The Gentle Art of Spiritual Death Cleaning or 'What Would Jesus Chuck?'

By Lynnette Lounsbury

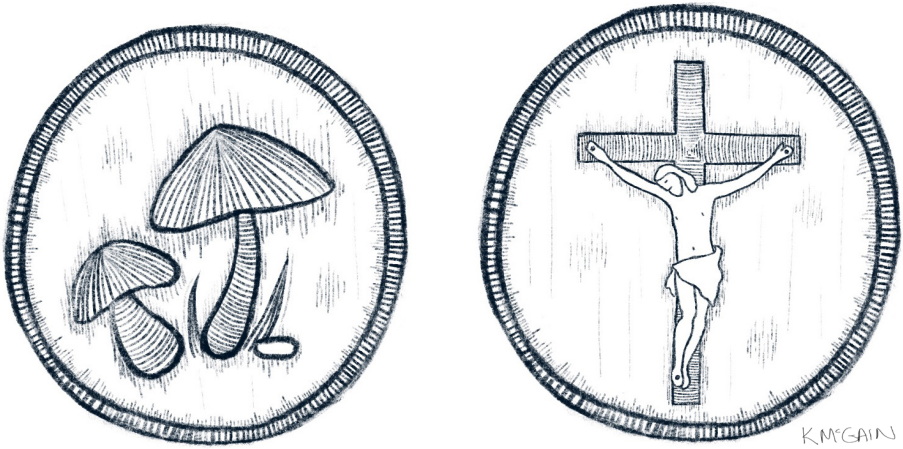
My mother is downsizing and by downsizing, I mean she is moving from her six bedroom Ikea Temple into a tidy little three bedroom place that still makes my Sydney terrace look like I built it from straw, sticks and spit. She is giving me bags of the pieces of my life she has collected over the years. They are in neatly labelled never-to-biodegrade bags and I take them smilingly and put them in a box on the balcony, never to be considered again. Except this one bag. This bag is labelled: special.

The contents are spartan compared to the bag labelled *school reports* or the bag labelled *sports awards* (I was once a warrior). I empty it and find seven smaller ziplock bags – also the type to survive time, oceans and the stomach juices of marine life.

There is rage. It is a wild voiceless rage. Also there is amusement. And humiliating embarrassment. And loneliness. These are things from a time when I was not my own. When I did could not find myself in my own life. These are my stigmata.

The bag of honour

The first bag has my Pathfinder (*Scouts for religious folk who weren't allowed to do Scouts*) sash; a dark green collection of small circular badges inexpertly sewn askew and declaring my knowledge of such useful life skills as glass painting, cake decorating (*not that long ago girls were girls*), 'finding funghi' (*not those funghi*), first aid, bicycle maintenance, laundry (*I told you, girls were fucking "girls"- the boys made rockets*), long distance swimming, small mammals, ferns. I remember the woman who taught glass painting. Her husband used to make us sit on his lap. He went to jail a few years later. It was "lap-



sitting" related. There is a loose badge in the bag. Not yet, and now never to be, attached. It has a needle and thread embroidered on it in nipple-pink thread. The "sewing" badge.

The bag of insurrection

A cassette tape labelled "Jesus Freak". I remember buying this. It is Christian Rock music. I had bought it in antagonistic defiance because I was not allowed to buy non-Christian music of any genre. I can't remember any of the songs which is odd, given my unparalleled ability to remember the lyrics of other 90s music. I don't even own a tape deck now. I open the case, which falls apart in my hand, pieces of plastic exhausted by evangelism. And then I remember. Inside the case is The Cranberries *Everybody else is doing it* album, switched out in the store before I bought it. Ask me a lyric. Just fucking ask me.

The bag of fictive excellence

An old exercise book, covered with red-tinted, much bubbled, plastic. It says "Year 8 Bible Class". I prepare to frisbee it towards the recycling bin, but hesitate and open it. It is 48 pages of Star Wars

prequel fanfiction that I do not remember writing. It is good stuff. It is better than I could imagine now, certainly better than George Lucas imagined. It deserves and receives a place amongst the literary fiction on my bookshelf.

The bag paid in blood

We had an option in Year 8. We could go to Math class with our rage-filled shouty assistant principal. Or we could go to Baptismal classes, with the hot young chaplain who bought us pizza. I chose poorly and so in this bag was my baptismal certificate, water damaged because I accidently sat on it after I had been plunged into the cold water of the Tweed River down the back of our school. I stood on an eel during a practice run for this event, waiting in the mud to be dunked by the chaplain. It bit the bottom of my foot with its rows of tiny teeth and it bled like a war wound. It got infected and I had to take antibiotics for two weeks. I ended up being baptised in my own blood, and it changed nothing - *I'd still sell my soul for pizza.*

The bag of abstinence

It looks like a licence. A small card that promises everything, but without the 13 points of grace that my driver's licence offers me. On it, I have signed my name. In flourishing cursive that tries hard to look like an adult signature. The date reminds me that I was thirteen. *I promise to respect myself and others enough to say no to alcohol, drugs and sex before or outside of marriage.* We signed these in Bible class. At least, most of us did. Will changed his to say that he promised to say "yes". Darren licked his and stuck it to the window and even when the cleaners peeled it off the words stayed there for months, backwards and incomplete. Sarah argued with our teacher that she shouldn't be forced to sign the card and she ended up with two weeks of compulsory counselling with the chaplain. I didn't want to sign it. I signed it. I want to rip it up now, this little brown card with peeling laminate that makes me dislike my thirteen year old self. I should dislike the person who created it. Who printed it. Who forced

their students to sign away their sexuality to pass a class. But I dislike myself instead. Have disliked that thirteen year old self for years. I look closely to see if it resembles my current signature and I see it. I have spelled both of my names incorrectly. Signing away absolutely nothing.

I don't know what to do with the stigmata. I hated that time - the time of somebody else's *truth.* But I have remember it wrong. Remembered myself falsely. I like her, this quiet revolutionary, eating her pizza and ignoring her sewing badge. She knows all the lyrics to Zombie and she promised only that there was never any need for Jar Jar Binks. I keep them. In a box underneath my bed, like the nudes in the vault underneath the Vatican.



