

(June).

2010

WHO WAS HITLER DAD?

The things our children ask, the things they deliver up to us with <sup>some mad</sup> almost rhetorical suspicion, at times. The things they ask us grown ups <sup>WHO</sup> that are meant to respond with just the right amount of sensitivity and fair-mindedness.

The questions our children ask can be hilarious:

'When I grow up do I have to be like you?'

Often poignant:

When I die will it hurt a lot?

And sometimes just plain gob smacking:

Who was Hitler? <sup>Popa? Dad?</sup>

That last beauty <sup>is</sup> was from my son to his father. In German. ~~His father is German.~~

<sup>It's</sup> 'Pick up time' (will it ever get any smoother and will either of us <sup>parents</sup> ever really know how to behave and better still, actually behave like we do?) ~~and~~ <sup>has</sup> my ex-husband and former citizen of the GDR started up a conversation, ~~(of sorts)~~. Well, more of a filler while our son, <sup>the</sup> too-seasoned a little traveller <sup>goes</sup> packed his school bag and went to grab his latest obsessions ~~(Boinicle, Captain Underpants book)~~ for the next 3 days at his Dad's.

I noticed <sup>an odd</sup> with a combination of sorrow and ~~Schadenfreude~~ <sup>glee</sup> that the father of my son had become somewhat jowly (or something) - sorrow, <sup>because</sup> as I had once thought him beautiful and the other, <sup>as had been</sup> because he was always on about my own propensity to plump. ~~add it~~

~~But a bit good to see his riddle age to something filling out as they say~~  
'I had snails last night,' he says. We went to a French restaurant for Fritz's 90<sup>th</sup> birthday'. <sup>Karl's</sup>

'Oh', I say, unaccustomed to such benign social interaction. 'He's well, then? I mean, he was in hospital a long time, wasn't he?'

'Hah! Yeah, and -'

At this point our son <sup>had</sup> re-entered the kitchen, laden with goods and chattels <sup>for the</sup> next three days at Dad's. It's business as usual.

turn-a-round

The for his weekly

“Yeah”, he continues <sup>fluffing</sup> at his son’s unruly <sup>hair</sup>, and hoisting the school bag on <sup>to</sup> his shoulder. <sup>Karl</sup> ‘Fritz says,’ and here he gives a little ironic laugh, ‘that he survived Hitler and the Holocaust but the Australian hospital system has nearly <sup>bloody</sup> killed him.’

And this is when our son, who’s obviously been listening <sup>with</sup> despite his fidgeting, asks his father in German. (They only speak German when they are together so most of the time I have little idea what is going on and have to rely on intonation, body language and, increasingly, my son to translate.)

~~Wer ist~~  
Wer ist Hitler, Pappa?

<sup>is</sup> ~~‘Who was Hitler?’ (SAY THIS IN GERMAN)~~ ~~my son asks...~~  
And then in English, to both of us. ‘And what ~~was~~ the Holocaust?’

I <sup>im</sup> was relieved he didn’t also ask what <sup>doesn’t</sup> was wrong the Australian hospital system ~~as~~ as well. <sup>mind benders</sup> <sup>bad</sup>  
~~well~~. I mean two ‘unanswerables’ are <sup>bad</sup> tough enough!

The answer he <sup>gives</sup> gave his son <sup>gets</sup> got too complex for me to follow but I did pick up the part <sup>about</sup> ‘tyrant’, ‘evil’, ‘murderer’ and ‘war’. He didn’t exactly seem to be skirting the issue, that’s for sure. No mention of the figure, six million, though, <sup>do</sup> noticed. <sup>in note to self:</sup> (I made a mental note to get that Morris Gleitzman book about the Holocaust for later <sup>down</sup> down the track.)

<sup>is</sup> Our son ~~was~~ fascinated ~~with it all~~, of course. It <sup>is</sup> was just all too much like the <sup>essential</sup> ~~east~~ ingredients of <sup>the</sup> his latest Bioncles computer game to let go of his father just ~~quite~~ yet.

‘Did Germany win the war?’ <sup>asks</sup> his son

‘No.’ <sup>says</sup> his father.

‘Were you in the war?’ <sup>says</sup> his son.

His father

He probably needed to have prefaced his little lecture about WW2 <sup>with</sup> with the catch-all <sup>atrocities</sup> words, ‘In the olden days ...’ because that way, our son wouldn’t have <sup>imagined</sup> ~~hoped~~ his father direct involvement with Hitler let alone his implicit involvement with his country’s ‘turn and look the other way and pretend it is not happening’ posture <sup>at</sup> the time.

'No', he went on, elegantly, 'I wasn't born and your grandfather, <sup>(you're named after him)</sup> ~~who you are named after~~ was too young to be in the army. So it was good for him he missed out on it all too.'

Mmm ~~but did he?~~ Really? There was always Hitler's version of The Scouts <sup>while</sup> ~~and~~ anyway, how did any of them actually really miss out on it all, <sup>when all's said and done?</sup> ~~done?~~ Really?

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When we met 10 years ago I had asked lots of questions about my husband's past, his country's past, and being brought up in the East and all that. With Communists for parents I had always been fascinated with Eastern Europe and particularly ~~with people who had been reared by Communism~~ I was pretty dumb, really. Naïve and desperate for a religion, any religion. With atheists for parents, I'd latched on to the closest ideology. But then if you were still a Communist in Australia after 1956 you were pretty naïve too. Naïve or plain, deaf, dumb and blind.

But when I'd ask my husband about the real thing, his authentic experience of having been born and bred in East Germany, he was always faltering, guarded and a bit defensive ~~in his responses~~. Had he so internalised a sense of national guilt that he couldn't even talk about this stuff with his own wife <sup>or</sup> and this is probably ~~more~~ <sup>closer to the truth</sup> true, was he shocked by my ignorance and the barely disguised romance of my attitude.

The first piece of theatre I took him to in Australia was a big visual opening night festival experience with lots of audio visual imagery, little spoken text and lots of repeated and relentless obtuse, and not so obtuse references to the Holocaust. Great. Great first date choice on my part.

Instead of <sup>spurning</sup> ~~spurning~~ a fantastic intellectual discussion in the foyer after-party, my new husband was flat and un-talkative and more interested in the champagne in circulation than any kind of debate about German history and its potential for aesthetic translation ~~with me~~. I felt like an idiot. My ill footedness had made me feel like a little girl.

But with his little boy ten years later he was far from untalkative <sup>or</sup> and looking for an out when presented with ~~questions about~~ <sup>questions about</sup> his country's past.

'I escaped from my country because of <sup>very bad and crazy</sup> people like Hitler who thought they knew what was best for us.'

He didn't mention <sup>The Stasi</sup> Stalin but that's a kitchen sink life lesson for another time, I dare say.

'Awesome.' said his son.

'Hah! Yeah, awesome', said his father.

And he did that half-laugh of his again and our son and his father left my kitchen in a scramble of German and hair tousling.