

# ETHOLOGY

Subjects:

**Paul Trapp, 54, estates and maintenance**

Alice McGann, 26, account manager

Mike Roe, 56, senior copywriter

Matt Wong, 33, head of planning

**You know, urban foxes. I mean the agency is fairly near the park so you see them at night. When the headlights catch their eyes they look strange. Silver.**

I was on the V\_\_\_\_\_ account. The work is really good, really creative, but often you have to stay late. It's a last-man-out sort of thing. I've always liked dogs; Mum keeps Cockers. I heard this barking, and I was worried because it sounded quite vicious. I thought that some boys from the estate must have been making their dogs fight – because you do read about that happening, even in this country. I had a Post-it on my screen 'Ring RSPCA' – but I wasn't sure what to say to them. I was worried they'd think I was just some mad old lady. We were so busy, I never got round to it.

**Yeah there was the barking, but the kids by the canal they have those big dogs don't they? I mean, they can be scary if you're on a bike or something.**

The agency has been here forever. They keep saying we're about to move, but over time we've come to realise that it's just an excuse for never doing any maintenance work. Any chance you could change that flickering light? Well, we're about to move. Yes, but it's giving me epilepsy. Don't worry we're about to move. Colin has been here nearly as long. He wrote the famous F\_\_\_\_\_ Cleaner campaign – with the singing policemen. Just a couple of squirts and there goes the evidence? Yeah that's it.

It's a worldwide network – and increasingly the UK media climate resembles what we've had in Singapore for many years now. That is, a more heavy emphasis on web, with traditional media coming second. Now, I'm a media agnostic planner – I work across all these media. I'm Head of Planning on like two or three accounts – automotive, FMCG – we get awards on all of them. So when the agency looks through its personnel they look at Singapore and they think, We want some of that. So I get a call, How about you come to London?

**General maintenance. Means a bit of everything really. But any complaints come straight to me yeah. Some of the staff, on the first floor, above the car park, started to complain about a smell. I have a sensitive nose as it happens, so I went down there to have a look, or a sniff, I suppose you'd say. There's this odd smell, like a tomcat. Only we used to have a cat and even before he'd had the snip it wasn't as strong as this.**

Rob and I try fairly hard not to stay late, but occasionally someone will leave or top themselves and then we'll all go out for one of those advertising lunches people talk about.

You're half way through your second bottle of Margaux when you get the call from some suit saying they want to WIP with you at 9.30am. So you have to go back and sit there goggling at one another till midnight. It was one of those times, I think, that I saw one. From my window I get a charming view of the fire escape – dangerous-looking thing – and the patch of macadam at the back of the building. It was just for a moment, a dark shape behind the bins. A dark shape. I thought it was a stray dog, or the DTs. I'm not sure I even told Rob, maybe he'd fallen asleep.

It's an insane month, Christmas takes such a big bite out of it and even if the client says, 'Oh, it can wait till after Christmas,' *you* still have to do it before Christmas because they're going to come back all fresh in Jan, realise that they've got nothing to do and start emailing you every five minutes. I hadn't been home before ten in weeks. Usually there were few of us, so you'd get a nice atmosphere going, it's dark outside and someone would get wine from the fridge. That night I was there with Sam, and Helen – my boss. I don't know how much work we were doing, we were all laughing – Sam was very funny – and Helen went off to do some photocopying. She was only gone a few moments but she came running back into our office. She said she'd seen something in the corridor – at first we thought she was winding us up. I remember Sam said something like "Was it Stephen? Is he naked again?" She didn't laugh and then, both of us realised that she was scared. She was breathing like she was going to have an attack. We made her sit down and Sam got her a cup of water. We tried to make her tell us what happened – she kept saying she'd seen something. In one of the corridors.

**People start to find things. Bones. They'd come in the morning and there'd be a little pile of bones – chicken bones usually, and maybe some other rubbish. Well I went all through the building looking for where a cat could have got in – I thought it must have been one of the old chimneys. The building is Victorian – so the drop ceilings, partitions, make quite a lot of dead space. Thing was, going round the building from the outside, up on the roof, I couldn't find an entrance. I thought a cat must have got in, crept up into one of the ceiling spaces and had kittens there – then she was going out during the day to get food for them. I even sent round an email saying, Agency has visitors, in Form of Cats. If you see Anything please let me know.**

One of the suits saw something weird, or thought she'd seen something weird. John and Dave had found bones in their room, but they thought it was a gag. At Ogilvy's we had a phantom shitter – so a few bones is nothing. Yes, they told Estates but you might as well dial a random number and tell whoever picks up for all the difference that makes. Now this suit, apparently, had seen a dog in the building. I've been in advertising too long to believe a single word anyone from that floor

says – but I think somewhere in my mind it clicked with what I'd seen.

So I come over and take up position here as Head of Planning. It's going real good, we win like three pitches the first three months. Then, from out of nowhere: Wolf attack. I'm like hello?

So I go down to security and I say, let's look at the footage, the CCTV. Only it turns out that Colin and Stephen have taken it already – they've come and requested it. So I go along to the board meeting in morning, at the end. The door's locked, but there they all are, sat round watching the TV. I use my key and let myself in. You could have heard a mouse fart. They're watching the screen, apart from Colin who's lying with his head on his hands. He looks up when I come in. He tells me to lock the door behind me.

Rob and I were in the Tradesman's Entrance having a pint with Colin. We got onto the topic of this suit, Hannah or Helen, and what she'd seen. I think Rob asked him if it was a motivational device. Colin claimed he hadn't heard a word about it. Almost believable because, Ok, he's not the world's most approachable man, and being the Creative Director he's oddly out of the loop, which is one of the reasons he associates with us I suppose. But he got quite het up – he said people shouldn't spread that kind of rumour. It was damaging for morale and it was probably just a stray cat anyway. The idea of wolves in the agency was absurd he said. Then he clammed up. That was when we twigged that something serious was going on.

After a few minutes I say well, at least we know where the bones are coming from. Stephen, he's the CEO, says, there's no need to panic. The agency has been here 50 years already and there's no reason to believe that we won't be here in 50 years time. We may have to lose some staff, that's all. Part of the natural order. If we just sit tight it will all be over before we know it and we can start the process of rebuilding.

We went through all the rational explanations – it was a cat or a fox even. We tried telling her that she was stressed, overworked, you know, there we were at 10 o'clock at night so that much was obvious. It doesn't seem so unreasonable, you're tired, you see a fox that's got in through an open window and your mind makes the wrong connection – the switchboard puts it through to the wrong department. We kept talking to her till eventually she seemed accept what we were saying was true. Sam even went to look. Helen tried to stop him but, you know, he made a joke out of it – went round the corner and started howling. After a while Helen began to feel embarrassed. She told us not to tell anyone

about what had happened. We all promised. It was a strange night.

How did I find out? I'll tell you how. I'm here till midnight with one of my grads – going through a brief- I'm all for giving people the opportunity, but you got to support them also. Anyway we get takeout, I pull his brief apart and put it back together and it looks pretty good. So then we turn off the lights and head downstairs – cause you have to go all round this building, which is like, 100 years old, to get out after 6.00pm. And here I am talking away, the grad is a few steps ahead of me and suddenly he stops and puts his hand out. I'm like, What is it? He looks at me and I see his eyes are like needle-pricks and he doesn't say anything he just points and starts to back up the stairs and then he's running. And I'm still like, What the F? But then I see it, at the bottom of the stairs. And I think, that is the biggest dog I've ever seen.

**But isn't there anything we can do?**

**And Colin says, we're in the business of publicity Paul – can you imagine what will happen if this gets out, if Campaign gets hold of this? How will our clients respond to the idea that their advertising agency is under attack from wolves? That'd be the end for all of us. All we can do is ease the process. Then he put his hand on my shoulder. We need you Paul – it's for the good of everyone, it's your chance to be a hero. He looked into my eyes and he said, We need you to keep things clean. Sometimes part of being a hero is that no-one ever finds out.**

If you went down to account handling – I do go down there every now and again to harass them – it's not that they weren't laughing, engaging in the normal strained performance of account management humour – it was like it had all become brittle. Even up here everyone seemed to be working extra hard to make it look as though they were having a wonderful time. Then Steve and Danny went. I saw them as I left, about 7.00pm, my usual time, Ok, slightly later than my usual time, for heading to the pub. Anyway, I put my head round their door and said, come down and join us if you fancy it and they grunted, which means yes. But they never turned up. It took us a couple of days to realise they were gone. Even a relatively friendly ad agency is still an ad agency. I thought maybe they were on a shoot. If you get something through on the shampoo account you don't tell a soul about it.

I didn't like it. Not one bit. But we've got all the gear – gloves and masks and one of our clients is a F\_\_\_\_\_ Cleaner so there's no shortage of that stuff in the store cupboard. I'd go in at dawn, when I was sure they'd have left the building and just make sure it was all fresh. Nothing too grisly. Some people seemed to have gone without even putting up a fight. Fear I suppose. I told myself that I was doing it for the rest of them. I was doing it for us.

I was in that cupboard for like 2 hours. I tried calling people – but all my Singapore friends were just waking up, and anyway they were in Singapore. I even thought of calling the police – but what am I going to say? Excuse me, there's a wolf in my office? Like they won't think I'm on drugs and send people round to lock me up. So eventually I come out of the cupboard and tiptoe, real carefully down the stairs. By the time I'm in the taxi I'm beginning to think I've imagined it. The only thing that reminds me that it was real is that I'm really mad with the grad for running off like that. I even put a note in my Blackberry.

There was nothing there. I mean, there was a load of shit in there, Steve's collection of plastic action figures, a sizeable collection of porn, but there was no sign of them. And that was strange because Steve and Danny have a combined age of around 30 and treat the office as an extension of their bedroom. But it was clean. More than that, it was neat. It even smelt good.

Stephen closed the blind on his glass partition. Afterwards she said, oh, he just wanted to run through some figures. She was still here when I left that night, my boyfriend had insisted we do something together, so we were going to see a play. I said Helen are you ok? She smiled and nodded. She didn't come in the next day. All her stuff was still here. I caught Stephen in the corridor and tried to ask where she was – he said, Oh holiday I think, over his shoulder.

So the next day, first thing, I go try and find this grad – but he's gone. His desk is tidy, but he's not at it. I ask someone to call him at home but there's just no answer. I think, that little son of a bitch has just gone away, taken holiday or something, and he made me re-write his brief before he went – the little two-face.

It was Friday 13<sup>th</sup> absurdly enough.

**They came during the day you see. They weren't expecting that. There was barking downstairs. And screaming. One of the receptionists ran up through the building in hysterics. They couldn't really keep it quite after that could they?**

We didn't know what was happening – we thought it must have been an accident in the street. There was all this shouting and then, when it went quiet, you could here it unmistakably. The howling.

These emails started arriving, from Colin and the management team. They said things like 'there's been an incident in reception. Please don't be alarmed. Stay at your desks until further notice.'

**Colin and Stephen were holed up in Meeting Room One. They told me that no one was to leave the building – that we just had to sit tight and keep calm and could I go and tell people to stay at their desks.**

Well it didn't take a genius – even Rob worked it out. Howling? I mean please. Did I mention that our office looks out on to the fire escape? Did we what? No obviously not, but we left a note saying we'd be in the Tradesman's.

**So looked at them and I said yeah – you can rely on me. And I went out. As soon as I heard the door lock behind me I went down the corridor and set off the fire alarm.**

We'd got these emails saying just keep calm. We thought that they had it under control. I had some spreadsheets open – I thought I'd try and get on with something. But then one them found its way into our office. We're open plan you see, so I noticed it at first, as a commotion. Something happening in the corner of the room – like someone had tripped, or spilt a cup of coffee. Suddenly everyone was on their feet, and Sandra, one of the grads, went running headlong out of the room, knocking over the chairs, falling over herself, shouting Wolf! Wolf! Wolf! She had a wound on her arm, these half-moon punctures welling with thick blood, the skin hanging off. Then it was up on the desks, growling – it was such a strange feeling. I remember thinking that all through my life I had heard of terrible things happening to people, but none of those terrible things had happened to me. Now it was happening it didn't feel like it was meant for me. It felt like something out of a film. Then there was another, it came in from the corridor. And the two of them, without seeming to acknowledge one another, started advancing towards us. Towards me and Sam, because it was just us in this corner of the room. They'd cut us off. I could see Simon, from Production, hiding under one of the tables. Shaking his head. He looked, not so much frightened, as disgusted. The others were slipping out onto the main stairwell. I was so angry. Up until now it had not been an unusual day. How was I to have known? To have prepared for this?

So Nick, he's the metrics guy, runs in and he's got this big wolf chasing him, nipping at him. For me it was like almost a relief because you know – all along I'd been thinking I'd seen this freaking wolf in the office and it turns out that I wasn't insane after all. Nick is screaming, like get this thing away from me, oh my God and everybody is panicking, running around, pushing one another to get out of the door. I'm super mad – there's no way that I'm ending my career like this. So I go over and grab the fire extinguisher from off the wall, it's one of those old ones with a big horn, and pull the pin. As Nick make his second circuit of the office I jump out in front of it, in between them, and I start blasting it with nitrogen from this fire extinguisher. The thing starts backing off, so I

blast it again, I'm forcing it back. One of the other guys sees what I'm doing and he runs to grab another extinguisher and together we blast it back toward to stairwell. Once it's out we lock the door – and we can hear it outside, growling and scratching. We were pretty pleased with ourselves. It was only later that we found out that account management were heading down that way.

**Yes, that was unfortunate. But if more people had used the exterior fire escapes rather than the main stairwell that would never have happened.**

Suddenly Sam was up on his desk. He started to stamp on the table. I remember thinking, is he about to dance? And both of them turned to him and bared their teeth. They held their heads low, the back legs bent. He looked right at me, and his look that seemed to say, what have I done? This must be it, I thought. He kicked out uselessly, knocking over one of the screens. Then the fire alarm goes off, and at that moment the larger wolf leapt, its front paws hitting him hard in the chest and he came down on to the floor behind us. The other wolf shot over my head, its claws scrabbling on the tabletop. I could just see it diving on to him over and over, and with each dive I heard Sam say Oh! Oh! like he was realising something. It came up with its muzzle red, growling at me with blood on its teeth, but by then I was already half way out of the door to fire escape.

**It so happens that we have the B\_\_\_\_\_ Dog Biscuit account. I'd taken to always carrying a box of these Chewy Treats with me. And I say, look, here you are, I take a few out the packet and throw them to him and he stops growling to sniff at them. I start to back away and manage to get to the doorway. I throw in the rest of the box get the door closed, lock it and head downstairs. You see, I thought that Colin and Stephen and the rest of them would be safe in Meeting Room One. Unfortunately I'd failed to remember that the Meeting Room One is also accessible through the editing suite.**

Well when we got the news we stopped the pool tournament straight away. We were all, well, in shock I suppose. But then, Colin hadn't written a decent ad in 20 years. He was at work when they got him, it's what he would have wanted. At least he got in Campaign.

I suppose you could say I was one of the lucky ones.

With most of the board gone my position was shaky. You don't make any friends, coming in from overseas and trying to do things differently. But I know I've got much more to give. I'm adaptable. You need to be in today's market.

With the benefit of hindsight, there are things I might have done differently. But I stand by the decisions I made. In the end, you have to get on with your life don't you?

I've always wanted to write for film actually.