

Holtermann's Gold

An anthology of stories and poems
by the boys of Shore



2012

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Privacy of Students: Shore respects the privacy of all students.
Permission has been granted by each boy for the School to publish his work.

Kellingley Colliery, Beal, North Yorkshire, England

Ian Creek and his team had just stumbled across an amazing discovery. But they didn't know that. Not yet. They entered the vast cavern they had just discovered. The cavern was so enormous that their headlights just faded into the darkness. Five miners were in the cavern when without warning, the tunnel behind them collapsed. The miners rushed back and found themselves blocked by a wall of rock. They were trapped.

Beal, North Yorkshire, England

Word spread quickly about the accident. The tunnel that had branched off into the cavern had completely collapsed. The remaining miners had outrun the collapsing tunnel and word spread through the entire village.

Jasper Creek sat at the bank of the River Aire that flowed through the village, trying to relieve the stress. He lived with only his father, his mother having left them years ago. The sound of the river always calmed him down. He stared down at the water as tears fell.

He heard an aircraft flying overhead and looked up briefly. To his amazement, the plane landed about a hundred metres from him. He turned around and saw two figures step from the interior of the plane, one short figure with a venerably-sized beard and another more slender figure, taller than the first.

“Dul ka zin ezkenig kira,” the shorter figure shouted gruffly. “Koz vak!”. Jasper stood up, perplexed.

“What language are you speaking?” The shorter figure and the more slender one looked at each other. He heard some quiet discussing between them before they started walking towards Jasper. Jasper was unsure of what to expect. They didn't seem like kidnappers. *They landed for me... That means either I'm in trouble or they are... They could be tourists who got lost.*

Suddenly, the taller shouted, “Human?” Jasper let out a sigh, they could speak English. But why would they ask if he was human unless...they weren't human.

Jasper nodded. They looked at each other again and he started realising that these two exactly fitted the descriptions of an elf and a dwarf, thus giving a reason why they would ask if he was human. However, Jasper was pretty sure elves and dwarves did not exist in real life.

A sudden thought came across Jasper's mind. Dwarves were great miners, right? And his father had been trapped in a mine, and a miner had even described that they had entered a large cavern before the tunnel collapsed. The dwarves might be able to save his father.

Abandoned Mine, Dwarven Kingdom, underneath Europe

Ian Creek and the other four miners looked about the cavern. It surely had to be a mine, but who made this? It was massive. They wandered across the room towards a faint and distant light on the other side of the cavern. As they stumbled closer, they realised that it was electric light. Definitely not natural. Who made the mine?

Sky above England

Jasper rode in the back of the plane. He was absolutely sure now that they were an elf and the dwarf after seeing them close-up. After some attempt at discussing, via body movements, he had informed them of his desire to go with him and he had boarded the plane back to their kingdom.

After half an hour, they landed at a deserted field. They climbed out and pulled away a circle of grass to reveal a metal grille underneath. They pulled the plane over to the grille, pressed a button and began descending. They fell fast, pulled by gravity alone and slowed down to land next to an absolutely enormous cavern. Filling it up were buildings and houses where varying tall and short figures were wandering around. He was amazed. This was an underground city built by two mythical races of beings.

“Ve kond o human,” his two escorts shouted. Heads turned their way and they stared at Jasper. They led him to a large and ornately decorated building. After entering the building, they walked through a long hallway. At last, they came up to a throne room where two figures were seated, one elf and one dwarf. “Ve kond o human,” the pilots repeated. The two kings looked at each other and the elf shouted a command at a servant.

“Tret jer traslat.” The servant scuttled off and returned minutes later with another elf, a translator.

“Are you truly human?” he asked. The words didn’t sound right but were still understandable.

“Yes,” Jasper replied. “I need help”. The elf turned to the kings and translated. The kings replied and the elf turned back.

“What is it you need?” the elf asked.

“My father is trapped in an abandoned mine. I believe that he might be in one of your abandoned mines.” Jasper prayed silently. After the elf translated for the kings, they discussed quietly and stated that a search would commence immediately. The dwarf king took out a map of all the mines and called Jasper and the guards to his side and pointed out the abandoned mines. Jasper gave the description of the escaped miners. The size cut and the location close to a coal seam narrowed it down to only three mines.

The dwarf king sent a dozen of his personal guards and soon they were rocketing down towards the mines. Jasper hurried with three others along a tunnel. Soon they saw light ahead and heard footsteps. Jasper turned around a corner just in time to run into his father.

“Father!”

“Jasper!”

They embraced and after a moment, Ian asked, “How did you find me? And who are these odd fellows here?”

“Dwarves.”

“Dwarves? You probably have a lot to tell me.” Jasper smiled.

“You bet.”

Unlikely Hero (A story in a news report)

Ben Jefferson (Year 7)

Superman hands over the baton

In a surprise turn of events today, Superman has revealed that he will be training an apprentice. The news comes in light of recent accusations that Superman has grown “too old for the job” and “should retire, for his and our safety”. The hero himself gave a public statement today, saying that he is “growing tired of all the responsibility” and he “would rest easier knowing that there is a young new hero on the streets of Metropolis”. Superman has not yet revealed the identity of his trainee superhero, but he claims that “you will be surprised.”... *Metropolis Daily*, 17th September 2012.

Celebrities vie for Superman’s job

...several names have been put forward as candidates for Superman’s apprenticeship, notably Arnold Schwarzenegger and Usain Bolt. Several feminist activists have openly suggested that the new Superman should be a “Superwoman” to represent the leap forward in women’s rights since Superman first appeared on the streets of Metropolis. Many have speculated that Superman may choose to select his apprentice from the few descendants of his native race of Krypton, but he quickly quashed these rumours stating that he would “choose a human defender for a human planet.” Us here at *Metro* can only hope he’s as much of a hunk as our current urban protector; perhaps we could import Hugh Jackman for the job? Yummy! – *Metropolitan: Sales, Sex and Superman*, 21st September 2012.

New Superman revealed

...the recently restored Town Hall was choked with Metropolitan citizens today, all crowding to lay eyes on the chosen apprentice of Superman. A few introductory speeches were made, and the man himself made his farewell oration, thanking the people of Metropolis for their support and welcoming demeanour. A hush fell over the crowd as the curtains opened, to reveal our new big hero, Alex Lauterstein (picture below). From conversations after, it sounded as if some members of the crowd were disappointed with Superman’s choice of the gangly youth, but grudgingly accepted that if Superman had chosen him then he must be the right guy for the job... – *Metropolitan: Sales, Sex and Superman*, 11th November 2012.

Superman transfers powers

...Yep, it’s finally happened, and despite a protest from some members of the city council, the big swap has finally occurred - Superman has officially retired, transferring all his powers to his apprentice Alex. The safety of Metropolis is in your hands, mate! ... *Metro Mail (Columnists)*, 21st November 2012.

Devastating fire claims three lives in high-end suburb

...a house fire has claimed the lives of three children in a house on Metropolis’ northern suburbs. A police report has been issued, stating that the fire was caused by a heater in the family’s main room. The fire spread quickly to the bedrooms on the bottom floor, and the parents of the perished children awoke too late to save their children. They jumped out a low window to safety, and are unharmed, but devastated over the deaths of their children. The couple refused to comment. The question on everybody’s minds: where was the new Superman? – *Regional Nightly News, Metropolis Area (Transcript)*, 27th November 2012.

Superman apologises

...In a public statement today, the new Superman, or “Blooperman” as he is now commonly known, apologised formally for his absence at the house fire that claimed three children’s lives on the weekend. “I was catching up on some rest - I’ve been working very hard” he puts forward as an excuse. Working at what, exactly, is what everyone wants to know... - *Metro Mail*, 28th November 2012.

Reserve bank robbed

...A shocking heist has been carried out, right under the nose of the new “hero” of Metropolis. Thieves reportedly broke into the City Reserve Bank in the very early morning, making away with around 100 million dollars. The staff members are shocked, the President is furious and “Blooperman” is nowhere to be found. Even more embarrassing, the heist was carried out just 2 blocks away from the retirement home where Superman spends his days. The retiree watched the whole action unfold, but depleted of his powers he was helpless to stop the thieves as they stole away past his window. The city council is now seriously questioning Superman’s choice of successor. – *Regional Nightly News, Metropolis Area (Transcript)*, 13th December 2012.

Blooperman found skiving off duty

...a senior citizen has discovered Blooperman lying in his bed playing video games, eating junk food and completely ignoring his duty as protector of Metropolis city. “The young whippersnapper was lying on his bed fiddling with his electronic gadget”, Frank Lorenziona has revealed. Frank is a long-time resident of Metropolis, and recalls with ease the glory days of real heroes. “Superman, Batman, Spiderman... take your pick! These modern-day heroes are nothing but trouble, especially this one!”... - *Metropolitan RSL Weekly*, 17th December 2012.

Superman chose apprentice for “Underdog factor”

In a shocking declaration today, Old Superman stated that he chose his apprentice purely for the “underdog factor”. The statement came in light of a scathing report from the city council regarding Superman’s choice of apprentice, saying that “he shows no physical prowess whatsoever” and “has a disturbing lack of concern for the safety and security of others”. Superman responded to these comments today, confessing that his apprentice Alex was an “unlikely hero” and that he thought his successor would win the hearts of the city with his defiant courage and surprising capability. Unfortunately, Alex has so far shown none of these qualities and the safety of Metropolis is threatened by his lack of presence. Superman finished saying that he was sorry, but he “was just doing what he thought the people wanted”. All the people of Metropolis can do now is hope that nothing catastrophic happens before Superman can find and train another apprentice. - *Metropolis Daily*, 20th December 2012.

Why do superheroes only exist in comic books? I don't get it. They're meant to be an augmented version of reality, right? Well, why hasn't anyone done it yet? Why hasn't anyone become a real life superhero? People have the dedication to cosplay, to dress up, to get replicas of suits, of weapons, of helmets and capes, yet they do not have the dedication to become this character, this urban myth, this **legend**. So I took it on as a challenge.

Let me introduce myself: I'm the Cap', Captain Exemplary. If you're reading this, then you've probably heard of me. By now, I should be on the news worldwide, on tabloids, TVs and the Washington Post, right? Maybe not. You see, I'm not your regular superhero. No spangly, flashy costume – just some plain coat I found in my cabinet. It does the job – I mean, it's pretty iconic, with its completely white cloth. Oh yeah, and I'm not a high school or university failure, which seems to be the stereotype for most comic book heroes – I know Pi to at least 24 decimal places, and hey, I know my way around biology and chemistry, and am skilled in the art of medicine.

Why would I decide to become this superhero? Let's say I wasn't affected by any cosmic coincidence, or spiritual circumstance. My peers didn't pressure me into it, and I didn't choose to be a superhero because of some three minute video on the internet. I do enjoy sci-fi and fantasy works thoroughly, but they played no part in my overall decision. I'm also not one of those miraculous individuals that go out of their way to rescue others. And I'm not trying to be a mega record breaker or achiever. I'm just a guy in a coat willing to solve problems.

And when you get to the core of it all, which superhero isn't just a 'guy' willing to solve problems? Tony Stark – a rich 'guy' with a heart problem. Guess what? He decides to turn his heart problem into somehow saving the world and builds a metal suit so he can fly around and save people. Bruce Banner – a researcher 'dude' who exposes himself to insane amounts of gamma radiation and becomes the Hulk. Oh yeah, and me: Captain Exemplary. As they say, all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy. It can't be that hard. I have time. I went to an English lecture once, on heroes. In that talk, I learnt about the heroes of regular life. For once in my life, I believed I could be a hero in a modern and traditional respect at the same time, and not be this dull human being welled up to the brim with nothing but atomic numbers of barium and tungsten (56 and 74, respectively).

I reflected on the insignificance of one's life one time in the wee hours of the morning. We are all simply one pointless, meaningless pound of flesh and bone, in a swarm of six billion other insignificant, meaningless pounds of flesh and bone in a universe of an infinite number of insignificant, meaningless pounds of flesh and bone. We live and then we die. Time will erode our life history, and three generations down, you will be just a word, a phrase – 'great-grandparent'. Then I thought about the famous people, the superheroes, the icons and the legends. If one makes a deep enough dent, a noticeable mark or a big enough stain in history, then they will, technically, live on forever. They will be immortal. And I thought 'Hey. I want to be that kind of person', and so here I am, all dressed up, ready to fight whatever's out there.

My job is actually quite simple. As I stated before, I solve problems. Not regular superhero problems like some bad guy in town who's robbing banks and pillaging innocent civilians, but global issues. I'm not a celestial being like the LORD, and I'm not a magical miracle worker. I have a set of skills, but not like Liam Neeson saving his daughter. However, I can save people with these skills. I can develop procedures, techniques, cures even, to save people. I study things intensely and I crack codes and patterns within the things I study. I draw diagrams of these things and share it with the wide community of superheroes just like me. You may ask why you haven't seen one of these superheroes before, and yet they are right in front of your eyes every day, all across the world, in each country, in buildings scattered throughout the globe, all chipping away at one goal.

I slot the slide holding the tumour under the microscope lens.

Washington Kevin Liman (Year 8)

Jim Owen hated the desert. Whilst others saw great beauty in the land where waves of sand gracefully tumbled to meet the azure, pursued seemingly in jest by a perpetual wind, he felt the sun's sweltering gaze, relentless upon the shrivelled carcasses sprawled upon the splintered earth. Jim paused on that last thought. Carcasses. Shredded faces were embedded beneath the bloodstained sand as birds came to scavenge, only to join them in death. A dying animal was never a good sign. A dead one implied an accident. Jim was aware of that. What awaited him in the Mojave was hundreds of birds face-down in sun-baked sand, surrounded in pools of their own blood. This appeared to him as a more-than-subtle suggestion that he should floor the brake pedal, perform an illegal U-Turn, and drive for his life back towards Vegas. And so he did.



'Tell me what you know.'

Robert Ford always spoke in this characteristically blunt, unequivocally forthright tone of voice. Shades of consolation, or the embracing familiarity the elite mastered in speech, he chose to ignore. According to Ford, the observation of propriety was 'too taxing' for a man of sixty. America seemed to appreciate their President's realism.

'There's been a breach of security, Mr President,' reported Donald Cohen, the Secretary of Defence.

'Would you care to elaborate, Mr Cohen?' asked Ford, eyes transfixed on the documents spread on the table before him. He noticed the lurid hue of red encircling the obligatory 'Confidential' stamp, a mere formality in his opinion, intended to exaggerate the magnitude of the most insignificant of events.

'It's a violation of... sorts. There's been a minor issue with our Nevada research facility and...' replied Cohen.

'Mr Cohen, are you suggesting that I've been withdrawn from a G8 summit meeting because of some potentially trivial inconsistency in weather data?'

Cohen breathed deeply, struggling to suppress his indignation. The President was alluding to an incident in the past. During Ford's first year in office, a government meteorologist stationed at an Antarctic observation post had interpreted large, recurring fluctuations in temperature and humidity as a sign of 'imminent atmospheric catastrophe'. It was later revealed to be a minor expansion of the ozone hole above the South Pole. Ford would have been pleased that he was notified of the discovery, had he not been awoken at ten minutes past midnight about an issue which should have been brought to the Administrator of the EPA.

In fact, the occurrence was so common and insignificant that this particular government-employed scientist was later relieved of his duties. At the time, Ford believed it was necessary for the public to learn of this 'imminent catastrophe', holding a press conference with the intention of saving lives. The consequential imbroglio of shocked panic and terror, closely followed by an exasperated public's outburst of outrage after the true nature of the 'storm' was revealed, immediately resulting in a dramatic plummet in the incumbent's popularity.

'I assure you, Mr President. This could be a matter of national security,' insisted Cohen.

It was at this moment that James Franklin, White House Press Secretary, arrived at the conference room, carrying nothing but a practically-sized briefcase. Franklin greeted the men, and immediately took his seat at the table. All were learned men, adept and skilled in their professions.

‘It’s nice of you to join us, James,’ said Cohen. ‘I was about to begin the briefing.’

‘I understand there’s been a biological contamination at the Nevada plant,’ said Franklin. Arching his chair’s plastic spine with hands interlocked over his waist, Franklin continued, ‘That was all I could gather from the message I received.’

‘Contamination?’ asked the President, suddenly alarmed. ‘By what?’

‘Over the past decade, the United States military has been developing, in conjunction with our biologist friends in Nevada, multiple strains of weaponised viruses and biological agents intended for use as...’ began Cohen.

‘Wait, biodefense research was outlawed by the 1972 Biological Weapons Convention,’ stated a shocked Ford. ‘Why wasn’t I informed of this?’

‘It was a project carried over from a previous government,’ explained Cohen. ‘It was kept on a strictly need-to-know basis.’

‘Explain to me,’ began Ford, ‘exactly how the fact that our military is covertly and illegally developing biological weapons something the President of the United States doesn’t need to know?’

‘Sir, that decision was made with the interests of our country in mind,’ replied Cohen. ‘We believe that the strain is contained, for the time being, within the Nevada desert. We have satellite images taken this morning, which confirm its... effect.’

An image was projected onto the wall of the conference room. The men immediately recognised it as the Mojave Desert. Upon closer inspection, they noticed black specks scattered sparsely throughout the orange landscape – boils of pitch plaguing the coarse, tortured grain.

‘What are those?’ asked Franklin, pointing at the dots.

‘Animals,’ replied Cohen sternly. ‘Dead. All of them. Vultures, we think.’

He zoomed into the image. They could see the blood surrounding the birds, with ashen wings askew and shredded feathers littered around them.

‘How can we stop it?’ asked Ford.

‘As I’ve mentioned, the strain shouldn’t spread further than the Mojave,’ said Cohen. ‘We have an anti-virus, but that will take time to administer. For now, our main priority is to stop it from spreading.’

‘How is that supposed to happen?’ asked Franklin. ‘We can’t send units to protect the borders; they’d all just get infected...’

The doors to the conference room swung open. As the men craned their necks, they saw a man of sixty entering the conference room with an awkward gait, moving with a speed which suggested a matter of urgency.

‘Mr Bowen, is there a problem?’ spoke Ford, his voice sounding agitated. ‘Because we have more than enough in here.’

The Secretary of Health and Human Services nodded to the men, ‘We’ve had reports of unexplained, *horrifically violent* deaths in Las Vegas. Hospitals have gone absolutely chaotic, with the dead seemingly infecting the patients, and the doctors, and the...’

‘It spread,’ stated Ford, his face a pallid, bloodless imitation of the man the American people elected, a mask creased with sorrow and kneaded by the hands of desperation. ‘It actually spread... Can you predict when the virus will reach Washington?’

‘Since the virus was developed for bio-defence, it spreads... considerably quicker than most strains.’

‘A specific date and time, please, Mr Cohen,’ said Ford.

‘Eight a.m. Tomorrow.’

Ford placed a quivering hand over throbbing bloodshot eyes, inhaled, paused – and then exhaled.

‘If I may, Mr President,’ began Bowen. ‘I don’t exactly know what’s happening here, and I’d prefer not to find out... But if people’s lives are at risk, and given that human beings are actually dying down there, I’d encourage you to tell people the truth...’

‘Absolutely not!’ exclaimed Cohen, as he stood in protest. ‘Might I remind you of the kind of panic *you* instigated three years ago with that ozone screw-up? If you genuinely care about the safety of the public, mass hysteria is definitely something we should avoid!’

‘You might like to remember,’ Franklin calmly stated, ‘that this is our fourth year in office. Votes count. If we intend to win the next election, we certainly don’t want a repeat of the ozone incident.’

‘With all due respect, Mr Franklin, if we all die, there won’t be a party to vote for,’ spoke Ford.



At the George Washington University Medical Centre, DC, Alex Tyler was working the twelve-to-five shift in the Emergency Department. A patient had arrived minutes earlier, having staggered to the entrance – presumably intoxicated. As he logged in to the hospital’s computer network, he heard a gasp from one of his colleagues, followed by a horrific retching noise behind him. As he turned around, he gagged at the revolting stench of bile and blood before he saw it – the patient sprawled on the floor – wretched frame convulsing, inflamed throat gargling Ichor as he breathed his last. On that autumn night in the nation’s capital, his death was the first of many.

The truck rattled through the scorching Afghan desert, heat radiating throughout the dark, claustrophobic metal box that Terry sat in. The slightest relief came in a breeze through the thinnest of cracks between the locked doors at the back of the truck. Terry sighed, trying to ignore the thick layer of sweat that stuck to him like lacquer.

“This is not a good situation,” he murmured quietly to himself.

Terry habitually glanced around the rest of the empty cabin, designed to ensure that no curious eyes had silently crept in since he last checked 5 minutes ago. Assured that no one was there, he relaxed, and slipped a small piece of cardboard out of the hidden pocket in his camouflage uniform. The brilliant colours of the photo brought a smile to Terry’s eyes, as he beheld his wife and young son, surrounded by the brilliant blue sky of Australia. The picture filled Terry with an overwhelming desire to get back to them.

“I will survive,” he muttered determinedly.

For a moment Terry was happy, but then the memory of where he was came back to him as a stabbing pain in the heart. Instinctive reactions aligned with the memories caused him to cry out in terror, and he shut his eyes in an attempt to forget what had happened. But that only allowed the memories to flood back with even more vivid force.

He had been out on patrol for the Australian Army on the 8th of June 2005. It was supposed to be a routine reconnaissance of a track up into the mountains, but they had been ambushed by insurgents and pinned down under heavy fire. Eventually, Terry and the rest of the patrol had been forced to surrender. Laughing at the weakness of the Australian forces, masked men had lined them up facing the wall. One by one they had been asked a question.

“Do you have family?” they asked the first Australian.

“Yes, my parents and a sister,” he had replied.

“Prove it,” they had barked, and as the Australian stuttered a “no,” a short burst of gunfire pierced the air. Each of Terry’s compatriots had faltered when it came to proof except for Terry himself, and each one of them had been killed. The photo had saved his life, but he felt as if his precious connection to home had been exposed, stolen, poisoned. Terry had vowed to keep it hidden as a symbol of love for his family, and protect it from the hatred that permeated between him and his captors.

He had thought himself lucky to survive. But then he had been taken back to the base and used as bait in the hope that someone would pay a ransom, or make a trade. They had picked him only because they thought proof of a family would make people more likely to care about him. He was tortured, and kept under brutal conditions in a cramped and uncomfortable cell. A feeling of hatred had welled up inside him, like a wave about to peak and crash down in vengeance upon all those who had caused him pain.

The weight of memories bore down upon Terry, threatening to drown him in tears. With great effort he managed to drag himself free by thinking of the final moments of loving contact with his family:

“Be safe. I don’t care if you make an utter fool of yourself as long as you don’t desert your family.”

“I won’t – you would never forgive me.”

“I love you, Daddy.”

“I love you too Jake.”

“Just remember, you have a loving family to return home to.”

Terry created a mantra in his head to keep himself sane: “Just remember, you have a loving family to return home to... a loving family to return to... a loving family...”

Terry was stunned from his slumber as the truck jolted to a violent halt. He was slammed against the metal with painful force. Terry slowly opened his eyes, shielding them from the bright light that was shining through the doors. His mind was slow to comprehend after the shock: “A thin light... and now a bright light...”

Suddenly, Terry jumped up, and surveyed the wreckage of the doors that had once blocked his freedom. Without a second glance, he clambered out of the doors, and took a breath of fresh air.”

“Fresh air!” he shouted happily to the world. “Dusty, and hot, but FRESH!”

Glancing behind him, Terry saw the mangled heap of the rebels’ truck that lay burning. The back section was mainly intact, but the driver’s compartment where his captors had been travelling was smashed into the lone tree in the vast emptiness of the desert. In the distance Terry could make out the shape of a chopper, with what could be a tiny American flag on the tail. Filled with optimism, Terry started running towards his salvation.

Yet a slight sound made Terry stop and turn around, and before him on the ground lay the sorry, injured body of the driver. With great effort, the driver whispered a single word. Terry didn’t understand.

“What did you say?” Terry asked forcefully.

“Help... please...”

This time Terry could just make out the words. He considered the request. With help from a medic the driver would probably survive. It would be considered a ‘Good Samaritan’ deed – help those in need, even when they are your enemies. Then he thought about the times that he had been made to suffer at their hands, and what they had taken away from him. All his comrades that had died next to him.

Terry turned, and jogged away into the desert.

Like Father Like Son

Harry Tuit (Year 9)

Justin sat, slumped forwards, in the back left seat at the small pub table. It was the same spot he had practically collapsed into after finishing work, nearly five hours ago. His eyes had slowly glazed over, as he ordered glass after glass of hard liquor. Shoulders folded inwards noticeably, he was a sad, forlorn figure, drinking his night away.

“I take it your friends still aren’t here, Mr Samuels?” said the pretty serving woman, as she absentmindedly polished a shot glass.

“This might be a time to confess to you, m ’lady,” replied Justin with a drunken smile, and in a slightly slurred voice, “that I may have told a little white lie: I took this table with full knowledge that no friends would join me tonight. I am a lone wolf, in some respects.” He finished with a loud cackle; his enthusiasm vastly outweighed whatever humour was present in the joke.

The woman looked down at the hunched figure with a sad, knowing smile.

“I understand, Mr Samuels, it is the third time you have done it this week.”

Suddenly, the serving woman felt a stinging blow to her left cheek. She was spun around by the blow, and took an involuntary step backwards amongst shards of now shattered glass. Turning back, she found the pointed finger of her client angled at her face, his anger arriving as fast and as unexpectedly as a summer storm.

“You should be more grateful for my business” he snarled, with droplets of spittle landing on the woman’s nose.

With disgust and fear only partially hidden from her face, she replied: “I think it is time you left now, Mr Samuels.”

Again she felt a palm whip across her cheekbone. “I will be the judge of that.”

However, gathering his coat around him, he complied. Picking up his small grey bag, he pushed open the door to brave the chilly July night.

Staggering from one side of the footpath to the other, Justin headed for his apartment building at the end of the nearly deserted city street. The cool night air whistling down his throat seemed to sober him up a little, as he thought about his current predicament. He was thirty two years of age, and lived alone. He made a decent living out of his job as a production manager, however it wasn’t taking him anywhere fast, and to say he disliked his work would be an understatement.

But for all his worldly struggles, it wasn’t what was on the outside which was worrying about the young man. Inside, his dark and insecure character plagued his life no end. Unable to make relationships of any kind stick, he had always been more comfortable on his own than with others.

Justin was a full grown man haunted by his childhood. Growing up as an only child, he was close to his mother but both had a rickety relationship with his father, Greg. A heavy alcoholic, Greg had an abusive and violent personality, which often came out in the domestic environment. From little things like slapping his son’s hand when showing bad manners at the dinner table, to more serious incidents like becoming violent during disputes with his wife. On not a few occasions, Justin and his mother both received quite severe beatings.

Much of this was the result of Greg Samuels' drug and alcohol problem. Whatever was causing Greg's inner discontent, he took it out on the bottle, and subsequently his family. And tonight, as Justin walked along the road with a thousand drunken thoughts drifting through his head, he couldn't help but see the similarities between himself and his father by way of character. Was he turning into the man he had learnt to despise?

Justin continued his walk home, which was taking longer than it should have. As he walked out onto the next intersection, he was bowled over by a fit looking man in running gear. A strong hand pulled Justin to his feet.

"Look, sorry about that mate, I just didn't see you in the dark..." said the slightly gravelly voice of a man around sixty years of age.

As the two men locked eyes, a sense of recognition overcame Justin. "You..." he said menacingly. The older man's jaw dropped open.

Suddenly, Justin placed both hands in the centre of the other person's chest, and shoved him out onto the road. Dropping his bag, he readied himself for a fight.

Greg Samuels picked himself up off the street, and stood to face his son.

"I can't believe you have let yourself go this fa-" he began, before a fist crunched into the side of his face.

"You filthy hypocrite!" Justin screamed, as he swung again, this time missing as he stumbled forwards. "You were worse, and you had a family to care for!"

Deftly, Greg ducked under another blow and came up to drive a punch into his son's belly. "Yeah, but now I've picked myself up. I'm a new person."

Justin grunted, and pulled himself away. "Well, now is a bit late for mum and I, isn't it!" Soon, the pair was having a full-blooded fistfight in the middle of the street, exchanging blows between their arguments.

Then, out of nowhere, a car rounded the corner, and simply couldn't stop in time. It would have hit them both, but luck was on Justin's side that night. Greg landed the final blow, before looking up to see the grill of the station wagon bearing down on him. He simply couldn't do anything. Before he knew it, he was flat on his back, with massive bleeding.

However, Justin had been knocked to the side by his father's last act, and just escaped the same fate. Slowly, he approached the body of his dad, the person who had caused so much grief. Standing above, Justin let out a guttural sound of anguish and emotion, and thumped his boot into the dying man's body, before breaking down. Sobbing, he fell to the ground next to his father.

But the older man's chest still rose.

"Son," he said with a dying whisper. "I am sorry."

This was all Justin could take. Writhing uncontrollably with his sobs, he managed to control himself enough to take the small box of tablets from his pocket. Popping out all twelve tabs, he leant over his hand and inhaled. Slowly and deliberately, he laid himself over the body of his father, and waited for his only peace.

A man stands overbearingly, hands gesturing wildly, a woman standing tall and proud, unwilling, fighting. In his frustration the man kicks over one of many buckets filled with water from the storm the night before, and wheels around to leave. The woman, complacent for now, moves to follow the man back down from their apartment roof, but slips on the water he spilt.

Below in a small, two bedroom apartment, one bathroom, half-a-kitchen, two brothers sit eating breakfast with flurrying movements. Trying, most definitely, to drown out the rooftop shouts from above. Staring ever harder out of their window, looking out to the town's distant borders. The sound of an iron bucket. Then, suddenly, a scream. Still trying to drown out the sounds, the brothers stare straight out the window.

Just as their mother flies by.

Eyes meet. Breaths hold. Then. Time stops.

Sepia tinted rays illuminated his haphazard exit from reality; his torn body flitted from shadow to shadow, passing by the grey-cloaked figures that walk the dusty streets at night. Embraced in the town's maze of crevices and alcoves, he ran on, the tender hold of the shadows keeping him in darkness. He stopped as he reached the town's edge, the edge that he had never crossed, that had always bound him to his perpetual living nightmare.

The smell of the sugar cane plantations filled him, a sweet and slightly overpowering tang; he could feel the rough fibres breaking beneath his feet, their previous respite from pain now becoming his cloaking shadow.

The jagged leaves of the sugarcane cutting into him, the bamboo-like trunks jostling with him for space in this crowded train out of hell.

❖❖❖

Peter knelt on the floor, praying and crying fervently, his body revolting against him and contorting into unsettling postures. Like an immense wave it undulated through him, culminating his life of fear into a life of pain and loss. He glanced up around him, the flaked, peeling walls, the cracked and sagging ceiling and the uneven floorboards.

Doggedly, the illusive puppet master picked Peter up on his fine, silken strings and commanded him away and shutting his eyes, Peter retreated inside himself until he was immersed into his azure dreams.

His nostrils expanded with turmeric scents, half-made sentiments whistling thickly past him, the velvet rustle of sand under the camel hide silks of his mind's bazaar. Mellow saffron fumes, undulating through the time laden air. Ever flowing, irrespective of time, quivering, poised over the monotony of the endless sands. The gusts of life flowed over him, lifting Peter up and leaning him against the edge of consciousness. Flitting shapes ran unfiltered across his eyes, abhorrent imaginings playing on his mind's reel. Wild imaginings rising up in revolt against order, his pernicious mind periodically punctuated by the sharp tang of aniseed souls.

Outside, the apartment building stood with a lopsided grin, its façade opening up to the white asbestos fillings and rotting decay inside.



Intricately adorned carvings embroidered the edges of the house. Like a fine, shining cloth in this bleak landscape the house stood tall and rigid, firm in its place. He glanced down at the ancient woman, tottering from side to side as she made her way down a narrow street filled with tall houses emanating the gentle glow of warmth. Systematically sliced and gradually drying cuts adorned his arms as he left the last of the sugar cane fields. He savoured the pain.

He loped down the slope and came up behind the woman, a simple tap to the temple and she was gently swinging from side to side in his thief's embrace, her limp body barely weighing him down. As they ascended the steps, he finally guided her calloused and liver-speckled hands to turn the key in the immense door.

Inside the house he found many treasures. Most importantly he climbed into the bed, the soft sheets embracing him. He left the wizened widow on a peach duvet, the grief that had caused him to act in anger still not sated as he restrained himself from lashing out again. As salty tears percolated through his cuts, the greatest pain still engulfed him, an unquenched thirst.... for more.



As he re-entered our world, Peter stared straight ahead and walked out of the room, his eyes unusually focused on barred windows looking out from their laminate kitchen. Entering his own bedroom, he noticed the absence of his older brother, as well as their grandfather's old golf bag. He knew where his brother must be. Grabbing a hessian sack from the kitchen, barely filling it with a round of hard cheese and a loaf of bread, he left, eager to see his brother and share his grief.

As the sun reached its pinnacle and the flat rays broke through the factories' smog, Peter reached their hideout. He remembered the last time that they had been sent there, sure that inside he would find his brother and mother, simply in limbo, awaiting his return. Yet as he crawled through the open crevasse, the air was heavy and stale, the dirt floor austere and dusty. As he looked at the swollen couch in the corner and the plethora of lichen-coated novels, he remembered one of the first times he had been there...

His father banged on the door outside, metal dust cascading in violent shivers from the dull red hinges, his garbled hollering filled with menace. A miasma of sour wine shrouding Peter and his brother's senses. Their mother rushed about, handing his brother flat bread and a rare apple, the hushed message "Don't return until you've nothing left to eat," and then the gentle nudge in the direction of the roof, the teetering leap to the metal scaffolding never taken down from the building's conception and then the desperate need to run.

Not to escape their father, but to escape the shrill sounds of a screaming woman.

Once at the abandoned shack, they lit a candle, always the only one remaining, and sat, lips balanced one atop the other.



Opening the glove compartment of the patent leather bag, he gently brushed his fingertips along the crest of his grandfather's club colours, trying to instil in himself the pride with which his grandfather had lived. Entering the widow's pantry, he took whatever he could find, a loaf of bread, a stale sweet cake, munching on the core of an apple for breakfast.

At the door to his night's abode, he glanced down at his sleeping hostess. He thought to check for a pulse, but became distracted by the innocent frolicking of a dragonfly. He grabbed it in between his index finger and thumb with a pinch, thinking if it would feel the pain as its translucent wings were torn off, but then he was struck down by the memory of a Sunday afternoon.

He was but nine years old; his father had just started to drink after the loss of his parents and realisation of a diminutive inheritance. The velvet lawn of the local park their banquet table, happy in those days, his brother Peter just an innocent toddler.

Just as they were about to eat, a dragonfly landed onto his father's palm. "A dragonfly!" Peter exclaimed. "They bring us good luck, especially when they come in autumn," their mother said, all our eyes fixed on its silver lined wings and glistening body.

A hand came down suddenly, barely a sound as a small stream of green blood echoed around them.

Needless to say, they never spoke of luck again.



As he sat down into the couch, it sank inwards, but Peter was too tired to change positions. Closing his eyes, his mind was too weary to avoid rest, but diverted from true sleep to lucid dreams.

The sand lifted up and whipped him from side to side, until he staggered back into the desert mirage from which he had fled. Inside the market, whether or not it was real no longer mattered. All manner of earthly goods were on display. From bright gold and blue parrots to chained tigers and lionesses bridle with their pride, from saffron and myrrh to tarragon and marigold perfumes, Peter traversed through the stalls, searching for one item. Jungle cries rang out in carefree abandon, the smells of pomegranate and aniseed perforating the market air.

His purse was bulging, yet he could not find what he desired. Rare goods, magical poultices and beautiful carvings were offered to him, but he turned them all away; from immense riches to fabulous gardens in the centre of an endless desert. Nothing could interest him and yet he could not leave.

At last he caught a glimpse of a scarlet ribbon of ivory silk and strap of a leather golf bag. He ran instantly, calling out, hope rising in him as he pursued his quarry. Dodging through the cramped market streets, he crisscrossed and zigzagged a path until he had woven within his mind that instant of reunion.

On and on he ran, never giving up, until slowly, the market began to fade. Bearded vendors and splendid silk carpets were buried beneath the hot sands, until only a small, young boy remained.

His mother and brother had run off together, but they had called out to him, signalled for him to follow. As he awoke, Peter knew that at some point, the desert must end, and he could be with his mother again.



He trudged once again through the endless, bristling stalks of sugar cane, seeking refuge in their towering fronds which blotted out the sun's rays and hid him from view of his grief. As he slowly traversed the fields, he came upon a small red sparrow, its wing dangling limply, the creature caged by tough stalks. It flew weakly in circles as its functional wing made the bird veer haphazardly from side to side, unable to take off.

He sat down and studied the injured specimen. A narrow, oblong eye led down to an ochre beak and curved out to a proud, stuck-out chest. As time passed, the sparrow's orbits gradually shortened until the bird stood almost still, a lone chime ringing out periodically, a desperate appeal for help from above. With the bird still, he studied its red feathers which gradually turned into a muddy brown by its tail. Row upon row of infinitesimal shades of the earth, curved and jagged, connected and separate with each desperate movement, as the bird struggled to unleash the power of flight that it knew it had once had.

Knowing there was no hope left, he reached over, the sparrow just managing to hop away but then lying, exhausted, on its back. He snatched up the small body, then knowing no-one else could save the creature, a short cry of retort and a sharp twist ending the matter.

Hope never comes from above.

For days he traversed the fields of sugar cane, his nostrils filled with the rich smell of the alcohol the local farmers made from the fermented canes, his teeth becoming sore and aching from the rough fibres which sustained him. He travelled without real objective, seeking simply to escape reality, occasionally thinking of his brother, but knowing he would be in their safe place.

Peter ate the last of the loaf of bread he had taken with him, still awaiting the return of someone, anyone. All hope gradually fading away, until he felt his mind was strong enough to return home.

Wandering once again through smog filled streets and narrow cracks in between factories, Peter stood again outside their apartment building. The paint flaking, the harsh white of asbestos showing through, and yet the smell of gas lamps and the warm yellow light was welcoming him home.



He reached another frontier of his sugarcane habitat within a week, and there he saw him. A welter of emotions built up, thick bile rising in his throat, as the foul stench of sweat, beer and blood overpowered him with remembrance. The man he had hated and thought about killing for so long now stood but a few hundred metres away.

As his father climbed onto a donkey alongside a group of travellers, he made his way to the last fringe of the sugarcane forest that had harboured him. Plodding along, the coarse jokes and shouted laughs from the walking travellers and his father served only to further ignite his fury.

By dusk when they stopped and turned off the track, he knew their destination. Looking down into the violet shot valley below, he had come home.

Walking through the streets of his youth, he peered out at the sultry buildings, once grand and hulking, now abandoned and crumbling. Slowly, he retraced his steps until he stood outside the peeling building that was his home. Climbing the stairs slowly, he stood outside their sagging apartment door, his attention captured by a small spider spinning a silver web in one of many cavities in the wall.

As he reached out to knock, the door shivered on a breeze and he watched it swing open, welcoming him in. Bread crusts and lemon rind littered the living room floor, empty beer cans draped over mice-ridden couches. A familiar waft of alcohol lay poised in the air, just noticeable, but as soon as he fixed his nose on the scent, indistinguishable.

Walking past, he walked into his and his brother's bedroom. A Tarzan poster dominated the far wall, beside the small bed where his brother had slept. He wondered where he had gone; worry replacing his anger for an instant. But he remembered his refuge, his special place, and knew his brother must be waiting for him there, as once they did for their mother.

Opening his father's door he saw a hunched figure with hands stiffened into claws grasping tightly the edges of the woollen blanket. Enraged once again, he retrieved the small pistol he knew his father kept below the bed, and aimed at his target.

The sound of the gunshot ricocheted through his skull, a horrible pain hitting him in waves of disgust. He sensed the front door opening; someone had heard. He looked around briefly, but the window in the wall had never been open and was encrusted with a century's layer of dust and

mould. Escape didn't matter to him now, his vengeance had been enacted, his hunger sated, but pain bringing him to his knees.

Heavy, running footsteps and a hand appeared on his left shoulder, pressing down heavily on his shoulder blade.

“Daniel, Daniel, you're home!” The words were drowned out by the harsh ringing in his ears, but suddenly he became aware of someone shaking his shoulders roughly, then walking over to the bed and pulling back the covers. He noticed that the figure lying on the bed seemed much smaller than his father had been, skinny and weak, but he supposed that that had occurred from guilt.

Finally he shook his head fiercely and stared anew at the room. Eyes wide with total despair and helplessness, he gazed down on the figure crying softly beside the bed, as his eyes slowly lifted up to meet his, the words escaping his lips, “My father.”

(DARKNESS, THE PENTAGON)

BLACK: Where're the damn lights?

WETHERING: Building this big, built this quickly, don't expect it to be well thought out on the planning side of things.

BLACK: What? Best architects in the country can't design a light switch you can find in the God damn dark!

(LIGHTS COME ON. 2 MEN WALK IN WEARING SUITS AND WETHERING CARRIES BRIEFCASE)

BLACK: What have you got in that suitcase?

WETHERING: Never mind. Right, Ryan Holland will be here along with Toby Cole in about fifteen minutes. Holland had to be present in the Senate for a vote and Cole was at some rally...for something.

BLACK: Oh man not another kid who has enough moral fibres to knit a sweater but no stomach to actually act out on what he believes in.

WETHERING: General, you don't even know him yet and to be honest I'm not that interested in spending a day in argument. If I wanted that I really could have just spent the day at home.

BLACK: *(sarcastically)* Sure thing. What on earth is all this paper?

WETHERING *(serious)*: They are high security documents sent to us by the White House to help with our decision. We have maps, schematics -

BLACK: Just tell me what is in the suitcase! *(WETHERING shakes his head)* Probably just more documents right? Don't need any of that anyway. I know exactly what we want to do. Well, I do, don't know about Mr "high and mighty" Cole out at his big rallies...

WETHERING *(aside)*: This should be fun.

BLACK: You're not happy with my opinions?

WETHERING: Look, this whole exercise is pointless if everybody walks in here with his own preconceived opinions and not a mindset that maybe, just maybe, they are wrong!

(LONG PAUSE, BLACK THINKS IT OVER)

BLACK: Nope, *(laughs)* I'm definitely not wrong. So what is your opinion then? You've been pretty quiet about that.

WETHERING: It's all relative. *(BLACK gestures to continue, WETHERING sighs)* I'm for letting them know just exactly what we got here. Don't have to use it, just show them what we got and how willing we would be to use it. Send them photos, shout it at them. I don't care if we send them a goddamn postcard with a mushroom cloud on the front saying inside this'll blow you from here to kingdom come, sincerely the United States of America -

BLACK (*more excited*): Hear, hear! Someone who is on the same page as me then, eh?

WETHERING: No. (*beat*) What I want to do is give them every chance to wave a little white flag before we go throwing around this atrocity.

BLACK (*aside*): Well this should be fun...all right, just tell us what the hell is in that damn suitcase!

WETHERING (*looks at watch amused*): The other fellas sure are late (pause while BLACK looks at him intently). I'll show you mine if you show me yours.

BLACK: Deal. Nothing too interesting (*rummages through briefcase, pulls out an apple, papers, baseball and baseball glove*). What have you got?

(*HOLLAND and COLE enter the room. Both dressed in suits, HOLLAND has suitcase while COLE does not*)

WETHERING (*amused*): Oops, saved by the bell (*BLACK is infuriated*)

COLE: (*angry*) I can't believe this meeting even had to be called!

BLACK: Tell me about it.

COLE (*excited*): Oh good, you agree! (*Sits*) I'll admit I was a little bit worried that this was going to be a room of trigger-happy Southerners but man it is a relief to know that we are going to make the right decision and be outta here for dinner! (*BLACK adjusts his tie and shifts in his seat aggressively*) Oh.

BLACK: You must be Mr Cole. (*Introducing himself with fake sincerity*) Sam Black, 5 Star General with the United States Army and proud resident of Austin, Texas. You probably know me better as "that trigger-happy Southerner".

COLE: (*laughs*) So being an army general, you're the guy responsible for killing hundreds of thousands innocent lives, right? German, Japanese, American, does it even matter to you?

BLACK: Listen here ya little -

(*HOLLAND AND WETHERING MOVE TO BREAK IT UP*)

HOLLAND: Gentleman, this will be a long day if we are spending it, you know, trying to kill each other.

BLACK: (*Sarcastically*) Ever the diplomat Ryan!

HOLLAND: Listen, why don't we focus on our similarities, rather than our differences?

COLE and BLACK: We are not alike at all!
(*Pause*)

WETHERING: (*sees the baseball and glove from BLACK's suitcase*) You both like baseball right?

BLACK: I do. (*Pause. Reluctantly initiates conversation under glare of WETHERING and HOLLAND*) What team do you support Mr Cole?

COLE: (*grudgingly*) The Yankees.

BLACK *(to WETHERING)*: I honestly didn't think it was possible for me to have a worse first impression of him than I did, I honestly didn't. Then he goes and tells me that he goes for the most annoying franchise in all of professional baseball and the personal rival of my Texas Rangers...that is one hell of an achievement.

WETHERING: Okay that is it! I don't care if you two can't get on, we don't have long and we need to make a decision. This is important stuff here so you both shut up and let's decide whether or not it is a good move to drop a bomb whose power is unrivalled by anything man has ever made. Agreed?

(Everyone mumbles in agreement)

BLACK: Just quickly, put me out of my misery. For the last time, what is in that suitcase? Top-secret government files? Only for our eyes? Or maybe the launch codes for the missile system!

WETHERING: *(pulls sandwich out of suitcase)* Okay, can we begin?

(BLACK bangs head on table)

COLE: It is evident we have three options. Option A - drop the bomb on Hiroshima and needlessly kill thousands of innocent lives -

BLACK: Sorry to interrupt but in the process we will be saving American lives. *(Everyone looks at him)* I digress. Please continue.

COLE: Option B - We show them the raw strength of what we have and hope that is enough to make them surrender

BLACK: Sorry to interrupt, but it won't be.

HOLLAND: Why bother saying sorry to interrupt? You're going to do it anyway.

BLACK: Little something called common courtesy -

COLE: Option C - We don't drop the bomb.

(Pause)

WETHERING: Gentlemen, we have what is known as a dilemma...

(Knock on the door)

COLE: I thought nobody was going to interrupt us

HOLLAND: I'll see who it is.

(Moves to door, has brief conversation and then comes back)

HOLLAND: Gentlemen, this meeting has now become pointless. The President has made a decision by himself.

COLE: What did he choose?

(Darkness)

“Your guest has already arrived”. Your breathing quickens, ‘perhaps it’s a good thing you’re late’, ‘makes you seem less keen’. ‘But maybe she likes an eager man’ you argue telepathically. Your mind is a torrent of possible variables that could make, or ruin this important occasion, but you have to focus, seem calm as if you’ve done this thousands of times before. You quickly iron your commissioned suit with your hands and as you turn the corner, your stomach overturns as you see your beautiful date waiting patiently in the middle of the room, holding a cigarette in her elegant grasp.

My pen seems fatigued.

“Excuse me. Terribly embarrassing but my pen seems to have run out. Unreliable things aren’t they? Do you happen to have one on you?”

“Yeah mate, here. Keep it”.

“No I couldn’t..”

“Relax, I found it on the ground”.

“Well, thank you”.

The blue will have to suffice tonight.



Man at Restaurant continued....

If only you were that cigarette. Suddenly, her twinkling eyes catch yours and she gestures for you to approach. You drag yourself towards your placement reluctantly rehearsing your greetings and topics of discussion in your head before hanging your suede blazer over the seat.

Time to get some fresh air. After all, it wouldn’t be an eventful outing without an excursion through Kings Cross, would it? After placing a Bill on the table, I ventured out the thin doorway into the untamed night.

Victoria Street presented a joyful scene. Up-and-coming businesses littered the junctions where young entrepreneurs expelled the hard work of their week. As I ventured through the tributary alongside the majestic St Johns’, an acute noise made me pause. It was crying. Very distinct. How interesting. I proceeded towards the crying through the darkness when I found a young woman no more than 27 and a half. Leaning up against a cracked wall.



I approached slowly, as to avoid alarming her.

“Hello” I began.

“Did Dan send you?”

“No, who’s Dan?”

“Leave me alone”

“I’m just trying to help”

“Help someone else”.

Surely her situation wasn’t so critical that her manners to a passing stranger were being infringed!

“Are you hurt young lady?”

“I will be. Soon”.

Without a word, I withdrew an old, thrice folded piece of paper from my chest pocket. My favourite poem:

“Why, when I needed you most,

you have not been there for me?”

The Lord replied

“The times when you have seen only one set of footprints

is when I carried you”.

Excerpt from *Footprints in the Sand*
by Mary Stevenson



I loved that tie. Who would’ve thought an orange tie could look this good? I always got comments when I wore it. Emily did have a good eye for those things. I approached the stained, white microwave, passing the kitsch painting of Jesus in the top left corner of the wall. Obviously a donation from someone’s attic. Or a neighbourhood clean-up. Further I trudged, past the sink whose contents of brown water and used cutlery spilled over the edges onto the unevenly tiled floor. I then withdrew the rubber gloves from the box to fold over my clammy hands and snapped them over my wrists, signaling my readiness for another exhausting 4 hour sentence at 231A Victoria Street Darlinghurst. Oh crap! A stain on my favourite shirt. Perhaps from last week’s work. Oh well, it’s not like the clientele *here* would notice! The *Rough Edges Café* served a valiant purpose. A refuge for those who are urbanised and displaced, *blab blab blab*. Yet, every visit brought me more depression as the crowds rolled in for feasts of potato and pea puree and cold pizza served from buckets.

Why was I there? I was a volunteer after all. Was it some masochistic hunger or a misguided sense of community service? Perhaps at my position of status it was important to witness those below me as a humbling experience. More like discomforting.

The smell of stale cigarettes combatting lemon disinfectant was overwhelming. This sensation must be left unrelieved however, as the croft outside representing the only window for air was equally strong-smelling of marijuana and tobacco. The white van labeled “Aus. Harvest” crawled into its usual zone and I greeted the enthused charity worker, whose optimistic attitude would be broken eventually as the homeless continued to roll in. Case by case I unloaded the loot. Pastries and old pizza were prevalent, however mashed up peas and tomatoes were also popular tonight. The irrepressible men and women stared blankly as I lowered their sustenance down onto the dull orange bench. Their eyes slightly receded from the burrows in their foreheads like Neanderthals approaching prey.

A lone man with large square wire glasses, far too big for his head, sat gracefully with a chessboard near the front door sipping at his instant, two-minute coffee. He was wearing a clean-looking blue knitted vest accompanied with neat silken pants. I turned to Jeff. An experienced charity worker.

“Oi Jeff, who’s that guy? He always here?”

“That’s Paul. Just sits there every night”

“Doesn’t look very homeless”

“That’s cause there isn’t a homeless look, Jack. Anyone can be homeless”

“Yeah, but...”

“Just get ‘im some coffee”.

Jeff was tired, we all were. The nights were hard. Some harder than others, especially when Caroll sauntered in. I know as volunteers we’re taught to be patient and understanding, but this woman could make Mother Teresa’s patience wear thin. Caroll was simply unappreciative, rude and loud. There was always a problem, whether it was her sixth husband sleeping around, or her sixth affair with her husband.

I refilled the pot aggressively just at the thought of Caroll but burnt my hand as the black ooze dribbled through my fingers. The coffee was tempting. I threw a harvest of sugar into the swirling black liquid and then proceeded towards Paul.

“Want some coffee?”

“No, I’ll finish this one thanks” he replied without looking at me.

A follow-up was not required. I didn’t want to be sucked into another two hour conversation. Like last night. There’s this guy, us volunteers like to call “*the conspiracy guy*”. I was in the chair closest to the door experiencing the elements of a Kings Cross winter, while immersed in two hours of Hitler’s real ambitions, Egyptian pharaohs and 9/11. ALWAYS 9/11!! When I broke his gaze he’d tell me to turn around and listen. Like a teacher preying on a student.

They’re not all bad though. George, for example. He reminds me of Santa Claus. Massive white beard, red cheeks. His ‘Ho Ho’ laugh was also a giveaway. But honestly, he gives me better advice than any teacher, lecturer or parent I’ve ever heard. Always asking how I am as well. A considerate homeless person.

It’s strange you see. Some people shuffle in here with beards and cloaks and scars and you expect them to yell at you or hit you or spit in your face. But you end up having a decent conversation with them. And you wonder. How in the hell did they get themselves homeless? Some guys roll in wearing black pants, work shoes and polo shirts. But they’re on drugs and dribbling all over

the Scrabble board, spelling illegitimate words that as volunteers we're expected to accept as answers.

I'm a bad volunteer, aren't I?

I went over to see how Paul was doing. When I looked over I saw nothing but an empty chair and 5 bucks on the table. The coffee was free.



"What's this?" the rain girl asked. Her purple eyeliner peeled down her saggy cheeks, diluted with tears and rain.

"Well, only a slice of poetic genius..."

"Spare me the lecture old man. You can have your stupid poem"

"I'd hardly call the..."

"You're not one of those do-gooders are you?"

I was lost for words and couldn't handle the pace at which she was speaking.

"Save it. Head down".

She cowered once again. Her head receded into her knees, as a snail's eyes duck into its head when prodded. There was a dull shuffling behind me. It became quicker, closer. The girl tensed. There was no time to turn around. The dull thud of metal on bone echoed through my ears and brain. Darkness closed in and a dreamless sleep awaited me.



My lips hugged a fresh cigarette. I gulped in the beautiful dank smoke. I could feel it corrupting my lungs by every puff. My gloved hand reached for a stool which I firmly placed under me. Half the night was over. I had laboured away on instant coffee, milkshakes and hot chocolates for long enough. As I turned to adjust my wooden stool I knocked over one of my proud banana smoothies. It collapsed on the pavement, the contents increasing in diameter. As I looked up at some clients getting some fresh air, I noticed that their expression seemed to suggest that I was the pathetic one. How wrong they were.

As I peered around the endless stream of liquor shops and tobacconists I felt alone and adrift in the Kings Cross ocean. Even Faust did his deal with a partner. With a glance up the street towards St John's Cathedral, he acquired his roughly parcelled bundle with clammy hands and hobbled into the darkness.



The girl had departed. The alleyway was empty. All except for me. The walls of the alley wrapped around me. I was in a daze. Never mind. I had to figure out where I had mindlessly walked into.

Some of the book even had excerpts from other places. Bits of old paper were messily glued into the journal.

Psalm 121

- | |
|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. I lift up my eyes to the hills – where does my help come from?2. My help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth.3. He will not let your foot slip – he who watches over you will not slumber |
|---|

It's funny how much you can tell of a person by their belongings. Not only through the content, but even the fact that this person owned a journal in the first place tells me that they're smart, a sociopath, a woman or just highly emotional. I like this guy. I feel like we're on the same page, you know? Pun not intended. Even now, I'm writing to you, just like he's writing to me. Well, not on purpose.



It was a thirty degree summer night and I was shaking. The only thing keeping me connected to the earth was the music coming from behind the wall of the nightclub. A constant reminder of home. I was stranded in a desert with no water and no food. The fruits of my journal would now be lost forever; I had plummeted into withdrawal, withdrawal from the pen. Why didn't I buy another journal you ask? Well the answer is simple. I don't have any money. Even if I bought another one, what's the point? My labours from the past year and a half are lost. It would be like writing a book, without a beginning, like dividing by zero, like splitting an atom.

I wouldn't even be in this situation if it weren't for Jane. It pains me to think about her. What did I see in her? Why in the hell did I marry her? She was always going to run away with some merchant banker. That note, the last thing she ever wrote to me. It would forever be glued in my mind. At least without my journal it would be. My journal created a new world, a world without Jane, without that damned note.

Dear Paul

I've gone to the supermarket. Took the kids with me. You know how they love going down the street.

They didn't...

There's dinner in the fridge. Love you.

The man did not look up. He was glowing. This was the first time I really had a good look at him. He looked woeful. His eyes, deeply carved into his skull with huge black bags down his cheeks. He looked like he hadn't slept in weeks.

"This is pretty good, you know"

"The journal?"

"Yeah, I read a bit of it. Sorry".

"No, it's good to have an audience".

He bounced out the doorway and I assembled in front of a table to take a moment to recollect my thoughts as to what had just happened. No sooner than I sat down the conspiracy guy sat down next to me. His chair groaned.

“Have you read the paper lately?”

I was too immersed in thought to reply. The look in Paul’s eyes when he received his journal, was it gratitude? His face lit up, his small-shouldered frame inflated and his glassy eyes protruded from their hollow sockets. I would never forget that. I’d merely given him a yellow-paged, dusty moleskin. Did it really mean that much to him?

“The evidence all points to the same thing. They’ve finally uncovered Bush’s intentions. They can’t keep it from us any longer”.

But was that really all it was? Paul looked at me as if I had given him life. As if he had received salvation, been thrown a life-raft.

I was plucked from my thoughts by the conspiracy guy’s nudge.

“Hey, you listening? Soon everyone will know what I’ve known all along”.

I looked at this guy in the eye. His passionate, all-knowing eyes. Were we really that different? Me, the conspiracy guy, Paul. We were all just searching for something – to be heard, to be appreciated. He was glaring at me, waiting on my response.

“Yeah. Of course. So you really think Bush had something to do with it?”



I regained my reserved area next to the nightclub stairs. The music’s different tonight. An improvising saxophone. I rolled over onto my side and the corner of my journal jabbed into my breast through my pocket. It felt good. I closed my eyes and once again tried to picture the image of Jesus, but my mind was occupied by the face of the volunteer worker. I had come face to face with our savior himself. I closed my eyes and let sleep set in.

Shore Year 9

Sydney Morning Herald

Younger Writer of the Year Competition – Winner 2012

NB Students had to use one of three story starters to guarantee it was written for this competition. Anthony Kenny's script follows the opening in italics.

The Act of Defiance

Anthony Kenny (Year 9)

Commander Chen-Smith of the Republic of Australia Airship Fleet was not a woman to be reasoned with, much less argued with. So when she summoned me to the bridge and told me that I was to be one of the squad being lowered to the surface the following day, I just saluted and said 'Yes, Ma'am.' Like my knees hadn't suddenly turned to jelly and my mouth hadn't gone dry as a biscuit.

It would have been understandable if I'd blurted 'But, Ma'am, I'm only a Junior Midshipman! I've only been in the RAAF six months!' But I didn't. For those very reasons.

A tube burbled, and she turned away to answer it. I looked down through the plexiglass floor of the bridge. We were about a thousand feet above the Ballard Archipelago. The islands stretched northwards into the distance. Some were green, some black, some still burning. I couldn't make out a pattern. There didn't seem to be a front line. The attacks, it seemed, were random.

We assembled in the descent pod before dawn. Six of us humans plus three Assault Replicants who strapped in and switched themselves into Standby mode. Lieutenant Bax did the checks and then released the winch. We dropped away from the ship like a stone.

I was only a child when the government was overthrown 10 years ago. The Visionaries, as they called themselves, fought for 3 years without rest to make Australia a republic. The overthrow happened in 2020. Most people eventually became supportive of the cause, and the new government grew strong. It built up the strongest armed forces the world has ever seen, and developed the most terrifying warfare technology such as the Republic of Australia Army's fearsome Assault Replicants, robotic soldiers that could blend with humans but had superior strength, agility and intelligence. But perhaps the most feared weapon in the hands of the Republic of Australia's Defense Force was the Airborne Battle Station.

The flying fortress was a Command and Control Center, troop carrier, missile platform and strike aircraft all rolled into one. But it wasn't just its awesome capabilities that made it the biggest innovation in warfare since the aircraft carrier. It looked scary. With its forward slanted wings, glass dome cockpit, rotating turrets mounted on each wing and the rear of the aircraft and the plexiglass floor of the main control center, allowing the crew to look down on its prey, made for a sight that would chill an enemy to the bone. This is the ship I was stationed on.

Two years ago, the government decided that it was time to start expanding, and sent troops and ships to all the nearby islands: New Zealand, Caledonia, Indonesia. Within hours of the first deployment, a phone rang somewhere deep inside Parliament House. It was a representative from the UN. Countries around the world were in uproar about these invasions, and sent troops to try and defend the smaller nations around us. And so the Republic of Australia went to war. With the World.

As soon as the pod hit the ground, six soldiers and three Assault Replicants clambered out. Immediately the Assault Replicants (or Arnolds, referring to the strength of the robots like that of Arnold Schwarzenegger) raised their weapons and took up the lead while us humans followed somewhat timidly behind. We charged through the jungle towards the target. Our objective? To infiltrate and destroy the UN base.

Finally, after what seemed like hours of stumbling blindly through the jungle, we came to the end of a clearing. We all crouched down and peered through the scrub at the UN base. It was just a concrete building with lots of antennas on top.

“Thermal imaging shows two guards patrolling the opening hallway and ten bogeys in the control room,” reported an Arnold. The team ran silently to the door of the complex. The Arnolds swiftly entered the base and we followed.

I heard two gunshots. One after another. As we proceeded to the control room, I passed the bodies of the guards. Both had holes in their head. The door to the control room flung open. There were screams and gunshots.

“Alright, everyone on their knees up against that wall!” I heard the voice of Lieutenant Bax yell. By the time I got into the room it was a mess. Blood and bullet casings littered the floor. Only three of the ten personnel were up against the wall. The other seven were lying in a pool of their own blood.

“Here is the question,” said the lieutenant, “What are you three going to tell me about the UN’s plans? Give me a good answer and I’ll let you go. Give me a false answer, and you’ll join your comrades. You,” he said, pointing to a rather young American boy, “What do you know?”

The boy muttered something incoherent that sounded like “I know nothing.”

“Wrong answer,” said the lieutenant. He raised his gun and pulled the trigger. The lifeless body slumped on the floor. “What about you? Are you going to make the same mistake?” he asked the woman on her knees.

She said angrily “How dare you? Do you think you can just take over the world? You -” she was cut off by the sound of a bullet leaving the barrel of a gun and entering her skull. Finally, he moved onto the last captive.

An old man with puppy dog eyes and a kind face. His bottom lip was quivering with fear. “Now, I’m going to give you one chance to get this right. What do you know about the UN’s plans?”

“I know everything,” the old man said defiantly, “but I’m never going to tell you.”
“Very well,” he said “Midshipman, kill him.”

I realised in a moment of despair that he was talking to me. I looked at the old man. He looked back at me helplessly. “No” I said.

“I’m sorry?” asked the shocked lieutenant.

“I said no. This is cold blooded murder.” I replied.

“Midshipman you better pull that trigger right now or I’ll do it myself,” he threatened. “Alright,” I said. And in my last moments of defiance, I raised my weapon, aimed at the lieutenant. And fired.

Battle of Nemanada Island

Mackenzie Taylor (Year 8)

Commander Chen-Smith of the Republic of Australia Airship Fleet was not a woman to be reasoned with, much less argued with. So when she summoned me to the bridge and told me that I was to be one of the squad being lowered to the surface the following day, I just saluted and said ‘Yes, Ma’am.’ Like my knees hadn’t suddenly turned to jelly and my mouth hadn’t gone dry as a biscuit. It would have been understandable if I’d blurted ‘But, Ma’am, I’m only a Junior Midshipman! I’ve only been in the RAAF six months!’ But I didn’t. For those very reasons. A tube burbled, and she turned away to answer it. I looked down through the plexiglass floor of the bridge. We were about a thousand feet above the Ballard Archipelago. The islands stretched northwards into the distance. Some were green, some black, some still burning. I couldn’t make out a pattern. There didn’t seem to be a front line. The attacks, it seemed, were random.

We assembled in the descent pod before dawn. Six of us humans plus three Assault Replicants who strapped in and switched themselves into Standby mode. Lieutenant Bax did the checks and then released the winch. We dropped away from the ship like stones. My brain stopped working. This was my first proper drop after all. But my training asserted itself and I pulled the parachute and landed as if the ground was made of pillows.

I scrambled out of the parachute and looked around for the rest of my squad. I saw something that would make anyone run. Three aliens were tearing towards me like a cheetah hunting its prey. I scrambled towards the forest hoping they would give up the chase. One of them raised his weapon and fired at me. I heard a loud hum, like a bee in my ear and instinctively ducked. It hit the tree to my left and erupted into flames. I dodged and weaved through the burning remains like a gazelle leaping through the Savannah.

I eventually heard their footsteps fading and I slowed down. I turned on my radio and tried to contact my commander. “Jacob to Lieutenant Bax. Come in Sir”. The radio crackled to life. “We’re pinned down under heavy fire near the Amonocor Dam. I can’t get through to Chen-Smith. Radio for back up immediately then come here.”

“Yes Sir” I replied sharply and turned it off. I switched to the ship’s radio frequency.

“Jacob Baten to Commander Chen-Smith. Come in Commander” Her voice sounded through the radio. “Commander Chen-Smith here. What is your squad’s status?”

“I was separated on arrival. They’re under heavy fire near Amonocor Dam. Lieutenant Bax requests immediate back up”. I heard her breathing, thinking of the next move, the next way to take back Nemanada Island. “Negative. I can’t waste any more troops. Tell them to fight hard. Chen-Smith over and out.”

I felt that familiar steely resolve inside me. The one that got me through training. Chen-Smith may have given up but I hadn’t. I powered up my satellite watch and switched it to map mode. I could see all the action on this little map as well as my own position. I pulled my laser out of its holster and turned towards the Amonocor Dam.

When I arrived I stepped out of the forest onto what seemed to be a rocky plain. The ground felt hard compared to the soft soil of the forest. The battle was to my left. I ran towards it and took aim at an alien about to sneak up on Bax. It screamed in pain. "Thanks," Bax called to me before turning his sights towards a new hoard of aliens joining the battle. The next few minutes were the most frantic of my life. I fired left and right, mowing down aliens like there was no tomorrow. Our Squad fought back the aliens even though we were outnumbered ten to one. Eventually the aliens were brought to their knees.

Then something amazing happened. They turned and fled. Never before had the aliens retreated. I saw the squad coming towards me with grins on their faces. They looked like a group of Cheshire cats. I smiled and we embraced.

Lieutenant Bax congratulated us on our great work but warned us we weren't out of the woods yet. We had to take down the aliens' base on Nemanada. We turned towards it, invigorated by our victory.

When we arrived at the base night was falling. I had to rub my eyes to convince myself it was real. The base seemed to stretch into the sky. It made me feel like an ant. Puny and insignificant. I gulped. Before I could voice my fears Bax explained our plan.

"Jacob, you and Alexander are going to drive deep into the base to plant the bomb. The rest of us are going to cause a distraction by attacking the outer guards. If everything goes to plan we will rendezvous at Landanatiola." We all nodded.

I grabbed the bomb and ran into the darkness. There was no resistance and we easily snuck past the guards. When we got in things became a little trickier. The place was a maze and it took us time to find the control room. We fought our way through the control room guards. I took down the last lot with a grenade and reached the centre. I planted the bomb and ran.

We reached the outside and had to forcibly fight our way back to the forest. I whistled the signal and Bax dropped a smoke grenade and ran. The aliens gave chase. Bax was bleeding from his side. We dragged him to Landanatiola and were beamed up into the ship. But it was too late for Bax. Chen-Smith looked surprised to see us. She covered it up and smiled. She shook our hands. Her skin felt very strange. Cold, hard and slimy. Much like an alien's.

Shore Year 7
Sydney Morning Herald
Younger Writer of the Year Competition– Runner-up 2012

Nametag
Ben Jefferson (Year 7)

Jakke had two unusual problems. The first was his name, Jakke, which would have been fine on some Scandinavian island with a population of three, two of whom wrote grisly crime novels, but not in London. In his fourteen years living in Stepney, Jakke had never met anyone else with his name. And having an unusual name in Ken Livingstone Comprehensive made him as much a target as the four-eyed kids, or the stuttering kids or even the cosplay kids. Jakke had nothing against any of those kids, it was just that he didn't want to be a target. Jakke's second unusual problem, and the more pressing one at the moment, was the consequence of finally standing up to Brace Ferguson, the lumbering cretin who decided who the targets were in KL Comp. The conversation had gone like this:

Brace: 'Here he comes, Jakke Denham. Where are your parents from, Jakke? Moominland?'

Jakke: 'You shut your face, Brace.'

It had been an accident. The rhyme. But the laugh from the kids on the yard had given Jakke courage.

Jakke: 'Yeah, you heard me. Shut your face, Brace. What kind of stupid name is Brace anyway? Where are your parents from? Stupid One Syllable Ville?'

He'd gone a bit far, Jakke could see that now. Which was why he had skeddaddled pronto and was now hiding inside a giant papier-mâché elephant in the infant yard. They'll never find me here, he thought. Never. Then he heard Brace's voice say, 'Check the elephant.'

Jakke knew what was coming. It was inevitable. *No-one* stood up to Brace Ferguson. Well, he thought. This is how it ends. Fortunately, Jakke had never been subject to one of Brace's famous beatings. Unfortunately, he was about to be. One of Brace's goons peered into the elephant, grinned at Jakke and yelled out to Brace to 'get over here, we got him.' Jakke chose to step out of the ridiculous elephant rather than be pulled out. He had to try to keep some dignity in front of the schoolyard, even if his name was Jakke Xerxes Denham. He slowly clambered out and blinked at the harsh sunlight. Brace stood about 5 metres away, his huge body casting a shadow over the compact earth of the kiddy playground. All the kids, even the toddlers, went quiet. A storm was coming. Brace took a step forward, his hands bunched in fists at his side. On cue, two of Brace's beefheads grabbed Jakke's hands. No escape now. Jakke closed his eyes. *Here it comes*, he thought. He waited. And waited. And opened his eyes to see Brace slouching back to the senior yard alone.

Brace wasn't in class after lunch. The teachers simply ignored his absence. It wasn't uncommon for kids to bunk off, particularly kids like Brace Ferguson. But it was with surprise that Jakke found that he was the only one who really cared where Brace had gone. The idiots who hung around him just wanted some power. They didn't care where he went, as long as there was someone they could suck up to. Jakke wondered why he cared himself. It wasn't like he missed Brace. Jakke told himself just to forget him. Brace was unimportant. He had enough worries of his own to trouble himself with someone he didn't even like.

That afternoon Brace's disappearance came springing back in the form of a lighter. Brace was well-known for his pyro shows after dark. He would empty some petrol onto an old piece of furniture donated by a kid, then light it and run. The police had caught him once and given him a formal warning, but that clearly hadn't stopped him. Jakke was walking home from school when he spotted Brace's lucky lighter. It was lying a few metres away from a sofa-sized scorch mark on some pavement near his street. Brace had obviously fled the scene pretty quickly as a trail of petrol was drizzled all over the grey concrete. The trail led towards an old warehouse that had been abandoned by the user long ago. Jakke started to follow the spilled petrol to see if he could find where Brace had disappeared to.

Jakke found the end of the trail at the back of the warehouse. Obviously no-one cared much about what happened to the place; the windows had been smashed in long ago. Inside one of the jagged glass holes was a big empty space. Empty except for... Brace's head popped up, causing Jakke to fall back into a shrub with a thud and a high-pitched wail of surprise. Another embarrassing habit. Whenever Jakke got scared he had a tendency to let out a shriek that sounded *exactly* like a girl. Brace was out of the window in an instant and rolling into Jakke's shrub.

'What was that?' Brace asked with a weird look on his face. Jakke groaned. Brace Ferguson wasn't exactly the ideal guy to have kneeling on your stomach. 'What are you doing here?' Brace whispered hoarsely. 'Can't you just leave me alone?' Brace looked close to tears. Jakke was shocked. This was a complete role reversal. *Jakke* leave *Brace* alone?

Yeah, right! 'You're not the only one with a stupid name.' Brace murmured. Then it clicked.

The schoolyard. The rhyme. The Stupid One Syllable Ville joke.

'Who teases you about your name?' Jakke asked.

'My parents.' Brace replied miserably. Jakke recoiled.

His *parents*?

'They were drunk when they wrote up the birth certificate.' Brace continued. 'Thought it'd be funny.'

Jakke thought for a moment. Those words threw everything Brace had ever done into a new perspective. 'My parents are just really bad spellers.' Jakke said.

Brace sniffled and grinned. 'You coming back to school?' Jakke asked.

Brace nodded. They both stood up out of the shrub. Then Brace punched Jakke in the arm and frowned. 'Don't think this changes anything, Jakke-boy,' Brace threatened. Jakke knew Brace didn't mean it. He had a feeling his two problems were solved.

In the last few weeks of Term I students in Year 10 – 12 participated in the **Shore Essay Competition**. The topic of the competition was – *The Current Generation Only Cares About Itself*. David Marr, distinguished Old Boy, author and journalist, kindly returned to read the essays and select the winners. I would like to congratulate and commend all the boys for a wonderful array of compelling and persuasive essays. The competition showcased some very talented writers. I would like to congratulate **the winner Calum Buckling (Year 12) and the runner-up Joshua Clarke (Year 12)**.

David Marr: *“Joshua Clarke’s story was clearly written, agreeably sceptical and displays another virtue of the form: not piling arguments on top of one another but selecting key arguments and shedding the rest. Essays are not about mass but judgement and finesse. But the overall winner is Calum Buckling. He’s personal, he’s funny and he knows what to do with words. He makes you see life in the Buckling household. Serious playfulness of this kind is a great pleasure. I’ve been reading it to friends at the Herald. They’re laughing too.”*

Calum Buckling’s Winning Essay

So what is the “*current generation*”? Are we talking here about today’s teenagers, otherwise known as Generation Z, or today’s twenty-something’s, known as Generation Y, or even older (not that they would ever admit to being old) generations such as the Baby Boomers, a generation of which my parents are stereotypically part. (Think Beatles music, rose tinted spectacles when reviewing the “good old days”, and worst of all, middle-aged bodies in lycra, either cycling or attempting the latest yoga positions designed by the guru at Fitness First).

On the assumption that this discussion should be about me (not that I only care about myself...), let us postulate that we are talking about Generation Z, and in particular about the subset of Generation Z which comprises kids in their late teens – not yet working or attending college or university, but those in their final years at school. People like me.

The starting point to this discussion is that the proposition is true, the current generation, particularly me, only cares about itself. I know this to be true because my Dad, a baby boomer who has never been wrong about anything, has told me on several occasions that it is true. But perhaps this bears a little more examination.

Why does my Dad, who has never been wrong about anything, think that I only care about myself?

Is it because of my reluctance to interrupt my homework, or worse, a particularly interesting Facebook session, in order to “run downstairs and get me a cold beer”? This request usually made from a supine position on the sofa, on which he has fallen, still wearing his sweaty lycra, after an apparently exhausting and disabling bike ride. Doesn’t he know that I am thinking only of him, his liver and his spreading figure – I am only trying to save him from himself! If I only cared about myself I would be force-feeding him more beers in an attempt to accelerate my just inheritance.

Perhaps it is because I very recently refused to play him at table football, explaining that I was absolutely focused on completion of my compelling, and almost certainly winning, entry in the Shore Essay Writing Competition. This apparently was selfishness and caring only about myself, when the truth of the matter is that I was again thinking of him, anticipating the reflected glory he

would feel at the first prize for essay-writing ever won by a member of our family. Not only that, I was protecting his ego, given his inability to beat me at table football since 2007. It is interesting that my Dad, who has never been wrong about anything, has an extraordinarily selective memory when it comes to the history of table football results. I sometimes wonder if perhaps he was wrong about something once and has selectively forgotten it. Surely not!

Mum on the other hand, rarely accuses me of caring or thinking only of myself, although she does get a bit cranky on yoga mornings if I happen to be taking a little longer to get up than she would like and she senses that she might be late for her guru. It is not unusual for there to be an accusation of selfishness and not being sufficiently considerate of other people's time and commitments. Again I would contend that I am being considerate. The less yoga that Mum does the less the chance of her suffering a chronic back injury. The better rested I am, the more pleasant I am to be around. Everybody wins! Rather than suggesting that I think only about myself, Mum more often accuses me of not thinking about anything. "What were you thinking?", is the usual question asked when my boater inexplicably fails to make it home after rugby training, or the new mobile phone that I had just been given finds itself in the water at Balmoral Beach. This question is asked even more forcibly when I advise her at 6.00 pm on a Sunday night that I had neglected to check the due date for my entry to the Shore Essay Writing Competition and that having now checked I would therefore not be able to complete any of my other study tasks that evening, as I had to complete and submit my compelling, and almost certainly winning, entry the following morning.

However I do think that her criticisms are unfair, given that it has been scientifically demonstrated that teenagers are wired not to think. A British neuroscientist, Sarah Jayne Blakemore, wrote a paper in 2006, published in *Cosmos* magazine, that demonstrated that teenagers have an underdeveloped medial prefrontal cortex and as a result "when choosing a course of action teenagers hardly use the part of the brain involved in thinking about other people's thoughts. Furthermore they often fail to think about their own."

So it wasn't my fault Mum!

My older sister also has views on the current generation. First of all she refuses to accept that she, at precisely 2.5 years older than me, but nonetheless still a teenager, is part of the current generation. She believes that she is a mature adult, with nothing in common with her brother, and in fact that she deserves a generation letter all to herself.

More relevantly she shares Dad's view that the current generation i.e. me, care only about themselves. Strangely she does not share Dad's view that he has never been wrong about anything, but rather holds that he is wrong about almost everything, except of course about me. Her belief that I care only about me is based on the flimsiest of evidence. Apparently she believes that on the nights that she has a date, I deliberately take too much time in the bathroom preparing for my own social activities, thus preventing her from getting herself properly made up for the evening. She doesn't seem to appreciate that I am not thinking of myself but actually thinking of her best interests. It is well known that boys prefer to date girls with a more natural, "un-made-up" look - so the less time she gets in the bathroom, the less made up she will be when the doorbell rings and the more successful the date. Another example of selfless behavior by the *current generation*.

And what do my teachers have to add to this debate? There seem to be varying opinions but largely it seems about identifying all the things that I don't care for and concluding that I must care only for myself. This is false logic. I accept that I don't care for homework (but then who does?), that I don't care to tie my tie properly, wear a boater on the bus, sit exams or study for

them. As a general rule I don't care for essay writing, although I am happy to make an exception for this compelling and almost certainly winning entry in the Shore Essay Writing Competition. But none of that proves the proposition.

If we set aside my Dad's infallible opinions, my Mum's over-reactions to minor events, my sister's delusional view that she is not part of the *current generation*, and the teachers' unnatural expectations, what is the other evidence either for or against the proposition that the current generation cares only for itself?

The evidence is overwhelming that the prime example of the *current generation* (i.e. me) cares deeply about very many things **as well as** myself.

I care about my iPod – where would we be without music? I care about my iPhone with which I can communicate to the world. I care about Facebook, without which I would not be kept up to date with everyone's social life. I care about the mighty Roosters, who are going to win the Rugby League premiership this year. I care about rugby and Shore's performance this year. Most urgently I care about finishing my compelling entry to the Shore Essay Writing Competition. Now some may see some or all of these things as superficial, but I think they demonstrate the fact that I do not care **only** about myself. And nor does the rest of my generation.

We can be as flippant as we like, and our generation is prone to flippancy, but we don't have to go very far to see examples of how the current generation is both caring and giving. The Shore Weekly Record only last week included an account of the work that had been done by a group of Shore boys to help underprivileged kids in the Philippines. I would contend that all Shore boys have played significant roles in some sort of charitable activities in recent times. The school breeds an ethos of caring and giving among the boys, both internally and more importantly in the wider community. As my Dad, who has never been wrong about anything, said to me just the other day while resting on the couch – “Shore boys are really impressive in the way they give to the community and help those less fortunate than themselves – now there is another opportunity, please get me a cold beer.....”

Shore Fifty50 Short Story Competition

In the last few weeks of Term III students in Year 7 – 12 participated in the **Shore Fifty50 Short Story Competition**. The boys were required to compose a short story of no more than 50 words that included the word “rustle.” There were some exceptional entries in this year’s competition showcasing the vast array of talent at Shore.

Thanks also to this year’s **distinguished judge of the finalists, the Headmaster, Dr Wright**. Students also had an opportunity to vote for their favourite story on Lampada. Please find following the winning story from each Year group.

Year 12 winning story (and also people’s choice) Max Frost

*The delicate sunlight irradiated the isolated tear upon Abdul’s face. In Kabul, children awoke to a city alleviated of draconian Taliban rule. Ecstatic kites peppered the azure, the first time for years. The safety of the Kalashnikov clicked off with a mechanic **rustle**. The barrel’s interior was arcane and starless.*

Year 11 winning story by Hugh Guest (People’s Choice: Baxter Atkins)

*Seeing the empty plate in front of his son was too much to bear. “Dad,” his son said. “Will there be dinner tomorrow?” The lie he had to tell was bitter on his lips. “I’ll try to **rustle** something up.” That night he entered the petrol station, gun in hand.*

Year 10 winning story (and also people’s choice) by Henry Wrench

*Leaves of paper **rustle** with a ticking zephyr on the public noticeboard. Kookaburras giggling atop the board are interrupted by a lone woman. She rubs her belly and pulls a sheet from her bag; writes on it, “for sale, baby shoes, unused.” And posts it with loving hands.*

Year 9 winning story (and also people’s choice) by Jake Hedge

*The misspelt sign had two words that read out to me, sadness and misery. But by watching this man, watching his face light up as soon as he heard the **rustle** and clang of the coin pieces hit the bottom of his old, rusty can, I understood.*

Year 8 winning story (and also people’s choice) by Sam Parker

*I’m running for my life. My feet muffled by the grass. Dodging the lights.
My every move calculated.
I can’t be caught.
Not now. Humanity’s existence depends on me.
Leaves **rustle** as I step on them.
The beast has heard.
‘Come inside’, the monster roars. ‘And finish your greens.’*

Year 7 winning story (and also people’s choice) by Toby Hoggett

*He is dead. They found the one closest to me and now he’s dead. I just couldn’t drop the case like all the other detectives before me. Afraid. Our city is corrupt, so corrupt that police fear doing their job. They fear for their loved ones. For if we **rustle** this gang the consequences are personal.*

Shore Kenneth Slessor Poetry Competition

The *Shore Kenneth Slessor Poetry Competition* saw an outstanding collection of poems submitted across Years 7 to 10, many were close to the highest honours, and the overall winners deserve commendation and approbation.

Liquid Life Ben Jefferson (Year 7)

Spotlights of sun
Trawl the underneath
Of the dappled surface.
Specks of silt, water-dust,
Dance in the dying rays.

Horizon-bound expanses of sea,
Characterised by the choppy
Ups and downs of the water,
Never happy in one spot.

Beach-brine laps at
Rocks and sand,
Brown foam festoons
Blank sand.
Water pools
In clusters of wet sand
And rock.
Some last, but some
Are swept away, by stronger elements.

But water returns,
Constantly recycled by
Its great source.
Faster that it is gone, it returns.
Returning by the legislations of physics.

Then water rises, a slow dance
To the heavens.
Soaked up by blankets of sunlight,
Reused, remade, recycled.

And thus water returns.
Supposedly different.
Supposedly transformed.
Supposedly changed.

All that's changed;
Its place, its time.
Its perception, if water had eyes.
Born to die another day.

Battlefield

Kevin Liman (Year 8)

Wretched soles smear the drenched earth
while straining lungs fight silted breath
as crimson flowing from silhouettes
stain blades upon the Battlefields.
Broken men plodding, spines arched
by burdens increasing as
tortured eyes stare, paralysed by
the floundering, the staggering, the collapsing
of lifeless shells in barbed seas of shrapnel.

Onwards! Was the sole command
of muddied tongues in drunken
ecstasy, driven by serenity
impending sleep foretold.
Forward! Was the sole reply
of slit lips quivering in
the sultry torment of
caustic sun.

Arrival was long awaited
at the cliff sides stained
a lurid hue as of festering flesh
ground by splintered rocks ...
And there stood the foe. Perched
upon the ragged scarp embracing
death as troopers cried,
the face of anguish consumed by fear
as silent as the wind.

Eyes unblinking, fixed upon the panoply
of ordnance unrestrained. Mouth agape
as frenzied bullets flew, crazed shells shattering
skulls while the dead continued to charge,
fire incessant, implacable, unsatisfied
the calamitous force like hail askew where one can
Hear, Hear the cries of Despair.

Listen! To the agony of the
mortared soldier whose silent cries echo in the
cold, relentless cannonade.

The faceless 'peace-keepers'
deprived eternally of youth and
vigour with remains scattered in vain.
Victims of pride, casualties of greed, the
tormented prisoners of callous destruction.

Some choose to speak of virtue. Others
of nobility, of courage, of 'Fighting Spirit.' Where lies the
reality? The Glorification of Terror!

The Exaltation of Brutality!
What service hails fevered destruction?
Which nations celebrate lives 'so willingly sacrificed?'
War: Humanity's vessel for gratuitous devastation!
Perhaps these faceless thousands may remain.
If tortured spirits fail to live, may they be
Immortalised in memory.

Wind

James Balzer (Year 9)

Whipping, whistling and whining by the valley's edge ...
It strikes and spins ...
Curls and strikes ...
With not a course in sight it is flying.
It is striking the cliffs, the trees, the rocks and the seas.
It has a heart of freedom.
It aims for the seas and dives ...
Falling and falling with no control ...
The very atoms of water and salt brushing its face ...

His heart stops
only to rise up at the last second and gasping its breath from its relief.
And his face touching and breathing in the warmth of the sun ...
Life is what keeps it going as it weaves its way up the cliff face ...
And over into the forest.
Then, zooming and darting through the leaves and animals.
The moisture hammering at its face and the animals getting in its way ...
But the wind doesn't care and it knocks them out of the way and rejects them ...
It keeps on going and going; nothing stopping it ...
And then it stops as it crosses the city that it approaches.

The crummy smoke and buildings block its course ...
It zooms around the buildings and through the taxis ...
The cars, the trucks, the windows, the towers ...
Dashing and dodging the obstacles that it approaches.
Under over beside and through ...
It flips and bends and swings and sings ...
It laughs ...
"Nothing will stop me, the invisible wind."
And then it enters the subway tunnels and through it he moves ...
It whips and bangs all through the metal and when the subway comes it splits
then it comes back and runs and runs ...
Only to emerge into the light once more ...
The invisible wind ...

Mother Earth
Michael Park (Year 10)

I can hear you. The scores
Of tiny limbs pattering upon
My very flesh. The miseries, the wars,
And the other minute things that bother
These little minds.

I can see you. Those infinite specks,
Growing into saplings. Plants from small shoots
Fighting over a patch of land before dying
To make way for mountains, valleys and
Sometimes seas themselves.

I can smell you. The acrid tang of
Long-lost trees. Burnt so that
You can move around frenzied,
Eventually settling down and reaching nothing.

Why the worry or the wait?
Little are your lives to my million years.
As you began, you will join me once more.



SHORE

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