

A COLLECTION OF **bytestories**

A WEBSITE SERVING AS AN ARCHIVE OF MY
DIFFERENT ADVENTURES ON PLANET EARTH...



BY LUKE SIMMONS

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Cool Handling in a Crisis Situation

In June 2018, my wife (Camila) and 2 year old boy returned to Porto Alegre to visit family and friends. It happened to coincide with Camila's 40th, so we decided to rent a house which was at a lovely, but isolated spot in the countryside to have a big party.

Everyone and their families arrived late in the afternoon and the beers started flowing as soon as we got the Brazillian BBQ all fired up.

As a surprise, one of our friends had arranged for a 5-piece samba band to play some live music for us this night. They arrived at dusk while everyone was having dinner and we were happy enough to give them plates and have some drinks with us.

They put on a great show for almost 2 hours with everyone singing along, dancing along. As the show finished, we gave them thanks and as they were packing up, there was only one of them left.

He said to my friend Rodrigo, "I see that bottle of whiskey there, I'd like to take it with me".

Rodrigo said, "Umm, no. Sorry, but it's mine my friend".

To which he replied, "Hmm. I'm taking it!".

The mood had totally shifted.

"Me and the guys are armed and we're crazy. We don't care. We'll rob you and all the families here!". Rodrigo said, "You're armed? Show me.". So the guy opened up the car boot and showed off a handgun with an extended clip.

He then continued on, "Nice jacket. I want that too."

Rodrigo then said, "Look it's cold, it's my only jacket. Please... We have kids here. We don't want trouble. You have my whisky."

The guy was angry at this point, but then a voice from the inside the car yelled out, "Come on, it's late! Let's just go!". He looked back at Rodrigo, and then begrudgingly got in the car.

And off they went.

Pheuw...

In Eldorado do Sul - RS, Brazil

Going in for the sniff

About 4 months ago Gypsy came into our lives. She'd lived her first 5 years with a breeder as a preened up show dog - while also finding time to bear two litters of pups.

When she had her annual checkup this year, they found that she has a heart murmur meaning it'd be best if she did not have anymore litters of pups. The owner (Maryanne) had come up from Tasmania to Melbourne for the checkup and realised that it'd be a good opportunity to give her away while she was on the mainland. As we'd recently enquired about buying a newborn pup, she thought of seeing if we'd like to adopt her. We said YES and it's been god damn excellent ever since. She is such a sweetheart.

In fact, she can be almost too affectionate. If you're on the couch with your laptop, she lies on top of your keyboard. She's also been banned from beds because she overtakes your pillow and sniffs your face from all angles.

To celebrate Spring's arrival, I took my wife and boy down to the local beach and as we were playing around near the shore, at about 20m back from us there was a poor fella in a sleeping bag. Bless him, he was doing it rough. He did also have bottle of red in full view - and stirred a few times to give it a solid swig before going back to sleep.

At this point, we thought we'd let Gypsy off the lead and I couldn't believe it when she went on a beeline over to this guy. No!! And right into the bees nest she went... She sniffed him for about 10 seconds before she cleared off thanks to this guys flailing arms. I'm sure she blew this poor guy's mind.

Naughty Gypsy.

In Beach Foreshore, Beach Rd, 3194, 151 Bay Trail, Parkdale VIC 3195

Day & Night

I had a moment when I was making the most of daylight savings by putting the clothes out on the line for my wife. At that point in time, she was putting our little one down to sleep. Fair enough...

I was in the zone, chucking up clothes left right and centre then I got my wife, Camila's shirt and I put it up inside out. As I got to the next piece of clothing, I started thinking... Well, if she's going to get the clothes off the line tomorrow, then... she'll then have to turn the shirt inside out. I didn't want to burden her with this so I finished off the next piece of clothing, then went back, took it off the line and turned the shirt in the right way.

At that moment, I felt a strong feeling of love for my wife. And then I thought, should I share this moment with her? Or should I just leave it as a nice thought I had in my head. I thought, "No, I'll tell her!" I'll tell her...

So then I continued on putting the rest of the washing on the line and... it seemed that this was the first of her clothing that was to come out of the basket. And every other #%\$%*#@ piece of her clothing was inside out as well.

It was a tough slog - like I was walking in mud...

PS - And when I made it inside, it was pitch black.

In Parkdale, Victoria, Australia

One Big Drag

Many people have got a crazy Uncle. You know, one that's noticeably wilder than the rest of the family.

So, I was in the car with my wife with another couple of friends of ours to spend the weekend away on the beach at one of their Mum's summer houses. As we were rolling into town, they started asking each other whether uncle X would STILL be there. They hoped "No", but as we arrived and saw him on the front lawn half washing his car and half partying with his lady friend, answer was a big "Yes".

As we pulled in, everyone was full of smiles and we quickly gathered that he was on his way out. Phew. The guy was/is actually pretty jovial, so it was kinda fun having a beer with him.

During the trip from Porto Alegre, I'd told my friend that I had some nice Cuban cigars for us to smoke, so I pulled them out pretty soon after we arrived too.

So we're on the lawn and Uncle X asks my mate, "Mmmmm, what ya smoking there?" My mate tells him that's it was a Cuban and asked him if he'd like a toke. He said, "YES!" and proceeded to take the biggest drag I'd seen of a cigar, then drew it all back deep into his lungs, paused and then carefully let it all gush out.

Lungs of steel.

In Capão da Canoa - RS, Brazil

I Whooped That One Up

May this story be a lesson to any kids (or adults) reading this.

The lesson is this: NEVER drop a saying into a conversation without fully knowing what it means.

Back in 1992, I was at my Dad's place for the weekend and he'd gone out so it was just my step Mum and her home alone. It was time for my bed time and Jeannie was doing the right thing by helping me get settled in for bed. As she went to turn the lights out, she asked if I needed anything and I jokingly replied back with, "Everything's alright, let's make whoopy." I'd recently heard a song about making whoopy and I THOUGHT it meant to have some fun.

The moment Jeannie froze, I realised I'd said something wrong.

What had actually happened was a young, precocious (and opportunistic) 12 year old boy propositioning his Dad's new wife.

It wasn't until the following day that I realised what had happened. I was too embarrassed to apologise, and it was only this week - 24 years later - that I had the courage to bring it up.

She said she remembered it happening and hoped it was just a faux pas.

In 10 Cornborough Court, Frankston South, Victoria, Australia

The day Guns N Roses played at Calder Park - Before the Show

I showed early signs of an addictive personality disorder when I fell in love with GNR at the tail end of primary school.

As you can imagine, I was beside myself when I found out that GNR were going to come to play in Melbourne in Feb 1993 at the height of their fame. Wow. And to my good fortune, my eldest sister liked them, so we snapped up tickets and started counting down the days.

I was whipped into a frenzy just before the concert when they arrived in town, started appearing on the news and I can recall thinking, "Wow, Duff looks a lot different than in the pictures". It was only when I read in his book much later on that the then-26 year old was churning through 5 bottles of wine - just to take the edge off - per day.

On that magical day, we packed into my sister's blue Gemini and headed up to Calder Park for the show. It was a scorching, 40°C day which made the 1km long line to get in utterly gruelling. And to make matters worse, they announced at the end that no food or drink could be brought in and it had dumped in a pile. "Ahhh, so THAT was the pyramid structure I could see in the distance".

Once in, we nabbed a "prime position" so far away from the stage that GNR would have looked like ants through the scope of a sniper rifle.

Before the show, I recall water cost \$2 per cup so people resorted to breaking pipes. There was then a deluge of rain which meant I was cold AND sunburnt, plus I only recall enjoying the support bands when they were leaving the stage.

In 377 Calder Fwy, Calder Park, VIC, 3037, Australia

Ode to the Australian Huntsman spider

"Huntsman spiders, members of the family Sparassidae, are known by this name because of their speed and mode of hunting. They are total assholes."

- Wikipedia

Growing up in Australia, they're unfortunately a part of life. One moment you're feeling around for the light switch in the dark and nek minnit you're staring into one on the wall two inches away from your face.

I really like telling foreigners the story about my friend's sister who woke up in the morning with a massive Huntsman spread out across the middle of her face.

One story about them (that I know is true) revolves around my Dad when I was growing up. In our family home, all hell would break loose when a Huntsman was spotted on the ceiling.

"Get rid of it Dad!!!"

Now, anyone that's tried to get rid of a Huntsman know that they're slippery bastards. If you try and swat it with a newspaper, it's likely to tuck into the fold then leap out at you as soon as you say, "Maybe it disa-PPEARED!"

To get the job done, my Dad used to pull out the 10m long ducted vacuum (see above) which fires up when it gets connected to the wall and would nonchalantly walk up to the hairy beast and suck it up. I'll never forget the noise it made as our nemesis was sent down the tube. In fact, you could almost follow it along as completed the loop to loop.

And to put the final nail in the coffin, he'd sometimes chuck in a handful of stones for good measure.

In 116 Allison Rd, Mount Eliza, Victoria, Australia

All Tied Up in Brazil

Confused and drunk Australian tourist:

- "Where am I? What's going on?"

Attentive Brazilian doctor:

- "Garble garble garble garble"

Confused and drunk Australian tourist:

- "Arrrrrrrr!!!"

It was June 2014 and I was working as a local guide for an Australian touring group and I was having my last beer for the evening in readiness for the massive day ahead. All was going well until I got a phone call.

I was told that the police found an Australian sleeping outside a nightclub and they needed someone to help identify him. So I got to the hospital, spoke with a concerned nurse and as soon as I got into his ward, I "diagnosed" straight away that the guy was simply plastered.

I'm sure the guy has had more glamorous moments in his life because apparently he'd put up a bit of a struggle, so they decided to tie his arms and legs to opposite corners of the bed. And to add salt to the wound, he'd been stripped of his clothes and was wearing this weird looking, clear plastic nappy. Poor guy.

There had been stories about getting your kidneys stolen in Brazil, so could you imagine this guy coming to in an old hospital with everyone speaking in tongues? WTF indeed.

We managed to coax out of his hotel which lead us to his travel mate who'd been freaking (the hell) out waiting up for him. And with him on his way down to the hospital, it was 5am and time to go.

As I shut the door to the ward behind me, all I could hear was, "Where am I? What's going on?". For the millionth time...

In Porto Alegre - RS, Brazil

Careful Partying With Mad Frenchmen

During my time in London, I made some great friends and had some pretty crazy times.

One of my best friends was John from France who was/is an amazing chef. If we were heading to his place for dinner on a Saturday night, he'd wake up at the crack of dawn that morning and head to the secret fish market where he'd pick up an ice box full of fresh seafood.

One night, we went back at his apartment after having a messy evening on the town which was situated just opposite Stamford Bridge in Fulham.

We all wanted to kick on and continue with the party, but one of his French mates had gone too hard and decided to have a snooze in the middle of the lounge room.

To demonstrate John's disgust, he walked into the next room and came back in with this absolute mother of a crab. With a wicked grin on his face, he sought our advice about whether he should use Mr Crab to wake "Captain Snooze" up.

The above pic captures the moment JUST before his mate let out a scream that would have given Ned Flanders a run for his money.

Psychos.

In 471 Fulham Rd, Fulham, London, United Kingdom

Bumblebee Is Hurt (1986)

This is one of my earliest memories from primary school.

Thanks to the new Optimus Prime toy I'd brought to school, I was admitted into the Transformers group.

We were all busily doing our own thing with some kicking up dust, others having wars and the poor lonely souls without Transformers looking on as we had a ball.

Even though I don't remember why, I disliked Boy X (I forget his name). He was kind of a smartass to me which was probably made worse because he had Bumblebee which was yellow and cool.

So we're all playing along and all you could hear was, "Ahhhhh Crasssshhhhh", or "I'm gonna get you Decepticon!".

Then Boy X yells out, "Ahhh! Bumblebee is hurt!". And we all play along, "That's OK Bumblebee, we'll come and help you! Ahhhhh Crasssshhhhh"

"Nooooo!" :FIGHTING BACK THE TEARS:

"Bumblebee's really broken...." :CRYING NOW:

We all looked around to see Boy X holding a decrepit looking Bumblebee who was now missing an arm.

With Boy X now inconsolable, Optimus Prime and I took it as our cue to get the hell out of there.

In Derinya Drive, Frankston South, Victoria, Australia

Unfortunate Wardrobe Malfunctions

I've had a gut-full of wardrobe malfunctions during work hours.

The first major breakdown I had was in 2007 when I travelled to Buenos Aires to train up a sales team in Rosario which was 2 hours away by bus. My meeting was first thing in the morning and I caught the last bus arriving late.

At one of the stops enroute, I somehow ripped the zipper clean off my slacks coming out of the mens. Having travelled light, I didn't have a spare meaning I'd have to spend the next day giving presentations "in the wind".

Kinda resigned in defeat, I found a bobby pin and thought it'd be my only hope. So I slotted in the über-sharp implement at the half-way point, and prayed it'd stay put. Thank god it did and I really only had to manage my angles to ensure the flaps of my pin stripes fly region was on show.

So this nasty beast reared it's head again today. With a day of presentations planned and ready to go, I went down to pick up a pen and "REEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEP".

My lord I thought to myself... To my colleague's credit, he [a] didn't hear the loud-as-a-cough ripping sound and/or [b] laugh and point at me.

With the coast seemingly clear, I then thought of three things, "How do I get outta here", "What colour jocks did I wear today?", and "How do I hide this massive hole I've made".

So I gave my presentation facing the audience kinda like the moon faces Earth (like a boss) and then went to the toilet to inspect the crater-sized hole I'd made. See the pic above for proof of what's left of my soon-to-be-binned trousers...

So I hear the Paleo diet's a good way to lose a little weight. Any comments on that?

In 453 Nepean Highway, Frankston, Victoria, Australia

My Mud Princess from Glastonbury

Today marks 8 years since my wife, Camila, and I had a ball at Glastonbury. She was METICULOUS about not getting any dirt on her, which was impossible given the downpour. If she got flicked with a bit of mud, she'd get the wet wipes out.

So.... we were rushing at night to get to a band and poor old Camila took a step where she shouldn't have and BAM. She became my mud princess.

Above are some pics of her coping at that moment.

In Glastonbury BA6 9HD, United Kingdom

My brush in with Doc Wheildon

If you don't know who Doc Wheildon is, he's an AFL footballer that played for Fitzroy and showed glimpses of brilliance in the early 1990's.

He was known as being a bit of a showman and getting reported on multiple occasions for wacking opponents. I recall watching him at Princes Park where he was on fire, taking speckies and kicking freaky goals. I have to say that he was one of my favourite non-Richmond players!

Unfortunately his career was cut short in 1995 when he ran into the path of a car at 4am outside a nightclub. I think there may have been some alcohol involved...

Fast forward to 2000 and I am playing football for Morwell Tigers in the old Gippsland Latrobe Football League. The day had come to play against Wonthaggi and guess who was in their line-up. The Doc!

I must admit, I was a bit star struck and daunted at the prospect of playing against him. But everything was put aside once the "white line" fever kicked in and he was just another player. He seemed to struggle a bit, taking too long to get rid of the ball and didn't have much of an effect on the game. In the 3rd quarter, he went to run for the ball and unfortunately his hamstring gave away. Game over.

As he was hobbling from the field, the ball was booted from the backline and bobbled towards him. He was almost off the field and I could see the indecision in his mind. But he could see no opponents around him, so he gingerly picked up the ball and looked around to hand-pass it to a team mate.

What he HADN'T seen was my mate Tubby. He was sprinting at him from behind and smashed him into the ground with a hard tackle. He took too long. The ball spilled clear and, just like in the cartoons, all I could see was the Doc's fists and dust flying everywhere. Haha.

Even though we lost that day, I owe him a thanks for putting on one last show.

In 60 Korumburra-Wonthaggi Rd, Wonthaggi, Victoria, Australia

No Train of Thought

This week I was returning home after a long day at the office by train and put on a memorable display.

During this particular journey, I was busily reading my book and couldn't help but notice when a guy got up and went to exit the train at one of the stops. He tried to open the door, and nothing happened. As the train shuffled off, I felt sorry for the guy because he'd missed his train and looked like a bit of a dick in front of me.

"Uh wait a second", I thought, perhaps the door wouldn't open! "Oh no, poor bugger. That would be horrible if that happened to me!"

As we pulled into the next station, and I put my book down and watched with interest to see if he got shafted once again.

"BEEEEEEEEEP", the train made the right noise this time and out he popped.

I returned back to my book and read like a maniac for the remainder of the journey. In fact, even as the train was pulling in to Bentleigh station, I was still at it til the very last moment.

So the train stopped, I leapt up gathering my things and then made my way out recalling the poor fella who'd just missed his stop.

The beep went off, I tried to open the door - but it wasn't budging. There were two guys sitting right there, and I let out a, "Ahhh, it's jammed and won't let me out!"

And as one of the guys leapt out of his seat to help me, my macho side took over and I reefered open the door with a lot of my might.

As I was about to squeeze myself through the crack I'd made for myself, it was at the moment that I looked down at the bare tracks, rocks and nasty looking drop that I realised I'd gone to exit the wrong side of the train.

What a dick.

In Bentleigh, Victoria, Australia

The Nudist Beach in Croatia Incident

"Hey guys! Apparently we're about to sail passed a nudist beach!"

At this very moment in mid 2007, I was on a sail boat tour in Croatia with my (now) wife, enjoying some cold beers when one of our new friends shared the piece of intel he'd just received from our skipper. With 80% of the tour being made up by young and single males, this announcement was met with loud cheers.

As our boat pulled into the inlet, it looked promising with with a beach dotted with volleyball courts and we could even make out a couple of groups of people frolicking about in the water.

However....

As we got closer, we could make out that the nudist beach was full of middle aged European men sporting gold chains and matted chests.

One group had taken some particular interest in collecting shells from the sea floor and were in the shallows busily scouring for treasures. It was at that moment when one of the guys turned his attention towards collecting rocks. Heavy rocks.

We had one man up to his ankles with his backside facing towards our boat. He bends down to pick up what looked like boulder with his legs wide apart - presumably to muster up some extra strength. And as he stressed and strained away, we in the packed top deck of the boat saw muscles that we didn't know existed.

I guess it served us right for not knowing when to look away. It cost us our appetites and years of mental scarring...

So he may have failed in dislodging that rock from the sea floor that day, but we know he tried his very best.

In Dubrovnik, Croatia

Getting robbed at knifepoint in Brazil.

It finally happened. After a combined total of 2.5 years living in Brazil, I got robbed last week. Yay... Almost all of my Brazilian friends have been robbed in the past, so I guess my number just came up.

It was around 21:00, I was coming back home after inspecting a venue for an event and I was on my guard because the area I was walking through has a bad reputation. I was about to hit the main road near a shopping centre and then I noticed two men walk around the corner towards me. It seems strange that they were walking together but with 2m between them. I kept my eyes on them and felt this powerful wave of emotion as I realised that it was happening. As they got to within 10m of me, they broke into a jog and before I knew it they were both in my face. The one on the right was sporting a shabby beard and he calmly told me that I needed to give him everything before showing a fishing knife tucked in his pants. "Pretend like we're JUST talking OK?"

I rapidly snapped into action emptying out my wallet which contained around \$60 in notes. They were looking extremely nervous so I didn't want to upset them in any way. I opened up my jacket to show them that I had nothing else and they thought this may attract attention so he told me to not do that again. I then found another \$15 in my front pocket and gave that to them as well. I did this because I've heard of people getting killed for lying... They were kind of agitated and I could feel it was about to end then one remembered to ask me for my phone. By luck or otherwise, I didn't have it on me. So, how do I tell this to them I thought. I told them that I honestly didn't have one on me and thank god that they believed me and kind of moved on. I was then free to go and they both told me not to yell or call the police - or else.

What a way to spend 45 seconds.

With the ordeal over, I had to walk the 2km home because I had no money for the bus. And during this walk, I gave a lot of thought about what had happened. Do I feel sorry for them? How many times have they done it? Why do they do it? How can this happen so close to my home?

I then thought about how this would affect my persona here. Will I start feeling insecure? And based on my forays outside in the last few days, I do feel paranoid. In fact I now know why Brazilians always freak out when I'm running on the side-walk behind them...

But I've decided to be resilient about all of this. I'm proud of the way I acted in the situation. And if it happened again, I'd happily trade USD\$30 for my life. I'm not going to stop exploring Brazil!

In Rua Comendador Coruja, 366-420, Floresta, RS 90220-180, Brazil

Birds and the Bees

I don't have any kids right now but I do enjoy other people's kids. However, I prefer to return them to their rightful owners when they become physically or emotionally painful.

Last week, I was playing a local support role for a large group of Australian supporters who came to Brazil to watch the three World Cup group matches and I had an awkward encounter with a 12 year old boy.

He had a cheeky grin on his face and told me that he'd just learned how to say, "shit" in Portuguese. I then prompted him by asking, "Well tell me then!" and he responded proudly with, "Porra".

Even though he was pretty much spot on, I find this expression to be a real paradox because it directly translates to "sperm". Don't you think it's strange that you have Brazilian men yelling this word at each other when they're ready to explode with anger? It would never work in English....

Anyway, I decided to enlighten him somewhat and I said, "Do you know that porra means sperm?" He looked at me kinda puzzled and asked, "What's sperm?" "Oh shit", I thought. Looking over to his Dad, I nervously suggested that he ask his Dad what this was and rapidly got the hell out of there.

In São Paulo, Brazil

Bitten On The Ass By Stand Up Comedy

As definitely one of the weirdest things I've done in my life, I started doing stand-up comedy here in Brazil last year. It's as good as a learning experience as it is a challenge. I'm not up there with the best. But I don't suck either.

So yesterday, I did a show in the afternoon for the local newspaper and I decided to add in a little story in which paints Brazilians as being soft asses when it comes to pranks. If some of the pranks my Aussie mates have pulled off happened here, I'm sure that violence and/or police would be involved. To illustrate my point, I shared a story about the time my friend snuck into his friend's hotel room and shat into the shower head - before kindly replacing it. #brown #pasta

Here is where the irony starts. Afterwards I was at a cool party which was absolutely packed. I was busy chatting with a couple of friends, when this guy came up to me, passed me his cup and asks if I'd like some "champagne". Accepting drinks from strangers here is the norm, so I didn't hesitate holding the outstretched clear plastic cup. As soon as I held it, I noted that it was about 39°C (100°F), and decidedly flat for champagne.

This guy just handed me a cup of his piss!

I immediately handed it back to him and he started to walk away slowly - even mouthing off a little. That is when I nearly broke my teeth from over-clenching as I stared at his goofy looking mug and contemplated my next move. He clearly deserved to receive punishment for this act. But what sort of mess would brawling cause in a crowded party? What if he had a gun/knife?

During the next 15 min, I calmed down and convinced myself that by choosing peace, I'd reached a higher level of, what do you call it, enlightenment?

I reckon even Ghandi would have hulked up and crammed that cup of piss down his scrawny looking throat though.

In Av. Ipiranga, 3850, Praia de Belas, Porto Alegre - Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil

Confusing Kissing Culture

While growing up in Australia, it was perfectly accepted to greet a friend of the opposite sex with a not-too-firm handshake. I guess you could say things are a little different here in Brazil when I'm currently living.

When meeting someone from the opposite sex, you have to guess whether it's going to be one, two or three greeting kisses. A lot of the time, it comes down to guess work.

Sometimes someone is left hanging.

I've seen people butt heads.

I've butted heads.

Once I didn't get a hover kiss.

After doing the math, I can once remember stressing out the moment I realised I was to be the last on a long list of men who would be planting a juicy one on the new party guest. I probably had nowhere to run.

For work, I once travelled down to Argentina and quickly gathered that it's a custom for the local men to give each other a greeting kiss as well. I've got no moral problem with this, but I just find it could makes things weird. Could you imagine having to give Daryl from IT a daily kiss at the coffee machine? Or in the elevator. I think it could cause strikes.

Anyway, after I finished up my work and prepared to leave, I went to say goodbye to the General Manager and.... I crossed new boundaries. I went in for the handshake and he planted a peck on my cheek. Although my blood pressure spiked, I followed it up with a blokey sounding "ADIOS", as I left to get my bus.

A few months later, I returned for another visit and spent a good lot of the trip thinking about the goodbye (ritual). Come to think of it, I spent far too time. But when the time came, I followed my Mum's advice and was calm, cool and collected.

This time, I went for the full hug and left hand cheek kiss combo. And there was none of that hovering rubbish - that's for girls!

In Rosario, Santa Fé, Argentina

Beware of Internet Translators

When I worked for a publisher in London, part of my job involved sending promotional material to a distributor of ours in Dubai. So one day I carefully made up a package of fliers and decided to go the extra yard by using a web-based translator to write the message; "Delicate, Do Not Bend" in Arabic on the front of the envelope - and off the package went in the mail.

So I called them up the next week to ensure it had arrived safely and they confirmed its' receipt - with a chuckle...

"Why are you laughing", I asked.

To which my contact replied:

"Hahahaha. Because when the package arrived, it had "NO TRANSLATION FOUND" in big letters on the front. Thanks for giving the office a laugh."

Whoops.

In Bermondsey, London, United Kingdom

Surviving an avalanche in Brazil

I had just arrived in Porto Alegre (2008) with my girlfriend and happily took up the invitation of one of her friend's, Leandro, to watch a game of football.

Once we arrived at the stadium, Leandro told me to watch out for Grêmio's world famous "avalanche". "Huh?", I asked in my broken Portuguese.

"When a goal is scored, just RUUUN!", he said smiling.

"Okaaaay"

To set the scene, all of the fanatics are placed in an area directly behind the goals where there is no seating. It's just an upward slant of concrete slabs filled to the brim with supporters screaming songs and profanities towards the referees. I surveyed the scene and got a little nervous knowing that we were right in the middle.

The game started and within the first 10 min, there was a penalty to Grêmio.

The moment the ball hit the net, it was like a trapdoor opened letting millions of litres of water gush out as everyone surged forward towards the bottom of the stand as one. I was bounding from step to step, desperately trying not to lose my flip flops and/or balance because falling over would have resulted in cheese-grater-like grazes all over my body. It reminded me of getting off/on a packed train in London - but at 20km/h.

Thankfully unscathed, I made the 20m trip to the bottom and it was high tens all round with randoms hugging randoms. Absolute bedlam.

This was nothing like I'd EVER witnessed. To get an idea, watch this vid.

In Largo dos Campeões, 1, Medianeira, Porto Alegre - Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil

The dangers of cliff jumping in Jamaica

Warning: The subject of this story has not been named and will have probably already forgotten about the incident.

About two months ago, I visited Rick's Cafe in Jamaica. It's a beautiful cliff top bar overlooking crystal clear waters. It's as close to paradise as you'll get.

One of the big attractions is the 10m (35 feet) diving platform where everyone is allowed to jump off in full view of the bar.

This also provides everyone else with a bit of entertainment because it's a looong way down.

Up to the stage stands, Girl X. Girl X is 20 something years old, very pretty and demonstrating some nervousness before making the leap. Everyone can sense this fear which doubles - and then triples - her audience within moments.

Girl X notices the attention and, against her better judgement, takes the leap. The crowd cheers as she slams into the water below with an unglamorous, BOOM! As the dishevelled looking girl resurfaced, the large crowd's clapping abruptly stops and everyone let out a collective, "Wuoh!".

Floating around her were two fillets from her bikini and a big (mostly) white tampon.

To pour salt into the wound, she had to make a time consuming trek through the water and up the windy stairs to get outta there.

In West End Road, Negril, Westmoreland Parish, Jamaica

Black bears and golden rules

Although my wife and I were excited about being in the beautiful Sequoia National Park, we were a little nervous spending our first night in "bear country".

Dutifully following the required protocol, we stowed all of our scented items in the lockable bins to ensure we wouldn't get "carjacked" overnight. After all, this was going to be our place of rest for the night and we were informed by the ranger that it would take minimal effort for them to get in if their hunger levels demanded.

Once it got late, we collected our toiletries and cautiously walked the 50m by torchlight to the toilets. "Okay", I thought, now let's just go to bed after we'd finished up.

We took a few steps then witnessed an adult black bear bound away from us at a rapid pace. I was frightened because it was faster than I could run!

We returned straight away to the safety of the bathrooms not knowing whether there were more behind him - or whether he was after us! My poor wife was in hysterics and she didn't want to leave. I looked around out our stinky bush toilet and thought that this aint gonna be our place of rest for the night!

The useful thing I had learned was that they're scared of loud noise, so I said I'd rush to the car and then come back here. Camila didn't like that idea. I pushed forward with it anyhow and found that she'd decided to join me in my half run, half NKOTB-style stomping dance towards the car.

We made it safely, locked the doors and let out HUGE sighs of relief.

In Sequoia National Park, Three Rivers, CA

Worst first date

When I was around 14, I was feeling happy with myself having snared a date with a pretty girl I'd met. She asked whether I'd like to ride horses with her on the coming weekend, and I agreed without hesitation.

On the Saturday morning, I arrived at the agreed spot on time and noticed that all of her cliquy mates were joining in too. Okay.

I was directed to jump on the back of the horse where my friend was sitting and got up with dignity in tact. However, that was when things started going downhill.

I was nestled in the back of the reins holder in a pretty tight spooning position. Not much room to move.

The relaxed bubble I was in was obliterated when I felt (and heard) a sharp and crisp :PARP: come from my lady friend up front.

This was well within earshot of her adoring friends who, within 0.7sec of the blast, had eyes trained on us. Instead of owning up to the crime, my lady friend decided to laugh and blame the mess on me.

She certainly succeeded in making me look like a sad young man with an active case of irritable bowel syndrome. In any case, we trotted off on the horse to the tune of controlled sniggers.

To top things off, she then leaned back, by my stiff neck a kiss and whispered, "Got ya".

I never have any luck with horses.

In Baxter, Victoria, Australia

Who said Brazilians take their football seriously...

While living in Brazil, an opportunity came up to head along to watch Grêmio play a crucial away fixture against Internacional - their fierce inner-city rival. It sounded like fun...

So I met my friend near Gremio's home stadium for a pre-match beer and this is where I learned that we'd be getting a police escort for the 3.5km walk to Inter's ground. Okay then...

The time came to head to the meeting point which included about 20 cops in riot gear riding horses clad in matching apparel. All of the police moved to their positions which was meant to provide "protection" from the front, back and sides.

Without much of a wait, about 500 of us Grêmio supporters pressed forward making our blue-coloured beeline towards the ground through the back streets to avoid the Inter supporters who were also on their pilgrimage to the ground.

I knew we were in their territory due to the abuse that was yelled at us from people on the apartment balconies - which were bursting with banners and flags all matching Inter's red. It wasn't one-way traffic with our guys returning insults and even dedicating a cheeky one fingered salutes back up.

Our group moved a bit like an accordion with moments when the police leading us had to stop to avoid a clash with groups of chanting Inter supporters. And as we approached the stadium, the crowds had dispersed thanks to an especially created no man's land. Into the packed stadium we went.

"Okay, what happens next?", I thought to myself.

In Avenida Padre Cacique, 891, Praia de Belas, Porto Alegre - Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil

Sin Alcohol - From hero to zero

I was in a hostel with three other friends and I decided to be Mr Nice Guy by offering to collect the groceries and drinks for our planned feast later that night.

Down the supermarket, I had no problems selecting the food but was indecisive when it came to drinks. When I saw some reasonably priced bottles of Shiraz, I thought, "They'll do me", and popped a couple in the basket. What do I buy for the boys... Hmm. Scouring the aisles, my eyes lit up when I saw a pile of beer cans stacked up in the middle which were a bargain at around €1 each. BINGO!

I returned back to the hostel, dutifully put the beers in the freezer and got started on the dinner. I'd finished my first bottle when the guys arrived and ordered them to get a nice n' cold beer from the fridge as I cooked the dinner.

Given the beers had been warm and the freezer was "sin" power, they started complaining about [a] the taste of the local lager and [b] the lukewarm temperature.

After they'd finished at least a couple each and I was well onto my 2nd bottle, I inspected the cans to see what all of the fuss was about. I could read "Pilsner" but I burst out in laughter as I identified the words; "Sin Alcohol" meaning alcohol free.

With Shiraz fuelling my thought patterns, I forgot that I was the jerk who bought them and proudly announced that they were drinking alcohol free beer*! Uh wait a second...

*My Father-in-law says drinking this is like "dancing with your sister".

With the cat (s) out of bag, my sober friends managed to pour the beers out WHILE simultaneously delivering punches and insults.

Whoops.

In San Sebastian, Spain

Hungry street seller in Hanoi

As bad luck would have it, whenever you're not interested in buying something while in Asia, you'll be guaranteed to have every vendor make a magnetic beeline towards you. They'll be trying to sell you food, drinks, sin (wide variety), and/or shonky looking trinkets.

On this occasion, I was in Hanoi with two good friends and we'd completed an afternoon of exploring the über busy and beautiful old town on foot. We were navigating our way through the streets and I felt a hankering for some of those delicious, bite sized "dwarf bananas".

It was now the hunters becoming the hunted - but I couldn't find anyone! After some unsuccessful searching, my eyes lit up and I flagged down a middle aged woman who was balancing her wares with a wooden board across her shoulders.

Knowing they would be dirt cheap anyway, I took control of the situation and asked her if I could sample one of her bananas to make sure they were in season and in good shape. After eating most of the (delicious) banana in one bite, I asked her how much and then paid on the spot.

However, I didn't want to litter and asked her whether she had a bin for the banana skin. I'm not sure whether she understood my question 100% because she grabbed the almost-finished banana from me, quickly gobbled down the rest, threw it on the ground and then took off.

With that little bit of sustenance in her belly, she was already off looking for her next customer.

I think we bonded though.

In Hanoi, Vietnam

The Pamplona-Barcelona Saga

The situation: Shannon, Craig, Mike & I wake up in a hostel with massive hangovers in San Sebastian & trudge our way to the bus station to head to Barcelona.

We got to the bus station, worked out that everyone else had the same idea & that we couldn't get a ticket! Hmmm. One of the guys had the idea of hiring a car &, with it being the same rough cost per person, we took it as our only & best solution.

We all piled into the car with our packs & set off on the 600km journey. This represented the first time we'd driven on the "wrong" (or, right) hand side of the road so that was an interesting challenge. Also, Craig hadn't driven a manual for years which provided some laughs when he stalled at the toll with the gate hanging precariously above our car.

We FINALLY got the outskirts of Barcelona & were greeted by a nasty traffic jam. With Shannon's skilled hands now at the wheel, we edged closer & decided to find a park so we could find accomms for the night. As he went to take a right, a car cut us off causing us to slow - which caused a guy on a Scooter behind us to get catapulted into our car thanks to being hit from behind by a 4WD.

So now, we've got police everywhere & a damaged rental. With my pigeon Spanglish, I managed to get what I thought was a police report. In the meantime, Craig had found some accomms so we were off. When we learned the car rental place wasn't going to slug us for the damage, the saga was over.

The 1st beer that night tasted SO good.

In Barcelona, Spain

Revenge Gone Wrong

When I was young, we used to go visit some family friends of ours in the country. I had a bit of a crush on the girl (Lisa) who was my age which probably contributed to a bit of an outburst . You see, my Dad was fooling around and half-dacked (pulled down my pants) me as a bit of a joke which may have exposed my "undies" to Lisa. This set me right off. I'm pretty sure I cried in the other room for a good few minutes! In my absence, there was a bit of a conference and it was agreed that I would feel happier if I saw my Dad get dacked. Go figure. They enlisted Brett, Lisa's older brother, to be the fake "dacker" and everything was set up fine. I returned to the room and immediately the act started with Dad standing there with hands on his hips as Brett "snuck" up behind him getting ready to latch on. Brett jumped onto the top of Dad's jeans which sprung him into action as he gave a fake "Arrrrr". At this point, Brett used all of his brute force which surprised Dad enough that he lost his grip and, despite Dad's best belated efforts, everything (and Brett) fell to the floor exposing all of his junk to everyone assembled in the room. Now THAT cheered me up.

In Fernihurst, Victoria, Australia

Deception at Christmas time

We were all young and naive once right?

During my early years, I used to spend most afternoons at my mate Rob's place who conveniently lived a few doors down the road. He had 2 older (twin) brothers who clearly enjoyed having a lend of our imagination.

We were 5 and very much looking forward to Santa's arrival in the coming weeks. The "evil twins" decided to sit us down and tell us something horrible they'd done the year before. Something that may affect Santa's ability to deliver presents that coming year....

They recounted that the previous Christmas they'd decided to patiently stay up all night and wait for Santa and the Elves to arrive at their house with large sized garbage bags at the ready.

And at the moment when the Elves came in the house to do Santa's dirty work, "SWOOOOP", they captured the 2 elves in the garbage bags and then buried them.

"Oh the horror!", I thought to myself. I was shaken to the core.

With this sad update, I remember Rob and I slinking out of the room - which probably coincided with his brothers giving each other high fives.

Rather than show fear for his brothers (aka "murderers"), I think I was more upset at the prospect of Santa not delivering the goods that Christmas. #shallow

In Allison Road, Mount Eliza, Victoria, Australia

Helium balloon mishap

I can remember being at a birthday party and having my first helium balloon experience. I was having a whale of a time, sucking out the gas and making everyone laugh with my cool sounding "jockey" voice.

If only I'd known when to stop....

It seemed as though we were running out of balloons so I pounced at the opportunity when I saw one tucked away in a box. Without hesitation, I ripped off the top, put my lips around the end and eagerly took in about a litre of human air. Ugh.

It's still probably the most disgusting experience I've ever had and I can still remember the foul "taste".

In 1281 Nepean Highway, Cheltenham, Victoria, Australia

Chaos before the Grêmio v Internacional game in Brazil

My wife is from Rio Grande do Sul which has around 11 million passionate football fans who are mad about either Grêmio or Internacional. While living there, I got a ticket to the "Grenal" which is the name of the fixture when the fierce rivals clash. I was instructed by my friend Leandro to meet on the corner 2 hours before the game so we can prepare. He is a Grêmio fan. By preparing, he meant drinking beer. When I got to the meeting point, the street was absolutely full & the cars attempting to get through were in gridlock. Without pause, Leandro handed me my cup & I began... erm, preparing! It was cool catching up with Leandro's friends & I even started to get used to the policemen walking by with their full riot gear on carrying their shotguns.

I noticed some commotion on the road &, through the sea of blue Grêmio shirts, I saw that someone had "stupidly" decided to pass through this road in a taxi wearing their distinctively red Internacional shirt. I don't know whether he flashed his middle finger at the mob - but his cab got showered in beer bottles all the same. This sharp movement attracted the eyes of the police who stormed over & started firing off their super loud (blank ammunition) rounds into the crowd. In terms of crowd dispersion, I had never seen anything so effective! With the space now clear to pass, the taxi limped on it's way - complete with police guard. And once the dust settled, we quickly got back to our pre-game preparation activities. Wow.

In Rua Afonso Pena, 244, Porto Alegre - Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil

The Light At The End Of The Tunnel Is A Train

While living in London, I was lucky enough to have a cool friendship with a French girl called Christine. We met at a Cut Copy gig in around 2005, started chatting about music and become pals. The main game was introducing one another to cool bands and one day she made me listen to a song called "Leave Them All Behind" by an English guy called Whitey. "Wow, this is trèèèè BIEN", I immediately thought to myself. After rapidly purchasing the album, I became pretty infatuated with his work so waited patiently for his 2nd album. And waited. I started to wonder what the hell was going on! Had he quit music?

And then, out of nowhere, his MySpace page came back to life in 2010 and he announced a new album. Around about this time, I noticed random songs of his popping up on YouTube and I did some searching to find out something REALLY intense.

This guy had completed his 2nd album in 2007, was in the process of trying to sell it to a label when everything was brought undone by someone who'd leaked a copy of the album online. At that exact moment, record companies pulled the trapdoor lever and his contract was ripped up. This left him seemingly stunned and with bills to pay. I can only imagine what he would have gone through.

However, the good news is that he's now using the Internet to sell direct to fans, has since re-released that album and one of his songs ("Stay on the Outside") was heard by millions after it was featured during the last season of "Breaking Bad".

In London, United Kingdom

Revenge on the school bully

This story is dedicated to anyone that's ever been bullied.

When I was in my first year of high school, my (tiny) friends and I had to deal with a bully who used to target us on the school bus. At that time, home economics (cooking) was a compulsory subject for us and our bully could smell cookies! Starting at the front, he marched down the centre eyeing off any of the young ones nervously holding any food containers. That day, I was proud to show off my baked treats because I'd made quite a large mistake that day. We were tasked with baking biscuits which required 1tb of bicarb soda and 1 cup of sugar. Through lack of awareness/experience, I got the two mixed up and cooked up an awful concoction. Ugh.

As the bully came past me, I sheepishly offered him the contents of my crinkled paper bag which he didn't hesitate tucking into. He didn't take the whole bag (damn!) but he did scoff down two in quick succession.

As soon as he moved on to his next target, I let out the broadest of grins on the inside.

I wonder how long it took for him to stop burping...

In Canadian Bay Road, Mount Eliza, Victoria, Australia

Making beds in the army (Jan - Mar 2000)

During the university/college break, I decided to join the army reserves with 4 mates & go through the initial boot camp over our break. When I got there, we were immediately "broken" & built back up in the way that the army deemed fit. It was an intense experience.

Of a morning, we'd have 30sec from the hollar of the corporal before we had to wake up & present ourselves in front of our room with our bottom sheet on our left shoulder. After we'd all arrived (in time!!), we were instructed that we'd have 2-5min to complete our 1st morning task of perfectly making the bed - complete with a hospital corner and, after we'd all finished & reassembled, there would be an inspection where every bed would be looked over for any traces of tardiness. If ANY bed wasn't "squared away", everyone would have to return in 15sec with their bottom sheet on their left shoulder.

One such morning during about the 75% mark, I believe they tried to re-break us after we'd had a good run (see: gaining our 1st lots of praise) by being especially harsh. After the first round of making our beds & returning, they made us try again. And then ONE more. During the 3rd go, we were so flat but focussed on the annoying task at hand. Even though the tone of the corporal's voice was maxing out during his 3rd inspection, we were given justice at the end as he informed us that we'd passed. However, we'd been wasting time so we'd now have 20min less to clean up, get ready & eat breakfast.

Sheesh.

In Kapooka, New South Wales, Australia

NO EXPERIENCE NECESSARY = Beware!

After university, I drove 1800km up to Brisbane for a bit of a working holiday. Having no experience, I became frustrated at the lack of interest my resume was gathering so I pounced on this plum-looking Marketing & Sales job which read "NO EXPERIENCE NECESSARY". I immediately got on the phone & was offered an interview that day. I nailed the interview & was asked whether I'd be available the next day for a trial. Although it wasn't clear what they actually sold, I turned up at 7am the next day & met up with my two "trainers" who explained that we were going to head down the Gold Coast. After asking exactly what the company sold, I got a convoluted answer back & my heart sunk when I realised that we were going to be selling miscellaneous goods (see: crap) to workers in an industrial estate. Now, I was 50km from home & carrying an arm full of giant fly swatters for my "trainers". Their strategy was to walk into the workplace, interrupt everyone & run through their specials of the day. I thought I was going to get beaten up at one stage when we walked into a meat processing factory and our spiel was cut off half way by this massive guy who stormed over to shut him up. As he was forcing us to clear off, he looked at me & said "so these guys showing you the ropes are they?". At least I had a fly swatter to defend myself! Anyway, I trudged through the streets for the whole day & let the guys know at the end that [a] I respect their hard work but [b] this aint for me.

In Luscombe, Queensland, Australia

Embarrassment in the Amazon

While living in Brazil in 2009, I was lucky enough to have my Mum over for a visit up to the Amazon. The tours through the river were fantastic and one component of the trip was an overnight stay with some locals. Accessible only by boat, we arrived in the late afternoon with a couple of English guys and met our new hosts at the river bank.

I had been in the country for about a year at this stage, so I was happy to have a bit of a chat with the locals and work as the pseudo translator as they showed us their garden and house.

That night, they cooked us a great meal and everything was going just fine until I decided to say "Mmmm, this bread tastes greeeeeat" as a complement. There was a moment of silence and then the hosts erupted in wild laughter.

You see, I'd mispronounced the word for bread (pao instead of the nasal sounding pão) which meant I said, "Mmmm, this dick tastes greeeeeat" - putting a whole new twist on the night. It took me a moment to pick up my faux pax and, finding it hilarious, I told the English speakers what I'd just said. Funny gringo...

In Manaus - Amazonas, Brazil

Hetty's mine!

On summer break from university, I worked night shift at my uncle's factory and met some interesting characters. My favourite was a Vietnamese guy called Eric who was always smiling and great for an entertaining one-liner.

One day, I was unpacking boxes in one of the storage rooms with him and this lovely (old) lady called Hetty who was a look alike for Margaret Thatcher.

We were bustling away and then all of a sudden, the lights went out and we were stuck in sudden darkness. Hetty was dealing with the situation the best she could and said, "I'm operating by touch guys," to which Eric bellowed out, "HETTY'S MINE!".

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In Braeside, Victoria, Australia

Thankfully lost in translation

During our visit to Ilha Bela (in Brazil), my wife and I decided to check out a beach where this secluded surfing community lives. This place (Porto Bonete) is totally isolated, not accessible by car and is so small it's not on Google Maps!

We set off on our 10km walk through the beautiful national park stopping by a number of amazing waterfalls along the way.

Anyway, we finally arrived at Bonete after 3hr of walking and were greeted with the sight of the locals surfing the 6ft breaks. However, we were tired and didn't want to stick around as there wasn't much else to do there so Camila set upon asking the locals how we could return up the coast to our camping area.

It so happened that a local fisherman was about to make a voyage and we (plus 4 other Brazilian women) chucked in a couple of R\$ and it was all set.

The 1st surprise was understanding that we had to paddle through the breakers in a 3-man canoe to dock with the small fishing boat.

Once we got going, the 2nd surprise our boat rapidly filling with water. When he became aware of this, our trusty skipper balanced his way to the centre of the boat and set upon fixing the leak. He instructed one of the passengers to hold a rag in place as he jammed it into the hull. As he was about half way through, she smiled and asked him "what will happen if I let it go?". To which he replied straight back, "we will sink".

Thankfully I didn't understand that. With that saga over, we then continued on to hit a nice thunderstorm (see pic) with rain hitting us from all angles as he wove in and out of (seemingly) hidden rocks. At various moments, I looked towards the shore to see how easily we could climb up the vertical - cliff face in case we fell out.

My nerves only settled once our boat spluttered into our familiar cove. I was so relieved, I felt like kissing the sand when we arrived.

In Ilha Bela, Ilhabela - São Paulo, Brasil

The worst of my two aborted plane landings in Brazil

While living in Brazil, I was unlucky enough to experience two last-minute aborted landings. The worst of which happened when I was about to touch down in Rio.

It had been a very early start for me as I got the flight from Porto Alegre at around 6am and I spent most of the time sleeping uncomfortably on my window seat. I was so disinterested in being awake that I even chose to have another quick snooze even though I could see that we were fast approaching landing. I was half drifting off and contently expecting the landing at any moment when - WHOA - the plane sharply took off leaving my stomach on the runway strip. Now I was clutching the hand rest and fully awake! I think this may have been standard practice because there was no announcement and no look of panic for my fellow passengers. We then spent the next 15 minutes flying in circles until we finally made a safe landing. Pheuw. As I left the plane, I asked the attendant at the front what happened and she told me to wait there for a moment as she grabbed the attention of one of the pilots who was leaving as well. He told me that the landing was aborted due to a big gust of wind which came from nowhere and that he had to make a last minute decision. I then asked him, "so.... how close was it?" and he replied, "it was right at the critical moment" with a broad grin. I was a happy man stepping foot on solid ground after that experience.

In Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

Tourists getting punk'd in Venice

I enjoy being a bystander in amusing situations. One highlight was when I was traveling in Venice.

Throughout this city, the roads are replaced with waterways and there is wage to be made driving water taxis. I spotted a group of skippers that were waiting in the rank for a job and I was interested to find out why they were sniggering and poking each other in the guts. Upon further investigation, I learned that they had decided to amuse themselves during down time by super gluing a nice and shiny €1 coin to the pavement in front of them. All they had to do is prepare their coffee and cigarette and watch the show. I too started giggling when I saw tourist after tourist wage a mental war in their head about whether they should pick it up. Those that lost the battle would usually double back, look around and then swiftly bend down (legs invariably straight) to grab what was rightfully theirs. On first attempt, they'd skim their fingers over the top of the coin and they'd always go for the second attempt. At that point, they would realise they'd be "Punk'd" and the taxi drivers would be struggling to hold their nerve and keep from laughing out loud.

The victims didn't seem to mind because all they did was return to their duties of taking photos and gawking around as if nothing happened.

In Venice, Italy

About Author

Luke Simmons

I believe that life is a (relatively) short ride and that it's crucial to squeeze as many good times out of it as possible. I love travelling, music, reading, writing, all kinds o' sport, & my wife!

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