

Doctor to Patient

Bruce Dawe (1980's)

Please sit down. I'm afraid I have some rather bad news for you: you are now seventeen and you have contracted an occupational disease called unemployment. Like others similarly afflicted you will experience feelings of shock, disbelief, injustice, guilt, apathy, and aggression (although not necessarily in that order) and you'll no doubt be urged to try the various recommended anodynes: editorials in newspapers, voluntary unpaid work for local charities, booze, other compulsive mind-destroyers, prayers, comforting talks with increasingly less-interested friends. It is small comfort to know that the disease is universal and can accommodate the middle-aged and thirtyish and strikes down those in camps in Kompong Sam and Warsaw. However you will discover, as time passes, that your presence in itself will make others obviously uncomfortable. Try not to let your shadow, at this stage, fall across your neighbour's plate; eat with the right hand only; do not touch others in public (this can be easily misconstrued); keep always down-wind, if possible. Please remember you have now become our common vulnerability personified. Oh yes, and by the way, you will be relieved to know the disease is only in a minority of cases terminal.

Most, that is, survive. Next, please.