



Standing On My Head ... With My Fly Open

Duke Robinson

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When the author was in the fourth grade, a Philadelphia Inquirer photographer caught his grammar school tumbling team's premier performance at a PTA meeting. As a result, Duke Robinson claims to be (trumpets!) **the only Presbyterian minister in the history of Western civilization to have had his picture in a major metropolitan newspaper standing on his head with his fly open.** The fact his fly was open, he says, reflects the innocence typical of an eight-year old boy reared in a very religious family in the first half of the Twentieth Century. That's who he says he was. That's what he did. And he says, "**I wanted never to do it again.**"

Robinson's intimate memoir takes you through a life marked by complex coincidences, surprise twists and turns, and life-or-death close calls that impacted him dramatically. His curious mind kept him asking and trying to answer, with some measure of intellectual integrity, why life works the way it does. How come the smallest incident or choice, either by yourself or someone else, can turn your life in a direction you never dreamed of?

The mythology on which Robinson was reared gave him an answer to this question. It emerged, however, from an ancient people who thought the world had recently been created for them, believed demons caused illnesses and didn't know where the sun went at night. He says that he came to see that he could not be whole living in both that world and in the scientific cause-and-effect world we all know today.

The author's story of his personal change has to do with discarding a lot of superstition, sentimentality and wishful thinking in religion, in order to be grounded in, integrated with, and liberated by relating honestly to the real world. Looking back, he says, "I began my adult life vowing never to be caught *standing on my theological head with my fly open.*"

This book gets you inside the head of a Presbyterian minister who also found that he could not go through the motions or play so many of the games that the Church generally asks of its clergy today. He has wrestled with traditional religion for well over a half-century.

Robinson's four other books also bear witness to his changed and changing worldview. Here, in more personal terms, he weaves together stories about his Christian fundamentalist upbringing, reflections on sexual repression, his wonderful families, hilarious adventures on stage, his reputation for humor, parenting four strong children, some hilarious, embarrassing professional mistakes as a pastor, and fascinating projects he adopted in retirement.

He served the once very traditional now progressive Montclair Presbyterian Church of Oakland, CA, from 1968 to 1996, when he retired. He began by asking its membership to lighten up and to get real. And they did. And he tells some remarkable stories about them.

He also talks about being a fervent fan of the Philadelphia, Kansas City and now Oakland A's baseball teams for almost eighty years. He asks, "How much more theological stature can you get than that?"

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