



Source: James Glanz, 'In the heat of battle and politics, the hard facts melt', *New York Times online*, 20/05/07.
Tags: [child/parent](#), [home](#), [global warming](#), [world events](#)
Writer/s: [Jessie Lilley](#)

© 2008 Barbara Campbell and the writer/s

Every second Saturday I'm over at dad's, on my hands and knees, scrubbing his kitchen clean. Dedication, Barry calls it. Feels more like stupidity to me, especially with the vile concoctions he insists on using as cleaning agents.

He's gone 'Green', my dad. Imagine that? A bloody pensioner in Weston-super-Mare who'll only have one light on for two hours in the evening to save on electricity bills, and he worries about being carbon neutral! The man doesn't even have a fridge! But once he gets something in his head, well that's that.

Like his letters to the council—Barry calls it Pensioner-gate. It began when a woman's body was found in her bed seven years after she'd died of pneumonia. Dad got angry because he said the paper wrote about it as an isolated tragedy—no one even missed her, and all that. He thought it should've had wider social implications, that they should've been talking about how the pension's not enough to live on rather than tugging at people's heart strings. Let's just say it got him very fired up.

Personally, I think it just gave him a scare because he can't afford central heating either. But like I said, once he gets something in his head...He even went to the papers to get somebody to write about it, but I'm sure you won't be surprised to hear that pensioners were low on the list of hot news topics of the day. First place belonged to the crazy frog ring tone.

That's when his obsession with the papers began. I collect them from reception at work then bring them with me every week. He reads them cover to cover, putting a little red cross on every page once he's done with it, so he can keep track.

Between you and me, I don't mind bringing them so he gets a balanced view of the world. You know, *Men's Health*, *Hello!*, *OK* and all that. He won't read *News of the World* but I sometimes try and slip it in.

Anyway, the reason I'm telling you all this is because this morning I was around at his trying to get everything done before the final—Chelsea versus Man U. I could hear him clucking from the other room, and even though I had my head in the oven—my big arse waving about for anyone who cared to admire it—I could see him clear as day in my mind, sitting in that grim old chair in the half light, tapping the magazine pages with his finger.

'That poor wee girl,' he was saying.

Straight away I was thinking, Serena, he must be talking about little Serena. Barry and I have been worried sick about her too, you know, the one from Bristol who's all over the papers. So I put the kettle on, thinking he must want to talk about it. I opened a packet of Jaffa Cakes and the used tea bags went in a little bowl on the bench for recycling.

He's good for a chat, you know, being so well read, and I

was really looking forward to sitting down with him. But when I took the tele tray in I found him crying, bless! I really thought he was upset about Serena so I went and set the tea down and patted his arm.

'Don't worry about it,' I said, trying to comfort him. 'They'll find her.'

He looked at me shaking his head. 'That poor young thing,' he said, 'stabbed to death by her father-in-law and they've got her all the way back on page 32. Not even a photo.'

That's typical of my dad, really it is. The whole world's trying to find an innocent young girl who's been snatched in the middle of the night, every parent's worst nightmare, and dad's more concerned about a domestic dispute in Birmingham.

'And look!' he jabbed at the paper with his skinny finger. 'Page 33, a wee boy with his legs blown off. THIRTY-THREE!' He was shouting at me like it was the greatest indignity in the world. 'It's alright,' I said, trying to calm him down. 'It's on the International pages, that's all. They're always at the back.'

But really, I was at my wit's end. Why would he want to read about something that makes him that upset in the first place? At least with little Serena, we can all do our bit to find her, emailing her picture around, while there's still hope. Which is what I said next, trying to change the subject.

Well! You'd have thought I asked him if he wanted to go to bed with the devil the way he looked at me. Straight to my face, he says: 'Mary, I don't give a fuck about that.'

My father! In all my fifty-seven living years I have NEVER heard that man swear before. Not once. Not even when the arthritis behind his knee caps gets so bad his legs stick out like a fork in a tree. Not ever. And to have such little charity for an innocent! (I read that in the *Grazia* editorial. Sadly, my dad is not the first person to complain about the amount of coverage little Serena is getting.) I felt angry, I really did.

All I could think to do was go out to the car and fetch the little tele I brought over so we could watch the game. Dad won't keep a TV in the house, he says it uses too much electricity.

'Barry will be over in a minute,' I said, in case he wanted to apologise or at least explain himself. Do you know what he said?

'What's another word for cleavage, five letters?'

He'd just turned the page and forgotten about it.

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Jessie Lilley.