

The Tanzania Boat Lady

THIS IS A TRUE STORY.

I wrote it at a time when I was starting to realise that my parents and I were very different people. We weren't in conflict, but I felt we had a lack of common ground between us. A gulf was starting to open up and I began to look for ways in which to bridge it. I still sometimes call my mother The Tanzania Boat Lady and I like to think that it's something she appreciates.

I was lying in bed some months ago and I was thinking about names. And I started to think how unfair it was that my parents got to make up names for me, but I didn't get to make up any names for them. They got to call me "Matthew James", when they could have picked anything – Oberon for example – while I was stuck with calling them "mum and dad."

So, I decided that what I would do was make up some new names for my parents. I decided that I would call my mother "The Tanzania Boat Lady", and that my dad would be called "Mr Tangerine Man" and I went and sat on my parents' bed the other month and explained this to them.

Now my dad was not particularly keen on this idea – partly because he thought it was completely stupid, and

partly because he was asleep – but my mum got really into it. In fact, she took to her new role with alacrity. And now, whenever I ring her up to speak to her, she'll pick up the phone and I'll always say, "Hello. Is that the Tanzania Boat Lady?"

And she'll say, "Yes, yes it is."

And I'll say, "How are you? And more importantly, how are your boats?"

And she'll tell me. Which is nice.

Apparently, they have been in storage for the past few months, as the weather has been very bad, but she will soon be taking them out and she intends to sail the seven seas, possibly in search of porpoises.

And when she does this, I think what a great idea the concept of the Tanzania Boat Lady was. I think how great it is that we have the opportunity to create ourselves anew every morning, no matter what our names are. And I'm filled with hope that life is so full of possibilities for being. Because now, no matter how dull our days have been, when we speak to each other in the evenings, we can forget the fact that we might not really have very much to say to one another and instead we can sail away together on the endless, sunlit waters of the Indian Ocean.