



Source: Abraham Rabinovich, 'Ultra-orthodox party grants Olmert his majority', The Australian online, 02/05/06.

Tags: [husband/wife](#), [workplace](#), [fortune](#), [home](#)
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I was talking to Thompson the other day. You might recall him: white, middle-aged, going to fat. Worried, with sweaty palms. Works in the lower realms of the money trade. I don't mean to make him sound awful—it's just a physical description, nothing more. I mean, it's all true—his hands sweat, and he has the sort of skin that never took a tan; even in his youth he turned red after an hour on the beach. But he's a lovely man, or can be. He's also capable of a really sharp turn of phrase, and over time he has become cynical, in his gentle way. 'Going to fat' is a bit cruel I suppose—he's simply expanding around the waist, growing slack from all those hours behind a desk. About the only exercise Thompson gets these days is running numbers on his computer. He can be quite eloquent about the slow decline of the middle-aged corporate hack. I tell him he eats too much cake for a man of 50 who doesn't exercise. He agrees, and scrapes the cream to one side. He calls that 'watching his diet'.

I've known Thompson a long time. We met at university, which is when our lives really seemed to get going: finally, we were away from home, out of the nest, inventing ourselves, eager to learn. Just eager, generally. We weren't just taking courses in 17th Century English Poetry (which is where I first met Thompson) or Approaches to the Novel. We were taking drugs, taking time, taking off. He was rail-thin then, and wiry in a kind of rock and roll lizard kind of way, and I know more than one of the gang we hung out with at the time lusted after him. Men and women. Thompson himself was undecided at the time, and flirted outrageously with whomever. He wore nail polish sometimes, and kohl around his eyes. T Rex and Bowie and Lou Reed were big influences.

God knows how Thompson got into the financial services sector. He never had any money back then—and he has precious little now it seems. But he has charm, and always has. Not sleazy charm—charm the pants off you charm, but a real kind of open boyish kind of loveliness, which seems to have endured, despite his years of office work, despite the unrealised promises.

Anyway—I digress. Since his divorce he's been living in a one bedroom apartment down by the water—revisiting his bachelor days, before he and Susan got married, moved to a semi in the inner west and had kids. The divorce was cruel, although I don't blame Susan: Thompson just drifted. One day, he seemed to have drifted far off shore, tethered to Susan and the children and the house and the garden and all that stuff by nothing more than habit. He simply wasn't anchored anymore. Maybe he never was. He wasn't restless exactly: he didn't want to change jobs, he didn't want to screw other women; he didn't want to travel. I think that was his problem. He had become content with a quiet life fuelled by good food, a bit too much to drink, late night

TV and stacks of fantasy novels, which he reads voraciously. He can still quote John Donne and when you ask him about his job, he'll deliver a wicked piss-take on corporate life. He's savage about the mating habits of ambitious thirtysomethings, hilarious on the abuses of language. He still refuses to talk about how a change in circumstances will 'impact' investors. Thompson insists a change in interest rates will 'affect' mortgage payments for the average household. He obviously doesn't believe in the purity of the market. I know for a fact he loathes political conservatives as a matter of course. All of which is one reason why he's fifty and still sitting in an open plan office with a dozen men and women 15 years his junior.

Whatever ambition Thompson may have harboured—and whatever hope he had of actually realising that ambition—was finally shattered last week. He told me the story, over coffee and cake. He asked for cream on the side, and ate it, and I suspected he was actually depressed. On the phone he'd said he had news for me, but I hadn't realised quite how momentous it was. They'd sacked him. After 15 years of unambitious diligence, he was given a month's notice.

'Why?' I asked.

It seemed he'd taken his observations on the mendacity of corporate culture too far: he'd 'leaked' a confidential management paper (all his own work of course) outlining a radical new approach to Performance Management. He cadged the language from a guide to imbecility devised by the American Eugenics Society in 1922: workers were placed on a finely gradated scale according to ability from Moron to Idiot. He chose his words well. The document was laid out as a discussion paper. He forged the signature of the head of the company's Human Resources Manager. He showed me. It was good—very good. Junior staff—particularly the support staff—loved it. Fast-tracked middle managers had a chuckle. They expressed the opinion that it was good but suggested he had too much time on his hands. Senior management simply saw it as disloyalty and contempt. He actually had an audience with two of the senior partners. 'Why did you do it?' they asked. 'It was meant to be humorous', Thompson told them. He said he was quite calm at the time. He thought he'd simply be chastised and sent back to his workstation, chastened. Instead, an hour later he had a letter of termination from H.R.

I had to go back to my office. Thompson wasn't in a rush to return to his. When I said I had to go, he ordered another coffee and a second serve of cake.

He finishes next Friday. We're having a drink after work.

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Tony MacGregor.