



Lynn Orr

Out of step, out of time

LUCY IS 3.5 million years old and something of an anachronism to the world's paleoanthropologists. Her discoverer, Dr. Donald Johanson, believes she is one of man's ancestors — an *Australopithecus afarensis* fossil, the oldest and most primitive hominid fossil yet discovered.

Lucy isn't a human — even a dead one. Johanson believes she's a step on the evolutionary scale. Those who argue with Johanson over his placing of Lucy on that evolutionary ladder find Lucy to be an anachronism — something out of place in time.

Typically, one hears about anachronisms in junior high, to explain Shakespeare referring to the striking of a clock in "Julius Caesar," which takes place in the first century B.C. before clocks struck.

In junior high, however, it's difficult to relate to anachronisms. Typically, adolescents make it a point not to call attention to themselves by deviating from the norm.

We wore pleated skirts and knee socks in the 1950s and early '60s because girls were forbidden to wear pants to school, just as blue jeans were forbidden for everyone.

DINOSAURS weren't walking the earth when schools had these rules. We had already entered the Age of Sputnik when it came to education, but no one questioned the wisdom of keeping young persons in strictly segregated sexual roles.

As my cheerleading sister now regrets, girls were expected to raise spirits, along with eyebrow, in short skirts. The closest we came to girls' sports was the Girls Athletic Association, a loosely organized group in which girls played games after school but didn't compete with other teams.

Competition definitely was not encouraged for young women. Neither were careers, unless you planned to become a nurse, teacher, secretary — something to "fall back on" if your husband died on you.

Certainly men were not encouraged to learn to cook, draw or paint. Tennis was a sissy sport in the early 1960s. Our high school even debated whether tennis players could earn varsity letters.

We didn't exactly understand anachronisms, yet we certainly began to push for some change. Civil rights, the women's movement, Students for a Democratic Society — they were all signs of people who felt out of step and didn't mind being iconoclasts ready to break some images.

SO WHY WOULD some of us feel more out of step now when women wear pants to work, as well as school, tennis is a big-money sport for both sexes and men flock to cooking schools?

It has something to do with pro-lifers, the Moral Majority, creationism, real estate and tax shelters, today's topics of conversation. It has to do with turning back the clock.

Reactionaries want women to return to "traditional" roles, presumably cooking, baby-caring, etc. Creationists want the biblical theory of man's beginnings to be taught in public schools.

I don't see much hope for those kinds of conservative proposals, but not because there's a force out there willing to go to bat for women's rights or science.

It's just that everyone is a whole lot more concerned with the price of real estate and how to safeguard their money than anything else.

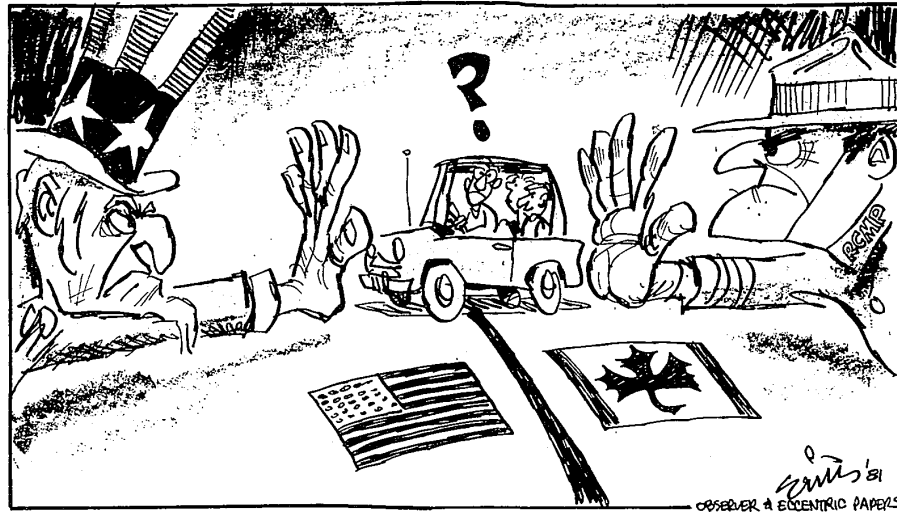
It's easy to feel that you missed a beat somewhere.

Without a handle on creative financing, forget buying a house. Those who don't know the going rate for money market certificates are apt to feel highly out of place at a party.

Those who prefer to consider how a Reagan-appointed Supreme Court justice will affect future decisions of the court are the new minority, an anachronism in the monied world of the '80s.

Like Lucy, we're out of step on a new scale and unwilling to learn the new rules for survival. And there's no Shakespeare around to include us in the cast, even as a supporting player.

What we built simply may be too fragile to survive the brave new world.



Caught in the border's crossfire

As a kid I used to go to Windsor and buy fireworks just about this time every year. The profit margin was similar to, oh, heroin or Exxon.

Being too young to drive, I'd take the bus over and back. When returning with the illegal goods I'd reach under the seat of the tunnel bus and tape the big shopping bag in place, trying to insure that the dyed-red rocket sticks didn't poke out into the aisle too much.

Customs never found the stuff. Now there's a concept common to eastern religions called "karma." Ten years ago or more karma briefly hit the buzzword bigtime. Song titles included it. Whole songs were written about it, now that I come to think on the subject for a second.

Anyway, broadly the concept of karma is that whatever you do unto others is going to eventually be done to you. What goes around, comes around. I am a believer.

BEFORE Wednesday, my last 13 consecutive trips to Canada had ended with U.S. customs happily stripping my automobile of a greater or lesser quantity of its removable parts. Government-owned German shepherds got stupid grins on their faces just from the sight of my car pulling up to a customs shack.

But at the U.S. side of the bridge sat David Grafe and Dean Franz, a couple of pleasant-enough looking young guys relaxing against Army duffel bags with their thumbs up in the air.

On Wednesday my job required me to go. I sort of gritted my teeth and got ready for another unpleasant interlude of dealing with government dogs. But at the U.S. side of the bridge sat David Grafe and Dean Franz, a couple of pleasant-enough looking young guys relaxing against Army duffel bags with their thumbs up in the air.

IT ONCE took me 1½ days to get a ride back into the U.S. at the British Columbia-Washington state



Mike Scanlon

I decided to give Grafe and Franz a lift, after first making diligent inquiries as to the nature of any contraband material they might have designs on bringing with them.

"I'm only going to Windsor," I said as I pulled to a stop.

"Is that in Canada?" said Franz. Heh-heh, said I to myself. Turns out they were from Indianapolis. Making a long story short, this 14th trip I got a chance to break my streak of having my car pulled apart by U.S. customs. This time I passed U.S. customs but Canadian customs asked, where were you born? And Grafe said Germany, and customs whipped out a pink slip faster than you can believe.

We were referred to immigration, where a fellow named Ray Barnais disappeared into a back hallway with Franz and Grafe, and when he returned, a very long time later, it was to tell me: "They're not admissible to Canada and, since you brought them here, you're legally obliged to bring them back."

Why aren't they admissible, I meekly inquired. "That's none of your concern, ey?"

So Barnais, myself and a stern-faced customs woman all stood and watched Franz and Grafe pull their belongings off the floor of my trunk and stuff them back in their duffel bags. Barnais handed them a form, saying they were "Allowed to Leave Canada" because of Paragraph 20 (1) (b).

What does that mean, Mr. Barnais? "That's none of your concern, ey?"

SO BARN AIS and the stern-faced woman stood

and watched until they had satisfied themselves that, indeed, I was taking Franz and Grafe back to the U.S. and not making a desperate bid for political asylum.

We got to the other side, where I handed the form "Allowed to Leave Canada" to the officer.

"These guys were hitchhiking and they don't want to let them into Canada," I told him, thinking the unpleasantness was just about over.

"Uh-oh," said the U.S. customs agent in an extremely unpleasant, phony, Spanish accent. "You have got double-trouble."

So Franz, Grafe and I watched them spill their goods out onto the trunk of my car. Then we got led inside, where we had to clear immigration.

"Do you know you could have been charged with smuggling illegal aliens if they turned out like that?" a customs officer said to me.

"But I picked them up in the U.S.," I protested. "It doesn't matter," he replied.

Then we had to clear customs, where a guy took our driver's licenses and started feeding them into a computer.

"Nice day, isn't it?" I remarked, venting my irony on a customs officer who could have been less responsive only if he was stuffed.

"What're you hooked into off that terminal?" I asked. "I could hear sawdust settling in place of a reply."

FINALLY THEY turned us all loose. I drove Franz and Grafe out onto Jefferson and let them off. I got back on the bridge and drove to Canada. A grim-faced customs woman cleared me in about 12 seconds. An hour or so later, I came back to the U.S., and the same phony, Spanish-accented customs guy gave me the same phony accent and cleared me in 11 seconds.

And the closest I expect to get to Canada again for a very long time is Channel 9 in my living room.

Cutting through the used car jungle

If I answer the phone as "Mr. Chevette" or "Mr. Omni," please forgive me.

I've been cutting my way through the used car jungle in the past few months and sometimes I get the impression that the concept of free market enterprise is working against me.

Maybe, it just the auto companies' strategy to force me to buy a new car instead of a used one.

In the past few months, I have taken volumes of notes on late model compact cars, buying for the first time copies of Car and Driver magazine, and pouring over Consumer Guide books which rate new and used economy cars.

I'm not sure if my decision will have an impact on the current auto industry recession. But it's been an education for someone whose last three car purchases have been in the used car market.

The reason for refusing to fall into the new car market in the past 11 years have been obvious. Prices of new cars have gone up substantially — along with the prices of everything else.

But at least gasoline prices dropped earlier this spring when Americans drove less and/or bought smaller and more fuel-efficient cars.

New car prices have continued to go up regardless of how the market is operating.

FOR EXAMPLE, foreign cars are selling like they are going out of style. But those prices haven't increased as much as American auto companies which have laid off hundreds of thousands of blue collar and white collar employees.

If the free market system worked in the auto industry, foreign car prices should increase even faster than they have while American models should drop, or at least stay the same.

The problem is that American car companies aren't in a true free market atmosphere. They operate in a controlled economy — but that's another story.

I first bought a used car just over five years ago



Leonard Poger

when I needed a station wagon to take a vacation trip to Boston for the bicentennial.

There was never any consideration of buying a used car until a friend mentioned that he always buys used cars for the traditional reason — it's cheaper.

My first venture into the used car jungle was a three-year old Ford LTD 10-passenger with most of the extras and low mileage.

I paid \$3,000 which I felt was about right. IN THE PAST FEW months, I gained a valuable education on how gasoline prices have affected used car prices.

In comparing my initial station wagon purchase, I checked the Observer auto wants ads recently to see what I could get for \$3,000, the price I paid for the station wagon.

If you look hard, you could get a three-year-old Mercury Bobcat three-door hatchback with no options other than a radio.

One used car, a 1978 Plymouth Horizon, was nacked except for a radio, but was selling for more than a full-sized Dodge with all the bells and whistles, including the fancy upholstery.

But it's obvious that there is no big rush by people to buy a car which gets 10 to 12 miles per gallon.

ANOTHER PART OF my education in "Auto Economics 201" is that the prices of some 1978 fuel-efficient compacts are just a few hundred dollars less than what they sold for as new machines.

On the other hand, the prices of new imports are well under the costs of American compacts of similar size.

But a Ford Motor Co. employee who has been a good news source in the past told me, he would never talk to me if I bought a foreign car.

I didn't comment. I have two other options to consider.

One is I could buy a used import. That means that the dollars go into an American business and my service dollars would stay in town.

Another possibility is that several friends who toil at Ford said they would help me buy a newly-new car through the Ford discount plan.

In that program, I can visit the Ford employees' auto lot on the east side of Dearborn and get as much as 40 percent off on a 1980 car with only a few thousand miles on the odometer.

I wish used car dealers would provide a big help for potential customers by doing more of what one or two do — put a sticker in the windshield listing the model year, odometer reading, major options — and price.

Many people walk through the lots in the evening or on weekends to avoid bumping into a salesperson. Without the "suggested" prices listed, it forces a potential customer to call back.

In many cases, it's easier just to avoid the call and shop the want ads where prices are listed.

BUT, MEANWHILE, my 1974 Maverick is "tasty, but rusty."

It's a thousand percent dependable. It has all the options I want. It gets 17-18 miles per gallon in the city — on regular gas.

I paid only \$1,300 for it three years ago so the capital expense (to sound like a bookkeeper) was relatively low.

If I can avoid looking at the rusted doors and rear trunk panel, I can keep for another few years.

But then I would miss all the friends I've met, at the dozens of used car lots I've visited.