



Source: Dana Milbank, 'President's new man refreshingly un-Rumsfeldian', *Washington Post* in *The Age* online, 07/12/06.

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I'm not an important man. Let's get that straight to start with. I'm not the man at the top. There are plenty of others who are far more important than me.

It was a train of events, as people like to say, an unavoidable train of events.

I mean if that self-righteous, smirking bitch-faced cow wasn't in the lift, I'd've been fine, just fine. If Bernie had come down with me, or Martin; but no, it had to be her, Shirley MacKenzie. It turned out that bitch had worked for the RAAF during the war, had been a secretary in a high-profile law firm, had a photographic memory, an impeccable record, and bloody antique moral standards.

When it was her turn she got up in court and said it wasn't so much that I'd kicked the boy, notwithstanding—whatever—the fact that the kick had set off his cardiac arrest, but it had been what I'd said before that.

I mean hadn't she heard a bit of colourful language before?

But then she said it wasn't the colourful language, and yes, she had heard colourful language before, after all she'd been in the war. She said that she didn't like to admit it but it was personal. She knew who I was. Had read about me in the paper.

Not bad, eh? The paper!

She said that she was sick of men like me using words in that way. To terrorise people she said.

For fuck's sake, I'm not the terrorist.

Of course I tried the standard tactic. I mean, hell, it had worked before hadn't it? We couldn't believe it actually, me and the boys. It was too easy. That Montrose inquiry was a piece of piss.

'I'm sorry, your Honour, I can't remember.'

'No, I can't recall that.'

I mean are these guys dumb or what? Of course I knew what was going on, I brokered all the deals. And then when Gareth pulled the one out about being slightly deaf in one ear, I mean that was GOLD! And the judge bought it!

Not this time.

So what happened? We'd had a great meeting, first time we'd really all been together again in the chair since the inquiry, and shit it felt good. We cooked up a really sweet little new scheme. It was watertight. We'd learnt a thing or two ourselves from the Montrose inquiry, let me tell you.

And then there was this little shit-kicker lefty university vegetarian type in the lift. 'Excuse me, Sir,' he says, 'I'd like to ask you a few questions about Iraq.'

I ignored him. We were already on the 23rd floor. I'd be out soon.

He tried again. 'I'd very much like to know, Mr Braun, what you feel about the number of people dying every day in Iraq, and the contribution your actions have made

to the current situation?'

'Get stuffed.' I said. Twelfth.

'I suppose to you' the shit-kicker couldn't keep his mouth shut, could he? 'the number of people dying in Iraq is just a number, but—'

'Shut the fuck up! I've finished work for the day. And if you wouldn't mind getting out of the way, we've arrived at the end of this lovely little lift journey and I'm going to go and have a beer.'

But the little shit had his finger holding the lift doors closed. He said, 'How do you look at yourself in the mirror with respect?'

I tried to shove him aside, but he was surprisingly strong. For a vegetarian. And I didn't wanna get too rough because there was a lady in the lift too. Yeah, Ms bloody Mackenzie. 'Oh, come on mate, piss off.'

'I'm interested,' he said, 'in respect.'

And then I opened my mouth.

'Listen mate, alright, whatever, we can have a little talk about it, but I know your type. You're the type who doesn't want to see anyone else's point of view. You just want to lecture me. You want to whinge. And you want me to change. Well I'm telling you mate, you're not going to change anything. Especially not me. I'm on to a bloody good thing with my business. I'm proud of it. I developed this business from the ground up. Started when I was about your age and it's gone from strength to strength. I mean get real! I've got a family to look after; two families in fact, my first and my second. And I've got to make money, and this is a smart way to do it, and there's nothing you can tell me that's gonna convince me why I should worry about a few dumb, poor, gun-obsessed angry fuckers who want to pick fights with each other in a desert a long way away.'

'You make me sick.' The vegetarian said. 'You're a disgrace. I'm glad you're not my Dad.'

And that was what did it. I mean, for fuck's sake. The little shit insulted me. How did I know he was a bomb waiting to explode? I pushed him aside, hard, and he fell to the floor. The doors opened, and I gave him a kick before I left. He deserved it. But as I left the lift he started to writhe and shake, and I could see Mackenzie going to him and bending over him. She looked up and the last thing I saw was, her eyes pushing into mine, and I felt a coldness in my gut. Which wasn't beer. I knew then that it was just a matter of time.

So when that piss-weak vegetarian died of his cardiac arrest, there I was again, hauled up before a court. Ms bloody Shirley Mackenzie got up there and opened her mouth and spilled the beans, and after that I was done. Like a dog's dinner.

Respect. Compassion. Wisdom.

What a heap of shit.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Caroline Lee.*