

MURDOCH'S

MAN

(We caught up with Joe at the News Ltd local, the Aurora Hotel.)

How did you come to be residing in the Inner West?

I once wrote a column slagging off Erskineville as some horrible Doctor Moreau concoction, half thirtysomething yuppie and half unbearable late-teens hipster – you fuse them together and throw in a little dog and you've got this grotesquerie. I'm told that the column was posted on the noticeboard in the local pub saying, 'Shoot on sight' or 'Do not serve drinks to this man' or whatever. Then I got together with my current girlfriend and, of course, she lives in Erskineville. She loves Erskineville, we have to move in together in Erskineville. So it was either the girl and Erskineville, or no girl and no Erskineville. I accepted that for love – and I'm nothing if not a romantic – I would have to wade waist deep into the very bowels of hell.

What kind of helpful feedback do you receive wandering the streets of Erskineville?

An unforeseen consequence of appearing on the ABC is that people who hate *The Telegraph* know I work for *The Telegraph*. There's a guy at the Rose Hotel who, every time I walk past, will yell out, "Telegraph scum!" Other people come up and say, "Keep doing what you're doing. I love the way you stick it to them!" That always makes me frightened, because I'm never quite sure what they are talking about. Half the people think I'm a dirty Lib and the other half think I'm a dirty communist, so when people say, "Keep up the good work!" I wonder who I'm meant to be going after. Men come up and say, "My girlfriend really loves you, can I get a photo with you for her?" I'm like, "If your girlfriend really likes me, shouldn't you be punching me up right now? What are you doing encouraging this?"

Living among we pretentious pseudo-intellectual elitists must give you plenty of ideas for columns.

Yes, but sadly they are other people's ideas. Living here has made me very enthusiastic about hipster bashing but that is already what I believe the hipsters call "naff". That's unfortunate because there is so much joy to be had in bashing hipsters – they are so inherently, deeply, deeply annoying. But it has all been said.

What do you make of your new neighbours?

At *The Telegraph* they used to call me 'The Communist' because I didn't necessarily agree with everything that Genghis Khan set out in his various policy manifestos. I used to be a student socialist, a dirty little hippy, and the Inner West has reminded me of that and made me realise just what an annoying, contemptible, stupid, pointless, immature, selfish little brat I was. Because I see my [younger] self reflected in the Inner Western community. I sometimes see the hippy wandering around, struggling to operate a vending machine and think, 'God, that could have been me.'

Do you subscribe to the theory it's easier for right-wingers to be funny?

I do. The Right is all about Darwinism and there is nothing supportive, considerate and nurturing about jokes. The old saying is that the only important common element to all good jokes is that someone has to lose their dignity. There's nothing funny about three people standing around telling each other about how much they respect each other's point of view, how they can work together to make a better world and that if one of them loses their job the others will provide a welfare net. But if one of them slips on a banana peel and cracks their head open, that's funny. If they get hit in the nuts at the same time, that's doubly funny.

Where do you place yourself on the political spectrum these days?

Convention dictates that a journalist shouldn't declare their allegiances. But anyone who has read anything serious I've written, be it on asylum seekers or the assassination of Kevin Rudd, or the policy positions I like... I believe I said on Q&A that my favourite politician was Paul Keating and still people think that I'm a right-wing psychotic Murdoch lapdog, so I'm not sure how many more clues I could possibly give away to where my political sympathies tend to gravitate towards.

What do you make about the moral outrage echo chamber that's such a big part of the mediascape?

Nowadays, if you say just about anything about anything it's, "Oh my God, that's so offensive, I can't believe you would say that!" The extremes on both the Left and the



Joe Hildebrand has been a prominent *Daily Telegraph* columnist since the middle of last decade, but for non-Hate-Media-consuming Inner Westies he remained under the radar until last year, when he started appearing (first by tweet, then in person) in the more respectable media forum of Q&A. At around the same time he was getting a taste of TV stardom, the 35-year-old ex-Melburnian suddenly found himself a tabloid interloper in broadsheet territory. It was a culture clash that **Nigel Bowen** just had to learn more about...

Right try to censor things – both are completely absurd and both are the enemy of anything funny. I was going to do a tweet today that said, "If foreigners want to be welcome in our country they should learn to say, 'Don't Taser me,' in English." But I thought, 'You just can't say that.' And the reason you can't say it is because it will immediately be seized upon by the outrage brigade – it will be completely misinterpreted for all the wrong reasons. Half the people will think that I'm serious and, more frighteningly, probably agree. The other half will think I'm a horrible racist monster and say, "I can't believe you're making a joke out of someone dying, what if it was your son?" The point I was trying to make – that it was an absurdly heavy-handed response from NSW police where clearly the main problem was the guy wasn't able to speak English and therefore they just decided to shoot him with an electric gun – would be completely lost.

Your paper routinely hammers ALP members who live outside their electorates. What do you make of News Ltd employees who spend their days decrying the pernicious influence of the decadent, urban intelligentsia then retire to their Inner West residences?

It is certainly entirely hypocritical and entirely cringeworthy of me and if anything it just makes me love outer western Sydney even more. I'm a self-hating Inner Westie, so I try and compensate for that hypocrisy by flogging myself with a horsehair whip every night before I go to bed.

■ Photo: Ben Cregan

JOE'S GUIDE

TO MULTIMEDIA STARDOM

If there's one thing that the average Inner Westie aspires to even more than getting one of their tweets on Q&A, it's being invited on as a guest. For Joe, one led to the other: "I used to hang shit on people who were on Q&A, as one does on Twitter, and eventually people on Twitter started saying, 'Joe should go on Q&A, Q&A put Joe on' and eventually they did. I suppose it was a Twitter campaign, but what the ABC didn't realise is that most of my followers are spambots, automated software in California, so they really got suckered in on that one. I went on *The Drum* before Q&A, I think that's like the kiddies pool. I had done TV shows before but Q&A is terrifying because you're supposed to know what you're talking about. I think a lot of people, especially non-*Telegraph* readers, were quite alarmed, firstly when I came on the show without a pair of red horns and a forked tail and secondly when I could apparently at least fake an impersonation of someone knew how to read. So it's all about managing expectations."

So what advice do you have for all those aspiring journalists/bloggers/TV stars who see themselves as the next Joe Hildebrand?

"Back off! I'm barely managing to make a living on my own – I do not need any competition. I had to do a talk at UTS, and the attendees kept saying, 'How can I be like you? How can I be a multimedia superstar?' I'm like, 'Do you really think I'm going to tell you? Do you think I got where I am by telling other people how to be super-famous celebrity journos?' No, it's a secret. There is a book out there, but I'm not telling you where you can get it."

Want more?

Go to @Joe_Hildebrand, <http://blogs.news.com.au/dailytelegraph/joehildebrand/> and keep an eye out for his TV show *Dumb, Drunk and Racist*, screening on ABC2 in May.