

*Saturday 29th of August 2009*

## **Emergency supplies**

It must have been the International Week of the Airborne Fool, and I was fortunate enough to attend a couple of events in the Asia-Pacific region. I flew from Australia to Thailand with an Aussie nerd who demanded to know whether Qantas served KFC in premium economy, then took the next leg of my journey, Bangkok to Singapore, with a "budget airline". (Why does that phrase fail to inspire confidence, I wonder.)

Tiger Airways allowed me - for a fee - to choose my own seat. Readers who continue to believe that my legs are only three centimetres long will be surprised to learn I opted for the emergency-exit row, for extra legroom. The charges and taxes ended up costing me four times the price of my airfare.

Tiger Airways has all kinds of conditions about who can sit in its exit rows, as they have to be willing to help the crew in an emergency evacuation. They must be "fit and able-bodied, over the age of 15, have weight in proportion to height and be able to understand the safety briefing".

But there is no requirement that they be sober, and that's the loophole through which my exit-row companions had managed to slip. They were a Singaporean couple, and the bloke's weight was probably disproportionate to his height, but people write in to this magazine and say things like that about me, so I think I can let that go. His wife was small but perfectly formed and barely dressed. They appeared to be having some kind of party.

While we were still on the runway, a hostie marched up to us with the card that showed what cartoon people would do if their plane landed in the ocean (even though there have been hardly any successful open-water evacuations in the history of civil aviation). Like the cartoon people, who maintained a level head (in every sense) and a sanguine expression no matter what disaster befell them and their unnaturally composed children, we were urged to pull the cover off the emergency-door handle and discard it.

The Singaporean woman misunderstood the situation, and attempted to do this immediately. The hostie pointed out her mistake, and repeated the instructions. This time, the bloke tried to tear the cover off the handle.

Once we took off, I felt we might not be in safe hands. Since I couldn't be expected to single-handedly evacuate the whole right-hand side of the plane (okay, so it's probably got some kind of official name like "port" or "starboard" or something, but I don't know it), I decided to join my companions in a drink (prior to joining them in the drink\*).

Unfortunately, they bought the last three beers for themselves. When it was my turn to order, all the hostie could offer was wine in a can.

My Mandarin-language skills are on a par with my driving prowess, but I still managed to figure out what my companion was saying: "He can't get a Tiger Beer on Tiger Airways! Ha! Ha! Ha!"

He apologised to me in English, knocked back his beer, then lost consciousness on the tray table. His wife fell asleep slumped across the emergency door, with her hand inside his shorts.

In Singapore, I stayed in Changi Village, where I was saddened to find I had just missed Window Safety Week. It sounded like a fantastic party for people like my Thai

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"gap inspector", who could've measured the distances between frames and sills in hundreds of identical apartments.

I flew home on British Airways, and was upgraded to business class, perhaps for good behaviour. I chased beer with wine and wine with beer, but fell asleep before I could make an airborne fool of myself.

\* Useless pun, inspired by a typing error, whereby I actually wrote "the" instead of "a" in the first place.

*Saturday 15th of August 2009*

## **Journey of discovery**

Last week, I wrote about how I had lost my house keys, a quiz prize and my aunty's gravestone. I'm pleased to report that two out of three have turned up.

The mysterious Ha, who'd phoned the gym to say she'd found my house keys, then left a contact number for a woman who threatened to ring the police if I called again, contacted the gym once more to say my keys were at the local newsagency. The shop is only two blocks from my house, and I couldn't understand how Ha knew to leave them there for me. But it turns out Ha is actually the woman who works in the newsagency, and I had lost the keys there in the first place. It's just that the guy in the gym had written down the wrong phone number.

Carmel Delprat, the winner of the very small picture of the moustache cup drawn by Nick Cave and signed "BICK", never received her prize, so the location of Platinum Post's CN3586239 remains a mystery, and I won't be calling upon that dubiously useful service again. Unfortunately, I don't have a similar prize to offer Carmel - such as a miniature portrait of hair-clippers, painted by Peter Garrett and signed "BLAD" - so all I can offer is a copy of the novel *Disco Boy*, written by The Chaser's Dominic Knight and signed "Dominic Knight".

But my biggest problem was my Aunty Gloria's gravestone, which - since Gloria has been dead for more than a year - really should be on her grave by now. My aunty spent the last years of her life afraid she might have an accident, so she went to buy funeral insurance. Incredibly, the insurer - one of Australia's largest - sold her a policy that was only valid in the event of an accident. She died of a brain tumour - which, the insurer clearly felt, she had developed on purpose - so she was paid nothing.

My aunty was a lifelong socialist and atheist, who underwent a deathbed re-conversion to Judaism, the faith of her fathers. She planned to use her \$25 million fortune to set up the Betty-Gloria Foundation (named after her and my mum) for social justice, but asked that a portion be set aside for the building of a mikvah, or ritual baths, for the orthodox community. The rabbi said this was a miracle, as he'd been praying for a mikvah only the week before. It would have been a miracle, too, since my aunty had closer to \$25,000 in the bank, and even the sale of her weatherboard home wouldn't make up the difference. (Her small house was bought by a mildly famous evangelical Christian couple with 10 children - including IVF sextuplets - presumably to use as an annex to their principal residence.)

Several incidents point to the possibility my aunty wasn't entirely *compos mentis* when she re-embraced God, including the fact that she had taken to going to the shops wearing her clothes inside out; that she thought her doctors were filming her naked through the smoke alarm and broadcasting the footage on the internet; and that she assured me my son would grow up into a beautiful woman.

However, we had to respect her wishes, which meant she must be buried under a Jewish gravestone, the marble for which needed to be ordered from overseas. My aunty had the misfortune to live in one of those mysterious Australian states that is not served by Good Weekend, and where the only Hebrew-competent stonemason has no email address. I paid the full amount for the stone, but never received a receipt, nor did the stonemason ever return my calls. But it turns out the marble has been here all the time, and the receipt went to the lawyer, and the tradie didn't get back to me

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because ... well, that's the way they do things in the slow-speaking states.  
So, er, all is not lost. As it were.  
Sorry.

In one week, i lost my house keys, a paperback book, a very small picture of a moustache cup drawn by Nick Cave and signed "BICK", and my aunty's tombstone. It's a good thing my aunty is dead, otherwise she might've been (a) upset about the loss, or (b)alarmed that I'd ordered a tombstone for her.

*Saturday 08th of August 2009*

## **Land of the lost**

I didn't know I'd lost my keys until I got a call from the manager of my gym - whose number was on my key fob - saying that a Chinese woman called "Ha" had found them. Ha had left him her phone number. When I called, the old lady who answered denied being either Chinese or called Ha. When I tried a second time, she threatened to call the police, which seemed a bit unreasonable coming from somebody who had stolen my house keys.

I had ordered a biography of Nick Cave from an Aussie website that touted itself as a local alternative to Amazon. The website boasted an impressive tracking system that I could use to monitor the progress of my order. It was a rare book but, to my surprise, it was dispatched in three days. A month later, it still hadn't arrived. There was no phone number on the website (to help keep prices low, according to the company). By email, I managed to contact the seductively named "Tanya", who informed me that the book had been "short-shipped". That was fine by me; it is unreasonable to expect delivery firms to use longboats in the modern era.

When I asked what "short-shipped" meant, it turned out Tanya was using "short" as a synonym for "not". "Occasionally our supplier makes an error," she wrote, "which they did in this case." Their error, she explained to me, was that they "did not send you the book".

This was not the end of the Curse of Nick Cave. Carmel Delprat of Alexandria, NSW, correctly guessed "Nick Cave" as the answer to my quiz question "Which celebrity is the coif-lipped king of cool who owns two moustache cups?" and won a very small picture of a moustache cup drawn by Nick Cave and signed "BICK". I sent it to Carmel using Platinum Express Post, which has an impressive tracking system I could use to monitor the progress of my order. It was dispatched from Alexandria the day after I sent it but, a month later, it still hadn't arrived. So I rang Express Post - which does have a phone number - and the operator assured me the item had been delivered. Unfortunately, she could not tell me where or to whom.

I had marked the envelope "moustache cup", and I suspect consignment number CN3586239 now rests in the greedy hands of a shameless art thief. If you are reading this column, you bastard, I urge you to give yourself up to the police before you slide even further down the slippery slope of criminality that leads inevitably from torturing animals to stealing Carmel's mail to serial killing.

My aunty died in Queensland last year. I was her executor. Surprisingly, this did not mean I had to kill her, just that I had to make sure her bills were paid, her will was honoured and she had a funeral and a headstone to mark her grave.

I succeeded in all but the last task. Although I forwarded a stonemason the full amount for the tombstone, I never received a receipt or heard anything back. When I rang the company, I was told the manager was on holiday. I left another message, and nobody returned my call.

They do not appear to have an impressive tracking system I can use to monitor the progress of my order, and my mum is coming over from England in October. She might, conceivably, want to look at her sister's tombstone. All I can tell her is that it's been lost in the post.