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Where Was I?!

The World According to Terry Wogan

Written by Terry Wogan

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WHERE WAS I?!

THE WORLD ACCORDING TO

TERRY WOGAN



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Introduction

You know me: never listen to myself on the radio, never watch myself on television. It's embarrassing. Who is that pie-faced, overweight eejit bursting out of his suit? God, does that goddam gobdaw ever shut up? Oh, it's me. The shame of it. I shouldn't be doing this job at all, I should have stayed in the bank. It's pathetic, all this showing-off. The nuns and priests who educated me well beyond my intelligence must be very disappointed in me. I was taught modesty, duty, self-control and a strong sense of sin. Vanity, self-aggrandisement, attention-seeking were beyond the Pale, the marks of an outsider, someone who would never be a Child of Mary, an altar boy or amount to anything much. Be nice to everybody, don't be rude, don't talk back, conform, do what you're told. What am I doing here? My mother and father were pleased and proud of my success, but surprised and bemused by it. An old pal of mine in Dublin, obviously as surprised as everyone else, once said to me, 'People are always saying to me that you must have been very ambitious and determined to get where you are.' I said I'd never noticed it. 'You weren't, were you?' No, I wasn't, no, I'm not. I've never knocked on a door and cried 'Gissa job!' in my life. I hate the limelight. I'm totally and utterly wrong for the game I'm in. Don't ask me how I got

into this – I woke up one morning, and there I was, on the radio. And I love it, and I've always loved it. It's what I do. I'm not nervous doing it, I've no idea what I'm going to say until I open the microphone, and when I'm done, I go home. My mother said when I was a little boy, I'd play with my friends, but always close the garden gate behind me when I came home. Because that's what I've always liked best: home, comfort and the love of my family. Everything else, ambition, fame, success are as the idle wind . . .

Even as you flick through this book, deciding whether to buy it now, or wait for the inevitable car-boot sale, you may detect a certain *déjà vu*, particularly as an avid reader of a certain women's magazine in the naughty nineties. If so, Heaven bless your memory, because when I read these fragrant nosegays again, I didn't remember a single word. And, if you don't mind me saying so, they might well have been written yesterday. 'Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose', as Carla Bruni/Sarkozy puts it so well, and I'm sure she didn't mean her 'bons mots' to be translated as 'It's the same old thing.' That's a slur you could just as easily hurl at my daily morning effusions on BBC Radio 2. Same person, same voice, saying the same old things. Except that eight-and-a-half-million people choose to listen, every morning. That's more than listen to any other broadcaster in Britain or Europe, more than watch *Eastenders*, *Big Brother* or Ant and Dec. 'In Heaven's name, why?' I hear you cry. As the song says, 'Who can explain it, who can tell you why – fools give you reasons, wise men never try . . . '

Put it down to fellow-feeling, a shamed sense of life's

essential foolishness, predictability, if you like, mutual regard – no, make that love. We're the 'Folks Who Live on the Hill', my listeners and me – Darby and Joan who used to be Jack and Jill. They know every word I've ever said, and can anticipate everything I'm about to say, before I've said it. I'll swear that they can sense when I cock an eyebrow or scratch an ear. I've always said that the reason for my success as commentator on the Eurovision Song Contest was that I got my shot in a split-second before the viewer. I hope that's the way you'll feel about this book: you could have written it yourself . . .

'Do I Come Here Often?'

(Wogan's Life)



The Home for the Bewildered

As that 'rara avis', the regular listener to *Wake up to Wogan* on BBC Radio 2 will know all too well, if it wasn't for my listeners, I would sit in front of the microphone mum-chance, without a word. I'll admit that there's a strong body of opinion that feels the programme would be all the better for that, but like a good politician, I'm going to pretend I didn't hear that point of view, otherwise we'll be here all week. The point I'm trying to make, Jeremy, if you'll let me, is that without the hundreds of e-mails, faxes and letters and postcards I receive every day from the deranged, demented and blatantly bewildered folk who gather around the wireless to listen to my foolishness every morning, there'd be a lot more pauses in between the music. More than pauses, actually. Hiatuses, more like lacunae. A deathly hush.

These good, if wildly misguided people are what keep me going. Without them, the BBC would have rumbled me years ago. Dammit, I owe everything to my listeners; they've put my children through college, kept the present Mrs Wogan in the extravagant comfort to which she has become accustomed. I rarely meet my benefactors, except when they come to my television shows, masquerading as ordinary people. They soon give themselves away, of course, by putting on funny hats, opening their cardigans to reveal

Terry's Old Geezer sweatshirts (bearing the proud legend, 'Do I Come Here Often?') and hurling smarties and ancient tins of rhubarb at me. (Don't ask me to explain the rhubarb and the sweets – it'll end in tears.) They come to my book signings, and inflame the crowd with their whispering: 'Ooh, he's much fatter/older/ smaller/uglier than he looks on the television, isn't he?'. . . They bring me my book for an autograph, and when I enquire 'Who's it for?', they say, brightly, 'It's for me!' They demand photographs, with cameras that don't work: 'Did the flash go off?' 'Oh, hang on, I've forgotten to wind it on . . . ' They have their own Conventions, to which they forget to invite me, and every year 40,000 of them turn up in Hyde Park for *Proms in the Park*, and drown out my every word with community singing. You see, they know that I need them more than they need me. My recurrent nightmare is that one day in the not-too-distant, they'll ignore me altogether, and write to each other. What am I saying? They do that already; they've got their own website on the internet (www.togs.org) where they chatter away merrily without ever mentioning me . . .

I'll miss 'em, when they go; the little kindnesses: 'Terry, here's a tip to save money. Old telephone directories make ideal personal address books; simply cross out the names and addresses of people you don't know.' 'Wogan, me old mucker, don't fret. Age is only important if you're a cheese . . .'

And blindingly original ideas: 'How's this for a brilliant new TV show? A huge production team scour the country

looking for people who have no talent, but huge egos and an all devouring wish for money and fame. Most of them will have no skills nor qualifications. After lots of heartbreaking live auditions the worst of the lot are taken away and locked up in a secret mansion, to be groomed for their release on the public. Yes, they are going to be asked to join the next government and run the country for four years! Anyway, they are locked away in this secret hideaway, watched only by the whole world over the internet and via TV cameras, and one by one the most hideous are voted off to form a cabinet. After four weeks the lone survivor is Prime Minister . . . Good eh?'

You see, it's mad, but only slightly. The lines between reality and the image, between fact and the message, become more blurred every day. I well remember a website inviting contributors to pay tribute to Alma Baldwin, who died so tragically in *Coronation Street*. She was a character in a soap opera, for Heaven's sake! The actress who played her is walking the streets, in rude good health! Hey-ho, at least we know we're loonies, my listeners and me.



Looking for Something in Beige?

Loonies? Fools for good, more like. Over the past few years, TOGs have transformed themselves from a happy-go-lucky crowd of ne'er-do-wells, whose greatest delight

was to make me look like an eejit, into an extraordinary force for raising money for the BBC's Children in Need Appeal. Inspired by the creative genius and indomitable spirit of Hellen Bach (she wouldn't want me to use her real name – no true TOG ever does; they'd rather embarrass me with double-meaning pseudonyms – Tess Tickle, Rudolph Hucker, Drew Peacock and the like . . .) TOGs have raised well over three million pounds over the last three years. Starting with the TOGs Calendar, they moved on to the million-selling *Janet and John* CDs, then last year's triumphant *Bandaged* CD, and a host of T-shirts, sweaters, mugs, car-stickers and even jewellery. All of it done on the internet, the world-wide web. If you're interested, and would like to help, it's www.charitygoods.com. If you'd like to join in the grand lunacy of TOGdom, it's www.togs.org. Trust me, you'll never be the same . . .

Bandaged is a shining example of the single-minded, imaginative force of nature that is our Hellen Bach. When she first mooted a compilation CD of the musical talents of Radio 2, I'll confess that myself and Barrowlands Boyd, producer to the quality, were sceptical. I wouldn't say that we scoffed, but we did pat the little woman's hand quite a lot, smiling sympathetically . . . Hah! *Bandaged*, with little or no promotion other than the website, sold, and continues to sell, in its thousands. When last I looked, it had netted one hundred and fifty thousand pounds for the charity. All of Radio 2 rallied round, fearless of their musical limitations: Ken Bruce with 'Donald, Where's Your Trousers?', Alex Lester's 'My Bruvver', Mark Radcliffe's 'Right Said

Fred', matched only by my own pathetic effort at the 'Hippopotamus Song'. Aled Jones and I combined for 'Little Drummer Boy', which for a couple of glorious weeks, looked as if it might make the Christmas Number One in the pop charts. We were thwarted in the end by the *Pop Idol* winner, but the single made more than fifty thousand pounds for Children in Need.

Another magnificent idea that gave us all a good laugh was Hellen and her husband Norm's brainwave of a 'TOGs Cruise'. It was only when three hundred and fifty TOGs, The Voice of the Balls, Janet and John Marsh, Barrowlands Boyd, Charles Nove, Lynn Bowles the Totty from Splott, and me found ourselves having the time of our lives aboard Cunard's *Queen Victoria*, that we realised what a blinding idea it really was. We did two live morning shows from the good ship, a concept which involved the loose canon himself, Rev. Roger Royle, and Barrowlands coming up through a hole in the stage playing the old Joanna, and an episode of *Janet and John*. What the Japanese and Americans in the audience made of it, we, mercifully, will never know. But I saw the sun come up over the Straits of Messina, and thanked the Lord for TOGs . . .