

Embrace your aloneness

has a unique literary formula.
It is a blend of autobiography,
collected verse and a nonfiction.

Within these pages, philosophy, psychology,
self-help, and truth, stem from a plausible
context.

By Michael John Holme

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Contents

Introduction 5

Part 1 - Causing the damage 7

Part 2 - Repairing the damage 38

Part 3 - Michael's New Testament? 78

The "I am" book -
"Conforming by nonconformity"

Introduction	78
Chapter one	81
Chapter two	85
Chapter three	88
Chapter four	90
Chapter five	95
Chapter six	97
Chapter seven	99

Part 4 - Gallery 102

Introduction

Between 2000 and 2020, Michael, the author, wrote several hundred poems, each dated by their conception (and any major revisions.) Some poems reflected on past times, whilst others journaled the present. However, after 2015 in particular, Michael was using poetry less for diary writing, and more to express and ultimately cement his emerging philosophy.

Michael had worked as a computing technician, and broadly speaking, he was much more prolific as a creative writer, after being made redundant in 2010. That job's second year: 1998, was marked with Michael's bipolar diagnosis. During the initial manifestation of this mood disorder, in 1992, he was mistakenly labelled schizophrenic, because of the severity of the psychotic depression crippling him.

It is well documented that mood disorders are linked to creativity. Not only did Michael become an accomplished amateur classical

pianist, after beginning studies at the age of 21, but his nonfiction that makes up Part 3 of this book (and forms Michael's central tenet) was written, proofread, edited and published in no more than three weeks. It simply poured onto the page, whilst he was making the best of his time in the UK's first coronavirus lockdown.

Like Susan Jeffers' book, "Feel the fear and do it anyway," the title of Michael's nonfiction, "I am", summarises its contents too. So ironically, you needn't actually read it, but can instead accept its message from the title alone?

That's unlikely. The point of first sharing poems and remarks in this volume, is to provide a considerable context to the later nonfiction. It is hoped that the author's lived and experienced background, helps the reader to gain some trust.

It will be clear early on in this book, how profound have the ramifications of trust been in Michael's life.

Part 1 - Causing the damage

This first poem was based word for word, on a postcard that Michael's late father sent him. He was on business in America. Michael was seven, and typical of a young boy, he was interested in guns. As the poem's title suggests, his parents separated within the next year,

Divorced in a year, postcard 22 VIII 1975

Thursday:

Everything here is very big,
buildings, cars;
hotel has swimming pool,
you would enjoy a holiday here.
We hope to visit Texas before we come home,
may see a cowboy.
All the police carry guns in America,
so I'll need to be good.
I hope you're being a good boy.
I've told Andrew and Mummy
I'll be home Wed/Thurs,
since writing them it may be Saturday,
Lots of love Daddy.

9/3/11

It must always be hard for young children to be brought up by one parent, but especially so, when that single parent is the father, after maternal abandonment. At best, the adult lives of such children will be struggles, not only in terms of their careers and/or relationships, but also their mental health. Drug and alcohol issues are shockingly likely also.

* * *

Please appreciate that some of these poems have greater poetic craft than others. The previous one is on the attractive, Literary Orphans (dot) Org website, and other editors have collectively published around fifty of Michael's poems, in either print anthologies or on websites. The next one is not well crafted, but it tells the sad story of the moment Michael's mum left home for good.

The announcement

Silence was pervasive
under a blanket of Pink Floyd,
and a sewing two litre Cortina Ghia engine.

Weekend ferrying
to a fast cabin cruiser,
was an attempt at reparation,

and a chance for one of the party
to fantasise about a new life
in the Lakes.

Silence had existed as long as memory had kicked in,
the day the passengers were requested down,
as if extracted from school assembly.

It was cold as a snake's belly, pointed and short.
She didn't speak, they had to be men and watch,
as she drove away, in the car he'd recently bought for her.

James at eleven was tangled in wires and resistors.
John, three years younger, needed counselling: he lashed out in school.
Help came much later, when the damage had been done.

As young men they did drugs and drink, flunked university, thought with the sheltering they were given, life would twig. Dad never cried. John grew to weep in empathy for pain.

30/1/11

Note: Above, Michael is referred to by his middle name “John.” Likewise, Andrew “James” is his brother.

* * *

Michael’s high school friends reached an age at which girls became their focus. Instinctively, Michael shied away from joining in with their pursuit. In part, Michael feared rejection, but consequently lost contact with that group of friends.

There was a computer at home: his brother’s; and Michael became interested in it. This led to his involvement in what was essentially a male dominated, bedroom based culture and community. People played and swapped, pirated computer games. Some people including Michael, even programmed these earlier microcomputers.

Whilst Michael was in the sixth form, he fell into the relatively welcoming, soft-drugs culture of cannabis smoking. His avoidance was already evident, and perhaps worsened by the lack of what some call, “a secure base”? In fact, the reason Michael entered his school’s sixth form, rather than studying for his A levels at the local college, was essentially one of fear. He even knew he had admiration for friends that made that break from school, and perhaps denied somewhat that he’d have liked to as well.

At 17, Michael had a car and could drive. Cannabis smokers valued that, and of course therefore, Michael ended up taking people from one deprived housing estate to another, and back, to “score.”

The following poem relates. When Michael wrote this, he chose to hide behind the name “Thomas.”

Platt Bridge -

was “dole-town.”

John and Mark lived
on the second level
of a two-story block,
across an empty car park,
facing Fudge’s pad.

They shut the world out.
Fudge studied racing form,
and had a dog called Sensimilla.

People
dropped in occasionally.
They played whist and hearts at John’s
to pass time.

There wasn’t much to say,
after *alright?*

The focus was a homemade bong.
With a Bic, pop bottle, some BluTack and foil;
it still wouldn’t make Blue Peter.

Thomas visited,
and drove John to Hag Fold.
There were semis there,
but it was still down-market.
He’d park around the corner,
anxiously waiting,
as John sampled and scored.

Back at home with an ashtray,
John would roast a Regal.
He'd crumble dry tobacco
and mix it with the hash,
like bars dilute spirits with pop.
They'd giggle.
John would find his tongue,
then forget what he was saying.

Mark left the flat and his sanity. Thomas studied.
Eventually, John found a woman and a job.
They didn't know what happened to Fudge.

5/9/12 - 11/12/16

One highly memorable day took Michael to a local pasture field with his Platt Bridge friends. They picked very many magic mushrooms (liberty caps), consuming some at the same time they bagged others for later. On returning to Platt Bridge, they smoked cannabis as usual, and in Michael's case, that was on top of about 50 mushroom from the field. In a trance, watching an old black-and-white film, Michael mindlessly treated his remaining mushrooms like popcorn. When asked if he had any left, the sight of a near vanished supply, once over a hundred strong, was very disturbing. (People often take only thirty.) His fear probably worsened the experience to ensue, but he was absolutely going to have a so called bad-trip.

“Panic attack”, overleaf, attempts to express what happened in verse. It took Michael years to understand, that he had an enormous adrenaline rush of war zone like proportions. And that his perceived *physical* feelings of his brain and spinal cord that followed later, had not been real. He had not caused them physical damage, because those feelings were hallucinations brought on by the mushrooms; specifically, the drug psilocybin.

Panic attack

A spectacle of eyes transfixed by film:
some third-rate fifties black and white repeat.
Three minds imprisoned by the endless frames,
are islands.

They spend the night with oral yen to stoke,
says Freud arrested growth is why they smoke.
And in between, small mushrooms picked that morn'
keep mouths content, effects will last till dawn.
Ironic, caps they have are 'Liberty'
cause Tom seems quite entrapped, the irony.
Slow rhythmic right hand reflex feeds his face.
He's disappearing from the human race.

When asked are any 'shrooms left in his tin,
Tom confidently looks but sees nothing.
They tell him he's been popping them all night,
a moment of denial, futile; they're right.
Affectively the mushrooms make him sink.
Effectively they're time bombs for a shrink.

A den like this is alien to him.
He's guilty now just being in the room,
and anxious 'shrooms inside have yet to work;
he says *goodbye*, and goes.

Claustrophobic feelings the sky's vast heights relieve.
He breathes in the fresh air, nervous reprieve.
His small red sports car beckons patiently.
He reckons he could handle driving home,
and longing for his bed, heads to the car.
He shuts the door behind him - big mistake,
then knocks a switch. A buzzing fan comes on.
He finds his keys, inserts them, tries to think
so consciously, of how to drive a car.
How does he start? Digressing, what's the buzz?
Check gear in neutral. Clear, now what comes next?
Digressing, what's the buzz? What gear's he in?
He's not, he's checked. Digressing, what's the buzz?
What is the buzz? His head? It's in his head!

His mind no longer functions.
He's unaware of his breath.
He's drowning in thin air now.
Grasping the steering wheel,
he wants out of the door.
Think! Think! Where's the handle?
Digressing, has he air?
He tries to reach the knob,
he can't, he coils back in,
shaping like a ball.
Just about to die,
he has no air.

Cortex wrenching.
(Hormone rescue?)
A surge,
huge rush,
a slice of thought.
He launches for the knob,
the door bursts open. Out he crashes. Free.
Wild, heart beating, jelly legged freedom.

His brain's learned panic.

24/04/00

* * *

Michael's brother started York university three years earlier, then settled there. Socially speaking then, by going there too, to study chemistry, Michael made another easy and typically avoidant choice. His brother even knew a local cannabis dealer.
Whilst at the university, Michael did gain an awareness of his need to entice others with externals, as opposed to relying on his own personality, but he was not able to predict any future problems that such an approach might attract.

In the next poem Michael is again "John", and along with two others, he made up part of a regularly formed trio.

University

John stood in the queue taking in the back of a head.
Trying to look cool, he didn't expect an approach,
but not trying too hard sometimes attracts.

A lad from Belfast with caramel-tongued charm spoke.
Dribble was his magnetic verse. He could sell hashish
to Moroccans. But he was prospecting, and probed John's
resourcefulness.

John's shoulder length hair drew him in.
Three years were spent smoking,
in John's case, to excess. Their academic success was polar.

It started with a queue position, a butterfly wing beat, and ended
with a drunken scuff, caught on film and hanging in the bar
for generations to see, with Irish advice, *watch that chin*.

11/12/10

Michael was very elated in his first year at York, and he enjoyed a great
social ease that was uncharacteristic for him. In his first summer holiday,
along with an Australian, the trio headed for an Israeli kibbutz.

They had a month on Nahal Oz. Michael left early, and whilst there, he
chose solitary work. This involved cutting gigantic steel rods into equal
shorter lengths, to ultimately become huge nuts (see Image 1). The others
joined the melon picking gang, technically in the Negev desert, but with
Israel's desalination of sea water being economically viable, the area was
more agricultural than of sand dunes and camels!

Although separated by Gaza, they were close to the Mediterranean sea.
And on the day Michael chose to leave the kibbutz early, a collective
curiosity prompted the group to take the moderate walk into that troubled
Palestinian region (see Image 2). After seeing Gaza, Michael extended
his adventure alone. He visited Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Cairo, prior to
worrying about returning home to the UK.

* * *

Michael was quiet and reclusive for his remaining two years in York. He had experienced a dramatic mood change, but typically for the eighties, nobody suspected a mental health problem. It was a time that not even homosexuality had been accepted, demonstrated by a whole university campus ostensibly appearing to be comprised, of just heterosexuals.

* * *

After leaving York, Michael and a Platt Bridge associate had a failed three week holiday/tour of Morocco. In retrospect, Michael was already very depressed, and therefore he made a poor traveling companion. Throughout the holiday he was humourless and spoke very little.

In truth, Michael thought the holiday would prove he had some autocracy, outside of the trio, but sadly he had none. Indeed he had no friends either, so he gravitated to his mum, especially when his dad had sold the original family house, and moved with his second wife, to a completely foreign area to Michael.

Given Michael's marketable skills, his desire to avoid people, and an increasing pressure to work, he ended up programming computers. In a couple of months he was offered two such jobs: programming fruit machines, and writing computer aided learning software. He took the latter, despite it having "assistant" in its title, and a lower salary; but certainly when he thought one fruit machine must be very much like any other. Therefore he started work in a university pharmacy department, whilst also attracted by an assumption that it would be a relatively less threatening environment than some.

Soon after starting this job, Michael began learning the piano. (He now plays to a useful advanced level, and has taught others.) His mother is adamant the piano saved his life. Doubtlessly, when he was in his early twenties, he would have been a much greater suicide risk without music.

* * *

This next poem deals with the psychology in Michael's year-long first job. The other character is his immediate boss, who he found impossible to relate to, and never grasped where their roles overlapped.

Michael's self-consciousness became disabling, and fuelled paranoia. He believed people entered his physical work space to purposefully stress him.

The programmer's first job

Can't you sense my anguish,
in this silence imposed by social anxiety?
It's anxiety borne of silence that spirals.

You've entered my cell, called such,
because it has no windows or people,
and I'm chained to a desk.

I can't ask you to leave,
as you're ostensibly superior,
but intellectually, do I better you at cost?

Computers are strewn.
They hum banshee wails,
eventually draining spirits.

Peacefully leave me with my digital monsters,
and precise rules, but YOU,
do you pity or persecute?

One year was enough.
I took alternate #1. Leaving you and hum,
and following ME, like a stalker.

28/2/12 - 11/12/16

Lunchtime drinking in a nearby pub helped Michael get through that year. However, his vulnerability caught the attention of a gay middle-aged man who essentially tried to groom him. Read on, Michael takes the pseudonym “Tom.”

Pete

Tom’s only happy respite was in dreams.
He’d dug a grave, jumped in
and tippled the soil on his head.
Any opportunity to drink was snatched,
especially lunches, punctuating the days he spent
computing alone, in his first job.

His refuge was the Ducie Arms:
Irish and hidden by a huge library.
The landlord was hunched and expressionless.
Problem drinkers were people he’d pour for
unprompted. Weeks passed in solitary Guinness supping,
till his alcove was invaded.

The invader was late forties, sporting a moustache
and jacketed spread. He tried a joke.
Tom chuckled then replied.
Both worked at the university.
Hiding behind folded arms, taciturn by nature,
Tom encouraged him a little: he was a reluctant loner.

Tom clock watched more for lunches.
The invader kept showing.
Pete was passionate about Spanish,
and spoke often of a Mexican friend, Antonio,
and Mexican travel. Tom was learning piano.
Pete encouraged him saying *bueno Chopin*, as he gave Tom a score.

It emerged that Antonio was Pete's lover.
Pete had left his family for him.
Depth grew between Tom and Pete.
Pete implored Tom, *why do you hate yourself?*
Curious about Antonio,
Tom agreed to a night out with them both.

Antonio was Tom's age, handsome, and had dancing feet.
His smile was infectious. After much drink he mimed a Tango,
then kissed Tom, French style, in the street.
Tom wasn't gay, but Antonio's flamboyance,
a need for acceptance and the drink,
allowed it to happen a second too long.

Eventually Pete and Antonio parted.
Antonio wasn't gay, it was just his way of getting by,
Pete said, whilst pulling his impressive wage slip,
casually, out of his equally rich,
jacket inner pocket. Tom
was nonchalant.

Tom was invited out for a meal.
The romantic candles and dim lights
made him canvass for people's gazes.
Back at Pete's house, Tom curled up, drunk,
in front of the gas fire, Z shaped,
and was gently moulded to by a larger Z.

Pete and a suitcase ended up in student accommodation.
Tom visited after another night drinking.
With twenty pints between them
they arrived at the halls. Joy -
there was a piano. Tom played his Bartok
and simplified Chopin.

Pete marveled at Tom's grade three pieces, asking,
how can you play?
In his twin room he revealed his interest
in Tom's groin, and reached out to touch it.
Tom recoiled and sternly frowned. Pete chortled.
Now depressed; had Tom unwittingly led Pete on?

Knowing where Pete worked offered Tom some safety,
he also added, *I'm not gay*,
and found his way home to his mother.
Pete and Tom met once more: late at night in the Ducie.
Tom wasn't expecting Pete, but he reported
about his worse job. He'd carried over his problem: him.
As for the pair, their depth had gone.

31/1/11 - 4/12/16

Michael left the university after being matched by an employment agency to one of their clients, but he hadn't realised that he was his own problem, and he'd "take himself" to any new job.

His new environment was a big change; it was commercial. You could rightly say he'd "jumped out of the frying pan into the fire;" for example, being self-consciousness in an open-plan office environment was not going to work. In just a few weeks that was apparent, and any understandable new-job anxieties, were not blameable. In fact, being a great computer programmer, ultimately made him a target for bullying.

This next fictitious poem, tries to illuminate aspects of this state of over awareness.

Self-consciousness

Can't you guess what I'm thinking,
or see through my eyes?
What was that smile about?
Am I transparent?

I shyly mirror your grins
and attempt the odd fake chuckle,
sometimes inappropriately,
and socially stumble.

I'm lost
and aim to be polite,
but my frown betrays me.
Do you see it?

If I had words to say
it'd be like balm,
but my lack of focus
is a social handcuff.

You leave and I relax,
until we meet again;
to greet
or not to greet?

We meet several times.
I say *hello*.
How weak I feel.
I'm my own proverbial fly.

28/11/01 - 16/11/10 - 11/5/13

* * *

Michael frequented bars at night, purposely spreading himself around all the village pubs, to hopefully be less noticed. It initially worked, whilst at the same time he denied it was unhealthy behaviour. But he had no friends, he hated his job, and problems followed at home. His mother and stepfather started bickering regularly. On one tense night, Michael returned from drinking, and soon afterwards his stepfather shouted upstairs to him, “if that drunken fucking bastard comes down, I’ll hit him.”

Michael didn’t understand it at the time. Afterwards, he thought that outburst might have been linked with guilt, because Michael was an innocent victim, of the devastating consequences of adultery.

“Downfall” describes his solitary, daily, village drinking.

Downfall

It’s Friday night. He knows no villagers.
He’s deluded into thinking everyone’s out
and happy. Most pretend,
fuelled by alcohol.

He lives with his guilty mum and stepfather,
though he grew up with his workaholic dad.
He can get away with excess drinking here,
and smoking in the house.

He heads to the village to play fruit machines.
It’s a tax he pays for aloneness. He drinks
two pints in each of four bars. Even so
he’s recognisable and tries somewhere new.

Who wants to know a cancer?
He’s predominately dead, loathing his ungrounded self.
He sits in the empty main bar,
then stands, watching passing cars.

On the next day, with regulars in the snug,
he's alone. The landlord checks on him.
Bursting into tears, he's asked *what's the matter?*
So he randomly cites his parents divorce.

In the snug, a quiet man says, *he doesn't say much*,
after all the introductions had been made.
He feels inferior, as he hasn't chatted in years.
He braves offering a drink to Reggie, who's his age.
The man's always alone and refuses.

He goes for another week, but self-love
will help him to mix. It's the same at work,
so he quits, and hospital follows.
He's depressed.

4/9/12 - 11/12/16

Michael's mental health worsened. He became very paranoid in work and out of it. Then he started hearing imaginary voices aimed at himself (which at that time he took to be real.) They were always derogatory or critical, and always in the third person. He challenged just one, a much later one. Out-of-the-blue, his own father apparently said "he's a rogue and a vagabond." Michael asked his dad what he just said, and it seemed to be repeated. On a handful of occasions over the following few years, Michael asked his dad again about this, but his father was always absolutely incredulous, that Michael would ask such a question.

After 18 months he resigned from the software house, but it wasn't the answer. His mental health continued to decline. By being unemployed and so isolated, there was still plenty to become less well about, and his confused deluded thinking played a big part in what many would call a nervous breakdown.

* * *

On seeing his GP, who was initially flippant, Michael patently placed a physical threat in the doctor's mind, because he assumed a defensive body stance. His mother, accompanying, told the doctor he shouldn't have said "milkman"... That day Michael was admitted to a private psychiatric hospital, and quickly diagnosed as schizophrenic. His psychiatrist was extremely surprised Michael had held his job as long as he did.

After two weeks in hospital he emerged on antipsychotics, and with some follow-up outpatient group appointments. Additionally, his mother contacted the local NHS mental health outreach service. That led to him spending nearly a year as a client/volunteer, in the social therapy department of the local state mental asylum. "Gap year" shares some of his experiences there.

Gap year

Since volunteering to man the urn,
I'm less concerned about being on the dole,
no "proper role" to kick start the day.
Life in the hospital seems easy going;
keep taking the tablets, sit around,
smoke cigarettes, do a quiz. Strange thing
is that people don't seem to mind,
after years in these confines,
sectioned in white washed halls and wards,
long corridors bursting with emptiness,
handrails a reminder of plodding movement.
Tranquilized silence fills the air now.

Stan's still here, John Wayne's biggest fan,
three shots kill you stone dead,
said with word salad either side,
profound but for his laugh and smile.
He seems happy to endlessly circle the hall

Bob's the man, only heard him speak once,
under very mild duress, four cig brands in as many seconds.
I smiled and gave him two Regal.
He normally used his hands,
karate chops meaning *I want*,
the context telling what.

Do away with words, refine routine,
over the years the priorities are clear,
cigs, tea, food and sleep;
in the hall with an urn nearby, tea
else sadly, smoke by elimination.

What's to be said? Odd at first, almost a joke
when I asked Bob what he meant,
tea, coffee, orange? as he bent forward,
chopping in pairs with half-mast trousers,
red braces and lips pursed. I was helped
eventually, and coincidentally, Bob took two sugars.

And I ask, what do they think about?
Some have nothing to look back on.

??/??/01

Michael's mum always looked out for stuff he might do, and she spotted a computer course advertised in a local paper. It was fledgling, and may lead to a master's degree. Michael enquired. He was unemployed, with a suitable first degree, *and* relevant work experience. He was ideal. Then again, being cynical, students like Michael could help the course's initial statistics: if the course was to enter a second run, it would help if it appeared to be doable.

To survive, Michael decided he would keep himself to himself. After all, it was just one year fulltime. But firstly, because Michael had shared his diagnosis with the course leader, a phone call to psychiatry was necessary, but that positively ensured Michael's enrolment.

The course ended Michael sickness benefits, because he gained full-time student status. Then a week into things, he was unexpectedly awarded a maintenance grant, on top of the tuition fees he had already been granted.

Michael soon began missing lectures, but only when he thoroughly knew the topics, such as 8086 assembly language programming. However, an exception was "Multimedia", in which the lecturer might discuss the pros and cons of an onscreen button being green or cyan. This was intolerably frustrating for Michael, who could happily consider delegating such a decision to a coin toss.

Despite his initial wish for a low profile, Michael's programming prowess attracted attention to himself, and incredibly, he met a piano teacher called Clare, on the first day. Clare was 15 years older than him, and joined the course to get away from music. Her first degree was in biochemistry. She'd had a varied professional career, including school teaching, and radio presenting for BBC Manchester. She also had a music degree. Meeting a keen "adult" piano student midway through their grade exams, was unlikely. (A later Clare is seen in Image 5.)

* * *

It wasn't quite right, but it may have been a necessary step in Michael's life: given his mental ill health, vulnerability, and strong piano interest; because he drifted into a relationship with Clare.

Whilst it is pathetic, this poem mentions the time Michael thought he was first meant to kiss Clare, which turned out to be an action dictating the course of many following years of his life: his journey.

Just good friends?

The concert's over. Time dwindles.
He's deep in thought as they approach
the cars.
His dilemma is that earlier look,
wide eyed and smiling, a moment too long.

They sit in his car before parting,
and briefly talk about the concert,
how amazingly Michel Petrucciani played,
despite his size.
His mind's multi-tasking.

Then, fifteen years her junior, he chances a kiss.
They're well matched, he fancies her,
and she responds.
It's sealed, they are more than friends.
By chance it is Valentine's day, his birthday.

This was the start of something long term,
he's too kind to break a heart.
She later says that simple look was chance.
But, can compatible men and women be
just good friends?

18/6/02 - 24/11/10

Things were Okay for several years, because Clare tolerated Michael talking piano all the time; until it stopped, and silence followed. The next poem is not retrospective. It occurred as dated, and it's the first such one in this book. It naively complements Clare.

Clare's mum always lived with her daughter, including during Clare's first marriage. She died between Michael first meeting Clare, and him writing this next poem. At that time he was working for the department in which he met Clare, where he got his MSc. But in 1998, after one year in this new job, he had his third, and at the time of writing, his last psychiatric hospital stay, and was diagnosed with bipolar disorder.

The Road

She dresses from eBay, vain cares put aside.
Her songs touch our hearts deeply.
She has no interest in plastic mirages,
spurns instant joy, the soul's ruination.

She found me alone, in need of a friend;
there was no mask, she had no agenda.
She loved me, healed my heart,
healed my mind, after others hurt me.

I seek truth, I must find courage,
treading together, forgetting the past.
A light shines before us, bright as the sun.
We must believe it's true heaven.

We must not hate the world, it must not fool us.
The light beckons, the road needs to rule.
Don't look back, we must keep walking,
we are growing you and I.

23/3/00 - 22/11/10

The following cameo highlights the routine Michael had already found himself in. He lacked the mental resources to change his life, and after that last hospital admission, he was permanently on lithium therapy.

Night in

I sit with my palmtop computer,
trying to compose this poem. You
with your microphone and mixing desk, are singing
upstairs in the room we call the playpen.
Is this life then?
Lucy's brindle coat is drying by the fire.
My trousers are damp too. You
don't take the dogs at night, that's my job.
What with the parrots we've a little family,
of a sort. I ought
to stop worrying whether we're normal.

2/1/01

Any spark between Michael and Clare vanished as their talking lessened. Michael tried to end their relationship, but Clare cried! He went on to lose the best years of his life. Clare's death at the age of 59, when Michael was 44, ended 18 years together.

A colleague who knew Michael well, told him the following; "you gave up your own happiness for the happiness of someone else." That was the most bittersweet thing anyone ever said to him, and the thought of it still affects him, in part, because in the verse John 15:13, it is suggested, that Jesus said, giving up your life for your "friends" is THE greatest form of love.

"Words" describes hundreds of silent occasions that Michael and Clare spent eating out.

Words

Words are incessant hailstones
piercing.
There's no hide,
our oasis is drowned.

Twenty years have passed.
Once we'd be like an amp on nine, now we're quiet
as I imagine
space is.

But we're troubled,
though food
will soon free us from standing out
in this people patchwork.

Once I could be confident yet quiet
like Hines' Gamekeeper,
and proud in the storm; a lighthouse.
Now I'm dimmed and confused, an autumnal muffled bird.

A standard BLT
with rocket added,
causes renaming of my fodder, pricing it
accordingly higher.

You eat pizza Margherita
with no surprises. How could there be?
The food is delicious and our mouths
are engaged.

It's Friday night and no wonder
ear density is high, as is volume.
We finish and I tip with just enough to make sound
into a golden metal piggy bank.

We leave; for good?

23/10/10

Clare was very spiritual, and whilst very dependable as an organist at a local Catholic church, she was much more drawn to eastern religions, and other ideas. Astrology was a speciality of hers. In time, Michael decided to try the church, because Clare always seemed calm. So after he'd read "Mere Christianity" by C.S. Lewis, he begun lessons in Catholicism with a priest where Clare played the organ. Ultimately, he was confirmed. Being bipolar, Michael's Catholic faith had its on and off times. When he was down he was more drawn, than when he was up. And in time he reappraised Christianity completely, remaining mostly happy with Jesus Christ, but unsure of the existence of a supernature. He certainly read the Bible less literally. However, he also stopped attending masses.

Risperidone and Depakote were added to Michael's psychiatric medication regime. Perhaps with abusive disregard, Clare encouraged too much of the former (enter the next poem.) Small increments of that antipsychotic managed to reach overwhelming levels in an insidious manner. The maximum dose of risperidone in bipolar disorder is 6mg, but Michael was on doses of up to 12mg, alongside large amounts of his two mood stabilisers, lithium and Depakote.

It should also be noted that the word "husband" appears in this next poem. After Clare had beaten the 60/40 against odds of septicaemia, during a seven month hospital stay in 2006, they made it a reason to marry. She actually died six years later. Michael had cared for her very personal needs during that time, driven her about in the car, and always pushed her wheelchair.

Michael had always lacked mental insight, and in the capacity of being his wife, Clare was probably able to have a greater than otherwise influence, in terms of his ongoing private psychiatry appointments and their related phone calls. One might postulate, that anyone 15 years older, physically disabled, and co-dependant, may have a reason to assert control over their much younger, and physically-able partner, even by allowing chemical "straitjacketing."

Risperidone

Those extra two milligrams have done it.
You've got your husband back.
He's tired at night, and can't manage
on three hours' sleep. He's no longer high.

No more irritability and indiscretions,
no more spending and rushing about,
you always said you preferred him low to high.
You've got the perfect medium.

1/4/11

* * *

Michael was made redundant in 2010, after thirteen years of continuous employment. In truth, he'd hardly done any work for a decade, but he was so vulnerable and without confidence, that his feelings of being both unemployable and trapped meant he just kept sitting it out. Clare died two years after he was made redundant. Not uncommonly, she'd been in hospital again, but this time she was transferred to a nursing home. Totally unexpectedly, after little time there, when Michael visited her room very early one morning, he found her dead.

* * *

The next six poems, written during that time, chronicle it somewhat. The sixth: "Two days later," about Clare's actual day of passing, was understandably written some days after that day, and not on it. Michael was drinking very heavily at this time, in fact, up to a whole litre of tequila on one particular night.

Everything but the girl

You're there again.
This time the period will be remembered
with "Everything
but the girl."

You aren't talking, and your eyes
don't look into mine. You never
liked needles, and your arms
are black and blue pin cushions.

Saline and blood drip into your veins.
Oxygen tries to infiltrate your nose,
when you're not too confused
to dislodge the tubes.

I think of those years ago
when you presented like this.
You were sent to the ICU
I can't take that twice.

So it's night time again.
I'm alone with our fretting dog Lucy,
a can of strong lager and a packet
of cigarettes.

I sleep two till two in the bed I've not made
for weeks. Then I drive over and hope
to see you smile. It kills me
thinking about this.

29/4/12

Tequila

Am I high? I haven't slept for two nights.
Usually I'm dead after one. I downed
a bottle of absinthe last night, didn't have
any effect bar placebo, weak 38% abv stuff.
Tonight I'm on tequila, 38% too.
It's one litre of the shit plus energy drink;
Red fucking Bull on fire. Give me
strength to last these times alone.
I drink out of boredom; loneliness.
If some other drug was available
I'd probably take that; sad fuck.

19/5/12

Early rise

It's 6:45a.m. I hear your alarm start.
You sleep downstairs, I sleep up.
I'm finishing off last night's Budweiser.
It's flat. That's how I feel. Rings emanate in the glass.
That damned touchscreen phone is frustration.
I try to text you.

I'm going to mass later to feed and pray.
I should confess as it's been long since sharing,
but I'm like the Lost Son. It'll be Okay with Christ.

My problem's semantics exploding like puffballs.
And I need people but I can't cope: my paradox.
I'm alone except for the dog.
I'm going crazy.

24/5/12

Polefield nursing home

It's 1a.m. I've got four cigarettes,
a bottle of Irish whiskey
and our dog snoring at the end of my bed.
A power saving light is on.
I look at a cupboard mirror asking myself,
what happened to that man?
I'm sipping my drink, playing with whiskers
and unable to see beyond.

I knew I'd end up alone.
I didn't think it would be like this.
That nursing home makes me love you more.

5/6/12

Anniversary

A blank white sheet is lighting
my face. Should I pray? Would
Jesus mind if I smoked? I babble,
*take care of Clare Christ. Please
take care ...* I multitask with thoughts
and a cigarette, then write.

You've gone in a home now.
I've canine company and Jesus.

It was our Sugar anniversary today.
You battled pain. Your morphine confusion
hurt me when you said
would you sooner I died?

I left unopened Love Hearts
on your table.

13/6/12

Two days later

You'd been in constant pain.
What did you mean by *come January*
it'll be curtains?

Now you are peaceful in bed on the 15th of June.
Your eyes are cat's and your mouth
could be a gentle air passage.

I say *Clare*. You don't respond.
Believing morphine is numbing you,
I deny worse.

You're meditating. I don't want to disturb you.
Your eyes close. I deny.
You ARE with me.

I sit sharing peace.
The suffering is abated
then I leave you to rest.

Passing a nurse
I ask *is morphine doping Clare?*
She checks you.

Three times I denied. I weep.

26/6/12

Taking stock: Michael was mentally ill, a widower, unemployed, on very low income. He lived alone with his geriatric and incontinent dog. He had no social life, and was vulnerable. He owned a house, thanks to giving Clare 18 years of his life, but otherwise, at 44 years of age he could be viewed as being at “square-one.”

Michael had just one regular social media contact, but after about a year they fell out, over some inappropriateness and other mix ups. They just *knew of* each from high school. However, at the time, her abrupt Facebook “block” caused Michael notable anxiety for a week or two; but by listening to those feelings, he became able to turn them into a new and needed motivation, and ultimately, consequent action.

* * *

Part 2 - Repairing the damage

Michael wrote the next piece six months after Clare's death. It has some profundity that makes it suitable to begin Part 2 of this book. Michael's instincts were leading him to the fundamental question: "who am I?" In another seven years he wrote his interesting and suggestively titled "I am" book, which answered that question. It forms Part 3 of this volume.

Armadillo

Who am I? Am I that child grown up?
Who am I? Am I an evil man fighting his heart?
Geese travel beautifully, but greet with open beaks.

Who am I? Now numb with life, so chilled I don't feel down.
Who am I? Teeth smiling to be seen, dirty or not, who cares?
Higher, like Indian moods, what of India? What of her moods?

When life's this way, you make a new self with armour, hiding -
the boy.

30/1/13

Michael continued asking questions and contemplating. Within days of writing the last poem, “Armadillo,” he wrote the following thoughtful piece of dated verse. By this time little of his work was retrospective.

The trap

Are we children?
Haven't we grown?
Are we all mirrors
of our youths;
flies caught in amber?
We're constricted
by the truth in our mind
which we can't
gloss over,
with make up
or loud music.
Damn life's trap;
most can see it
in front of them.
Damn the trap. In life,
we've bought a pup.

9/2/13

* * *

A little after Clare passed away, Michael was diagnosed with type two diabetes. Then one night he inexplicably drank copious amounts of high sugar energy drinks, etc. In the morning he was hospitalised. His blood glucose was over 50 mmol/l, and he could have been comatose. Whilst on the ward he hallucinated. He “heard” a male nurse say “magic mushrooms” on walking past his bed. Of course the nurse wouldn't have done so, and later in Michael's life, he heard other rare but quite passive voices.

As a teenager, Michael gave himself a 240 volts mains shock from an empty lightbulb socket. In his forties he took two separate, and impulsive, lithium overdoses. One was considerable.

One in five people with bipolar disorder, diagnosed or not, don't attempt suicide, but rather they complete it. Therefore, the stakes are high to get well. Finding the good in the bad can only help, for example, Michael learned that there were times when impulsivity, could in fact be valuable. That strengthen his notion of finding **balance**.

This next piece references Michael's hyperglycaemic stay in hospital, and more.

One of many?

The man-child is the youngest
ward member at 45.
He hears a trigger:
magic mushrooms.
His paranoia's more like denial now,
but he accepts
that he could be old
before his time.
It's not worth the anxiety.
God made him
especially for something;
even if it's just a man-child.
Perhaps life's jigsaw
will make him fit.

3/3/13

The idea of pure love began to occupy Michael. He rejected its existence outside of nature. A social media contact suggested he was a pantheist, which was a new term to Michael. Months before receiving that suggestion, he wrote this next poem revealing some related thinking.

Truth

I searched for **it**
my entire life.
Then I realised
it had been there all along.

Nature asks for nothing.
She feeds us, clothes us,
warms us, body and heart.
Nature must be love.
We take advantage
and she forgives.

I saw a robin today.
Surely it was God
with its characteristic trust.
I shared moments
in my space; its space.
I smiled at its lack of dogma.
I knew simplicity was divine.

23/1/14

Michael appeared warm, by his writing the fourth line in “Truth”: “**it had been there all along.**” Ironically, nature was a red herring, because he grew to learn that nature wasn’t ***it***.

* * *

Michael's ability to read and comprehend words continues to be poor. He has read precious few books, and then usually technical or scientific ones. As such, Michael's broader knowledge and wisdom of life, stems from his lived experiences, observations, reflections and cross-referencing. He works best with pages holding pictures, signs, symbols, equations, mnemonics, numbers, graphs and/or tables. He rarely tackles pages of just words. It's not surprising then, that his first degree was in chemistry, and his master's was in computing, and for an amateur pianist, his sight-reading is very strong.

In essence, many thinkers, systems, and religions, etc., suggest similar things to this book. That strongly validates Michael's writing. People want ideas presenting in manners that suit them. Some need a supernatural element. Some want it very clever, perhaps they devour Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, Jung, Freud, Nietzsche, etc., etc. There is no reason that the most simple person can't arrive at a position. Michael is touched by the film "Forrest Gump." He thinks it offers so much. Yet that beautiful story, will give nothing to an untrusting and closed mind. Of course much depends on trust, for that reason, Michael offers succinctness in an original manner and/or form. Importantly, although he is autobiography writing, he has avoided most things about himself that give little to the reader, and could be seen as extraneous to the spirit of this book. If he was famous and had the inclination, then perhaps by putting every little detail about himself in a much bigger book, it would be vastly more popular than this one. Whilst Part 3 can be read separately, as stated earlier, trust might result from reading the initial parts.

* * *

Ideas continued crystalising within Michael's head. The next poem is about "child-selves," and how that notion might lead to more truth and honesty. However, societal rubbish and his own bipolar disorder, might have made Michael's battle to clarify the notion of a child-self, harder than most. Therefore it is no wonder, that Michael's writing asks the following question more than once: "what is my essence?"

Becoming a child-self

Mine computed
and didn't go out.
Last Christmas
I saw a pale reflection,
whilst watching children's magic tricks.
Shyness charges.
Acceptance dissolves ego.

I went full circle:
drugs and Catholicism,
then dogs' love exclaimed Eureka.

I smiled at bedroom reclusiveness,
realising we're together when we're us.

28/1/14

The last stanza above anticipates even the subtitle of Michael's 2020 "I am" book, that being, "Conforming by nonconformity," meaning we are equal by being different individuals.

* * *

Notably, the body of the next poem (or piece): "Made", forms from seven words in a number seven shape. Seven is the number that represents completion: seven days in the week, seven wonders of the ancient world, and without wasting ink, there are multitudinous examples.

Michael featured that number in his poetry in various ways, even "I am" has seven chapters. Its importance is not numerological as such, it is a reminder that things come to a close, they complete. Everything turns around: "this too will pass." At the same time its regular appearance indicated a consistency.

Made

Childlike, Openness,

Truth,

Nakedness,

Oneness,

Courage,

Destiny.

30/1/14

* * *

Some identities are less deniable than others. For example, being born makes you a biological son or daughter, despite even family feuds, etc. However, does an accomplished musical instrumentalist remain as such, after a serious physical injury prevents them ever playing again?

Many identities crossed Michael's mind in "Being."

Being

I'm a son.

I'm a brother.

I'm a nephew.

I'm a relative.

I'm diabetic.

I'm bipolar.

I'm an allergy sufferer.

I'm a pharmacist?

I'm a poet.
I'm a pianist.
I'm an art collector.
 I'm a bohemian.

I'm a pantheist.
I'm a Green.
I'm a vegetarian.
 I'm a hippy.

Most of all,
 I am.

1/2/14

Perhaps through increased mental activity, Michael became more elated, or he was getting more elated anyway, and his thoughts increased, and even deepened? Either way, straight after meeting an old school friend (on the actual date of this next poem/piece) a **paradigm shift** occurred. Then in the small hours, Michael text messaged that friend with these same words.

Hypomania

This may sound bizarre.
I feel a huge black cloud
has lifted from my head
for the first time in my life.

I wonder if I still need meds.
I think I've grown up at the age of 45.
I've had to battle with being raised
by my dad; drugs, alcohol and spending,
but I've had some successes, too: piano.

I wonder if some people
have tried to prevent me from growing up.
Jesus taught forgiveness.
This might be a crazy idea, but I'm calm.
A psychiatrist said
I would be feeling better round now.
I can't decide if it's the meds
or the fact I've got my head together,
and my perspective right.
I need to step out. I'm 45.
What has happened to me?

12/2/14

* * *

Michael's mother was again helpful. She financed ten psychology appointments, which led to two important things: firstly, Michael realised he was avoidant, and secondly, he got the details of a city centre based, free, and long standing creative writing group. Despite fear, he absolutely had to go, and in his favour, initially he would take previously published and admired poems.

As it happens, Michael wrote these next thoughts whilst having a coffee just before heading off for his final psychology session. This book's title is amongst these brief sentences.

My three words

I could cry.
We're all alone.

It's not fair.
Embrace your aloneness.

Gimme a break.
Why'd she die?

Opportunists are twats.
I want connection.

Everyone is hurt.
Religions are lies.

Dogs are love.
Everything turns around.

16/7/14

Eventually, embracing his aloneness made greater sense, because many people have a limited understanding of others, and consequently use their own personal examples as yardsticks. After generalising, the existence of normality, or “normal,” may develop, along with an assertion of belonging to it. Furthermore, those who are misunderstood must be abnormal, or “not normal.” One imagines this is rooted in the psychological mechanism of “projection.” However, what better and more logical way to broadly integrate into the world, than to assume like yourself, that everyone is individual, with an individual aloneness deserving mutual respect, and like you, neither strongly affiliating with any groups, or especially protective of their own identities.

* * *

The regular writing group meetings were going well, and Michael was gaining confidence from them, aided in part by the continued good reception his work enjoyed. One evening he shared the next poem, “Hiding in the corner.” It’s an observational piece penned in situ at the back of a city centre pub, where Michael sat alone.

Hiding in the corner

Her brow feathers
some consciousness out.
It's love tainted:
instincts polluted.
It's a boy girl thing.
They accommodate.

He surveys compulsions
whilst accepting aloneness.
His pen is company,
stuffing his face with its flavours;
documenting the "normality"
that his social model excludes him from.

The band's shite:
stereo sound, stereotypical stunt.
He'd like to kill the singer,
because he lies.
Volume perverts,
it's mortar.

The blokes want to fuck.
The women want to talk.
The landlord's satisfied,
surveying on an end-of-bar perch;
armed with a half
and an antidote to smugness.

He writes one last stanza.
Weeds are bluebell-like assassins.
There's incense in the air,
but the beer's unconsecrated
and no-one offers peace.
Everything's religion.

His mantra is “**embrace your aloneness.**”

18/7/14

Michael's psychologist was good, as his writing group attendances remained positive; although he continued to live alone and didn't work, and whilst he was compliant with his medication, his mood could drop at times. Of course everyone's mood changes, but as he'd experienced severe and catastrophic depression, that was once mild, then rather naturally, the mildest slump bothered him. Michael still thinks that having a second very severe depression, like the first, it would result in his death.

He wrote this during a typical mild lowering of his mood.

I thought “Capriciousness” then “Untitled” then this

I knew my mood had changed,
because I visited the crematorium
for two consecutive days.
I'd been high for months.

She was the only one who understood.
Many liked the ups.
She preferred the downs.
I wanted to be me.

I spent my ISA.
I tried to date.
I spread my poems
and offered my house.

I woke.
It was gone, pfft, just like that.
I surveyed the battleground:
the people I'd hurt and deceived; not least me.

It's just another day. It's my drama.
I asked, "what is my essence?"
That's carried through.
That's me.

31/7/14 @ Blackley Crematorium

That question, "what is my essence," might be clearer now. Whilst being singularly important, the drive to realise a central and personal distillation of self, has even greater gravity for people with severe mental illnesses; but also in sufferers of serious physical illnesses, and not least in those amidst personal issues like divorce, or perhaps bankruptcy, etc. All such aspects of our human condition can, or should, trigger introspection, and there is never any end to that process.

* * *

Beyond his writing group activities, Michael began walking dogs once weekly, for the RSPCA. Later, he took the plunge of buying a six month's subscription to the dating website, Match (dot) Com. He took an honest approach in "selling" himself, and very briefly it was too honest! But by incredible chance, "Michelle" sent him a so called "wink." She saw his picture in the "Daily six," a somewhat peripheral feature of the system, which perhaps mismatched the pair on this occasion, because Michelle had "ticked" options indicating a preference for marriage and having children, which Michael had not. Whatever placed him in her "Daily six,"

his voluntary dog walking made Michelle think he might be a person who would view her *five* cats, not as potential relationship baggage, but at least as an interest. So given their mutual physical attraction, and what followed: texting, Facebook contacts, and a fairly long phone call, they had a date. Later Michelle said she would have wanted to have met anyway, because her view is that you can't have enough friends.

* * *

Michael and Michelle had a whirlwind romance. Both had unfortunate histories: unsuccessful first marriages, etc., and Michelle followed hers, with a wasteful relationship costing her significant family building years. Herself and Michael started trying for a baby almost immediately, and Michelle soon caught, but not before Michael had proposed. They were married in six months from meeting. At the wedding, Michelle shared copies of the 12 week baby scan.

There follows some relevant poems.

You sleep. I write this love poem

It's six a.m. and I kiss you,
easy as scales ripple away,
tenderly, and diamonds say
"I love you," and we are tighter.

I have no exit. I'm flowing.
Rapids offer binary trust.
C'est la vie, it's easy. Just wait,
no decisions need to be made.

When it is felt within your heart,
your mind calms down. I think that's love.
There is no escape. You will have
what's coming, like or not; it's life.

26/10/14

Michael sent "Seeds" into the annual Rialto magazine's nature competition, for which you submit one or more poems broadly about nature. On the surface this is about a garden, but it's really about a couple getting on in years who are trying for their first baby. The poem didn't succeed, but maybe the judges missed its point?

Seeds

I knew our whirlwind would last.
We'd hit the epicentre.

I gained trust from your sunflower hearts
that you always offered wearing pyjamas.

My microcosm was novel to you. Even jays
were won; their beauty fooled.

Robin performs, but frustratingly
his love's a tease too. Only the stillness
of an angler can seduce him.

I'd shifted the leaves. They die to foster growth
on the bed our randomising rescue dog fouls.

Snow is due. Your silhouette will trace
regularly. I hope it will prosper.

Maybe you will synchronise with spring.
Last year wrens built in the rusty alarm box
that not even magpies could infiltrate.

Daffodils form a strong wake from crocuses.
Monochrome days miss them, till summer's promise
gifts beyond feeding trays.

Innocence appreciates.
Right now the seasons are precious.

2/12/14

Whilst briefly diverging from poetic journaling, Michael wrote the next thoughts down. He returned to using poetry to record events, with examples like "Wednesday 29/4/15", which is a tragic poem that poured out of him on the morning the couple buried their baby: Rose Megan Holme. The pregnancy was terminated after the 20 week ultrasound scan showed Rose had severe spina bifida.

Four philosophy stanzas

The world was mean
because I'd been mean.
It turned out,
there was no doubt
that minds were blank,
but I had mine to thank
that bad proliferates,
creating paranoid states.

Do not be a bully.
You're your own enemy.
That's how it'll be.
You'll never be free,
unless you formulate
a chance for better fate,
by life analysis, programming bliss,
and getting off the piss.

Do not think,
but give a fuck
about values.
Avoid news.
Follow a passion.
Have faith, hope and compassion.
Some call it charity.
Lay down your actuality.

If it didn't work out
give all you're about.
It's the greatest love of all
and easy after a fall.
Bad can become good.
What's intrinsic should
be subjugated by the mind,
that's what science can ultimately find.

9/3/15

Wednesday 29/4/15

I played "Somewhere over the rainbow"
to make us cry. Michelle wept the most.

My life:
I get up, I get through, I sleep.

If it was a good day it was a blessing.
If it was bad it was a curse.

I try not to think, like meditating.
I don't need yoga.

The beat of a butterfly wing a hundred years ago
could have changed everything.

I hope it didn't all end in the still birth room
aka "The butterfly room."

This isn't boringly affective is it? As I say,
"I write poems and walk dogs."

It's not raining.
That's good.

29/4/15

After Rose was lost, Michael's mental health deteriorated, and he became increasingly manic. Around then, he wrote "To Michelle."

To Michelle

It was May.
Was God penciling us in for spring?
I'd be forty-eight,
diverted by art for three decades.

We deserved blessing.
You, an intrinsic mother,
would be tragic
(more than that)
if you weren't actively a mum.

Paradoxically,
life was humbling complexity,
because time had insisted simplicity
was worth pain.

We'd stopped worrying about the system.
Peripheral confusion melts.
What better armour is there, than naked honesty?

I've never properly loved a woman.
I can't imagine loving you more.
Simple seems surreal.
In silence or bipolarity,
I might understand,
a silent baby or sacred storm.

23/5/15

In terms of Michael's writing, the following, "Joe's second-hand testament", was a landmark poem, but also in terms of his self-discovery. It is very rich, and took several few weeks to plan, structure, and to populate its eventual form. Like his "I am" book, both works were products of a manic or hypomanic creative energy. Michael remains proud of them both.

Rather than break "Joe..." down, bit by bit, with many interpretations, it is offered in full below, so that some of it, but not necessarily all of it, will profitably resonate with the reader. Incidentally, Michael wrote his first poem when he was on the kibbutz in 1987. It was simply called "Joe", and was sadly lost back then. Of course Michael and Joe are the same person.

"Joe's second-hand testament" deserves good presentation. Its structure enjoys the next seven pages of this book.

Joe's second-hand testament

Nahal Oz kibbutz is close,
via melons, to Gaza.

Is it “cool” to risk your life
for foreign travel stories?

His first poem was obscure,
written in past tense and true.

Thirteen years flew, till he thought
“I will share more honesty.”

His openness
 defined him.

Confessional open-mic
was part of his adult path.

He wrote poems
 and walked dogs.

* * *

Life is a Venn diagram
in multiple dimensions.

We strive for one boundary
like a central unity.

It does not
exist.

No trust
is perfect.

There are
no saints.

We only have one model,
projecting it on others.

Paranoia has its roots
in the crossed wires of childhood.

* * *

Only compete
with yourself.

Everest is locally
known to the plain and humble.

“It is lonely at the top”
where the Eucharist dissolves.

There our child-selves socialise,
ultimately via sex.

We attempt, but suicide
leads to absolute mind-sets.

Humour fleetingly connects
like a drug the masses crave.

Denial of aloneness
promotes control of masses.

* * *

Anxiety: not knowing,
might lead to paranoia

by ideas
of reference.

Delusionary thinking:
a form of bizarre logic,

is self-perpetuating
like recursion running wild.

If you were stressed in your youth
adulthood might feel softer.

Meditation may still minds.
Perhaps the east is more chilled.

Self-realisation sucks.
You can't accelerate life.

* * *

Existing as someone else
allows your exploitation.

We all end up being us,
even if we are evil.

Obsession for more money
generates competition.

Depression
stems from conflicts.

Life
has too much illusion.

It
is biological.

Return
to the school playground.

* * *

Individuality
is lacking with Catholics.

Sacraments control people
producing robotic drones.

Everything is religion,
even without a structure.

Everyone's path is
unique.

Find your own God:
nature? Sun?

The Bible is man's construct
and not immune to logic.

Accept we are different
and essentially alone.

* * *

He does not walk dogs (plural)
anymore. He knows nothing

apart from his own madness,
that came by observation.

The world is not
absolute.

Make an early decision
and hope that your luck holds out.

Risk your life
to have a life.

Accepted, there is some truth
in the Bible. Take a chance

because everything
is HYPE.

June - July 2015

“Joe’s second-hand testament” is perhaps unique in its literary form.

Michael insists the next piece is poetry, because it has lines of seven syllables and other more obvious structural elements. And regardless of whether words “tell”, or they artistically “show”, or they’re literal or figurative, if a rigorous form is evident, then so too is verse.

Therefore Michael followed with many poems using the writing formula of the next one, “Recalling the wilderness”. He found it to be an excellent vehicle to share thoughts and ideas.

Recalling the wilderness

Trade a decade? Trade your life.
Head to personhood. Have choice.
When you don’t know, it can’t hurt.
Be livid later with voice.

Play piano. Learn guitar.
Go far with isolation.
Manic dedication helps:
obsessional exertion.

Write verse. Nurse dogs by walking
them all over everywhere.
Do anything positive.
Don’t drink and smoke. Sigh then dare.

Be aware that most folk act.
They are not better than you.
Be you. Honestly, be true.
You are amazing. Just do.

1/9/15

Please, please paranoid people

If third person references
seem to be getting common,
confide in a companion.
Don't quiz when TV is on.

Ideas of reference
do not make sense to the well.
If you smell rot that is not
there, maybe prepare for hell.

You are not in the paper.
It is not about you. True,
madly there is some logic.
Dilute your ego, so few

will attack you. Jesus Christ
was right. When you are anxious
paranoia can occur,
if your mood is obvious.

2/9/15

It cannot be synthesised

Confidence founded in light
is unfounded. Your darkness
collects deposits of hurt:
investments of hopefulness.

It is said, "no pain no gain,"
and fools build houses on sand.
You can sail through life unscathed,
a dope with your brain unmanned.

Some people never wake-up:
approximating normal:
the path of least resistance:
herd safety they can follow.

The straightest route is shallow.
If you divert off its road
you cause your halo ruckus,
you sap your heavenly food.

16/10/15

Tomorrow and yesterday

Wisdom is a cursed surprise.
When you end your false-selfhood
you start another hurting,
and different yearns for good.

What should or could have been life
becomes clearer. Compromise
and see the broader picture.
Everything is at a price.

Be compassionate and share
your empathetic nature.
Some people never wake-up.
Don't exploit. Try to nurture.

There could have been difference
if a change had taken place.
It's pointless saying what-ifs.
You'll become a mental case.

30/10/15

Real life or fantasy?

Life begins in its good time.
It might creep there unnoticed.
It can become manifest
if the past is diluted.

What a blessing to live life
without needing to begin.
That makes blissful ignorance.
Be humble to avoid sin.

The past can be foundation
or it can be a horror.
By learning from your errors
you make a good tomorrow.

For some it might start plural.
Without pain it may fleet by.
You may waste yours for normal.
They say, “feel the fear and try.”

5/11/15

I am

For some that is everything.
Others strive to qualify.
Vagueness might negate attack.
Hence, do not identify.

Everything is tenuous.
Even love is not perfect.
It comes and goes with reward.
Grave payment may be respect.

Truly we arrive and leave
with absolute nothingness.
Surely purpose is to make
purposeless feel less pointless.

Perhaps honesty is brave:
honourable naivety.
Sod it? Release everything?
Choose capitalist pathways?

16/11/15

The next poem was in answer to a homework. A different writing group (one that Michael helped to run) asked, “what would you like to hypothetically tell a younger you.” Writing a poem wasn’t mandatory, but Michael answered this question in his established style of verse. The group existed as part of a charity that helped people to recover from alcohol, narcotics, and any other substance addictions. Of course everyone there, could have profoundly used, good earlier advice.

A letter to young Michael

You’re in the system. It’s hard.
On balance, two point five kids,
mortgage and bright holidays,
are less pain, but close eyelids.

When mum left so early on
her action caused a ruckus,
implying you were worthless.
But you’re equal, not surplus.

Don’t act the goat and fall in
with the easiest of “friends.”
Laziness can be a route
to denial and pretend.

It's good to freely say "no."
Opinions are respected.
By slowly braving feelings,
one day you'll know life's started.

25/11/15

"Life 1-0-1" - The poem

Can pure love be possible?
Satisfaction is reward.
Pantheism is plausible:
all is God and we are Lord.

How can that be, when we take
isolation as a truth?
Groups are total delusion
to an existential sleuth.

What is the function of life
when children are not gifted?
Is it to buy bigger cars:
rewards for painful business?

For some there is no purpose,
that alone is firm belief.
Thinking can make us worthless.
Mindlessness is stress relief.

25/3/16 - 18/4/16

I said, “What is my essence?”

I change up and down my range.
I do not know if you know
who I am, now I have slumped.
Smiles between us are now few.

If I gave you love before,
and my loyalty and time,
now I love you more. Stay close.
Am I done? Are you still mine?

Fluctuating is a swine.
People intertwine, wine, dine.
Me? I might when I am high.
Do you see the thread, the sign?

Will we become over, done,
through a change you cannot stand?
Take a stand or give commands.
That way our bonds might withstand.

15/4/16

* * *

Whilst breaking the trend for structure, Michael proposed, or even asserted, a general course of life in this aptly name poem, “This is life”. Its first stanza is Matrix-esque, i.e. like one of his favourite films.

This is life

You are sleeping.
You do not want to wake.
You shun the truth.

You have one life.
Thieves abound.

Remember once living?
You were a baby.
You became a little child.

Afterwards you were fooled.
It seemed acceptable.
Your parents pushed you.
They had to.

Mad people are not mad.
They saw truth once.
It was in part or whole.
They understood Gnosis.
Jesus was censored.

The true path is harder.
Ideas cause danger.
Your thoughts confuse.
They may be chemically culled.
Chlorpromazine could mean well or ill.

6/10/16

* * *

The poems to follow continue to strengthen themes in this book; however, they were written after Michael's more elated period, when he met Michelle, proposed to her, got her pregnant, married her, and they lost Rose.

Michelle, you wanted a poem

I found me.
Stay by me.
Not everybody
knows their unique “me.”

It took
the everlasting summers,
from a way back,
to become, five annual fishing trips.

There are only so many years
in a life. I pissed away eighteen,
with risperidone, alcohol,
and my late fucking wife.

When I am most passionate,
I feel I can do anything.
I mean, I FEEL; Yes?
I get fucking ELECTRIC ...

In our early days,
we made Rose.
God only knows
if..... God only knows...

For months, mania woke me
from our bed, in less hours
than one hand can count,
and shed loads were spent.

Now I say, “I change,
up and down my range,”
and stuff like
“what is my essence?”

I don't think I could fall in love again.
Is this good? "I can't possibly
imagine another life,
and certainly not a third wife."

I love you; #justsayin ;)

19/11/16

When the mania has passed

I ask you if you love me.
I ignore a queue jumper.
I calmly leave our front space
with its road neighbours capture.

My stomach feels my self-doubts.
They play havoc with my brain.
I can do it. Feelings pass,
but manic wakes are insane.

Projects start to panic me.
They used to be exciting.
I still keep my diary.
I say this stress; is "living."

Bipolar lasts forever.
The rhythms fool me every time.
I ask you, "what's my essence?"
You don't understand that line.

2/7/17

Michael experimented with forming groups of poems, for example, his Gnosis series (and the Fragments one.)
Here's the first and last poems from "Gnosis".

Gnosis #1 - "We"

We were brainwashed at our schools.
We buy pointless bigger wheels.

We eat, smoke, drink, copulate.
We are dopamine addicts.

We should compete with ourselves.
We chase reward chemicals.

We learn "no" for our own good.
We gain choice and real friends.

We learn that we're chemical.
We gain noble-gas comfort.

We have always been ourselves.
We stop turning anger in.

We're an atom of a god.
We're infinite gods of gods.

We're fractals and energy.
We're nothing if not spirit.

We're more like balls than bipeds.
We know through popping mushrooms.

We'll find a messiah, BUT
We'll have no trust to listen.

We'd pride, now it's suspicion.

20/11/17

Gnosis #7 - "Gnosis"

No pair view life the same way.
That is a religious aim.

Everyone has a gnosis.
Then that is an assertion.

You cannot share a gnosis.
That is also assertion.

Logically, a gnosis
cannot be validated.

Confidence negates gnosis,
by its slowing of thinking.

Analysis is pointless.
Mindlessness is blissfulness.

Projection of empty minds
should remove paranoia.

Paradoxically, age
aids living and ends it too.

Embrace your aloneness, not
the construct of a council.

Escape your self-made prison.
Master tyrannical thoughts.

Empty your mind to be free.....

8/12/17

Just before Michael wrote the nonfiction, "I am", he wrote "When I changed:". He'd been performing at open-mics for a few years, after being nudged into doing so by a lady in his original writing group. With covid-19 restrictions stopping such live events, "When I changed:" was the last poem Michael read to an audience.

When I changed:

It happened in one moment.
I realised my worth.
Some people stopped liking me.
Some people started.

Most days became valid.
Acting out me was fun.
I could drink alcohol sensibly.
I became interested in humanity.

The longer I was me, the more me I was.
Dare I say I increased in wisdom?
My empathy rocketed.
The plight of others could make me cry.

In part, the right wing grated.
I gained personal rules.
Turning a blind eye was not one.
Further introspection was.

An adult relationship was possible.
I'm made up I became me.
I'm saddened some don't make it.
It's hard, but the "before-me" bit has a name.

It's called Hell.

26/1/20

Part 3 - Michael's New Testament?

"I am - Conforming by nonconformity"

Introduction

The author was born in Lancashire, England, in the late 1960s, over a decade before Margaret Thatcher closed the pits. His generation knew of the writer Barry Hines, and how Hines' Jud Casper replied to his younger brother, Billy, after Billy said he would not work in the local mine. Jud said they would not want him anyway, as the job required literacy skills, but cuttingly, and in a more stylistically accurate tone, he added, "they wouldn't have a weedy little tw@t like thee."

D.H. Lawrence wrote his classic, "Sons and Lovers," before Hines' time. It paralleled "A kestrel for a knave," quoted from above, by also powerfully covering mining. Mr Morel was one of its main characters: hard working, a man of few words, and head of his family. He appeared resigned to his endless cycle of toil, domesticity, and an absence of recreation.

The author was aware of such historic lifestyles, not least because his high school sat on coal, and the National Coal Board (NCB) was a major local employer in that parochial setting. Younger people are unaffected by these past realities.

Unfortunately, the passage of time, pacifies the power of such messages. Therefore (especially in developed countries) the young find that a life without choices, is an unacceptable reality. It is a nonreal existence, in equal but opposite magnitude, to the reality of their all-powerful entanglement with the Internet.

An interesting parallel would be to ask whether Second World War soldiers, felt not having to climb out of trenches, was something to feel lucky or entitled about?

Our modern profusion, of global media sources, has allowed the monster that is personality, to have decimated the value of having character, whilst increasing people's feelings of entitlement, not least in their "God given" rights, to display Hollywood originated characteristics, whilst the figurative miner, who did not want to be a miner, is further buried in the irrelevance of the past.

Beyond not wanting to mine, miners did not necessarily want to marry. But without social security, that meant cooking, washing, cleaning, etc., too, and without the modern help of things like electric washing machines. Also, who would be looking out for the aging retired miners if they had no family?

In England, formal adoption procedures began in 1926. Couple that with the taboo that illegitimate children created, then the likes of Mr Morel had to marry to produce offspring. Even family sizes were not a choice, because contraception in those days, meant monasterial life or practising a "withdrawal" method. Fertile couples were likely to have children, whilst not having complete control over how many.

Celebrities, personalities, reality show contestants, Twitter influencers, etc., all help build a picture suggesting choices are increasing. Even the photonegative of the picture, presents more decisions, for example, dislikes, and things to find disgusting. After all, so much is so topical, it draws people in.

Some of these choices automatically define us. You could stop eating meat and be a vegetarian. Even without any action at all, choosing your gender identity these days, is a potentially instantaneous label creator. Of course, that was an unavailable choice to people in Mr Morel's era.

Within modern cultures, societies, politics, and religions, you can have many picks. Maybe the film "Forrest Gump" is out of date. His mother

said, “life is like a box of chocolates, you never know what you’re gonna get.” There are a lot of people now, who would reject this metaphor, because they would want the description card, AND a Google search on possible allergens, AND the working conditions of the chocolate factory employees to be of sufficiently acceptable standards, before considering eating any of them.

It is the author’s purpose to show that these many choices lead to strong attachments, and ultimately a dangerous tack, because they become weaknesses, or “Achilles heels.” He thinks Jesus warned against this, as recorded by St Matthew.

Matthew 7:24-27 “The wise and foolish builders.”

In this passage, Jesus spoke about the risk of building your house on sand, because internal, intrinsic, or supernatural based identities, i.e. the more solid and independent ones, are less vulnerable to losses, whereas, strongly world-based ones that might be susceptible to external influences, are the houses on sand.

It is also recorded in the New Testament, that the Kingdom of Heaven is in your midst (or “within,” in other translations.) See Luke 17:21. What is intrinsically yours, or you, and not external, is better to build that house upon.

Although the author is technically a Catholic, it is important to note that he is not a Christian. He maintains that Jesus Christ was real, and existed, but he thinks connections made between Christ and God, were well meaning ideas aimed at drawing people to the religion. In fact, the author does not want to promote any religions. He talks about Jesus, because Christianity is by far the most prominent religion amongst the members of social groups and communities, that have been a part of his life.

Chapter one

It is reasonable that the author offers credentials before you continue. He wants you to have faith in his words that follow. After all, he lacks a humanities degree. All academics validate one another through such qualifications. They imply that certain books have been read and assimilated, whilst perpetuating their academia, their academic jobs, and occasionally producing an innovation.

The author is poorly read. He is a scientist with 18 years direct inner-academia experience. When he was 22, a colleague told him that “universities are a haven for the unemployable.” That became abundantly clear, through the author’s own example, and not just that of others.

His lived experience, as opposed to a read-out-of-books doctoral theories one, is his eligibility for sharing these words and ideas, and suggesting strangers finish his book. At 52, the author has been carefully studying life for three decades. Most of his contemporaries have been focused on common specifics, such as careers and families. That is what most people do.

With such major distractions, people do not necessary, observe, broadly and fundamentally, and with care and commitment. Further to that, if you have no reason to do something, you are unmotivated. Motivations cause emotional drives. By just thinking something “sounds like a good idea,” you will not supply long-term energy.

An example of a distraction is when an interest is developed in a colleagues’ professional habits. A clear and likely reward from such a focus, is a possible ultimate promotion. That is in the realm of microcosms. This book covers the macrocosm.

However, people often want to understand hierarchies. Broadly speaking there are two types. Skills hierarchies, which are straightforward. They are less emotionally dangerous things to exist in, than the other type, i.e. power hierarchies. Life is more likely to approximate to the latter. In power hierarchies, the complexities of different characters and

personalities can be almost baffling. And without your own basic life-fundamentals, that parents, schools, clubs, etc., should have instilled in you, then an ability to flourish in power structures, will be highly compromised.

At the age of eight the author suffered maternal abandonment, with its many, ongoing, and profoundly serious consequences. Not least, a complete nervous breakdown in his 20s, and the following serious psychiatric diagnoses, in this order; schizophrenia, psychotic depression, schizoaffective disorder, and bipolar disorder type 1.

The author now has good mental health. He is reluctant to say he has fully recovered, because he believes that theoretically, that statement can only be asserted moments before death. During the author's breakdown, his sense of identity was absolutely destroyed in every understanding of that statement. However, he found happiness in 2014, 22 years after his mental destruction, and he quickly remarried one year later.

His previous wife was domestically abusive, for example, she encouraged his gross over medication. She passed in 2012 after their 18 years together.

Herman Hesse in his famous quote from "Siddhartha," suggested wisdom cannot be imparted, adding that knowledge is different, it can be freely shareable and comprehended. However, when someone tries to share wisdom, it sounds like nonsense to some.

"So why read further?"

When people who seek, look, and listen, are given enough time, they consequentially collect an amount of data that enables patterns to emerge. The ideas, behaviours, effects, and outcomes witnessed, that recur to greater or lesser degrees over time, may make some sense. Eventually, some seem more sensible or profitable, whilst others are the opposite. But even the latter are useful. They may become things to avoid.

Either side can be subtle, for example, attitudes and behaviours in people, as opposed to direct “do and don’t” rules, are the route. Therefore, a gradual presentation, to physically present and receptive people, typify this kind of teaching, furthermore, mixing with positive people, as opposed to the path-of-least-resistance easy to access types, is something people can strive for.

This book offers good pointers. The author holds two science degrees: a bachelor’s in chemistry, and a master’s in computing. The latter prompted his terms like “data.” He has considered the Bible seriously, but not covered other humanity works. He tries to be strictly logical.

In recovering from his quarter century setback, grounded in a childhood and early “adulthood” completely left to chance, it is a clear fact that some people never become adults. In fact, the elucidation of the word “adult,” is a point of this book.

Returning to the data idea: the author suggests people should observe life, and if possible, observe themselves, too. No-one ever knows everything. Younger people often fail to realise that we never stop learning. Older people’s social media profiles, sometimes make a reference, to going to “The university of life.” Such people might write a book like this. One of them did: the author. Even the less analytical will see things others miss, and what one person misses, that might have been profitable, another person might have missed and lost nothing.

This is not academic, and excluding religions, there are no quick fix books. If there was, we would all have one, and the author would not have wasted his time writing this. There is presumably much overlap amongst the primary texts of the main religions, for example, the core teaching of humility. But in the Bible specifically, St Paul has a metaphorical “quick fix” whilst on the road to Damascus (Acts, Chapter 9.) The author had a similar experience in his forties. He describes that personal “road to Damascus” moment, in less profound terms, as a paradigm shift, and he shares the essential substance of it on a later page in this book.

The Bible's Narrow gate and Ten Commandments are a path, but richness either side of it is not necessarily ruinous. People get back on track. Some straying builds firmness of wisdom, because whilst compliance is safe, greater self-confidence stems from lived experiences that incorporate that richness, whilst banishing the banal.

Slavish obedience necessitates great trust, patience, and other virtues, because ultimately it insists life is more about a conceptual infinity to follow, rather than the now.

This book tries to guide people, with their own aspects of their own "data," i.e., their life experiences. Manoeuvring the likely and certain things to come in life, is not an intended scope of this text. Everyone has preferences, and other unique aspects anyway. Therefore, a general approach is required. All our differences lead to a fascinating world, whilst not necessarily being negative or dangerous. However, we all fear and/or avoid something.

Hopefully, we will reinforce our positive behaviours over time, and keep incorporating other ones, whilst reducing the negatives. That way we become more adept, wiser to pitfalls, gain trust in ourselves, and hopefully acquire faith, but not in a religion (though we can); but more in life, and beauty in little things, such as for starters, us all!

Chapter two

The introduction suggested that these days we might be led to become many more things, than was the case generations ago. For example, it is unimaginable that Lawrence's Mr Morel would have chosen his gender, despite the insistencies that some people today, in more liberal countries, have in that respect. And it is complex, and reliant on other people recognising the choice. For example, the psychologist Dr Jordan Peterson, of Toronto university, was an early challenger of those notions, and he ran into considerable trouble around campus because of his refusal to use what he saw, were the incorrect gender pronouns to address people.

In the author's hometown of Manchester, England, a huge number of people decide to follow either Manchester United or Manchester City football clubs. The former has a red strip, and the latter has a blue strip. Football is life to many, even without them physically touching a ball. They spend entire lives watching others play it. Public houses, particularly in the suburbs rather than the city centre, regularly feature groups of males discussing nothing but the game. They are often impassioned and very opinionated discourses. Ignorance of the subject can literally be socially handicapping. If such features were compared against those of typical religious cults, a notable overlap would be evident. Whether a "red" or a "blue," allegiances can be inherited in families. Whilst that implies less choice for some, the risk of social isolation makes group membership an obvious attraction for others.

A bizarre phenomenon occurred after the Manchester Arena bomb tragedy. The concert of the US singer, Ariana Grande, on the 22nd of May 2017, was most tragically ended by a suicide bomber triggering his device. He killed 23 people including himself, whilst physically and psychologically injuring hundreds more.

The author himself was once a victim of an assault. It led to him suffering very regular night terrors for years, but he cannot imagine some of the mental scars that would have resulted from surviving that concert.

After the concert there followed a public reaction, that in the author's 52 years, he had never seen or heard of anything like before, because all over Manchester, people had (permanent) bee tattoos tattooed on their bodies. (The bee, or "busy bee," has been a symbol of Manchester's hard work ethic since the 19th century.) Whilst some of these symbols were small and discreet, others were quite large. Not all were particularly artistic, looking more like signs.

By chance, at this time, the author drove past a tattooist shop, and witnessed a queue of people emanating from outside of it, and to a remarkable distance down the road. It was obviously for bees, and completely unprecedented for such a business. Such queues have in the past, presumably been limited to the likes of concentration camps.

Many people showed solidarity by putting less permanent bee signs on the backs of their cars at this time. Such manners of display were not new, because backs of cars (at least in Manchester) showed "Child on board" signs for many years, then quite suddenly not. The implication of course, is that the driver is a parent, and therefore in the group of people who are parents.

Christians have been attaching fish badges on the backs of their cars, for much longer than people displaying indications of their parenthood status. The fish symbol existed in the early years of the church. By displaying them outside a building, it was a covert sign telling other Christians that their brethren dwelled inside. Modern day atheists have occasionally reacted by attaching identical signs on their car rears, but for the important differences of their fishes having legs and the word "Darwin" in their bodies.

It is a fact that the backs of cars are used as spaces for personal announcements, often suggesting a proud group membership. It is also a fact that this cultural trend is relatively modern. The author gained his UK driving license in 1985, he has considerable motoring experience, and insists in the veracity of this statement. There was an earlier trend for Bumper Stickers in the United States, but statements like the classic "Shit Happens" were more typical.

After the desperately bad events at Ariana’s concert, the social reaction seemed to be part of a general compulsiveness, to gravitate towards the perceived good and wholesome. Topical popularity, enhanced through general publicity, just increases such urges further. And attempts of religions to wholeheartedly offer similar, fail, due to their over-involving complexities, and lack of online “with-it” factor.

The 21st century is the Internet age. It is no longer an age of fast food, but an age of fast food and I want it fetched to me. People expect quality without a wait. “Bang for buck” and “something for nothing” have broadened, for example, gaining an identity by virtue of acquiring a membership of a group is now an example.

During the 2020, worldwide Coronavirus outbreak, a soon to be centenarian, ex-army Captain called Tom Moore, embarked on a social media/internet fundraiser for the NHS. His goal was to cover one hundred laps of his outside space, during the so called “lockdown,” and to collect £1000 for NHS charities. In fact, he past £30,000,000, such was the popularity of his undertaking.

Donors almost became NHS appreciation society members. However, if achieving the maximum good was the sole point, then ironically, the UK government had already issued the NHS itself with a blank cheque, and with innumerable victims of the virus impacted in ways other than direct medical ones, a greater impact, or greater good, might have been possible with the sum.

A human herding like mentality was seemingly placing people in a bubble of goodness, rather than one of getting hands dirty and down to business. In other words, the final achievements of the cause, were not questioned before donations were made.

Chapter three

Developed capitalist countries often create groups that are essentially, displays of, or other expressions of loyalty; for products, hence the expression “brand loyalty.” Looking from 2010 onwards, a curious phenomenon evolved in Manchester, and although it is irrelevant, it surely manifested in many other places, too. German saloon cars became exponentially more popular, and consequentially, they had a strong presence on the road. Particularly, AUDIs, BMWs and Mercedes Benz gained a vogue status. In opposition to most saloon car manufacturers, these makers routinely installed powerful engines up to 6 litres in size.

With many people becoming environmentally concerned, some UK motorists regressed. In 60s and 70s America, a trend was to drive V8 saloons and fastbacks. They were collectively referred to as Muscle cars, and included classics such as Dodge Chargers, Pontiac Firebirds, Corvette Stingrays and Ford Mustangs. The latter is especially interesting, because it was remarketed in the UK at this time of interest, as an obvious alternative to the more powerful German cars.

Black or white were once the main colours of these cars, then, as if in a competing two-part biological system, one dominated. Consumers’ colour options effectively mirrored the Ford Model T scenario, i.e., any colour “as long as it is black.” Such powerful German cars looked menacing. Recognising that drivers increasingly liked to look mean, manufacturers made further adjustments. For example, chrome trims and badges became black, too, and bizarrely, their black on black was practically invisible. Previously silver/greyish looking alloy wheels were also blackened, and consequently made to easily highlight scratches received from rubbing curbs, etc. Worse still, these cars encouraged fast and antisocial driving habits in their owners.

With such desirability displayed daily, feelings of exclusion and inferiority nagged people to join the group of German saloon car owners. The arrival of the first credit score company advertisement, on UK national television, was contemporary with this. It looked like loan

agreements for these cars, were indicative of the obsessions their owners had about keeping up appearances, especially when the great majority of these cars cost more than an average annual salary.

Not wanting to be outdone, the people who could not afford a newer example of these modern muscle cars, sometimes settled for a much older mechanical liability instead. The psychological problem with this and many similar behaviours, is that they are always linked to other people's opinions; very much including strangers and not just acquaintances. In other words, they highlight a reliance.

Especially younger people feel little reason to analyse their motivations. It can almost appear like a "herding instinct" is operating. Today's world is far from the one D.H. Lawrence described in *Sons and Lovers*.

Chapter four

Identity and identification are psychological ideas, whereas group membership may just be statistical. When the latter is linked directly with positive aspects of mental health, pride (or ego), self-worth; or it boosts self-confidence (whether denied or not), then it should be personally analysed, because the enhancing of any of those aspects, needs to be robust to attacks.

Maintaining an identity that emerged from chance circumstance, or fixed truths (such as being a man in the biological group of males) is an unnecessary acceptance of potential burdens. What is the point of bothering? Hopefully, this book has pointers helping to answer that.

Identities divide the world. Uneven distribution of natural resources, and widely varying climates will always cause imbalances, too. We can do something about the first one though. Emphatic individuals, who try not to maximise their own comfort, whilst improving themselves, might make small positive changes to the world. They realise we have one life. As in Susan Jeffers's message, in her book "Feel the fear and do it anyway," they exercise some trust and faith, and with or without identities, they act.

Through having group membership, you must hold the requisite criteria of entrance, and automatically have a high likelihood of overlap with others, thus you enjoy mutual validation. Significantly, many people increasingly crave validation. This century, a priority for acceptance and popularity, especially amongst younger people on social media, has become much more culturally significant.

Three identity groups follow.

- 1) The male subgroup, gay men, holds some members who continuously broadcast, that they sexually prefer other men. The rest of the subgroup do not; their sexual preference is not obvious from outside. People in the earlier half are effectively asking people, including strangers, to be receptive of their messages. It

involves reliance again, plus feedback/validation. Unless you were an anarchist, you would not put out messages to invalidate yourself. In fact, psychological mechanisms such as confirmation bias, may be lessening negatives.

- 2) German saloon car fans can be financially excessive, as stated, and they seem motivated by desires to impress strangers. Ironically, those overstretched budgets aim to fool us in to believing that they are rich. In truth, no-one cares, apart from likeminded people, and they are in the same group.
- 3) Veganism is becoming more common and talked about. A meme appeared on Facebook which makes a point about vegans. It pictures a face with pronounced blood vessels. A caption reads, “A vegan who has not told anybody they are a vegan for 15 minutes.” Whilst unfair, it is not entirely untrue.

Here are three questions:

- 1) What relevance have strangers got within my sense of self?
- 2) Can I become more independent?
- 3) Will I always need others to enable me to be who I want to be, or who I like being?

Associations lead to tenuous and potentially dangerous concepts of identity. If too much is assumed, then incorporated into to your identity, through the ramifications of who you mix with, you are dependant.

It is not unusual within groups of children, for one to be more magnetic. Being with such a person can make others assume they have acceptance. Whilst socially together, the positivity of such a “vibe” might boost self-worth, and consequently increase the time others may want to be with such a popular person. It is somewhat addictive though, and may compromise chances of personal growth, even leading to denial of the negativity.

Individuals have immunity to situations like this. They are “their own person.” It was mentioned before that this book is essentially an explanation of the word “adult.” “Individual” has mostly the same meaning.

Later in life, relationships such as marriages can be of these natures. But in his late teens, the author spent his first year of university in a manic like state with effortless social skills. Then his mood plummeted, and two years of reclusiveness followed. Finding new friends was too hard, and he clung to two old ones. They were popular college personalities who did well later in life, especially one, who is now a successful international entrepreneur.

Driving home on the author’s final student day, his fantasy that he must be special because he knew special people, began a path to complete erosion and realisation. Of course, his self-esteem vanished in sympathy, without those two physical presences. This was a major psychological blow, and coupled with other significant negative experiences, a nervous breakdown and further psychological annihilation resulted.

Just before returning home from university, the author began to develop a love for classical piano music, having had a chance exposure. He was aged 21 at the time. As his father was musical, he soon began to encourage this, even buying his son a digital piano. The author was working as a computer programmer. It was his best way of avoiding people. However, being tied to a computer screen all day, was not that different to looking at a coal face, like Jud Casper and Mr Morel.

This career attempt was very unsuccessful. After one year he changed jobs due to feeling psychologically bullied. Then after a further 18 months he quit his second programming job, with its significant bullying and stress levels. As he was developing psychotic signs, some of the bullying was probably imagined. That made little difference though, because stress does not care if the source is real or imaginary.

He lived with his mother and stepfather, who argued a lot. Without friends, and having a programming job, he was very isolated. There were

about eight local bars around his home area. He used all of them to drink in, soon developing a very unhealthy habit. He drank every night, and swapped locations regularly, but over many months, strangers seemed to realise, that he was a loner with a bad drinking habit.

With other factors including unemployment, he ultimately became under psychiatry, and his psychiatrist labelled him schizophrenic. Thankfully, he was more treatable though, because it turned out he was depressed, and so severely, that it presented like paranoid schizophrenia.

Before seeing a psychiatrist, the author remembers a night in his mother's house. He burst out of sleep, realising that he did not know who he was. He had lost all his connections, labels, and identities. He was nothing, but the gigantic task of learning piano had started. Without it, perhaps his risk of suicide would have been high. His mother still says piano saved his life.

Ironically, as well as giving the author a personal career/skills hierarchy, studying classical piano started building some sense of identity back. This is where he had been before though, and previously, he had experienced people who had not held the same view of himself, that he held of himself.

With successes in grade music exams, he arrived in a competitive structure. Rarely, he would meet another music maker, but sometimes humiliation resulted from this structure. That was clearly worth analysis. Then he found that the better he got, and the increasing number of years he had played, he turned his playing into something commonplace that he just enjoyed.

Classical music can certainly involve competitive structures, but whilst that is unwanted, a more psychologically destructive total loss of skills can occur. The self-taught Russian genius, Sviatoslav Richter, is widely regarded as one of the greatest pianists of the 20th century. He died in 1997 at the age of 82. Before he died, Richter allowed Monsaingen to interview him on camera. This ultimately led to the production of the video, "Sviatoslav Richter the Enigma."

In the video, we learn Richter lost his sense of pitch by a whole tone, which prevented him from playing. His last concert, a good while after his next to last, was given to a small private gathering on the 30th of March 1995. And having been so immersed in music, then no longer able to play, he appeared very depressed in this video.

The author's first wife, Clare, developed a hearing problem that stopped her singing. She had been in demand as a professional singer and could also simultaneously play the organ. Sadly, during a considerably long hospital stay for septicaemia, Clare received Amakacin. It is a drug that can permanently affect your hearing; and unfortunately, that happened to Clare.

Years earlier she took the exam of the Licentiate of the Guildhall School of Music (LGSMS) singing diploma. She was so good she received the college's silver medal, which only the best diploma performance of the year attracts. However, on discharge after the previously mentioned hospital stay, her singing was ruined: musically unpleasant.

Amongst all the spiritual ideas that Clare explored throughout her relatively short life, and starting with Catholicism in her youth, she was ultimately set on Kriya Yoga, which was first brought to the west by Paramahansa Yogananda. Clare eventually travelled to Germany for advanced instructions in it. Whilst amongst her temporary group of strangers in that country, one evening they were asked "what are you?" People began to answer, and everyone other than Clare had been saying, "I am" followed by something, like "a parent," or their occupation, etc. But Clare's answer proved final. It was clearly the sought-after one, because the instructor said, "that's it." Clare had said only "I am."

Chapter five

Originating in Christian theology, the seven deadly sins are pride, envy, gluttony, greed, lust, sloth, and wrath. In the book “Mere Christianity,” by the famous 20th century Christian apologetic, C.S. Lewis, it was suggested there is effectively one deadly sin, due to the other six being based on the one, i.e., pride. Lewis considered it to be the deadliest of the deadly sins.

Pride leads people to fight one another, and to despise one another. It can even exist at a national level, or it can be a feature of a group of any smaller size. It is a characteristic we hate to see in others, but particularly so when we perceive they have more of it than us. You cannot directly measure it, but it may be gauged comparatively.

If for example, a person seeks divorce as a solution to maintain their pride, then ipso facto their pride was more valuable than their marriage.

That example should hopefully be enough, because pride overlaps with almost everything that is bad in the world. It is found everywhere: in people, countries, football clubs, and ironically, in members of religions, etc., etc. The lack of it in nature is part of nature’s beauty, and the fruit of the figurative Tree of Knowledge, should never have been tasted, thus bringing it into the world. Everyone is guilty of this theological sin. Lewis said, whoever claims to have no pride, is very conceited indeed.

The life of Jesus Christ resulted in the formation of a religion centred around the opposite of pride, i.e., the virtue of humility (of course.) We can miss that all religions overlap on this aspect.

With Sigmund Freud, the concept of ego was suggested. It is much like pride, but whilst the latter is originally a religious idea, ego stems from psychoanalytical thinking, and it manifests in a similar way to pride.

People do not like egotists, as such the word is used as an insult. As with pride, we do not like seeing displays of ego. When two overtly egotistically people meet, especially if it is regularly, like in a work

environment, then they might compete to discover who has the bigger ego. They might deny a competition, despite having spectators and any suggestions at all of childishness.

Often then, pride and ego are somewhat interchangeable, but where they differ and do not overlap, includes cases where having pride is generally, socially acceptable. These include situations like having some pride in your children, or a little personal vanity expressed via your looks, because looks, for example, are relatively harmless.

Chapter six

It is implausible that we would readily accept, identities we know of which to suggest predominately negative characteristics about us. Furthermore, if we did, we would be likely to deny the connection. In fact, if a frank statement, such as “I am a convicted criminal” is shared, it could quite easily imply elements of, humility, reflection, contrition, and acceptance, for it to have been voiced at all, because negative personal attributions can point to a depressed mood.

When we say to another person “I am a -” followed by some descriptive noun, it is usually a matter of indifference, or better. It is common in the UK, to say “I’m Okay,” in reply to someone making a general inquiry about you, even if you are bad. Our broader UK society does not expect people outside of closer networks, to share any negative information.

We even make inquiries about others, primarily to gain opportunities to boast about ourselves. In the author’s experience, the capitalistically more advanced culture of the United States, makes it easier to jump straight to the boast. At the time of writing, 2020, the American president Donald Trump, was continuing to make personal and national boasts, on a regular, and international, basis.

The author met a lady called “Debbie,” through his local NHS mental health services. He was unemployed as it was after he left his second job. Debbie and himself were attending the local social therapy / community outreach service, and at this time, with Michael having a strongly honest tack, if someone asked him what his job was, he would actually say he was unemployed, then paint an even worse picture by saying he had been ill. Unfortunately, many people asked this. It is a hard question to avoid. Debbie chastised him for his excessively open, sometimes negative behaviour, so much so, that she taught him to begin to tell occasional lies.

No-one wants to be in the group of losers, and seemingly accept and identify with it. People want to be winners, and to identify with being in the employment/occupational group, that holds the greatest potential for

societal respect. Of course, this book wants you to resist that, and not be motivated by respect. The ego, or our pride, wants respectability, but as has been covered, it is a state of reliance. It needs what is outside of us, but “the Kingdom of Heaven is within.”

In 2020, Love Island presenter Caroline Flack, lost her television show hosting position after unwanted publicity around an assault charge against her, and she tragically took her own life. Bearing in mind again, that the author is not a Christian, he thinks fame and fortune are very linked, and can be interchangeable, as typified by this statement of Jesus’, “it would be easier for a camel to get through the eye of a needle, than for a rich ‘man’ to enter the Kingdom of Heaven.” Jesus also insisted that, “the last will be first, and the first will be last.”

You’d imagine that finding the internal, must be an easier prospect, when there are less external complications?

Chapter seven

It is fitting that this discourse is in seven chapters, because the number seven is special to the author. Many of the poems in his complete verse, considerably feature the number. It is present in forms, and more directly. Seven commonly represents completion. As well as having Seven Deadly Sins, Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, seven days in a week; seven is everywhere, and throughout the Bible.

This book has at least one thing in common with Susan Jeffers' "Feel the fear and do it anyway." The titles of each of those books, say such great amounts about their contents. However, people say "don't judge a book by its cover," but the author made that kind of judgement 30 years ago, and approached Susan's wisdom in the standard painful manner, the one many of us opt for?

Whether reading Susan's book would have generated sufficient motivation to cause actions, can never be known. In a similar manner, if someone reads this book, they may not be changed through an emotion, but going back to the author's earlier language style: people collect data, information, and experiences, and with sufficient time, they hopefully recognise patterns in that data. The author's ideas are suggestions to spot. If we do not tune in, or are not sensitive to something, it could be unprofitably bypassed.

Most people eventually reach a workable way of thinking and viewing the world. However, the author still hopes that his own message may be considered, and lead to useful ramifications for others, but earlier rather than later.

This requires faith and trust. Of course, the author thinks he is worth reading. These pages took a great amount of work. At the same time, the author also accepts that people perhaps half his age have already internalised all of this, or for some, rejected it.

The author was 45 years old before general people could no longer easily exploit him, threaten to take things from him, or control his anxieties.

When St Paul headed to Damascus (Acts 9) he changed in a moment. A similar thing happened to the author. Such things can happen in a moment because decisions happen that fast, and it must be decisions that are needed, in moderation though.

Importantly, rather than a religious conversion, a “paradigm shift” was a more accurate description of the author’s experience.

He suddenly realised, that all along, the only thing he had needed to be was himself. It followed that he must be the best person in the world to do that job, and he immediately realised that the same thing was a truth for every individual on the planet.

No-one could be better at being him than he was himself. At the same time everyone is different, but as such, a logic makes us the same, because we are equal, through sharing an equal difference. Groups and identities separate us. The author’s hope is that everyone becomes an individual. It was said earlier that this book explains what it is to be an adult. The core of adulthood is individuality, with outer parts mirroring our inners.

Jesus Christ said, “the Kingdom of Heaven is within.” This eventually made sense. It was even emotional for the author when it did. He had been to places, joined organisations, bought things, been with people, done things; then he found it, “under his nose.” He just could not see it before.

The author’s wife, Michelle, has maintained there are too many choices today. That is also the author’s view. Michelle would add, that having too many decisions leads to anxiety and stress. Return to D.H Lawrence, Mr Morel’s choices were scarce, although physical hardships created different stresses.

With so many opinions big and small, many of which readily become identities, the adage “can’t see the wood for the trees,” and perhaps even, “chip off the old block,” might now have a different interpretation?

Finally, the author likes to say - **“Godspeed.”**

Part 4 - Gallery

Image 1 -

This shows Michael's temporary workplace on Nahal Oz kibbutz, Israel, 1987. In the centre of the photo, a great steel rod can be seen in the grips of a ferocious metal cutting saw.



Image 2 -

Walking through Gaza in the summer of 1987, Michael “snapped” his Irish friend boldly leading their group of four young men. They had ignored the advice of an Israeli border soldier, who said they might not want to enter the region!



Image 3 -

It's 1989 and Michael is in Marrakesh, Morocco. He was in a very low mood before going, and made a poor travelling companion, but the "Djemma el fna" was a highlight.



Image 4 -

This picture was taken at the local school where Michael's mother worked. By chance their photographer was there, and Michael had been able to drop by. It was circa 1978/79. **Michael was 10 or 11** and looking unexcited.



Image 5 -

This is Michael and Clare in the house of a friend of hers. It was millennial eve. **Michael was 31**, and had been diagnosed bipolar in the previous year. Clare was 46. It was a bad day. He hated being there. He felt both unhappy and trapped.



Image 6 -



This is Michael, aged 52. He's with his second wife, Michelle, and their second rescue dog, Chloe. The year is 2020. The world was in the grips of the coronavirus pandemic, but despite that, this moment was a typically happy one.

Enough said...

You can buy Michael’s books directly from his indie publisher, lulu.com, for example his -

“Complete verse 2000-2020” -

which is an impressive hardback of almost 600 poems, and the source of the verse in this book. Its main title is -

“My beautiful diary”

(and it has the penname “Glenn Evans”)

Part 3 of this volume, “I am”, is available as a separate book.

Searching by the author name, “Michael Holme”, will locate volumes, but for greater ease, Michael’s website is -

www.michaelholme.com