

Everyone thinks of changing the world, but no one thinks of changing himself.

INSIGHT

My addiction

Our columnist writes about his experience with cocaine and shares the letter he wrote when he hit rock bottom

THE NARC REPORT

with Jarrod Cronje



I SPEAK freely about my history in addiction these days. I suppose I feel proud of the fight I have had and the success of overcoming it. Someone asked me the other day if I didn't feel too vulnerable when I speak so candidly about my experiences. In short, it is this honesty that keeps me clean, but more

than that, it enables me to connect better with all of you and creates an authentic space for me to do the work I now do.

What better qualification than real experience?

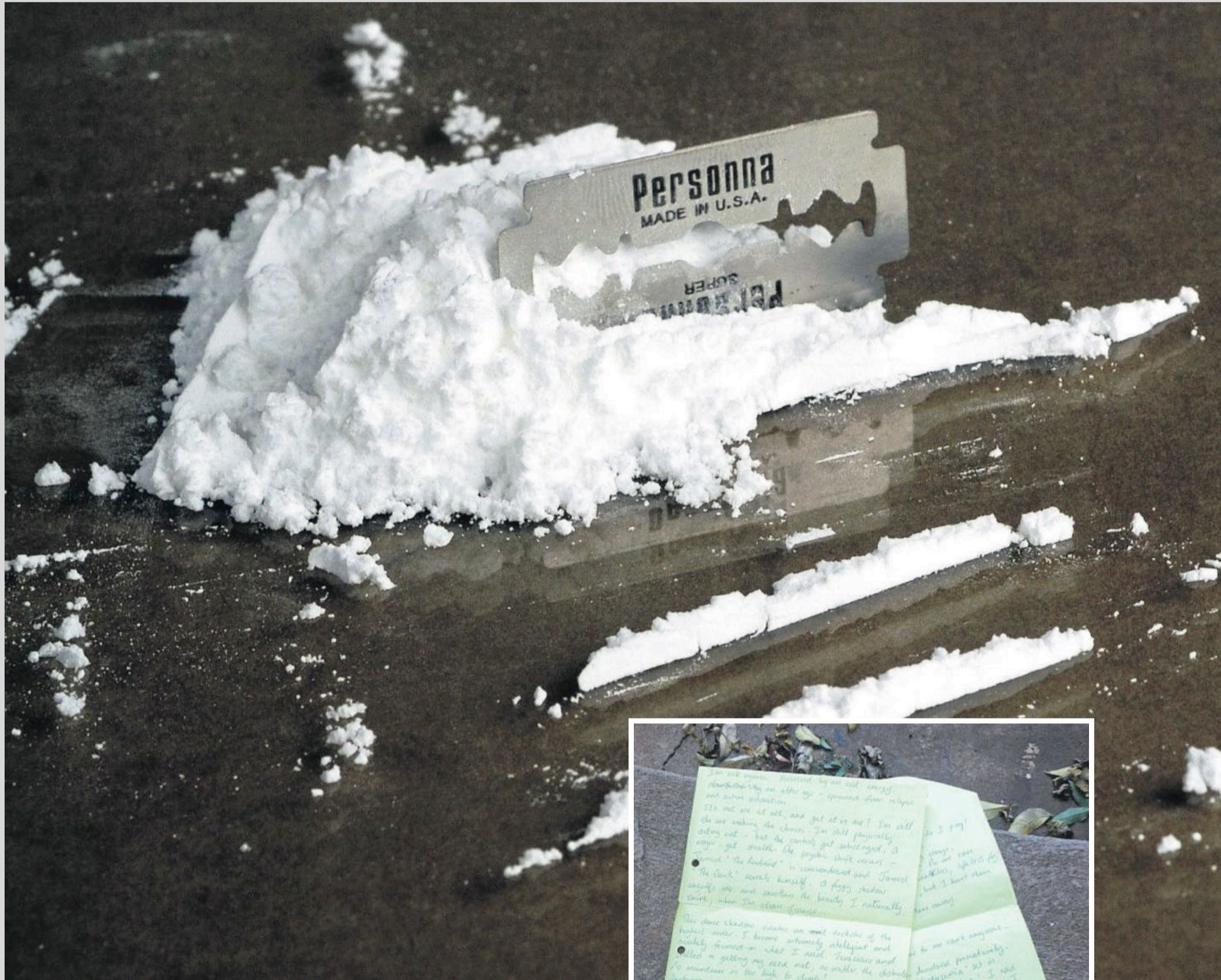
My drug of choice was cocaine. I'd like to talk about that today but as I do that, I'd want

first to become vulnerable again with you, in the hope that you too will become introspective. The extract to follow is something I wrote on a few pieces of yellow note paper on October 31, 2011, in a pub somewhere in Johannesburg. This was my rock bottom. I had been drifting around the city for days

sleeping in my car, and as I sat at a table alone barely dressed after selling my clothes and shoes, halfway through a bottle of red wine that I couldn't pay for and no more cocaine left, I finally realised I'd had enough.

Tears slid down my puffy face and the words just poured onto the paper.

The letter:

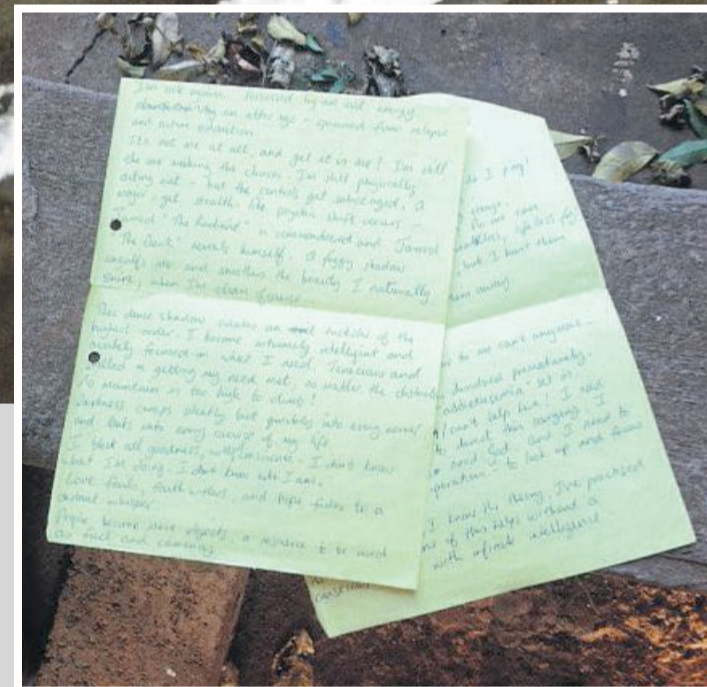


Cocaine is one of the most addictive substances known to man. It has proven almost impossible to become free of its grip physically and mentally without prolonged treatment.

PHOTO: SUPPLIED

'addictasemia' has set in. No doctors can help here. I need something much stronger to direct this surgery. I need a higher power. I need God. I have the skills, I know the theory, I've practised the drills but none of

this matters without a conscious contact with infinite intelligence. This time I will surrender unreservedly. This time must be the last time, or it will be the last time I ever hear my name ..."



The letter Jarrod Cronje wrote on October 31, 2011, in a pub somewhere in Johannesburg. PHOTO: JARROD CRONJE

"I'm sick again. Possessed by an evil energy, spawned from relapse into active addiction. It's not me at all, and yet, it is me. I'm still making the choices, but my controls seem sabotaged. A powerful yet stealth-like psychic shift occurs. Jarrod 'the radiant' is commandeered and Jarrod 'the dark' reveals himself. A foggy shadow engulfs me and smothers the beauty I naturally shine, when I'm clean of course.

This dense shadow creates a trickster of the highest order. I have become extremely intelligent and acutely focused on what I need. Tenacious and skilled in getting my need met, no matter the obstacle — no mountain is too high to climb. Cocaine is my survival.

Darkness creeps silently and leaks quickly into every crevice of my life. I've blocked all goodness without conscience. I don't know what I'm doing. I don't know who I am. Love fails, faith withers and hope faints to a distant whisper. People have become mere objects, a resource to be used as fuel and currency. Objects are precious tools to trade with. Materials have value, not people, not even loved ones.

Nothing anyone says matters any more. Nothing, nothing, nothing. I am an absolute living nightmare with constant sweats, intense anxiety, body twitches and paranoid insomnia.

As if by destiny, dealers are now the centre of my world. They are preciously managed. We laugh arrogantly together in the beginning when cash is flush. But then it turns sour and we fight passionately. Negotiation and deals ensue. They seldom lose, I never win. Half the rush is the ability to manipulate them by rolling over deals. But only so far. It's an art that's natural to me under the influence, but this time the art has faded. With four dealers in the jungle, I'm at the end. I've even changed my name. I have no clothes, no ID, no cellphone, no deodorant. I've even closed my bank accounts.

I've become unhinged and useless at everyday things like working, walking, eating, sleeping, laughing and loving. My brain is numb, breath stinks and skin smells as evil oozes from my pores. Body functions have shut down and my vision is tunnelled into two dimensions.

Cocaine! I love it! I hate it!
I scorn it! I praise it!
I weep with it! I weep without it!
I weep incessantly and pathetically!
I lie, cheat and hide with it!

And now I have to pay for it. Boy, do I pay. Everybody pays, and then they leave. Friends and family have left. Nobody stays. Why would they? Who can tolerate being near a dense, dark, breathless, lifeless fog?

One thing is for sure, those near to me can't do it any more. The cut is too deep and the last set of stitches dissolved prematurely. The wound has reopened and

use can bring about the same effect.

With that comes a host of life-threatening dangers like respiratory failure, stroke, cerebral haemorrhage or heart attack.

Do not be fooled, the KZN Midlands is riddled with cocaine. Pietermaritzburg and surrounds is no exception. A gram of cocaine sells for about R400 on the streets and it's not unlike an addict to use three or four grams a day. Binge users will often use up to five grams at

a time. I could carry on for pages about this drug, what it does and how it destroys lives. But will more information actually help you realise that this is no game? If this article has, in fact, hit

a chord in your heart, then stand up and do something about it.

Jarrod Cronje is an Addiction Recovery Coach at Harmony Retreat, Greytown. He is passionate about treatment in the addicted community as well as the development of preventative education among youth. Feel free to contact him at Harmony at 073 989 9803 or 033 417 2227 or e-mail him at jarrod.cronje@gmail.com Client confidentiality applies.

The following article contains vital information on drug and alcohol abuse. It takes courage to confront these issues so I encourage you to take the time to read through this series carefully. What questions do you have? What problems are you facing? Are you a concerned parent? Are you a school in need of a drug prevention strategy? Do you need help? Break the denial and make contact with me.

COCAINE is one of the most addictive substances known to man. Next to methamphetamine, cocaine creates the greatest psychological dependence of any drug.

It stimulates key pleasure centres within the brain and causes extremely heightened euphoria. It has proven almost impossible to become free of its grip physically and mentally without prolonged treatment. A tolerance to cocaine develops quickly — the addict soon fails to experience the same high experienced in the beginning. Only higher doses and more frequent

We have redefined the art of intimacy

MICH ATAGANA

I COME from a generation that would delete the phone-dialling app if it could. My generation doesn't make phone calls. When I call my friends, they ask me who died. When my father calls me I assume something disastrous has happened.

We are the generation of Facebook likes, comments, Gplus photo stories, retweets, @replies and Instagrammable moments. We are the generation of memories in motion, constantly.

We live our lives plainly for society to witness, the Internet is our home. The Internet is the place we go to at the end of a bad day, who we talk to when we need guidance. It is there with us in every moment, good and bad. We are the generation that has our friends in our ears and heads all day via Skype or Hangouts. We will sit all day, say little to nothing, but enjoy each other's company from afar. It's an experiment in intimacy, connection and some conversation.

My generation is about the lived and documented experience, because if it is not on social media it didn't happen. People talk about my generation, how we live our lives through screens, how we don't know how to hold a real conversation. They call us the generation that

killed voice.

They say my generation knows nothing of intimacy. A TED talk by Sherry Turkle addresses our need for a "Goldilocks" brand of intimacy. She argues that the technologies we hang onto for dear life propose themselves "as the architect of our intimacies". My generation, it presupposes, longs for the connections inside its devices. Our likes, retweets, grams, and photos make up our daily experiences. Turkle explains that our daily social-media experiences can be equated to a single moment of temptation; the place we are pulled into the illusion of "companionship without the demands of intimacy".

My generation, it seems, believes or at least clings to the hope that status updates and online sharing are genuine communication, allowing us to sacrifice "conversation for mere connection".

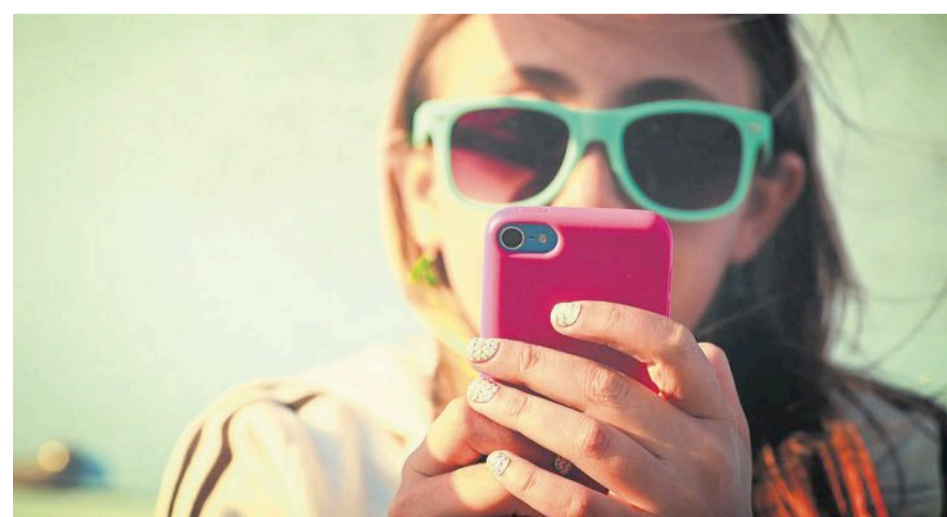
"The feeling that 'no one is listening to me' makes us want to spend time with machines that seem to care about us," says Turkle.

My generation is plenty intimate. Our phones are the most intimate non-physical things in our lives. We can be close and intimate with people through our cellphones without actually being physically close to them. If we define intimacy as the feeling in any relationship that provides closeness and bonding, and connects one per-

son to another, then my generation has redefined the art of intimacy. Intimacy is an art; connections require work and finesse, and my generation does all of that, and many times takes those connections offline. The assumption is that intimacy may be sustained through devices and could be fleeting because the connection is lost when the device is no longer there.

"Will all your friends in your cellphones be there for you when the time comes?" For my generation, the answer is that we hope so. We hope the people we have taken out of our devices and welcomed into our hearts will be there for us. Just like your generation, with its phone calls and physical lunches, hopes that its friends will be there for it. The conversations we have online are smart, silly, life-changing and at times racy, or as we say, not safe for work (NSFW). There is a likelihood that there will always be someone to talk to online.

My generation is vulnerable to a fault. Our hopes, dreams and insecurities are laid bare for the world to comment on, like, dislike, favourite and retweet. We live it everyday and we still share. We live, love, hate and have our hearts broken publicly everyday and our peers endure with us and sometimes they mock us but we carry on. My generation is both fearless and afraid. My generation is behind a screen but we



People talk about my generation, how we live our lives through screens, we don't understand how to hold a real conversation. They call us the generation that killed voice. PHOTO: SUPPLIED

will not let it stop us from experiencing the world. Each experience shared, validates who we are and the path we are on. Some call it narcissism, a lack of the adventure gene, but we call it our way.

My generation believes in the crowd and power of the hive mind — you may call us slacktivists sitting behind our computers key stroking a stop to injustice. We make our difference and when it matters, we step out from the LED gaze

of our screens and stand up for what we must. We may not all be in the streets protesting but we are all contributing. We work behind the scenes to build products that help the disenfranchised. We give everyday humans a voice and we let our voice be heard.

We tell sly anecdotes about online liaisons both on and offline, even with the involved party "listening". We are acerbic and give brands and people little room to hide faults or service deliv-

Why a total blackout is unlikely

THE risk of a total blackout is lower than it was a decade ago, according to the man behind Eskom's load-shedding operations.

Eskom's general manager of the national electricity system operator, Robbie van Heerden, said the transmission network has been strengthened and there is heightened awareness and contingency plans in place to avoid a blackout scenario.

He was speaking at a South African Institute of Electrical Engineers (SAIEE) seminar about the future of South Africa's power network.

Antonio Ruffini, who wrote a story for the June edition of the institute's *watnow* magazine, said a blackout would be a "black swan" event.

The black swan effect is a metaphor that describes an event that comes as a surprise, has a major effect and is often inappropriately rationalised after the fact with the benefit of hindsight, according to Wikipedia.

TOTAL BLACKOUT WOULD HAVE CATASTROPHIC EFFECT

Unlike load shedding, which is the controlled rotational shedding of electricity supply to prevent the chance of a complete blackout, a total blackout of the national power system would be a catastrophic event, said Van Heerden.

"It is an extremely low-probability, very high-impact event, likely to occur once every 50 years or 100 years, coming about due to an unforeseen sequence of occurrences that result in the cascading collapse of the integrated transmission or generation system," Ruffini wrote.

"In the event of a complete blackout, a cold start of the national power system would be required and it could take up to two weeks before electricity supply is restored in certain areas," he wrote.

SIMILAR TO CIVIL WAR BREAKING OUT

Van Heerden told the seminar that it would be a "disaster akin to civil war breaking out in the country. Darkness, no or minimal telecommunications, water reticulation schemes running dry within days, social unrest, looting ..."

"In order to sustain South Africa's grid at its 50 Hz frequency level and avoid the risks of a total blackout, taking into account the ongoing tight state of the national electricity system, frequent load shedding occurs, even with the use of emergency diesel-fired generation units, interruptible loads and the country's pumped storage facilities.

"However, in spite of the lack of spinning reserve, something mitigated in part due to the interruptible supply agreement Eskom has with BHP Billiton's aluminium smelters, the risks of a total blackout today could be lower than they were a decade ago."

WHAT COULD CAUSE A BLACKOUT?

"It would require the system frequency to drop to about 47 Hz for the various turbines in the grid to trip and create the blackout event, and the lowest under-frequency occurrence thus far in the present era has been above 49.1 Hz.

"Typically, an event that brings the frequency to about or below 49.2 Hz occurs once a year, the last being an incident on March 6, 2014, when the majority of units at Kendal power station tripped out. Frequency stability was restored within 45 seconds. South Africa experiences demand in summer of about 32 GW, going up to 36 GW or 37 GW during winter peaks. The system can withstand load on the grid being down to 7 000 to 10 000 MW before the network becomes unstable and islanding starts in an attempt to avoid a total black start.

"The SAIEE is confident that the monitoring and operational management of the power constraint to the demand in the national grid is in good hands and that the residual skills capacity responsible for this critical activity is doing an excellent job in preventing a national grid failure," wrote Ruffini. — Fin24.

ery failures. We know we have not been invited to the social-media party to play mannequins so we contribute, at times too much. Many times our good intentions run amok and social gaffes have become our thing. Language for my generation is artisanal. We speak in short codes and emoticons, the rules of this kind of interaction were not explained yet everyone is clued up. We have eased into the world of emojis, our comfort zone of smileys and info-desk lady.

We and our selves, our IMs and status updates, we too think about the future of our world and our role in it. It's hard to think of my generation as the one that broke down the boundaries of intimacy, when I feel that we are learning to find ourselves in the world where intimacy has many faces. We mitigate our vulnerability through external image curation. We live, we love, we fail and succeed online.

My generation doesn't make phone calls because we think they are the harbinger of doom. In a world overrun with so much mishegoss, we retreat to the Internet for solace and we seek shelter in our devices because there, people like us wait. My generation is not held back by the screens we live through. Life is generally less traumatic when all your "friends" go through it with you. We are not online because we don't know how to live outside it (perhaps we don't), we are online because it feels oddly safe.

We may overshare but as we mature and our social-media usage matures, we learn to curate our sharing and the generation of "tnx" becomes the "thank-you" generation. — Memeburn.