

'SIT DOWN GIRLIE'

Welcome to Girlie's weird,
wonderful and worriesome world



Irritating underwear

Who could forget the famous case of *Grant v Australian Knitting Mills* (1933) 50 CLR 387 when the unfortunate plaintiff was burned by his long johns which retained traces of manufacturing chemicals? This was a leading case in negligence and now dozens of women in England are suing a leading lingerie firm. They allege Victoria's Secret underwear, in the form of push up bras, caused painful rashes and welts because of traces of formaldehyde in the fabric. This dangerous chemical is sometimes used in the textile industry to make fabrics crease resistant. The burning issue is whether Victoria's Secret used formaldehyde in its bras, which it denies.

Old habits die hard

Girlie never thought she would see such a thing — a beauty pageant for nuns. *The Herald Sun* (26 August 2008) reported: 'The first beauty pageant for nuns debuts next month with the advent of Miss Sister Italy, aimed at erasing a stereotype of nuns as being old and staid.' 'Nuns are, above all, women and beauty is a gift from God,' said organising priest Antonio Rungi. Surprise, surprise a few days later the pageant was withdrawn following Vatican rage. *The Age* (28 August 2008) reported the priest backtracked, saying he had been misunderstood. He thought the beauty contest would give nuns more visibility in the Catholic Church and fight the stereotype that they were all old and dour. He said attacks on him and the unease of religious superiors prompted him to drop the plan altogether. It reminds Girlie of series 2, episode 7 of *Father Ted* when Ted is invited to judge the 'Lovely Girls' competition.

The racket

Gideon Haigh has published a fascinating and disturbing account of illegal abortion in Victoria, revealing how dodgy characters emerge from the woodwork when prohibition of a procedure takes place. Victoria's Parliament finally decriminalised abortion on 10 October 2008. While opponents of the legislation in the public gallery were extremely vocal and threatening, eg 'There will be recriminations!' pro-choice supporters showed a quiet dignity for which the Speaker thanked them. In Queen's Hall however, extraordinary scenes were witnessed by Girlie when some Liberal, Labour and Greens women quietly embraced.

No Catholic Church, we do want family planning

The Philippines Congress has backed government distribution of free condoms and the contraceptive pill to poor families. A proposed new law would offer a choice between natural family planning based on abstinence during women's fertile days in their menstrual cycles and artificial methods.

No choice

The Herald Sun (1 September 2008) reports from Islamabad that a Pakistani law maker has defended a decision by south-western tribesmen to bury five women alive because they wanted to choose their own husbands. Israr Ullah Zehri, who represents Baluchistan Province, was quoted as saying, 'These are centuries-old traditions and I will continue to defend them... Only those who indulge in immoral acts should be afraid.' According to media reports and human rights activists, the women, three of whom were teenagers, were shot and thrown into a ditch but were still breathing as their bodies were covered with rocks and mud.

'Heroine from the brothels'

The Sunday Age (28 September 2008) reported on sex trafficking of women. This 21st century version of slavery exists throughout the world with very little being done about it. Somaly Mam, a Cambodian who was sold to brothels when she was a young teenager, now runs an organisation that extricates girls from forced prostitution. Her memoir, *The Road of Lost Innocence*, is an inspirational read and the work she is doing is worthy of support. Her efforts to rescue women from brothels have sometimes led to gangsters raiding her shelter, kidnapping the girls and taking them back. However, she continues her fight and, with the help of others, has made progress.

'Where have all the flowers gone?'

The United Kingdom charity ActionAid has published a Report called *The Disappearing Daughters*. It indicates 'an all time low' in the number of girls aged under six in India. The Report called on the Indian government to implement tougher enforcement laws prohibiting prenatal sex detection and sex selection abortion. Figures published in *The Lancet* showed more than 500 000 female fetuses were being aborted each year. The report says government needs to take sustained action to prevent a lost generation of women (*Australian Doctor*, 4 July 2008).

Flat Out

Happy 20th birthday to Flat Out, an organisation which assists women leaving prison to find accommodation and settle back into the community. These fabulous women, Billi, Emily, Brooke and Michelle have been under funded, under resourced and overly wonderful and inspirational. Happy birthday Flat Out.

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