



Source: Ed O'Loughlin, 'Israeli-Arabs always the outsiders', *Sydney Morning Herald online*, 20/03/06.

Tags: [corporeality](#)

Writer/s: [David Hagger](#)

© 2008 Barbara Campbell and the writer/s

It appeared to be a delightfully warm day through the window. I was expecting visitors later, but for now I was fixated on the hole in my sock. It was one of those holes where your toe looked like a little pimple trying to burst out of your body—if you resembled a charcoal business sock of course. I couldn't stop staring. I don't even think I was really looking at it. I was simply staring in that direction, lost in thought, zoned somewhere else. It wasn't even my big toe you know, but the second toe that was trying to escape.

As a younger man I often worried when I wore thongs outside, where everyone could look at me, that there was the potential to be instantly humiliated. You see, I was one of those people whose second southerly digit was the longest of them all. My brother always found time to ridicule me about it. He would say it looked like E.T. with its bulbous head and narrow frame for a body. It moved independently to the rest of my toes, and could often be seen hanging over the edge of the thong, a mere millimetre or two from the ground. In hindsight it was suicidal to risk a severe scrape along the bitumen as I walked, but the hot summer days, the trips to the beach and even a dash to the corner store could not warrant anything different.

It's sheer protrusion made it terribly difficult to buy shoes. Not only was the torture of having a salesman measure your feet unbearable, but to then wear a shoe that had to be half a size bigger to accommodate your extra length made you feel as if you were traipsing around in clown boots. I remember opting for the size down once. The pain of dealing with a gnarled toe constantly rubbing against the upper was too much to handle and I would try to walk on my heels to counter it banging into the front of the shoe each and every step. Quite like the famed Charlie Chaplin waddling walk.

And don't even start me on stubbing the darn thing. Coffee tables used to jump out and attack, and the shower screen door at the old house seemed to have a personal vendetta against me. I stupidly kicked back in a fit of revenge once, only doubling the injury and cursing as the throbbing increased. I often wondered why no one had managed to design a band-aid that covered your toes well. No wonder the local swimming pool used to be riddled with these fallen, blood-stained bandages in amongst all the hair ties and bobby pins and other pieces of drowned debris. I should have looked into it. I might have even been rich by now.

Apparently over half the population has what they call Morton's toe. I don't know who Morton was but he must have had a longer second toe than even I. Poor guy, it's hard not to feel for him being remembered as the toe man. I'd like to see what my brother would have said about that one.

They say that your little toe is imperative for your balance, but I think in my case it was my second. It acted as an anchor, providing security for the rest of my body in high wind situations or even standing in church for a long Sunday Mass. As a child I remember careening down the street on my skateboard, toes curled over the edge for greater turning speed and control. I always did weave better than anyone else. As a matter of fact, I could coil my toes right around the school diving board. I suppose then it was helpful at times.

My grandmother used to always say that a hole in your sock meant that you weren't cutting your nails often enough. She would suggest keeping your nails trimmed every couple of weeks to ensure that they build strength and maintain a healthy, milky appearance. She was pedantic about matters of hygiene. I guess that is why I am the same. I used to carry around antiseptic wipes wherever I went.

That being said, my grandmother's fable was not quite true. Since being in here, the nurses have paid close attention to my nails upon request. I have them cut frequently. It is a much more enjoyable experience when you can't feel them snapping off all over the place. I have them done after a bath to ensure they are soft and easy to trim. I prefer the nurse to use nail scissors though. The clippers don't do anywhere near as good a job. Sometimes I ask for a little lanolin to be rubbed on my feet before bedtime.

And last night, as the nurse pulled off my sock another hole appeared near my ankle. It looked like the knuckle of a fist trying to punch through a wall.

'Ahh, you see now. There's a hole in my sock dear Liza, dear Liza'.

I think it was her fingernail. She has lovely, long fingers does Margaret.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by David Hagger.*