

Life Influences and the Laws of Social Dynamics

I recently received a letter from a person who is about the same age as myself. He had taken early retirement at about the same time I entered long term unemployment. He had pursued a higher degree and hoped that it might permit him to start a fresh career. Ten years later, the benefits had proved to be rather less than my correspondent had hoped. His account of the intervening decade interested me since his experience presented a likely *“Best case scenario”* for what my experience would have been had I pursued the notion of a higher degree.

I had considered that option, and was planning to sell some of our assets to fund it. In the event I discarded the idea for a few reasons. A review of my output satisfied me that I had long since surpassed the requirements of a Doctorate. My experience of having produced top quality work was that in almost every case the credit was stolen by Dr. or Prof. A.N. Other. Thirdly, I could not satisfy myself that there was anything I could be taught that I could not learn for myself. The latter process might be less efficient in terms of time, but that was more than offset by incurring negligible cost and offering total flexibility. Fourthly, doing a course which is fully funded with some kind of stipend attached, and coming out with nothing at the end through no fault of one's own is one thing. Expending scarce resources, while surrendering my time and dedication, in order to permit others to tell me what they think of me, is another level of insanity altogether which ranks with joining a religious cult.

The clincher was an assessment of my personality as it had been expressed to me by others at various times. Descriptions include *“Unclubbable”*, *“Perfectionist”*, *“Rough diamond”*, *“Idealist”*, *“Quirky”*, *“Eccentric”*, *“Fantacist”*, *“Crank”*, *“Asshole”* and *“Wanker”* to name a few. Several of these descriptions were applied by people who went on to profit by what they had stolen from me and could never have been expected to be anything other than derogatory.

Nevertheless, there is that great line from *“Lucky Number Slevin”*...

“The first time someone calls you a horse, you punch him in the face.- The second time someone calls you a horse, you should stop and think about it.- But the third time someone calls you a horse... well, perhaps it's time to start looking for a saddle.”

I reckoned it was time to go saddle hunting. The exercise proved most rewarding and I feel my decision has been further vindicated by the experience of my correspondent.

Following redundancy from a major engineering firm, my friend John Ewing, spent the remaining 15 years of his life chasing *“Microsoft Certifications”* while dropping in and out of employment. John died last year aged 59 years. We went through Glasgow University together. John went on to do his PhD in the Kelvin Lab at East Kilbride, but never wrote up. I place the blame for that squarely on John's supervisors. John had been acquiring data using their old Digital Equipment PDP8A. The data was transferred to their Mainframe which was a DEC10, and subsequently a VAX, for analysis. The PDP8A was scrapped and I bought it for £100 as an interest. John could not make any sense of his experimental data at all, which was not surprising. I spent countless hours running diagnostics on the PDP8A and replacing dud transistors.

I eventually got the computer running properly but its MTBF was only a few hours and there was no real likelihood that John's data had been properly digitised by the PDP8A in the first place. There was another factor too. John was running large data sets while carrying out program development. His use of computer time became something of a legend. His supervisors ought to have focussed John's attention on verifying the software on small data sets prior to attempting a full analysis.

What a waste... Or was it?

John had originally declined an undergraduate place in Cambridge in order to study Physics at GU. He was utterly committed to the cause of Scottish Nationalism and lived long enough to see it tested by referendum. Many times I tried to persuade John to write up his PhD. The rules at the time permitted him to do so without time limit. He wasn't interested.

John told me how he regretted having split up with his long time girlfriend Rochine. My suggestion that he might at least check her out and explain his regret was an option John never pursued.

When he was unemployed, I tried to persuade John to follow an MSc course as I had done, (Though without success in my case). No dice. I drew John's attention to jobs from time to time, but again since the vacancies were usually in England, John's Scottish Nationalism prevented him from applying.

I went to the extent of trying to persuade John to train as a teacher. John would have been as good teacher as any. I argued that even though John never used the ticket he might meet another girl during the course. Nope!

John lived his life in a dark miserable flat, in a tenement with sloping floors which was shaken like a jelly every couple of minutes when the Underground went through. John lived alone and died alone. Barbara and I will both miss John. He was a very good friend and was always there in times of need. Nonetheless, John was an excellent example of

The First Law of Social Dynamics

“A person will live his or her life in their state of rest or uniform motion unless acted upon by an external force.”

John’s story also illustrates the first of my three categories of Life Influences which is the “*Lifestyle choices*” we all make. We must each of us be prepared to accept the ramifications of those choices. In appropriate circumstances we must each be prepared to say “*That was stupid of me!*” I am very good at making stupid decisions. Usually my mistakes are of the same type. I trust people who ought to be trustworthy, and present themselves as such. They then betray my trust.

For us, the last decade has been productive in certain ways and destructive in others. Many times I have had to accept the stupidity of my decisions. Barbara rightly expected to receive a pension when she turned 66 but was told that she had not earned enough from her farming activities to qualify for a State Pension. Arguably Barbara would have done much better to sign on unemployed throughout those years and receive credits instead of breaking her heart over the farm. As things stand, we are obliged to continue farming until we die. There are a lot of our neighbours in their late 70s still farming, though most do so because that is all they know and it integrates them in the community. Neither of us mind the prospect of being active to the end. We wouldn’t have it any other way, but neither of us is a farmer at heart. Just the same, I prefer this life to the one John chose.

Not all our decisions were stupid, and we now have a very good workshop indeed. Barbara and I spend a couple of hours in there working together most days. We don’t do anything stunning, just drilling holes in pieces of metal and making swarf in different ways. It can be quite surprising what shapes are hidden inside pieces of material. All it requires is to remove the excess material to reveal the hidden contents.

When I was young I dreamed of having access to facilities such as we own. I have offered the possibility of student placements to many universities over the years, but there were few responses and never any takers. I haven’t figured out why students are prepared to get into an appalling amount of debt to go on a Degree course. Those same individuals seem to recoil at the idea of learning when there are no course fees.

Perhaps they feel daunted by the prospect of experiencing a low stress environment in a rural setting where fresh air abounds and one is woken in the morning by birdsong rather than traffic or aircraft. It could be the threat of being mentored by someone with fairly wide experience. Perhaps they are afraid that the engineering and other skills they might develop could enrich their cvs and their lives more than any scrap of paper, revealing how worthless an expensive degree can be.

Whatever their reasons, it’s their loss. Offering my knowledge, experience, and facilities without attaching a large fee might be another example of my stupidity. I should count myself lucky that nobody has ever taken me up on it.

I guess it’s just another aspect of religion. Physics doesn’t appeal to many folk because it is visibly associated with Mass Destruction. Military applications are ultimately the main source of funding for the subject.

Religion on the other hand offers hope, a need for which is apparently deeply seated in everyone. The fact that the hope is projected into another context without any tangible evidence to justify the claims of these religions seems to be irrelevant. People unquestioningly surrender their Free Will to the bidding of others. What is well concealed however, is that the major religions are the flipside of the Military coin. Throughout history religious dogma has served to justify the campaigns of the warlords. The present conflict in Syria is an excellent illustration of the phenomenon.

Education is very similar to religion. The propaganda machine offers hope for the future which is essentially unfounded for the majority of its followers. Education is one Secular Humanist solution to an essentially genetic, inherent yearning, to find some kind of meaning to life. The population is conditioned from birth to believe that “*Education is a GOOD THING!*”.

Few people pause to examine the destructive effect that debt will have on their relationships and the rest of their lives. If they did, then the majority would ignore education and seek employment until they had determined their life direction and stabilised their finances. If they subsequently chose to pursue an education option, it is more likely that it would be an informed choice. At least it would be their choice!

After 14 years in the wilderness I managed to get a job as a research technician in the Physics Department of Royal Holloway University in 2016. It was a wonderful 6 months. I had suspected for a great many years that I should have remained as a lab technician. Barbara was at Royal Holloway with me and we were fortunate in getting a flat in Kingswood Hall of residence. Our Royal Holloway experience confirmed my

suspensions with a vengeance. Interacting with the students and other technicians filled us both with optimism, and the brief return to living in the UK was nothing short of inspirational. I started dreaming of the future again, something I had set aside long ago. I can now state unequivocally that relinquishing my technician status to study for a degree was a complete and utter waste of my life. We never recovered from the disruption to my career.

I know what has happened in my life, but it is common to wonder what might have been if certain people had lived longer. Such thoughts highlight the fickleness of fame. If those same individuals had lived and died anonymously they would not merit a second thought.



This photo used to sit on the mantelpiece in Uncle Jim's house. Left to right are: Uncle Jim; Uncle Jim's trainer; Chic Brogan; Sir Robert Kelly; Benny Lynch; Sir Harry Lauder

I had the choice of two girls. Long before I met them I had mentally constructed a checklist of what I believed was desirable in a wife.

Georgie was extremely attractive with long black wavy hair. She wanted me very much. Her voice was sweetness itself, and Georgie was an accomplished guitarist. Georgie had ticks in all the boxes. Barbara was every bit as attractive but I didn't realise that until much later because, like a stray dog, Barbara was in very poor condition when we first met. Barbara also wanted me very much. I don't think I have ever heard Barbara sing, and although she learned to play piano when she was young, she never played in my presence. Barbara's short Ginger hair didn't appeal to me in the least, and for lots of other reasons she had no ticks in any of the boxes. Both girls were very capable technicians and 100% feminine. Feminism was absent from their psyche, something that would be extremely difficult to find in modern girls.

Annette was another girl in the lab with Barbara and Georgie. Annette had gone to school with the Guitarist Jack Bruce of the rock band Cream. Liam Meagher, who used to come to my house to practice guitar with some other friends, was Billy Connolly's cousin.

My uncle Jim McCann had served his time as a riveter and later became a welder. He had been a boxer in his youth and was proud of the fact that he had never been KO'd. His face showed the scars of nearly 40 professional contests. Uncle Jim fought under the name of Boy Nickel and regularly sparred with Benny Lynch. He came to know Sir Harry Lauder quite well since Sir Harry was a great fan of boxing. Uncle Jim kept a photograph of himself with Sir Harry Lauder and Benny Lynch.

I would often walk with my uncle through Clydebank. It seemed that everybody knew him, and it must have been tiresome having his young nephew constantly asking "Who was that?" Uncle Jim never became impatient and would tell me the person's name. Of course it meant nothing to the young lad. For some reason which I never understood Uncle Jim was inordinately proud of his Southpaw nephew. Boy Nickel was a fighter, but his aggression was kept for the ring. Uncle Jim was the most placid and optimistic of individuals. I loved going fishing with him. He would have been a great boxing coach, and he wanted to take me with him to the Gym so that I could learn the rudiments of the sport. Perhaps he wanted an opportunity to get back into the boxing environment, but mum refused to give her permission. Uncle Jim wouldn't argue with his sister, and I was an obedient son.

If the spotlight of fame had pointed in a slightly different angle, any of these people might have become widely known. The film might have been made about Boy Nickel rather than Benny Lynch.

Yet anonymity has its attractions, for along with fame and fortune come jealousy and hatred. John Lennon made the mistake of letting it be known that he was planning to release another album. The warlords had been caught out once by people like Tom Paxton, Leonard Cohen, and Bob Dylan. Protest singers were a major influence which spoiled their fun in Vietnam. John Lennon had already produced Working Class Hero, and Imagine. My guess is that the Warlords didn't care to Imagine what problems John Lennon was likely to present them with next.

Living in Kingswood Hall of Residence also presented a spiritual experience for us in a sense – at least to the extent that we can be accused of that particular psychiatric disorder. It might well be fair evaluation of us. The complementary psychiatric condition of Secular Humanism, to which Physicists are more or less expected to align themselves, and on which Medical Psychiatry is founded, strikes me as sterile in the extreme.

The Christian Churches are perhaps the most virulent promoters of Secular Humanism. Hatches, Matches, and Dispatches. (HMD Services Inc.) Roll up! Roll up! Get your eternal salvation here! Complete you application form and Direct Debit online...

Our daily constitutionals regularly took us into the Air Forces Memorial at Runnymede, about 100 yards from Kingswood Hall. The Memorial commemorates 24,000 WWII airmen who have no known grave. Most of these people were young conscripts who were robbed of their “*Lifestyle Choice*” but did their duty irrespective of any reservations they may have harboured. Folk leave cards and notes which occasionally contain an account of the final mission of the lost airmen. We would read these as part of our walk. Some of them were extremely moving. I wonder how many potential great Scientists went down in flames.

Perhaps as a contrast, there was a commotion outside the Memorial one morning. A student had discovered the body of a man in a car parked beside the fence. He had committed suicide by burning a barbecue inside the vehicle. The toxic fumes had done the job. Why the man had thrown his life away is irrelevant, but I would have little difficulty naming at least twentyfour thousand individuals who would have given anything to have had that man’s “*Lifestyle choice*” in their own hands!

Paddy Hopkins was in his mid 50s when he was “*Run Through*” by a bale spike fitted to the rear of his tractor. He had been helping Mattie Dooley tow start his tractor. Once both machines were running Paddy got out of the cab and went to undo the tow chain. Mattie still had his machine in gear and in a moment’s loss of concentration let the clutch up. Paddy was

sandwiched between the machines, his body run through by the bale spike. Paddy is now in his 70s leading an active life. The bale spike is lying in one of our fields. We often joked that we should Chrome plate the spike and mount it on a board for Paddy to hang on his wall. Paddy was the oldest in his family, and his brother James, the last of Paddy’s brothers and sisters, died last year.

Royal Holloway University had lots of trees planted in memory of students who had died, some tragically, and others by their own hand. The trees made the campus attractive. They are a visible, productive, and lasting way to remember lost friends. Nevertheless, no university course is worth killing oneself over and I am confident that if people delayed their third level education, student suicides would be likely to decline.

My Uncle John Cahill was a Battery Sergeant Major in the Royal Artillery during WWII. He fought in many theatres in the middle and far East including serving with the Chindits in Burmah. One account told how Uncle John brought his Battery safely through the allied lines from German occupied territory in the run up to El Alemain. Only half an hour earlier, a similar attempt by another British unit to rejoin their lines had ended in them being wiped out by friendly fire. Uncle John lived well into his 80s.

My Uncle Frank Cahill was drafted into the RAF. He broke his leg during training and was set back a couple of months. When Uncle Frank finally joined his squadron, every one of the men from his initial intake had already been shot down and killed. Uncle Frank flew as Navigator / Bomb Aimer in the “*1000 Bomber*” raids. He lived well into his 80s.

Uncle Pat McCann was a Merchant Seaman who served in the Atlantic Convoys. He arrived home to Clydebank at the end of one voyage and went to bed exhausted. Half an hour later a telegram arrived ordering Pat to report for duty. My Uncle Charlie took the telegram. Charlie decided to let Pat sleep. When Uncle Pat awoke and discovered what Charlie had done he was furious and made his way to the docks, only to discover that his ship had already sailed. The ship was torpedoed with the loss of all hands. Uncle Pat lived well into his 60s.

A couple of years after we came to Ireland, Michael Meechan’s 18 year old daughter Mairaid developed a lump on her calf. The cancer progressed and she died in 2007 when she was 26 years old having spent almost her entire life in the education system. Both of Mairaid's parents are still alive. Michael is now in his late 70s and still actively farming.

Mairead

I just can't find the words nor scarce feel your pain
In the loss of a daughter so fine
Whom you nurtured from infant through youth to full bloom
To be taken by such cruel decline

No I can't feel your sorrow for I don't have the means
That can know all your memories dear
All the secret emotions the hopes and the dreams
That you harvested year upon year

I can not understand why the good Lord should take
One he gave though t'were just yesterday
"It's the good who die young" is a cliché too hard
To endure as you go on life's way

It's not foolish to think that in suffering loss
With your hearts and emotions so strained,
In a world out of reach, and yet ever so close,
There, in some higher context, you've gained.

For I pray and believe that a new day has dawned
In a place where from cares and from woes
Of her mortal encumbrance her spirit flies free
To embrace and protect those below

Now in Summer's soft breeze or in Winter's harsh bite
And with each lamb of Spring you'll recall
As you pause in your chores or you gaze at the world
Every joy Mairead brought to you all

Jim Cahill
© February 2007

These examples broadly illustrate the second of three Life Influences which seems to be some element beyond our control. This may be interpreted in a variety of ways, from chance, through metaphysical, to outright spiritual. The user is a liberty to apply any context which is deemed appropriate to their life model. The essential characteristic is that this element beyond our control occurs haphazardly and without malice.

For events such as these we can seek comfort along the lines of "Time will heal the hurt", or "It was God's Will", or, "What rotten luck!".

The third category of Life Influence which I wish to illustrate is that due to the wilful acts of others. The individual has no control over the actions of others or the devastation it wreaks in their lives.

There is no comfort to be had for the victim nomatter how much "Water flows under all the bridges of the world".

The Christian Churches certainly deserve absolute condemnation for their promotion of the "Unconditional forgiveness model" or more correctly, the "Perpetrator's Charter". It is morally indefensible to place

any obligation on a victim to forgive people who never give the slightest thought to the havoc they wreak in the lives of others, much less experience any sense of remorse. Perhaps non Christian religions are no better.

Only those who accept that they have done wrong and seek to make reparation for their actions, have earned any right to forgiveness.

One typical example of this type of situation would be the consignment of pregnant girls to the workhouses and convents of Ireland.

Further examples would be the Enniskillen, Hyde Park, or Guildford bombings. Human trafficking, exploitation, and wanton destruction of lives are big businesses.

I have earlier recounted the saga of Barbara's pension. For Barbara things were to get worse, - much worse at the hands of the Irish Medical Profession.

Dr Ken Ledingham stole my Wolfson Industrial Research Fellowship, and with it my prospects of a higher degree and a career in Academia. He used my achievements to advance his own career.

Ken Ledingham and his family enjoyed every benefit and comfort that he had denied to me and to my family through his criminal action.

My father was never obliged to risk anything. He received an excellent education, and during the war was in a sanatorium suffering from tuberculosis. He recovered fully and went on to become a teacher. Dad might reasonably have expected to live as long as any of his brothers. He died when he was 67... murdered by his two favourite daughters. - There's gratitude!

In respect of this third Life Influence, the individual has a right, and indeed a duty, to lay the blame squarely on the shoulders of the perpetrator. Taking a line from one of the "Bourne" films:

"Remember everything. Forgive Nothing."

Only when that becomes an instinctive response in the majority of individuals will Natural Justice ever have the slightest prospect of being implemented in Society.

A Search For Justice

There's right and there's wrong, it's stark and its clear
Without need for the laws of the land
It is deep down inside every person who breathes
Hard encoded in the heart of Man

Our society needs only one law
"Do to others as you would be done"
But we each make our choice, good or evil
Take the side that we want to be on

Those who choose to serve evil, there's no going back
In that instant a race is begun
Between folks who seek justice while they're still alive
And the Reaper when their days are done

The past that they left far behind them
While they sped on in life's outside lane
As old father time slows them down to a crawl
It will sure overtake them again

We'll start with a blank sheet of paper
And a mind that is open and clear
Then slowly and surely we'll gather the clues
Till a full understanding draws near

Call it gut feeling, hunch, intuition
That something that keeps driving on
Past doors that are closed and leads to dead ends
Till the darkness gives way to the Sun

Keep on chipping away at their secrets
It's a struggle that's uphill and slow
But there's hope we will find as we get near the top
The bad guys have nowhere to go.

We may never know "Why" - that's their secret
They can take that along to the grave
We want what, who, where, when, and how, for our files
To their minds, we will not be enslaved

Though the fight 'gin the bad guys is so long
Normality sometimes feels strange
Just remind ourselves that for transgressors
Arrest is as good as a change.

Jim Cahill
© December 2005

It is arguable that since it is evident that few achieve Justice in life, a belief in an afterlife where some power will even the score, could prove to be an essential construct in order to provide a context in which people can carry on through adversity.

It is also arguable that the most tangible evidence of the existence of a God is the selfishness, destruction, and suffering in the world. Greed knows no bounds, and in the absence of some force to limit its progress, no civilisation could ever have existed. That limiting force is variously given the title Allah, Mother Nature, Positive Energy, or generically God.

In the worst of times, belief in such a force could become the only barrier between the individual and suicide. If things take a turn for the better, the believer can look back and congratulate themselves for trusting in their God, whatever they might consider it to be.

Nevertheless, over the years I have encountered a few people to whom the supernatural is as real as anything physical. This handful of individuals were in stark contrast to those multitudes who make a vocal declaration of their religious convictions. When these individuals confided in me, sincerity and humility were their dominant characteristics. They were not trying to convert anybody. These people had all experienced great trauma, and it might be said, taken to the brink. In a sense they each seemed to regard their role almost as an observer of a conflict between invisible forces of good and evil, which took place in and around them. However the challenge they faced was to make a commitment to one side or the other. Each one had made a commitment to the force for good. Their stories are all different, but the poem, "*Mulholland's Contract*", by Rudyard Kipling, is a good surrogate for any one of them.

The individuals to whom I refer came from a variety of backgrounds and their stories represent evidence of the universality of some force for good. It appears that organised religion simply packages and sells what is freely available to anyone who cares to ask for it. Often the religious sales pitch includes claims to being the only "*Genuine Product*" and an exhortation to accept no substitute.

As has already been observed, it is because people have some kind of celebrity status that we become aware of tragic circumstances. I am reminded of the front page of an old Glasgow newspaper which declared the death of Elvis Presley in bold headlines. In a single column to one side there was another news item...

"This morning, a woman was found murdered in the stairwell of a Glasgow Tenement. Her 2 year old child was discovered clinging to her mother's dead body."

Religions, Consumerism, Feminism, and the Education System Conveyor Belt are perhaps the greatest culprits for fostering unrealistic expectations and meaningless ambitions, actively distorting and eroding Society.

When women chose to suppress their natural function as mothers and pursue the 9-5 career model, employers were delighted. The available pool of employees had doubled almost overnight at a time when employment availability generally was declining. The consequential downward pressure on wages was inevitable.

A few Dinkies do well out of it, but the majority of people suffer, children to the greatest extent. A secondary effect was the influence on male outlook which shifted from a broadly "*Provide and protect*" ethos to one of "*Woman mind thyself*".

In a Secular Humanist, Capitalist, context there are no grounds on which either the employers or the menfolk can be criticised.

In contrast, a context which limits the excesses of capitalism and which may be described as Spiritual Socialism, implements the principle... *What goes round - comes round.*

The above represents a corollary to

The Second Law of Social Dynamics

“To every Action there is an equal and opposite Reaction.”

When it comes to addressing the Work-Life balance problem everybody faces, it is also necessary to understand

The Third Law of Social Dynamics

“Career acceleration is proportional to the applied Force of Commitment.”

This Law only holds at low career velocities. Apart from rare examples of individuals who encounter a resonance and are accelerated into the “*Career Free Continuum*”, relativistic effects are quickly apparent. Most of us live our lives in a steep walled financial Quantum Well.

My advice to anyone starting out is identical to the advice given by Robert De Niro to Edward Norton in the film *The Score*.

“Make a list of all the things you want in life and then set about getting them – slowly.”

Leave school and get a job. Experience life and save every penny possible. One can always do a bit of “*Lifelong Learning*” if one's life turns out to be long enough.

Work-Life balance is difficult to achieve. One way it can be achieved is by close cooperation between man and woman, each complementing the other by accepting and utilising their inherent Natural attributes and talents rather than subverting them to a bankrupt Social Model.

It is surprising what can be achieved when this cooperation is coupled with tight control on expenditure in compliance with “*The Macawber principle*”, set out by Charles Dickens...

“Income one pound - Expenditure one pound and sixpence... Result Misery.”

Income one pound - Expenditure nineteen shillings and sixpence... Result Happiness.”

Numbers change over the years, but the principle remains true. Seemingly trivial marginal effects can make all the difference to life. An employee generally only receives about 70% of their top line salary. Once the overheads of actually earning that salary, such as travel and so on are taken into account, the figure is likely to be nearer 50% of top line. If the overheads of debt are factored in, the figure will be lower still. This means that every £1 saved is at least as good as £2 earned.

Barbara and I were both set up to fail by our respective parents and others. Barbara is as gifted as her Cousin Alan. Barbara's parents were wealthier than Alan's. However, Alan was given a good education and went on to become one of Glasgow's top Pathologists. Barbara's parents preferred their holidays and new cars. Barbara was consigned to a local school and bad went to worse. Barbara was guilty of being born a girl in a Male dominated household. I was guilty of being born a boy into a family of hard line feminists. My sisters all went to one of Glasgow's best schools, with no expense spared. I was consigned to the local school and latterly was not even allowed money for the school dinners.

As “*Rocky*” has it

“Mix with good people, you get good friends. Mix with smart people, you'll get smart friends. Mix with Yo-Yo people you'll get Yo-Yo friends. Simple Math.”

Guess which type of people I was mixed with!

Barbara and I have been together now for nearly 49 years, so I guess the qualities listed against the boxes all those years ago must have been incorrect. There were also lots of other qualities which I hadn't thought of which proved to be much more profound. We heard that Georgie's marriage ended after a few years on account of her husband's gambling habit. Hopefully she found happiness subsequently.

For many years Barbara wouldn't explain what attracted her to me, but about 20 years ago she let it slip. “*I just had to make the most of whatever I could lay my hands on at the time.*” All credit to her. It has proved a sound basis for our marriage. Barbara and I might fail yet, but we've defied the probabilities to date.

By the “*Theorem of No Memory*”, there's no reason why that shouldn't continue for a while.

When I was about ten years old, I was taken round the sights of Dublin by my parents. The beauty of the Book of Kells left a lasting impression.

However, the visit to St Michan's crypt remains one of the highlights of my life. In the crypt I was introduced to "*The Crusader*". This man had been dead for about 800 years, and he wasn't the young warrior he had once been. However, his body had been surprisingly well preserved and his skin was a dark leathery brown.

After introducing us to the gentleman, the guide then invited any of the assembled group to shake hands with the man. Being a little lad, I was standing at the front, and nothing was going to stop me shaking hands with the Crusader. I was delighted to meet him. I recall only one other individual stepping forward. He was a tall American who declared "*I've travelled all the way from Texas to meet this guy.*"

About seven years ago we were in a Dublin taxi. The driver pointed across the Liffey and informed us "*That's St Michan's. There's the preserved body of a crusader in the crypt. They say that if you shake his hand you will have a happy marriage.*"

The Crusader might have influenced my life. It could have been he who was responsible for persuading me of the unholy nature of Holy Wars. He too may have experienced a special kindness at the hands of someone whose religious beliefs were radically different to his own, and who was worse off than he was. Perhaps it's superstitious Blarney. But nevertheless, it's an intriguing conjecture which is unusual as far as supernatural influences are concerned, insomuch as it has the potential to be objectively tested by statistical analysis.

Our story isn't over, and there could be an organisation out there which would appreciate the enormous market value of the energy storage approach. It might be possible to identify a Patron who has an interest in examining the Fusion Igniter scheme or would like to implement my proposal for a novel type of Gravitational Wave detector. We might yet find a means to realise my greatest dream, which is the construction of an experiment to detect an effect which I am confident could topple the Big Bang theory. If I was a young postgrad I would know we were on track for a Nobel Prize.

I can't find any reason to reject the theory which has evolved since it first occurred to me several years ago. The experimental design has been refined in the interim and whereas I originally anticipated a budget requirement of about £2M, I now believe the experiment can be implemented for a fraction of that sum.

One estimate reported that students could accumulate nearly £100K of debt in pursuing their First Degree. Nobel Prizes are often split between 3 people. Having a share in a shot at the Nobel Prize for Physics must be worth a lot more than a First Degree. All I need to do is identify an Applied Mathematician, an Engineer,

and a Physicist. There must be people in those disciplines who have a hankering to do real science which could change the way we understand the world, but went into Financial Services instead. People with that background could muster up a few hundred £K in a couple of minutes with some phone calls to members of their, "*Social Networks*". The downside would be well covered by one or more of my several commercially viable ideas making the risk/return on the experiment essentially zero in financial terms.

Nobody is going to give old codgers like us a Nobel Prize for Physics. They would kill us in preference. Even if by some fluke we were given such an award, what use would it be at this stage of our lives?

On the other hand, Physics is as guilty of "*Celebrity culture*" mentality as the music or film industry. I cannot even think of Stephen Hawking without my head being filled with a vision of David Kelly and Milo O'Shea doing their "*Temple of Truth*" thing in the comedy film "*Mystics*." The Popular Science machine turned a personal tragedy into a Global Media Circus. It was perhaps the worst thing to happen to Physics in the last 50 years.

It might be useful to take advantage of this desperate obsession with Public Outreach in Science. If it was possible to identify three girls who are early post-docs, the experimental design could be handed over to them. In the present "*Early Career - Women in Science - Celebrity Culture*" climate, the probability of such a trio obtaining funding is excellent. What is more, they would rank highly on the nominations lists once the work was completed.

Proposing an experiment is one thing, implementation is another. The girls would have earned the prize. A Nobel Prize for Physics would also have value to them for the rest of their lives. Barbara and I could be their research technicians and have the satisfaction of seeing the dream become reality, albeit by proxy. In any event, if we had a Nobel Prize it would almost be worth giving away just to enjoy the seismic repercussions in Cosmology! Just think of the T shirt.

"Dark Matter... Ho! Ho! Ho!"

I used to walk the three miles along the banks of the Forth and Clyde canal from my home in Yoker to my Uncle Jim's house. When I arrived, Uncle Jim welcomed me with a mug of tea. It was always strong, usually black, and with lots of sugar. He never had fresh milk, but on some occasions Uncle Jim would have a tin of condensed milk which made the tea whitish and even sweeter. He would then light the fire and we would sit together passing the time.

The chance to relax in familiar surroundings, sharing the company of a friend, with the day's obligations forgotten, and nothing bearing down on one, makes for the most treasured memories. In more than one film, scenes of that nature are accompanied by the shrewd observation that *"This is as good as life gets."*

For his part, Uncle Jim would also call up to Yoker on a Wednesday. I would lend him two shillings. On Thursdays, Uncle Jim signed on at the Labour Exchange, or "*Buroo*" as it was known. He was broke by the Wednesday, and used the two shillings to buy himself some cigarettes or go into the pub for a pint with some old friends that evening. On the Friday afternoon, Uncle Jim would show up at Yoker again and give me two and sixpence. I didn't care about the vig, but Uncle Jim insisted. The arrangement suited us both and went on for quite a while.

One day Mum became curious about Uncle Jim's visits and asked me to explain. When I told her, mum became very angry and directed me never to lend any money to Uncle Jim. "*Jim knows he can come to me if he needs cash.*" Those words ring in my ears to this day. When Uncle Jim came round the following Wednesday, I told him that mum wouldn't let me lend him the two shillings. Uncle Jim understood in a way that was beyond the comprehension of his young nephew. He went away empty handed. I never saw Uncle Jim again. Soon after his last visit to Yoker, Uncle Jim failed to sign on at the Buroo. He was found dead in his squalid single end flat on the top floor at 10 Swindon Street, Dalmuir West. He died about 300 yards from the house where I had been born all too few years earlier. Uncle Jim was 60 years old.

Like so many fighters, Boy Nickel was KO'd in the final round by loneliness and neglect.

Perhaps I suffer from some form of "*Survivor guilt*". Dreams are what keep us going. The most serious mistakes might be caring how long we live, what we end up doing in life, how we are regarded by others, or for that matter, what comes after. The trick seems to be to accept life as it is rather than as we would wish it to be. It can be difficult not to lose sight of that on occasion.

When everything is said and done, there will inevitably be at least one question remaining which can only be answered in posterity...

"Was it worth all the saying and doing?"

It would be nice to think it was, but since there is no way of knowing, the best that anyone can do, is to do their best.

If the Banshee wails, and the Headless Coachman draws up at the gate in the meantime, what the heck. He can come in for dram before we go. How he is going to drink it I can't imagine. I might have to pour it down his neck.

Perhaps I'll end up like the neighbour we passed on the road to do our shopping last Winter. The snow was about 6 inches deep and drifting. He was lying in the field near the road, beside his tractor, with his sheep patiently waiting to be fed. He was only 62, but he died doing what he knew. - Not a bad way to go.

That's for another day...For now I'll keep on dreaming.

Jim Cahill

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