

# **Christ, the Cross and the Concrete Jungle**

John Caldwell



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While this book involves details of my memories of events, many of the names have been changed in order to protect the identity of the people involved.

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# Dedication

To Steven (Morry), Martin, Anton, James, Louise Anne,  
Rachael, Gillian and all the gang from Paisley YMCA.

## Dictionary of Local Dialect

**Ah:** I.

**Awrite:** Literally means 'Alright' and is a way of saying 'Okay'.

**Aye:** Yes.

**Close:** Stairwell of a tenement building.

**Crash/Crashed:** To spend the night or to sleep, e.g., to crash (sleep) on the couch. Or, to crash at a friend's house.

**Dae:** Do.

**Dodgy:** Illegal, untrustworthy.

**Fag/fags:** Cigarette/cigarettes.

**Guid:** Good.

**How:** Why, e.g., 'How no?' means 'Why not?'

**Naw:** No.

**No:** Not.

**Old-Firm:** A collective term for two Glasgow based rival Scottish football teams: Celtic Football Club and Rangers Football Club. (An 'old-firm top' is a Celtic or Rangers shirt.)

**Pop:** Go (briefly), e.g., to pop (go) into a shop.

**Popped:** Went (briefly). e.g. I popped (went) into the shop.

**Proddy:** Protestant (as in a person connected to the Protestant church as opposed to the Roman Catholic church.)

**Tablet:** Confectionery.

**Tae:** To.

**Trainers:** Footwear ('Sneakers' in USA).

**Trakkie:** Literally, Tracksuit (Sportswear).

**Wasted:** Drunk.

**Weans:** Children.

**Wee:** Small

**Whit:** What.

**Wir:** Were

**Wrecked:** Drunk.

**Ye:** You.

**Yer:** Your.



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# 1

## Glimpses of Chaos



SIXTEEN years ago, I awoke in a cell in Giffnock Police Station. The police officer had just clattered the cell door and shouted through the gap that it was time for me to be released. I was hungover, disorientated, cold, choking for a fag, and could only vaguely remember why I happened to be in a cell. I was eighteen years old, and this was the first time I'd been arrested.

I was accompanied to the front desk by the police officer, given my trainers back and informed that I would be given a date for court. I simply responded by asking, 'What did I do?'

'You took a baseball bat to several car windscreens,' replied the officer. The truth was, I was so drunk the night before that I could barely remember any of it.

Here I was being released from the police station with no money, fags or any way of getting back to Barrhead. Actually, I had no idea where Giffnock was. I asked the desk sergeant how I was to get home, to which he bluntly replied, 'Walk.' After getting some directions, I made my way to a phone box; I was supposed to be working with my godfather that morning. I called the operator,

reversed the charges and asked the guys to pick me up in the work van.

As I waited at a bus stop for them to arrive, I tried to piece together the jumbled collection of hazy memories from the previous night. I remembered meeting up with an old schoolmate and drinking some cans of lager. We then bought cider and later some vodka. By the end of the evening we were wasted. As we were chatting, I recalled a recent incident in which I'd been attacked by a guy from one of the other schemes. I was outside a shop with a mate, we were about to buy a carry out, and the guy came towards me wielding nunchakas.

It was only seconds into the pursuit when I felt the thud of the nunchakas on my right shoulder. I continued running, and my pursuer turned back. The guy was after me because I owed him money and he was fed up waiting for it. After discussing this with my mate, he informed me that the fellow had moved into a house on a street nearby. Fuelled by alcohol, we headed to my Mum's house for a baseball bat in order to go and see if we could find him.

The rest of the details are lost to me. From what I've been told, we tried several houses to no avail. Somewhere along the line I got myself into a bit of frenzy and began to smack lamp posts, fences and car windscreens with the baseball bat. I think I smashed approximately half a dozen car windscreens that night. As I was too drunk to run very far, the police had no problem in catching me.

I share this story not to portray myself as some sort of hard man. I wasn't. Neither do I share it in order to glorify the incident. There is no glory in it; it was a senseless act of vandalism. I share it in order to give a glimpse of the level of chaos my life had spiralled into by the time I was eighteen years old.

## BEGINNINGS

My early childhood was quite normal and happy. I grew up in the small town of Johnstone in Renfrewshire with my Mum and Stepdad. A few years later, my younger sister came along, and a few years after that, my younger brother. There were grandparents on both sides of the family, both parents worked and both grandparents would babysit. Both sides of the family were Roman Catholic, so we also went to church (chapel) regularly on Sundays. All in all, things were happy and normal.

Although I was growing up with a stepdad, I am not sure I had a real awareness of this fact. I do remember being at my Mum and Stepdad's wedding at the age of four, but I have no recollection of my biological dad whatsoever. My Mum's first marriage ended when I was still a baby. My Mum remarried, and family life was reasonably stable.

### *Trouble*

However, trouble was to hit the Caldwell home in the early nineties. The difficulty was in the form of an extra-marital affair, followed by separation and divorce. I was about ten years old, my sister was five and my brother was three when we learned that 'Dad was leaving because he was seeing another woman.' Looking back, I realise that I did not really understand what was happening, but I knew it was bad. The sense of grief was tangible; pressure and stress filled the very atmosphere of the home.

Mum was devastated by the circumstances; in order to deal with the pain, she immersed herself in music. I still remember the many nights where the record player would be playing constantly and the songs of Paul Simon and REO Speedwagon could be heard in every room in the house.