

Opinion

# Stealing sheep, chasing careers



Ben Burrowes

*Studentville, C4's* new reality programme, claims to "remove the veil surrounding student life in New Zealand" and show what our country's student generation really gets up to.

As a former Otago University student, I always got a lot of grief from friends and family about the apparent easy ride students get down south. Never going to lectures, always drinking and failing papers seemed to be the impression a lot of outsiders had of student life in Dunedin.

Anyone will tell you that surviving three or four years at Otago and coming out the back end with a degree is no easy feat. Freezing flats, no food and no money makes it tough to get by, let alone study.

The \$150 a week student loan looked pretty skinny after paying around \$100 a week rent, plus the food, power and phone bills that forever mounted up. "Ben, how do you manage to spend \$150 a week?" is a question I never want to hear from my mother ever again.

We knew how to get up to mischief like the programme portrays, but

when it came to handing in assignments or studying for exams, we knew how to do that as well.

In my third year, two of my mates jumped on the back of a truck outside The Bowler, a Dunedin drinking establishment, with the aim to get a ride home to our flat. Unfortunately for them, the driver never hit a red light until they were too far to turn back.

They began to wave out to passing motorists as the truck driver was unaware he had a couple of extra passengers for three hours. They ended up more than 300km north in Ashburton in the hands of police.

The boys in blue took pity on the freezing pair, gave them a milo and packed them on a bus back to Dunedin.

Cow TV managed to hear about the truck ride and gave us plenty of free beer, the *Otago Daily Times* ran a story and both news networks covered it. It even, believe it or not, got a mention on *The David Letterman Show*.

The same year, we were all out of money and the fridge was completely bare. A group of us took a trip out to Mosgiel, jumped a fence, grabbed a sheep and chucked it in the boot back to Leith St Nth.

My flatmate, who had a farming background, performed the necessary act on the poor beast on our back

lawn. We were having renovations done to our flat at the time and we were woken the next morning by shouting from our landlord.

He had come to check how the new bathroom was progressing and he was far from happy to find our prize mutton hanging in the new shower, rigged up by the builder's extension cord.

We had our fair share of run-ins with policemen, firemen and ambulance staff and a number of us learnt some invaluable lessons about dealing with authority.

To be fair, Dunedin police give the students a long leash when it comes to misbehaviour. Most students are aware of the "diversion" get-out-of-jail-free card where no criminal record is kept for harmless acts and many use it sometimes two, three or four times. Plenty of us left Dunedin with both our degrees and a sound knowledge of the court system.

All these episodes taught us some important time management skills, having to juggle social time with study time and was hugely character building.

Plenty of study went on, but as producer Hamish Coleman Ross says, "it's not that studying, debating politics and foreign policy aren't important...they just don't make for good tv."

# MySpace: its online nicotine



Laura Wallace

It's a bird, wait, no, it's a plane, wait, no, it's MySpace. And it's probably on the computer screen right next to you.

MySpace is the latest craze to have swept across the internet, akin to the ebola virus. But without the blood and gore.

Wait, you say, is this not just a rip off of every other blog that already exists in the world?! The answer is, yes, it is. MySpace is a complete rip-off of the blogs that have been going for years, and of

MSN Space, which is attached to another notoriously addictive internet chat system, MSN Messenger.

Created by Tom Anderson from Santa Monica, California, MySpace has been designed more to allow people to do a bit of "social networking" and to keep in touch with their friends wherever they are in the world at present. But hello, email has the same function and we've had email for, like, 20 years.

MySpace means you can detail your life, sexual orientation, height, weight, body type, hair colour, aspirations, likes and dislikes and other creepy things to the entire world. And anyone, and I mean *anyone*, with access to a computer with the internet can access your information by simply searching under your name, or if they know it, your email. It's a little scary. And more than a little bit addictive.

And I've forgotten to mention that MySpace is now owned by a corporate giant, News Corporation and is the world's fourth most popular English-language website. Its headquarters remain in Anderson's home town of Santa Monica, but News Corp has its head quarters in New York *and* they do not disclose the amount of profit that MySpace makes. Cunning.

Oh laugh now, I can hear you all derisively laughing. But I'm telling the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help me... You don't need an internet psychoanalysis to tell you that there is a desperately odd set of circumstances that lead to the obsession with MySpace, you need a real example, from the real people. Thus you will get one. Like the *TV3 News* ad says — real news journalism.

A craze swept across the newsroom a few weeks ago, which led to a number of people spending a number of hours setting up elaborate insights into their daily lives, courtesy of MySpace, myself included. After mass discussion about content, backgrounds, music, pictures and personal assessments, we decided that we were all techno-geek journo-losers and we had nothing better to do in our lives. Yeah. Right.

However, it's addictive. No. Seriously. After setting up my MySpace on the Monday, I booted up my computer on Tuesday to have a look. 240 profile views! Wow! I'm loved: by-some-random-on-the-other-side-of-the-world-who-may-or-may-not-be-a-homicidal-maniac — it appears to be the dating service for the ultimate nerd.

If you have a picture of your profile that appears to look relatively like a female, be prepared to be bombarded with "hey babes" from 44-year-old men with nothing better to do in their lives. According to my friend, who posted a bulletin "If MySpace was real", in the world of MySpace, no 19-year-old male would wear a shirt and no 19-year-old girls would wear pants. Classy.

So after this wee social experimentation, and many messages from friends in Australia, and people who live round the corner, I've decided that MySpace is as much a blessing as a curse. Yes, it's a useful thing to be able to keep an eye on your friend's lives when they live overseas. But really, if you are good friends you should be able to afford one phone call a month or send more than one email or use MSN messenger.

Girls, put your jeans back on. Guys, put your shirts back on. I'm all for keeping in touch, but this is ridiculous.

# Swiss clockwork? They can keep it



Justin Latif

*"The Swiss are not a people so much as a neat, clean, quite solvent business,"* - William Faulkner

I was fortunate enough during our frigid winter to spend a week in Switzerland. This country is a picture postcard in 3D.

Whether travelling through a beautiful lakeside town or taking a gondola up a famous Swiss mountain, this small nation boggles the senses. The architecture is of elegant class and the sense history seeps right down to the cobblestones. From cultured country lane to the highly proficient urban highways, Switzerland impressed this little country boy immensely.

While it is a land of beauty, the people have a personality like beige. To say the country is efficient would be an understatement.

The whole transport system runs much like one of their exquisitely made watches. Like a large processing factory, you can leave a bus and get on a recently arrived train without

having to wait. Easy-to-use vending machines and speedy escalators keep commuters chugging along the national production line. Their virile economy will wait for no man.

Another amazing aspect to this country is how prepared the Swiss are for a war or catastrophic disaster. As you drive through the mountains, you notice many sealed tunnels which lead into underground bunkers. From what I've been told 90 per cent of the population can be moved into these bunkers at a very short notice. Their largest hospital is housed within one of these mountains. It has the latest equipment and is constantly kept stocked, yet has remained dormant for more than 50 years, waiting for war to break out.

Litigation worries seem to affect all walks of life. You need to have your push-bike registered, you can't sail a yacht without a license (I wonder if Russell Coutts has one) and apparently insurance companies won't pay if you crash while driving with no shirt or no shoes.

One night we asked our Swiss friends to let us ride in the boot of their wagon to save us catching the bus. They were horrified at such a suggestion.

Their concern seems to verge on paranoia, and according to the World Health Organisation, 26 males and 10 females in every 1000 take their own lives each year. This is a much higher rate than in New Zealand. Yet the media constantly tell us we have one of the worst rates in the world.

Travelling around this seemingly beautiful landlocked nation, I gained a deeper appreciation for our own island paradise.

We are creative, dynamic and vibrant culture. Our "give-it-a-go" attitude to life, means we take risks but also experience more adventure and fun.

Flying into Auckland airport you immediately get a sense of our nation's ancient landscape, largely untouched by modern development.

Our lack of efficiency makes New Zealand interesting, messy and real. I pray that we do not regulate and organise our country to such an extent that the room for creativity, personal expression and learning from mistakes is taken away.

Let us be thankful for what we have, because while at times we may feel inferior to the big wide world, we are in fact far superior in so many ways.