

Manifest Decadence

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Oh, how things change

Goodness, I've a lot to catch up on! I believe the last time I wrote a contribution I was working at BVS Training and being A Bit Mad. I had in fact stopped working there by the time that issue arrived on my doormat a few days later. They terminated my contract on the basis that I was in fact *Too Mad* and they felt it was affecting my work too much to be tolerable. I rather suspect that they had a point. Those five weeks have become a strange blur now, and I can't believe I did it at all. It was, in fact, *awful*. The office was up three flights of stairs that left me in pain most days, the work itself was slightly more physical than I'd been expecting and wasn't very good for me, the MD was a really nasty bloke, the commute was lengthy and complicated, and the whole thing was just stressful, tiring and unrewarding, not to mention how much of my life it ate up.

But anyway, enough of that – it's all ancient history by now! I spent some time working for Naomi in Cambridge but it soon became clear that being away from home that often just *wasn't* going to work. As I write this it is Wednesday 2nd January 2008 and either tomorrow or Friday I intend to get together my passport, a few copies of my CV and my Interview Clothes and trot on down to my local temping agency. My theory is that I can ask them at first for short-term jobs (no more than a month) and if I start to Go A Bit Mad I can just ask them not to find me another job for a few weeks. I intend to stay on the anti-depressants and start seeing my therapist more often, and I'm sure I will be fine. With a bit of luck by the end of the year I'll be able to find and hang on to a permanent contract somewhere – and I know full well that trying lots of different things will mean that I have a clearer idea of where that might be.

Anyway, enough of all that

What else have I been doing? I had a lovely Christmas in

New Year's Resolutions

I know, I know – they're a really bad idea and nobody ever sticks to them. But I do have a few things I want to achieve over 2008, and thinking about them right at the start of January is usually a good way of starting!

-I want to have more of a daily routine, and get better at keeping the flat tidy. I'd also quite like to maintain a diurnal sleep cycle!

-I want to successfully complete my Open University course (A103, Introduction to the Humanities), getting things in on time and working every day if possible.

-I want to work on my French, until I have it at a level I'm much happier with. I'd like to read some of the French novels I know and love in their original language.

-Speaking of reading, I want to do a lot more of that. I managed 52 books in 2007, so I'd like to average at more than a book a week in 2008. I also want to write more, every day if possible, and complete NaNoWriMo again in November.

-I also want to start temping, with a view to having a permanent job that doesn't make me Go Mad by the end of the year.

I'm fairly sure this is all achievable, and am going to get cracking on the OU course, writing, reading and tidying the flat when I've finished writing this...

Cambridge, staying with Kari and Phil for about a week. All the usual suspects turned up for Christmas day, and it was all a lovely and relaxing affair with gin, telly, books, cats, good company, laughter and an obscene amount of food. On Boxing Day I woke up at about twelve, staggered downstairs groaning about my head, and drank a gallon of tea before going over to my pile of Christmas presents and extracting a box of chocolates, a book and some posh bath stuff and disappearing for some hours – much to Phil and Kari's amusement! It was my first ever non-family Christmas and I rather suspect that it will be the first of many.

New Year's Eve was just as fabulous but very very different. there was an enormous and somewhat wild party at a friend's with plenty of drinking and dancing and fun. Both of my partners were there and I saw 2008 in with them, complete with amusing stereotypical midnight kissing, while pleasantly but extraordinarily inebriated. Anne (a different Anne to the one in TWP, I hasten to add for fear of confusing you all mightily!) and I were the last ones standing as per usual and fell happily into the sofa bed together at about half seven in the morning. It took me most of yesterday to recover but I am absolutely fine now and looking forward to the year ahead.

At the risk of sounding melodramatic I think it's safe to say that 2005 was the year that everything fell apart. Very little went right that year, especially towards the end when I really was simply being flung from disaster to disaster, through no fault of my own and with no chance to stop and breathe. It took me the entirety of 2006 to recover from that, and over the course of that year I did pretty much nothing at all.

Over 2007, I struggled to get my life back and I almost succeeded. I suppose in some senses I'm in exactly the same position as I was at the start of the year – broke, unemployed and slightly mad – but I have done an awful lot of things. I have a passport and a fully functioning bank account, neither of which I had a year ago. I've had my first Proper Jobs and have a plan about what I'm going to do next workwise. I finally have anti-

Favourite Plays of 2007

Macbeth with Patrick Stewart was *amazing*. I've never seen it so originally and effectively done and my only wish is that I'd been able to see it again before the run ended.

I also very much enjoyed Cabaret, which I did see twice – though the cast had almost entirely changed by the second time. That's still going and I think I will go and see it thrice! I've often joked that I believe the phrase "When I go, I'm going like Elsie" more deeply than I've ever believed anything else in my entire life...

Favourite Films of 2007

Can I count Ballet Shoes? I know it was only on the telly but it was two hours long and I thought it was absolutely fantastic. Poor Phil sat there through two hours of myself and Kari squeaking and squealing and weeping at each other. I'd forgotten how much I loved Noel Streatfield – I'm not too familiar with Ballet Shoes but I read White Boots several times as a child – and I thought that the BBC's adaptation was really very good indeed.

Oh dear – thinking about it it's not really been a very good year for films! I'm told that I'd put both Spellbound and Enchanted if I'd got round to seeing either of them, which I haven't...

Favourite TV of 2007

Ahh, this is an easy one – Heroes and The West Wing. I'd never seen any West Wing till recently and I'm only up to series 2 now but it's *brilliant*. Heroes has also been great fun, and I look forward to S2 of that. Ooooh, Torchwood's back in a few weeks – JAMES MARSTERS AND JOHN BARROWMAN. TOGETHER. AT THE SAME TIME. OMG. [squee]

depressants and they genuinely work. I'm going to go back into education for the first time since I quit sixth form at the age of sixteen. I've gained two wonderful partners and a group of friends more amazing than I ever thought possible, and through them I have learnt an astounding amount about myself and tried ever so many new things. I've written my first novel, I've been there for people, I've had people be there for me, I've been to new places and I've attended some pretty damn brilliant parties.

I know this sounds stupid but just now I have this feeling that 2008 is going to be My Year. It's time to shake things up a bit, and I am looking forward to it tremendously!

“Hair like Jesus wore it/Hallelujah! I adore it!”

This is going to sound stupid but the one thing that most symbolises the amount of change I went through in 2007 is my hair. At the beginning of this year I had my hair in the same style I'd had it for years – jet black and so long I could sit on it. I was very attached to my hair, saw it as one of my best features, and the thought of cutting it was so unlikely as to be laughable. Somehow or another, though, it changed so much as to be unrecognisable – first I bleached all the black out as an experiment, and then one afternoon a friend cut it into a bob. That doesn't sound like a big deal to most people, but at the time it was an *enormous* thing and for a few weeks caused many tears – though I have to admit that it suits me much better and I certainly do like it now. I had the peroxide bob for most of the year, and have just recently started dying it pink, which seems to suit me well enough. I think I'll stick with it for a while, though I'm not sure what I'm going to do with it next. I'm tempted by the idea of a drastic undercut, which I might go for the next time Libby does my hair for me...

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Oh dear, I am a bit crap – I know full well that I jotted down some notes from the last issue and I haven't the foggiest where they are. I think they had something to do with NaNoWriMo, which I noticed that a couple of other people did too, and I was amused to read that you all lost as much of your November as I

Favourite Gigs of 2007

I've not been to as many gigs this year as I'd like to have done – off the top of my head I can only think of Billy Bragg, the Oysterband, My Life Story, The Pogues and New Model Army, though I do have a sneaking feeling that I've forgotten something.

The Army weren't half as good as I'd been hoping they'd be – or indeed as good as I've heard they are live – but I shall go back next year nonetheless, as I do love the music very much. I live in hope that they will do a lot more from Thunder and Consolation and a lot less from the stuff they've written since their most talented songwriter died!

My Life Story was probably the best of this year's gigs, but in some ways the Pogues was the one I enjoyed most. The place was hot, sweaty, packed, we were so far away from the stage we could hardly see and everyone was singing along so loudly we could hardly hear – but the atmosphere was amazing and I couldn't believe I'd actually got to a Pogues gig.

I was practically raised on them – my father used to play Pogues songs to me on his guitar when I was still in the womb and I knew every word to every song on their Best Of album by the age of four, including all the words you might not want a four year old to know! They've been one of my favourite bands right the way through and Shane McGowan, although we've never met, feels somewhat like my amusingly disgraceful uncle.

Despite all that, until the week before Christmas I'd never actually seen them live. The whole experience completely blew me away and I'm so very

did!

I did find my notes from the issue before, though, in which both **Caroline** and **Flick** mentioned that they have recently read Michelle Magorian's *Back Home*. I discovered this book when I was about eleven and instantly fell in love. I wish I knew where my copy was, I'd love to read it again. Don't bother with the BBC made-for-TV film of several years ago, though, it's crap.

Also from that issue, **Anne** – thank you for the book recommendations! I read *Kim* as a child (in one of my phases of reading Grown Up Books in order to make Grown Up People think that I was a Grown Up Person and stop telling me to Do Things) and should probably pick it up again now that I will have a shot at understanding it and appreciating its subtleties. I've never read any Trollope, much to my embarrassment, though I fully intend to do so.

Good grief, it's nearly five in the afternoon and I'm still wearing my nightclothes. I'd better sign off now and go and Do Stuff. Happy new year, everyone!

glad that when I did finally go it was with my father. I fully intend to go to every gig of theirs I can get to from now on.

Favourite Books of 2007

And finally, books. This is the year that Kari got me into French literature, and I have enjoyed all of the novels I've read very much – especially Colette's *Claudine* novels (which I'd say were my absolute favourite books of the year) and Françoise Sagan's *Bonjour Tristesse*. Turn of the century French writing is different from English novels of the period, and in many ways it's an awful lot more fun!

I suspect that Pratchett's *Monstrous Regiment* makes it onto this list, too. I think it might actually be my favourite of his books so far (apart from *Mort*, which will always have a special place in the bit of my heart devoted to *Discworld!*) Oh, and Stephen Fry's *Making History* was both great fun and extremely thought-provoking.

The two books that made me think the most were CS Lewis's *Mere Christianity* and Richard Dawkins's *The God Delusion* – though admittedly in the latter case a lot of what it made me think was “oh get over yourself, you infuriating bigot”. I read them both in quick succession a few weeks ago and it made a fascinating comparison, and was a great help as I was going through a period of trying to work out exactly what my own beliefs are. It has to be said, I'm a lot more with Lewis than I am with Dawkins...

If I mention the last Potter book you'll all laugh at me, so I won't.