

About a boy

Kris King – November 20th 2011

<http://www.rantinaminor.co.uk/2011/11/about-a-boy/>

Having spent last weekend gallivanting around that London, determined to put in whatever effort was required to enjoy, at all costs, the one big treat I had afforded myself this year (namely seeing the awesome Within Temptation at the Brixton Academy with my fellow [radio 4 radical](#), Simon), I returned to a rather hectic week of work, domestic chores, and an attempt to rectify the recent sexual laziness that has managed to creep in between my boyfriend and I by trying to have it every day (and in every logistically feasible way) this week. Okay, you probably didn't want to know that, and I apologise for the mental bleach you'll now require to help rinse any unseemly images out of your head, but I was trying to find the most efficient way I could of bringing together the subjects of "fun", "hard work", and "my boyfriend" in the opening paragraph of this, a post for my Raven in celebration of his 30th birthday. Now, be good, click the "Read More" link, and I promise I'll try to keep any talk of leather and buggery to a minimum.

Raven and I have been together for over 5 years now, although given the incredibly non-linear nature of our relationship and how we ultimately ended up together, one could justifiably say that it's actually more like 8 years. I shan't go into details, not least because it's more convoluted than the menu screens on a Virgin TiVo box, but largely because it's impossible to recount the story without going into private, intimate details that would require your purchasing a quantity of mind-bleach so large it would leave you bereft of most of your neurological faculties (to the point where all you could reasonably do is drool like a Fox News viewer when confronted with the instructions for opening a door). Regardless of exactly *when* "you" and "me" officially became "us", it has been not only the most frustrating, infuriating, and stressful relationship I've ever had, but also the most fun, rewarding, enjoyable, and fulfilling by every conceivable measure.

For those of you who haven't read any of my earlier posts (if you are one of those people, shame on you!), [I talked previously](#) of how Raven suffers from Aspergers Syndrome. If you don't know what that is, try to think of it as like a mild form of autism in which the social inappropriateness or dysfunction of a teenager lasts forever, and the incessant focus on limited fields of acute interest, the verbosity of language, and the concentration of intelligence that gets put into personal projects, are all the sorts of things which may result in the building of an internet or two. Due to the way his condition robs him of the ability to correctly process non-verbal cues, Raven is, and in many ways always will be when it comes to his emotional senses, a 15-year old boy (this is often how I see him in my head too, but not like **that** ... well, alright, *occasionally* like that, but not in a bad way – okay, yes, alright, *occasionally* in a bad way ... look, you do know I'm joking, right? Anyway, I haven't mentioned leather or buggery yet, so you can all calm down).

Learning to cope with, and understand, the general idiosyncrasies and day to day issues that Aspergers presents is one of the many things that my life with Raves has taught me, and for that I can only express my absolute gratitude. For example, while there has been nearly two hours worth of random, tangential conversation between myself and Raves since writing the previous paragraph and this one, I don't begrudge the interruption all that much. Even though, under normal circumstances, it would invariably seem to many like it was a frustrating, yet unintentional, attempt to derail a person's train of thought and distract them from the task at hand, I don't really mind because it regularly inspires a multitude of other avenues of potential thought exploration that I might not ordinarily have considered. More importantly, it allows me to develop both tolerance and compassion for those facets of another's personality that they cannot do anything to sublimate, as well as giving me the chance to write 175 words about nothing in particular.

The number of wildly differing creative projects that Raves has embarked upon since I've known him is often quite overwhelming – he throws out ideas like sparks off a catherine wheel, and I frequently find myself struggling to keep up. What makes the constant stopping and starting, or the endless shifting from one project to another, so enjoyable (rather than provoking a desire to scream, "stick to one thing and bloody finish it!") is how there will usually be a technical aspect to it that wanders

some way outside of Raves' area of expertise and strides confidently into mine. Whether it's building websites, editing video, making music, or writing oodles of code in order to achieve a particular milestone within a project, he always finds some way, no matter how small, to include me in his interests. Likewise, I try where I can to get him involved in the things that I do by opening up any and all possible areas where he can make a contribution that will engage him, either intellectually or artistically.

One such project involves taking a slight diversion in order to explain it, if you'll indulge me (actually, you don't have a choice – it's my blog and I can do what I bloody well like). Raves has always loved animals; it doesn't matter which animals, really, he is able to find something lovable or cool about pretty much any creature – except wasps, obviously (they are, we both maintain, complete bastards). For as long as I can remember he has harboured the desire to keep a pet tarantula, but it's a wish that has never been granted because I am horribly arachnophobic and have always rejected the idea flat-out (his parents were never terribly keen either). As a concession, however, I reluctantly agreed to his second choice of instead purchasing a few rats. I wasn't reluctant because I was afraid of them, or anything like that – it's more that I was *suspicious* of them, wary of the reputation they had for being vicious little disease bags. I need not have worried.

It's been a shade under four years since Raves first brought that cage and its occupants into my life, and in less than an eighth of that time I went from being moderately distrustful of the tiny monsters, and observing them from a safe distance, to a proud rat fancier (stop thinking *that*, you pervert – it's the proper term for it). However strange it may be to you, it's stranger still to me that I fell hopelessly in love with creatures that have such a universally poor, yet utterly undeserved, reputation. I've seen in them personalities that are far more distinct than any dog or cat I've known (if I'm honest, they've got more unique character than some people I've met), and their intelligence, their ability to learn, continues to impress me every day. Ours will happily sit on your shoulder while you do the washing up, and they've learned to recognise the sound of a packet (ostensibly containing treats) being opened from across the room (seriously, if one of us opens a bag of M&Ms, you will quickly see ten adorable faces staring in our direction).

Despite the short lives of rats (around 2 years, more if you're lucky), and the inevitable heartache that one has to go through on an all-too regular basis (I honestly never imagined that I would one day be bawling my eyes out, almost to the point of wailing, whilst cradling a dead rat in my arms), I wouldn't change it for **anything**, and I will never be able to thank Raves enough for the immeasurable happiness that he, and they, have brought to my tiny world. If nothing else, the sheer entertainment value *alone* is more than worth the grief of losing one of our scuttling, furry little friends (honestly, you have never giggled so much like a twat in your whole life until you've sat on the sofa, wondered for a moment why your plate has one less slice of toast on it than it did a minute ago, only to turn round and see a rat, proudly bounding across the windowsill with the entire slice of hot, golden, buttered scrumptiousness in its mouth).

It was our love of these achingly cute little creatures that inspired the creation of a website (still being worked on after a couple of years of gradual development) devoted to the squeaking darlings we share our lives with. Yes, it might seem a bit twee and silly, but I just wanted to put up a few pages, with pictures and [videos of our rats](#), for no other reason than to give them the same opportunity that we humans have; to plant a flag in the universe and say, "I was here". In the grand scheme of things, our pets mean sod all to anyone but us and it just felt like a nice way of giving them a little bit of life beyond the short ones they have, and introducing them to other people so that they can make them go "awwwww!" and giggle like twats too. As soon as we get a few spare moments, and I can divert Raves' stroboscopic attention from his current distraction for long enough, we'll get around to finishing it.

As if dragging me in to help with his various and ever-changing projects (while simultaneously helping me embark on a course of self-improvement and be less of an uncaring, insensitive git) wasn't enough, Raves frequently challenges my ability, often to the point of teeth-shattering frustration, to argue about the very things I talk about on this blog. Although by no means religious, he does find "militant" atheism to be as equally annoying as fundamentalist faith and, having claimed to have seen a ghost, believing aliens a more probable explanation for some complex crop circles, and making some concessions towards the idea of there being legitimate psychics, there is *plenty* for us to argue about ... and we do. I won't deny how having had to argue against logic backed by Aspergers makes me want to strangle myself unconscious just to get out of the argument, however, I will say that I am grateful that at least my darling boy never makes the debate too easy for me!

Insofar as our “discussions” have often become “arguments” (or, if we’re honest, “pitched battles”) we’re no different to anyone else. The same could be said of our having sought counselling for one or two of our issues (in my case it’s for stress/anger management; for Raves it’s to help overcome some of the social anxieties and fears associated with Aspergers), and how it has helped us have fewer, and less shouty-nasty, arguments. Where we do probably differ from the norm is that these are not our only regular run-ins with mental health professionals. As [I’ve mentioned in previous posts](#), Raven is transgender, so we spend an inordinate amount of time going backwards and forwards to London for appointments, chasing people on the phone, writing letters, visiting his GP, chasing people on the phone, ploughing through paperwork, and chasing people on the phone. To say that I was an expert on Gender Dysphoria would be an exaggeration; to say that I’ve learned a shit-load about it over the years would not.

This has had probably a far greater, and more positive, impact on me, on my emotional and psychological development as a human being, than almost anything else I can think of. Over the years Raves’ condition has forced me to do everything that I can to be a better person, to learn how to help bear the weight of his problems in addition to my own, and to understand and appreciate what it means to be born into the wrong body. I am hugely proud of the fact that he has chosen me to be the one to help him deal with the every day stress of his hating what he sees in the mirror, and the drama of the emotional turbulence that it often brings. I feel honoured that he looks to me to put my arms around him when he’s feeling low and give him the best reassurance I can that everything is going to be okay, and I consider it a great privilege to be able to tell him that, no matter how much of a “freak” he may sometimes believe himself to be, he will always be something uniquely special in my life, and I will always love him no matter what.

I’ve said sometimes in the past that nature seems to have had it in for Raves; in addition to suffering from both Aspergers and Gender Dysphoria, he has had to cope with being asthmatic, gluten intolerant, and seemingly born with eyes that are little bit too big for the sockets they’re sitting in (as a result, he is prone to headaches and migraines – and the sinusitis he’s also been lumbered with doesn’t help much either). In reality, though, both Raves and I know full well that there are people out there with far greater mountains to climb, to the extent that it would be both more accurate and fair to say that nature has only really thrown a handful of persistently annoying roadworks into the middle of his mortal motorway. Yes, these obstacles may repeatedly thwart his attempts at making a smooth journey of his life, but at least he *is* moving forward, slowly but surely, and with no uncompleted bridges to leap the bus over (take that Dennis Hopper!).

So, on the occasion of his birthday, what I can I tell you about my boy that you don’t already know? Well, firstly, he wasn’t all that keen on being 30 this year (there was a certain amount of stress to be had when he hit 27, the infamous age at which a few of his heroes met their untimely end) – for someone with such a significant majority of his life still to come he certainly does worry way too much about growing old (this is probably more to do with a fear not of death but of looking less gorgeous as time marches on). He has an infectiously dark laugh that veers sharply between a hearty rumble and a terrifying cackle, and wouldn’t sound out of place emanating from the larynx of a supervillain’s most evil henchmen. He’s an avid gamer with a passion for survival horror, graphic violence, and intelligent, absorbing story (“Silent Hill” and “Forbidden Siren” being huge favourites).

He has an abiding love of Japan and its culture, particularly anime (it was he who introduced me to “Akira”, “Spirited Away”, and “Full Metal Alchemist”), Dir En Grey, and most of the horror movies to emerge from the country in the last three decades (he, in fact, has an serious appreciation for Asian horror in general, believing, quite reasonably, that it is substantially more original and effective in scaring the crap out of people than anything Hollywood has done in a very long time). Without Raves, I would probably have never seen “Ghost House”, “R-Point”, and the sublime “Welcome To Dongmakgol”, and for those alone he gets a lifetime of grateful hugs. It is my intention that, as soon as I am financially able (and as soon as he can mentally cope with the idea of full body scanners at the airport), to take him on his first ever foreign holiday to Tokyo.

All of these things play a big part in his creative endeavours, providing a seemingly never-ending source of inspiration. He is a fairly talented artist, regardless of whether he is working with graphic pens or a graphic tablet. He has quickly picked up Photoshop, Cararra, Poser, Daz 3D, Premiere, and used them to create some seriously striking imagery. He is also a writer, having completed the first novel in a trilogy, gotten half-way through the second, and laid out plans for the third, not to mention a plethora of short stories, poems, and songs (he’s reasonably good at playing bass, drums, and knows his way around Fruity Loops fairly well). In fact, if I were to ask him what I could say of him that I hadn’t already (and, since he just asked me when I was going to be finished with this

thing so that we can get on with the rest of the evening, I told him this was *exactly* the question I was rhetorically asking), he would, and did, respond, "that I'm smarter than *you*".

I could tell you a million other things about Raves but, to be honest, there's only two things that you really need to know: that it's his birthday, and that I absolutely love him to pieces. Happy birthday, boy ... I hope that I can make it, and you, as happy as you make me.

And, see? I didn't mention leather or buggery **at all**! What am I giving him for his birthday? Ahem ...

