

THE SEARCH FOR SIGNS OF INTELLIGENT LIFE IN THE UNIVERSE

Excerpts from Jane Wagner's work

Shirley Kinney

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Opening – two speakers

1796 English physician Edward Jenner introduces a vaccination against smallpox—a major breakthrough in wiping out this dreaded killer

1945 The Japanese government drops smallpox and plague bacteria from airplanes over several Chinese towns, in an attempt to decimate the population

1814 At Killingworth Colliery, near Newcastle, George Stephenson constructs the first practical steam locomotive. This train permits easier and safer transport of passengers and goods

1865 The first train holdup occurs at North Bend, Ohio

1859 The first oil well is drilled, providing access to cheap fuel to light homes and to power transportation

1987 The oil tanker Exxon Valdez causes the world's largest oil spill (11 million gallons) when it runs aground in Alaska. Captain cited for drunkenness. Thousands of ocean mammals and fish killed.

1863 Abraham Lincoln issues the Emancipation Proclamation, stating that all slaves within any state shall thenceforward and forever be free.

1864 The Klu Klux Klan is founded in Pulaski, Tennessee

1900 American scientist R.A. Fessenden transmits human speech via radio waves, opening the way the rapid communication of ideas to millions over the radio

1988 Evangelist preacher Oral Roberts uses the radio to reach millions, thereby successfully raising four and a half million dollars, after declaring that God would “call him home” if he failed to do so.

1925 Scottish inventor John Baird transmits recognizable human features by television, opening the way for rapid communication of ideas and artistic achievement

1988 Television audiences reach new records as talk show hosts Jerry Springer and Sally Jessie Raphael present the bizarre and the disturbed elements of our society.

1939 For the first time, DDT is synthesized, enabling scientists to begin the elimination of diseases such as yellow fever, typhus, and elephantitis

1962 Insecticides such as DDT are found to enter the food chain and cause reproductive dysfunction in birds. Many bird populations threatened with extinction

1939 Joliet-Curie demonstrates the possibility of splitting the atom—the first step towards developing a new source of energy to power homes and factories

1945 The U.S. drops an atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan

We have found the Creator and he is Us

We have found the enemy and he is Us.

Here we are, standing on the corner of “Walk, Don’t Walk”.

I know what you’re thinkin’; you’re thinkin’ I’m crazy. You think I give a hoot? You people look at my shopping bags, call me crazy ‘cause I save this junk. What should we call the ones who buy it?

It’s my belief we all, at one time or another, secretly ask ourselves the question, “Am I crazy?” In my case, the answer came back: A resounding YES!

You’re thinkin’ how does a person know if they’re crazy or not? Well, sometimes you don’t know. Sometimes you can go through life suspecting you are but never really knowing for sure. Sometimes you know for sure ‘cause you got so many people tellin’ you you’re crazy, that it’s your word against everyone else’s.

Another sign is when you see life so clear sometimes you black out. This is your typical visionary variety who has flashes of insight but can’t get anyone to listen to ‘em ‘cause their insights make ‘em sound so crazy!

In my case, the symptoms are subtle but unmistakable to the trained eye. For instance, here I am, standing at the corner of “Walk, Don’t Walk”, waiting for these aliens from outer space to show up. I call that crazy, don’t you? If I were sane, I should be waiting for the light like everybody else.

They’re late, as usual.

You’d think, as much as they know about time travel, they could be on time once in awhile.

I could kick myself. I told ‘em I’d meet ‘em on the corner of “Walk, Don’t Walk” ‘round lunchtime. Do they even know what “lunch” means? I doubt it.

And “round”. Why did I say “round”? Why wasn’t I more specific? This is so typical of what I do.

Now they’re probably stuck somewhere in time, wondering what I meant by “round lunchtime”. And when they get here, they’ll be dying to know what “lunchtime” means. And when they find out it means going to Howard Johnson’s for fried clams, I wonder, will they be just a bit let down?

I dread having to explain tartar sauce.

This problem of time just points out how far apart we really are. See, our ideas about time and space are different from theirs.

When we think of time, we tend to think of clock radios, coffee breaks, afternoon naps, leisure time, halftime activities, parole time, doing time, Minute Rice, instant tea, mid-life crisis, that time of the month, cocktail hour.

And if I should suddenly mention space—aha! I met most of you thought of your closets. But when they think of time and space, they really think of TIME and SPACE.

They asked me once my thoughts on infinity and I told ‘em with all I had to think about, infinity was not on my list of things to think about. It could be time on an ego trip, for all I know. After all, when you’re pressed for time, infinity may as well not be there. They said, to them, infinity is Time-released time.

Frankly, infinity doesn’t affect me personally one way or the other.

You think too long about infinity, you could go stark raving mad.

But I don’t ever want to sound negative about going crazy. I don’t want to over-romanticize it either, but frankly, goin’ crazy was the best thing ever happened to me. I don’t say it’s for everybody; some people couldn’t cope.

But for me it came at a time when nothing else seemed to be working.

I got the kind of madness Socrates talked about, “A divine release of the soul from the yoke of custom and convention”. I refuse to be intimidated by reality anymore. After all, what is reality anyway? Nothin’ but a collective hunch.

My space chums think reality was once a primitive method of crowd control that got out of hand. In my view, it’s absurdity dressed up in a three-piece business suit.

I made some studies, and reality is the leading cause of stress amongst those in touch with it.

I can take it in small doses, but as a lifestyle I found it too confining. It was just too needful. It expected me to be there for it all the time, and with all I have to do—I had to let something go.

See, the human mind is kind of like...a pinata. When it breaks open, there’s a lot of surprises inside. Once you get the pinata perspective, you see that losing your mind can be a peak experience.

I was not always a bag lady, you know. I used to be a designed and creative consultant. For big companies! Who do you think thought up the color scheme for Howard Johnson’s? At the time, nobody was using orange and aqua in the same room together. With fried clams.

Laugh tracks—I gave TV sitcoms the idea for canned laughter. I got the idea, one day I heard voices and no one was there.

Who do you think had the idea to package panty hose in a plastic goose egg?

So, it should come as no shock—I am now creative consultant to these aliens from outer space. They're a kinda cosmic fact-finding committee. Amongst other projects, they've been searching all over for Signs of Intelligent Life.

It's a lot trickier than it sounds. We're collecting all kinds of data about life here on Earth. We're determined to figure out, once and for all, just what the heck it all means.

I write the data on these Post-Its and then we study it. Don't worry, before I took the consulting job, I gave 'em my whole psychohistory.

I think you should know I worry a lot. I worry that humanity has been “advanced” to its present level of incompetency because evolution works on the Peter Principle.

I worry that Andy Warhol may be right—and everyone will be famous for fifteen minutes.

I even worry about reflective flea collars. Oh, sure, drivers can see them glow in the dark. But so can the fleas.

I worry if peanut oil comes from peanuts and olive oil comes from olives, where does baby oil come from?

One thing I have no worry about is whether God exists. But it has occurred to me that God has Alzheimer's and has forgotten WE exist.

I worry that our lives are like soap operas. We can go for months and not tune in to them, then six months later we look in and the same stuff is still going on.

I worry whoever thought up the term “quality control” thought if we didn't control it, it would get out of hand.

I worry no matter how cynical you become, it's never enough to keep up.

I worry where today fits in the Cosmic Scheme of things. I worry there is no Cosmic Scheme of things.

I got enough worries of my own. I forget things. Never underestimate the power of the human mind to forget.

The other day, I forgot where I put my house keys—looked everywhere, then I remembered I don't have a house. I forget more important things, too.

Life the meaning of life. I forget that. It'll come to me, though. Let's just hope when it does, I'll be in.

My space chums say they're learning so much about us since they've begun to time-share my trances. They said to me, "Trudy, the human mind is so-o-o STRANGE."

Next to my trances they love goin' through my shopping bags.

Once they found this old box of Cream of Wheat. I told 'em, "A box of cereal". But they saw it as a picture of infinity. You know how on the front is a picture of that guy holding up a box of Cream of Wheat. And on that box is a picture of that guy holding up a box of Cream of Wheat. And on that box is a picture of that guy holding up a box of Cream of Wheat. And on that box is a picture of that guy holding up a box of Cream of Wheat.

We think of different. They find it hard to grasp some things that come easy to us, because they simply don't have our frame of reference.

I show 'em this can of Campbell's tomato soup. I say, "This is soup." Then I show 'em a picture of Andy Warhol's painting of a can of Campbell's tomato soup. I say, "This is art."

"And this is soup."

"And this is art."

Then I shuffle the two behind my back. Now, what is this?

No, this is soup, and this is art!

We must dash soon! We're on our way to Stonehenge. I like to plan it so we have at least one peak experience each day. When you got aliens in from out of town, you want to do something special.

It's great traveling with 'em. You go faster than the speed of speed.

To them, a journey of a thousand miles begins with bio-astral projection. I said, "So, you folks believe in astral projection?" They said, "If something's true, you don't need to believe in it." I'm talkin' advanced.

They are just about perfect, except for one weak spot—their personal appearance. They look like a gelatinous mass of ribonucleic acid been poured out of a Jell-O mold too soon. Plus they got no eyelids. That alone would drive me up the wall.

I don't know what I'd do without these Post-Its. I've got the facts right at my fingertips. Let me read you some data we found:

- Did you know, the RNA/DNA molecule can be found throughout space in many galaxies...only everybody spells it different?
- You are what you think. Jeez, that's frightening.
- What goes up must come down. But don't expect it to come down where you can find it. Murphy's Law applied to Newton's.
- Did you know, in the entire universe, we are the only intelligent life forms thought to have a Miss Universe contest?
- Did you know, throughout the cosmos they found intelligent life forms that play to play. We are the only ones that play to win. Explains why we have more than our share of losers.

I took my space chums to a violin concert. What a concert!

Just listen...amazing...in my head, I can still hear that violin concert. What is it in our brains that lets us recall the music after it's over? Why is it when we hear certain music we get a lump in our throat?

My space chums wonder how come we don't get the lump in our ear. They're impressed with our ability to get lumps in the throat. Apparently, we're unique in that respect.

They wanted to know if it felt anything like goose bumps. I said, "You never felt goose bumps, either?" They said, "No."

They asked me to explain goose bumps—Do they come from the heart? Do they come from the soul? Do they come from the brain? Or do they come from geese?

This set us waxing philosophic!

All this searching. All these trances, all this data and all we really know is how little we know about what it all means. Plus, there's the added question of what it means to know something.

Scientists say for every deep truth discovered, the opposite is also true. So when we get the feeling we're going around in circles—no wonder, we are!

They said, "Trudy, we see now, intelligence is just the tip of the iceberg. The more you know, the less knowing the meaning of things means. So forget the meaning of life."

I didn't tell them, of course, I had.

See, it's not so much what we know, but how we know, and what it is about us that needs to know.

The intriguing part—of all the things we've learned, we still haven't learned where did this desire to want to know come from? Oh, don't look at me. This is the way they talk.

So no matter how much we know, there's more to knowing than we could ever know. We're thinking maybe the secrets about life we don't understand are the "cosmic carrots" in front of our noses that keep us going.

So maybe we should stop trying to figure out the meaning of life and sit back and enjoy the mystery of life. The operative word here is what? Mystery! Not meaning.

This should be comforting, especially to those who think life is meaningless. It just might be, which could explain why we have so many meaningless things in our lives.

And yet, if life is meaningless, this is the greatest mystery of all!

Even this feeling we get in the pit of our stomach when we contemplate how meaningless it all seems is part of the mystery. And the more meaningless, then the greater the mystery.

But if all this is meaningless, then why the heck bring up the subject? IF life is meaningless, this discussion is even more so.

Next the aliens insisted I take them somewhere so they could get goose bumps. They were dying to see what it was like.

I decided maybe we should take in a play. I got goose bumps once that way. Did I tell you what happened at the play?

We were at the back of the theater, standing there in the dark, all of a sudden I feel one of 'em tug my sleeve. Whispers, "Trudy, look" I said, "Yeah, goose bumps. You definitely got goose bumps. You really like the play that much?"

They said it wasn't the play gave 'em goose bumps, it was the audience. I forgot to tell 'em to watch the play; they'd been watching the audience!

Yeah, to see a group of strangers sitting together in the dark, laughing and crying about the same things...that just knocked 'em out. They said, "Trudy, the play was soup...the audience—art."

I like to think of them out there in the dark, watching us.

Sometimes we'll do something and they'll laugh.
Sometimes we'll do something and they'll cry.

And maybe one day we'll do something so magnificent, everyone in the universe will get goose bumps.