

# Fit, or unfit – that is the question !

## My Story – My Life !

### Donald Chalmers 2005

Lies are the termites in the House of Life

“Zebras have stripes; leopards have spots. How do you define yourself ?” That was the question which confronted me in a holy place of worship recently. “*You are not a fit person....!*” These angrily shouted words had erupted from the lips of someone I had revered for almost a decade; someone I had counted as a friend. And, to make matters worse, he was someone who “should” know – a man of “the cloth” – a “Reverend Gentleman”.

I indeed feel that I have had a “fortunate life”, and had already concluded that although “in adolescence we learn everything, it takes a long life to express it”. This was a pivotal moment, and I have been beavering away for the last eighteen months, trying to come to grips with the accusation, and my question.

I am now 59 years young, having been born in 1945 to Anglo Australian parents on the then outskirts of Melbourne. But that big “0” birthday was already looming, and the realization that “every breath brings us closer to death which may come at any time.” I have already experienced several moments which could have been my last, due to my failing heart, recently diagnosed. How unfair ! Just when I seem to be getting a grip on what it means to be truly alive !

My parents had sprung from the working class, and their forbears had only just escaped being included with the convicts when they made that perilous journey by sailing ship to Australia from 1851. They risked everything ! Times were hard for everyone not among the landed gentry and educated elite. Queen Victoria “reigned” and God and State were married in the Church of England. The British “Empire” was fast gathering everything in for itself, and everything was “rosy” – for the aristocracy anyway. Especially if you were a man, for women were not considered equal then ! How strange then, that a Queen reigned supreme !

It was whispered in revered tones that perhaps *our* family (well, my Mother’s, anyway) was actually well connected in the “old country”. That grandfather Boyd (it emerged later that his surname was actually “Wilde”) had been “sent down” from university for some misdemeanour and sent to Australia from his Manchester family at “Yewtree Hall”. He did play the piano well enough to ply that trade on

quite a number of trips back “home” to England, while leaving his long suffering wife and children at Maldon, in the goldfields of country Victoria.

While still a youth, my grandfather, James Dukinfield Boyd had been embittered by his father’s final disappearance, as he was thrust into the role of sole breadwinner for the family. He didn’t realize his dream of an education, and became a train guard instead. He ruled his family with the iron hand of discipline, hard work, duty and responsibility as expected by God and Country, and the Church of England.

My grandfather Boyd’s mother, one Louisa Charlston was the daughter of Louisa Lyons of Grafton, N.S.W. nee Catt, hailed from Battle Abbey, Hastings, in the south of England, and it was rumoured that she had been a “lady in waiting to Her Majesty, Queen Victoria”. Our connection to the splendour of “Royalty” was firmly “established”, even in Yarraville, which was not far from the stink of Melbourne’s abattoirs at Flemington, and the open tip, which then girded the length of Footscray Road.

Evidence of the connection was firmly sealed by delivery of a special sealed tin from England, which contained an “Iona” style Celtic silver cross, wrapped in a finely embroidered cloth with accompanying letter. This arrived by post after my mother was born in 1917, just before the end of World War 1. Apparently, my grandfather’s brother, Bill, had contacted that side of the family with the news, after being wounded in France, and evacuated to a proper hospital.

Unfortunately, the cross was lost by my father at a Melbourne University Examination, held at Wilson Hall around 1937. My mother had slipped it into his coat pocket as a “good luck” talisman for the occasion, just before he left. Imagine his mortification at having lost so valuable an item ! But gone it was. I do remember seeing the tin and embroidered cloth while still a child, but have not seen it since.

My parents relived this unfortunate event when I was about seven, when we drove into the University grounds to look at the burnt out shell of Wilson Hall, but it was never spoken of again.

Another such calamity happened when my father lost his gold watch (a Wedding Present from my Mother), and later found the shell amongst the ashes of a pile of leaves he had been burning. Still visible were the words “Semper Fidelis” (“Forever Faithful”, in Latin, which they had both studied at school) engraved on the back of the watch, with their names, and date.

My parents had first met in their first year of High School, and my father still has his autograph book then popular, inscribed by my mother:

*True friends are like diamonds, Precious and rare*

*False friends are like autumn leaves, Found everywhere*

*MAISIE BOYD*

He has described their meeting in his 2003 autobiography entitled “Harry Chalmers – His Memoirs” as follows:

I had always had an eye for the girls and during school hours was now surrounded by dozens of them. Maisie Boyd was one who stood out with shiny brown hair in a bob and fringe, big blue eyes, slender body and shapely legs which were always encased in silk stockings unlike most of the other girls who wore lisle. She also had a beautiful English rose complexion and was always well turned out with starched blouses and well pressed tunics and shiny shoes. A credit to herself and her mother.

I began talking to her one day when I was sitting behind her in class and the teacher was late in arriving. She told me how much she enjoyed spending the holidays on her Uncle Ronnie's farm at Addington. Little did I know then that within four years or so she would be the love of my life, but she told me in later life that she made up her mind then. And how lucky I was!

When I entered Form 3 at Williamstown I opted for a commercial course as did about a third of the students, Charlie continued the standard course and there was no sign of Maisie! Then one day while I was waiting for the form room to open, I saw a girl running toward me with a piece of paper in her hand. She was Rona Boswell, a friend of Maisie's, and after handing me the paper she ran back to her own form room, ignoring the jibes of my peers. I put the paper in my pocket and looked at it later when the coast was clear. Rona had written that Maisie was now attending St. Michael's CEGGS in East St. Kilda. It has only now occurred to me that Maisie asked Rona to let me know.

I was to see her only once or twice in the next three years or so. Once she was in school uniform, which was very fetching. She was wearing heavy framed glasses and I, very rudely said "Hello, Goggles"! She coloured, but chose to ignore my rudeness and I continued on my way trying to convince myself that I hadn't said anything untoward. My next conversation with her, which began our romance, was not to take place until we were both in the workforce.

My father rather fully describes his life in his own memoirs, completed in 2003. He said of course, that he'd had to censor himself heavily. I encouraged him not to censor any interesting bits, joking that all of the people he had written about would be long dead before *I* published it ! He replied “I'm doing this as a legacy for my family history, only”.

However, he did give me a copy of his personally typed speech he delivered at my mother's funeral in 1989, which does warrant inclusion here, as it is my family history encapsulated:

Maiebelle Ada (Maisie) Chalmers was born in Magpie Street, Ballarat, near Sovereign Hill, the second child of James Dukinfield Boyd and Mabel Margaret Boyd (nee Wright) on the 5<sup>th</sup> July, 1917, their first child (Geoffrey) having died in infancy. Maisie is survived by a brother, Ken and sister Ethel (Mrs Pollard). She is a descendant on her mother's side of Ballarat pioneers as is husband Harry on his father's side.

Maisie was educated at Francis Street, Yarraville Primary School, Williamstown High School and St. Michael's Girls Grammar School.

She grew up in a strict but loving family environment and acquired from her upright and honourable father and gentle and compassionate mother a sense of moral and religious values which guided her throughout her life.

On her ninth birthday her father gave her a Book of Common Prayer upon the flyleaf of which he wrote “Semper Fidelis” (Always Faithful) and she took this as her motto. She was indeed always faithful to her beliefs, parents, husband, family, extended family and friends.

Her wedding ring, which has been constantly worn for more than forty-eight years has a tiny inscription inside the band "H to M 28.9.40 Semper Fidelis". The ring accompanies her to her final resting place.

It was at the age of twelve while a student at Williamstown High School that she first met Harry. After leaving school Maisie spent most of her working life at Buckley and Nunn Ltd., Melbourne and as Harry also worked in the city, they met every day travelling to and from work. They began keeping company, and after a long courtship of seven years were married at St. Luke's Church, Yarraville.

Four children were born to them; Beverley, Donald, Janice and Kaye. The tragic death of Jan at the age of twelve cast a blight on the lives of Maisie and her family from which they took many years to recover.

While on National Service, Donald served in Vietnam with the 1<sup>st</sup> Australian Field Regiment. This was a time of great anxiety relieved only when he returned home safely.

Maisie was musical and with some instruction from her mother learned piano as a child and later in life taught herself to play the organ. Together with her father and husband, she loved the music of the Highland Bagpipe, and was delighted when at the age of twelve Donald expressed an interest. Lessons for him were soon arranged and Jim Boyd, his grandfather gave him his first set of pipes.

Donald became a member of the Melbourne Highland Pipe Band. His parents were soon enthusiastic supporters of the band and the Victorian Highland Pipe Band Association. Later, Kaye was to join the Southern Districts Ladies' Pipe Band as a drummer, eventually becoming Drum Major. This band was also given every support.

Maisie was a loving and caring wife and mother as her children grew up and married, and was pleased to welcome Nick, Lynne and Deric into the family. When their children came, she was a devoted grandmother.

She gave unqualified loyalty and support to her husband in every venture and interest.

From childhood to mid teens she spent all her school holidays on the farm where her mother was born and raised, "Rosedale", Addington, near Ballarat. She had a very deep affection for that land and visited it whenever possible, even after it had passed from the hands of the Wright family. At her request, soil from the farm will be scattered in her grave.

Maisie was a skilled knitter from her early days and in later years learned to spin and tatt, acquiring great skills in these handcrafts.

Following a major operation about five years ago her health gradually deteriorated and in her final year she suffered much with courage and without complaint.

After moving to Ballarat three years ago, she became a friend of Sovereign Hill, but finally became too ill to continue.

She had an enormous capacity for loving and caring for people, being unselfish, tolerant, giving and forgiving; abhorring prejudice in all its forms.

As a result of her qualities she had a wide circle of friends. During her last days she said:

" I have more riches than any millionaire, my jewel box is full of precious gems – my true friends. And I have never lost one!"

With faith and conviction she would say to you now, "until we meet again, goodbye. I love you all".

As she lay dying from leukaemia, I witnessed her GENEROSITY, one last time.

She knew that my father would not last long without her, for they had been inseparable. She made sure that we children were aware that she had given our father permission to marry again. She even made out a list of her available friends

she thought would make a good mate for her man. We should have anticipated this act of final generosity and kindness, because that is the way she lived life.

My father remarried almost a year to the day of mum's death to Joan, one of Mum's friends, and with our blessing. We felt able to give it ! He has lived, and loved on to a grand old age, fully engaged with, and contributing to life. He was lucky indeed ! And so are we !

My own first memories really go back to Blackwood, and staying with my Nanna and Pop (Boyd) at their holiday shack called "The Hut", well before I even thought of going to school.

They had two rooms, the second (front one) just new at the time, I guess around 1948, as well as the attached side shed which housed the wood and tap from the tank, and the "meatsafe", a separate annex made from barked saplings and fine wire mesh. This housed a couple of single beds. I thought this room very special because you could see out from the inside, through the walls, but not from outside "in".

At that time, they didn't have the kitchen dresser, which they eventually brought up from Yarraville, but had a hand made green painted couple of shelves on which a drawer stood containing the cutlery.

It gets very cold there, so my first memories are of having to run in the rain to use the outdoor lavatory, having a wash in the dish and drying off before the fire, and the smell of the gumleaves, used to start up the fire every morning. It snows there very occasionally, and I thought it must be Christmas !

Uncle Luther and auntie Florrie Pearce seemed to be always there (though I do remember them from a very young age at Ballarat, both at Mair Street, and Peel Street). Pop and uncle Luther would go off in the daytime to do some gold panning, and Nanna and auntie Florrie would be chin wagging (chatting) non-stop, talking about the "old times". I am sure that if I heard their dear voices again from the ether, I would recognise them instantly. They were and are a very intimate and loved part of me.

Uncle Luther was always very gentle, as were Nanna and aunt Florrie, but "Pop" was very stern, and just had to raise his finger, or glare, to be taken heed of instantly. He used to call me "Donald Dinnie" for as long as I can remember, and later told me this was for the famous Scottish Donald Dinnie, who was the only one strong (or silly) enough to carry the famous "Dinnie Stones" (? circa 1900).

Nanna would walk me up from Golden Point (The originally Gazetted "Township of Blackwood") to the General Store at (New) Blackwood (originally known as "Red Hill"), and while we were walking would tell me about the history of the place, as she knew it.

Old Mrs. Mathieson had burned to death because she'd been using methylated spirits on her legs (for the arthritis), when she foolishly got up to whitewash the fireplace (of course, the fire was alight, and so soon was she!). The Mathieson's cows used to wander all over Blackwood at that time, but used to know their own way back for the milking.

We had to be careful where we walked, because of the loose cowpats all over the place ! But they kept the grass down quite well, and when someone complained of cows on the road, and the free ranging of cows stopped, the hard work began, as WE had to do all the cropping, with lawn mowers, which came in soon after – or by scythe.

Nanna used to hang out the washing on the gorse bushes nearby, secured by their prickles. Later, when the gum trees at the back grew up big enough, a clothesline was strung out between them – quite a modern innovation, I thought! An unfortunate incident happened to Nanna one day. She was pegging out the washing, and had not noticed the bullants running along its length, until one dropped down between her breasts, underneath her corset, and started biting!

She rushed inside and roused Mum who was having a nap, and was bitten many more times, as Mum had to undo the corset, one hook at a time! We had to get out quickly and look for bracken fern roots, to be applied to the bites to reduce the pain. We didn't dare laugh at the time, but had many a laugh at Nanna's expense afterward.

When I was about four or five, Nanna used to bury some old Chinese Coins (they were not perfectly round, and had a square hole in the centre, and of course some Chinese Characters on them) they had found years before (the Hut was built on the site of the Chinese Mission), in a ditch which was filled with river sand and ashes from the fire (the only loose soil around). Those coins were recycled for all of the grandchildren, and we spent many happy hours looking for them!

What simple pleasure! Just as we used to enjoy our walks to the shops and mineral springs (armed with the snake stick, and dressed in very patched pre-loved misfitting clothes and hats), always remembering to bring home a good supply of dry twigs and bark to start the fire!

We could see old Mrs Fitz Simon's house "Fairy Dell" from the back door (the trees in the gully had not regrown then), and walked over to visit when I was young. We walked along a path along a fence, now long overgrown, before coming to an enchanted place – her pond, full of goldfish! After her death, some mean minded person let out the water, and that was the end of that! The trees grew up and her house was obscured, eventually falling into ruin, after some squatters had lived there.

Fairy Dell was mentioned in Dr Gwen Wisewould's book "Doctor on the Great Divide". She herself lived on to a great old age, and I met her several times, once at an accident scene, where, while waiting for the ambulance to arrive, she, standing smoking, dressed in men's trousers and greatcoat, let out a great explosion of gas. She didn't stand on ceremony or appearance, and was purely practical and down to earth!

She attended Pop once at the Hut, not long before he died. I played the pipes at a fundraising concert hall at Trentham years later. The town gave thanks for her years of unstinting work, for both human and animal kind, by the erection of her "Memorial Clock" in the main street. I would imagine she was one of the first women Doctors around, and faced much discrimination in Melbourne, but this was not so for the simple folk she tended in the mountains, who never mentioned that she had a special and devoted lady friend living with her all those years.

We could also see across to the log cabin at the head of the Horseshoe Bend owned by Grace and Jack Rayner, and could just see their lamplight on dark moonless nights, since the trees were still quite sparse at that time. Their eldest daughter Tessie (Theresa) was about my cousin Valerie's age, so we saw quite a lot of them. As Dad has mentioned in his memoirs, they had quite a few children, as good Catholics were expected to back then.

I think three of them succumbed to illness by the time they were about 11 years of age. Very Sad! Grace Rayner had come from a family who had lived at Blackwood before, and after Jack retired, they moved permanently into their log cabin, by now extensively extended, and refurbished. They even piped water from an old tunnel nearby – an unimagined luxury, well before "Town Water" was installed in the 1980's, and established a garden. Grace was well known for her enthusiastic productions on New Years Eve, where she played the piano, and simple fun had by everyone. I played the pipes there on several occasions. They still live well and healthily in the mountain air today.

Around 1950, Uncle Ken (Mum's brother) purchased land just near the Rayner's and started to build his own place. I remember Auntie Beverley from an early age. It was her name that got Uncle Ken in the first place, since he already had my sister Beverley as his just arrived first niece when he first met her at a dance. But I always thought she was just beautiful. She loved to go walking with us kids all around Blackwood, and I must say she was my favourite Aunt.

Unfortunately, just after Ken had installed the foundations of his place, Ken Turner (whose family were long time Blackwood residents) put in his – right in front of Kens – and spoiled his expected view. I suppose Town Planning and Permits weren't thought of much in those days, especially in a little backwater like

Blackwood ! Their original one room grew like “Topsy” over the years, and they acquired a much larger block at the back around 1955.

My Dad’s father, Harry Black Chalmers, had gone to the United States in 1923 to try to get recognition for his patent which had doubled the production of glass bottles for Australian Glass. I have a copy of it somewhere. Australian Glass though considered that since he worked for them at the time that it was “their” invention, and used their muscle to prevent his recognition. So he was disappointed, but also travelled to Canada, before having to return unrewarded, and having to go back to work for AGI.

While overseas, he purchased the latest fad in instant entertainment – a pianola (player piano) which soon arrived. This was just about clapped out by the time Bev and I were old enough to have a go on it with our cousins Faye, Peter, Arthur, (and later, Phillip) who lived with our “Nanna Chalmers” at the old family home in Williamstown Road at the time, with uncle Bob and auntie Florrie. My memory of this was around 1950 – 53.

Bev and I used to think our cousins were *so* lucky – they had crates of “Boon Spa” (a local brand of soft drink) always on hand, were allowed to play the piano whenever they wanted to, and had a “crystal set” (primitive radio, with headphones, no electricity required) or two, to listen to.

Nanna Chalmers (as distinct from “Nanna”, or “Nanna Boyd”) had a boyfriend we used to meet from time to time. He used to amuse us by his ability to wriggle his ears. His head was quite bald as I remember it. They used to go out dancing. Nanna Chalmers at that time had a job a Prince Henry’s Hospital in St Kilda Road (since demolished) as a food deliverer to the patients. She was a big woman at the time (but not enormous) and had a great sense of humour. She described herself as “a thoroughbred, of draft horse variety !”

We cousins used to play a lot in and out of doors, and it was always noisy. Aunt Florrie was quite deaf, She didn’t seem to notice it, but I don’t know how Nanna Chalmers could stand it. Maybe it got too much for her in the end, because she went to stay with her sister Nan, and her husband (Uncle Jack Rook) in Bischoff St Preston more and more often, before she was hospitalised with a stoke. I think of them often, because I now live nearby. They have long departed also.

Bev and I received good birthday presents from her (compared with the ever practical Nanna Boyd, who always gave us socks or underpants, purchased “on special” at “Fred’s Yarraville Clothing Store” (something like Dimmeys). Usually they were seconds, with uncomfortable darns in the toes or heels. Bev received a child’s sewing machine, which actually worked. Pity she was so big, and had to hide her disappointment, for she had expected a full sized model !

I remember receiving a couple of 78 records – “Exhibition Swing”, and “Petite Fleur” – which no doubt she liked much because of her love of dancing. I loved them too, and could play them on my windup gramophone, purchased for me by “Pop” Boyd (from a very old man in Blackwood)(it was a miniature version of the one they had in the “Hut”, with built in speaker, which we got back to “The Hut” on Uncle Luther’s wheelbarrow).

In 1953, Jan arrived on my 8<sup>th</sup> birthday, as promised. Bev and I spent a week or so of our school holidays on “the farm” at Addington (near Ballarat) with Mum’s cousin Jack and Auntie Snowie. It was here that I first noted the difference between cows and bulls, and what seemed to come naturally, but Beverley continued her story that “baby’s came out of belly buttons, when they were ready”, and denied what was happening, claiming that they were merely “playing piggy-back”.

Mum faithfully preserved my letter to Santa I wrote from school the month before. I hope you will find it of interest, as it certainly shows my state of innocence then:

“Dear Santa

I would like to rit this letter to you to bring me a yot and then I will be great. You and please bring my Mother a a blanket for the baby ~~sk~~she is getting it on my ber<sup>th</sup> day. I would like to tell you who is the biggest chatterbox in our clars. it is Helen Samens. I think my cozens will like a doll and my other cuzen would like a train. Last night I was watch-ing ~~someb~~ some boys playing tenes the ball hit my nose. One day I was playing with Alern and there was a goat in that street when I was going home my dog barked at it. when I got home my father was going out and my Mother and sister were going to. My cuzen tucthed your wiscers and when he came home he said he didnt like you.

Yours sincerely Don

State School, Black Rock, 16.12.52”

Life was certainly simple in those days, as I later described in my older age in a poem:

Now and then I lift my Pen to tell of When  
Life was Simple, before a Pimple  
Came out to Grace my Face,  
When I was Ten.

I already Was as Tall as a Mast.  
Tallest in the Class !

Life was not Simple, with a Singular Dimple,  
And One Pimple !

But then came some More, Lots More, and my  
Once Angelic Face Changed Shape, with  
Proboscis Pre-eminent among the Tufts and Puffs  
Quickly Forming on my Face !....etc.

That was the end of our many trips to Yarraville, as the “line” (clothesline) was always full of nappies – for years after that! Probably just before Jan arrived, Dad

arranged for our chip heater in the bathroom to be replaced by a gas heater, and also a gas “space” heater in the living room.

Hitherto, we had to rely on our “fire stove” in that room to heat the whole house (we didn’t often use the lounge room, where there was a fireplace), and sometimes we would also use the electric radiator (it had a large cone shaped exposed element on the middle of a chromed curved back plate), which we could use from the house’s one power point.

Around this time also, we had new cupboards built in by Vic Taylor (an old kitchen stand alone cabinet, cut in half, to make a bench top over cupboards, and an overhanging cupboard. I thought this was “really nifty” (a great idea), and was very excited when we also had new power points installed (one in the bathroom, and one in the kitchenette, for our new Hoover single tub washing machine, and sink heater, which miraculously provided almost boiling water “on tap”).

We had quite a few new innovations around this time. A new “washhouse” (laundry) attached onto the back of the house where Mum had boiled the clothes in a fired “copper” (she used to use screwed up newspapers and some kindling for this, the same as for our chip heater in the bathroom). This must have come before the power points and the washing machine etc, because I remember Mum trying out a “water powered washer” which would “swish” the washing around in our concrete twin tubs. No thought was given to water conservation in those days !

Because new houses were being built higher up in First Street, and Beaumaris was beginning to be developed, we were almost flooded out one year after heavy rain. Up until this time, we’d had no trouble, for many of the blocks still had their stands of native tea-tree intact. We certainly had many, even though my Pop Boyd (before my remembrance), much to my father’s annoyance, would sometimes visit during the week, and chop a few down, leaving Dad the big task of cleaning up, and cutting up the wood into usable wood-stove lengths.

The soil was sandy, and much to my father’s dismay, he got home from work to find a truck full of sand from excavation works at the end of the street dumped onto our driveway. Mum had had the bright idea that we needed to raise the level of our yard to prevent flooding ! It seemed to take forever to make a dent in the huge pile, one wheelbarrow load at a time.

Before Jan arrived, Bev and I were able to take leisurely walks to the Rush’s Honey Farm in Beaumaris, to buy tea-tree honey, and honey on the comb. The Rush’s had no electricity or water connected, and I loved the smell of the kerosene lamps which reminded me of Blackwood and the farm. We soon found ways to make ourselves useful when Jan arrived, and soon I regularly rode my bike to the shops to get some of the daily supplies.

On my ninth birthday, Mum toiled mightily to give me a party which she held in the pavilion at Black Rock's playground on the beach. She organised "egg and spoon" races in 108 degree Fahrenheit heat, with a one year old in the pram in the shade nearby ! Some of our neighbours came to help, and also brought some of the goodies. Even chocolate crackles, which had well and truly melted in their papers – but which were still thoroughly enjoyed.

On really hot nights, we, like many others, slept out on the front verandah. One night I was awakened to find the "Punch" house next door well alight, with the fire brigade just arriving. It was a real lesson for me to see the flames coming out of the windows, and the pain the desolation caused. The Punch's had lived initially in the garage Mr. Punch built himself, and had then built the house himself, with the help of his older sons.

They had come from England to start a new life, because everything had been tight due to rationing after the war until then. It really upset me to see that their most precious family heirloom, a clock, had also been lost.

The children were farmed out to other local families so they could rebuild. Mum and Dad took in Johnnie, who was my age. He stayed with us for quite some time, and it was at this time I noticed that he seemed to be made differently from myself. I reasoned that English boys must be different. They were Catholics, too. Could it be that Catholics were different also ? How could this possibly be, since I knew that our great-grandparents had all come from "the old country".

At that time, we kids at the State School had a great fear of the kids from the Catholic School, and I was always alarmed when opposing sides would call out rude slogans like "Catholic dogs sitting on logs, eating maggots out of frogs". How could this be, when as far as I could tell, we were all the same, and our parents were friends ?

Although I knew Father McGrade from St. Joseph's (he, like most others, walked everywhere) to say "hello" to, I felt very nervous when Mrs. Punch asked me one day to take a message to the Presbytery, which was inside the church grounds. It had been around this time that I had heard that the nuns at the convent had to shave their heads, and then almost completely hide themselves, to look like penguins, and were not trusted to go out by themselves !

Father McGrade, and all the Protestant ministers I knew, *had* to wear their collars back to front. This was all very strange. What for ? How could this change how they behaved ? My father had long stopped going to church by the time I had arrived (some "sanctimonious old *bitch*" had pulled the pew from under his bottom so that he fell down more properly on his knees, and he had refused to be so humiliated again), but he seemed to me to be every bit as "good" as anyone else.

In fact, I used to hear quite a lot of discussion about the wrongs of the world, stated in the Guardian (a Socialist underground paper he subscribed to) to be due to religion, and that the common people should rise up to rid themselves of this oppressive yolk, which was keeping them poor, while others waxed fat. This still seems reasonable to me, *especially* where church, mosque or temple is married to the state and protects a monarch and clergy who like to make all the rules !

We had “religious instruction” at school, but all the Catholics were not allowed to attend. Leon, the one Jewish boy in my class, also, was excused, and had to keep very silent about his parents’ religion. And yet, I liked him more than many of the others – and also, he was even then a very talented pianist !

Some of our class of around 50 came from the local orphanage called “Blamey House”. I felt sorry for them, because some of them were called “bastards”. I tried to hold them close to my heart, because they were blamed for something they could do nothing about. I could not imagine how I would feel if I didn’t have a family to love me, so I tried to love them too. Because of the war, I supposed, everyone was poor, things were “tight”, but these kids were destitute, and it showed in their faces!

It seems no wonder that in my older age I penned the following lines about the church in general, and the Pope in particular:

While I was in Rome, I Looked for Your Home.

But Found there Instead, Instead of a Shed,

And at the very Seat of Saint Peter,

A Palace, a Bloody Great Palace, filled with

Gold and much lucre filthy !

Now Tell Me, What Has All That Got to Do with the

Mission of Saint Peter ! For Christ's Sake ?

Of course, given the great deal of religious intolerance found in the world, I also found some scathing remarks about other religions, even though I consider myself to be a spiritual person:

When I'm Awakey, You'll Hear me Speak Plainly - of Popes and Blokes, like

Osama Bin Laden and the “Great” Intifada, through “Holy” Jihad.

Which Reminds Me of Protestant Prick Paisley,

Who with Hitler and Stalin will Stand, with Blood on His Hands !

Paisley and Pope all Nasty and Ghastly

Are as Rabid and Racist as Rabid Islam !

And how about all those Jews and some Others who  
Think There are No Others ? And Don't Forget our Own Uncle Sam !  
So it's for Other's of Gentler Persuasions, of the Book or the Look  
To Make a Difference !

Let Peace Rule on Earth, and in Your Hearts !

And also:

LOVE, you Log, 'Cause Life 'twill be better off Without you...  
Unless YOU Choose to Love !

That's the Message of Jesus, the Jew, a Better Person than You....

And:

You Have to Walk on the Land to be Humble !  
You have to Walk on the Land , as well as Through Life,  
To Know "It" and Yourself !  
Don't Always get About in Tinted Glass and Car Windows,  
Air Conditioned, and Protected, and Comfortable, or You'll Rue It !  
Life is Meant to be Lived with Wholesome Intent,  
And with Goodness and Productivity as Your Only Goal -  
Not to Waste and Pillage, Pilfer and Steal,  
All things Good, which are Meant to be Shared,  
And Laid By in the Larder, for Bad Times Ahead !

But I am getting far ahead of myself. These things only “came” to me much later. More of that further down the track of my reminiscences. So, to get back to where I was, still in primary school....

.....

You may remember that I have described the effect the “Reverend” persons accusation had on me, and that I said I had beavered away for 18 months, trying to work his accusation through, to get past my anger, hurt, frustration, and desolation in having lost a friend. How well I already knew that (as my Mum had penned all those years ago) “True friends are like diamonds, precious and rare” and “False friends are like autumn leaves, found everywhere”. It was a lesson I should have more fully understood much earlier. As to whether I am a fit person: I would think

that is something I'll find out when I meet my maker, which will be one day, soon enough.

In the meantime, I have thanked my "Reverend" friend, and given him a copy of my research entitled:

"Unwinding the Wound; Wound Wisdom" or

"A Generous 2005 Reasons for Living in the Third Millennium".

This collection of Wisdom quotes concludes thus:

2114: Zebras have stripes; leopards have spots. How do you define yourself ?



May all of life's benefits and blessings be yours !

AMEN – ACTION !