

Opinion

Perils of coupledness for the great ungrooved

I fear I have reached a point in my life I promised myself I'd never reach.

Every teenage girl looks at her mother and vows she will NEVER turn out the same. Some say they will never pick up their children from school wearing their 'I survived the Shotover Jet' T-shirt back-to-front. Some say they will never shop at Supre when they are 50.

I always said I would never stop shaving my legs and start wearing underpants with holes in them.

Long-term relationships can distort your perceptions and your memory.

Yesterday, while grocery shopping with my long-term boyfriend he asked me something no hip 20-year-old should ever be asked by her lover. Did I want him to buy me a razor? Reality hit me hard.

Was I really that ungrooved? All of a sudden I became aware of my crow's feet sprouting, my frown lines deepening, and with one look at the chocolate bar I was

holding I felt another cellulite cell burst out the side of my hip.

And then my thoughts travelled down to my underpants. If the elastic had pulled away from the cotton did that count as a hole? I conceded it did. I was prematurely changing into my mother.

Everyone always said our family was like peas in a pod. I always thought mum was the slightly shrivelled pea near the stalk but I realised I am close behind.

Like fat Britney whose zit pics are splattered across the tabloids, I have nestled myself far too deeply in my comfort zone. The idea of femininity, grooming and society's expectations now seem menial concerns. He loves me just the way I am, right?

I have fallen for the clichéd long-term-relationship-equals-letting-yourself-go. I used to shave, exfoliate, moisturise, tan, manicure, pedicure, blow-wave, exercise, stretch, hydrate, diet and even wear sexy

(but oh-so uncomfortable) lingerie.

How else would I have attracted anyone in the first place?

I remember yearning for a boyfriend. I remember having a softly-lit vision of cuddling up to a boy on the couch to watch a movie and picnicking on an isolated beach.

Well, the couch and movie part has been made a reality but the character has morphed. In my vision, I was hot. My poor boyfriend.

As he stood there holding the two-for-one razor-heads-with-aloe-vera-gel as casually as if it were a bottle of blue-top milk, I became acutely aware of what I had become. For want of a better word, I felt ugly; pasty, spotty, wobbly and spikey.

Needless to say I dropped that chocolate bar, snatched the razor (and the exfoliating shower gel) and vowed that I would stop biology before it made me the putrid pea that's thrown out with the potato peel.

Who was I to accuse mum of being saggy

and unshaven? She has been married for 25 years. I am already feeling the repercussions of two years.

Later that night as we sat on the couch and watched TV, I asked my poor boyfriend why boys stayed with girls when they started to turn ugly. His reply? "I guess you don't really care aye, like you get it on tap, you don't have to make an effort any more."

On tap? Well I'm not sure about that but I'm with him on the effort part. It's certainly less expensive to have a long-term girlfriend: no dinners, no movies, no surprise bouquets of flowers.

And come to think of it, he stopped going to the gym a year ago. Poor me.

So as I settle on the couch with my Mr Right (or at least Mr All-Right) I see why we all turn into our mothers is because the old adage "mum's know best" is true.

It's like she always said: Domestic bliss is an oxymoron.



Jacqueline Smith



Cameron Broadhurst

Murder in the Congo: the human shadow under fire

What kind of creature would try to kill its own shadow?

In the Congo basin, near what we often call the birthplace of mankind, is our closest animal relative: the Bonobo chimpanzee. These primates share 98.4 per cent of our DNA.

They often walk on two legs and are renowned both for their sexual intimacy and ability to peacefully coexist. Some locals say they are trying to become like people.

And indigenous legends talk of them as an "almost human shadow".

But as old African taboos break down, aggravated by pressures from industrial logging, they are being slaughtered in the commercial bushmeat trade.

Without major changes, they are headed for extinction.

If Africa is our birthplace, it seems our civilization is threatening the womb — we are making the world which gave birth to mankind unsafe for our closest siblings.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the world another of the great apes bears the brunt of our "civilised" society.

Vast swathes of Indonesian forest cut down for palm oil plantations encroach daily on the world of the orangutans. Eighty per cent of the habitat of these great apes has already disappeared.

They are now shot as pests if they intrude on the plantations. The result: up to 5000 of them lost every year.

Some years ago I sat outside a cage in South India, holding a bar with my left hand while a powerful 80kg chimpanzee played with the fingers of my right hand.

That close, the kinship to humans is undeniable.

That close, it's like another person in disguise.

But when she finished toying with my fingers, she had to turn back to her own world.

And I, reluctantly, to mine.

The link between the world of Homo sapiens and the higher primates is both profound and mysterious.

Emotionally, socially, and genetically they are as close as animals can be to humans.

Yet our deeply confused priorities are resulting in a kind of ethnic cleansing — but by species.

Any sentient life that cannot keep up with human demands finds itself on the brink of extinction, and we go on mercilessly coveting the remaining sanctuaries.

In a desire for what? For wood? For palm oil?

We would commit animal genocide and irrevocably change the face of the planet for the sake of timber?

The inability of mankind to deal with the devastation the legal and blackmarket economies wreak is a sure symptom of our confused identity.

We think and act like we are creatures of the market, but we aren't. We too, are creatures of the wild.

Like extensions of the original ecosystem, human cultures are worlds within a world.

But in this ecosystem there are creatures with their own worlds, whose needs are not lesser than ours.

If we can't pay attention to this, the continued indifference to our place in the world will bring further suffering not just to our animal relatives, but by natural extension, to ourselves.

The deadly responsibilities of a pesto demonstrating girl

Plopping chunks of pesto onto stale crackers at a food expo is a position of deadly peril.

As a Pesto Demonstrator, you become the object of hatred. You are the one who must placate grubby-fingered children grabbing for more, and worse still grubby-fingered grown men eager to fill their overhung tummies with minute samples of green basil goo.

It begins in the early morning when the nasal-voiced woman with a loudspeaker informs the retailers the gate has been breached.

The crowd charges down the narrow cardboard cut-out street, intent on filling their provided plastic bags with mini-variants of cleverly marketed cuisine.

The Remuera not-so-young mums lead the charge, double-pushchairs their weapons of choice.

"What's this?" they demand, poking pieces of Italian-herb smeared biscuits into their mouths, reaching for more before you even have time to say "one per customer".

Your objective is to convince customers that their lives aren't worth living without an \$8.95 pottle of pesto in their fridge.

This of course clashes with the customer's objective to get something for nothing. You have a split-second to explain the handpicked-basil-and-parmesan-pesto-made-with-roasted-pinenuts-in-a-handy-resealable-jar.

Often too late, they have already gobbled down the treat and snap their beady eyes in the direction of their next victim.

Then the next customer is upon you immediately, repeating the demands.

At first you try to do your job and explain that *everyone* is buying pesto these days, it is *such* a versatile food, "you could

put it on crackers as I've done here, or stir it through pasta, or even on a lamb chop for a culinary flavour explosion".

But they don't care that mass-produced pesto is lovingly made by the moustached Italian godfather cartooned on the label.

It becomes a conveyor belt. Scoop pesto onto cracker.

Repeat spiel. Scoop, repeat, scoop, repeat.

As the day wears on, the crowd turns on themselves.

A hard-faced lady with too much make-up grabs the last jar of the sun-dried tomato pesto, which the effeminate blond man had wanted specifically for his dinner party that evening.

He did say he wanted it first, but the woman was clutching the pottle defiantly and had thrust her cash onto the counter.

"I'm sorry sir, but we still have plenty of

the original handpicked-basil-and-parmesan-pesto-made-with-roasted-pinenuts-in-a-handy-resealable-jar left."

The day wears on, and what began as an unbeatable battle starts to swing in favour of the retailers.

The bloated civilians are slower now, weary from pillaging the other end of the pavilion. They are convinced, beaten into buying.

The pottles flew across the countertop and embedded themselves into the bulging bags. A ceasefire was declared.

I had not come through unscathed, wrists wrenched from the twisting motion of the pate knife; RSI would hit me later.

But approximately 394 refrigerators in the greater Auckland region now contain basil-and-parmesan-pesto-made-with-roasted-pinenuts-in-a-handy-resealable-jar.



Lauren Bartlett