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BY ANDY THOMPSON

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Dean's Revenge

I was recently in the Northern New South Wales town of Murwillumbah. The town had recently suffered its largest flood in living memory and I was assisting with some flood insurance claims. It's thirsty work. Not as hard as cleaning the thick mud from your house or workplace but sweaty work all the same.

While on a break, I walked into a downtown store to buy an icy cold bottle of water. The lady behind the counter squinted in my direction for a few seconds and then approached the counter.

"Is your name Dean?"

"Ahh no. It isn't."

"Dean who used to be in the Comancheros Motorcycle Club?"

"No, no. Andrew. I'm from Brisbane. Motorcycles terrify me. Haha..."

"Are you sure your name isn't Dean?"

"I'm, like, 98% sure, lady."

"Mmmmmkay."

"Um, can I have my water now?"

As I left the shop to return to my dusty rental car I heard her whisper, "Hey Cheryl, Dean is back in town."

Sorry Murwillumbah, Dean's second reign of terror has begun in earnest.

In Murwillumbah, New South Wales, Australia

Life, uh...Finds a Way.

I've done a bad thing. I've created a monster. Well, a flock of monsters.

I started feeding a pair of magpies a month ago. My wife wasn't happy with it so I did it on the sly. She'd go to the shops and I'd run out with some cashew nuts and call them down with a whistle. I can hand feed one but the other hangs back and watches. My wife asked me last weekend if I was still feeding them and I smiled and said no. The next morning I heard a magpie calling at the back door. He was right there yelling at me to get some bloody nuts. If the door was open he'd have sauntered inside. I looked at my wife, she looked at the bird and back at me and said "No more..."

I haven't fed them for weeks but unfortunately they now greet me when I come home like a pack of excited velociraptors; sprinting down the lawn to the car, chirping at me. Yesterday there were four magpies, all yammering at me to go and get some tasty nuts. Obviously the word is getting out that I'm an easy touch. I'm the nut-man, apparently.

"See that bald prick? Yeah? Well, he gives us nuts. Go and ask him for some."

Yesterday I had to step over them to get to the front door. I was shooing birds out of my way like a crazy man thrashing in a pile of leaves. This morning one of them found out where our bedroom window is. At 5:30 am. Turns out I don't need an alarm. I have a small black and white reminder to get out of bed and get some goddamn nuts.

This is my life now.

In Eight Mile Plains, Queensland, Australia

You Have the Right to Remain Terrified!

While driving to work this morning I saw a motorcycle cop, who was winding his way through a traffic jam on the freeway, yelling at people who were using their mobile phones. He didn't give them tickets, he just yelled at them. He'd ride up next to a car, shake his head at the driver and then gesture at them to wind the window down. Then he'd unleash a torrent of abuse not unlike an obstinate schoolteacher trying to corral a group of boisterous kids on a field trip.

It was awesome.

I had my window down and he pulled up next to me and saw my beaming smile and said "I love terrifying people in the morning..." and sped off down the road towards his next unsuspecting victim, laughing heartily.

I laughed too.

I had my phone wedged in between my legs at the time.

In Holland Park, Queensland, Australia

Some Science Teachers Just Want to Watch the World Burn.

If there's one thing I enjoy it's a flagrant disregard of safety by an authority figure. Nothing made me grin more as a child than seeing my father march down to the incinerator with a load of potentially flammable material and 4 litres of petrol on a Saturday afternoon.

My Form 3 science teacher blew up our classroom on a weekly basis, often for no apparent reason other than to watch things burn. Sure, he'd often add some actual science into the lesson but we all knew how excited he was from that manic glint in his eye when he fired up the Bunsen burner.

"Thompson, hold that Magnesium in the flame, will you? No, you don't need safety glasses, you pansy. Just squint, lad!"

He once he made salt by putting a chunk of sodium into a barely sealed jar of chlorine gas. As anyone who knows chemistry will confirm, the explosion and subsequent voluminous discharge of noxious green gas was astonishing. Yes, we all should have been wearing safety equipment and many kids developed hacking coughs not unlike those heard in the trenches of Ypres in World War 1, but we all enjoyed tasting the end product to ensure it was actually salt. Well, salt-flavoured charcoal with a slight undertone of mesothelioma.

His teaching methods may have been a little unorthodox and downright dangerous but his enthusiasm enamoured me with the world of science. I can't help but think kids these days would have a greater interest in science if it was taught by ruddy-faced men with no eyebrows.

In Whanganui, New Zealand

Your Screaming is Making Me Nervous.

I haven't met a person from Finland who wasn't a genuine, fear-inducing psychopath. When I finished school I worked in a remote gold mine in Western Australia's Pilbara region. There I met a geologist who terrified all the other workers, especially when he was driving. His name was Timo. Visiting far-flung exploration sites was one task we did regularly and I was always stuck with Timo on these long and dangerous drives in the desert. "Oh, Andy, I think I know a shortcut," Timo would say, as he twisted the steering wheel and swerved off an escarpment. "This is fun, yes? HAHA! I learn to drive rally car in snow and sand is like snow only not cold. HAHAHA!" "HAHAHA...FUCK" I would reply, as I gripped the seat with my limpet-like butt cheeks.

His manic chortling wasn't helped by the fact he was perpetually sunburnt and had Cornflake sized chunks of skin peeling off his nose. Seatbelts were an optional accessory while driving in the mine. Well, except when Timo was driving that is. "You think your pansy safety strap will save you from your death if we roll off this cliff? HAHAHAHA!" "HAHAHA...FUCK"

One night, at a remote campsite, I caught him trying to catch wild dingoes. He was lying in the dirt, wrapped up in a sleeping bag with a piece of meat in his hand. The dingoes circling the camp would come close but he could never grab one. When I asked why he said "I would like to touch one to see what their fur feels like. HAHAHA."

"HAHAHA..."

In Telfer, Western Australia, Australia

Don't Forget to Knock!

I'd be lying if I said that, as a kid, I didn't take any joy in my sister's misfortune. Sure, I chortled when a bee became tangled in her hair and she sprinted across the backyard howling while my father chased her in a vain attempt at bee removal, the screaming intensifying in a similar fashion to the buzzing emanating from her blonde locks, but you have to draw the line sometime.

That time was in 1983 and we had sailed to Whitehaven Beach in our dinky little sailboat. This was before planes and helicopters landed every half hour and we had the squeaky, gleaming beach to ourselves. An outdoor toilet was set back from the beach and, after being on a boat with a bucket as your toilet, the first port of call for everyone was this rustic throne. My sister went first.

As we waited by the water's edge, dipping our toes in the refreshing water, she came sprinting onto the beach screaming, closely followed by a large goanna which waddled out onto the sand, blinked at us and then sauntered back to the tree line. She recounted her adventure after calming down. She had opened the door and was about to sit down when she heard rustling emanating from inside the toilet. Before she could peer into the foetid abyss, an angry goanna poked its head out, hissed at my sister and then clambered out of its own personal snack-hole. As terrifying as this scene was I can't help but side with the large lizard.

No one likes being interrupted during lunch.

In Whitsunday Island, Queensland, Australia

Sometimes the Sweetest Things are the Most Dangerous

Don't stick things into electrical sockets. Let sleeping dogs lie. Never anger pregnant women. These are 3 lessons I adhere to in life. Not observing one of them will result in a serious facial injury and a painful death. Dogs and electricity are also dangerous. When my wife was pregnant we had a Craving Incident. One afternoon she suggested we find a bakery somewhere so she could indulge in a vanilla slice. When I laughed and said there wasn't a bakery nearby she indicated that finding a nearby bakery would be in my best interests and Bad Things would happen if a vanilla slice didn't appear in her hands. Right. Off to the bakery we go. We arrived at a small shop staffed by a pudgy boy who looked like he had sampled every third sausage roll. I spied a vanilla slice and asked him for it as my wife waited patiently.

One vanilla slice, mate.

That isn't a vanilla slice. That's a Neapolitan slice.

Okay. I'll take it.

But it isn't a vanilla slice. I mean, it's kinda like a vanilla slice but it isn't. You know?

Oh yes. I understand. I simply don't care. I will take it.

But it isn't a vanilla slice! It's different.

Look mate, don't try and talk me out of this sale. Take my money.

I don't think you'll like it.

At this point I assumed the kid wanted it for his mid-afternoon snack but before I could haggle any further my wife approached the counter and said, ever so sweetly...

Just put the fucking slice in a bag and no one gets hurt, okay?

In Nerang, Queensland, Australia

There's a Monster Inside All of Us

My family moved around a lot when I was a kid so I was often forced into making friends quickly. I became a bit of a target when I moved to New Mexico. Being a brash, pale Australian kid stands out in that environment. Soon enough, some tough kids started picking on me after school. The bullying was relentless and I didn't know what to do. I couldn't fight and even if I could, I was outnumbered. Snitching meant I'd get hurt even more. One afternoon 3 of them cornered me as I was walking home. After some jostling, they punched me in the stomach and a switch flipped inside me. I lost my mind and started screaming at them. Like, full-on-what-the-fuck-are-you-looking-at meth-junkie crazy. Even in my blood-rage, I knew I couldn't fight so I ripped my shirt off, threw it on the ground and ran in a tight circles while screaming as loudly as I could in the Aussiest accent I could muster.

I'LL FUCKEN EAT YOUR FUCKEN FACE, YOU FUCKEN PACK OF GALAHS! FAIR DINKUM!!

I threw a couple of bins vaguely in their direction and started snarling and growling at the one closest to me. "YOU'RE FIRST, YOU FUCKEN TWAT!" I screamed and they looked at each other and ran off. I stood there shaking, possibly from adrenaline but most likely because it was November in New Mexico and I was half naked. That was the day I learned that you don't have to throw a punch to win a fight. You just have to look like, if given the chance, you'll eat an ear or nose if it pops into your field of vision.

In Farmington, NM, United States

It's Not You, It's Me. And the Alpacas.

I hate confrontation. I'd rather tell a ridiculous lie than get into a verbal skirmish. As everyone knows, cancelling a gym contract can be a prolonged and exasperating battle. I went through this process several years ago. When I told the orange woman at the front counter of the gym my intentions she frowned and one of the managers, a pony-tailed lady with a thousand-watt smile, came bounding out of the office.

So, Andy. You'd like to terminate your contract with us

Uh, yes.

Any particular reason?

Here was the point where I was should have been honest.

Yes, I'm moving and won't be able to come into this gym and there aren't any of your gyms near my house.

That's what I should have said. Instead, I stammered, uh...yeah. I'm moving to Argentina.

Why? Why did I say that? Of course, now that I started the lie, I couldn't leave it at that. I had to embellish it. I had to add to the lie until it was a snowballing jumble of words and falsehoods.

Yes, I'm moving there to research the sustainability of alpaca farming. Also, I met a lady over there. Her name is Maria and she has a son called Jose and I'm going to live with her.

And the alpacas?

Huh? Yes. The alpacas. Amazing animals... I trailed off.

I've been to Argentina twice. Where are you going to live?

Shit. She raised a solitary manicured eyebrow.

Buenos Aires. They're, uh, urban alpacas. Are we done?

Mm-hmm. Enjoy Argentina, Andy, she said with a smirk.

I think I got away with it.

In Brisbane, Queensland, Australia

Sex-Ed on the Fly

The first comedy competition I entered was in a comedy festival in a sleepy little village in NSW 7 years ago. My wife and I had a baby boy and it was to be our first holiday. Our plan was to stay in a nice resort and I would amaze the locals with my witty wordplay and stage shenanigans.

My heat was at 2pm. I hadn't performed in the daytime so I was nervous but I trusted my material. Upon entering the venue I saw it was full of hippies and country folk leaning against the walls oozing that small-town charm. And smell. I sat backstage and peeked out to wave at my wife who was sitting with our son looking perplexed (I later learned she'd just found some gravel in her salad). She stood out because she'd washed her hair in the last week. There were also about 40 kids in the front row staring up at the stage with wide eyes and big smiles. I started panicking because my material was a bit rude. Well, not just a bit. It was really filthy so I spent the next couple of minutes removing jokes and was left with about 3 minutes of semi-blue material. My name was called and I walked on stage to moderate applause and a wafting haze of patchouli and incense.

I told my first joke. Silence. The kids stopped smiling. I freaked out and reverted to my crude material. It was horrible. My set ended early and I shame-walked off stage. As I walked to my wife I heard a 7 year old girl ask her father, "Daddy, what's a hand-job?"

In Bangalow, New South Wales, Australia

Wait Until You See The Whites of Their Eyes...

“Move over. I need to rest my gun there” isn’t something I’d prepared myself to hear. I was inspecting a site near the town of Dululu and the farmer was having dingo problems. Specifically, dingoes eating his calves. As we bounced along in his modified 4WD golf-buggy contraption, I admired the ruthlessness of a farmer. Being able to dispatch an animal isn’t something I’d ever been good at. I once cried while gutting and scaling a fish. It was a delicious fish but I still cried. We came to a small fenced area with a gate that was guarded by a monstrous bull.

Gee that’s a big fellow, I said as I chewed a stalk of grass in what I hoped was an authentic manner.

Yup. That’s Terry. He’s a bit of a wanker and had to be separated from the other bulls. He starts fights, you see?

I nodded. I’ve known some Terrys in my life.

Jump out and help me with the gate

Sure. Will Terry charge us?

Yeah, maybe. Don’t take your eyes off him.

I stared at Terry. Don’t be a wanker Terry, I said under my breath. Terry appeared to have super hearing because he started tossing his head and pawing the ground with his hooves while he ogled me.

When a bull starts pawing at the ground, does that mean he’s going to charge?

Yup.

Ah.

The farmer turned around, strutted up to the slavering bull and slapped it with his hat

Don’t be a fucking wanker, Terry!

Yeah Terry. Don’t be a wanker, I mumbled as we manoeuvred around the confused bull.

In Dululu, Queensland, Australia

"10-4, Good Buddy. What did that mouth-breathing pilot say?"

While recently driving a 4WD with no radio reception and only the homoerotic chatter of truck drivers on the CB radio to entertain me, I was reminded of an intense moment of childhood terror. My parents bought me a pair of walkie-talkies when I turned 8. Sure, these weren't high-grade gadgets and you had to be in the same room as the other person when you used them but they looked snazzy. I'd often hear truckers chattering amongst the static and on hot nights I'd lie awake and listen to them tell lewd but hilarious jokes. One afternoon I was showing my friends how to use the walkie-talkies when we heard several truckers shooting the breeze. For some reason, I decided to chat with them. Instead of saying hello, I spoke loudly in the best "grown-up" voice I could muster.

MAYDAY! MY PLANE IS ABOUT TO CRASH! HELP ME!

I stifled a snort of laughter and looked at my horrified friends who gawked at me like I'd just run over their cat. The walkie-talkie then burped to life with questions from the truckers.

What's that mate, your plane is about to crash?

Someone call the police!

What did that young lady say?

What had I done? I spent every night for the next month waiting for a story in the news of juvenile delinquents faking plane crashes. I was certain the police would burst into our house and I'd be frogmarched out the door. I spent many nights wondering if the police would let me take my walkie-talkies to prison.

10-4. The food is really bad in here and I miss my mum.

In Moranbah, Queensland, Australia

Fore!

I've always been fascinated by nudists. It isn't the wobbly bits that intrigue me (yeah, okay, maybe a little) but the driving force behind the compulsion to walk around naked in public. The first time I ever encountered nudists was during a family holiday in Broome, Western Australia. We visited Cable Beach for a camel ride at sunset one afternoon and found after ten minutes, to our complete surprise, that the camel trek took us along the stretch of beach dedicated to nudists. My mum spied a leathery old man sauntering towards us with a golf club, thwacking a ball every couple of yards.

"Is...is that man naked?" she asked.

Oh yes. There was no mistaking his pendulous dong waving in the breeze as he waved to us.

"Afternoon folks!"

The next day I decided to ride my rented bicycle to Cable Beach. I told my family I was looking at souvenirs when I was actually going to try nudism out for myself. I found a secluded part of the beach, stripped off, applied generous amounts of sunscreen to my body and my previously nocturnal wang and sat back against the warm sand. I was a nudist and, by God, it felt liberating. It also felt rather hot. I looked around at the other nudists who all appeared to be on the wrong side of seventy years old. They didn't seem to be feeling the heat but their gristly, tanned hides spoke volumes. Mainly about cancer. Having Scottish ancestry meant my time in the sun was limited and I had another fifteen minutes before I turned into a walking leg of roast pork. I closed my eyes but a short time later heard an inquiring voice nearby.

"Excuse me, mate. Have you seen my golf ball?"

I shook my head and reached for my pants, trying to avoid looking at the schlong oscillating at my eye level.

I guess you could say my life as a nudist was short but eventful.

In Cable Beach, Western Australia, Australia

It's Raining Spiders!

There's nothing worse than being sick while travelling. Sure, careening off a ravine in a poorly maintained and possibly flaming Columbian bus would suck but that feeling of helplessness when you're sick can be suffocating. When I was 21 I became so sick I thought I was going to die. Funnily enough, I was on a bus at the time.

I finished my shift working in a night club at 5am and went to the bus terminal. I wasn't feeling the best but there were no chemists open in the vicinity of the bus station. 24-hour food joints that sold desiccated dim-sims? Yes. Chemists? No. By the time the bus reached the town of Warwick I was feverish and shaking. Every bone in my body ached. I rang my mum who told me to buy some paracetamol and to try and get some sleep. I dry-swallowed three tablets and leaned my pillow up against the window.

That's when the spiders attacked me.

Not real ones, you see, but ones that appeared in my feverish dream. Big thick hairy-legged spiders with protuberant bellies that chattered as they cascaded from the air-conditioning vents down the windows of the bus and onto my face. I remember screaming in my dream. It all seemed so real.

I then felt someone shaking my shoulder. I opened my bleary eyes and saw that the bus had stopped and the driver was asking me if I was okay and if I was on anything. Turns out I wasn't just screaming in my dream but also in real life. The rear of the bus had emptied. People, in their haste to get away, had knocked over drinks and chip packets. A lady was crying.

"No, I'm just really sick" I said to the burly driver.

"Sure. But if you're a junkie, I'm fucken kickin' you off, you got that?"

I croaked in the affirmative.

If only there was a ravine nearby.

In Tamworth, New South Wales, Australia

Run! He's Behind You!

When I was a kid, Dad brought home an orphaned emu chick from work. We named him Eddie and he was a part of our family until Mum started to freak out about the feathered dinosaur living in our backyard whose curious beak was conveniently at the same height as my eyeballs. One night he disappeared and my parents told me the back gate was accidentally left open and he'd snuck out into the bush. A short time later a tame emu was spotted around town. Eddie had returned.

Eddie gave no fucks whatsoever. He'd run at people and get all up in their face which is a kind of intimidating and obnoxious thing for a six foot tall bird to do. Still, kids from town would actively seek him out because Eddie was pretty friendly unless you were carrying something shiny. Eddie just about loved shiny things and would harass people into relinquishing their shiny thing by hissing at them and chasing them relentlessly. He didn't go far and we'd see him once a week or so roaming the town. Some days he'd appear at the local sports ground or at the school. One morning I saw him looking into the windows of a neighbour's house, most likely for something shiny. One day a kid put some tassels on his bike and toured the neighbourhood showing off his bling, ringing his bell and smirking at everyone. We were all suitably impressed. The bell was loud and the tassels were shiny. You better believe Eddie liked those tassels too. I still recall laughing so hard until I peed my pants at the sight of a screaming eight year old kid pedalling his bike as fast as he could as Eddie the Emu loped alongside him pecking at the handlebars.

I guess Eddie didn't like show-offs either.

In Dysart, Queensland, Australia

Do You Want to See the Man With the Sourdough Legs?

I've always trusted doctors, including the ones who say "cut down on the drinking" and "would it kill you to go for a run every now and then?" I find people who distrust doctors troubled in the head. Sure you hear the odd horror story but, generally, doctors know their stuff.

However, there are exceptions.

I was once the subject of one such exception when I was sick with a virus which had left me feverish, shaky and somewhat bed-ridden. I endured numerous blood tests, including one where a giggling nurse said "Do you think you might have AIDS? Because your symptoms sound just like AIDS. LOL," but nothing malicious showed up in my bloodstream. The suggested treatment was to take Aspirin and see how it goes. Soon the shaky fever abated but I developed a weird pain in my legs and the flesh below my knees started to resemble warm, goeey dough. You could prod a finger at it and leave a visible indentation. After terrifying some friends at a party with my soggy leg, I decided to see a doctor. A good, old-fashioned knowledgeable doctor. I showed him my leg and he prodded it with a finger and said a phrase you never want to hear a doctor say.

"Hmm. I've never seen that before. I'll get one of the other doctors."

Another doctor came in, prodded my leg and gave the same diagnosis.

"That's weird. Go and get Steve," one of them said to a nurse. Steve came in. I didn't know who Steve was but by this stage I was kind of hoping Steve was a doctor who had his shit together. Steve looked at my leg, squeezed it, laughed and said "Yeah, I've never seen that before either. Stop taking Aspirin see how it goes."

Thanks Doc. Thanks a lot.

In Greenslopes, Queensland, Australia

Let Sleeping Koalas Lie

It's widely known that Australian wildlife is dangerous. In actual fact, most native Australian animals spend more time plotting your demise than eating and procreating. I came upon this realisation as a child one dusty afternoon in the bush behind our house in Moranbah, Central Queensland. Some kids had spotted a koala sleeping in a tree and, as with all small country towns populated by bored children whose only excitement in the previous 12 months was when the takeaway shop had started stocking chicken salt, this news spread like wildfire. I went and looked at the critter with my friends and saw that it was only about 3 metres up a tree. Naturally, my friends all goaded me into climbing the aforementioned tree in order to get a closer look at this dozing ball of fur. "It's a sleeping koala" they said. "It can't hurt you!"

Before you could say "razor sharp claws" and "chlamydia", I was grunting my way up the tree, eyes firmly fixed on the koala. I had no idea what I was going to do when I got up there but I quickly reached the large branch it was perched on. I shuffled closer and raised my hands in triumph as I looked in the direction of my mates. In hindsight, the whole raising of the arms thing was probably a bad idea because the koala instantly exploded into action and started growling. It then slowly turned and began making its way along the branch towards me, rumbling like a badly maintained motorbike. I started mewling in terror before losing my grip and promptly falling out of the tree. As I lay on the ground in tremendous pain I looked up and saw the koala staring down at me with malevolence in its eyes. Then it urinated, chuffed in my direction and climbed higher. My friends were nowhere to be seen.

That's how the legend of the Flesh-Eating Koala evolved at Moranbah East State School

In Moranbah, Queensland, Australia

It's a Broad Lic Nic!

I wanted to become a comedian when I first heard Bill Cosby. I felt the same when I was introduced to the Doug Anthony All Stars (D.A.A.S.) in the late '80s. We used to sit late at night at boarding school and listen to their album Icon while nibbling contraband biscuits, giggling furtively while reciting the lyrics, hoping we wouldn't get caught. I relished the Tuesday nights when we were allowed to watch The Big Gig on TV and I would have given my left pinkie toe to have seen them live.

As fate would have it, I didn't have to relinquish my squishy little digit to see them perform. I had moved to the Telfer Gold Mine on the edge of the Great Sandy Desert in Western Australia for vacation work after school had finished and, while sweating profusely and eating errant flies, I saw a poster for a D.A.A.S. show at the local town hall. \$20 a ticket and free booze! I was over the moon. Of course, the seasoned comedian I am now would have shuddered at the thought of a bunch of miners drinking free grog but I didn't care.

I snagged a seat right at the front (what an idiot!) and enjoyed the energetic 20 minutes set D.A.A.S. put on before the miners started brawling and the lads left the stage. I also scurried out of the venue in fear of getting a can of beer to the noggin. I was lucky enough to meet Tim, Paul and Richard at the rear of the hall just after relieving my stomach of its contents. They seemed genuinely glad that I was a fan and shook my hand and gave me a warm beer from their rider. As I stumbled off into the vomit-spattered spinifex I clearly remember Tim screaming, "Keep reading books! There are a million worlds out there for you to immerse yourself in..."

At least, that's what I think he was saying. I was busy spitting out flies. Thanks for the inspiration D.A.A.S.

In Telfer, Western Australia, Australia

Tickets Please!

I'm not a huge fan of train travel. Sure, some people find the gentle lulling motion of the carriage to be soothing but I've always found the pervading odour of stale urine a tad off-putting. I also prefer to arrive at my destination within a suitable time-frame, not a week later looking and smelling like a hobo.

The only time I've enjoyed a train trip was when I travelled from Brisbane to Blackwater in Central Queensland and I was lucky enough to snag a seat in the sleeper carriage. Sleeper carriages in trains are segregated by gender and I ended up sitting on my lonesome. Early on in the trip I snaffled a choice seat in the bar carriage but upon finding out the majority of the clientele in this part of the train were old swaying men who reeked of sherry and who wanted to tell me about their gout, I retired to my private room for some shut-eye. After wrestling for 20 minutes with the fold-out rubber coated seat that transformed into a bed, I drifted off to sleep. It was possibly the best night's sleep I'd ever had.

I awoke early in the morning because I had neglected to shut my blinds so I decided to have a lukewarm shower. As I dried myself off in my room, staring out at the sun rising over the plains, I noticed that the train was slowing and I could hear a faint bell ringing. Before I could react the train leisurely rolled through a road crossing, at which an elderly couple sat parked in their farm truck. I distinctly remember making eye contact with the gob-smacked couple as I stood there, naked. Towelling my junk.

I still regret waving.

In Dingo, Queensland, Australia

We Can Never Eat Here Again

I've got a confession to make. I once left a restaurant without paying. The guilt has been overwhelming since that fateful afternoon in 2007 and it's time to get it off my chest.

Let me set the scene for you. My wife was pregnant and craved some steak. Rather than run the gauntlet of disappointing a pregnant woman, thus endangering my life, we went to lunch at a nearby Western-themed restaurant filled with licence plates, bull skulls and various leather items that have some vague connection with the Mid-West USA. Our meals arrived and my steak was burnt which, considering a microwave was most likely the kitchen implement of choice, was rather surprising. The gravy also appeared to move on its own. My wife and I picked at our food in a disinterested manner for 20 minutes or so until we decided to cut our losses, pay the bill and leave. 10 minutes passed and we saw no sign of our waiter. I went and stood next to the register. Another 10 minutes passed and still I saw no one. I sat back down and we talked for a further 15 minutes while I played with the rubbery gravy until we both agreed that we make a run for it. We justified our reasoning with excuse after excuse. No staff. Terrible food. Possible rash caused by sentient gravy. There were so many justifiable reasons. I told my wife to walk slowly out of the restaurant. Under no circumstances was she allowed to run. Mainly because this would draw attention to us but also because she was 7-months pregnant.

We eased out of the booth and calmly walked out the door. That's when I screamed "RUN WOMAN, RUN! RUN FOR THE CAR!" We hustled as fast as we could and took off, half expecting for blue and red lights to appear in the rear-view mirror. They never did. The restaurant closed down several weeks later. I can't help but feel partially responsible.

In Springwood, Queensland, Australia

No Means No, Little Dude!

My first pet was a bedraggled kitten that was being mistreated by a pair of vapid sisters living nearby. They never fed the little ginger rascal and one afternoon he appeared on my balcony during a thunderstorm. I fed him some chicken skin and that night he slept on my chest purring away like a small lawnmower. He soon became my cat. His name was Sam and he brought much mirth and hysterical laughter to our house.

He was especially fond of men and as he came of age he'd typically reciprocate pats and scratches from my friends by forcefully ejaculating on their shirts. That came as a surprise to everyone involved. Once, during the half-time break of a rugby match, he sat in front of us and licked himself until he climaxed. I was somewhat horrified but my friends thought this was hilarious and threw cash and coins at him and begged for more. "Best stripper ever!" one of them said. Sam winked in agreement as coins bounced off his head.

One night, while watching TV alone, I heard muffled screams emanating from the bedroom. I raced in and saw that Sam had "mounted" my sleeping girlfriend and was biting the back of her neck while thrusting away at her shoulder blades. I'm ashamed to say my immediate thought was one of pride. My little mate was trying so hard to get some action. Heroic little fellow. Then, of course, I realised he was trying to rape my girlfriend so I pulled him off and made a note to get him de-sexed the next day. That was the best course of action.

He just didn't understand that no means no.

In Greenslopes, Queensland, Australia

Ding! Ding! DING!

It's the law in Queensland to have a small bell attached to your bike. For the uninitiated, this bell is to be used to warn meandering pedestrians you're hurtling towards them and that they should refrain from waving their arms like they're performing Tai-Chi. It's also used to notify other cyclists that you want to race them and I have, on one hilarious occasion, seen it used in a vain attempt to dissuade a marauding bird from attacking the facial region of a cyclist. When I'm nearing the end of my commute I'm physically exhausted and generally regretting my choice of late-afternoon snack and it doesn't take much to annoy me. I rode behind a man earlier this year that seemed to have wholeheartedly embraced the concept of the safety bell. He dinged it at everything he saw.

Pedestrians? Ding!

Dogs? Ding!

Other cyclists? Ding!

Every chime from his sparkling bell irritated me to my core. I started to think that this guy must be some sort of special needs bloke having a cheerful afternoon jaunt on a bike. He was keeping up a brisk pace but I decided to overtake this jingling maniac lest I throttle him with my bike lock and end up serving 2-5 for assault. As I overtook him I looked across and, sure enough, he was a special needs bloke on a cheerful afternoon jaunt. He beamed at me, gave me the thumbs up and dinged his bell enthusiastically.

DING! DING! DING! DING!

The guy looked like he was having the time of his life. I laughed along with him and, strangely enough, the rest of the trip home seemed to fly by. Thanks for that, passionate bell-ringer!

In Greenslopes, Queensland, Australia

Don't Make Me Race You!

Any man who says he isn't competitive is lying and I'll wrestle him to prove the point. I've started cycling to work. There's no better evidence for this competitive streak than being in a group of men on bikes. It's amazing how quickly a commute can turn into a vicious stage of the Tour de France. Still, I'm okay with losing. I don't want to die of a heart attack while riding to work just because some Lycra-clad accountant called Kevin beat me to the city. Some men are absolutely manic about it. I passed a man the other day and it triggered some primal response which caused him to start growling as he stood up on his pedals and flew past me at a great rate of knots. Of course, he was knackered from this beastly effort and I overhauled him shortly afterwards, resulting in numerous episodes of furious pedalling and grunting on his behalf all the way to the city.

The thought of being overtaken can sometimes force me to dig deep. One day I was wobbling up a large hill when I noticed the light of a bike getting closer behind me. I mashed my pedals for a couple of minutes and looked back. The light was even closer. I repeated this effort until my lungs felt like they'd burst. Still, my stalker kept coming. Eventually my pursuer went past me as he continued up the hill. He was 70 years old and was riding an electric bike. He wasn't even pedalling.

"Evening!" he said.

Bastard.

Next time I see him, I'll ask him if he wants to wrestle.

In Nathan, Queensland, Australia

You Say Tomato, I Say Hurry Up

I love embracing new technology. I was especially happy when self-service checkouts were introduced at my local supermarket. As much as I like communicating with the checkout servers as I admire their curved talons and vapid stares, I'm sure I can do my shopping in a more efficient manner. Of course I didn't allow for the natural adversary of the self-service checkout area: the middle-aged man.

Some middle-aged men are quick to grasp onto new technology. Others view it as a form of witchcraft. The middle-aged man in the supermarket the other week fell into the latter category. He also appeared to have no consideration for the other people doing their shopping. No other checkouts were working so I waited patiently in line behind him as my rage simmered away inside.

My rage nearly erupted when I saw what he was trying to do. He had a tomato and he was trying to scan it.

Swiping...swiping...swiping.

The machine wasn't beeping and he kept peering at the tomato like it was broken. The vacuous clerk monitoring the checkouts shuffled over and said "You'll have to look it up." The man nodded and smiled at her in a perplexed manner.

He stared at the tomato. Then he looked up. I swear I felt something pop in my skull.

He managed to bag his food and walked out. I shook my head in exasperation and the clerk smiled back and rolled her eyes. Then I looked down at the selection of Asian vegetables in my basket.

"Um. Hi. Excuse me? Is this bok choy or choy sum?"

In Mount Gravatt, Queensland, Australia

The Crushing Pressure of the Socks

I think I've done a great job at being a parent. Well, except for that time I watched Jurassic Park with my son when he was 3 thinking I would be able to fast-forward through the people-eating scenes without him seeing them. Turns out I wasn't quick enough.

"T-REX EAT HIM UP DADDY! HE EAT HIM UP! YUM!"

All successes aside, there is an unrelenting pressure when it comes to being a father. I attribute this pressure to the socks. Those bloody socks. My wife bought me the socks for Father's Day. They have "World's #1 Dad!" emblazoned on them. When I wear them I feel like such a fraud. Sure, they may be comfortable but do you have any idea what having this shroud of deception hovering over you feels like?

World's #1 Dad? I'm not even in the Top 10 Dads in my suburb. I see those fathers on the weekend. Polo shirts immaculately ironed. Cargo shorts crisp and devoid of food stains. No breakfast cereal detritus entangled in their impeccable chest hair.

I see them, nonchalantly reading the weekend paper as their perfect little child cavorts on the playground. Meanwhile, I'm dressed like a hobo trying to stop one belligerent child from eating dirt and rocks while convincing the other one that you probably can't physically do a loop-the-loop on the swings without some sort of painful repercussion. I look at these fathers and they give me a fraternal smile but they don't know a thing

They don't have the socks, you see? Wait until they feel the pressure of the socks.

In Eight Mile Plains, Queensland, Australia

It's Just a Flesh Wound.

Last year, while doing rural flood damage inspections, I met one of the most Australian men in existence. His name was Rob and he was a farmer. Rob had finished work for the day and was relaxing on his deck in the afternoon sun. As we walked to his truck I asked him if he wanted to put on his boots.

"Nah, she'll be right mate."

We drove down to the lower paddock and climbed out of the truck to inspect a damaged pump which was surrounded by knee-high grass. Rob said "Yeah, this is the fucker that got damaged. Ow. Shit. Fuck," before quickly scurrying up onto a nearby water tank.

"I...fuck...I think I just got bitten by a fucken snake, mate" he said. I froze. Terrified.

"Garn have a look over there, will ya?" he said pointing at a waist high patch of grass. I didn't see a thing and I suggested that maybe it was just a stick or a twig and he responded with "Nope, I felt something squishy underneath me bare foot and then BANG!"

I looked at his foot and saw he had bite mark from a small snake. I told him we should go back to the house and he said "Fucken, nah. I'll be right mate. Here, lemme show you that fence..."

Ten minutes later he said "Not gonna lie, mate. Me foot is throbbing like a bitch. We better go back."

When I got him back to the house he was slumped over the steering wheel and groaning so I called for his wife. She came out, took one look at him, and laughed.

"Not again, Rob, you dickhead. I bet you took your bloody boots off..."

In Monto, Queensland, Australia

I Didn't Mean to Stare. Honest.

I started going to the gym when I had my first child because the vision of a bloated hot sweaty mess that's too unfit to get off the couch to play with his kids was becoming a stark reality. I enjoy the gym. It's my time to focus and it gives me time to think. Sure, I mainly think about lifting things up and putting them down but it's still a thought evoking process. I just hate talking to people in the gym. Some people find the gym to be a wonderfully social place and a great opportunity to make new friends. Others just like to grunt, sweat and lift things while waiting for a coil of intestine to loop out into their pants.

I'm all over the unofficial "No Obvious Staring" policy too. Everyone stares but you just don't do it in an obvious way. That's what the mirrors are for. And certainly don't lick your lips in a lascivious manner. I've seen a hairy-backed guy in stringlet do that as a lady walked past and even I felt violated. I'm so hyper-conscious of not making women feel uncomfortable in the gym that I've become paranoid whenever one ventures close.

"Hi. Are you finished with this barbell?"

"YES! YOU CAN HAVE IT! I WASN'T EVEN LOOKING AT YOUR BOOBS! I'M SO SORRY."

I was in the gym the other week and when I finished a set a girl working out nearby said "65kgs? Wow, that's as heavy as me!" and smiled. I replied with "Gnnnnhahahaggfer" and scurried off to the drink fountain like a beaten stray dog.

I don't want to be lumped in with the lip-licking sex pest.

In King George Square, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia

Beware of the Bright Green Screeching Snipers

Australia has more than its fair share of deadly critters. We have poisonous snakes and spiders, man-eating crocodiles and even a cute little monotreme that will give you a nasty jab if you accidentally grab it. Why is it that our birds are absolute clowns? They're like the drunken hooligans of the animal kingdom. From whirling galahs to belligerent cockatoos, Australia is filled with yammering birds who like nothing better than to squabble like boozed miners on a rostered day off while they strip a tree of its vegetation.

Avian hilarity aside, I once witnessed a horrific attack on a human by a rainbow lorikeet. I was at school waiting to be let into our room after lunch. Flocks of these brilliantly coloured birds frequented the area so it wasn't uncommon to see them hurtling through the buildings like little bright green bottle-rockets. While chatting to my good mate Daniel, a flock raced through the under-covered area.

SCREECH! THWIPTHWIPTHWIP! SCREEEECH! THWIPTHWIP! THWACK!

Daniel fell to the ground like he'd been shot in the head. Which he had. However, given the feathery detritus scattered next to him, the projectile wasn't a bullet but a now deceased rainbow lorikeet. He was knocked out cold and it took a few minutes before he was able to be roused awake. As he was carried off to sick bay he said in a puzzled voice, "Did...did a fucking parrot just hit me?"

"Yeah man. A fucking parrot."

"I thought those guys were harmless"

Tourists, you've been warned.

In Mackay, Queensland, Australia

Chin Music: A Cricketing Lesson

I love cricket. I truly do. One of my favourite memories is being 9 years old and waiting in anticipation for Dad to come home from work so we could play cricket. I would sit on the front steps, cricket bat placed across my skinny, pale thighs, hoping that the next coal-caked car that turned into our street would be my father. We'd take turns batting and bowling and my dad would take it easy on me by only belting every third ball back over my head.

One afternoon I masterfully perfected a late turning, dipping leg spinner and bowled my father behind his legs. He muttered something under his breath and asked me to do it again, which I did. I did it a third time and danced a little jig of joy. He then gave me the bat and marched a good thirty metres to the back fence and proceeded to send down some pretty hostile deliveries. This probably doesn't sound like a problem, given that cricket players usually wear helmets, pads and a protective box. According to our house rules, these devices were the sole domain of pansies and I spent those harrowing six balls whimpering in terror at the sight of my father steaming in from the chicken shed boundary end.

My eldest son has started to enjoy cricket. He's grasped such nuances as the leg glance, pull shot and the Yorker. He's also learned how to sledge and the other day mocked me after smacking an errant delivery of mine over the fence. He didn't laugh when I lengthened my run-up.

In Moranbah, Queensland, Australia

The Trials and Tribulations of Being a Bus Politician

I've done something horrible. I've developed a rapport with the regular travellers on my bus to work in the morning. Some would say this isn't an issue but my ability to function as a normal member of society is somewhat diminished at that time of the day. It started innocently enough. A lady dropped her bus pass and I retrieved it. She said "thank you" and I said "you're welcome." I've now progressed to waving and chatting to everyone on the bus like a beaming sweaty-faced politician two weeks out from an election. I'd much rather bury my face in a book or stare idly out the window. This is my alone time. I don't want to chat but there's no going back.

"Hi there Steve! Like your jacket!"

"Susan! New hair-do? Looking great!"

"Yes, Paul. It is rather muggy this morning. We'll get a storm I'd say."

I once lamented the fact that no one sits next to me on the bus. Now not only are people sitting next to me, they're showing me photos of their kids and asking me about sports I don't care for. I haven't spoken to the alpha male and female on the bus though. This chunky couple climb on first, sit in the same seat and mutter snide remarks about the other passengers. The alpha-female once had a dig at Susan's weight issues which was a bit rich coming from a rotund lady whose chin, cleavage and stomach are all located in a similar region. I've been biting my tongue but I'll soon lash out at these two well-upholstered hobbits.

No one fucks with my Susan.

In Brisbane, Queensland, Australia

Hey! I'm Not a Tree!

I was quite a fearful child. While living in a small mining town in the middle of Queensland I spent a lot of time being terrified of goannas. Goannas are large, dog-sized lizards with sharp claws and a sauntering gait like a pugnacious gunslinger. My Dad told us that goannas were extremely vicious and if we ever encountered one it would very likely mistake us for a tree and clamber up our bodies and scratch our faces off. He then said that the best thing to do when you see one was to lie down on the ground. That way they won't mistake your trembling pale form for a large eucalyptus tree. Okay then.

One afternoon my older sister and I were walking through a park on the way home from school when she screamed "Look! It's a goanna!" and dropped to the ground like she'd been shot by a sniper. I squinted into the distance and I also saw this ferocious lizard. Well, it could have been a large stick but I wasn't going to take any chances so I laid prostrate in the dirt alongside her. Every now and then my sister would furtively check on the whereabouts of the loitering malicious killer but I lay perfectly still in the baking red dust, like a newborn fawn, waiting for the danger to pass.

After what felt like hours but was probably only 10 minutes, a neighbour saw us and yelled "Hey, you kids! What's going on? Get off the ground and out of the sun, you idiots!"

We sheepishly got up, dusted ourselves off and scampered home, our faces intact. Thanks for the advice, Dad.

In Dysart, Queensland, Australia

Sometimes They Come Back

Growing up in a small town meant we had to make our own fun. Luckily there were numerous crazes such as marbles and Yo-yos that came and went each year. There once was even a short-lived boomerang craze. Some afternoons the local kids would all compare boomerangs and see who could get the most consistent throws. A kid's dad even made or bought a really big one. We're talking about a yard long on each arm. One balmy afternoon we were all down at the local park throwing bent projectiles at the sky when this kid arrived with his Dad. His dad laughed at our little boomerangs and dragged this monstrosity out of the car and told us all to put away our puny toys and step back and watch the magic. He had a couple of test throws but realised he needed to put a bit more effort into it to make it fly, so he took a run up and threw in a hefty overhand manner. All the kids just stared in wonder as this boomerang went "wokka wokka wokka wokka" off into the distance.

Then it started to turn around.

A couple of the smarter kids who knew what was happening started backing away and to the side. Before the others could realise what was happening it was too late. This helicopter blade of a boomerang flew in at top speed like a belligerent pterodactyl at a height just below the knee. Screaming kids and yipping dogs scattered everywhere but the dad was too slow. He copped it right in the shin and it broke his leg.

That was the day I became comfortable with the size of my boomerang.

In Dysart, Queensland, Australia

No Gloating in the Pool, Please.

I'm taking my youngest child to his first swimming lesson on the weekend. I'm about as excited as one man can get when he knows he has to strip off at 8am and plunge into a tepid pool with his struggling spawn while other parents float about cooing at their own kids who've most likely laid a sloppy nard in their soaked swim-nappy. My son loves the water so I'm not too concerned that he'll be THAT child who sits on the edge of the pool screaming like a shaved piglet. I do worry about other parents though. I found with my eldest child that a lot of parents can get super competitive in swimming classes and some of them don't mind gloating. I'm envisaging the following:

"My Taneesha can swim on her own and she's barely 8 months old. How's your boy doing?"

"He's struggling with the whole ingesting chlorinated water thing but he'll get there."

"I'm sure he will" says Taneesha's Mum, pausing in between screaming at her floundering child like an East German swimming coach and filming her with a bedazzled iPhone. "We've been teaching Taneesha how to swim since the day she was born."

"That's awesome. I've been trying to juggle the whole work-life balance thing without causing irreparable damage to my sanity and my relationship with my wife and family members."

"Mmm" replies Taneesha's Mum as she floats away from the weird bald man who's trying to keep his son's face out of the water while looking out for errant floating turds.

Wish me luck.

In Brisbane, Queensland, Australia

Friendly fire! Man Down!

I like to think of myself as a good Dad. I'm moderately handy and my major skill of turning a sobbing child into a giggling monster quicker than you can say "sorry about throwing that ball into your face" comes in handy every day. However, there's one thing I'm terrible at doing and that is changing a nappy filled with poo. I just can't do it. I mean I still do my duty but the miserable gagging that occurs when I do it has made me the laughing stock of the house.

Early one morning, six months ago, I lay on the carpet wrestling with my youngest. Although he doesn't actually wrestle in the traditional sense. It's more of a prolonged sit. At one stage he ended up sitting on my head in just a nappy and t-shirt. That's when I smelled it. Poo. I carried him to the change table saw that poo had exploded out of the side of his nappy. I started changing him but then I got some on my hand and I couldn't help but start making guttural sounds like I'd been drinking heavily the night before which, by the way, I had.

I then felt something wet on the side of my face. I looked in the mirror saw that I had a streak of runny poo sliding down from my eyebrow to my jaw-line. I squealed and then started retching. My wife, who'd been sleeping in, came into the room and said "What the hell is happening in here...OH MY GOD, YOU HAVE POO ON YOUR FACE...GAAAAAAAAAGH." It was a horrible moment for everyone involved. Not for my son though. He thought it was hilarious.

A Cheeky Red With Bold Nuances of Ulcer

I sold my soul while working in retail liquor. I also sold a lot of terrifically bad booze. One particular incident involved a pile of horrid cheap wine the manager had got at a bargain basement price, probably from some Russian gangsters. We stacked it at the front of the store and sold it for \$2.99 a bottle and still made a handsome profit. It was almost criminal. Especially considering how bad it tasted.

A lady came in one day and was transfixed by the appearance of this stack of wine. I'd done a great job with some tinsel and it almost looked classy. She said to me, "Excuse me, can you tell me something about this wine?"

"It's \$2.99," I said.

"I see" she replied. "But what's it like?"

"It's \$2.99," I repeated.

"Oooh a bargain. Does it have a nice taste?"

"It's \$2.99," I said again.

"I see" she said, completely oblivious to the fact that I couldn't describe the taste to her without swearing. "Would you drink it?"

"I would probably use it to clean my driveway" I replied.

"Okay. It certainly is a cheap price isn't it?"

"Yes, ma'am, it certainly is cheaper than most other driveway cleaners. A bargain, in fact."

"Would it go well with lamb?"

"Well, you could use the bottle to bludgeon a lamb to death...so yes!"

"I will buy 4 cartons please"

"Excellent choice!"

A sale was a sale, even if I was selling radioactive coolant.

In Carindale, Queensland, Australia

Just a Trim and Some Psychotherapy Please.

Trying to be spendthrift is something that comes with being a parent. Spending money on my kids means I can't buy fancy things for myself. With this in mind, we took our son to get a haircut a few weeks ago. Rather than go to an upscale salon where orange women with monstrous talon-like fingernails would charge us \$40 for a bit off the back and sides, we took him to a budget hairdresser.

Upon entering the salon, which was called possibly Super Happy Fun Time Go Hair Stylists, we noticed that the décor was similar to that seen in a storage shed used for dog grooming. Well, that is, apart from the garish Anime posters and televisions showing some Karaoke film clips and a weird Chinese version of Tom and Jerry. We asked a tall lady wearing a surgical mask for a haircut and she grunted and pointed at a vending machine. I inserted a \$10 note and received a ticket. We sat my son down and the masked lady charged at him with a comb, a spray bottle and a sharp pair of scissors. Needless to say he freaked out a bit. She then tried to calm him down by doing some sort of song and dance (muffled by her surgical mask) while holding the scissors above her head. This made me freak out a bit.

Still, she got the job done quickly and did not once speak to us. Unfortunately, my eldest son was a bit traumatised and is now having nightmares about the crazy dancing lady with the white face mask coming to cut his nose off. We'll probably go back there.

I don't like drinking cask wine.

In Brisbane, Queensland, Australia

Has Anyone Seen My Xanax?

When you have children there's a certain horrible pressure on you to be a good father. I'm not saying being a parent is terrifically difficult but there certainly is a fair bit of stress involved in the whole process. I guess it comes down to the fact that you're continually judged when you have kids and I'm always worried about what other people think. I wish I could ignore the possible thoughts and tut-tutting of others. I wish I had that ability to sit back and relax in my stained undies and drink beer as my kids joust on bikes in the street with faeces-tipped lances while sickened neighbours stared in horror. I have way too much pride for that. Plus, I'd want to join in with my own bike and foetid jousting stick.

The other night I was tucking my eldest son into bed. He's 5 and is starting to become acutely aware of the world. I reached across the bed to give him a kiss and he looked up and then cradled my stubbly head in his small hands. He stared me right in the eye, kissed my forehead, and said "Daddy, you like your job. I don't ever want you to lose your job."

"Aw, thanks little mate. I won't lose my job"

"That's good. Because if you lose your job we'll all starve. And then we'll die and it will be your fault that we're all dead. Anyway, goodnight Daddy. Sleep tight."

That's the horrible pressure I'm talking about.

In Brisbane, Queensland, Australia

Please Hold the Safety Railing

When it comes to parenting, there are numerous perils a father should be aware of. Answering the dreaded “where do babies come from” question and reading books to your kids when you are terrifically hung-over are two such perils which quickly come to mind. Some parents are bashful about their own nudity around their kids. Not me. This is mainly due to my inherent laziness when it comes to the concept of pants. I often bathed with my oldest boy when he was a fat, rotund, giggling blob but about 18 months ago he made the step up to having a shower. He was initially terrified so I agreed to shower with him. We no longer share the shower because of two reasons. 1: He’s getting too big and 2: because of The Unspoken Incident.

The Unspoken Incident occurred when I was hustling him into the shower one night. He stepped into the shower and slipped. Fortunately for him, he was able to grab the nearest object to stop himself from slamming head first into the shower-tiles. Unfortunately for me, that nearest object was my scrotum. There was a brief moment where I was confronted with 2 options. Knock his hand off my squished genitals and let him hit the ground or wait for him to right himself. I chose the latter because I’m a caring father. He let go, looked at my pained expression, and giggled quietly.

“I, uh, grabbed your balls”

“You sure did mate.”

“Sorry Dad.”

“That’s okay, buddy.”

“Um. I think I’ll have showers on my own from now.”

“Sounds good to me.”

In Eight Mile Plains, Queensland, Australia

The Lure of the Ham Steak

I have a secret shame. I sometimes enjoy dining at venues with very little class such as services clubs and the like. Venues chock-a-block full of bad décor, pokie machines and a slow-shuffling zombie-like patronage. Some days I like to take a trip into the tacky mundane and have a hot meal at Twin Towns. I generally don't like to stay too long because watching the hordes of dribbling elderly people filing into the room stacked with pokie machines make you want to do destructive things with a fire-axe. Plus, I can only take so much velour. Still, a good ham-steak is hard to find.

The last time I went to Twin Towns I was involved in a little incident. I was waiting in line at the food counter for my much anticipated ham-steak (my wife likes the schnitzel) and noticed a little old lady standing in front of me. The server asked the old lady if she wanted something and got no response. She then abruptly collapsed. To this day I don't know how I managed to catch her because I vividly remember being fixated with a poster informing me that a John Farnham impersonator would be performing later that month. I went from staring vacantly at the wall to suddenly cradling an octogenarian who felt as light as a bird in my outstretched arms. The old dear had been playing the pokie machine and hadn't eaten in more than 6 hours, apparently. I guess the lure of the ham-steak was stronger than the appeal of addictive gambling.

She was okay, by the way. Just a little hungry.

In Tweed Heads, New South Wales, Australia

Dinner and a Show

I used to live near a KFC and was a regular customer at this franchise when I had a hangover, which was nearly every Sunday afternoon. After one brutal evening of debauchery, I was in a sorry state of disrepair. While I was crawling to my bed like an infant after vomiting in the shower at 1pm, I knew I needed some grease so I toddled up the road and settled into a booth to dine on fried chicken. I was wrestling with a particularly nasty piece of gristle when I looked up and saw what can only be described as a junkie-skank tottering up to the store entrance. She walked in, looked around, and then went into the ladies toilets. Nothing strange there. 30 seconds later, a Mercedes Benz pulled up and a well-dressed middle aged lady in a suit-dress and high heels hopped out. She also went into the ladies toilets. Again, nothing strange. 2 minutes later I saw a rotund, unkempt man in shorts and a singlet moseying into the store. He scratched his groin, looked around, and then went into the ladies toilets.

I sat there sniggering amidst my detritus of chicken carcass and sanitary napkins and waited for the inevitable screams. The screams didn't come. 10 minutes later the well-dressed woman trotted out of the toilets, fixing her hair. She was followed by the junkie-skank. 3 minutes later, the scruffy man wandered out of the toilets, looked around, and then ordered some chicken. I still don't know what went on that afternoon. It certainly gives a new meaning to the term 3-Piece-Feed.

In Greenslopes, Queensland, Australia

The Devil is in the Detail

I had always thought replicating currency was the sole domain of shady, extremely successful gangster types so it came as somewhat of a surprise when I was first exposed to dodgy bills by an old man driving a beat-up Holden Gemini while working in a drive-through bottle shop.

An elderly, yet spritely man bounded from his car one morning and proceeded to place about \$300 of alcohol on the counter. When I told him the price he smiled and handed me what appeared to be 6 faded pieces of yellow paper. I'm no rocket scientist but even I can distinguish between these floppy urine-coloured bits of paper and our crisp, yellow, polymer plastic \$50 notes. He'd just photocopied a \$50 note multiple times and thought that's all you needed to do. I turned the note over and saw that he hadn't even bothered to print anything on the back.

"You can't pay with this, mate," I said

"Money is good. Is good. I am labourer. Get paid in gesh. You take gesh? Gesh is good! I no trust banks" he replied in a thick Eastern European accent.

"I don't trust banks either but this isn't even money!"

He seemed to realise I had found out his clever ruse.

"You don't want my gesh? My gesh not good enough for you? Well, fuck you my friend. Fuck you"

He stomped back to his car and angrily stuffed his crumpled notes into a pillow-case which was overflowing with the pale yellow notes and drove away. I didn't call the police. He'd probably just try to bribe them with gesh and make things worse.

In Camp Hill, Queensland, Australia

The Mug Never Lies

Everyone likes to be complimented but comedians are ego-junkies, always wanted positive reinforcement. Although I tramped the stages by night, I worked in a large engineering firm by day. I was also the “Office Funny Man.” Whenever a witty comment was needed, I was there. An awkward silence during the farewell to an employee who didn't pass his probation? Hello! I enjoyed this status until that fateful day in 2008 when another comedian joined our firm. As in a proper comedian who earned money instead of free post-mix Coke. His name was Joel Bryant.

We, of course, hit it off from the moment we met. We were two peas in a pod and bounced ideas off each other in a constant stream of monkey-like babble. That was until Xmas 2009. Our company did the Secret Santa thing whereby employees were forced to buy a present, to the value of \$10, and secretly give it to another random employee who would then open it in public. Joel received his present. It was a mug and on the side of the mug was a label saying “Office Joker.” I got a packet of highlighter pens some reprobate had pilfered from the stationary cabinet.

It was official. I had been relegated. I was no longer the office joker. Joel, seeing my despair, sometimes let me sip from the mug but I felt no funnier and there was always an aftertaste of shame. That could have just been the remnants of his drink. Still, I learned a valuable lesson. Life is full of ups and downs and you should never steal from the stationary cabinet.

In Brisbane, Queensland, Australia

Give My Regards to the Chef

I travel a lot for work and being alone in a strange town can really get me down in the dumps, especially when I need to find a place to dine. Sure, lying in a mushy bed in a dank motel room while I eat pizza and drink beer in my undies, waiting for “Embarrassing Bodies” to start on television so I can compare rashes has its own appeal, I do like to get out and explore my surroundings. I just hate the awkwardness of eating alone. My father tells me he loves it and passes the time by doing a spot of people watching. In my world, this is called creepy staring and I’d rather do that on the sly. I’ve since found a novel way to pass the time in a restaurant packed with people. I pretend to be a food critic. It’s highly liberating, I must say.

Recently I visited a nice restaurant in Bargara and shortly after I sat down I noticed a few people staring at me, so I pulled out a notebook and started jotting down my review. It is outlined below:

Entrée: 3 beers from the bar. Beers were delicious. Would drink again. Probably in about an hour.

Bread has arrived! I check to see if it is bread. I tap the loaf with a knife and smile. It is indeed bread.

Main meal: Moreton bay Bugs with red chilli sambal. Meal is delicious. Reminds me of Jakarta.

Mental note: Visit Jakarta some time

The waitress brought me my bill and asked if everything was okay. I could tell she had her suspicions about my surreptitious scribbling. “We’ll see” I replied as I walked away. “We’ll see.”

In Bargara, Queensland, Australia

Who Cut the Cheese?

I really admire smokers for their stoic obstinance in the face of adversity. They are fast taking over the title of most persecuted minority group in society. However, the anti-smoking lobby has almost won the hard-fought battle they've been waging for years. I grew up in the 70's and nearly every adult smoked, including my parents. I'd be building Lego with my Dad and he'd blow smoke in my face and say "ha, ha, I made you cough." Yeah, that's a good one Dad, you joker. If you do that now and you'd go to prison.

"What'd you do to get in here, mate?"

"I held up a 7-11 and shot the clerk in the face. You?"

"I blew smoke in a kid's face"

"You sick bastard!"

I'm worried that once the anti-smoking lobby finally gets smoking banned, they'll switch to other things that are bad for us that I actually enjoy. Like eating cheese, for example. And that would be terrible because I'm a 2 pack a day kind of guy. Soon we'd start seeing images of fat, cholesterol choked, constipated men sitting on the toilet on the front of packets of cheese. Following on from that, cheese would only be sold in plain packets and if you wanted some Parmesan cheese on your pasta at a restaurant you'd have to sprinkle it on your plate and eat it in a segregated alley-way like a criminal.

The final straw will be resorting to cheese from made from mystery sources in backyard cheese labs and I don't think I'm ready to sprinkle "Fromage de Chat" or "Pig Cheddar" on my pasta.

Keep fighting, smokers!

In Brisbane, Queensland, Australia

How is my hair?

I started going bald at an early age. It's a horrible thing for a young man to go through. I tried to hide my receding hair by wearing a hat a lot of the time. I even once wore a bandanna (it was 1991 so it was kosher). Then I saw a photograph of myself at a party. I was wearing a see-through Sea World sun visor, tight red flared pants and a Hawaiian shirt unbuttoned to show my manly chest-thatch. I was horribly embarrassed but not because of my clothes. No sir, those clothes were stylish. Debonair, if you will. It was the baldness I could see peeking out of the top of the visor. It wasn't made any better by the fact my hair was quite long and I had started to resemble Krusty the Clown. I decided to get rid of it and have never regretted the decision. I still have a large collection of hats.

Still, the stigma of being a bald man can be a soul crushing one. Some people like to point out my genetic weakness. Likewise I enjoy pointing out that they are a socially inept retard. It appears it's acceptable to make fun of a bald man. Call us slap-head or cue-ball. Give our head a rub. We love that.

I once went on a first date with a girl who I met on the internet. Halfway through the date she said "I like you, Andy, but I just prefer my men to have a full head of hair."

I was okay with this honest statement. Funnily enough she wasn't okay with me saying "That's fine, I just generally prefer my women to be classy and to not be shallow slags."

It was our last date.

In Brisbane, Queensland, Australia

Hold the Lemon, Please.

I worked as a bartender for a number of years in my early twenties and, when the hotel I worked for closed down, I applied for a job at The Roxy, a now-defunct venue that used to showcase some fantastic bands. I was excited because I would, hopefully, see some bands that I adored. On my first night, Australia's "The Cruel Sea" was playing and I was over the moon. I trotted into work and was told I would be working upstairs instead of the main room. I glumly trudged upstairs and opened the door into a roomful of pain. Like, an actual room filled with pain. It was the Hellfire Club, a once a month night when people who loved bondage and discipline got together to whip each other with various implements. The first thing I saw was a masked 6ft tall lady wearing a G-string and thigh-high boots with 2 men walking behind her like dogs, wearing leashes. One of them was even barking. I took up my position at the bar and tried to avoid watching a portly naked man being spun around on a wheel-like device while a lady belted him with a whip. About halfway through the night, a semi-nude man with perfect hair, wearing what appeared to be 3 leather belts tied strategically about his person, sidled up to the bar.

Can I help you?

Yeah, can I have a Jack Daniel's on the rocks with a twist of lemon and you?

Um. You can have all of those things except one.

Okay, hold the lemon.

Well played, weirdo. Well played

In Fortitude Valley, Queensland, Australia

Siblings Stick Together. Sometimes.

I did a fair bit of travelling with my sister and my parents when I was young. Some would say this kind of experience would be enlightening to a child but the reality was I spent all that time in the car fighting a vicious and prolonged battle against my older sister. She is 2.5 years older than me and by the time she'd reached the age of 14, I had simply ceased to exist. I was a gnat that required slapping from time to time. I would take the abuse with a minimum of whining but every so often I would lash out like a cornered baboon. One such event occurred when parents rented a small hatchback car and, perhaps in the interest of science and/or entertainment, had confined my sister and me to the rear seat. One thing led to another and before too long, a protuberant leg started poking me in the ribs. My sister was staring straight ahead out the window but was doing her best to dislodge one of my kidneys. The red mist descended and in a fit of rage I swivelled in the seat, arched my back and then exploded with my legs. To say I kicked the shit out of my sister is an understatement. I belted her so hard that she flew across the seat, hit the door, which then opened, and started falling out of the car which was travelling at about 75km/h at the time. I lunged across and pulled her back in to the chorus of screams from my parents.

“What the hell just bloody well happened?”

My sister looked me in the eye.

“The back door just opened, Dad. This car is a piece of crap.”

In Maui, HI, United States

Dinosaur Favouritism

What's your favourite dinosaur?

This is a question I am asked on an almost daily basis. You see, I have two sons under the age of six and dinosaurs are pretty much the coolest things ever. I was the same when I was their age. My knowledge of dinosaurs was unparalleled until I discovered girls and Star Wars and my interest in monsters of years gone by faded into the background. Having kids has brought dinosaurs back into the spotlight. My son rates all the dinosaurs. He's not a huge fan of Hadrosaurs, but really who is? Like all little boys he's enamoured with Tyrannosaurus Rex but thinks their arms are way too short and that they wouldn't be able to brush their teeth. You can't argue with that logic. He's moved onto Ankylosaurus which was surprising given it's a dopey herbivore but he saw a badly drawn picture of an Ankylosaurus fighting a Tyrannosaurus in a tattered book and the Ankylosaurus was winning! He said its armour and heavy club-like tail make it a formidable opponent. He's correct. He also said the only way an Ankylosaurus could be any more awesome was if it had laser guns glued to its back. Again, faultless logic.

For the record, I like Allosaurus and my wife likes Brachiosaurus.

In Brisbane, Queensland, Australia

Please Sit Next to Me

No one sits next to me on the bus to work. When I first noticed this happening I was delighted. I mean, who wants some voluminous ham-beast sitting next to you annoying you with their high pitched nose whistle and hungry grunts. I certainly don't, but after a while I started to question why my seat was always vacant on otherwise packed buses. I even moved down the front where the bus is more crowded in order to get someone to sit next to me but alas, people would actively scurry away.

I once even said to a pregnant lady, "You can sit here" and patted the seat next to me but she gave me a horrified look and decided to stand in the aisle a considerable distance away. I don't have a particularly pungent man-musk and I'm not obese and overflowing in my seat. Is it because I have a shaved head and sometimes scowl when I'm reading my book? That could be it! So this morning I decided to smile at everyone on the bus.

That made it worse.

A lot worse.

In Eight Mile Plains, Queensland, Australia

About Author

Andy Thompson

I tell jokes for cash, manly hugs and free drinks. I'll tell you which way the water flows for free. Comedian, engineer, writer and husky man-about-town.

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