

canvas

Weekend Herald August 11, 2012

NEWSPAPER MAGAZINE OF THE YEAR

Stripped bare

Matthew McConaughey
on hitmen and thongs

The lost arts

Bringing back
old-school crafts



1987	Mrs. Doubtfire	Stroud book
1993	Charlize Theron	Life (d)
1995	Alison	Political and belief book
1998	Zenna	Knee-high boots
2005	Hayden	Unleashed album
2007	Wendy	Dip bowl
2009	Glenda	Cat Power album
2011	Wendy	Dip bowl
2011	Glenda	Cat Power album

Return to sender

The fine line between borrowing and stealing

Beg, borrow, STEAL

Still long for that beloved jacket you lent a friend and never saw again, the much-loved book that was never returned by a workmate or the favourite CD your flatmate 'borrowed' then lost?

Sarah Lang listens to some lending nightmares

Advertising executive Kirsty was living in Ponsonby when an acquaintance from London, Jenny, looked her up. Jenny stayed at her place for a couple of days and while there took a shine to Kirsty's favourite vintage T-shirts and asked if she could borrow them. "She put me on the spot and I felt like I couldn't say no." So Kirsty handed over her prized T-shirts – and would never wear them again.

"Despite various entreaties on Facebook and by text, Jenny never gave them back. She claimed they got lost or maybe

nicked, but then I kept seeing photos of her on Facebook wearing my stuff."

Jenny in front of the Eiffel Tower; among the pigeons in Venice; outside the Egyptian pyramids. Wearing Kirsty's T-shirts.

Have you ever lent someone a book you never got back, a favourite CD that was never returned, a dress you're sure she's still wearing? Most of us have – and have found out that just because something has sentimental value to us is no guarantee it'll be returned. This, even after social networking has changed the rules of engagement – it's hard to lose touch unless you want to and it's easy to track people down.

Nearly everyone has a similar story to



Illustration / Vasanti Unka

tell. Give some the chance and a tsunami of resentment rises up. One had a friendship bust-up over never-returned CDs. One dislikes a workmate because she's never returned her fancy ballpoint pen. One resents her sister for taking years to return things, if at all. One "stole" her scarf back off the borrower, who'd convinced herself she'd been given it. One guy just turned up at the borrower's house to take back his cordless drill. One never lends anything anymore, to anyone, full-stop.

All asked to remain anonymous, for the same reason most never confronted the culprit: they were worried they'd look "petty", "pushy", "uptight" or "anal".

The only person willing to be named is Krystal Waine, 31, a Wellington arts administrator who can laugh about her aversion to lending.

"What's funny is I can tell you exactly everything I've ever loaned out that's never been returned. It's like I have an internal cataloguing system in my head.

"In 1987, Misty borrowed my Barbie doll – we moved; 1993, Charlotte: sweetheart necklace – I changed schools; 1995, Alison: mesh spiderweb top – she swears it was left in my hot-water cupboard (it wasn't); 1998, Jenna: knee-high boots – lost contact; 2005, Hayden: *Unleashed* album – denies ever having it; 2007, Rebecca: Jonathon Stroud book – changed jobs; 2007, Reuben: *A Bug's Life* DVD – denies he ever borrowed it; 2010, Rob: ritual and belief book – lost somewhere in his room; 2011, Wendy: dip bowl – haven't been back to her house."

She could go on – for some time – but her blood pressure probably couldn't take it.

I'll admit this borrower-turned-klepto thing bugs me too. I like to share and I like to get things back, but I've found about only half of my things get returned.

My super-soft blue scarf (lost); my one-of-kind, jagged-hem skirt (she says she returned it); a couch and chairs (he left them at his old flat and they disappeared); the Baileys liqueur I won in a competition. (My flatmate drank it without asking, replaced it, drunk it again and didn't replace it because now it was kind of his. This convoluted logic floors me.)

Nowadays I mostly lend novels I love. Some are returned, some aren't. Sure, I probably won't read *A Visit From The Goon Squad* again, but I'd like to have the option – and to be able to lend it to others. What annoys me most is when someone on-lends a book to someone

else without asking. Despite this, I rarely request returns and I don't write down names and titles, for reasons that are starting to sound familiar: not wanting to be uptight, pushy or petty.

I've joked with my husband about setting up a library-style system with check-out cards and overdue fees, but I'm way behind. A friend owns the Knock Knock Personal Library Kit, with self-adhesive pockets, checkout cards, a pencil, date stamp and ink-pad. Another now logs names, titles and dates in a special notebook. Others use old-fashioned bookplates: a small decorative label pasted into a book with the owner's name or an identifying motif, to guilt the borrower into returning it.

WHY MUST we resort to these tactics? Why do we keep other people's things when we have no right to? Auckland psychologist Sara Chatwin says these issues often crop up.

"Failing to return things speaks volumes about either memory or manners," she says.

"Often people forget they've borrowed an item and sometimes they may wear or use their friend's thing so much they believe it's theirs. Lines become blurred."

Hamilton accountant Kate and her partner are friends with a couple who just don't return things, including books, CDs, DVDs. Yes, she's asked for them back. "But once a long time's passed and you've already asked more than once, it becomes awkward to ask again. I've now stopped lending them anything unless I'm happy to say goodbye to it forever." It's little wonder the couples have grown apart. "They still ask to borrow things though. Recently they wanted to borrow a CD, so I just burned them a copy."

Would she ever tell them calmly that no, they can't borrow things, because they don't return them? She pauses. "I don't think I'd be willing to confront them." Why? "Because it's quite embarrassing that, as grown adults, they can't be trusted to return my things. I actually find it quite disrespectful."

Disrespect is a word you hear a lot from disgruntled lenders. Yet most admit they shrink from asking for things back, feeling embarrassed or uncomfortable. A woman posting on consumer-health website everybody.co.nz bemoans the loan of a learning-aid clock, never returned. "Why am I so chicken to ask for it back? Do you have trouble asking for things back that belong to you that you

Biggest bugbears

1. The delay ("sorry, I forgot, not sure where it is, next time ...").
2. The denial ("what dress? You must have lent it to someone else ...").
3. The damage ("soiled, scratched, food stains").
4. The deception ("I'm sure I returned it ...").
5. The dunce (losing or on-lending it).

Lending life-savers

1. Write down the names, items and date.
2. Write your name on it if you can.
3. Stipulate a return date — e.g. a week for clothes, 1-2 months for books.
4. Make it clear you're lending it, not giving it, and there's to be no on-lending.
5. If you're not willing to ask for it back, don't lend it.

Right of return

1. Ask sooner, not later. The longer you leave it, the less likely you are to get it back.
2. Give them a specific reason why you need it back now.
3. Ask when is a convenient time to pick it up.
4. Don't get mad, keep your tone even.
5. Slip this copy of *Canvas* into their letterbox.

'Often people forget they've borrowed an item and sometimes they may wear or use their friend's thing so much **they believe it's theirs. Lines become blurred.**'

Sara Chatwin, psychologist

have lent out to friends?" Others replied saying they felt similarly – they don't want to nullify the nice thing they did nor sound pushy.

My theory for this reticence is that New Zealanders aren't comfortable with conflict. We pride ourselves on being easygoing, not uptight nor materially focused.

"It's a Kiwi thing to err on the side of silence as opposed to being upfront," Chatwin says.

"Having worked with Americans and Australians, we're shrinking violets compared to them. But people should feel comfortable asking for something that's theirs. These dynamics can put pressures on friendships, and lead to feelings of being used, so it's always best to resolve the issue by honestly and openly saying what you feel."

Or, try a more wily way. Taranaki lawyer Dale Cameron, author of *Modern Etiquette: A Practical Guide*, suggests giving a specific reason. You know, 'can I grab that dress back to wear to a party this weekend? When's a good time?' or 'hey, Mum's keen to read that book'. But I don't think you need to be too sensitive as, after all, the person who hasn't returned the item is the one being rude.'

Nowadays, Krystal Waine's done with lending altogether, and neither will she borrow. As for the vexed case of the nomadic T-shirts, sighting them on Facebook still makes Kirsty thump the table in frustration.

"It's bad enough seeing someone in these countries you've always wanted to go to, but it's doubly galling when they're wearing your clothes that they've purloined." ☺