

BRENDAN - MATE

This place, this god-damned grotty and ordinary railway station was the site of your victory mate.

I taught you to strive beyond yourself to achieve what you wanted more than all other things - independence and especially independent travel. You started at four when, like Houdini you escaped the inescapable at home and headed off down Milton Street Canterbury on your tricycle. The call went out to the neighborhood Brendan Watch and you were found at the bottom of the hill pedaling across the railway crossing, quite sure of what you were doing and where you wanted to go. Incidents, many incidents followed. Well like the time Helen looked after you at her place in Mont Albert Road. You and her daughter Lucy had a tiff in the sandpit. She told you to p...off so you did. Down Mont. Albert Road, across Balwyn Road, across that major motor artery Canterbury Road, along Maling Road and back up Milton Street to stand waiting on the front porch at home. Meantime Helen asked her daughter where you were – “I told him to go home” she said. Helen's frantic and panic-stricken search back to Milton Street gave no clues but when I interrogated you for detail, you said that the cars went 'Rrrrrr' when you crossed Canterbury Road.

Once I left you in the Volkswagen at Camberwell because you were safe in your harness and I reckoned that I 'would be back in a jiffy'-.

You weren't going to put up with this and decided to go for it. You fiddled with your harness till you got it undone and headed off. You were rescued by a lady from the Sewing Machine shop. She had watched anxious and open mouthed as you crossed the Burke Road and Prospect Hill Road intersection independent of the traffic signals.

On a shopping trip in Camberwell you did your very clever and well practiced trick of zapping off while mum was paying for the goods - 'Now I see you now I don't.' It's happened too many times to panic but anxiety drives the search for you. Half an hour and no sign of you. You have gone on your own tour of the shops and when you tired of it you remembered to seek help. You asked a lady, in the shop if she would drive you home which she did. When I arrived home you opened the door because you managed to climb in a window. I ring the police to cancel their search.

It's high time you had proper training. The man from Guide Dogs Mobility and independence training visits you at Special School and observes you. When he

speaks to me later he looks defeated and shakes his head, meaning like " how could you even think of trying to travel train this young fellow.' I ignore his ignorant and limited view on the matter and persist till I find someone who will give it a go. You go through several trainers who lack the gumption to hang in there. For them the preferred client is non-challenging and completely compliant. A couple of special people work with you and put in the time and patience required for overcoming your anger and frustration and for learning through repetition, repetition, repetition. We achieve the simple walk to the park and back with Hanna. The walk to the milk bar and back. Then how to use public transport.

You become ambitious. Ged is on the scene now and you think you'll show mum and him where to get off by doing your own thing. Ged and Bron really P..... you off because when we all go shopping they are rapt up in themselves and you don't want to tag along besides, you're not a little kid anymore. They keep telling you to make an arrangement before you go off on your own, but you go off on your own anyway. Shopping takes 3 -4 times longer these days including the looking for Brendan bit. One day I was shopping with you in Coles at Box Hill. I was really tired and you weren't anywhere to be found when I had finished. I traipsed about doing the usual grid technique to search the aisles that Ged and I invented. Feeling angry I decided you were the community's responsibility and got in the car and drove home and had a nervous cup of tea (or was it a brandy?). Anyway the expected call came from the police after closing time. You arrived pleased as punch in a police car. I tried to look a bit worried - but I'm really sick of this stuff.

You want to branch out. You start exploring the possibilities of public transport Ged and I have anxious rather than quiet evenings wondering 'has he gone on the way home today?' You know to give us a call and you usually do, but sometimes you ring off before we have sufficient search details. We no longer get dressed. We set off in our 'jamies' late at night to look for you. Once it was sheer intuition on Ged's part that we found you on some eastern suburbs railway station after a station to station search. We reckon we're expert at this job now and no longer call the police.

The city's looking good and after all you haven't tried that direction. You catch a train to the city and get off at Burnley Station. You ring to tell us where you are. We hop in the car and go through the usual routine. Just as we approach Burnley station we see someone who looks a bit like you disappearing into the pub. By the time we park the car and walk over you have settled in at the bar and ordered a

drink. You say hello and tell us in a relaxed and adult manner that you're just having a drink now.

One of your greatest ambitions is to drive a car just like anybody else. One day when mum is mowing the front lawn you see the opportunity to move the car out of the way for her. As soon as she has her back to you, you hop in and start it up under cover of the lawn mower racket. You manage to get it into reverse and start backing out of the driveway and across the road. It seems to be going okay but why is mum running up screaming hysterically and what do you do next? Not to worry- the street pole pulled you up. Try another gear, there we go oops -go,go,go - now how to stop. Oh dear what happened to the front fence - and for Gads sake, stop your blabbering mum all the neighbors are coming out to have a look.

After this not to be repeated incident we used to go to Waverley football stadium car park to drive. Up and down the empty parking lot 'Low gear, only low gear Bren'. That's it slow, slow, Slow down! Mum on the alert for cruising police cars - 'Quick Bren, swap sides'. I think the experience quieted your ambitious heartache a little.

You use public transport to go to Box Hill Tech. You move to your first community home in East Burwood, then later to a new house at Forest Hill. Mum moves to the west with Ged. You learn to travel to the city and then change trains to Footscray. This is a superb and triumphant achievement.

Then, as your sight and general health deteriorates you are less able to do this. A staff member follows you one day, you are in tears and angry when you drop your money and are unable to find it. City trains go by but you are unsure whether they are the one you want. You bump into people whom you are less able to see now. They react and so do you. Eventually you catch the right train and you mutter angrily to yourself during the journey.

Taxis are a great way to travel as you eventually discover and it's great to get in the front seat with the driver and chat about things on the way. Finally the last journey you take with Bron and Ged is back to Macey Avenue in the Commodore to spend your last week being, doing, saying all that you are able to before you leave us.

Actually your very last and final journey is down Macey Avenue in the white hearse with the funeral director stopping all traffic on Milleara Road for you. Then down the Western ring-road with a magnificent escort of cars to the Western

Crematorium. And here you are back to the site of your many and varied and vitally important travels.

Travel on mate, you who have taught me so much about honesty and insight into human behavior, sensitivity to oneself and to others and no end of courage despite absolutely all the most incredible odds. I can only keep on loving you and be inspired by you and your incredible journey and take you with me in my heart.
Love, MUM.