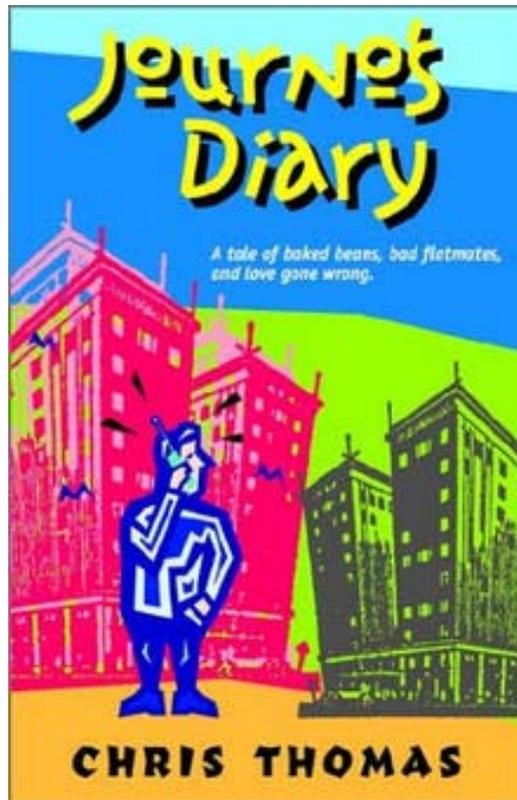


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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

CHRIS THOMAS is a writer, actor and journalist from Perth, Western Australia, who has many eclectic acting credits to his name, matched with broad media experience, working for mainstream newspapers, independent publications and freelance for numerous titles. He has also worked extensively as a media relations professional.

In addition to *Journos Diary*, he is also the author of the plays *SMS Mess*, *Which One?*, *The Bonza Land of Oz*, *Appetite For Destruction*, *King Bling*, *Who's Your Daddy?* and *Reality Matters* and the *Doctor Who* short story *One Step Forward, Two Steps Back*.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 25, XMAS DAY

Thank God it's over. How I hate this season. Why oh why do we always have to have Aberdeen sausage? Nobody likes it but every year it gets dished up because it's "traditional"! Apparently old Auntie Grace was partial to it and that's where it stems from. Somebody should have burnt the recipe with her.

Everybody was cordial, but the strain on mum's face showed by the time the pudding was served — it's always a mistake to let dad do the brandy sauce. Mind you, gramama wasn't complaining.

I got some okay presents but it wouldn't have made a scrap of difference if I'd got nothing. I think I'll stay home next year. Why? I'm an atheist, thank God!

The big subject of the day was my new job as a journalist. Everyone wonders why I wasn't happier. I didn't tell them but it's because I think I'll get the sack within a week. I'm working for the State's weekend newspaper, imaginatively titled the *Weekend Star*. I start on January 2. I just know I'm going to fuck up.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 26, BOXING DAY

Guess who got breathalysed on the way home from mum's? Gran managed to blow 0.19 — I would have given anything to see the look on Gramps' face.

I have a fridge full of cold Aberdeen sausage. What the hell I am supposed to do with that? Maybe my flatmate will eat it when he returns. Perhaps the word should be "hopefully".

Lied around most of the day either reading or shitting myself about my new job. Filled my new briefcase with my meagre journalistic possessions. I still don't know what a participle is or how you modify a noun or exactly what a split infinitive is (although there is supposedly one in that *Star Trek* "final frontier" speech). Verbs are doing words, of course. So I've got a few basics but I'm no Shakespeare.

11pm. Since when were journos comparable to Shakespeare?

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 27

No sign of George, my flatmate. At least the place has stayed relatively clean without him here. I have never known anyone to spray so much water when they have a shower. It's like he points the nozzle out on to the floor and soaks the bath mat. And, of course, forgets to hang it up. Whinge, whinge, whinge. I'm sure I do things that piss him right up the wall.

It's 1pm and I'm already writing in my diary. This is definitely the uneasy calm before the storm, I'm sure. One thing is certain: the future is uncertain. I've looked over the previous articles I've written... they are *so* bad. Why do I doubt myself so much? They wouldn't have hired me if they thought I couldn't do the job. But then, they don't really know me, do they?

4pm. A life at last! Am going out pubbing and clubbing with Antony. We've got bugger all money (well, there's one plus from the new job) but we'll manage.

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 28

Around 7.30pm. My memory has started to return (sort of). I met Antony in the city and we went to the Sausage Club... we heard it was a meat market. But lo and behold it was a German pub with guys called Klaus in traditional gear swinging jugs of beer and eating dubious-looking fatty knobs. We tried to get into the swing of things and I was just chatting up a nice Valkyrie-type called Helga (you should have seen her jugs) when Antony made a terrible, terrible faux pas.

He mentioned the war. Both of them. And he had the gall to ask why they didn't wear the nazi gear if they were going to get into traditional dress.

We both had to piss-bolt and jump the fence in the beer garden. I got a splinter under my thumb and it was after much yelling and pussy-footing around Antony managed to get it out.

So by 9.30pm we'd had some beer but had no place to go. Antony suggested In-U-Endo, a club he sometimes goes to. I thought it

was a gay hangout but the sign on the door said it was “for all sexualities”. So in we went to In-U-Endo. Luckily, there was no cover charge until 10.

Unfortunately, it was drag queen night and Antony and I looked somewhat out of place in our standard shirt and pants. Ten minutes later and we were on the street again. Some girl with cold sores on her face offered Antony “oral relief” for \$2. He declined.

I was getting sick of this piss-farting around so I dragged him off to the over-30s club, Pastzitz. We weren’t that pissed so I thought, fuck it, let’s get a couple of flaming lamborghinis. And yes, this was where things started to get a bit hazy.

The smoke from the drink made my eyes water and some woman thought I was upset about something. She was about 40 and pleasant-looking, although the leopard skin top and stretch pants weren’t exactly right for her. She came over and grabbed my crotch. I squealed and the club stopped dead. Even the music.

Then Antony yelled: “Flaunt the flesh!” which resulted in a resounding cheer and his attempt at half a strip show. The 30+ lapped it up — he has a good physique, I have a slight belly. That was the last I saw of him.

But back to Ms 40. She was still holding on to my crotch and something was growing in her hand. By this stage the flaming lamborghini had smacked my head at 100kmh and the room was spinning. Lights, dance beats, people. Vague, vague, vague.

Time passed. And then I found myself naked in a pool of (my own?) vomit in a strange house. I recognised some German sausage. A girl, about five, ran past and yelled “Yuck” then “My mummy loves you”. I blacked out.

Several hours later I woke up and the girl had gone. I had no idea where my clothes were so I found a towel and went out into the street. I had no idea where I was. I found a public telephone, made a reverse charge call home, praying George was back.

He came to pick me up and chortled all the way home. His constant talk of bacon caused several stop offs for pavement pizzas on the journey.

So at 10am today I crawled into bed, feeling rather sorry for myself. What the hell did I do with that woman?

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 29

No new recollections. Antony called, reckoned he bonked three women in the same bed, one after the other. I said “Bullshit” but he is the sort of guy where you always wonder. He didn’t know what else I had done, either.

My sleep pattern is completely out of whack. I am going to be stuffed for work. I am so grumpy when I am tired and incoherent at the best of times — *Weekend Star*, watch out.

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 30

George shat me off again today. He left bolognaise sauce in a saucepan and about 10 million ants decided to invade it. I almost tossed the whole lot in his bedroom. But no, I cleaned it up. Why?

It’s taken me two days to notice but my wallet was with the clothes I lost. Ms 40 will know where to find me. I’m going to have to get everything replaced, I suppose.

Tomorrow is New Year’s Eve. I have got nowhere to go. But I always have a crap New Year, anyway, and can I face another big night? If I stay home, won’t I worry about trying to be a hard-hitting journo in the next few days? Oh, my indecision! Why must I wemble so? (Is wemble a word?)

George says he is going to spend the New Year at his parents. On ya George! Party on, dude! Ten bucks says he is in bed before 10pm.

MONDAY, DECEMBER 31

6pm. Still no plans for this evening. George said I could come with him but I refused. The TV news is full of the usual reports about police cracking down if people get out of hand. I’ve even looked at the TV guide. Oh dear, no, not an evening of bad New Year specials. I keep looking at the phone, hoping it will ring. I’ve tried ringing

some people myself but they've already gone out.

12.30am. Technically, this should be under January 1 but it probably looks better here. I have eaten far too much pizza. At 9pm I realised I was in for the night and ordered two large pizzas, a garlic bread, 2 litres of Pepsi and a chocolate mousse for \$20. The meat lovers with barbecue sauce was good but why couldn't I have saved some for breakfast tomorrow? I didn't have to eat it all. No one made me. I'd make a New Year's resolution but I made a resolution years ago never to make another New Year's resolution. I have two options: sleep or read. Neither will be easy with this stomach ache.

TUESDAY, JANUARY 1

After finally getting to sleep at 3am — the neighbours partied on all night — the phone rang at 7.30am. George wanted to know if I wanted to join him for a barbie at his parents' place. I grunted at him, the thoughts of the pizza lingering in my bowels still. He said I was free to come if I wanted to.

Had an almighty crap... almost joyous... and the pizza was but a memory. Dozed until 11am. Decided to go George's parents, otherwise I'd fret about starting work tomorrow. I set my alarm but tried to put it out of my mind.

Barbecue was pleasant — George's mum is very sweet — but his big sister couldn't help but comment on my purple T-shirt. "Sexually frustrated, are we?"

I felt like saying: "Well, do you want to help me do something about it, honey?" but I didn't, of course. I'm sure she'd have me for breakfast.

George's old man spoiled the day by saying "Well, looking forward to work tomorrow?" I mumbled some rubbish about first days always being a bit of a strain.

Tried to get an early night but the fear in my heart was too great for a peaceful rest. Restless tossing and turning was the best I could do.

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 2

The alarm went off at 6.30am and although my mind knew it had to get out of bed, my body screamed “*Why the fuck are you doing this to me?*” Somehow I managed to haul arse through the shower etc. but I can’t get over the fact I’m wearing a shirt and tie. I can’t tie a normal one so I’ve got one of those ones on elastic.

Went in through the main entrance of the *Weekend Star*, tried opening the door and it wouldn’t budge. Some snide secretary asked what I was doing and I told her I was trying to start work. Apparently, there was a magic button I should have pressed, some sort of security measure.

Odd, coming in on a Wednesday but it’s because we work across the weekend, updating editions from midday Friday to Sunday lunch. Or so I was told.

I was taken into the editor’s office and given a welcome and a speech about making the most of this opportunity. My body was still in bed and I hadn’t had any coffee so I tuned out for most of it.

Then I was handed over to the chief-of-staff, Noah, and he introduced me around the office as the new cadet. Lots of people stared at me intently and then he asked me if I had any story ideas.

What?

The best I could come up with was “It’s a bit hard, you know” and so he told me to read the daily paper, aptly titled *The Daily Chronicle*, to see if I could get any ideas. By the time he came back I was still at a loss.

Then it was a meeting with the general manager and human resources manager. Boring videos, boring speeches. Everything seemed so anachronistic as if no technology or office workings had changed since the 60s. Finally, I was given a desk next to the industrial relations reporter.

As soon as Noah was out of earshot, Tate (for that was his name) started giving me an ear bashing about joining the union. I told him I was already a member of the AJA. “So we can count on you to strike, then” he said with a nod, before I had a chance to protest.

After twiddling my thumbs for an hour, Noah gave me something to do. Apparently, some guy had built a gigantic walrus in his backyard out of concrete. The pictures had already been taken so I had to ring him up and get some words to go with them.

Mr Adelphiolous was a little difficult to understand. Every time I asked a question he'd say "Yeah mate", even when I said "Have you thought of making a giant cockroach?" After this little disaster, I told Noah and he said I'd probably have to go and see him.

It was 4pm by this stage, so I was told to take a van and pay him a visit the next day.

I am so annoyed at myself for not thinking of having a story to chase. But I can't think of one now, either.

THURSDAY, JANUARY 3

Body screamed at me again. It's going to take a while to get the hang of these early starts.

The snide secretary from yesterday scowled at me but I showed her my new prowess with the door button. Noah gave me the keys to the van and I was off to see Mr Adelphiolous. I'm not used to driving a van but all I had to do was take it a bit easier around corners. Bloody things only have AM radio. The drive took about an hour, it was reasonably pleasant.

Then the fun started. Mr A showed me his giant walrus and from what I could understand, he built it because he had a fascination for The Beatles and possibly was a victim of a bad LSD trip in the late 60s (seems someone drugged his grappar). He works with cranes and concrete so it wasn't like he didn't know what was he doing in that department.

But for some unknown reason, he wanted me to see all his paintings — Pablo Picasso, he wasn't — and his home-brewed wine. I have a feeling he has a still in his cellar but he insisted it was an urn.

When I left I couldn't back out of his driveway. It was a steep gravel hill. Mr A told me to floor it. The wheels spun, gravel flew

everywhere and the car shot straight back into his letterbox.

He came screaming at me, some sort of abuse in Greek and/or Italian. I sped off down the road, wondering what I was going to tell Noah.

After I had collected my thoughts on the way back, I decided not to tell anyone. Maybe they wouldn't notice the dent or someone else would get the blame.

Didn't get a chance to start on the story, got lumbered with some bullshit cadet jobs, like inputting the TV programs and getting the weather pages organised.

FRIDAY, JANUARY 4

Discovered my weekend shifts were 10am to 10pm on Saturday and then 7am to 1pm Sun. Goodbye normal life. Apparently we are compensated with penalties and rostered days off.

Tackled the giant walrus story:

By RICK HUGHES

WHEN it's time to break from his grappar, Mr Adelphiolous gets to work.

After tripping out to The Beatles' *I Am The Walrus* he was inspired to make a giant statue, tusks and all.

So he grabs "extra" concrete from his building sites around town and moulds and folds again, layer upon layer upon layer.

Mr Adelphiolous said it was a lot of hard work but it got him away from his wife most of the time.

"My wife, he nags and nags and wants me to do bull... girlie work like the dishes," he said.

"I said 'No way, woman' and Isa get to work with the concrete and make my walrus - even when she need me to lift washing machine.

"Ha Ha Ha Ha!"

While he's got his walrus, what about the egg man? Or will Mr Adelphiolous now forever make strawberry fields?

“Eh?” he said. “Nah, I just make my home-made grappar and paint nude ladies from the high school.”

He encouraged *Weekend Star* readers to drop by and buy some of his grappar.

It took me most of the day to write the story because I couldn't read my notes. I told this to Noah and he said I'd start having to learn shorthand soon. Oh dear.

Nothing was said about the damaged van. Have I got away with it?

SATURDAY, JANUARY 5

Managed to sleep in a bit but the shit hit the fan as soon as I walked into the office.

Apparently my walrus story had got sent to the subs and the guy who had to sub it (Creamy, a drunken Irishman) went ballistic. He eyed me as I sat down and said “Do you know how much fucking trouble you could have got this paper in? That story was a fucking mess!”

I immediately tried to protest but he demanded I look over his shoulder and pointed out the problems.

“The intro's bullshit. The crap about The Beatles doesn't work. And you've basically got this wanker admitting he's a criminal throughout the story!”

He'd had words with Noah and told me to take a look at how he altered it when the paper came out.

Little happened for the first few hours and the few calls I had to make came to nought. My story finally appeared in the afternoon edition, radically altered. I was aghast – my name wasn't even on it.

This was the new version:

A LOVE of The Beatles has inspired another great work.

Mr Adelphiolous has taken his love of the song *I Am The Walrus* further than most – he's erected a giant monument to it.

The concrete worker created it in his spare time, using plenty of drive and determination.

“I enjoyed making it and it let me get away from mundane household chores,” Mr Adelphiolous said.

Aside from being a budding sculptor, Mr Adelphiolous is also a would-be Picasso and makes his own wine.

And the headline? “A HARD TUSK” — is this supposed to be a play on “a hard task”? I desperately wanted to complain because it was nothing like I had written but then Noah told me as soon as a place was available I was being sent on a media law course. Well, it looks like you can’t believe everything you read.

In the evening, I learnt to do police rounds which basically means listening to police radio and ringing the emergency services. Lots of alarms went off and the coppers ordered some kebabs.

SUNDAY, JANUARY 6

Getting out of bed after a 12-hour shift was a killer. Bloody George was watching the pro-wrestling on TV until 1am, really loud.

The Sunday shift appears to be the graveyard one. Only a few others were in the office, in case something was needed for the final edition.

The political reporter Edward had drawn the short straw and he told me to beware of Creamy — he was the one he didn’t get on with. And then I discovered all the cosy little relationships in the building where I should tread carefully. At least someone’s looking out for me. I thoughtfully made the coffees all morning. That was one bonus here. Endless supplies of free coffee.

The most exciting thing to happen was a spill of vegetable oil on a main road near Carlo. The paper was put to bed with minor changes.

Still no word about the van.

MONDAY, JANUARY 7

Can't believe it, I slept in till 3pm! And I only got out of bed when mother phoned. She wanted to know if I still worked for the paper because she hadn't seen my name in it. I told her the walrus story was mine but that story hadn't been in her edition.

Lazed about most of the day but got the shock of my life when I saw the late news! Ms 40 is wanted for questioning by Queensland police for credit card fraud. Shit, shit, shit! Have I bonked a criminal? What if the paper finds out?

3am. Forgot to mention her name is Heidi Delsminka.

TUESDAY, JANUARY 8

Had a phone call from the police. It appears they have located my wallet sans cash in a rubbish bin. No mention of Ms 40, I mean Heidi, was made but one did recognise my voice from me doing the police rounds the other night. I debated about mentioning the Heidi encounter but thought better of it, thinking they may link me to her crimes.

George was in a crap mood but I suppose it's hardly surprising. He hates his job. I'm beginning to see how it feels. I want to write but this first week wore me right down. All I need is a few more encounters with Creamy and I think I will be institutionalised.

I wish I had a story idea for this week. Maybe they will sack me if I don't come up with anything.

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 9

Body is still screaming at me. Will it ever get used to this new routine?

First shorthand lesson today. It's all a bunch of squiggles that represent letters. I tried to explain I had my own style of shorthand but the teacher wouldn't buy it. Spent all lesson drawing vertical lines and horizontal lines which variously represent: t, d, g and c/k. It's like a foreign language.

Had a meeting with Noah, he wanted to know if I had any

story ideas. I told him I hadn't read *The Daily Chronicle* yet. He furrowed his brow and then said: "Which van did you use last week?"

I didn't know the number plate but he said "Van 3 has a big dent in the back."

The only thing for it was to lie through my teeth so I said: "There's so much traffic out the back when the paper's being printed it wouldn't surprise me if a casual had done it without noticing."

Noah looked at me, hard, and asked when I had seen the production facilities. I said I briefly glanced at the area when I went to the toilet on one occasion.

"It doesn't really matter, the vans are insured anyhow."

I do worry for nothing, I must be paying penance for something I don't know about.

Spent most of the day answering Tate's phone (it was his rostered day off). Seems he wrote a story that pissed off a number of people and I copped earfuls of abuse all day. I have come to two conclusions: there are none as stupid as the general public and; all they want to do is have a whinge.

THURSDAY, JANUARY 10

I have written several fillers for the paper but still no story. I had one idea: why doesn't fast food ever look like the photos? The idea was to take a photographer, order food, take pictures of it and note the time, then compare it with the publicity photos in the paper.

Noah said no.

FRIDAY, JANUARY 11

When the first edition came out, I noticed how many fast food ads we run. Methinks the paper does not want to touch touchy ground. Typical.

Tate had written some story on Heidi Delsminka. A known con artist, she reportedly preys on men in nightclubs and steals

their wallets. She had done this in most states and Tate had a “source” that said she had pulled the stunt here. If it ever came out I sit next to him, then I would be labelled as that source, despite the fact it wasn’t me.

I’ve started to notice that although everyone sort of has a round, any one can write about what they want. So the fashion editor can end up doing police rounds.

Finally got a tangible story to work on... I had to accompany police through peak hour traffic to see what stupid things motorists do.

The photographer whinged the whole time: “What the fuck am I supposed to take a picture of?” he kept repeating. The coppers were okay until I distracted one with a question at a crucial moment and he clipped the side of a bus.

Oh, this *is* fun.

SATURDAY, JANUARY 12

Was told the peak hour traffic story was a better piece for next week. Kept going through the peripheral stuff and I was told in no uncertain terms not to fuck up the lotto results. Made a few mistakes: after I sent the weather a sub yelled: “Rick, is it really going to be 320 degrees in Auckland tomorrow?”

Got sent out to a small fire, came back smelling horribly of smoke. Stupid photographer Dennis had been standing around going “Where’s that burning rubber smell coming from?” not realising he was standing on hot ash and it was melting the soles of his shoes.

Luckily no one was hurt and I wrote the story thus:

A FIRE burnt through acres of bushland yesterday.

It threatened nearby homes and people were on standby to be evacuated but no one was hurt.

Thousands of dollars damage was done to several buildings, including one home which was gutted.

Fred Farmer came home to see his life up in smoke.

"I couldn't believe my eyes," he said, holding back tears.

"I had gone out to get some ice cream with the kids and 30 minutes later my life is a mess."

Head fire officer Peter Lowe said people should take more care by cleaning their gutters and yards on a regular basis.

"There was far too much dry material lying about and all it takes is one idiot to flick a cigarette butt out of a car," he said.

"We responded as quickly as we could but the fire tore through in a matter of seconds and we were lucky the weather was on our side today.

"If the wind had been blowing in another direction we could have had a real tragedy on our hands."

Forecasters are expecting a scorcher of 40C tomorrow so the fire brigade said people should be warned of the dangers.

As luck would have it, Creamy got the story although he was a bit nicer this time. He just thought opening few pars needed work and changed them to read:

FIRE caused thousands of dollars of damage and threatened lives as it swept through bushland yesterday.

Homes were put on evacuation alert and several buildings were destroyed, including one home that was gutted.

And he had the heart to give me a by-line. Got to say I was finally relieved to see "By RICK HUGHES" in the paper. So, too, were my bosses, I think.

SUNDAY, JANUARY 13

Sunday mornings are soooo boring at the paper. Nothing happens! All the good stuff happens when the nightclubs shut and the late crew pick that up. I'm told I'm going to be doing those late shifts soon — 10pm Friday to 7am Saturday and same again, Saturday through Sunday. Hope I get a decent photographer.

Spent the morning chatting with Suzanne, a journo in her late 20s and a very nice looking brunette. I haven't made my lustful thoughts known yet.

Antony called in the evening, wanting to know if I fancied going to a pub. The thoughts of the Heidi encounter rang through my mind so I said no, feigning my tiredness.

MONDAY, JANUARY 14

It's odd staying at home when everyone else is at work. There's no one to see and it feels as if I'm missing out on time off. Week days off just don't seem as relaxing. Does everyone turn their pace down a notch on the weekends?

Looked through all my past articles, desperate to find a story idea. Think I've found one: public transport. That's all we ever seemed to write about at my last paper, the ill-fated *City Times*. I'll run it past Noah.

TUESDAY, JANUARY 15

Have noticed a rash around my groin area. Could the legacy of Heidi Delsminka be living on? It's taken a while, if it's what I think it is.

9pm. Think it's just a case of dermatitis, caused by some nylon jocks.

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 16

Body *didn't* scream at me. It appears the tide is turning.

Spent most of the day writing the peak hour traffic story and I actually found it reasonably enjoyable. It was all bright and breezy — something to do with it being an eyewitness account, I think. Noah thought it was okay, although he told me to read our style book. I discovered we're supposed to say "about" instead of approximately, avoid cliches like the plague and numbers from one to nine are spelt out, then from 10 to 999,999 as numerals and then

it's 1 million.

My falldown is how I set out the quotes. I'm tempted to open them and let the person have their say, because I'm sure that's what the readers are interested in, not the crap I write around them.

Noah explained the upside down pyramid equation to me: the most important information at the top and then it decreases as you go down the story, allowing the reader to break off at any point.

What about style? Effect? What about the crap headlines that put people off anyway?

Of course I didn't say all this. I nodded humbly and said "Thanks for the tips."

I finally ran my public transport idea by him in the afternoon. He was keen, as long as what I did hadn't been done before, so I was to check the library.

The library is a wondrous resource. Clippings of stories from the *Weekend Star*, *The Daily Chronicle* and the Australia-wide paper, *The National*, are all there, going years back. It's a wonder people can come up with new ideas. The librarian is a Spanish looker called Kavisha, aged about 40. If it hadn't been for my run-in with Heidi, I'd put her on my potential list. Her bright red lipstick against her tanned skin almost sent a shiver down my spine. Still, good for a flirt.

The public transport file was extremely boring but I think I've got an angle. Three years ago the State Government planned to upgrade the city's major bus station but instead added two new rail lines which everyone thinks are hardly used. My story will be on why no one used the new rail service and whether the old bus station is adequate for the city's needs.

Sound boring? Noah and the deputy editor almost shot their loads when they found out. Maybe they can finally see a journalistic glimmer emanating from me.

THURSDAY, JANUARY 17

Spent all day making calls about the bus/rail story. The Transport Minister's office seemed to be the most pissed off but perhaps it was understandable. I told them I needed some sort of statement from the minister and about 2pm two pissy quotes came through on the fax:

"The government is currently looking into the matter and we hope to resolve the matter forthwith in the next two years with a working party investigating strategies commensurate with current policy," Minister for Transport, Mr Melvyn Nobbs, said.

"However, the essence of the matter should not be hindered by sensational journalism."

My grandfather is right: no matter who you vote for you always get a politician.

Tried ringing a newsagent at the bus station to see how the lack of patronage affected business but announcing myself as Rick Hughes from the *Weekend Star* set him off on a deranged diatribe.

"Why don't you send us more papers?" he whined.

"Ah, I think you might want to speak to our circulation department."

"Can you put me through?"

"No, no, I'm a journalist with the paper and I want to speak about your business."

"It's none of your business. I want more papers."

So I tried going straight into the questions:

"Does it bother you the government hasn't upgraded the station like it promised so your business could improve?"

"Eh? What government?"

"The State Government."

"It's in a terrible state."

And people think journalism is glamorous! I ended up writing him into the story thus:

A spokesman for City Bus News said he often required more papers, which meant more people were coming through, but he had little praise for our current government.

It's amazing how we twist things to make them work.

Still didn't think the story had enough length so I arranged to do a vox pop with a photographer tomorrow to find out what people on the street think.

What fun.

FRIDAY, JANUARY 18

I must have scored the worst photographer possible for the bloody vox pop. Mind you, it was probably a bad choice on my part to head into the nearby markets which are full of hippies, ferals and lesbians.

I've started to learn photogs all have a massive chip on their collective shoulders but this one, Laurie Moffat, has absolutely no social skills whatsoever.

I knew I should have been worried when I saw what he was wearing: a nylon black shirt and brown and orange paisley tie. At least it took my attention away from his toupee (apparently everyone in the office had nicknamed it "the ferret" behind his back).

Laurie turned out to be homophobic, racist and completely tactless. All I wanted to do was ask people if they had problems with the bus or train systems but Laurie wanted to have some of his own input.

"Do you like smelling and looking like an animal?" he asked of one feral. The feral growled, Laurie took a picture. We ran (well, Laurie wobbled and bobbed as fast as he could) to find someone we could interview without offending.

Somehow we managed to get the job done but it was living hell. I later saw the photos and Laurie managed to get absolutely everybody's worst side. I wrote the story in a huff but Noah and everybody seemed quite pleased at what I managed to put together; it got a half-page run on page 48.

SATURDAY, JANUARY 19

I don't believe it! I came in for an afternoon/night shift and what's on the front page? The feral Laurie upset! The headline was "THE FUTURE OF OUR CHILDREN" followed by a hatchet job by Suzanne. I desperately wanted to give her a piece of my mind but decided against it, knowing it would limit any future chance of getting into bed with her.

The day was so boring, just peripheral stuff to do. Not one to waste time (ha!) I decided to chat up Kavisha in the library. I couldn't be sure but I'm sure she was decidedly pointing her breasts at me. But I got so caught up in my leering I almost missed the lotto results. I managed to grab them by calling the official office.

Two hours later I got the next edition of the paper and was horrified to find one of the numbers was wrong, after comparing it with an official fax. The guy that spoke to me had botched it. I fucked up. No, I *fucked up big time*. I had to tell Noah, so I put on my most humble and apologetic voice and was met with the resultant "Shit!"

Then it was a quick word with the subs and me feeding them the right numbers.

I am so crap at this job... why don't they sack me?

SUNDAY, JANUARY 20

Didn't have to go in today, having worked the night before. That gave me all day to stew in my own juices about getting the sack.

George was philosophical: "Look, if you get the sack, big deal. You've dealt with it before and besides, there's absolutely nothing you can do about it until Wednesday."

That's the good thing about George. No matter how irritating he gets he somehow manages to let his good qualities shine through at the right moments. He was at a loose end so we went to the pub for the Sunday session, trying different imported beers and crapping on about life and our futures. I keep forgetting George does a job he loathes — he works at a baked bean factory and is responsible

for the tomato sauce section.

Our pantry is full of them and we've spent many an aimless night having trouser trumpet competitions.

We staggered home around 10pm, after a greasy kebab. The lotto debacle was but a distant memory. Why aren't there more days like this?

MONDAY, JANUARY 21

Got a shock in the mail today. There was a naked photo of me, chained up, screaming. It must be related to the whole Heidi thing. I can now be blackmailed. The address on the envelope was typed and the postmark was simply the GPO. So was Heidi still in the city, then?

TUESDAY, JANUARY 22

Went to the chemist, demanded their super strong Vitamin B tablets to cope with the stress I am under. I took six as soon as I got home; they smelt like Vegemite. I *loathe* Vegemite. My piss was bright yellow for my next five toilet trips.

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 23

Made myself look a fool again today. It was my rostered day off and I came into the office. Noah said I could take it the next week. We also had a serious discussion about the lotto results. Apparently, a photographer will take a picture of what's on screen and I'll take the numbers from that. It's laborious but Noah insisted it was the only way to make sure it was right.

He told me one of my predecessors had almost cost the company \$1 million in litigation when people read some wrong numbers in the paper, thought they'd won, and then discovered they hadn't.

Good to know I'm not the only screw-up to have been through this place.

THURSDAY, JANUARY 24

I just don't know what to do with myself. Or so Dusty Springfield once sang. Today was so boring. I spent the day pretending to research stuff and making phone calls to my home number, as if I was trying to contact someone. I don't have any adequate story ideas. The only break was my shorthand lesson and I can see that wearing thin very quickly. The lessons aren't bad it's just the hours of homework you have to do. Homework, my God. I thought I was beyond all that. Obviously not. I feel like a total zombie at home, just soaking up the gravy from the TV. There was one item on the news I thought might be worth chasing but then decided *The Daily Chronicle* would end up doing it.

FRIDAY, JANUARY 25

Story wasn't in *The Daily Chronicle* but it's bound to be in there tomorrow. Tate decided to give me another earbashing about the union until I said: "Don't you think you'll bite the hand that feeds you?"

He got really aggro and yelled at me, going on about workers' rights and how the paper earns a nice million or two each week.

That's a relief. Now I don't need to be scared about taking so many pens. They're only Bics, anyway.

SATURDAY, JANUARY 26, AUSTRALIA DAY

Re-read last entry. How exciting is my life when I need to crap on about pens? I thought journalism was supposed to be interesting.

But today I discovered something: as soon as you say nothing's happening, manure will hit a rotating device in the ceiling.

I got in at 8am and was soon heading to the town's major hospital. Turns out a man got so fed up with waiting so long to be treated in the emergency ward, he went home and got a sawn-off shotgun. He came back and fired a couple of warning shots, demanding to see a doctor. Police, ambulance and fire brigade all turned up, it was the closest I'd seen to a war zone.

Police wouldn't let me in and told me I had to go through their media liaison unit. A flash of inspiration hit me and I said "They told me to speak to someone in charge here." This taxed the young constable's brain too much and he called over the sergeant in charge.

"Look, we've got an absolutely critical situation in that hospital, an angry man loose with a gun and hundreds of innocent people in the building. The Tactical Response Group is here to put a lid on it and we don't need the bloody *Weekend Star* here to cock things up!"

"Can I quote you on that?" was my immediate reply.

He looked as if he was about to thump me until my photographer stepped in. Mike was a smooth cat and managed to defuse the situation, even getting us closer to the action so I could give a blow by blow account to the office via the mobile they had given me.

Trouble is, things got a bit tense later and one of the cops punched Mike in the face and, as I was screaming this down the phone, another cop threatened to take my mobile phone away. I ran away, not wanting to lose my lifeline to the office, and hid in a nearby lemon tree outside. Unfortunately, it had lots of thorns and I scratched myself badly.

Meanwhile, Mike had retreated somewhat and was hollering at someone through his mobile. Things cooled down after a while and we gradually came back closer to the action.

Little else happened at our end and the gunman eventually gave himself up by late evening.

The paper had been putting out editions, updating the hostage drama all day with the headline: "GUNMAN TERRORISES HOSPITAL" and there were three by-lines on the story — mine, Suzanne's and our health reporter's, Lesley. Apparently, Suzanne threaded my information together and Lesley got all the official lines from the hospital and Health Minister. I was told later if there had been one more by-line they would have just used: "By STAFF REPORTERS". Still, I haven't been at the *Weekend Star* a month and I've got my first front page.

Not bad if I do say so myself and at least it got me out of covering boring Australia Day crap.

SUNDAY, JANUARY 27

Was so exhausted I slept in until late afternoon. That's what happens when you get invited to have a beer from the editor's fridge the night before. All anyone talked about was football. Glad I didn't have to go into the office today.

Ate, crapped and spent the day being a general vegetable in front of the TV — George had taped a couple of Spanish flicks from SBS a while back which had some good nude scenes in them.

MONDAY, JANUARY 28

I really need a life, or, at the very least, a girlfriend. Mind you, adjusting to this journalism gig has been hard. Contemplated doing some shorthand homework but the thought of doing hours of practising outlines led me straight to the fridge to make a couple of ham and mustard sandwiches.

It's so boring on Mondays. Everyone else I know is at work and there is no one I can hang out with. Except Antony. But he's never bloody around when I want to do something.

Follow-up to gunman story has been appearing on all the evening news bulletins and how such a thing could've happened plus the health crisis surrounding it all.

I think one of the scratches I gained from the lemon tree is becoming infected.

TUESDAY, JANUARY 29

Antony called up out of the blue and came over to hang out. After swilling much of George's beer (he was there and guzzling with us) we decided we needed some crap food. And what better than Fried Calories Aplenty or FCA as it's commonly known?

We thought we'd make absolute pigs of ourselves and ordered the family feast. But we wanted Diet Coke in a bottle instead of

the ordinary stuff — George and I think the other stuff is too sugary — and we were going to get started on a bottle of scotch with it.

But the manager said it was unpopular and they didn't have any bottles until I pointed out the cans below. I had a bright idea: how about exchanging cans for the bottle. No, he replied, he couldn't do that because of the pricing structure.

I was ready to blow my top but grabbed a complaint form, waved it under his nose, and left with George and Antony.

Two hours later I was in a cold sweat on my bed — why do humans continue to eat FCA when it makes you feel bloody awful later on?

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 30

There was hardly anyone in the office today (many of them had RDOs) so I wrote my complaint about last night's incident:

TO THE HEARTLESS BASTARDS AT FCA

I have a gripe with your chain of stores. I waltz in to one of your stores on a Tuesday night (29-1) and order the family feast which includes a 1.25L bottle of Coke. I politely ask for Diet Coke. Mr Manager says they don't stock it. Then I point to the cans below. He says they don't have it in a bottle. At this point my temper frays slightly. I have a solution — three cans of Diet Coke instead of the 1.25L bottle.

No can do, says Mr Manager, some bullshit about price structures. Well, hate to say it but I would have been getting less drink by taking the cans — 175ml less, in fact. Surely a manager is allowed to make such decisions or is FCA (Filthy Cockheads Associated) a completely fascist organisation?

I could walk out and not complain. But you are providing a service and your service is just not good enough. It's a fucked attitude when there are so many other fast food joints in the area competing with you. You don't even allow a

little leeway. Well guess where I'm never going again? Sucked in, arseholes.

And yes, I do expect a reply to this letter. If I don't, I'll keep sending it. But I know it will be one of those bland "hope you will continue to enjoy FCA in the future" piles of crap.

Up yours, RICK HUGHES

That should stir them up! I had to be quick when I printed it because there were a few people about and I didn't want them to see it. I stapled it to the complaint form so I could take advantage of their free postage service. Like hell was I buying a stamp.

THURSDAY, JANUARY 31

Noah asked me to send a memo, detailing the standover tactics of the police on Saturday. Apparently, one of the television news crews caught the cop punching Mike on camera. Mike got a black eye and was reporting it to the Ombudsman and is demanding an apology from the police.

I duly wrote down what I saw and, after being hounded by other media outlets, the police issued a statement just before 5pm stating they had handed the incident to their internal investigations unit.

We were all standing around Mike, looking at the fax, and Edward harrumphed it would all come to nought, because it was simply police investigating police and they all looked after each other.

11pm. Just realised I forgot to take my RDO yesterday which I originally should have taken the week before. Nobody noticed.

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 1

I asked Noah if maybe there was some follow-up I could do on the gunman but he said *The Daily Chronicle* had run with it all week and there would be little left for us by the weekend.

Later in the day, I somehow got in a conversation with Lesley who kindly informed me she's doing a feature piece on the cash

crisis in the health system. Apparently, she's found a doctor who's lost faith in medicine and the world.

And guess who's doing the recap articles of what's sparked the new outcry? Bloody Suzanne! Who was there? Who gave them the vital information they were screaming for? Of course, I'm only the cadet and can play the fall guy but I'm not trusted enough to actually write about a serious issue.

Instead, I was asked to do our inane regular feature, "Dog Of The Week." Each week we publish a photo of a dog that needs a home and some sucker has to write some lines to go with it. Here's my Shakespearean effort:

**ROSES may be red, violets may be blue - but
Bugsy the beagle is sad and has nothing to do.**

**Put the sunshine back in your life and his by
making this dog part of your family... your very
own Snoopy.**

**With an easy temperament, beagles are renowned
for being good with children and are extremely
loyal.**

**Help him before he has to be put down. Contact
the Kelming Shire Pound for details.**

I couldn't have made that sound more like an ad if I tried. Forget breaking the news, this is what journalism is about. Filling pages with mindless pap between a few interesting news stories and the sports pages.

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 2

Had a day shift and it just dragged and dragged. Tate told me it was what's described as a "slow news day".

Instead, I chatted to one of the copyrunners, Stacey. She's quite cute and has the tedious job of running errands for all and sundry but it's mainly running page proofs between subs and other departments.

Bit young for me, only 17, but it's been ages since I had a root (the whole Heidi incident notwithstanding) and despite the current heatwave, her nipples were standing proudly to attention. Must be

the office air conditioning. Or maybe she likes me? I doubt I excite anyone that much, I'm getting delusions of grandeur.

Spent the rest of the day trying to eye off other erect nipples in the office but it came to an abrupt end when I went to the canteen and subconsciously found myself trying to look through one of the old ladies' blouses. I still get a cold shudder thinking about it.

Stacey spent the rest of the afternoon ringing my phone and hanging up. Each time I said "*Weekend Star*, Rick Hughes" and she knew I couldn't not be polite, in case it was someone important. Mind you, it would hardly be the Premier giving me a quick call.

Noah frowned at the antics after an hour but, luckily, my shift was soon over.

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 3

As always, there was bugger all to do today. I went to photocopy some articles on an upcoming story and there were all these copies of someone's arse! Well, it was probably two, male and female. Edward walked by and tut-tutted, implying the scattered pages were revealing black and white copies of my behind.

I lifted up the lid but quickly snapped it shut again because there was an unknown gelatinous substance on the glass plate. Someone else can discover it and draw their own conclusions.

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 4

George was at home today because there had been a minor explosion at the baked bean factory. As always, this happened after our final deadline and was in today's *Daily Chronicle*.

Apparently, someone in Japan screwed up the order and sent broad beans by mistake and they contained too much moisture. This caused pockets of steam to form simultaneously and — voila — it was raining hot beans and tomato sauce.

How George got out of the clean up operation, I don't know, but he always manages to wangle his way out of things. Just like the dishes.

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 5

George home for the second day. He called me a whinger! Reckoned I wouldn't be happy if my arse was on fire! Bastard.

He thinks I should be happy to have such a good job and maybe I should try the baked bean factory for a while.

I told him I was getting disillusioned by everything so far but he made me realise this is another week and the paper is my oyster. Actually, better cut down on the cliches, we're to avoid them like the plague when we're writing for the paper.

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 6

Smaller paper this week for some reason and there's plenty of copy left over from last week. Noah asked me to re-hash the most scintillating (note sarcasm) government press release into something usable. I bet it's dropped after the first edition:

ACCOUNTABILITY and consistency of ethical standards were identified by John Weaver as problems for everyone who holds public office.

The Minister for Micro-Economic reform was launching a discussion paper entitled Accountability and Responsibility at the South Timda Centre.

The Minister confessed to a conflict between his role as a member of Cabinet and that of local member of Parliament.

"As a Minister my duty is to everyone in the State without fear or favour," Mr Weaver said.

"But as the member for South Timda my constituents expect me to gain benefits for them."

Bill Roberts, a member of the working party that prepared the report, said the understandings and values that were second nature to many members of government boards now needed to be spelled out.

He expressed the hope that members of the public would take the time to read and respond to the document.

Public service commissioner William Thomson described the crucial relationships between public servants, board members and Ministers of the Crown.

Ethicist Simon Thornton drew attention to the limitations of codes and guidelines – pious phrases are of less value than reflective ethical practices.

Who wants to be a cadet? I don't. (Think positive, might be something better tomorrow).

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 7

No, an even worse day. Four paragraphs. Partly to amuse myself I wrote a suggested headline. The news editor, Bruce Hunter, went off his tree. He really is a bear with a sore head. If he's not careful, he'll have a coronary.

POP IN FOR A FREE JAB

AN adult Immunisation Week is currently being held in the City Mall, near the pedestrian overpass.

The service is free and the target group will be adults who have let their immunisation against the diseases tetanus, diphtheria and poliomyelitis lapse.

A council medical team will operate from a self-contained immunisation bus and is open from 10am until 3pm.

Although these diseases are not present in epidemic form in the community they still exist and form a potential danger to those who have not been immunised.

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 8

Another great day:

AN astronomy evening on Thursday will offer a journey among the planets of the solar system out to the furthest reaches of the known universe.

Beneath the sky of the YMCA Pavilion, Buralder

Street Reserve, in Troughton Lakes from 7pm to 10pm, Saturn, the stars of Scorpio; the craters, sea and mountains of the moon and the 100,000 stars of Omega will be viewed through a range of powerful telescopes.

The Astronomical Society in conjunction with the Smiley Park Festival invites the public to take a trip around the galaxies for the affordable price of \$4 adults, \$3 children and concessions. Bookings can be made through Shirl on 9123 4321.

Why did I even show up?

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 9

Today's supposedly the big news day, right? Well, not for me. I had to write some blocklines for a pissy picture story. Walkley Awards, here we come.

THE State's Fire Brigade promoted fire awareness, safety and education with displays and demonstrations last week in the city.

As part of Fire Awareness Week, the aim was to make people aware of fire safety and what fire services do.

The fireman pictured is demonstrating how the "jaws of life" are used in a car accident.

This was part of a demonstration to show there is more to being a fireman than just fighting fires.

The safe use of fire during summer was also highlighted.

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 10

I concede: my one effort for today was slightly more interesting. But the editors didn't want it for the final edition, they wanted to hold it until next week.

BLAIR University physics expert, Dr Ed Malcolm, has spent several years of research work developing a new type of sapphire clock, the world's most accurate.

"It was a spin-off from a gravitational wave program," Dr Malcolm said.

"We needed more sensitive sensors so we had to invent something."

Based on a single crystal of artificial sapphire, the clock can be used in communications to reduce the amount of background noise or hiss over mobile phones and spacecraft broadcasts.

It can also be used for time-standards in astronomy and increasing sensitivity in radar systems.

"Since its original inception the clock is now 10 times better," Dr Malcolm said. "It's the best in the world, there is nothing to compare it to."

The National Measurement Laboratories in the US have been supplied with one of the clocks to help develop other types of oscillators.

The sapphire clock is being marketed by firm Titan Scientific Facilities.

Could be worse. At least I'm getting paid for my efforts. I've finally decided if I get the sack, I get the sack. It's as if a great weight has been lifted from my shoulders.

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 11

I'm finding that having to write crap during the day is sapping my creative juices in the evening and I am uninspired to write the chronology of my life. Maybe I should focus less on work. But there is little else happening in my life, apart from the occasional fret over Heidi Delsminka.

Work is so boring at the moment, maybe I should think about something else. Like today. I made six hot dogs with tomato sauce, mustard and fried onions and watched day-time TV. Is America really the stupidest country on earth?

I don't know, sometimes I think life is passing me by.

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 12

Felt very, very ill this morning. (Actually I slept in until 1pm). I dreamt about fried chihuahuas and eating them, covering them with thick blood. Had my head down the toilet bowl for ages.

Don't think I'll be eating hot dogs for a while. Of course, George taunted me all day saying "Hot diggity dog!" ad nauseam. Mildly amusing once, bloody annoying for the rest of the infinity.

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 13

Is Stacey coming on to me? I can't tell if she's being mischievous or flirting. She left a message on my desk to call an Albert Ross and left a phone number. I had no idea what it was about so I rang and got the bloody zoo. Of course, "Albert Ross" equals "Albatross". Tomorrow is Valentine's Day and I have no one to share my heart with. I spent hours and hours debating whether I should send a card, flowers or chocolates to Stacey or possibly even Kavisha in the library but before I knew it time had flown and it was five o'clock. All the stores were shut. I'd blown my chance for another year.

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 14

Frantically went to the letterbox as soon as I got home, desperately hoping a card may have made its way to my home. It was the last chance for the day. The only thing was a reply from FCA following my letter. I'd completely forgotten about it.

Dear Ms Hughes

Thank you for taking the time to inform us regarding the poor service you received at one of our FCA stores. Your complaint has been addressed with the management and they assure me that Diet Coke has and will be available at all times.

Please accept my apologies on behalf of the company for your dissatisfaction at the service you received.

I have enclosed a voucher for your use at any of our FCA stores in the State.

I would just like to point out that the bad language used in your letter does not actually deserve a reply and in the future will not be replied to if written in this manner.

Regards,
MR KIM LOLLER,
District Operations Manager

Ms Hughes? Ms Hughes? They didn't even address my complaint properly. Another letter is required!

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 15

As always, bugger all to do at work, so I wrote a letter back to FCA, expressing my extreme dissatisfaction. And just to make up for the Ms Hughes bit, I called the manager Mrs Loller. Hope that raises his hackles.

Dear Mrs Kim Loller

You have not addressed my complaint regarding one of your FCA stores in an adequate manner.

I quote from my last letter:

"I waltz in to one of your stores on a Tuesday night (29-1) and order the family feast which includes a 1.25L bottle of Coke. I politely ask for Diet Coke. Mr Manager says they don't stock it. Then I point to the cans below. He says they don't have it in a bottle. At this point my temper frays slightly. I have a solution - three cans of diet Coke instead of the 1.25L bottle."

Your letter to me says that store has had Diet Coke available at all times. This wasn't the issue. It wasn't available in a *bottle* when I ordered the family feast and the manager said I could not get cans instead, doing some unconvincing nonsense about pricing structures. If it *was* available in a bottle as you claim in your letter why was I told they don't stock it

and that Diet Coke in a bottle was not popular with customers?

And as for the language in my last letter, it was because I was annoyed, furious and dissatisfied. Every word used is printed in the English dictionary and littered all over popular culture through television, radio and film.

It got your attention, didn't it? Lucky I didn't carry on like that in one of your stores, or you would have had a nice bit of negative publicity.

I return the vouchers you so kindly sent me because I can never foresee myself walking into another FCA store. You're probably saying to yourself some people are just never happy but I'm trying to point out the farcical nature of this whole incident. The manager could have fixed it in a flash - especially if he wanted my business - but no.

Reginald Chuckhop would be turning in his grave.

MR RICK HUGHES

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 16

My car got a flat tyre on the way into work and guess what? The spare was flat as well. I eventually got it to a service station but all the air pumps were out of commission. There was no choice but to hitch a ride to work and leave the car on the side of the road.

Some absolute lunatic pulled up and I had to shut my eyes for the whole journey because I swear his rustbucket could have fallen apart even if someone had breathed too hard on it.

I ended up being three hours late for my shift, hands and face covered in black grime from my failed tyre change. Noah frowned severely but I explained and even offered to make up the three hours but he shook his head and said "These things happen".

On my way out to the men's to clean myself up Creamy yelled "Hey sambo, do *My Little Mammy*." Should have guessed he'd be a racist. I don't even want to know how he treats women.

Called George: he came to the car's rescue while I was working

and even picked me up after work. I now need to be nice to him. Will a week do?

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 17

Bit of a crisis in the office this morning. Tate had a hot new story about Heidi Delsminka and needed someone to help him with it. I was the only person available.

I had to contact police to see if she was back in the State and ring credit card agencies and everything. I tell you, the room felt like it was 40C (it was only 32C outside) and I desperately wanted to tell Tate everything that had happened but was far too scared. Somehow I managed to get the information together and I got a joint by-line with Tate on the story. Great, my name is now associated with the Heidi stories.

It's only a matter of time before someone finds out. How much incriminating evidence could be out there?

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 18

I looked in the mirror and weighed myself today. No wonder I haven't been pulling the chicks lately, only myself. What was it someone once said: "You wake up, age 24 or 25, and suddenly you're a fat bastard".

I'm only 23. Couldn't face the day so I bought a big bag of donuts and two bags of potato chips. Oh, and some soft porn mags.

Felt better after that.

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 19

I finally got to live out one of my fantasies this evening. Someone had got the wrong number and instead of me simply saying they had dialled wrong, I said something else:

"Is Paul Deans there?"

"No and don't cream your jeans, either."

Well, *I* thought it was funny. George came out of the lounge room, incredulous at what I had done and just kept shaking his head.

The phone didn't stop ringing for the next hour and a half.

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 20

When I went to grab my morning coffee, I noticed a bunch of fellow workers standing around the noticeboard. They all seemed to be rather amused by something.

And then I realised. It was one of the first articles I ever wrote for *City News*. I was much more naive then and my writing was shocking (although the subs would say nothing's changed). Nothing like public humiliation of a colleague to bring them out in their masses.

The story was boring in itself — just must have been the shoddy way it was written.

ENERGY CONSERVATION: COUNCIL GOES WITH THE TIMES

By RICK HUGHES

The ever-growing concern for the environment, and basically the future of the planet, from the general public has led governments and big businesses to sit up and take notice.

One particular thing of interest to these people is energy conservation in buildings, which is finally being recognised as something of international importance.

To achieve this, one would imagine thousands of dollars having to be poured into research. However, as with most things environmentally sound, the knowledge and advanced technology that would make buildings more energy efficient, has been around for a number of years.

Now that the environment has become a major issue, dollar signs have again lit themselves up in people's eyes, and only now they are realising that there is potential savings in efficient energy use.

On the local front, there are many types of homes that are energy efficient, with the inclusion of solar houses.

Take a drive around Plespert and you may come across one house with a wind generator, and a roof covered with solar panels. The electricity is free, and stored in batteries.

And the house would only be without power if there were six windless, cloudy days. Also, no problems with blackouts.

The Solar Energy Department is in a three storey office building that has operating costs one third the average.

The City Council has decided to play a large part in the promotion of energy efficient buildings by taking energy conservation into account, when new designs for the city's buildings are put forward. They intend to carry out energy audits in existing buildings in order to discover money saving opportunities.

They also hope to develop ways in which the city can help publicise the need for the acceptance of energy efficient building practices (the Building Section of the Local Government Act is currently being reviewed, to make provisions for energy conservation in buildings).

Of course, Creamy accosted me later in the day and told me what a piece of shit it was. He'd taken a photocopy and was pointing out that when referring to the City Council it is a singular body and should be referred to as "its" rather than "they". I tried arguing about some of his points but he wouldn't have a bar of it.

He'd been at the pub and by mid-afternoon everyone had a right to *his* opinion.

I'd had enough so I said "Get fucked" and stormed out. I walked straight out of the building with no intention of returning. I didn't care whatsoever. I'd been unemployed before, I could do it again.

It's now late at night and no one's called me. Should I go in tomorrow or not? The paper hasn't actually sacked me yet.

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 21

When I came in there was a note on my desk, folded in four. It read:

Rick,

I went after you but you were a couple of miles down the street.

OK, you're stressed, under pressure — take a couple of deep breaths and focus on what you have to do NOW, forget this afternoon's bullshit for now.

Xavier

Xavier was a gothic-looking, waif-like sub who I'd had little to do with except the odd comment or two about some of my stories so I was a little surprised he was taking an interest at all.

Suzanne had a quiet word in my ear (somehow I still managed to think lustful thoughts) and said everyone in the office wanted to tell Creamy to get fucked at least twice a week and at least I'd had the balls to do it.

Rumour has it he's been up on several harassment charges and was only surviving at the *Weekend Star* by the skin of his teeth, thanks to some of his mates.

He paid no attention to me all day, even though I knew he subbed a couple of my stories.

So I didn't get the sack. Seems you have to commit blue murder here before that happens.

1am. Who found that old story of mine and put it up on the noticeboard, anyway?

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 22

Noah sent me out on a real oddball one today. He'd had a call from some woman who was looking for her daughter she had to adopt out 50 years ago. But the authorities were not releasing any information. A freelancer had already written a couple of stories, so I read those to get the gist before I went out to her home in one of the company vans.

Upon arriving and knocking on the door, there was a sudden multitude of yapping from behind the door. As soon as the door

opened I had six Pekinese snapping at my ankles.

“Mrs Clifton?”

“Oh, don’t step on my little preciouses. They don’t really mean it, they’re just excited.”

I yelped as I was sure I felt some teeth start to sink in.

Eventually, we got in and settled at a table as she made me a cup of tea, even though I had asked for coffee.

She started telling me the story of how 50 years ago she had to give up her child because it turned out she wasn’t really married. The man who married her was already married and because bigamy was illegal, it made his second marriage null and void.

Apparently, he pissed off, never to be seen again and left Mrs Clifton pregnant. But the welfare agencies didn’t think it was right she should raise the child on her own and as soon as her daughter was born, the baby was adopted out.

I had gleaned some of this already from the previous articles but they hadn’t gone into this whole false marriage affair, leading me to wonder why the freelancer hadn’t included it.

Mrs Clifton soon broke down and was in tears when she told of how she discovered her daughter, at age eight, had become a ward of the state and was in a special home for abandoned children. When she found out she took her daughter, called Veronica, and looked after her for two weeks until someone found out and took her away again.

I fumbled around with my notes as Mrs Clifton cleared up her tears and then, out of nowhere, came a man wearing only a shirt and his underpants.

He grunted a nod of recognition and then came and sat down at the table. I assumed he was Mr Clifton.

“Greek women are nice, aren’t they?”

I didn’t know what the hell he was talking about so I remained polite and said “Yes, they are”, thinking about a Greek girl I knew.

Mrs Clifton said she had tried adoption agencies around Australia but there was a special procedure and she could only get

fragments of information at a certain time. The other problem was that, even if she did get her daughter's adopted surname, there was a good chance she would have got married and it would have changed again.

Suddenly, Mr Clifton was at it again. "America's an evil country, don't you think?"

"Ahh, I guess some people would see it that way." And then he went to his shed in the back garden. Hate to think what he was doing.

Mrs Clifton then drifted off into comments about her Pekinese and how she bred them. One was the grandmother of another and one litter had one pup with no face and another had to have its uterus removed.

I didn't want to tell her inbreeding could lead to these sort of defects so I humoured her and eventually left, the dogs snapping at my heels again as I went out to the van.

It was after 5pm by the time I got back and almost everyone had gone home so I decided to tackle the story tomorrow.

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 23

I told Noah the (important) events that had transpired but he didn't think there was enough new information to write a new story. He thought we should wait to see if anything was forthcoming from the adoption agencies before we did any more on Mrs Clifton.

It pissed me right off because not only had I wasted an afternoon and wouldn't be getting a good story in the paper on the weekend, I also kind of felt sorry for Mrs Clifton and didn't know how she'd be if a story didn't appear.

But I managed to contain myself — Noah was a different kettle of fish to Creamy — and sulked for the rest of the day.

Don't know if it was intentional but Noah asked me to fax the first five pages of the paper to various people around the country, a job that could easily have been done by a copy runner. And there were several available for the task.

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 24

For some reason the books editor was in this morning and approached me to review a book. I was happy to do anything that would get another by-line in the paper but the book he gave me, *Let's Think About Religion*, hardly inspired me.

I took it and flicked through it between tasks. This is going to be a tough one to get through, methinks. Had a look at other book reviews, seems you can say exactly what you think and only mention a bit about the book. Shouldn't be too hard.

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 25

Spent most of the day at a half-assed attempt at reading *Let's Think About Religion*. It's soooooo boring. I can't imagine why anyone would ever want to buy it.

George burned the spaghetti for dinner. I don't know how he managed it but we ordered yet another pizza. Sometimes I think they should just deliver every second night and stick to our regular order. No wonder I'm getting even pudgier. I don't know how George manages to eat so much and stay thin. At least I'm not losing my hair, though.

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 26

Hadn't heard from Antony in ages but when I rang his number, I was told he didn't live there any more. And no, they didn't have a contact number or forwarding address.

So yet again Antony has disappeared off the face of the planet and it's up to me to track him down again. Sometimes our friendship seems so one-sided.

Was at a loose end so I tried a few other numbers in my address book. Some friends from my past had also moved, others sounded as if it was a huge pain to hear from me. I gave up after five goes.

I have no friends, it seems.

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 27

Got a call from Mrs Clifton first thing this morning, upset the story wasn't in the paper. I calmed her down and explained the chief-of-staff wanted to go with the story after she next hears some results from the adoption agency. She seemed happy with that and said "You're a good lad, Rick" before hanging up.

The National had a front page story about Heidi Delsminka. Seems she's now wanted in three states in relation to credit card fraud and one armed robbery. How long will my secret shame stay quiet? Tate was doing yet another follow up and had her photo on his desk which I had to stare at all day.

Maybe all I need is a good hard root to sort myself out. But there haven't been any takers lately. Do I dare ask Stacey out?

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 28

Looked at Stacey's tits all day until she finally came up and said: "Would you stop looking at my tits? Otherwise I'll report you for sexual harassment."

Of course, I denied doing any such thing but the more I denied it, the more it sounded like I had definitely been drooling over her gorgeous bosoms. And before I knew it she mashed my face into them before walking off. Right in front of everyone! I went bright red and received a few smirks from surrounding colleagues.

So does that mean she likes me or not?

FRIDAY, MARCH 1

Stacey played Ms Ice Bitch all morning but I couldn't tell if this was one of those "play hard to get" things. It would so much easier if I could go up and say "Look I think you're attractive and want to get funky with you" and she would say "All right" or "Get fucked". At least everyone would know where they stood then.

I tried explaining this to George later that night but he said half the fun would be gone then. Got no idea why I'm really discussing relationships with George — the last woman he bonked was three

years ago and that somehow started on the lounge room floor in front of her parents. Surprised he got away with his balls although another acquaintance had suggested maybe they joined in for a foursome.

And that does not bear thinking about. Really it doesn't.

SATURDAY, MARCH 2

I was finally brave enough to have a crap at work. Up until now I've been holding on and doing a mega-turd whenever I got home. But I just couldn't hang on today.

My main problem was one of embarrassment and making all those sounds and smells and then coming out and knowing some of my workmates had witnessed everything. But I worked out that I could stay in the loo until I was sure everyone had either gone out or was safely locked in a cubicle.

I don't know what the guy three doors down was doing but it sounded like he was scrubbing his pants out with some steel wool. Some wag had written above the toilet roll: "*Weekend Star*, free copy. Why not subscribe today?"

It's a worry I've spent more time worrying about hanging a bory at work than the future of my journalism career. But what did I end up doing today? Tried getting a few local angles on some stories we'd imported from some of our interstate papers so there was no way I was going to get a credit on any of those.

Couldn't believe the front page: "MISSING GIRL: CULT LEADER HERE?" Some girl's grandmother had taken her away from the family — obviously something had been going on a while — and there was the choice quote: "How can I be a witch or cult leader? I've been a member of the Labor Party for 10 years."

Jeez, we publish some shite.

SUNDAY, MARCH 3

George and I have had an ongoing saga with the real estate agent about an archway we have to drive our cars through. Some tree

loppers next door let a huge branch fall on it and smashed part of the top. George wrote a letter to the people handling our rental property but we haven't heard anything for ages.

This morning was the last straw. I've always fucking hated the arch and I've scratched my car on more than one occasion trying to back out. It's far too narrow and, following a late shift last night, my head was still groggy after the neighbour's dog woke me up. I decided to get some croissants for breakfast and made a ripper of a scratch down the side of my car.

So I quickly knocked out a letter to see what the hell the agency was going to do about the bloody arch.

Liz Montgomery
Senior Property Manager
Western Realty

RE : MASONRY ARCH

Dear Ms Montgomery,

As a tenant of one of your properties, I feel it somewhat necessary to voice my concern about the masonry arch. According to a letter directed to Mr George Conwald you stated you were willing to answer any queries, so I assume this applies to other members of the household.

In your letter you stated that Peter's Maintenance Services were coming to view the arch. This is all very well, but this was at least two months ago. What has happened since then? Have they made any recommendations? You see, I am worried about the arch's stability. Sure it has a *temporary* brace on it, but how long will this last? I would hate for it to fall on someone (I mean, what a downer it would put on your day).

Not that my opinion is really worth anything, but the first repair job was hardly successful. The arch would have been better clamped across the top, rather than from underneath. Really, the best thing for this arch structure would be to remove it in its entirety.

Please let me know how proceedings are going,

so I can sleep at night. I thank you for your time.

Yours faithfully,
RICK HUGHES

George felt the letter was rather tactless and wouldn't be much of a help, given we also had a rent inspection imminent in the next few weeks. I said we needed to make a point, so I posted the letter anyway, despite his protests.

MONDAY, MARCH 4

Had another go at *Let's Think About Religion*. I managed half of chapter one and skimmed a fair bit of the rest but all the author wants to do is explain how I should read the book, instead of how to think about his subject matter.

Picked up a couple of women's magazines lying around and flicked through those, under the pretence I may find a story for the *Weekend Star* in them. Stranger things have happened.

Another uneventful day in my continuing tedious existence.

TUESDAY, MARCH 5

Looked in the phone book and eventually found Stacey's phone number. I debated for ages whether I should ring her. Eventually I did ring and heard her voice on the other end of the phone but chickened out and hung up straight away.

I have not known a more pathetic creature than myself. *All she will do is say no and life will go on!* But the humiliation will still be there, and I can chalk up yet another turn-down.

Someone once said I was a self-defeatist and I replied "Yeah, I know."

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 6

Mrs Clifton called and told me she thought the adoption agency had lost her letter because she didn't think these things should be taking so long. I explained they often took many months but she

wanted to chew my ear off and it was 45 minutes before I could get her off the phone. Old people really are lonely, I guess. Especially if they want to talk me.

Got another weird phone call from someone who could barely speak English:

“—(gibberish) the fucken shit I get (gibberish) why for he kick my dog and call him fuck off (gibberish) fucken going to kill (gibberish) shit wank bloody hell (gibberish) die fucken scum (gibberish) I kill you—”

I really hope the call wasn't for me. I can't imagine who I would've upset. Maybe it was a crossed line or a wrong number.

THURSDAY, MARCH 7

Antony called me reverse charges at work. Somehow he's managed to get himself stranded in New Zealand and is in a spot of trouble (although he didn't say what, exactly). He desperately needed \$1000 to get back to Australia and asked if I could possibly lend him the money.

He wanted me to put it in his bank account and reluctantly I did, knowing I would be lucky to see half of it again.

I can't believe I can be so nice and yet not pork someone at least once a week.

FRIDAY, MARCH 8

Had to do another job with that wonderful photographer Laurie Moffat. My God, how did that man get a driver's licence?

He kept accelerating and then braking suddenly, making me smack my head against the sun visor every few minutes. And then he kept fiddling with some button which I later worked out was the indicator switch. For a brief moment I thought I would become asphyxiated when he let a real stinker go. If hell exists, the devil must surely be Laurie.

He didn't improve much on the job either. It was a picture

story, about a giant pumpkin. Laurie was his usual social retard self and ended up making the little girl sitting on the pumpkin cry. I tried to calm the mother down when I all wanted to do was run away and let Laurie handle the mess but I knew he could very possibly make it worse.

Apparently, the pumpkin was going to be turned into soup for the homeless. Well, it was, but Laurie somehow managed to stick his foot through a soft part as we were leaving. I had to leave that fact out of the story.

Tate had a good chuckle at my misadventures when I got back to the office and said everybody had a horror story about working with Laurie. His reason for speeding up and slowing down was because he'd had a lot of speeding tickets lately. Why doesn't he just stick to the speed limit? And the constant checking of the indicator is because he's not sure he has turned it off.

I now live in fear of the photographic editor saying: "Ahh yes, you're with Laurie, he'll come and get you."

SATURDAY, MARCH 9

Saturday is supposed to be the big news day in the office but I still end up doing piddly things. Anything major that happens is given to the more experienced staff members and I am only a last resort. I had to do some bullshit windsurfing story and got completely lost with Dennis the photographer looking for the right beach.

We wanted the finishing spot for this competition and Dennis insisted he had the right beach. We drove to about five beaches and I kept saying it was where the big stereo was but he wouldn't have a bar of it. So on we trudged through sand until a ute involved with the competition picked us up.

The bloke driving thought we were Mormons! That's what I get for wearing a tie on Saturday. Bloody noose. Come to think of it, hardly anyone in the office wears a tie, except Noah and the editors. Might have to lose that.

SUNDAY, MARCH 10

After the drudgery of the Sunday morning shift where I drank eight cups of coffee and urinated a lot, I went home and George showed me some items he found on our front verge.

Luckily there was a name and contact address so I wrote a quick note to send back with the stuff:

Dear Ms Pauline Jenkinson

On Sunday my house mate found some of your personal belongings on our front verge.

I have taken it upon myself to return these to you.

These include a first aid book, a health care card, fifty cents, a piece of note paper with information somehow relevant to your life, three used bus tickets and a screwed up mintie wrapper, all contained in a clear plastic pocket.

I don't know if you really want the bus tickets or the mintie wrapper, but I have included them in case your life is incomplete without them.

If you have any further queries, do not hesitate to contact me, but I am sending you everything that was found.

Yours sincerely
RICK HUGHES

MONDAY, MARCH 11

Thought about Stacey all day. Well, not entirely. The shame of the Heidi Delsminka affair plagued me and I also considered Suzanne and Kavisha as potential mates.

Stacey is a bit young, only 17 but I've always thought anyone from 17 to 45 is fair game. Kavisha had shown a glimmer of interest but Suzanne seemed to be a fairly hard-nosed, career-driven woman. But maybe I'm the man to break through all that.

Who I am kidding?

TUESDAY, MARCH 12

I confessed to George today that journalism was making me deeply cynical. He snorted and said I've always been cynical, I was just aware of it now. He told me to work in his baked bean factory for a while, then I'd really know what cynicism was.

The company is doing a new flavour: baked beans in anchovy sauce. I almost retched when I heard about it but George seemed pleased. The fridge is full of his bloody anchovette paste.

Another wasted day. I should be living life but I'm just existing at the moment.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 13

I've given up on *Let's Think About Religion*. But I still desperately need to have more of my stuff in the paper so I managed to knock a review together:

LET'S THINK ABOUT RELIGION

by Murray Mortimer.

Review by RICK HUGHES

If you want the short review, it could best be summed up with "don't bother".

This book is designed to be a "a map for the modern day pagan". Pagan being, of course, an irreligious person — someone who does not worship a God.

In the opening chapters the author states that the book is intended for people who are unsure whether there is a God or not.

It is for those that neither believe nor disbelieve. I regard myself as one of these people, so I read on.

I think the main problem is that Mortimer spends so much time explaining how to read the book and other things that tend to get us side-tracked throughout the book.

It takes a long time to get to the point — indeed you could probably just read the last few

chapters and not have missed much that was in the first half.

It states on the blurb Mortimer has written 43 books — perhaps he is the Barbara Cartland of the theological world.

The only people I could recommend it to would be philosophy students writing essays on the existence of God.

Apart from that, it's a load of pretentious twaddle, really.

THURSDAY, MARCH 14

No comment about the book review. Must have been all right then.

The Daily Chronicle made a passing reference to Heidi Delsminka in a story about big credit card scams. Nothing new, although police think she may now be out of the country. Good. Looks like the heat is off on that front.

Creamy came back 30 minutes late from lunch, after obviously getting tanked at the pub. When the news editor Bruce started having a go at him, Creamy went off his nut.

“Fuck you! Do you know how much stuff I sub every fucking week? More than these fucking lumps of lard! Jesus fuckin’ Christ! Well, fuck the lot of you!”

Bruce was just as vocal: “Well, fuck off then. There’s copy to be subbed *now* and it doesn’t make a fuckin’ scrap of difference what you did yesterday! So either sit down, do your job and shut the fuck up or fuck off out of here!”

Many more fuck yous were exchanged between the two and Creamy disappeared for a while. I noticed Xavier going after him and then saw Creamy talking to Noah much later.

Edward came by and said Creamy should have got the sack but Xavier saved his arse. I wouldn’t have minded if Creamy had disappeared and was never heard of again.

FRIDAY, MARCH 15

I'm starting to notice the subs all have their own pet ideas of how things should be done. One says I should write a certain way and then another will completely contradict that method. And half of them tell me I should ignore the chief-of-staff and the editors. It's bloody confusing.

Mind you, a lot of them are sitting there moaning "I should be writing a book" and "God, this material is shit".

Edward, in his polite way, said to become a sub you need a frontal lobotomy. From what I've noticed, the subs' desk is awash with cynicism, full of boozers and bloated bellies who have fucked up half their lives. They get paid a tonne and then get crushingly bored when there is no material to sub. It's a sweeping generalisation but some of the older women on the desk seem to have a better balance and can deal with people better.

The young ones, only a few years older than me, are extremely condescending and think they know what's best for everyone when secretly they don't know what's best for themselves.

And why have I gone into this tirade against the subs? It's only been 10 weeks at the *Weekend Star* and I have nothing but resentment for them.

That and the fact my review for *Let's Think About Religion* got me involved between a confrontation between Noah and the sub, Valerie. Noah said I needed to be more balanced and couldn't use words like "twaddle" in a family newspaper. I said I'd re-write it but Valerie had already gone to town and fixed it up. What's the point in doing that? Surely it's better if I correct my own mistakes?

SATURDAY, MARCH 16

Noah told me I have to go out to the country for a couple of days next week to do some stories. They sound riveting: a woman who makes crafts from gravel, a bloke who has invented a new dam to help get through droughts, a family that has collected rainfall measurements and two teenagers lobbying to get a basketball court

in their town.

I really hope I don't get Laurie as the photographer.

SUNDAY, MARCH 17

The phantom pant scrubber was back in the men's toilet today. There's hardly anyone else around but us journos so that narrows it down a bit. What the hell is wrong with his underpants? Doesn't he realise that everyone else can hear him?

MONDAY, MARCH 18

After another weekend of having bugged all in the paper I have come to the conclusion I am a fraud. I am The Platters' *Great Pretender*. What am I doing? Am I just too insecure? Perhaps I should get on with living instead of worrying too much. But why haven't I managed to score a woman of late? George said it would probably help if I had the balls to ask one out. And I've had so little in the paper... another two weeks and my three months' probation will have expired. Guess I'll be looking for another job.

I really hope I don't get Laurie on my country trip.

TUESDAY, MARCH 19

I don't think I'm ready for this country trip tomorrow. I have this nagging feeling something is bound to go wrong and I'll get my arse kicked. Mind you, if Creamy can tell everyone to get fucked and still keep his job, I'm probably worrying about nothing.

Packed some clothes and the like for the trip but the closest I could get to boots to wear on a farm were my cowboy snakeskin numbers with the Cuban heels. Better than nothing, I suppose. I put in seven pairs of jocks because usually I forget them.

I always feel like I've left something behind but for the life of me I can never figure out what it is until too late.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 20

Sigh of relief! I didn't get Laurie! My photographer for the trip is Jim Kearns, an American. I had to do my utmost not to take the piss out of his accent. I soon discovered on our 200km journey he is a keen stamp collector. No, *really* keen. I heard all about the various types of watermarks and specialist stamps he's collected from all over the world, including an extremely rare one from Quetzlzacatenango (I asked him to spell it) in Guatemala.

That aside, he turned out to be a fairly nice bloke but his choice of music leaves a lot to be desired. All he plays is calypso music. The odd track or even the occasional album wouldn't be bad but Jim insisted on playing it constantly. I felt like I would turn into Harry Belafonte by the end of the journey.

First port of call was the gravel craft woman and I couldn't see what the attraction was. Obviously, while her husband was out working his paddock, she got tired of making jam and scones and turned her hand to crafts. Putting goggly-eyes on rocks is something I could manage. I rolled my eyes at Jim and he just shrugged back. When the woman, Mrs Oakley, was out making us a cuppa I said: "How the hell am I going to get a story out of this? I'm sure a three-year-old could do crap like this."

I hadn't noticed Jim pulling some strained expressions on his face and when I looked up, I saw Mrs Oakley standing there with a tray of tea and scones. I went pale. I had no idea what to say. It was definitely one of those moments where I wished the ground would open up and swallow me.

A pregnant pause ensued and, luckily, Jim came to my rescue (like to see Laurie doing that). Somehow he managed to gloss over my faux pas and said "What's your favourite piece of work? I'm sure that would look good with you in the paper."

She scurried off to another room and Jim scowled at me, then shook his head and chuckled. At least he can see the funny side of things. Mrs Oakley came back, heaving a gravel man, made from lots of little pebbles. Now I was impressed. It took her three years

to make and was her labour of love. Looked like it was going to be an okay story after all.

Jim and I checked into the local pub and got a mixed grill for dinner. All the meat was burnt on the outside and dry as hell on the inside. I almost needed a hacksaw to get through it. At least it explained why there were six different bottles of sauce on the table.

The good thing I discovered was that the *Weekend Star* would pay all these expenses. Which was good, since I was bit short of cash ever since loaning Antony that \$1000.

THURSDAY, MARCH 21

Three roosters started crowing at 5am and despite putting two pillows and a blanket over my head, I had no joy returning to sleep.

Jim was already downstairs ploughing through his second plate of bacon and eggs and when I joined him, he enthusiastically gushed about a farmer's set of Icelandic stamps the pub owner had told him about. He was sure we should do a story about it, on top of everything else we were doing.

Driving through the small village, we noticed a signwriter painting "NEWSAGENCY" on a building. Jim thought it might be an amusing photo for the paper but I said we could get it on the way back.

The Grey family had been collecting rainfall measurements for the past 100 years, recording the level at 9am each day and then giving the data to the Bureau of Meteorology.

At least Mr Grey didn't understand what the fuss was about — most farmers measured rainfall, his family just happened to give the info to the bureau. It's a mildly interesting tale but Jim insisted we get a shot of the family with the rain gauge. We had to put water in it because there hadn't been any rain for several months.

When we went back to the car, Mr Grey noticed I had locked my door and said: "Can tell you're from the city, boy" and sauntered off.

Around lunchtime, we found the teenage boys who wanted the basketball court. Unfortunately, they were extremely monosyllabic

and I couldn't help but think, uncharitably, they might have been inbred. The conversation went as follows:

"So you want a basketball court?"

"Yeah."

"Why do you want one?"

"Play basketball."

"How have you lobbied for it?"

"We just want one."

"So you haven't approached the shire council?"

"Nah."

"What makes you think you'll get a court if you don't do anything about it?"

"Dunno."

"Are there many basketball players here?"

And that was just met with a shrug! Jim set about taking a picture but they didn't have a basketball we could photograph. So we just had to get a shot of the two, which Jim said was extremely boring. I knew as soon as we left I would only get four paragraphs out of it and there was a very good chance they wouldn't get a run. Where does Noah get these stories from?

The farmer and his dam proved to be a more workable story. He had consulted a university and discovered by grading it differently he could catch more water. He had also devised a special system that meant it would evaporate slower by putting a large shadecloth over the top. Rain could still get through but less sun would get in and less water would dissipate into the atmosphere.

I don't how Jim managed it but he convinced the guy to be photographed up to his waist in water.

I begged to do the stamp story on the way back tomorrow and Jim, thankfully, agreed. We stopped to photograph the misspelt newsagency sign but the sign simply said "NEWSAGENCY". We knew we hadn't imagined it and when we went in they said the manager had spotted the signwriter cocking up and got him to fix it. That will teach me to strike while the iron's hot.

FRIDAY, MARCH 22

No roosters this morning but I jumped out of bed when I heard some strange sounds coming from the main street. I stuck my head out of the window to find a herd of cows marching down the street. It seemed quite surreal to a city fella like myself but I suppose it was simply a way of life down here.

Jim and I made our way to the farmer with the stamps. For the life of me, I couldn't see how I was supposed to get a story. But Jim was in his element as soon as he met Mark Gjundotizak, a descendant of seal farmers in Reykjavik.

They went right into the intricacies of the paper and types of glue and other stuff that would only be of interest to an enthusiast. But then Mr Gjundotizak pulled out a stamp that was four times the size everyone was used to. And on it was a seal woman. It wasn't like a mermaid with the top half being human and the bottom half being fish. No. The flippers were hand-like but long and webbed, the chest part had breasts but were covered in seal skin and the face still had the whiskers and black eyes but a less pronounced snout and long black hair.

I thought this was the key to the story. But then I was told I couldn't write about it because Mr Gjundotizak's great grandfather had said there was a curse on it. I didn't believe a word of it but the room suddenly dimmed (power fluctuation in the farm's generator?) and a wind whistled through the window.

Jim remained calm and Mr Gjundotizak said: "And the Fenrirs came by the North Way, stopping on the Ice Land on the way. But many of them did not make it for they had seen the laeslub, an exotic beauty, somehow a cross between a seal and a woman. They saw the image on the horizon and heard a cry for help. They swam to help but the laeslub had vanished by the time they got there and each man found something pulling at his legs. They were never seen again."

"So how does that put a curse on the stamp?" I asked, perhaps naively.

“Somewhere, somehow the laeslub manages to mate with a man. Resulting children were found in the icy streets of Reykjavik. And the pollution in the laeslub’s soul spread through the generations. One of the descendants was responsible for the stamp. There is enough resonant evil for it to curse those who touch it.”

Jim frowned and I wondered if he was thinking the same thing. Did that mean Mr Gjundotizak was now cursed and even Jim and myself were affected?

“No,” Mr G answered. “Where there is evil, there must be good,” he replied enigmatically. Quickly he put the stamp away and in 10 minutes we were on our way.

Jim was intrigued by the legends that were spoken of but I couldn’t help but think there was just a tad of hogwash about it all. Mind you, it was a good story. Just a shame I couldn’t use it.

SATURDAY, MARCH 23

Noah sounded pleased at the results of my trip but was less than enthusiastic about the stamp story. I contemplated telling him about the curse but something in me thought better of it.

Little was happening on my front, so it was a good opportunity to write up my country stories, even though they weren’t going to be used until next week.

Otherwise an uneventful day. Oh, except when I spilt orange juice on my pants and I had a hard time convincing everyone I *hadn’t* pissed myself.

SUNDAY, MARCH 24

Still struggling to catch up on my sleep after the country trip. But Sunday mornings are always slow and this one was no exception. About the only thing to happen was my discovery of the following amusing fax that came through on the machine:

Brush Up Your English!

FUCK

Our most versatile word. By its stress and inflection it can describe many emotions. It can be used as a noun (I don't give a fuck or what a dumb fuck), as an adjective (it's fucked), as a verb in its transitive form (well, I'll be fucked), in the present tense (I'm fucked), in the past tense (I was fucked). Many everyday expressions show its true versatility:

Denial	I didn't fucking do it!
Perplexity	I know fuck all about it.
Apathy	Who gives a fuck?
Greetings	How the fuck are you?
Resignation	Oh, fuck it.
Derision	He fucks everything up
Suspicion	Who the fuck are you?
Panic	Let's get the fuck out of here.
Directions	Fuck off!
Disbelief	How the fuck did you do that?
Quantity	There was an absolute fuck load.

The word has been used throughout history by many famous people. Some of the more notable quotations are:

What the fuck was that?	Mayor of Hiroshima.
Look at all those fucking Indians	General Custer.
Where's the fucking water coming from?	Captain of the Titanic.
That's not a real fucking gun	John Lennon.
Who the fuck's going to know?	Richard Nixon.
Heads are going to fucking roll	Anne Boleyn
Who let the fucking woman drive?	Captain of the Challenger.
I thought I could smell fucking petrol	Nikki Lauda.

Any fucker can understand that	Albert Einstein.
It does fucking look like her	Pablo Picasso
Where the fuck are we?	Christopher Columbus.
I'm forever blowing fucking bubbles	Michael Jackson.
How the fuck did you work that out?	Pythagorus.
You want what on the fucking ceiling?	Michelangelo
Fuck a duck	Walt Disney
Why? Because it's fucking there	Sir Edmund Hillary.
I don't suppose it's going to fucking rain	Joan of Arc.
I haven't got a fucking clue	Miss Marples.
Scattered showers my fucking arse	Noah.
Just give us a fucking cigarette	Yul Brynner.
Yeah, fuck it, we'll take the convertible	John F. Kennedy.
Of course I'm fucking right to drive	James Dean.
Marilyn fucking who?	Robert Kennedy.
Of course I'm a fucking Muslim	Salman Rushdie.
This election is a sure fucking win	John Hewson.
Ever flown one of these fuckers before?	Buddy Holly.
Let's play a joke on the fucking Americans	Saddam Hussein.
Go on, have a fucking apple	The snake of Eden.
Et fucking tu, Brute?	Julius Caesar.
Nice fucking day for a swim	Harold Holt.

I put it away for safe keeping. The last thing I want to do is get into trouble.

MONDAY, MARCH 25

God, shorthand is driving me crazy. How am I supposed to get up to 120 words per minute? I know I'm still doing the theory but it's so bloody tedious. I can never tell my dark strokes from my light ones (they indicate different letters) and I'm always putting things in the wrong positions (this, again, indicates different phonetics). And it takes me bloody hours to get through the homework. Why can't I just use a tape recorder? Ah! Now there's a thought! Must look into that.

TUESDAY, MARCH 26

A decent tape recorder costs \$80! Until Antony pays me back, looks like I will have to rely on my shoddy notes.

George was home early after a contamination scare at the baked bean factory. Someone found a dead cat in the ham sauce mix. I felt like chucking instantly and knew I wouldn't be able to think of eating another baked bean for a very long time.

Mentioned Stacey to George (again) and he said "For Christ's sake, just bloody ask her out!" With motivation like that, I rang her but was told she wasn't there.

The person (presumably her mother) asked if I wanted to leave a message but I said I'd call back. I didn't give my name. After that I felt a sense of relief and some disappointment. But while she still hadn't said no, there was always hope for the future.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 27

I got asked to see the health and safety officer, Barry Johnson, first thing in the morning. I had no idea what he wanted — maybe he thought I knew something about the phantom pant scrubber.

Climbing the steps to his office I thought Stacey may have put

in a complaint about me sexually harassing her but I soon discovered it was something I'd completely forgotten about.

The "FUCK" fax.

"This sort of smut may be all right at university and the school playground but it's got no place here, right?" Johnson barked. "We had some of the big bosses come through here yesterday and one of their wives saw this stuck to your computer and was most offended. I don't want to see you in here again about this. First and last warning."

I had left the fucking thing in my drawer! Some fucking asshole must have pulled it out and stuck it on my computer. Could it be the same person who stuck the *City News* story on the noticeboard?

11.45pm. Could it be the same person that sent the photo of me tied up by Heidi Delsminka?

THURSDAY, MARCH 28

I've just realised I've missed my RDOs for February and March. I keep forgetting about them. Nice of someone to tell me. But I get so bored at home anyway, it's probably better I'm at work doing something, no matter how tedious it is.

FRIDAY, MARCH 29

Got sent out to do a pic story on some kids carnival at the local children's hospital. There were lots of men in novelty suits who I initially thought were just dressed up for the day.

But I soon discovered there was also an opening of a new ward, made possible by FCA. I immediately thought half the patients probably ended up there after eating too much of their crap food.

Dennis took some shots of the kids at play and the hospital publicist thought I should get some quotes from the FCA manager. I agreed (anything to pad out a story, more chance of a by-line that way).

"This is Mr Kim Loller, FCA's district operations manager," the publicist announced as I promptly shat my pants. "And this is

the *Weekend Star's* Rick—”

“How ya doing?” I almost yelled and started delivering a vigorous handshake. Loller and the publicist were slightly taken aback but I soon got into the questions. At the end of my brief interview Loller said “Sorry, I didn’t catch your name before.”

My mind raced at 100kmh and before I could stop myself I answered: “Rick Moffat. Story should be in this weekend’s paper.”

He’ll get a shock when he sees the real by-line on the story.

SATURDAY, MARCH 30

I know Kavisha in the library is about 40 but she sure as hell doesn’t look it. My loins were lusting for some action and I was too scared to even ask Stacey out. But Kavisha could be interested in having some fun with a younger man, given someone had quietly mentioned she was divorced and hadn’t seemed to have a boyfriend since the bust-up two years previously.

What is it they say about divorced women? Hot to trot? Or is that just an urban myth? Probably something made up by desperate men who thought that was their only chance of getting a root.

Another day of pic stories: the most exciting one was an orang-utang being transported from our zoo to one in London.

Wandered around the nightclub strip, Zupton Gate, after my shift in a vain effort to enjoy myself but the couple of drinks I had only made me feel more melancholy. A few more and I was right on to nihilistic.

There was only one thing for it — a kebab with the lot with plenty of garlic sauce.

I’m such an attractive beast.

SUNDAY, MARCH 31

Mrs Clifton called me this morning to chew my ear off for another hour. Her main gripe was that someone had parked on her verge all weekend and it was a registered lawn. I told her to call the council but she quickly pointed out the offices were shut until tomorrow.

Then she went on again about the adoption agencies and how they still hadn't released any new information and she wondered what she should do. My brilliant advice was: "Keep trying."

She kept saying what a nice boy I was and started to insist I come round for dinner. I thought of an excuse, telling her I was already having dinner with my parents. "They can come too," she said.

I politely declined. The thought of those Pekinese and her husband were enough to make me want one of George's cans of baked beans.

MONDAY, APRIL 1

At 7am the phone went and George said he had driven his car into a lake on his way to work. He needed me to come get his car out.

Somehow I found some rope and duly made my way to the lake. I couldn't see George or his car but eventually somebody tapped on my shoulder and made me jump out of my skin.

"The whole thing's submerged. You're going to have to wade in and tie the rope to the bumper or something."

George then informed me his tinea was playing up and he couldn't go into the water. So in I trudged through the mud and slime and found what I thought I was part of the car. I tied the rope around the metal, jumped in my car and started revving the engine. The car squealed and groaned in protest and eventually out came George's vehicle. Or so I thought. Somehow I had brought out an array of dumped shopping trolleys, tangled together.

"April fool!" George hollered, almost clapping his hands in delight. I shot him a murderous look but realised I only had myself to blame for not knowing what day it was.

The car clunk-clunked all the way home. If there's any damage, I know who's going to pay and it's not going to be me.

TUESDAY, APRIL 2

Daytime TV is utter shit. Who watches it? Poor saps like me who have to work on weekends and then have nothing to do in the early part of the week? How long has *Days Of Our Lives* been going on for?

“Like sands through the hourglass...” my arse. Should be “Like shit through a sieve...”

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 3

Finally remembered to take one of my RDOs. Now I understand why I've been avoiding them. By staying at home I am thoroughly and excruciatingly bored.

The most exciting thing was me driving through Hamburger Time's drive-thru and reading the graffiti on a drainpipe. Oh, and eating one of their Meaty Meat Burgers.

THURSDAY, APRIL 4

Noah handed me a letter which had been faxed by someone with a gripe against a nightclub I had only walked past a few days ago. The cover sheet said the following was a letter he sent to the nightclub but as yet had no reply:

**The Manager
!Part Tae! Nightclub
284 Longstat Street
Zupton Gate**

Dear Sir

After frequenting your establishment for well over a year now, I have started to become disillusioned with the concept of “!Part Tae!”. On entering your club the other night, I was kindly informed by the bouncers to “lose the bandanna”. I did so, but not wanting to.

I think the problem is, they did not explain why. It wasn't as if it was particularly offensive. I mean, it didn't say “I love Hitler”

and wasn't shaped like a penis or anything. The other clothes I was wearing (shirt and pants) were clean, along with the bandanna; in fact they had all been just washed and ironed. The bouncers have not stopped me from wearing my bandanna before, so why do they now?

Secondly, the bouncers are constantly telling people "not to sit on the steps". Has it ever occurred to you that a sign saying "PLEASE DO NOT SIT ON THE STEPS" may prevent people from doing just that?

Until such a time arrives when I can wear my bandanna freely in your club, I will go somewhere else and spend my money, which, as you may like to remind some of your staff, pays their wages. Congratulations on losing another regular patron.

Yours faithfully, WAYNE KING

Noah said it was good chance to do a discrimination story but I just thought it was a pile of wank. Tried ringing the Wayne guy but couldn't get hold of him.

FRIDAY, APRIL 5

Tried contacting Wayne King all day but there just wasn't any answer. Noah's keen to get the story up for this week but I can't see how it's possible if we can't contact the guy. I tried faxing him, using the number at the top of his covering sheet but heard nothing by the end of the day. Noah suggested I contact the nightclub but I didn't see much point until I spoke to the guy making the complaint.

SATURDAY, APRIL 6

By RICK HUGHES

NIGHTCLUBBER Wayne King has hit out at his favourite club, !Part Tae!, after the treatment he received from the bouncers recently.

The popular Zupton Gate night spot attracts hundreds of punters every week but it has lost a regular patron due to what some have called discrimination.

Mr King's problems started before he was even allowed inside the club and was informed he could not come in unless he removed the bandanna he was wearing.

"The bouncers told me to take off my bandanna and, although I didn't want to, I complied," Mr King said.

"The problem is they didn't explain why and I didn't see it as offensive or anything.

"My other clothes were clean, the pants and shirt I was wearing had just been ironed.

"And the other thing I couldn't understand was that they had let me wear the bandanna before.

"I'm never going back to !Part Tae! again until I can wear my bandanna.

"I will spend my money elsewhere."

!Part Tae! management could not be contacted for comment on the weekend.

In other nightclub news, police had to break up a large brawl outside Pastzitz when a gang of youths demanded entry but were refused on the grounds they were too young.

Police played down the incident and said these things happened from time to time and there was no point in making mountains out of molehills.

Well, I managed to get something out of it without even speaking to Wayne or the nightclub. The few paragraphs at the end were written by someone else and tacked on by the news editor. I know the story probably hasn't been done with ethics in mind but when your bosses are screaming at you for a story, that's the last thing on *your* mind.

Besides, it only ran as a single column story, down the side of a page and I imagine it will get dropped by the later editions.

SUNDAY, APRIL 7

Took a phone call mid-morning which was unusual in itself for a Sunday but something made me answer the phone "*Weekend Star*, editorial" instead of announcing myself.

A really pissed off voice said: "Is Rick Hughes there?" and so,

my mind jumping to every conclusion possible, I said “Who’s calling please?”

“Paul McCoy, manager of !Part Tae! nightclub.”

“He won’t be in until next week.”

McCoy left his number and said it was urgent.

Shit, shit and shit! I really am in deep do-do now. I should have called this guy on Friday. What if this Wayne King made it all up and is setting up the club? Why didn’t any of the bosses pick up on this?

Goodbye job.

MONDAY, APRIL 8

Fretted about having to speak to Paul McCoy all day. What if he sends his bouncers after me? !Part Tae! is one club I’ll never be able to go into again.

Actually, I’ve never been there at all. But it’s nice knowing I could, if I ever wanted to.

TUESDAY, APRIL 9

Spent the day on the crapper. I am shitting bricks about facing work tomorrow.

Why is it that when people are shitting bricks, supposedly solids, they usually have the runs?

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 10

Spent the morning out of the office doing some bullshit pic stories and somehow managed to avoid all calls from !Part Tae! nightclub.

But by the afternoon I had a fax from Paul McCoy, stating that Wayne King was desperate to put the boot into his nightclub and sent the following article, as it appeared in a university newspaper called *Ettekorg* (where do they get these names?).

!PART TAE! NIGHTCLUB

284 Longstat Street, Zupton Gate

"THE MUTHA OF ALL PARTIES"

6pm-6am

Review by WAYNE KING

I HAD been flicking through various papers when a simple black and white page advertisement grabbed my attention.

It seemed a mega-party was happening at !Part Tae!, daring everyone to "stay all night". Not one to miss a happening party scene, I went along with this review in mind.

I realised I had to stay objective, as !Part Tae! was one of my favourite clubs and that might sway my opinion somewhat. I needn't have worried, as I discovered later.

The advertisement had boasted many things, so I was expecting something more than the usual night out at !Part Tae!

There was free entry between six and eight. I rocked on in at about half past seven, hoping to take advantage of some of the special drink offers.

The ad had said "2 for 1 Drinks-Ladies, Free Champagne". Did this mean that women got half-price drinks or free champagne? I don't think anyone quite worked it out.

Besides, the half price drinks were limited to local beer and wine, so if you go in for Heineken or Midori and lemonade (such as I do) you were left high and dry.

They also served hors d'oeuvres which they say are much better than just salted nuts. I don't know. Hors d'oeuvres have this amazing ability to look appetising but taste horrible. Oh, and they extended the drinks offer until ten.

At ten the "!Part Tae! Street Dancers" came on. Since it was advertised I had assumed it would be some sort of a show. Wrong. This was

just the time they started work. Why advertise that? What if people had come to only find they were just background dancers like in other clubs?

Mind you, they did dance well and did some informal dance routines throughout the evening (the choreography was incredible).

At midnight we were to see the "Brilliant !Part Tae! Laser Light Show", which frankly was a major disappointment. It was just like someone twirling a pencil thin red light over the people. There is more effect when they use the strobe or fluorescent lights.

At two a dance/funk band by the name of Moonchild arrived on stage. There was a guy on keyboards, another DJing, mixing etc. Two girls came out and danced to the first song (there were no lyrics).

Then one girl disappeared, and the other sang a couple of tunes which were boring and forgettable. For the last number, the two girls were dancing again accompanied just by an instrumental.

The !Part Tae! dancers were a lot better and more entertaining. When Moonchild left the stage they received a smattering of applause, probably people sorry for them. If you want to see (or avoid) them, they play at In-U-Endo on Thursday nights.

At four a "sumptuous champagne breakfast" was served. It might have been sumptuous but most of it had been devoured in five minutes. I only saw a few pieces of pineapple, which were so thin you could see through them. I finally left at about half past four.

Don't get me wrong, I did enjoy myself. However, it had not been what the ad had promised. It was just like a regular night there.

I have only seen two shows there that have impressed me - the Madsy Germaine Swimwear Collection and the dance group, Escalate.

Go to !Part Tae!, enjoy yourselves. But don't go on the basis of what is advertised or you might be let down.

**You, the people, make the party atmosphere,
not gimmicks. My advice is to go when they don't
have any shows on, you'll enjoy yourselves and
won't feel cheated by misleading advertisements.**

I've read some shit in my time but this is even worse than a lot of the stuff I submit. No wonder !Part Tac! management was upset so I contemplated what I should do. I thought about telling Noah but decided I'd already cocked things up enough.

It was time for positive action. I rang Paul McCoy. After not breathing as the phone rang, a secretary told me he was available on his mobile. So I rang that.

And I got a message bank service. So I left a message. At least it looked like I was trying to call him back.

Didn't hear from him.

THURSDAY, APRIL 11

Paul McCoy spoke to me first thing and tore strips off me about the nightclub story.

"Why the fuck didn't you ring me and get my side of the story?"

"I tried but you were never around," I replied lying through my teeth. Strangely, he didn't ask why he never received any messages.

"Then you shouldn't have published the story."

"We acknowledged we didn't get your comment, which meant there was more to the story, obviously." Where did I get that from?

"Of course there fucking was! You read the fax I sent?"

"Ah yes."

"So what are you going to do?"

"Well, I'd say we should do a story giving your side, don't you think?"

"I'll say you bloody well will."

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