

## Habbo Voices: A Moderator's Memoir

When I went into my first room in June, 2004, it was empty save for a couch. The walls and floor were painted and Nick was there. I didn't even know how to sit down. It was the first second of my life as an avatar.

Becs gave me a three-month training period to see whether or not I could adapt from the RFM and Computer Executive Suite worlds into teen-think — a sense of time measured in milliseconds.

Habbo was a parallel universe, a virtual world that gestated in your mind.

However, instead of Cartman's nice twin befuddling Kyle, members had many identities. Gender was irrelevant. Changes took place every 5 seconds.

To avoid boredom, someone might come in a room as a male and female at the same time. Others needed to tell everyone how many accounts they had. They wanted to make themselves look "big" by boasting that all their furni was on a secret account, when they really had nothing.

More crafty personalities entered familiar rooms to hang out with people they knew on a secret identity. They might bring up their known Habbo in conversation with a "girlfriend" to see what she really thought of them or if she was cheating.

Social interaction ran at warp speed. You could swim, play darts, run casinos, DJ parties, or join fan sites. But in its essence, Habbo was a game of morality. Improvised human intrigue gave the player moral forks in the road on a minute-to-minute basis. Which road do you take?

Would you choose to be dishonest, self-interested, put on a false character, fool people, express racism, be an online version of your real-life problems, become authoritarian, stalk, or pretend you have another life?

Or, would you choose to be honest, have the same identity online that you had in real life -- and be fair even if it would cost you materially in the game's currency.

There were Habbos who ran honest casinos, formed clubs where everyone came to the meetings and met goals, and put on brilliant chat theatre productions of Shakespeare plays. They realized what they had to do to protect their own safety and took responsibility. They treated others with respect, protected people from bullies, did not engage in racism, and took care of their virtual pets.

I still remember how nervous I was before my first moderation shift. The other moderators were on a private AIM account so we could communicate and ask questions. We had the power to ban, and our bans had to follow the safety manual.

From answering my first call for help, I learned the ruling force behind teenage boys was not physical lust, but the belief that all their emotions had Godlike significance.

The log attached to that call said, “You stole my furni. God will punish you for this.” When I investigated, I found out the kid was talking about a plastic table-and-chair set.

I saw boys bully girls. The girls would stay in the room, tell the boys to stop, take the bullying, and not report it. Then two days later, the girl would call a mod into her private room, tell them the story, and ask that the boys be punished.

Unless girls reported the bullying at the moment it was happening, technology couldn’t help them, which means we couldn’t help them.

Sometimes, I sat there for 20 minutes comforting someone and giving instructions on how to use Habbo’s tools to stop bullying. Our tools were effective. The girls just didn’t use them. They were too frightened at the moment of attack.

But with a rate of perhaps 800 calls for help an hour on a busy weekend afternoon, as Habbo grew, even with a team of 5 phenomenal moderators, I didn’t have those 20 minutes.

And if I may take a moment to say – the moderation team on Habbo UK was a communication machine, who oversaw online safety in-game with world-class acumen. I was honored to call them my colleagues.

The community staff created many programs to address bullying on a global level. BullyBusters had articles translated into all languages, [bullying-prevention classes](#) , [games](#), which taught Habbos to report right away and make a [bully diary](#). Mods could then find multiple offending logs and punish the abuser accordingly.

One major safety campaign was the Ignore Button. The tech department programmed a new tool. If someone was bullying you, you could just [press that button](#), and the bully’s chat would disappear from your screen.

The head of the US Hotel believed in this so ardently, he used his band to write a [song about it](#). What’s so sweet is that Brojo was one of the founding members of The Well.

What made my soul come alive was that the kids were starting to do radio. Two Habbos started the fan site HabboHut Radio . Becs took leadership, and Dubya and Dileas of Habbo Canada got the hotel to fund it. It became one of the most important outlets for teen and staff creativity I have ever experienced.

At the end of every BarbaraAnne show, I read “[The Road Not Taken](#),” by Robert Frost. I felt real life and every possible online environment in existence gave us the same moral choices, and I... I took the road less traveled by.

## The Jellomaster's Guide to the Galaxy

A moderator took calls on Habbo Canada alone. It was one of the smaller hotels. There weren't that many calls for help because the Canadian kids had character. I had time to go into members' club rooms and get to know them.

Recently, one of them, who is 20 now, wrote to me on Facebook asking for help on his history application for university. He said, "I don't know if you remember but in 2004, you were the first staff member to help me when I was like 12." I didn't remember. A million children later, I didn't remember. But he remembered me.

So it was one of those first nights on Canada when a Habbo in a red cowboy hat told me he had sung a solo in his Christmas concert.

"What?"

I had just gotten involved with HabboHut Radio. Becs just joined, and so I followed my dear genius-friend with all my passion. I could teach the ideas of RFM to the teen world. I couldn't believe it -- the opportunity to make a new generation feel the innovations I gave my life to create.

It was in a little room that RTTennis told me about his solo. Two seconds later, an email went out to Becs. "You gotta get this kid for HabboHut Radio. He sung a solo in his Christmas concert. May I give him your contact info for the radio?" "Yes," Becs answered immediately. And so, as I was teaching everyone to combine the chat rooms, games, and social groups on Habbo with the radio to become RFM-like digital jockeys, RTTennis became the greatest DJ HabboHut had ever known.

He was part of my [Content Producers Program](#). He did [impressions](#), made [commercials](#). He invented [characters](#), did [different voices](#), and [told stories](#). He learned a few things from me and needed no more. His talent rocketed into space. HabboHut Radio made him Artistic Director. Awards showered upon him like rain. He told me the radio gave him more confidence in his singing. But most importantly, everything he promised to do, he did. He never acted immorally toward another human being. He spread joy, and all these years later, I know why.

As RT grew up, he got into a college in his home state and majored in music. One time, and only once, he sang, "Laaaaaaaaaaaaa" and I heard his voice. One note is all I had to hear. The kid was a solo tenor.

After age 18, we became friends on Facebook, and I met his mother. She is her church's music director and creates theatrical shows. A miraculous human being, I realized RT had the blessing of parents who loved him with a depth of soul few children realize.

That is why he never took a wrong step in the virtual world. No one had to tell him anything. He knew how to make good choices. This is the real currency in the virtual world, not money. The questions that haunt others never occurred to him. He kept himself safe and gained social status because his parents taught him to analyze the world around him correctly.

One of the funny situations he made up was a battle between good and evil, represented by [jello and pudding](#). "[Jellllllooooo](#)," became his trademark phrase and song (mixed by CommanderDEUX), and his fame spread around the Habbo galaxy. The Jellomaster reigned.

Now, he is part of Eric Whitacre's Virtual Choir. He is in "[Sleep](#)," a face in Eric's galaxy of planets, a voice in a virtual world that sings. He took the road to joy. His parents gave the virtual world the gift of the Jellomaster, and allowed their son to take the ride of his life.

Bless you, Susie. Believe it or not, this chapter is not about your son. It's about you: the transfer of spirits, the transfer of faith, moral example, love without words.

You were his Guide to the Virtual Galaxy, as the Jellomaster looked out the car window and discovered the world.

## **Peace on Earth**

Two executives on Habbo Canada, Dubya and Dileas, created The D&D Power Hour, and invented the idea of rock musicians visiting virtual worlds in vastly popular marketing events. Community and marketing actually danced on D&D. It was innovation, brilliantly done. They were beloved as the demented duo on the sweetest smelling hotel in the world.

[The BarbaraAnne Show](#) came from a completely different philosophy. Combining the people in a virtual chat room, fan-site request line, and my radio voice, I lent some of my moderator privileges to my audience. There were room alerts featuring the people's names, saying silly things.

"Someone was using power to play with us?"

"Say this!"

"Say, 'I said that!' "

I fulfilled every request. The idea was to give the kids a chance to control me. For two hours each week, I allowed members to tell me what to do, host the show, design their own group games. I had hosts lined up a year in advance. Give the power away, earn respect, it is with the reflection of power that you lead. Hello, philosophy of the Socks list.

In combining game chat and radio, reading their names on the air, saying what they wanted me to say, downloading songs from iTunes when there was a request, reflecting the real lives of my audience, I brought RFM to Habbo. The kids understood this idea as naturally as they ate pizza.

We started producing content. Kids used to group-chat on skype all the time and stream it via shoutcast on their own radio stations. They mixed different sounds, voices, music, to make their own creations

and put that on internet radio. I wrote the [Content Producers Program FAQ](#), and we had a [Content Producers Awards Show](#)

Here is some of the creativity that came out:

- [Alex G doing a commercial for DJ Wuzz](#)
- [xbadwolf's 9/11 Tribute](#)
- [Three Steps to Conquering Online Boredom with DJ Merf](#)
- [Smith0's attempt at doing DJs RTTennis, BA, and Snowy](#)
- [DJs Ice and Baile on a James Bond Mission](#)
- DJs [PumpkinPeta](#) and [Gruffy](#)
- [One of Ginny's first robots.](#) (Ginny did all the screen captures of our shows. Thanks, Ginny!)
- [:::Bubba:::s Hogwarts video, part 1](#) (Content Producers Award Show winner)
- [DJ Dude's Advertisement](#)
- [Ginny's HabboHut Christmas Video](#)

My experiment: [Back at the Office](#), script written by Murdoch, cast: multi-voiced RTTennis, Murdoch, Niiri, Becs, BarbaraAnne. We all met on skype and recorded it. Then Murd mixed it. Woooo Hoooo!!!

The Iraq War had just started. 9/11 was raw. I knew kids who had lost parents. CommanderDeux wanted to mix a song. "What should we do?" he asked. "What about Peace on Earth?" I suggested.

The call went out on the HabboHut homepage. Send in your sound clips! We're going to do a community music mix of Peace on Earth to express solidarity with the 9/11 victims and protest the Iraq War! The clips came in from all over the world, and CommanderDeux put them to music.

When I heard it for the first time, I cried. I knew it was one of the greatest achievements in community building I had ever been a part of.

Jaron Lanier once said, "The purpose of community was to stop war." Prophetic indeed, given the current relationship between wireless networks and the overthrow of dictators.

But in our small world, children's spirits from all over the world channeled the random, hilarious, improvised thoughts they expressed on The BarbaraAnne Show into a call for peace.

Without being aware of it, our emotional attachment to each other took us on the community journey into the unknown. We improvised and recognized significant moments that whooshed by in a flurry of creativity. Nonchalantly deciding to sieze one of them, the show produced its self-defining art, our theme song.

### [Peace on Earth](#)

To this day, I am still awestruck at the years of organic community development that produced it.

CommanderDeux [thanked me](#) for inspiring him, but it was really the other way around.

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When the [NSFNet](#) was decommissioned in 1995, it was feared that no restrictions on commercialization would destroy the ideals of the Internet's pioneers, namely unlimited access to information, freedom of expression, and a network that would make all users equal,

But the story didn't turn out that way.

The dot.com era chose its winners. Many of them were communities: E-bay, YouTube, social media companies, MMOG's... I want to give a special nod to Napster, which I believe led Steve Jobs to create iTunes.

Capitalism provided our industry's innovative geniuses with the business plan. Stable funding of networks required huge numbers: members, profits, unique visitors, and downloads, to name but a few.

Metrics became the equivalent of voting in a democracy. Powerful people in the real world paid close attention to their demographic analyses, and the generation who grew up with the Internet found its voice.

With these elements in place, a man spent 9 years in Uganda tracking an obscure war criminal, who forced kidnapped children to become soldiers. Then he made a half-hour video about it and posted it on YouTube. He asked celebrities with huge followings on social networks to share it. Children saw a father explaining to his own son how this man forced these children to kill their parents.

"What do you think?" he asked his son. "Sad," his son said.

With 13- to 17-year-olds leading the way, Horton heard the Who.

In 5 days, Kony 2012 received over 75 million views. The plight of African child soldiers shot to the forefront of world news. People wanted to know what governments were doing about this...

...because children voted on the internet. And what did they say?

*Peace on Earth.*

Signed, BarbaraAnne. Harry says, "Hello," to everyone, BTW. ☺



The energy I have  
to spend feeling  
disdain for you  
is excessively  
annoying.

Squirril???

I love you.

Thank you for giving me my soul, Daddy. I love you.

