

# Leaving Faith, Finding Meaning

A Preacher's Daughter's Search for God

*Lynne Renoir*



A MEMOIR

Praise for  
*LEAVING FAITH, FINDING MEANING*

“Through her breathtakingly honest account of her early life in rural Australia enduring the brutal hypocrisies of her family’s religious beliefs, Lynne Renoir shares her path to empowerment, discovering her connection to the divine within. Brilliantly written and inspirational!”

— DR MANJIR SAMANTA-LAUGHTON MBBS, Dip Bio-energy,  
author of *Punk Science and The Genius Groove*

“I wish it had not taken Lynne Renoir so many decades to tell her profoundly moving and inspirational story, but thank goodness she found the courage to write it. Renoir’s journey from the suffocating and sometimes dangerous religious environment of her childhood to the spiritual playground of the psychosphere is the adventurer’s journey. Renoir’s is an extraordinary tale, and she, a woman charged with a unique fearlessness to believe.”

— CARMEL NILAND, author of *Our Spiritual DNA: The Ascended Masters*  
and *The Evidence for Our Divine Ancestry*

*Leaving Faith, Finding Meaning* paints a vividly poignant picture of life growing up in a religiously controlled and often abusive family environment in mid-20th-century Australia.

It’s filled with compelling stories that illustrate how the weight of her father’s religious fervor shaped the first half of Renoir’s life. From stamping on her ambition to be a teacher and dismissing her spirited nature and incisive intelligence as aggression to the final beating that led her to flee her home and family, Renoir evokes both outrage and empathy with her honesty and courage.

Renoir’s journey from religious indoctrination to spiritual freedom is a beautifully written and inspiring story for anyone seeking to find their own pathway to liberation.”

— SANDIE SEDGBEER, TV/Radio host of *What is Going On*  
and founder of The No BS Spiritual Book Club. [www.sedgbeer.com](http://www.sedgbeer.com)

“There is always a plan and in these pages you will read about a most difficult journey, but nonetheless, a journey with great purpose. Within Lynne’s core was a seed of passion to know and be one with God, but each time she tried to nurture that seed in her younger years, the castigating situation at home would snuff out the light needed for it to grow. Despite the odds stacked against her, each struggle, each seeming disappointment, and each experience unfolded one petal at a time to reveal the full beauty of Lynne’s true purpose and spiritual abilities. This true story is a triumph of the human spirit and the remarkable way we are guided by unseen hands, even when that guidance is difficult to see.”

— NANCY J MYERS, Speaker, Medium, Orb Photographer,  
Host of “The Spheres of Spirit” Podcast, and author of *Entering the Light Fantastic: Discovering Life after Life Through Orbs* and *Encircled by The Light Fantastic: A Deeper Journey into the Light with Orbs*. [www.theorbconnection.com](http://www.theorbconnection.com)

“*Leaving Faith, Finding Freedom* is a courageous story. Lynne Renoir engages the reader from the outset. She is a curious and thoughtful child whose spirit is stifled by the religious environment she is raised in and by the abuse she suffers at the hands of her father. Renoir’s early life astounds. The stories of her adulthood will astonish. Renoir describes her communication with the spirit world and long-dead philosophers — which opens up her psychic abilities. Readers will find this beautifully written memoir inspiring — ultimately, Renoir’s is a journey to spiritual freedom.”

— GAIL TORR, [www.galaxymediamanagement.com](http://www.galaxymediamanagement.com)

What early readers are saying about  
*LEAVING FAITH, FINDING MEANING*

“I was pulled right into Lynne’s life from the first page of this book. It reads like a great novel, and, like a great novel, has a surprising plot twist. But, of course, this is not fiction, and I am in full admiration of this lady.”

— E. HARRIS

“So gripping, I felt I went on her journey with her.”

— FRANCES M.

“A fascinating story! Lynne’s research on the abuse of men gave me a whole new understanding of the violence that men can also suffer, and told me more about how she was able to put her own experiences at the hands of men aside to try and help men who have had the same experiences as her.”

— GEMMA HANSEN

“This book starts like an autobiography and also reads deliciously like great fiction.”

— ELLEN WOOD

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## Introduction

I grew up in a deeply religious family whose every thought and action were dictated by the need for approval from a punitive God. In my home, to displease God was evil. And to disobey my father, who saw himself as God's representative in the family, was a heinous sin.

I am not alone in this situation.

For most of human history, the word "God" has been understood as a love that is beyond description. Yet in various countries throughout the world, thousands of people have been cruelly treated because of their involvement in a particular religious tradition.

Like many such people, my life has been a story of struggle. I was forever trying to discover what would give my life meaning. For the first twenty-three years, I was physically abused by my father, who proclaimed the teaching of God from the pulpit. He held firmly to the view that every word in the Bible had been dictated by God. And he was attracted to the words of Solomon that he must use "the rod" to discipline his child. Beatings began at a young age and ended when I eventually found the courage to leave home, never to return.

Being raised in this kind of home caused much conflict within me. Was my father really doing the will of God in using the cane whenever I forgot something or had an accident? It was not as though I ever did anything terribly wrong. I was never even tempted to get into any kind of trouble throughout my teenage years. But I had to be totally submissive to whatever my father decreed. And I was

not allowed to challenge anything he said. My obedient and dutiful mother supported everything my father did, and never once tried to protect me from his excesses.

The above problems would have been bad enough, but in trying to engage with the Christian faith, I was confronted with the fact that I did not measure up to the qualities the Bible lists as an outcome of belief. I had none of them. It never occurred to me that the reason for my predicament was the treatment I was receiving. The scriptures did not make allowances for abusive fathers.

A further problem was that many people who held beliefs similar to mine exhibited the required qualities. But what really complicated the matter was that these qualities could often be found in people who held different beliefs, and in those who had none.

I had so many questions and no one to answer them. I wondered whether there could be a fundamental difference between consciously held beliefs and a deeper part of our being that may be involved in the process of transformation. Pursuing this question led me to undertake postgraduate studies in Psychology and Philosophy. Quantum theory also fascinated me. I wanted to know more about the nature and behavior of matter and energy, and I read everything I could on the subject.

As a result of my extensive studies, I was eventually freed from the idea that I was a failure, and that there is a God who sits in judgment on me. I discovered instead that everything in the universe is one. This meant that there could be no supreme being who is beyond all that we know, and who constantly evaluates our behavior. This was not an overnight discovery, nor did it occur in a flash of inspiration. Rather it was a lifetime journey that I wish to share and to help anyone else who is seeking to understand the meaning of our existence.

This book is the story of my journey to freedom.





## Early Days

God punishes those who fall below his standard of perfection. During my early years I did not question this idea. Punishment—both by God and my father—was gradually forming my identity. But I struggled to understand what I could have done to deserve the treatment I was receiving, and whether there was any hope of escape.

The time was the early 1940s at the height of the Second World War and the place was a modest home on the outskirts of Brisbane. Our dwelling sat on a steep slope, low at the front and with high piers at the back. Like those of our neighbors, our small front yard was bare of shrubs or trees. The back yard, beyond which was bushland, descended in four terraces. The bottom one was all weeds—long sharp blades that cut your fingers and thick fluffy undergrowth. Holes in the weathered grey palings of the back fence allowed a free flow of wildlife. Snakes dozed on our side, unaware of passing from public to private property. One slid up under the house and curled itself around a leg of the green gas copper, narrowly escaping Mother's attack with a broom. Mother could handle anything, but when I thought of that horrible creature close enough to strike at her, I realized how much I wanted to protect her.

In the garden near our parents' bedroom, feral cats mated. Father roared at them, hosed them, threw stones at them but they defied

him. In retribution he drowned all their kittens. I thought it was cruel, but he said they didn't feel anything.

The outhouse containing the lavatory stood at the end of the top terrace. We were too far from civilization to have sewerage, and too poor to afford a septic tank. The small timber structure provided strange acoustics when my younger sister, Deborah, stood on the seat and sang through the triangular gap formed by the inverted V-shaped roof.

The only feature of the narrow, sloping terrace below the outhouse was the incinerator, a three-sided stack of blackened bricks. Mother was known throughout the neighborhood for her regular burn-offs, though her fires were lit only after she had assured herself that no one within smoke range was planning to hang washing. Mother never kept anything for more than a few weeks. Cards, letters, even photos of unidentified people, fell indiscriminately into the flames, together with advertising junk and butchers' wrapping paper.

Between the incinerator and the weeds was a terrace containing vegetable gardens, a strip of level ground on which we played a gentle version of cricket, and the chook pen, made of wire netting strung between wobbly square poles. Bits of tin and corrugated iron formed the walls and roof of a shelter, adjacent to the side fence. In the open area the roosters fought and the hens roamed free, except when pinned to the ground to satisfy the bodily needs of their masters. I felt sorry for the hens as they struggled to free themselves, but I never questioned the right of the roosters to overpower them. That was the way God had ordered things.

Inside the shelter were two boxes lined with straw—miniature versions of the manger of Bethlehem—and perches of parallel bars half way between the ground and the roof. Near the entrance was a round silver tin for shell-grit and a china bowl filled with water.

Other food—sodden bread scraps and wheat grains, was thrown over the fence. We were supposed to scatter it evenly, but invariably it fell in piles, giving yet another opportunity for the males to demonstrate their lordship of the pen.

Scrawny white Leghorns and corpulent black Orpingtons dwarfed the scurrying brown Bantams, whose maternal instincts drove them to sit on eggs too large to have been produced by their tiny bodies. Each morning I squelched my way through the slosh and gently extended my arm into a nest, pulling it out quickly when a sharp beak dug into my skin. Normally hens did not object to the removal of their eggs, but they sometimes resented being deprived of time to deliberate upon their readiness for motherhood.

A few days before Christmas each year, one of the senior hens whose eggs had provided the foundation for sponge cakes, flummeries and lemon meringue pies, was grabbed by Father and taken to a chopping block. Deborah and I hid in the bedroom when we saw him take the axe. Did the hen struggle? Did she feel pain? I did not want to know the answers, but we could not avoid the sight of the bird a few hours later, dripping with blood, hung upside down by her feet from a clothes line under the house.

Whenever we had a surplus of eggs, we shared them with the Thompsons, who lived across the road. They lent us their goat, but a snake killed him. “He was old anyway,” they said, trying to hide their pain. Most of our neighbors cared for each other in practical ways. Washing would be removed if the owners were out and a storm was approaching. Other people’s gardens were watered during holiday periods and their animals were fed.

The fences in our street, mostly low brick or wire on timber frames, allowed clear views of the homes and gardens. Saturday mornings saw exchanges of male opinions from front lawns, between

stints of gardening, on topics from house painting to politics. Father loved any kind of audience, waving his grass clippers when making a point or slicing the air with his hands, clippers cast aside.

The Cartwright-Brownes, who owned both a brewery and a two-storey mansion, lived next to the Thompsons. Their brick fence looked down upon the surroundings, its imperious height signifying the disdain of its owners for the common people around its borders. Dense trees, which prevented the curious from gaining too much information, provided just the narrowest glimpses of upper frills on lace curtains. We never saw the Cartwright-Brownes, only their ghostly shapes through the darkened windows of their limousine as it slid silently out from its hiding place in the shadows. Even the gardener seemed invisible, other than when his capped head bobbed up for a moment above the level of the fence.

Our immediate neighbor was Mrs. Ryan, a stooped, wrinkled lady with a mournful smile who gave us lemons from her tree. We visited her place only once. Thick black curtains, which were never opened, fell almost to the floor. In the darkness we saw strange whitish figures gleaming along a polished mantelpiece. Mother explained later that these were the figures of saints. Each day Mrs. Ryan walked a mile to the Catholic church with the help of a stick. To me, she was even more devoted to God than our parents were, but Mother said Catholics offered prayers to saints and that this was wrong.

In our district everyone knew everyone else's business. The disappearance of a teenage girl "for about eight months" was discussed by all the women other than the girl's unfortunate mother, whose supervisory negligence was universally condemned. Mothers with sons and no daughters must have felt safe in their superiority. The failings of their offspring were known to very few.

One woman in a tiny cottage was shunned by all. “She’s a *de facto*,” I heard Mother whisper. I wanted to ask what that meant, but the look on Mother’s face ensured my silence. Had the lady committed a crime? She seemed so nice.

The weekday bus into the city was filled with women discussing breastfeeding, children’s illnesses and problems at the local school. But one subject was never raised. It was only alluded to in laughter at male foibles—a safety valve, I was to discover, when the pain became too great. “Women are better people than men,” was all Mother said.

If Mother’s belief had been right, my gender should have given me an advantage. But I was soon to learn that in the eyes of God and my parents, the only acceptable way for a woman to behave was to be meek, quiet, and submissive.