

My dark secrets exposed

Joel Magarey emerges from his cave of secrecy to describe the consequences of publishing a tell-all memoir.

FOR years my cave of secrecy had served me well. It was deep enough. It seemed to work. People seemed to like me.

Then I came up with a plan. The plan was somewhat strange. It was to charge out of my cave naked and, in full view of a crowd of thousands, to point at my freakishly deformed bits and growl scarily and then make funny faces and fart noises.

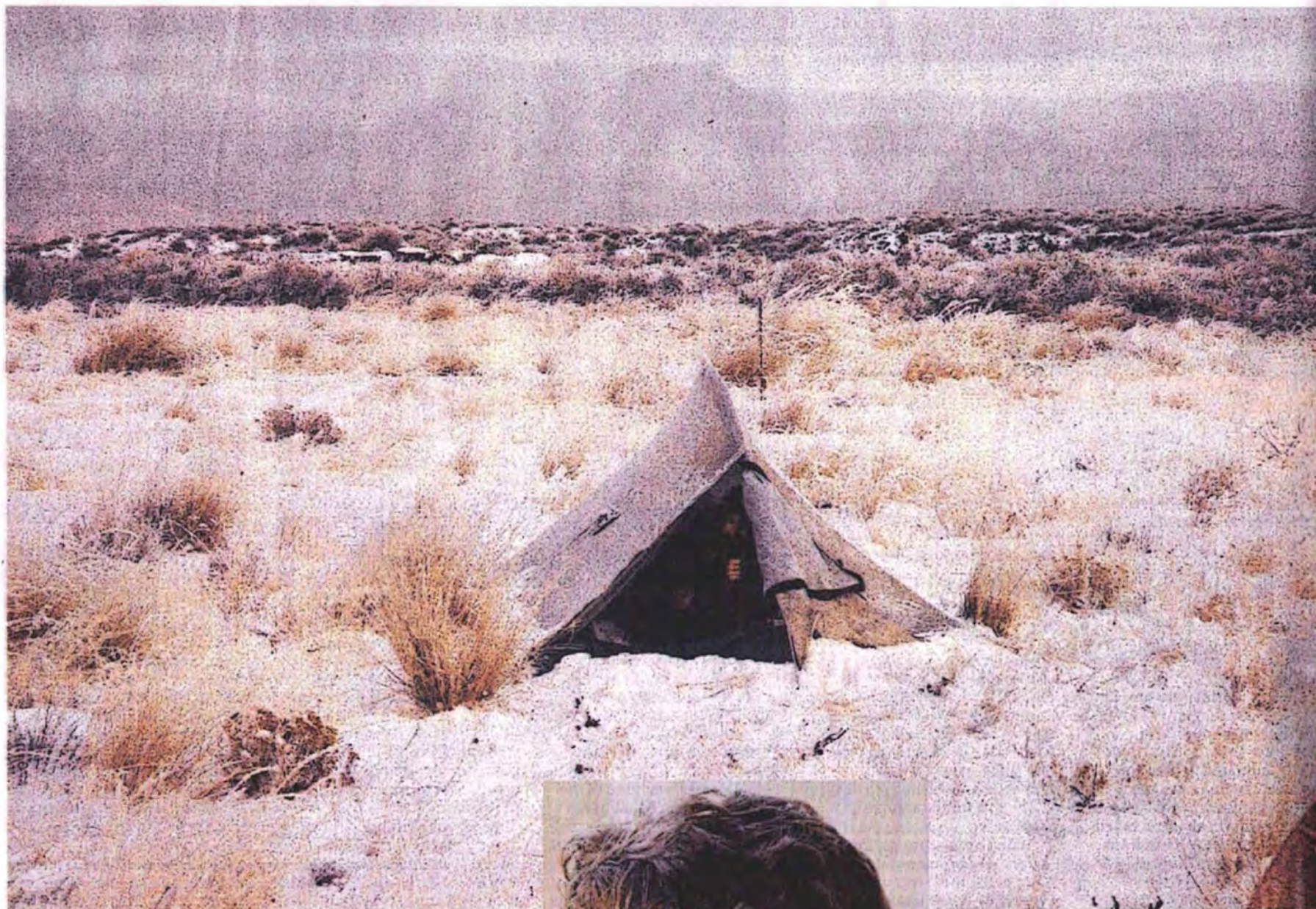
In other words, I was writing my memoir, *Exposure: a Journey*.

I should be clear. It's not about farting. And there's heaps in it that I wasn't too worried about revealing. At least relatively speaking, I barely cared that my friends would learn how for the first 12 years of my life I thought I was Jesus Christ; or how at 17 I rode to the house of my History of Political Thought tutor late one night to make her fall in love with me and instead made her scream in terror; or how, as a 24-year-old, I so enthusiastically tried to help a policeman park that he arrested me.

Pah. What worried me far more was the main act: the naked freak show, the bit with me dancing the disordered-mind fandango.

I make light of this partly because it hurts. My story is one of love and adventure with a psychological edge. It's about the powerful illusions that can be created by unbridled fear and desire — and when I say unbridled I mean it. For the decade of my 20s, fear periodically deranged me and took control of my actions. It did this to me most destructively when I travelled.

So the book recounts me trying, for instance, to rescue half of Bombay's blind beggars and then making myself vomit repeatedly to stop myself going blind along with them. It describes me in Donegal washing my hands until they were



raw and rinsing my eyes until they were bloodshot. It relates how on a remote Orkney island I searched day and night for nearly half a week to rescue a lost man who didn't exist.

Yes, it was the obsessive-compulsive dance, one of humankind's most embarrassing.

And then there was desire. Like many young sufferers, I was in denial that I really had OCD. And, aged 25, I decided it would be a good idea to run away from that diagnosis and from the love of an extremely lovable young woman to travel round the world and try to

Are you getting the idea? And that's only the start of the story. At that point I hadn't even left the country. I hadn't

In the weeks before the book's release, I was afraid to the point of insomnia. Above all I feared *Exposure's* expos-

ures would push me out of the light — not back into the cave of my secrecy this time, but much further down, into the abyss of social ostracism. Amid this swirling fear I was already in the darkness, legs dangling over the chasm. The many friends who didn't already know would disown me. My colleagues wouldn't be able to handle it, would silently judge, would exclude me.

Release day passed. At first the light penetrated in single, narrow shafts. A tentative knock on my office door: a colleague, visibly moved, revealed she had OCD. A day later an unknown co-worker sidled up to me in the parliamentary gardens: her best friend was crippled by anxiety; she wanted me to sign a copy.

At home the phone was channelling more disclosures, more exposures: men I hadn't heard from for years revealing similarly misadventurous



Joel Magarey (left), whose memoir details his struggle with obsessive-compulsive disorder. The author (above) isolates himself by camping in the wilderness.

sexual and romantic histories, women acknowledging struggles with anxiety and choice, with love and especially with commitment-phobic men.

A guy I'd played soccer with told me that his ex-wife had

had OCD, that he now felt he'd let her down. We'd hardly talked, except about soccer. Emails came from strangers. An economist divulged he'd also been a dream-kid who thought he was the Son of

Man. A psychologist regretted his overly cautious choices.

The exposures were flooding, each shaft joining with its neighbour to become a broad beam of light, and now the light had pulled me out into a shire of human hobbits who looked startlingly like me. As they walked past on the path some of them had their heads in my book, and some of them were chuckling, and each chuckle left me more connected; less alien, even to myself; more human.

This light is spilling into summer's. I'm caring less, I'm caring more. The cave has dissolved; the light has me in its spell. In the evenings I ride along the river, careless and flushed, beneath a human sky.

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