

From Vampirologist to Vamped: Why the Change?

“Having the freedom to really feel like there was no topic that I couldn’t write about, that was liberating in a lot of ways”

— Laura Jane Grace, lead singer of Against Me!

Andrea Beattie, “Free Spirit,” *mX* (Melbourne), January 23, 2014, p. 15.

In “Looking Back at 2013: A Personal Retrospective,” I briefly discussed the creation and launch of my website, vampirologist.com, on October 26, 2013. Between then and the site’s relaunch on January 20, 2014, some major changes took place—I ditched the site’s title and URL in favour of something completely different: Vamped. Why?

The site, created by *IndieJudge*’s editor-in-chief, Sufi Mohamed, was intended as a spin-off of my Facebook group, “The Vampirologist.” That, in turn, was a spin-off from my blog of the same name. The Facebook group’s original purpose was to foster discussion on vampires and to promote my blog entries. Much to my amazement, it took on a life of its own.

Its membership levels, at first a trickle, turned into a flood when members of the Vampire Community started flocking to it. They’d join, their friends would follow. My group’s emphasis on respecting fellow group members, allowing debates—so long as they didn’t get out of hand—and laidback approach, not to mention the diversity of vampire topics, ensured its success. As of this writing (January 31, 2014), it has 924 members.

To be honest, it still mystifies me. Usually, large groups equal “flame wars,” mass bannings and the like. Not mine. I’d love to claim credit for the group’s relative peace, but I defer credit to its members for getting along so well with each other. They never cease to amaze me.

Perhaps it’s the middle path my group takes, whatever it was, Mohamed saw “something” in it and approached me about the idea of establishing a website based on it. I was intrigued—I’d always wanted to establish my own site, but never got ‘round to properly starting one. He gave me the kick in the pants I needed. I was also encouraged by his enthusiasm and passion for the project, so I went along with it. But once it was established, my interest began to wane. Why? Because I didn’t feel it was living up to its title.

“Vampirologist” implies academia. It implies a study of the genre. That wasn’t taking place on my website. I already had a blog of that name, why would I resort to writing the same thing on another medium? Mohamed’s pitch—replicating the the Facebook group’s “feel” to a website—wasn’t gelling for me, because the content I was receiving and writing was akin to human interest stories and promotional material. General interest, not academic, per se. It didn’t *feel* right.

That's why I began going in a different direction. During that time of disenchantment, I also became acquainted with Erin Chapman, a member of my Facebook group. Her marketing background, social media networking and passion for vampires began to lift my spirits. We discussed various ideas for the site. She helped empower me into fully realising the site's true direction: the website would preserve the *spirit* of the Facebook group, yet have an identity of its own. To reflect that change, Mohamed challenged me to come up with a "brief" and new name.

Chapman and I collaborated for weeks on it, before we eventually settled on one of Mohamed's suggestions: *Vamped*. It took a while to warm up to, but I had to admit, it had "pop." All that was left to cement the deal was to buy the domain name to establish our "brand." On January 19, 2014, I took the plunge and secured vamped.org (vamped.com was too expensive!).

You've no idea how much I fretted over the change into the lead-up. It was a scared, nervous, and exhilarated: I was moving on from using free blog hosts like Blogger and WordPress into a world I'd only tasted by had no proper grasp on. Domain names. Hosts. Yearly payments. WordPress plug-ins! I felt totally out of my element. Fortunately, I had Mohamed and Chapman by my side—they calmed me and guided me through the process.

With the change and new look, the preparation, the help and support, I felt re-invigorated. Re-inspired. A whole new outlook on the thing and what I was trying to do: create a site with mass-appeal, share my interest in vampires, encourage participation—to get to the heart of vampire interest. See its human side. But the heart is in the people and their stories are the most important ones to hear.

That's one reason I enjoy the social *interaction* side to my online presences. Everyone has a story. Everyone is drawn to the vampire for their own reason. Those stories deserve to be shared. Despite a minor outcry over the site's name change after establishing myself as a vampirologist for several years, I wasn't "selling out," I simply decided to pursue a different avenue, a different manifestation of my interest. *Vampirologist* appeals to my mind—*Vamped* reflects my heart.

I certainly haven't given up on my vampirological pursuits. If anything, I'll be pursuing them with more fervour. I've got major plans for that—you'll just have to wait and see what they are!

There was one contribution to my website, however, that overlapped the two aspects. I began speaking to a fellow Melburnian on Facebook, Paula-Maree Cavennett—who happens to be a "Vampyre." We discussed why she identified as one—and from there, a fascinating story emerged. It was one that *had* to be shared. She had some reservations, being aware of how divisive the Vampire Community could be, nonetheless, she agreed to share her story on my website (still called "Vampirologist" at that time).

I expected a stock-standard autobiographical narrative—instead, I got a footnote-riddled essay (it'll make more sense when you learn about her academic background). It was brilliant! I was incredibly

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impressed and shared the subsequent website post on Facebook group, “Vampire Community News.” The response was overwhelmingly positive and virtually unanimous: many related to her experiences and views on the community. I’m proud to see her story shared in this volume, and I’m sure you’ll enjoy it as much as everyone else has.

I’d also love to hear your stories and vampire interest, too. Contact me through vamped.org. I won’t bite.