

the days
in the life of
of lindsay

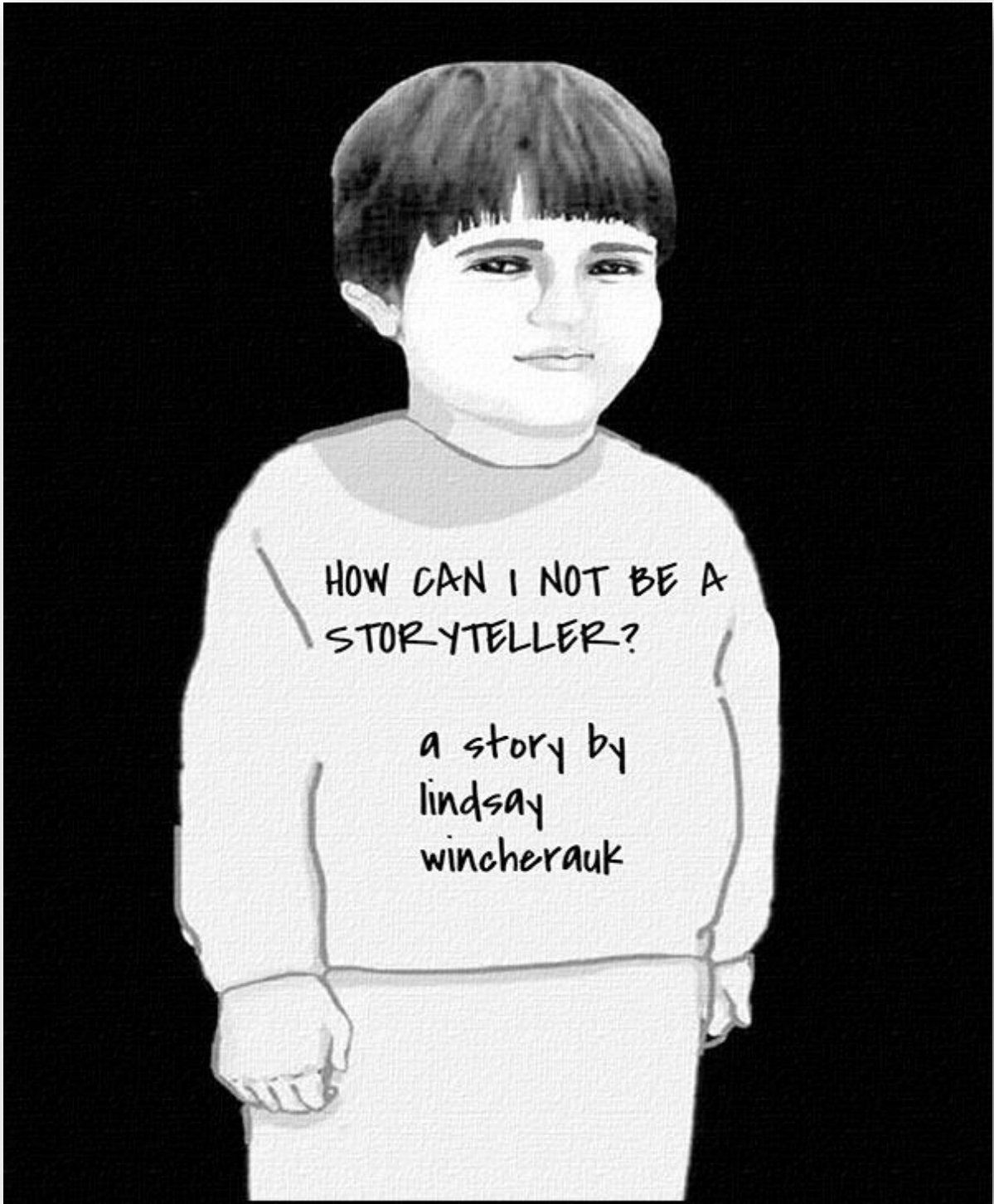
wincherauk

-the travails of-
an unwanted son

lindsay
wincherauk

How About One of These Babies for Your Christmas Gift?





HOW CAN I NOT BE A
STORYTELLER?

a story by
lindsay
wincherauk

HOW CAN I NOT BE A STORYTELLER? HOW CAN I NOT BE A STORYTELLER?



3

The first of every month comes laden not just with bills but a heavy historical weight. It's the day Jay and I, e-transfer our rent to a man whose gaze stretches back through decades of Zimbabwean jurisprudence. Our landlord, once a Justice of the Supreme Court under Mugabe's shadowed reign, now exchanges pleasantries with us at the door with an air of stoic grace, his wife Sue always a whisper behind him. It's surreal, to say the least.

Lindsay Wincherauk

But then again, so is the notion that the Man in Black himself strummed chords in honour of my cousin Alexandra Wiwarchuck. You might not find her story in the annals of internet searches, but in the hushed tones of family gatherings, they say Johnny Cash captured her tragedy in melody after Colin Thatcher, son of the Premier, allegedly spilled her blood along the South Saskatchewan River one summer night in 1962 - a whispered truth I gleaned not from the papers, but from somber bedtime stories.

My parents, those guardians of adopted secrets, spun these yarns. It wasn't their genes I carried, but their inherited mosaic of history that coloured my identity. And while Colin Thatcher became known to the world for the murder of his wife JoAnn Wilson in 1984, it was the earlier, unsolved crime that echoed through my lineage.

5

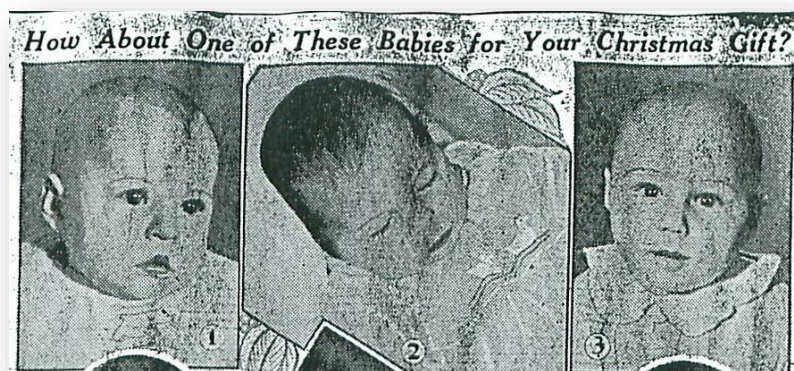
The mantra “**Everything Happens for a Reason**” sometimes feels like a cruel joke, but it’s stitched into the fabric of my being. I arrived into this world on July 16, 1960, in the grim corridors of Beulah House in Edmonton, where the sins of loveless unions were buried, and society’s judgment drowned under the hush of religious piety.

Babies, considered the shame of their unwed mothers, were stripped from warm embraces and either tucked away into the farmland’s austere cradles or sold as precious currency to the arms of the affluent.

My birthplace was not a beginning; it was a marketplace for innocence.

Yet, against these odds, **I emerged with an unshakable sense of purpose:** to unearth stories, to give voice to the silenced whispers of history that cling to my soul. This conviction is not a choice; it breathes life into my every being. It insists, with every pulse, that I must believe.

6



Baby Adoption Offered As Christmas Gift Idea

How about doing part of your Christmas shopping in the basement of the legislative building this year?

Here's the idea, as proposed by C. B. Hill, child placement officer in the department of child welfare. "What could make a grander Christmas present than a darling baby?" Mr. Hill asks, revealing that he now has available for adoption some of the finest babies he has ever seen in his 24 years as official "baby man" for the provincial government.

"... He who gives a child a home builds palaces in Kingdom come," wrote John Masefield, England's poet laureate. But isn't that just part of the story? Isn't adopting a baby sort of a double-barreled Christmas gift, benefitting the otherwise neglected child by giving it a home and also bringing joy and happiness into that home to benefit the foster parents? He who adopts a baby provides a Christmas present both for himself and

placed thousands of deserted and neglected children in Alberta homes. They have been adopted by professional men, members of parliament, farmers, business men, clergymen and others. Many of the children placed are now grown men and women, making successful careers for themselves in various spheres of life.

Mr. Hill now has a fine group of babies for adoption. Information about them can be obtained by applying at his office in the basement of the legislative building or telephoning him at his office, 916-258, or home, 23937.

Mr. Hill emphasizes that babies can be taken on trial before final legal adoption procedure is carried out. The desire is to secure a good home for the children and to have the foster parents completely satisfied.

The child placement department is a unit of the child welfare branch in the department of health in charge of Hon. Dr. W. W. Cross. T. ... is superintendent of

Emerging from a shrouded beginning, my existence was a hushed transaction, destined for a farm family's arms or the void of the never-born. My mother, her lips sealed by faith and shame, relinquished me as penance, her path back to matrimonial purity paved by my disappearance.

8

An afterthought, perhaps, yet here I stand – scathed, but unbowed. My life hinged on a decision, wavering between adoption and oblivion.

Fortune or fate, call it what you will, favoured my first breath – gratitude courses through my veins for that choice. Childbirth was a crucible where too many mothers and infants met their demise.

9

Whispers of these tragedies sometimes echo the grim history of residential schools, don't they?

Abandonment issues?
The question hangs heavy, rhetorical, and suffused with irony.

Indeed, my journey was not one of adoption, nor was I traded for currency. Instead, I became the family's unspeakable secret, shuttled from hand to reluctant hand – a living embodiment of the lie they were all conscripted to maintain.

Was I so homely as to be undesired, or was it something more?

The times be damned. Oblivious to any other reality, I carried on, each day unpeeling a sliver of the truth hidden beneath the veneer of the life I was given.

Navigating through life's intricacies with partial blindness (a literal affliction I bear), I sensed the absence of crucial elements—those vital pieces that complete a person's essence. Vital, indeed, as they hold the key to wholeness.

As the revelation bore down upon us, my relatives scattered to the four winds, unable or unwilling to shoulder the mantle of reality.

11

Abandoned, I was left to grapple with the specters of doubt and the haunting fear of being unloved—vulnerable to a world ever ready to prey upon the fragile and the forsaken.

My family's traditional roles tangled and twisted like a vine out of control: aunts morphed into sisters, uncles adopted the role of brothers, and my father – what form did he take in this ever-shifting kaleidoscope?

12

The youngest of seven, I threaded my way through the days, yearning to be seen, to be acknowledged. My silent plea manifested into a roar for attention: “SEE ME – truly, see me.”

13

I channeled this fervent desire into the dusty grounds of a baseball field, etching my name into the record books as an all-star second baseman, as well as a decorated city and provincial champion. I forged an identity as a record-holding, one-eyed titan—a quarterback whose name would echo in three divergent halls of fame, whose victories spanned city, province, and nation.

14

Embraced by the glory of my twenties, the merciless shadow of loss loomed. The sequence of life's cruel cuts began with my father's departure, the day following my 25th birthday, and less than two years on, my mother's absence sealed the gaping wound.

15

Cancer, that malign force, stealthily stole them away, despite the relentless back-and-forth—the over 1500 times my brother Brian and I traversed the well-oiled path between hospital and home.

The final night before another return to the hospital, as the arctic chill of a minus thirty-five-degree night enveloped us, my mother and I paused on the steps of our abode. I watched as tears born of her realization crystalized upon her cheeks. She lifted her gaze, eyes brimming with despair, and whispered, "I'm never going to come home again, am I?"

I offered comfort in the form of a falsehood. And I despised every syllable, every breath of the lie.

The day my mother exhaled her final breath, the fabric of my world unwound after she pulled me close and faintly whispered in my ear, "goodbye," leaving me alone to weave the fraying quilt of my existence anew.

Her demise was not just the cessation of her heartbeat; it was the crumbling of the foundation upon which I had built my life.

More than three decades have since trickled through life's hourglass, and now, the rare echoes of family come through whispers of illness, the heavy breaths of dying, or the solemn stillness that follows death.

17

These infrequent calls are the only threads that tentatively connect me to a past that feels increasingly distant.

Why don't you bridge the chasm? Extend a hand across the growing divide?
It's not that simple. Our minds are complex mazes, winding, and re-winding upon themselves.

Oftentimes, the pathways leading to reconciliation are overgrown with the weeds of hurt and the brambles of misunderstanding.

Our psyche isn't programmed for straightforward navigation through the thorny underbrush of estranged relationships. It's easier said than done to reach across the void, to find and forge a new connection where old ones have frayed and vanished into the ether.

After years of living in a monochrome existence, I uprooted my life and found myself in the vibrant, rain-soaked streets of Vancouver, where skyscrapers grasp at the heavens and the sea whispers to the city's soul.

It was an unlikely home, but one teeming with the promise of new adventures and unforeseen turns of fate. And besides, my friend Wes was living there.

In one such twist, I swayed to the reggae beats and the heat-soaked breeze of Negril, Jamaica, with the grand ambition of purchasing a charming seaside hotel. However, my Caribbean dream skidded to a halt when I crashed a motorcycle on the treacherous mountain roads, my plans dissolving into the sapphire waves below the cliffs.

20

Amid political chaos, I found myself navigating the tense streets of Panama, a country held in the iron grip of Manuel Noriega's military coup. The air was thick with unrest, and the clamour of the city stood in stark contrast to the sudden silences that fell when gunfire echoed in the distance.

21

On the days when the world felt more surreal, I stepped onto a basketball court for a pickup game with none other than Fox Mulder – or rather, the actor who brought him to life. We exchanged playful banter and three-pointers under gym lights that seemed to wink at the improbability of it all.

At the break of dawn, I once shared a breakfast table with The Thing, his rocky countenance every bit as imposing as his comic book legend, though his warm eyes told tales of humanity behind the façade.

And in a moment bizarre and utterly mundane, I wove through a bustling shopping mall food court, only to brush past the crimson robes of the Dalai Lama himself. His serene smile lingered in my mind long after the scent of fast food faded. And so, with these tales spilling from my lips, you cast me an incredulous glance, the skepticism clear in your eyes. There's disbelief there, the unspoken challenge that whispers, **"You're making all this up."**

In the tumultuous spring of 2003, the universe seemed to conspire against me with a relentless succession of heartache. Over a mere eight-week span, the specter of death weaved its unforgiving narrative through my life, claiming the lives of five people who were the keystones of my existence.

Amidst this cascade of loss, the fragile threads of my romantic relationship unraveled, leaving my heart frayed and exposed.

I had hoped for some solace in routine, mundane tasks – one of which was obtaining a new birth certificate in order to obtain a new passport. Little did I know, this simple errand would be the catalyst for an unraveling of a different kind. The truth was unceremoniously foisted upon me on the most impersonal of phone calls.

A civil servant, with an indifferent timber in her voice, shattered my reality. **“We can’t renew your birth certificate,”** she stated matter-of-factly, **“because the details you’ve provided don’t match our records.”**

26

A pause that felt like an eternity hung between us before her next question jolted me. **“Could you phone your parents and ask them who your real parents are?”**

The foundation of my identity crumbled beneath me – I was suddenly, starkly, not the person I had believed myself to be all these years.

27

The news severed my place in the family valance as the youngest of seven siblings.

When I confronted one who had worn the title of my brother, I did so armed with the shards of partial truths that now composed my existence. His words, however fleeting, upended my sense of self once again. I learned my mother – a woman I'd always thought of as my sister – had borne another daughter, my true sibling, three years subsequent to my own birth. The sands of my lineage had shifted, and I found myself standing as the eldest of what were now only two.

To add to this growing estrangement from my supposed life narrative, there was my girlfriend, Corrie, Wes's sister – my companion of many years. Our connection had always felt deeper than mere happenstance, bound by something inexplicable. She was three years my junior and, like a poignant echo of my own newly unveiled story, was adopted. My heart, already ravaged by loss and betrayal, dared not utter the question silently forming in the back of my mind. She couldn't possibly be... could she?

Four arduous months had crawled by when, amidst the gothic allure of Munich, Germany, my friend Wayne's voice crackled through the phone, piercing the veil of mystery surrounding my origin. He unveiled the identities of my birth parents. My mother... argh... a sister who had woven a relentless vitriol of dismal prophecies, foretelling I was destined to be nothing but a failure.

30

My father - an enigmatic shadow, a blank canvas in my mind's gallery, nothing more than a question mark lingering in my heart.

As autumn's chill descended upon us in November 2006, I found myself navigating the streets of Vancouver, buffeted by the relentless gales of an inescapable windstorm.

Against all odds, it was there, in a restaurant parking lot, during the gale, I met the man believed to be my birth father, a stranger with an uncanny semblance of warmth in his eyes.

He ushered me into the folds of his family, and for a brief, heartwarming moment, I was enfolded in an embrace I'd never known.

In his acceptance, I became a cherished member, expanding the small circle to now be one of four siblings.

Merely two weeks had danced by when I picked up the phone, the weight of my words threatening to fracture the fragile connection I had just begun to forge. My voice trembled as I confessed to my newfound father the appalling lie etched onto my birth registration by my mother's hand - he was not, in fact, my biological father.

With one fell swoop, my father died a second time, this time metaphorically. The man who had so willingly accepted me was now just a poignant reminder of what could have been, a specter of paternal love dissolving before my eyes.

Bereft, I retreated into a world where once again, I was the eldest sibling in a duo, not a quartet.

“You’re fabricating this entire tale,” came the skeptical voice, laced with disbelief.

32

“No,” I countered, with the raw truth resounding in the simplicity of my response.

“No, I’m not.”

With dogged perseverance, I continued my journey through life's complex gauntlet. Tirelessly I wandered, a steadfast voyageur tasked with an eternal quest to gather the fragmented shards of my soul, endeavoring to reconstruct the fullness once known to me.

Yet, in this relentless pursuit, my voice dwindled into a profound silence. Echoing the sentiments of those well-intentioned souls who, in their desire to soothe my woes, blindly attributed the cause to the spirit of the age, I've lost track of the countless instances where acquaintances – whom I once naively regarded as friends – offered up hollow platitudes. “So many people hail from similar tribulations...” or “Countless others have experienced the same misfortunes...”

33

Empty words hopefully leading me to muting them in my life.

When I finally mustered the courage to unveil the newfound truths that composed my reality, one individual – now excised from the circle I call friends – had the audacity to say, “It all makes sense now. We always sensed something was wrong with you.”

The sting of such an assertion lingers; how I wish it were but a figment of my imagination.

There are those who assure me, **“You're better off without them.”**

But the thought of solitude claws at my being – I am not ready to embrace loneliness. “Let someone in,” an inner whisper beckons. Yet the question remains, an enigma wrapped in my yearning: How?

And still, I press on. In the vastness of life’s mosaic, piece by precious piece, I uncover more of what I had lost, or more aptly, never had. For this, amidst the bittersweet complexities of my odyssey, I remain ever grateful.

Among the patchwork of extraordinary souls that grace my life, I carry a compelling charge to continuously weave the fabric of my story into the broader quilting of human experience.

35

It was in the spring twilight of 2009 when tragedy struck amidst the haven of a local gay bar—a place that should have been a sanctuary from the prejudices shadowing us outside.

A dear friend of mine, 62 and deeply cherished, suffered a brutally unprovoked attack. A man, fuelled by nothing but hate and ignorance, swung his fist with such force it shattered not only the sanctity of that space but also the delicate equilibrium within my friend's skull. The aftermath was catastrophic – a vicious blow resulting in irreparable brain trauma. I remember the hushed murmurs and the distinct scent of fear mingling with spilt drinks as I chased the assailant down the neon-slicked streets, my heart pounding against my ribcage in disbelieving sync with my footsteps.

Upon confronting him, the cruelty of his words echoed the violence of his actions, chilling me to the core. **"He's a faggot. He deserved it,"** he declared, his tone laced with disturbing conviction. That statement has since been etched into my memory, a stark reminder of the darkness that resides in some hearts.

36

My friend spiraled into a shadow of his former self, never to reclaim the vivacious spirit that once animated him, and two years on, he succumbed to the invisible wounds that had relentlessly gnawed away at his vitality.

The perpetrator?

His punishment was laughably fleeting – a mere six years designated for a hate crime, yet he sauntered free after only two, an affront to justice and to my friend's memory.

When my friend's fate sealed with tragedy, an outcry for change roared to life. 'Enough is Enough,' the rally summoned, calling on voices to rise above the violence that had claimed yet another life.

It was before this congregation – a sea of 5,000 souls united in the quest for peace – I found myself sharing a piece of my heart, voicing the hurt, the anger, the loss. My knees trembled, my voice wavered, but the weight of my friend's silenced laughter pushed me forward.

In the aftermath, whispers reached me – voices I recognized, but not ones I'd call friends. They muttered their dissatisfaction, claiming I hadn't spun the narrative to highlight their roles, that my words should have danced more around their contributions. But this was not about them. It was, and always will be, about my friend, about the stark truth we face, and about the love we must foster to drown out the hate that took so much from us.

As the phone call drew to an end, on an early October evening, I wondered at the strange twist of fate. The cousin on the line, someone who had once been known to me as a niece, relayed the harsh news: my mother – who had once been a sister to me – rested on the precipice of death.

Journeying to Calgary that melancholy October in 2016, the crisp autumn air felt heavy with memories. It had been nearly three decades since I'd last seen her, our paths diverging in the shadow of our matriarch's passing. I'll never forget how the chill of that day matched the one that had haunted us back when we lost our mother. Her mother.

As I entered her palliative care room, a sense of déjà vu enveloped me. There I was, standing beside the woman who had given me life yet felt like a stranger, a woman who only now, as her own life ebbed away, took on the role of my mother.

For a fleeting ninety minutes, I endeavored to weave the threads of a bond that had never had a chance to form.

Our conversation revealed more than any previous engagement had allowed – a raw, unfiltered patchwork of emotions. Bitterness gripped her words, anger laced her breath, and resentful thoughts filled the space between us. Her revelation echoed with pain, “My father wasn’t a good man,” she confided, a shadow passing over her weary face. And when I asked her who my father was, she vehemently said, “At least it wasn’t that asshole,” the name she had placed on my Birth Record.

39

When the time arrived for parting words, I reached out and folded her into an embrace that was only our second – the other dating back to the dark night we lost the first mother figure in our lives. Then, our parting had been abrupt; her eyes, once wet with grief, instantly regained composure as she ushered me away from what was formerly my sanctuary, now needed for other mourners coming into Saskatoon.

In that dim room in Calgary, I wrapped her frail form in my arms, imparting every ounce of love and strength I could muster. Her voice quavered, a frail whisper heavy with irreversible goodbye, “I’m never going to see you again, am I?”

Upon returning to the familiar yet indifferent embrace of Vancouver, I confided this intense reunion to a friend. His response was as blunt as a sledgehammer, “A lot of people come from fucked up families.”

His words, meant to be a solace, were instead a dismissal, aye, a softer blow would have been to command my silence.

Those were the times.

Fuck off.

Merely a week later, the news came – my mother had departed this world a second time. Abandonment clung to me like a second skin.

Fuck off.

The loneliness gnawed at my core, an unwelcome companion whispering doubts about the right to burden another with such heavy chains of pain. It felt monumentally unfair – too-fucking-much to ask of anyone.

The question hung in the air, barbed and accusatory: “Are you okay?”

How could I be?

A drift amidst this tumultuous sea of emotion, I endured by sheer will.

Pushing forward, piecing together a semblance of normalcy, I wrapped myself in the warm cloak of storytelling.

Twice, I took to the stage, mic in hand, humour as my shield – I performed stand-up, baring my soul through laughter amidst the echoes of my heartache.

I secured a tenure with an enigmatic corporation shadowed by the grim reputation of exploiting the anguish of those teetering on the margins of society.

For nearly a decade and a half, I was the epitome of dedication, infusing a mix of respect and empathy into the fabric of the company culture, as I rose through the ranks, becoming a beacon of guidance to our diverse workforce.

My resolve did not waver, even as I navigated the treacherous waters of survival following a debilitating stroke that came without warning, stealing my fluent speech and full mobility in a relentless tide.

Amidst this personal battle, the tendrils of illness and mortality crept closer, their dark whispers carrying news of family falling prey to sickness and the shadow of death inching ever nearer.

Then, as the world grappled with the foreboding onset of a global pandemic, I was unceremoniously stripped of my position. Discarded without the slightest remorse or a backward glance – as disposable as the bathwater splashed from a tub, this decision was ostensibly a consequence of my advancing years, as I was on the precipice of turning 60.

From the genesis of that societal upheaval, I became another forgotten relic, condemned to gather dust on the shelf of the disregarded – permanently sidelined, with no reprieve in sight.

The corporation – my once trusted employer – displayed an appalling indifference to the profound depths of depression and the economic decimation their abrupt dismissal wreaked upon my life.

After a tenure marked by unwavering loyalty, I had now joined the growing ranks of the aging workers deemed expendable in the harsh eyes of industry.

With dignity as my shield, I made a stand for myself – craving the respect, seeking the validation that was swiftly and callously ripped from my grasp. But there would be no more pleading, no further entreaties. Silence settled like dust. Acknowledgment, understanding, compassion – it all fell away.

After navigating the twists and turns of life for nearly sixty-two years, I've come to a profound realization: my riches of experiences, woven with strands of triumph and adversity, holds a wealth of wisdom I am compelled to contribute to the world.

Yet, the very company that once fuelled my daily purpose vehemently disagreed with this newfound clarity of mine. They not only hindered my progress, but they also had the audacity to send an emissary – one cloaked in the false civility of corporate guise – to execute a metaphorical assassination upon my character. This so-called representative coldly dismissed me as a 'failed writer,' asserting someone as inconsequential as I had no place in the pursuit of such fanciful 'dreams.'

Can you believe that?

This spokesperson had the further gall to arrogantly suggest I should simply fall in line and obey, as if my years of dedication were nothing more than a footnote in their grand operating manual.

I've crossed the milestone of six decades and three years on this earth. It's been three years since I've been expelled from the company's ranks, unceremoniously discarded like a piece of obsolete machinery that had outlived its operational efficiency. Not one of them – no colleague, no manager, not even a peer from the old days – has bothered to pick up the phone, to check in, to extend the barest hint of human concern for my well-being.

47

I gave them almost fifteen years of unwavering service, my attendance record unblemished, my loyalty steadfast; and yet, their actions, or rather the lack of them, paint a vivid picture of their corporate ethos.

The sun rises and sets in a predictable embrace, and with each golden dawn, my ritual remains steadfast. I've confessed this, a solemn mantra I find myself repeating I rise with the hesitant light, allow my thoughts to gather like a storm of locusts, and then I unleash them upon the page.

In the labyrinth of my mind, there are over one hundred and twenty-three tales, each simmering like a pot of alchemist's brew, waiting for their chance to transform leaden thoughts into narrative gold.

Sixteen manuscripts – my literary offspring – are scattered across the desks of indifferent gatekeepers, their fates hanging in the precarious balance of acceptance or rejection.

Yet, even in the face of oblivion, my resolve is ironclad; surrender is a word that has been expunged from my vocabulary.

Amidst this tempest of creation and anticipation, a whimsical detail emerges according to the whims of genetics and the revelations of a DNA test, I carry within me a lineage of Viking blood. Forty-eight percent of me hails from the icy fjords and towering cliffs of Norway, a heritage shared by a vast tapestry of humanity.

49

Yet, the world's indifference to my newfound ancestry is palpable, a stark reminder of our shared smallness beneath the vast cosmos. "Fuck off," the universe seems to whisper with each beat of its cosmic heart.

In the looming shadow of possible revelations, I find myself teetering on the edge of another familial precipice. There's a chance that in uncovering the secrets of my paternity for the third time—each more uncertain than the last—I might shed the title that has defined my place in the family hierarchy for so long. I stand to lose the singular distinction of being the eldest among the two souls that sprang from the same mysterious wellspring.

The adage speaks volumes: you cannot truly comprehend another's essence until you've traversed not just a solitary mile in their well-worn shoes, but countless, through their journey.

Yet, what becomes of those whose paths have been strewn with relentless adversity, each step a herculean task burdened with the weight of sorrow?

How can one forge connections when encased in an armor of persistent distress, and when the ache of heartbreak becomes a monotonous echo in the chambers of their existence, dismissed as mundanity?

52

Yet herein lies the crucible of significance – The heartache – undeniably profound. The need to vocalize – imperative. I am compelled to speak. To weave my narrative from the threads of an exhaustive, seemingly ceaseless sequence of hardships. An unyielding catalogue of woes so vast, it necessitates segmentation, dissection into bearable parcels of my past.

Such a relentless chronicle, this litany of life's trials, that I choose to commence my recollections from a more recent chapter – starting in the year 2016.

And so, I begin. This divulgence does not seek the shallow comfort of pity. No, I unravel these threads of my history in pursuit of comprehension, to extend a hand holding an olive branch, signaling peace, questing for solidarity.

Acknowledge the steel in my resolve. Embrace the depths of my empathy. Feel the breadth of my compassion. I am here, with a tapestry of tales unfurled, ready to share.

From March 2016 to January 2020, the specter of death and misfortune loomed over me, casting long shadows.

On a somber March day in 2016, the world dimmed with the loss of Allison, my youngest niece, anchoring a series of goodbyes.

By summer's pinnacle, June claimed Bernard Hrapchak, a thread plucked from the fabric of my childhood memories.

55

Come October, an eternal farewell awaited as I stood by my mother, Bernice - her identity as my mother cementing only in her last breaths. A brief autumn week later, she slipped away.

Winter brought no reprieve, as it swept my sister Beverly into the inescapable cold.

As the year closed, I wrestled with a sinister diagnosis - Sarcoidosis, a rebellious flame ignited by my workplace environment.

56

With the new year, my body betrayed me. A stroke in January struck like a thief, stealing pieces of the world I knew.

Love and loss intertwined on Valentine's Day as Jeff V departed.

2019 unfurled, and with it, Gordon, my uncle, joined the silent ranks.

57

A revelation came as cruel as it was terminal - an Alpha One Deficiency clawed at my lungs.

Defying odds, I continued, even as an unwanted transfer to the Surrey Office loomed ominous, a harbinger hinted at by my own condition.

Jason D, a friendship sculpted over shared living, became another memory as the year darkened.

58

Yet, as the decade waned, a sliver of hope pierced my litany of despair - my Alpha One diagnosis, a dark cloud, had been mistaken.

In the relentless march of time, 2020 unfurled its trials. A career termination, shortly thereafter a milestone at sixty, followed by a throat surgery that proved both saviour and sword, as erstwhile employers sought to turn my lifeline against me.

History echoed its grief on the day Scotty Larin's laughter was forever silenced - an eerie symphony to the silence that my mother's passing had left years ago.

The legal battles and health scares interwove, encapsulating my sixty-first year in paradoxical celebration and somber commemoration - life continued amidst death as the calendar mourned with me over Sadie and Rebekah.

Hear episodes punctuated the closing days of 2021, a stark reminder of mortality as I forged an alliance with a cardiologist, underwent scans, and confronted the trials of a thrumming heart.

Spring 2022 whispered the finality of loss with Dannell P's departure.

Tests and trials paced my relationship with time, challenging me at every beat until

September delivered the opportunity of retribution through a counteroffer - a calculated strike, 911 days in the making.

By my sixty-second summer, the turning of the year's wheel had etched resilience into the fabric of my being, a testament to survival inked into each line of my story.

The revelations I have unfolded before you are not only extreme; they are steeped in the unvarnished truth.

How could I possibly weave lies into the very fabric of my destiny?

I am acutely aware my purpose on this tumultuous earth is to weave narratives. And so, on the days when tears aren't streaming down my face or tremors aren't seizing my hands, I drape my sorrows in the gossamer of wit.

Note About Our Landlord

A It was a crisp November day in 2021 when he and his wife, Sue, graced the threshold of our abode. I, in my casual disarray, mustered the semblance of decorum to welcome them – attired in nothing but my well-worn boxer shorts and the slightest hint of formality afforded by a faded t-shirt.

Before me stood a man who had once presided over legal destinies as The Justice of the Supreme Court of Zimbabwe. And there I was, a humble host in my minimalist attire, extending courtesies to a former pillar of jurisprudence.

Quite seriously.

Who else but a born storyteller could find themselves in such a peculiar page of life's grand book?

But then, I pose this question to you not in search of an answer.

Rhetorical, indeed.

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