

Louis meets our ‘Louis’

By Annette Northey

LEGEND has it that if you come face to face with your doppelganger, or double, it is an omen of bad luck or impending death.

So, it didn’t bother Louis Theroux one bit when I presented him with just a photograph of his doppelganger - the BDT’s very own Louis, journalist Callum Marshall.

It all started as a harmless BDT office prank. My boss thought it would be kind of funny if I took to Canberra a copy of the headshot we have of Callum, pinned to the office wall. The plan was to get Louis to sign it, then put it up on the wall in place of the original.

The show tickets were my gift to my good friend, Deborah, for her 60th birthday. A huge fan of Louis, she can recall with prodigious accuracy the details of any of his documentaries. So off we went, road-tripping to Canberra from our native Newcastle, with all the excitement of two teenage girls off to see their favourite band.

Louis was appearing on stage at the National Convention Centre with comedian Julia Zimero. Making a guest appearance would be Megan Phelps-Roper, a former member of the Westboro Baptist Church in America, the subject of one of Louis’ more well-known documentaries. It was bound to be entertaining. But not as entertaining as what would unfold.

Anticipating that I might catch Louis at the end of the show if he came out to do a book signing, I carefully rolled an A4 photocopy of the Callum headshot, secured it with an elastic band, and popped it into Deborah’s handbag as mine was one of those very impractical, but fashionable, clutches. But what actually happened was totally unexpected and much more fun than a tedious book signing.

During the first half of the show, Louis took his microphone for a crowd walk and interviewed a few people - what’s your name and what do you do type of thing. The cameras followed him and the images were projected onto the big screen above the stage so that everybody could see the interactions.

He started on the far side of the theatre and worked his way to the opposite side, towards us. His first stop was a gentleman who professed to be a reconstructive surgeon - boy did Louis have fun with him. Next was a woman who claimed she worked for a removalist company that relocates government employees. Louis tried to prise from her some juicy details about the domestic habits of famous politicians, but she said if she told him she’d have to kill him. He persisted, to no avail.

Then came the man who owned a Barbeques Galore store in Canberra. Louis Theroux was lost for words. Completely stumped.

“What?” he asked.

“What’s that?”



Documentary filmmaker Louis Theroux (left) and BDT journalist Callum Marshall ... we’ve never seen these two in the same room.

When he finally worked it out with some help from Julia, who was on stage watching him and commenting as he went along, he quizzed the guy about shrimps on the barbie. It was obvious that he knew nothing about Aussie barbie etiquette, but the crowd seemed to find his naivety quite funny. The Barbeques Galore guy had so far elicited the most laughs from the crowd.

Then came the moment. Louis turned and started walking slowly in my direction, so Deborah pulled the Callum headshot out of her handbag and said, “Here, hold it up”.

Knowing this would be my last chance, I started waving it above my head. Louis continued to walk slowly in our direction, looking carefully at people’s faces, not wanting to choose the wrong one. He walked really close to me but turned and walked back down towards the stage. Oh no. That was my chance, gone. But Deborah yelled and pushed me.

“Stand up, Nettie. Louis! Back here, Louis! Come back!”, she called.

There was really nothing to lose now.

So, I stood up and continued waving the Callum headshot above my head. Then Julia said, as she shielded her eyes from the house lights, “Louis, there’s a lady up there, and she’s very active. She’s holding a picture or something but I can’t see what it is. It’s too small from here.”

Louis then turned around and slowly walked up to me.

“Hello, what’s your name and what do you do?” he asked.

“Annette, and I work as a sub-editor at a regional newspaper,” I proudly replied.

“Oh, and what have you got there, Annette?”

“It’s your doppelganger,” I answered.

His eyes fixed on the copy and I could see that he was processing it very carefully.

“Well, what’s his name and why isn’t he here now, Annette?” he asked.

“I’d rather see my doppelganger in person, but gee, he does look a lot like me doesn’t he.”

I answered, “His name is Callum, Callum Marshall, but we call him Louis. He’s at work in Broken Hill now, but wanted to be here tonight. He’s actually from Canberra, and studied journalism here too. Does anybody here know Callum Marshall?”

There was a loud silence, then three people put up their hand.

Louis scanned the theatre for the response.

“Hmmm, only three people here know Callum,” he said. A few muffled laughs from the audience.

“Were you expecting a different response, Annette? Like a Mexican wave or something?” he asked, in his signature credulous questioning style.

The crowd roared with laughter as I wiped the egg from my face.

“Could I get a picture please?” he asked.

“Sure,” I giggled nervously, due to disbelief that I was still talking with Louis Theroux.

“Here, can you hold this up next to my head (he adjusts the position of the picture to align it with his head) and just hold it right there,” he directs.

Then he whips out his smart phone from the pocket of his blue denim jeans and aims up to take a selfie, at which point I am standing on my tippy toes to get my noggin in. He’s really tall, about six foot three. That’s a whole 12 inches taller than me.

Then he says, “Um, Annette, I’m sort of trying to get a shot of just me and Callum.

The crowd roars again.

“Oh, woops, sorry.”

So, he snaps a couple of pics with his doppelganger and says, “Oh alright, come on then, you can get in too.” More laughs from the crowd as he snaps a selfie of the both of us; me on my tippy toes, with Callum’s headshot wedged in between us.

He thanks me and asks, “What was his name again, Annette?”

I told him and he mumbled it repetitively as he walked back to the stage.

“Annette, Callum Marshall, Annette, Callum Marshall, etc.”

I wondered what he was doing until he gets back on stage and he and Julia launch into a rap competition to see who could remember the most about all the people he had spoken to.

Julia went first, and she was to recall Louis’ conversations with the surgeon and the pollicie relocater. Louis’ brief was to synthesise his chat with myself and Mr Barbeques Galore.

With a rap beat playing as rhythmic backing, Julia launched into her rap like a boss, recalling details accurately, while making puns and sending the whole audience into hysterics. A hard act to follow.

Louis looked forlorn as he contemplated the task ahead of him. The rap beat fired up and that was his cue. He took a big breath, “Well, there’s Annette who works at the paper, and Callum who is not here.”

He gives up and concedes defeat to the brilliant, the unrivalled, Julia Zimero as the audience offers him applause in consolation.

So, there you have it. Louis Theroux now knows about ‘our’ Louis, but the question remains, which one is the evil twin?

I am still waiting for him to tweet our selfie.

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