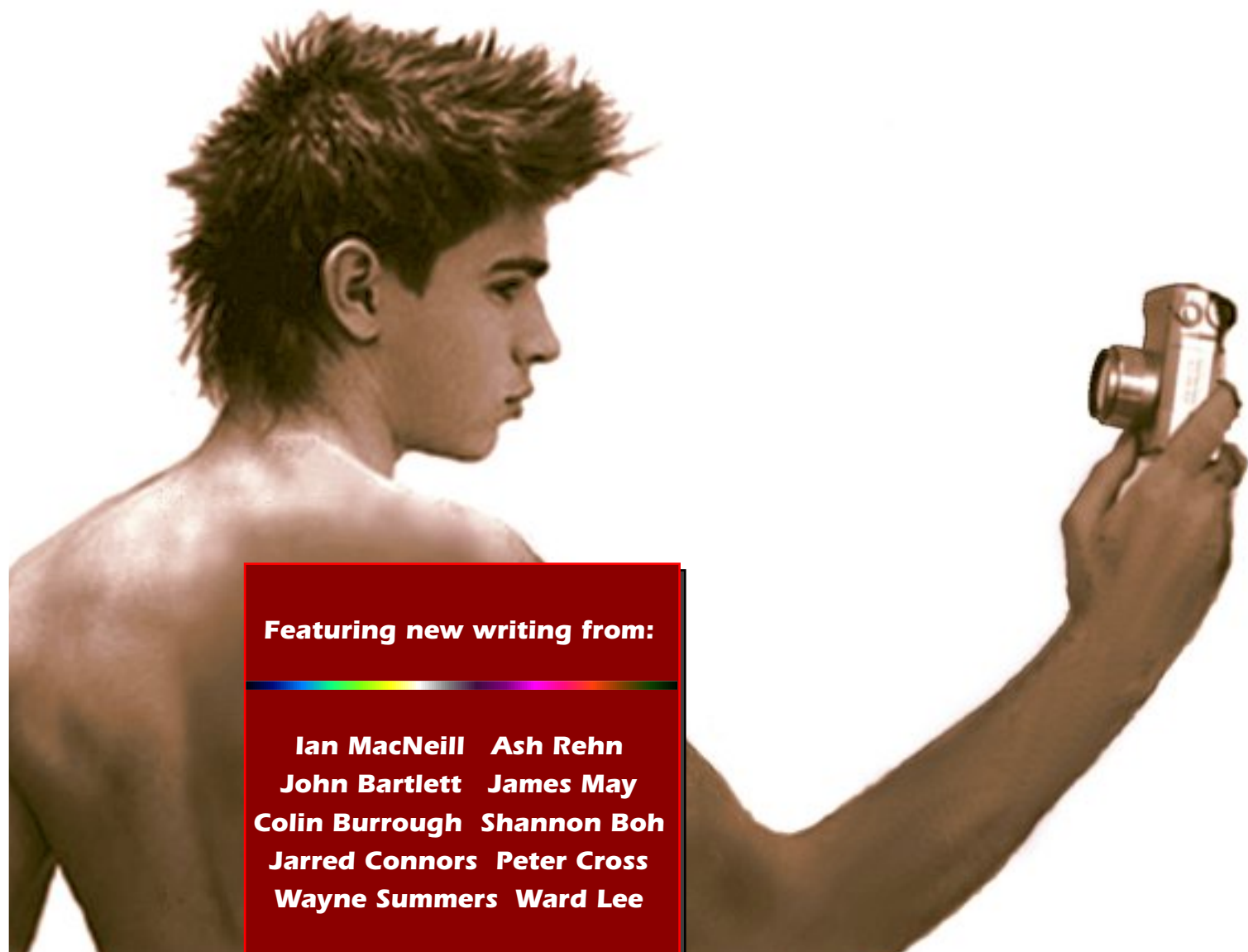


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presents

I am a camera



Featuring new writing from:

**Ian MacNeill Ash Rehn
John Bartlett James May
Colin Burrough Shannon Boh
Jarred Connors Peter Cross
Wayne Summers Ward Lee**

**Editor — Gary Dunne
February 2009**

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'I am a camera with its shutter open, quite passive, recording, not thinking. Recording the man shaving at the window opposite and the woman in the kimono washing her hair. Some day, all this will have to be developed, carefully printed, fixed.'

Christopher Isherwood, *Goodbye to Berlin*, 1939



Editorial

I am a camera

Our latest project grew out of a discussion about the current online fascination with recording daily life via blogs and pages on *facebook* and *myspace*. Autobiographical fiction (a label that captures the inherent contradictions) has been an almost defining characteristic of gay writing, and now, thanks to modern technology, anyone can put their life in words and pix out there for the whole world to click on and observe. Why are so many gay guys doing it, is one question. Why are so many others regularly clicking on their pages, is another. Back in the po-mo 1990s, books and theses were written on the role of the "I" character in fiction, biography, autobiography and documentary recording. We wondered if the "I" blog character differed so greatly from the "I" character of gay fiction.

Our title came from a line in Isherwood's *Berlin* stories, first published in the 1930s, which evolved into John van Druten's play, then the film, *I am a Camera*, in the 50s, before finally turning into the movie *Cabaret* in the 1970s. It was only in *Cabaret* that the implied homo or bi-sexuality of the "I" character in all his earlier incarnations could be openly shown.

In general, it wasn't until the 70s that the observing and recording of gay lives could finally be less coded and "gay fiction" as a genre could evolve. Even Herr Isherwood returned from fiction to autobiography, in part because he could finally write openly about who

was sleeping with whom, which explained so much of what everybody was doing beyond the bedroom.

That was our noble theme, and our contributors took it in many directions. What most submissions had in common was the goal of, to paraphrase Isherwood, developing, printing and fixing a particular record or memory. The pieces we finally selected cover every decade since WWII, each one a unique portrait of a time and place in a character's life.

We also contacted a number of gay bloggers, particularly those who were simply recording their daily life, to see if any were interested in talking about what they were doing; the process and consequences of creating an on-line personality. Young Sydney photographer Shannon Boh was kind enough to give us an interview and let us run a selection of posts from his highly popular blog.

Laurin and I would particularly like to thank our contributors for their stories, Shannon Boh for his generous cooperation, Phil Scott for the big plug in his *Sydney Star Observer* column which generated its own minor flood of emails, our rural submission readers for their ongoing support, and, Brian Watson, the scourge of the misplaced apostrophe, for his dedicated proofing.

Gary Dunne

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Peter Cross

How I met my boyfriend



I met my partner; that's what we have to call each other these days, once upon it time it was boyfriend but then that somehow didn't define enough of the depth of the relationship that we had, so we had to change it to "partner" to please the political activists. I met my partner at a beat. He still refuses to acknowledge that he was doing a beat; he says he was just desperate to go to the toilet. For three hours he was desperate... please.

It was summer and for some reason I was out near Brighton-Le-Sands. I think I had been taken to see Bernard King's show at his theatre restaurant the night before; anyway, I got so drunk that I had to stay the night at the ex-boyfriend's. I think Judy Connelli was in the show but that's by the by.

I woke up the next morning like Vera Charles, hung darling and not in a good way. (Once upon a time I never knew who Vera Charles was or Mame Dennis). I'm sure I was still drunk and I thought a swim would bring me back to life.

Brighton-Le-Sands in summer, on a hot day and with a hangover, is not a pleasant place to be. However, there is a little amenities block down near the beach that had always been popular with some of the more "ethnic" queens. And god knows I do love a wog boy. So just after lunch, devon, cheese and pickle on white flushed down with a

can of Tab, I found myself in need of a little relief.

I had seen this one number, a rather rough-looking piece of trade with a plumber's crack, scoping out the toilets and I thought to myself, "now that's right up my boulevard". I headed into the darkness and the smell of men. That's a nice turn of phrase... the smell of men... men smell; even as I sit here I can still feel it wash over me, the aroma of men, a mixture of sweat, adrenalin, cum and with a hint of Old Spice. Where was I, oh yes ... the darkness, the smell etc. Okay so there I am standing at the urinal pretending to pee and in he comes. His head nervously flicking from side to side, checking out the cubicles, scared his mother is hiding in there waiting to jump out and accuse him of crimes against her soul. Remember he's a wog boy and they're always so scared of what their Mummy will think. He sidles up to me and I can see that this one is a hairy number, black curls of coarse hair plastered to his stomach. A five o'clock shadow permanently darkening his chin. His breath is hot and hard in that close room. His trembling hand reaches out and snakes into my pants, he grabs me and I swear I can feel that sigh that rushes from his mouth, my body tensed with expectation. This is what I needed and desired, a real man someone who knew what they wanted and how to take it. No

bullshit. Just a primeval grunt and I would be his.

So there we were just about to get really heavy when some queen rushes in screaming “run, girls, it’s the bashers”. We all button up and run for the door and this creates rather a log jam at the exit. I’m stuck, until I feel one hand on my shoulder push me through and I tumble out into the sun just in time to see ten big burly shire boys barrelling down on us.

I’m grabbed from behind and pushed to the car park, thrown into the front seat of a car and then as the wheels squeal (assonance in case you missed it), I’m driven off into the afternoon.

Like a real bloke I start to scream, “Let me out... Let me OUT... I know people... whatever you do, NOT the face.”

“Oh shoosh,” he said. Shoosh is not something a basher usually says. “I’m not going to bash you, you big girl... I’m saving you.”

Sitting next to me, his face fixed firmly on the road ahead as we career along General Holmes Drive, is the little queen who had run or, more correctly, swished into the toilets, hands flailing, screaming with a slight lisp, (not an easy thing to do) and warned us all of the impending attack of the barbarians. This little number, no bigger than an elf, a refugee from the Myers window dressing department, a hairdresser in search of a blow-dryer is the person we all owed our lives to. Can you believe it? Now I’m no ocker butch queen, I am what they now call a “straight-acting gay”, a term I really dislike but that’s another thousand words. However, sitting next to this little fem bot made me look like John Wayne or maybe even a Russell Crowe.

“Saving me... you... look at you... how could you save me?” I screamed, in my deepest butchest voice.

“I can always drop you back there if that’s what you want,” he simpered.

He had me there. The last place I wanted to be was back at that beat. Maybe that’s why they call

them beats – because eventually you will get beaten up.

“So just shoosh and say thank you. My name’s Leon, what’s yours?” My heart sank. Of course his name would be Leon. He had Leon written all over his face.

“Tony,” I mumbled. Oh the humiliation. Not ten minutes ago I had been about to do the “good deed” with the future Mr. Right and now here I am trapped in a mauve Toyota with a tiny mirror ball hanging from the rear vision mirror and some animal print fabric covering the seats.

I had gone from Old Spice to Opium in five fast minutes. From plumber’s crack to... really there are no words to describe where I was now.

“Hello, Tony. Well that was a close shave. Lucky I just happened to be passing by and saw those brutes. I thought that trouble was brewing.”

Who says “trouble was brewing”, and what does he mean “just passing by” - I had seen him in the dunes about an hour before. Passing by, yeah right.

I found that I was getting more and more irritated by this little number as she prattled on about gossipy titbits and trivia from Broadway shows and then from out the blue she hit me with, “would you like to go out for a cheap eat with me? Not tonight but later in the week.”

“Sure,” I said. WHAT. How did that happen, why did I say yes, I can’t still be drunk... no one can be that drunk. Before I have a chance to change my mind my phone number tumbled from my mouth. Maybe I was just rattled. I mean it’s not every day that you are chased out of a public toilet block by a group of thirty, (it’s growing isn’t it), cricket bat-wielding neanderthals with the scent of blood in their nostrils.

“Drop me here,” I blurted out, “there’s my car.”

I got out of the car confused by what was happening, not so much the riots (thousands of them now), more the acceptance of a dinner date with this jockey. I leaned into the window to say

thanks and as quick as a flash he leaned over gave me a peck on the cheek, flashed a smile, “toodles,” he said and drove off.

Toodles! Oh god. Toodles.

I was left staring at the rear of his Toyota as he drove off into the sunset back to wherever he had come from.

Sure enough three days later I got the call.

“Hello, Tony, it’s me, Leon... from the other day, I thought it might be nice to have dinner tomorrow night. I know this little place in Paddington behind the Unicorn, we could get a bite to eat there and then see Kandy Johnson’s new show.”

“Okay, Leon... hi... yeah about that...” I stammered, “You kind of got me unprepared the other day and I wasn’t really thinking straight. But I don’t think...”

“Oh, shoosh you, you silly thing,” there was the shoosh again, “a date’s a date. Now what’s your address and I can pick you up.”

“My address. Look what I am trying to say is... I don’t really think that we...”

“Darls, let’s say about 7.30 for dinner, then you can have a beer after the meal while we wait for the show... now what was the address again?”

“Flat 5/78 Brougham St.” Jesus wept, what am I doing? It’s all that Opium he uses – it’s seeping through the phone lines, drugging me.

“Lovely, see you later. Toodles,” and then he was gone.

So we had dinner and then I had a beer, a few beers actually and then we watched Kandy’s show. We were the odd couple, him with a scarf and me with a scowl. But you know what? After thirty years I don’t notice the scarf so much any more or the indecent amount of perfume that he insists on spraying before he leaves the house and I guess he has learned to put up with certain irritating habits of mine that some people say I have.

Every now and then as we drive down to Berry to our weekender we pass that little amenities block

at Brighton-Le-Sands and without fail every time we pass it by he says, “I was NOT doing the beat, darls.” Yes, dear, and that’s still your natural hair colour.

I sometimes wonder what my life would have been like if I had taken up with the “plumber’s crack” that day. I suspect that I wouldn’t be driving to Berry for the weekend.

Toodles.

PS. This is Leon now. Tony tends to exaggerate, god love him; allow me to correct some factual errors.

I did meet him at Brighton-Le-Sands but I have never done a beat in my life, I mean they’re just so dirty... and that smell. There was no riot, there may have been a cricket bat and yes, there was a small group of about three boofheads who wanted to cause some trouble. And yes, I did run into the toilet block and shout out a warning.

Yes, I gave Tony a lift... no, I did not ask him out, he asked me out... to thank me, he said. Well, I thought that was a nice thing to do and, being polite, I agreed. He kissed me. I gave him my number, he phoned me (three times), he suggested we have dinner and then he wanted to see a drag show. Drag is not really my cup of espresso but I thought, why not?

So we had dinner, I paid; we saw a drag show and then spent the next thirty years together.

I am five foot nine inches tall and I do NOT dye my hair.

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Peter is a Sydney based freelance writer, a guest contributor to *Sydney Star Observer*, *SX Magazine*, *Columns*, *Spirit Today* and many other magazines. He is currently working on a feature film script set in London in the 80’s. Peter will write for food but prefers cash. His email is homemadeproductions@bigpond.com

Ian MacNeill

The Marble Bar



Many figures go up and down the wide and winding staircase of the Marble Bar. A few want to be noticed but it's de rigueur not to pay any attention to the comings – and nobody is interested in the goings unless there's been the suggestion of a scene.

It is its own dimension. As we move from the bar towards a group of friends perhaps concentrated around one of the few small tables scattered across its vastness we might garner an impression (we don't look around) of a landscape, geography, universe suggestive of Jenolan Caves and hell, heaven and the lying-in-state room of a grand funeral parlour in St Petersburg maintained for the exclusive use of Grand Dukes and princes. The columns suggest Philistines wary of Samson, the marble a lavatory stained with the blood of Caesars. The weight of all that bronze would sink a superdreadnought. The stained glass makes the cathedrals of Byzantium look like Methodist chapels. The fireplaces explain what happened to the cedars of Lebanon. The opulence is so desperately oppressive it has become frivolous.

The denizens are dressed in grey and dark blue and dulled dark browns. If the latter is emphasised with a touch of tan anywhere – say shoe, belt, hatband – he is probably a bookie, or a detective to watch out for.

The barmaids are retired nymphs, blown, edging blowzy, never risking daylight. They are the splash of dangerous colour, their piled coiffures chemically gold or flagrantly hennaed. The Tattersalls hire them because of what they are and what they know – how to deal discreetly with even the most improbable satyr awakened by alcohol and how to suppress the roars of minotaurs.

The dimness, the vastness, the huge expense spared also encourage the subdued, though there is that occasional guffaw through the eternal murmur.

Tobacco scents the air. There is the occasional tapping of a pipe, snap of a cigarette case, snap and snare of a struck match. The woollen cloth everyone wears reeks of it but it did before they descended those shallow, curved, treacherous stairs.

Elioth Gruner notices someone is taking someone's number with a thin gold pencil in a gold-cased notebook. Flashy but a tiny highlight in the planes of pulsing dull shades which could so easily give at a distance the effect of khaki silhouetted with grey-navy shadows suggesting figures. He picks up another highlight – a deeply blue jacket – though very interested and guessing already it can only be Feint, returns his vision to the whole. The mirrors stretch the scene; the canvas would have to be huge, or is it a mural? Not for him, not his sort of

thing at all. 'Must be careful on these slippery stairs with their fatal rounded edges. Feeling clumsy with this bloating. Bloody nephritis. Couple of beers might flush the kidneys out. Or kill me.'

He does not realise he has been noticed too.

'Jupiter must be in the right quarter,' Adrian says to the fellow from Beard Watson's – this Earnest – who is exactly that before him in his new pepper and salt tweed jacket and dangerously caramel daks though he is to be forgiven them because they hug then fall and because he got his wheaten cowlick like that with something that wasn't Brylcreem and because he might be encouraged into promoting the Feint name as a bookplate designer. Pity about the socks. Wish he'd stop swinging his leg, get him to stand up. 'We should go over when he lands, I'll introduce you. He seems to be alone. Probably waiting for someone.'

Adrian was a stunner himself. About forty, Earnest guessed. Though the War always made them look older. 'Who?' he asked, making the mistake of looking around.

Adrian frowned but said pleasantly, 'Don't stare but old Elioth Gruner just ...'

Elioth soon enough came their way with a beer. 'Ah, Mr Feint, I knew I'd wander into someone I knew here. And it's you.'

'So it is. And this is Earnest ... Mr Purfroy of Beard Watson's. Earnest, this is Elioth Gruner. I'm sure you've heard of him.'

Earnest was standing at tight attention before old Gruner. He was seeing another handsome man, not as handsome as Mr Feint – practically nobody was – but Mr Gruner did have a strong jaw and an inclination to be amused around his mouth and a twinkle way back in his eyes which made him look like a dear old fellow who could be tempted to be naughty, maybe even very naughty. He was also wearing a beautiful blue suit, a bit old fashioned and not of course as beautiful as Mr Feint's – Adrian's

single breasted in that wondrous colour which surely you couldn't get in Australia and that tie ... it was nearly purple. But Mr Feint, Adrian had introduced him to Elioth Gruner. What could he say? All he could think of was the print he'd paid two and six for.

'I've got a print of yours. I know it's only a print but I love it. It's of some cows – Friesians – under a tree, it's called –'

Earnest stopped; Adrian was looking discouraging.

'Elioth's done so many cows, haven't you? Remember any Friesians?'

Adrian laughed but Mr Gruner said to Earnest Purfroy, 'I'm glad it gives you pleasure. I hope it's one of my better ...' He turned slightly towards Adrian, 'cows.'

Earnest gulped his port. Now his glass was empty.

Elioth Gruner sipped his beer studiously. Adrian Feint gazed into what was left of his brandy and soda. In that moment Earnest Purfroy abandoned port except after dinner with walnuts and cheese. 'I'll wait and then I'll go and get us both a brandy and soda,' he said to Adrian.

Which he did.

'Seems a nice sort of chap,' Elioth said after they had seen the figure, striking for its youth, grace and almost colour, off towards the bar.

'Beard Watson's. But could be better than that. Seems to have some curiosity. Not much else.'

'Well he got himself there. And here. With you,' Elioth added.

Adrian flinched then let the brandy let him grin at this old nervous wreck.

Elioth was twelve years older than Adrian. He had taught Adrian at Julian Ashton's Art School. The pupil had seen much more of the War than the master. Adrian considered that Elioth had dallied with his conscientious objections until it was almost over. But then again he did have some sort of invalid condition – he was such a touchy old thing. He was making good work of that beer though.

Any discerning glance would have chosen them as easily the most distinguished people in the Marble Bar, despite the judges imposing stupid puns on barristers, the Macquarie Street specialists no better than quacks, the company directors with the instincts of SP bookies.

'I was thinking of how to paint this scene. As I came down that bloody staircase. It's a wonder it hasn't killed someone.'

'It only hasn't because it's so difficult to fall up. Have the Tattersalls commissioned you?'

'Good God no! I was only thinking how one would do it – the canvas would have to be enormous, or a mural. The perspective would have to be in waves. It would look like the trenches transported to Valhalla. One would have to fight the khaki distances, if you see what I mean.'

'And how would you do that?'

'I saw a fellow writing a note with a gold pencil in one of those notebooks that have gold covers. Very obvious. I would put that in some kind of far relation to the bamais. But it's all too Victorian for words, the French have done away with all that as you well know ... these Impressionist fellows.'

'Thank you,' Adrian said to Earnest who had placed his brandy and soda on the table they were all now standing about.

'I'll get you one, Mr Gruner, you look ready.'

'Oh,' Elioth let him. 'Dear boy,' he said to Adrian as they again glanced and retrieved their glances from the departing grace.

'So what are you up to, Feint?'

'Bookplates. Did one for Thelly Clune.'

'Did you? Bit of a comedown from the Duchess of York.' Elioth wished he hadn't said that. 'I saw one of your still lifes in the Grosvenor.'

'Did you? They're coming along. I'm thinking of taking a few lessons with Margaret Preston.'

'She's mad.' Again Elioth wished he hadn't said that. The woman would probably throw something

at him if Feint repeated it. 'But she's on the new path. Always has been, of course, she's that type.'

Earnest put a beer in front of Elioth. 'That didn't take long,' Elioth said then smiled because it had sounded so wrong, again. What was up with him today? It must be this bloody place, he should never have come. 'We were just talking about Mrs Preston.'

'She sells well. We sell a lot of her flowers. People love them. Especially. We sell her other things too – the parrots and ... things.' Earnest picked up his brandy. He drank and it tasted like stale tank water but he'd get used to it. 'What do you think of her?'

'Elioth thinks she's mad.'

'I didn't say that – I didn't mean that, like that, I just meant ... She's got a bit of a reputation for ...'

'She came in once. She made me move her things.'

'Why?'

'She didn't think they were displayed properly, for them. For what they were.'

They all drank and thought about that but it provided no further conversation.

The bar absorbed them. Earnest longed to lay his cheek against the marble column beside him. Elioth suppressed the thought that he'd like to watch his piss streaming against the marble of the bar and meandering with a mazy motion before losing itself in the scarlet and gold runner. Adrian despaired of asking Earnest for dinner at the back dining room here – why did they have to run into old Gruner? Maybe he'd go and he could suggest the Latin Café though everyone there would know what was going on.

All three gazed morosely and unabashed about them.

Half the mob here already knew.

Sinking his gaze into the morass of dull wools, Adrian was picking out ... the morass had become a spectacle of types – individuals and groupings. There were a few predators and the usual passive souls

waiting to be saved or damned. Trust old Gruner to see it in wavering planes. Khaki! If you knew how to look, it was lurid. Look at that fairy waving her gold watchband. Look at the hairdo on that one. Good God, that one was disporting suede shoes, looking for trouble.

They drank. Adrian offered them a cigarette from his gold case. Elioth noted its worn sheen and the engraving of the initials, doubtless his own design. Earnest could see that Adrian's tie only gave the impression of purple from a distance, it was a deep blue filigreed with scarlet. Adrian decided Earnest's eyes had an eau de nil tinge.

'Wouldn't music be good?' Earnest said.

The other two glanced at one another, were perplexed, tacitly agreed not to respond. Adrian wondered if he had a Salvation Army band in mind. Elioth thought probably Brahms.

They drank.

Earnest decided it didn't matter, he had to tell Mr Gruner. 'I know it's not the cows, though they're part of it, or the tree though it's the centrepiece. It's the atmosphere.'

The other two were gazing at him.

'The atmosphere of early morning in the country. I know just what it's like. I had to get up and milk the cows. I hated it but some mornings it was ... like your painting that I've got a print of. It's so beautiful. The atmosphere. The light. I know it's only a print but I got the man who does our framing to frame it. He used some moulded pieces he had left over, they're off-white just touched with gilt on the moulding. It really brought the atmosphere out. You could feel that the mist had just cleared ... I think you would think it was all right.'

'I'll get us another before they close,' Adrian said.

'I just love your snapdragons, the 'Antirrhinums' in the Art Gallery. I love it. It gives me ... it inspires me.'

'To what?' Elioth said.

'To live a beautiful life, to have a ... Is the vase Chinese? I think one of my aunts has one like it.'

A dreadful loud clamour broke out. It was the brass bell to announce closing. Some ex-army type was marching around like a drill sergeant bellowing, 'Finish up your drinks! Closing in five minutes. Get a move on there!'

Earnest noticed that Adrian and Elioth just pushed their glasses away so he did the same. Elioth was going to the toilet so he and Adrian left together.

© 2009 Ian MacNeill

Ian MacNeill still goes to the Marble Bar; they shrunk it into the basement of the Hilton in Sydney. Adrian's flowers are everywhere. So are Elioth's. And his cows. Earnest died in Changi.

John Bartlett

I cam, therefore I am



Eventually by positioning his semi-flaccid cock closer to the cam Travis made the discovery that it would appear larger than its actual size. Small cock in this virtual world spelled disaster. It was a bit like vomiting over someone you had just met in a club when things seemed to be going so well and you were just about to initiate the delicate operation of exchanging phone numbers.

After a few guys started clicking onto his site, some sort of magic began to happen. Under this intimate, global gaze, his cock would appear to engorge and lengthen, growing bigger and thicker than its usual maximum six inches until he could hardly recognise it as his own. This process was all about physics and angles of light, not mere anatomical good fortune.

‘When I am observed then I exist and the more I am observed’, he thought, ‘the more fully I exist. I cam, therefore I am’. From now on this would become a daily mantra in Travis’ quest to achieve the sublime state of ‘everythingness’ or ‘Anavrin’ so prized by his technology-savvy generation.

The irony however of his new discovery could hardly be ignored for someone like Travis whose day job kept him captive on the wrong side of cams. During his working hours he stared at banks of CCTV monitors until his eyeballs bulged as traffic crawled bumper to bumper in one direction in the morning and then

reversed the same process in the afternoon. He worked at CHUTI, which could be mistaken for the noise one makes after projectile vomiting a bad Chinese takeaway, but which actually stood for Central Hub for Urban Transport Inc. The boredom in the stuffy workspace was relieved only when there was a breakdown in a tunnel or a bingle on the freeway. After a few months Travis longed for a bit of carnage just to pass the day.

So he had taken to reading philosophy at work and was currently absorbed in the works of Setra Csed and his theories of existence. Csed was an Indian philosopher whose genius had been nurtured in the call-centres of Mumbai and who had recently released a bestseller– ‘Screenalism: contemporary manifestations of existence’. Its main tenet was summed up in the aphorism – ‘Anything which cannot be contained within a screen does not exist.’ Setra Csed’s more recent ideas had built on but were now making redundant the hypothesis of his previous book, ‘Celebrityitis: the art of being well-known for your well-knownness’. Contrary to those earlier beliefs that only celebrities truly experience existence in all its fullness, the philosopher now declared that the existence of individuals had meaning only in so far as they could manage to successfully insert themselves into the instruments of technology, namely the screen in all its contemporary manifestations –TV, computer monitor and mobile phone et alia.

So Travis, a man very much in control in front of the monitors at work, had been feeling out of place living there on the inappropriate side of the screen but after reading Csed, his eyes were opened. He came to realise that he had been born to be observed, to be an individual who was contained within the confines of a screen, not to be the observer of the screen's players. Hadn't he always felt out of place up until then, out of fashion, hairy when everyone else was smooth, big and solid and bearish when slim and shaved was the style and with a small stubby dick when all around him he imagined that most other men could barely contain within their Calvins or Hugo Boss, dicks like coiled fire hoses, which threatened at any moment to spring free and annihilate the unwary? In their world Travis simply did not exist.

He had stopped going to rave parties because he danced like a flailing windmill and he'd tried a few drugs but nights always ended with him throwing up in a piss-stained toilet bowl and passing out. Perhaps he'd been inoculated at birth against contracting the 'fun' virus. He was just a round peg in a square hole or was it a square peg in a round hole? He wasn't even too clear on that fine distinction. A chubby, hairy, short-dicked gay man in a world of svelte, hairless, ageless, dancing, buffed Adonises with muscles on their muscles. He might burp and he might fart like everyone else, but did he really exist?

He'd gone looking on the internet for those big fire hose guys with names as long as their equipment - 'I'm_horny_wanna_play', 'nice_n_thick_4_u_baby' and 'the_tool_man_in_New_York'. Here were plenty of tanned, shaved and plucked guys but to Travis their dicks always looked rubbery or plastic somehow as if they belonged to blow-up dolls and the more he looked at them lying back tugging lazily on their dicks, the less these seemed to be the property of their owners. Maybe they'd been hired just for the occasion... To Travis they all looked like a battery of shiny, plucked chickens in a delicatessen's display case.

On these solitary nightly rendezvous he discovered that guys even refused to engage with him unless he had a personal cam - 'no cam- no connect' was the usual proviso. So eventually Travis bought himself his own cam and with his screen name, 'Micro-phallus', he quickly discovered his true vocation as an exhibitionist. Life as a faux porn star was launched. The mystique of exhibiting, he came to learn, was all in positioning the body creatively in front of the cam and the lighting (or lack of it). The thrill lay in shadows and concealment, allowing just a hint of the unexpressed when imagination would take over just as it did in advertising. There to succeed all you needed was to identify one tiny positive element of a product and emphasise the crap out of it. For marketing gurus even dead-end merchandise such as toilet cleaner or room deodoriser had a sexy side to them if you just knew how to highlight it (and if you could work out what it was!).

Luckily it was a big world out there and Travis soon found that he was in demand for just that, for 'being out there', for allowing himself to be framed and contained within a screen for the globe to observe. Here was a world of chubby-chasers, small-dick worshippers and hairy crotch devotees (to say nothing of those recalcitrant, sweaty-pit-sniffers) who begged Travis to be permitted to worship at his altar. So gradually he came out of the shadows and turned on the lights. His growing band of admirers demanded it, begging him to display all for their devotion. Small dick became a badge of honour and total exposure the only legitimate aphrodisiac.

So 'I cam, therefore I am' meant he no longer really existed in daylight hours but only on those nights when the whole globe waited for him, longed for him to speak directly to them. They soon began asking for advice and he was forced to change his screen-name to the 'Phallic Oracle'. On the other side of the monitor (preserved in cyberspace like pickles in a jar) were legions of fat, hairy, lonely men who had failed that unwritten code of male desirability and not achieved a sufficient level of

‘hotness’ and who needed Travis’s advice.

The fact that Travis had been brave enough to display himself to the world, short-dick and all, meant that he had released others from self-imprisonment too and given this minority (or was it a majority?), this subgroup, a voice. His example had been sufficient to release them.

Other mantras soon began to echo round the gay chat rooms. ‘I’m here, I’m queer and I’ve got a short dick’ and ‘I’m hairy with a big stomach and I’m not going away’. Men with short dicks were scrambling out of closets all around the world and some were even threatening to take over established porn-sites like www.wellhung.com with their six, five and even four-inch erections. Travis had started a revolution.

But there’s a downside to every revolution, always winners and losers. Heads got lost in France and you can be sure that if you could ever be lucky enough to stumble across a descendant of the Romanoffs, they’d have a pretty dim view of revolutions too. For Travis, the downside came in the form of a text message from his boss asking why the hell he’d missed two shifts in a row and where the fuck was he. Travis knew he’d been at work even if his boss hadn’t noticed him. Something else, something far more interesting was developing here. Travis realised that he was becoming no longer ‘real’ in the non-cyber world and unlikely to exist much longer outside his screen reality.

If he was now regarded as AWOL at work, even if he was ‘really’ there, what was the point of turning up, especially when his pay was stopped? And why go to work when he could make loads more at home? Travis own site www.phallicoracle.com was expanding too, engorging and growing bigger and thicker with hits.

Voyeurs (or were they just viewers in this new non-moralising reality?) were subscribing to his site and paying big bucks for Travis’ video_advice_clip where, nude and cross-legged, he replied to viewers’ questions. He was becoming the unclad Dorothy Dix of cyberspace. His world was slowly contracting. He had

time now to collate his responses into an e-book (who read the ones made out of dead-trees any more anyway?) with the title ‘Create your personal cyber-profile and live forever’. It mattered less and less that Travis barely existed in the boring day-to-day world now that he had given birth to his new cyber-existence. In this reality he would never grow old but would live forever in some little corner of cyberspace. This was the state of ‘Anavrin’ he’d been searching for that was so sought after by screen aficionados, the state of perfect suspension within an eternal screen-based reality.

Travis had in fact disappeared up his own ‘black hole’, his own cyber-arsehole and was now the living proof of the theories of Setra Csed – ‘perfect existence consists only in containment inside a screen and forever observed by countless global eyes’. For a chubby, hairy man with a six-inch dick, Travis had done much better than he had expected.

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John Bartlett writes both fiction and non-fiction and his first novel *Towards a Distant Sea* was published in 2005. In March 2009, he will release a collection of his short stories, *All Mortal Flesh*. He teaches Professional Writing at Deakin University in Geelong
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James May

Broad Horizons



It was a hostel for people with HIV/AIDS. The residents were colourful, to put it mildly. I had a gloomy flat on the ground floor with no character or charm. I told myself to be grateful; I could barely walk the block or prepare a meal, let alone find private accommodation. I spent most of the time awake, watching the days come and go with little sleep. I was lost in my own mind, the place seemed haunted with ghosts.

It was hard to say if it was sleep deprivation or benzo diazopenes. Maybe it was the 25 pills I took each day for AIDS-related infections. My emotions fluctuated wildly and I felt like going on a shooting spree. The doctor warned me not to skip doses but it was hard to know what I was doing. The pills were scattered in packets on the dresser and I forgot what had to be taken at breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Perhaps I appeared more lucid than I was. I did my best to appear sane at the hospital; the shrinks were on my case. The last thing I wanted was to be force fed psych drugs. I couldn't think straight or walk without tripping over my feet. I was scared of losing my mind, I felt trapped in another dimension. No one understood so I didn't explain. I hid in that flat, trying to bring myself back – answering the door politely if anyone stopped by.

There was a vase of plastic flowers on the table and

a pathetic tapestry hanging above the television. I watched an episode of South Park and it felt like the characters were taunting me with snide remarks. I pulled the plug out of the wall and never turned it on again. Most nights I dozed off briefly and woke up in blankets drenched in sweat and pharmaceutical poison. I ran out of sheets and pillows by morning. I woke to the sound of the guy upstairs, calling out like a madman. He was alone up there but it sounded like he was laughing with friends and rolling about with an air guitar.

I was too nauseous to eat and too insane to think or sleep. Anything I swallowed was regurgitated with my first dose of tablets. The taste of milky vomit and cereal was always in my throat. The toilet and the walls had to be scrubbed after each attempt. I couldn't bear to see myself in the mirror. I looked like a walking skeleton; a man trapped in a child's body. There was no fat on my arse, none of my clothes would fit.

I read Louise Hay books and chanted affirmations; I love you, Jim. You're a good person. You're strong, healthy, attractive. I imagined my immune system getting strong – the cold sores healing on my lips, my cheeks filling out, eyes coming to life. I imagined eating, gaining weight, the taste of food; sweet, succulent and delicious. I drank ginger root tea for the nausea, natural yogurt to balance the bacteria in my gut and dandelion tea to cleanse the liver. My diaries overflowed with

messages to the universe asking for guidance and intervention. I begged to understand the experience and make a full recovery.

Slowly, I could face the world, lifting the blinds and soaking up the sunshine. Bees hovered among the flowers, hiding in the jasmine and lavender. Crawling beneath the window each night, I fell deeper into sleep; closer to Earth. I weaned myself off benzos and the mist cleared from my senses. It no longer felt like I was drifting beneath the sea or floating in outer space. I felt connected to my body; a living, breathing soul. It was cold in the flat, no matter what the temperature was. I couldn't feel the heater; my body didn't register the warmth. I sat beneath the clothes line, shrouded in a thick pullover, trying to get warm in the sun, shivering like a leaf when a cloud passed over.

There was a picnic table where the residents camped each morning, smoking cigarettes, drinking instant coffee. A huge can rested at their feet, filled to the brim with rubbish and butts. Roy tore through the courtyard, swearing at the nurse to leave him alone. He threw his medication up in the garden, washing the vomit down with a can of coke.

The residents gathered in the kitchen at 10am for breakfast. Ralph, Roy, Betsy and Barry stood at the counter with Frankie the cleaner who dished up cereal, French toast, coffee and tea. He was a feminine gay man with his hair pulled back neatly in a pony tail; not a whisker on his face or body. He wore tight white shirts and shorts and spectacles like an old woman, smiling with a mouth of perfectly straight, pristine white teeth.

None of the residents believed he was a man. Betsy told him to 'stop pulling her leg' and Barry said that he'd seen 'tougher sheilas getting waxed on Bridge Road.' Frankie was always polite, dishing up flapjacks made from instant pancake mix and collecting the residents' shopping from Richmond Plaza. I refused to eat the hostel food – flimsy white bread, tuna mornay and beef

mince stew wouldn't cut it. The meals were frozen, smelled revolting and were hard to identify.

I rarely entered that kitchen because no one cleaned their mess and the stench was overpowering – someone was moping about or sprawled in front of the television waiting for their psych drugs to kick in. Frankie had the Oprah show turned up full volume while he emptied the trash and dusted the cupboards – another pile of French toast growing mouldy on the counter. The residents usually settled for a bowl of ice cream, a can of coke and a cigarette for lunch.

Once in a while I sat at the picnic table, attempting to be social. Ralph asked if I had any cigarettes for the tenth time, telling me he smoked forty a day because he only had HIV, not AIDS. Roy sat beside him, groaning and rubbing his stomach, wearing a wife beater singlet, blowing smoke rings like a thug. They were best friends but they fought like cat and dog.

Ralph dragged Roy to Cash Converters to carry the stereo and bargain with the sales guy. He said he was a diagnosed schizophrenic and could flip into a psychotic episode any minute. That meant abusing the night staff for spying through his window or causing havoc at the gay bars. He turned his stereo up full volume at night, blasting a compilation of 80s dance music. The caretaker confiscated his speakers and turned his power off in the main office. Ralph flew into a rage, hurling furniture from the second floor balcony, vowing to run away from Broad Horizons.

Barry sat at the table in the morning, slurping a bowl of ice cream and rolling a cigarette. Betsy shuffled about on her walker, dressed in a night gown and slippers; she hadn't changed that outfit for a week. She was glad to find the hostel. She hated living with her daughter and the grand kids - they threw toys, tripped her over and pulled her hair. The men at the hostel didn't like having a woman there, gabbing about her life as a barmaid in the roughest clubs in Melbourne.

Most of the residents weren't 'all there' anyway and it scared me because I wasn't either. I had cracked up and lost touch with reality; holding onto sanity by a thread. Slowly, I started to feel like myself again; the one I hated, the one I rejected, the one I chastised into psychosis. I didn't want to stay but I had to get strong enough to leave.

I wanted to be polite, yet keep the residents at a distance. It was hard to manage without causing offense. The slightest fault in tone of voice or facial expression aroused suspicion. I couldn't have a two way conversation – they had no listening skills, no awareness of my presence. They talked about drugs, AIDS, television, irrational fears or unreliable relatives. It was hard to excuse myself. They blew smoke and spittle in my face, watching me without eye contact. They were offended when I went to my room; it was another mark against my name. When I passed them in the courtyard the next day there was no acknowledgment; just a cold shoulder, an ominous glare.

It was like a school yard, trying to fit in, avoid the bullies. I adopted a suit of armour, spending days at the beach or tucked away in my room. I waited till the coast was clear before going outside. Barry talked to himself at the picnic table. If he saw me, he paused mid sentence and sat still, trying to look inconspicuous. Sometimes the discussions were so animated that spittle frothed from his mouth and he turned the table upside down.

I was bombarded by Malcolm's television in the afternoon. He watched variety shows at full volume, laughing and changing the channel constantly. The sound of cop shows and war movies reverberated through the walls till late at night. He shuffled through his flat, smiling insanely, wearing a belt with the label

I Like Boys wrapped around his waist.

He hoarded junk and rarely cleaned the apartment.

The caretakers ignored it till cartons of junk food were piled so high you could barely see through the windows or get through the door. The dishes were stacked high, the stench of shit was over-powering. They charged in with face masks, garbage bags and cleaning products as though they were hauling radioactive waste from a nuclear plant. Malcolm hobbled out with a bag of McDonald's, hooked up to a walkman and headphones.

The staff cared for those who needed it. Frankie made breakfast whether we liked it or not and delivered medication to our rooms. The night staff wasted time in the office. They dished up the muck for dinner, made sure there were no squabbles over the television and spent the rest of the night surfing the Internet. They invited me to meals but I refused. I was afraid they'd see how truly mad I was and tell the nurse to medicate. A psychiatrist paid a visit to the hostel each Wednesday with a nasty dessert and a bottle of soft drink. The residents made a day of it; they wanted all the medication they could get their hands on. They drank it with a bottle of cheap wine before hitting The Peel on Friday nights.

I was grateful for the roof over my head but it was a curse as well. I felt trapped in a lunatic asylum and had to prove my sanity to get out. I wondered how the residents ended up in this place. No one came to visit and they had no desire to leave; they were afraid of the outside world. It was hard to say if their health was a mess because of HIV, medication or both. Their lives revolved around tests, medication and hospital visits.

Now and then Barry stumbled along Bridge Road trying to extract coins from parking meters while yuppies sipped lattes, chuckling in disbelief. Now and then Ralph and Roy caught the tram a few stops to Richmond Plaza, shrouded in coats and beanies on a stinking hot day. They stumbled arm in arm through the aisles of Coles wearing dark glasses like a pair of burglars, filling a basket with chocolate biscuits and ice cream.

The alarms went off during the night from people burning toast or smoking in bed. Clothes went missing from the line and the staff were threatened for money and cigarettes. A BBQ was held each Sunday with expired meat from the kitchen and a brawl erupted over the division of burgers and sausages. The caretaker stepped up in an apron, protecting himself with a spatula when Roy threw a plate of burgers at the wall and stormed off to his room.

One day I found a café where I could get a decent coffee and a sandwich. I trudged along that street bustling with barbie dolls in designer clothes; my body aching like a chemotherapy patient. I ordered the most delicious food on the menu, climbing onto a stool and holding the bench to stop trembling. I felt alive and strong with each mouthful, imagining my body as a picture of health, full of vitality. I wandered the streets of Richmond admiring cottages, dreaming of my own place with a garden; safe and secure in the world.

My health returned with the onset of Spring. Jasmine and roses bloomed everywhere. I stopped at one garden after another, inhaling the aroma, soaking up the sunshine. It seemed like a new dimension; my perception was clear and refreshed. It felt like a rebirth; my soul had returned to my body, becoming aware of its surrounds. I was afraid to think of the lucky escape I had, afraid it could happen again. I could lose my mind and health so easily.

It was hard to shake the memory. As soon as I felt a familiar tremble or saw something that sparked a fear - the way people looked at me, the expression on their face; a knowledge that everything was peculiar. I had to snap out of it before the fear consumed me, sucking me into that place. It taunted me like a voice from the past. I walked through the world with the knowledge that everything could go up in a cloud of smoke. I felt like an extra terrestrial, masquerading as human – a spirit with the ability to shift realities and take up residence in

different bodies.

I wanted life to be simple again. I wanted to be who I was, even though I took that person for granted. I felt like an inferior copy of my self, stripped of character, integrity and creativity. I remembered how graceful I was in contrast to this – a bleak, disenchanted shell of a man, void of emotional depth and spiritual substance; stuck in a barren landscape. It was a lower realm in the underbelly of existence where people are shadows; lost souls suspended in time. I had to navigate myself back to the land of the living.

Broad Horizons was a hellhole. I vowed to pay little attention to the surrounds. Ralph sent bad vibes my way for refusing his advances. Betsy was offended when I didn't join her for tea and biscuits. Medical complications were relentless; healthy blood cells were destroyed by the medication, anaemia and low haemoglobin set in. Lymph nodes swelled in my stomach, causing me to double over in pain while walking or eating. The cramps made it difficult to move without pain. The nausea increased; I threw up in the street, walking home from a restaurant. All I could do was wait for the spasms to end, directing the vomit away from my feet.

The doctor hauled me in for kidney treatment and blood transfusions – day after day, jabbed with needles and hooked up to intravenous drips. I sat in a cold, sterile room, attached to a bleeting machine, plugged into a socket in front of mind-numbing television. The day care centre was full of morose people, hooked up to bags of fluid and blood. Now and then a kidney specialist showed up with ambiguous news – more fluids were needed, a blood transfusion, further investigations.

I was carted off to the 'bug spray' room for pneumonia prophylaxis – locked in a tiny space with a tube of pentamidine stuffed in my mouth, a box of tissues to wipe the phlegm away. Two floors down in

ophthamology, the physician squirted a solution into my eyes to investigate – a necessary routine for anyone with a low T Cell count to intercept the possibility of CMV Retinitis. At the end of the day I climbed onto a bus, exhausted and disillusioned with the taste of pentamidine in my throat.

I was under surveillance at Broad Horizons. A caretaker was always at the door, coaxing me back to the hospital, telling me how dangerous it was not to be monitored. I wanted to run away, reclaim control of my mind and body. The residents were considered to be out of their mind; unable to make rational decisions. They milked the system in return for being enslaved by it. It was impossible to live there at your own free will. You were watched like a hawk or encouraged to move on.

Frankie delivered the residents to hospital for appointments with doctors and shrinks. No one seemed to get better. Betsy's ankles swelled up and she couldn't operate her walker. Barry rarely emerged from his room; the lower half of his body crippled by the treatment for bowel cancer. The radiation burnt his legs and made it impossible to move, so he listened to opera music – mellow tunes wafting through the courtyard at dusk. Frankie was uninspired by the role. He escaped through prayer and meditation, describing visions of the Virgin Mary he saw in his apartment. He asked the holy mother to fulfill his dream of being a photographic model in Hollywood.

Broad Horizons wasn't a hostel where people came to get well. It was a place where people gave up. There was no recovery, no growth – the residents would rather die than face the world. It was a roof over their heads, a means to an end, a graveyard. If the isolation didn't kill their spirits, the food would ruin their health and the medication would destroy their bodies. No one was coming to the rescue; you had to find your own way out. The longer I stayed the more I lost the will to live.

Six months after my arrival, a call came through

from public housing. They had a place for me by the Yarra bend. By that stage, I was ready to shoot everyone in the hostel. The council started building apartments next door and we were woken at 7am each day by fat men in work shorts, driving tractors and jack hammers through knee deep mud. My immune system had stabilised and I was ready to start over.

I piled my things in a car and set off down Punt Road with Frankie in the driver's seat. He dithered and dallied all the way, saying he needed plenty of notice before each turn off because he was nervous on the road. He held the wheel tight with dainty hands and he had faultless posture; his legs were closed like a prude. People honked at us to speed up, indicate and hurry before the lights changed but Frankie went at his own pace, ignoring their demands.

An hour later I was standing in the public housing estate, waving Frankie goodbye at the bottom of the stairs. He smiled politely like a nun and encouraged me to keep up the spiritual practice. He promised to send a postcard from Disneyland and blew me a kiss as he pulled out the drive.

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James May is a writer from Melbourne who writes short stories and plays with inner city themes: queers, dysfunctional relationships, drug use, social misfits and mental health issues. He is currently working on a novel about a year spent at a crack ridden hotel in San Francisco where he worked as a cleaner in a bath house in Berkeley. "Broad Horizons" was adapted from his experience at a Melbourne city hostel for people with HIV/AIDS needing crisis accommodation.

Ash Rehn

View from the twenty-fourth floor



Chris had only seen the window cleaner for a few minutes but could not clear his mind of the expression on the guy's face. Their short relationship began divided by glass, a man in his twenties and another in his forties, brought together by chance and the need to remove sea-spray.

Chris and Fernando had flown in late the previous day and by the time they arrived in a cab from the airport, most of the decent shops were closing. Fernando wanted to catch the last rays of the day but Chris insisted their priority was new swimwear. It wouldn't do to be seen in something from last season. Fernando had paid as usual, with a roll of his eyes at the price tag. The trunks were exactly what Chris wanted, the latest style worn by boys in Rio. Excited by the prospect of trying them on in private, he hurried back to the high-rise. Fernando was still out getting the groceries and wouldn't be back for some time. Chris had the place to himself.

He dumped the store bags on the living room floor without so much as a glance to the magnificent view, grabbed the trunks and went to the bedroom to strip off. Once in the new trunks he checked himself out in the wardrobe mirrors. He liked what he saw. All that time in the gym was starting to show; he was getting bigger, more solid. While he could still be described as boyish, even pretty, he had lost that teenaged look of

being all arms and legs. His workouts were working.

The new trunks made his legs look bigger. Fernando was right; the colours did suit him. The bold pattern of red and black was right for his complexion. There was the problem of a new tan line and, then, something else. For sure they made a feature of his package, that's what he hoped for in choosing this particular pair, but he wondered whether the trunks made too much of it. It would be daring to wear them. He flexed his six-pack and grabbed at himself. Then he saw the man outside.

It was a window cleaner. He must have dropped down to the level of their apartment while Chris was posing. The man would have seen him pulling at the front of the trunks, arranging his package, checking his profile to see how it might appear to others, the shape of his bum and what happened when he bent over. Chris knew instantly he had seen everything.

It was a shock at first, to see the reflection of someone observing him. Someone he had never met. He felt overcome by self-consciousness. The surprise of being seen, then the embarrassment of his own behaviour: pure vanity. He must have turned fright-white then shame-red. He spun around to check the man was really there, outside the window, looking in.

It was no apparition. The man was there, swinging from a rope and looking straight at him with some interest. Then, realising again he had been caught off

guard by the shirtless stranger, Chris found himself aroused.

There was nothing in the man's appearance to suggest why he would be interested in Chris. He was butch, swarthy even: capable and strong. Probably married with kids. He was all suntanned, muscular legs and stubbled jaw, with a chest that was hairy but equally tanned. He wore nothing but sunglasses, shorts and leather boots as he swung suspended there, one hand swiping windows, the other pulling at his crotch. Chris turned back around to see the man's reflection in the mirrored doors of the robe, only the top half of the stranger on view from this aspect, torso supported by harness and ropes, cleaning windows as he cruised.

That was the clue; he was cruising. He must have been. The stranger was clearly interested. It was that thing, that magnetism that turned the world, a biological dynamo that drove them all, his lovers and friends, pushing them on through their lives until death. It was, he thought, probably the same for straight people but it was hard to imagine how it could be as intense for anyone busied by the labours of raising kids and providing for a family. With this man there were no tell-tale signs of common genetics. But it was there: the desire, an attraction that was all animal. Maybe he was straight. Maybe he was gay. Did it matter? Not at all. Not if they were both horny.

Chris left the mirrors and walked towards the window. The man did not move away, or avert his stare and Chris was not about to draw the curtains for privacy. The man stopped cleaning.

Then he gave the man The Look.

It was something he practised, The Look. He had used it on Fernando many times. It was Chris' signal. The reason they were here, on holidays in this high-rise. The reason they had met. For Chris, it was his trump card: the final luring tactic, the make or break of every game of pursuit with men. It had won him

opportunities in the strangest of places and the most unusual of situations; on buses, in lifts, office toilets, and in supermarkets during evenings when the city workers despaired of returning to their one bedroom apartments alone.

And for all his working out and those hours at the gym it was The Look in every case that got him what he wanted. The Look was something he could switch on at will. It was the gentlest hint of smile, a subtle tilt of the head and one eyebrow slightly raised. And of course it was the piercing glance, the eyes. It was all these elements and more. It never failed. From the other side of the glass, the man's nostrils flared and he lowered himself down to a concrete platform protruding just wide enough to stand on. He put down his squeegee under the sill line.

The pursuit was over. Whatever happened next would take on an automatic drive, impulsive and unknown but inevitable, proceeding from its own momentum without need for further sign or signal. Chris stepped forward and slid open the window. The man unbuckled his harness line, dropping the slack rope away behind him.

Then he felt a flash of uncertainty. Fernando could be back soon. Would they have time? He hesitated, unsure whether to help the tanned stranger through. Sure he had time but it would have to be quick. Chris tugged off his new trunks.

The man clasp the sill at his nipple line and stepped his boot against the outside wall, ready to heave over the window frame and into the room. Chris saw strength and was excited. He anticipated the man above him, working him over. He ached for the feel of stubble grazing his neck, for rough hands moving him into position. He imagined being taken there on the bedroom carpet by the stranger.

The man pulled himself forward. Then there was a scuffing sound from the stranger's boot, and a curse as

he slipped down. Chris watched the man's hands release their grip on the sill and then fall away, arms spread, mouth open in a silent scream before he disappeared out of sight over the edge of the concrete lip.

He did not step forward to the window or attempt to look out to see where the man had fallen. He did not move at all for some time. Then he turned around and saw himself in the mirror. He still had an erection.

He was standing there when he heard the front door of the apartment open and close before the shuffle of Fernando's grocery laden steps across tiles.

"Darling, something terrible has happened outside."

Chris wrapped a towel around himself. Fernando appeared from the hallway and stood at the door to their bedroom.

"Someone has jumped out of the building and splattered on the road. It is really quite horrible. I don't even want to think about it any more."

From behind him, Chris could feel a breeze through the open window. Outside, the rigging hung loosely. Twenty- four floors below them, a man's body lay covered with a sheet.

"Come in here," said Fernando with a nod to the living room. "I want to fuck on the floor."

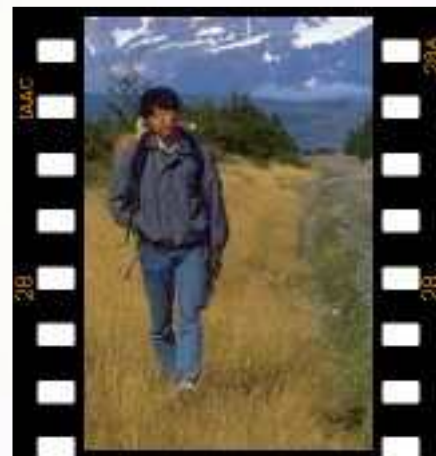
Chris did as he was told.

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Ash Rehn grew up in Brisbane, Australia and on Queensland's Gold Coast. Since the age of 25 he has lived in Sydney, London, Edinburgh and Stockholm. He currently resides in Sydney where he works as a counsellor and therapist and is undertaking an MA in Creative Writing. Ash is interested the way individual's identities are shaped by the stories of their lives. He has won a number of awards for short stories and enjoys exploring social issues through fictional narrative. His favourite fiction authors include Jeanette Winterson, Mary Renault, Michael Cunningham, Tim Winton, Andrew Holleran and Evelyn Waugh. More of his writing can be found at www.ashrehn.com

Ward Lee

I am a camera



I first met Daniel a year ago. A shy 19-year-old boy from Argentina, he looked around in the arrivals hall at Sydney Airport like a Latino Bambi. He spent the night at my place and got on the coach to Melbourne the next morning.

That's not the story, of course.

I had known his mother when I worked in Buenos Aires in the early 1990s. We were both teachers at an international school. She was one of those 'more English than the English' *Porteñas* with a small flat in Palermo filled with Harrods shopping bags, ceramic tea pots and posters of Dorset village life. She'd done a one-month teacher-training course in Bournemouth a few years earlier and we'd met there. I was doing a gap year in England. But this was all long ago: I left Argentina soon after she fell pregnant and moved house and we'd lost touch since.

Rewind 18 months ago: Laura tracked me down through mutual friends and sent me an email telling me her son was coming to Australia to go to university. "Yes, I'll make sure he's ok," I replied to her unasked question. "Just send me a photo so I know who to look for at the airport." Her reply was, "He looks like that *hijo de puta* of a father of his." But she attached a photo anyway.

At this point, the usual thing would be to talk about how sexy, slim and smooth he looked in the photo and how guilty I felt about being attracted to him. The truth

is he suffered from bad acne, had greasy hair and a sullen look on his face. And this was probably the most recent and flattering photo she had of Daniel. I was relieved for all sorts of reasons that I didn't fancy him.

He looked a bit happier and more presentable when I found him at the airport and drove him back to my flat in Elizabeth Bay. He spoke reasonable English and my Spanish wasn't so rusty that we needed to resort to an old bilingual dictionary more than a few times.

I was in the kitchen making us dinner and the conversation flowed but every now and then there were awkward silences as he'd notice a framed monochrome print of some athletic surf god on a wall or the copy of DNA open on the coffee table showing a photo-spread of French rugby players.

"I do hope I can meet Australian girls," Daniel said in his mother's over-precise English. "Do you think they will like me?"

The answer came on Facebook a month later. Daniel's profile finally had more than the one original unflattering photo on it. He had his arm around a chubby girl with faintly Chinese features. He was in a group of students, all looking impossibly young; smiling at the camera with a look of excitement summing up perfectly the idea that just being that age and in Australia was enough to make life perfect.

I called Daniel once a week and visited him a few times when work took me to Melbourne.

Each day I'd do some cyber-loafing at work and log into Facebook and find 'you were poked by Daniel' and of course I'd poke him back. It's strange how the straight boys poke you on Facebook.

As part of my 'multi-tasking' at my desk, I'd see what photos he'd uploaded of clubbing around Melbourne. Each month, a different photo would stand out:

- The one of him at the GodsKitchen club night with his hands in the air like he just didn't care.

- Drinking from a huge cocktail glass with the Chinese girl. She wasn't tagged so I still had no idea who she was.

- Posing at the Motor Show, bent over a police car, one arm behind his back, his face on the bonnet, with the police officer pretending Daniel was a dangerous perpetrator.

- In the album 'Riding Waves', Daniel asleep in the back of a car, resting his head on a friend's shoulder. That one was tagged: Carlos Ortiz. Carlos and Daniel were in the next photo too with another Latino guy: wetsuits pulled down to expose their pale smooth chests, leaning against a fence. Daniel had a serene smile as though he was exactly where he wanted to be.

It was great to see each month's album showed a happier Daniel, more relaxed and more sociable. His smile got bigger and his skin got clearer. It was like a very slow-motion Clearasil advert. In fact, he started to look more and more like his father although I never commented on it. I figured mentioning the dad that had left you before you even knew him wasn't something for a stranger to do.

Last month he called about 11pm in that typical Latino 'time is not important' way and said he was in Sydney and was it ok if he stayed the night? He was just down the road so I barely had time for a quick tidy up before he was at the door.

"Carlos is coming to Sydney tomorrow," he said. "We're going to Byron Bay but he had to work today." I told him I'd seen Carlos on Facebook and it looked like he and Daniel were great mates.

Daniel's change of subject floored me. "You knew my dad, right?"

"Uhhh, yeah, you could say that?"

He raised an eyebrow. "He left before I was born. Am I like him at all?"

"I guess so. You look alike." I replied, not sure what to say.

"He left mom for a man, didn't he? She won't say but I think that's what happened."

"Yes, he found out he was gay. It must have been a big shock to her. She was already pregnant with you."

"Who was the man?" Daniel stared straight at me like his eyes had a lie-detector installed behind them.

I found myself blushing for the first time in ages. "I think you know the answer to that or you wouldn't ask. I guess your mum said something, didn't she?"

He just kept looking at me, waiting to hear the rest.

I took a gulp of vodka before launching into it. "We got drunk one night your mother was away. Your dad and I woke up the next morning in love with each other. He left your mum. We stayed together for a year but my visa ran out and I came back here. I'm really sorry I broke up your family, Daniel. I didn't think your mother would ever talk to me again. I can't understand why she'd ask me to keep an eye out for you when you got to Australia."

It was his turn to blush. "She found my computer history and looked at the photos on the last website listed. So I think I am like my dad. And like you. Do you have his email address? Is he on Facebook?"

I hesitated. "He's not on Facebook but yes, we keep in touch by email."

"Can you take a photo of me and Carlos tomorrow at the Opera House and send it to my dad? I want him to know I'm happy and met a cool guy too just like he did."

His Facebook status is now 'in a relationship' and his profile photo makes him look even more like his dad. I'll admit to a twinge of envy.

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Ward lives with his partner and their cat in the People's Republic of Newtown. A native of Sydney, Ward spent several years in Europe before returning, as they say, to his roots in Australia. This is his first published story.

Colin Burrough

Parlour



The lacquer had an industrial sort of smell and was squirted from a puffer-spray. If you sat within a certain radius a faint, sticky mist shrouded you and took your breath away. The backcombed blonde tufts stood upright, like stiff feathers raised for battle. Bobby pins poked out from between her teeth. An arm's length away, up on the grey settee, I held my breath, my arms, legs and face collecting a cement-like debris of the morning ritual, a strict requirement of all her bouffant variations. There she towered and bulged over the hearth in a cloud of Woodbine smoke, clumsily curvaceous, blowing and waving her scarlet nails dry. An elastic-strapped, conically-moulded, girdle-bound, suspender-belted warrior queen.

I played with the wine-gum coloured containers in her make-up bag; they smelled like boiled lollies and lanoline. After the lipstick she bent down and playfully blotted her lips onto mine, 'and don't tell you father,' she chuckled, huskily. She only applied lipstick, eyeliner, mascara and a bit of powder, that was all that she needed. Without it she was a different character altogether; a creature caught in the hour between savage and siren. This was at its most noticeable when she charged, heavy-footed, down the stairs before breakfast in nightie and dressing gown, bare-legged and coughing, sooty-eyed, wild-haired and craze-weary from the previous evening's darts practice. She was a

Blackpool Ladies' Darts Team champion. Only on rare occasions were their men included in their foxy shenanigans. Their practice nights were held in the houses of members who had enough space. I was allowed to go with her. My maleness didn't count in their world of pencil skirts, cleavage, sherry and growling conjugal rebellion. One weekend, my father back home from working away, the two returned one night from one of her tournaments with a prize. A yacht lamp, the base carved from wood, its pale yellow shade forming the sails. I was in their double bed with a hot water bottle when they came upstairs and plugged in this yellow yacht; Mum wore a black slip but still the diamante necklace and earrings; my father, a short man with knobbly knees, just his lengthy dress shirt and socks. I could smell Babycham, smoke and Yardley. The only way to get me to go to bed if they were out was to put me into theirs. My feet barely extended beyond the level of the sheet turn-back, and I was mesmerised by this yacht lamp.

I hated being taken to my own room. There were ghosts on the landing. It was a Victorian corner house with darkly varnished skirting boards, wooden banisters and dados, elaborate plaster cornices, cobwebbed picture rails and dull, austere though worthless furniture. Next to my room was a dark alcove with a chest of drawers, and next to that a winding, creaking, narrow

staircase winding up to the attic which doubled as a spare bedroom for any visitors who dared go up there. On the other side of these attic stairs was a built-in panelled linen cupboard which I, of Lilliputian height, could sneak into and hide. All these dark places housed sinister beings, I was sure. One was a mysterious old man in a nightgown and nightcap who rummaged through the chest of drawers in the alcove and often left its drawers open. He was spotted several times when my grandfather was out shopping, so couldn't have been him. Another was Billy Wind. He had a long billowing black cloak and huge mousse-like antlers, and lurked on the stairs and landing in the dead of night, howling and whistling. I was so terrified one night I leapt out of bed and tore across the landing into my parents' closed door, knocking out my first front teeth.

On Saturday mornings Mum donned a smart black waitress's dress with a white apron, Kirby gripped a black chiffon bow onto her bird's nest hairpiece and went off to the Mirabelle restaurant on the prom. My father and I adjourned to the back room where he and his father would spread newspaper on the oil cloth and cut each other's hair with a pair of antiquated clippers, or pull each other's bad teeth out, or repaint and wallpaper parts of the house. Then we had roasted lamb's hearts followed by one of Gran's specials: baked egg custard, rhubarb and gooseberry pie, hot jam roly-poly and custard or cold sliced bread and butter pudding. My grandfather would watch his wrestling, boxing or football on the television. Gran might send one of them across Forest Gate for ice cream blocks and wafers and we'd congregate in the front garden, where my father trimmed, watered and weeded, or chatted to visiting great aunts and uncles who reminisced about their world long gone, a world of cotton mills, gruel, sudden cot deaths, syrup of figs and copper bath tubs. Only on Saturdays. The rest of the week it was just Mum and I in the front parlour. She

did jigsaw puzzles, knitted and received visitors, female darts comrades who plotted, conspired, debriefed and gossipped. I crouched behind the settee, imitating them silently, or if Gran had her own visitors in the back of the house I might go in there, as her visitors were often Wilson relatives and therefore mine as well as Gran's extended family, Gran being one of seven Wilson siblings. Grandad only had his spinster sister Emily, whose betrothed had perished in the trenches of Mons while grandad looked on, back in another age. Emily's seaside visits were infrequent.

Mum's people had remained firmly rooted in the charred ruins of post-war Manchester, Cottonopolis, an inky-skied world of crumbling, derelict ghost mills, from where my father's clan also originated before heading to the blustery ozone of our rain-swept sands. Mum's visiting darts mates and Gran's extended family guests formed two worlds under one roof, from which I could swap and choose as I meandered and eavesdropped between the front parlour and back living room of ten Forest Gate.

Inside the wireless lived tiny people, one man who told us of Marilyn Monroe's death, others with drums and guitars. Mum had a deep, throaty voice, and anyone walking past our parlour on this typical weekday morning would most likely have overheard her, through the open window, roaring along to Marcia Blaine's '...I wanna be - Bobby's girl, that's the most important thing too-oo me-ee,' Helen Shapiro's 'Hu-walkin' back to happine-ness, whoopah-woo-ay-ay,' and Carole King's 'It might as well rain until Sep-temm-brrre.' We joined in together with Sophia Loren and Peter Sellers: '...it goes boom-diddy-boom, diddy-boom, diddy-boom...well goodness glacious me!' She turned the volume up full for The Shadows' Apache and raved on about Hank Marvin, then she grabbed me from the settee and we did the twist to Chubby Checker, which must have rattled Gran's china cabinet again in the back room,

leading to a familiar rat-a-tat-tat on our parlour wall. My grandparents were unaffected by our noise, but their neighbours in the once adjoining servant's cottage next to the rear of the house, the Corriganes, disliked children and frivolity and were prone to making a fuss about it. Mrs Corrigan was an uppity old stick, Gran said, she was a Jewess and thought she was the Queen of Sheba and used to have servants waiting on her, hand and foot.

'Oh aye?' Mum argued, 'Well, if she had servants, what's she living in the servants' cottage for then? Tell me that.'

'How the blazes do I know,' Gran said, 'but they've owned it for donkey's years and we rent, we can't afford to give folk the pip by upsetting the apple cart.'

But Mum wouldn't have it, 'For cryin' out loud, Mam, we're just as entitled to live as owners. Sod Mrs rotten Corrigan, why should we creep about like church mice for Lady Muck?'

'Church mice my eye, we're too old to be turned out on the streets, we have to keep the blasted peace,' insisted Gran, but she was wasting her breath.

'Oh peace off. Don't talk so wet, you're not her tenants, you're Mr Proctor's. It's not the dark ages, Mam, things have changed since when you were a lass. Tenants have rights in this day and age.'

So when tedium reigned supreme, Mum turned the music up relentlessly and danced in the parlour with me, Gran rapped on the wall with her broom handle by proxy for Mrs Corrigan and so it went. I never actually saw Mrs Corrigan, or indeed any Corriganes. Mum said it was all a yard of tripe anyway, she said old people made mountains out of molehills, you just had to humour them to a point then take no notice.

Meanwhile, if someone had walked up Myrtle Avenue past the back half of the house and the Corrigan cottage, Gran's wireless would have sent out of the open sash window and through the net curtains

a whole different ambience of soft, trickling sounds. Whole orchestras inhabited Gran's wireless, playing Percy Faith's Theme From A Summer Place and other haunting sounds, like the Breakfast At Tiffany's signature track. Nat King Cole's Ramblin' Rose had the potential to set her off for a whole day sometimes. Her singing voice was of another world, one of gas lamps, horse drawn carts, cobblestone streets and music halls. How anyone could have survived such a transition from her world to this one was incomprehensible, a testimonial of invincibility, proof that anything was possible, that life was, despite how it looked, a sailable voyage.

Earlier, before I could walk or talk properly, I had often played up at feeding time, which invariably resulted in a raucous chase around the parlour, and loud tears and wailings, Mum roaring, and Gran would turkey-waddle into the parlour with a broom in her hand, pick me up and cluck, coo and bounce me against her huge wrinkled bust: 'You leave 'im be, you damn bully!' My ear against her chest, the noise booming as if from within a great cavern. Her cheeks smelled of Lux soap and Ponds Cold Cream. One cheek had a big mole with a grey wiry whisker growing out. Her arms were thick like bear's limbs, her hard-worked old fingers swollen and porky like sausages with rings on them.

'He's just being a mardy,' Mum would yell back, exasperated, 'mind your own flamin' business!' But Gran doted over me, always stepping in and having her say, undermining Mum every step of the way. She was a round, squat, bandaged-legged, hair-netted, pom-pom slipped fairy godmother, armed with a wooden rolling pin and a gargantuan mushy heart bursting with ancient sayings and wacky remedies. If you bumped your head she rubbed butter on it. If you had hiccups she gave you a glass of Corporation Pop and if your head ached she dabbed 4711 onto your temples.

Bantam height, almost as wide as she was high and rheumatically tortured though she was, my grandmother was as sturdy as an ox, and wrestled weighty wet cotton bloomers, woollen long johns and candy-striped flannelette sheets, feeding them masterfully through an old mangle over the kitchen sink. Over the scullery passage hung an antiquated wooden laundry rack, suspended from the high ceiling by pulley ropes tied to metal wall hooks. This required unwinding, lowering and securing at half-mast for draping, then re-raising when covered with wet laundry, but she wrestled brutally with it this morning, panting out her own personal expletives: 'deuce,' 'blast it,' 'damnation!'

My grandfather had better 'walking legs' than his wife had and a hearing aid which he habitually left switched off. I imagined that he was how the giant from Jack and the Beanstalk would be, with tough leathery skin, fierce ruddy cheeks, thick white hair with wild bushy eyebrows and the booming voice of a deafened old soldier. He ate kippers for breakfast, or fried black pudding, always preceded by half a grapefruit and a bowl of bran. He shrewdly escaped Gran's wireless sing-along hours, slipping on his hat, coat and scarf and plodding off to the stores down Whitegate Drive for groceries. When he returned he went down the long scullery to the back kitchen to prepare evening meals and leave them to simmer: potato hash with pickled cabbage, steak and kidney with suet dumplings, tripe and onions or whatever had been decided upon, then on returning he sat oblivious in his rocking chair, deeply absorbed in his football results or whatever else he could bury his head in. He'd re-emerge at lunchtime to nibble on some crumbly Cheshire cheese, crusty bread and a boiled beetroot or stick of celery. He was a proud collector of the British war pension, his deafness brought on by a burst eardrum in the trenches of France, and everything had to be shouted to him. He

sold poppies on street corners from a tray strapped around his neck on Remembrance Day, lest we all forgot the brave yet awful reasons for his disability and his three war medals. He couldn't actually hear Gran's put-downs, but he sensed it and responded by flicking his hand in the air at her, which really got her goat and sent her mutters into a full-volumed, 'Don't you flick your ruddy 'and at me, rude devil!' This made him laugh and he'd mock and needle her. Pursed lipped, she ignored these mischievous taunts with burning indignation, furiously crocheting her antimacassars and summoning a rhythmic, broody silence metered by the stern tut of the grandfather clock. Her face took on the same expression as Queen Victoria's on the diamond jubilee commemoration plate that glared down formidably from the wall. He'd wink at me, grinningly, or nudge my elbow with his, before her muttering started up again: 'Go to blazes... damfool gives me the pip....daft apeth....barmy devil....' When she got tired of crocheting she'd open one of her romance novels from the library and her head would nod wearily and her chin drop open as she dozed off into a Mills and Boon inflicted afternoon nap, slaverling out of one corner of her mouth, the library book sliding, still open, down her pinny and onto the rug. Grandad would nudge me again and wink and make fun of her. He would put his finger to his mouth in a shushing gesture, relishing the peace and quiet while it lasted. He lived all afternoon behind a newspaper, his thumbs tucked importantly into his trouser braces, in a world of wrestling and boxing results and international conflicts. He knew all about strange far-off people, places and events with names that to me were just meaningless sounds that grown-ups made, like Martin Luther King, President Kennedy and Charles de Gaulle. If Mum was invited in for tea, he'd debate these issues authoritatively with her, which called for raised voices and bawling because of his deafness, and Gran would jolt from her armchair snooze: 'You what? What did you

say?’ She’d look vexed and dejected until Mum withdrew to our parlour. Mum nicknamed their back living room the War Office.

Mum was not invited in for afternoon tea some days, so I meandered back and forth between the two family rooms until Gran sat me on the back doorstep with some bowls to lick cake mixture off, or a stick of rhubarb from the garden. My grandfather might put his head into the parlour once and exchange comments about the wrestling results or Fidel Castro and missiles, he had an easier rapport with Mum. Gran had her own wrestling to do in the scullery, her own domestic cold war to monitor. Her daughter-in-law had landed on her territory and was posing a strategic threat, wreaking havoc wherever she turned. She was like a hurricane, Gran said, and she nicknamed her Hurricane Kathleen.

Thirteen years was how long they had been married before I appeared, an unimaginable wait marked by post-war rationing, the shrinking of an empire and the fairytale coronation of a radiant young queen. Waiting for me they had witnessed, on an unwholesome new phenomenon called television, swing bands and jitterbug pushed aside by jive, teddy boys, guitars and bobby socks. They had cheered on a bizarre technological race into space and under the noise of the cheering my parents had filled out from the spindly teenaged newlyweds, framed on our parlour sideboard, into restless, childless thirty-somethings. Mum said I was a miracle. They had previously lost hope and succumbed to a peripatetic, childless existence in rented caravans around the countryside, wherever my father’s job had taken them. Then she had slipped in the snow one icy dawn, trying to dig out an outside lavatory at a caravan park and broken her leg. Nine months later, presto, a stork flew over with my cradle in its beak and saved their ailing marriage. I liked this idea but Gran was clearly not as sold on it.

Communal family life at ten Forest Gate was to the

two women an awkward, stubborn waiting game as my parents gathered a home deposit, each female willing this tense phase to expire without the ultimate showdown that loomed like domestic thunder in the common areas of hall, stairs, landing, kitchen and bathroom. These no man’s land areas were neutral ground and I, a born affiliate of both sides, lurked in the shadows, watching, listening, and as Gran puffed and panted through her housework in a haze of Omo and Stardrops I’d jump out and scare the living daylights out of her, just to hear her exclaim ‘Blazes!’ or ‘Great Lucifer!’ I’d fall over laughing and she’d call me a little monkey and give me that look which said she ought to have expected this from me, that I was, when all said and done, not just her grandchild but a chip off my mother’s block - a riling, perplexing reality that was, at best, tolerated in stifled, denture-grinding formalities and sombre household politeness.

If Mum and I were long-term temporary lodgers in Gran’s house my father was a formal weekend visitor. He arrived carrying a worn brown suitcase every Friday evening, in a haze of aftershave and Brylcreem. He looked exactly the same every Friday, in a thick duffle coat, a grey serge suit and a stripy shirt with starched collar, Windsor-knotted business tie, enamelled cufflinks and tie-clip. He appeared without a jacket or tie on the evenings he was home, when the two of them got in a couple of large bottles of beer and the three of us sat by the television for Dr Kildare, Dixon of Dock Green, Z Cars and Emergency Ward Ten. Mum followed Coronation Street, which my father put up with, though it was obvious that something about this was beneath his dignity, and she told me one day that this was because it reminded him of Salford where he had grown up. He always went upstairs for a second daily shave before television and he never took his shoes off downstairs. They allowed me a sip of beer one Saturday and I shuddered, which amused them. I didn’t see him laugh

often; there was a remote serenity about him. If they quarrelled, his voice was never raised, his patience apparently infinite. I sensed some resolve to my parents' niggling residential predicament was imminent. Meanwhile, Mum and I just had to ride out the war of the wireless channels each week morning and bide our time.

When the day came, our furniture van went ahead, then the three of us headed for the bus stop. Gran, teary yet glad, she said, for the extra rooms for visiting relatives, waved from the porch. There was a slight air of triumph in the way she waved at Mum who, absorbed in her own score, held her powdered nose skyward. For each the hatchet was buried. My father and his father looked relieved and weary. As we waved again from the bus stop they looked like two old bears on the front doorstep.

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Colin Burrough: Began life in Lancashire, UK. After full-time performing arts industry education, concluding 1975, moved to London, establishing a West End theatre wardrobe 'frock fairy' career. Moved in search of sunshine and muscles to Sydney, Australia, in the '80s, got comfy and stayed. Worked for some years as a travelling in-store prestige cosmetics consultant in Sydney CBD and surrounds: making-over faces in public, flogging high profile gloop and spraying passers-by with nauseatingly expensive designer fragrances. Several experimental vocations later, and after reinventing himself more times than Madonna, he eventually settled on the life of a massage therapist. Began writing within the community from 1989 with a lesbian love story *Box and Cotton*, in *Australian Short Stories* #27. 1995 *Just up the Road*, a short story about Sydney's early gay bar, The Rex Hotel, published in *Outrage Gay and Lesbian Short Story Anthology*. 1995 *Keeping the Family Name*, full length autobiographical work. 1996 – 98 wrote regular fortnightly column *Keeping up Appearances* for Sydney gay newspaper *Capital Q Weekly*. Later wrote weekly gay fictional serial, *Not Grunting, Squealing* for the first six months of *SX News*. Still here, still enjoying the sunshine and muscles, still writing leisurely and has never been back to the UK.

Jarred Connors

Come to me



Thursday night, late - you're asleep (and snoring).

Tonight, I watched you cooking in the kitchen, ghostly, through the screen door, making food for everyone. There were flashes of light from the gas stove and a deluge of noise and steam and smells that seemed so outrageous I was sort of worried you might hurt yourself. You, of course, were smoothly confident (as always) – a muso able to play any instrument, even several at once if needed, correctly, easily.

When you offered to do the food tonight I felt left out, frustrated. I'd only just arrived and I was jumpy; keen on being close to you, keen on touching you, keen on melding with you. I just wanted to kiss you properly – right away, immediately, not later, not after you'd controlled the storm you were making. I was twitchy all night, in a state – nervous and teenage-anguished – because you switched off me and on to that kitchen.

I wondered what your flatmates would've said if I had, right then, gone in there and done just that; jumped you and maybe caused you to burn the beans, or something. As I watched you, my cock responded and I had to rearrange my jeans to give it room. No one noticed. I needed to be disciplined, and that's what I was; I shouldn't let myself think that I can have all of

you, and your life, to myself.

I was so not interested in the conversation Paunch and Judy were having. They usually ignore me when you're not in the room, but if they have to talk to me, they always talk down to me, just like my mother. They were looking at the photos Paunch took at that party last weekend. I hated them, the photos, because they showed the four of us all pally; arms draped around each other, drinks to the fore, smiling and happy. Bullshit, it just wasn't true. On the way there, they'd had a flaming row in the car over nothing, and had been bickering at each other, non-stop, all that afternoon. So, it was weird; I'd spent all day looking forward to our getting together; then you're off in the kitchen and I'm dragged into a crap conversation about 'good times'.

So I waited. You seemed unaware of me or my desire to rush in and distract you. I stayed glued in the chair and didn't get up or move; I watched you, scared I might miss a glimpse of you, of something that you were doing.

My whole life is now anchored around our getting together, just two week nights and a Sunday afternoon, the rest – work, college, promises. When I'm with you, I'm completely enveloped, overpowered by you, me, us. Apart, I struggle to recall our joy, of how we filled the hours, of your smile, your smell. Alone, I'm

unhappy, isolated. I know this mightn't seem to be very healthy; I know I shouldn't be in so deep. I soar through the highs and am drained by our every encounter but I'm also lost by your need to be elsewhere at other times, and by my stupid inability to do anything definite, deliberate, about changing our, my, circumstances.

You've taken me to places I've never been before; places I'd not dare to go to if I thought about it. I think back to Tuesday, and I loved it when you, your tongue everywhere, surrounding me, clinging tightly to my body, your arms around my shoulders, your legs around my arse, making the closest embrace, externally and internally. I loved entering you, slowly, carefully, totally. I loved how you came, explosively, vocally, beaming your pleasure at me, your cum drenching our chests in celebration.

You know I love it when we get sexy together and you take charge, devouring me, swallowing me, encompassing me, so that I am, want to be, need to be, so completely adrift, drowned. Once, after-sex, while I lay there, floating, blissed out, you planted kisses on my back, my shoulder, my bum, the inside of my knees, in a quick fire, staccato, rhythm. I was gone, off somewhere else, ten minutes past the hour.

I'm sorry that we never go to my place, you know my mum never asks about who I sleep with, and I've never tried to explain. I just can't imagine her telling her friends, down at the club, what her boy got up to last night. She doesn't know you exist; you, the main, possibly the only, reason I am alive. My lack of courage really shits me.

It says so much about me that I couldn't come off that one time we tried to have sex at home, in my bed, while she was out. And then we did it ok ten minutes later, in the car, in the car park, in the basement of our unit block. Foolishly dangerous, far too many eyes. You are so good for, to, me.

Uncle Jim, he's not my uncle really, but he acts like that around my mum. Around me he acts like a sleaze bucket, and I just know he wants to touch me. I don't let him. I wouldn't ever let him touch me. It's not that he's old, it's just that he doesn't do it for me in any way or shape. Why mum keeps him around, I don't know. It's too horrid to imagine that they actually do it. Anyway, I just don't want to be around him.

Remember last week, after sex, probably quite noisy sex, I don't recall, when we were surprised by a neighbour at your door, dropping in, unannounced, looking for lost mail. The door to your room was open; the sheets and our clothes strewn everywhere across your bed and the floor, and the sun, now streaming in the window, dramatically highlighted the shambles. Wrapped only in towels, we were so distracted that we never really saw what she must've seen until after she'd gone. She never said anything at the time. (What could she have said?) I loved that we laughed about it for ages, after.

And again, last week, the sex we had in the lounge here at your place, on the sofa; urgent, quick, needy sex that was so exciting. Knowing that someone may come home soon, knowing that we'd both have to scramble to get our clothes together quickly if that were to happen; fucking joyfully as we waited for the sound of a key in the lock. Knowing all that gave our sex an urgent edge, a dangerous demand. Of course, no one did come home early, and we both came quickly; and after, I never loved you so much as we had that long, slow, delicious, shower together.

I need to explain that I want something to change, at least a little. I'm not at all sure I can fully explain what I want; and, I still have no real idea of what you want from me. You and I've been going strong for almost a year now and I want desperately, so desperately, for it to grow much, much further. But, it's obvious to me that I'm not coping with this fragmented, incomplete,

positive (you), negative (everyone else), seesaw life I, we, have made. Any doubts I have don't change the fact that I want so much to be with you, to keep on loving you. But I also need to do something about these endless everyday compromises. I know we are so very, very, good together; I assume you think so too?

Tonight, I made a decision. I need to make a break from here. Will you come with me? We could run away! Just disappear, start a new life somewhere fresh; on the coast, by the sea, anywhere else. You, me, together, cue the sunset. We could do it, I know! And I want to do it, now! Seriously. Will you come? I promise to give you my all, everything I have, I am, can be. Totally, nothing less.

Suddenly, I'm frozen with fear that maybe I don't know you that well. But I can't go on like this, so a change is going to happen; my mind is made up. If I have to, I will go alone. I need to test myself, and I need to test you.

If you do love me, please, please, please, please, join me:

South Coast train from Central, platform 34,
tomorrow, at noon.

Come to me.

Wayne Summers

An afternoon in the life of ...



The tennis ball hits me with all the sting of a snake bite. I yelp and rub the back of my leg, which has already begun to swell. Across the quadrangle a group of Year Twelve boys is laughing uproariously. I put on a brave face and continue to collect the books I'll need for my afternoon lessons. The tennis ball hits again. The pain is white hot, searing, and brings a tear to my eye, though I force it back. It's what they want. A reaction. It's why they threw the tennis ball with such force a second time. I close my locker and limp to my next class with as much dignity as I can muster.

The girls look at me with pity in their eyes. I cast my own eyes to the grey concrete.

"Don't worry about them. They're so immature," says Sharon, one of the girls I catch the bus with. She's a nice girl and at the top of every class she is in.

I smile at her but it is only the ghost of a smile. My real smiles are miles away.

"What are you talking to that faggot for?" asks Darren, a tall, solid boy who sometimes talks to me – when no-one is around to see.

My cheeks burn. I don't hear any response from Sharon nor do I dare turn around. I hurry away lest I feel the burn of the tennis ball again. The top of my right leg and my right buttock are radiating heat, throbbing beneath the fabric of my school pants.

When I think of how pathetic I am my eyes begin to water. My bottom lip quivers and I am dangerously close to just dropping to the ground and giving up.

I am distracted in biology class. My teacher keeps looking at me. I see her but it doesn't register that she's looking at me because I am quite obviously not paying attention. She has ginger hair and is fond of chewing the skin on the inside of her cheeks. She is frowning at me.

"Mr Wallace, are you with us?" she barks.

Sooner or later it registers that she is talking to me.

"Yes, Miss," I reply.

"He's just tired from taking it up the arse all night," says one of the boys sitting behind me. His voice is just loud enough so that I hear. I don't recognise it but it is accompanied by a burst of barely suppressed laughter.

"Do you have something to share with us?" Mrs Williams enquires with a stern look.

"No, Miss," comes the reply though I still can't work out who it is. I daren't turn around. It's never good to turn around. It only brings more trouble; worse trouble. I stare ahead. I promise myself that I will pay attention. My pledge is short-lived. I can hear the boys behind me whispering. I don't know what they are saying but I know it's about me, mainly because their sentences are peppered with the words 'faggot' and 'poof'. Darren is amongst them and I wonder why I ever bother talking to him. Why am I good enough to talk to on the weekends

but not at school? It reeks of hypocrisy but I would rather have part time friends than no friends at all.

“Mr Wallace! I will not ask you again. If you can’t pay attention, then don’t come to class!”

Her cheeks are red and her frown is as deep as it ever goes.

Why doesn’t she tell the other boys off? They’re making all the noise. It’s not fair. These are my thoughts as she finishes scolding me with a glare that could stop a rhino in its tracks.

When the siren goes at the end of the school day I hurry out of class. If I am quick, I have found, I can get to the bus stop before the bullies set up shop at the front gate. But as I leave the room I see that the accounting class has been let out early and already the verandahs are swarming with students. Still, I hurry to my locker. In fact I am in such a rush that I don’t see one of the boys stick their leg out. I go flying forward; my chin hits the concrete of the verandah. My arms go flying out in front of me as my teeth smash together. I bite my tongue and immediately feel the warm, metallic tang of blood. One of the boys kicks my file into the quadrangle and another picks my pencil case up and drops it in the rubbish bin.

“Tony Wallace, get up off the ground!”

It’s Mr Curtis, the accounting teacher.

This time my tears run freely. I am beaten. If the teachers are going to join in the persecution then I am lost. I have no-one on my side.

But my troubles are not quite over for the day.

I half run half hobble to the boy’s toilets to wash my face and rinse my mouth out. Despite the stiffness in my leg and the spears of pain shooting along my jaw, I have to hurry. If I miss the bus there is no way to get home. When I have finished mopping up I return to my locker and then I remember my file and pencil case. I pick my file up and dig around in the rubbish bin for my pencil case. Mr Kelly, the English teacher,

walks past shaking his head. I pull my pencil case out and hang my head as I turn and scuttle back to my locker. I open it. Someone has drawn a crude picture of an erect penis on the back of it. I can’t think about that now. I am going to miss my bus. I throw everything I need into my bag, close my locker door and run for the bus.

It pulls out just as I dash through the school gates. I run after it as best I can, shouting and waving. I see Darren and another boy, Alan, look out the back window at me. I call their names and they laugh at me. Even some of the girls look back at me as the bus gets smaller and smaller on the road towards home.

I sit down on the kerb, resting my face in my hands. I feel something slam into me. Someone says “Sorry about that” then I hear a burst of laughter. I know they aren’t sorry and I don’t even look up to see who it was.

I am alone. Everyone has left the school yard. Only the teachers remain, hidden away in their staff rooms, smoking cigarettes and bitching about students. I know I have to go into the school building, to the front office, and call my Mum. She is going to go off at me. We live half an hour away, which means an hour’s round trip. I know I am going to get into trouble but I can’t handle any more grief today. I have my limits and every day they are reached, and more often than not, breached.

It is late when I finally get the strength to stand up. I walk into the front office and catch the secretary just before she locks up.

“I need to call my Mum,” I say. “I’ve missed the bus.”

She nods to the telephone. She doesn’t mind, as long as I am quick and don’t hold her up.

“You’re joking!” Mum shouts. “I have to go all the way over there to pick you up?”

“I’m sorry, Mum,” I say. What else can I say?

I hang up, thank the receptionist and walk back out to the roadside. I sit down on the kerb again. My chin is throbbing and there is blood on my school shirt. I am

going to get it big time for that. I stare ahead. I feel that piece by piece I am turning into something hard. Parts of me are dying and are being replaced by something more resilient so I can survive each school day and the trials they always seem to bring. I am turning into a machine.

My mother pulls up. It is the car horn tooting that alerts me to her arrival. When she sees the state I am in she sucks her teeth.

“What have you been up to this time?” she asks. Her delicate features are shadowed by a frown.

“I’m sorry, Mum,” I say. “I’ll wash it.”

“And what happened to your chin?”

I stare through the windscreen. I don’t want to tell her. I am too embarrassed. I don’t want her to be ashamed of me. I’d rather be yelled at and punished than have my own mother ashamed of me.

I shrug my shoulders and hear her suck her teeth again. The rest of the journey is made in silence.

The nearer we get to home, the better I feel. Once I get to my bedroom, my sanctuary, I will be safe from the world and everyone in it. I can lose myself in a fantasy world of music and pop stars. Adam Ant. Boy George. Duran Duran. I have a crush on Nick Rhodes. I’ve lost track of how many times I have jerked off to his pretty face, staring down at me from the wall with a smile that seems pleased with my carnal attention.

“Where have you been?” asks my father. He is home early. Usually he isn’t home for hours; till after the pub has closed. He’s always grumpy. After he’s been drinking he also becomes aggressive. I hate him with every fibre of my being.

“I had to go and pick Tony up,” my mother says as she hurries into the kitchen to get dinner started. “You’re home early.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” my father snaps, slamming the fridge door before he twists the top off his first stubbie of beer for the night.

My mother doesn’t look up from her preparations. “Nothing,” she replies. “Just mentioning it.”

My father glares at her. I wonder whether he really loves her as I scurry away to my bedroom. At least the heat is off me for another day.

In my bedroom I turn on my cassette player. I am playing the latest one by Culture Club. I lie on my bed looking at the cover of the album, at Boy George. He is my hero. Because of him I know that there are other people out there like me and that is comforting. Before Boy George, before the New Romantics of the early 80s, I was truly alone. Now at least I know that while I am alone in my little country town, there are other gay people out there. I also know that if I can just endure this one last year of high school then I can join them, in the city. I can have friends and people I can talk to. I have thought about it so much I am in danger of idealising it.

My mother walks past my room. She can hear the music. She bangs on the door.

“Are you doing your homework?” she calls out.

“Yes, Mum,” I call back.

I roll off my bed and unpack my bag. I open my human biology book to discover that someone has smeared something that looks like banana over some of the pages. I let the book drop from my hands and start crying. I cry so hard that I don’t think I will ever stop. I cry because I have done nothing to deserve this. I have always been a polite, kind and friendly person. I cry because I feel as though I have no power in my life. I am weak against the constant barrage of name calling, punches, knocks, taunts and insults. I cry because I am tired, so tired.

I also cry because I know that these things will be with me till the day I die. If I am a machine then I am a camera. My memories are the photos which will never fade, which will be with me forever more. And when I look back on my life I will see that these photos are just

as clear and fresh as the day they were taken. But unlike other people, I will not want to look back at my school life. I will never be able to talk about my teen years with fondness or talk about the crazy things that we all got up to. Others have made sure of that. Others have taken from me those things that most take for granted.

And because I am a camera I have their faces still in my head. I even have the voices of some, and their names and their hurtful words.

Yes, I have been robbed.

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Wayne Summers was born and raised in rural Western Australia. He left home at 17 to study teaching in Perth. He now lives in Mount Lawley and works as an English language teacher and counsellor. He writes horror and fantasy short stories under his real name and gay erotica under the name Wayne Mansfield. He has been published many times in both the US and UK, both in print and online. This is his first piece published in his home country. Find out more at

<http://www.myspace.com/darknessgathers>

Feature: Shannon Boh

The internet offers new ways of telling our stories. Most obvious is the blog, but sites such as *myspace* and *facebook* also create options for those wanting to share their life with the world. But what's it like to post regular online updates on your life? What does it mean to have 100,000 hits? What then is public and what remains private for your many cyber fans and buddies around the world who only know you via your web persona? And why are so many young (gay) guys locking themselves in the bathroom to snap emailable self portraits in the mirror, in or out of their Bonds undies?

To find answers to all these questions Gary Dunne spoke with young Sydney photographer and blogger, Shannon Boh. Less than a year ago he launched *Shannons Official Blogspot* as a response to his images being claimed by others and as an easy way to keep distant mates updated on his life. Over time the number of daily hits has seriously taken off and Shannon now finds himself a slightly surprised cyber celebrity, with all that entails, from being recognised by strangers when out clubbing to having an In-box always crammed with emails from blog buddies.

Besides answering all our questions, even those about contemporary gay yooof's ongoing fascination with designer undies and bathroom mirrors, Shannon also kindly agreed to let us publish a selection of his posts and pix to give readers a taste of what he creates online.



"This was taken at a beach in Melbourne on a beautiful sunny day and amongst all that sunshine and brilliance, I just felt like URRGGG. I had a lot inside me that was just screaming to get out, emotion and drama, things I wasn't happy with. I literally felt like I had all this negative energy. And it all came out in the photo, capturing exactly how I was feeling. I changed it to B&W, did the editing and used a bit of photoshop artistic licence. I think that's all part of creating an image that conveys a message. It goes from being just a pretty picture to becoming an image." Shannon Boh



MARCH 4, 2008

Welcome to my official Blog spot

My name is Shannon. I live in Melbourne, Australia, and have created this blogspot to combat the rising number of cyber thieves and posers using my images as their own.

ALL the images posted on this page are my own, taken in collaboration with a local photographer and finished by myself. I have been working with this photographer for some time now to create a kind of scrapbook of images showing my development over the past 2 years. It has become a hobby for us and we both enjoy the creative process of shooting and editing photos. It is the result of our common interest that you will see here. Unfortunately many of our images have been stolen and reposted. It's is quite annoying being abused by a cyber contact who claims your pictures are actually a friend of his from Brisbane.

Like many things this page will evolve as I add more to it in the future however please enjoy the pictures posted here and leave whatever comments you like.



Interview

Autobiographical fiction (a label that captures the inherent contradictions) has been an almost defining characteristic of gay writing for decades, and now, thanks to modern technology, anyone can put their life in words and pix out there on the internet for the whole world to click on and observe. Why are so many gay guys using not just the dating faves such as *Pinkboard* and *Gaydar*, but also the more revealing social connectors such as *myspace* and *facebook*, and even the DIY chan sites? Plus there is the recent rapid growth in the number, and popularity in terms of hits, of gay blogs. Why are so many readers regularly clicking on all these pages? From our perspective the words they're posting about their lives could qualify as gay writing, but, more interestingly, how do these guys actually view what they're doing?

Nine months ago Melbourne photography enthusiast Shannon Boh began a blog, *Shannons Official Blogspot* primarily as a way of exposing various fakers who were using images of him, claiming them as their own. Over the next few months the project evolved into a journal of his daily life; a combination of unpretentious posts about his artistic, romantic and domestic adventures, peppered with pictures taken by and of him. Shannon seemed the perfect person to talk to about the current online fascination with recording daily gay life.

"I had had profiles on Gaydar, Manhunt and so on, and there were a couple of

JUNE 3, 2008

On the way back.

Hey guys,

Well i'm still working on getting set up in my new digs but things are finally settling down. It's amazing how cut off you can feel without access to the internet. I find the feeling of disconnection from the rest of the world quite interesting. Whether it's losing my phone or not being able to access the internet, the feeling of not being connected has made me realise just how global my life has become. I have friends and contacts all over the world now... messages can be sent and received instantly but why do I feel so anxious when this contact is disrupted and why does it matter to me so much?

I think I have become used to instant gratification that being online brings and the feeling of community that contact with fellow bloggers brings. This online community has been a nurturing place for me and being part of it feels like being part of something that is vastly bigger and infinitely more diverse when compared to the physical environment in which I live. But is this an illusion? Is sitting in my room in front of my PC promoting my global self doing more good than harm?

Since having limited access to the internet I have had to make more effort to catch up with friends and companions... Ive actually had to leave the house and have actual conversations and meaningful interactions with people. This is a good thing. I think quite often we sacrifice our local selves for global gratification that is ultimately meaningless if we never leave the comfort of our blogs.

JUNE 9, 2008

A busy week

Saturday night was my boys going away party... he is heading interstate to live and work. I am very sad but hopefully ill be able to join him soon.

Then it was off to the Peel to sell some raffle tickets to raise money for the water polo club. A fun night... couldn't get any photos of me there (hard to walk around with a camera in a nightclub) but do not be disappointed because I managed to snap a couple of shots with my new camera before I headed out. The boys decided we were all going to wear short shorts and not to be outdone I made sure that mine were the shortest.

modelling sites where I had posted photos. Then suddenly my pictures were doing the rounds. Friends would send me emails saying I saw your photo advertising some Eastern European porn site. For a long time it really bugged me. I even had my own pictures sent to me by a guy claiming it was him. So I started the blog originally to expose these posers. In the first couple of weeks there are all these entries naming fake profiles, now I just have a list in the side bar. I'm not as worried about it as I used to be. I don't like it, but I accept that it's going to happen. I don't mind if people use my pictures on their blog, the thing that bugs me is when they use them to make money, for example to advertise a pay-website. But the reality is that anyone who puts a photo on the internet runs that risk. Anyone can right-click it and it's out there and there's nothing you can do about it.



"Well I am a cover boy and I didn't even know! Apparently I'm from North Carolina and my name is Jakob."

Sunday we were off to DT's to sell more raffle tickets this time in my uniform. It sounds terrible but i'm sure we sold quite a few tickets just so the guys could stuff the notes down my speedo... which they did, so much in fact that the club treasurer got nervous and decided to take the money off me LOL.

All in all a successful weekend.

JULY 10, 2008

For all the world to see

Well i'm single again although i'm beginning to think it was the wrong decision.

Recently I broke up with my boyfriend Josh. He has moved interstate and there are still so many things in my life to sort and finish before I would be able to move there with him. Breaking up is hard enough but it's even worse when you both feel like you are walking away from something that is really good.

We are both on facebook and before I had even gotten home from the airport our facebook relationship status had been changed to single complete with live feed that informed everyone in my friends list of the change in situation. Text messages and emails began to flow like a torrent of sympathy at a time when all I wanted to do was hide under my bed. People who have barely even a passing interest in my life now were sharing in my pain, being nosy, gossiping and adding their opinions.

The whole experience made me think about how the internet is changing the way we open ourselves up to the world. Internet dating allows those without confidence to open up without making themselves vulnerable, blogs and camera phones make it easy to put our images all over the world. Then I thought about the way the current generation "Y" is using this technology to send pictures of themselves out to people they have never met. Millions of images floating in the ether of naked young people standing in front of their mirrors holding camera phones. What seems like fun at the time will surely have consequences. Technology moves so quickly and our ability to self-regulate our use of it does not. This is a problem that will only really make itself known in 5 or 10 years time when these teenagers are looking for work as doctors, lawyers, teachers, or entering any

"The blog simply grew from that. I started adding the odd day to day thing. I had a lot of friends from around the world who I'd met online, initially from those dating and photography websites where I'd been posting, and from my facebook and myspace pages. They could all use my blog to keep up with what I was doing. I'd just post a link to my blog on those pages. It grew from that into an on-line journal that has taken on a life of its own."



"The kilt was a hit, not only at the party, but also on the street, and at dinner, and also at the nightclub later ... it was an absolute hoot."

"I have a map on the blog showing where the hits are coming from and they're from everywhere; the Middle East, Iran and Iraq, and from the middle of Russia. Places I would have never expected there'd be people reading my blog. It's really humbling to think that people are looking at it from so far away and getting something out of it. Think of how many blogs there are out there... the number of hits you get is almost a kind of validation of what you're doing. 100,000 is just a

kind of public office. Will we be forgiving or will a moment of weakness and a camera phone be the end of it all?

SEPTEMBER 7, 2008

Super Saturday

Well spring is on its way and the weather on Saturday was so awesome that I just had to get out with my camera. I now have a zoom lens thanks to a generous friend and I couldn't wait to try it out. It's secondhand and I need to get the auto focus repaired but it's got history and character and I love it.

I went for a wander down the beach, the sun was shining and I was in the best mood all afternoon. Being creative really makes me feel connected to the universe, like the energy I'm releasing is adding to cosmic balance.



SEPTEMBER 13, 2008

Awesome weekend

Last night I hit the clubs with a mate. I haven't been going out a lot and it felt good to let my hair down and have a dance. I'm getting over the club scene down here though. The gay community down here is so small that I'm beginning to feel like a whale in a very small pond. I wouldn't ever want to be in a town smaller than Melbourne. I think that would drive me nuts.

number, but for me, it was a benchmark, and reaching it meant something.

"As the blog grew, I found the actual writing really therapeutic. If I was having a problem and I didn't really feel like I could talk to someone about it, or I just wanted to get something off my chest I could write it on the blog. I don't know how other people see it but when I'm writing, it's almost like I'm alone with myself. And what I can put into writing is different to what I'd say if I was in conversation with someone."

The thing about the internet is its intimacy. What a blogger writes tonight in the privacy of his study, a reader gets to view almost instantly in the privacy of his own study. It's an ultimate example of the small personal voice of the author.

"It is very intimate. But the internet is also a shield. When you use the internet this way you're not having a conversation with someone, so you tend to be a lot braver in your writing. You can say things that you might not say in person to someone. Take all this on-line dating, people can be quite different to what they can be in real life. It's the same thing with a blog. Things I write about are things I might not voice."

"On the other hand there are some things that I am deliberately private about, like work and where I live. There are a lot of other things going on in my life which don't end up being mentioned. It's more a glimpse of me, rather than the whole of me. Blog-buddies are interesting because they've never met you and the only impression they have of you is what they see on the blog. I consider them friends, but it's a very different relationship to something I might develop with someone I met through friends or a social group."

I caught myself on the dance floor giggling to myself at all the punters gyrating away in some kind of epileptic mating dance. It amazes me how much effort some boys will go to. It was a sea of plastic, bleached, over-solariumed, Supre-wearing twinks with too much attitude and nothing to back it up, and me in the middle in my five year old singlet and non-designer jeans with no make up or product in my hair. What kind of a fag am I. Better be careful or they might revoke my membership!

SEPTEMBER 17, 2008

Spring Cleaning

I was spring cleaning my wardrobe today and I learnt a few truths about myself. I have never been very fashion conscious mainly because I can never find anything that fits me properly without shopping in the kids section.

I was mildly surprised to discover that I only really have 3 pairs of jeans, 5 old t shirts, a few pairs of shorts and a few jumpers that are part of my regular rotation compared to the real surprise which was that I own 52 pairs of underwear, 20 assorted speedos and 12 pairs of short (and I do mean short) shorts.

Now I know I am a summer person and quite often I am wearing very very little but I didn't really think about it until today. Mostly I own so many pairs of underwear because I am constantly finding something I like. Nothing makes you feel more confident than walking around in brand new jocks and like Mum says if I ever get hit by a bus at least i'll have a clean pair on.

Hi my name is Shannon and I have a underwear addiction.



For Shannon, regularly writing about his life is fairly new, but he has been documenting his life with pictures for much longer.

"For me, this whole thing about recording goes right back to way before the blog. When I was in high school I had very bad acne and was bullied. I was a skinny, nerdy kid. It was very difficult. I never had a lot of confidence. Then I met a wonderful guy and I started recording myself with photos. I've got hard-drives full of pictures, thousands of them. For me recording the journey from then till now is really important. I can look back and see where I've come from.

"Modelling as such has always only been a hobby. I would love to do more of it and I've had some great experiences with it, but it's a little bit embarrassing when people say I'm a model. I don't think of it that way. I guess I'd say I'm more of an exhibitionist (LOL).

"The first modelling shoot I did was for a chain of solariums. I was so excited to get that job. It was through a friend, not something I got through an agency or a website. What they wanted was a body landscape, with skin tones, and they said you can either wear flesh-cloured underwear or you can do it nude. For the life of me I couldn't find flesh-coloured men's underwear, couldn't find it anywhere. I know now about dance suppliers. But back then, I wasn't walking into some ladies lingerie store and asking for a flesh-coloured G-string. So I said, stuff it, I'll do it nude. That was a giant leap for me to be able to be there in front of not only the photographer, but also the photographer's assistant, the marketing manager, the advertising person and another model. To just be there naked and be photographed. I was thinking about how a year ago I didn't want to take my shirt off, and here I am naked in front of the camera. And they were amazing photos, they look fantastic.

OCTOBER 18, 2008

Fun at Ikea

Had a good day yesterday. Went down to the beach again with some mates for a bit of a sunbathe. I have been working on my tan line so that it's juuuust right for summer. I was surprised how many lurkers there were in the bushes. It seriously was like Meercat Manor. After braving the leathery old nudists and a few unsavoury characters we headed off to Ikea to buy a new bed.

Ikea was huge and yet still managed to be either out of stock or down-sizing its range on nearly everything we looked at. After negotiating the arrows that lead you like bread crumbs through the maze, you finally collect your items and load them onto the trolley that crashes into everything and everyone because the guy that designed it didn't think that four same-sized wheels was really necessary. I half expected to be served at the checkout by the Swedish Chef from the Muppets.

The best part though was the car park. I swear I'm gonna make a reality TV show about Ikea car parks and become a millionaire. Not only do you have to run the gamut of clueless mums, irate dads and manic children but when you finally get a spot at the loading zone you then have to play the most diabolic game of tetris just to get all the stuff in your car.

Even with a four wheel drive we struggled to pack the queen sized bed into the back. Imagine three queers laughing hysterically in the middle of the car park as they try to fold a mattress in half and jam it in the boot because one of the seats is broken and won't fold down, only to realise in the end that somebody is going to have to take a cab home.

OCTOBER 24, 2008

Porn Porn Porn

I was watching 60 Minutes last night and apparently Australia is the fifth biggest producer of Internet porn in the world... go Aussie GO!

The gadget generation has arrived and anybody with the Internet and a camera can now go global. This blog is proof. There are billions of people on this planet and if I could get only a 1000 of them to pay \$10 a month to look at me in my jocks I'd have no trouble paying the rent. I'd be making money while I slept.

Now if only I could break my habit of giving it away for free!

"So for me modelling is not a career. I'm not tall enough for catwalk and that sort of work anyway. For me it's always been about challenging myself and saying, I can do this. Then doing it and moving on. I know now I can do it. So now I'm focusing more on my photography."

A majority of the pictures on his blog of himself are collaborations between himself and his photographer. Together they decide on what they're going to try. The photographer then takes the photos, and Shannon does the photoshopping when necessary. It's a small step from that to actually taking photographs. Shannon's listed on ModelMayhem, a freelance modelling site, as both a photographer and as a model. His own pictures are on another blog, Skirbie Photography.



"Full credit to my friend Steven who posed for this in his swimmers only metres from a major road on a cool spring morning... I'm particularly fond of the sphere. A great sculpture I found on top of a hill."

NOVEMBER 23, 2008

Moving madness

Well here I am in Sydney and I have to say that it took me a couple of days to really come to terms with the fact that this is now my new home. I think it will take me a few months to really settle into the place. Today is the first day that I have really felt ready to embrace the city and what it has to offer. I arrived here with one suitcase, my camera and my board. My computer and DVDs will arrive later this week. I have packed light. There is beauty in simplicity I think. I am looking on this as a fresh start.

This morning I sent my new address out to my closest friends and family. Within moments my friends were sending me text messages saying, "I can see where you live." Google is an amazing thing. I miss them a lot but it reminded me that they really are not that far away.

I look forward to taking you along on the journey with me as I discover what new adventures this place has to offer. Every journey begins with the first step.

DECEMBER 1, 2008, 2008

Drive it like you stole it!

I had my first bus trip in Sydney today. I was lucky that I had a friend with me to guide me through it LOL. After explaining to me the most complicated ticketing system I have ever experienced we settled into the back seat. By the time we arrived at Bronte Beach my knuckles were white and my hands had to be prised off the seat in front of me. I have never seen a bus driver drive his bus like it was a go kart until today. We went off road at one point, over curbs and narrowly missed a concrete pylon. I half expected Keanu Reeves to fall through the skylight and yell "there's a bomb on the bus".

We did arrive safe and sound at the beach and I was chuffed to discover that it had only taken about 20 minutes to get there. The surf wasn't great and after not being in the water for such a loooooooooong time I managed to make a total fool of myself. I did however have a blast and that's what counts really. This could signal a whole change in lifestyle for me. No more two hour car trips to find some surf. Sydney is growing on me LOL.

"Now I take the camera where-ever I go because I like to have photos for the blog. I think they're a great way of showing things you can't easily write about. The pictures can be a little bit pervy sometimes. I make no excuses for posting the Speedo photos. My exhibitionist side comes out But also I'm documenting what's happening. Pictures can say a lot about friendships and things like that, emotions that would be really hard to convey in words. For Mid Summa for example I went out with the intention of taking photos and writing about it. I wanted people to know about what I'd been doing during my weekend in Melbourne."

In one post Shannon talked about people not thinking about the consequences of posting soft and hardcore self-portraits – it's all too easily done with a digital camera, a mobile phone or a webcam. At the softcore end the internet is currently awash with free product placement for Bonds comfy undies and Swedish bathroom mirror manufacturers. Hardcore amateur porn is equally viral.

"I think it's almost a generational thing as well. You look at the guys who are doing this, most are in their teens or twenties, and they've grown up always having this technology around them. It's nothing to them to take a photo and send it to their friends, nothing to them to take a picture and keep it on their phone. It's really strange and it hasn't been possible before. We're only going to see the consequences of this in the next five or ten years. It's so easy to just snap a shot."

The sun is shining today and I am reminded of all the things I am thankful for. I have one more thing to add to my list now... HOT SURFER BOYS IN TIGHT WET SUITS LOL.



DECEMBER 30, 2008

A little bit of housekeeping

Thanks for all your messages of support over the last few days. I thought I might take the time to answer a few questions that have been coming up over the past month. This may be my last post for a little while as I have to move out of my current home again for a couple of weeks and I'm not sure what my Internet access will be like.

I have always been fairly guarded about the specific details of my personal life. Mainly this is because I want to maintain some degree of privacy but I'll do the best that I can...

The first reason I moved to Sydney was to be with my boyfriend of one year. That has not worked out and we are no longer together although we are still close, and remain friends.

The second reason I moved to Sydney was for work which is

"Take some 18 year-old taking photos of himself in his Bonds underwear. He whips it out, goes click and posts them all on-line. It's that voyeurism thing. That 'I'm almost famous' attitude. Look at me, my pictures are all over the internet. Everyone knows me and my hot Bonds underwear. There's a bit of that as well. My point was - what happens in ten years' time when he wants to be a doctor?"

"You can't look at it on its own. The pictures are only part of a much larger thing. Look at myspace and facebook, the on-line profiles, the blogs even, photos are an integral part of it all. People use these things to keep in touch with the rest of the world. When they're out taking photos, part of it is voyeurism, part of it is exhibitionism, and part of it is recording."

"On my blog I could write a thousand words, but sometimes a photo can say a whole lot, more much more concisely. My sister, my brother, my friends - everyone goes out, and everyone takes photos. It's an extension of the old thing of taking photos at family events such as Christmas. Once upon a time the family owned one camera and used film. Now everyone has a digital camera. It's just that the technology has made so much more possible."

Gary Dunne

now looking like it will go ahead after some waiting and stress.

If I sound a bit down it's because things have not gone as planned here but I am still happy.

No I will not be spending New Years eve alone.

No I do not do full frontal nude photos... not yet at least hehe

I hope that that has answered at least some of your questions.

I hope you all had a wonderful Christmas and I hope you all have a fantastic new year.

JANUARY 4, 2009

100,000!!!

My first 100,000 hits!!!

Yeeeeeha!

Well guys first I want to say thank you to you all for your comments and your questions since this blog started. It really has gone from being a tool for exposing the fakers into what has now become my online journal. It has been a really great experience sharing the last 8 or 9 months with you and I look forward to many more posts. There have been times when it has been difficult to keep making regular updates and I thank you for keeping up with me. In many ways I enjoy sharing my thoughts with all my blog buddies and it still amazes me to think that I have friends from all over the world who I have never even met or spoken to. This blog is the reason we may have met but It is not the reason we are friends.

MONDAY, JANUARY 19, 2009

That Midsummer glow!

Well I am so glad I came down to Melbourne for the Midsummer carnival. I am back in Sydney again but what an awesome trip. I feel totally renewed. It was so good to see my boys again. Friends really are worth their weight in gold and I needed mine. I kept it as a surprise and didn't tell anyone.



"I have gone from a boy too scared to wear a singlet in a night club to a young man who can dance on bars in a speedo, march in the Mardi Gras and cruise Sydney harbour in pink floral swimwear."

The day was stunning and the carnival was a huge success. I had such a good time saying hi to all the people I miss right now. Carnival is part of Melbourne's GLBTI Midsummer Festival and is basically a big party in a park culminating in the "T Dance" under the stars. Last year it poured rain but this year was perfect. I finally got the chance to just go out and have fun again. I have not been able to do that in a long time here because I don't have a close group to go out with. That's why it's been so difficult because when you have nothing to do, you sit and over think everything.

I took the camera and got heaps of awesome photos. After picnicking in the park, talking and listening to music we headed off to the T Dance. Day slowly turned to night and we danced and danced. God it felt good to dance again... have you ever danced around the house in your underwear? I recommend it. My heart was full and my mates were around me bathing me in support and love. The music ran through me like a cleansing rain and I was at peace again.

Then as the perfect end to the perfect day I strolled home with a bestie and stumbled upon a late night gathering in the park. There were fire twirlers and people playing music just chilling out and talking and drinking and loving. I snapped a few photos and enjoyed the peace and calm of the moment.

I feel so happy right now. My boat is turning downstream again!



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As the top of its front page constantly updates with newer entries, a blog flows back ceaselessly into the past. Reversed into chronological order, as we've done here with a small selection of Shannon's posts since March 2008, it feels more like a conventional narrative. But unlike fiction, it doesn't end neatly with all the loose ends tied up and resolved. Tomorrow there will be another post.

For the complete story and to find out what happens after January 19, head on over to

[Shannons Official Blogspot.](#)

Shannon's photography can also be found at:

[ModelMayhem.com](#)

[Skirbie Photography](#)

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