

Pav defender run over by Holden

The Pavlova Debacle is an extract from Julie Hill's book *Shamejoy* which is a collection of smart, darkly comic short stories.

They found us in London's least popular suburbs.

They found us in their nightclubs, fling off our tits, ripping our shirts off, peeping senselessly on neon-coloured whistles, dancing solo on podium.

They found some of us at the Walkabout, TVs playing rugby on both sides of the stage, flies in the toilet.

It was the year 2000. We were dressed as intergalactic exchange students in silver parkas and garments with missing sleeves.

We listened to dance music on CD players that skipped and bashed our hips as we dodged horse shit in Hyde Park.

As one millennium flipped over into the next, the people of Britain opined that there was no apocalypse, no Y2K bug, nothing. Life just went on as it had before.

But then the Pavlova Debacle happened.

They found us on the Tube, on our way to our quasi-legal working holiday jobs: back end of a donkey in the new Jason Donovan pants, through a friend of Jason's cousin, fill-in section editor at *The Guardian*; clown doctor, earning hundreds and thousands of the mighty British squid.

Standing silently, balancing against poles, staring at advertising, reading *Meatros*, trying to merge into our environments like lizards. We never spoke because our accents would have given us away.

Some of us served ourselves by learning to be like them, copying their voices, joking about poo, complaining about trains and being racist about Welsh people. We hid and snunk inside their culture until there were no discernible traces of ourselves left.

But the rest of us could never get the hang of saying foch when we meant fair, or pretending we liked warm beer and vinegar on chips. And those of us were the ones who they got.

The ones who found us were businessfolk rabbis, accordion players, Pret-a-Manger waitresses,

Julie Hill
Shamejoy



Julie Hill, journalist and script-writer.

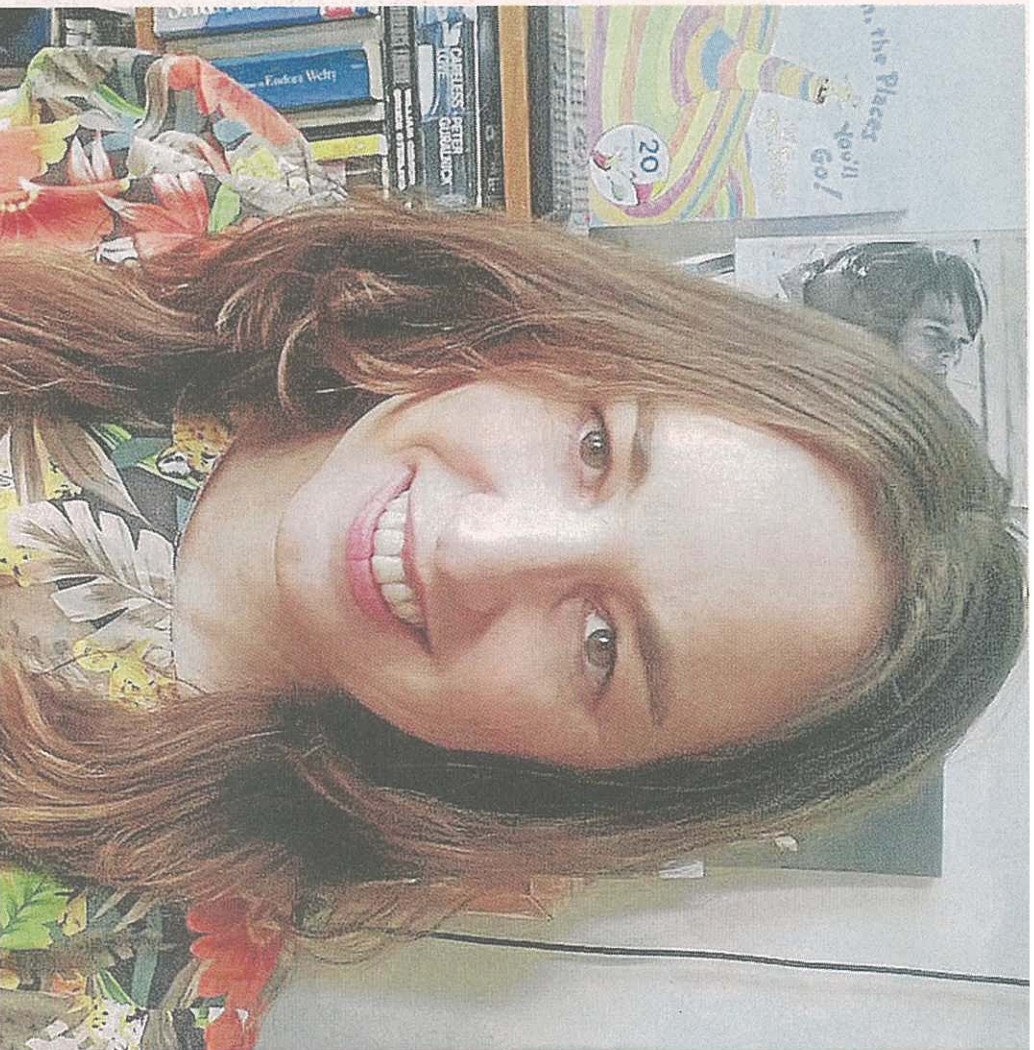


Photo: Supplied

nurses, deployed by the government to trap us. They asked us about the weather or the soccer or did we like this tune. Once we let our vowels incriminate us, they captured us and took us away in cars, black cabs, things they called lorries but were trucks.

And then we were never seen or heard from again.

On the day Uncle Jeff died, Caramel received a present from him

**The shoelaces said
I Love Australia,
with a heart to
mean love, and they
made Caramel's
mother cry.**

in the post. She was allowed to open it even though it wasn't Christmas for another eighteen sleeps. Inside the bubble wrap inside a brown envelope was one candle and one pair of novelty shoelaces.

Uncle Jeff had been run over by his own car. What happened was, the car behind him was going too fast, and when Uncle Jeff slowed down for the lights it snunted him from behind, so he shot out of his seat and went through the window and over the bonnet and onto the road, then his car, a Holden, painted the same chocolate hue as his eyes, rolled over

his body.

It was midnight in Adelaide and 2.30am in Auckland on December 7, 1989. There was a phone call to say that Uncle Jeff had hit the dust and wasn't coming back.

The candle was blue and had a thick white line around its middle. The line dipped up and down like a radio wave, as if it was the road Uncle Jeff was driving down when it rose up to meet him.

The shoelaces said "I Love Australia", with a heart to mean love, and they made Caramel's mother cry. But all it seemed to prove to Caramel was that even though people might be dead, they can still send you Christmas presents.

One morning in Adelaide, shortly before he died, Uncle Jeff had been reading the paper. He had just been made redundant and had debt up to his jockstraps and was in a nipper of a shit mood.

He turned the page to an article with the headline "The Good Ole Aussie Pav".

"The pav is not bloody Australian," shouted Uncle Jeff at the newspaper. Uncle Jeff was from Tauranga, and he'd had an absolute gushful of Australians saying all his things were their things: Split Enz, Sam Neill, Weebix, bloody Phar Lap.

He remembered his mum standing in the kitchen, not far away from where the great Te Whiti led the people in peaceful resistance, setting an example for Ghandi and Martin Luther King, not that those racist idiot Australians would give a flying f***

about that, and his mum was making pavlova for Christmas lunch, pasting the sponge cake with cream and sticking kiwifruit on top and all around the sides.

It's got kiwifruit on it, thought Uncle Jeff. So clearly it's from New Zealand. Some lady baked it for Anna Pavlova the ballerina. Everybody knows that. Uncle Jeff dialled up the offices of AdelaideNow and asked if he could place an ad in the classifieds.

"Which section?"

"Complaints."

"That's not a classified section."

"I dunno. Cake."

"That's not a section."

Uncle Jeff went berserk. "Look,

scumbag," he yelled down the phone, "I've changed my mind. I want to take out a whole page, and I want it to say: Stuff You Australians Kiwis Invented The Pav You Didn't So Stuff Off PS You are Convicts."

"You want any punctuation in that?"

"F*** you."

"Ok. That will be \$800."

Which was all Uncle Jeff had left in the world, give or take. His message was published in the newspaper the next day. On the front page there was a pointer to it saying: 'Good Ole Aussie Pav? A Reader Speaks,' which would have made Uncle Jeff absolutely roppable, but he never got to see it, and he never got to witness the fallout - that is, full-on, hard-out trans-Tasman war - crushed to death as he was by his chocolate Holden.

Extract from *Shamejoy*