

MY FAMILY



My name

My name is Jack.
Not Jackson
or Jackie;
not Jack-in-the-box,
 laughing like an echo;
not hit the road Jack;
not Jack the rat
or Jack, go wash your face,
or Jack rabbit,
 lifting my head to get shot,
or Jacqueline;
not Jack of all trades,
 master of none,
or car Jack
or Jack Frost;
not Jackpot,
 the name of a loser,

or Jackboot
or Jacktar
or Jackknife
or Jacket –
 something to wrap yourself in;
not just Jack
or Jack of hearts
but
JACK.

Okay?

My Family (the dream one)

There's my dad,
dressed in his best blue suit,
counting his money: \$10,000, \$11,000, \$12,000 ...
My mum –
she'll be home soon –
she's starring in another movie
so she's acting late.
And my sister? She's away.
She's a nun, helping the poor in Africa.
They had her on *60 Minutes* last week;
Saint Sister they call her.
My brother?
He's outside polishing his Porsche.
And me?
I'm just starting my Maths homework.
I love Maths.

My Family (the real one)

There's my dad,
snoring in his chair, still in his work clothes,
sleeping without a shower for the third day running.
My mum –
she's wearing those pink curlers in her hair –
looks like a space cadet to me.
And my sister's in the bathroom.
She's dyeing her hair orange.
I think it'll suit her.
My brother?
He's in jail, we expect him home next year.
And I'm here writing this, watching the footy on TV
and doing everything possible to avoid
homework.

My Family (the truth)

Actually, truth be known,
they're both wrong.
I live with my dad
and my sister.
My dad works at a newspaper.
He says he tells 'edited lies' all day.
He's a journalist,
which means I never see him.
He leaves home at 7am
and returns at night,
smelling of cigarette smoke and defeat.
He walks in,
reheats the dinner
and asks me if I've done my homework.
He's okay though.
He talks to me on the weekends
and that's enough for a parent.
My sister I like!
Yeah I know,
you're not supposed to like your sister,
but Desiree's great.

She left school last year,
went right out and got a job.
She's assistant manager of a bookshop.
She says they'll stock my first book
when it's published.
She's nineteen.
Tall, dark eyes, long black hair
and
this faint trace of soft light hair on her top lip!
That's what I like about her:
she's upfront.
Other girls might wax it
but not Des.
I tell her it looks sexy
and I think it does – for my sister!
So Des and me
get on fine.
She even talks to me
about Ms Curling
and Annabel Browning.

Sex, sport and nose hair

I'm a normal guy.
An average sixteen-year-old.
I think about sex, sport and nose hair.
Sex mostly.
How to do it,
how to get someone to do it with me,
who I should ask for advice.
My friends are useless,
they know nothing.
We sit, at lunchtime,
trying to make sense of that
impenetrable mystery called girls.
I've thought of asking Ms Curling –
she's the type who'd look me in the eye
and talk straight –
but I could never hold her stare.
I'd start dribbling or blushing or coughing
or worse:

I'd get an erection!
They happen at the worst times.
In the bus,
in Science class.
I spent all Friday night thinking I must be
perverted to get excited during Science!
So, I can't ask my teachers or friends.
Dad?
It's so long since he had sex
he'd have trouble remembering.
I'd be better asking him
about nose hair.

Desiree?
She'll tell me ...

Desiree on sex

‘Des, I want to know about sex.’

‘Like what?’

‘Like how, why, when and who with.’

*‘How is simple. Hands, lips,
kissing, touching.*

*Why? Because it feels good
and costs nothing, except
for the condom.*

When? When Dad’s not home.

*Or on the weekend, somewhere nice,
like the hut near Megalong Creek.*

Who with? Can’t help you, sorry.

*Why not ask Annabel Browning on a date?
You keep talking about her ...’*

Trust Desiree to answer
everything about sex in about fifty words
and bring up Annabel Browning.

Another poem on sex, sport and nose hair

Sex is late-night games on the computer
thinking, 'There must be better things to do.'
Sex is the morning newspaper crimes,
with my dad shaking his head
saying, 'What a world, what a world.'
Sex is with a condom
or so the school counsellor says.
Sex is the beach in summer,
the smell of suntan oil,
the long train ride home, alone,
reading a book.
Sex is acne, greasy hair and shopping
for the Hollywood gloss of magazines
and movies.
Sport is as much energy as sex,
yet half the fun, I imagine.
Sport is the only time
you'd get me wrapping my arms
around Peter Blake's legs!
Sport is the way we decide who should be
the school captain.
Sport is money, broken noses and played
by guys with thick necks!
Nose hair is my destiny.
Nose hair will prevent me from having sex
until I'm too old to care.
Nose hair is the first thing I check in the morning.
Nose hair bristles in the afternoon wind.
Nose hair keeps my mind off girls, Maths
and the adventure of sleeping.

A writer

I'm going to be a writer.
I decided
while Ms Curling, my Art teacher,
had my head cradled in her arms,
wiping my brow
with a warm towel.
We were surrounded by
twenty-one fellow students, all in football gear,
and two less concerned teachers.
It seems my face and someone's elbow
had a close encounter.
The result: Ms Curling's Chanel N°5
wafting through
my newly broken nose.
Maybe it was this
and her concerned caress,
or the thought
of another fifteen games
left in the season
that decided it ...

Yes.
I'm going to be a writer.
Beat the typewriter
not my mates.
No more changeroom jokes on muscles
or competitions for the smelliest socks.
I'm retiring,
joining the guys on the outer.
I'm going to wear dark clothes
and an intense expression.

If nothing else,
I hope it will attract the girls.

The great poem

I have just written a great poem.
A classic.
One that's so good
university professors will read it, badly,
in front of hundreds of students
twenty years
 after I die
to prove to the world
what a jewel,
what a gift,
what a gem
 I gave,
what a poet I was.
Here in my Blue Mountains garret,
I light another imaginary cigarette
 to celebrate
death and the poem.
I'm sending it to every publisher in the land.
I want them to fight for it.
I'm sitting at my desk trying to choose the pen
I'll use to sign the contracts
 to sign the movie rights.
I'm sorry it's night, or I'd ring the chat shows
to arrange to read it live to the nation!
Ms Curling, my dad, Desiree
will shake their heads in disbelief.
 A great poem from 'what's-his-name ...'

Love is like a gobstopper

Love is like a gobstopper.
It's true:
you spend all your childhood
wanting that perfect, round, life-giving,
never-ending ball of sweetness.
You look through the shop window,
 your mouth waters,
 legs shake,
 eyes go in and out of focus,
until that desired gobstopper is yours.
 You hold it,
 cherish it,
 kiss it,
 dream about it,
sleep with it under your pillow,
wake up sticky
and hope you'll never be alone.
But like all lovers,
you want more.
So one tempting night,
you close your eyes,
push it all the way into your mouth
and taste its wonder –
 then you swallow it,
 choke
 and die!
Love is like a gobstopper.

Desiree on Facial hair

It's Jack who's to blame.
His obsession with facial hair
has got me looking at my moustache.
God! He's even got me calling it that
when it's only light lip hair,
and now I can't look at anyone
without noticing the shadow above their mouth.
Three weeks of research has proven
that every woman I know has facial hair.
The only people without it seem to be
models and movie stars
and we all know about their grip on reality!
So I'm keeping mine,
despite my hairdresser
mentioning it every time I see her.
Waxing, electrolysis, dyeing –
give me a break.
And besides, I'm beginning to like it.
Maybe Jack is right,
maybe it is sexy.
Let's face it,
it's certainly more attractive than nose hair.

Violence in the Family

Today I'm going to watch my dad
hit a white ball with a big silver stick.
When he's hit the ball,
he's going to walk after it
carrying a whole bag of big sticks.
When he finds the ball, hiding, grass-stained,
he's going to hit it again
until it does what it's told
and falls in the hole.
Sometimes it refuses
and he bashes the big stick
on the ground in threat.
Occasionally he drowns the ball in a lake
and walks silently away.
Once he stamped his petulant feet,
quickly looked around,
alone, and ashamed,
and gave the little ball an almighty smack.
After doing this for a few hours,
he'll put the ball and sticks in the car,
drive home
and boast about his game to me and Des.
One day he asked Desiree to join him,
but she smiled no
as she took a knife from the drawer,
went to the fridge,
dragged an onion out
and slowly, deliberately
cut its head off.