

## First Words



MARY CORRIGAN

## Poverty of riches

I am really quite relieved that I am not terribly wealthy or excessively famous. It might be a crazy declaration for a wannabe world-famous novelist to make, but after years or decades of following – okay, maybe devouring – stories about the rich and famous, I believe that is the only plausible conclusion a sane person could reach. If anything, the latest developments in Britney Spears's tragic existence make wealth and fame look like a fatal disease.

I won't deny that there are advantages to having mega bucks in your bank account. I would love nothing more than to sashay out of a Gucci store with bags of designer gear, own holiday homes in exotic locations and have a full complement of staff to *schlep* me around town, clean my teeth and de-clutter my handbag for me.

No, I wouldn't mind having enough money and influence to be in the position to tell those who have not fully grasped my magnificence where to get stuffed, but the fact of the matter is that being super rich and famous can make your life impossibly awful.

The super-wealthy's main complaint is that most of their entourage, admirers and friends are not genuine; they are in it for the bucks, influence, and so on. I, of course, have no such doubts about my pals; there really are no advantages to being my friend, except for my gastronomy.

But I hardly think that anyone is hanging around me so that they can sample my famous tomato tart with balsamic reduction. Nor do I have to put up with crowds of paparazzi following my every move. My cats are probably the only living beings that deliberately follow me about and, even then, it's around meal times and I am hardly left feeling harassed.

The other downside to being excessively rich is that it is seen to be obscene to moan about your privileged position. When you have achieved the ultimate capitalist ambition, you simply can't point out its pitfalls without undermining the ambitions of the poor or the middle class.

You can only turn to other mega wealthy folk for sympathy. It's not unexpected, really, that the famous are forever turning to drugs and drink; what do you do when you have achieved the pinnacle of success and realise that it's not all that it is cracked up to be? It comes as no surprise to me either that many superstars are embracing unconventional religions such as Scientology or Kabbalah. When you realise that pursuit of material wealth only leads you to a vacuous spiritual *cul de sac*, you need a quirky belief system to bolster the spirit.

At least I still live under the illusion that acquiring more stuff will make me happier. Not that I am a materialistic sort; I wouldn't be a journalist if that were the case. But, when my nose is pressed against a shop window as I admire a pair of strappy Prada shoes that cost double my weekly grocery bill, there is a part of me that believes that, if I took those shoes home, I would be a more complete person.

I guess Ms Spears has probably just discovered that the converse is true.

# OOPS! YOUR GAP IS SHOWING

Rapidly changing technology means generational differences have never been so stark, writes Sue Grant-Marshall

He jerks into your office, spindly fingers snapping, eager to sort out your computer problem as fast as he can. This isn't out of concern for your nerve-shredded state. Quite the opposite. He thinks you've done something stupid which has stuffed up the machine. He wants to prove that he can fix it faster than your eyes can follow him and then make a nimble departure to make more money out of another befuddled BC (before computers) twit.

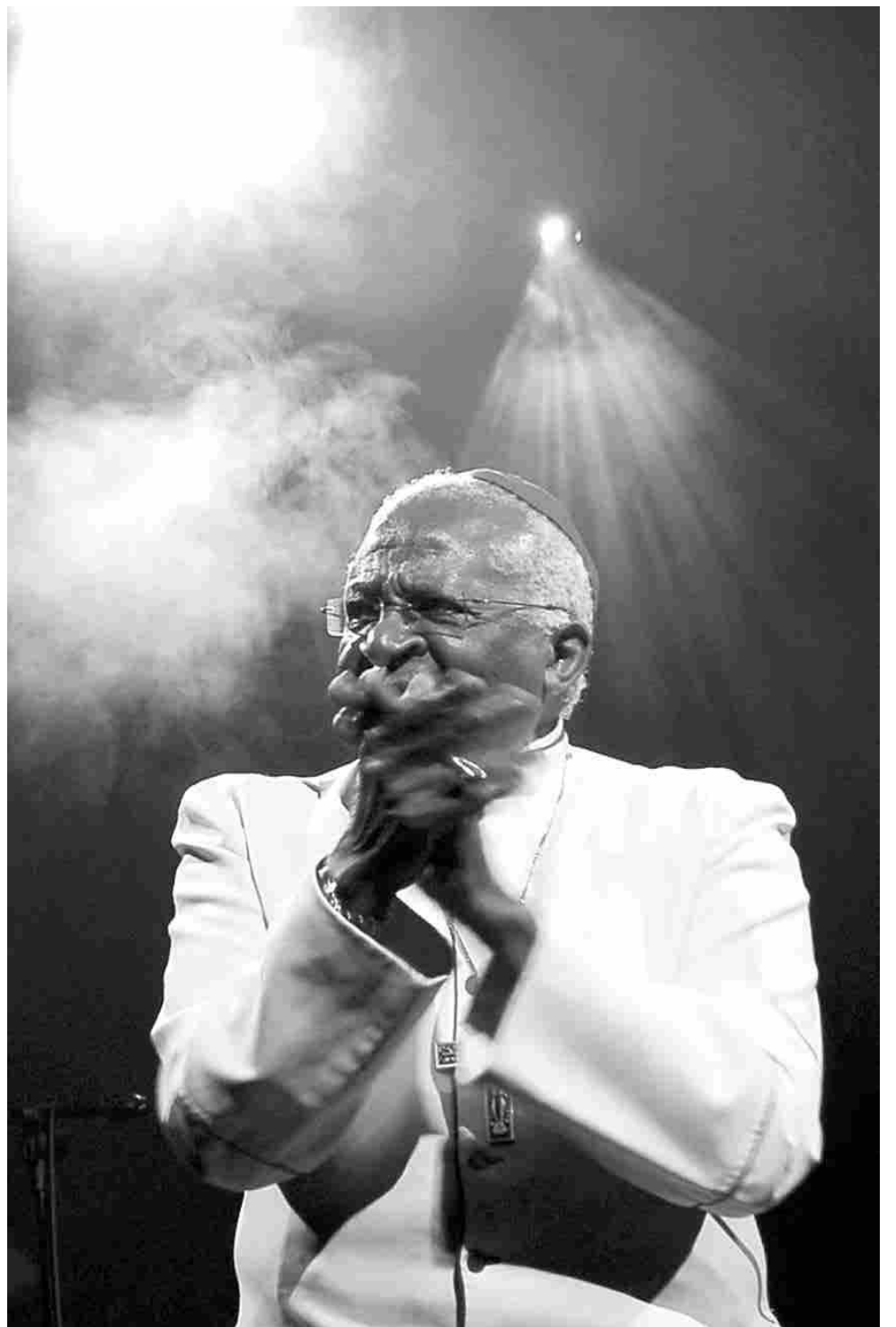
He whirls out, leaving you dazed and muttering, "Is that all?" and "Seems so simple" until, five minutes later, the miracle's over, your laptop freezes once more and the humiliating, macabre dance begins again. That's a typical Boomer and Generation X situation.

Paul has had only a few hours' sleep, working round the clock for five days to finish a project spec for his boss. He stumbles into the office in his jeans and tackies soon after 9am. He drops the disk containing his work and graphics on his boss's desk, informs him the job is done and he's off home to sleep. Mr Boss, 53, looks astonished, asks Paul where his collar and tie are and says he can't remember giving him the day off.

"You didn't. I'm taking it," responds Paul and disappears. That's also a typical Gen X and Boomer scene.

In these daily scenarios that occur in offices and homes throughout the country, the players are left angry and with a sense of being misunderstood. Something happened and they don't know why. It's called the generation gap.

There are five generations which American theorists William Howe and Neil Strauss created about 20 years ago and wrote up in an academic tome that sold like wildfire. Realising they were on to a good thing, they wrote several more easily accessible and popular books. Now, others have been written all over the world to help people who yearn to understand why their kids, their parents, their employees, their teachers, behave so differently from them.



Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu is a member of the Silent Generation, but he's certainly not voiceless

PHOTOGRAPH: IAN LANDSBERG

On the cover: Nelson Mandela is a member of the Hero generation, while Princess Diana's death was a defining moment for Generation X, as was the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. Hector Peterson's death was a marker for 1970s South Africans

There have always been generation gaps. It's healthy for each generation to rebel against the rules their parents and society lay down and for them to question politicians and other leaders.

In the past tumultuous 100 years – with two world wars, the great depression, massive technological advances and the rise of multifaceted media reflecting every bomb and kiss – the generational differences