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Delete This At Your Peril!

Written by Bob Servant
with Neil Forsyth

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Delete This At Your Peril

The Bob Servant Emails

Bob Servant

with Neil Forsyth



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For my big brother Alan, with love

Introduction: Meet Bob Servant

I remember the first time I saw Bob Servant very well. It was in the late 1980s and I was a ten-year-old cycling through Broughty Ferry when I saw a burger van opening for business down at the harbour. This was a novel event both for me and, it would turn out, for Broughty Ferry and I skilfully reined in my Raleigh Burner and watched the momentous scene unfold. There were a couple of glum-looking men sprucing the van up, switching on ovens and so on, but my attention was drawn to another man who sat on a nearby bench watching them and occasionally offering words of advice that appeared to go largely unheeded.

I can really remember only a few details. One is that Bob had a bright red face, another is that he was drinking what I thought at the time was a milkshake but I now strongly suspect was a cocktail, and the final thing I can remember was what he said. He said, with an epic sense of despair, 'Fuck me Frank, watch the fucking sausages.'

The next time I saw Bob was perhaps five years later when I opened my bedroom curtains and there he was at the other side. The suddenness of my appearance caught him unawares and for a moment Bob threatened to fall off his ladder but he caught himself and gripped the window frame, panting and sweating and saying, 'Christ, you nearly fucking did for me there son.'

Bob, it seemed, had taken over the window-cleaning round that included our house. I can recall my mum's confusion at the increased frequency of the window-cleaning team's appearance. 'Someone's making a bloody fortune,' my dad used to summarise when he returned from work to hear of yet another visit.

Bob and I quickly became not friends, but certainly firm associates. For a bored schoolboy, Bob was a man of the world who advised with little encouragement on anything from women to feverish speculation on local thefts, and his ongoing feud with a local newspaper. For Bob, I was a willing listener, and the search for willing listeners has probably been the great cause of Bob's life.

In the winter Bob would appear on Saturday mornings, scaling his ladder dressed for Kilimanjaro rather than our two-storey home. I would crack open the frosted glass and it would begin. Both he and I would be going independently to watch Dundee United in the afternoon and, from

deep within his array of padding, Bob would offer a range of optimistic predictions as steam rose from his bucket and multiple layers.

In the summer, Bob would curl a thick arm over the windowsill and start, usually with:

'Ah, how you doing? I was just saying to Frank there . . .'

And then he would unleash a story, a joke or, often, a plan. Bob's plans were extraordinary, containing an audacious mixture of ambition and completely undiluted self-belief. He toyed for a long time with entering local politics for what he called a clean-up campaign. That plan was quietly abandoned when Bob and Frank, whom he had appointed his election agent, could not decide on a suitable slogan.

Frank, I should point out, was Bob's regular window-cleaning sidekick and, I presumed (correctly), the original Frank from the burger van. Sometimes there would be other men with Bob, all of whose grave moods would clash markedly with his, but Frank was the standard. Perhaps because of this sustained exposure to Bob's peculiarities, Frank's depressive air was almost overpowering.

While Bob was halfway into my bedroom explaining how he was going to build a private zoo, or complete the Dawson Park monkey bars course in less than a minute, or swim the River Tay once things warmed up a bit, I would peek down to Frank, who would be standing at the foot of Bob's ladder.

At the very best he would look crushingly bored. At worst I would sometimes catch him staring at Bob's ladder with a distant look in his eyes, as if calculating just how many of life's worries would vanish with a hefty kick.

It was a few years on, when my friends and I began sneaking into Broughty Ferry's bars, that I saw a different side to Bob. His window-cleaning operation had been passed to strangers but his message on the matter was very clear.

'Not to worry,' he told me with an elaborate wink, along with the much-repeated suggestion that he had landed a significant windfall on the round to go with the riches from his years as the owner of a cheeseburger van.

There was also something about gypsies stealing his ladders that always sounded to me like a botched insurance job. Once, emboldened by drink, I put forward that theory to Bob, who replied with a quote from Winston Churchill that bore no relation to the situation whatsoever.

It became strange to walk into a Broughty Ferry pub and for Bob not to be there. If the place were quiet he would be hunched over a barstool, lecturing the barman and jabbing a finger to make his point. In busier pubs he would retreat with companions to a table, though this didn't stop the barman being generously incorporated by Bob into his conversation.

He had an eclectic collection of associates who you will soon discover are in his thoughts to this day. There was a uniformed security guard, a local

lawyer who had been struck off and a group of traffic wardens who I'm sure were supposed to be working at the time. But more often than not, Bob's immediate company would be drawn from any combination of three men.

There was a small, sharp-faced man known as Tommy Peanuts who wore a suit with loosened tie, which did not seem to halt daytime excursions through the pubs of Broughty Ferry. He was quick with the cutting remark and often this would be aimed at an unknowing Bob's expense. I would feel a strange pang of shared betrayal when Tommy slipped in some mockery and Bob laughed innocently away.

Chappy Williams and Bob were locked in a love–hate relationship that clearly still rumbles along. The two should be brothers, such is the inherent rivalry as they compete for social standing in the bars of Broughty Ferry. This battle is generally waged through incredibly intricate practical jokes often taking days, if not weeks, in planning and execution.

And then there was, and is, Frank. A man referred to by Bob with, I believe, genuine fondness as Frank the Plank. As I gained increased access to Frank's company I realised very quickly that he wavers spectacularly on the very edge of sanity. Much of this is undoubtedly due to living next door to Bob. Whatever warped scheme or activity Bob is indulging in, you never have to look far to find Frank.

So that, for me, was Bob Servant. I moved away from Dundee, and a highlight of any return would be a chance meeting with Bob, for whom nothing ever really changed except the steady flow of ideas. He thought for a long time about opening a café, only to give up in fury when someone else did the same. He started another clean-up campaign which started and finished with him shopping a corrupt member of the local Limbo Walking Club to local press. He declared to myself and other astonished drinkers that he was going to buy a pair of ostriches and mate them in his garden (he never did).

But away from thwarted dreams, Bob had been doing something else. It was something that no one knew about and it was when I became the first person to be told that the relationship between Bob and myself changed forever.

* * *

As I sat reading a newspaper in a Broughty Ferry bar of an evening in early 2007, a familiar combination of reddened forehead and bunnet appeared above the page. It was Bob and he wanted to talk, but there was something different about him. There was none of his usual grandstanding and he employed a nervous whisper, darting his eyes around the pub in fear.

He confirmed that I was a writer and then slipped into a muddled explanation of some strange pursuit he had undertaken after winning a computer in a raffle at the local bowling club. He talked of Africans and

Russians, of emails and computers, and hinted at long nights of cheap wine and Internet exchanges.

'I mean,' he said with a sly grin, 'They're chancers, these people, Neil, real cowboys, but we've had some fun.'

Intrigued, I accepted Bob's invitation to learn more. We walked through the darkened streets in near silence, with Bob occasionally attempting further description only to give up in frustration or an extended bout of laughter. To be perfectly honest, I was a little nervous. Bob's eccentricity was all very well in public but, on the way to his house with him babbling about lions and rubber belts, it was slightly disturbing.

My alarm increased when we arrived at Bob's home. Although an impressive sight from outside, the interior was a study in chaos. There were collections of empty bottles throughout, various pieces of fancy dress hung from doorframes and an extraordinary number of novelty duvet sets. After we weaved through to the living room Bob directed me to a computer that he activated and went to get us drinks.

As the computer warmed up I noticed some scraps of paper beside the keyboard with scribbled notes. Amongst the jottings were names with arrows connecting to startling terms. 'Lanzhou', for example, pointed to 'rubber belts', which in turn pointed to 'stuff Clive's mouth with prawn crackers'. Bob returned with the drinks and brought up an email account on the screen.

'That's it,' he said simply and retired to a couch on which he lay in silent contemplation as I made my first entry into a very different world. An hour or two later I turned back to him.

'Bob?' I asked, 'Would you be interested in writing a book?'



Neil Forsyth and Bob Servant (right), Broughty Ferry, summer 2007

Each man is a hero and an oracle to somebody, and to that person whatever he says has an enhanced value.

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–82)

The thing is Xiong, you're over there in China and I'm here in Broughty Ferry. But you're just a man and I'm just a man. That's what I'm saying. We're all just men. Apart from women.

Bob Servant (1945–)

1
Lions, Gold and Confusion

From: Jack Thompson
To: Bob Servant
Subject: Delete This At Your Peril

FROM HIS ROYAL HIGHNEST, JACK THOMPSON

Dear sir,
Permit me to inform you of my desire of going into business. I got your name and contact from the chamber of commerce and industry. I am JACK THOMPSON, the only son of late King Arawi of tribal land. My father was a very wealthy traditional ruler, poisoned to death by his rivals in the traditional tussle about royalties and related matters.

Before his death here in Togo he called me on his sick bed and told me of a trunk box containing $75m kept in a security company where i amin the city of Sokode. It was because of the wealth he was poisoned by his rivals. I now seek a foreign partner where I will transfer the proceeds for investment as you may advise. I am willing to offer you 20% of the sum as a compensation for your effort/ input and 5% for any expenses that may occour.

Anticipating to hear from you soon.

Thanks and God bless

JACK THOMPSON

From: Bob Servant
To: Jack Thompson
Subject: Greetings

Good morning your Majesty,
I want 30%, and not a penny less,

Your Servant,

Bob Servant

From: Jack Thompson
To: Bob Servant
Subject: I will speak to the bank

Hello Bob,
See these percentages was arranged by the bank and not me. If you insist on getting 30% of the money i have to call the bank.

Pls send your

FULL NAME.
CONTACT PHONE NUMBER.
ACCOUNT NUMBER.
COUNTRY/STATE:

I will be expecting those details.thanks.

JACK THOMPSON.

From: Bob Servant
To: Jack Thompson
Subject: Good luck with the bank

Your Majesty,
Let me know what the bank says. Tomorrow's a bank holiday here, I don't know if you have the same ones? My full name is BOB GODZILLA SERVANT.

Yours,

Bob

From: Jack Thompson
To: Bob Servant
Subject: Hello

Hello Bob,
I went to my bank. If you are now requesting 30% we have to go back to the high court to change things. I and my family members has added some amount upon your money provided you are going to be serious and trustwordy. We have agreed to give you 25%. Pls i think that is all we can do.

We need your telephone number, country, state, city and account number before we can go further.

Jack Thompson

From: Bob Servant
To: Jack Thompson
Subject: Let's try the court

Good Morning Your Highness,
Please go to the High Court and request the 30%, I think it is a fair figure Jacky-O.

Bob

From: Jack Thompson
To: Bob Servant
Subject: YOUR URGENT RESPONSE NEEDED

Dear Mr Bob,
In order not to waste more time I have agreed the 30% and have notified the court and my family accordingly. Within these few days now, I have developed that confidence in you and believe that you will be of great assistance in perfecting this transaction. We have to go ahead immediately. Please email me –

1. Your address
2. Private Telephone and Fax Numbers
3. Banking details to enable transfer of the money to you.

I await your immediate response,

Jack Thompson

From: Bob Servant
To: Jack Thompson
Subject: Hold Tight…

Your Highness,
I have been looking at the sums again, and I have decided that I want 40%.

And not a penny less.

Bob

From: Jack Thompson
To: Bob Servant
Subject: URGENT FROM MR JACK THOMPSON

Dear Bob,
Please let us PROCEDE. I am not greedy. I will offer you the 40% instead of delaying the transaction. I want it done, no matter how little it will change my life. Send your details now. Like I told you I need to meet with the security company immediately,
I await an urgent response,

Jack

From: Bob Servant
To: Jack Thompson
Subject: Taxman

Jack,
40% sounds about right. However, I do not want the money in cash, as there is no way I could hide it. The taxman tried to turn me over back in '89 when I was coining it in from the cheeseburger vans, and those bastards always come back.

Can I have my share in diamonds and gold? I can shift it gradually through pawnshops in Lochee.

Bob

From: Jack Thompson
To: Bob Servant
Subject: URGENT

Hello Bob,
I received your mail and I guess I understand it. As for the diamond and gold, I think I have access to raw gold. You will get your share in some amount of cash and some valuable quantity of gold. Look Bob you are wasting some time in forwarding your details that I need urgently. So now that we have come to an agreement can I have the details now please,

Thanks,

Jack

From: Bob Servant
To: Jack Thompson
Subject: Animals?

Hello Jack,
I'm afraid I just cannot take my share in cash, too dangerous. I could take it in diamonds, gold, or livestock (lions). My neighbour, Frank Theplank, has a private zoo. I just caught up with him in Maciocia's chip shop where he was waiting on a bag of fifty fritters for his monkeys. I told him a little bit about all this and he is willing to pay $80,000 for every lion I can get him,

Bob

From: Jack Thompson
To: Bob Servant
Subject: URGENT

Hello Bob,
I understand what you mean. You don't want the money in cash. Well I just got in contact with a friend of mine who sells raw gold and I can now pay you through live stock lion heads raw gold…quantity (4). So now you need not worry about the taxman coming again you can always keep them in your friend's private zoo as you said.

Now I will go and arrange for them while you send me your full details of yourself.

Jack

From: Bob Servant
To: Jack Thompson
Subject: Lions

Hi Jack my friend,
Great to hear from you again. You can get hold of 4 lions? Are they male or female? I will speak to Frank who will undoubtedly be very excited. Where are these lions just now?

Bob

From: Jack Thompson
To: Bob Servant
Subject: URGENT DETAILS PLEASE

Hello Bob,
The gold lions are all male and i have arranged for them. But Bob can't you see you are dragging us backwards i have been asking you for your details for the past days now. Pls reply with the following:

Full Name
Home Address
Phone/Fax Number
Banking Details

I will be expecting the above information.

Thanks.

Jack

From: Bob Servant
To: Jack Thompson
Subject: OK

Jack my friend,
OK, things are now progressing. My full name is, as you know, Bob Godzilla Servant
68 Harbour View Road,
Broughty Ferry,
Dundee[1]

It's a lovely spot Broughty Ferry, and I stay down near the river. There's not much traffic which is obviously perfect, as otherwise the lions would get rattled. Can you please send me a photo of the lions without delay? I need to see that you definitely have access to them, before I confirm things with that halfwit Frank.

Your friend,

Bob

From: Jack Thompson
To: Bob Servant
Subject: Details

Hello Bob,
Hope fine. The informations you gave me not complete, you only gave me your full name and your address. I will need–

Country
State
City
Zip Code
Phone Number
Bank Account

Pls give me the above information then we can proceed. As for the lions, I have to take some photographs of them before I scan and send to you, so you have to give me some time. Pls provide me with the remaining information Bob.

Thanks,

Jack
---

1. Bob does indeed live near the River Tay, and in some style, but this address does not exist. Just in case anyone was thinking of visiting.

From: Bob Servant
To: Jack Thompson
Subject: Here you go champ

Jack my friend,
What a wonderful morning, hope it's a belter over there in Togo also.

Zip Code - [redacted]
City - Dundee
Country - Scotland

I'll get the information from the bank later on. The Bank of Scotland in Broughty Ferry closes early on a Wednesday so the staff can go tenpin bowling.[2] Please get the photos of the lions to me as soon as you can, then we can move on. I cannot wait to see those magnificent creatures. Are they currently in captivity, or will you actually be capturing them yourself? By Christ Jack, I wish I were on that hunt with you my friend. Helping you. And holding you.

Yours Faithfully,

Bob G Servant

From: Jack Thompson
To: Bob Servant
Subject:
Pictures of the raw lions

Hello Bob,
You didn't include phone number or bank account. I have made arrangement in transporting the 4 gold lions to you. I have put photos below. One costs $299,000 so 4 will cost over $1,196,000 then the rest will be in cash. These gold lions will be bought from a friend of mine's company. So give me your phone number for better communication and bank information,

Thanks,

Jack

2. The Bank of Scotland in Broughty Ferry does not close early on a Wednesday so the staff can go tenpin bowling.