

Stream of Consciousness

When their son developed a gift for always telling the truth, Mr. and Mrs. Digby felt that they had sired an angel. Later with heart-felt dread they realised that they had spawned a monster.

Children are taught that telling the truth is good, and that lying is bad. Later as adults they learn that the truth isn't always ethically sound, and that in some cases can be used to devastating effect. A good example would be if a fat, ugly woman asked if you thought she was fat and ugly. Being pure of heart is one thing, but wielding the gleaming sword of truth could be a little harsh under the circumstance, and may do more harm than good.

So it is that adults develop secondary filters to the truth such as tact and compassion. They use sarcasm to state truths in round about ways, and white lies to shield emotions from an often grim reality.

For Damien Digby these secondary filters never developed.

If it wasn't bad enough having a name associated with the anti-Christ, Damien also had the problem of having no inner-monologue. Whatever thoughts entered his mind immediately left through his mouth. There was no separation of the wheat from the chaff. It all came spewing out in an unending stream of consciousness.

From the very moment he opened his eyes each morning his every insignificant quandary would be voiced.

'Ooh I'm awake. It's sunny outside. That makes a change. I'm hungry. What do I fancy for breakfast? Cereal would be good. What to drink? Tea? Yes, tea. What shall I do today? First I think that I shall bath, then I will go for a walk, a walk yes, down to the shops where I will purchase a chocolate bar and a newspaper...'

Initially his parents had thought him a little eccentric for talking to himself. When they started to notice a rhythm to his rantings they found that the truth was much worse. It wasn't just that he bored them to death with his constant trivial observations and questions. It was also that these observations were often downright offensive to both them and the public at large.

They first became aware his condition when Damien was only eighteen months old. Before then his dark talent had been concealed beneath a baby's babblings. However, once he began to learn words and sentences the whole world fell prey to unintentional venom.

His long-suffering mother, Debbie Digby, was pushing his pram down a crowded street one morning when an elderly gentleman crossed in front of them. With seething disgust Damien leapt up and screamed, 'Errr Prune-face, Errr Prune-face,' over and over again. Even when Debbie had turned around and headed for home her son's cries could still be heard all over town. It wasn't that he was being spiteful. It was simply that his young, inexperienced mind had found the old man's wrinkly complexion hideous.

This is probably a bad example. After all, most babies make mistakes like that. A better example would be from later on in life when he was twelve.

Damien stood facing the wall having been given a dinner-time detention for getting into a fight. As you can no doubt imagine, Damien got into a lot of fights, none of which he started. He had been minding his own business when Jay the local bully came up to him and said, 'I hear you think you're harder than me?'

Damien replied, 'No, you are taking my comments out of context. I have never claimed to be harder than you. What I *did* say was that I am more intelligent than you. Mind you, with your ole man in prison and your mother permanently drunk it's no wonder you're so thick.'

WHACK!

During her son's third year at high school Debbie Digby was called in by the Head Mistress and handed a piece of paper. On it were a series of paragraphs written in Damien's handwriting. It read:

In my mind I have let myself fall to the ground without fear of injury or pain. I have exhaled a hate-filled gasp and felt the ecstatic release pass over me like cold air across perspiration. I have taken on the night and become

the impenetrable heart of darkness, worn the very face of death, and cast down my enemy like an inferno raging through field after field of dry grass.

At home I sit in my kitchen naked and unashamed, conjuring rhymes and waxing lyrical. Free from the constraints of morality I scrawl page after page of illegible, filth-ridden diatribe. When the supply of paper is exhausted I turn to the floor, the walls, the cupboards, the doors and windows. The world is my oyster, my scribe and my footstool.

Oh how I walk the streets in broad daylight. My audacity knows no bounds. I taunt the general populous with my superiority. You there! And you...and you. I would have you fear and revere me as a deity, but my humility is unsurpassed in history.

I make no apologies for my hypocrisy. My opinions change on the weather, or the toss of a coin, or spin on the head of a pin. I have all of the responsibility and none of the accountability.

Love me? Hate me? What of it? I am passing you by, and you in turn are passing beyond the realms of my existence or compassion. You are already forgotten. Now what was I talking about again?

Ah yes, ME.

As long as my eyes remain closed I can believe that I am vapour, that I can sail mischievously from one reality to the next, taking in your innermost thoughts and deeds, and yet I say that you mean nothing to me. What a joy it is to embrace contradiction.

As a distant annoyance your voice carries on a vague breeze. You feel that I have wronged you with my salacious disclosures. Why should my falsehood not carry equal truth to your own? To whom do I address these words?

It's you Miss Riley. To you do I pour out my fettered exuberance.

Miss Riley, high-school teacher and apparent object of Damien's haunted affection had been hospitalised earlier that morning with nervous trauma, mistakenly believing that one her pupils was planning to kill her.

When questioned about his intentions Damien replied, 'Miss Riley was teaching us about Independence Day. She asked us to write a page on free speech, and this is mine. Between you and me I don't think she's quite got her head round it, poor girl.'

At the age of sixteen, in the midst of puberty, Damien discovered girls. Discovering girls is a painful paradise at the best of times for any teenage boy, but Damien took it to a whole new level.

'I really fancy Tina,' he once shouted out in the middle of a trigonometry class. 'She's got a great body. I wonder what colour underwear she's wearing.'

WHACK!

On a separate occasion he was heard saying, 'Sorry Karen, I'm flattered by the offer but you're just too flat-chested.'

Despite coming from a long lineage of hairy males, Damien's father, Bob, went grey and bald at the age of thirty-two, an occurrence that wasn't missed by his son. At ten-minute intervals Bob would hear, 'Gosh, father's hair's getting a bit thin. He's starting to resemble a furry egg on legs,' or, 'Dad's bald spot puts about fifteen years on him, twenty on a bad day,' or even, 'I hope it's not hereditary. I should look positively ridiculous.'

After leaving school Damien found it impossible to get a job, never having the inner composure to make it through an interview without some titanic blunder. For example:

'So, Mr. Digby, tell me why you want this job?'

'I don't.'

Or, 'Why should we employ you over the other candidates?'

'Are you kidding? The others look like a bunch of shaved monkeys in suits. I would've thought the answer was obvious.'

A career in a bakery ended suddenly after comments such as, 'I can't believe a guy this fat is ordering six doughnuts,' and, 'Whoa darling, one step closer to a coronary.'

Then of course there was the brief two-hour stint at the employment agency where he managed, 'There's no way this guy'll get a job wearing a shell suit,' and, 'What a terrible shirt. All he needs now is a novelty tie and a gimp mask.'

At forty-two Damien was still living with his parents. By this point Debbie was as thin as a rake with all the stress, and Bob had, had three heart attacks with a fourth looking imminent.

'Father, you're looking peaky. I hope you don't die any time soon.'

By this stage the local council had given up on trying to find him work and shelled out endless state benefits no-questions asked. He didn't even have to go down to the job centre and sign on.

It was when all hope seemed lost that he finally got a job as a Customs official, where, (no offence to Customs officials), being brutally honest to the point of offensive is often a good thing.

Damien's job was to ask awkward questions to people as they tried to get into the country. His unusual approach threw most people, and often led to them getting emotional and disclosing things they shouldn't have.

A well dressed, sweet smelling, softly spoken woman would be greeted with:

'She looks a little too innocent. There's a good chance she's smuggling something.'

Equally unorthodox was the way in which he overlooked blatant criminals as being too stereotypical to be anything but false. The best example was the Cuban gentleman who walked into customs with two large suitcases claiming to be a talcum powder salesman.

Damien let him through without so much as a word.

The Cuban was so taken aback that he gave Damien a bag of white powder as special thanks.

A week later when he finally used the talcum powder he suddenly felt ravenously hungry. After eating he felt a strong urge to go clubbing and wasn't seen at work for three days.

Most Saturdays Damien would wander into town, do some shopping and go to the cinema. He always went alone, and always waited until the demand for a film was at its lowest. Being unable to contain his inner feelings he had learned early in life that trips to crowded cinemas made him extremely unpopular, and usually culminated with being asked to leave. On this particular Saturday Damien realised that he had no money. He popped into the bank on his way. All the cash machines were out of order and so he joined a long winding queue to the counter.

'I hope there aren't any students in this queue, counting out their two pees and smelling of pot noodles. They'll really slow things down.'

Several people in the queue turned and scowled. Damien didn't notice. He was distracted by a suspicious looking man in front of him.

'He looks like a suspicious looking man...'

The suspicious looking man turned and glared.'

'...All sweaty and beady eyed. I wouldn't trust a man like that.'

The man started to fidget nervously, and click his fingers.

It took fifteen minutes to reach the front of the queue. During that time Damien managed to offend the man eight more times without realising it. He smiled at the bank teller but his eyes were instinctively drawn back to the man who was now speaking in a low whisper at the next counter. After mumbling something incoherently he unraveled a scrap of paper and pushed it across to the lady serving him.

'Can I help you?' Damien heard.

'Yes,' he replied without looking back. 'I'm just spying on this guy next to me, but I'll be with you in a moment.'

The lady was reading the scrap of paper with a confused look that turned rapidly into deep concern. The suspicious looking man was reaching into his pocket and producing what appeared to be...

'OH MY WORD,' Damien cried, 'A BANK ROBBERY!'

The bank robber was as shocked as everyone else at the revelation. He stepped back and toted what appeared to be a hand gun with an air of inexperience.

'I don't want to hurt anybody,' he shrieked. 'I've just come for the money.'

'We...don't keep any money in the branch sir,' the teller stammered. 'It's sent down in tubes to a locked room underground.'

'Mm,' Damien said shaking his head, 'Sounds a bit fishy to me. I saw her put some in that drawer ten seconds ago.'

'WHAT'S WRONG WITH YOU?' The teller screamed. 'ARE YOU TRYING TO GET US ALL KILLED?'

'Not at all,' Damien replied. 'I'm trying to gain the bank robber's trust so that he'll let his guard down and I can make a grab for the gun.'

At this the bank robber laughed. 'What are you, some kind of idiot?'

'No, you're the idiot.'

'What?'

'Any non-idiot would be working for a living and not robbing banks.'

The bank robber pointed his weapon directly at Damien.

'Cor, doesn't it look plastic close up?'

'One more comment out of you and you're dead.' He turned back to the teller. 'What's downstairs, an office?'

'A vault sir,' the teller responded.

'Get them on the phone.'

'Sir, I can't give you the phone. It won't fit under the counter.'

'Put it on loud speaker.'

The teller dialed a number.

'Hello.'

'Hello, this is a bank robbery. Send up all the money.'

There was a slight pause. 'Is this a joke?'

'Of course it's not a joke!'

'I'm sorry sir. We make a policy of not negotiating with criminals.'

'Send up the money or I'm going to start killing people.'

'I'm sorry sir. We make a policy of not negotiating with criminals.'

'I MEAN IT,' the robber shouted. 'I'm going to count to ten and then kill someone.'

For a moment there was no reply before, 'I'm sorry sir, we make a policy of...'

'ONE...TWO...THREE...F...'

'I don't reckon he will,' Damien muttered to himself. 'He doesn't look like the killing sort.'

The robber walked slowly to where Damien stood. Far from angry he seemed rather despondent. 'Do you have a death wish or something?'

There was a noise behind him and he turned just in time to see the bank staff scurry out through a door and slam it shut behind them.

'Come out of there.'

'NO.'

'What do you mean, 'No'?''

'I'm phoning the police now.'

'Look, just give me the money and I'll leave.'

Behind the locked door he heard the staff burst into uncontrollable laughter. There was another noise, and the robber turned back to see several of the shoppers diving out into the street and running away.

'COME BACK!'

'Honestly,' Damien sighed. 'If he had any brains he'd go through everyone's pockets for their wallets.'

'Good idea,' the robber answered. Unfortunately the nearest person to him, an old lady in a thick duffel coat, was adamant that no one was taking her purse. When he tried to take it from her she screamed and hit him with her bag.

In sheer desperation he looked at Damien. 'What do you think I should do?'

Damien gave him a sympathetic smile. 'If I were you, I'd take one of us hostage.'

'Oh saints preserve us,' the teller cried from the next room.

'Well volunteered,' the robber answered motioning him towards the front door.

Penniless and highly-strung the robber returned to his car to find that he'd been given a parking ticket.

'Oh bloody hell!'

'You haven't really thought this through have you?'

'Shut up and get in.'

Half a mile out of town Damien started to giggle. 'I can't believe he brought his own car. This has got to be the stupidest criminal ever...'

'Shut up.'

'...And I've seen his number-plate. He's gonna have to kill me for sure now.'

'For all you know I might've stolen this car.'

'Doubtful.'

The robber pressed the barrel of the gun against Damien's forehead. 'Doesn't this frighten you?'

Damien laughed. 'I'm petrified. Why do you think I'm talking so much?'

They drove on in silence for a few minutes before he noticed an empty cigarette packet by his feet. 'So, he's a smoker. That'll make it easier for the police to narrow it down...'

The robber turned and stared in disbelief.

'...And if I'm not mistaken I think I can smell dog...'

He had given up trying to intimidate his hostage with the toy gun.

'...So he's a pet owner and a smoker. Getting warmer...'

The robber brought the car to a screeching halt. 'Stop talking.'

'...Mind you, all they'll need to do is find the traffic warden who gave that ticket, and *bingo!*'

'GET OUT!'

Damien, who had spent his entire life being shouted out, bullied, sacked and laughed at for no apparent reason simply got out of the car without protest.

'Ooh look, the police.'

The robber tried to pull away but he was caught. The next day many of the national papers ran with headlines such as 'Customs hero distracts gunman whilst coppers pounce,' and 'Daring Damien foils robbery.'

When Debbie and Bob Digby heard the news they couldn't believe it. Finally they had a reason to be proud of their one and only son. They were interviewed by a local journalist and found notoriety all over town.

A week after the robbery an official looking parcel arrived with Damien's name typed in gold leaf. Inside was a single sheet of fine-grained paper that read:

Mr. Digby,

Her Royal Highness Queen Elizabeth II requests the pleasure of your company at the celebration of this year's honours list. Your brave deed has been noted with some considerable admiration, and you are to receive special recognition.

R.S.V.P

Yours,

*Jonathan Brook-St.David
Buckingham Palace*

P.S. Bring a friend.

In the absence of any friends Damien managed to swing an invite for both of his parents. By this point they were both bald, and Bob had been fitted with a pacemaker. When Debbie received the invite she had to break it to her husband gently for fear that one more sudden revelation may tip him over the edge.

On the morning that the honours list was being announced Damien and his parents drove into London, and made their way to the palace. Even then they expected to be turned away at the gates through some mix up with the invites, but the guards smiled respectfully and let them in.

The ceremony started promptly at midday in a vast banqueting hall. The Queen walked majestically to her seat, stared out at an array of politicians, rock-stars, war veterans and other assorted notables.

Damien looked all around in wondrous bewilderment but said nothing. His parents couldn't believe it.

'Maybe he's overwhelmed by the occasion?' Debbie whispered to her husband.

'Let's hope it stays that way' Bob replied.

One by one the names were read out along with their achievements, and slowly but surely Damien's moment arrived. When his name was called out he stood as everyone before him had done, and walked clumsily towards the monarchy.

The Queen smiled her regal smile.

'Mr. Digby. I would like to commend you on your bravery, and present you with this special award for courage above and beyond the call of duty.'

With shaky hands and a nervous bow Damien accepted the award and stepped back.

'Thank you your majesty. Gosh! You have a lot more wrinkles up close don't you? And who the hell did your hair? They should be shot!'