

CHAPTER ONE

I feel there must be something more worthy of my time than waking up and just going to school each day. There must be more to life. At the ripe old age of 16 I feel that I must be doing more other than going to school, studying for my HSC exams and then working part time at Coles to eke out an existence in this big wide world. I mean some kids my age have developed apps, started businesses and ran for school captain and I have done nothing in comparison. I know I know never compare yourself to other people, but what is life all about really?

I am an overweight average looking 16-year-old teenager with fuzzy brown hair, green eyes and I want to be doing much more with my life! I have another year of school to go after this one. Then I have either work or uni to look forward to. So, once again what am I doing with my life?

As I awoke from my slumber on a cheery summer Monday morning I could not stop thinking about my life and why I should go to school? Couldn't I just study my English at home? My teachers were ordinary, and my studies were basic. But nevertheless, I got up, had a shower, got dressed, said bye to my family and forced myself out the front door. I walked down to the miserable bus stop around the corner from my house to wait with the hordes of other half-asleep teens. We were all dressed in our blue and yellow ugly school uniform standing there like a pack of zombies waiting to attach the bus driver with our tickets and money.

'Yes,' said the bus driver.

'I would like a ticket to school please,' I would say. Then he would give me my ticket and I would give him my money. Some of the other kids had passes, but I wasn't that privileged.

Then when the bus pulled into the bus bay out the front of the big ugly buildings that was our school, Frensmollton High School, we would all walk off the bus like zombies and into the school grounds to wait for the first buzzer to sound to attend our first class for the day. It was the same old same old every darn day and I was so board and over it.

My first class for the Monday was English with Mrs Davis-bell-green and she was a miserable character. She was an old short lady with white hair, green eyes and a sternness about her. She would get us to participate in class and answer questions from our homework readings. I hated it so much I would try and hide from her gaze and look down at my desk hoping she wouldn't see me. In fact, most of us student zombies did the same, hide and glance our eyes towards our desks as we all sat there praying to every god imaginable, she wouldn't choose us to answer a question. But as luck would have it, she would always pick ME and if not me another boy in my class name Hugh-Muv. He was the weirdest young boy I had ever met in my life! He had freckles, brown straight hair, brown eyes and was a bigger built lad around the same size as me. As fate would have it our English teacher seemed to like singling out the plumper students in our class. It was as if god had willed it that way on purpose. I am sure she knew that out of everyone in our class Hugh-Mur and I were the quieter ones and therefore ripe for the picking. And even though I usually did my homework readings I often struggled to answer the questions and so did Hugh-Mur.

But something was different with Mrs Davis-bell-green this cheery morning. She seemed rather distracted as if her mind was thinking of something other than teaching our English class. But even though she was distracted she still picked me to answer one of the questions from our readings.

'Ivie Stivellton,' came our teachers distracted voice. She always said our full names and it drove us nuts!

'Yes,' I replied as my heart was pounding hard in my chest so worried at what she was going to ask.

'What was the most important leading sentence you read in the weekly readings?' I just sat there perplexed as I never really gave our readings much thought. I was also questioning how that question, or any of the other questions we had to answer in English, were either useful or relevant to our lives in the long term. Was I ever going to need to identify the 'most important' leading sentence in some random book I find in my local library? When I was at work in an office somewhere was I ever going to pick out a leading sentence as part of my job? Very doubtful. How were those questions helping me with my life skills? I guess being humiliated in front of our class as I struggled to answer the

question was a life skill in how to cope with being singled out. It was a life skill in how to deal with 20 pairs of eyes staring at you while you answer the useless question at hand.

I flicked through the book and found one sentence that read:

‘I am going away on an adventure into the western desert,’ that sounded exciting like it was something to aspire for in life. To go on an adventure away from the boring mundane daily life of sitting in this stupid classroom! I read out the leading sentence and Mrs Davis-bell-green just nodded and said:

‘Very good Miss Stivelton.’ I shrivelled up in my chair glancing my eyes back towards my desk once more. I was so glad my turn at answering a question was over. She continued to ask the other zombies, fellow students, other just as drab questions.

After our long drawn out English class finally finished Mrs Davis-bell-green, the distracted one, pulled me aside as the other students were leaving and handed me a small white book. I was shocked by her actions. She liked to single me out to answer questions and asked me more than any other student, but she never usually singled me out when I was leaving her classroom.

‘Evie, you seem like a nice and smart girl. I came across this book the other day. Would you read it for me please? It’s an adventure novel you will love given your answer in class today,’ she had a small smile coming from her lips as she handed me the book. I took it and looked at it. It was a white book with the title *‘An adventure covered with dust, myst and time.’* I had read many adventure novels and seen many titles, but this one seemed that little bit different.

‘Um, okay Mrs Davis-bell green,’ her name was so long, and I hated it. ‘I will read it.’ I put the book on top of my notebook in the crook of my arm.

‘Thank you. Please read it and bring it back to me in our next class with your thoughts.’ I was really so grateful the old biddy gave me extra homework! But this book seemed so much more interesting than the usual Henry Lawson and other books we had to read each week.

I walked out of the room and into the playground for recess. It was warm outside, and I found some seats to sit that were positioned under some shade near the science and maths classrooms. That was the major problem with our school, too many zombies and not enough playground! I think the architects never thought about school numbers back in the day when they designed it. But anyway we made do, and my friends came to join me for our recess.

I had 4 good friends. Their names: Anastacia, Finnie, Jinn, and Phesophie. We have great times hanging out at lunch and spend time together on weekends. They aren't like zombies like the rest of the hoard, well not all the time! Unlike me, my friends all have boyfriends and that takes up so much of their time. They are always going on about their dates, their movies and their times away together. Mind you, one of my friends Jinn goes on and on and I found out the other day that her 'boyfriend' Tommie, who comes from another town and goes to another school, doesn't even like her that much and finds her a pain, but he is too scared to say anything. I am too scared to say anything too. I mean what would I say? 'Um Jinn your boyfriend doesn't like you?' Yeah and that would go down well. After all Jinn is my close friend and I couldn't do it to her. So, for now Jinn and Tommie are the closest and they love each other, even though she likes him, and he hates her!

Other than that we are an honest and supportive bunch of friends. Anastacia is slim, has blonde hair and is rather tall with blue eyes. Finnie is also skinny, but with long brown straight hair and brown eyes. Jinn is like me, a bigger built girl with brown eyes and fuzzy hair. And Phesophie has brown hair to her shoulders and is not big, but not a skinny mini either. I really love supporting my friends with their ideas and their career goals. As an example, Finnie wants to be a doctor or something to do with hospitals and I encourage her every single day. And Phesophie loves reading and writing and I always read the books she writes in her spare time. But, even with my supportive friends I still think my life is boring as the clappers.

'So, what is that book Mrs D gave you to read then?' Asked Jinn. My friends sometimes shorten our English teachers name when we can't be bothered saying Mrs Davis-bell-green at it takes a lot of effort and sometimes we don't want to expend that effort.

‘Um well Mrs D just gave me this random book called *‘An adventure covered with dust, myst and time’* it’s my homework reading,’ I replied as my friends just stared. ‘Give me that!’ said Anastacia as she snatched it from my hands in a friendly manner. We often joke around like that and sometimes even playfully slap each other and push each other. Anastacia opened the book and started reading the first page much to my amusement.

‘Once upon a time in a land of dust and myst. What the hell is this rubbish?’ she asked, and I agreed with her. I thought I was way too old to be reading fairy tales and anything that began with *once upon a time...*

‘I don’t know! Mrs D just gave it to me and said read it,’ I shrugged. Anastacia was never a lover of reading at the best of times and was more into girly things like makeup and clothes shopping.

‘Here have it back,’ she said as she threw the book at my head.

‘Hey,’ I said as the book bounced off my head and landed squarely in my lap where I picked it up and started reading where she left off. I began reading in my head to myself while my friends were chatting to each other about their boyfriends and weekend exploits.

‘Once upon a time in a land of dust and myst there was a charismatic leader named Amunblisk. He had command over his kingdom, a grant city, that was built across a desert with a river flowing to the east.’

The first thing that I thought of was it sounded like some fantastical kids book out of the sands of the desert of the middle east rather than anything more practical. I did not think that reading that book would be useful for my English class, but it sounded interesting enough, so I kept reading.

‘One day a great sandstorm came, damaged his city and revealed something hidden under the layers of the thick sand. A papyrus scroll that read of a story of a tragedy that hit his kingdom not 100 years before. A tragedy that destroyed their temples and their great pyramids and tombs. A story that was so tragic it was something that Amunblisk rather not have found out. Apparently, the king three generations prior had built a great

kingdom and fell in love with a beautiful princess from a neighbouring city, and within a year, the sand had consumed everything he had worked so hard for. He lost his love, and his city in one great event. He had hired workers to build his temple from miles around. Then their hard work was gone in an instant when the sand came and covered his land.

Amunblisk decided to investigate this recent and yet forgotten city he read about in the papyrus scroll. He hired workers to excavate the sand and dig deeper and deeper in the areas mentioned on the papyrus in the hope of finding his ancestors long lost pyramid, city and tomb. He wanted to find out the name of his ancestor, because the papyrus was not forthcoming with many details. All he knew was that around a hundred years prior the previous king of his land had built an empire and it was swallowed and buried deep in the dust. It was ravaged by natural disasters. Where was this buried city now? Amunblisk needed to find out.

He searched and searched, and a year turned into two, then three and he found nothing. His family were worried about him, because he was so focused on discovering this long-lost city that he was beginning to neglect his family and the leadership of his kingdom. He was becoming the laughingstock of his great and fair city.

Then exactly four years after the discovery of the papyrus scroll something remarkable happened. A strong myst enveloped his kingdom. A deep thick myst that covered his entire city to the point that his citizens could not see but a few centimetres in front of them. Nothing this bad had hit his city before. The myst lasted for a whole day. And when it finally cleared it had removed a whole layer of sand from the outskirts of the city. With this sand removed, everyone could see tree stumps sticking out of the ground revealing an area that was once full of trees and plants. It was like a long dead oasis had formed from the abyss. Was this area once a tropical paradise? Or something else unknown to Amunblisk? He was even more determined to find out.'

I was excited at the direction this ancient mystery story was heading and so tempted to keep reading except the dull sound of the after-recess buzzer sounded deep in my ears. And me and my four besties had to go to our next class: Science.

After another fifty minutes of sitting in class like zombies listening to the dull tones of our science teacher, Mr Gevs, we were free once more, but only for a few minutes as we

strolled across the corridor to our next class: history. BUT Something happened as I was walking. I thought about skipping class. I could not face another second of sitting there in yet another boring class listening to the same old same old boring crap told to us by our teachers. It was all the same. English, Science and now History. I couldn't do it anymore! I had had enough of the mundane and so I started walking towards the back oval not far behind our main English and History classroom block not sure what I was hoping to achieve by my wayward behaviour. Should I risk skipping classes for the rest of the day? Just as I was about to, my history teacher, Mrs Quincy, a rather young, arrogant red headed skinny lady with these horrible black eyes, came walking over towards me at a rather quick pace!

'You! Where do you think you are going Miss!' She yelled at me from about 3 metres away. She looked a tad angry.

'Um I am just taking a stroll,' I lied as my eyes glanced at the squishy grass beneath my feet.

'Well I think it is so important that you come to our class! Come!' Mrs Quincy ushered me to follow her. I did as I was instructed and followed.

We entered the history classroom to be greeted by a loud ruckus of noise coming from the students. They were not as much zombies anymore, but rather were sitting at their desks interested and discussing things while looking at a heap of A4 sized laminated posters distributed randomly across their desks. I sat down and one of the posters in front of me said: Egypt and had a picture of the great pyramids on it.

'Right class!' came Quincy's voice as she walked out to the front of the room. 'As you can see there are many posters on your desk in front of you! You each must select a poster. Each poster represents a country of the world. Your task is to go and research a part of that country's history and write a 3000-word essay on it. But please once you pick a topic check with me first!' From the classes silence came muffled tones of discussion.

'So, Miss, can we pick any poster and any part of history?' asked one of my more inventive classmates.

‘Yes, you select your poster. Research the country the poster represents and then do a project on any part of history from that country you like. We did this same project for our year 11s last year and I will show you one of our best examples’. Mrs Quincy pulled out an A4 bundle of pages stapled together. ‘This assignment was on the history of England during the time of William the Conqueror and was exploring his exploits and leadership style. It got an A. I will pass it around the room, and you can look at what I am expecting of you guys. Please tell me your topics of choice prior to commencing the assignment and make sure you have a question you would like to answer. As you will see with this example, our student wanted to know the leadership style of William and how he managed to achieve what he did.’

More muffled tones filled the room as we all started looking at the posters and passing them to each other across our desks. I grabbed the Egypt one and thought that will do! But then Jinn said she wanted it and snatched it rather forcefully from my hand.

‘Hey!’ I yelled at her. She handed me another poster titled: Qatar. I just sat there thinking what on earth can I research? I hadn’t heard much about that country’s history before. The desert? Their modern buildings and landscape? I would have to do some research.

‘Right! Have we all picked a poster yet?’ came our teachers voice as we all looked up listening intently.

‘Yes,’ we all replied. Some of us nodded and some sat there staring at our posters wondering how we ended up with our selection.

‘Very well. Now you can take that home and work on it. Please tell me your topics before the end of the week. The final essay is due to me in exactly three weeks’ time. So please put some solid research into it and include your references!’ More moans and groans came from the class.

‘Now as you all know we have exams not too far away and our main essays are on ancient Iran and the middle kingdom Egypt. I hope that you are putting in some solid study so you can do well and have good grades. Please turn your Egypt textbooks to page 107 and

read the next 10 pages and then we will discuss it with questions Okay?' more groans followed. We opened our textbooks and began reading in silence.

After our history class It was lunch and I was famished. I ate a sandwich and some crisps that I had packed for myself at home. I live with my parents and my younger annoying brother and sister. Our house is in a normal typical run of the mill suburb called Frensmollton. We have lived there for ages. Although I wasn't born there, I might as well have been! Our house had 4 bedrooms and we had a small backyard with patio. It was nothing fantastic to look at.

My family and I are so different and I share no interests with any of them. My parents are weird. My mother Eve is a stay at home mother and my father was Max works in an office for a firm doing god knows what! He never discussed his job or work. My younger brother Marius is 8 and seems to be suffering from dementia, in my opinion, as he can't even remember his own name half the time! While my sister Trace is a laugh, she is 14 and going through many teenage mood swings and is driving me crazy with her temper tantrums and love stories. My life is rather uneventful except for our normal daily challenges. Like the normal daily challenge of my sister slamming her door in anger because some boy didn't like her. Or her refusing to eat for three days because she feels fat and ugly even though she is a size 8! She loves to rib me about my weight all the time!

That is why I find it necessary to explore what else life had instore for me other than school, work and the same old same old boring routine at home. I am the only one out of my siblings to work as they are both too young, and more importantly too stupid. I don't think even when they reach the working age they will find jobs.

After I had finished eating, I pulled out my poster and asked my friends if they knew anything about Qatar. They said they didn't. Anastacia had picked Belarus and she thought that was a challenge enough!

After lunch we had our final class of Maths and I fell asleep and woke up to hear the final buzzer indicating that my day at the hellish school was over, and I had to follow the rest of the half-asleep zombies back to the bus stop to go home again.

Now the day was over I made it my absolute mission to go and explore alternative education options for my final year and a half of school. I just couldn't go on living this boring existence for that long! I couldn't. I really really couldn't!