

# Bypass: the story of a road expository piece



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

There are many different journeys being undertaken by Michael McGirr in his story of his travels along the Hume Highway, *Bypass: The Story of a Road*. In his book, McGirr embarks on a quest to discover his identity and belonging hand in hand with revealing many of the Hume Highway's hidden stories. McGirr's search for his spiritual beliefs is also an integral aspect of *Bypass*, as his recent departure from the Jesuit priesthood not long before he completed the cycling feat from Sydney to Melbourne along the Hume Highway meant that his identity was no longer associated with the Jesuit priesthood.

McGirr was effectively a 'nobody'. Although working as a Catholic priest for 20 years of his life provided him with a sense of direction and security in life, McGirr decided that being a Catholic priest was not for him anymore; this is later reaffirmed when he states that he does not miss saying Mass. The Jesuit priesthood was, for 20 years, the author's focus in life - Being a priest gave McGirr security, self-worth and identity, but his primary motive for becoming a priest was to find an occupation that gave him a sense of identity and personal fulfilment.

If it were not for his job, McGirr would have considered himself a nobody. After 20 years of service, McGirr leaves the priesthood and observes that when he stopped work as a priest he actually 'missed [his] title'. McGirr then concludes that he 'didn't know what to call [himself]' and that 'only other people can give you your name' - this makes it apparent that McGirr was seeking direction and purpose in his life and felt convinced he himself didn't know or understand his own identity.

The author seemed convinced that he did not belong anywhere, thus setting out on a journey from Sydney to Melbourne to discover who he truly was.

Along with his physical journey along the Great South Road, McGirr is also seeking a soulmate with whom he can depend on emotionally. Being a Catholic priest for a major part of his life has led McGirr to become very lonely - he headed into middle age still single. Although leaving the Jesuit priesthood was a major life decision for McGirr, he believed that the benefits of leaving the Jesuit order outweighed the disadvantages.

Through travelling along the Hume, McGirr discovers happiness in life such as the opportunities offered to him through dancing and the emotional satisfaction that his marriage to Jenny provided him with. Fathering his first child gave McGirr a fresh sense of direction in life; being a good father became his new focus. Although McGirr had left the priesthood, he had advanced in his personal journey through his newfound marriage with Jenny, which holds more meaning and brings more fulfilment to McGirr than his spiritual beliefs.

McGirr's meandering search for a reawakened spirituality and belief in God may have been the primary focus of his life during his times as a Jesuit priest, but issues such as the desperate need for a sense of belonging and emotional security, as well as the search for a loving and accountable soulmate became first priority for McGirr as his lifestyle was no longer shaped by involvement with the Jesuit priesthood.

McGirr's quest to rediscover his own identity became the primary focus of his journey along Route 31, but McGirr discovers that he is actually embarking on multiple quests to take him to the next step in life. With his marriage to Jenny and their newborn son, McGirr has found fulfilment in life and thus does not need to pursue spirituality in order to find identity.