

PATRICK CREWDSON

Did ya hear the one about Zaoui?

Selwyn Manning, Yasmine Ryan and Katie Small – Zaoui is a cheerful man. He “laughs contagiously”. He has a wide smile and a great sense of humour. That may be, but what evidence have we seen of it? Everybody loves a comedian, so – undeserved image as a dour Islamic terrorist notwithstanding – I’m willing to accept that Ahmed Zaoui is a funny guy. But the fact is, if he’d been a little quicker off the mark with one of his trademark zingers or droll witticisms, this whole sorry affair could have been avoided.

When Zaoui arrived in New Zealand a customs official asked if he was a member of the terrorist agency the GIA. “FIS,” he replied, meaning that he wasn’t, but that he did belong to the Islamic Salvation Front, a democratically-elected political party.

Only, in his heavy accent, “FIS” came out sounding like “Yes”. (That’s not the punchline, by the way, that actually happened.)

If only they’d been screening Monty Python on the plane trip over here, Zaoui’s many months of imprisonment could have been avoided.

“GIA?”
“Er, no, freedom actually.”

“What?”
“Yeah, they said I hadn’t done anything and I could go and live on an island somewhere.”

“Oh I say, that’s very nice. Well, off you go then.”

But no, instead we got two years of interminable court cases and appeals, with nary a quip or bon mot to leaven the drudgery.

Still, Zaoui’s had plenty of chances to make the system work for him. Your average comedian would kill for the sort of media coverage he’s had. Hell, the fatally un-amusing Mike King managed to wheedle himself a second shot at a talk show, so I struggle to believe that the nation’s favourite asylum seeker couldn’t find a promoter willing to stage his stand-up routine. No doubt it’d generate more public interest in his cause if the Free Ahmed Zaoui campaigners changed all their stickers and flyers to read ‘Free Ahmed Zaoui gig’ and started advertising his courtroom appearances as comedy events. And while we’re on the topic of promotion, Zaoui’s agent really must get some new publicity stunts circulating. We’ve been looking at the same out-of-focus shot of him grinning for far too

long. That’s no way to manage a career.

To be fair on Zaoui, his strength might lie more in slapstick or physical comedy. It’s hard to pull off comic pratfalls when you’re in solitary confinement. Either way, if and when he’s finally released, Zaoui’s gonna be grateful for all the time he had in Paremoremo and Auckland Central Remand to hone his act. He’s got two possibilities: either he’ll be deported to Algeria, where he’ll probably be killed (which, as fans of Weekend at Bernie’s will know, doesn’t mean the laughs have to stop. Weekend at Ahmed’s anyone?), or the Government will decide it’s never too late to say you’re sorry and he’ll be granted asylum, freeing him up to hit the circuit with his one-man show Wowie Zaoui!

As Readers’ Digest always maintained, laughter is the best medicine. Can it heal our broken Security Intelligence Service or patch up our ailing legal framework? I’m confident that if anyone can make us forget our troubles, it’s Ahmed Zaoui. That guy’s a crack-up.

Patrick Crewdson is an AUT Graduate Diploma in Journalism student and former editor of Critic.

Pasifika news media need unity

The Bible says God helps those who help themselves. Sadly, this value is missing with some Pacific Island journalists.

The recently concluded Pacific Islands Media Association conference clearly showed the lack of unity and commitment among Pacific journalists working in New Zealand.

It’s sad but true. If it were not for the awesome threesome – Lito Vilisoni, Sandra Kailahi and Iulia Leilua – PIMA would have been in the doldrums long ago.

Pacific journalists are fighting for a stronger footing in the New Zealand media industry.

It is through awareness programmes and efforts of Vilisoni, Kailahi and Leilua – and outgoing chair Kalafi Moala – that Pacific journalists are slowly making inroads.

The opening of PIMA’s conference was attended by about 40 people, 15 of them panellists invited to speak at the conference.

There is a substantial Pacific Islands

media network – six Pacific Island language newspapers in New Zealand and four radio stations (Niu FM, Radio 531pi, Radio Samoa and Samoa Capital Radio).

There are more than 20 Pacific Island community radio shows on Planet FM and two iwi radio stations (Wanganui and Kaikohe).

Tagata Pasifika is the longest running Pacific Island programme on television and there are also seven other Pacific Island community TV programmes on Auckland’s Triangle TV and other community TV stations in Wellington.

These media outlets employ Pacific Islanders but surprisingly most of them decided to stay away from the conference.

Not all of them were hosting the radio programmes on the day or were out doing interviews.

How about sacrificing two days in a year for PIMA? After all a stronger association will mean increased Pacific Islands content in the media.

Vilisoni says the biggest challenge is how to get colleagues to work alongside them.

“We talk so much about advancing the cause of Pacific media but the commitment is missing. We need more hands on deck,” she adds.

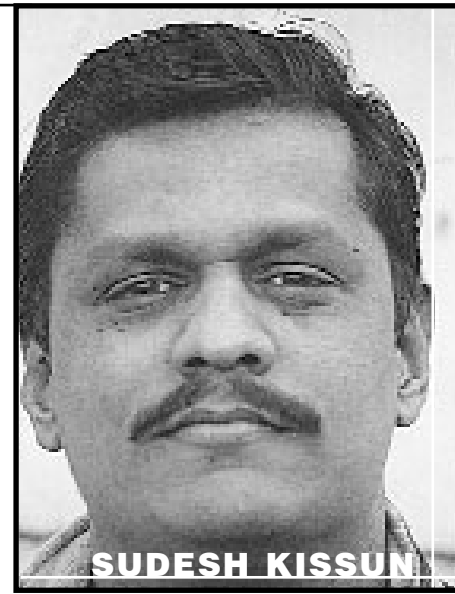
Kailahi says several Pacific people were missing from the conference.

“We don’t have the support of our own people. At the end of the day, three of us do it on our own time,” she adds.

Their frustrations are understandable. How can Pacific media fight for greater say and equal footing in the industry when their association is not getting full support?

Like a delegate said, the line-up of panellists at the broadcasting workshop was an indication of the respect and importance PIMA has in the industry.

The presence of heavyweights like Ian Fraser of TVNZ, Mark Jennings of TV3 and Linden Clark of Radio New Zealand International shows people care about Pacific media. Pacific media may be treated as second class in some quarters but they are important enough for executives like Jennings and Fraser to attend their conference.



SUDESH KISSUN

The message is clear for Pacific journalists. For them to stop second-class class treatment in the media industry, they need to be active in PIMA.

Unless they help themselves, New Zealand media bosses or even God will not help them.

Sudesh Kissun is an AUT Bachelor of Communication Studies student.



JOHN CAMPBELL

How to survive a career in journalism

I thought I might give you some advice, but realised that what was disguised as advice was really a defence of my own choices and my own career. (Forty, and already trying to justify my own history.) So I will simply tell you that if I had my time over again, I would still want to be a journalist. On a good day journalism is the best job there is. On a bad day it’s horrible, but the promise of a good day is enough to get you by. So, some thoughts from the old guy.

One. You will probably be asked to cover bollocks. Well, do. But don’t let your coverage be bollocks. “Shit has its own integrity,” artist Dick Frizzell said.

Two. If someone tells you something, ask yourself what benefit the telling accords them. Everyone will want something from you: advertising, assistance, silence. The more respectable they are, the more ingrained in the establishment they are, the better they will be able to disguise their self-interest as selfless orthodoxy.

Three. No one is truly independent (simple logic tells you everyone is coloured by their experience), but people who unilaterally offer their expertise are always after something. Look out for

third parties, for people who come from nowhere to give aid to one side or other. No one except Superman does that for purely civic or munificent reasons. Ask them simple questions. Why are you here? Who funds you? What’s in this for you?

Four. Don’t be scared to offend, but this doesn’t mean you must always offend. Assess, consider, study, feel and think. Scepticism is good, cynicism is tiresome. Celebration can be fantastic.

Five. Have fun.

Six. Be brave. You will know from Chomsky, of course, that the easiest journalism to do is journalism that toes the line. Well, we should all aim higher than that. Edward Said said we should “say truth to power”. And he was right. It’s a simple mantra, but so rarely executed.

Seven. Be the kind of journalist you admire. Don’t be afraid to not say what the pack is saying, or what the prevailing hegemony would have you say. Remember why you entered journalism, remember who you wanted to be.

Do it. Be them.
Eight. And think of Martha Gellhorn, who towards the end of a long and wonderful career as a journalist, said some-

thing utterly beautiful. This: “In all my reporting life, I have thrown small pebbles into a very large pond, and I have no way of knowing if any pebble caused even the slightest ripple. I don’t need to worry about that. My responsibility was the effort.”

Nine. Make that effort. What a chance you are about to have. To scrutinize, to challenge, to hold to account. To acknowledge the good and expose the bad. Who else goes to work and gets to do that?

Ten. Aim high. By doing so you will lift the bar for all of us. We will all have to better, just to keep up.

Good luck. I hope you find jobs and I hope the jobs you find are satisfying. I look forward to reading, or hearing, or seeing you work. I look forward to your work making me stop and think, or showing me something afresh, or telling me something I didn’t already know. And I really look forward to feeling proud that I work in the same profession as you.

John Campbell is a journalist and TV3 newsreader.