

Shazia's week

Columnist of the Year



There was more hat swapping than wife swapping at this year's Glastonbury

Some people go to Glastonbury to change the world. I went to change my socks. Not once or twice, but six times. It was a very dry weekend: there was no rain, no swamp, and a notable absence of topless mud wrestling. I was disappointed: Glastonbury is just not the same without muddy ditches. It's not as entertaining when you can't watch drunken people rolling in the mud with an orange wig caught in their fishnet stockings, searching for their lost bra – and that's just the parents.

I had an eventful time. I stayed in a tent next to Billy Bragg's Portakabin. We all had to rough it but he roughed it slightly better than I did. Even in the world of camping there is a hierarchy: tent, Portakabin, QE2. This hierarchy must extend to the toilets. If Glastonbury can harness the methane from the ones I had to use, it will soon become energy-self-sufficient.

I listened to Tony Benn speaking, with such effortless style and sincerity, about how he loves coming to Glastonbury to be rejuvenated by the energy of youth. It was a moving experience. Speaking of moving experiences, I wondered which toilets he was using.

There is a curious style of democracy that prevails at this festival. Glastonbury is like the lost-property box at infants' school. There was always an odd shoe, a Mickey Mouse rubber,

two marbles and a pair of worn-out gym pants. Where else could you find such a disparate mix? In my first 20 minutes I saw a man pushing a wheelbarrow full of children, a donkey on a stick, and a Tony Benn book signing.

Trying to be part of the scene, I bought a hat. Wear a hat in a drunken crowd and there will always be some idiot who feels the need to swap it for his. There was more hat-swapping than

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wife-swapping. How things have changed since the Sixties.

Whatever the real world provides, Glastonbury provides the holistic version. There was a stall selling herbal Ecstasy. What next? Crack with echinacea? The man at the stall told me: "Normal Ecstasy makes you dance all night and sweat like a dog; with herbal Ecstasy you'll just want to hug strangers whilst knitting." He really sold it to me. The next stall was one hippie treatment too far. It was herbal palm reading.

An old man was seated in a pink tent with a picture of a big hand hanging on the door. I was intrigued, but on closer inspection

I became doubtful. The diagram showed that each line on the hand stood for a part of the body, so what I would normally call the life line was now the kidney line, and the love line became the large intestine. Not great if you're looking for the love of your life, but a world-beater if you're searching for a man with a strong pancreas.

We all ponder the meaning of life. From Plato to Wino (for *New Statesman* readers, that is the artist formally known as Amy Winehouse), many great thinkers have been frustrated by this subject. But here in Glastonbury I found that by wandering into the right tent, you can find the answer in a 90-page paperback for £3.50: *The Meaning of Life: a Very Short Introduction*.

The best part of the festival was watching Leonard Cohen. The evening was warm and the sun was setting. There was a sense of sentimental calm and friendship among the thousands and thousands of people who swayed in unison to that golden voice singing "Hallelujah".

As I stood there I thought: how wonderful. Then in the middle of the crowd I saw a man waving a ten-foot, bright yellow flag that read: "Fist me Jesus." Thank God Britain is a democracy, even if the Son of God may not appreciate the invitation. ●

Shazia Mirza

PAYNE'S GREY BY CHRIS PRIESTLEY

Snow Hill liked to talk.



He liked to sing.



He liked to ululate like a Palestinian woman burning an effigy of George Bush.



But his wife wanted to know why he couldn't just grunt and fall asleep like every other man.

