

Six

Doing Something Good

I am a nobody," said Hank, "just a guy with a family and a job, a middle America-type guy."

Hank wasn't his real name. He'd managed to keep that aspect of himself a secret. He was talking to me via Google Hangouts from his kitchen in a suburban house in a West Coast American town I promised him I wouldn't name. He looked frail, fidgety, the sort of man more comfortable working alone at a computer than talking to a human stranger via one.

On March 18, 2013, Hank was in the audience at a conference for tech developers in Santa Clara, California, when a

stupid joke popped into his head, which he murmured to his friend Alex.

"What was the joke?" I asked him.

"It was so bad I don't remember the exact words," he said. "It was about a fictitious piece of hardware that has a really big dongle—a ridiculous dongle. We were giggling about that. It wasn't even conversation-level volume."

A few moments earlier, Hank and Alex had been giggling over some other Beavis-and-Butt-head-type tech in-joke about "forking someone's repo." "We'd decided it was a new form of flattery," Hank explained. "A guy had been onstage presenting his new project and Alex said, 'I would fork that guy's repo.'"

(In tech jargon "to fork" means to take a copy of another person's software so you can work on it independently. Another word for software is "repository." This is why "forking someone's repo" works both as a term of flattery and also as sexual innuendo—just in case you wanted to know. I think it is a very special sort of hell where you're compelled to explain to a journalist some terrible throwaway joke you made ten months earlier and the journalist keeps saying, "I'm sorry. I still don't get it," but that was the hell Hank found himself in during his Google Hangouts chat with me.)

Moments after making the dongle joke, Hank half noticed the woman sitting in front of them at the conference stand up, turn around, and take a photograph. Hank thought she was taking a picture of the crowd. So he looked forward, trying not to mess up her shot.

It's a little painful to look at this photograph now—knowing what was about to happen to them. Those mischie-



Hank is on the left, Alex on the right.

vous, stupid smiles that follow in the wake of a dongle joke successfully shared would be Hank's and Alex's last smiles for a while.

Ten minutes after the photograph was taken, a conference organizer came down the aisle and said to Hank and Alex, "Can you come with me?"

They were taken into an office and told there'd been a complaint about sexual comments. "I immediately apologized," Hank said. "I knew exactly what they were talking about. I told them what we'd said, and that we didn't mean for it to come across as a sexual comment, and that we were sorry if someone overheard and was offended. They were like, 'Okay. I see what happened.'"

And that was that. The incident passed. Hank and Alex

were badly shaken up—"We're nerdy guys and confrontation isn't something we handle well. It's not something we're accustomed to"—and so they decided to leave the conference early.

They were on their way to the airport when they started wondering exactly *how* the woman sitting in front of them had conveyed her complaint to the conference organizers. They suddenly felt anxious about this. The nightmarish possibility was that it had been communicated in the form of a public tweet. And so, with apprehension, they had a look.



A bolt of anxiety shot through Hank. He quickly scanned her replies, but there was nothing much—just the odd congratulation from a few of her 9,209 followers for the “noble” way she’d “educated” the men behind her. He noticed ruefully that a few days earlier the woman—her name was Adria Richards—had herself tweeted a stupid penis joke. She’d suggested to a friend that he put socks down his pants to bewilder TSA agents at the airport. Hank relaxed a little.

The next day Adria Richards followed up her tweet with a blog post:

Yesterday, I publicly called out a group of guys at the PyCon conference who were not being respectful to the community.

She explained the background—how she was a “developer evangelist at a successful start-up” and that while the men had been giggling about big dongles, the presenter onstage was talking about initiatives to bring more women into the industry. In fact, he’d just projected onto the screen a photograph of a little girl at a tech workshop.

Accountability was important. These guys sitting right behind me felt safe in the crowd. I got that and realized that being anonymous was fueling their behavior. This is known as Deindividuation. Theories of deindividuation propose [here Adria was quoting from Wikipedia] that it is a psychological state of decreased self-evaluation and decreased evaluation apprehension causing antinormative and disinhibited behavior. Deindividuation theory

seeks to provide an explanation for a variety of antinormative collective behavior, such as violent crowds, lynch mobs, etc.

Deindividuation. Here was Gustave LeBon and Philip Zimbardo springing into life once again, this time within Adria's blog.

I stood up slowly, turned around and took three, clear photos . . . There is something about crushing a little kid's dream that gets me really angry . . .

It takes three words to make a difference:
"That's not cool." . . .

Yesterday the future of programming was on the line and I made myself heard.

—ADRIA RICHARDS, *But You're a Girl* BLOG,
MARCH 18, 2013

But Hank had already been called into his boss's office and fired.

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I packed up all my stuff in a box," Hank said, "then I went outside to call my wife. I'm not one to shed tears but . . . When I got in the car with my wife I just . . . I've got three kids. Getting fired was terrifying."

That night Hank made his only public statement. (Like

Justine and Jonah, he had never spoken to a journalist about what had happened until he spoke to me.) He posted a short message on the discussion board Hacker News.

Hi, I'm the guy who made a comment about big dongles. First of all I'd like to say I'm sorry. I really did not mean to offend anyone and I really do regret the comment and how it made Adria feel. She had every right to report me to staff, and I defend her position . . . [But] as a result of the picture she took I was let go from my job today. Which sucks because I have 3 kids and I really liked that job.

She gave me no warning, she smiled while she snapped the pic and sealed my fate.

"The next day," Hank said, "Adria Richards called my company asking them to ask me to remove the portion of my apology that stated I lost my job as a result of her tweet."

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I sent Adria an interview request. "All right, pitch me via e-mail and if relevant, I'll respond," she replied. So I pitched. Successfully. We agreed to meet two weeks later. "We will meet in a public place for safety reasons," Adria wrote. "Make sure to bring along your ID for verification."

We settled on the international check-in desks at San Francisco Airport. I was expecting someone fiercer. But when I saw her

half wave at me from across the terminal, she didn't seem fierce at all. She seemed introverted and delicate, just like how Hank had come across over Google Hangouts. We found a café and she told me about the moment it all began for her—the moment she overheard the comment about the big dongle.

"Have you ever had an altercation at school and you could feel the hairs rise up on your back?" she asked me.

"You felt fear?" I asked.

"Danger," she said. "Clearly my body was telling me, 'You are unsafe.'"

Which was why, she said, she "slowly stood up, rotated from my hips, and took three photos." She tweeted one, "with a very brief summary of what they said. Then I sent another tweet describing my location. Right? And then the third tweet was the [conference's] code of conduct."

"Danger?" I said. "What were you imagining might...?"

"Have you ever heard that thing, 'Men are afraid that women will laugh at them and women are afraid that men will kill them?'" she said.

I told Adria that people might consider that an overblown thing to say. She had, after all, been in the middle of a tech conference with eight hundred bystanders.

"Sure," Adria replied. "And those people would probably be white and they would probably be male."

This seemed a weak gambit. Men can sometimes be correct. There is some Latin for this kind of logical fallacy. It's called an ad hominem attack. When someone can't defend a criticism against them, they change the subject by attacking the criticizer.

"Somebody getting fired is pretty bad," I said. "I know

you didn't *call* for him to be fired. But you must have felt pretty bad."

"Not too bad," she said. She thought more and shook her head decisively. "He's a white male. I'm a black Jewish female. He was saying things that could be inferred as offensive to me, sitting in front of him. I do have empathy for him but it only goes so far. If he had Down syndrome and he accidentally pushed someone off a subway that would be different... I've seen things where people are like, 'Adria didn't know what she was doing by tweeting it.' Yes I did."

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The evening Hank posted his statement on Hacker News, outsiders began to involve themselves in his and Adria's story. Hank started receiving messages of support from men's-rights bloggers. He didn't respond to any of them. Later a Gucci Little Piggy blogger wrote that Hank's Hacker News message had revealed him to be a man with

a complete lack of backbone . . . by apologizing you are just saying, "I am a weak enemy—do with me what you will." [In publicly shaming Hank, Adria had] complete and utter power over his children. That doesn't piss this guy off?

At the same time that Hank was being feted and then insulted by the men's-rights bloggers, Adria discovered she was getting discussed on a famous meeting place for trolls: 4chan/b/.

A father of three is out of a job because a silly joke he was telling a friend was overheard by someone with more power than sense. Let's crucify this cunt.

Kill her.

Cut out her uterus with an xacto knife.

Someone sent Adria a photograph of a beheaded woman with tape over her mouth. Adria's face was superimposed onto the bodies of porn actors. Websites were created to teach people how to make the superimposing look seamless, by matching skin tones. On Facebook someone wrote, "I hope I can find Adria, kidnap her, put a torture bag over her head, and shoot a .22 subsonic round right into her fucking skull. Fuck that bitch make her pay make her obey." (That message, Adria told me, although I couldn't confirm it, was from a student at the New York City College of Technology.)

"Death threats and rape threats only feed her cause," someone eventually wrote on 4chan/b/. "I don't mean stop doing things. Just think first. Do something productive."

Then her employer's website and servers came under a massive DDoS attack, which caused them to crash—the automated version of one person or even thousands sitting at a computer manually pressing refresh relentlessly until the targeted website becomes overpowered and collapses. A group of attackers said the attacks would stop if Adria was fired. Hours later she was fired—publicly and without warning, according to SendGrid's CEO, for dividing the community she was supposed to unite.

"I slept on couches for most of 2013," she later emailed me. "I cried a lot during this time, journaled, and escaped by watching Netflix. How do I feel about losing my job? I didn't expect it. SendGrid [her employers] threw me under the bus. I felt betrayed. I felt abandoned. I felt ashamed. I felt rejected. I felt alone."

A few days before I flew to San Francisco to meet Adria, I posted a message on 4chan/b/ asking for anyone personally involved in her destruction to contact me. The message was deleted in less than a minute. I posted another request. That one vanished after a few seconds. Somebody inside 4chan was silently erasing me whenever I tried to make contact. But my messages happened to coincide with the arrests of some hard-core 4chan trolls and DDoSers and activists, so suddenly there were real names out there. Which was how I came to meet a twenty-one-year-old 4chan denizen, Mercedes Haefter.

In her Facebook photograph Mercedes wears a comedy mustache and bunny ears. Now we sat opposite each other in a vast, opulent loft apartment above an old grocery store on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. It belongs to her lawyer, Stanley Cohen. He's spent his career representing anarchists and communists and squatter groups and Hamas, and now he was representing Mercedes.

The crime she was accused of (and would later plead guilty

to; she is awaiting sentencing as I write this) is that in November 2010 she and thirteen other 4chan users DDoS'd PayPal as revenge for their refusing to accept donations to WikiLeaks. You could donate to the Ku Klux Klan via PayPal but not to WikiLeaks.

The FBI showed up at her Las Vegas apartment one day at six a.m. "I answered the door and they said, 'Mercedes, do you mind putting your pants on?' To be honest, being arrested is really fun. You get to troll the FBI, you get to wear fancy handcuffs, you get to pick the music in the car. But the indictment was boring. I napped through it."

I spent a few hours with Mercedes. She was, on the surface, quite troll-like—a lover of jubilant online chaos. She told me about her favorite 4chan thread. It was started by "a guy who's genuinely in love with his dog, and his dog went in heat, and so he went around collecting samples and injecting them into his penis and he fucked his dog and got her pregnant and they're his puppies." Mercedes laughed. "That's the thread I told the FBI about when they asked me about 4chan, and some of the officers actually got up and left the room."

This aspect of Mercedes wasn't so interesting to me because I didn't see this story as being a story about trolls. Focusing on trolls would be taking the easy option—blaming the renaissance of public shaming on some ludicrous, outrageous minority. A scattering of trolls may have piled on Justine and Adria, but trolls didn't fell those people. People like me felled them.

But I got to know and like Mercedes during the months

that followed—we e-mailed each other a lot—and she really wasn't much of a troll at all. Her motives were kinder than that. She was also someone whose shaming frenzy was motivated by the desire to do good. She told me about the time 4chan tracked down a boy who had been posting videos of himself on YouTube physically abusing his cat "and daring people to stop him." 4chan users found him "and let the entire town know he was a sociopath. Ha ha! And the cat was taken away from him and adopted."

(Of course, the boy might have been a sociopath. But Mercedes and the other 4chan people had no evidence of that—no idea what may or may not have been happening in his home life to turn him that way.)

I asked Mercedes what sorts of people gathered on 4chan.

"A lot of them are bored, understimulated, overpersecuted, powerless kids," she replied. "They know they can't be anything they want. So they went to the Internet. On the Internet we have power in situations where we would otherwise be powerless."

This was a period of sustained draconian prosecutorial bombardment—an effort by authorities to subdue people like Mercedes into submission. But when I asked her if she thought the prosecutions would end their DDoSing and trolling campaigns, her response was sharp and trenchant.

"The police are trying to claim the area," she said. By "area," she meant the Internet. "Just like in the cities. They gentrify the downtown, move all the poor people into ghettos, and then start trolling the ghettos, stopping and frisking everyone."

As it happened, shortly before I met Mercedes, the New York Police Department released figures on how many times their officers had stopped and frisked New Yorkers during the previous year. It was 684,330 times. That was 1,800 stop and frisks each day. Of those 1,800 people—according to the New York Civil Liberties Union—nearly nine out of ten “have been completely innocent.” Eighty-seven percent of the people targeted were black or Latino.

In July 2012 a civil rights lawyer with the Center for Constitutional Rights, Nahal Zamani, interviewed victims of the policy for a research paper, “Stop and Frisk: The Human Impact.”

Several interviewees said that being stopped and frisked makes you “feel degraded and humiliated.” One went on to say: “When they stop you in the street, and then everybody’s looking . . . it does degrade you. And then people get the wrong perception of you. That kind of colors people’s thoughts toward you, [people] might start thinking that you’re into some illegal activity, when you’re not. Just because the police [are] just stopping you for—just randomly. That’s humiliating [on] its own.” . . . [Another said,] “It made me feel violated, humiliated, harassed, shameful, and of course very scared.”

By some strange circular coincidence, it was Jonah Lehrer’s fellow *New Yorker* writer Malcolm Gladwell who had popularized the stop-and-frisk policy. When it was first implemented in the 1990s—it was known as broken-windows

policing back then—Gladwell wrote a landmark *New Yorker* essay about it, “The Tipping Point.” He called it “miraculous.” There was a correlation between coming down heavy on petty criminals like graffiti artists and fare dodgers, his essay argued, and New York’s sudden decline in murders.

“A strange and unprecedented transformation” was happening across New York City, Gladwell observed. There used to be volleys of gunfire. Now there were “ordinary people on the streets at dusk, small children riding their bicycles, old people on benches, people coming out of the subways alone. Sometimes the most modest of changes can bring about enormous effects.”

Gladwell’s essay was a sensation—one of the most influential articles in the magazine’s history. It sold the aggressive policing tactic to thoughtful, liberal New York City people—the sort of people who wouldn’t normally support such a draconian idea. He gave a generation of liberals permission to be more conservative. He became a marketing tool for broken-windows policing. His book *The Tipping Point* went on to sell two million copies, launching his career and the careers of the countless other pop-science writers who followed in his footsteps—like Jonah Lehrer.

But Gladwell’s essay was wrong. Subsequent data revealed that violent crime had been dropping in New York City for five years before broken-windows policing was implemented. It was plummeting at the same rate all over America. This included places—like Chicago and Washington, D.C.—where war hadn’t been declared on fare dodgers and graffiti artists. When I interviewed Gladwell in 2013 for a separate project—BBC’s *The Culture Show*—I brought up the topic of stop and frisk and

broken-windows policing with him. A pained, remorseful look crossed his face. "I was too in love with the broken-windows notion," he said. "I was so enamored by the metaphorical simplicity of that idea that I overstated its importance."

Stop and frisk continued through the 2000s and into the 2010s, and one by-product of it was that some repeatedly frisked young people sought revenge in online activism—by joining 4chan. It wasn't only Mercedes who told me this. Soon after we met, I had a cloak-and-dagger meeting outside a subway station in Queens with a 4chan friend of hers. A battered car pulled up. The driver was young, white, of Spanish heritage, and wore a big crucifix. I still don't know his real name. He said I should call him by his Internet name: Troy.

He took me to a café where he grumbled about how things weren't like they used to be, about the good old days when you couldn't leave your mobile phone on a café table around here without its being stolen. I told Troy that the good old days sounded terrible to me, but he explained that with gentrification comes collateral damage—constant stop and frisks of any young person who doesn't look like a preppy hipster: "Going to the store, coming home from school, ruining your whole day. It's disgusting. It's dangerous to walk the borders around here." It was these police inequities that compelled Troy to join 4chan, he told me.

"The police are saying, 'Look at what we can do to you on your own turf,'" Mercedes continued. "'This is not your

space. It's our space, and we're letting you exist here.' People socialize on Facebook because where do you go to loiter in New York anymore? The Internet is our space and they're trying to take it, and it's not going to happen because it's the Internet."

"And you know more about how it works than they do?" I asked her.

"Fuck them," she said. "They're idiots. If you understood medicine in Massachusetts at a certain time, you were a witch and they would burn you. There aren't a lot of people these days who can get past Facebook. So explain to them how a router works and you're a magician. You're a dark wizard. Then they say, 'We need to lock them away forever because we don't understand how else to stop them.' Part of the reason all these kids have become experts on the Internet is because they don't have power anywhere else. Skilled trade is shrinking. That's why they went there. And then, holy shit, it blew up."

I asked Mercedes about the attack on Justine. She said, "Sacco? The one that got those guys fired for joking about dongles?"

"That was Adria Richards," I said. "Justine Sacco was the AIDS-tweet woman."

"Well, that was Twitter," she said. "Twitter is a different beast from 4chan. It has more regular morals and values than 4chan. Adria Richards got attacked because she got a guy fired for making a dongle joke that wasn't directed at anyone. He wasn't hurting anyone. She was impeding his freedom of speech and the Internet spanked her for it."

"And Justine Sacco?" I said.

"There's a fair understanding on the Internet of what it

means to be the little guy," Mercedes said, "the guy rich white assholes make jokes about. And so the issue with Justine Sacco is that she's a rich white person who made a joke about black sick people who will die soon. So for a few hours, Justine Sacco got to find out what it feels like to be the little guy everyone makes fun of. Dragging down Justine Sacco felt like dragging down every rich white person who's ever gotten away with making a racist joke because they could. She thought her black AIDS joke was funny because she doesn't know what it's like to be a disadvantaged black person or be diagnosed with AIDS." She paused. "Some sorts of crimes can only be handled by public consensus and shaming. It's a different kind of court. A different kind of jury."

I asked Mercedes to explain to me one of the great mysteries of modern shamings—why they were so breathtakingly misogynistic. Nobody had used the language of sexual violence against Jonah, but when Justine and Adria stepped out of line, the rape threats were instant. And the 4chan people were about the most unpleasant.

"Yeah, it's a bit extreme," Mercedes replied. "4chan takes the worst thing it can imagine that person going through and shouts for that to happen. I don't think it was a threat that anyone intended to carry through. And I think a lot of its use really did mean 'destroy' rather than 'sexually assault.'" She paused. "But 4chan aims to degrade the target, right? And one of the highest degradations for women in our culture is rape. We don't talk about rape of men, so I think it doesn't occur to most people as a male degradation. With men, they

talk about getting them fired. In our society men are supposed to be employed. If they're fired, they lose masculinity points. With Donglegate she pointlessly robbed that man of his employment. She degraded his masculinity. And so the community responded by degrading her femininity."

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The death threats and rape threats against Adria continued even after she was fired. "Things got very bad for her," Hank told me. "She had to disappear for six months. Her entire life was being evaluated by the Internet. It was not a good situation for her at all."

"Have you ever met her?" I asked him.

"No," Hank replied. "There's never been any contact between us since she turned around and took my photograph."

Ten months had passed since that day. Hank had had ten months to allow his feelings about her to settle into something coherent, so I asked him what he thought of her now.

"I think that nobody deserves what she went through," he replied.

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Maybe it was [Hank] who started all of this," Adria told me in the café at the San Francisco airport. "No one would have known he got fired until he complained," she said. "Maybe he's to blame for complaining that he got fired. Maybe he secretly seeded the hate groups. Right?"

I was so taken aback by this suggestion that I didn't say

anything in defense of Hank at the time. But later I felt bad that I hadn't stuck up for him. So I e-mailed her. I told her what he had told me—how he'd refused to engage with any of the bloggers or trolls who sent him messages of support. I added that I felt Hank was within his rights to post the message on Hacker News revealing he'd been fired.

Adria replied that she was happy to hear that Hank "wasn't active in driving their interests to mount the raid attack," but she held him responsible for it anyway. It was "his own actions that resulted in his own firing, yet he framed it in a way to blame me . . . If I had a spouse and two kids to support I certainly would not be telling 'jokes' like he was doing at a conference. Oh but wait, I have compassion, empathy, morals and ethics to guide my daily life choices. I often wonder how people like Hank make it through life seemingly unaware of how 'the other' lives in the same world he does but with countless less opportunities."

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I asked Hank if he found himself behaving differently since the incident. Had it altered how he lived his life?

"I distance myself from female developers a little bit now," Hank replied. "I'm not as friendly. There's humor, but it's very mundane. You just don't know. I can't afford another Donglegate."

"Give me an example," I said. "So you're in your new workplace"—Hank was offered another job right away—"and you're talking to a female developer. In what way do you act differently toward her?"

"Well," Hank said. "We don't have any female developers at the place I'm working at now. So."



Another picture Adria took at the tech conference on the day of the dongle joke.

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You've got a new job now, right? I said to Adria. "No," she said.

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Adria's father was an alcoholic. He used to beat Adria's mother. He hit her with a hammer. He knocked all her teeth out. Adria's mother finally took her children and moved out. But for Adria, things got worse. "Going to school was hard," Adria wrote on her blog in February 2013. "The kids

would tease me. . . . I felt ashamed." Adria ended up in foster care.

She sent me a letter she'd written to her father. "It's Adria! How are you doing? I know it's been a very, very long time. I want to see you. I love you, daddy. I'm 26 years old now. If you get this, please contact me as I really would love to see you."

Her father didn't write back. She hasn't heard from him in decades. She thinks he's probably dead.

When I asked Adria if her childhood might have influenced the way she'd regarded Hank and Alex, she said no. "They say the same thing for rape victims. If you've been raped, you think all men are rapists." She paused. "No. These dudes were straight up being not cool."

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I had shamed a lot of people. A lot of people had revealed their true selves for a moment and I had shrewdly noticed their masks slipping and quick-wittedly alerted others. But I couldn't remember any of them now. So many forgotten outrages. Although I did remember one. The deviant was the *Sunday Times* and *Vanity Fair* columnist A. A. Gill. His wrongdoing was a column he wrote about shooting a baboon on safari in Tanzania: "I'm told they can be tricky to shoot. They run up trees, hang on for grim life. They die hard, baboons. But not this one. A soft-nosed .357 blew his lungs out." A. A. Gill's motive? "I wanted to get a sense of what it might be like to kill someone, a stranger."

I'd been about the first person to alert social media.

This is because A. A. Gill always gives my television documentaries very bad reviews, so I tend to keep a vigilant eye on things he can be got for. And within minutes it was everywhere.

Following in Jan Moir's footsteps, "AA Gill" is now a trending topic on Twitter, where [he is] being denounced for the murder of a primate. The Guardian, of course, is fanning the flames. They've been in touch with Steve Taylor, a spokesman for the League Against Cruel Sports, who said: "This is morally completely indefensible. If he wants to know what it [is] like to shoot a human, he should take aim at his own leg."

—WILL HEAVEN, *The Daily Telegraph*,
OCTOBER 27, 2009

Amid the hundreds of congratulatory messages I received, one stuck out: "Were you a bully at school?"

Was I a *bully* at school?

When my son was five years old, he one day asked me, "Did you used to be fat?"

"Yes," I said. "I was fat when I was sixteen. And I was thrown in a lake for being fat."

"Wow!" Joel said.

"There are two lessons to be learned from this," I said. "Don't be a bully and don't be fat."

"Will you show me what it looked like?" he asked me.

"Me being fat or me being thrown in a lake?" I asked.

"Both," he said.

I puffed up my cheeks, waddled self-consciously around the room, fell over, and said, "Splash!"

"Will you do it again in slow motion?" said Joel. "And put a cushion under your shirt?"

So I did. This time I added dialogue: "Please don't throw me in the lake! No! Splash!"

"Will you sound more scared?" said Joel.

"PLEASE!" I shouted. "I might drown. Please. No, NO!"

Joel glanced, startled, at me. It was his fault that I'd gone that far. He'd been like Sam Peckinpah, forever directing me to make it more grotesque, basically getting me to mime the swallowing of dirty water as I struggled to the surface. But I think he'd trusted that within my reenactment I would at all times retain some dignity.

But then he smiled.

"You were SO fat!" he said.

My life has basically been a good one, but my mind forever returns to those two years in Cardiff—between 1983 and 1985—when I was bullied every day, stripped and blindfolded, and thrown across the playground. Those years hover over me when I walk into new rooms, meet new people.

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It seemed to me that all the people involved in the Hank and Adria story thought they were doing something good. But they only revealed that our imagination is so limited, our arsenal of potential responses so narrow, that the only thing

anyone can think to do with an inappropriate shamer like Adria is to punish her with a shaming. All of the shamers had themselves come from a place of shame, and it really felt parochial and self-defeating to instinctively slap shame onto shame like a clumsy builder covering cracks.

I remembered something that Jonah Lehrer had said to me back in Runyon Canyon. He'd said, "I look forward to reading your book so I can learn how people find a way out of shame."

I hadn't thought about writing some sort of a public-shaming recovery guide. But what he'd said stayed with me. Were there old-timer shamees out there who had managed to survive theirs intact and who could offer enlightenment to the distraught victims of this new shame dynamic? Were there people out there who had found a way out of shame? I knew just where to start.