

## Memoir with a message

### I wonder what sort of biographies you read?



By Barbara Henderson

I am fresh from finishing *Wah!* by Cynthia Rogerson, the subject of my last column. As I write, the One Town, One Book campaign is going to start in Dingwall in earnest: Dingwall Community Library, Picaresque Books, and local publishing company Sandstone Press are partnering to encourage everyone in Dingwall to read Rogerson's witty, honest memoir. I love this idea, fostering community spirit by getting a town reading and discussing the same book, and supporting independent bookshops while you're at it.

Well, let me tell you, I have been reading another memoir this last week, and it is blowing me away! Local columnist and quiet activist John Dempster (*pictured below*) has long been a likeable face among my friends and acquaintances.

He is a committee member at Highland LIT, a former librarian, and the writer of the Christian Viewpoint column in the Highland News. In short, he is my kind of person. I am always impressed by his quiet, constructive and servant-hearted positivity. In a way, I was perhaps surprised that he called his memoir *Choosing Joy*. Choose?

Yes, choose.

Subtitled 'A Memoir Of Spiritual Trauma Survived' John writes eloquently about growing up in evangelical circles in Carlisle, of the bullying and the unasked questions of his school days, of struggles with mental illness as he wrestles with himself, the church and the world. Having grown up in the church myself, and still an active member, I relate to so much of what I read here, despite being more of an

extrovert and probably lacking the depth of thought which characterises the author.

I have so looked forward to my characteristic book o'clock for the past week or so. Far from a heavy, theological treatise, *Choosing Joy* is full of everyday anecdotes, making this an easy read to pick up even for brief periods of reading - in turn entertaining, cringeworthy, thought-provoking and yes, inspirational. This is a person I recognise in myself. These are struggles and questions I recognise.

John's journey has taken him to a very different mindset from the one he started out with.

He writes: "Constructing over-fastidious theological arguments seems to me like trying to refine the gateway rather than enjoying a God who I suspect isn't much concerned about our theology but cares a great deal about our loving response."

He describes a near epiphany in Tesco at Inshes, all the more powerful to me because I myself visit regularly.

Do I agree wholeheartedly with every conclusion the writer draws? I'm not sure, and neither do I need to be. But John is excellent company for *Choosing Joy's* 400 pages, and the truth is: I wish the book was longer!

The online launch for *Choosing Joy* takes place on June 28 at 7.30pm-8.30pm on Zoom. To join, email: [choosingjoybook@gmail.com](mailto:choosingjoybook@gmail.com). More information: <https://www.choosingjoybook.co.uk/blog>

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