

"The outside doesn't exist to me," says Julian Assange (in his designated room at the Embassy of Ecuador in Knightsbridge, London, on July 17).

"I miss all the outside world, obviously"

Julian Assange

INSIDE MY WORLD

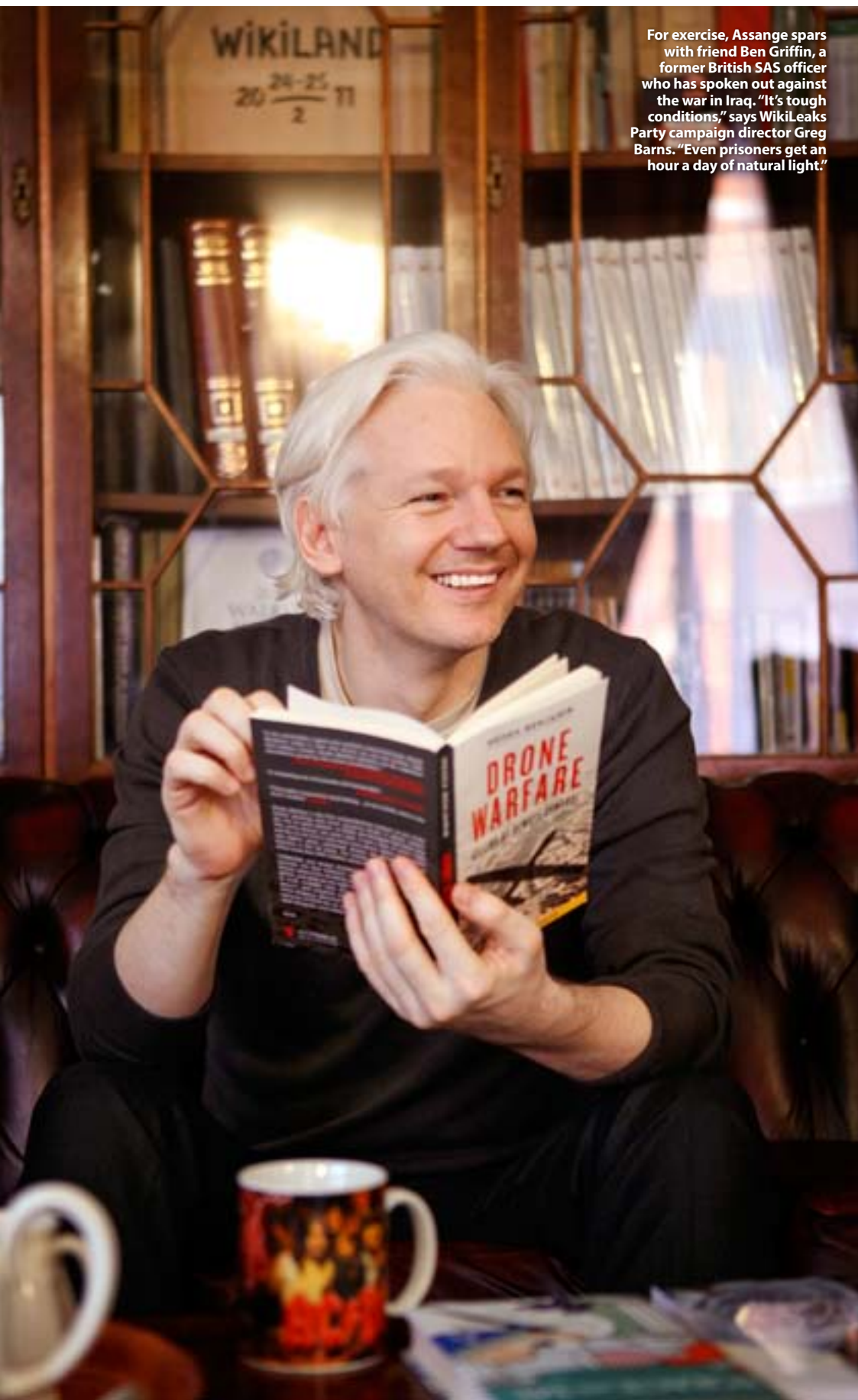
After 400 days living in asylum, the WikiLeaks chief welcomes WHO into his room at the Ecuadorian Embassy in London, where he talks about his daily routine, his political ambitions and his fears of being forced outside

Sitting on a black swivel office chair in the corner of his room at the Embassy of Ecuador in London, Julian Assange gazes through the sheer white curtains to the bustling world outside his window. At a round table behind him, two assistants work on four laptops nestled amid a tangle of cables, which wind down and snake across the wooden floorboards to phone sockets. A maroon leather couch sits by the wall near a fireplace, its mantelpiece displaying Assange's two goldfish in a small aquarium. Also on show, in a glass-fronted cabinet, a collection of gifts from friends and fans: Barossa wine, Tasmanian honey, whisky, Vegemite, books and DVDs. The only thing notably absent, in a space he calls home, is a bed. "I couldn't sleep because of the Harrods loading bay and the cops always doing shift changes outside," says Assange, in a tired voice. "And the quietest room is the women's bathroom, the only room that's easy to sleep in. So I thought I'd try and somehow get

hold of it and renovate it. And you can imagine how hard it is in an embassy, which has a female ambassador, to try to take over the best women's bathroom. Eventually, somewhat reluctantly, the staff relented. They ripped out the toilet. They've been very generous."

Under these conditions, Assange has forged a new life. Since June 19 last year, the co-founder and editor-in-chief of WikiLeaks has been living in exile at the Ecuadorian Embassy, avoiding an extradition order to Sweden, where he is wanted for questioning over two alleged sexual assaults. But Assange, who vehemently denies the accusations, says, "I didn't come here because of Sweden," telling WHO he fears only the threat of eventual extradition to the US, where he faces potential espionage charges over his whistle-blowing website's leaking of classified material. And so relying on family, friends, colleagues and embassy staff for his daily and work needs, and using a sunlamp to keep his Vitamin D levels up, Assange has carved out a working life in his embassy niche, a short stroll from





For exercise, Assange spars with friend Ben Griffin, a former British SAS officer who has spoken out against the war in Iraq. "It's tough conditions," says WikiLeaks Party campaign director Greg Barns. "Even prisoners get an hour a day of natural light."

Harrods department store. Inviting WHO into the Knightsbridge haven, Assange, 42, spoke of the difficulties, fears and sometimes excitement of living in asylum. "I'm obsessed with what I do," he says. "And I'm used to dealing with strange and difficult situations."

That much is clear. In black jeans, a casual buttoned shirt and socks without shoes on a 32°C summer's day in London, Assange takes a seat on the sofa as two assistants buzz about the internet activist, scheduling meetings and posing technical questions without discussing specific WikiLeaks issues. "We live in a world where a microphone bug was found in the ambassador's office," says Assange, who is constantly shifting rooms in the embassy, which occupies a single floor of the building: "We've had this room for about a week and we don't draw attention to which rooms. That's quite dangerous."

Exactly what he fears might happen within the legally protected space he doesn't say, but four Metropolitan Police officers are stationed on Hans Crescent outside, including one by the entry, ready to arrest Assange in accordance with an Interpol Red Notice over the charges in Sweden. When WHO asked one officer why he was there, he replied: "For Julian Assange. He's a criminal." Assange laughs. "I haven't even been charged," he says. "But a lot of the police aren't like that. They say, 'This is absurd; it's a waste of time.'"

Even so, Assange fears somehow being forced outside and suffering the fate of Bradley Manning, the US soldier who at press time was nearing the end of his trial for releasing classified material to WikiLeaks (see box opposite). When an embassy staffer brings him a sushi lunch, Assange asks that the name of the restaurant not be published. "They might track

'RAPE' CLAIMS

Two Swedish women have accused Assange of sexual offences in Stockholm in 2010. "Anna," with whom Assange had been staying in Sweden, claimed he caused the condom he was wearing during consensual sex to tear. "Sofia" invited Assange to her flat after he spoke at a seminar and says she woke to find him having sex with her without a condom (they had had sex the night before).



Assange pictured in the Interpol "wanted" file.

Both women wanted Assange to undergo HIV tests, which he reportedly did not. "I really didn't want this [matter] to be in the papers," said Anna in the documentary *We Steal Secrets*. "But he chose to make a big deal out of it."

JULIAN WEARS V NECK WOOL, KNIT BY JOHN SMEDLEY, SUIT TROUSERS BY NICK TENTIS; INSERTS, FROM MIDDLE: INTERPOL; GETTY IMAGES (2)

the place down," says Assange, who was born in Townsville, Queensland. "They might put something in there that won't kill me, but make me very sick so I'll have to go to hospital." To that end, he relies on house calls: "One of my teeth was damaged and I tried several [dentists], but they wouldn't do it on the basis that their work insurance wouldn't cover Ecuador. Eventually we found someone who was happy to deal with it."

He believes his family are potential targets, too. "American right-wingers put out a call that the way to get me was to 'take out' my eldest son," says Assange, who has fathered a number of children to different partners, whom he refuses to discuss due to safety fears (he had his eldest, Daniel Assange, now 23, when he was living with his then wife in Melbourne; it is also on the public record that he has a young daughter). "My son has had to move, change all his identities. My mother has had to move, too. There are many death threats made to the lawyers."

He finds comfort through his support base. Visitors to his embassy home have included Lady Gaga, actor John Cusack, fashion designer Vivienne Westwood, members of Pussy Riot and

"There are many death threats made"

Yoko Ono, who has visited "several times," says Assange. "I'm a big admirer." Australian friends try to quell the homesickness with gifts—"Flannel shirts, Tim Tams, Vegemite, gum leaves"—and at 4 PM each day, a small group including former refugees and soldiers hold a vigil for Assange outside the embassy. "They try and keep my spirits up," he says. "And they do."

Does he hold hope of soon rejoining the world? "To get out of here would require the US to drop its investigation or the UK to abide [by] international law and give me safe passage to Ecuador," he says. But discussions in June between Ecuador's Foreign Minister, Richard Patiño, and British Foreign Secretary William Hague made "no substantive progress," according to a British Foreign Office statement, leaving "no resolution seemingly in sight," a spokesman for Australian Foreign Minister Bob Carr tells WHO. And so Assange remains in limbo—and missing his homeland. "I miss all the outside world, obviously, but seeing the horizon [in Australia] is certainly something you don't get in London," he says. "And the quality of light, the smell of the gum vapour in the air and, of course, family."



"The embassy provides, as part of its asylum obligations, a roof over my head and lunch five days a week. Otherwise, my people buy the food," says Assange, who has two goldfish (seen above the fireplace here) named after WikiLeaks assistants.

THE HIGH PRICE OF WHISTLEBLOWING



EDWARD SNOWDEN
The former NSA employee released documents showing that the US routinely gathers phone records of Americans and monitors internet traffic. He has been charged with espionage and is seeking asylum in Russia.



BRADLEY MANNING
The US Army private, 25, has been in custody since May 2010 on suspicion of having given classified material to WikiLeaks. He has pleaded guilty to 10 of 22 charges and faces at least 20 years' jail.



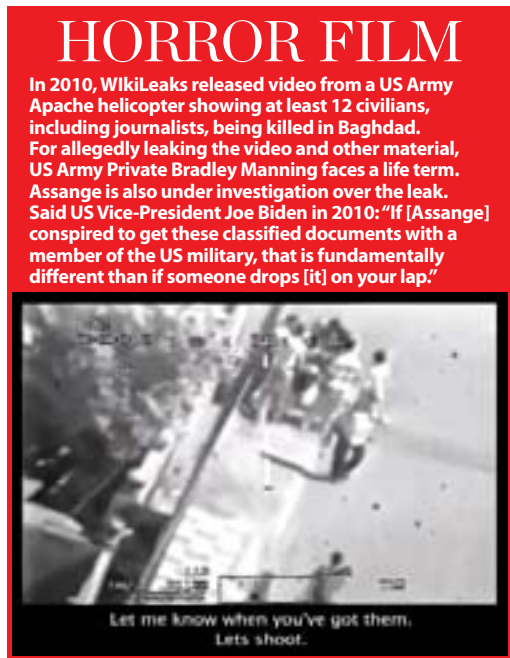
The UK surveillance bill for Assange while living in the embassy “has already reached \$10 million for the police component alone,” says Assange (with an AC/DC mug on July 17).



“He works tirelessly,” says WikiLeaks Party UK coordinator Sarah Saunders (with Assange and an unnamed assistant on July 17).



From 4–6 PM every day, a small group of protesters assemble peacefully outside the embassy. “It’s a constant vigil,” says Assange.



HORROR FILM

In 2010, WikiLeaks released video from a US Army Apache helicopter showing at least 12 civilians, including journalists, being killed in Baghdad. For allegedly leaking the video and other material, US Army Private Bradley Manning faces a life term. Assange is also under investigation over the leak. Said US Vice-President Joe Biden in 2010: “If [Assange] conspired to get these classified documents with a member of the US military, that is fundamentally different than if someone drops [it] on your lap.”

In the meantime, the work continues. “All Julian really needs in life is a laptop and connection to the internet,” his Australian lawyer, Jennifer Robinson, told WHO last year. On this particular afternoon, Assange, who relaxes occasionally by watching “some TV” or a DVD on a monitor that is wheeled into his room (he recently saw *The Godfather*, which he liked), was visibly exhausted, having worked until 1.30 AM the night before. While he’s coy about what kept him up, among the news of that July 17 morning was that Edward Snowden, the former US National Security Agency contractor who leaked documents exposing the US government’s mass surveillance program, had applied for temporary asylum in Russia, the country to which WikiLeaks helped the 30-year-old flee from Hong Kong on June 23. Says Assange, proudly: “We were able to assist in extracting the world’s most wanted man.”

More of his favourite achievements include the release of “the Kissinger Files” (1.6 million US diplomatic cables), the Collateral Murder video (see box, opposite top), and “the exposure of 15,000 new deaths in the Iraq war,” says Assange. Such leaks made him some powerful foes. “This guy has put in jeopardy the lives and occupations of people,” said US Vice-President Joe Biden in 2010. Assange dismisses such claims. “Justice, happiness and self-determination are important,” he says. “Transparency is the most effective tool we know to get those.”

It’s a philosophy borne of a tumultuous childhood. The son of Christine Hawkins and John Shipton, who met at an anti-Vietnam War rally in Sydney and split up not long after their son was born, Assange spent much of his childhood on the road with his mother as she fled a former partner who was with the notori-

ous Anne Hamilton Byrne cult (before meeting the unnamed man, Christine was married to Brett Assange and the couple ran a travelling theatre together). On his second day at Townsville High—one of 37 schools Assange attended in a transient childhood that he says gave him “perspective”—a student stole something from the school’s storeroom and a group of students “pinned” the misdeed on him. “The principal caned me for having the temerity to have stolen something on my second day,” he recalls. “I was furious, just *furious*. It was the first serious event when I saw administrative injustice personally.”

It planted a seed of rebellion. A self-taught computer programmer since he got his hands on his first PC—a Commodore 64—Assange set about discovering the inner workings of corporations and governments by hacking into their systems. By penetrating the Pentagon at the time of the 1990–91 Gulf War, Assange says he saw “the hypocrisies and lies involved.” Eventually, his hacking, which included breaking into Canadian telecommunications company Nortel, led to his arrest by the AFP in 1991 (he pleaded guilty and got off with a fine).

Having already registered the website leaks.org, he met Andrew Wilkie in 2005, the whistleblower turned federal senator who in 2003 resigned from his analyst post with an Australian intelligence agency in protest over the Howard Government’s support for the war against Iraq. “I spoke with Andrew and a former Australian Secrecy Intelligence Service agent,” says Assange. “And they were speaking about how dangerous it was for whistleblowers. And I said, ‘Someone should design a system to fix this problem.’”

“Some might say we’re adrenaline junkies”

That system, WikiLeaks, is now an international force and Assange is looking to extend his influence as he makes a bid for a Senate seat in this year’s federal election. WikiLeaks “has exposed billions of dollars worth of corruptions,” says Assange. “So it would be good fun to take that skill-set to Canberra.” According to his father, John Shipton, 68, who administers the WikiLeaks Party, his son “may do all right,” he told WHO in April. “Julian is warm and charming and hospitable.” But if he wins, he would have to take his seat by July 2014. Says Assange: “Hopefully, the situation has been resolved by July.”

If not, he sees value in staying put. “I’m a symbol for the issue of the rights of journalists and publishers,” he says. “By being in the embassy we make the conflict clear.” It’s a fight he relishes. He recalls the dramatic moment on Aug. 16 last year, two months into his embassy stay, when British authorities descended on the building, appearing to be threatening to take hold of Assange. “It was a very serious breach of international law,” says Assange, who was officially granted asylum that same day. “But psychologically it was very exciting. Some might say we’re adrenaline junkies. We like these moments of extreme challenge.”

■ By Michael Crooks, with additional reporting by Louise Talbot

HACKING INTO HOLLYWOOD



‘UNDERGROUND’
“It’s good,” says Assange of the telemovie of his time as a young hacker, which aired on Network Ten in 2012. “I liked it.” The drama, which was based on the book of the same name co-written by Suelette Dreyfus and Assange, deals with Assange’s early hacking life and his arrest by the AFP. (Assange pleaded guilty in 1995 to 25 charges of hacking.)



‘WE STEAL SECRETS’
Directed by Oscar nominee Alex Gibney, the documentary on WikiLeaks claims Assange said the “going rate” for an interview with him was \$1 million (he was not interviewed for the film). Assange rejects the claim, saying he told Gibney only that “WikiLeaks previously received an offer of £800,000,” for a British documentary project, which he rejected.



‘THE FIFTH ESTATE’
Assange tells WHO he is already aware of the content of the thriller (to be released later this year in Australia), which is partly based on the memoirs of former WikiLeaks staffer Daniel Domscheit-Berg. Assange calls the film a “lie built upon a lie ... It’s a serious propaganda attack on WikiLeaks and the integrity of its staff.”

JULIAN AT DESK WEARS SLIM WHITE SHIRT BY LIMITED EDITION, PALE BLUE TIE BY NICK TENTI; INSET: WIKILEAKS; FILMS: NETWORK TEN