

DISCLAIMER: This story hasn't been put through our political correctness sanitizer. The trilogy this book forms part of—the middle—looks irreverently at life generally—family, school, marriage, work, religion. This one is about what all Australians dread and know as 'the visit'—by the Jehovah's Witnesses. Hamilton has made no effort here to be politically correct, so at least we can say he's consistent. All he can say in his defence, so he informs us by his Blackberry from Greenland, is that if he's been a bit audacious ... even disrespectful ... in his handling of the material, they are no less so in bugging up his Saturday afternoons with their superstitions and fears. 'He who go forth into udder people houses to tell them their thoughts of God are crap deserve big surprise.' (Old Chinese saying). – Ed.

Jove's Witness

by G. James Hamilton

I had to offer a disclaimer here about impending blasphemy which is okay in my religion but it may not be in others. So if you might be offended by what used to be called blasphemy when the Medieval Church held sway in the community, you may want to skip to the next story. This one involves breasts and some pretty

weird ideas about who God is. It's not such a good story anyway, although true, so missing it isn't going to affect the overall edification the book will bring to more twisted readers.

When I lived at Repton, on the coast near Bellingen, I could count on regular visits by Jehovah's Witnesses people out from Toormina and Coffs Harbour. They'd venture out into the boondocks to rescue the souls of The Lost and my good spouse in a quasi-military operation they call 'witnessing'. They believe we need saving, and, to be honest, every time I have a shave I get the same feeling. But a shot-glass of Vickers London generally solves the problem. Having been through an upbringing as a Catholic, religion was no stranger to me. I was the only person we knew of in my street to have been excommunicated from the Holy Mother Church of Rome. It was a double wammy, in fact, since I was also the only one in that vicinity who'd managed to excommunicate himself without putting the priests or prelates to any undue bother or inconvenience by dispensing with the formalities and paperwork. The JW's must have known this, being in touch with God on a regular basis and all, so it was only natural they'd pop out on an equally regular basis to try to get me back into the fold. You know it makes sense.

When I say I was brought up as a Catholic, I lie. (a) I never got brought up, as such. I was dragged up by the

scruff of the neck and by the ear. Besides, calling it 'up' is a little too euphemistic for my liking. And (b) I was never a Catholic—in the same way the present Pope was never a Nazi. It was something he and I did to avoid the firing squad. In my case, like his, there was a whole lot of pretending going on, so I just joined in, to avoid causing any more of a ruckus than I was already causing just by being different. And when I tired of pretending, I just peeled off and went my own way. But I have to confess to being influenced spiritually by an eclectic collection of semi-inspired 'sacred' sources. I used to read Monty Hall USMC comics in Lithgow as the Korean War dragged on toward a whimper of an end, and their intellectual content had a big impact on my view of the world. It taught me that violence was a timeless form of human expression, so when I ultimately came to know it intimately, I took it stoically. Then I graduated to *The Phantom*, sending off for the skull ring with the red eyes. With Alex Pryjma, the son of Ukraine immigrants—refugees from Stalin's purge of all the Russias—we formed our own Bones club, making the one at Yale look quite Stale.

From that to Existentialism was a mere hop-step-and-a-giant-leap, but I think I made it with wedding tackle intact, relatively speaking. We Existentialists basically believe that you can't claim to have a big Daddy who's gonna getcha when yer dead, even if you

wanted to. It's a longing of the ego, and doesn't cut the mustard. Because you exist, you are, and that's all there is to it. You're where the buck stops. The logic is that if you're not where the buck stops, someone else is, so it's someone else's responsibility, someone else's problem, and you're just a nothing so what the fuck are you worrying yourself about? What are you doing down on your knees over someone else's problem??! Get it? No need to have a Nobel Prize to get your custard lumps around that. Now, my two heathen brothers and I basically understood this, although Paul and I worried about Bob, who was rather keen on having a bob each way, just in case. (We had many worries about Bob, all of which came to a head when he finally renounced the material world of sin and became a real estate agent, realizing all our worst fears). But do you think we could get it across to the girls? In a pig's arse. Or is it ear?

Our sisters, by sad contrast, all got the religion bee in the bonnet from their hyper-pious *senis matei*. So, the bottom line with my brand of Existentialism was that if you want to believe there's a God, you're It. I didn't want to believe anything. I wanted to know, or stuff it. I saw no need to believe when with a little extra effort, and testicular amplitude, you could indeed know, and things suddenly made sense. When I looked at myself in the mirror while shaving, I thought, God, if that's God, somebody ought to do something quick; we're all

in serious trouble. I got by like this for years—until this gorgeous sort turned up on my front porch with a Bible in her lovely hands. She had an older man with her, in the usual prison-issue suit, whose silent manner told me he was coaching her, and I was the first solo flight she was making. I noticed straight away that she had particularly wholesome or is it fulsome breasts, and I could see that her visit was going to do me all the good she no doubt intended for me. I couldn't understand for the life of me why so many people dread 'the visit'.

Honestly, to listen to people quake on about the invasion of their neighbourhood by the Witnesses of Jehovah you'd swear the Martians were coming. I'm different. For years, I relished a visit from either. When you've alienated your extended family, you tend to spend a lot of time pretending they're there, sharing tea and scones and engaging in a spot of leisurely back-biting. So when a bunch of religious ratbags turn up out of the blue, you don't look a gift-horse in the mouth. If I can spot them coming from a distance, I have the scones and tea on in expectant anticipation. I hadn't got a good sort before, just young men who needed a good dirty weekend somewhere to get them to wake up to themselves, or old farts investing heavily in their hope of a better time of it in the next world, having given away all their prior sinful practices due to age and infirmity and the evening panic attack.

They were always astonished when I received them so well. I'd not only stand to talk willingly, but I never used the f-word as veiled advice to leave pronto, as some of the riff-raff in my street would do, beer in hand, fag in mouth, and beer gut in relaxed and protruding mode would do. I was considerate and civil in my approach to them, if sometimes a touch leering. I'd invite them inside and set them up comfy-like in my lounge room. That unsettled them where little else could. They were taught how to cope with rejection and how to get their message across to people who wished they were dead—and all that through the fly screen of the kitchen window. I was a loose cannon, and they soon realized that I had them as a captive audience to my affected ranting as a communist radical.

'I'm glad you came, because I too have been having serious thoughts about where this world of ours is heading,' I'd say in deadly earnest. Their eyes would light up and they'd flick through their bible to see what Ecclesiastes or Timothy had to say about it. Then I'd come the heavy with my Stalinist rant, and they'd do a runner on me.

Chick Elliott, the bloke who lived next door, was highly amused to learn that Jehovah's Witnesses were seen fleeing from the Hamilton House looking quite stressed—not to mention *distressed*. He wanted to know my secret, and, like an idiot, I told him. He took

off too, cursing under his breath something about you never know your own bloody neighbours. You just can't win. Anyway, this gorgeous looking sort turns up and I'm having thoughts that would be of serious interest to a confessional priest and possibly a prude psychiatrist. You could tell she was with God: she was fairly beaming. It was such a shame I was the first person she was to try out on. I thought about it later. If I played my cards, right, though, and signed up with her, I . . . God, what am I saying?! I thought about it afterwards and I felt shabby knowing that she'd probably signed off witnessing for life as a result of my need for any sort of attention.

People just don't realize how bloody boring it gets in Australian suburbia if you're not into footy, beer, Austar and swearing. She must have smelt a rat when I was the first to offer a greeting. She couldn't have realized yet who/what the greeting was for as I never look directly at the particular breasts I'm offering the greeting to. We enjoyed a little light-hearted banter as I tried to lift my eyes to meet hers. Gawd, I thought, she's brought the whole box-and-dies along. Then she made the leap.

'Have you thought about God?' I was taken aback. I felt like a God in this lady's presence, I knew that. Just a glance from her and you felt ready to run a medium sized kingdom somewhere where kings were still in

fashion. I had to do some quick thinking. It was 'box-clever' time and counting. Fortunately, being a son of the greatest quick-thinker of all time, the reply needed just materialized on the tip of my tongue.

'It's funny you should mention that,' I said. 'Just an hour ago, while shaving, I had a vision of that very person – in person.'

'I'm sorry,' she said, stumbling a little with her routine. There was a glitch. The pidgeon (JW for client) wasn't supposed to take command of the conversation. As a learner, she mustn't have known that. And her coach himself was distracted by both the breasts in question and the humbug I was wielding about so unparsimoniously. Advantage: Hamilton. 'I thought I heard you say you had a vision of God,' she said, expecting a correction.

'That's right,' I said. 'I did have such a vision. Right there before my very eyes. In my own bathroom. An encounter of the First Kind I think.'

'I've never met anyone who's had a personal encounter before.' She must have read my mind about that. I was just waiting to share a very personal encounter with her once we got all this God stuff out of the way.

'What did he look like?' she asked, awed to be in the presence of someone who'd been where Moses went near the burning bush.

'He looked just like I look now.'

'Like you? How could that be?'

'I saw him in the mirror.' Her kind demeanor just wilted like a soggy petunia growing too close to a bus exhaust pipe. She went cold and rigid, as people do when they suspect you've just had a lend of them. Any chance I might have had of getting to know her better was starting to look pretty shaggy by now. And here I was ready to sign up as a JW just so I could show her my collection of aboriginal carvings I keep stashed in an attic somewhere nice and dark and snug and comfy.

The croc-skinned coach with her put his hand on her arm as a signal – worked out in advance no doubt – that the séance was over, due to the presence of evil spirits and a certified rat-bag. She looked at me as though I'd committed a number of worse-than-mortal sins in the space of one or two sentences. I'd blasphemed in the worst possible way; I'd made fun of her religion; I'd insulted the Jehovah's Witnesses faith; I'd made a mockery of the whole concept of God Almighty; I'd . . . well, you've probably got the general drift by now ... as I had ... that I wasn't going to score this time. And, very possibly, it'd be a year or more—possibly ten years—before any Jehovah's Witness ever condescended to come visiting again. They'd mark my house on their map with a big, fat, red X and the word HEATHEN!! next to it as a warning to new members.

I was about to eat crow big time when she gave me a look of abject horror, turned on her heel and took off, nearly missing the top step on my front staircase. The wrinkly old coach did likewise, desperate not to be tainted by the sulphur fumes emanating from my person and the yellow bile seeping out of my red-glowing eye sockets. I was left standing there, godless, hairy-legged and with very few future prospects, especially from a metaphysical point of view. I watched her scrumptious butt as she walked nervously over my front lawn to the man's car. They normally carried on up the street to do the other houses, but I'd put a spanner in the works and they'd abandoned the mission as impossible.

It's moments like this where your faith is really tested. I felt dirty, unclean, ashamed. How could anybody calling himself God do that to a nice, sweet thing like that? Even more to the point: how could he do himself out of a continued relationship with a cracker of a sort like that? I'm not talking adultery here, folks, because I'm married. Hello? I'm talking just holding hands and admiring aboriginal carvings in the dark of my attic. God, some of you people have minds like sewage farms. I went inside to see if we had any bandages for my intestines which were hanging out now. My hands were greasy from holding back the bluish snags from plopping out all over the floor.

I looked in the bathroom, and caught another glimpse of God in the mirror over the sink. I studied the Divine Features more closely. A pimple on the chin, a nasty 'Bob Hawke' drop each side of the mouth, nasal hairs I could do nothing with other than plaiting, a shave rash, a razor nick, a blackhead in the making, a weak chin, teeth that looked like too many people in a lifeboat, and a slight trace of shaving foam left over from a prior shave. I think my early observation was clear enough—if this was God, we were all in for grief, and I mean bulk-style. I panicked, and rushed out of the room over to the phone. My chest was pounding as I banged out the three numbers. Bugger! 991 was bloody engaged, and my call to the Council just got through to a confused assistant at the dog pound. Poor little buggers were yapping like Hell, but mankind had bigger problems on its plate.

Just then, Gazza, the drunk who lived down the road a piece turned up on my front porch. He knocked on the door. He'd brought the customary six-pack and a questioning look on his face; the usual. He came to hear my rants on religion, especially Existentialism. Some people couldn't make trouble of their own. 'God!' he said. 'You look terrible!' I didn't hit him. We gods don't go around zonking or harassing people any more—not like we did once at Sodom and then Gomorrah. No

way. Especially if they had the foresight to bring the liquid refreshments. 'Wanna coldie, Geejay?' he said.

What could I do? He might be a nice bloke and all that, but he'll never get to glimpse my Aboriginal carvings. He handed me a nicely chilled stubby and I gestured him toward the couch before biting the cap off the bottle.

'Now, Gazz, I said in my best patronizing manner. 'What sort of rubbish would you like to hear today?'