

B u n F i g h t a t t h e O K C o r r a l

Earlier this year OTE published *Hello!* by Jude Calvert Toulmin about Ben Moon's leaving party. Here Jude recounts the resulting online fracas and reveals how she outmanouvered her critics with her deadly accurate sharp shooting. Go get 'em girl!

I T started with an e-mail from me to the ed: "Have there been any letters about my *Hello* article? (OTE 104) I'd like some feedback."

E-mail back from Neil: "Nope. However allegedly there's a cyberwar going on about it, over at www.rock-fax.com, on the Rocktalk bit. Check it out at your peril, it can get vicious!"

The nature of Rocktalk is that people start debates, or 'threads' with a heading like, "Who is climbing God?" or "Is Climbing Art?" In a typical thread there might be 10 people posting messages, responding to each other minutes, hours or days apart. But for every 10 contributors on one thread there will be about 300 "punters" reading the postings and not posting anything. So, basically you're performing on stage. But you can't see the audience. Plus you don't know what any of the other actors look like.

So I innocently venture into unknown territory and make that first click on the thread entitled 'OTE Feb Issue'.

P e r d y l i d d l e a n k l e s !

Suddenly I'm not a mother of three freelance journalist and artist at home sitting in front of my cuddly little computer. The wooden doors clatter shut behind me as I walk into the all-male saloon of the OK Corral. I trot up to the bar and say "Make mine a Sasparella. And one for ma horse," thinking, 'ooh, this is fun'... and then I hear my name mentioned.

"Ah hear thar's a female just rode in. A stranger. Goes by the name o' Jude. Writin' 'bout our town. An' her writin's a heap a' horse's duuuuung."

"Oh no help!" I'm squealing to myself, my perdy liddle ankles all exposed and making me feel very vulnerable. I peer from under my girly curls at the hired hands. They are all tooled up to the nines with Smith & Wessons, or should I say SW – they are all protected by the anonymity of a pair of initials. I've strolled in there with my real name on show, i.e. my holster's empty. "Should be run oudda town," they're all muttering menacingly, running their fingers over their triggers.

Now I can either surreptitiously slink out of the saloon, make a dash for the doors at lightning speed, or I can stand my ground and fight like a lady. I remember Sharon Stone in *The Quick And The Dead* and decide to do the latter. I quickly type out a polite and restrained defence of my article, click on the *Post Message* button and lean on the bar, look straight at the barman, curl my lip and murmur:

"That thar woman y'all want run oudda town? Well she's here boys."

All heads turn to stare incredulously at the stranger they've been cussin' who just sauntered into their joint.

"She's just a hoooar. Don't mind her," and they turn back to their beers and their cussin' of all the town's elder statesmen and all the town newspapers that talk about them, (i.e. they're all posting messages griping and bitching about climbing mags and famous climbers.)

Suddenly I remember my life motto, 'the pen is mightier than the sword' and I realise that although not protected by anonymity as most of them are, I have under my Sharon Stone leather trenchcoat the biggest goddamn rifle you ever saw – words. I start composing my retorts and hitting Post Message and before long I'm having a complete gas.

I pick up the nearest cowboy's beer and swipe it off the bar. I sneer:

"Boys, you two-bit cowhands ain't even worth fighting, I'm headed off oudda town to find me some real cowboys."

"The hell y'ar I'il lady. Yer jus' dead meat."

They all stand up, draw their guns and start blasting me at once.

I pull out ma rifle and shoot back. I kill a few stone dead there and then. They're all shooting back but missing me. I keep on blasting, afraid of nothing. Suddenly a message pops up posted by J.W. John Wayne's voice drawls from the back of the saloon:

"Hold yer fire boys. The woman's a lady. Ah like what she wrote. Ah think she's oooookaaaay boys."

I put my rifle away and go back to my drink, stepping over a few dead bodies on the way. In the background the cowboys have changed tack. They're no longer griping and slinging mud, they've got their heads

**" B o y s , y o u t w o - b i t
c o w h a n d s a i n ' t e v e n
w o r t h f i g h t i n g , I ' m
h e a d e d o f f o u d d a
t o w n t o f i n d m e
s o m e r e a l c o w b o y s . "**

together and they're having a meeting about what they can do to improve the quality of the town newspapers.

A big fella wanders over, takes his hat off, stoops a bit and says politely:

"With respect M'am. Still didn't like what yer wrote 'bout our town. But yer welcome in our saloon any day M'am"

"Well thank ya sir, thank ya. Hey, have ya heard the one about the one-armed brothel owner?"

As I walk out of the bar, piercing eyes looking

straight ahead, leaving them laughing and having fun and slinging no mud, I look back and wink.

"And when I return, make sure y'all bring along yer lady friends. This ain't no spitttoon room no more boys. Thar's a lady in town."

Exit Sharon. Log off me, to pick the kids up from school and walk the dogs. In the park, a bloke I've never seen before wearing a Rab jacket and carrying a Pod rucksack recognises me from my photo accompanying the *Hello* article. He grins and shouts over Helloooooooo! I smile shyly and say 'hi' quickly and look away blushing. See, in cyberspace I'm a gunslinger. In real life I'm back to being a timid old home bird cooking up ma man's supper and feeding ma three I'il chil'ren.

B e h i n d T h e S c e n e s

And this is how the West Was Won. Stop right here if you want gear, gnarl and grades and are not interested in climbing goss, OK? Just... turn... the... page. Sorted.

So I click on the OTE thread and someone calling himself "MattB" has, a few days previously, posted this:

"Did anyone else waste five minutes of their lives reading that tatty article in this month's OTE about Ben Moon's leaving do in the Sheffield "hub" of climbing! What a waste of time. Has OTE completely lost the plot. Why would I want to know about this woman's circle of friends, and a party for a bloke I don't know, attended by... wait for it... people I've never met! Utter drivel, I wouldn't even have minded should the girl have been able to write, which evidently, she can't. Save that kind of nonsense for the pub... the general climbing public just don't give a damn."

My first reaction is sheer pain, I have to admit. Lots of people are agreeing with him. I feel really hurt. This is barbaric. I could refrain from posting anything, but I make the decision to stay and defend myself. It is hard work and takes many of them over with my wit and scrupulous debating style. All except MattB. But

with a flourish I make a posting that finishes him off:

"And when will any professional editor feel inspired to publish a thing MattB writes? Never. Unlike him I've got a life outside cyberspace. And whilst the landlord is refilling our glasses as the rest of us have a laugh in what has turned into an entertaining after-hours lock in, he sits there alone in the corner in his greasy raincoat, dribbling vitriol into his empty glass."

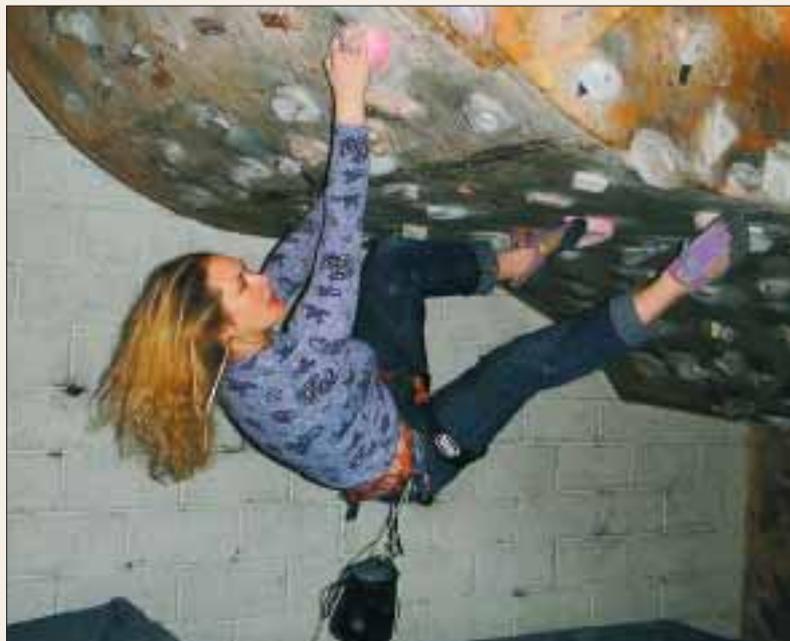
MattB is finally conquered. His apology is suitably grovelling:



Below: Jude snuggles up against John Allen, once known as The Shirley Temple of Grit, but alas no more. The snuggling took place in Café Revolution, the fairly trendy coffee shop/hangout owned by ex-OTE contributors Matt Smith and Del Goodey. (You see, who knows where it could lead?)

Right: Jude failing to snuggle up against the steep woodie at The Foundry.

Both Karen Ghiselli



"It wasn't a big deal, a page in a magazine which I would doubtlessly read cover to cover anyway. I didn't lose anything, and after the long discussion, I have gained a new friend (and secret lover!) Looking forward to your next article with baited breath. Hugs (it is Valentines' after all).

MattB

A week after we are e-mailing regularly, and on Rocktalk he's calling me "Judecakes" and I'm calling him "ma little cornish pasty" much to everyone's entertainment, and a couple of weeks after that I'm meeting him in *Coffee Revolution* with only a dodgy photo vaguely reminiscent of the Yorkshire Ripper to go on. I still agree to meet him though! And when he walks in he's not only passable, but turns out he's a lovely bloke to boot! A few hours later MattB is in my lounge teaching my kids to juggle, then off down the Foundry with my husband Martin, Colin Harden and Mark Leach all spotting him as he pulls all the stops out to repeat a boulder problem they've all just flashed. He does it with style much to everyone's delight. And he's now one of my closest friends. Life is stranger than fiction eh?

Anyway, by now I'm regularly posting on rocktalk. As is Grimer. I've spoken to him a couple of times over the years but due to a chance meeting outside the Sheff Rock 'n' Run, Grimer and I start chatting in cyberspace and then e-mailing, and in earthspace become friends with the odd coffee and dog walk etc. However, in cyberspace we are sharpening our swords on each other with veiled messages on a thread promoting his last Ape Index show (a brilliant series of nights down the Lescar with slide/tape shows by various famous climbers interspersed with Grimer's side-splitting stand-up comedy routines). And when Grimer draws blood and then starts bleating (he likes sheep) "but I'm innocent! It wasn't me, honest guv!" Someone called Neil comes in and with the expert swordsmanship of his amazingly witty, intelligently, brilliantly written short pieces of prose, cut and thrusts Grimer to the ground in my defence. Grimer then

brings out the axe with the aim of chopping me into little pieces, making postings under an assumed name and even hooking up to a different internet connection to disguise the displayed server location in a cunning attempt to outwit us, but Neil and I suss it immediately and unmask the dastardly foe. Grimer then, like the top bloke he is, publicly admits defeat, so I declare we're still pals. Cool.

Cyberduel

I am subsequently amazed to discover that Neil is only 18 years old! Two weeks later Neil Kershaw, maths undergrad, is up in Sheff too: at one point my little girl asks him: "Are you Mummy's internet shite in knight-ing armour Neil?" When Neil and I turn up at the Ape Index show, Grimer walks over and gives me a big bear hug so as far as I'm concerned all's well that ends well. No point in letting cyberduels spill over into earthspace is there? And now Neil is almost part of the family.

A few months previously, by the way, Neil's in Sheff with his friend Irish Simon. They get rained off bouldering, so Irish Simon rings the nearest Irish climber he even vaguely knows, who happens to be Grimer. They go round to Grimer's, all get trashed together, and Grimer very charitably says they can stop at his and takes them to none other than Ben Moon's party! And I spend all night at that party by the buffet making a complete fool of myself with el Crispino Waddyo and standing next to a real person (Neil Kershaw) whom I was not to meet for another three months... in *cyberspace!* Life really IS stranger than fiction!

On the edge

So now my mornings often start with a chat with Neil or Matt, or the climber James (who is only 16 and makes very funny postings on Rocktalk) on Microsoft Messenger. Later on that morning I'll be walking the dogs on the edge of Derbyshire and watching the cows grazing (what are they doing there? Thought they'd all been slaughtered?) and I am thinking of how different are all our lives, us Rocktalk chums. The ice climber Toby Archer overlooking the Baltic Sea from his office window in Helsinki; the mountaineer Doug Briton aka

"Almost Sane" walking past the ruined palace near his home in the wilds of Scotland; the climber Jonathan Tompkins aka "Jonathan" who defended me when I first arrived on Rocktalk, sitting in his office in Saudi Arabia with the sound of the morning call to prayer outside his window; the climber John Scott sitting in his engineering room on an off-shore rig off Aberdeen; the climber Jude Onions aka "Rockdivajude" walking to school in Kendal before going down the wall; the climber Chris Fryer aka "Happycranker" in Bristol, off surfing if the surf's up; the climber Kev Wynne who always makes me laugh, landscaping gardens in the rain down in Liverpool; the climber Kate Cooper making the kids watch TV in a tiny square of the television set in Leeds whilst she hogs the rest with Rocktalk postings on nt! And there's Steve Pridgeon aka "SteveP" whose writing is almost as good as mine, with his *fantastic* website wedding pics, and Jon Croxford aka "JonC" with his reasoned posting style and wey-hey hunky telephone voice, (it was none other than he who played John Wayne, what a noble chap) and the old timer Al Downie who's been posting for six years and has become a bit of a reluctant celebrity on Rocktalk, earning the respect of everyone with his astute and confrontational debating style. Most of these people are now my friends, some only with one e-mail a fortnight, some, like Neil, Kate and MattB, friends in real life and sending dozens of e-mails and text messages all the time about life, climbing, art, friendship, whatever.

I even achieved some kind of cult celebrity status of my own. At one point three of the four most recently contributed to threads *actually had my name in the title!* This was simply too much and I asked Al James, the moderator, to wield his feared and revered secret zap tool to obliterate any thread title containing my name.

It could have all been so different, but, as I said, all's well that end's well.

So get posting girls, (and get flirting. Most fun since the art college refectory back in...ohh...way back!) ◆