



“They’re **not** my drugs. I **didn’t** put them there”

- SCHAPELLE CORBY



“I’ve **never** violated a law of **my** country”

- BILL CLINTON

# “I SWEAR I DIDN'T DO IT”

SOME OF US ARE BETTER LIARS THAN OTHERS, BUT FEW CAN GET ONE PAST AUSTRALIA'S TOP DECEPTIVE BEHAVIOUR EXPERT. **LARRY WRITER** INVESTIGATES



“I have a wonderful wife and two very special kids. There is **nothing** a third party can do to change these **facts**”

– DAVID BECKHAM

ome on,” says Steve Van Aperen, “lie to me.” I am at the Melbourne home of the deceptive behaviour expert and detective. The subject is lies and liars, and the last thing your law-abiding reporter is expecting is the third degree from the FBI-trained polygraph examiner.

To demonstrate his ability to detect deception, I’m to give varying versions of my journey that morning from Sydney to South Yarra. One is to be as it happened, uneventful and straightforward; the other littered with fibs. I recall how my alarm clock failed to ring, there was a security scare at the airport, how I lost my bag and the crooked taxi driver who drove me from Tullamarine to Van Aperen’s, via Geelong. All the while, the human polygraph machine across the room is watching me intently. I’m sure I’m lying plausibly. I’m mistaken.

“Your body language and speech was totally different in the second version,” Van Aperen says. “The first time, you spoke evenly, sequentially, in the past tense and in the first person. You said ‘um’ or ‘ah’ just four times. You sat still, glancing up and to the left as we often do when we’re remembering. During the second [fake] version of the story you shuffled in

the chair, glanced around, crossed and uncrossed your legs and bounced your foot, folded your arms, tugged your ear, licked your lips, scratched the end of your nose, kept changing tenses and spoke in grabs. You said ‘um’ or ‘ah’ 13 times as you stalled for time to get your story together. It’s easy to think of a lie, but it’s much harder to communicate it convincingly to someone who knows the signals. Sorry, but like almost everyone else, you’re a terrible liar.”

Busted big-time, but there’s no shame being caught out by Van Aperen. A big, cheery, easygoing guy, he was a cop in Victoria and South Australia for 14 years before studying behavioural interviewing in the US. After graduating from Western Oregon University as a polygraph examiner, he spent time at the FBI’s elite behavioural science unit at Quantico, Virginia, and did an internship with the LAPD.

Since 1997, when he resigned from the police force, he’s been a lie-buster at large, commissioned by law-enforcement agencies, the media, private companies and even suspicious spouses around the world. This aficionado of falsehoods has interviewed – or, as he puts it, gone on “fishing expeditions” – with thousands suspected of having something to hide: thieves, murderers, kidnappers, cheating husbands, prevaricating politicians and executive job applicants who have perhaps gilded the lily on their CVs.

His time with the FBI was a revelation to Van Aperen, aged 43. “As a young detective in Australia, sometimes my questioning of a suspect brought a confession and sometimes it didn’t. I had no idea how to interview properly and usually wasn’t picking up the interviewee’s signals.”

When you suspect a person of doing wrong, but have no forensic, scientific, medical or trace evidence to tie them to the crime, questions are all that remain. “My training prepared me to talk, listen and observe a suspect in an interview. More times than I can count, I’ve brought him or her to justice or exonerated them if innocent.”

Van Aperen, a self-confessed fan of Peter Falk’s amiable but deadly TV detective *Columbo*, chats in a friendly, respectful manner to a suspect about what they know of a crime. “You must establish a rapport,” he says. “No-one is going to divulge information to someone who is threatening. Their verbal and bodily responses to my questions lead me to conclusions about their involvement. I create an environment in which they feel comfortable. I let them minimise, justify and rationalise their behaviour. I don’t blame, I find out.”

He still shudders as he remembers the time he, still a junior, and a detective colleague grilled a Melbourne paedophile suspected of new crimes. “My partner pointed at him and yelled, ‘If you don’t tell us what you did to this kid we’ll lock you up and throw away the key, your wife will leave you, and you’ll never see your children again!’ He was giving the suspect excellent reasons not to answer questions.” →

Van Aperen, whose memoir *The Truth About Lies*, has just been released, normally begins by asking innocuous questions – the suspect’s name, occupation, address – noticing, all the while, their unstressed speech and mannerisms. He then compares this benchmark behaviour with that when curlier questions and subjects are raised: where were you on July 23? Do you know where the stolen property is? Did you kill her?

Van Aperen believes a good interrogator must be a first-rate analyst of human behaviour prepared to observe and listen at length, while tailoring questions carefully and specifically. “For example,” he says, “when a thief is asked whether she stole \$20,000, it’s easy for her to say she didn’t if she knows the sum she actually stole was \$19,999. Questions must be clear, exact and concise, allowing no manoeuvring.”

Once, when commissioned by a client to ask a murder suspect if he knew where the body was, Van Aperen told his client the question was badly framed. “Why? Surely if he killed her, he’ll know where the body is,” protested the client. Van Aperen replied, “Not necessarily. He genuinely may not. What if an accomplice disposed of the body? What if he threw the body off a bridge into a river? He won’t have a clue where the current has taken his victim.”

Alarm bells also clang for Van Aperen when an interviewee is evasive, omissive or dismissive. “Ask yourself: have you ever been accused of something you know you didn’t do? If so, you’ll have angrily denied involvement. If someone asks you: ‘Did you steal \$10,000?’ I’d expect an innocent person to declare, ‘No, I didn’t.’ Someone with something to hide may reply, ‘Why would I steal \$10,000?’ I’m also wary of people who waffle, ‘I’d like to say ...’ and ‘I’d like to think I’d never do such a thing.’”

## HOW TO TELL IF SOMEONE IS LYING

- Once an interrogator knows a suspect’s normal behaviour, he looks for abnormal body language and speech in the interview that signals deception. For example, **LEGS AND ARMS CROSSED** indicate defensiveness.
- Look for contradictions between what a person is saying and what he is doing, such as **SAYING NO, WHILE NODDING YES**.
- Non-verbal indicators of lying are a **HAND OVER THE MOUTH, PANIC-STRICKEN EYES, ADJUSTING THE COLLAR, REPOSITIONING IN THE SEAT AND EXCESSIVE SMILING**.
- Look for “micro expressions”. When we receive a pointed question or alarming news, our brain automatically sends a message to our facial muscles resulting in a momentary **FURROWING OF THE BROW, AN EYE SHIFT, A TWITCH** and so on.
- US research shows that when we lie our autonomic nervous system regulates the body’s functions through emotions. Consequently, when stressed **PUPILS DILATE, HEART RATE ALTERS, BLOOD PRESSURE INCREASES, PERSPIRATION OCCURS AND THE MOUTH BECOMES DRY**.
- A truth-teller typically speaks in singular person, past tense. In contrast, the recollections of a liar, who can’t rely on memory, will be sparse because he’s processing the information in his head on the spot. **THE LIAR’S STORY WILL BE RECOUNTED OUT OF SEQUENCE AND THE TENSES WILL NOT BE CONSISTENT. Voice tone may change. There’ll be “ums” and “ahs”.**



The truth is, nobody can pick a liar quite like Steve Van Aperen.

Schappelle Corby’s denial of drug smuggling rang true for Van Aperen. “When asked if the drugs in the boogie board were hers, she replied, ‘They’re not my drugs. I didn’t put them there.’ You couldn’t ask for a more straightforward denial of guilt,” he says.

“Yet I immediately doubted David Beckham when he responded to, ‘Are press reports that you had a sexual affair with Rebecca Loos true?’ with, ‘I have become accustomed to reading ludicrous stories about my private life. What appeared this morning is just one other example. I have a wonderful wife and two very special kids. There is nothing a third party can do to change these facts.’ Well and good, but he didn’t answer the question and so gave the impression he had indeed had a fling with Loos.”

Van Aperen continues, “I interviewed a male doctor who’d been accused by one of his female patients of exposing himself to her in his surgery. He indignantly offered, ‘I didn’t drop my pants to the ground at all.’ Liars often isolate one area of the allegation and hang their hat on that because they know they’re being truthful about this particular thing. But you can still expose yourself without dropping your pants.”

Van Aperen also notes that when asked if he had ever smoked marijuana, former US president Bill Clinton said, “I’ve never violated a law of my country.” Turns out he smoked the drug in the UK. Federal Treasurer Peter Costello was guilty of similar slippery-sliding, says Van Aperen. “When it was put to him that he coveted the Liberal leadership, he replied, ‘I remain faithful to the Liberals and Mr Howard has my greatest respect.’ Well, yes, Mr Costello, but do you want to be PM?” **m**

# THE MOMENT OF TRUTH

People lie for many reasons – but some have much darker motives than others. **Steve Van Aperen** talks us through the language clues that gave the game up for these convicted criminals

	the accused said:	the lie expert says:
	<p><b>TAN DUC THANH NGUYEN</b>            One of the so-called Bali Nine, Tan Duc Thanh Nguyen, 23, was among a group of Australian citizens arrested in Denpasar, Bali, on April 17, 2005, for plotting to smuggle 8.3kg of heroin from Indonesia to Australia. On February 15, 2006, he was sentenced to life imprisonment. Last October, he told a court and the media he'd only been holidaying in Indonesia: "I was stunned to hear that some of the members of the Bali Nine pointed their fingers at me and said I was the financier... I stand here before you to tell you that I love Indonesia and would never intentionally damage or hurt her reputation ... As the only and oldest son in the family I was the one who supported my four younger sisters and I paid for the groceries and my sisters' education and school needs, so how could I possibly be the financier?"</p>	<p>"He's omissive and evasive. I'd expect a truthful person to exonerate himself. The first thing I listen for is a denial and there's not one in Tan Duc's statement. He talks about his family and what a good man he is."</p>
	<p><b>JOHN SHARPE</b>            In March 2004, Sharpe, 37, of Mornington, Victoria, shot wife Anna Marie Kemp and their toddler daughter Gracie with a speargun while they slept. He dismembered his wife's body and disposed of the corpses before fronting police and the media two months later to report them missing. He claimed pregnant Anna Marie had left him for another man and taken Gracie with her.            Asked by reporters if he'd killed Anna Marie and Gracie, a pale and trembling Sharpe, ostentatiously rubbing his wedding ring, wept "I haven't caused any harm to my wife or my daughter whatsoever. I haven't harmed either of them ... Being a suspect makes me sick ... I understand that people will have their own opinions, but I can't really do anything to change what people think. I also understand that the police have a job to do and they have to investigate and question me."</p>	<p>"Sharpe didn't say, 'I didn't kill my wife and daughter.' Instead, he carefully said that he never 'harmed' them. He's deliberately confusing the words 'harmed' and 'hurt' and rationalising that because they were asleep when he shot them, they felt no pain. And he was 'sick' not with grief, but with worry at the prospect of being apprehended by police." →</p>

what the accused said:

the lie expert says:



**BRUCE BURRELL**

In July 1997, Burrell agreed to face questioning by *60 Minutes* reporter Richard Carleton over suspicion that he was involved with the disappearance of Sydney mother Kerry Whelan two months earlier. (Burrell, 53, was convicted on June 5 this year of kidnapping and murdering Whelan and sentenced to life imprisonment on August 9.)

Carleton said to Burrell, "Police have been crawling over (your) property (at Bungonia, near Canberra) ... because they believe you kidnapped ..." Burrell interrupted, "Well, the interesting thing is, one of the very first questions I was asked when they first arrived was had I been doing any digging lately. I said, 'We haven't had rain here for months and if you can dig any deeper than six inches around here with all the equipment you've got you're doing pretty well.' So the answer is no, I haven't been doing any digging ..."

"That's bullshit! If Burrell was truly innocent he'd have been outraged that he was a suspect. It's difficult to fake outrage, so he hasn't even tried. His digging answer doesn't even relate to the question. That's what deceptive people do. Also, they start answering the question before the interrogator has finished asking it. They can't bear to hear it, so they cut it short."

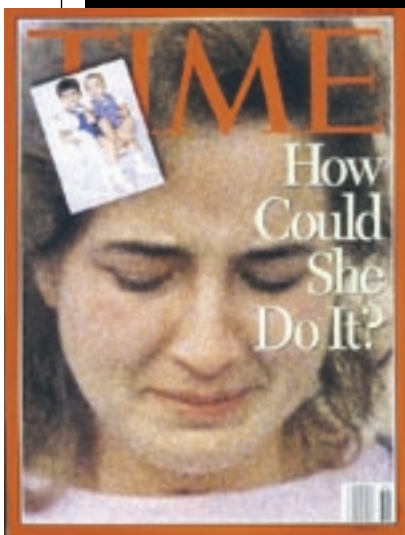


**JOE KORP**

Korp's lover, Tania Herman, testified that on February 9, 2005, the Melbourne man made her strangle his wife Maria, pile her body in his red Mazda 626 and park the car where it would appear Maria's mystery abductor had abandoned it. Korp's car was found on February 13, with Maria, near-death, in the boot. Korp and Herman were charged with attempted murder; which became murder when Maria died on August 4 after languishing in a coma. Korp hanged himself on August 12. After reporting Maria missing, a seemingly distraught Korp faced the media to plead for her return.

"All I want is for my wife to come home and for us to live like a family. I love her very much. She's never missed church on Sundays. She prays every night. She goes out of her way to do things for other people ... Anyone who knows Maria knows she's a fantastic mother and (wife) ... She's so well respected."

"I'm always suspicious when someone builds up into a saint someone they're suspected of doing away with. Korp's talk of her being a churchgoer beyond reproach is his attempt to get across that there was no motive for him to kill her because she was so wonderful no-one who knew her would ever have harmed her."



**SUSAN SMITH**

America's heart went out to 23-year-old Smith when she told her seemingly horrific tale on the TV news and talk shows. On October 25, 1994, she said a gunman commandeered the car in which she was driving her two young sons. Eight kilometres down the road, he ordered her out and powered off with Michael, three, and Alex, 14 months.

In reality, Smith had locked her boys in her Mazda sedan, opened a window enough for water to flood in and rolled the car into John D Long Lake where the trapped toddlers drowned. Before the children's bodies were found and she was charged with matricide, Smith was asked by a television journalist if she was responsible for their disappearance. She vowed, "I would never hurt my kids. I loved them." She also sobbed, "I've put all my faith and trust in the Lord that he will bring them back home."

"The big giveaway is that Smith speaks of her children in the past tense. 'I loved them.' She obviously knows Michael and Alex are dead and beyond love or help. And to compound matters, she brings God into the equation, to establish herself as a pious person who would be unlikely to commit such a heinous act as matricide. And I'm always wary when an accused person invokes validation from an unattainable source, be it God, his mother's grave or his son's eyes." **m**