

Empower you

A forum for empowerment and change

Issue 3

June/July 2010

An Actionwork Magazine





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- INTERACTIVE WORKSHOPS
- ISSUE BASED THEATRE IN EDUCATION

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Mpower You

A forum for empowerment and change

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Note from the Editor:

Welcome to the third issue of Empower You. As Gaza again is blocked and more people are killed in the region we have two stories sharing what it is like to live in Palestine for ordinary people. The UK has a new Prime Minister or is it two? Read about the election from three different angles. Our top reporter, Rebecca Brynolf, shares with you her ideas about comedy and what it is not possible to make jokes about. Do you think she has gone too far?

Have we manage to offend you with this one? I kind of hope that you at least feel a little uncomfortable reading this - if you are easily offended, give it a miss!! We also take a look at Ritual Theatre and one of it's leading proponents; Amani Naphtali. As well as this you can read our regular features and make use of our free lesson plans and resources. If you would like to make a contribution, write us a letter or just let us know what you think of the magazine. Please write to us at: questions@mpower.eu. Thanks again for reading and I hope you enjoy this issue of Mpower You magazine.

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What's On

Coming up in the months ahead; music, theatre, art, peaceful protests, eco friendly events, dance, workshops, conferences, films, adventure walks & more.

June

1st – 19th Actionwork Anti-bullying Workshops.

Taking place all over the UK, members of the Actionwork team come to your school/event and run fun, interactive workshops on a range of topics.
Info: 01934 815163/actionwork.com

May 28th – June 14th Schumann Fest

Düsseldorf celebrates the 200th anniversary of German composer Robert Schumann. Renowned musicians and orchestras from all over the world will gather to perform Schumann's entire body of work in classical venues such as the Opera House, the Concert Hall, the College of Music and various churches.
Info: schumannfest-dusseldorf.de

8th CyberScream: AVC@SL

A 'radio play' version of the TIE production takes place in Second Life's Anti Violence Campus.
Info: antiviolencecampus.org

11th – 13th Download Festival
Donington Park is a veritable recreational area of rock this summer. ACDC, Megadeth, Rage Against The Machine, Thirty Second to Mars, Motörhead, Billy Idol and others. Nuff said.

Info: downloadfestival.co.uk

11th – 13th Isle of Wight Festival
Jay-Z and Florence and Blondie, oh my! Not actually that difficult to get to and looks like bags of fun. There's also a Kid's Zone at the festival, so the whole family can enjoy a getaway.



Info: isle-of-wight-festival.com

12th World Cup: England V USA
Venue: Rustenburg. Time: 20:30GMT
<http://www.fifa.com/worldcup/matches/index.html>

12th Russian Independence Day.
You can celebrate in Moscow.

15th Peer Mediation Role Play Workshop: AVC@SL
Explore peer mediation strategies in the virtual world of Second Life, using your avatar in role plays. Set in Second Life's Anti Violence Campus.
Info: antiviolencecampus.org

18th World Cup: England V Algeria
Venue: Cape Town. Time: 20:30GMT
<http://www.fifa.com/worldcup/matches/index.html>

21st – July 11th White Nights Arts Festival
While the sun hardly sets during this time in St. Petersburg, the city will see musical concerts, theatrical performances, street events,

firework displays and various other arts related events taking place during the celebrations.
Info: st-petersburg-life.com/st-petersburg/white-nights

23rd World Cup: Slovenia V England

Venue: Nelson Mandela Bay.
Time: 20:30GMT
<http://www.fifa.com/worldcup/matches/index.html>

23rd – 27th Glastonbury Festival
The biggest festival of the summer. The line up is amazing. Just go look at the website... now.
Info: glastonburyfestivals.co.uk

25th – 27th Hard Rock Calling
The famous Hard Rock Café has its own festival in Hyde Park and the line up is as Hard Rock as can be expected. Stevie Wonder warms up for his Glasto set the next day while Jamiroquai, The Hives and Paul McCartney and others do their bit to shift some merchandise.
Info: hardrockcalling.co.uk

30th Empowerment Workshop: AVC@SL
Andy Hickson leads a workshop that focuses on issues of empowerment. Join in with your avatar in the virtual world of Second Life's Anti Violence Campus.
Info: antiviolencecampus.org

July

2nd – 4th Wireless Festival 2010
London's Hyde Park is home to the likes of The Ting Tings, P!nk, 2manydjs, Jay-Z and Snoop Dogg this summer, plus so many more.
Info: wirelessfestival.co.uk

2nd – 4th Cologne Gay Pride Festival

JAH DARLINK! Get your rainbow flags because the centre of Cologne is partying it up while the LGBT and friends crowd paint the town pink.

Info: csd-cologne.de

6th World Cup Semi Finals

<http://www.fifa.com/worldcup/matches/index.html>

4th-8th Baltics biggest Beer festival Song Festival Grounds, Tallinn: with over 100 concerts of Estonian national music, rock, Reggae, and hip-hop. Combine that with loads of cheap beer, and you have one of the biggest events of the summer.



7th – 11th Berlin Fashion Week
Jah darlink, vot you are wearing ist zo hot right now. Germany's capital is the home of the biggest fashion event of ... that week, probably.

Expect many beautiful people schmoozing and smouldering and avoiding the buffet table.

Info: fashion-week-berlin.com

9th – 11th T in the Park

Scotland's much loved music festival is back, giving you Muse, Faithless, Eminem, The Prodigy, Dizzee Rascal, The Black Eyed Peas, and just too many to fit into this little space.

Info: tinthepark.com

11th World Cup Final

<http://www.fifa.com/worldcup/matches/index.html>

15th – 18th Benicassim Festival
Amazing summer music festival taking place in Spain will see performances by Kings of Leon, The Killers, Paul Weller, Mystery Jets, Glasvegas, Maximo Park, Friendly Fires and many MANY more.

Info: benicassimfestival.com

15th – 18th Glade

The arts and electronic music festival is here once more in a weekend packed full of plenty of festivals already. Why go to this one above all others? It's got one up on all the others in that it has ART on top of music, theatre and cabaret. Though I haven't heard of any of the acts...

Info: gladefestival.com

15th – 18th Latitude Festival

Set in the picturesque Sunrise Coast in Suffolk, Latitude is offering up some pretty good music, comedy, cabaret and literature alike. The Early Edition with Marcus Brigstocke and Friends is always worth a look and Pappy's Fun Club is unmissable.

Info: latitudefestival.co.uk

16th – 18th Guilfest

Great line up of Orbital, Status Quo, Hadouken!, N-Dubz, Tinie Tempah and more. Won the 'Best Family Festival Award' in 2006, not

too big, not too small, extensive kid zone and plenty for grownups.
Info: guilfest.co.uk

16th – 26th Cardiff Comedy Festival

Russell Kane, Jo Caulfield, Elis James, Lucy Porter, Gary Delaney, Lloyd Langford, Rhod Gilbert and more deliver ten days of top comedy in the Welsh capital. All hosted in St David's Hall, it closes with the winner of the Welsh Unsigned Stand Up competition winner performing in front of thousands.
Info: Cardiff-festival.com/comedy_e.htm, cardiffcomedy.co.uk

24th-25th Baltic Beach Party.

Liepaja Beach: The music festival gets bigger and better with September, Guru Josh Project, Mumiy Troll from Russia and various other Latvian and Baltic bands. So put on your blue tops and white shorts and groove on down to the beach.

30th – 1st Camp Bestival

Pitch up a tent in Dorset and enjoy a cracking family festival in a castle by the sea. Acts ranging from Madness to Calvin Harris, from The Human League to Mr. Tumble (off of children's telly), there's something to please everyone.

Info: campbestival.net !



Top ten ways to survive

Glastonbury Festival

With Mpower going to Glastonbury festival this summer, here are some of your tips to ensure our survival over the week. Many thanks to everyone on Twitter who offered up their suggestions

1. Take more plastic/bin bags than you ever think you'll need.

Ideal for desperately needed storage, alternative wet weather gear and patching up rubbish tents, the uses of a plastic bag while at a festival are surprising and many. Nappy sacks are also useful and less cumbersome for your smaller, plastic bag related needs. Just make sure you do your part to keep festivals going by not leaving plastic bags lying around in fields when you leave.

2. Learn to be creative with the cleaning options of the wet wipe.

Much like the plastic bag, you will find many a use for the humble wet wipe. They also serve as a useful and effective 'keeping cool' device, whereby you wipe one on your neck and face and let the breeze do its thing. Carry them with you everywhere as you never know when they'll come in handy, particularly when you're suddenly busting for the loo.

3. Plan for every temperature.

Plan for boiling hot, freezing cold and soaking wet weather. You are in a field with a canvas tent, which acts as both a sweat lodge and a surprise shower, as your only protection. Please. Dress. Accordingly. Bring plenty of sun block and after sun. Definitely bring a waterproof coat and an umbrella.

4. Consider your lavatory related options. Depending on the festival, the standard of toilets will vary dramatically from the award winning portaloos at The Big Chill to the literal hole in the ground at Glastonbury. Most will never have been so caught out that they haven't managed to get to a toilet in time but, god forbid, should it ever happen to you, you have options. There's the bucket, which is especially handy if you're bringing kids with you and don't relish the 4am trip to the loos in the dark. There's also the 'Pringle tube' method... which you can probably figure out on your own. FYI – if you see anyone walking around holding the lid really tightly over a Pringles tube, give them a wide berth.



5. Sleep well away from the sides of your tent. There's nothing worse than waking up with a face full of damp polyester canvas. If you've got the room, create a barrier between yourself and the tent wall with your stuff and put bin bags over your stuff to protect it from said damp polyester. There's a lot of faff involved but you'll thank me in the morning.

6. Keep your beverages cool by putting them under your tent during the day.

Just remember to take them out from under the tent when you want to go to sleep.

7. Bring some alcohol hand gel. Like the kind used by doctors, nurses and the obsessive compulsive. Use it before and after food and before and after the toilet... and any other times you feel unclean (shudder).



8. Eat everything.

Again, it might cost you a fair bit, but try to sample a bit of everything on offer. You can get some absolutely amazing food at festivals from venison burgers to pieminister pies, from amazing vegetable curries to some incredibly sugar coma inducing candy floss. If you can, try to score free food at the Hare-Krishna tent

9. Don't panic!

If you've forgotten something. You can probably get anything you need at the festival, especially if it's one of the bigger, more commercial ones. It'll cost you a bit but at least you'll have a toothbrush/tampons/sun block/a tent again.

10. Leave your valuables at home.

Really really think this one through. People at festivals are generally in a very caring and peaceful 'hands across the world' sort of mood and will mostly likely leave you and your precious things be. Sadly there tend to be any number of idiots who for one reason or another, set out to ruin your fun. Nicking your stuff is a very good way of doing that, so just make sure anything that might get nicked isn't anything you'll miss too much. As for the valuables that you really can't leave home without, keep them on you at all times.



Readers' Letters Page

Letter of the week

Dear Charley,

My Dad keeps saying that I can't go on the computer when I want and that I can't have the computer in my room. I think it's not fair because he should trust me and I don't want my whole family to see what I'm doing on the computer. What should I say to him to let him put the computer in my room?

Dear frustrated computer fan,

I wish you had told me how old you are, as this might be a clue as to why your Dad doesn't want you to have a computer in your room. We do lots of work on cyberbullying in schools and we are always surprised by the huge number of young people who have Internet access in their bedrooms, away from the protection of their parents. While it's true that the Internet isn't necessarily the cesspit of filth that the media makes it out to be, there are some ill-intentioned people who can take advantage of young people in a number of ways. People can easily steal your personal information or coax it out of you, or charm you into compromising situations. The good thing about having the computer in a family room is that your parents can help you if anything bad does happen. They can also be on hand to help you if you become a victim of cyberbullying, as well as putting you off falling into the trap of becoming a cyberbully. If you feel as though you're grown up enough to have a computer in your room, perhaps it's time to have a chat with your Dad and ask him exactly why he's said no so far. The important thing is not to whinge or complain that "it's not fair", because that'll just make your Dad think that you're not ready. Maybe you could compromise? If there is a computer in your room, your Dad can set parental locks on the Internet access. You could both agree on a 'Computer Curfew', where you don't use it after certain times in the evening. The more you stick to these rules, the more trustworthy you'll prove to be, and eventually the boundaries might be relaxed. I hope this helps!

Dear Charley, How do you manage to write to reply to all these letters when you're clearly a puppet? Do you think we're all stupid or something?

Dear Cynical Reader, I may be a puppet but I've worked very hard on my penmanship skills in recent years. Not only can I write, type and juggle, but I can also express my feelings towards you in the form of sign language. Can you guess which sign I'm using? Thanks for writing in and keep reading!

Hello Charley,

I want to know the best way to get this boy to fancy me back. We're in the same tutor group and I've never been good at talking to fit guys. I'm not one of the popular girls and I don't wear short skirts and things like that, so he doesn't look at me. He's really nice though and I can't stop thinking about him because he's amazing. What's the best way to get him to notice me?

Hello,

You've probably heard this a million times already, but it doesn't stop it from being true – Be Yourself. Before you get tempted to wear short skirts and try to be interested in different things or behave in a different way to get this boy's attention, ask yourself if you'd do any of these things just for yourself. If the answer is "no" because you either don't like these things at the moment or aren't ready for them yet, then don't do them for some boy who might not have even noticed you yet. Find out if there's anything the two of you have in common, that way you'll have something to break to the ice and you don't have to make any drastic changes to your personality. Keep in mind that you can't get or make anyone fancy you, but there's a better chance if you stick with being yourself. You'd rather be with someone who liked you exactly as you are instead of someone who wanted to change everything about you, wouldn't you?

ELECTION? WHAT ELECTION?



Right. So. There we are, then. We've got ourselves a Lib/Con coalition government and two Prime Ministers... sort of. We asked three writers to tell us what was going on in their heads before, during and after the coalition had been announced.

Election coverage-weary *Elizabeth Stephens* takes us up to Gordon Brown's resignation on May 11th, 2010.

I must be getting old. This is the first time I've ever felt resigned to our two-party system. I can feel all the teenage idealism draining away. Just two weeks ago I was holding back tears (I cry when I get angry...or sad...or happy...or tired) arguing about why exercising one's democratic right should be taken seriously. And I stand by what I said then, I do, but it all just seems a bit, well, pointless.

I think it was the sense of anticlimax and slight confusion that last Friday brought with it; I quickly realised I would have to stand up, be brave and

admit it: I had (correction, have) no idea what this election result really means. For me, or for anyone else. I feel like I'm reviewing a gig just after the second support act has left the stage. Anything I write now will undoubtedly come across as hideously irrelevant and ill informed before this piece has even been proofread, or even before I've finished writing it. (Edit - this prediction will come true. Fact.)

I voted Lib Dem (twenty-something teacher has left wing leanings. Shocking, huh?) So I guess I should be happy. This is the biggest opportunity the party has had in recent history to actually influence policy making; in that sense the hung parliament is a good thing. So why do I feel like it's all about to end in reputation-destroying disaster?

I didn't vote Tory, and I probably never will, but I'm extremely uncomfortable with the fact that, at this stage, someone other than David Cameron might end up as PM. How can he

get the most votes, but still not get to lead? The voting system might be (sorry, is) unfair, but surely it's wrong that we could all turn up and vote, only for the politicians to re-make our decisions for us, behind closed doors. The undisputable fact is that Nick Clegg has got to play this very carefully. If he's seen to be propping up the Labour party and potentially keeping him in office it'll be political suicide. But then getting into bed with the Tories isn't exactly going to win over the party faithful, or help to achieve the electoral reform that might actually start to create a fair system. At least it's not my decision.

Speaking of closed doors (and we were, remember) I'm sick of 24-hour news coverage. I watched (glanced at occasionally while drinking tea and feeling hungover) BBC News 24 for a couple of hours on Sunday morning. Let's just say: three doors, three hours, no news. Well, David Cameron returned from his morning jog and chatted to a neighbour, but nothing newsworthy enough to prevent me

from turning over to Something for the Weekend.

Argh, the repeat of Coast has just been interrupted by a Breaking News piece! A lectern has just been set up outside Number 10. 'Something is extremely imminent indeed.' But what? David Dimbleby is about to take over the coverage, it must be important. 24-hour news, this is why you are pointless: every time something actually happens, it's forced upon us whether or not we were wasting our lives watching the news channel. DD is now telling us about the gates on Downing Street. News, you're killing me. This is probably the least exciting important political moment ever. DD starting to talk even more slowly to fill time... He's obviously running out of gate-related trivia. I wish I was still watching Coast. Shut up, David, Gordon's talking! He looks pale. Sarah is hanging around behind him, looking slightly awkward, like she doesn't know what to do with her hands. Blah, blah. Awkward eye contact and well-practised cracking voice when thanking wife for love and support. 'Thank you, and goodbye.' Oh god, now he's bringing the kids out. Good thing no one cares enough to try an assassination attempt. Kids look cute but confused. They've packed light, anyway. A Daimler. In a recession. Typical. DD keeps talking about executing prime

ministers. Am a bit worried about him. So it looks like ConLib. Shame really, I enjoyed the alliteration of LabLib, but sometimes democracy has to come first. Cameron's PM. He's driving to the palace and everything. Just because I think it's fair, doesn't mean I have to be happy about it. Cuts, cuts, cuts. Probably from education budgets. The Tory pre-election vagueness about where the cuts will come from suggests (and you don't have to be a fully qualified political analyst to figure this out) that they will be painful. More sitting on the fence over Europe. Unfair tax breaks. Throwing money at nuclear missiles. My faith in Mr Clegg's ability to influence policy is already waning...

I am, however, not one to ruin your day with doom, gloom and indecision, so let's take a moment to remember the silver comedy lining of the 2010 General Election: the forty year old black man who had served in the Navy for 30 years. Sir, I salute you.

The Lib/Con coalition has been announced, Clegg and Cameron are soon to reintroduce themselves to the world as Britain's new double-act, and Gavin Webb has his reservations.

When we all look back on the General Election of 2010 will we see it as a

watershed moment in British politics? Well it certainly has supplied us with some firsts. The first ever Leaders' debate, the first hung parliament since the 70s, the first ever moment Gordon Brown showed humility and the first faltering steps in a coalition government that looks as steady as the economy and twice as volatile. Don't be fooled by the opening days of chumminess & hospitality between the Conservatives & the Liberal Democrats. Both parties have extremely combustible grass roots members and backbenchers who are going to be narked off by this deal. Both parties at that level have extremely different ideologies & if one of Clegg or Cameron were to falter then this marriage of convenience would be over quicker than you can say pre-nuptial.

It remains to be seen who is the fat no-hoper with more money than sense and who is the slim, svelte foreigner waiting for the perfect moment to end this sham and run off with the rugged handsome man next door (or David Miliband as he is also known), but I have my suspicions and I'm sure Nick Clegg does too. His main problem is that after all the bluster and rhetoric of the debates, labelling Labour and the Tories as the two "old parties", asking people to vote Lib Dem for real change he has been placed into a



position where he has to look like the old guys in order to try and change the system. This is how the 2010 election will be defined in the future. The question of whether or not Nick can succeed in getting voting reform without having his party, credibility or political career destroyed. If he can then 2010 will be seen as a real watershed moment, a time when real change occurred brought about by a historic coalition of parties more interested in the Nation than narrow party political philosophies. However, what is more likely is that the Tory cuts will hit hard, Nick Clegg will be hammered for backing Cameron by a resurgent Labour party backing the working class and the coalition will fall apart as Lib Dem backbenchers abandon a sinking ship. The Lib Dems will be annihilated in the following election and voting reform or no we're back to a two party system. Or are we?

One of the main reasons for voting reform is that people can see how unfair the system is. After all how fair is it that a fifteen thousand majority in one seat is equal to a majority of four in another? It's not and the system needs to be changed. The unfortunate thing about this is that in order to bring about the change Nick Clegg has had to surrender his own party to the wolves (and I have no doubt that this was not his intention). People who wanted a left of centre government (and there are a lot) will not forgive or forget Nick's acquiescence to David Cameron (even though he said he would deal with the party with the biggest share of seats/vote) and punish accordingly, while the Conservatives will be out in force to make sure they never have to make a deal again. After this however, what happens next could be interesting. As time marches on and we have a system (hopefully) of voting that means that every vote counts new ideas, new parties might start to flourish. A lot of people you hear on television, radio or in the street know that Labour and the Tories aren't perfect, far from

it and as the system changes these new ideas and ways of doing things will could well force the big parties to either change their outlook or lose their votes to these smaller parties. Suddenly a real chance for change appears rather than empty rhetoric of the last thirteen years; people's voices count, people's votes matter. This is what the General Election of 2010 will be remembered for in years to come... as well as Nigel Farage's silly plane crash and the hammering of the BNP in East London and Essex.

Whatever might happen in the next few months let alone the next five years is difficult to predict. There are so many variables. Ideally we'll get proper voting reform and the chance to get a government that represents all the people of Britain (or as close as damn possible) and Nick Clegg will not be vilified for taking the opportunity. We could however be entering an even stranger twilight world where Ed Balls becomes Labour leader and every Labour member resigns, or where David Cameron suddenly goes insane and Nick Clegg is left in charge. Hopefully we'll be able to get the economy right and people close to the poverty line or unemployed will not be sacrificed to do it. More likely though is another election in a couple of month's time. See you there...

Cleggaron has given its first co-speech and has taken questions from various members of the British press. Lib Dem voters are said to have felt betrayed and the Labourites are said to be up in arms, except for the ever-imperturbable James Carew. He talks about how he's responding with the new Lib/Con coalition.

There are two things people often call me. Well, actually, no. There are many things people often call me, but for the sake of staying on-topic and staying pre-watershed, I'm only going to include two of them; they call me an optimist and they call me a Labour voter. So, given the current state of our leadership, logic dictates that I

should be running through the streets of our fair kingdom, naked, save for my doom-prophecy-daubed sandwich board. I should be performing some kind of Japanese ritual suicide to escape the shame of enduring five years of living under a *shock-gasp-horror* Tory government. At the very, very least I should be praying for my immortal soul as David Cameron's rise to Prime Minister is clearly foretold in the Book of Revelations. But I'm not. Instead, I'm currently sat in my computer chair, sipping a cup of coffee and browsing the Internet in a contented pool of quiet. Occasionally, the scattershot clack of my keyboard will puncture the gentle serenity of this picture, but otherwise, this is a calm scene. I remain a calm person. And, in my experience over the last week and a bit, I believe this makes me some kind of biological freak as the desire to vote Labour and the ability to stay rational appear to be completely at odds with one another on a genetic level.

It happens every time there's a parliamentary change in this country. A new party rises to leadership and the opposite side starts strapping on their lifejackets and preparing themselves for a rousing finalchorus of Nearer, My God, To Thee.

They wait with a sense of morbid glee for the looming iceberg of social disaster (that only they can see, of course) to come barreling into us so they can get in one last "I TOLD YOU SO!" before our ruined country is swallowed up by the waves, leaving behind a severely confused Ireland looking very much like a dog whose master has, rather abruptly, fallen down a manhole.

And it never bloody happens. I apologise for sounding so disappointed, but I place great deal of faith in dramatic exposition. As a writer, doom and gloom is my metaphorical bread and butter. I'm a firm believer in delivering on your promises and, every election, all the political pundits build us up for this great, climactic battle where the

world ends, the curtain is peeled back and all the politicians are revealed for the black-hearted devils that we've suspected all the time. And, after every election, things... well, they stay the same.

I have to confess, I feel by this point we're getting dangerously close to becoming the parable of The Country Who Cried Apocalypse.

So that's the reason I, a thoroughly red, Labour-voting lefty, am remaining clothed and sane regarding our coalition government. We've survived much worse. And, I believe this government has the potential to be the most tempered, rational governments Britain has had in a lifetime if given the chance; a government where it is in everyone's best interests to ignore the traditional, knee-jerk response to take to the streets weeping for the future of our children and to actually work together to ensure our children have a future.

This partisan hackery that is bred into us, that makes us believe The Other Side Is 100% Uncut Columbian Evil by virtue of simply being The Other Side, and the closed-minded approach to debate where we all may as well be wearing neon badges, emblazoned with "We Already Have An Opinion, Thank You Very Much" is a fruitless and intellectually dishonest game to play with the state of our country. There is a false dichotomy that's been created between the parties that has painted them as polar opposites, which is simply not the case, and, to allow this falsity to taint this coalition would be a needlessly self-destructive act on all our parts. For the first time in several decades, we have a government where the socialist excesses of the left and the self-serving back-patting of the right can be held in check and both can work together for the good of the country. I refuse to allow myself to despair simply because Labour isn't in charge. David Cameron is not Margaret Thatcher. He will not have to face the same problems, he will not be surrounded by the same

people and he will not attack issues with the same blunt-force trauma approach that so thoroughly characterized the Thatcher approach to politics. This is not some re-hashing of the past; this is something new. If we give this coalition a chance, it has the potential to do some incredible and unexpected things. And if not, who cares? They'll be out again in five years.

Writers in order:

Elizabeth Stephens

Gavin Webb

James Carew



Virtual Worlds Reach Reality

For the past two months I've been involved in an online virtual role-play project on Second Life. For those of you who have no idea what Second Life is, check out <http://secondlife.com/whatis/> for your very own special introductory video. Be prepared to feel slightly stunned, and if you're like me kind of bemused. If the video doesn't appeal to you, Second Life describes itself as the 'Internet's largest user-created, 3D virtual world community.'

The role-play's taking part in Second Life where to see how successful online role-plays' could be as opposed to role-plays in the physical world. Go to <http://www.antiviolencecampus.org/> to read their mission statement.

I was apprehensive to say the least, when I was approached to take part in this project. At first I declined the invitation, but upon

learning that it could double up as part of my digital media assignment, I reconsidered.

Honestly, I was scared, scared of such a large online community with 'avatars' the thought of Second Life made me feel old- probably the same way my parents feel about msn messenger, facebook and mspace. I felt very cynical and didn't think Second Life could offer me anything worthwhile. I didn't feel like my technological skill was up to the task (designing your avatar is very mentally strenuous). I'd also heard of some of my parents' friends succumbing to Second Life and letting their first lives deteriorate. I just kept thinking, I don't have time for a Second Life; I can barely keep up with my first one. But the 'killing two birds with one stone' opportunity presented itself, so I 'bit the bullet' and had a go.

Before I created my avatar, I started thinking about what I wanted her to represent. I didn't want her

to be an extension of myself. A pixelated me walking around didn't appeal to me in the slightest. So I figured she'd have to be a completely separate entity. (I wrote all about this on my blog <http://contortedteddys.tumblr.com>) Take a look.

My first trip into Second Life left me feeling out of my depth to say the least. I had no idea what I was doing. I think I accidentally made my avatar lose all her hair. It was all very stressful. But once the role-play started, I got into the swing of things. Admittedly I'm one of those 21st century children who spent way too much time on msn and mspace and now facebook. So my typing is quite fast. I managed to keep up with a type-based role-play pretty well. Observers were pleasantly surprised at how 'well' the role-play flowed, even if some of the participants felt frustrated at their typing speed. Not being from an acting background I was also worried that this would hinder my believability as a character, but because it was all text based I wasn't embarrassed, I just typed as it came to me. Hiding behind a screen and a keyboard definitely had its advantages for this game. Simultaneously reinforcing how dangerous virtual reality could potentially be. If I, somebody who cringes at the thought of acting, felt at ease playing characters online, then so must thousands of other people, who come want to escape and lose themselves online.

Through my blog I documented my



experiences with the Second Life project. I hold my hands up and admit that I only entered the virtual world to participate in the role-plays. A temperamental Internet connection and masses of uni work kept me from going there more often.

As I'd decided that my avatar – Seren, was a separate entity from myself, I entered Second Life as her, not me. I felt empowered by just being able to make that choice and maintain it. Seren was empowered because the workshops were her escape from the family life that she resented so much. It's interesting that I felt the empowerment Seren felt, and that I could differentiate my empowerment and hers, in a world where boundaries of people and avatars are extremely blurred and fluid.

Being a part of the online workshops did give me more confidence. With some practise and determination I'd probably be able to role-play in real life workshops rather than virtual ones- if I wanted to. I agree that virtual role-plays could be the future, but I don't think that we're there yet. Some participants and observers of this project, very obviously didn't take it seriously, and the only reason I could see why, was because it was virtual and not physical. And although it was easier to play a character online, than in the flesh, at the end of the sessions I didn't know how other participants felt or what they gained, because it's very difficult to express yourself through text after such an intimate workshop. I personally feel that if I was just an observer and not a participant I would have gotten



more out of similar workshops in the real rather than virtual world. What also troubled me was that for Second Life to work, you have to have a decent Internet connection. This automatically excludes the majority of the population who barely have an Internet connection, let alone a fast one. The other issue is technological competence. I wouldn't say I have a very high competence, comparing me with other 21st century children who've grown up surrounded by technology. But I'm defiantly a lot more competent than some. So if I found the technological requirements of being involved in Second Life daunting, imagine how complete technophobes would feel?

I'd hoped that being a part of Second Life might enlighten me to things I was missing out on. After all, people couldn't be getting sucked into this place for no reason, right? But sadly, I felt that all my prejudices were proven right. Through some research, I found that Second Life was mainly used for its 'adult content' island 'Zin-

dra.' People are letting their real lives slip through their fingers, because they find virtual reality more satisfying, rather than facing up to real life challenges and situations.

All in all taking part in this project made me realise, that Second Life is not somewhere that I'd like to spend my time. It is different from a game on many levels, but at the same time its dangerous because it can feel like a game. Before you know it, you've spent the whole day creating your avatar, and you haven't even gone shopping or interacted with other avatars. The workshops are a good idea, using Second Life for educational reasons and in positive ways is something that needs to happen more often. But it needs to be taken more seriously by the people involved and include a broader spectrum of the population, possibly by offering tutorials and training on how to use Second Life, and access to an Internet connection that allows the virtual world to be used at its full capacity.

By Sophie Hickson

Modar Shalabi talks about life in Palestine

I appreciate it that you care about what is taking place here in Palestine and what the Palestinian people are facing in their home land, but I must tell you that writing or talking about Palestinian issues is considered as a kind of risk. Its just like this: you write about the Palestinians, you are a pro-Palestinian, so you are seen as anti-Semitic !! , especially if you are European. So please take care, okay!

Sometimes we read that also there are some Arabic writers who have been accused as anti-Semitic, despite the fact that Arabs are actually the original Semitic !!! That said I will try to paint a picture of life in palestine for you. I'll try to be neutral as much as I can, try to show the peoples point of view and not my own, but sure as a Palestinian lives in Palestine I'll have my own sight maybe by giving comments .

Q) What is good about living in Palestine?

A) Living on your home land, among your country men and friends, some religious reasons for both Muslims and Christians like being close to their holly places, the way of living together by the Palestinians as there are no racial or religious problems. Palestinians sometimes prefer to stay here despite all the events they live every day because they know very well what it means to be a refugee outside their home, many of them have lived this experience or heard about it from family , friends or neighbors.

Q) What is life like for a young per-

son living in Palestine?

A) Well there are some varies between Palestinian towns, vil-lages and camps, but almost all of them have no entertaining places like cinemas or theaters, beside the general worries of occupation and the suffers of moving between towns or entering Israel or (48 Palestine), work field is completely effected by the events, so dreams of many of them about drawing their own future , family , home , work ...etc are on hold. Living in that situation of mess, depressed, disorganizing because of the weakness of the Palestinian security devises, turned some of them to become criminals, steal to eat, to have fun,or even to protest .

That really gave many or let us say the majority of young people here to keen more on education because that will be a good shelter they'll never lose .

Q) Do you think that the Israeli government treats you badly?

A) Well, answering such question needs a good knowledge of Israeli government and constitution as well, Israel is a Jewish democratic state , democratic for Jews, and Jewish for Palestinians, and that can be very clear in terms of discrimination between Arabs and Jews in Israel itself, or the daily humiliation the Palestinians face on their lands or the Israelis check points, prisons, collective banishment, the wall, the invasions , the incursions ... etc.

Q) Name one thing that would make your life better?

A) Ending the occupation .

Q) What do you think the future holds for Palestinian people?

A) If there will be no fair solution for their issue, and if Israel continue its well known plan to steal more lands and kick out and kill more Palestinians, their rage and depressed will grow more and more, and then there will be only 3 ways to use, leave, wait to get killed or transferred, or fight for freedom .

Q) What would you like to say to the people of Israel?

A) Withdraw to peace, there is no IDF (Israeli defense forces) its IOF (Israeli occupation forces) we can live together in peace if we get back our rights, come to our land as welcomed visitors (like we were before) and never come to take our land, peace is between people not between leaders .



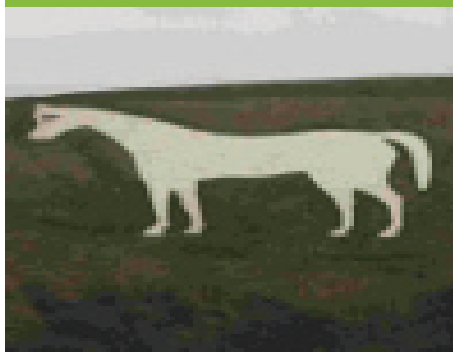
White Horse Relay

If you had pitched this idea to me a year ago, I would have laughed heartily in your face. You want me to run for approximately 70 miles and have me pay £70 for the pleasure? Yeeeeeeah... I'm not much of a running enthusiast. If anything I'm more a fan of the sitting and the lying down. Though nowadays, what with Jamie having his way with our diets and everyone looking to stay fit and healthy by taking up more exercise, this does actually look quite tempting. Plus it'd be nice to actually exercise in the real outdoors instead of in front of the Wii. Basically you and your team of seven to ten runners will relay through the Wiltshire countryside, making your way around all eight of the White Horses and all profits go towards Carers Support West Wilts. So, as well as keeping fit and engaging in some friendly competition, you get to have a warm fuzzy feeling in your tummy because you've helped out a good cause too.

The teams are limited to 20 in total, and at the time of writing there are seven spaces

left for any groups of relay enthusiasts who are looking for a different way to see the Wiltshire countryside.

There are a variety of distances and terrain that take you through beautiful scenic routes. Guarantees of the girl from Devizes (who won lots of prizes for her assets of two different sizes) being one of the runners can't be made, unfortunately. And for your own unofficial rules, you can keep a mental tally of the number of times you hear someone with a thick West Country accent exclaim, "Bloody big 'orse, innet!"



When:
Sunday 5th September 2010,
kicks off at 9am.

www.carers.org

www.whitehorserelay.org

Managing School Violence and Bullying: a Whole School Approach for Teachers and Healthcare Professionals

Facilitators: Helen Cowie and Pat Colliety

Welcome to the Anti-Violence Campus at Second Life course on how to manage school violence and bullying. The course will take place online using the resources to be found on the Violence in Schools Training Online Project site <http://www.vistop.org/> Please click on the Teachers Course on the VISTOP site.

The course will last for six weeks from 17th May – 25th June 2010.

Participants are expected to read the materials on the VISTOP site throughout each week in their own time. The group will then meet face-to-face at the end of each week of the course on Fridays from 11 a.m. – 12.30 a.m. (Central European Time) in Second Life <http://secondlife.com/> to engage in experiential workshops on the topic for that week.

Prior to starting the course, you need to familiarise yourself with Second Life. If you have never used Second Life, go to <http://secondlife.com/> where you can create your own avatar. We attach two pdf files which give you useful advice on how to find your way around Second Life. The Adult Education Centre, where the discussions will take place, can be found on <http://slurl.com/secondlife/Anti%20Violence%20Campus/217/226/1>

Please feel free to visit the Anti-Violence Campus before the course starts. We look forward to seeing you there. Our avatars' names are Helen Cedarbridge and Pat Pizzario. We look forward to meeting you there.

Expected time involvement of students
Approximately 30 hours

Contact us

h.cowie@surrey.ac.uk

p.colliety@surrey.ac.uk



WARNING: This article contains strong language and jokes that may be considered offensive (seriously, it gets quite fruity).

Rebecca Brynolf looks at taboo humour and asks why certain subjects are just untouchable.

There's a particularly great reaction to an offensive joke at a comedy night. We've all heard it and we've probably all done it at some point. It's the big belly laugh "HAHA..." followed by a verbal finger wagging in the form of an "... ooooooooooh".

It's that moment when a room full of people have had the collective gut reaction to laugh, but a split second later have remembered that, yes, they are in fact in a room full of other people. Their morals suddenly kick in so they groan or suck air through their teeth. It's a two-part knee jerk reaction that we all experience occasionally; you laugh because a joke is clever or funny, or appeals to the immature child in you, you then

attempt to withdraw the laugh by making some kind of noise to show everyone that, "Actually, no, I don't find that kind of thing funny. I'm offended." Quite often there's still a smile on people's faces; they're still there to have a good time and they can see that it's all just a bit of fun, but there's the underlying sense that a nerve has been hit.

But why are you offended?

Did the joke make fun of you personally? Did it poke at something that you have personal experience with? Was it in poor taste? Was it just not funny and a bit of an insult to your intelligence? Was it patronising because it seemed to have been said for the sake of being shocking?

I've told offensive jokes that had no point to them on stage. They weren't clever, and in hindsight, they weren't very funny at all. If anything they were just mean and picking on people who couldn't defend themselves. The "jokes" got laughs, followed swiftly by the withdrawal noise. Looking back I think the audience were just shocked to hear the words com-

ing out of my mouth rather than actually finding it funny. In my case, such offensive jokes were a bit childish and with little point to them. People had a right to feel offended. But what about the comedians and writers who are making a good point? How about the ones who look the audience in the eyes and ask, "Why does this offend you?"

Leonard Alfred Schneider, better known as Lenny Bruce, was a controversial stand up doing the New York circuit in the Fifties and Sixties. More than just a 'joke-man', he was a social commentator. One of the more notorious of his routines saw him stand on stage and deliver the following

(Warning: if racial slurs offend you then I'd strongly advise skipping this part... though, considering the whole point of this piece, I'd really appreciate it if you carried on reading).

" Are there any niggers here tonight? Could you turn on the house lights, please, and could the waiters and waitresses just stop serving, just for a second? And turn off this spot. Now what did he say? "Are there any niggers here tonight?" I know there's one nigger, because I see him back there working. Let's see, there's two niggers. And between those two niggers sits a kike. And there's another kike— that's two kikes and three niggers. And there's a spic. Right? Hmm? There's another spic. Ooh, there's a wop; there's a polack; and, oh, a couple of greaseballs. And there's three lace-curtain Irish micks. And there's one, hip, thick, hunky, funky, boogie. Boogie boogie. Mm-hmm. I got three kikes here, do I hear five kikes? I got five kikes, do I hear six spics, I got six spics, do I hear seven niggers? I got seven niggers. Sold American. I pass with seven niggers, six spics, five micks, four kikes, three guineas, and one wop. Well, I was just trying to make a point, and that is that it's the suppression of the word that gives it the power, the violence, the viciousness. Dig: if President Kennedy would just go on television, and say, "I would like to introduce you to all the niggers in my cabinet," and if he'd just say "nigger nigger nigger nigger nigger" to every nigger he saw, "boogie boogie boogie boogie boogie," "nigger nigger nigger nigger" 'til nigger didn't mean anything anymore, then you could never make some six-year-old black kid cry because somebody called him a nigger at school."

It's hard to deny the bravery (or stupidity... it's a very thin line) of what Bruce did. He stood on stage in a room full of people from all different backgrounds and

ethnicities, in New York, at a time when racial tensions were high and said words, so loaded with hate, over and over again. But there was a point. It was shocking, sure. It was offensive, no doubt. But it was drawing attention to a larger issue.

I admit to having a big problem with tabloids that report on the apparent 'outrage' induced by a big-name comedian or film or TV programme. Some jokes, especially ones with the potential to offend, tend not to translate well through the written word, without the benefit of context and intonation that comes with a live delivery. They could just come across as harsh and unsavoury. When a risqué comment or joke that gets picked up in the press, the retelling of the joke in print stirs up so much more disgust than had the readers heard it told live.

Take Jimmy Carr's joke about amputee soldiers last year: "Say what you like about those servicemen amputees from Iraq and Afghanistan, but we're going to have a good Paralympic team in 2012."

The tabloids were incensed and disgusted. They found mothers of servicemen amputees (who hadn't necessarily heard the joke but had read about it through The Daily Mail's 'Sensationalisation Filter') who were equally incensed and disgusted. "It's disgusting," said Rena Weston (see?). "This is a person that is in the public limelight and he can't be allowed to get away with saying such things."

They also found a mother who was willing to give Carr a good telling off. Diana Dernie said, "I hope Jimmy Carr realises that these soldiers have lost their limbs fighting before he makes jokes like that. Soldiers are fighting for freedom of speech. There's no one with a better sense of humour than the lads who have lost limbs. It's unfortunate that people like Jimmy Carr abuse them."

Now, I'm not saying that these people aren't entitled to their opinions and aren't within their rights to feel offended, but was Carr really "abusing" soldiers who had lost limbs? Or was he making a political point? Or was he just telling a joke? A good one, at that? I like that Diana Dernie mentioned that she thinks soldiers who have lost limbs have a good sense of humour. I hope that said servicemen and women are able to take things that comedians say with a pinch of salt, and that so long as they're laughing about it first, nothing anyone else can say will sting quite as bad.

Dave Brain, a Bristol-based filmmaker and comedy

writer strongly believes that comedians should avoid picking on individuals, but instead focus on any broader issue involved. "The September 11th terrorist attacks are still a sore subject. I would never do material based on a victim of the attacks, but that doesn't make the subject untouchable. I think it's perfectly fine to do 9/11 material within reason."

"Chris Morris did a sketch where a skiving radio news reporter claimed to be in the World Trade Centre, unaware that the place had just been reduced to rubble. The joke is on the reporter in question and the subject becomes useable. People complained but the joke didn't go as far as to directly insult an innocent victim of the attacks."

Joan Rivers, famous for plastic surgery and caustic humour alike, says she was one of the first comedians to put her head above the pulpit after the 9/11 attacks and make light of it all. She spoke about how she had been in New York in the time, how she had lost 11 friends, how awful it was and how the 2,500 widows had finally been given cheques for five million dollars each. She gave the audience a 'well that worked out nicely' look, before saying, "When you've had a partner for six years or more... Think about it for a second; what would you rather have? Someone who farts and drools in their sleep and whose mother lives with you... or a Nice. Big. Cheque. There had to be at least three women out there who were like 'Oh no, Harry's dead, boo hoo'", after which Joan did a little celebratory dance. To say the International Associa-

tion of Fire Fighters (IAFF) weren't impressed is a bit of an understatement. The IAFF's General President, Harold Schaitberger, released a statement to the press, opening with, "Comedian Joan Rivers' attempts to find humour in the catastrophic loss that our members and their loved ones suffered on September 11 is a new low and cannot be tolerated."

I laughed at the joke because I found it funny. I'd also heard it in 2009. Joan told the joke in 2003. OK, so it was a good joke, but was it too soon? That said, sometimes a subject can be so sore for people that it's always too soon.

Australian comedian Kitty Flanagan told a joke on stage in Cardiff about Princess Diana. Diana died in 1997 and Kitty told this joke in 2008. The audience laughed and then quickly tried to withdraw it with a cacophony of "Ooooooooooooooh" noises, to which Flanagan responded with, "Too soon, Cardiff? TOO SOON?"

I lean towards blaming media outlets like The Daily Mail for ensuring that people never get over certain issues, for helping people avoid looking at certain topics from another point of view, which is essentially what comedy is great at doing.

Brendan Burns, the Australian comic whose Edinburgh poster for his "I suppose THIS is offensive now?" tour bore images of him doing so-called offensive things; being crucified on a cross, pretending to be a disabled person in a wheelchair, blacked up from head to

What the readers think

Lindsey Rutt – To me, nothing is sacred. Someone will be offended by anything you say. If you're easily offended, don't go watch stand up.

Dave McCarthy - Either everything is ok for parody, or nothing is.

Andrew King – As long as the aim is to entertain, and not intentionally offend, then nothing is sacred. There's a big difference between telling a racist joke, and being a racist. One is satire or commentary, the other is bigotry and ignorance.

Rob Hughes - I was only ever upset by someone doing 'Madeline McCann' jokes. As a parent it struck a nerve and it bothered me that the girl could be being hurt or abused as some guy stood on stage laughing about her disappearance.

Jonny Bull – An audience can go along with anything in the right context.

Ana Catris – Comedy is all about making you look at horrific situation from a new perspective. After you've laughed you can analyse your reaction to a situation better than if you stewed on it.

Dan Mitchell - The darkest of subjects, if handled with intelligence, should be allowed to be used for comedy. Comedy is a unique 'open forum' art form. Its performers discuss any subject, showing a different viewpoint of the world. It may not be for your palate, but it's only through seeing all sides of something can you truly understand it. You c*nt.



toe. Sacha Baron Cohen, the covert comedian who plays into common prejudices and stereotypes. As Borat, the reporter from Kazakhstan, Ali G the 'black' kid from the streets, or Bruno, the overtly gay Austrian fashionista who swaps and African baby for an iPod, he manages to uncover bigotry and hypocrisy, all while getting huge laughs... albeit if most of those laughs are coming from behind hands clasped across shocked faces.

Let's not forget South Park's 200th episode that trod so cleverly and carefully around showing the image of Muhammad, getting some intelligent laughs out of the town's tip toeing around the notion of showing him in his true image and trying to find ways of getting around it so as not to anger Muslims, eventually settling on asking him to wear a bear suit. The episode did anger some Muslims and the creators were told that merely censoring Muhammad's image was not enough. They needed to bleep out any mention of his name too. If anything this further proved the point they had originally tried to make.

Iranian comic Shazia Mirza made a very good point in The Guardian when she wrote about how people are so easily offended these days; "Being offended is not like having cancer or rabies; people don't die of offence. At most, your feelings will be wounded, you

will feel displeased or angered."

Anyone out there who does find anything they've read here offensive, can I just leave you with a couple of suggestions? Take them or leave them, but I think they might help you to stop being so angry and the odd joke.

1. Try and hear it straight from the horse's mouth. A dirty/dark joke that's intended to be told live rarely benefits from being first experienced through the printed word, particularly if it's surrounded by such emotive words as, "SHOCK", "SICK", and "OUTCRY".
2. Ignore the papers. Their main job, aside from delivering what they feel is pertinent news, is to sell more papers. Which one are you more likely to buy? The one that says, "Comedian does job" or "OUTCRY AT SHOCK COMEDIAN WHO TELLS SICK JOKE."
3. What was the point of the joke? Once you've answered that question you can decide whether or not it was making a statement and offering a different point of view or if it was just mean and pointless. It's easier to be angry at something when you know why you're angry in the first place.

Written by Rebecca Brynolf

Photos provided by Rebecca Brynolf

Flying El Al



ACTIONWORK AT GLASTONBURY 2010 GREEN FUTURES FIELD

Israel. Why did these officials not want me to go? Why did they put me through this? It had taken them three hours to process me – it had even made the plane late!

The official took all my equipment (I was given a receipt for it!) and was told I could not take any 'carry-on' luggage, except a book. I was then escorted up to check-in and the departure gates with a plastic carrier bag containing my book. Once at the gates I was again searched in front of all the other passengers for 10 minutes and then made to wait while every one else boarded the plane. Once on the plane I found that they had given me the seat right at the back of the plane in the corner. Many of the other passengers were listening to their personal mp3 players and had video cameras dangling from their necks! No one spoke to me.

My experiences in Israel are another story altogether, suffice to say that on my return to the UK I was able to claim back my equipment. I complained to the airline at a later date but was not given an explanation as to why I was treated the way I was.

I understand the need for security on planes but what I was made to go through was, in my opinion, an attempt at humiliation and oppression. There was no other reason for it. I am glad that I made the decision to go despite how I was treated at the airport because I met some wonderful people there, will I ever fly fly EL AL again? I don't know, would they want me to?

By Dr Andy Hickson

Bristol-based Theatre in Education Company, Actionwork is returning once again to Glastonbury's Green Futures Field for a week of inspiring performances and fun-filled workshops sessions.

The 12-strong Actionwork Team, made up of writers, actors, singers and comedians, will be focusing on the topic of anti-bullying for their week-long residency at the festival. Two shows, 'Glastonbully' and 'Cyber Scream' will run once a day in the Actionwork Marquee and once in the legendary Speaker's Forum on Saturday morning.

If theatre isn't your thing, then there's plenty more to enjoy.

'Impro-Olympics' will see the team take suggestions from the audience and try to make up funny scenes on the spot in rapid-fire rounds of sharp wits and quick thinking.

Actionwork's famous 'Blind Olympics' will be running again this year, where contestants don blind folds and make their way around the obstacle course that it Glastonbury with only their partners as their guides (remember, no talking).

Also going on around the site will be Actionwork's 'Image Theatre Dip-Ins'. The team create an on-going flash mob of still imagery around the festival while the public can feel free to join in or simply observe.

With all this and still more on offer, Actionwork's daily events are perfect for all ages and designed for festival-goers to drop in whenever they like and leave as soon as their favourite bands are about to take the stage elsewhere.

Actionwork events will be running from 1pm to 6pm each day and from 12pm on Saturday.

For more information go to:

www.actionwork.com/glastonbury-festival.html

www.glastonburyfestivals.co.uk





A former hypochondriac, for whom the mere mention of a disease was as good as a diagnosis, speaks to **Rebecca Brynolf** about their experiences... but only after making sure she had thoroughly disinfected her hands of any germs. "I've only ever had two quite serious illnesses, which is odd for a hypochondriac to say. You expect them to say that they're always ill. I'm pretty self aware about the fact that I'm actively looking for an illness and I've got the benefit of hindsight. Looking back over the years, I can appreciate that, really, I only had two serious illnesses. One was caused by an accident I had while chopping a tree: I managed to slice open the top of my knee. There was a lot of blood. A few weeks later I came down with Hepatitis.

Now, you might be thinking that with all of the blood involved it would have been Hep C, but no... Hep A, something acquired when I was living in Brazil. I think the accident with my leg just made me more susceptible to the virus, which I believe is spread on human faeces. There is no cure for Hep A, just rest. I was down for about six weeks. Six weeks of pure torture; night sweats, constant nightmares about dying, aching body, shaking, vomiting. My stomach felt like it was being punched on an hourly basis. Towards the end I went all yellow, and then suddenly, right as

rain. The best thing to come out of it is the fact that I now have immunity to Hep A for the rest of my life. Anything else could kill me, but not Hep A! The whole experience sent me into a bit of a panic. I became really paranoid about sickness. Headaches were potential brain tumours. Coughs and runny noses were meningitis. An ache in my arm was leading up to a heart attack and **mild diarrhoea was the precursor for bowel disease**. I was scared of dying a horrible death and started to live in constant fear of myself; the twinges, a missed heart beat, perspiration... a continual general malaise. I was going to die. I was sure of that. As time went on I protected myself, shielding myself from potential danger. I never ventured far from home and I never went near anyone who was ill. If disinfectant hand gel and wipes had been around I would have been in heaven. All of the worrying was stopping me from sleeping so I was constantly tired. I kept going to the doctor with recurring symptoms, and when he stopped saying what I wanted to hear I found a different doctor. I even managed to fit in a few hospital visits and in my run down state **I found myself exaggerating what little symptoms I had** to each new physician. Eventually I could see what I was doing to myself and that I was on a circle of self-destruction. I could see that it was all in my head and that the constant worry was actually causing

the head aches and making myself feel nauseous. I could analyse it and talk about it, well, a little, to my Mum, but I couldn't stop it. I started to think I was going mad, I even entertained the idea of killing myself to stop the worrying. Worry, worry, worry. I worried about worrying, and I kept on worrying.

Eventually after the umpteenth clear test by one of a wide variety of doctors I had seen, I was prescribed anti-depressants. These kind of helped. I got some sleep, though I was still tired. I went to see a counselor for a while and I tried to focus on nice things, pleasant things. I put the illness to the back of my mind. Every now and then it would rear its ugly head and I had to rush to the doctor for a quick check up, but as always, everything was okay. Phew. And although that's what I knew deep down, I became very irritable, angry even. I found blame in other people's actions. I was negative. I was depressed. I went away for a while and spent some time in Wales near a huge waterfall. I went walking by day and slept in a tent by the water at night. I didn't take my tablets with me, which I thought was going to be hard, but strangely it wasn't. I did have some withdrawals, but they have faded from memory. I knew I had to get off this spiral and I knew I was the only one that could do it for me.

A friend once told me that if you're scared of something, pretend the world is going to end in five seconds.

Tell yourself that in five seconds you will have done the thing you're afraid of, and then start counting. I used this simple technique to get myself off the spiral. I told myself I was going to do two things; first was to eat well and exercise so that I had the best chance of staying healthy, secondly I had to submit to fate. I had to accept that what will be, will be. I had to accept that I did not have the power to control my own death. I had to accept that all I could do was live well and take each day as it came.

My time will come, sooner or later, but in the mean time I know that having the sniffles won't be the end of me!

Just a few months following the tragic attack on the World Trade Center, I was asked to join a group of Russians who were trying to promote the idea of building peace through cultural diversity. My tour was set up with the help of the Glasgow City Council and the Russian Cultural Center. Our shows took place in schools, concert halls, clubs and a special show at the Arts club set up in Edinburgh by the American Consulate.

The idea was to show young people in schools that people from different lands can work together even if they come from very different backgrounds. In our case we had three Russian Classically trained musicians working with an American Folk Artist. Many of the

shows took place in some of the poorest neighborhoods, with some of them in Muslim communities

It might sound like a bit of a stretch musically with me playing an American banjo (really an African instrument) together with an accordion, classical violin and a Xylophone and to tell the truth it really was! The students watched as we struggled with not only musical styles but language and culture, yet through our struggles we showed them that if we listen and work together we can learn from each other. In truth a program of musicians from the USA and Russia fostering the idea of peace and understanding seemed to set the right note as only a little over a decade back we our selves were still adversaries.

One of the performances took place on December 11th just a few

months after the attack of the World trade Center. That morning we watched a special feature detailing the events of that tragic day on BBC television. Ironically our first performance of the day we were scheduled to perform at a Muslim school on the outskirts of Glasgow. . At first it was a bit strange to see the sea of Muslim children dressed in their traditional head ware, especially after seeing the strong images from the TV show.

As I faced the crowd of eager young faces, I knew that more than ever it was important to give these children a good example of our culture and people. With in

minutes they were laughing and singing along with old American folk classics and then when we introduced this simple Russian song everything clicked and we reached common ground. Near the end of show we featured a Russian song that was composed by a young boy during the heat of the Cold war. The Song "May there always be Sunshine"

May there always be sunshine, May there always be blue skies, may there always be mama, may there always be me, (repeat)

Was first sung and pronounced by our Russian violinist

"Lev" and then I helped the kids with learning the songs complete with the hand gestures. Then we sung it together in both Russian and English.

I led them into song by explaining the words with a few simple hand motions with our arms reaching the sun, reaching the sky, rocking a baby and pointing to our selves.

Here we were two Russians and an American from countries once locked in suspicion and fear, now joined together in the hopes of fostering peace and brotherhood. As we sang the song and the young voices filled the room, struggling to sing together as one voice with their arms reaching out towards the sun, I could see that there is still hope.

by **Rik Palieri**

Rik Palieri and Marianna Holzer
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Americans & Russians
Performing for Peace, in Scotland

MINI PLAY FOR TEACHERS TO USE IN CLASS

Each month we include a 'mini play' to be used in schools and youth groups. This month's focus is on homophobia and may not be suitable for all ages.

Use this as a springboard for discussion and a way to find interesting and dramatic ways to bring the script to life.

The character of Sam is stood on their own and talking to the audience about their life, hopes and aspirations.

This play is a monologue.

Sam:

I was born in a hospital. I have ten fingers and ten toes, two eyes, two ears, one nose, one mouth. I looked no different to you. I say "ouch" when I scrape my knee or get a paper cut. I get upset when something sad happens to me. Sometimes I cry. Sometimes I try to bottle it all up inside. Sometimes I laugh it off.

I have a crush on someone but I'm not brave enough to tell them how I feel. I have fights with my Dad and I have fights with my Mum. I fight over the TV with my brother and sister. I miss my Grandma.

I really like riding my bike. I try to cycle as fast as I can because the high speed and the danger that I could lose my balance and come flying off it is exciting to me.

I'm not sure what I want to be when I grow up. I'd like people to know my name and to be interested in what I do. I'd like to make a difference. I'd like to help people in some way but also to have lots of fun and make lots of money so that I can help my family. I want to retire knowing that I've been successful in what I set out to do and that people will thank me for it. I'd like to be comfortable in my old age.

I'd like to have children one day. I don't mind if I have a boy or a girl. If I could, I'd like to have at least five children. I love the idea of having a big family and that in years to come, my kids will be all grown up and bigger than me and living happy lives.

I hope I can keep being healthy. I know you can never be too careful these days. There are so many diseases flying around and sometimes you can never know the person you're with. They could be lying about their past, and you won't know until you're in the Doctor's office being given some

devastating news.

I would like for people to just like me for who I am. I've tried to change myself a lot to make other people happy but that's so exhausting to do. You can only really be yourself and anything else is a lie.

I'd like to apologise to my parents for not being myself for a very long time. I thought they would be mad if they knew the truth. Turns out the moral of the story is that people will only be angrier when they find out you've been lying. I should have been honest about myself as soon as I knew the truth about who I was, that way they wouldn't have gone on for so long building up specific hopes and dreams around me that won't come to light... not in the way they originally imagined anyway.

I'd like to forgive my attackers. It's been difficult to do but I'm finally at a point where I can understand why they did what they did. I can understand why people like me get attacked every day. I can understand it, I can forgive, but I'll never condone it and I'll never forget it. I'll never forget the walk home from school that started out so well. I had said good-bye to my best friends as they carried on their different routes home. It was a nice warm day. I heard footsteps racing up to me from behind. Just as I turned around I was pushed to the floor. My head hit the concrete hard and started bleeding. I could feel the metallic taste of blood in my mouth. I was frozen. I couldn't move. They hurled abuse and spat on me. They kicked and punched me over and over again. The eyewitness accounts say it all happened in a minute. To me it felt like much longer.

Now I'm back in a hospital. I still have ten fingers and ten toes, though my left hand doesn't move as easily as it used to. I still have two eyes, but they are swollen and the skin around them is black and sore. I still have two ears. They escaped without any physical injury, but they still heard the names, the taunts, hatred coming from my attackers. I still have one nose but it looks very different now. It's broken and misshapen. I still have one mouth. It has a deep cut on the bottom lip and I've lost some teeth. I look pretty different to you now. I yelled out loud when they kicked my ribs in. I get upset when I think about it. Sometimes I cry. Sometimes I try to bottle it all up inside. Sometimes I try to laugh it off.

I can't stop being who I am. I can't stop being gay. I hope that one day everyone will accept that people like me are here to stay. I hope that one day everyone will accept that no amount of beatings, name-calling or threats will make me disappear.

Each issue we'll aim to provide you with a new lesson plan that you can keep for your own use. We accept lesson plans from teachers and youth workers too, so if you have some great ideas, please get in touch at questions@mpower.eu and there's a good chance we'll feature your lesson plan!

Something For The Teachers

Body Confidence

Body image, negative and positive, is an ever-present issue for young men and women today. Still images in their favourite magazines, popping up on their favourite websites and posing in adverts during their favourite programmes, there's not much respite from what the media consider to be the 'body beautiful'.

This lesson plan aims to help your students understand exactly why the media bombards them with images of so-called "perfect" models all the time and begin to appreciate how there is no such thing as "normal" or "perfect".

This lesson plan does require some resources that can be sourced from the Internet such as videos that you may need to view first in order to assess how suitable they are for your students.

'Getting to the heart of the matter'

Dr Sue Jennings, HPC registered, offers a unique approach to counselling for decision making, trauma, and life-path changes.

Integrating verbal and creative methods through symbols and sandplay, people who feel stuck at a crossroads can find new directions.

Contact: Rowan Centre, 72 High Street, Glastonbury
01458 831395 email sue@rowancentre.net



1. Pick out some print adverts that feature models in them from magazines aimed at males and females, preferably ones that your students are likely to read. This way the products are likely to be aimed specifically at them. Have your students analyse the print ads with you.

o What is being advertised?

o What do the people in the advert look like? Tall? Short? Skinny? Athletic? Over-weight? Spotty? Are they famous?

o Do they look like the majority of people your age?

o Why have these people been chosen to help sell this product instead of a different looking person?

o Is there a different way this product could have been advertised without using people? Why haven't the advertisers decided to use a campaign without people in it?

This exercise helps your students to recognise how advertising is all about selling an aspiration to its target audience. By showing beautiful people who look like your students want to look, they'll be more encouraged to buy the product because they're being told that they will enjoy the lifestyle the people in the adverts have.

2. Appreciating other people's qualities:

Everyone is given a plain booklet. They must write their name on it and decorate it to in a way that represents their personality. The whole class is then split into smaller groups. In the smaller groups, everyone passes their booklets to their left and write into the booklet they have been given. Keep going until everyone in the small groups have written down what they like about everyone else in their corresponding booklet.

Something For The Teachers

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3. There is a similar activity that might not be doable with a large class, but maybe a group of ten or less, where one person leaves the room and everyone else contributes to a mind map about their good qualities. When the person returns, the others explain the mind map to them, listing their good qualities and why people like them.

4. What we're "supposed" to look like. This activity might only be suitable for students above a certain age, so it's best to view the video first to decide whether or not your students can take part

o Go to YouTube and type in the following: How to Look Good Naked – Debbie's Mirrors. The clip is taken from an episode of Gok Wan's 'How to Look Good Naked'. Here at Mpower we're fans of Gok as he fought hard for Body Confidence to be included within PSHE.

o Listen carefully to what Debbie says she is "supposed" to look like when she sees herself in the mirror in her underwear.

o Discuss the clip and how Debbie feels with your students;

- What is she feeling?

- Why does she feel this way?

- Do Debbie's feeling seem familiar to anyone?

- Do only people who look like Debbie feel this way?

Use this exercise to generate a discussion about the pressures people feel to look a certain way and how people can feel doomed to misery if they can't achieve "perfection". People who don't have the time or money to dedicate themselves to the gym/posh diets/personal trainers/drastring surgery or secure enough not to succumb to an eating disorder, seem to be looked down upon in society. Is this fair?

Debbie's words - "You're supposed to look like they do in the magazines. It's supposed to be all nice and flat and it's supposed to look slim and slender, and you're not supposed to look big. You're supposed to look all nice and pretty and skinny, and just... not like this."



AVC@SL

Anti Violence Campus (@ Second Life)

The Anti Violence Centre in Second Life invites you to visit our virtual island and help us explore issues of violence, bullying, xenophobia and racism. Participate in: Meetings, Research, Exhibitions, Training, Workshops, Films and Shows. Welcome.

Now showing: Exhibition of paintings and photographs by artists from around the world representing peace and empowerment. Includes the special exhibition of paintings by German children: "Wer, wenn nicht wir".

Where: The AVC Creative Arts centre (The Arc) on the AVC@SL

More information here: www.antiviolencecampus.org



Andy Hickson talks to theatre director and playwright Amani Naphtali, writer and director of the hit musical 'Ragamuffin'. I have known Amani for many years. To many, he is an imposing black dreadlocked man, highly political, dangerous even, always standing tall and proud. He has stacked up a range of hit theatre productions in Britain and abroad. Look under his skin and we see a man who has struggled for his art and for his people and who, after many years, has found a peace for himself and the world around him. It has never been an easy ride for Amani who has got to where he is through sheer guts and determination, rising above adversity, having a strong will and a belief in his own talents.

Amani has a lot to say about

empowerment.

"Empowerment to me is about gaining power for yourself that is either given to you by others or by finding it for yourself. Usually to become empowered, people need to have allowed it to happen, to have promoted it in some way. They need to have room to become empowered. It is easier for some people to become empowered by virtue of their birth; likewise, many people are disempowered or disenfranchised purely because of whom they are.

Here's an example:

When it comes to our history, black people are disenfranchised in a world seen through a white historical lens. When you see documentaries made about history, the Egyptians were portrayed as being Mediterranean or sometimes even white with blond hair and blue eyes (played by Richard Burton). These were presented as facts. The documentary makers refused to acknowledge that the Egyptians were black. Only now, belatedly, more radical documentaries may show some of the physical characteristics of black people. That to me is not an accident, it is done on purpose. When they put something over an image, even when the image is contradicting what is being said in the documentary, that image is meant to permeate through people's psyche. Therefore, what people go away with, in this case, is feeling that Egyptians

are not African people."

He is passionate in his belief: "A denial of black history has perpetuated for years and years and years, meanwhile black children are struggling in school trying to find things that they are proud of. Their culture is not told to them, even those parts of their culture that are part of the British culture; The Nubian culture or Kushite culture is not discussed at all. No one tells us that Dr. Charles R. Drew discovered blood plasma, no one tells us that the traffic light, the first hair press, or electricity were invented by black people. Its not part of the dominant culture so no tells us these things. That is, I believe, disempowering people. At school in Britain we learn about fundamental things like St George's Day – it is England's national day. We are not taught though that St George was Turkish and that he is the patron saint of Ethiopia. St George was know as Giorgi in Russia. When we say, 'St George', it almost becomes a nationalistic symbol that is held up by the right wing. If I ask right wing people whether they like Turkish people, they usually say "no". Therefore, the contradictions are vast. A little bit more information will empower generations and will help them become part of society and play their full and positive role in society. Information is crucial, information that helps people know about themselves, who they are, their culture and that they have a place in the world. Black history is totally **denied in this country**. It's not even shown, its a month in the calendar (October), if that! This is a token. A lot more could be done to empower young people to help

them know that they can achieve positive things. Look, the flip side is that if you don't give people power they will go and take it and sometimes they will take it in ways that are not positive. Alternatively, they may seek power elsewhere in ways that may be negative and in ways that may have negative impacts on society. They may seek it on the street or they may seek it in their house. If you disenfranchise a man he will go home and still want to be a man. He may confront the woman of the house and where do they go with all that energy? What do they do with it? Sometimes it turns in on themselves."

Amani is seen as a leader in his field. When asked about his own life, I felt a sense of sorrow in his

voice, as he described how the establishment of this country has never given him the status he and others feels he is due. He describes this as a humbling experience. Amani is known throughout the industry and even has a cult following but the remuneration due to him or the work due to him has been and is still denied. He believes this is because of his politics or how people view his politics. "I got a phone call from the National Theatre the other day" he says, "they wished to have my plays included in their season. When I went to see them they didn't even know my name, they had no idea who I was, they had done no research about me whatsoever. They were working with some people who I had mentored and they had no idea who I was. Kwame Kwei-Armah, a now famous black actor, had told them about me, now they

say they know, but do they really know or are they just responding? So it means nothing to me – it is more for them than for me. I take it as it is, with a pinch of salt, it means nothing. It's too late and they don't really know, they just do it because they think they should and they will just stick it in the archive and their job is done. That's no good to me, I want to be doing my plays now."



Being treated this way might send some people mad or make them give up, but not Amani. "I realised a long time ago that the race is not for the swift, it is about endurance. When you get those kind of rebuttals you perfect yourself, you have to be better. You can't afford the mistakes that others have afforded. Every time you create its got to be of a high level because you might not get another chance. It makes you a better artist because you have to graft. Some people are watching you to make a slip, which you cannot afford to take. I do cultural theatre, theatre that has messages and meanings that may not all be palatable to the authorities, so I try to find spoonfuls of sugar to help the politics go down!"

Amani is always trying to perfect himself, even now. "One of the big-

gest things I have had to overcome in my life", says Amani, "is my ego. Ego is crucial in the arts. If you are not careful or not aware you can become pumped up and puffed up thinking that you are god's gift to anyone. It is therefore crucial to maintain your ego in a world that is full of ego, in an industry that professes and pushes forward ego. Egotistical people are seen as role models, yet the reality is that they are not, they are selfish individuals that think about self. The arts are much more about collective. Learning that the ego does not really take you far was a very important lesson for me."

Amani believes that theatre is fundamental to our lives. Song, dance and drama articulate who we are as humans and helps give meaning to our lives. Without theatre, he says that we will just shrivel up and die. I asked him about his legacy and how he would like to be remembered, he told me that just being remembered was enough. When pushed he went on to say that he would like to be remembered as the person that put the 'R' into ritual theatre and the person that gave African theatre some dignity. "One of the things that I am mostly proud of is that we liberated the African artist from the shackles of naturalism. In the past, African artists would often gesticulate too much and be too animated. They were using a style that was not culturally theirs. Naturalism is trying to recreate reality and you can't beat reality, so theatre should be something great than reality, somewhere you can dream. Theatre in this way can be a source of liberation."

Theater of Resistance

Theater of resistance

Al-Harah Theater

Andy Hickson asks Marina Barham, General Director of Al-Harah Theater/Palestine about theatre and empowerment.

I started working in theatre in 1996, says Marina. At that time we believed that theatre is a powerful tool for creating change in the community. We believed that this art is a way to criticize our society and a way to make people aware of the problems they have in their lives.

Doing theatre in general in any community is hard and faces many challenges, but doing theatre in Palestine is even more difficult. Al-Harah Theater has worked under difficult financial and political constraints since the beginning. We continued to challenge all tensions and odds through building a very strong relationship with the community first, with the local civil society organizations and by developing connections and collaborations with international organizations.

The work of this theatre was based on a belief in cultural development through theatre and arts.

Facing the most difficult political situations like war and the continuous instability in the region made AL-Harah Theater stronger as a creator of positive change in their community. Locally and internationally Al-Harah Theater has managed to become more visible as a cultural organization assisting in building and maintaining a civil society that emphasizes human



rights, democracy and pluralism.

Working in the community using theatre has been an empowering experience for me personally because it gave me the space and tool to express my anger and my feelings of resentment towards many issues in a positive way through the productions that we present on stage and also through the work we do with young people and the impact it has on their lives.

Training Palestinian young people in theatre has had a great impact on them and on their lives. It created new stronger people who can deal with challenges facing

them in their community and also with the Israeli Occupation in a peaceful way. It helped develop their characters, their trust, their confidence in themselves and also in working with others.

When we work in a country where the basic human rights of moving freely or working freely does not exist, then we ourselves as workers in this field also feel frustrated and down sometimes. But seeing and hearing what theatre does to young people is the reward and the fuel that keeps us going.

When we hear what young people feel about theatre and how it affected their lives, this is when

we feel satisfied and happy. A young woman in our group called Christine, 19 years old, said that for her in a patriarchal society, nobody listens to her at home, at university and in the community. But in theater when she is on stage, everybody is forced to listen to what she has to say.

Another young man Yazan; said that before he started theatre he was lost and did not know where to go or what to do, but now when he does theatre he feels he belongs and in his place. He can speak freely and speak what is on his mind.

Another young girl called Mona, said that before she started theatre her voice was very low and she was very shy and not confident. Now her voice can reach the world and she can speak about her feelings and emotions freely.

Another young man called Nidal, said for him theatre has no limits, the limits are the sky.

When we as workers in theatre hear this from the young people this is when we are empowered and we continue to do what we do despite all problems and difficulties financially and politically.

On the community level and how it changed we can say that 15 years ago when people asked us what we do, they said "oh these are the crazy people who make fools of themselves on stage", but today and because of all the work of artists in Palestine, people ask

us about our next performance, "what is the next project?" "Where is the next tour?" So this change does not happen overnight it needs time and the effort of all people working in the field of performing arts.

Using theatre in changing attitudes of people towards children and people with special needs, or towards women or children is a clear evidence that

theatre is empowering for people who make it, people who watch it and people who are involved in it.

Theatre in Palestine is a way of resistance of the Israeli Occupation. A way and a language that people in the West understand as entertainment and accessory. For us making theatre under curfew is resistance. Making theatre and performing in different locations reaching audiences wherever they are is resistance. Training

young people for free in Palestine is creating a new empowered generation with hope and a reason to live, in a situation which has no hope, it is also peaceful resistance.

Touring outside Palestine with our theatre performances has made people abroad know Palestinians better and has encouraged them to question their views about Palestine and the occupation. It is as important to work inside Palestine as much as it is important to work outside and present the culture of Palestine and the daily lives of Palestinians.

Theatre is an empowering tool for those who make it and those who watch it.

For more information about Al-Harah Theatre/Palestine please contact : Marina Barham, Al-Harah Theatre, Virgin Street, Beit Jala, Palestine. Telefax: 0097222767758.

E-mail alharahtheater@yahoo.com

Photos courtesy of Al-Harah Theater



Why are guys with Cerebral Palsy such egocentrics?

In Mpower's first issue, *Ted Shiress*, stand up comic and Cerebral Palsy sufferer (though by no means suffering) wrote for the magazine about how he found day-to-day life. In this issue he writes for us again, this time delving into an unspoken aspect of disability: the ego.

Ok, I might get into a lot of trouble for writing this, but, anyhow, I'm just going to do it. However, before I continue I feel I should add that I am including myself in this too.

It was the other day that I thought I'd send emails to Francesca Martinez and Laurence Clark, two relatively young and new comedians with Cerebral Palsy, asking them for advice on how I could progress my comic career. Within two days I received a lovely warm and helpful reply from Francesca, and a few days later I received an email that I found somewhat cold and stubborn from Laurence. It was a short email basically telling me how he manipulated numerous transport schemes to allow him to get to venues and how proud he was of doing this. This attitude in guys with CP seems to be alarmingly common; I know I have it, and to all my close friends that have to put up with it, I am forever in debt to you. In fact, it was about a year ago that a very good friend of mine, Mel, pulled me aside and gave me a very delicate but honest word about my conversational behaviour. She suggested how maybe there are times when I need to ask more questions and pay more interest in people, and I really hope I have improved since.

In my third year of university, my flat-mate, Jamie, had CP and I can't help but admit I did not take to him at all; admittedly he was a conservative Christian, and as a liberal Atheist that immediately created a barrier. However, that clearly wasn't the only reason why we failed to bond. When chatting to him you were always talking about his agenda, Christi-

anity or extreme right-wing politics, and when you weren't you were less than a minute away from him initiating a genius turn in the conversation so it would almost magically swing back to him. Also it was not only the conversation he would hog, despite having a clearly unjustified 24-hour carer he would quite often 'ask' (read: demand) my helpers, who I had in total for a mere sixteen hours a week, to do a task for him. I made a note that his attitude seemed to have something in common with that of someone with Autism; he simply was blind to the fact he was doing anything wrong and assumed this was routine acceptable behaviour.

To use but another example, there's a guy out there called Simon (and I don't care if he tries to sue me for this) who considers himself somewhat of a disability guru. He is an MSN contact of mine and we were up until recently (when I deleted him) Facebook friends. I just became irritated with his behaviour over Facebook, he had thousands of friends, mostly able-bodied, who somehow thought he was a god and used to praise him continuously. However, he never interacted with them, to even say 'thank you' or enquire what they were up to. Plus when we'd 'chat' over MSN he was exactly the same, telling me long stories that he somehow thought I'd benefit from and when I'd try to tell him about something that happened to me he'd dismiss it by saying 'OK' and move on to a tale which he considered better than mine.

So, why are guys with CP often like this? Well, to start, if we've got anywhere in life it's hard not to think of this as a great achievement, because, I can't deny, it is! Also, I guess this may be the same for a lot of people with CP, it wasn't until relatively recently in my life that I started to feel close to my peers. For most of my life it was relatives and other people of that generation who I felt the closest to. Those people were there to protect and support me and they were 'bigger' than me so by nature of our relationship they wouldn't expect reciprocation.

Also, if there has always been a number of caring figures in our life, sooner or later it is hard not to expect this from almost anyone. As I mentioned I saw this a lot in Jamie and various people with disabilities I'd bump into at music festivals; and I know for a fact I used to be like this a lot and unfortunately can still be from now and then. **I guess the lesson that I've learnt, and sadly has to be learnt, is when you have a disability you can't have all the opportunities people without disabilities have. Yes, it sucks, it sucks a great deal, but it's just something we have to live with.** For instance, I am quite sure that I would get many more gigs if I didn't have CP and was more mobile; however, that's just life and I feel it is unreasonable to expect others to be there to make up for that.

Also, why men particularly? I have quite deliberately spoken quite exclusively about guys in this note. Sadly I can't answer this without using gender stereotypes so unfortunately I am about to. I guess males are by nature more competitive than females and possibly to us guys it is more important to prove to the world they can 'out-do' their disability. Plus, as someone who has studied language and communication for many years, studies have illustrated that males are naturally more competitive in conversation as a whole, it just seems that we seem to go into overdrive when we have a disability.

Lastly, I guess I should tie up a few ends. I am making a big generalisation based on a few particular individuals and myself. I do know a number of men with cp that are incredibly humble in their conversation and lovely to talk to. I've recently acquired a really nice friendly Facebook friend called Ciaran who has always come over as incredibly modest and friendly in conversation. Lastly, I guess I must thank all my lovely friends that have turned a blind eye to when I behave like this, and those, like Mel, who have felt confident in letting me know how I could improve my behaviour.

Incredible Hulk Sayings

Don't make me angry



You puny bully

Alan Davis is the creator of Captain Britain and is an artist for both Marvel and DC comics. Find out more on his website: alandavis-comicart.com



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Half Past Seven

My eyes barely open
From the self I didn't get
The cold air send shock waves to my brain
I gaze into a mirror
And see a face I don't know any more
A pale white reflection
Long dark hair covering the misery in my eyes
Then I go down stairs - because I have to-and I meet
An atmosphere I could cut with a knife
Since I told my family about my trouble at school
The house is so quite
Everyone top toes around me
There's something missing
And I cant put my finger on it
But I think they're scared
Just as much as I am
Because when I walk out the door
I get half a smile
That tells me so much
I know-if they could-they would swap places with me
But its still me who has to walk to school

Terrified of what lies round every corner
And I know they worry about me
All the time
They just don't know how to show it
I am his teacher
So many things to make
Assignments to give out
Targets to reach
I see one lad's makes have slipped again
I've tried talking with him
He just looks back at me lost
Of course it might be a family problem
His parents did explain that he was having trouble
settling in
Yes. It's probably just a phase he's going through
And if it was really important
He could all ways come and talk with me
I'd like to help
You know I would I'd like to help
But at the moment
As you can see
I'm a bit snowed under.

Poem by Luke Welch

Look out for more interviews in future issues of Mpower You magazine



5-minute
interview

Andy Hickson

Q: What is your name?

A: My name is Andy Hickson.

Q: What are you best known for?

A: Theatre director, creative workshop facilitator and dealing with issues of bullying and violence.

Q: What might not a lot of people know about you?

A: I was an undefeated amateur boxer.

Q: Who has inspired you?

A: Muhammed Ali, Bruce Lee, Nelson Mandela and Ghandi.

All of these people, in my opinion, were leaders in helping us find peace in our world.

Q: What have you been up to recently?

A: Trying to fix the carburettor on my historic forward control landrover.

Q: What will you be doing next?

A: Driving to Mongolia.

Q: Who or what keeps you going each day?

A: My children, their energy and creativity.

Q: What's your favourite joke (keep it clean!)?

A: Oh I don't know ... I love a lot of stuff by Jamie Foxx

Q: Do you have any regrets?

A: I was told once that you only regret the things you didn't do. I have done things in my life that I now wish I hadn't done, but saying that I wouldn't change them as they have helped shape who I am.

Q: If you had three wishes, what would you ask for?

A: World peace, onelove and an unlimited supply of roti canai.

Q: If you weren't doing what you do, what would you be doing?

A: A scuba diver.

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