



**ANNE LOUISE
BANNON
FAMILY
VIEWING**

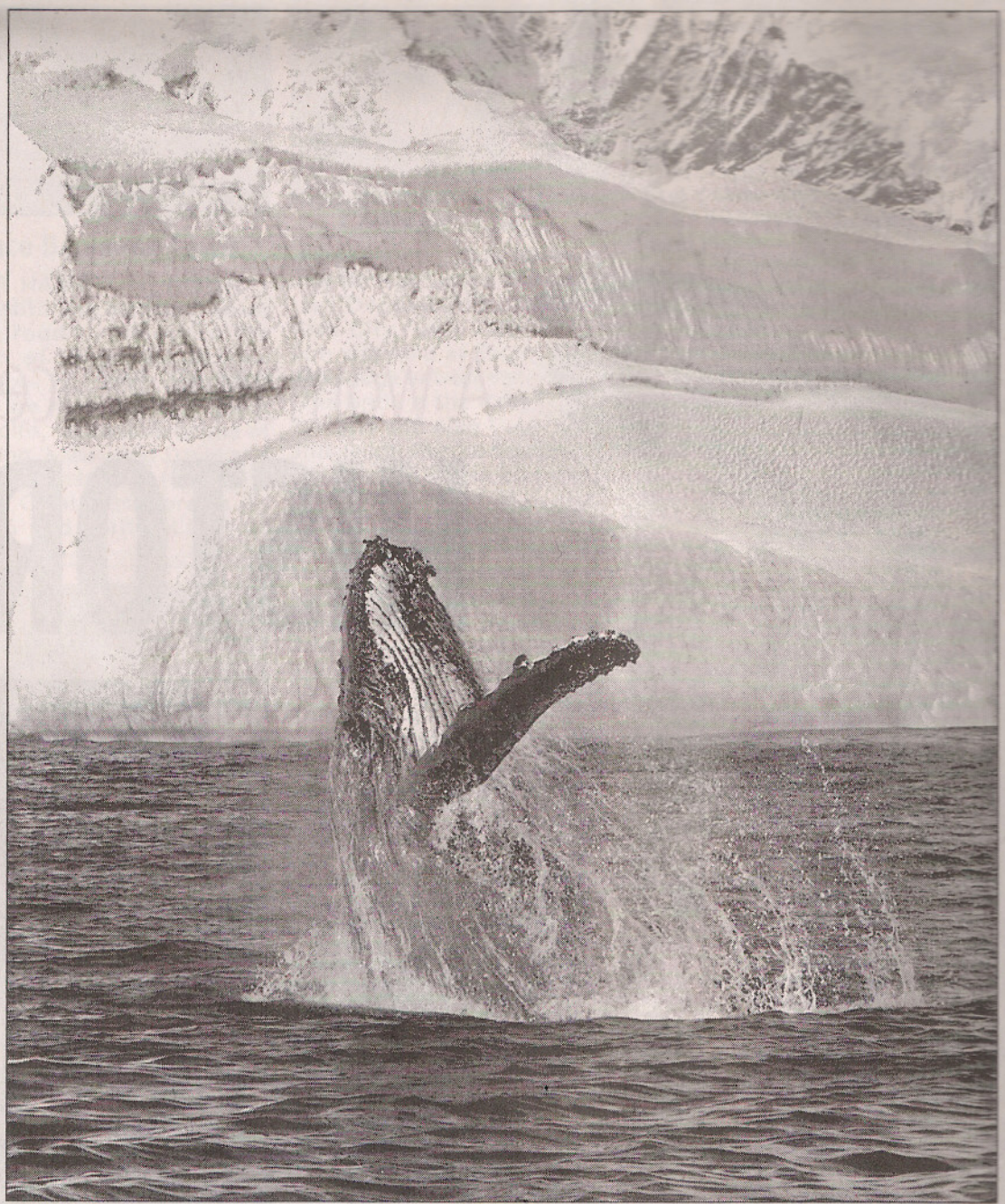
I'm coming to the conclusion that denial isn't just about addiction. We all know that one of the greatest obstacles to getting addicts into treatment is their denial that there is a problem. In fact, it's often likened to an elephant in the room that no one wants to admit is there, never mind how huge and overwhelming having an elephant in your room is.

I've got three shows this week that in different ways deal with various forms of denial. One, a nature doc, seems to be dancing around the issue of the environment. A second is trying to get past the stigma of a job loss by laughing at it. The third show is in our face about probably the worst elephant in the room of American culture - racism.

Discovery Channel has been making this huge deal about the nature doc "Planet Earth" - a limited series that will be airing in 11 parts over the next five Sundays, starting tonight at 8 p.m. I will say there is beautiful photography, but there is also some of the worst narration ever written. Every third shot is a "first ever," there's all this fabulous new technology. In fact, there's so much bragging, it's amazing they got any information in about the wildlife being shot. Granted that first hour is more of a survey of what the rest of the series will cover, but it still comes off as another ad for high definition TV.

At least, they don't avoid mentioning that one rare leopard is on the brink of extinction. But that's one mention among a host of other species shown, which face similar threats because of habitat loss and global warming. Also, the tendency to cast the predators as bad guys is really unfair. Predators hunt because that's how they eat and it helps keep the population of the prey at manageable numbers and healthy by culling out the sick.

Showtime's film "Fired!," Thursday at 8:30 p.m., must be approached with extreme caution because of the language and some of the attitudes about stealing from employers, and excessive drinking. That being said, it looks at getting fired, uses laughter as the coping mechanism and ultimately offers hope. The starting point is Anabelle Gurwitch's own experience getting fired from a play by Woody Allen. But she not only managed to find a way



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Wildlife is the focus of "Planet Earth," an 11-part documentary series premiering Sunday on Discovery Channel.

to cope with being fired by a cultural icon, she turned it into a book, a stage production and now this film, in which she talks with all sorts of people from the famous to the average every day, about being fired and turning it around.

Which leaves us with "Race to Execution," on PBS (10 p.m. Tuesday). It's the latest offering from the network's Independent Lens series of documentary films. The film explores the reality that who is executed and who is not in this country is very much a matter of race. It is not easy to watch. But it is necessary.

Produced by Rachel Lyon and Jim Lopes, and directed by Lyon, the introduction to the series points out that one of them supports the death penalty and the other doesn't. We do hear the voice of a woman whose father was murdered and how she felt when the person convicted

for that crime was executed. But we also hear from the condemned man's family, not to mention a host of other experts with strong evidence that the wrong man was executed.

We don't want to talk about racism, no matter what the color of our skin is. It's a hard subject to deal with because we all want to believe it's not still with us. And yet the evidence is inescapable that it is still with us. And this film makes it very clear that we still value the lives of white people over those of people of color.

Regardless of whether or not you believe that the death penalty should be there to punish those most horrific crimes, it's impossible to escape the reality that the death penalty, as practiced in the United States, is badly misapplied. The system is broken.

Part of that is because of how deeply entrenched racism is in

our culture. It is the elephant in the room, and it won't get any better until all of us "go beyond the Wall," as Sr. Eva Lumas, an African-American nun and theology professor, put it during a seminar I recently attended. We have to be present to people who don't look like us, don't think like us, who are not like us, not just to find the universe of commonality that we share, but to rejoice in our differences.

"Race to Execution" left me with little to rejoice about, and left there, it is depressing as all get out. But getting us out of our comfort zones is why films like this are so incredibly necessary. Because when we're comfortable, it's too easy to not reach out. It's too easy to pretend the elephant isn't there.

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