

A Political Nerd's Novella

by

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[Title Page](#)
[Another Dollar](#)
[Fans begin to spin](#)
[The seat of power](#)
[Character building](#)
[1001 Pots - A BLOG](#)
[A very pleasant Sunday](#)
[The apprentice teaches master](#)
[Some very different people](#)
[An economic and linguistic miracle](#)
[Busker Bob](#)
[Apologies Due](#)
[A change of circumstances](#)
[Epilogue](#)
[End Piece](#)
[Outtakes](#)
[Back Cover](#)

This is a piece of pure fiction. The characters depicted bear no relationship to anyone living or dead. It is obvious that the members of parliament and councillors described could not possibly be in the Labor Party as they would not make it through the rigorous selection process. The character Wendy is certainly not based on anyone that I know.

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Chapter 1 - Another Dollar

Geez, I'm crook. I shouldn't have had those extra couple of reds last night and that late night snack is sitting pretty heavy in my guts this morning. There's no way I can walk to work in 45 minutes. I really wish I hadn't made such a big deal of not needing a car space when we moved office and I wish I hadn't bragged about how quickly I walked to work that first day. It's crazy for a bloke 10 kilos over weight, on the wrong side of 50, to get into competition with a mob of young blokes who are still wet behind the ears. They go out to discos until 4am and still front up to write the perfect piece of software 4 hours later.

Perhaps I'll have to lie again. At least yesterday I had an excuse. Not that I'm real happy about getting angry and knocking down a builder's barrier and throwing a section of orange fencing into the river. These bloody developers should be able to build their inner city castles without blocking pedestrian access to the river. Wendy reckons I'm too old to be taking on every issue and she's probably right. I actually feel stupid because I got angry. "Don't get angry. Get even." is what the old pollies say. I should have left for a while and come back later and pretended to be angry. I could still have thrown the fence in the river and although they would not be as elegant as King's "I have a dream." or Keating's Redfern speech, my comebacks would surely have been a bit wittier than "No, YOU fuck off".

At least this morning I have a pre-breakfast meeting, so I can still walk along the river and not have to worry about avoiding the building site.

These early meetings are stupid but Gerry our esteemed MD insists that programmers put in a full 8 hour day of fee earning. Gerry is a 38 year old hotshot salesman who has the knack of finding out exactly what the customer will buy and then whipping up a Power Point that describes how, with a few minor modifications, our product will do the job better than any other form of sliced bread. Gerry also knows nothing about software. When he gets the order, he gives the happy client my mobile number and leaves me and my young tyros to work out how to fulfil his promises and try to explain why delivery is 3 months late.

This walking is silly, it's OK that le tour powers past me on bikes with horns blasting and bells ringing, but it's pretty deflating when pensioners and mothers with prams pound effortlessly past. It also gives me too much time to think. Why oh why did I get into this? I was perfectly happy as the oldest programmer in Melbourne. Why did I give that up to go into management? Sure the money's good but some of my mates are already retired and spend their week trolling porn sites and worrying about which club to visit for the next golf game. I suppose Wendy threatening to leave me if I was home all day has something to do with it. "My poor mother had Dad walking around behind her turning off light switches after he retired. I'm certainly not putting up with that from you". Perhaps after I lost pre-selection for Council, I needed something to boost my ego.

We sit in the board room drinking paper coffee and boasting about how many hours we each worked last week. The news comes that Gerry and young Tamsyn, the token female project leader are still in Sydney. Apparently there was some problem booking out of the motel. I'm quite shocked to hear that they have become an item. Yes, Gerry is still living

with Ursula and their 5 kids and Tamsyn is only 22, but that's not the problem. Their fling has been going on for 3 months and this is the first I've heard of it. Why am I off the office gossip tree? I'm certainly informed pretty quickly when someone fails to meet a deadline or when the toilets get blocked. In an earlier job, I'd made the mistake of telling one of my colleagues what a dickhead the MD was. I only found out later that they were both living together. It probably explains why I did not progress far there. I feel particularly old just now.

Nick and I go off for breakfast. That's something to be said about the new office, there are plenty of good coffee shops and you can have a reasonably private conversation if you pick the venue carefully. I order coffee and an egg and bacon roll and silently thank Gerry for the early start. I've avoided Wendy's low GI bran and wheat germ for another day.

Nick's quite a smart young bloke and he reminds me of how I was when I was his age. OK he is like many of his peers and knows nothing about politics and worse still he doesn't seem to care. He's pulling in 90 grand a year in his first year out of uni and is unconcerned about the battlers from Broadmeadows. It's funny how it happens but Nick's uncle is Hon. Con Pandemic, our former local member in the state parliament. Con didn't care much for battlers either.

Con gave me the shits in all sorts of ways. I was originally a very loyal supporter. I could even live with the crazy pin-stripe board shorts he wore to community meetings on the high rise estate. How he got to be deputy leader of the opposition still amazes me. He showed his true form when he promised the leader total loyalty and then walked into the caucus room and voted for someone else. He lost me completely at the High School when he stood on the barricades and blustered: "I want you to understand me clearly. The Labor Party is right behind you and will support you through to the end." Next day while the wallopers were using minimum force to drag me off the picket line, he flew off to Salonika to continue lobbying for a cushy EU job. I really wish I'd followed through with my threat to stand against him. Gee he's an arsehole. I suppose Wendy was right when she said I was too much of a nice guy. She probably means I don't have the guts.

Nick filled me in on Gerry's latest sale. Apparently he'd convinced some idiot in the Liberal Party that our software was just the thing to fight terrorism and keep those dangerous refugees away from the borders. What is it about these Libs? They seem to be convinced that money and software can solve the world's problems.

I went back to the office and authorised time sheets and wondered how many of these blokes have a career as fiction writers. How could it take Steve 26.25 hours to find a minor bug in that simple bit of demonstration software I wrote in 2 hours last week? I'm sure he must spend most of his day arranging gigs for the covers band he plays drums in. I've heard drummers aren't that smart.

I attended a couple more bullshit meetings and drifted along more worried about what might be expected during Thursday's meeting with the Immigration Department. I've got 48 hours to try and guess our solution. It's no good asking Gerry; he won't even remember the sales call.

At 10:30, I headed off to the noisy coffee shop next door where the receptionists and PAs hang out. I had two more coffees and read the current affairs magazines they have there and was shocked to read that Jennifer was contemplating an affair with her dentist.

After lunch I decided to go home early and do some further research. Wendy does jazz ballet on Tuesday afternoons and I'll have the house to myself. SBS has a pretty good doco on colour photography in Nazi Germany this afternoon. I walk one block and then catch the tram. Bugger those builders.

Chapter 2 - Fans begin to spin

Nick is agitated when I arrived at work; it seems that ASIO is now involved. Gerry's Lib mates are pretty upset that someone on a Labor Campaign Committee knows about their plans for border protection. They don't know that there has been no time in living memory that anyone from an ALP Campaign Committee has been listened to about anything.

Perhaps that explains the bloke messing with the chairs at the back of the hall when my vocal quartet rehearsed last night. Now I think of it, that bulge in his jacket might have been a shoulder holster. I joined the quartet a couple of years ago and sing a passable bass at citizenship ceremonies, community festivals and fund raisers. It was either that or go to Wendy's poetry reading group on Tuesday nights. Wendy has pretty strong ideas about culture and Tuesday is my culture participation night. I'm sure as hell reading some 17th century blank verse is not for me. Anyway, I've got the hots for our lead singer Gabby. Wendy has already given me the go ahead. "Well go then, she's welcome to you. All these women that apparently fancy you would run a mile if they spent a day picking up your socks and listening to you farting and belching. I've a good mind to put a sign on the town hall door giving a sisterly warning about your gross behaviour."

The walk to work hadn't been any better. I'd forgotten about the building site so I'd blustered through the chaos with the foreman advising me of the dangers of falling objects and lamenting the damage that might be done. "Just try it then arsehole. You won't be so smug when you're fronting the coroner's court!" hadn't actually come out as well as I'd hoped.

People are pretty annoyed and it was probably time for me to get some protection. It was no good chasing Gerry for help. According to Steve, who'd tapped into the Optus network, he and Tamsyn had now gone to ground in an expensive unit on the Gold Coast with their phones diverted back to our office.

I decided to ring my son Mathew and ask him and his mad mate Bernie for a protective escort for a couple of days. Bernie is a landscape gardener who writes bluesy torch songs about lost loves. He acquired the nick name "hydraulics engineer" after he mistakenly put a pick through the local branch secretary's water pipe and cleared off. When the comrade got back from Tuscany two weeks later, there was not much left of the expensive front garden and the excess water bill will put a dent in next year's foray abroad.

Bernie is also the grandson of Mick Doherty who used to work at the depot and was famous for being the only person in local history who was every charged with multiple voting. "It's like this comrade. I walked into the polling booth wearing different hats and claiming the vote of some recently deceased citizen. I got confused after my counter-lunch and wore the same hat a second time. The puritan poll clerk called the cops.

"Well bugger me, the protestants are still persecuting me. This year they sent me a fine for not voting. They blamed some new fangled computer system that got confused and issued fines to all those who had bloody voted. Bloody yuppie programmers"

Mathew is a social worker, musician and gardener who only actually gets paid for his gardening work. He spends time with each of his elderly clients listening to their worries

and putting their bets on. When he picked me up in the ute, his latest composition was playing on the CD. He has actually found melody again. I'm glad he's now moved off his angry rapper phase.

We drove to a quiet pub by the river and had a counter lunch and a few pots with Bernie. The builders in the front bar didn't recognise me without my walk shorts and we didn't see any sign of any ASIO agents.

By the time I'd walked home it was dark and Wendy had already left for her Wednesday night book club. I went and slept in front of my TV. About 2am when question time woke me up, I joined Wendy in bed and lay looking at the ceiling wondering what I'd do at Immigration later this morning. I hope I don't miss the plane. I'd missed the Dorothy Dixier about kids being thrown off ships.

Chapter 3 - The seat of power

Fiona Richoux is now a public servant working in the minister's office. She was on Council with me for 7 years and was a real nasty piece of work. She didn't really like public housing tenants or anyone who worked with them and used a grab bag of lies and sickly sweet platitudes to oppose any low cost housing initiatives. In fact, she doesn't like anyone who might be more intelligent than her and hence she has no real friends. I don't know how she manages to bullshit the Admin committee to stay in the party. More to the point, I don't know why she wants to stay. Richoux also managed to knock me off for mayor three times and organised the numbers against me the other times. The man-hating Rat!

Mathew and Bernie are looking pretty tough in beanies, bomber jackets and blundstones. I'm wearing that reefer jacket and collarless shirt that Wendy made me buy so that I'd be less conspicuous at art openings. The jeans and training shoes are my own idea and I reckon I look particularly elegant. Richoux is looking overdressed and uncomfortable in her power suit and stilettos. Round one to us.

"So you've found a nest with the Libs in Canberra, Fiona". We're cooking now. I took a wild stab: "I suppose you'll want us to bar-code all the people in Indonesian refugee camps to make processing easier when they arrive at the borders".

"The minister is already considering my bar-code initiative and I understand she ranks it pretty highly"- Shit, she can't be serious. Richoux didn't ever have much appreciation for my sarcasm or irony. "At the end of the day, we need to make sure that we use proper processes. Your software will need to meet all the requirements of the Interim Internal Information Technology Trusteeship and Superintendence Guidelines. Every step of the process will have to be fully documented and audited" This is why the Libs love her. There are a lot of big words, apparent activity, huge consulting and legal fees but no danger of actually implementing or changing anything.

Just then Mathew leaned over conspiratorially and whispered "Gee Dad, I could do with a piss" and right on cue, Bernie yelled "This is Bullshit". I terminated the meeting with "My advisors recommend we strategise on this and inform you of our decision". Game, Set & Match.

We left the parliament via a side door and watched the media pack devouring some idiot junior minister for aged services support who is already sick of counting bedpans and wants to be foreign minister.

The boys wanted to see Blue Poles but it was still only 9:35, so we drank a couple of pretty passable coffees in a square in central Canberra. The place was deserted. Wendy rang. "Stop dicking around with your Canberra mates and get back here. Your daughter and I have been summoned to an urgent meeting of the grounds sub-committee. The Feng Shui consultant has just reported that the playground equipment is 12 degrees out of alignment and it's causing all sorts of disharmony. You will have to pick up the grand children from school at 3:30. It's about time you did something for your family for a change."

I dropped Bernie and Matthew at the National Gallery and flew back to Melbourne. I sat next to Jane Saunders who lives a few streets away and commutes to Canberra with her industrial law firm every few days. She is a member of the Right but I think she's good value anyway. She's always been a support during election campaigns and her young son is a pretty handy rover for the local under 10's. I tell her about the bloke who used to live in her house. Billy had been mayor 6 times and still knew his way around the Town Hall when he rang me a couple of years ago.

"Listen comrade, I'm sorry to ring you on the weekend, but my own ward councillors are useless and can't get anything done." The Rat was his ward councillor. "Everyone says you're the only one still breathing at the Town Hall." He'd won me now. "The street light outside my house hasn't worked for 3 months. I've rung the SEC and nothing. Can you help me comrade?" I made a note and then got on the phone to talk with one of my IT mates about old times. As soon as I hung up the phone rang again. It was Billy. "Gee you're good comrade. I'd barely had time to turn around and the SEC truck turned up and fixed the light. Bloody fantastic service mate." "No worries Billy" - well I'd done nothing, but if someone wants to give me a leg up, who am I to complain.

Chapter 4 - Character building

I have decided to walk the dog to the boathouse this morning. The dog's handy when I'm being overtaken by pensioners. I can save face by stopping to attend to her needs. Over coffee, I think about last night's trip to the ballet. What is it with Wendy anyway? Why do my opinions cause so much heat? "I can't believe you sometimes? You know nothing about ballet. I know where these ideas come from. I'm going to ban you from reading The AGE reviews before performances in future. You just persist in pushing forward your ill-considered opinions. I ought to know about ballet, I slaved away in my tutu for 9 years and you've been to 2 performances and become the world's expert on dance all of a sudden."

Wendy's tirade was interrupted by Song Lei, a Timorese Asylum Seeker. Wendy or I are always running into him on the street somewhere. He seems to be even more troubled by his demons lately. "Happy ANZAC Day, Mrs Wendy. Happy ANZAC Day, Mr Wendy". ANZAC Day was last week. "How're you doing Song?" "Things aren't too bad Mr Wendy; I'm just going to Casino. Can you give \$2?" I slipped him \$10 and after more seasonal greetings, he crossed the road to catch the tram to Sin City. We sat silently until our tram arrived.

"But I was disappointed that the corps de ballet didn't actually seem to be in time. Surely the whole show would have been better if there had been a ballet mistress keeping the beat at rehearsals. 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 ..." I rap it out on the seat in front while Wendy shouts above the beat. "Your trouble is you live in the past. Don't you understand that this is a new form of dance performance? That was beautifully choreographed so that each member was doing something different." I was incredulous and so was the drunk in the next row who had been woken up by the shouting. "I would think it is physically impossible to plan a 5 minute dance routine where no 2 blokes in a mob of 20 ever did the same step at the same time. I know they did it because I saw it with my own eyes, but they couldn't possibly have planned it." "Well I'm not talking to you about this again and that's that". I might actually be right.

I had another coffee and rang Nick. "We have to get out of this project. Put everyone in the office onto it. Get Steve to poke around on the WEB to see what he can find."

I got home just as Wendy's art class was winding up in our spare room. Mathew and Bernie had come along as special guests and everyone and everything was covered with spots of brown paint. The room was reminiscent of a Bedlam Hospital etching. Some paint had actually made it onto the canvas. I asked the art teacher to explain. "What the hell's going on here, Harriet?" "This is an exciting new experimental style of free form performance art that's just emerging out of Eastern Europe. I'm so pleased that we could try it out in Wendy's studio." I hid in my study for the rest of the day.

The football at the G was pretty terrible with the Tiger's performance laying a sort of deadening mental haze over the crowd. It could only be described as a character building experience. Even Wendy was half hearted with her commentary on my performance as honorary umpires' advisor. "I'm sure he has seen an optometrist and I'm sure they won't make him umpire in the country leagues next week for such a minor indiscretion. Anyway don't be so insulting of country folk."

It was all pretty deadly until the last quarter when the Tiger supporters started to argue with each other. Fiona Richoux rang from Canberra during the din and started to negotiate an exit strategy. I did the best I could in the noise. I was a bit intrigued at the urgency and the large inducements being offered. Just then our full-forward sprayed another easy kick out of bounds. The crowd yelled as one: "Arrh - you've got to be kidding Richo". The phone went dead.

On the way home, I got an SMS message from Nick: "g nws bss n dtls ag bs lg ano dnt oxm emkd ..." it went on in a language only the young understand. We called in at the local and had a beer while Bernie decoded the message.

It seems that Nick has successfully negotiated our exit from the barcoding project:

Great News Boss - Canberra has agreed to discontinue the project and have agreed to the following terms:

- Large anonymous donation to Oxfam earmarked for indigenous and refugee health
- Gabby has been made associate professor of biology, seconded to CSIRO
- Junior minister resigns from parliament and appointed the second assistant at the Glasgow High Commission

At home I found some interesting videos posted on YouTube by someone called stevedrums754:

- Canberra Capers
- Junior Minister having lunch in Fremantle restaurant with a bloke in a strange white hat

Canberra Capers had already been withdrawn, but in 2 hours it had more hits than Paris Hilton's home video had in a week.

Fiona Richoux has been appointed to a project to increase the number of seats in the Prime Minister's dining room.

Chapter 5 - 1001 Pots - A BLOG

I think my daughter Sue likes the story so far:

SueNotSusie: Ok it's great. Alright I said it. Now don't go getting a big head!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

TheWriter: [No danger of a big head when I live with Wendy](#)

SueNotSusie: Harriet suggested you do a serial. Weekly instalments maybe?

TheWriter: [Yeah - that's a BLOG.](#)

SueNotSusie: It may be called a BLOG now smart arse but it is how some authors started - writing serials!!!!!!!!!!!!

Sue didn't fall far from the tree.

I report on progress to my son Matt:

TheWriter: [Thanks Matt, With Sue \(and Harriet's\) help I've worked out a technique for telling my yarns in a serial form using a Frame story \(Literary technique - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia\) – like Arabian Nights, Canterbury Tales or Forrest Gump.](#)

I later discuss my ideas while I make a coffee for Wendy and Sue. “I'm thinking of a Frame Story called **1001 Pots**. It's about some lefties standing in the pub each week and telling yarns. Wendy, Mathew and all the gang would comment on each episode. The narrator would comment on everything and everyone. I have even considered writing it in the form of a dummy BLOG, with dummy people writing their comments on each episode – might be too hard to meet a weekly deadline.”

Wendy takes a break from her Internet shopping: “You really are incredible. You've done a WEB search and suddenly you're an expert on literature. Harriet's got a double degree in Art History and 17th century literature and if she says a serial, you should do a serial.”

“Yeah Mum. He reads the A2 in Saturday so that he can discuss the books at the pub with his mates. I happen to know that he is reading the First Chapter section of the New York Times Book Reviews every Sunday night so that he can try to dominate dinner parties. If he keeps this writing up he'll be like Shane Warne – Written more books than he's read.”

“And while you're about it – what about a bit of truth in the story. For a start you're over 60 and you're at least 20 kilos over weight.”

I think I'll try a BLOG.

1001 Pots – A BLOG

Renaldo's Story

Well I bought a camera last week. I was working on the building site and this bloke pulls up in a car and yells at us. “Do you want to buy a camera mate?”

"No thanks mate."

"I won't charge you nothing to look. Here look at it."

It was one of those new Canon digital things. "How much?"

He suddenly goes all secret and starts to look around. You know – looking for the cops. "Only \$250 for you mate. That's good value. They sell down the road for \$400."

This would be good to take photos of the new baby to send home. "I'll give you \$50, no more."

"You're kidding aren't you? How much you got?"

"I've got \$80."

"That's no good. Can your young mate lend you \$20 and it's a deal?"

I says: "I'll give you \$90 and that's all."

"OK mate you drive a hard bargain, I'll give you a new one, still in the box if you like. It'll impress the missus."

He goes to the car and comes back and hands me the camera. New box and all. I hand over the money while he tries to sell a camera to the apprentice. Talk about a cheeky bugger.

Anyway, when we break for the lunch, I start telling the apprentice what a good deal I have. He wants to have another look so I go to the car and get it.

I open the packet and bugger me it's one of those plastic throw away cameras they sell at the chemist for 7 bucks. The box was fair-dinkum.

Was I upset? The apprentice didn't stop laughing all afternoon. The wife wasn't that impressed either.

You've had similar problems before haven't you Renaldo?

There's always someone trying to sell me something. I was stopped at the lights the other day and the bloke in the next car tried to sell me a new stereo.

I suppose it's not as bad as the bloke I heard about who bought a digital movie camera off a bloke in a pub. He opened the box and there was a bloody house brick. At least I could use the camera. The photos turned out OK too.

OK, what about another beer then?

Comments:

Could you find out from Renaldo if he can find that salesman bloke again?
I am looking for someone to sell my rebadged IR policy.
John: Canberra - 2 hours ago

Multi-Culturalism

Jack starts off: I have long had an idea for a short documentary on Australia Day celebrations.

One Australia Day weekend, I attended a citizenship ceremony, a Scots highland pipe band gathering and a sports meeting and reunion for local H'mong people from the Vietnamese highlands.

I also went to Footscray and heard a group of Vietnamese teenagers doing Stones' covers. "(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction" was awesome.

The weekend culminated in dance at Collingwood Town Hall where the Taiwanese consul taught us all how to tango.

A traditionally dressed Timorese Singing group sang folk songs. One of the folk groups included a white t-shirt with a Fosters logo under his traditionally embroidered vest.

Almost perfect multiculturalism.

Jill: Last month, Belgium Avenue Neighbourhood House had us back to Collingwood Town Hall for their annual Gala Ball.

Dance music was provided by the Dennis Farrington Big Band, a Chinese Choir from Fitzroy produced some beautiful harmonies with the male voices sometimes sounding as if they were from the pews of a English cathedral rather than being from a group where English is a second language.

A Timorese folk group and a very nervous West Papuan group at their first big gig provided more traditional fare, while at the end of the evening, members from all the groups joined a few aging hippies to sing Bob Dylan's "Forever Young".

Jack: The revisionists in Canberra might say that all this is just superficial. OK, so the hokey pokey and the duck dance are not great cultural fare, but the shared enjoyment and outright delight was something to relish. Having an old Collingwood identity introduce me to his East African neighbour from the same public housing floor was something to cherish.

The Gala Ball also reminded me that my neighbours are not so well off. There were some West Papuans who had come to see their mates who were embarrassed because they could not afford the \$5 concession entry

ticket, luckily one of the organisers noticed this and ushered them in.
Unfortunately diverse incomes and opportunities are also part of the territory in a multicultural society.

Mixing together and sharing experiences does more to preserve our safety than the “Australian values” entry exam that seems to be cynically devised to divide us and divert us from the real issues our society faces.

OK, time for another beer I reckon.

Comments:

That Jack bloke sounds a bit pompous doesn't he?
Reminds me of someone I know.

Wendy: Richmond - 20 minutes ago

People in the Labor Party and lefties from the ABC have been pushing this political correctness line too long.

What's wrong with a bit of Wedge politics heh?
(I'm still looking for someone to sell my IR policy)

John: Canberra - 9 minutes ago

John from Canberra is right.
The lefties have been pushing their conspiracy theories hard for a while now.
Their latest is some rubbish about global warming.

Andrew: Melbourne - 8 minutes ago

There is a big multi-cultural event at Cronulla on Sunday.
I urge everyone to go along and have a good old time.

Alan: Sydney - 7 minutes ago

“Gee Mum, he's recycling his failed letters to the AGE now. Next thing he'll try to con us into doing a WEB search to find how many times he's mentioned.”

I'm just off to the school to help move the playground equipment.

Chapter 6 - A very pleasant Sunday

I get up early and sit on the back veranda, contemplating, reading and generally communing with nature.

The kids across the back fence are up and have started a game of Aussie Rules. I can't see them but the sounds of play tell me exactly what is going on.

The eldest boy is probably about 9 and on weekday mornings, he is up early for twenty minutes basketball practice. He does not speak but I hear bounce, bounce, shuffle, bounce and bang. Over and over! I reckon it's pretty dedicated for a kid that age.

Today is for fun and there is lots of talking. "The captain scoops up the ball, weaves past his opponent and kicks another goal." BANG as the ball hits mum's kitchen door. "This time the captain hand passes to the full forward who dodges around his opponent and BANG - YES he scores another goal."

I wonder how the settlers' kids played without a running radio or TV commentary.

This goes on for a while with the two brothers devising more rules and scenarios that leave their young sister, flat-footed and utterly defeated. The opponent eventually fights back. "It's my turn to have a kick." "No, just wait ..." "If I don't get a kick now I'm going inside and not play." She's needed. "OK kick then."

This goes on with negotiations and threats of sanctions escalating. In the end, mum gets sick of the banging on the kitchen door and calls them inside to get ready for Church. These are pretty new people, the last owner was a fitter and turner and long time councillor.

The TV goes on in the bedroom for "The Insiders". Wendy is finally awake. I wonder which Murdoch drongo will assault our intelligence today.

After lunch, Wendy and I go for a walk along the river to Harriet's place and catch a tram into the Art Gallery.

There is an exhibition coming up and the artists are going to be singing some stuff and I've been conned into going along and making up the numbers.

We have a touchy feely, get to know you session at the start where we pair up and interview each other and then report on the other person to the whole group. It's not just wanky artists who do it. I've done it at wanky IT conferences as well.

We're supposed to find out about the other person including their favourite whinge. A bit strange. I make up something lame about the exit buttons being in the wrong place on the new trams.

My partner is an actor, Penelope. "I'm actually getting a bit embarrassed. I feel I'm starting to blush." "You are blushing Penelope, what's it about? Don't be nervous, what's your complaint?"

"There's no foreplay." My mouth fell open. I closed it long enough to offer comfort. "I can see why you're blushing Penelope."

I sat there with my mouth open until it was my turn to report. I too started to blush and then blurted out. "This is Penelope, she's an actor and her complaint is no foreplay."

One of the other long suffering blokes said: "What's foreplay mate?" "I've no idea, Fred." Ha. Ha.

Harriet leaned over and nudged me. "You know what foreplay is don't you? 'Hey are you still awake?'" Ha. Ha. Harriet.

When we get home I go back to my study and the BLOG. I think about Penelope.

1001 Pots – A BLOG

Jack's story

I was reading that Les Carlyon book about the Great War. Pretty horrific. It actually makes me angry what those Generals did to the soldiers.

Anyway, I read this bit and was reminded of our discussion about migrants and multiculturalism the other day. This bloke named Gottlieb Schuler was the editor of the AGE during the first war. He'd arrived in Australia as a young kid and by the time the war started he'd been editing the paper for 15 years. His son was at Gallipoli and died in the trenches in France, but they still ran a whispering campaign against him - the bastards. Just because of his name and where he was born.

Nothing changes mate.

You know one of the first books I read when I was promoted to the adult section of the library was a book called something like "The Donkeys and the Lions". The lions were the front line soldiers. The donkeys were the bloody generals.

I was still in Primary School I reckon.

The military never learn.

I once worked with this bloke, my boss. He was pretty smart. We were standing in the courtyard at work, both a bit upset about the Indonesian Military killing a whole lot of people in Timor, Dili I think. A Massacre!

"What a waste of humanity. One of those people might have found a cure for cancer if they'd been allowed to live."

...(We all look at the wall)

At this same place one of the kids I managed came in one day, all excited. Greek he was, a citizen soldier when he wasn't writing software. "I'm just letting you know that my unit has been called to Timor as part of the peacekeeping force and I won't be in next week. We're going as volunteers."

Well I was pretty shocked. What do you say? I was torn. Australia needs to help its neighbours, but this kid might die. He doesn't even understand the danger.

I quizzed him to see if he really wanted to go. In the end I offered my personal support and told him his job would be here when he got back.

I was pretty upset. What with protesting the war in Vietnam and everything.

Anyway he's back in next day and comes into my office all sheepish and shuts the door. "I'm not going to Timor and I'm leaving the army."

What happened? "My mum had a heart attack when I told here. We were in St. V's all night. Everyone was screaming at me, I was really in the shit. You can imagine a Greek family when they're upset. My brothers threatened to belt me up, but that didn't worry me, I can handle them.

"But it was pretty bad mate. I eventually told mum that I wouldn't go."

How's your mum now? "She's OK now, at home recovering."

I wonder how serious the illness really is. Mum had found a way of keeping her son safe. I am still torn each time I think of this.

Here have another beer mate.

Comments:

(0 comments to date)

Tell us about the Council Billy!

Billy's story

It was basically an ALP Council back in my day. Everyone in Richmond was doing it hard and there were no YUPPIES like now. There was only one non-Labor man and he represented the area on the hill around St Ignatius. He was a Mick of course, a bit of a toff. He was alright though.

We ran a pretty tight ship in caucus. Your neighbour Clarrie is a good case in point.

We had pretty much decided to open a child care centre but Clarrie didn't like the idea. It wasn't that he was against child care or working women. It was more that he didn't think the rate payers should have to foot the bill. You know Canberra or someone else should pay.

Anyway we voted in caucus and Clarrie lost. It was the tradition then that the person who voted against the motion in caucus went into the Chamber and formerly moved the motion.

That's a pretty tough line Billy.

Well that's the way it was. We were working together to get the best deal for the people and we had to stick solidly together. You know! Win some, loose some.

We named the centre after him – the Clarrie Jones Child Care Centre. Funny, Clarrie's wife now volunteers at the centre a couple of days a week.

Want another beer Billy?

Just a pony thanks mate.

You know that silted up quarry next to the river? Well they reckon there's a steam roller in there.

The Council had this steam roller. It wasn't much good and was always breaking down. Anyway it was pinched, good riddance really. Council got a brand new one on the insurance.

Some blokes reckon the depot boys got drunk one night and dumped it in. It was under water then.

Sounds a bit far fetched Billy

I don't know really. That's what they say.

Jack again:

Well you know that land near the depot with the new Fire Station? That used to belong to Council and the bloody Libs stole it off us.

It used to be the Abattoirs. We had a clear title, granted by the Crown that said we could use it for any municipal purpose. For good.

After the Abattoirs closed, it sat vacant for a long time just getting vandalised.

Some of us had a scheme that would redevelop the land for low cost and public housing.

We were going to get some money from the Feds and the rest by selling some of the land for high cost private apartments. You know the type.

Anyway the Libs got wind of it and introduced special legislation to take the land off us - late one Monday night during a Council Meeting.

We adjourned the meeting and some of us went with the Town Clerk to Spring Street to press our case. We even had a QC's opinion that building housing was a municipal purpose.

It was no good with those Libs. Local Government can never win. Council is just a product of a State Government Act of Parliament. The State Government can do whatever they like if they have the numbers.

I got a nice old bake from the Rat and her mates when we got back to the Town Hall. I left with the idea that I'd get a hero's welcome back and be chaired along Bridge Road by the thankful citizens. No such luck.

Time for a beer, I reckon.

Comments:

More evidence of ALP economic mismanagement.

Peter: Melbourne - 2 hours ago

Leave it to me then. I'm the man for the people.

John: Canberra - 5 minutes ago

I'd better get to bed. I've got to stir up those young blokes tomorrow.

Chapter 7 - The apprentice teaches master

The smoke haze from the bush fires makes the negotiations of the building site a little easier this morning. They don't actually see me. The smoke has also made my throat pretty dry and parched. I suppose 3 pints of Guinness, numerous VBs and two large reds haven't helped either. I reach behind for my bottle and take a long swig of cool water. Only to spurt it out. Bloody Wendy! Things are going from bad to worse.

When Wendy got her own laptop, things did get a bit better for a while. I can now send her emails from my study to the kitchen and we coordinate our diaries the same way. Much better than the cryptic felt pen notes on the fridge and the post-it notes lost on my desk with the unpaid bills. But then she discovered the joys of internet shopping. The latest adventure is www.vinegar.com. OK, I love a bit of balsamic splashed around my plate, but gee! We have 5 normal lifetimes supply of vinegar at home, but the rate at which we use it, it might just last out the year. We use it to clean the bath, dunny and the floors. The whole house reeks of the stuff. Even my clothes have this hint of vinegar that's added to the laundry mix. I phone Wendy on the mobile. "I've put you on a vinegar diet. It will help you lose some of your weight, clean out your skin pores and generally clear the impurities from your body. It might also improve your wind problem. Harriet swears by it." Yes she would. I finish the walk with a very strange taste in my mouth and nothing to wash it away.

"I like your new BLOG, Boss." "Thanks Steve, but I only started it on Saturday. How did you find it so soon?" Steve looked at me as if I was asking the meaning of life. It just is. "It's getting lots of hits now that I've tricked up the search engines to make it a hot item. I also modified the layout and fixed some spelling errors. I liked the stories about migrants and those old codgers on Council." "60 isn't old Steve. Anyway how come you can access it without a password?" "Basic problem when you use the same password everywhere you go Boss, particularly if it's the name of your dog." This means he can access my bank account and my personal files and emails here at work. Well I have said some stuff about drummers and Gerry has copped a serve, but I've said nothing bad about Steve – just the opposite.

... [*Some IT and music yarns here!*]

Overnight another video appears on YouTube - Gerry doing push ups in a Gold Coast motel room. The video had obviously been doctored. Tamsyn's face has been pixilated but I'm sure they have also digitally manipulated Gerry's image. No one could do all that without getting a hernia or rupture.

Chapter 8 - Some very different people

“I really don’t understand my mother. What’s with these older women?” Marie is Nick’s girlfriend

“She and Dad came around for dinner last night and Nick did his turn at the cooking. It was a nice meal but Mum made out that it was something special. Something akin to open heart surgery.” I must make sure that Wendy doesn’t meet Marie.

“When I mentioned that we have an equal relationship, each sharing the housework and that Nick cleans the bathroom and toilet, she carried on as if he’d invented penicillin or something. It doesn’t really help.”

Marie works at the local community centre and runs a recreation program for people with acquired brain injury. I’m with Nick, Steve and one of his guitarist mates helping out at a BBQ. At the end of the BBQ we run a bit of a sing along.

Steve can actually sing pretty well for a drummer.

1001 Pots – A BLOG

Kev

Arh arnh e ng a a?

What's that Kev?

Arh arnh e ng a a?

Why don't we sing what? Hum a few bars...

Arh a e a, arh a e a i i ...

Oh! Mumma Mia. ABBA. Good one Kev.

Mumma Mia, here we go again...

Peg

Have you come along for the singing?

Not really. I'm here for my good looks.

(Grins:) Well you'd better go back home then. *That doesn't sound like someone with a brain injury.*

Next week:

I took notice of what you said last week. I haven't had a cigarette. Remember you told me that I could eventually undo the damage. Do you reckon the patches cause me damage?

Len

Are we going home soon Marie?

No Len, we've only just come. We have to have a sing first.

Thank you Marie.

Are we going home soon Marie?

No Len. We're going to have a cuppa first. What do you want to drink?

Thank you Marie. Tea thank you Marie. Yes, milk thank you Marie. Two sugars thank you Marie.

Are we going home soon Marie?

Jude

You've had your hair done Jude. It looks good.

Yes I'm off to court next week. I am trying to get access to my children. I can't look after them, but I want to see them occasionally.

We ought to sing your song then. What do you think Steve?
"Hey Jude, don't be afraid.."

Jim

I've got a new girl friend?

Straight Man: What's her name then Jim?

Robin. Robin Banks.

Straight Man: Robin Banks Jim?

She has expensive tastes. That's what I have to do to keep her happy.

That's all that the straight man has ever said while I've been going to the sing alongs.

Comments:

(0) Comments

We all have a great time, but during a break I look around the room and notice that many people have more than just a brain injury. My fellow singers generally have bad teeth, some of them have cataracts.

“How come? Marie”

“Some of the accommodation houses just don’t act until things get so bad that it’s often too late.

“By and large they really are neglected. Even though these snags and hamburgers are a bit below par, for some of the people here, it’s one of the few times each week that they get a cooked meal. At one house, they have sandwiches for lunch and dinner. Sliced tomatoes on toast is a real luxury.”

When I talked to Wendy about it over dinner, she suddenly got those thin and mean lemon lips again. “I really do wonder how an affluent society that can spend millions on military adventures and pay your young hotshots a small fortune, yet still neglect the basic health care of its citizens.” Wendy is not amused.

Chapter 9 - An economic and linguistic miracle

“This video system is hopeless. I’m trying to watch ‘The Queen’ and it keeps showing up ‘Pac Man’. If it’s going to give me a game, why not ‘Free Cell’? ‘Pac Man’ is really just too hard with this stupid controller”. Wendy is trying to come to grips with the new QANTAS in flight entertainment system. I press a couple of buttons and Wendy becomes lost in her regal fantasy. Wendy is the standard by which we can measure our human to software interfaces. If we devise a system that she can work without assistance, we will make a fortune.

We’re on our way back from a junket to Shanghai. I was there to attend a conference on ‘Software development opportunities in modern China’ and Wendy was to join the partner program. We gave the conference a miss. While checking into the hotel, I saw their IT bloke installing a pirate copy of Windows on the reception PC and I realised that we can probably only sell a total of one copy of our software for the whole of China.

Wendy and I decided to do our own thing. We would have a couple of days walking and bussing around Shanghai and then book ourselves into a week’s tour of the surrounding countryside. “I’m really excited about immersing myself in the culture and buying some toys for the grandchildren. Harriet says we should be able to get some excellent works of art if we can get off the beaten track”. It was an expectation that was impossible to realise. In 8 hours travelling by train and car throughout the Yangtze Delta, there were no more than 5 minutes in which we did not see factories or multi-storey housing complexes.

I’d been here 30 years earlier on a lefties’ tour. It was quite a shock to the system then. Europeans were novel and we were constantly surrounded by a large group of staring citizens. We had travelled from workplace to workplace. At each workplace we were met by a retired worker who told us about how bad life had been before “the people joined Mao and the other revolutionary forces to throw off the chains of oppression”. We were told of the recent “struggle against the ‘Gang of 4’” and how the workers were so much better off now. The travel was fantastic but the political indoctrination was even more boring than a local ALP branch meeting.

The exception was a particularly memorable visit to the famous [Tsingtao Brewery](#). Instead of the usual green tea and lung buster cigarettes, the brewery turned on free beer for their “fellow worker comrades from Australia”. Beer served on a brewery tour is always top class, because the brewers know exactly how to present their product to best effect. While the retired comrade regaled us on the horrors of capitalism and the joys of the people’s revolution, we and the brewers sank jug after jug of the local product. At each call to arms we raised our glasses in praise of the workers who were overcoming back-sliding capitalist roaders and increasing monthly production of this wonder food. “Long live the workers. Long live Chairman Mao’s glorious revolution. Long live Tsingtao beer.” We cheered – louder and louder with each jug.

30 years later I am destined to an even bigger culture shock. Mao is probably spinning in his grave. There were 55 channels on our hotel TV; most were game/greed shows or soaps. One even looked like a milder version of Springer without the bare chests. I saw just one stirring revolutionary tale about the liberation of Shanghai on a culture channel at 2am one morning.

Our hotel room also offered some excellent advice:

1001 Pots – A BLOG

Dear Guest,

Watch your step it's very slippery, when you come into the toilet.

NOTICE TO GUESTS

- According to our law, inflammable or radioactive materials, explosives and illegal drugs are prohibited from being carried into the premises.
Guests are not permitted to light fire-works within the hotel.
Illegal activities such as illicit sex, addicting to drugs, gambling and smuggling are penalized for infringement.
- Please always be quiet. Fighting and creating trouble owing to drunkenness are strictly forbidden.
Anyone who disturbs the order will be handed over to the proper authorities.
- Visitors should obtain prior approval from the guests and register at the gate of the hotel.
They should leave before 11pm.
Those who want to stay overnight must register at the front desk with proper documents.
Any infringements carry severe penalties
- The management reserves the right to terminate the tenancy of any person who wilfully breaks the regulations.
Thank you for your cooperation.
- Cooperate with the hotel to create "No Drug" unit.
Refuse to engage in drug taking, drug trading and other illegal activities.
- Keeping in high alert to refuse to accept any drug offered by crimes.
- Anyone who find any clue to illegal drug and report to public security bureau, you will get reward when the crimes are got.
Tel: 8518 7607

LOBBY SERVICE

Les Clef Dor

We'll take care of any problems you may have in our hotel.

Reception

It handles matters of registration.

Car Park

Car park stands behind the backdoor and the underground park as well.

Medical Service

The clinic is on the 4th floor

Service For The Disabled

If a wheelchair needed, please inform the protocol Department.

HOUSEKEEPING SERVICE

Room Center

Please contact with the room center for inquiries, we will offer service at anytime of the day.

Shoeshing

Please call the room center

Fire-Emergency

In case of emergency please call the room center at once.
the dispersing map is stucked on the back of the room door

Hair Drier

The hair drier placed in the bathroom will bring you convenience.

Mini-Bar

Drinks and snacks will be charged to your account automatically according to the consumption

Ice Cunes

Please contact with room center for ice cunes

Drinking Water

The tap water is safe to drink directly. Please boile the water in the electric thermos before you drink it.

Clothes Line

The string in the bathroom can be used for hanging after clothes washed.

No Disturbed

If you wont be visited or disturbed, please switch on "No disturb" or inform operator and she will give you non-bothering service

Phone Service Charges

You will be charged according to actual usage time from the other side taking up the handset to hanging up.

I had reason to call the Room Center at 3am one morning after a big feed at the neighbourhood Mongolian restaurant. "Could you please send someone with toilet paper? We have run out." Silence, then a shout to a colleague on the other side of the room. The colleague offers to help. "Could you please send someone with toilet paper? We have run out." More silence and the call is transferred to someone in housekeeping who knows English pretty well. "I will send it up sir. Thank you". 5 minutes later I open the door to a porter who bows politely and hands me a bundle of hotel stationary. Fair enough.

Italian Neapolitan Pizza Restaurant

The restaurant locates on the 1st flr.

All food is cooked by Italian pizza cookery champion winner.

The restaurant is well-environmented and full of romance.

Room Service Menu

...

Stir-fried sil rer fish

RECREATION SERVICE

Chess and Cards Room

Being on 3rd floor, they are clean, hygienic and comfortable.

Men's Sauna Center

Located on 3rd floor, a nice place for entertainment with all sort of private rooms.

Feet Caring Center

On the 3rd floor, you will take on a new aspect with our best design and service,

Beauty Salon

On the 4th floor, it can do much good to mental and physical health.

Gymnasium

Gymnasium (Fitting Center) located on tenth floor

Kara O.K

Kara O.K is on the half second floor. It is well equipped with the latest lighting and sound systems as well as the self-entertaining Kara OK facilities.

Beautiful melody and dancing will make you fully enjoy yourself during the whole night,

As long as you avoid crimes carrying radioactive materials and lighted fireworks.

At first light I opened our hotel window and looked down at a busy food market just opening for business. A woman arrived and started to set up her kitchen on the pavement in the lane outside the market. She squatted on the road and started a production line of deep fried goodies. Meat balls, rice balls, rice paper rolls ... All done by hand without a food services manual or hand washing facilities in sight.

If I twisted hard enough, I could also see the anarchy they call traffic on the main road. A bloke on a bike with a pile of shoe boxes gets knocked off his bike by a car, right in front of a bus. He is not allowed even a moment of shock. The car driver abuses him while the bus driver sounds his horn and yells abuse. "Get up you wimp. You're holding up the service." No one helped as he repacked his boxes and reloaded his bike. They just blew their horns and rang their bells furiously.

People in the next door housing estate are now up and preparing breakfast. The kitchens and laundries are out on the balconies, either by design or to make more room for people inside. It must be a bit tough cooking a meal in winter.

A pensioner group has started shadowing boxing and backwards walking. They have their own specially designed playground equipment to keep their joints moving.

Wendy is in culture shock: "What's with these shopping precincts? Every shop sells exactly the same product. How do they cope?" Our hotel was an hour's walk from the

Bund and as we walked we passed clusters of shops all competing for a slice of the same market. Here we have all the photo copier shops. Here the bolts and screws. Now the car transmissions. Here the timber shops. Next the bicycle parts shops. You don't have to buy new. We have lots of staff busily recycling old parts delivered by people on push bikes.

There's not much rubbish around. "Rag and bone" men on push bikes swoop on any item that might be of value, including packaging. Probably to be re-used in re-cycling the photo copiers and car transmissions.

There were plenty of snack bars and other little private enterprise food stalls. There are people everywhere.

The Bund has changed in 30 years, the major banks are probably now in Hong Kong and you can't see the river from the footpath. Either the city has sunk or the water level has risen. The promenade is now a high embankment. The family run san pans have gone to be replaced by quite substantial family run seagoing barges and coastal traders. The area of farmland that was out of bounds to Europeans 30 years ago is now a major commercial area with high rise towers garishly demanding attention and investment.

We find ourselves under an enormous system of motorway flyovers and interchanges. We're looking for a subway station and circumnavigated the outer boundaries of this enormous Ikea store under all this. It seems to take 20 minutes.

... In the country

We took a magnetic levitation train to Shanghai Airport and hit 431 kph at mid-journey. It took just 7 minutes and contrasted greatly to our trip to town on arrival. This was hairy one hour ride in the front seat of a taxi with no passenger seat belt and my nose just 30 mm from the windscreen. I had not wanted to give offence on my first day.

We checked the last minute information on the "**Flighting Information**" whiteboard at the QANTAS check-in before boarding the plane home.

The authorities have promised that all improper signs will be replaced before the Olympics in 2008. Air quality will be excellent and there will be no traffic congestion. Maybe they can do it... [Chinglish](#).

Chapter 10 – Busker Bob

“Would you like a drink brother?”

“No thanks mate, I don’t drink on an empty stomach.”

“I know what you mean brother.” Well he might, but I don’t. The truth is, I’m shit scared of getting pinged by ticket inspectors at any time. I certainly don’t fancy the idea of going down for swigging Cab Merlot out of a bottle while being in charge of a 10 trip 2 hour Inner MetCard. It still has 6 trips to go.

“I just had some chips, not that it matters much when you drink 3 bottles of the stuff a day. This Queen Adelaide is a good drop. I don’t know how they make it so cheap. Y&J’s also has a really good clean skin that goes well.”

“I don’t like merlot that much. Cab Shiraz is more my go.” I have mates who have no problem with \$70 a bottle and I’m discussing the merits of fourpenny dark with a stranger.

The young Malaysian woman opposite was starting to look a bit disturbed. She wasn’t scared, but she was making herself thinner and pressing against the wall of the tram. It’s OK to share the seat with a smelly guy with a guitar, but when the eccentric old bloke opposite starts to socialise with him, it promises to be an eventful journey. I smile at her reassuringly. She offers up a conspiratorial smile back and relaxes a bit.

“Where do you live brother?” Shit, he wants to move in with us.

“Richmond.”

“Gee you must have money then.” What if he gets off at the same stop?

“Not really. We bought our house in the 70s, all we could afford. No one wanted to live there then. Less than a years pay to buy a house.”

“Yeah, but now you’re worth a bit, hey brother.” If he gets off, we’ll go and have a coffee.

Wendy is slightly uncomfortable about living in such an expensive bit of real estate.

“Well if we sold where would we go, we’d have to move away from the area.” She still makes sure she lets her mates know the bank valuation whenever she can though.

“You’re right sister, you need somewhere to put your roots. I have this mate. Best mate a man could have. He renovates houses. Moves his family in, does the place up and then moves out. He makes a bloody fortune. But it’s no good for his family, moving all the time. All he’s interested in is the big...” He draws an enormous dollar sign in the air with a sweeping gesture of his now half full bottle of red. It must be an abhorrently unsayable word. The young Malaysian woman looks at me for guidance and I smile again.

“I’ve told him, well you have to tell your best mate don’t you? I’ve told him to look after his family better.” Yeah, I know about best mates, you’ve probably been in competition with each other since primary school. You’ve probably drifted apart and see each other occasionally for a drink. You probably both say things that hurt the other and feel rotten afterwards.

“I’ve got a beautiful women now brother. I’ve written a song about her. 'Jan Jan'. I’ve been testing out what people think, you know, busking, doing research. There were some dickheads who yelled out, but there are always some dickheads when you busk. I think people like the song.

“I’ve got a mate who used to be a guitarist with all the big groups. He knows the blokes from Daddy Cool. You know Daddy Cool brother, the Eagle? I heard it the other day. They’re all coming back now.

“Anyway, 'Jan Jan' will top the International charts I reckon. Do you want me to play it now?” Fear of the ticket inspectors sends me into mild panic.

“No that’s OK. What sort of song is it?” “Vocal!?” “No he means what genre?” Wendy helps translate.

“Soft Rock brother, but when the big groups get hold of it, they change it. You know. Add drums and anything could happen.

“I love Jan and her two girls. I treat them like my own. They’re from a previous marriage. Are you happy brother?”

The young Malaysian woman looks at me, Wendy looks at me, and Bob looks at me. I hesitate. I smile. “No, I’ve got a terrible life. I’m terribly unhappy.” We all laugh.

“I know you love her brother. Woman like that. How could you not love her?” The unashamed flatterer, but he’s won the young Malaysian woman; he owns Wendy. They smile at him while at the same time they half glare at me.

“This stuff certainly helps you sleep after a hard day’s busking.” The bottle is now only a third full but Wendy loves the bloke. “They say red’s good for you.” “Yeah, but in moderation Wendy. A glass a day maybe.” “No two’s OK” she shoots back. Wendy drinks red out of a beer mug shaped like an elegant wine glass. I don't think you're supposed to fill it to the brim.

“What do you do, brother?”

“A bit of this and that. I sometimes write actually. I’ll probably write about you and Jan Jan. I’ll change the name though. I don’t want you suing me for my money when I make my fortune as an author.”

“I’d love you to use the name brother. Just love it. I’m not like these bloody Americans you know, suing each other.”

Our stop is coming up. We start to make our exit.

“What’s your footy team brother?” I hesitate to say my unsayable word. “It’s Richmond isn’t it? Look at you. I know it is.” I smile politely. “How many games have they won this year?”

“I’ve enjoyed our conversation, why do you put the boots in now?” I overdramatise.

“Just asking brother. How many wins?” he calls after me as the doors begin to close. The whole tram is laughing as it speeds into the night.

We're both laughing too. “You certainly attract them don’t you?” Yes Wendy, I attract all sorts of people.

Chapter 11 – Apologies Due

“That’s bullshit Pat. I’m not falling for that one.”

I first met Pat O’Connor when he was a trainee social worker at the local community health centre. He was also secretary of the Toorak branch of the Labor Party, so he was an optimist even then. Pat used to pull my leg pretty well then and I reckon he was at it again.

Last night was Pat’s 50th birthday party and we had been invited down to join the celebrations. We were now in the kitchen washing last night’s dishes, drinking coffee and catching up with what’s happened in the last few years. We were probing each other to see how our political ideas might have changed. Pat and his wife Mary are both good Irish stock who’s families had been cow cockies, train drivers or worked in the local butter factory.

Pat had worked for some Aboriginal people in the Territory for a while, but when their kids came along he and Mary came back to settle down near their parents and for the past few years he’s been working as a projects officer with a Victorian rural Aboriginal community.

“Look I’m fair dinkum. The local drug rehabilitation centre does not have enough funds to open on the weekend, so young Russell spends 5 days living in and is sent home on the weekends.”

“But how can he get straight like that? I don’t know much about it, but I know that he needs help 7 days a week. Surely on the weekends when he’s out with his mates is just the time that he is going to get tempted and get back into the dope.”

“Dead right, that’s one of the reasons I was so happy to see him turn up here for the party last night.”

“Geeze Pat! If you are fair dinkum, this is real crook.”

Unfortunately, we arrived early the day before and I’d been put to work getting the place ready. Cutting wood, mowing a paddock for car parking, moving furniture, you name it, if it involved something heavy I did it. By the time the mob arrived for the party, I was exhausted, but it was a great country party.

Pat’s boss Martha is a local elder and pretty famous in Aboriginal politics. I was rapt to get a chance to talk with her. “You ought to give the ALP away mate, surely its time for a new approach in Australia. People like you should be looking at another way, leading the country towards a more cooperative approach. An approach that preserves the country rather than destroys it.”

“You’re probably right Martha, but something like that would take too long. I can’t wait around while the Libs destroy the country. I just can’t sit talking while Howard and his mob have another 3 years looking after the fat cats.” What am I saying? I’m telling someone who’s people have been waiting for some equity, reconciliation or even an apology for more than 200 years that I can’t wait another 3 years for a change. That’s great.

Pat waves the dish mop at me. "Martha was called to the local primary school the other day and I went along to hear what the headmaster had to say. He wanted us to move half of the 20 aboriginal kids there to another school. Apparently some of the local farming families have taken their kids away from the school and are driving an extra 30 Km to another school with no Aboriginal kids.

"This bloke thought that if there were less Aboriginal kids, there would be less disruption and the people would not have to travel past their local school. I can't believe he thought that our kids should move to make it more convenient for a few local farmers. Surely the challenge is to attack the problem and make our kids less disruptive.

"We had a look at it and it seems that every aboriginal kid at the school had been assessed to be below the government's minimum standards and nothing had been done to improve the situation. No extra resources, no special needs teachers, absolutely nothing. All the non-aboriginal kids were above standard.

"As it is, we have to send the kids to a boarding school in Ballarat for their secondary education. The local high school is just not equipped to handle the kids. That's part of young Russell's problem now, he hated high school, learnt nothing and left as soon as he could. It's a pretty rotten setup."

"It's a crap system Pat."

"I'd better make us some breakfast. Do you fancy bacon and eggs on toast? You still have to clean up all the glasses and beer cans in the yard. It was a good night. Go and shake Mary and Wendy up. They both hit the red pretty hard hey?"

After a lazy day and our evening meal, we left Mary and Wendy gossiping over a couple of reds and went down to the beach to do some surf fishing. It was a pretty steep track to the beach. Pat reckoned we should do all right: "The two hours around sunset are the best time to fish. They'll be jumping onto the hooks." Pat produces a couple of cans from the fishing bag I'd carried down the hill. "You need a beer?"

We fished for a while. I thought I'd caught a whooper at one stage. It felt like a whale but when I landed it, it was an enormous mass of seaweed. After we each lost our tackle in the rocks and seaweed at least 3 times each and I'd got bored untangling fishing line, we sat and looked at the sunset and drank more of the beer I'd unknowingly lugged down the hill.

"Since Howard scrapped ATSIC, things are getting worse. They have told us there is no more funding for sewerage and other town services. He reckons it's not the Fed's job and all that has to be done by the local shire but where is the shire going to get the money? Martha and the other elders are seriously thinking of closing the doors."

We talked about life here as a hunter gatherer. Abundant food; fish and shellfish from the sea, birds and kangaroo. A pretty good life. Knowing your environment, knowing where to fish, knowing the cycles and the seasons. No one else for miles, completely alone. I wonder if they got scared. "You forget; you lose touch with nature in the city. The moon is looking a bit weird tonight; it's got this sort of haze around it. Does that mean rain?" The sun had set and revealed an enormous light in the sky "No it's not the moon." "It's not a plane or satellite, its not moving. I reckon it's not a star, its not twinkling. It must be a bloody planet." "No it's too close to the horizon for that." We ring the house on the

mobile and Pat's teenage kids search the WEB. It's a comet. It will be in the southern sky for about a week.

We have more beers and look in awe at the sky. I think about what a family sitting on the beach long ago would make of something new like this. Perhaps they had a story to tell handed down from the last appearance.

We scramble up the hill on the goat track in the dark. We walk in shifts. Pat walked ahead with the torch, then he shined it behind and I'd lug the rods and the rest of the gear up to him. A bit like Simpson and his donkey. Pat played Simpson and I played the bloody donkey. I got pretty scared standing there on the edge of an enormous drop in the dark when he moved ahead the next stage. By the time we got back, I could barely breath, my heart was pounding and my legs were like jelly. I contemplated a heart attack right there.

"How many fish have you actually caught there Pat?"

"Well none actually, but it's close to the house and a beautiful spot."

If we had been back with that original family group without a supermarket or the internet, we wouldn't have lasted long. We'd have died of starvation or fright.

1001 Pots – A BLOG

The Corroboree Tree

The Rat ounced tried to push a proposal through Council to cut down the Corroboree Tree in Burnley Park to make way for a soccer pitch.

She had got some engineer to say that it was not culturally significant and that a nice plinth on the edge of the park would be just as good.

She even organised a group of kids in their soccer gear to turn up to Council for the vote.

The caucus had organised for someone from the Wurundjeri people to come along and talk about the significance of the site.

The Rat tried her best to belittle the report and the reporter but her usual cohort of haters weren't buying in this time.

Even the young soccer kids realised that the tree should stay.

The tree is still there.

The local hall.

It's not much of a town really, it never was. If it wasn't for the sign on the road, you'd miss it for sure.

There are a couple of tennis courts, a hall and an enormous cream brick church set well back from the road.

The church is about 3 storeys high. I call it the local cathedral.

Not many years ago there were a lot more people here. Mainly Irish Catholic cow cockies.

The local hall still has pictures of the local premierships as well as group shots from debutants balls. Funny, one of the local member's staffers is from around there but her deb's photo is not in the hall any more.

My mate told us to come down early on Friday so that we're in time for the monthly film society screening.

"Oldest film society in Australia" he reckons.

Well they were old all right; we were the only ones under 70.

It was freezing. The gas bottle outside the hall was empty, so we made do with a little electric heater that turned itself off every time someone moved.

The film was pretty good. Tim Robbins "Bob Roberts" it was. About a pretty awful right wing candidate for the US Senate. At the start of the year, the group makes a list and the National Film Archive send out a new film each month.

At half time while my mate changed the reel and we had plunger coffee and cream scones. I had to give a report on the film so far and describe the political implications.

My mate had told them that I was a film critic for the local Richmond paper and a former Labor Politician.

They were all pretty impressed. You can imagine that they were all the lefties for miles around.

I was even asked my ideas on some town planning problem involving the local tip.

I found out the society had been going for 18 months.

My mate gives out ALP how to vote cards at the hall during elections. He sits there all day and only the members of the film society bother to take his cards.

Bird Watching

It was time to take a census of the local parrot population. Mary led us down the gully to the beach.

We'd listened to the a CD that recorded the distinctive call of our parrot, but every bird I heard as we walked down the track sounded exactly the same.

We stood on a small sand dune while I scanned the trees with the binoculars. After a while I sighted one of the near extinct birds.

It was bright green and dancing around in the tree at the bottom of the cliff face.

Mary had a look and saw it too. She was delighted and I got a fair bit of praise for my keen eyes.

It sat in that tree for more than 30 minutes and we eventually climbed up the hill towards it to get a better view.

No near extinct parrots today. It was just a bit of very green branch from another tree.

I felt pretty silly but we had a good day sitting there enjoying the waves breaking and listening to the birds. On the way back home, we stirred up a mob of wallabies.

Chapter 12 – A change of circumstances

"You're looking pretty flash today Boss-man. I haven't seen you in a suit before. There must be something special going on"

"Well thanks Tamsyn. It's nice to be appreciated and it's good to see you back." Wendy had said something similar when I'd given her a preview on Sunday night. "You look about as flashy as a pox doctor's clerk and that yellow tie does not look good. John Howard wore one just like it in the Parliament last week."

"I don't see that that matters. Peter Garrett wore one last week too."

"Well you're not Peter Garrett. What's all the fuss about anyway? You've spent the day in a flap. You haven't worn a tie or anything but a black shirt with your suit for at least 7 years. You have at least 26 shirts in that cupboard. If you're not going to wear them I'll take some to the op shop. I banned you from getting more shirts until you got rid of some. You've now gone and bought 3 ties, 2 white shirts and a pale blue shirt. Wear the pale blue shirt and that blue tie."

"Those shirts are all perfectly OK. They will be just right when I lose a bit more weight."

I was in a flap, I got a text message first thing Sunday morning. "Please attend board meeting at 11:30 on Monday. Please note early start time for this very important meeting." The directors have a very interesting idea of what constitutes an early start. I'd gone around all the shops that were open, looking for a shirt that would fit me. My size doesn't fit me any more. They seemed to all be Chinese sizes or something.

I was still a bit worried. Gerry had left under a bit of a cloud after the YouTube affair. It seems that his father in law (the MD) was not too impressed by his push up technique. I'd kept at home in my study doing some research on WEB 2 user interface techniques, extreme programming and the local coffee shops.

Now I had to face the music. I didn't want to get the sack again at my age. I'd "retired" before after a blue with a director who hadn't liked being told when things were about to go wrong. He wanted a yes man. I'd always planned to retire early, but I found it terribly boring and went looking for a new job after 3 months. It took 2 months talking to head hunters before I got a gig. I didn't fancy more time being interviewed by kids who knew nothing about IT and who were asking questions off a check list.

I Straightened my new yellow tie and joined the directors in their deliberations.

... *[The challenge here is to think about something funny about a Board meeting]*

1001 Pots – A BLOG

Jack's Story

I was at a Council meeting where they argued for 45 minutes over a gift of \$75 to help a library in Cambodia buy some books. Everyone had an opinion.

Bugger me that the next item on the agenda was a proposal to spend \$300,000 of the citizens cash on some engineering equipment or something. It went through without anyone saying a word.

The whole issue was beyond their understanding.

Comments:

There's no way you'd ever get a job as a CEO.
You're dreaming.

Fiona: Canberra - 20 minutes ago

The problem with the French is that they don't have a word for entrepreneur.

George: Washington - July 2001

Apologies for that unashamed Bush bashing.
This is about enterprise...

Jack: Melbourne - 2 minutes ago

Epilogue

Tie up all the loose ends here.

Things have moved along pretty nicely since then:

- Gerry now sells ads for Yellow Pages.
- Tamsyn has become lead singer in Steve's cover band.
She has quite a following of young men who recognise the tattoo on her ankle from YouTube
- Steve has been promoted to run our computer security consultancy.
No major company can afford not to employ our unique "Trojan Horse" test suite.
- Nick runs our low cost hybrid car software unit
- I'm now CEO.
It only takes a day a week, so I spend the rest of my time working for Nick as developer of the module that switches the hybrid car engine from electric to petrol and back again.
- Gabby fulfils her dream and goes to Mawson for 12 months to research penguin numbers.
- The vocal group has a new lead singer. She is a paid up Green but she has eyes you could swim in and I can't wait to do a duet with her.
- Mathew and Bernie are the new art sensation.

"You see Dad, the trick is to stand just 2.3 meters from the canvass and roll your arm over like a spin bowler and just flick your wrist on delivery.
Look at my zooter. Pretty good hey?"

In deference to the National Gallery, they use blue paint.

- Wendy has taken up something called "Tantric Yoga" and keeps looking at me strangely.

Proposed Cast of Film Version

“The Voice” - David Wenham

Wendy - Julie Christie

Gabby - Sigourney Weaver

New lead singer - Gwyneth Paltrow

Mathew - Johnny Depp

1001 Pots – A BLOG

Comments:

You have to be kidding.
David Wenham is quite slim and he looks terrific.
And can't you find someone just a bit younger for Wendy?

Wendy: Richmond - 16 minutes ago

Hmm!

Jack: Richmond - 28 minutes ago

Outtakes

1001 Pots – A BLOG

Sleeping In

“There must be a lot of pages in the A2 this week.”

“Just the normal. Why do you ask Wendy?”

It’s cold and I’ve decided to stay in bed to read.

“Well I wish you’d hurry up and finish them. You’re making a hell of a din turning the pages. I’m trying to sleep.”

I put on a warm coat and go and sit on the back verandah.

Making Contact

“Can you put me in touch with old Ristos?” It’s time for the internal party elections and Bert is chasing votes.

Strange bloke Bert, he’s actually running against me for Branch President and he wants me to help him chase votes.

“You’ll need a bloody medium to make contact with Ristos and a pretty good one at that. He’s been dead for 3 years.”

Coffee Grounds

“What the hell do you do when you get up in the morning?” Wendy and I are having a talk over an intimate lunch.

“I get up and you’ve managed to spread coffee beans, and wet coffee grounds all over the kitchen. You spill drops of the stuff all the way up the hallway. Can’t you try to be more careful as you prepare your morning fix?”

Back Cover



1001 Pots – A BLOG

Comments:

This novella would be greatly improved if you decreased the distance between the covers.

John: Canberra - 16 minutes ago

This book will go directly to the remainders table if it ever gets published.

Alan: Sydney - 15 minutes ago