

AZARIA - "the confession"

December 6th 1981

To Whom It May Concern

I am 64 years old and my friend is 57, we live in separate towns... In July we went on a trip and went to Eyres Rock, we camped some distance from the main camping area... I went some distance away to do a job, as I was returning a dog went trotting past with something in its mouth, I shone the torch... it looked like a doll being carried by the head, I threw my hammer at it and it dropped it, I picked it up and it was a baby with its head very mutilated and its neck badly bitten open... as we are both dingo admirers decided to quickly dispose of the body we did not wish to see the dingo done away with...

Signed the persons unknown

February 15th 1982

To the Coroner,

The baby was being carried by the back of the neck... its feet dragged on the ground. It looked like the baby had been pick up the dingo with its jaws over the baby's mouth and throat and shaken viciously as the flesh was torn away badly from the side of its face and neck. We have taken snapshots to prove it... the instruction in our wills are they are to be made available in our demise.

Yours faithfully

The persons unknown

Long before Frank Cole, the first confession came through in 1981. December, some sixteen months after Azaria had disappeared. Addressed to "whom it may concern" but sent to the Chief Minister, Paul Everingham, Dennis Barritt, the first coroner and Michael Chamberlain, it was taken seriously by the Northern Territory Police Department, even though there wasn't a cop in the land who didn't think Lindy was guilty. They got fingerprints off the letter, searched for the envelope and followed leads.

It was widely reported in the newspapers, but the confession story was soon forgotten. At the time, Azaria Chamberlain's "murder" was the story in the media and in the minds of the public, being fuelled by rumour and myth...

Azaria meant sacrifice in the wilderness. Lindy had dressed the little girl in black. She was born deformed anyway. Lindy was covering up for one of her sons; the six year old really killed his baby sister... They were part of some weird religious sect. The jumpsuit was folded and cut with scissors and dingoes can't do that.

Back in 1981, when that first confession came through, the Azaria Chamberlain story was only just beginning. A confession was more than a distraction; it got in the way of the main game: murder, sacrifice, fringe religions, a mother who cut the throat of her nine week old baby then decapitated her.

Another confession came through in 2000. A man by the name of Frank Cole contacted [a national broadcaster] and told him he and his mates were hunting dingoes in the Uluru National Park on the night of August 17, 1980. They had shot a dingo. In its mouth was a baby.

Back in 2000 the story did not run. The confession faded away. Why? Perhaps, as it's been said to us, [They] didn't think it was viable... perhaps [they] did. Perhaps then there were more important stories for [them] to be screening.

Sorry [...]; the above is as speculative as that second confession you ran through the nation, in an eerie and not-so-pleasant reminiscence of the rumours and myth of 1981. But, you have a job to conduct: the collection of ratings. In a flash of *deja vu*, no different from what Geoff De Luca, an Adelaide journalist told us last year: "It was a great story... pretty young woman, husband with a fringe church, baby taken by a dingo... at Ayers Rock". After the first *Adelaide Advertiser* hit the streets with the Azaria story, as that journo was packing up to go home, he got the news: sales of the paper have gone up 150,000 copies.

"Stay there." And so he did. And so does the story of Frank Cole; still there, back in 1980, when the media gripped this story and wouldn't let go... despite knowing they were dealing with rumour, not fact...

Four years ago we were approached to re-tell the Azaria Chamberlain story. After initial doubt we were finally convinced that it was a story ready to be told again; after meeting hundreds of people who were involved at a primary level, we had amassed a body of material in which we felt we could tell the story as it had never been told before. Police interviews, interviews with lawyers, forensic experts, eyewitnesses, rangers at Uluru, transcripts, reports, letters, files...

And then the phone rang in the office. At the end of the line was a man who said, "I'm Frank Cole and I have a confession." We pounced on him. When we first heard his story we thought we had "the final truth"... This was going to be an amazing, sensational climax to our story, already crammed with new and revealing information about certain participants. But warning bells rang. It seemed to be a gift too good to be true. We had to apply scepticism. "It's in the detail", we had been told by a profiler, Claude Minisini. "Stories are easy but detail is hard; that's when they (criminals) start to make things up and make mistakes."

And mistakes Frank Cole made. Very quickly.

Frank told us he had been camping and hunting in the Uluru National Park. He and his mates had been shooting dingoes. On the night in question they shot a dingo and, when approaching it, discovered it had a baby in its mouth. When they saw this they were all shocked and deeply upset.

Liberty file note:

"The head of the baby was badly damaged and had an ear missing. The garment was not torn. There were ribbons around the waist of the garment and we could see the baby's hands and there was lace around the cuffs. A leg was exposed 'with bare feet. We put the baby on the back gate of the ute on a towel or blanket and started to cut the clothes. We decided to undo the buttons instead. The nappy had safety pin and we washed the little girl and put her in a bag and had a cup of tea to decide what to do. My friend Norman disposed of the clothes and the body. Somewhere near the Rock. When I got home I found ribbon from the baby." Frank said: "The child had a hooded knitted garment".

Frank also told us he likes to read stories of true crime.

These are the inaccuracies:

There were no ribbons around the waist of the jumpsuit, as he described.

The baby's hands were covered by the jumpsuit; there was no lace around the cuffs.

The baby's booties were on its feet, not outside the jumpsuit, as he described.
There were no buttons on the jumpsuit.
It was a disposable nappy, therefore no safety pins.
The knitted garment had no hood.
Nobody heard a gunshot that night.

Frank's story in 2004 also contained the suggestion the baby was taken back to Melbourne and disposed of possibly in a backyard; in the story he told us the baby was disposed of at Ayers Rock.

When we asked Frank to give us the names of the others in his hunting party so we could contact their loved ones, as they had all died but presumably loved ones still were living; and wouldn't they have been told... he chose not to call us back.

Frank Cole's dramatic revelations which, in October 2004, were dismissed by the NT Coroner, are yet another example of the grip and fascination the case has with people even 25 years after the disappearance.

NEWS FLASH

Frank Cole makes claims about another murder mystery

September 6, 2004 -7.53pm.

The man who claims he shot the dingo that killed Azaria Chamberlain has told police he can solve one of Melbourne's most notorious murders. Frank Cole, 78, of suburban Pascoe Vale, made headlines in July after he claimed he shot a dingo that had killed baby Azaria, who disappeared from a campsite at Uluru in Central Australia on August 17, 1980. On Monday, Channel 10 News reported Mr Cole contacted Victoria Police claiming he saw convicted murderer Peter Dupas fleeing Fawkner Cemetery after the brutal murder of Mersina Halvaxis in November 1997. A police spokeswoman confirmed Mr Cole had made claims that he was aware of a person who may have been responsible for the murder of Ms Halvaxis. But she could not confirm that Dupas was the subject of Mr Cole's allegations. She said the allegations were thoroughly investigated by the homicide squad but were not substantiated.