About Me

I love South Africa, but I agree with Albert Einstein that nationalism is like measles.

Consequently, I'm not going to con a description appropriate to the theme of this book, something serious and respectable.

I'm just a stubborn citizen with some smarts who got pissed off at corruption. I could be you. But to tell you about you would be weird. Instead, let's make this about the less-overweight dude with a strangely shaped head called Me.

I'm argumentative and opinionated. I sometimes talk too much in company, maybe because I've got to set my spinning head free after spending the majority of time alone. That's probably what I'm doing now, talking to you. Or maybe it's me being kind to my enemies, giving them better reason to call me narcissistic. A print editor would be horrified but this selfish ending.

I'm not standing on a pedestal with my activism. I’m not perfect or trying to be a hero. There are things I wish I’d done differently. I’m like everyone else. We have warts. The difference between people is whether they cover them with make-up, wear them proudly or with indifference, or burn those fuckers off. I want to do enough to be comfortable in myself. It was a long journey that began when I was twelve-years-old. I'm forty-seven and almost there.

Chronologically, I’ve been nicknamed Mickey Mouse (by my sister), Negative Mike (by my Grade 8 religious education teacher who never wore panties), Half Man Half Head (by a friend, now dead, who liked the band Half Man Half Biscuit), Peace (by music fiends Shovel, Hobbit, Bhaal and Orange), Conehead (by several), and Fat Fuck (conveniently by a mate whose fatter than me). But it was Wicked Mike that stuck, after I was strangely named that twice by different crowds years apart. And my enemies like the way it drools off their lips. It's a winner all round.

I was never who or where I wanted to be so it's unsurprising, I've never had a career.

1989. Notable for my late rebellion against my parents and my final year at Queensburgh Boys' High School. For my History class (and sexy teacher), I did my main project on Apartheid. I cannot confirm it as truth but after the school gained special permission, I was told it was a first for the provincial education department. IFP leader Mangosuthu Buthelezi sent me a letter of encouragement and opened the door to the Inkatha Research Institute. There I briefly met Gavin Woods. He'd later go on to heroically fight against the Arms Deal, the ANC's first great corruption scandal.
There was no way I was doing National Service, the obligatory service in the military that turned white teenagers into black oppressors and sometimes killers. The way out was to study or hide. I seriously considered running to the IFP but chose to study journalism. It was unbelievably good timing for short but invaluable experiences.

After only five months at Natal Technikon, I dropped out. I was only seventeen at the start of that year, kicked out of home and having to lie about my age to get an unfurnished flat. Money quickly vanished. I was offered a study bursary but wouldn't have been able to cover rent and food.

Finances weren't the only factor for dropping out. I was disturbed at how the news I was reading wasn't always real. For example, when an AK-47 was used in a robbery on the Durban beach front, it was dumbed down to a handgun. The ruling National Party was likely managing perception but for me it was a betrayal of what journalism was supposed to be. I was nagged by the thought I'd study to tell the truth and then be unable too.

I was also disappointed at my multi-racial class which I'd been initially been so proud to be part of. If I recall correctly, we were a test case for Natal. I was proud to be part of change in search of South Africa's soul but dampened by moments of distinct discomfort. The worst was when one of my fellow black students suddenly stood up and screamed at length and with vicious passion that he supported the PAC, and that all white people needing killing. The guy who'd I'd joked with everyday was convinced I must die for colour. My idealism, from the uneducated comfort zone of being a lower middle class white, was shaken. I should have considered that maybe he had reason to be traumatised. I should have spoken to him. But I was too young to deal with it properly.

On the big plus side, the ANC, Black Sash and others got unbanned the first month I was there. Most of my teachers had secretly belonged to them. They were so happy. And it can never be forgotten that Nelson Mandela was released the same time. And somewhere in all that I got to secretly meet an impressive Terror Lekota (who, in modern times, unfortunately has no one answering my emails).

Suddenly I had choice rather than reaction. I did exactly what had terrified me the previous year - I volunteered for the South African Defence Force. En route, a favour from a friend's dad got me allocated to the Airforce.

I wasn't like the other cadets. After finishing basic training and another course in Pretoria, I traded the promise of a crate of beers to get myself back to Durban. I
joined 15 Squadron, the helicopter base.

I won a battle with the sadistic Captain in charge of security to which most of the troops belonged. The commander of the base transferred me from Base Ops, where we monitored flights and debriefed pilots, to the Combined Mess where I was put in charge of the accommodation and associated buildings. Despite having no rank, I filled a Flight Sergeant's post. They saved money, I got perks. I had a broom closet office and staff. More importantly, I got to be one of only two national servicemen to use the NCO's bar. I could organise better food. And I 'bought' a lot of goodwill through my weekly trip to choose movies for my fellow inmates, or by replacing the sheets of the trainee male pilots who'd smuggle girlfriends into the base.

But I still seemed to hate it more than anyone else. Stupid authority didn't fit well on me. Nevertheless, the Airforce gave me a roof over my head, cheap beer, my choice of steak twice a month, and illegal trips to the gloriously dingy Monk's Inn music bar in Brickhill Road. I will always remember the shock of bumping into Flight Sergeant Blackie who was drinking a beer there. We were AWOL and in uniform, reasons to be arrested, but Blackie just gave us a nod of understanding and we had a good evening.

I also received lessons in *How to be Less of a Child and More of an Adult*, and *Power in the Wrong Hands Should Be Feared*. For the first time, I willingly wrote a poem... about dictators. Maybe I was an obnoxious crusader in waiting.

Learning is endless but later political activism and the excruciating loss of love would teach me most of the rest I know now.

My intended career in the horse racing industry vanished when it became one of the first to unofficially practice black affirmative action. Being a white male was no longer a cool thing to be in South Africa. I had a host of smaller jobs before and after which ranged from being a bookie and waitron to working for the local elections and being a warehouse stock controller. Out of hundreds of applications, I was picked for training as a Customs Officer at the harbour but was so bored I quit after one day. Rowan Atkinson will be pleased that I worked only half a day at a bank – I remember the chilli hotdog in my hand when I phoned them at lunch-time to say I was never coming back.

My largest responsibility was for two years as a liaison to seventy-two sales offices in South Africa which I visited monthly. I witnessed the beauty of all our provinces as I passed on helpful info to managers, assessed complaints, caught stock thieves and closed offices. Those trips extended to Namibia, Uganda, Egypt, Kenya, Swaziland and
Lesotho. The travel and corruption were a brain-opening experience.

Theft sank that company but not before I ate goat in Kampala, Indian curry in Nairobi, and all colours of Mediterranean fish in Alexandria. I’ve visited the toilet from ‘Trainspotting’ in a train trip across the desert to where an army General’s car fetched me with flashing sirens. I’ve felt the absolute joy and pride of a Moslem woman’s eyes in a remote chauvinistic village when I complimented her coffee which she’d made special for me after having read in a magazine that Europeans filtered it. I hired a prostitute to talk to me so that hordes of her colleagues would stop bugging me long enough for me to drink a beer in the middle of darkest Africa whilst the bar played Black Sabbath and other classics. I stood on the blackened site of a club that had been bombed the night before.

I sought an alternative life for almost a decade in Durban’s miniature music scene. I was an event organizer, band promoter, booking agent, DJ and CD compiler. I was always poor, almost always frustrated. No hope and ambition could conquer the fact that radio doesn’t meaningfully support local English bands, and that local artists are crushed by multi-million advertising packages for overseas artists. Most of the bands I loved disbanded. It was good that I left, people becoming nasty over the little bits there were, but its like some of my blood is missing, that my veins are thinner than they ought to be. Despite the rollercoaster of fun and anger, The Winston Pub and Burn Night Club will always warm my memory. Oh, what I’d give to see pretty Alternate and Goth girls dancing again.

My activism has deprived me of a lot of joy as a music and movie lover. I haven’t had a game of pool with a buddy in ages. But I’m trying to find balance, lose weight (19kg so far) and repeat simple pleasures.

My ears appreciate many voices from classic pop to hip-hop but only seek the best of the best (which is rarely on radio so I don't listen there unless its to a political, social or crime podcast). Thank Charles Darwin for the internet! Although my taste is wide, I get the kinkiest kicks out of indie, rock and metal. Non-fiction audio books rock like hell too – they and Radiolab are my early morning walking edutainment. Everyone should make that joy into a way of life.

I’m a massive movie lover for a motley crew. Foreign movies (non-English) present a different kind of happiness as their smaller budgets insist on stronger, more realistic characters. You'd likely have a different view of Asia, the Middle East, Russia and South America if you watched their movies. You'd discover that Belgium, Korea and
Iceland exist. The screen is a wonderful way to visit a world of cultures glued together by common needs and emotions.

Movies and music probably mean more to me because of my empathy. That's held hands with Depression since childhood. I use present tense because depression is like drug addiction, always spying on the better version of you.

The loss of women I loved hurt me awfully, removing most of my quality of life for a seemingly endless period. I know what it's like to crawl on a dirty pavement and draw pictures with my blood on a hospital floor. It took me a long time to realise that my life was more my fault than sex betrayals.

Of course, I've tried drugs, like any normal person, but I've never swallowed a shrink or pretend-to-be-happy pills for that great darkness. There's beauty in depression if you embrace it; make it friends instead of the enemy. It removed society's filters and opened my mind to the real world. It gave me insight which I tried to write about. It made music sound better. I gloriously appreciated smaller things.

After the epiphanies, there was less need for depression. Action became a stabiliser. Helping others helped me. I may fear that Knysna, my greatest lover, will be the death of me, but she was also the best time of my life. I found more self-acceptance there than anywhere else. I'm the happiest I've ever been. Maybe I've achieved that rare thing secularists call 'spiritual growth'. Or political stress and fear is argument for making life into the best distraction it can be. I've debated that with a philosopher - screw the search for the meaning of life, distraction is the meaning.

I'm asthmatic so dairy is minimal in my diet. I was a cowardly vegetarian for one year and a determined vegan for four years. The last woman I loved asked me what rule I'd break for her, so we drank an immoral milkshake and ate torturied meat. My health improved. Consequently, nowadays, I accept that I need certain vitamins from meat but only allow myself it twice per week. Whilst I wrote this book, I cut down to a solitary meal but overate the last couple of weeks whilst sitting in restaurants and coffee shops. The intelligence of pigs makes me feel most guilty so I wouldn't put them in my mouth any more than I'd chew a puppy. That hasn't stopped me missing bacon and eggs but the temptation to kill vanishes...

The world would be a much better place if we practised moderation in several areas of our lives; enjoy food but don't get fat; exercise but not obsessively; enjoy beer without vomiting or losing memory; watch series like 'Firefly'/Serenity' and 'Trapped' but skip the obsession with dumb-us-down soapis and sport; be regularly kind but
not a sucker; obey the rules but not those that don't make sense (Government is suppose to help us, not rule us).

I've been abstinent for many years. Activism has been my girlfriend. I should definitely get back to sex before I'm dead (because it'd be totally bad for you to have sex with me then).

As you've probably noticed, I like quotes - thought history repeated forever.

It was immensely painful to leave Knysna. I was unable to imagine anything else before I did so. I consider myself in exile. I have no social life in Durban, and deliberately didn't made friends the past year and a half. I've remained focused on my fight for justice for Knysna. But absence eventually delivers the appreciation of new views and people. So long as it isn't jail, I'll find something to appreciate wherever I'm next... but I'm hoping President Ramaphosa takes one of his famous walks with me... in Knysna and Durban cause walking twice makes you fitter than once, for that fight against corruption.

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You're supercalifragilisticexpialidocious for reading my book. But if you're a lawyer looking for evidence against me, you're the same shit in the same government. You can't work for the corrupt without being corrupt. See my middle fingers.

You either love South Africa or you don't. Doing something is loving.