



Source: Damien Cave, 'Iraqi battlefront: Prices', *New York Times* in *International Herald Tribune* online, 26/08/06.

Tags: [plants](#), [art](#), [child/parent](#)

Writer/s: [Lucas Ihlein](#)

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We sourced the big tubs on 'Freecycle'—it's an e-list which is all about giving stuff away. Money's not allowed to change hands, and you can't swap, nor trade. It has to be (and sure, it's a tautology) a 'free gift'. The tubs were made of translucent plastic, about two feet high, with a one foot girth, and a large screw-on lid. We took four of them, one for each kind of cucumber. They came from a man who was obsessed with do-it-yourself pickling. He was planning to do his own olives, but never got around to it. He'd set up a still for hard liquor instead. The tubs smelled like barbecue sauce.

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Dad decided to take up painting. It was a few months after his wife left him, and he'd been having trouble sleeping at night. We spoke on the phone.

'How did you get into that, Dad?', I asked, a bit surprised.

'I was walking through the mall one day, and there was a display, you know, those freestanding panels with a sort of felt cover, and paintings were hanging on them. The people smiled at me as I walked past, and I stopped to ask what it was all about. The class is on a Monday night, for three hours. It's in the local sports hall, everyone brings along a blank canvas or two, and some paints.'

'And what do you paint, Dad?'

'Oh, we just work from magazine pictures,' he said, 'I'm doing a beach scene.'

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Rohan's curing his own meats. His mum gave him a book on 'charcuterie'. He loves his meat, does Rohan. He's been down to the local Portuguese butcher to talk technique, and he plans to build his own smoker—a sort of wooden chamber for making bacon.

'So, will you save money doing this?', I ask.

'Oh no', he says, 'actually, it's far cheaper to just buy it at the shop...'

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In those days, nobody could afford the rent to exhibit their art and Tien couldn't even get a job, since he had no permit. So he bought a cheap old station wagon and began his own 'mini-cab' company. It was perfect—his rates were cheaper than the official cabs, and he'd do house moving and odd jobs to boot. When there was no

luggage in the back, Tien would set it up as a gallery. It was called the 'Danger Museum'. Eventually the station wagon conked out, and he couldn't afford to get it fixed. He abandoned it by the canal in Bethnal Green, and ran the Danger Museum out of a cardboard box fastened around his neck with one of the seatbelts.

* * *

Roger told his parents to plant Wattleseed trees. His parents do whatever Roger tells them to, since he's got a degree in Environmental Science. Now there are ten thousand trees. There hasn't been any harvest yet, though Roger assures them there will be, sometime soon. In any case, it's better than sheep.

* * *

Helen owns an olive grove in Greece. It's run by a little Greek man. She lets him lease the grove for next to nothing. Her Greek relatives don't like it.

'Why won't she charge him proper commercial rates?', they want to know. But Helen likes it this way.

'Would any of YOU like to run the grove?', she asks. Of course not. She always has buckets of olives in various stages marinating in the kitchen.

'My olive man, he works hard,' she says.

* * *

Lisa's been stripping the asthma weed from the little patch of yard to the side of her flat. She's been meaning to do it for ages, and, in a moment of private generosity, I'd even thought of helping her out, but I never got around to mentioning it, and now she's doing it on her own. Lucy looked over the fence while she worked.

'You know, there used to be an orange tree in the yard there,' she said.

Lisa kept on pulling out the asthma weed. Asthma weed is the scourge of the inner west. When she got to the bottom, she had four garbage bags full of the noxious stuff. In the middle of the bare yard was the stump of an orange tree.

'It's probably just the root stock,' Rohan said.

I didn't know what he meant, and I forgot to ask.

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Lucas Ihlein.