

Extracts from published feature articles by Louise Charman, Charmedia

Mud, Mist and Magic (*Topic: hiking the Milford Track in New Zealand*)

I wonder what Frodo the Hobbit and the Fellowship of the Ring would make of the creature standing in the forest before me. Taller than a man yet strangely birdlike in appearance, its orange and brown colouring reminds me of the kea, a native of these misty New Zealand forests. Feisty and inquisitive, several of these birds have already swooped across our path, their outstretched wings flashing tangerine then folding back to brown as they settle in the trees to watch us. The creature turns to look at me, revealing the ruddy cheeks of my companion Diana, swathed in a huge orange poncho which covers her backpack and trails to the ground. 'This is fabulous!' she breathes. 'But I think I'm getting a blister'.

Of Toads and Men (*Topic: digital animation*)

When Queensland animators Andrew Silke and Dave Clayton decided to create their own animated short film, they found inspiration in their own back yards. The state's most reviled yet celebrated pest, the cane toad, hopped into their lives and their computers for the next six months. Once invited in, those pesky toads are hard to shift...

'Cane-Toad: What happened to Baz?' takes us on a four minute journey into the lives (and deaths) of two cane toad mates. Soaking in a dog's bowl with a cold beer in his hand, the overweight, uncouth Dazza ponders the possible fate of his adventurous but naïve friend Bazza, in a land where man versus toad presents an ongoing sporting challenge. Various fatal scenarios are played out in glorious technicolour as the unsuspecting Baz wanders into human territory.

A Date with Divinity (*Topic: Tantric sex*)

With the emerging popularity of Tantra in western cultures, many of us have been led to believe that the main thrust of Tantra is to improve your sex life. While it is true that practising Tantric techniques will certainly open up a whole new dimension of sexuality, what can be easily overlooked is that Tantra is ultimately a spiritual path. Many of us have grown up with cultural and religious beliefs which surround sexuality with shame and guilt, a sharp contrast to Tantra where sexuality is honoured and celebrated as part of the spiritual journey.

The word Tantra comes from Sanskrit and literally means 'a tool to weave'. In this sense it is about accessing creative energy, energy we can use to weave the web of life. Sexual energy is the most powerful energy we have in our body; it is life force itself, the drive for survival and the creation of new life.

Prayers on the Wind (*Topic: mountain temples in Nepal*)

By the time we reach Kagbeni, an old Mustang town nestled in an oasis of green fields, the grasses and wildflowers bow their heads low to greet us. The narrow laneways and stone walls offer some protection and I wind my way towards the tiny gompa, where I find a young Buddhist monk waiting in the courtyard. For a small donation he shows me the inside of the temple, filled with pictures and statues of Buddha, large drums to call the monks to prayer, and 700 year old 'books' wrapped in yellow cloth and bound with ties. He lets me climb alone up to the roof where colourful prayer flags flap in the breeze, winging their messages to Buddha. From this vantage point I can see the slopes stretching to the skies, the river below flexing a silver arabesque across the broad valley floor.

Looking Good (*Topic: laser eye surgery*)

But even wearing contacts wasn't trauma-free. My first pair were hard lenses and the slightest speck of grit would reduce me to a sobbing wreck. I would find myself in the middle of the road on a busy Saturday afternoon, one hand clamped over my eyes while the other attempted to halt the traffic, hold on to my shopping and grope for a tissue at the same time. My handbag bulged with bottles of soaking, wetting and cleaning solutions, lens cases, spare glasses, prescription sunglasses, ordinary sunglasses, tissues, mirror... I frequently lost a lens down the sink or under the sofa, and one morning had the entire family crawling around on the carpet for half an hour until my sister discovered it stuck to the cat.

For Richer For Poorer (*Topic: wedding photography*)

It may be the biggest day of your life, but will recording it for prosperity leave you with an even bigger hole in your pocket? Wedding photography could take a larger bite of your budget than you planned: so how much should you be paying to immortalize your big day?

Tips:

- Name your price
- Go for quality not quantity
- See lots of examples of previous work
- Pick a photographer you trust
- Listen to your intuition

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