

Prologue

It seemed like a good idea at the time. It's part of my planned desuetude; ultimately we're obsolete. Relevance Deprivation Syndrome (RDS) is a bitter pill. Is that better than *'it was a dark and stormy night'*? Charles Schulz's 'Snoopy' didn't advance much beyond that hoary old cliché. I will try. Come to think of it 'Snoopy' was attempting a novel; using an archaic typewriter. Remember them? Is a life story a sort of vicarious novel; perhaps not? Motivation is one of the hardest things to activate.

I enrolled in a Writing Memoir Course at the Australian Club. It was conducted by Mr Ben Taaffe. Mr Taaffe was/is a semi-retired English Teacher at Ascham School for girls. He was outstanding and clearly an inspired pedagogue. The class of 25 at the Club could be described as elite; with one notable exception! Everyone had a story to relate; and record. Much of this has been inspired by TV programs such as 'Who Do You Think You Are' and Ancestry.com. Millions of people throughout the globe, especially previously reserved and restrained conservative Australians, are motivated to seek clarity. This includes those with ancestors who'd earned 'King William IV Travelling Fellowships'; to quote one prominent waggish aficionado. I had already written two family histories promulgated by some old and very jaded 'sepia' photographs my elder sister Diana had stored in a plastic bag. She rightly said 'they would disappear into the bin'; when she expired. I knew I should hurry! I compiled one dedicated to Diana only to discover on presentation 'she had some more photos'! This led to Volume II dedicated to younger brother John. They are OK as annotated pictographs; but only just. I thought I should do better. This modest compilation is the outcome.

Mr Taaffe said to prepare a Memoir Plan; so I did. This prologue is the first part of that plan. The rest is blandly genealogical and vapidly chronological. I don't think it will matter much because almost no-one will ever read it. This is a self-justifying exercise in social catharsis with elements of exorcism. You actually have to do it before you die; unless and until proven otherwise? I'm also inspired by the lives and deeds of some of my close relatives. Foremost is my late cousin Liam Clarke in Northern Ireland. As I write (March 2017) former IRA leader and highly controversial British/Irish parliamentarian Martin McGuinness has just died. Liam was his biographer among many other notable achievements in journalism and public life. Liam had extraordinary courage. Second Cousin David Howey has also achieved eminence as an academic thespian at the University of Pennsylvania's 'Brind School of Theatre and Drama' in Philadelphia, USA. I think I should raise my game for posterity!

I'll work through my life in sequence; 'beginning at the beginning where it is customary to begin'. I suppose it begs the question: 'Who Am I'? Many pre-eminent philosophers have produced much fundamental wisdom. Descartes is one. ***'I think; therefore I am'***. I don't believe that necessarily applies to me? It also raises metaphysical parameters of belief systems and even 'religion'. At first we are inculcated with a firm set of 'life rules' by our parents and possibly their peers. These stick for a varied period of time until we are encouraged, but not always, 'to think for ourselves'. I have been struggling all my conscious life. I am still trying to come to terms with many paradigms. Forced to make a determination I declare myself as a 'secular humanist'; or possibly 'pantheist'.

"Humanism is a philosophical and ethical stance that emphasizes the value and agency of human beings, individually and collectively, and affirms their ability to improve their lives through the use of reason and ingenuity as opposed to submitting blindly to tradition and authority or sinking into cruelty and brutality.

The philosophy or life stance of **secular humanism** embraces human reason, ethics, social justice, and philosophical naturalism while specifically rejecting religious dogma, supernaturalism, pseudoscience, and superstition as the bases of morality and decision making". I think that's what I mean? That must be it!

"**Pantheism** is the belief that all reality is identical with divinity, or that everything composes an all-encompassing, immanent god. **Pantheists** thus do not believe in a distinct personal or anthropomorphic god".

When all else fails I often resort to 'humour' when challenged or feel threatened. Very often it's someone else's; which is better. It's like an escape clause; and very convenient. The 10 commandments are a good set of rules. 'Thou shalt not commit adultery' is extremely difficult to understand at pre- and primary school. Some others are clear cut although 'not bearing false witness against thy neighbour' could surely be abridged? Maybe I'm being pedantic; and even prolix. I'm reliably informed I'm very proficient at both! Guilty as charged!

I rather prefer the 'Popeye' version as depicted in the Horacek & Segar cartoons:



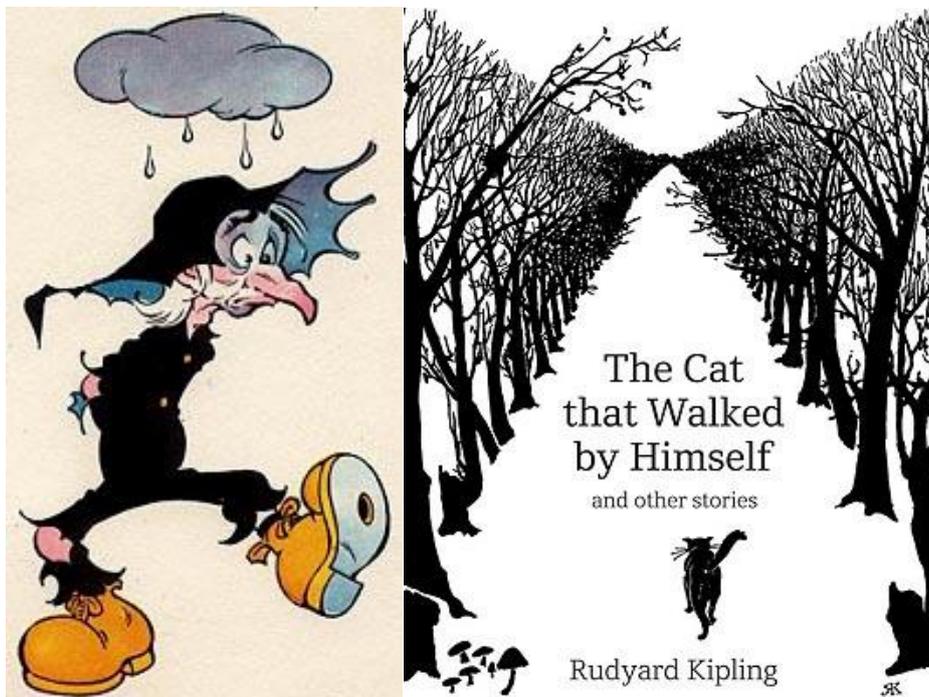
Maybe it would be simpler to stick with the 'sweet potato'? On the other hand a part of me is definitely manic; or mad. I think everyone subscribes to that? I rather like the idea! My children are indubitably not amused when I retort: 'I stink therefore I was'! Mind you I do think there could be some deep subliminal philosophical prototypes if you had the time or inclination to think it through; on further reflection perhaps not? See also 'incompetent sphincters and fugitive emissions' (ISAFE) which emerge later.



Mad

Maybe the cartoon depiction of the 'Mad Comic Icon' contains elements of all of us? I feel I can connect with much of it. I may even have resembled him in my formative years. Freckles, mildly bemused cheeky grin and red to auburn colouration were *de rigueur* in my early persona.

I loved the *Li'l Abner* series of cartoons of fabulous 'Dogpatch' characters with caricatures of barely disguised political figures making cameo appearances in small town backwoods hillbilly USA. I also liked the 'Shmoos', 'Vulgorilla', 'Earthquake McGoon', 'Kickapoo Joy Juice' ('Hairless Joe & Lonesome Polecat'), 'Schlemelium Toxicity', 'Sadie Hawkins Day', 'Daisy Mae', 'Moonbeam McSwine', 'Stupefy'in Jones', the 'Slobbovians', the 'Slobbolinks Iss Comink' (remarkably percipient and prescient; the Slobbolinks Iss HERE now) plus many others. 'Vulgorilla' became something of a cult figure in our genre, gender and generation. Confederate 'General Jubilation T. Cornpone' was another of my favourites with 'Slobberlips McJab' & 'Prunella McPrude' (deceased). 'Middlin' Welcome News' in Dogpatch was usually a portent for cataclysmic disaster! Sometimes I feel I can identify with Joe Btfsplk. It's important to be satisfied with who one really is.



Joe Btfsplk walks alone with only a cloud for company; the cat by him or herself

Joe Btfsplk was a seminal character in the satirical comic strip by cartoonist Al Capp (1909–1979). He is well-meaning, but is the world's worst jinx, bringing disastrous misfortune to everyone around him. A small, dark rain cloud perpetually hovers over his head to symbolize his bad luck. Hapless Btfsplk and his ever-present cloud became one of the most iconic images in *Li'l Abner*.

One storyline in the early 1970s features him trapping his cloud in a special anti-pollutant jar. Things don't go well when Joe becomes romantically involved for the first time. He reluctantly opens the jar and releases his cloud in order to remedy the situation and wistfully realizes that he wasn't meant for any other kind of life. For the moment Joe is satisfied who he really is as he returns to his normal, loner existence; his cloud once again in tow.

How would **you** pronounce Joe's surname? According to Al Capp, *btfsplk* is a rude sound. During public lectures, Capp demonstrated this sound by closing his lips, leaving his tongue sticking out, and then blowing out air, which is colloquially called a "raspberry" or Bronx cheer. Thank you Al! That makes me feel a whole lot better! I'm relieved. I will deal later with 'incompetent sphincters and fugitive emissions'. I'm something of an expert!

What about Rudyard Kipling's "The Cat That Walked by Himself"? Is this the story of evolution; or simply a very vivid version of man's domestication of animals? I think there may be some very deep, meaningful and sophisticated interpretations. Maybe I should simply stick with the average child's fascination with this and other 'Just So' stories; happy memories and merrier memoirs.

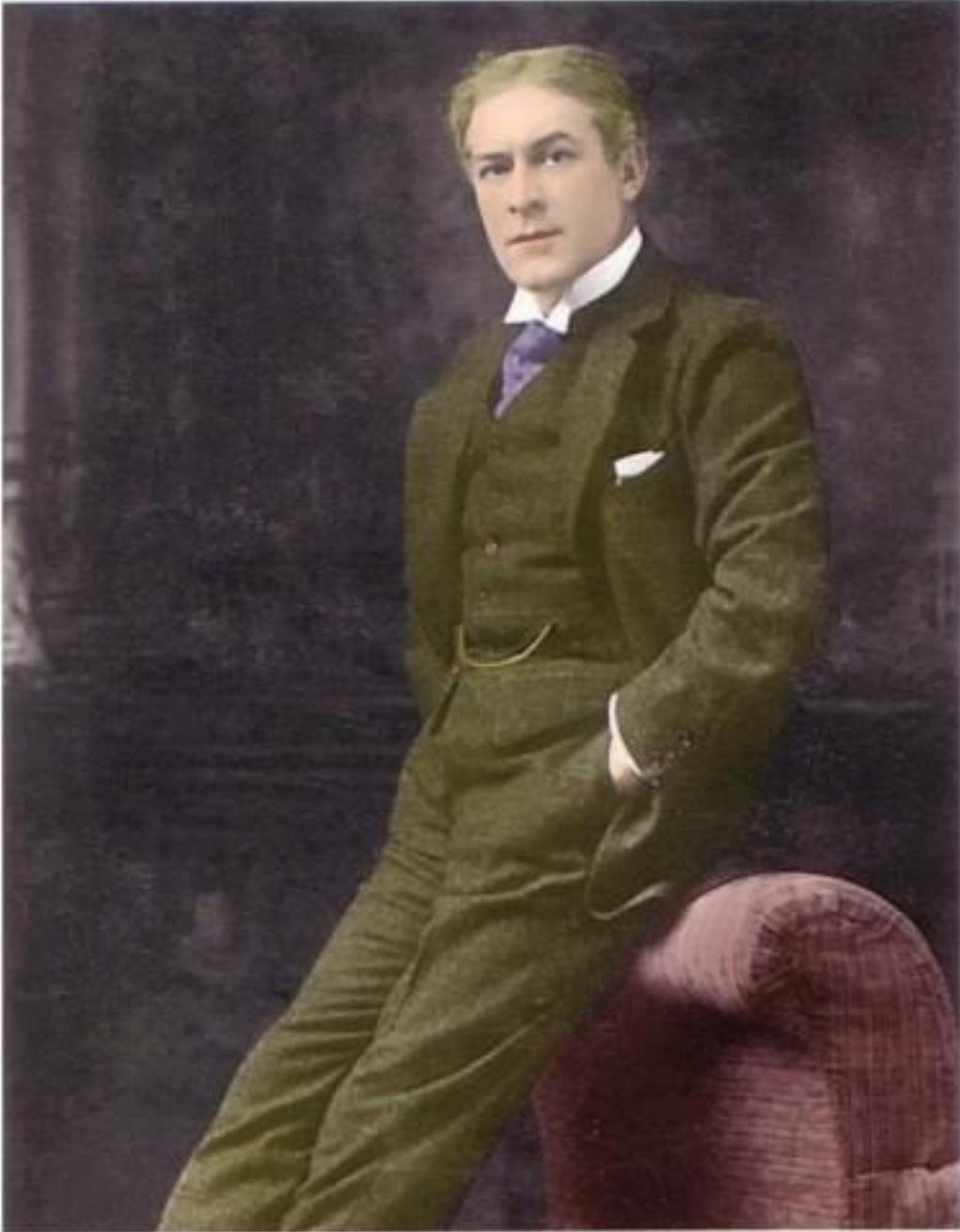
Did I mention belief systems; and a resorting to a vicarious sense of humour?

Let's put delusions aside and focus on 'ideal' outcomes. I subscribe to the Chief Joseph mantra. I like the philosophy of first nation beliefs. They tend to worship 'Great Spirits' and revere 'Mother Earth'. Concepts of 'birth' and 'evolution' are spiritual and colourful. It's easier to believe than creating everything within six solid working days; notwithstanding the omnipotence of the hegemonic initiator? I might end with this canon in the epilogue.

How long do you think a prologue should be? Is this long enough; or too long? Inevitably there will be quite a few tangential perambulations. I will introduce many philosophical peregrinations towards the end. Then I can fit in my 'writings' compiled over a period of time representing several incarnations in reflections. There's plenty of room to move. Let's leave it there!

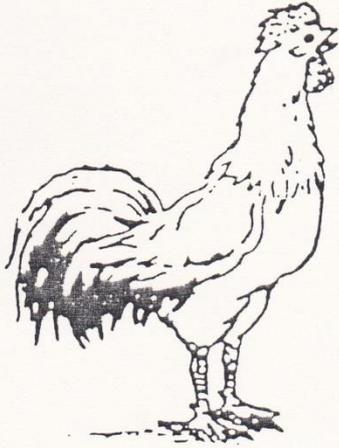
I'll also have more on incompetent sphincters and fugitive emissions later on. It was 'all-a-buzz' for a while in CSG exploration! Please excuse the unintended pun? I'll enlarge on this later; figuratively speaking. Did I mention 'manic' at any stage? I think I have something in common with Lord Byron: 'Mad, bad and dangerous to know'? Excuse me while I exit this page.

I used to be an atheist
until I realised I *was* God



Just Joking!

ALL I NEED
FOR TOTAL
CONTROL



IS FOR
EVERYBODY ELSE
TO BE
TOTALLY
SUBMISSIVE.

No joke?