



# Shadows of The Past

**I**t's a hot day in the ironically-named, "City of Churches", and I am in a time warp. It's been years since I've found myself on the cycle of "overnights", related to my job as an airline pilot, and here I am on a triple-Adelaide-overnight while my new wife, and my-reason-to-exist, is at home tending our garden and working with the lost lambs of childhood sexual abuse.

For five years my roster was carefully chosen to avoid overnights. The situation now in tatters as the arrangement that supported that lifestyle is no longer possible. I am now at the mercy of a lottery system that allocates my duties as a pilot. So here I am, miles from home and back in the all too familiar world of lonely disconnection that punctuated my life for many years. Spending half my life going from one five star jail cell to another. Options limited to a man who has spent the best part of his life living in this outwardly glamorous charade as an airline pilot.

I wake way too early in an empty bed, in a strange city. Turn on the early morning news—the world is in collapse—consider the options for the day with seven hours to go before I am picked up to go to the airport to fly another pattern of work. How can I use my time here constructively? Going to the barber at home is a waste of time that I could be using much better with my wife in the garden. I head out of the sanctuary of the hotel to find breakfast and then a place to get a haircut. After breakfast I walk up a narrow city laneway to Hindley Street and stand at the intersection wondering which way to go. I just want a cheap and simple haircut at a local barber and my instincts tell me to turn right, away from the city centre, and past the cheaper and sullied part of the city that lends itself to the cheaper rents an average fifteen dollar barber can afford.

I walk, scanning the shop fronts for the candy stripe sign of my destination, but I search in vain. I walk past the seedy shop fronts that are home to adult bookshops, massage parlours and strip joints. The smell of stale grog and cigarette butts make the air pungent. I walk past the oncoming flow of humanity; of the faceless, lifeless and soulless inhabitants of a sinful world. A world devoid of hope and filled with despair. A world in which I was once a lost inhabitant. In this world I used to find escape. I used to find justification for my sinful existence. In this world I would live another life; a life of degradation befitting a man who had lost his soul. Befitting of a man without a future. A man lost to his God given destiny. The soulless faces of those walking towards me were yet familiar. It was like looking into the mirror of my past, my endlessly seeking past. My pathway to hopeless despair.

The blazing sun of a thirty degree day scorching the concrete of the footpath framed in the shadows of lost people among whom I counted myself. As I ventured further into iniquity in search of a haircut, I started to fear every step. Every shadow was a shadow from my past. Every empty face a reflection of the man I used to be. As if programmed at my conception, I am drawn from deep down in my psyche to pause at each corner to explore my surroundings. Longings of my past still quietly evident like a hitching post in my soul. Like a connection to the lord of darkness who is ever waiting for me to trip. I find myself in a world familiar and yet now foreign. A place where I am no longer at home. A voice tells me to let go of my beliefs, that it's ok, that sin is normal and everyone is doing it. "Come back to the past", the voice says to me. "It's easy, no one will ever know". It's then that my Saviour speaks His loudest to me. In my daily prayers I ask Jesus to watch over me, to shed light on my character defects, to make me humble and to make me whole in Him.

I know that He is with me, watching me and He holds out His hand that I may be delivered. It is at that moment that I die again and I turn to Him. In anguish, I examine my feelings and explore my past. I think of the rails on which my life now runs, the commandments of God and the beatitudes that help me to keep them. Have I fallen off those rails even momentarily? My vulnerability hits me hard and I stop in my tracks and speak to Him who walks with me. The sun at my back casts a shadow before me that reminds me of my past. I am saddened—no, sickened—by the recollections of my past and the proximity of a failed destiny in this part of the world ruled by satan.

As the fear of entrapment strikes into my very soul, I ask what Jesus would do. I pause and I breath. I turn back to put the Son in my face and I retrace my footsteps out of that world in which I was once a regular inhabitant. My shadow disappears and I feel the Son in my face and I walk back to grace. What is ahead of me is a bright future, a hope for eternity. Behind me on the footpath is the empty shadow of the man I used to be, as if we are no longer connected. I open my phone and the smiling face of the angel that God sent me to be saved is fixed on me from the illuminated screen. I smile and call her to tell her how precious she is to me. She answers with, "Hello gorgeous boy!"

I am overcome with a sense of warmth and belonging as I tell her of my walk back to where I used to be. A smile breaks my frown as I hear her concern and fear, a fear that I may be subdued into my past. I am filled with both the sense of her love and the warmth of the arms of my Saviour wrapped around me as I head back to the hotel.

A sense of freedom is palpable when I consider my new life in Christ Jesus. Meanwhile, back on the pavements of Hindely Street, the filthy shoes of the lost souls that walk those streets tread upon the shadow of the man I used to be and I am forever grateful when I remember the day I walked into the sun for the first time and looked up at the sky and screamed, "I can't do this any more!"

I turn to Him who saves me and I am home. In a couple of days I will lie in the loving

arms of the woman I adore. In the mean time, I will walk in the loving arms of Jesus and know without doubt that it is well with my soul.

“For he who overcomes shall inherit all things; and I shall be his Father, and he shall be my son” (Rev. 21:7).

Thy will be done, Oh Lord of my soul.

*Graham Hood.*

Adelaide, South Australia. 27/09/2011

