

Ex-famous

by Chris Rose



Every time Joe Mangold went into his local shop or local café or walked down his street, he looked at other people carefully. He wanted to see if people were looking at him. He wanted to see if anyone recognised him.

Nowadays, Joe was always sad that the woman in the shop never looked at him, and the waiter in the café only nodded hello to him. It was the same everywhere Joe went. Some people said hello to him, but in a way that was entirely normal. Sometimes, when Joe went into a supermarket or was walking along the main street of the city where he lived, people did look at him twice, or they looked at him as if they recognised him. But then they always looked away. Nobody stopped him on the street anymore, nobody offered to buy him a drink, and nobody now ever asked for his autograph, and nobody ever stopped and asked if they could take a photograph with him.

Joe was in a strange situation. Two years ago, everybody stopped Joe on the street. Two years ago, it had been impossible for him to go more than a few steps before somebody stopped him and asked if it was *really* him, and then they wanted an autograph or a photo. When he went into his shop, the woman was always very friendly. When he went into a supermarket, he saw people stopping to point at him. "Is it really him?" they asked, and Joe always stopped and said, "Yes, it's really me."

Not anymore. Now, Joe Mangold was ex-famous, a former celebrity, somebody who used to be well-known, but no longer was.

A lot had changed in two years. Two years ago his picture was in lots of newspapers and magazines. He wrote a book telling his life story. He appeared on chat shows and quiz shows and radio phone-ins. Even though Joe was not particularly thin or healthy, he made a DVD showing people how to follow his diet and fitness programme. It didn't matter – Joe was famous, so anything with his name on it was successful. Two years ago, Joe Mangold wasn't just Joe Mangold, the regular, normal person he was today.

Two years ago, Joe Mangold was "Joe from *HouseMates*".

"*HouseMates*" was one of the most successful reality TV shows of all time. Millions and millions of people watched "*HouseMates*". Joe had been in the famous house, with all the other people. Millions and millions of people watched Joe every morning when he woke up, every day when he ate and chatted with the other people in the house, and even every night when he was asleep. It was true that Joe was the first person to leave the house on *HouseMates*. He was voted out when lots of people telephoned in to say that he should leave the house. It didn't matter; Joe wasn't disappointed. To tell the truth, he didn't like being in the *HouseMates* house much anyway. He didn't like being watched all the time. He didn't like the other people who were in the house very much. But because he was the first person out of the *HouseMates* house, he had more time to enjoy being famous. He made appearances at night clubs, he opened new supermarkets and other celebrities invited him to their parties.

To tell the truth, Joe didn't like all this much either. He liked being famous, but he didn't like being stopped every five minutes, he didn't like not being able to walk down the street without people pointing at him and shouting at him. He liked to be called "Joe Mangold" and not "Joe

from *HouseMates*”, which seemed to be his new name.

However, being famous was much better than being ex-famous. Now he was no-one. He thought about doing something else with his life, but the truth was Joe had never been very good at anything. He had had a few jobs, but was never successful at anything. “*HouseMates*” had been the only success in his life.

He wondered what was worse: being famous or not being famous. Both, he thought, were better than being ex-famous. Now he was nobody.

Being ex-famous was a strange life. Nobody wanted Joe anymore to visit their nightclubs or open their supermarkets. Sometimes he saw his DVD in the bargain bins and his book in second-hand shops. In the café that morning he sat down as usual with a cup of coffee. Nobody said hello to him. Then he noticed that someone was looking at him. It had been such a long time since anyone had looked at him in that way. The woman came up to him.

“Excuse me...I hope you don’t mind me asking...”

“Not at all...”

“Did you used to be Joe from *HouseMates*?”

“Erm...yes...actually, I still am Joe...but now I’m usually just called Joe Mangold...”

“Wow! What a surprise! Joe from *HouseMates*! Incredible!” The woman smiled and looked around her as if she couldn’t believe that she was

the only person to recognise Joe from *HouseMates*. “What are you doing now?”

“Well, erm, nothing much really...”

“What a shame!” she said. “I thought you were so talented...”

“Thanks” Joe felt embarrassed. He thought this woman might be mad.

“Listen,” she continued. “This really is a coincidence meeting you here.”

“Why?” asked Joe.

“I work for a TV production company, and we’ve just had a brilliant idea.”

“Oh yeah. What’s that?”

“We’re going to do a reality TV show...”

“There’s nothing amazing about that...” said Joe.

“No, but this one will be different.”

“Why?”

“This reality show uses people who have all been on reality shows in the past...and puts them all together in a big house!!!”

“Oh...” said Joe. “What an interesting idea. I’m not sure that really I’m...”

“You’ll be great in it!” said the woman. “It’s called *Ex-Famous!*”

“Thanks,” said Joe. “But, to tell the truth, I’d prefer just not to be famous at all, thanks...”