



Story Corner

Food For Thought

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In the early 60's I was studying Psychology at Melbourne University. Practically every lecturer and book tried to convey the idea that psychology was a science. The subject matter was mainly rats and stats. Whilst the overt communication was "Psychology is a Science", the covert message was that it was all an awful bore. To this experience there was one outstanding exception — our lecturer in psychopathology — Dr Alan Jeffrey. He talked about real people to a class of over 100 students and kept us all rivetted in our chairs.

It is ironic that this department, dedicated to research with a library full of theses, has no record of Dr Jeffrey's superb lectures. To demonstrate his teaching ability, I would like to relate an experience which has remained indelible in my mind.

Towards the end of the academic year, we were taken to the Royal Melbourne Hospital to interview some "real live patients". I was asked to see a working class migrant who came into casualty holding a brown paper bag full of sandwiches. He complained that the sandwiches were poisoned; so he was sent to psychiatry. I talked to him; he asked me to look at his poisoned sandwiches. He said he had come from Yugoslavia, had lived in a boarding house for a number of years; had no family and few friends and he believed his landlady was trying to poison him.

I asked why he thought this. He replied, "I know she wants to". I asked him how he knew and he said, "She has that look in her face". I asked "What do you mean; what look?" He said, "She looks as if she wants to poison me". No matter how much more I questioned him, I got no further.

I returned to Dr Jeffrey and our group and said: "I believe the man is paranoid". Dr Jeffrey asked me why I thought so and I explained. He then asked me if I was sure. I replied "Yes, certainly". He asked how sure I was. I said "very sure". He asked me if I wanted to go back and ask the man further questions. I said I didn't need any more answers. He

then asked me to get the sandwiches. When I came back he said, "Now you eat them". I stopped and thought and said "No thanks!"