

# I like to write back

A collection of silly replies to unsolicited email



Gareth J M Saunders

“Taking inspiration from *The Timewaster Letters* by Robin Cooper, this is a complete waste of everybody’s time, his, theirs, and now mine. Enjoy!”

**Danny Curtis, school administrator and email user**

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Gareth J M Saunders

## **I like to write back**

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**To Reuben, Joshua and Isaac.**

**Remember to be silly, humanity is relying on you.**

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“Your email inbox is a to do list written by other people”

—Unknown

# FOREWORD

Lovely and sunny today, which makes a nice change. Beat Bury HC 2s 5–1 too, which was nice. It's time for toast and marmalade methinks.

This is a such an inspirational read. You really do get drawn-in to everything that's going on. I found I couldn't put it down. The suspense was ridiculous, and the sequel will blow your mind!!

Please enjoy Gareth's book...

**Danny Curtis**

School administrator and email user

Manchester, England, UK

Saturday 19 March 2022

# INTRODUCTION

Email spam—(*noun*) unsolicited messages sent by electronic mail.

I can't believe that I put up with them for so long. Of course, there were the usual adverts for Viagra® and so-called 'legal highs', there were requests for help from the widows of Nigerian generals who needed to 'borrow' my bank account to rest sixteen and a half million US dollars in while they were 'sorting out their estate', and then there were the kind of spam messages that I still receive a lot of, the ones the spam filters miss.

For the last twenty years or more, since setting up my first website in the autumn of 1999, most weeks I get at least one email asking if someone may write a guest post for my blog, or 'buy links', i.e., pay me to add links to my website that point to their website. Why? Because that's one way that search engines determine which websites are the most important: the more links that a page has pointing at it from

elsewhere (like from my blog) the more important the search engines rank that site, so it appears closer to the top of the search engine results page. Search engine optimisation pays.

For the first few years, I used to just roll my eyes and delete the messages. Or let my email spam filter silently redirect them to digital purgatory before periodically destroying them forever.

At some point in 2009, though, I wondered what would happen if I wrote back.

I remembered the early days of using email. The excitement of receiving a new message from a friend, in the days before smartphones. In the days before we sent unlimited SMS messages or pinged each other on WhatsApp. Before blog posts, Twitter and Facebook. Before Skype and Zoom calls. Before MSN Messenger and ICQ. Our emails were long and chatty, carefully crafted like the letters they were meant to replace, full of news and humour.

What would happen if I wrote back in that same chatty style? What would happen if I feigned ignorance about what they were asking? How far could I take these conversations?

Would they even write back?

The following correspondence took place between 2009 and 2022. A random, silly thread that wound around my children growing up, a divorce, a breakdown, a global pandemic, and the gradual re-piecing together of my health and life. By the time I realised that I could have plotted out a nicely structured story arc for the strange goings on with my fictional neighbours Colin and Mr Parkinson, it was too late. Like real life, it had already taken a path of its own and found no tidy conclusions.

To simplify things, I have focussed mostly on my messages to them. You should be able to glean the context of their requests from my responses. To be honest, though, their context was never my priority. Most email replies from me were ignored—in one draft of the book, I included the words “*No reply*” at the end of each chapter. But that appeared at the end of most chapters, so I removed it with the understanding that if there was no further correspondence from that individual then it was obvious that they didn’t write back.

Some of their replies were heart-warming. I have included those.

Anyway, I thought it was about time that I pulled all these replies together into a book, to capture (and put an end to) this silliness. So, here they are. I hope you enjoy the silliness!

—

But before that, I want to say thank you to the many lovely people who were patient with me, believed in me, inspired me, loved me, and helped piece me together again during these last twelve years.

Aaron T Lott, Agnes Blackadder Hall, management, wardennial and porter teams (especially Lynsey, Jen, Renee, and Brian; Bobby, Kevin, Michael, Stewart, and Tommy), Alison Wallace, Alix Harvey, Dr Andrew Mirrlees, Andy Eccles, Andy Farris, Angelica Gween, Anna George, Arlene Brown, Aydin Kurt-Elli, Benjii Saunders, Bob Pack, Dr Bryony Coapes, Charlotte Dougan, Dr Charlotte Kennedy, Dr Chris Carroll, Chris Gordon, Christian ‘Documentally’ Payne, Chris Smith, Claudette Berquez-Jones, Clayton Hardisty, Colin Bovaird, Colin Yates, Dan Hart, Danielle Roa, Danny Curtis, Danny Wallace, Dave Gorman, the Revd David Meldrum, the digital communications team at the University of St Andrews, Doug Aitken; Eddie, Rebecca, Owen and Micah Saunders; Emma Shea, Erwin Lai, Frank Somerville, Garry West, Gary Harkness, Ged Robinson, George Beaton, Gillian and Kenny McLaren at Pittenweem Properties, Hui Chen, Jamie Leigh, Jenni Saunders, Dr Jenny Parkinson, Jim and Marion Brodie, Join Me, Fr Jonathan Mason, the Revd Jonny Coore, Justin Wilson, Kate Arkless Gray, Br Kentigern SSF, Kirsten Offer, Krish Bissoonath, Kyle Brain, Laura Rodgers, Lauren Sykes, Lee Barr, Lewis Wake, Liz Bingham, Lizzie Spear, Luis Durães, Lyall and Sally Donaldson, Mark

T Powell, Mark Robinson, Martin Dowling, Mike Jeremiah, Molly ‘the fairy godmother of the world wide web’ Holzschlag, Niall Scott, the Revd Nick Morgan, Peter Woodbridge, Pip MacInnes, Dr Pritam Chita, Dr Rabea Khan, Dr Raluca Roman, Dr Rebecca Lott, Richard Leigh, the Revd Dr Rob Whiteman, Robert Mailer Anderson, the Revd Canon Ruth Innes, the team at Safeguard Global, Sam Parsons, Sandra García González, Shirley Mackenzie Anderson, the Revd Simon Stevens, the team at Sky Business Connect, Steven Bruce, Dr Steve Evans, Steve ‘Solo Bass Steve’ Lawson, Stuart Brown, Tanya Hardy, Tim Watson, Trisha Gourlay, Watson Bell, Dr Will Hiles, and Zack Anderson.

All my love to my late mum, Rosalie Jean Saunders, my late father, Keith John Saunders, and of course, my amazing three children Reuben, Joshua and Isaac to whom I dedicate this volume of nonsense.

**Gareth J M Saunders**

Crail, Fife, Scotland, UK

Friday 10 June 2022



# CHAPTER 1: Why?

Why don't people always write back?

They started it!

## CHAPTER 2: Lisa Taylor

Dear Lisa Taylor

Thank you for your kind email. If I understand your message correctly you would like to advertise my blog in a small text ad somewhere. By “small text ad” are you referring to newspapers (and maybe on Ceefax<sup>1</sup> too, if things go well?). This sounds like an exciting venture.

However, I am—I must confess, despite my two university degrees—a little confused. The last time I ventured to place an advertisement in the London Times for my blog it was going to cost *me* over £200. I don’t understand why *you* would want to pay me to do this on my behalf.

Could you please explain your scheme in more detail? I do hope that this is not an internet fraud scam or a pyramid selling scheme as I’d hate to be involved in one of those again (we’ve still got a box of pyramids in the loft!).

Yours sincerely, Gareth

---

<sup>1</sup> Remarkably, while this email was written in October 2009, Ceefax closed down three years later on 23 October 2012.

## Try again...

*No reply, so I tried again, a few weeks later.*

Dear Lisa Taylor

Once again, many thanks for your kind email back in the month of October. I did reply to your query about your business proposal, perhaps you didn't receive it. I imagine that the recent Royal Mail strikes have also had a negative impact on the delivery of electronic mail and that perhaps it was held up in a backlog.

In my original email (computer reference 546/45b) I asked if you could please explain your scheme in more details, assuming that it is not some kind of internet fraud scam or a pyramid selling scheme.

I look forward to reading an email message from you.

Yours sincerely,

Gareth

## CHAPTER 3: Michael Z

Dear Michael Z

Many thanks for your kind email. Unfortunately, all the text links on my website have been sold already.

How did you learn about my *sponsor-a-link* hair-brained scheme? Was it from Colin's blog? He lives next door, and runs the local village 'internet shop', as we call it.

We were trying to raise money for my local church hall which, despite being a listed building, was being threatened with closure and possibly being dismantled. So, I started selling off the text links (and picture links too) for sponsorship to raise money for the hall. So far, we've raised just over £293; but I sold the last text link last week.

I would suggest that you offer a donation, but I see from your email address that you're from a casino. The church won't accept donations from gambling emporia so I'm going to have to say a regretful no to your kind offer of link purchase/exchange.

(To be honest, I've never really understood 'link exchanges', but perhaps I've never really needed to borrow a link before.)

Sincerely,

Gareth

p.s. Thank you for your kind words about my website. Colin, next door, helped me set it up.

## Reply

Thank you for your email.

Hope you get as much money as possible.

Have a good one,

Michael

# CHAPTER 4: Emily

Dear Emily

Many thanks for your kind email. You asked if I would like to exchange links with you. I wasn't entirely sure what you mean by that, so I asked Colin, next door.

You'd like Colin, he helped me set up my website back in 1999<sup>2</sup>, he runs our local 'internet shop', as we like to call it in the village—he sells computer parts and lets people use his wife<sup>3</sup> for free in his shop.

Anyway, I would like to exchange some links with you. Here are some of my favourites:

- [www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com)—messages with my friends.
- [www.b3ta.com](http://www.b3ta.com)—important news.
- <http://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/>—lets me watch the telly on my computer screen (and speakers).

---

<sup>2</sup> This is not a typo.

<sup>3</sup> Oops! That should probably have been 'wi-fi'.

What are some of your favourite links that you'd like to exchange with me?

I look forward to further details from you about these.

Sincerely,

Gareth

## Reply

Hi Webmaster

Thanks for getting back to me. My proposal is regarding 3-way link exchange deal between our sites.

I checked your both sites [sic], they are very good designed and just beautiful. I have couple of good quality sites, and you can check it as follow [sic]:

<http://www.URL.com/pr3>

<http://www.URL.net/pr5>

I can place your links on our both site's home page.

And in exchange I would also like the link on your both site's right sidebar home pages.

I hope you would like the above proposal and look forward for your reply.

Thanks,

Emily

## **No response**

No reply from me.

How rude!

# CHAPTER 5: Guy Fitzpatrick

Dear Guy Fitzpatrick

Apologies for the delay. The snow has prevented me from reaching my PC, which is situated in a self-built home office in our shed at the bottom of the garden, in what my wife likes to call *The Shed* (with capital letters).

Colin (who runs our local 'Internet Shop', as I call it) next door, tried his best to assist me digging a path to the shed (*The Shed*) but my brother, who is a health and safety consultant refused to sign the paperwork allowing me to work there, so I had to await the thaw, which happened on Sunday afternoon (between 9am and early evening, and then started again the following morning when the sun rose—I can find out from the weather authorities if you are interested).

- > I am writing to you on behalf of an online advertising
- > agency based in Berlin.

Thank you. I am writing to you on behalf of me (a 'computerist') based in Scotland.

- > Could you direct me to the person whom I could ask
- > about advertising on your site please?

That would be me. What would you like to know? There isn't any advertising on my website.

Sincerely,

Gareth

## Reply

Hi Gareth

Thanks for getting back to me and explaining your delay in such detail. It's really no problem.

I wondered whether you might be interested in discussing the possibility of placing advertising on your site.

All the best,

Guy

UK Marketing Coordinator

## My response

Dear Guy

- > Thanks for getting back to me and explaining your delay
- > in such great detail. It's really no problem.

Thank you for replying.

- > I wondered whether you might be interested in discussing
- > the possibility of placing advertising on your site?

I'm so sorry, I must have misunderstood your initial electronic mail message. I didn't realise that you were offering the placing of advertising messages on my website. I could never allow that as I do not wish to give away my FTP password (which I use for uploading new messages onto my web server). Colin keeps telling me that sharing passwords is a bad idea. 'Unsecure,' he calls it.

I suppose that you could send the advertisement messages to me, but then when I set up my website—well, when Colin helped me to set it up around 2000 AD—we made the decision (well, I made that decision) that it would be a BBC-style website rather than ITV if you get my drift (i.e., no adverts).

I'm so sorry for wasting your time. I wish your advertising-selling business well. (You must be pleased that Gordon Brown has solved the recession—phew!)

Sincerely,

Gareth

## Reply

Still early days regarding the recession solving... but glad to be in the safe hands of Gordon Brown!

All the best and thanks anyway,

Guy

## CHAPTER 6: William Marlatt

*The next email I received at work, one quiet morning in St Andrews. It was from a Mr William Marlatt (whose surname mysteriously changed to Chambers halfway through our correspondence) claiming to be a barrister representing the late Mrs Grace Groner. He said that he needed to borrow my bank account for a little while to move a large quantity of money around. Like you do.*

*So, my colleague Steve and I took a two-pronged approach to replying to William.*

### Steve, as ‘George’

Hello

I was very surprised and shocked to hear of Mrs Groner’s passing. Grace was a close personal friend of mine. Although she was older than me, she would still cycle faster than me, particularly when going up hills and along twisty off-road tracks. I will always remember the sparkle in her eyes when she told me about how she won the *Tour de Feminine* in 1981, despite suffering from arthritis in her right hip. Her enthusiasm when caring for sick birds and animals was also admirable. She would often stay up all night nursing injured animals that she found when cycling at night along unlit country roads.

I had no idea that she had managed to save so much money. That will explain why she always rode on a single speed bike made of steel, despite her fellow competitors being blessed with carbon fibre and Shimano Dura Ace loveliness. In my last conversation with her, she said that she would like me to have everything she had, should she die, or worse.

Here are the details you asked for:

- Bank account details: Yes, I have a bank account.
- International passport: I have a British passport—does that count?
- Full name: Mr M Y O Business
- Telephone number: 01234 87654321
- Job designation: Cycle mechanic
- Nationality: Lithuanian
- Home address: Lithuania
- Relationship to Mrs. Grace Groner: Personal friend and trainer

I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

George

## **Barrister William Chambers (or Marlatt)**

*This email had the name 'William Chambers' in the From field but was signed 'William Marlatt'. That's perfectly normal, right?*

Dear George

How are you doing? I will keep in touch with the bank tomorrow morning in order to discuss with the manager of the bank for the release of your 1 million pounds, therefore I need your account details including Swift code for international remittance.

Another important particulars is the scanned copy of your international passport or national identity card, the bank will need either of it from me for proper identification. I will also go with the statement of Mrs Grace Groners will in my custody for proof and clarification.

Send the above mentioned details at the receipt of this mail, for I am waiting.

Yours Sincerely

Barr. William Marlatt

## Gareth, as ‘Geraint’

*I now replied to William Marlatt (or Chambers) claiming to be Geraint Sanders.*

Dear Mr Chambers

I’m writing to you in place of Mr George Betsey with whom I believe you have been in contact recently.

I’m sorry to have to inform you that Mr Betsey died in a tragic cycle accident last night. It was a terrible mess involving a school bus, a lawnmower and a family of squirrels. And a goat.

I have been appointed by his employer to complete his business, reply to his emails and wind up his affairs from a professional standpoint.

Having read through your correspondence with Mr Betsey, given the current change in circumstances, what with him now being dead and all, I’m sorry to advise that you will now need to correspond with his solicitor to complete your business:

Quailty Solicitors, 68 Market Street, St Andrews, KY16 9NU

Between you and me, you may have got off lightly as Mr Betsey was also being investigated by the Serious Fraud Office on charges of defrauding people via email. I’m quite sure he didn’t tell you that. I do hope that he had not set you in his sights as he did so many other helpless victims, allegedly.

I would appreciate a response from you so that I can close this file.

Very many thanks,

Geraint Sanders

Senior Post-mortem Business Auditor (Professional Services)

St Andrews

## CHAPTER 7: Cairns Chen

*An email from a domain name registration centre in Hong Kong “mainly dealing with domain name registration and internet intellectual property rights protection.” They were clearly chancing their arm, trying to frighten me into spending a lot of money on these Asian domain names that I didn’t need:*

*www.garethjmsaunders.cn*

*www.garethjmsaunders.hk*

*www.garethjmsaunders.sg*

*www.garethjmsaunders.asia*

Cairn Chen wrote:

On Oct 26,2009 we received a formal application from a company who is applying to register several domains, using “garethjmsaunders” as the keyword.

Really?! I very much doubt that.

After investigation, we find that you are the original user of the keyword. Such similar domain cases may involve your trademark and company name and may cause website confusion and conflicts. For a responsible attitude, we inform

you here and ask for your opinion. If you don't mind, we will finish registration for the third company.

## **My first response**

Dear Cairns Chen,

Many thanks for your email. I do object to the use of garethjmsaunders—unless of course the other individual is also a Gareth J M Saunders.

What can I do about this, if anything?

Gareth

## **My second response**

Dear Cairns Chen,

Many thanks for your prompt reply. Gosh! What a marvellous service you offer, if only every business on the internet replied so quickly and efficiently. You are a credit to yourself. And to the international community of the Internet.

I've read your message very carefully, twice in fact so that I could absorb every word, and I have a number of questions for you. Which I will ask now.

What do you mean by “The third company applied these domains...”?  
Which third company? What do you mean by “applied”?

Would that mean that nobody but “the third company” would be allowed to even use that keyword on the whole of the internet?

But that’s my name! If that was to happen, then I would have to apply for a completely new name and I don’t know about in China but that’s quite a lengthy process here in the UK. It involves lawyers, the church (because it involves a Christian name), the government and sometimes even the Queen! Or so I’ve heard. I really hope that it doesn’t come to that!

But it’s my name, it’s not my trademark. I don’t trade, I live. It’s my *livemark*.

Actually, thinking about it, I’ve always quite liked the name Nigel. I could be called Nigel McQueen, in honour of our new queen, Queen Elizabeth 2.0 and my favourite band: Queen, and me being Scottish.

Phew! Thank goodness for the registration law. I trust that this is an international registration law, is it? Or is it only Made in China?

It is very kind of you to offer to send me an application form. Would you be able to post it to me surface mail? I’ve been informed by my

email address company here in Britain that they will need to switch off my email machines for a week to do some cleaning.

I like to make sure that everything is legal and—as we say in the UK—‘legal’. I like paperwork, so I would have to ensure that the forms were sent to me via the international letter mailing system of the world. What a fine system it is. I still marvel at how you can post a postcard or a rabbit one day and it arrives on another part of the planet the next day.

Amazing!

I’ve just had a thought.

Would I be able to register these domain names in this country? That seems to me that it might be a little safer. I would hate for this to be some kind of trick on my behalf. My friend Barry once ordered a new pedal bicycle by email but all he got a few months later was an envelope from Nigeria containing a twig and a letter with H, OAK, X and the number 7 written on it in scribbled handwriting.

I usually have a rule that I do not do any business outside of the village I live in. That has kept me safe for the last years of my life. I will ask my neighbour Colin who runs the local village ‘internet shop’. It’s a great shop; if you ever visit Scotland do make a point of visiting. Not only does he sell the Internet<sup>®</sup>, but his wife also makes the most

amazing chocolate chip cookies which he gives away for free to all customers! Free! He also registers domain names.

How much would it cost to buy all the domain names that you are asking about?

Thank you. I could not read the story (“Enclosed the internet keyword introduction”) you sent me in the document. It must be in a file format that I cannot read. I download all my email to a very old, small computer using a program called SinkMail, you probably know it and realise that it removes any files older than a week old attached to it. Could you please copy the information from your story into a plain text email message so that I can read it using my eyes?

Many thanks for your help. I look forward to hearing from you.

Your #1 UK fan,

Gareth

## CHAPTER 8: Thomas Walker

*I lost my original email reply to Thomas Walker where I had explained who Colin is. Here's the subsequent correspondence.*

Dear Thomas Walker

Thanks for getting in touch about adding a link to my mahjong page.

I spoke with Colin last night. We've been playing what we like to call 'phone tennis', that is leaving messages on each other's answer machines until we finally manage to speak with each other. Our record so far is 17 messages.

Colin filled me in about what buying a text link involves, shortly before your email arrived today. I feel so naively foolish for my inexperienced questions in my last email message. My apologies.

I'm most terribly sorry too that I shall now have to decline your kind offer. I did not realise that it would involve gambling or even 'gambling'.

My family have connections in Malaysia (as you know from reading my website) where—I am no doubt you are already aware—all gambling

involving games of chance are prohibited. I would not like to jeopardise my relationships there. I don't want to 'take a gamble', you could say.

You may have seen the recent article entitled "Men charged with mahjong gambling" on the Mahjong News website:

Lim Hock Seng, 66, Low Chaw Whay, 48, Teong Liong Tee 59, Goh Lay Keng, 64, Tay Moi Tee and Ma Mong Tiong, both 54, and Singaporean Lim Ah Yeow, 52, were charged with gambling illegally by playing mahjong with cash bets.

I'm attaching a copy of the appropriate Act from the Malaysian code of law which you may find useful in future for reference.

You wrote:

To answer your question about council tax, it will have absolutely zero impact on your pricing no matter what size your house is. I take it you haven't got much experience with links, but just to give you an idea of pricing, its more based on factors like how old the website is (the more valuable it is) and how commercial your website is. As your website is more like a homepage I would offer about US\$150 to have the link placed on your site for a year with another US\$50 if we get this page exclusive to us as the only paid for link on the page.

That is good news about my house size having no impact on such links. I've passed this information on to Colin too who has filed it away in his blue folder. "The internet is a wonderful resource," he said to me today, "full of many wonderful and helpful people." I quite agree and would like to include you, Thomas, in this description, if I may. Thank you for your courteous and friendly manner. I hope Colin now adds your name to his blue folder too.

I'm sorry if I have wasted your time. I was genuinely excited when you suggested purchasing a text link on my website. It's such a shame that it is to do with gambling. My wife said that it was like the 21st century equivalent of sponsoring a letter printed on one of my t-shirts! Which got me to thinking...

Would you like to sponsor a letter on one of my t-shirts? We're trying to raise money to rebuild the local village church hall. It accidentally burned down recently due to an electrical fire. The fire brigade suspected that it was caused by a poorly repaired television-set but as yet have no proof, so Colin assures me.

I've gone on too long, I'm sorry. I don't get much email and when I do...

Thank you once again for your offer and I wish you good fortune as you continue to surf your business across the perilous waves of the World Wide Web.

Yours sincerely,

Gareth

## Reply

Hi Gareth,

No worries. Thanks anyway. I lived in Malaysia for three years actually!

Regards

Tom

# CHAPTER 9: Carla Johnson

*When Carla Johnson's email arrived, oddly, all of the letter 'a's in the email had been replaced with question marks. There was only one obvious way to reply.*

Dear Email Sender

Many thanks for your electronic mail message. I'm having trouble reading your email message. There are some characters in most of the words that my email client (Microsoft Office Outlook 2007 12.0.6514.500 SP2 MSO (12.0.6529.5000) for Windows) says are Greek.

From what I could read it suggested that my website has been targeted. That sounds dangerous. Is there any way that you know of that I can protect my website from such targeting?

Maybe I should contact my website host and then get back to you.

Are you able to send me any more information in whatever language other than Greek?

Many thanks

Greth

# CHAPTER 10: Jason Billyack

Dear Jason Billyack

I'm very sorry to have taken so long to reply to you. The last couple of weeks have been very difficult for me.

On Monday 24 May, I lost my wi-fi. And well, I looked for it everywhere.

But could I find it?

(The answer is no.)

It took us nearly ten days to find it. It turns out that one of our children had attached it to the collar of next door's dog (Exeter). Colin next door found it in Exeter's basket only two days ago (three if you're reading this tomorrow). Once I got the wi-fi plugged back into my PC ... well, how many emails did I have?

(The answer is a lot.)

And then yesterday my glasses broke. And I'm really *very* short sighted.

You said that you emailed me a few days ago. I'm not sure if I received that email. Let me just go and check ...

Well, that took longer than normal, sorry about keeping you. When we lost our wi-fi, Colin next door, who runs our local ‘internet shop’, as we like to call it, kindly accessed my email account (he has the password because he helped me set it up years ago) and printed out all my emails for me. Your first email got accidentally placed in the emails-to-laminate pile.

Okay, so you said, “I have a client who is looking for some sites in your field”. I’m a little confused about that. Which field? My website covers Psions, mahjong, computer advice as well as personal information.

And then it says, “... with which to establish a relationship”. What kind of relationship? Do they know that I am married already? Or is this like one of those online relationships, like social networking such as Twitter or Facebook or buying Thai brides? I can pass on my Twitter or Facebook details if you need them. (But not the passwords, and my wife is not from Thailand. Yet.)

I see from your email address that you are from Matalan Media. I’ve never visited a Matalan store; will that count against me?

I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely

Gareth

## Reply

Hi Gareth

Thank you for your email, it has been the best reply to any email I have received. So, thank you again.

Now, down to business... selling internet links ... blah blah blah ... money for this ... blah blah blah ...

## No response

Oops! I didn't reply. I probably just laminated his last email and forgot. Sorry.

# CHAPTER 11: Jason Munroe

Hello 'Jason Munroe'

Danny is that you again? Last week you were trying to offer me an advertising opportunity on my blog selling elephant wigs. Before that it was sweetcorn wine. Now, doorknobs? I'm not going to fall for this again.

I showed your email to Colin, next door, and he agrees with me: he thinks this is a hoax.

Your best mate,

Gareth

## CHAPTER 12: Dawn Parente

Dear Dawn Parente

I was in a conversation with Jason Billyack recently about this very same issue.

In my detailed ‘English language’ conversation, I told him—once I had worked out what he was wanting; he didn’t make it easy, to be honest—that I was not interested. I do not agree with advertising on my website and have an aversion to gambling on ethical grounds.

I’m glad we had this chat. I feel that it has cleared the air between us.

Thanks

Gareth

# CHAPTER 13: Randy Seals

Hi Randy Seals

Thanks for your email. Are you sure you have the right person? My website doesn't sell advertising—maybe you are confusing me with the Gareth Saunders of ArtStorm Advertising Agency in London. I get that quite a lot with people wanting to buy advertising from him.

While I'm on the topic, I hope you don't mind me asking: are you the Randy Seals that I was in primary 6 with? The same Randy Seals who left the week before the end of term to move to South Korea with his mum and dad who was as a washing machine consultant. Or was it military consultant, I can't remember? If you are, I think the last time I saw you must have been by the pick 'n' mix in Woolworths in Galashiels when you were *en route* to the airport. I was buying the latest single by Doug E Fresh and the Get Fresh Crew.

Sincerely,

Gareth

## Not Randy Seals

Gareth

I don't think I had you confused. Thanks anyway on the link offer.

I'm not the same Randy that you described, sorry.

Best,

Randy

## Apology

Dear Randy

I've just noticed that your original email said your name was "Randy Seals" but your most recent email said "Randy Sears". I'm most terribly sorry for the mix-up.

Gareth

## The real Randy Sears

Gareth

No worries! Seals was a typo on my part.

Best, Randy

# CHAPTER 14: Thomas Walker

Hi Thomas Walker

Sorry, I don't have text links for sale.

Gareth

## Again

Hi Thomas

Thanks again. I should have explained that I'm a Christian priest and have reservations about adding links to my website that point to gambling websites as I'm against gambling on both ethical and religious grounds.

Thanks though for your email.

Gareth

## Reply

Hi Gareth

Yes, I think that would have definitely made things a lot clearer. Well in that case I will respect beliefs on gambling.

Thanks for taking the time to talk to me all the same.

Kind Regards

Tom

# CHAPTER 15: Matthew Vines

Hello Matthew Vines

I'm guessing that you've not actually visited my website. It's more "personal website" rather than "website that readers of the Sunday Times Magazine would want to visit... unless they are into mahjong rules, Psion PDAs and photos of me on holiday in California in 2004".

Sorry, but no.

Sincerely,

Gareth

## CHAPTER 16: linda linda

Dear “linda linda”

Many thanks for your email, and for your kind comments regarding my weblog: “I [...] was impressed by it’s design and professionalism.”

My web blog, as I like to call it—even though Colin says that the extra ‘b’ is unnecessary—was set up for me by my good friend Colin, who runs the local ‘internet shop’ in our village. I run all emails such as yours past him for his advice. He’s very good like that.

As soon as I had received your email, I printed it out (white, A4, 90gsm) and took it round to his shed. Tuesday is early closing so you can always be assured to find him in his shed on a Tuesday afternoon. He was putting the finishing touches to a sprinkler system for his greenhouse which is controlled by Twitter. His beehive is already linked to Google Buzz!

Anyway, Colin is a bit of a stickler for detail, as am I if the truth be told. He worked for 14 years as a copy editor and proof-reader on our local newspaper before branching out into electronic media. You may already have read his work on “The B9131 Gazette” and “The Ceres Series International”.

I told Colin that I would pass on the following comments to you, and hope that you find them helpful and that you can accept them in the good spirit that they are sent.

#### COMMENTS START

- > Today I was on your website and was impressed by
- > it's design and professionalism.

“it's” is short for “it is”, which made your email read “I [...] was impressed by \*it is\* design and professionalism.” I think you meant to write “its”, thus: “I [...] was impressed by its design and professionalism.”

- > That's why I am interested for business reasons. your site

There is a double-space between “am” and “interested”. I was taught to begin sentences with an upper-case/capital letter...

- > is really very interesting.concept behind your posts i really

...and one space after the full-stop/period. You need a capital 'i' in the personal pronoun 'I'.

- > appreciate.keep it up!

I refer you to my previous two points.

- > anywhere on your website homepage

I don't even understand what this means. Where is the verb in that sentence?

END OF COLIN'S COMMENTS

I do hope that Colin's comments are helpful to you and armed with this professional advice (from a copy editor and proof-reader of more than fourteen and one half years) are able to drive more business to yourself.

Oh, I nearly forgot, I'm sorry but I don't want adverts on my website at this moment in time. I'm more of a BBC kind of a gentleman than ITV.

Sincerely,

Gareth

# CHAPTER 17: Terry Johnson

Hi Terry Johnson

Sorry for my delay in replying to you, I couldn't find my slippers and so was unable to sit at my computer for long yesterday. You see, we've got decorators in, and they've taken up the carpet in my computing room and the floor is just too cold. I'm currently sitting here with two jumpers sellotaped to my feet.

Thank you for your email.

- > I am looking for repu table websites to support us in
- > promoting our client's websites and I would be more
- > than happy to send you more information about our
- > proposal.

I'm sorry to say that I'm not too familiar with many "repu table websites". To be honest I'm not entirely sure what a "repu table" is— is "repu" some kind of new board game? I think there is something on my website about "mahjongtables", I'll have to ask Colin the next time he's round. He borrowed my goldfish for the weekend and hasn't brought it back yet, so I'm sure to see him soon. He helped me set up my set up my website for me. He's great like that. He runs our local

village internet server providers and runs what we jokingly call ‘the internet shop’.

If I’m honest (which I am), I’m not terribly happy with the idea of advertisements on my website as I wouldn’t have any control over what they were for. As you’ll see from my “signature” below I am a clergyman so couldn’t condone adverts that were promoting gambling, guns, drugs, sex toys, pornography, Satanism, prostitution, smuggling, explosives, aerosols, electro shock weapons, matches, flammable gas cylinders, flammable liquids, substances liable to spontaneous combustion, confectionary, corrosive materials, acids, toxic substances, weed killer, toothpaste, camping stoves, avalanches, space travel, anything that promotes the idea of extra-terrestrial life, pork pies, etc.<sup>4</sup>

Colin helped me with that list—he knows more about these things than I do.

So, the answer is a regrettable no. But thank you for thinking about me.

Sincerely, Gareth

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<sup>4</sup> I’m pretty sure I lifted most of the items here from a list of prohibited items that must not be taken on board an aircraft.

## CHAPTER 18: Michael AustiN

Dear Michael AustiN<sup>5</sup>

Many thanks for your email. However, I'm in the process of completely redesigning my website. My friend and neighbour Colin is going to help me, as I'm currently very busy with another project: I'm building a scale model of a rocket out of common household items. Mostly cardboard and toothpaste tubes. You should see how much toothpaste I'm forcing my wife and I to go through each month. The toothpaste tubes are for the tops, so I can use them to make control knobs for the space rocket. So far, we've got ten tops, so a little way to go if the photographs of real rockets are anything to be believed.

Anyway, Colin—who runs our local 'internet shop', as we call it—is going to help me rewrite my whole website. He's a wizard at it. He uses a program called NetFusion Dreamweaver, I think. Colin thinks that my website needs more of a single focus so we're going to have to think about what that is.

---

<sup>5</sup> This is how his signature was styled in his email to me.

Colin wants it to be about his curtains collection, but I think that's weird and if he wants that then he can make his own website about that sort of thing. He's already mocked up a version of the website (*my* website) about curtains, but with a mahjong theme. If you want to email him to tell him that it's a terrible idea, you can at his new address [internetshopcolin@gmail.com](mailto:internetshopcolin@gmail.com) which he said he will set up after Thursday because he's got a hospital appointment tomorrow, and then his son is coming over for tea on Wednesday. But after that should be fine.

I guess what I'm saying is that since we're not entirely sure of the new direction of the website I'd better postpone your kind offer of my buying text links from you. Many thanks for your interest though.

Gareth Saunders (and Colin)

## Reply

Hi, thanks for response, I can understand. Many best wishes to your site. Whenever you will be ready for this, then let me know, we will work with you in future.

Best of Luck dear. Regards, Michael Austin

# CHAPTER 19: Anthony Tailor

Hi Anthony Tailor!

Blast it! I was trying to keep that website a secret. How did you find out about it? You said that it was while working on “one of my [your] project sites”.

My friend Colin, who runs our local ‘internet shop’, as we call it, helped me set up the website for my friends who are interested in Psion computers, mahjong (the game, not the animal) and my life. He said that others wouldn’t be able to find it very easily.

But now you’ve come along and told me that not only have you found the site, but you can make it MORE easily found?! How can that be possible? As far as I know it’s hosted in Colin’s shed and only he and his wife have a key—and she’s currently visiting her sister in Inverness just now. Although he did mention something about moved servers and DNS or something, I wasn’t really listening; it was while ‘Cash in the Attic’ was on.

Hmmm...

Yours puzzled,

Gareth

p.s. your email was flagged as spam. Just to let you know. I use Outlook. Perhaps you could email Microsoft to ask them to tell Outlook to look kindly on your messages.

## Reply

Hi Gareth

Thank you for your mail.

Mahjong is an animal?

You must have a LOT of friends with more than 10.000 BL for a secret website ;-)

Are you interested in promoting your website and have the ability to link on your page, let me know and I will send you the detailed exchange offer?

Thanks,

Anthony Tailor

## My reply

Dear Anthony

First, apologies for the inordinate delay in my replying to your reply to my email replying to your original email.

Second, you are right, there isn't an animal called a mahjong. I checked with my mother who has memorised all the animals of the world that begin with the 'M' that is in the alphabet—it was for a church-related quiz she was in a few years ago. She thinks that I've mixed it up with a Manatee.

I am going to have to gently decline your kind offer. First, although probably technically third in the context of this email, I am a clergyman of the Church, and we have an ethical position in relation to casinos and gambling.

Second (fourth, see above) my friend and neighbour Colin (who runs our local 'internet shop')'s wife recently suffered a terrible fall, ironically, leaving the casino in Edinburgh's busy west end. She sprained her ankle somewhat awfully and has been hardly able to weight-bear on it ever since.

I made the mistake of mentioning your email and the offer of a link to Colin while visiting Isobel last week. Colin's face said everything

(especially the mouth part of his face). He showed a look of shock and concern, and quietly but briskly shook his head, silently pointing towards Isobel and mouthing “No!” over and again.

Needless to say, the damage had been done and Isobel burst into tears. I didn’t know about “the casino incident”, as they’ve been calling it with her insurance company. She had been too embarrassed to talk to me about it because she knows my ethical position with regard to casinos and gambling, which I indicated to you above, namely that my church does not approve of them.

So, apologies, but no thank you.

Sincerely,

Gareth

## CHAPTER 20: Sarah Sheen

Dear Sarah Sheen

Thank you for your email of 21 December re. twin-linking (or triplet-linking as your email suggests).

I usually discuss website issues with my neighbour Colin, who runs our local village 'internet shop' but since your request involves our twin boys, I've discussed it instead with my wife.

In our discussions we've decided to not go ahead with your offer. While our twins do have domain names each, they are currently not linked to any website and to be honest we'd rather control initially where they are linked from.

Thank you for your interest in our twin boys, however, and their online presence.

Sincerely,

Gareth

## CHAPTER 21: Hannah Morgan

Dear Hannah Morgan

Are you by any chance working with Brigitte Crawford? On 2 January, I received this email from Ms Crawford:

QUOTE

My name is Brigitte Crawford, and I was wondering if you are interested in exchange links, I'll place your link on my site exactly here.

If you agree please send me your site details.

END

Your email messages are surprisingly similar to be unrelated.

Anyway, as I said to Ms Crawfish, if I may ask, how did you know that I use Microsoft Exchange for my email? I imagine that there is some kind of technique that allows you to reverse engineer an email address, or something. Computers are getting too complicated for their own good these days. Soon it'll be just like that dystopian Van Halen album (was it?) Nineteen Eighty-Four.

Anyway, my Microsoft Exchange link is this:

Title: Outlook Web App

URL: <https://exchange.simply.ms/owa/>

That's where I login to Exchange. Let me know if you need anything more. Don't bother asking for my password, I never give that away.

Thank you

Sincerely,

Gareth

## CHAPTER 22: Brigitte Crawford

Dear Brigitte Crawford

Thank you for your email regarding Exchange links. If I may ask, how did you know that I use Microsoft Exchange for my email?

Anyway, my Microsoft Exchange link is this:

Title: Outlook Web App

URL: <https://exchange.simply.ms/owa/>

Is that what you're looking for? I was going to ask my neighbour Colin to help me—he's my resident, as it were, networking guru—but he's currently visiting his brother Danny in Manchester. Danny is just out of hospital, so I don't want to interrupt Colin during this sensitive time.

I hope that helps. Do let me know if you need anything more.

Sincerely,

Gareth

## CHAPTER 23: Amy Warner

Dear Amy Warner

Thank you for your email. I think.

Paragraph 3 seems to be proposing something, but to be honest I have no idea what:

“I think a guest blog post that acutely attempts to dig into some of today’s more pressing issues in bringing societal relevancy to areas of business such as high finance, marketing, and information technology.”

I’ve spoken with Colin, next door, about this. He runs our village’s local ‘internet shop’, as we call it. I asked him if this sort of email was common nowadays, or whether it should be considered as ... what do they call it? Potted meat? Corned beef? Spiced Pork And eMail? It’s one of those, I’m sure.

Colin suggested that I write back to you to ask for clarification about what you were proposing: perhaps you would like to write a special post on my blog—although Colin did suggest that I point out that you can actually get your own blog very quickly, and for free, by signing up yourself at [WordPress.com](https://WordPress.com).

Perhaps you would like me to write a post on your blog. I don't think I'd be able to write very knowledgably about "the current economic landscape" or the economic crisis, but I could write a wee post about how I helped my wife fix her favourite purse. That said, I wouldn't be able to write anything until June or July as I'm shortly going to be packing up my shed and turning it 90 degrees; my home office is located in the shed, and we've been having some trouble with my neighbours on the other side. It would appear that my *other* neighbour, Mr Parkinson, is very fond of walking around his house in the nude, particularly in the rooms that face my shed window. There is only a certain amount of *that-kind-of-behaviour* that a man can take, and as the police are not interested, I'm taking the only action that I can take and I'm moving my shed 90 degrees. Colin has agreed to help me. So, I'll be going offline for the next few months to get this project completed.

That said, if you really did need me to write an article about my thrifty purse repair in this double-dip recession I could always borrow Colin's new Apple iPod to write it.

Let me know. Thanks.

Gareth

## CHAPTER 24: Madison Jones

Dear Maddie ‘Madison’ Jones

Thank you for your email. I think.

I have to admit being somewhat perplexed by why you felt that my blog, of the thousands of blogs out there, would be the most suitable for a guest post about “biology and biomimicry”.

I’m really not sure I’ve made any kind of contribution to the field of biology. I have three children, but I’m not even sure that counts as the creation of two of those were assisted using the IVF technique and a very attractive, blonde geneticist called Diana.

I don’t even know what “biomimicry” is. It sounds like something to do with LEGO®.

I’ve asked my neighbour Colin about this. He runs the local ‘internet shop’, as we call it, in our village and likes to keep his digital finger on the pulse of internet trends. In fact, I’ve shown him each of the requests for guest blog posts that I’ve received in the last few weeks. This is now the fifth or sixth, each of them asking to write about some topic wildly unconnected with the main theme of my blog, which is my life, my family, and the things I am interested and involved in. Themes

such as animal husbandry, the restoration of Latvian independence, recipes involving Eucalyptus, the current economic landscape, and biology and biomimicry are sadly not among my interests.

Colin suggested, and I quite agree, that I should politely decline if I want to keep the integrity and personal nature of my blog. He also reminded me that I'm shortly to be dismantling my shed (where I keep my home office) and turning it 90 degrees so I that I don't have to watch my neighbour on the other side, Mr Parkinson, walking around in the nude. He doesn't need to remind me of that: I have already dismantled my computer and I'm replying to you from the local library.

So, in short. I guess what I'm saying is thank you for your interest in my blog, but no I'm not interested in a guest post. Perhaps you might also want to review how you decide on which blogs to approach to request a guest post—I really can't see any reason why you might have targeted mine for a post about 'biology and biomimicry'.

Sincerely,

Gareth

# CHAPTER 25: Taylor Halpern

Dear Taylor Halpern

Thank goodness you emailed me once again because no, your original email didn't reach me and sadly I can't find it in my spam folder either. Which, if I'm reading your email correctly is where you expected that it should have gone.

While I didn't receive your original email inviting me to consider a guest blog post that "acutely attempts to educate about and develop relevancy from world wars" I did receive an email from (maybe your friend?) Amy Warner who thought that "a guest blog post that acutely attempts to dig into some of today's more pressing issues in bringing societal relevancy to areas of business such as high finance, marketing, and information technology", and another from (another friend of yours?) Maddie Jones who believed that my blog readership would prefer to read a post that "illuminates the plethora of applications for biology and biomimicry in today's world". I don't even know what that means.

I have to say that I am torn: world wars, business, or biology and biomimicry?

Sorry, I'm going to have to cut short this email as Mr Parkinson, my neighbour, is at the window again in the nude. The police asked me to get in touch if he was doing it again, and he is. It's upsetting my wife most terribly. Not to mention her Bible study class who are in just now, looking at the book of *The Song of Songs*. Well, I can see some of them are. The others are slack-jawed and just staring out of the window!

Back in a minute...

Right, sorry about the pause. That's the police called, and my other neighbour Colin is here. Typically, Mr Parkinson is all covered up now—but in *MY BATHROBE!* The one that I said was stolen off the clothesline.

We'd given him the benefit of the doubt when I confronted him about it, and he said that it must have been the high winds we experienced a few months back. I know it's my bathrobe because it's got a giant squirrel on the back, sitting on top of R2-D2 from Star Wars. It was a birthday present for my 34th birthday. Colin is off to get his camera, so the police have photographic evidence.

I think on reflection, probably no. But thank you for considering me for your guest blog-post hosting solution. There is enough sadness in the world caused by war, and I don't think my personal blog is the forum to add to it.

I do wish you well, however, raising money for your ballooning tuition fees. I've always wanted to go ballooning.

Sincerely,

Gareth

## CHAPTER 26: Chris Lee

Dear Chris Lee

Apologies for my tardy reply. Last week I was on holiday with my wife and three children. It was lovely weather for it, too.

You emailed me saying, “My name is Chris Lee and I will like to know if you can get me sheds? If yes kindly let me know and I will get back to you with what I need and will also want to know if you accept credit cards as form of payment??”

I have to admit to being a little confused as to why you think I sell sheds. I have a blog called *View from the Potting Shed*, I admit, but that’s where my relationship with sheds ends. Other than owning one which sits in the back garden, which we refer to as “*The Shed*” (with capital letters). Your email suggests that sheds are somewhat difficult to get a hold of. The great news is that they are not.

B&Q have loads on offer. Wooden sheds, metal sheds, plastic sheds and even sheds made of... oh, no! I think that’s all they have.

Wickes also offer a number of varieties: timber (another word for ‘wood’), plastic and even see-through sheds made of glass.

Even ScrewFix sell sheds. Who would have thought that? (In fact, I didn't realise that they had over 220 stores nationwide until that fact was pointed out to me during a radio commercial. I thought they were solely an online company, such as Amazon or... the other one.)

As I said, I find it peculiar that you contacted me, the owner of a 'lesser-known' website—certainly if the plethora of emails I receive from executives of search engine optimization companies offering to boost my rankings in Google are to be believed—with the vague notion that I *might* sell sheds, which I don't. Rather than, say, popping into your local DIY store or garden centre and sitting inside one for yourself.

It's as though we live in some kind of dystopian future where sheds are contraband. How exciting a world that would be!

So, ... unfortunately the answer is no. I don't sell sheds. And I don't take credit cards to pay for sheds. Because I don't sell sheds.

I do, however, sell CD-ROMs containing freeware software for the classic range of Psion handheld computers, popular during the mid- to late-1990s and early 2000s. But you can't keep your garden fork or lawnmower in a CD-ROM. Even if you scan it.

Sorry, yours sincerely,

Gareth

## CHAPTER 27: Terisa Abel

Dear Terisa Abel

Apologies for my delay in replying to your email. My neighbour Colin (who also runs our local ‘internet shop’, as we call it) has been helping me to set up a remote camera to capture photographs for the police of my other neighbour, Mr Parkinson, as he has been ‘flashing’ at us again, sometimes wearing my birthday dressing gown (the one with a squirrel and R2-D2 on it) which he clearly stole from my washing line! It has been a most upsetting episode. When will it ever end? My wife has threatened to leave me if this continues.

Anyway, you kindly asked if I was interested in working with you, “an independent online marketing consultant”.

Thank you, that is very kind of you, however, I have no experience of marketing—although I once lived near a ‘market’ in south London. It was very good for buying fresh vegetables and fruit. But mostly vegetables, such as carrots, broccoli, mushrooms, bell peppers, cauliflower, peas, beans, potatoes, spinach, onions, parsnips, sweet potato, turnip, Brussels sprouts, beetroot, bacon, lettuce and tomato, cucumber, swede, and. Also, vegetables that I am not so keen on, such

as asparagus, avocado, celeriac, celery, chickpeas, courgette, eggplant, fennel, guacamole, pumpkin, radish, squash, and zucchini.

None of my websites are themed around markets, so I think at this point, coupled with the...

Sorry, I had to answer my door. It was the police. They think that a remote camera might exacerbate things with my meddlesome neighbour. After they left, Mr Parkinson stood at the window facing my shed, stark naked and lighting match after match. I'm afraid that was a threat. Although of what, I'm not sure.

I was saying that given what is happening here, I think I will have to respectfully turn down your kind offer.

Yours sincerely

Gareth

## CHAPTER 28: Justin Mango

Hi Justine Mango

Sorry about my delay in replying to you. I've been in bed with the flu. Which was a little ironic as the day before I'd been in bed with the flue, as the chimney came crashing through the roof and landed at the foot of my bed.

We have someone in fixing it right now, otherwise, obviously, Santa won't be able to deliver presents to our children.

I printed out your email and showed it to Colin, next door. He runs our village's local 'internet shop' (as we call it) and helped me to set up my website. He was as confused as I am about which "business" you were referring to. I certainly don't run a business from my website—it's mostly a collection of largely outdated personal pages about Psion palmtop computers, the Chinese table-top game of mahjong, and other random nonsense that Colin encouraged me to publish to help me develop my '1337' HTML skills. (I have since learned some HTML5, which I have yet to transfer to my website, so I expect I now have more than one-thousand three-hundred and thirty-seven skills.)

You mentioned that you used a “top secret” ninja SEO analysis tool’. I’m pretty certain that as a law-abiding clergyman I wouldn’t want to be involved in anything to do with that. Ninjas were involved in covert operations such as espionage, sabotage, infiltration, and assassination. I’m no expert but those can’t be particularly good qualities to build a business on—I’ve watched every series of *The Apprentice* and I don’t remember Lord Sugar mentioning any of these as noble qualities for a modern businessman to adopt.

So, I must thank you for your interest, but gracefully decline.

Sincerely,

Gareth

## CHAPTER 29: Peter Simpson

Dear Peter Simpson

Many apologies for not replying sooner.

I did receive your email, fished as it was from the jaws of the clutches of my spam filter. I think I then must have lost it. Or deleted it.

Or both.

Apologies. (Technically, *more* apologies.)

I've asked Colin next door (who runs our village internet shop, as we call it) if he can help me find these messages but he's busy constructing a solar shelter in his garden and hasn't been around in the evenings to respond to my myriad of computer-related questions. All that will change in the next few weeks after the Festival of Sparrows<sup>6</sup>, however—as I'm sure I don't need to tell you.

Anyway, you asked me a number of kind questions. Let me get to answering them for you, shall I? (Yes, I shall.)

---

<sup>6</sup> Don't worry, I've no idea what this is either.

- > As mentioned, we can help you if you are struggling
- > with HMRC payments,

I am not struggling with HMRC payments thank you. I've already bought my HMRC outright, which I paid for in six easy, monthly instalments. I keep it in my shed now, with all my other remote-controlled models.

- > or are looking for some cash investment.

I don't think so. But thank you.

- > Please note that all calls and emails are treated in
- > the strictest confidence.

Thank you. Please don't tell anyone else about the Festival of Sparrows™. I fear that I've already said too much.

Yours sincerely,

Gareth

## CHAPTER 30: Mark Lewis

Hello Mark Lewis

Sorry, I'm not taking orders for adverts at the moment. Not since the shed exploded. Colin next door, who runs our local 'internet shop' as we call it, is helping me to rebuild my website—the original code went up in the fire, so we've decided to make a fresh start and 're-design' the website. Thankfully, the web server isn't in the shed (it's in Nottingham, I think... presumably in someone else's shed). Colin tells me that we're going to make the new site "modal first" using the Bootprint framework, I think he called it. Sounds very exciting.

Anyway, I'm just off the phone to him—he's been mucking out his fish tank (he finally found my lost goldfish, it was in the pirate ship)—and he has confirmed that we're not going to use guest articles, banners or widgets.

Thank you for your interest. But unfortunately (for you) the answer is no.

Sincerely,

Gareth

## CHAPTER 31: Andrea Dulio

Dear Andrea Dulio

My apologies for such an inordinate delay in replying to you. I've had various sickness bugs over the last couple of months (I won't go into the details, so please don't Google for images of 'loose jobbies'), as well as various project deadlines that I needed to meet. I met each one, thank you for asking.

I also wanted to run your email past my friend and neighbour Colin, who runs the local 'internet shop', as we call it in the village. He was over in Canada on a self-organised fishing trip. I would have emailed this to him, but he was wanting to keep his data roaming charges low. As it turned out he'd not done his preparation for the trip very thoroughly—or at least, he had... if he'd gone in the summer. The lake he was meant to be fishing on was frozen, and he got fined by the Mounties for leaving food litter at his campsite, which is a guaranteed way to attract bears, seemingly. He returned last weekend fishless, cents-less, and senseless with rage at himself. He's now beginning to see the funny side, which is good.

My main concern with your email was the name: *'jobbydoo'*. I thought that this was a hoax email from a friend of mine, Danny. He does that sort of thing all the time.

You see, in Scotland the word 'jobby' means 'poo', as does the word 'doo'. You can see now why I thought this was a hoax. I also mentioned this to a few colleagues at work and they said exactly the same: must be a hoax with a name like that.

It turns out that your email does look genuine, and that 'jobbydoo' is a real company. Albeit one that didn't do any company-name-research north of the English border. I'm sorry for the confusion caused, but I really thought you ought to know.

With all that out of the way. And I'm sure you can see where this is heading. I'm sorry to say that I shall not be adding a link to my blog, for the very reason stated.

I do wish you luck, and I am sorry.

Yours sincerely

Gareth

## CHAPTER 32: Alex Court

*The email the author received was written entirely in the third person. The author really had only one option on how to reply.*

Dear Alex Court

Gareth J M Saunders doesn't really understand what "right to work checks" are, let alone how to improve their efficiency.

Furthermore, Gareth J M Saunders strongly suspects that there has been some mix-up involving automated software and a mailing list. For Gareth J M Saunders (for it is I) is not a company but a human being who simply enjoys company.

Anne Morris is more than welcome to visit in person. My wife makes the most splendid cakes which I'm sure Ms Morris would enjoy, but I'm sorry to report that it would otherwise be a wasted trip.

I'm sorry for any confusion caused. Apologies too for the delay in replying, I've been having the shed repainted (and rebuilt) after that incident with the man from next door. "A nasty business," as our local

police ‘bobby’ said to me when I last reported him. A nasty business indeed. And his poor rabbits.

Anyway, sorry—I think the stick has been grasped at the wrong end.

Yours sincerely

(The real) Gareth J M Saunders

## Reply

Dear Mr Saunders,

Thank you for your reply it brightened up my otherwise boring day trying to find people to look at our brilliant product.

Sorry for the confusion and I hope the rabbits are able to recover from their ordeal.

Best wishes

Alex

## CHAPTER 33: Eric Chambers

Dear Eric Chambers

Apologies for my delay in working, I was at work when your message arrived in my inbox—I work at the University of St Andrews—and following that I went straight to church where I presided at the 6:00pm Holy Eucharist, a gentle and reflective said evening service. But here I am now.

Many thanks for your electronic messages, however I must admit to being a little perplexed as to why you have singled me out for such a fabulous offer (or offers, I'm not sure as I haven't read through your email in much depth).

Allow me to explain my situation. Well, actually, I more or less have above: I work full time at the University, which follows its own procurement procedures, rather than responding randomly to emails which some might regard as 'SPiced-Pork-And-hAM' (aka SPPAAM); and then I also help out at our local church, which has a multi-function printer/copier hired from a local multi-function printer/copier hire company called, I believe, *The St Andrews Multi-Function Printer/Copier Hire Company*. I'm not 100% as it's Betty who deals with that side of things; I just look after the website, and the occasional service.

I have shown your offer to Colin—he lives next door and runs what we like to call our local village ‘internet shop’—on the off-chance that he may be interested in it.

I think he was in a bit of a bad mood as he said some rather unkind things about Chromebooks, and “MFPs” which he implied most forcefully stands for “Multi F\*\*\*\*\* Printers”, “Members of F\*\*\*ing Parliament”, and “Military F\*\*\*ing Police”!

(Colin was in the army for many years.)

It’s understandable to a degree, this is the second time this month that his wife’s rabbits (which she has named Lewis and Endeavour) have escaped and have nibbled his cabbages (not a euphemism!). I expect he will have calmed down tomorrow—I’ll ask him to write an apology. Just in case he doesn’t though, “sorry”.

And another sorry from me. I hope my email wasn’t a terrific waste of your time<sup>7</sup>.

Yours sincerely,

Gareth

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<sup>7</sup> Is this really true?—Ed.

## CHAPTER 34: Susan Hill

Dear Susan Hill

You wrote: “We strongly believe that we have an excellent opportunity to increase the number of visitors to your website through our white-hat SEO services at a very affordable price. Email us back to get a full proposal.”

Thank you for your kind offer, but I already own a white hat.

Many thanks.

Gareth

# CHAPTER 35: Erika

Hello Erika

You have reached the right person. I'm sorry to hear that my website has not been cooperating with you. Might this be an issue with your web browser? I have optimised it for all the modern browsers such as Microsoft Edge, Google Crumb, Mozilla Firebox, JaxelScrobd Pi and Opera Opera. And Apple Safari 4.

I look forward to hearing from you. If I'm not around when you email, please just leave me a message and I'll get back to you.

Sincerely

Gareth

## My reply

Dear Erika

Thank you for your response, thanking me for my response.

Forgive me, but I am not entirely familiar with the web advertising industry (is it even an industry?) so many of your abbreviations (are

they even abbreviations?) and jargon went over my head, like a weasel on a hang glider.

- RTB Road traffic baccident?
- CPC Component Pascal Collection?!
- CTR Center (American spelling)?!
- CPM Control Program / Monitor?!

This is beginning to look very complicated. I do hope that I'm not getting embroiled in some kind of offshore pyramid selling schemes again. My wife nearly left me after that sorry episode. Of course, she's gone now but then... I don't think she ever... really... well, it is still a bit raw, to be honest. And after that sorry episode with the 'peeping tom' next door, and the rabbits, that was the final straw for her. I'm only now getting the shed windows converted to one way glass.

Having looked at the links you sent me, and then clicking them, and looking at the pages they point to, I'm concerned that I do not want my web pages to be plastered (if you will) with 17 types of adverts on each page.

Am I missing something?

Or someone?

Gareth

# CHAPTER 36: Kailey / Daniel

## Blanche

Dear Kailey (although the ‘To’ field now says Daniel Blanche... that’s quite deceptive),

Thank you for your kind email. I’m sorry about my delay in replying. I’ve been having the shed windows replaced with one-way glass following that terrible, ongoing issue with the man next door. It has been a terrible palaver; I can tell you.

And... oh for goodness’ sake! The glazier has put the one-way glass in the *wrong* way round and says that he needs to go home for his tea now.

Anyway, you’re not here to listen to my woes. So, you want to know about my website prices.

Well, I’ve just revised my prices for the new financial year—Colin from next door has helped me, he runs a similar business in town. Here they are:

- WordPress site (5 pages) — £1,000.00
- Drupal site (10 nodes) — £1,000.99
- jQuery plugin (small) — £650.00

- jQuery plugin (big) — £650.00 + optional cake
- WordPress plugin (food-related) — £486.75
- Logo design (mono, must be of a cat) — £80.00
- Logo design (colour, of a cat or) — £83.00
- Web hosting (< 900 pixels) — £300 per year
- Advertising design (1 banner) — £99.00
- Advertising design (vertical) — £99.00
- Advertising design (wedding-related) — £999.00

Does that help?

Sincerely,

Gareth

## CHAPTER 37: Jorge Bowditch

Dear Jorge Bowditch

I hope you don't mind me pronouncing your name as George when I read the email out loud. I am currently trying to teach my new parrot a few more words in English. I got him from my Danish friend Lars and the only words that I can understand him say just now are *tak* (thank you) and *Lego* (LEGO®).

I have to admit that I am intrigued by your proposal. Certainly, getting my blog written by experienced journalists would certainly help free up some time for me. I've had a hard time recently trying to find the time to blog and so getting a 'ghost-writer', if you will, might help.

Would this journalist have to follow me around to find out what I do, or would it simply be a case of me sharing my Google Calendar with him or her or they so that they get a general idea of my schedule? I could also share my photos in Dropbox.

What a splendid idea. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely

Gareth

## CHAPTER 38: Bradley Potter

Dear Bradley Potter

Apologies for my delay in replying, through a combination of extensive roadworks outside my house, a BT broadband outage that lasted more than a week, and a splinter that I got in my right hand from the now-rotated-shed door.

I ought to explain that I work from a new shed in my garden, after the last one was burned down in rather suspicious circumstances. I lost everything. My PC, three guitars, forty years of collecting Tolkien memorabilia, plus an unfinished homemade tuna and mayo sandwich, which was really, *really* tasty.

The new shed is still a little rough around the edges. I'm writing this on my laptop on a temporary desk from Ikea. In Ikea. I was looking for a new bookcase when I remembered that I needed to reply to you.

Anyway, enough about me. You asked about a 'bespoke piece of content'. Will this be spoken as a video. Or written? *Bewritten* rather than *bespoke*, I guess you could say. I am considering moving to all video content later this year.

Sincerely Gareth

## CHAPTER 39: Amrita Singh

Dear Amrita Singh

Many apologies for my lack of reply. I did not get your first email. Only your second (assuming that the email I received was your second email ... not your second email *ever*, I mean your second email to me). I have launched an investigation with my internet electronic mail company to find out who is responsible for this. Once I find out I shall instruct them to write you personally to apologise as this could have cost you a lot of money in lost revenue.

Congratulations on leading a Web Design Company.

The other reason (apart from not getting your emails) that I did not reply to you more promptly was that I needed to seek the guidance of Colin who runs our local village 'internet shop', as we like to call it. He really is a brick and keeps all of us in the village right when it comes to new technologies and the like. He helped me design and set up my own website. Last week he was helping old Mrs McGuigan (87) set up a VR (virtual reality) device in her living room to help her feel like she can still go down the shops on her mobility scooter. There was a bit of an early mix-up after Colin had mentioned to Mrs McGuigan that she needed a VR device, and she went out and bought a Victorian postbox.

Colin really is a kind man, and it has given Mrs McG a new lease of life, I can tell you... although, she has now found Call of Duty Modern Warfare and, honestly, I have never heard a woman swear like her.

Anyway, I spoke with Colin this evening (after Countdown) and he confirmed with me that he already does services, 1, 2, 3, 4, and 6. And 8. Even though he runs a shop he's not very interested in building ecommerce websites, except with WooCommerce and something called EBuy Buyer By and Bye or something, which is the latest thing (he tells me).

So, I appear to be covered on those fronts, should I need a website design (or redesign) or blog. Or development. Or static. Colin says that logos are just for companies and "people with big egos". He said that while silently nodding towards the man next door—I think you'll know what I mean. (Tut!)

Anyway, thank you so much for getting in touch. I don't get many emails now, after I unsubscribed from everything. After the virus. And the fire. So, it is lovely when I finally get an electronic letter from a nice gentleman like yourself. Or a woman.

I wish you well and hope that you lead your Web Design Company™ into ever deeper successes.

Yours sincerely, Gareth

# CHAPTER 40: Rachel Cook

Hi Rachel Cook

Apologies for not replying. Life has been very busy this week with trying to get my new shed set up after the fire destroyed my last one. Unfortunately, the building company set up the new shed in the wrong direction which reignited problems with my neighbour (“BATHROBE-STEALING NAKED NEIGHBOUR FROM HADES”, my local paper called him) and so we had to postpone getting my home office set up again until this week. And of course, with this recent storm, that’s been delayed now too.

Thankfully, my friend Colin, who runs our local ‘internet shop’ (as we call it) has been great. I’ve been able to use his shed in the meantime, although I’m not used to a standing desk and the shed isn’t very tall so whenever I do stand on it, I just hit my head on the roof.

I do have an interest in task management software but these days I limit myself to using just Todoist. And Trello. As well as OneNote, Microsoft To do and Mindjet. Also, Google Keep Notes, from time to time. Occasionally Jira for some projects. And Zendesk, Pivotal Tracker, Project In A Box, and Toggl Track. So, just the basics. I find it makes for a more streamlined workflow.

I always defer to Colin in matters of internet protocol and *whaddyamacallit* but I may not have chosen the right time to ask him about your request. He had returned home that evening to discover that while he was out his dog had jumped into the large fish tank in his living room.

But if I remember correctly, the last time I was asked about adding a similar link (but it had different words in that link) his advice was to politely decline. Seemingly some people use these links to promote unsavoury services and simply want to use these links to increase their site traffic, or something.

Thank you for your interest. I'd better go, that's the builder back with a stronger man he found at the gym to help turn the shed around 90 degrees. I can't wait to get back in and write my book in peace and quiet. It's about writing back to people who waste my time with their emails.

## Reply

Fair enough, thanks Gareth.

Rachel

# ENDNOTE

Fair enough, indeed.

And this is the book. Not written in a shed in the garden, but in a wee mid-terrace house in the East Neuk of Fife. During a pandemic. A little over two weeks into watching war tear into Ukraine. And seeing the kindness of neighbouring nations open their doors and hearts to millions of refugees.

There has been a lot of sadness in the world this past decade. “The world is hurting my soul,” I heard someone say the other day. I hope this little volume of nonsense can go a little way towards reminding us to be silly, to not take things so seriously, to remember what it means to be human, to make connections and celebrate the ordinary.

These email responses have been gathering and growing in a text file for years. Originally, I wanted forty-five chapters, but in the end Rachel’s ‘meh’ style answer to my latest email seemed like the damp squib ending that this book deserved.

I can finally go back to ignoring all these email requests for guest posts and paid links. Or maybe I should take them up on their offers. I wonder what that book would look like...

**Other books by Gareth J M Saunders**

*Teach Yourself Mahjong* (Third edition), Hodder Education, 2007

*Memories of Ian*, Lulu, 2019

**Coming soon**

*Oh, I am a Spaceman!* (with Reuben Saunders)

*Sex, Drugs and Penderecki: A rather dubious and personal history of the  
National Youth Choir of Great Britain, 1987–1997*

# What do you do with unsolicited emails? Ignore them? Delete them? Let your spam filter swallow them? What if you were to reply to them?

That's exactly what Gareth did in October 2009. Fed up of people wasting his time sending him emails about search engine optimisation opportunities, or who wanted to place adverts and guest posts on his blog, instead of rolling his eyes, tutting loudly and deleting them, Gareth wrote back.

At the time, Gareth was the web architect at Scotland's oldest university. He feigned ignorance, however, about the whole web design process and with the help of his (fictional) neighbour Colin (who runs the local 'internet shop', as they call it, in his village) he replied to these emails in a rather over-familiar style, taking delight to explain in great detail why his reply had been delayed, and often commenting in real time about the antisocial ongoings-on of his other (fictional) neighbour, Mr Parkinson. But would they write back to him?

Inspired by *The Timewaster Letters* by Robin Cooper, this is a personal collection of silly emails spanning 13 years, from 2009 to 2022.

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"A delightful read overflowing with character. I heartily enjoy it when the spammers reply as (convincing) humans. I love Colin from the local internet shop and was inspired to visit my local internet shop—they had the internet on CDs, if you can believe that! I encourage you to read this."

**Aaron T Lott, software developer, author and email user**

"Over the period of a 35-plus-year friendship, I have asked Gareth for many things. None of these have been as inappropriate, filthy, bizarre, erotic or frankly... *Scottish* as that which you will read here. I hope the writers of these do better than me. All I ever persuaded Gareth to give me was [redacted on legal advice]."

**Nick Morgan, priest, singer-songwriter, and email user**

"*I Like To Write Back* is a delightfully daft book that deftly highlights the utter absurdity of the kind of nonsense that constitutes almost a third of all email—spam. As well as introducing us to Gareth's fictional neighbours and weaving surreal tales out of whatever the initial spam request was, the book contains the occasional reply which bafflingly suggests that at least some of these spam messages we receive have actual people on the other end. Wonders will never cease."

**Steve Lawson, cyclist, bassist and email user**



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