

(taken from love, faults and thoughts by laurence suckling)
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"I have come from my childhood" – Antoine Saint-Exupery

What's your name?
Where are you from?
How old are you?
How are you?

Despite being able to ask and understand these basic questions in a number of languages, I seem completely unable to answer them straightforwardly. When I meet new people I like to ask them: *Do you do good things?* Pretty much all the ones who answer, *'What do you mean by good things?'*, never seem to hold my attention for very long. It's the ones who say, *'I'm not sure'* or *'I'm trying to'* or *'I used to'* or *'yeah, I think so'*, that seem to become my friends. You're your own judge to that question. It gives you space to manoeuvre. For what it's worth: my name is Chris Jenkins. I'm from Oxford, I guess, although I wasn't born here. I'm doing some years in the middle of my twenties. I think I'm ok, thank you. (God that's such bollocks, when am I ever OK?). I'd like to do good things – if only for someone else (maybe someone I've just met).

I came back from Italy twenty months ago. I was a nicer person then. Probably better looking. Italy seems to have so much more sky than us. But some things were similar. Those same questions were asked. And as you'd expect I couldn't answer them properly either – some of that was due to poor Italian on my part. Made the mistake of saying I had arses (ani) rather than years (anni). English stands apart from other romance languages. We use the verb 'to be' with age. Italian, French and Spanish all go for 'to have'. Not sure which I prefer. Age is something that's gone anyway. I think *'have done'* probably sounds best. My name is Chris and I've done twenty-something year thingies.

If you were to meet me, what three questions would you ask me? What would you want to get across about yourself? Write it down. The books you read are records of who you are during that moment of time. I love buying second-hand ones. Coffee stains and cigarette ash, grease marks from pieces of food or places where the ink's blurred 'cause someone cried, ruffled page ends, and pages that the books seems to open on. A book always has more than one story going on. I want you to be part of this. Please humour me and play along:

The three questions I'd ask would be:

- i).....
- ii).....
- iii).....

The things I'd like to get across would be:

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I guess I should try and do the same. Three questions then:

- i) Do you do good things?
- ii) What things make you go wow or wonderstruck or something?
- iii) What's the next good thing you're going to do?

The next one's a bit of a toughie. It's hard to get some things across sometimes without being prompted or put in a certain situation. Here goes:

I think I've met someone who might change my life. Her smile is full of magic. She has been in my mind since I saw her three days ago. I want to know what it feels like to hold her, to look straight into her eyes, to walk with her hand in mine. I have no idea if she thinks of me that way. She gave me a goodnight kiss, but that could mean anything. I feel I have things to offer her: love, friendship, a smile, an embrace, understanding and a sense of wonder (need to work on that one though). Not forgetting a body that's probably seen better days but can sometimes make the grade. Hair that's starting to recede and a pair of muddy green eyes that give away more than they should.

See I probably fucked it up. Guess I told you what's on my mind. But I didn't mention much else. My pet goldfish failed to get a word, let alone my family, friends and record collection. No mentions of loves and passions, places visited, lessons learnt. More importantly I failed to say if I did good things or not. Maybe Saint-Exupery was right just to say that he came from his childhood. It reminds you that we come from the same place, but a vast one with lots of different experiences. I've tried to use his line a few times, but it's never really worked. People think you're being overly clever or evasive or just plain weird. Funny how saying such things can alienate you very quickly.

"He will come like a thief in the night".

I've tried writing about things for ages. That was the idea of going to Italy. Go and do some writing (whilst pretending to teach people English). I did some writing as planned. It just wasn't very good. Couldn't get at the stuff I needed to. Kept hitting upon clichés. I'm not sure where the future generations can go with all these minefields of clichés out there... and it's not just the fault of interviewed footballers, pundits and managers. Clichés are everywhere, and we run the risk of becoming immune to them and of using them lightly... which is bad 'cause some of them are trueisms dressed in clichés' clothing. Anyway, should've planned to do some good writing. The few diary entries that I wrote are the only things I've kept.

The problem has always been finding where to start. I knew I wanted/needed to write about my life, but in an honest way without incriminating people or getting involved in lawsuit type things. My experiences are all that I really know of. Should I start with how my grandparents' grandparents got together? A description of the time when I was conceived? Please feel free to imagine your parents making you in your own time....(Did your dad put on some smooth music and dim the lights? Did your mum wear special underwear? Were you a quick fumble? A mistake?).

For what it's worth I have no idea how my grandparents' grandparents got together. (Mental note: try and listen more to ageing relatives' stories). I've got a polaroid of

the house where my mum and dad made out. I went there last year. Not exactly sure why. No that's a lie. I do that too much...shying away from saying the real reason when there was one. I guess it's just that I think I think so few people would understand that I just opt out. Again something I should probably do something about.... I went to the bungalow to take a photo of it. It's one of my on-going projects: my polaroid album. I've always loved polaroids since the days of the A-Team, when they'd clip polaroids in front of security cameras so they could 'do their stuff' unwatched and unnoticed by the bungling security types. I still think about this virtually everytime I walk past a cctv camera... Anyway, the album is probably the material thing I'd least like to lose. Well, it would be a toss up between the album and Elvis, my teddy. That doesn't mean I'm not attached to the other things I own. I am, and too much. I guess I have to face it, I'm more of a materialist than I would like to be. It's cds that do it more than anything else. But I guess you have to cut yourself some slack too. The materialism isn't the goal of the buying, it's the places the music can take you. Even intelligent Greek philosopher-types argued that it is the arts that can offer us understanding or spirituality or even the presence of god, (let alone something to relax or dance to). I seem to have a need of having things that can offer this nearby. I still felt obliged to get rid of over eight hundred cds. I think that was more to get some head-space though rather than to avoid being called a materialist. The cds had been part of my life, but it was time for them to find new homes. I wasn't trying to deny their existence or make out they hadn't been part of my life, I just no longer needed them. There are about ten cds though that I'd rather not have stolen:

And She Closed Her Eyes – Stina Nordenstam
Pink Moon – Nick Drake
No More Shall We Part – Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds
Vespertine – Bjork
Music in Colors – Stephen Duffy (& Nigel Kennedy)
The Heart of Saturday Night – Tom Waits
Wrecking Ball – Emmylou Harris
Tindersticks – The Tindersticks
The All Time Greatest Hits – Elvis Presley
The Ghost of Old Tom Joad – Bruce Springsteen

Probably.

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