

What is wrong with the Youth of Today?

Sadly, the news today was not good. Another brave, loyal and heroic young Australian soldier has paid the ultimate sacrifice, their life for all of the things we hold so dearly in our country. Of course this will start the usual chorus of bleeding hearts demanding we return our troops from their dangerous, yet important, work in parts of the world that don't have the luxuries of democracy, freedom and a way of life envied around the world.

Yet, where were these same voices last week when two young Australians lost their lives on our shores. Where were these voices in trying to protect the sanctity of young strong and vibrant Australian men? Where were these voices to stop a pointless waste of life in the pursuit of fame through social media in the aim to have the best 'planking' photo? No, it is easy to attack something like our obligation to protect the world, but too hard to speak out about protecting our youth from their own stupidity. Instead of these voices attacking the stupidity of some of our youth, instead we heard that 'planking' was a good means of personal expression, as long as it was done safely.

Eerily, the images of those lost were equally haunting. A strong proud young man, father to young children, husband to his best friend, uniformed and honored to be serving his country. His eyes spoke of a life lived, and a life to look forward to. Those same eyes were witnessed in Acton Beale, a young man with much life to live. The loss of people at such a young age is never easy, but when that loss is as a result of something as stupid as planking, you have to ask where society is headed.

For those of you that don't know, 'planking' involves lying face down in a rigid position on various objects and having your photo taken. Now if that has gotten you excited, the next step is to post those photos on your Facebook page or 'tweet' them on your Twitter. When

this was explained to me, that is exactly what I thought- you twits....

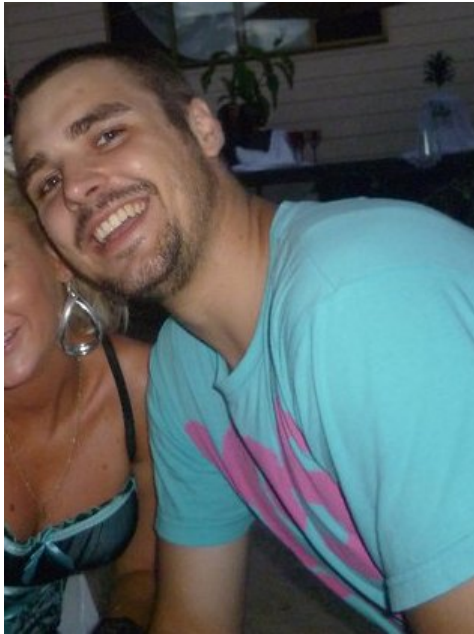
Now much to my chagrin, social media is now the most powerful form of media in our modern times. Don't get me wrong, I love social media, I use Facebook, love it, I tweet, love it, I blog- can't get by without it. But these agents of social media have a different hold over our youth. Whereas we see these forms of communication as just that, forms of communication, our youth see them as a means of being famous. Facebook pages with constant status updates about mundane things designed to let everyone know what they are doing every minute of the day, tweets about what they have for dinner, blogs about their thoughts on the latest episode of 'Angry boys', and now photos of lying down in rigid positions in ever increasingly stupid locations. It is as if our youth are in a constant race to out do each other and need to prove it.

This is not the fault of social media. It is, instead the fault of the bleeding hearts and civil libertarians in our society who constantly tell our youth that expressing themselves in these forms is 'healthy', it is the fault of parents who don't correct their kids when they misbehave, it is the fault of everyone of us when we allow the cult of celebrity worship to dictate our lives.

So keep using social media, but for what it is designed for, to communicate. Stop telling everyone what you had for breakfast; stop deliberating in a public forum about what to watch on telly tonight and stop trying to outdo each other in meaningless and stupid things. That is what we should be telling the youth of land, have fun live your life, but don't keep constantly telling us about it.

Horace Brown

RSL Director- Victoria



Tragedy- Queensland man Acton Beale who was tragically killed in a planking incident.

Image- Associated Press



Australian Hero- Sgt Wood MG

Image- Reuters

Television prankster Sam Newman's 40 metre 'plank'

Image- Dan Cutty



There's a fine (on)line between comedy and tragedy

It's time to stop sharing every stupid thing we do or say on cyberspace, writes Dave O'Neil.

PLANKING, something most of us knew nothing about until last week, is another ridiculous internet trend, up there with flash mobs and the baby who bites his brother. For those who don't know, planking is where you photograph yourself lying horizontally on something dangerous or ridiculous, and then put it on the internet.

These days every bit of stupidity has to be photographed and shared with the world. It's not good enough to make a few of your mates laugh, you've got to capture the moment and launch it into cyberspace. Years ago, these things were called

"party tricks." My friend had a dog that would leg when you'd play a certain Elton John song. At any party this performing canine would be trotted out for the amusement of the people in the lounge room. These days that dog would be a YouTube sensation, make Danni Minogue cry on *Australia's Got Talent* and Elton John would eventually record a duet with the mutt. The whole world would know about the howling Elton John dog. But would we be any better off?

There's something to be said for just enjoying the moment and moving on, whether it's a concert or your baby's first words. Not everyone needs to

know everything we do. Take, for example, Facebook status updates: getting any haircut, feeling much better, stepping out for lunch, anyone know a good sandwich shop in Merton? Or like the tweet I got the other day: "Thinking of watching a DVD, what should I watch?" What about a movie set in the future where no one can make a decision without doing a web poll on Facebook first?

And then this stuff goes too far. I'm talking of the young man in Queensland who fell from a balcony while planking and died. Like most people, when I heard a young man had been killed planking, I thought, "What an idiot." Then I thought, "Hang on, I broke my leg on a BMX bike jumping Dicko to get a laugh. And yes, it was a radio stunt to impress my friends and listeners,

and it was filmed and put on the web. You could actually hear my leg snap when I hit the ground." Ouch.

So I somewhat understand what drove this man to do something for a laugh, as dangerous as it was. You think at the time it will be hilarious, you think that because you're doing it under the guise of humour you're protected. I thought the gods of showbiz would look after me. But sadly they did not. The gap between comedy and tragedy is very small, and when I hit the concrete and shattered my leg in 16 places, it was a tragedy. I had a lot of time in bed to think about why I did it. I did it to fill in space on a radio program, to do something exciting that people would talk about. The orthopaedic ward was full of men who had broken

bones doing stupid things. All seemed to involve danger or extreme sports — dirt bikes, skiing, snowboarding, jet skis, skydiving. And it was only men. You never saw a woman on crutches who'd say, "Yeah it was my friends hen's night and someone dared me to jump off the mini-bus onto the train but I missed and broke my pelvis." Are men hard-wired to do idiotic things to impress their mates?

The thing that interested me was that nearly all of them had captured their injury on film, and then the injury footage became hot property among co-workers, friends and family. The shot of me breaking my leg got lots of hits, I'm told. I've personally watched the footage over and over, not because I'm studying the injury, but because I used it in my

recent comedy festival show. It was entertainment. But was it really?

Entertainment used to be carefully thought-out, constructed pieces. These days anyone can do it — lie horizontally on a rubbish bin, get the photo on your phone and you're away. Maybe after this planking tragedy, it's time for all of us to make a pact to stop doing stupid things for the internet. No more planking, flash mobs, pillow fight days, zombie marches, cats playing piano or Facebook updates. Take it from me, a year-and-a-half after my crazy internet stunt, my leg still hurts and is not fully healed. I don't care how many hits or laughs I got, in the end it wasn't worth it.

Dave O'Neil is a Melbourne comedian.

The Sunday Age - May 22, 2011