



Scene from the film *Giraffes IV*: This time they're not just looking for acacia leaves.

Reading through ANZAPA can be a harrowing experience. The worst bit, for me, is reading through my own contribution. Like a big, black ink blot, every mistake stands out so prominently. The typing is crooked, the reproduction is faint. Bad, bad, bad.

What has happened to the sentences, however, is inevitably far worse. They're like wild animals who have broken out of their cages. I discover them running in every direction, lashing out madly at bystanders, rampaging all over the page. I thought I had them safely under control at the time I was putting them into print, but now as I read it seems their meanings have twisted and turned on me, and they're saying things I never thought I was going to say.

Maybe this was the inspiration for the Philip K. Dick story about the books which kept changing their contents all by themselves, whenever they disagreed with what was written in them. I'd use that as my excuse, if I thought that anyone would believe me. "Look," I'd say. "Don't hold me responsible for what that ANZAPA contribution said; I only typed the thing up in the first place."

Disclaiming responsibility for what one writes in a private letter is a somewhat trickier matter; it's something I won't attempt here, when quoting from a letter I wrote recently to Avedon Carol, in response to an article which recently appeared in her fanzine Pulp. Your response to my response would be welcome....

The below was written by
Terry Lana. It appeared in
The Age, 8.2.42

Fear not: our city is safer than ever

HERE is some boring news about the crime wave. It seems to be either a figment of someone's imagination or else it is passing us by. — Out our way, in what the police call "G" District — Nunawading and Waverley to you — burglaries have dropped by more than 18 per cent, car thefts by 9 per cent and thefts from cars by 22 per cent.

In Waverley the drop in burglaries in the first six months of the 1991-92 financial year was 45 per cent.

Naturally the police congratulate themselves on the decline in crime and take the credit for it. The police spokesman puts it down to "accurate intelligence by police, good co-operation between the public and the police and the constant increase in the apprehension of persistent offenders".

... you'll have to excuse me if I don't entirely accurately recall what it was that you had to say [on the issue] but I thought you might find it interesting to read in this clipping about how, yes, it is safer for a woman to walk in the streets (of Melbourne, at least).

While for many years the conventional wisdom has had it that the streets of our cities are increasingly dangerous to be out and about in, especially for women, here are statistics which tend to indicate otherwise. It's interesting, perhaps, to consider why might the public perception be at variance with the observed reality.

Perhaps, you could argue, fewer women are out on the streets at night (fearful of attack) and so therefore it only seems safer statistically, but there are at least two other (and, I think, more likely) alternatives to consider.

The first one which springs to mind is the effect of television and, to a lesser extent, the newspapers. It's to these sources that people turn, for the most part, for information about the world around them. Each day, news both local and from around the world is collected and presented to people.

"This is what is going on; this is what things are currently like," we are told, but — especially in the case of television — what is presented is the spectacular, the sensational. The report that shows a slight but steady drop in the number of homicides or the amount of street violence will be passed over, always, in favour of the sensationalist reportage of a mass murder or a fire-bombing terrorist assault.

Some more boring information about the crime wave has come from the Law Reform Commission recently. In November the commission's report on Homicide was tabled in Parliament, but because it tells us that we are quite safe out on the streets at night it didn't get a lot of attention.

In fact the statistics show that about 67 people are murdered each year — compared with 421 suicides and 678 traffic accident victims.

Victimians are murdered at the rate of 1.5 victims per 100,000 of population every year. Compare that with America, where the rate is 9.4. Or Canada, where it is 2.5 or even New Zealand at 1.6 and you see Victoria is a safe place.

It was much more dangerous to live in Melbourne in the 1870s than it is today — and, indeed, it was more dangerous in the 1970s than it is now. Only the exceptional incidents of Hoddle Street and Queen Street put the figures for the '80s above those for the '70s.

Bronwyn Naylor did a study of homicide prosecutions between 1981 and 1987 — the period in which lawlessness is supposed to have reached alarming proportions.

Men, not surprisingly, are more likely to murder than women. And also more likely to be murdered. But you may be surprised to know that where the victim was nine years or less, the offender was most frequently female and was the child's mother. So much for the myth that men are more dangerous than women around children.

For 10 to 16 year-old victims one-third of the killers were from the same age group. There is no evidence that children are prey to dirty old men.

Sixty-eight per cent of female accused killed members of their own families. Only 21 per cent of male accused were prosecuted for killing family members.

About 40 per cent of killings are "domestic". (It could be more, but murder/suicides are almost always domestic and they do not lead to prosecution.)

If you are wealthier than average your chances of being a murderer or a victim are virtually nil. If you are unemployed or on social welfare benefits you are at risk.

If you were born in Yugoslavia you are more at risk of being a murderer or a victim than if you are Australian born.

Twenty-five per cent of those accused of murder were suffering from either a mental disorder or drug addiction and 70 per cent of victims knew their killer.

There is a belief that when women kill their husbands they only do so after suffering intolerable violence. In fact in about half of the cases where a woman killed her husband there was no history of domestic violence mentioned in the case.

So the facts are not as the unholy alliance of police, misandrists, sensationalist tabloids and opportunistic politicians would have us believe. Melbourne is a safe city — and seems to be getting a little safer by the day.

The point is that on a daily basis people are presented with stories of murder and mayhem, but most of it is not local and therefore, in a sense, not relevant. As an example, I would imagine that most of the people you or I know would know the name of Jeffrey Dahmer, the fellow in Milwaukee who killed all those people last year.

Every time that aspects of that story are publicised, we are reminded of the fact that there are (or might be) people out there who want to chop us into little bits and then have sex with parts of our bodies; but this gives us a false picture of the world we live in. Indeed, Milwaukee might be a town filled with nothing but mad, mad psychopaths, but how could that affect anyone living in Australia, or Britain, or even Philadelphia?

Those reports, those "stories", present us, uncritically, with a picture of "the whole world" gone mad, full of evil forces, threatening possibilities. A world where we have to be very conservative, very careful. You might even say that, apart from the people which Jeffrey Dahmer has killed, it is we who are now become the victims, the fear instilled in our hearts that we too may be at risk; the feeling there that it is we who are the ones under siege.

The second alternative to the possibility that the world we live in really is inherently a set of deadly traps just waiting to be sprung is the notion that our perceptions are based on some fairly pervasive, underlying cultural assumptions.

One of the central conflicts in our societies, one which is being fought on a daily basis, is the clash between the view that women should be and remain in a secondary and subservient position to men, and the view that all people should be held to be, and be treated as, equal.

When you hear people talking about it being dangerous for a woman to be out on her own after dark, can't you hear the voice of the storyteller? I can. I hear an odd admixture of people's own, genuinely felt fears and concerns, and an older, more traditional voice, raising its misgivings about the idea of a woman being out, away from the house or family, alone, independent, single.

Why, the voice asks, would a woman want to be out alone at night. There are wolves out there; there are goblins and vampires and rapists and ghosts out there.... Who'll be there to protect you.... A man, the voice might reason, could be out there on a Mission, a quest; but a woman's place... I know; you're miles ahead of me: a woman's place is in the home.

But it isn't. Of course. There isn't any such thing as a woman's place, or a man's place. To stand up and claim that there is, nowadays, would be an open invitation for anyone to be held up to ridicule. However when one is dealing with cultural stereotypes, they have to be recognised for what they are.

I'm not an anthropologist so I'm not going to go making too many claims in this regard, but I'd say it would be an even-money bet that this would be one of the basic cultural assumptions in our Anglo-Western societies, if not the main plank of them: that the unit of the family comes before all, and - a corollary to that - that a woman's place is in the home.

It is that corollary, if not the basic assumption itself, that has been the burning social issue of the last century. It has been tragically mis-labelled the Battle of the Sexes, although it certainly has been - and continues to be - a battle.

So to return from my slight digression, if a woman's place is in the home (as tradition would have it) then what the hell is she doing outside of it, walking the street at night. I'm not suggesting that anyone who talks about how dangerous it is to be out at night is trying to push that agenda. Women and men are beaten up, raped, threatened... it can happen. The fact is, however, that we are all very much a product of the society we were raised in, and our life experiences may individually temper that upbringing, but the myths and the mores and the assumptions instilled in us are there, ready to be referred to, ready to inform us, ready to explain the way the world works.

Between the mountain of ~~scary/terrifying~~ information assembled from all over the globe, showing us in graphic detail how at risk we all are, and those murkily, half-understood assumptions we've been raised on, it's perhaps no wonder that many women may feel that they are not safe. There's all the more reason, then, to look at the facts of the matter, instead of concentrating of the voiced and unvoiced fears. It was so refreshing to see you say: stuff this, I refuse to be intimidated; I refuse to walk in fear.

Wouldn't it be nice, then, if the general perception in our communities could come more into line with the observed realities, and people acted less as though they were living in a war zone and more like they were living in a society where they are, essentially, safe.

... and so, onto some mailing comments.

Dear Jeanne,

up until the last mailing of ANZAPA I had strenuously resisted the notion of commenting on anything printed there more remote in time than one mailing back. It had always seemed to me that ANZAPA was all about the giving and receiving of immediate feedback. Talking about what someone had said three mailings before struck me as being roughly on a par with the idea of writing at length to someone to respond to a casual remark they might have made in a conversation a couple of years ago. The context supporting the entire conversation would be missing, as would most of the reason for bothering to reply.

Personally, also, I find it hard enough to remember clearly what I said even one mailing back, let alone what someone else came out with three mailings (six months) ago. Sometimes, of course, I would prefer not to be able to remember what I said in the last mailing. See elsewhere in this contribution for my thoughts further on that.

Having said all this, you might well ask why I'm now going on to comment on things that you said nearly half a year ago. Partly I'm going to out of a sense of duty, and because I said I would in the last mailing. Why should you and Mike O'Brien miss out on the dubious pleasure of hearing what I have to say about your contributions, eh? So, with a vague sense of foreboding, I'll now attempt to do justice to your efforts of half a year ago....

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The first thing I noticed about your contribution was that you lived in 4157 Lyndale Avenue South. Four thousand, one hundred and fifty seven? As a child, reading American comics, I was always amazed to see such large numbers attached to street addresses. Where I grew up only the very, very long roads had numbers over the hundred mark - the highways or the main roads which led off into the country. I thought it would be unpleasant, living at such an impersonal address. It wouldn't be your street; it wouldn't be anyone's. It would be a... a conduit; a way of getting from one place to another but not a place you'd ever be wanting to stop. It would be impersonal. There'd be no sense of community.

I grew up knowing that most of our (Australian) cities were planned, some with wide boulevards and parks & gardens, some not, but for all of that planning, I'd never seen such a street as could bear numbers in the thousands (or never'd thought I had), and yet here were all these American addresses, seemingly every one of them numbering in the thousands. Did these people live in hugely long rows of houses, like some gargantuan government housing complex? It sounded pretty awful.

Since those days I've come across my share of streets in Melbourne that must be as long as any anywhere, although percentage-wise the number of them isn't that high. And - in fanzine letter columns, at least - the number of American fans with quadruple-digit letterbox addresses still remains high. So, give us the jiz, Jeanne: what is it with these thousands of houses in a row?

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More about America: you ask what inspired my 'essay about racial prejudice'.

From a very early age I wondered what life would be like for black people in America. Not from the point of view of wondering how difficult it would be on account of things like poverty or prejudice, but out of simple curiosity about a lifestyle or a culture that I figured must somehow be different.

You see, although I grew up in a country which until the sixties had an intentionally racist immigration policy (the 'White Australia Policy'), and although the story of the European colonisation of Australia was also the story of the systematic slaughter and oppression of much of the aboriginal population of the continent (nothing of which we were taught about at school), and although

the peoples of Asia were feared and hated ^{by some people in Australia} with at times a manic intensity, I didn't directly encounter racial prejudice as a child.

A few of our neighbours were Chinese, but they were just our neighbours. What was important to me was whether they were allowed to come out and play after dinner, not what colour skin they had. I did understand that not everyone felt this way, but this was a distant, theoretical concern. I also had the suspicion that, if there were more black people living in the country, it might well be shown that Australians really were racially prejudiced. Lacking the presence of a sizeable black minority, it seemed to me to be an unresolvable question. "We" just didn't have enough of anyone to show prejudice to.

I choke to suppress a bitter laugh when I contemplate that simple, good natured point of view. Look at the violence, the bias and the slander suffered by Asians in the last decade in this country, at the hands of Anglo-Saxon racists. Unimaginable, for a nine-year-old boy who had friends and neighbours of Chinese origin, and whose own father was born and raised in Asia, come here as a teenager from Shanghai only because of a war in progress.

A nine-year-old who had never seen an aborigine face to face, and whose concept of what prejudice was was based on its most commonly advertised manifestation: prejudice was something that American blacks suffered at the hands of American whites.

Even that understanding was limited to the few examples available to me as a young kid. I had heard about how, in America, some white people didn't like the idea of blacks moving into the area where they lived. (I still have trouble understanding what the actual difficulty in that situation could be.) Apart from that, there were the few examples in films of people being thought to be inferior or dangerous or comically stupid because of their being black. Films set in the days of slavery, or maybe just after. And when I saw these films, was I seeing what things had really been like, or what people (the white people making the movies) thought things had been like, or was I seeing what white people felt about black people now? Who could say?

At the same time I was taking all this in, blacks in America were complaining that television and film either ignored them completely or portrayed them unsympathetically, and nowadays of course all that has changed. At the time, however, what life was like for blacks in America was - for me - represented by a big, black question mark. Surely, I thought, it couldn't be just like it was for whites. Surely there had to be Differences.

I never wondered particularly about what it would be like to grow up in America as a white, I'd imagine, because there was plenty of information about what that was like. Television and cinema gave a clear (if distorted, sanitised, idealised) idea of how 'people' lived their lives. Black culture, though, if it existed at all, was... anybody's guess.

As I've said, this was hardly one of my abiding concerns as a child, but certainly the question mark over 'Black Culture' remained. From time to time the matter would be raised but never were any answers supplied.

As a teenager and then as a young adult I became more aware of why it might be that I had so few clues to what was going on. Blacks, I'd known, were not the ones who ran the movie studios or made the films. There was a black middle class but it was small. For the most part, blacks were working class, relatively poor. They did not control, they were controlled. They lived in ghettos; sometimes they rioted (for reasons that the Australian media did not care to examine). Some of their spokesmen were assassinated.

It followed that black culture, whatever that label might encompass, would be a folk culture. It would be something you'd probably have to encounter face to face. It wouldn't be something you'd be able to get much idea of from looking at the dominant culture of the country. The parallel to spring to mind, however inappropriately, was that of the English under the Norman French.

The chance to experience either culture, I suspect, will forever be denied me. The Norman English, because I have no time machine; the American Black, because of the alienating effect of generations-worth of racial prejudice that will mean I am always going to be viewed as an unwelcome intruder - although maybe things are not, as you say, quite as bad as that. I'll get back to you about this around a year from now, okay?

For a while I thought that sf fandom might be a way in, but that was before I found out that - as I should have been able to predict - globally, fandom is a solidly middle class, caucasian (if not almost entirely Anglo-Saxon) concern.

So there you have it: my essay was inspired by a mixture of feelings: puzzled incomprehension and anger and some sadness that there is such a thing as prejudice - of any sort - and indignant anger that, to borrow a phrase, 'the sins of the fathers' have in any way been visited upon this Anglo-Saxon son.

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Onto the matter of what ANZAPA is. Yes, I can understand that, especially for overseas members, ANZAPA might be a pretty good letter substitute. For all of us who live in Melbourne, however, I think it's a little different.

There isn't any reason why, in normal circumstances, I'd ever write a letter to Alan or LynC or James or Richard or Terry or Jan or Phil or Clive or Cath or Susan or Jane or Bruce or Lin or Kelly. I can talk with any or all of them in person, pretty much whenever I like.

This leaves people who live interstate or overseas. In the case of people I know already, it turns out that ANZAPA is not much use. I prefer to be with friends when I particularly want to see them (or when they want to see me), not just when I have a couple of hours to hand. In the same way, when I write a letter to someone I prefer to write it because I want to, not because I feel somehow obliged.

With ANZAPA there is what amounts to a bimonthly obligation, the call to respond to one and to all and to come up with original material besides - to a deadline. Some people don't appear to feel the weight of that obligation but I do, and in the end when I resign from ANZAPA it will almost certainly be to free myself from that bimonthly regimen which, I'm sure, actually prevents me from corresponding in the way that I'd like with some people I care about. In the meantime, I am kept up to date with people's lives, but in a slightly impersonal fashion. It's not really what I want, but I tell myself that it will do....

It doesn't sound too good, does it? Of no use for keeping in touch with the locals; and a definite second-best when it comes to keeping in touch with others more distant who I know. Where ANZAPA does come into its own, however, is in the case of people I don't know.

It's a great way to get to know people, or at least get to the point where you might make a start on that. There are at least a couple of people who I've encountered primarily through ANZAPA who I'm likely to keep in touch with now, and there are others (such as yourself) who I hope to get to know better. For people who live overseas, you're correct: ANZAPA is certainly the best way of keeping in touch with Australian fandom. Reading a newszine such as Thyme is also a good way of keeping yourself up to date with what is going on, but in ANZAPA you can start up a discussion about whatever it is that interests you or puzzles you about Aus fandom, and I would think ^{you would} get a better picture of what is going on, what is felt to be the case... that sort of thing. And certainly ANZAPA is a better way of getting in touch, in the first place, with Australian fandom. New Zealand fandom, well that's another kettle of fish.

Moreover, it's a kettle of fish I will have to leave undisturbed, for now. The deadline for ANZAPA's next mailing - this mailing - is, as I type this, today. Ah, I had plans for commenting on everyone's little zines... at least I can say hello Jane and Jan, it's great to have you on board. And David, you're doing a great (and elegant-looking) job. So much for intelligent comment on last mailing's contributions.

What happened was that, even before I received the last mailing, I started on this contribution; everything before the paragraph on this page that starts with the word 'moreover' was scripted, re-written, etc. etc. at that time. Then, Lhyfe happened. It seemed to me that although I theoretically had all this spare time, I was in a way waiting for there to be time for me to do the fanzine I wanted to.

The spare time was effortlessly being filled with social luncheons, film theatre and opera outings, trips interstate... all sorts of enjoyable experiences. I'm not complaining, you understand; it was simply a matter of deciding that I was going to make the time to do Lhyfe. And, it's coming together. I've set myself the completely unreasonable deadline of two weeks from start to finish to assemble, write, type, collate, print and have in finished form this fanzine.

What I've also decided is that instead of using a huge amount of time to produce a zine just for ANZAPA, I will now concentrate on producing Lhyfe. If issues of that are being produced and appearing in ANZAPA, I won't have to worry about my page count. And, I will append mailing comments, where I want to. So in a way this is goodbye to EXhYstEnTiar/sm, at least as a regular feature here. But Lhyfe, for me, is really what it's all about. Exhyting times are afoot!

