**1**

**PURGATORY**

*‘This ain’t exactly Hell. It sure as Hell ain’t Heaven...I guess I’ll do my waitin’ in this purgatory line.’ – ‘The Purgatory Line’, Drive-By Truckers*

Christ, he looked tough. They all did, but he looked especially tough. Tough and dangerous. As though he’d been designed for violence. A genuine Mustang Man.

He was sitting on the hard and cold floor. It looked like he’d been there all night. He was about thirty-five, I suppose. His faded jeans were torn and he wore almost knee-length boots that were scuffed and haggard. Those boots had seen a few things, done a few things. I don’t even know what sort of shirt he had on. It was probably a ripped lumberjack, but my eyes were drawn to his tattoos. He was covered in them. And not designer type ones, but ones that looked like they’d been done by crude hand-fashioned implements in the blazing sun of some hot prison yard. Of course, his face was stubbled – it wasn’t designer either – and he had a strong, unkempt moustache and goatee beard. There were tattoos on his face; specifically under his eyes. They were very rudimentary in design. On one upper cheek there were some intersecting lines in a ‘noughts and crosses’ pattern. The opposite side held a tear drop coming down from under his eye. Not a real tear drop, but a tattooed one. I remembered being told by someone who seemed to know, that a tattooed tear drop meant that you’d been in jail or had killed someone or both. I’m not sure which. Either way, I’ve always been firm in my view that any man who gets his face tattooed is pretty tough. Tougher than me, anyway.

‘Christ, he looks tough,’ I whispered to Lucy, looking away from the subject and trying to act casual.

‘Which one?’ she mumbled back, immediately falling in with my pantomime.

‘The really tough one. Any tougher and he’d rust.’

‘Yeah,’ she said. ‘I’ve noticed him. How do you find the tattoos?’

‘Tough. I think that tear one means…’

‘That he’s killed someone,’ she said, cutting me off.

‘Yeah, that’s what I thought. Don’t make eye contact, whatever you do.’

‘I won’t,’ she replied. ‘He’s one of those guys who could just go berserk at any minute’.

‘Yeah. I’m pretty sure he’s done some time. And I’m pretty sure it wasn’t white collar.’

I looked at the list of stations on the sign above the man’s head as a distraction, then quickly down to his face again. He had his right index finger well up his nostril and was staring directly at me, a blank emotionless expression on his face; an expression so cold that it effortlessly conveyed ‘I’ll happily gut you like a pig without raising my heart beat one iota’.

I averted my eyes as quickly as I could, without appearing obvious, an effect I’m sure I didn’t come close to achieving.

Another gaze around the station to show blasé, before turning back to Lucy.

‘He’s staring right at me,’ I said.

‘He’s been staring at me too.’

‘Christ, I hope he’s not sitting anywhere near us.’

‘Mmmm.’

‘I’m going to sleep for a week when I get home,’ a young and fit-looking black man said loudly to nobody in particular. ‘A fucking week.’

‘The first thing I’msa gunna do is shower,’ replied a white man who was standing nearby. He spoke with a southern drawl and was wearing a wide-brimmed cowboy hat.

‘Shower. What a beautiful word. Beautiful word, shower.’ Sitting on a metal wire chair against the window a few metres away was an obese white woman with bedraggled straw-like hair. She was alone. Most of the people seemed alone, but an unsavoury camaraderie appeared to be developing.

Standing next to us was a short, bald white man in his mid-twenties. He had a black T-shirt on that advertised a heavy-metal band that I didn’t know. He looked fairly tough in his own right.

‘I’ve got a three year old daughter,’ he opened with, completely non-sequitur. Perhaps we’d missed the back story. He was standing with a trailer-park skank, presumably not the mother. Her age was difficult to determine. Very hard to tell with the skanks.

He went to speak again.

‘I wonder where this synaptic misfire will land,’ I said to Lucy under my breath.

‘Actually,’ he went on. ‘I had better stop talking now. Right now. Whatever I say will offend somebody for sure.’

‘Man, an uppercut is no good as a punch,’ he continued, in what I gather he considered a less offensive subject. ‘Just no good.’

‘Totally,’ agreed the young black man, seizing on some common ground.

‘Yeah,’ said Bald Man, as he demonstrated his right uppercut in a fast and repeated cadence. ‘You’re just in way too close. I prefer the straight.’ He threw three straight rights, then began pacing like a frustrated animal in a zoo cage.

It was 8.25am and there were about thirty people ahead of us in the queue. My meagre wealth undoubtedly exceeded the collective of theirs. We were waiting for the 9.25am Greyhound bus to Nashville, Tennessee; the ‘Dog’ or ‘Dawg’, as it’s affectionately known by the scourge of the earth that ride it.

‘Will everybody listen up now?’ yelled a black woman from the entrance to gate 6 in front of us. She was wearing a high-visibility yellow vest. ‘Anybody who has bags to go under the bus, bring them forward now. But we are not boarding at this time.’ Always so many rules on the Dog. ‘I repeat, we are not boarding at this time.’

‘You wait here,’ I said to Lucy. ‘I’ll get these bags up. We don’t want to lose our place in the line.’

I wheeled our suitcases to the doorway.

‘Sorry,’ I said, as I hit into somebody’s elbow. It was Mustang Man.

He turned around with an economy of motion. You could tell that he definitely knew how to handle himself.

‘Did I hit you?’ he said in an accusatory manner.

‘No, no,’ I said. ‘You’re right. You’re right.’

I moved forward, trying to seem self-assured.

‘Where are you going, sir?’ the black lady said to me.

‘Nashville.’ You use few words with the Greyhound staff. They’re angry and they don’t enjoy chit chat.

‘Leave your bags here and go back in line.’

I did. Lucy had held firm on our place in the queue and we hadn’t lost any ground. In fact, we’d gained some. Not that I was happy about that. Now standing behind us were the bald man and his skank, the fit black man, the cowboy hat man, Mustang Man and a drug-addled worm who had joined their party. They were in front of us before the bag drop.

‘We’ve been hosed,’ said Drug Boy, the vile little newcomer. ‘Fucking hosed.’

‘Shhhooooss.’ The black man mimicked the noise of a hose. It was directed towards us.

‘They’re onto us,’ I said to Lucy. ‘And,’ appraising us both, ‘we really need to reassess our outfits for the Mid-West leg.’

I was in bright pink, flowery Abercrombie & Fitch board shorts, green Havaiana flip-flops, a Tiger Beer T-shirt and Ray-Ban Wayfarer sunglasses. Lucy was wearing leopard-print ballet pumps with a red trim, as well as a tight-fitted vest. Her brown hair was flowing past her shoulders and her olive skin glowed, her dark eyes mesmerized. Aubin & Wills terracotta preppie shorts showed off her smooth, toned and tanned legs. God, she looked good. She always looked good. The most beautiful girl in the room, in every room, she could brighten an entire place with her smile, that heartbreaking smile. She was like a supernova in this hovel of bottom feeders.

‘I know,’ she said. ‘We look like we’ve just stepped out of a Harvard Law School tutorial. You should at least rethink the watch.’ It was a Daytona Rolex, albeit a knock-off, but a very good one.

We stood out like dogs’ balls.

‘Yeah, the watch has to go,’ I said. ‘And I’m thinking cargo shorts from now on. Or faded jeans and boots.’

I also had $1,200 in cash in a clear freezer packet in my pocket. The bastards would have inhaled me if they’d known that.

The high-visibility vested Dog employee stood in the doorway again, making herself as large as possible. She was large.

‘It is time to board the bus,’ she yelled. ‘Board the bus. Ensure you do so in an orderly fashion, following the yellow line. You must follow the yellow line.’

‘A few of this mob should be quite used to that,’ I mumbled to Lucy.

‘Follow the yellow line,’ the employee added for clarity.

‘This is the last time,’ Lucy said.

I nodded and we walked up the steps and onto the Dog.

**2**

**HELL**

*‘On a Greyhound bus, Lord I’m travelling this morning…It’s been making me lonesome, on’ry and mean.’ – ‘Lonesome On’ry and Mean’, Waylon Jennings*

‘Grab the first set of two seats you see,’ I said to Lucy, sliding my watch off and putting it into my pocket as we boarded the bus. It was very crowded. We were lucky to get a seat on the bus in the first place. We had arrived at the station at 8am for the 9.25am bus. I asked the rarely-seen male ticket counter employee for two tickets to Nashville, handing over our Discovery Passes. The Discovery Pass is a good and bad thing to have. It only costs $564 for sixty days, whereas one-off Greyhound tickets are absurdly expensive for the crap service that is offered, usually costing around $100 for one five hour journey. The Pass also gives unlimited journeys in that sixty day period. The downside is that you can’t book seats ahead, but other people can. In fact, you aren’t allowed to reserve a seat on a bus apart from at the station of departure and no more than one hour before departure. There are many rules for the Dog, and most of them are fucking absurd. I tried to reserve a seat in St. Louis the night before and, when I told her I had a Discovery Pass, the ticket woman just screamed ‘Well, there’s nothing for me to do. Come back in the morning.’ What this means is that a lot of buses are full or almost full when the Discovery Pass holder tries to get a ticket. It was only the day before in Chicago that we were turned away and forced to pay for the far superior Texas Eagle train.

‘I don’t think that will be possible,’ said the man, shaking his head and starting the ridiculous five minute typing charade that goes on at bus and airport check-in counters. I can only think that the morons are emailing friends to pass the time and piss off the customers. ‘I’ll see what I can do,’ he said, still typing away. He was doing fuck all. Just checking if there were any seats left. Without saying anything more, he then printed out baggage tickets and put them on our suitcases and motioned for me to take the bags away.

‘Did we only just make it?’ I asked.

‘Yes,’ he said.

‘How close?’

‘There are forty-seven seats taken out of fifty.’

‘Thanks.’ I walked off. No more chatting with him.

So we got tickets, had endured the pain and danger of the pre-bus queue, and were now on the Dog.

We ended up getting a pair of seats together. There were three sets of two left. As we got our iPods out and settled in, the remaining seats filled up. The Dog set off. The configuration was not pretty. Directly in front of us was the fit black man and a girl, whose name turned out to be Ash. Across the aisle from her was the bald man, behind us was Drug Boy and across the way from us was a black woman with a crying newborn baby. Next to her was Mustang Man. It couldn’t have been worse. It was as if the good Lord had created Earth and all its beings, done Noah’s Ark and all that shit, had life exist for 5,000 years or whatever the claim is, and waited for that exact moment for the planets and stars to align and everything to come together perfectly to culminate in this, the ultimate test for me. ‘Hell is other people,’ as Jean-Paul Sartre said.

‘We’ll be alright,’ I said to Lucy. ‘At least we got a seat together.’

She didn’t respond.

As we rolled out of St. Louis for the six hour trip to Nashville, a man in the seat behind propped up on my headrest and said, ‘Miss Ashley. Miss Ashley,’ to the girl in front of me. There was an implication in the deep voice of the man that I was to get Ashley’s attention, who was oblivious. I ignored the appeal, but the fit black man heard it and alerted her. Ash turned around.

 ‘I’ve got some gum for you,’ the man said, reaching out past my seat and handing something to Ash, who cupped it secretively and put it in her pocket. It probably wasn’t gum. A few minutes later, Ash got up and went to the toilet. When she returned I got a better look at her. She had bright pink hair and was wearing pink tights. They were torn at the back, revealing six inches of her panties, a brightly-coloured striped number. She was a skinny skank as well. As she sat back down, Bald Man saw his opening.

 ‘Where you heading?’ he said to her from across the aisle.

 ‘Nashville.’

 ‘That’s a shame,’ he said. ‘I’m off in Kentucky.’

 She opened a packet of crisps and offered some to him, tossing him a bone anyway.

 ‘Are you hungry?’ she said.

 ‘No,’ he said. ‘I’ve got my meal right here.’ He opened his mouth to reveal a large wad of well-chewed tobacco. I could smell the pungent odour from my seat. To complete the courtship ritual, he smiled, exposing a gap from a missing front tooth, presumably a consequence of the habit.

But despite the futile nature of his pursuit, he continued poking her to get her attention and talking to her for the next three hours. He was, however, in competition with the fit black man who was preaching about his work in the army and his ‘strong belief in keeping our country safe’. ‘It is my responsibility. It is my responsibility,’ he kept repeating.

 Not long after we turned our first corner, the enormous white pig who was fond of the word ‘shower’ decided to get up and go to the toilet. She was in the front row of the bus, reserved for the handicapped and the seriously fat, of which there are many on Greyhound. She slowly waddled her way back, grabbing onto seat backs for support, and touched me with her huge arse as she went past. The stench was over-powering and I turned to look at her, holding my breath as I did. Actually, I just continued to hold my breath as I had been doing intermittently for ten minutes in the hope of averting the contraction of a case of the plague – the baby across from me was coughing and wheezing, and, of course, wailing loudly.

I focussed on the fat woman. God, she was hideous. As I turned, I noticed that Ash’s sugar daddy was actually a grossly overweight woman. She was built like a double-lined shithouse door and looked like she could have been a contestant in the World’s Strongest Man competition. She was one of those big-boned women with a big skull, like an ape. She stunk too. Things couldn’t get much worse.

 It wasn’t until ten minutes later, as we reached the outskirts of St. Louis, that the driver decided to set out the rules of the Dog. There were always the set company rules for each Dog, but the driver usually listed a few additional, idiosyncratic ones as well.

 ‘Hello and welcome to the 9.25am Greyhound service to Nashville.’ It turned out that the driver was the woman wearing the fluorescent yellow vest. She went on, well-rehearsed.

 ‘It is not permitted to smoke on this service, including in the bathroom that is located in the rear of the bus for your convenience. No alcohol or illegal drugs are permitted. If you use electronic devices such as music or DVD players, you must use headphones so you, and only you, can hear them. Turn the ringers on your cell phones down and only talk on the phone in quiet tones. If you have a conversation with someone next to you, do so in a quiet manner so as to not disturb the other passengers. Many people have been travelling all night and want some rest. Let them have that rest. If you choose to contravene any of these rules, your journey will be terminated early. I am the driver of this bus and it is my job to drive. Do not attempt to speak to me while I am driving. I will not respond to any such attempts. Thank you for choosing Greyhound and I hope you enjoy the journey. My job is to drive. Your job is to relax. Now, let’s ride. Ruff, ruff.’

 ‘What was that last bit?’ Lucy asked, pulling her headphones out of her ears.

 ‘She barked. You know, like a dog.’ I laughed loudly then checked myself so as to not draw attention.

 ‘And finally,’ the driver ended after a pause. ‘I pray to my one true love and almighty saviour our lord Jesus Christ to deliver to us today a safe trip.’

 Still laughing, I turned my head. Mustang Man was glaring at me from across the aisle through those cold and beady eyes.

‘Amen,’ I thought. ‘A-fucking-men’.

**7**

**MUSTANG MEN**

*‘I got a 1966 cherry red Mustang Ford. It’s got a 385 horse-power overload. You know it’s way too fast to be crawlin’ on these interstate roads.’ – ‘My Mustang Ford’, Chuck Berry*

A Mustang Man is a man who owns a Ford Mustang car, or would if he had the money. He knows a lot about cars and how to fix them, and what’s worse, he enjoys fixing them. He’s one of those absolute fuckwits who stands around with other fuckwits looking under the hood of the car, tweaking things in the engine, mumbling and sighing, hands on hips, a concerned expression on his face. He always looks angry and tough, tries to walk slowly and deliberately, like he is in some Western movie, and is willing to fight for his cause or any cause, or any reason at all. Nobody who is stupid enough to tussle with a Mustang Man emerges unscathed, most don’t even emerge alive. America is full of Mustang Men.

 America is full of Ford Mustangs as well. On the four hour bus ride from Miami to Key West, I counted fifty-six coming the other way. They were in varying colours, black being the most common, but there was also a preponderance of neon models – bright greens, blues and oranges, the drivers aware of their own desperate inadequacy and trying in vain to compensate with ostentation.

 The car itself looks like it is alive. There are often thick white stripes on the roof and down the bonnet and the curve of the headlights makes them look like the eyes of a snake, almost giving the car a personality, as insidious as its driver’s. They tend to have two large exhaust pipes and make the noise of a revving motorbike as they pass.

 The real mustang is, of course, a horse. It is a free-roaming horse of the American West. In 1971, the US Congress enacted The Wild Free-Roaming Horse and Burro Act, which stated ‘that Congress finds and declares that wild free-roaming horses and burros are living symbols of the historic and pioneer spirit of the West; that they contribute to the diversity of life forms within the Nation and enrich the lives of the American people...as an integral part of the natural system of the public lands.’

 The owners of Ford Mustangs buy into this wild freedom, similar to the riders of Harley Davidson motorbikes. They are freedom riders escaping repression, searchers of the American dream, complete losers and the epitome of the lower class.

 Mustang Men drive with the attitude of the wild horse. Every near miss we had on the roads of America was because of a Mustang driver. They show no quarter and are proud of the fact. A number of times I nearly crashed into a Mustang, as when I was passing a car, if there is a Mustang coming the other way, the driver will always speed up to make it more difficult.

 One day whilst driving in Tennessee, I was following a Mustang, or trying to - they always go as fast as they can. It was a peaceful and sunny day and the road was lined with deep green pine trees. I was suddenly forced to swerve as a full bag of McDonalds fast food came flying out of the Mustang driver’s window. The bag spewed open as it hit the bitumen, releasing a part-eaten burger and some fries, as well as a drink container of ice, its lid careering across the road.

 I sped up, taking my economy-sized hire car to its limit, as I wanted to get a better look at the driver. He was pure filth. A complete dirt tracker, with a missing tooth and cigarette-stained skin. He was smoking and talking to his skank of equivalence in the seat next to him. A low-life identikit couldn’t have created two more quintessential beings.

‘My God, look at that little battler,’ I said.

‘Shocking,’ Lucy said. ‘He’s just chipping away at the edges of life.’

By the look of the driver, in his torn sleeveless shirt (the sleeves had been ripped off), he was clearly a highly unintelligent member of society, and I couldn’t help but wonder what sort of things he might be thinking about, if anything at all. What was going through his mind? Was it like a dog’s thoughts, or no thoughts at all, or just static white noise?

I would never know, but I did know this - if you experience anything bad or dangerous on the roads of America, the culprit is bound to be at the wheel of a Ford Mustang. And if you experience anything bad or dangerous in America generally, the culprit is bound to have a Ford Mustang parked out the back. Mustang Men are the dregs of society, a terrible breed.

**25**

**GOD BLESS AMERICA**

*‘They say there’s a heaven for those who will wait. Some say it’s better but I say it ain’t.’ – ‘Only The Good Die Young’, Billy Joel*

America is full of religious freaks and the word of God is everywhere.

 God cannot be avoided. He’s on television, the Internet, road signs and the radio. His word is written on the sides of trucks and on car bumper stickers. And it’s not just in the Bible Belt, the traditional God-fearing region of the South, it’s everywhere.

 I was on a plane flying to Flagstaff, Arizona. Lucy and I had been allocated separate seats by the liar at the check-in counter and I was jammed in against the window next to a big fat ogre. He was wearing a suit and was breathing and sweating hard. He turned on his iPad and began reading. I was reading along with him. The title on the first page was ‘New World of Holy Scriptures’ with the heading ‘Draw Close to God’.

‘Christ,’ I thought. ‘The bastards have brought mobile technology to their pathetic cause.’

The article was an in-depth analysis about why Jehovah Witnesses go door knocking, with comments and quotes from various leaders of the Church. I never got the answer to that perennial question as the selfish cad saw me reading over his shoulder and angled the screen away so I couldn’t see it. Meanwhile, the hypocritical prick took up two-thirds of our seats, as well as the entire arm rest, and kept reading as we were landing, despite the announcement to switch off all electrical items. I guess when you’re reading the word of the Lord, an exception can be made.

 Of course, like in all guises and areas that religion exists, hypocrisy is rife in America. Close to nearly every roadside billboard about God, is another advertising an adult superstore. America produces more pornography than any other country. There are adult superstores dotted along every major highway in the US, warehouses just off the road catering to every need of the perverted church-goers in terms of toys and outfits. Surely at least a couple of the sacred commandments must be broken with that coupling. Or perhaps the superstores aren’t there to attract the celibate Christians, but merely strategically placed as an enticement to the Mustang Men to pick up a little something special for Christmas when driving back from an out of town bender.

 God’s roadside signs are just as brazen and obvious as those of the superstores. Fear and implied threats comprise their general tone. ‘Ready or not, Jesus is coming,’ read one sign in West Virginia, while another just outside of Yosemite National Park read ‘This is a test of your loyalty to God’. The test was not explained, but I’m sure those in the know would have somehow been made aware. A ‘God is watching us!’ banner in Texas felt more judgemental than protective, and ‘The only hope for America is Jesus’ seemed a little desperate. Yes, there are rules and scripture on enormous road signs all over the place and they usually carry an implied or direct threat. We saw one sign that was thirty feet high on the outskirts of Denver, Colorado. It simply listed out the Ten Commandments. Driving west of Chicago there was a sign just off the road for ‘Highway Evangelist’ and a toll-free 1-800 phone number. The caption read ‘You need God. He will save you. Call now!’ The Yanks effectively don’t pay for phone calls. Virtually every business has a toll-free 1-800 number.

 On the off chance you miss these roadside signs or don’t have a mobile phone to get your driving fix, the public have taken up the cause as well, displaying timely quotations on their vehicles. Many cars have subtle stickers of that Jesus fish symbol, while others have bumper stickers with helpful reminders such as ‘Found Jesus Yet?’, ‘Christ is The Answer’ and ‘Christ is the King’. Many simply read ‘God Bless America’. Some people have the Jesus fish symbol on their actual car number plate. It’s not a sticker, but is painted on and part of the plate. Presumably, this must be arranged through the transport department. One car had no numbers or letters on its plate at all, just the words ‘God bless Our Nation’. The motto on all Alabama state plates is ‘God Bless America’. Quite a few commercial trucks have Bible quotations written on the back. A lot of them merely refer to ‘John 3:16’ with no other text. I looked it up. Sometimes referred to as ‘The Gospel in a nutshell’, the verse reads: ‘For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.’ I had no idea how that related to hauling frozen goods across America, but it was only the truckers that were spreading this word.

 And if you happen to be a blind driver, there’s no need to fret. The word of God is not hard to find on the radio. In fact, it’s hard to avoid. Christian radio makes up around one in three channels. The other two are generally Country stations, or a mixture of Christian and Country. Some are Christian Country. Driving in Oregon we decided to have a break from the iPod and tried the radio. The first three FM stations, and six in the first nine, were Christian. A number of these were religious ranting stations, with the usual threats and aggression to keep the mob in check. We listened to one for a few minutes. There was a black man yelling, punctuating the prophecy with pregnant pauses. It was almost as if the heathen was in the car with us.

 ‘To live a Godly life you must be persecuted,’ he screamed. ‘Jesus said this. You may be persecuted by your family or you may be persecuted at your work. But you will be persecuted. It will happen. You might be persecuted at work, but you’ll be rewarded in Heaven. You might miss out on a promotion at work, but you will be promoted in Heaven.’

 ‘Cogent arguments,’ I said to Lucy, who couldn’t stand it anymore and was reaching for the radio to change the channel.

 Religion is advertised constantly on American television as well. One organisation was called Christianmingle.com. It was a dating agency.

 ‘Good news for you single Christians out there,’ said a cheesy young preacher wearing a suit and standing too close to the camera. ‘We have thousands of young Christians out there just waiting to meet you.’ The ad ended with the catchphrase, ‘Find God’s match for you’. Perhaps they should have teamed up with an adult superstore.

 God really is all around you in America. When you’re not getting inundated via the media, you’re getting hammered in your car. And you’re not safe on foot either. We saw many people with god-bothering slogans blazoned across their T-shirts or caps. Most caps simply read ‘I Love Jesus’, or the more pithy ‘Jesus’, unless I was mistaken and there were a lot of people by that name. Waiting for a flight at an airport in Austin, Texas, a woman sitting near us sneezed. She was assaulted from all directions, even at a distance, by strangers saying ‘God bless you’. In that same airport I overhead a discussion between two people who were getting to know each other.

 ‘Have you got a husband or boyfriend?’ one lady said to the other.

 ‘No, I don’t,’ she answered. ‘I’m in a committed relationship with God.’ Like most religious nuts, she was rather ugly, but I was tempted to direct the lonely soul to the Christian Mingle website.

 Should the barrage of religious advertising somehow pass you by in America, there is absolutely no excuse for not attending church in person. Chestnut reasons such as not being able to find a church that caters to your strain of faith do not wash in America. In the Texan desert I saw a rickety old barn with a cross on the top and a sign out the front - ‘Cowboy Church’. In Monument Valley a sign in the middle of the desert was for a ‘Coven Church’, presumably catering to the witches in the region. In Cody, Wyoming, there was a list of churches in a brochure about the town – for a population of only 9,520, thirty churches were listed. Mariposa in California has a population of 2,173. A large sign by the side of the road in the middle of town headed ‘Churches of Mariposa’ listed the following churches – Apostolic Power House, C. V. Church of Christ, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, Grace Community, Lutheran, Midpines Bible, Ponderosa Basin, St Josephs Catholic, Assembly of God, Christian Science, Circle of Hope, Hillside Baptist, Mariposa Christian Fellowship, New Beginnings, Seventh-Day Adventist, United Methodist, Cathey’s Valley Baptist, Church of Christ, First Baptist, Lighthouse Fellowship, Mariposa Revival CTR, New Life Christian Fellowship, St Andrew’s Anglican and Living Water Pentecostal Church of God. The information booklet at our hotel also listed these churches, as well as Church of Jesus Christ of LDS, First Baptist Church, First Spiritualist Church, Kingdom Hall Jehovah’s Witness, Little Church in the Hills and Cathey’s Valley United Methodists Church. It went on to say ‘For other churches in the area please refer to your local Yellow Pages’.

Just before we left America, I saw a female sprinter who was preparing for the Olympics interviewed on television.

‘What will you be thinking when you kneel down to run that race in London, the culmination of your entire career, everything you’ve ever trained for?’ the interviewer asked.

 ‘I’ll be thinking what I always think when I kneel down,’ she replied, smiling. ‘I’ll be praying to God, to not only win, but also praying to his glory.’

Yes, the poor bastards of America have been brainwashed alright. And they’re all going straight to Hell.