

Chris Chats

... about the good, the bad, the sad and the funny

Chris Bennett

*A selection of short posts from my Chris Chats blog
Volume One*



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About Chris Bennett



This ebook will be the first of a series of ebooks I plan to write comprising of selected short posts from my Chris Chats blog (<http://chrischats.com/>).

It's free and there are no strings attached unless you want to generously donate to my retirement fund. No pressure.

You're welcome to distribute this ebook free to anyone you think might enjoy reading it.

Why write this ebook?

Well, I enjoy writing and have several projects on the go. Currently I'm working on a screenplay, which I started almost four years ago. I have a formatted first draft and am now working on the second draft.

It's taken a while to get to this stage of the screenplay due to an ebook I worked on and completed called 'The Sandringham Sabres – The First 25 Years 1974-1999'. A non-profit venture that took over 10 years to complete, but that's another story you can read about in the introduction of the ebook on pp 1-2 (<http://chrischats.com/sabres-basketball/>).

My other major writing project is a memoir of growing up in Fitzroy, Melbourne, Australia, during the 1960's. I've already researched the era, written some vignettes and will have a draft by the end of 2011. I'm not sure what format I'll publish it in – ebook or hardcover – but I'm leaning towards a hardcover copy.

I also have another blog – Chris Chi <http://chrischi.com.au/> – which focuses on Tai Chi and I plan to write an ebook with a reflective theme from selected posts. This also will be for free.

Hmm, I'll never get rich giving things away but what the heck.

But I do have two commercial books – 'Tai Chi: A Step-By-Step Guide To Complete Relaxation' and 'How To Lose Customers Without Really Trying' (co-author Sue James) <http://chrischats.com/products/>

The 'Tai Chi' book is in a hardcover format and the 'Customers' book is an ebook.

I plan to convert the hardcover copy of the Tai Chi book into an ebook to be sold with a free ebook – Beginners FAQ's

Although the cash register hasn't exactly been clanging with sales it does occasional ring with the odd sale here and there.

I'm also planning to write for pay in regards to gift cards and articles for magazines on a regular basis. It would be good to have a few extra pennies coming in to pay for such luxuries as bills, food, petrol, etc. etc.

What else do I do?

Well, Tai Chi is my major passion followed by photography, creating flash slide shows, basketball (spectator, no longer a coach) and a little bit of juggling when I have the time.

Another side project I'm working on is creating a series of short black and white flash slide shows on various people's lives. This will combine my passion for writing, interviewing, photography, recording and sound.

Oh, by the way, I do work for a living.

With my colleague, Sue James, we run BJ Seminars International, <http://bjseminars.com.au/> - a facilitation business that focuses on getting the best out of people and organizations.

Well, if you excuse me for now, I've just had another writing idea!

Jacques The Shark



She stood there in the middle of the gym, disengaged, as the other fifty grade 5 and 6 students swirled around her.

I tried to encourage her to join in the organised chaos I had created but she wasn't interested. Her 10-year old body and tense brow indicated she wanted to be elsewhere.

I was puzzled. It was the fourth session of my 'Positive Kidz are happy kidz' program and she was still disengaged.

The theme for the program was on building self-esteem from a Tai Chi perspective. But in this final session I began to wonder whether it made any difference at all for this particular little girl.

At the end of session I got all the students to sit down and it was time for Jacques the Shark, a toy I use to help students learn how to relax when they feel under pressure. It has a snapping jaw and is always a favourite with students.

As I took Jacques out of his silver-starred, blue bag, the little girl still didn't show any interest.

I asked for two volunteers and, as usual, about fifty hands shot up in the air. I picked one girl and one boy to work with Jacques the Shark.

Well, Jacques did what he was supposed to do – bite. And the whole class erupted in laughter.

I looked over to where the little girl was sitting and saw a very brief smile that, for a few moments, erased all her worry and lit up her face.

And I smiled too.

I felt like I had achieved something.

Marysville Bushfire



It was an eerie feeling driving towards the township of Marysville last Sunday.

I went there with Sue, my colleague, to be part of a 'Celebrating Marysville & Triangle' program.

We volunteered our services as facilitators with 50 other facilitators and worked with 300 townspeople affected by the recent bushfire. The themes covered on the day were 'celebrating community' and 'what next'.

As I drove along Maroondah Highway on an early foggy morning, the countryside revealed many scarred trees, houses levelled to the ground by the fire with the occasional burnt brick chimney stack pointing to the sky, the only vertical structure remaining.

Burnt and twisted bits of metal lay on the ground nearby.

And amongst this devastation were trees and houses spared from the maelstrom of fire and noise that roared through the district on Black Saturday several weeks ago.

There were also signs of rebirth as grass, plant life and flowers appeared across the fields and the forest.

I did not know what I expected to see in Marysville - a place I had visited many times. It was a renowned tourist spot, and a beautiful sanctuary from city life, surrounded by trees, bush, flowers, pristine water, cottages and houses.

We arrived early and decided to drive past the Marysville Bowls club house, where the event was to take place, and continued on towards the centre of town, a couple of kilometres down the road.

I turned right at the roundabout and drove on.

There was a bakery still standing. I looked around and said to Sue, 'I don't know where I am'. Then I realised I was driving down the main street.

A street that a few months ago was full of people leisurely wandering along the footpaths – intriguing and wonderful craft shops – a cafe where I bought a meat pie and scoffed it down because I was hungry.

A street where we stopped at a stall on the footpath and bought raffle tickets from some primary school students who were raising funds for their school.

A street that no longer exists.

I wonder if the remaining people who live in Marysville and the surrounding communities will recover from the aftermath of that devastating fire. Will they be able to deal with the many lives lost, the destruction of homes and businesses, rebuild their lives, and recover the spirit of the old townships?

I don't know for sure.

But after a day working with the townsfolk, I think they will.

Footnote: *Marysville is located 93 kilometres east of Melbourne (Australia). The bush fire happened on 7th February (Black Saturday), 2009. At least 38 people died in the Marysville district.*

Bogan Cavalier



It's not a good look to enter an upmarket clothing store wearing a bogan shirt and a beanie.

The salesperson who spotted this 'apparition' must have thought I was a bit shifty.

All I needed was a 'thousand yard stare' to give the 'bum of the year' award a run for its money.

But I managed to hang in there and examine the coats on sale. I avoided the temptation to check the pockets for some spare change.

The salesperson occasionally glanced towards me in case I jammed a few coats under my arm and did 'a runner'.

Just as she was about to press a security buzzer, Sue walked in providing me with some instant credibility.

I was no longer a 'vagrant' but a potential customer.

Sue helped me try on a three-quarter-length coat and the fit was perfect. From the neck down to my calf muscles I looked like a real 'dandy'. Though the rest of me needs a lot of work.

Anyway, I decided to buy the coat and opened my wallet and to the delight of the salesperson, no moths flew out - just my credit card.

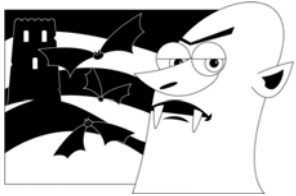
The next time I rush out and go shopping I must check my shirt.

Maybe I'll wear my new three-quarter-length coat over my bogan shirt.

So I don't look wrong.

Footnote: *Bogan means 'lower class'*

Beware Of Vampires



Gee, vampires are hard work.

I was on the phone the other day talking to a fellow I knew and for most of the one-sided conversation all I got was what's wrong with the world.

It was a whinge (complain) fest that I found tiring and it felt like all the energy was being sucked out of me. Just like a vampire sucking on an exposed neck. I almost lost the will to live, listening to all this negativity.

He eventually said to me, 'and how are you?' I felt like saying 'terrific until I started to speak to you.' But manners or my comatose state prevented me from being rude.

There are people out there who are closeted vampires whose mission in life is to suck the energy out of anyone willing to listen to their blood curdling whinges.

I suppose I should invest in some garlic to hang around my neck or maybe just drive a wooden stake into their heart to repel these vampires.

But I really can't be bothered.

Maybe I should just avoid these vampires altogether - or at the very least have a ready-made anti-vampire excuse so I can escape the ordeal.

Something like, 'Oh, excuse me, I need to go. My blood transfusion is ready.'

An Act Of Kindness



Dave Grant died last Sunday at 4.25pm. aged 50, from pancreatic cancer.

Who was Dave Grant?

Well, he was a high profile Australian comedian.

And over the years I'd seen him perform on stage and television but I did not know him personally.

I only met him once and for a brief moment.

It was a few years ago when I was dabbling in stand up comedy. I used an assumed name, as there already was a professional comedian with the same name as mine.

I did a five-minute spot in an out-of-city venue and bombed. I was woeful, but I was reasonably happy because I'd had a go.

After my gig I was standing around drinking an orange juice and Dave Grant came up to me and offered some helpful tips on my performance.

I listened intently and was impressed that a high profile comedian would bother with an amateur like me.

I've never forgotten his act of kindness.

And it's something that I feel we all should do.

Offer a stranger an act of kindness.

When you do, you will never be forgotten.

An Unwelcome Welcome



I was struck by the dynamics of the group as I entered the room.

It had a friendly buzz about it with people scooting around engaged in their own little world, not aware there was a visitor standing at the door.

I stood around for a while but no one greeted me, so I walked over to the row of chairs and sat down. There was a brief introduction and the MC nervously asked 'are there any visitors?'

I put my hand up, as did a couple of other people, and he then quickly went on to club business.

After that, as I sat and listened to the guest speaker, I wanted to dart out of the room and not come back. But I forced myself to stay until the break.

During the break I moved to the back of the room and got a cup of tea and a soggy chocolate cake. Then one of the members came up to me and introduced himself.

We had a very pleasant chat and he introduced me to two other members.

The two halves of that evening were such a contrast! Before the break I felt on my own and wanted to go home. Afterwards I felt welcomed and wanted to come back. I was glad I had stayed after all.

It's so easy to get lost in the crowd when you go to any new club. Unless you're assertive you can disappear into a vacuum and leave disappointed. And the club loses a potential member.

A visitor needs to hear the words, 'Hello my name is ----, welcome to -----.

That's all it takes to turn an unwelcome into a welcome.

Corn Cobs, Remote Control & T.V.



I love my cooked corncobs dripping in butter.

Last night I was eating my corncobs watching television.

Big mistake.

As I bit into the corn my taste buds sent me into food heaven. The butter melted in my mouth and over my fingers.

And then it happened.

A commercial appeared.

I quickly reached for the remote control, which I always have nearby in case of such emergencies.

I was about to pick it up and to my horror I noticed my fingers covered in butter.

What to do?

Press the remote with my greasy fingers?

Or continue eating my delicious corncob and suffer the screaming commercial.

My taste buds overpowered my weak mind and I kept eating my corncob with my buttered fingers.

After I fed my face I rushed over to the tap and washed my hands, dried them and picked up the remote control.

A fifth commercial started to appear and I zapped it by changing channels.

And guess what?

Yes, another commercial appeared.

I turned the television off.

And buried my head in the corncob bowl.

Where's My Cappuccino?



I paid for my cappuccino and sat at a nearby table waiting for it to be served.

And waited. And waited. And waited.

Waiters swirled by with trays of cappuccinos for other customers and I could smell the caffeine.

I wanted mine and I wanted it now.

Being coffee deprived for ten minutes, I started to twitch.

I motioned to a waiter in my usually suave way and said, 'Excuse me, where's my cappuccino?'

'I'll go and see what's happened to it'.

He disappeared into cappuccino land behind the counter.

Another two minutes went by and I was desperate.

I waved to another waiter and said 'Ah, where's my cappuccino?'

He nodded his head and disappeared.

I had two waiters on the trail - but still no cappuccino.

I wondered what they could possibly be doing.

A couple of minutes later a third waiter appeared from cappuccino land with a cappuccino.

He walked towards me and placed this elixir on the table and said 'sorry for the wait.'

I said, 'thanks'.

I took my first sip.

It was lukewarm.

The Day The Table Collapsed



The most exciting part of a workshop occurred when the table collapsed, sending books and pens flying into the air.

I am not sure why the table collapsed - the heat, a stress fracture or just boredom could have caused it. I certainly could relate to all three.

The presenter was friendly and knowledgeable, but lacked awareness of the effect she was having on her audience. The introductions took over an hour!

By the time it was my turn to introduce myself and explain why I was there, I was ready to collapse – but the table beat me to it.

What should she have done?

Well, in my work as a facilitator and presenter I have learned that she could have:

- Observed her audience closely and looked for cues that indicated boredom, tiredness or lack of energy. For example, the obvious signs are yawning, looking at watches, slumped postures or bored expressions. However she was oblivious to the effect she was having on the audience.
- Adjusted the presentation if she had sensed she was losing the audience. She could have used various methods to energise minds and bodies such as pairing people up with someone whom they haven't met and discuss a particular theme. She certainly didn't do this.
- Evaluated the presentation by getting feedback from the audience. Handing out feedback sheets or asking participants as a group or individually what they thought of the presentation may have been helpful. None of these things happened.

There are many 'collapsing tables' caused by experts who are so caught up in their message that they lose sight of the audience.

They really do need to observe, adjust and evaluate what they do.

If they did then their presentations would be much better.

And save a lot of tables!

Pongo



Pongo is old now.

I watch him move slowly and carefully in the garden. His cataract eyes and poor hearing makes it difficult for him to recognise me.

He no longer chases away the red, blue rosellas and yellow crested galahs that dared ventured into his perfect garden.

Once they would scatter shrieking into the sky when he appeared. Now they ignore him. Pongo watches them briefly, lets out a cursory growl and quickly returns to his thoughts.

Pongo sometimes shows moments of youthfulness when his old creaky body allows him. Perhaps it's his way of protesting against the advancing years. A brief respite from the inevitable effects of ageing.

Pongo is my friend. I met him several years ago. At the time I was thinking about buying the house next door. As I walked around the property, Pongo appeared from across the fenceless yard. He thought I was an intruder and bailed me up. After that brief confrontation we eventually became great mates.

We saw each other nearly every day. He would always come over to my house or I would drop in to see him.

Now Pongo waits. If he is in the garden he still makes the long journey across the yard to greet me. I watch him shuffle towards me and wonder how much longer he can keep going.

Yes, Pongo is old, at 15. That's old for a dog.

Slackawritis



One of the problems with social media is the disease that has infested many people. A disease that can be found on blogs, twitter, websites and every other form of social media.

This disease is called slackawritis and the symptoms appear as soon as one uses a keyboard. The symptoms? Bad spelling and poor grammar, which ain't good.

Usually slackawritis is preceded by itchyitis.

A condition where itchy fingers quickly type out a message and hit the send button in a nanosecond. The result? Usually poor spelling and grammar and regret.

Slackawritis is not fatal. It is curable.

Just, stop - think - type - check - send. Preferably in that order.

If that doesn't cure you then come to my English class and I'll teach you good spelling and grammar.

For a fee.

Good Old Days



He is now 47, married, and has two teenage sons who play basketball.

But I still see him as that 13-year old kid who I had coached in our Zebras (now Sabres) 1970's domestic and representative teams.

As we talked we watched his two teenage sons enthusiastically play one-on-one basketball on the court.

Images and emotions of my own basketball experiences as a young coach flickered through my head. The good times, the bad times, the mad times, the funny times - all jockeyed for position in my mind.

For a moment I was transported back to the old dilapidated, plaster peeling, tiny Memorial Hall where it all had started. He was one of many 'youngsters' playing in the local competition on a Saturday morning.

I could see myself enter the Hall and walk down the corridor, past our money making drinks machine, nod my head to the young boy at the table collecting 20 cents entrance fee. I stood at the opened double white wooden doors – watching the frenetic and awkward movements of junior players chasing a basketball.

Many things have changed since then except for one thing - the delight of children chasing, dribbling, catching, throwing and shooting a basketball with their friends.

I suppose in 35-years time his teenage sons will reminisce about the 'good old days.'

Picture This



This is not the picture I wanted to take but I had too to keep everybody happy including myself.

I was in Brunswick Street, Fitzroy (Melbourne, Australia) having a go at street photography.

I walked up and down several blocks of crowded cafes, shops and past some very weird looking people (besides myself), waiting for an opportunity to take a 'good photo.'

There was a cafe across the road, which looked interesting and I raised my camera as a stream of cars passed by me and slowed to a halt.

The fellow in the photo waved at me and I ignored him because I was waiting for a gap to appear between the cars so I could take my photo.

He kept waving vigorously and I eventually took a shot of him and gave him the thumbs up.

He and his passenger then broke out into huge smiles, I smiled back and he then drove off.

I've kept this photo to remind myself of a moment in time when strangers made a connection by sharing a smile.

Stable Manure



I was driving along the Maroondah Highway heading out towards Healesville and spotted a wooden sign, nailed high up on a tree.

It read 'Stable Manure.'

My first thoughts were 'stable manure? As opposed to unstable manure? How dangerous or explosive is this manure?'

Sometimes signs can mean something different from what was intended.

And it is important that the words used in a sign reflect their true meaning.

If not, the meaning can become unintentionally humorous, insulting or baffling.

Whenever I'm writing I take care to use words that cannot be misinterpreted.

Otherwise I end up with 'unstable manure'.

Next Train WAH - Platform WAH - Leaving WAH



Remember the bad old days when a voice on the PA system at a train station would puncture your eardrums with this announcement.

'The next train WAH on platform WAH will be leaving WAH.'

You'd stand there like the rest of the 'stunned mullets' on the platform trying to make sense of the announcement.

Well, it happened to me the other day when I tried to catch a train home, from town.

I'd just been to 'Jeff's Shed' (Melbourne Exhibition Centre) for the Melbourne Digital Camera Show.

Standing on the platform watching a hoard of Collingwood supporters descend from the carriages (not a pleasant sight), I heard the WAH WAH man.

'Crackle, crackle, the next train WAH on platform WAH will be leaving WAH.'

I felt as though I was catapulted back into the past when the WAH WAH man was a regular feature of our train system.

I recovered what was left of my senses and spotted the oncoming train. It was my train.

No thanks to the WAH WAH man.

Hmm, maybe the PA system should have a translator.

Then we could all understand the WAH WAH man.

And catch the right train.

Namaste



It was a moment I was not prepared for.

A moment that had a profound effect on me during our visit of a village in Chitwan, Nepal.

It was my turn to walk between the two rows of smiling, clapping, village women – elegantly dressed in their aqua, red and purple sarongs – greeting us Westerners with ‘Namaste’.

I lowered my weighty 50d Canon camera, removed my Aussie bush hat and bent forward as one of the women placed a chain of yellow flowers around my neck and another anointed me with a red mark on my forehead.

I walked along the path and acknowledged both lines of women with a smile, a nod and ‘Namaste’.

When I reached the end of the line there were emotions stirring inside me, which at that time I could not identify.

Rather than deal with those emotions there and then, I distracted myself by quickly raising my camera and looking for possible photo opportunities. As I had done many times in the previous eight days we were in Kathmandu for the World Appreciative Inquiry conference.

That experience, which lasted only a few seconds, still resonates with me now.

It was an experience that left me with feelings of humility, respect and admiration for the village women who had started a successful village bank many years ago with the help of Americans Mac and Marcia Odell.

A once poor village that was now a prosperous village thanks to the determination of these women.

And the experience has also left me with a strong desire to go back.

Perhaps as a volunteer to help out where needed.

O.P.P's



Do you feel like sticking your head out the window and yelling, 'I'm mad as hell and I am not going to take it anymore'?

Do you hate the curse that you know is going to get you sooner or later?

Yeah, life is tough.

Just when you think you are getting on top of things the dreaded O.P.P's strike.

No one is immune from the O.P.P's.

You can get it at work, you can get from a friend, you can even get it from a stranger.

It strikes without warning.

You can't hide. You can't run.

All you can do is suffer, and suffer you will.

One bitten you become listless, eyes glaze over and paralysis sets in. What are O.P.P's? Other people's problems!

Social Media Whirlpool



I've been trying to stay afloat catching up with all the social media but at times it feels like a whirlpool sucking me into a void.

There's twitter – a shorthand pen pal system – that has a constant stream of 140 character messages that become a torrent each day making it difficult to read let alone catch up.

There's face book, which I find has a more personal touch than twitter because I have a small number of followers. But even so I feel the need to contribute and stay current on a daily basis.

There's LinkedIn, which is more business focused and it is difficult to share news without becoming too commercial and annoying.

There's blogs of which I have two, Chris Chats and Chris Chi where I try to write posts each week. And usually I have to think of something to write on a daily basis.

Social media is convenient and fast and a great way of staying in touch with people around the world.

But occasionally I like to dip my head out above the whirlpool.

And have more 'good old fashion yarns' (discussions) face to face.

It somehow feels more human.

Manual Labour And Me



Now let's get this straight.

I don't like manual labour and manual labour doesn't like me

But the other day it caught up with me.

I was press-ganged into actually getting off my backside to do some physical labour.

It was mid Saturday morning and I was working on my computer, unshaven, and straining my brain thinking of Twitter gems to share with the world.

The phone rang.

And silly me answered.

'We need your help.'

'Oh?' I said.

'Yeah, we need help to pitch the tent and do a few other things for the wedding.'

'Now?'

'Yeah, if you can make it.'

'Okay, I'll be there in 45 minutes.'

So I got into my old bomb (car) and drove to the site and was greeted by my mate and that nuisance, 'manual labour'.

For the next three hours I was part of the dogsbody team, lifting, moving, pushing, kicking, rolling, tying all sort of odds and ends to get the outdoor wedding area into shape.

I was also the valet (no tips, unfortunately), directing cars up the driveway – 'just past the green garage and turn right, plenty of space.'

'Thanks, mate'

Well, that was okay until I heard something laugh at me.

I wasn't impressed. I looked around but there was no one there.

More laughter.

I looked up.

There it was.

The thing that laughed at me.

A kookaburra.

It was perched high up on a power pole looking at me with its beak up in the air.

'You rude snob,' I yelled

It just looked at me and laughed.

So I ignored it because you can never win against a kookaburra. They always have the last laugh.

Anyway, I finally finished directing the traffic and sat down to relax.

And you know what?

That manual labour fellow is not bad.

I actually enjoyed the workout.

But the next time the phone rings on a Saturday morning I'm going back to bed because I don't want to overdo it.

Box Brownie to Digital



I just started a short photography course called 'Advanced Beginners'.

And I've come a long way since I was an 'Absolute Beginner' holding my first camera, a box 'brownie', decades ago.

In those days you had to pay for a roll of film and secure it inside a small box camera.

I found a way of not having to pay for a roll of film but still take as many pictures as I wanted.

I used my imagination.

I simply didn't put any rolls of film in the camera. I just pressed the button and captured all the pictures in my head.

I loved the sound of that button clicking more than the thought of actually developing the film.

The viewfinder located on top and side of the camera, were small rectangular mirrors that caused the image to be viewed upside down.

As an excited kid with the latest in technology I often wondered, if I turned myself upside down, whether the image would correct itself.

Hmm, maybe. But it wasn't worth getting a sore head to find out.

When it did have film in it, the box brownie did the same thing as the digital camera I now have. It captured a moment in time that can be revisited.

And that's one of the reasons I enjoy photography

Are You a Toad?



No. This is not an insult.

It's the story of a toad.

This particular toad was caught up in a storm and found shelter by squeezing into a narrow opening of a rock crevice.

To the toad's delight the crevice had all the creature comforts of home. The area was dry and had enough room for the toad to spread its little legs out. It even had its own food supply. Just like meals on wheels. All the toad had to do was flick its tongue out and zap. Another insect bit the dust.

It even had its own supply of running water. Droplets cascaded through the rocks and fell straight into its mouth.

The toad was in heaven.

As time went by the toad got fat. And fatter. And fatter.

It eventually become so huge it could hardly move.

One day the toad got so bored it decided to slip out of the rock crevice and do a bit of sun baking. It tried to get out of the narrow opening and failed. It tried again and again without success.

The toad eventually gave up. It had become so big that it was impossible to escape. Its comfort zone had become a prison and eventually turned into a burial chamber.

The toad experienced what many people do. Getting stuck in a comfort zone. They become so comfortable that they stop making an effort. Like our toad their heaven turns into a prison and eventually a burial chamber.

So, don't be a toad.

Hop out of your comfort zone and thrive.

La La Falls Conquered



It's taken awhile but I have finally conquered a bush walk called La La Falls.

All 3.2 kilometres of it.

And that's 3 kilometres more than I'm used to walking!

La La Falls is located in Warburton, about 80 km east of Melbourne, Australia.

Sue and I regularly go to Warburton for planning days and on one occasion we attempted to walk the bush track but didn't get very far. It was wet and slippery so we thought we'd try again another time.

Well, a couple of weeks ago I had a go and I actually made it up the steep track without collapsing or calling for an emergency crew to bail me out.

I had my brand new camera back pack strapped on and a plastic water bottle attached. I looked like a real yuppie bushman.

About ten minutes into the walk I was starting to breathe heavily and I stopped for a break. I rang Sue on my mobile to let her know I was okay. She was parked at the entrance of the trail reading a book waiting for me to complete my epic journey.

A group of elderly people appeared, effortlessly walking down the track towards me and smiled. I smiled back and quickly regained my breath and put away my mobile phone, as any normal yuppie would do.

Anyway, I soldiered on up the steep trail, breathing the invigorating mountain air and felt like I was about to discover the El Dorado of water falls. I expected something like Niagara Falls, a breath-taking panorama of nature's raw energy.

I finally got to the end of the trail and stepped onto the small wooden railed landing. And looked up.

There it was. La La Falls! Not quite what I expected but I had made it.

I had conquered La La Falls.

The Road To Kathmandu



Our drive from Kathmandu airport to the guesthouse was organised chaos.

Cars, buses, motorbikes, taxis, trucks, guys furiously pedalling their three wheel bicycled carriages carrying tense tourists, street vendors with their fruit and wares atop of bicycles; all battling for the prime position on the road - the centre.

Head on collisions narrowly averted by the constant bipping and last second decisions to give way. Each potential disaster was nonchalantly waved away by pedestrians who walked, shuffled, meandered in all directions. Vehicles swerved as pedestrians simply held up a hand to slow the oncoming Kamikaze drivers.

And yet I did not see one accident. Any one of the many close shaves would have caused road rage here in Melbourne, Australia. But in Kathmandu it was normal driving conditions.

I only saw one set of traffic lights during my stay in Kathmandu.

And I noticed the odd traffic cop with a whistle. I thought 'why would you bother' but they had a job to do and that was to keep order from the chaotic traffic and not get run over themselves.

After a day of observing the mayhem on the roads I started to feel the rhythm of the traffic. The 'anything goes' rhythm.

I also started to become a Kathmandu pedestrian (a westernised version) waving away hurtling traffic coming towards me. I knew they would miss me at the last minute. Had this happened at home I would have dived into the nearest gutter for safety.

It's been four weeks since Sue and I got back from Nepal. We attended the World Appreciative Inquiry conference and delivered our 'Power of [AQ/KO](#) workshop in Kathmandu

I miss the traffic in Nepal. Maybe, we should forget about traffic rules here and just plunge into organised chaos.

Oh, I forgot. We already do.

Library Mayhem



Do you remember the golden age for libraries?

When librarians ruled supreme.

Any noise would be met with either a stern look, a 'quiet please' or 'you will have to leave' response from the librarian.

Well, it's mayhem now. They let any 'riff raff' in.

The other day I was in a library browsing for something to read. I walked in and out of the aisles and finally discovered a fascinating book to flick through.

I sat down on a stool nearby and then the 'riff raff' erupted.

A little kid was laughing and talking and running around the aisles.

A student working on a computer talked loudly into her mobile phone.

Elderly people nearby raised their voices.

I was distracted reading the same paragraph several times.

They really should ban the 'riff raff' from libraries. No kids - no students - no elderly people.

That way I can sit quietly in my corner and read my book - Organized Crime - in peace.

Knit One Pearl Two



Last night I was at my Mum's for tea.

After we finished eating she sat in her recliner chair and started to knit a football blanket for my nephews.

She's 86 and recently started to knit again. It keeps her occupied and it is not a wasted effort unless she's knitting a Collingwood blanket.

While she was knitting I wrote some notes in my folder about a screenplay I've been working on.

She looked over her yellow patch of wool and said, 'Oh, you're knitting too.' I said 'What do you mean'?

"Your knitting with words'.

I laughed. She was right. Mums are always right.

I enjoy 'knitting with words' although I sometimes lose the thread and the pattern at times.

And the odd 'pearl' goes astray.

We both sat there 'knitting' sharing a creative moment.

Fish and Chooks



Here I am at BJ Seminars International world headquarters office reading an article on management training, the fishmongers' way.

According to the article, a group of Washington fishmongers were so successful in their version of customer service formed their own training consultancy; offering management one hour sessions to join them at their Fish Market stall to learn how to throw fish and deal with customers.

They now have a highly rated video, 'Fish Throwers' and make more money from their management games than from selling fish.

It got me thinking. Why not jump on the fish wagon and convert an American programme into an Australian one? After all, don't we tend to follow the latest American training fad?

Hmm. Hang on a sec while I brainstorm for some Fish programmes that may work here in Australia.

Ah. Yes. Here we go.

How about these top ten?

- How to Be a Happy Fish
- The Fish Myth
- Just About Everything a Fish Needs to Know
- How to Overcome Negative Fish in the Workplace
- How to Interview and Hire the Right Fish
- Motivating Fish in Today's Workplace
- 13 Habits of Successful Fish
- How to Deal with Difficult Fish
- Empower Your Fish
- How to Become the Boss Fish

Hmm. Enough of the fish. It's getting a bit on the nose.

What about chicken? Wasn't there an American motivational book on chicken soup? Perhaps I could convert it into an Australian training programme?

These may work.

- Here Chook Chook Chook: leadership skills for the smart chook
- Old Chook Young Chook: keeping abreast of the generation gap
- How to Use Your Noodle: and make oodles of money
- Release Your Inner Chook: Pluck your way to success
- Super Chook: peak performance skills for chickens

Ooh. My brain is starting to hurt.

I think I will stick to what I know.

Tai Chi.

Have Mercy



I felt like doing a Peter Finch in the movie Network (1976).

Running to the nearest window and sticking my head out and yelling 'I'm as mad as hell and I'm not taking this anymore.'

But I didn't. I just stayed in my seat and suffered.

Suffered in silence from a speaker who talked and talked and talked.

It was evening and I was tired. The speaker started well, was affable and interesting but when he droned on for 90 minutes (an eternity) I was mad.

The speaker was so caught up in his speech he was oblivious to the discomfort and boredom of the audience.

He committed two cardinal sins in speaking - ignoring the reactions of the audience and going well over time.

So the next time you speak in public, don't punish your audience.

Have mercy.

In Search of Shoosh



Perhaps the hardest thing to find when I go for a coffee is shoosh.

Now shoosh is not on the menu but I'm willing to pay any amount to get it.

What is shoosh?

Shoosh is quietness.

It's what I was told as a kid when I was loud and boisterous. "Chris, shoosh!" "A bit of shoosh thank you".

Now shoosh is what I want when I go for a 'quiet' coffee.

But I never get it.

There is always noise in the background, foreground and on the ground.

Cafés sound like speaker boxes.

Blaring away while I try to have a 'quiet' cup of coffee with a friend.

It's almost impossible to hold a conversation without shoosh.

Just like there is anti-hoon legislation here where hooners can have their cars impounded, I believe there should be anti-noise legislation in cafés introduced.

Imagine that.

A shoosh squad that has the power to enter cafés, rip speakers and plasma screens off the wall and chuck 'em in the bin.

That's my dream.

To have shoosh when I'm drinking my coffee.

Until then I have to put with the incessant noise.

And yell 'A bit of shoosh thank you!'

Dumb Dumb Moment



Have you ever had a dumb dumb moment? Well, I have had my share of dumb dumb moments and the latest one was a doozy.

I'd just got home from shopping for groceries, jumped out of the car, grabbed most of the bags and raced to the back door. I unlocked the door, stumbled in and placed my shopping bags on the table.

I went back to get the remaining bags. As I left the laundry area I accidentally knocked over the mop and bucket, which tumbled forward and hit the backdoor. It slammed shut. I was locked outside.

Well, it was the first time I had kicked the bucket and the result was worse than death. I had left my keys and mobile phone on the table inside the house. And my spare house key was also inside the house.

Dumb. Dumb. Dumb.

I tried to figure out how to get back inside.

Oh, yeah. I'll try the kitchen window. So I used my cat burglary skills to break back into my house.

Well, it was more wombat skill than cat because I pushed too hard and the large window panel shattered and fell inside the kitchen.

I climbed through the gap and narrowly avoided decapitation from the jagged glass edges. As I jumped from the kitchen sink onto the floor I stepped on the shattered glass sounding like a breakfast cereal. Snap, crackle, pop.

The next few hours were spent cursing, cleaning up the mess and repairing the broken window.

I learned three lessons from my dumb dumb moment.

- Every one has a dumb dumb moment.
- Don't leave home without a spare key.
- Don't kick the bucket!

Hmm, dumb, dumb, dumb.

Embarrassment Boots



Well, I've finally done it.

I bought myself a pair of E.B's (embarrassment boots).

Boots that would have you drawn and quartered by the fashion police if you dared step foot outside your front door wearing them.

I had to buy them.

My feet were getting cold, up here in the hills, and I needed fur lined boots that would keep me warm.

There was a special on at our local store for E.B's and I spent much time deciding whether to buy them.

Hmm, warm feet or be cool.

My feet made the decision so I decided to try a pair on.

To make sure I wasn't seen with the E.B's, I hid behind the rack and sat on a chair.

There's nothing worse than being caught with E.B's.

I tried the size 11, yes I do have big feet, but they were a bit tight.

Then I tried the size 12's and they fitted well.

Now the only problem was to get out of the store without embarrassing myself holding a pair of E.B's.

Ah yes, the answer.

I used the shirt I was about to buy to cover the boots as I walked to the check out point.

So far so good.

Now for the ordeal of revealing the E.B's to the sales clerk.

I used all my charm and distracting techniques – 'nice day, how are you, love the display.'

It didn't fool her as she knew I had an E.B affliction.

She was kind and quickly processed the order and placed the E.B's in a bag.

Phew, I walked to my car, incognito and incoherent but happy I had made it this far.

When I got home I placed the E.B's on the floor.

Two days later I tried them on.

And do you know what?

They are comfortable and warm.

Even though they are the most 'Embarrassing Boots' I own.