

## “Finding the Real Me, Virtually”

I hate joining things. In 2007 and 2008, I got the occasional email saying “Alexis, or Rhonda, wants to be your friend on Facebook,” and I’d think, can’t Alexis, or Rhonda, just be my friend in the real world? They already are, anyway. Why do I need some website with a cheesy name to mediate my friendships?

I affected ignorance, moral superiority, lack of time, technical ineptitude. But as the publication date of my first book, *Love Child*, loomed closer, I felt the hot breath of inevitability on the back of my neck. Perhaps Facebook could warm up an indifferent world.

Now here I am a year later, newly techified, getting emails titled “How the F\*\*K Batman??” from an author friend trying to coordinate her fan page with her personal page. (I’ve got my own page, a fan page for *Love Child*, and a group page for my current project, a short film called *Good Luck Mr Gorski*--check it out! join the launch crew!) I’ve never been called “Batman” before, and I like it.

Maybe it was my profile picture that gave her the idea. I am impossibly leggy and lithe with silver hair, spherical breasts, and skintight raptor lingerie, and my name slithers across the top in techno-acid green. (This is thanks to my cyberfriend Allegra, who discovered an obscure comic book from 1996.) During the what-color-is-your-bra conversation, at a friend’s suggestion, I put “claw.” So much for *l’esprit de l’escalier*: no more staircase, no more “if only I’d thought of that.” On Spaceplant--my mashup of other people’s “Spacebook” and “Faceplant”--you can borrow your friends’ wit in real time, and stick your second thoughts, and third, and fourth, in the Comment string.

My superhero profile picture feels, weirdly, more honest than the photos I used before. The photos--sunlit in LA, sporty on top of a mountain, emo-posing at an Emo gas station in Ireland--are each anchored to a particular moment in time, a single facet of my personality. This babe in her raptor bra obviously isn't me; she doesn't lie.

Like most people, I am different in the company of different people: indoorsy, outdoorsy, responsible, devil-may-care, motherly, silly, professional. In cyberspace, any of my connections can pick up that kaleidoscope of selves, and look into it. Sure, I wonder if my stepson, or my elderly uncle, will be shocked when I make a post about cowboy porn, for example. (I love posting teasers, and I'm always surprised to see who picks them up and runs with them. Riverboarding was another big success.) But any one person's experience of me is necessarily limited; my Spaceplant self, like my real self, is the sum total of hundreds of relationships.

Social cyberspace isn't a parallel universe. It's our real lives intensified. Instead of going years without talking to a friend, I can now run into them, deliberately or circumstantially, in the cyberspace equivalent of Wal-Mart. Occasionally, someone new breezes in: there they are, a name from twenty years ago, in the lightbulb aisle. We may not have earth-shattering discussions, but then, how often do you anyway? It's the small talk of a small town that makes the web of warmth and connection. With geography consigned to past centuries, we can each manifest our own small town, and stretch its boundaries at will.

In some ways, these virtual towns are better than the physical versions. Gossip and expectations are defanged, because everybody doesn't know everybody. The only person they all have in common is you. And you can pop up and vanish at will, like the

Cheshire Cat. When you post a comment online, you are what you write--no more. The 18,000 comments on my wowOwow piece "What Is It About Adam Lambert?" expanded the online space of the article into a vast salon, all comers welcome. The women--and men--who wrote there are on the whole educated professionals, with families. In this space, they could leave their respectability behind and voice emotions they hadn't dared share with anyone in the physical world.

I could complain that my article was hijacked. I could moan that, within a day, the posts were no longer about my article, that the conversation spun off uncontrollably. Instead, I was thrilled. Why did I write it? Because I'd noticed, on tour for my book, how many women around the country thought Adam Lambert was fabulous, and were totally surprised to encounter another woman--me--who thought so too.

Liberated from the expectations and judgments of our everyday lives, we find more than each other online: we find ourselves. Impelled by passionate agreement or disagreement, seduced by the mysteriously serpentine trail of our own feelings, we think aloud through our fingers and give our thoughts substance by letting other people see them. With no image to worry about, we find our voices in these magically infinite pages--and (like Juneau and Xena, who published a book based on their Adam Lambert posts) take those discoveries, and that confidence, back into our physical worlds.

The paperback of *Love Child: A Memoir of Family Lost and Found* is published on April 20. Become a fan of *Love Child* on Facebook; follow Allegra on Twitter; and check out her short film project at [goodluckmrgorski.com](http://goodluckmrgorski.com).