Shazia's week

Before Google, I actually had hobbies, and before I owned a computer I actually had a life

It's three o'clock in the morning and I should be writing this column, but instead I feel the foolish necessity to google my friends from primary school to see what they've done with their lives. This task took a few hours, then I progressed to googling people I had met in nightclubs during my time at university.

Before Google I actually had hobbies, and before I started owning computers I actually had a life. I have been stuck at my computer all week, working on my new show for the Edinburgh Festival, but have been constantly distracted by the endless possibilities that the internet symbol "e" brings – from porn to fat-free fairy cake recipes.

I'm surprised anybody does any work any more. It seems the only time I do work these days is when I have a deadline.

I ventured into my garden shed a few days ago to take out the lawnmower and found there a host of things that used to have a place in my life: a pair of cowboy boots, old photos, a tent, a rake, leather gloves, a foldable bed, walking boots, a big suitcase and a pair of roller boots. Some people find themselves in the Himalayas. I found myself in the garden shed.

I stood inside the shed and looked out on to the street. Children were playing, laughing and eating ice cream. People were parking their cars and taking their shopping inside their houses. I love watching people doing mundane things. I find it interesting, which must say a lot about just how exciting my life is, but I find great comfort in the ordinary. If they had seen me making notes on my notepad while peeping at them and their kids, they probably would have called the police.

I was standing in my shed wondering if my Edinburgh show will be good enough, and wondering what it must be like

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to have a normal summer. A part of me quite envied the people bringing in their shopping and chatting to the ice-cream man about why he'd run out of red sauce. When I was seven I used to watch *Hi-De Hi!* and think that everyone spent their summer at a holiday camp engaging in frivolous antics, it looked like so much fun. Then I grew up and realised TV wasn't real, and that I was never going to meet the alcoholic, child-hating Punch and Judy man.

When the Edinburgh Festival is over, I will be going on holiday to Istanbul. So, in preparation, a friend of mine rang up a highly reputable travel agent to book the tickets. On the phone, he gave the names of the two passengers: Shazia Mirza and Jeremy Smith. The tickets arrived in the post a couple of days later with the names Jeremy Cubb and Mirza Smith. When I rang the travel agency to change the names, they informed me that it was entirely my fault and I would have to purchase a new return ticket to Istanbul.

I said this was ridiculous and that I knew what my name was, and why would I steal half of someone's name and add it to mine? If I wanted to be someone else I would steal their whole name and keep their ticket!

They didn't believe me, and said that I couldn't travel unless I had a passport with the name Mirza Smith, adding that no further deliberation would take place.

I have learned, from previously blackmailing people, that nothing scares a corporate person more than telling them you're a comedian. So I rang the travel agency again and told them that if they didn't put my real name on the ticket, I would name them and use them as material in my next comedy show. "Comedy?" screamed the woman on the phone. The staff refused to believe I was a comedian, concluding that I must be winding them up.
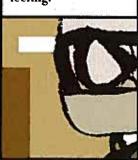
"Google me, then," I said.

A new ticket arrived in the post the next day. Google does have some good uses, after all. ●

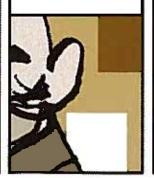**Shazia Mirza**

PAYNE'S GREY BY CHRIS PRIESTLEY

Weston Colville was tired of hearing people going on about their so-called problems...

Without ever once asking how he was feeling.

Didn't he have needs?

Didn't psychoanalysts have needs too?