

Saturday 27th of June 2009

Hit of the festival

I should probably have gone home at the point where I decided to walk across the table in the Chinese restaurant, but the night was still young, even if I'm not that young myself any more. Instead of taking this as my cue to grab an early night, I went back to the five-star hotel where I'd recently earned my First Great Hangover of 2009. The Sydney Writers' Festival was still raging - in so far as these events do- and I saw a lot of people I knew, who weren't as drunk as I was.

The hotel bar stays open until the last guest goes to bed. This presents a problem for literalists like me, who wait until last drinks to buy their last drinks.

My friend Benjamin Gilmour was in the bar with his publicist, Kate. About 2am, I found myself trying to teach Kate the finer points of the sweet science of boxing when she inadvertently demonstrated that she was already familiar with them by accidentally punching me in the face.

I immediately developed a black eye, which Kate delightedly photographed. It was a classic among black eyes, not a blue bruise or a light kohl-ing, but what we in the trade call "the full panda". If I had stumbled into a zoo, they would have tried to get me to mate in captivity.

If I didn't know better, I might have thought it was a publicity stunt gone horribly wrong, a misguided attempt to get me to mention Benjamin's book *Warrior Poets*, which you wouldn't think anyone would buy because there's no sex in it and it's set in the North-West Frontier Province of Pakistan. However, it's a useful book for holding in front of your face if you see his publicist coming at you with a right cross.

I got home a little after 3am. My girlfriend, Claire, was awake and wondering what had happened to me. When she saw I had a black eye, she was completely unmoved. It wasn't the first time I had come home with a black eye. It wasn't even the first time this year.

Normally, it wouldn't matter that I was disfigured because all I do is sit in my study and type random thoughts into my computer. This week, however, I had two more sessions to deliver at the Writers' Festival, one of them as the presenter. It was difficult (although not impossible) to feel sorry for myself at the first panel discussion, since I was seated next to the mountaineer Lincoln Hall, a man who doesn't appear to have any fingers.

But I was full of self-pity when I found out that my last session was to be filmed by the ABC, thus ensuring my black eye would remain forever in public memory, and the footage endlessly dredged up in low-budget documentaries about the history of hubris in the 21st century.

The most heartening result of the whole affair was the outpouring of public sympathy for my injury. For instance, when I phoned my boxing buddy Chris Sheedy to say I had a black eye, his response was, "Finally!"

He was obviously deeply distressed, although he said, "I love the fact that the day after you got your black eye, you had to appear on television, because that's exactly what you did to me. But at least I was hit by a man. I always thought it should come from me because it would've been the most honourable thing for both of us, but I love the fact that it was a 23-year-old publicist. And a book publicist as well - they're the softest

Mark Dapin



kind."

It's times like these when you find out who your real mates are, and I haven't got any.

Saturday 06th of June 2009

The Life of Ryan

Recently I wrote a column about the tragic and tragically overlooked plight of the nation's Chris Ryan population. There are so many Chris Ryans in Australia (and the world) that individual Chris Ryans find it impossible to distinguish themselves from the herd*. My mate Chris Ryan, who did such a marvellous job of minding the toilets on the critically acclaimed movie *Samson & Delilah*, is regularly confused with other, less accomplished Chris Ryans, who wouldn't know a Portaloo from a public telephone**.

After my ground-breaking column was published, I received a message on Facebook from a Christopher Ryan living in Dubbo, in central-west NSW. Yes, not only does Dubbo have a funny name and a big zoo, it has a Chris Ryan!

The Dubbo Chris Ryan was able to find me because I am, of course, the only Mark Dapin on Facebook, if not the only Mark Dapin in the world. I could not have found Chris Ryan this way, because when I search Facebook for Chris Ryan, the best it can offer is "over 500 results". Among the hundreds and hundreds of plain Chris and Christopher Ryan pages, there are specialist groups such as "Chris Ryan-aholics" (dedicated to the US basketball player); "Chris Ryan National Holiday" (for the British ex-SAS man); the mystifyingly named "Chris Ryan is ballin' as shitt!!" (something to do with a skateboarder); and the breathtakingly unambitious "Let's Get Chris Ryan on Facebook".

There are even hints of sinister Chris Ryans with disturbing agendas of their own, in "join this group if u think chris ryan is a stalker" and "Chris Ryan, stop inviting me to all these groups" (which, admittedly, has only one member).

Dubbo Chris Ryan has suffered all the indignities commonly identified with being Chris Ryan, but more so. He says there is a villain named Chris Ryan somewhere out there, and his local police have tried to arrest him "more than once" for crimes committed by his namesake. He has also been visited by debt collectors out to recover monies from the evil Chris Ryan. In what is surely a rare piece of bad luck even for a hapless Chris Ryan, Dubbo Chris Ryan's brother, Dubbo Michael Ryan, also shares a name with a known criminal.

"When asked if I was related to a Michael Ryan, I said he was my brother," says Dubbo Chris Ryan. "I was then lifted off my feet by the neck until I clarified the situation." Furthermore, he says, "I have always maintained a reputation for technical skill and integrity. A local retailer hired a young bloke named Chris Ryan and then heavily promoted the fact that 'Chris Ryan now works here'. A lot of people made purchasing decisions on that fact and were later disappointed. The young Chris Ryan left town for a while. A lot of people thought I was leaving and I had to make a media statement to clarify what was really happening."

There is even a machine that apparently believes Chris Ryan to be the Messiah. "I was a subcontractor for a multinational company," says Dubbo Chris Ryan, "and their labelling computer only had provision for six letters in the first-name field. For many years, much to the mirth of many, I received freight addressed to Christ Ryan."

What kind of a society do we live in that can allow its most vulnerable members - the Chris Ryans - to suffer such constant indignities and misunderstandings? Isn't it time we

Mark Dapin

all stood up and said, "Enough is enough"? The fortunate few among us who are not called Chris Ryan must take our Chris Ryan brothers by the hand, and cry out for the world to hear, "We are all Chris Ryans."
Or would that just confuse the situation?

*Assuming "herd" is the collective noun for Chris Ryans.

**I suspect some of these Chris Ryans live around my area, judging by the state of the local telephone box.