



# Contents

Introduction: The door.....	1
1. The sign.....	9
2. The scandal .....	19
3. The plan .....	27
4. The victory.....	35
5. The evidence .....	43
6. The prediction.....	49
7. The reaction .....	57
8. The response .....	65
Epilogue: The speech.....	69



## Introduction

# *The door*

I remember very little about my childhood, but there is one moment that is indelibly imprinted in my memory because it was truly traumatic.

It happened when I was in the second year of secondary school – Year 8 in today’s currency. The entire year group were lined up in a school corridor, in alphabetical order. We were waiting to be ushered in, one by one, into a small room – the nurse’s office. Every pupil in the year was waiting – silently, nervously, like lambs to the slaughter – to be given a BCG injection.

The BCG is an inoculation against the disease tuberculosis, which attacks the lungs. TB, as it is commonly known, is a killer. It was once responsible for one in eight of all deaths in the UK. Even today, it’s still a terminator –

worldwide, 1.5 million people died of the disease in 2019.

I was oblivious to those alarming statistics as I stood, quietly, as a twelve-year-old boy. Being a 'W' (Williams), I was almost at the end of the line, but by taking one small step to my right and craning my neck around the other pupils in front of me, I could see one kid after another go through the door marked 'Nurse'. As I watched the first few anxious kids go in and out of that room, it wasn't long before I witnessed an event that sent a shiver down my spine and left an imprint on my mind like an image caught on camera.

It involved a lad called Nigel Bailey. (Though, actually, I have changed the names in this account to protect the identity of all involved – and to ensure I don't get sued for libel!) Anyway, Nigel was one of the toughest boys in the year. You didn't get on the wrong side of Nigel Bailey – not if you were fond of the current arrangement of your face.

Nigel disappeared into the nurse's office. When he came out, just moments later, I had the fright of my life. Nigel Bailey emerged

looking like death warmed up. This tough lad – the hardman of Year 8 who could reduce any of us to shivering wrecks with one of his menacing stares – walked out of the nurse’s office looking as white as a sheet. All the blood had drained from his face. As he made his way back towards the classroom, he staggered along the corridor. Like a man who’d spent the night knocking back tequilas, he was unable to walk in a straight line. He swerved along the corridor, passing all the other kids in the queue. Then, as he neared the end of the line, just a few metres from me, his ghostlike complexion changed. Like a chameleon, he began to turn ‘green’. He put his hand over his mouth, picked up his pace – bumping into Mike Waters in the process – and ran as fast as he could, making a beeline for the door to the playground, where he promptly threw up.

It was a horrible moment. Admittedly, it wasn’t great for Nigel Bailey, but it was truly terrifying for me. I thought to myself, ‘If that’s what happened to Nigel Bailey in the nurse’s office, then there is no hope for me.’ From then on, I was really scared. If that injection

had reduced hard-as-nails Nigel Bailey to such a pathetic specimen of humanity, then I was certainly going to die in there! I went weak at the knees, began to shiver and at the same time felt hot under the collar. And I was not the only one. My good friend Neil Turner turned around and stared at me with a look that said, 'We are toast!'

So as I stood there, getting more and more nervous, I decided to fix my eyes on another lad halfway up the line: Peter Harris. I could see Peter easily. Everyone could see Peter easily. He was the tallest boy in the year. For some reason his somatotropin (growth hormone) had gone into overdrive years ahead of all the other kids in the year, so he stood head and shoulders above everyone else in the line. But Peter was also the skinniest boy you would ever see. He looked like a bamboo shoot – tall and thin, with the occasional knobbly bit sticking out.

Focusing all my attention on beanpole Peter, I figured that if he could go through the door marked 'Nurse' and come out again alive, then maybe I could survive it too.

Peter Harris did get in and out of that door unscathed. The moment he emerged, alive and well, I had great confidence that I too could enter the nurse's office and live to tell the tale. The fact that I'm writing this book, forty-six years later, tells you that my confidence was not misplaced. Clearly, I *did* survive the BCG injection. Looking back now, as I retell the story, I realise it all sounds rather melodramatic. But I recount it to illustrate a problem that cannot be exaggerated in its gravity. A problem that most of us don't care to talk about. A problem that's not going to go away by ignoring it. A problem that every one of us will have to face one day. I'm thinking about the terrifying truth that one day all of us will have to go through a door marked 'death'.

No human being can escape this problem of death. Due to the worldwide coronavirus pandemic, with its staggering death rate, every one of us has been confronted by it more sharply than in any of the previous seventy-five years since the end of the Second World War. The bare fact is that even the toughest, most successful, wealthiest and most self-confident

people who walk planet earth have to face the door marked 'death' sooner or later.

Of course, we're not literally standing in line waiting to walk through that door, but the chilling truth is that every day each one of us takes a step closer to reaching that place. It's a petrifying prospect. The thought of going through that door and never coming back hangs over us all our lives.

However, that is precisely why Easter is the greatest news we could ever hear – because Easter tells us how we can enter that door with confidence.

Easter is about a man in history who towered above everyone else who has ever walked this planet. This man went through that door marked 'death' and then actually came out again – alive.

Easter tells us that if we fix our eyes on that one man, we too can walk through the terrifying door of death with total assurance that everything is going to be OK. More than OK. Easter means that death can be the doorway to the beginning of the most wonderful experience of our lives.

Hang on, though – I'm getting way ahead of myself. First, I need to tell you the whole story of Easter.





# *The sign*

Do you have a hero or heroine from history? If so, who is it? There have been some remarkable people who have graced this planet. What human being would you call the GOAT – the Greatest Of All Time?

- William Shakespeare, the literary genius?
- Blaise Pascal, the philosopher?
- William Wilberforce, who is often credited with abolishing the slave trade?
- Ludwig van Beethoven, the composer?
- Mahatma Gandhi, the leader of the Indian Independence Movement?
- Emmeline Pankhurst, the suffragette?

- Albert Einstein, the scientist?
- Winston Churchill, the wartime Prime Minister?
- Rosa Parks, the civil rights activist?
- Nelson Mandela, the anti-apartheid campaigner?

Some of the great people of history have had greatness thrust upon them. Some have wanted none of it. Others have revelled in the adoration they received as a result. Some have claimed remarkable things for themselves.

I have no idea whether Jesus Christ would come close to being your greatest hero of history, or whether he'd even make it into your top ten. But there's no doubt that he's had a huge impact on the history of the world. Just look at today's date. It is over two thousand years since the birth of Jesus Christ. He marks the start of what we now refer to as the Common Era (CE).

I find it astonishing that the majority of the 7.5 billion citizens of the world measure time from the days when Jesus walked planet earth. His existence has had such a profound effect on