

# **Slices of Laugh**

Amusing Musings  
*on life and family*

**William M. Dean**

**WMDbooks**

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*for*  
*Julia Linden*

my amazing mother,  
for her endless love,  
patience and encouragement,  
and for passing on to me her love of books.

Being ultimately responsible  
for everything I write  
about our friends and family  
is a heavy burden to bear.

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I write wit and wisdom...

because what I know is laughable.

William M. Dean

## ABOUT THIS BOOK

It has been said that nothing funny ever came from something that went right, which goes a long way toward explaining why every time I sit down to write about my everyday experiences, something funny comes out. However, it is through failure that we accumulate wisdom. *Slices of Laugh* is 200-plus pages of laughter and life-lessons. There's a lot of humorous fare about the major elements of my life: family, aging, writing, and Japan, but also in the mix you'll find some serious relationship and parenting advice, commentary on our modern world, thoughts on pets, health, sex, violence, and Santa—An ideal book for anyone suffering from ADHD.

Be sure to fully appreciate and enjoy every word because *Slices of Laugh* is the culmination of fifty-plus years of living and I really don't take good care of myself, so the odds are stacked against a sequel. I hope it generates some laughs, and imparts a few nuggets of wisdom, as did the life from which it is drawn.

## THE e-BOOK EXPERIENCE

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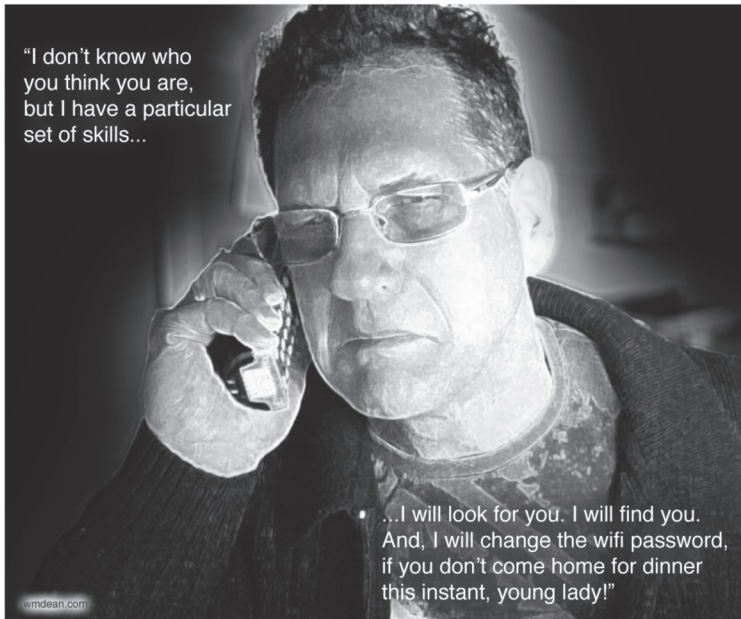
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Despite my best efforts, and depending upon your device, some photos may not display well. If you are interested, you will find full-color versions of all of the photos in this book (and it's precisely-choreographed print-book alter ego) on my book support website: [wmdbooks.com](http://wmdbooks.com).

I hope that you enjoy reading this e-book more than I enjoyed formatting it for every computing device on the planet.

## Parenting: Are you Liam Neeson Enough?



For me, having children seemed an easy decision. I liked children; had actually been one, in fact. Growing up, I'd been surrounded by them and enjoyed that. And it seemed a golden opportunity to show my parents where they had gone wrong. Also, sex was involved.

Ordinary people have been doing it since people first started "doing it," so I really couldn't understand what all the fuss was about. Raising children seemed like such a straightforward thing. But, as in most game-changing endeavors, after you jump in you find yourself hip deep and suddenly realize that gumboots aren't going to cut it; you're going to need scuba gear.

Reality struck early. Having sex is like entering the best contest ever and continually winning the best prize ever. Actually procreating, on the other hand, is akin to pulling the trigger on a powerful weapon aimed directly at your genitals. It turns out that sex is the one activity that regardless how much you practice and no matter how skilled you become, it in no way prepares you for success. And the success, itself, immediately seems dubious.

An incredibly forward-thinking aspect of an infant's survival skill set is to impede the possibility of competition by draining the caregivers of vitality required to further procreate. Fussiness and feedings at all hours of the night ensure that caregivers focus solely on the existing child, if they are able to focus at all. And, babies are born so vulnerable, needy and powerless that it's unthinkable that you blame them—well, you can blame them, you just can't tell anyone. So, instead, you redouble your efforts and do your best to love them even more, possibly because it's the only acceptable option. It's psychologically devious and perfect, and what keeps us from trading them in for puppies.

Most of this kind of thing I had heard from those who had gone before. Of course, I assumed that they were exaggerating. They were not. But like everyone else, I stumbled through most of it and emerged scathed, but still functional. But one thing that I have found near to crippling and was never warned about was the worrying.

I'd seen T-shirts and motivational posters that said things like; "Just Do It!" which I had, "Proud Parent!" which I was, "Become a parent. It's Payback Time!" which I think I completely misunderstood—funny word, 'payback.' But I've never seen a poster that read: "Parenting: a lifetime of worry!" Capitalism has never failed me so completely, and it's made me question the wisdom of motivational merchandise, in general.

Before children, I was easygoing, pretty much living by the mantra: "If it won't be important in five years, it's not important now." But then one morning, probably at three a.m., I awoke to the realization that everything we were doing now would affect the children five years down the road, and forever after. And my easygoingness evaporated.

Of course, when the cuddly bundle first arrives home, you worry about the obvious details: Are they eating enough? Or too much? Are they crying in pain, or just bullying? Could that stuff in the diaper be radioactive? It looks radioactive. At night, you listen to their breathing and your heart skips a beat if it's not regular as clockwork. And you keep remembering all the goldfish you owned that are no longer here. It's a nerve-wracking testing period during which you find out if all their internal mechanisms are in proper working order, and if you are parent enough to maintain the machine.



But then, in between legitimate fears, your tortured mind goes out into the field and picks some wild Paranoia from the other side of the fence. My first recurring and crazy worry came as a complete surprise to me and lasted for about eight years. A month into parenting, I was emotionally welded to my son, Noah, and I began to worry that we might get a call informing us that the hospital had mistakenly given us the wrong child. Would I want my genetic child? Probably. I could love two children. But surrender my little Noah? Never! It would rip me apart in a way non-parents can only imagine, or read about in high-quality books, like this one.

When I talked about this with my wife, she related a Japanese story of two families whose boys had accidentally been switched at birth. The mistake was discovered when they were about seven years old. One family was upper-middle class, had lots of rules and an intolerant, emotionally distant, workaholic father. The other family was working class, gregarious, casual, and emotionally close. The rich father believed in the idea of “upper-class blood” and, having the better lawyers, he used them to make sure that the exchange happened the way he thought best; quickly and completely. It was heart-wrenching for all involved. Both boys were heartbroken at being rejected from the only families they knew and, because the family cultures were so strikingly different, neither boy was able to make the adjustment. According to the story, in the end, the two families came to terms and decided to merge. They found houses next door to one another and the children were shared equally. No one lost a child. No one lost a parent. Knowing that this solution existed was the only thing that kept me from stashing a go-bag under the bed. This particular fear has subsided, but because it’s an irrational one, never completely goes away.

*The heart churning and deeply layered 2013 Japanese film, “Like Father, Like Son” by Director, Hirokazu Koreeda, tells the story of two 6-year-olds who were switched at birth. I highly recommend watching it, but keep plenty of tissue handy.*



Parenting fears are like mirrors on a disco ball: No matter what angle you look at it, there's always at least one shining directly into your eyes. They are also like Tribbles, and breed like rabbits. Oh! And, fruit flies! Suffice it to say that they are endless and relentless. For a complete list of parenting fears, simply refer to Wikipedia, under "Everything."

Even the beaming health and uncommon good looks of my children cause me concern. I would love them no matter what they looked like, of course, but I am unjustifiably proud of the fact that my children are the best-looking kids ever created. I sometimes feel sorry for other parents who must see the disparity whenever their average-looking children play with mine. A logical extension of this seemingly



*Babies remind us what beautiful creatures humans can be when their minds are uncluttered by fear and insecurity.*

positive belief is that my children, in particular, are powerful candidates for child snatching and I fear that I may not be Liam Neeson enough to rescue them and bring their captors to justice.

My wife often compares me to Liam Neeson, but not favorably, and so we both hover. The kids are now eight and ten years old, and only recently have we allowed them to play out of sight, in the neighbor's yard. When we do this, we open the doors and windows and investigate every silence. We're classic helicopter parents, armed with cannons that fire bubble-wrap.

It's a far cry from my childhood days when I was scooted out of doors with the parting words, "Go play in the woods and, this time, don't let the bears tear your new jacket."

For years, I've suppressed my fears and comforted myself with the thought that, "Worst case, parenting is a 20-year investment of time, money and energy, after which I can return to my quiet, carefree lifestyle." But recently, I remembered that my parents took me in for

several months when my first marriage ended. I was 34, at that time. And, as I recall, I arrived bearing emotional drama and raucous friends, so that my parents' house became a busy hub of activity. They never mentioned how I shattered the tranquility of their sanctum, and twenty years passed before it dawned on me. When it's still all about you, such details tend to go unnoticed. Which leads to the startling realization that, at 34, it was still all about me.

Turns out; parenting doesn't end when they leave the nest—if they leave. And therefore, the worrying, too, never ceases.

I guess the days when it's all about me, are all about gone.

Now there's a parenting T-shirt!

