

# FROM WHERE I SIT

JOHN COONEY

## A Funny Thing Happened on an Overseas Trip

I don't know if you've seen the movie, *Cheaper By The Dozen 2*, but I watched it recently. Well, tried to watch it. On a tiny screen in the seatback in front of me. While eating peanuts from the little packet they gave us. And drinking Coke out of a plastic cup. And wishing I could go to sleep. On this boring, long-distance flight to what felt like the other side of the universe.

There's not a lot else you can do on an aircraft, eh, once dinner's been served and your tray's been removed and the cabin lights are dimmed and the large man on your left starts snoring. So I pushed a few buttons on my handset and selected this Steve Martin comedy, hoping it might help kill two of the next 10 tedious hours.

It's about the Bakers – these nice parents who take their 12 nice children for a holiday-at-the-lake in search of family togetherness which, instead, turns into a cutthroat contest with the neighbours, another big family of not-so-nice over-achievers.

My wife kept nudging me during the movie because I kept giggling. Loudly. Too loudly, she claimed. And I remember thinking that the first *Cheaper By The Dozen* movie was actually funnier – where the wife goes off on a book tour, and the father-of-12 is left behind to handle a new job plus his unstable offspring who,



amongst other pranks, drive their sister's boyfriend away by soaking his underwear in dog-food and setting fire to his pants.

I also remember thinking: *Twelve kids – wow! The more the merrier – or the more the scarier?* But I must've drifted off soon after, because I can't remember thinking much else.

A LOT OF MONEY IS TAINTED – 'TAINT YOURS AND 'TAINT MINE.

**H**owever, a funny thing happened over the next two weeks. I kept having *Cheaper By The Dozen* flashbacks. The 'big families' theme wouldn't go away. Because by now we were in Europe. And Europe, it seems, is a mess because nobody's having big families anymore.

Everywhere we went we heard of declining birth rates and shrinking populations ... more and more retirees, fewer and fewer workers ... and (*how's this for a turnaround?*) families being paid to have MORE kids!

These PC Europeans aren't having enough babies. They simply aren't replacing themselves. Countries are running out of people, governments are running out of taxpayers, and millions of kids from very small families are running out of brothers and sisters and aunts and uncles and cousins.

Ouch!

**B**ut then one more funny thing happened. I got a text message. From our youngest son. Announcing that he and his wife will soon have seven kids – that grandchild-number-eleven is on the way.

YEE-HAA!

Okay, I know. Big families still cause raised-eyebrows in small-family New Zealand. A big family's not every family's cup-of-tea. And not every family would celebrate this baby's arrival the way our family will.

But we're used to big families. I'm one of five kids, my mum was one of seven, my mother-in-law was one of 18 – and I can't imagine life without a large extended tribe.

A big family is exactly what my son and daughter-in-law want. They'll have their work cut out, for sure, with seven small people onboard – but trust me: they'll do as good a job as other parents who've only got one.

And those kids they're raising? Hey, they'll soon join the workforce and support me in my retirement.

Bring it on!




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JOHN COONEY, GRAPEVINE'S FOUNDER & EDITOR, SAYS: "GIVE ME AND MY WIFE ANOTHER YEAR OR TWO AND WE'LL BE ABLE TO MAKE OUR OWN MOVIE – CHEAPER BY THE DOZEN 3!"

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## THORT



**"I think it would be really funny if NASA sent up rockets and pushed a bunch of planets out of alignment. Then they could sit back and laugh when everyone realises that their horoscopes aren't coming true!"**