



In the beginning

Each and every example of human existence - a diversity of being cooked together in a melting pot of nature and nurture - delivers a unique result: a remarkable blueprint which cannot be duplicated. From our first tottering steps to those last dodderly stumbles, we carve a matchless track, outlining our brief presence on this blue-green orb.

How does one define his or her life? Is it through learning achieved, or places visited? Could it be family formed, or work accomplished? Does our heritage say who we are, or is it more to do with friends we keep, the faith we maintain, the place we live in, or politics we prefer? All these assorted parts go to make one nominally flawed whole ... for better or for worse, richer or poorer. (*'So help me God'* some might add, if they have cause to resort to belief in such universal myths).

For all of us, a significant slice of life is already defined and fixed, even before that glorious moment when we poke our curious nose through the pubic hairs to breathe the air around. Looking on from the outer - from the aspect of the surroundings that greet us when we make our entry onto life's stage - brings an entirely different perspective. But this new world we encounter is also a fluid and flexible phenomenon, similar to the locale we have just emerged from, offering a multitude of choices to further define our being, perhaps even more so than those genes we arrived with from our forebears

We all have a tale to tell. That's what life is all about, isn't it? Whether a 'high-flyer', or living in abject poverty, it is a life: yours or mine; his or hers. Immersed in each life - underpinning every existence - there is a story to be told, which has relevance to its

unique universe. One life's story is a painting of countless brushstrokes: a Mona Lisa of our being; a Da Vinci code which only the painter can decipher with certainty.

For every individual, their personal tale is the most enthralling story of all, more important than any president, footballer, or film star. Our story sits at the epicenter of our galaxy: the searing light of subjectivity, outshining the more diffuse orbs of objectiveness. For ourselves, no other person's account matches our own narrative. We live every second of it: the highs, the lows and the myriad of events in between. But to be fascinating for others - even enriching - depends on how the tale is developed and narrated to the world beyond: those planets and their moons which surround us.

George Airlie Roderick Lachlan McLoed is an ordinary individual, with a pretentious bunch of Scottish names (assuming one looks past the *George*, that is). That's how he sees himself. There was a time when the thought occurred that he might be extraordinary; the new Messiah - immortal Son of God on Earth - growing up secretly amongst fellow mortals, ready to lead his flock to salvation on the command from above, while friends and relations look on with awe and expectancy. It was a hopeful dream, encompassing a number of inherent flaws, and unsuccessful precedents (bar one)!

As the years progressed, George saw reason, concluding the same thought probably occurred to every other expectant soul in the cosmos. Regardless, he would soldier on, silently waiting for some miraculous sign from God the Father, just in case he was right, and the other squillions were wrong!

At the same time, he realized any hopes of becoming the chosen one, might be severely limited by the fact that ever since his rejection of Sunday school (coinciding with the onset of adolescence) he regarded his potential benefactor - and would-be route to immortality - as a complete sham, dreamed up by a bunch of illiterate peasants, some 2,000 years in the past.

What George did not fully realise, was that even if God did not anoint him as the new Saviour, in one respect his life to date had been quite extra-ordinary. Indeed, he had not managed to reach the hypothetical human heights of *Everest* that many of us aspire to, and had not accumulated mountains of money, or both (hypothetical heights and mountains of money, as he understood, often travelling hand-in-hand). No, the main feature of his gathered experience thus far - the theme tune he could sing to the rest of the world - revolved around one word: adversity.

George had faced adversity in bucket-loads; at times it had been thrown over him like shit from a sewer ... from his somewhat inglorious start, right up to the present day. Over the years he had learnt to cope with these misfortunes, and move on, regardless of whether the hardship to withstand came in the form of catastrophic (and acute) or chronic (and

long-lasting). What we can call his periodic persecution, might appear as a gradual encroachment of skin keratosis from his forties, or an older man's prostate problems, each playing out over countless years, versus a shock attack by terrorists wielding guns and grenades, lasting minutes: one quite common, the other not so; each of course, in their own way very valid.

And who knew what was to come? More of the same most likely, if the past was anything to go by. *'Our history helps us to know and predict the future,'* George recalls being told at school; which all sounded a bit pompous ... but just maybe, it was true.

At the time of committing this narrative to print, George's physical form has reached the age of aching bones and sore feet: things it would not wish on anyone (but which it imagines almost everyone who passes the muster of middle age, has to endure). Non-the-less, this is the phase of one's existence where accumulated knowledge can enable clearer insight and better understanding.

Looking back from an older age, the highlights and lowlights can be viewed in the setting of a greater whole, encompassing past, present, and future, while comprehending meaning, through accrued involvement and accumulated comprehension. Like fish observed in a glass bowl, with hindsight and the wisdom of experience, we can see more from outside looking in, than the unsure fish in its limited world, sees from inside looking out.

George becomes a 'bruncle'.

George's story, the early years in particular, revolves around one rather unusual word, ***bruncle***; a new word coined from the amalgamation of two others: brother and uncle.

Some might ask, 'So what is the significance of this peculiar word?' Well, and in short, this rather offbeat term, is chosen because it defines and underscores the crux of his story – perhaps more than any other word in existence – the essence being that George had been misled by his elders, who had contrived to conjure up a non-existent birthright; a false tale to describe his existence on planet earth.

Bruncle is a term that applies a veneer of humour to imagined reality which has gone before (namely a fabrication of one person's legacy: a distortion of the family tree). Grandparents, parents, aunts and uncles, even cousins, muddying the waters of a person's heritage, to make things seem not as they truly were, or should be. A necessary *White Lie*, those involved would claim.

Which begs many palpable questions. *'How does an individual cope with being misled; deceived by loved ones, regarding his or her, own birthright? Can the deception be*

justified? Is it fair, and if so, fair for whom? Were those cherished family members (who were part of the falsehood) doing it for the good of the mother, or the sake of the baby, or to satisfy the cultural norm? Or was it a mix of these and other spurious reasons?'

George, our hoodwinked central character, discovered the truth by accident; a quirk of fate spiralling into his mailbox more than a quarter of a century, after he himself had fallen to earth as a healthy baby with three-parts Scottish blood coursing to the extremities. One major and quite positive result which sprang from knowing the truth, was that brothers and sisters became uncles and aunts, while nephews and nieces turned into cousins. In addition, he assumed the title of oldest in a younger generation, rather than his earlier status of youngest in a more worn and outdated clan: a reformed state of being which he himself much preferred.

But more critical than this general interchange of family descriptors, was the fact that one nephew – his mother's second born son - suddenly became elevated to assume the station of half-brother. From his former nephew's point of view, George suddenly morphed miraculously into brother, rather than uncle (as was the false belief for almost three decades).

Thus John, the re-aligned brother of George, quite pleased about this unheralded, somewhat engrossing departure from the tedium of his day-to-day existence, embraced and returned the compliment by coining the descriptor **Bruncle**, to seal their newfound bond. It was, you might say, a brainwave of brilliance with a comical twist: it formed a word that celebrated the new and rightful truth, whilst sending the fake news out to pasture ... and back to where it belonged, in its Victorian past.