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JAY WALKING

Battling Barney

By Jacqui Zurcher

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It started out as a responsible information gathering exercise. Know thine enemy sounded like a sensible maxim. And I admit, the only thing I really knew about the guy was that I loathed him. Really loathed him.



Now, loathing isn't all that common in my universe. Of course there is bitter contempt and disgust reserved for power-crazed leaders of imperialist superpowers, but common or garden-variety loathing, that's pretty rare. There it was though. Staring me in the face. Eating me alive each time I entered a fast-food takeaway dispensing kiddie meals.

When a friend said she'd seen giant pink footprints at the local shopping centre, I knew I had to confront the source of my inner turmoil. He was on my turf. There would be a showdown.

I prepared myself for the big moment. I meditated, performed an ancient Tunisian cleansing ritual involving sprigs of rosemary and washed my hair. By the time I reached the mall, though, the crowd of frenzied kids had dispersed and Barney had left the building. The flutter of excitement I had felt stepping onto the descending escalator turned to a chilling sadness.

Why sadness, I asked myself in a gruff interior monologue. It's not as if I was looking forward to meeting him or anything. I just wanted to face him, woman to dinosaur, and test the mettle of my loathing in the cold light of day. What would crumble first? Would it be my contempt, my self-control or his reserve? Would my hatred vanish in an epiphanous moment where I realised it was hurting me more than him? Or would I bop him in the eye? Now I would never know. Fate had cruelly denied me my moment with Barney the Dinosaur.

As a cathartic exercise and in an effort to purge myself of unseemly feelings of aggression, I decided to take the situation in hand and research the object of my disaffection. The internet was as good a place as any to start so I typed "Barney" into my Google search engine. Lots of Barney paraphernalia to buy, but not much in the way of biographical detail. I typed <http://www.barney.com> into my web browser and hit paydirt.

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from the editor



"If you like all the good things in life, you've come to the right place. So go on, live a little..."
Leigh Robertson,
Highlife Editor

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The little wait icon spun madly and slowly blades of grass and soothing clouds appeared. There he was, flanked by his small yellow and green underlings, extending his arms in welcome. And they were singing. "Anything can happen, anything can be, anything can happen in the land of make believe". It was insufferably cheerful, mortifyingly merry.

I suddenly realised why I despised him. His tireless cheer simply affronted my veneer of fashionable jaded cynicism. That came as a shock. It certainly took the wind out of my self-righteous sails.

Surprised to find that South Africa was one of only five nations to have a special link to a customised national site off the main Barney website (the others being the UK, USA, Canada and Germany), I clicked on the South African flag and continued my exploration. "Teeeerific", Barney applauded.

There wasn't too much on the site someone over the age of three might find fascinating, but nothing terribly menacing, sinister or worthy of my ire. Crestfallen, I decided this purple dinosaur was not a worthy adversary. He was innocuous. Barney was wordlessly relegated from purple anti-christ to mildly irritating child magnet.

At the core of my taking issue with Barney had been a vague idea that these days vacuous TV characters are usurping the childhood classics of my youth like *The Wind in the Willows* and *Lego*, turning modern children into drivelling idiots. But, when the fog of nostalgia for home made building blocks, hand-painted by my grandfather, cleared up, I realised those blocks had often been used to build a house for my favourite monster, *Kasimeer*, an early Afrikaans precursor of Barneys. Over 20 years ago I owned a pre-lifting-of-sanctions, home-grown soft toy replica of a bright orange singing and dancing TV dinosaur. The recollection of *Kasimeer* was the nail in the coffin of my Barney crisis.

Live and let live seems to be the new maxim of the day and in a spirit of glasnost and olive branches I decided to put my money where my mouth is. A packet of Barney soft fruit-flavoured character-shaped jellies later, I have made my peace with the big purple guy. Here's to you Barney. Anything can happen in the land of make believe.

More Jay Walking:

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