
September 1982 "BASIS", newsletter of the Bay Area Skeptics

Bay Area Skeptics Information Sheet

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Bay Area Skeptics is the first local chapter of the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal (CSICOP)

"THE CASE OF THE UFOS"

[Ed. note: WGBH Boston was kind enough to furnish us with this release.]

NOVA opens fall season with "The Case of the UFOs" on Tuesday, October 12, 8 PM, on PBS (check local listings).

Are they watching?

The Air Force says the reports are groundless. The CIA says they're not responsible. The sightings, however, continue unabated. Now NOVA, America's award-winning science documentary series, presents television's first rigorous, scientific investigation into the fact, fiction, and hoax of unidentified flying objects.

UFO sightings are often reported in sensationalist newspapers. NOVA, however, introduces serious investigators who are carefully sifting, researching, and interpreting UFO reports, because they feel there is more to UFOs than fantasy.

One scientist says that normal explanations can be found for 99 percent of UFO reports. He's interested in the one percent that are left.

NOVA takes a penetrating look at several famous UFO reports. Were Apollo astronauts shadowed by mysterious spacecraft on their way to the moon?

Was Travis Walton...abducted by aliens and taken into their spacecraft? He passed a lie-detector test on his story.... NOVA... also reveals little-known facts about the lie test and the newspaper's involvement.

What about Police Deputy Val Johnson, whose cruiser reportedly was damaged in an encounter with a brilliant ball of light?

The U.S. military closed its official investigation of UFOs 13 years ago, but NOVA proves that serious study of these mysterious phenomena is very much alive, and may just now be on the verge of

significant discoveries.

Says Robert Sheaffer about this investigation: "I have not seen this show yet, but Groom certainly impressed me as an objective researcher, and he stated his aim of presenting the facts fairly and honestly. Among those who will be appearing in the show are Philip J. Klass of CSICOP, and Allan Hendry and Bruce Maccabee of the Center for UFO Studies. Perhaps we will for once see a show on the subject of UFOs that is based upon facts, instead of the sensationalized rubbish we have all become accustomed to seeing."

CALENDAR

Oct. 12. "The Case of the UFOs" on TV.

Nov. 20. "The UFO Verdict: Examining the Evidence." The Gorilla Grotto is sponsoring Robert Sheaffer.

Dec. 15. "Does ESP Exist? A Demonstration and Debate." The Gorilla Grotto is sponsoring Bay Area Skeptics.

THE UFO VERDICT: EXAMINING THE EVIDENCE

Saturday, November 20, at 8:00 PM, the Gorilla Grotto is presenting a program examining the current theories and controversies surrounding unidentified flying objects, close encounters, and human abductions, using slides of famous UFO cases, together with a talk and a question-and-answer period. The latest theories, such as "extraterrestrial", "intraterrestrial", and "multi-dimensional", will be explained and examined. The speaker is Robert Sheaffer.

Location: Habitat Center, 3895 18th Street (at Sanchez), San Francisco. Admission: \$3.00.

DOES ESP EXIST? A DEMONSTRATION AND DEBATE

Wednesday, December 15, at 8:00 PM, the Gorilla Grotto is presenting a program that will begin with a purported demonstration of ESP, including telepathy, clairvoyance, precognition, and psychokinesis. It will then be examined and debated by a representative of the Bay Area Skeptics. The audience is invited to challenge and question either side.

Location: 5033 California (at 12th Avenue), San Francisco.
Admission: \$3.00.

DOES BAS HOLD MEETINGS?

Several people have expressed interest in attending meetings of BAS. They want to meet other interested parties in the Bay Area and want to exchange ideas, discussion, and friendship.

All of this seems to be a perfectly reasonable request.

Please send some feedback to your editor regarding your thoughts on this: whether, how, where, the nature of the meeting, format, open to the public, and such other ideas that occur to you.

H.A.N.D.

LIBRARY PROPOSED FOR BAS by Robert Sheaffer

A suggestion made at a recent BAS Directors' meeting was that we set up a library of newspaper clippings and other information concerning local area "psychics" and psychic researchers. Obviously, the reputation of a "psychic" is based upon his or her success in past predictions or other miracles, but unfortunately at the present time we have relatively little information on the previous success/failure of local "psychics". Perhaps some of our readers can help us out.

I volunteer to help the effort get started, to try to sort the information in some comprehensible format. Perhaps some day we may publish a summary of our files, or an index; it was even suggested that we might eventually get it all sorted on a computer.

All this is for the future; for the present, I would like to receive information, especially local newspaper and magazine clippings, about Bay Area "psychics" and those who investigate "psychics". What did such well-known local wizards as Kay Rhea and Sylvia Brown predict in 1980? In 1979? In 1969? What did local parapsychology labs do in recent years, and what findings did they announce?

If we are able to fulfill one of our key aims of being a reliable source of information for local educators, researchers, and reporters, we must begin to get our files better organized. Please send contributions (news, not money) to me at 1341 Poe Lane, San Jose, CA 95130. If the effort is a success, we will periodically report on how things are progressing. Also, since I often do not see all of the local papers, even the major ones, please clip and send anything you see in the future that looks significant.

[Ed. note: Hear! Hear! Excellent idea. Thank you, Robert.]

LETTERS

To the editor:

My article entitled "Tracking a `Psychic'" dealt with Jeanne Borger, not Jeane Dixon, as implied in the editorial preface to Mike McCarthy's article. It would appear that the editor misread the name in my article. [Note: That issue has been corrected in reprints.]

Additionally, I believe that it would be wise editorial policy to allow people mentioned in "BASIS", including the purported psychic named in my article, the opportunity to respond. While replies in the same issue would be desirable, this undoubtedly would be too time-consuming for a publication of the nature of "BASIS".

I intend, in the future, to send a copy of any prospective article of mine to all parties mentioned, with a request for comments. However, I will not wait for replies, unless necessary for the article. I think that all articles should be so treated.

Finally, what does H.A.N.D. stand for? Heathens Against Normalcy and Decency? How About New Donations? Happiness And Naked Depravity?

-- Dr. Kenneth D. Bomben

ED. REPLY: On your first point, you are of course right. We misread (or more precisely, probably did not read) the name in your article. Our (Ugh! The editorial "we" does get silly at times.) -- my apologies.

Your point about notifying people in the articles about the publication is well taken. Consider that to be policy effective this issue. Thank you for suggesting that.

Congratulations on questioning the "H.A.N.D." Please see next article.

And lastly, Ken has moved away from the Bay Area. Much luck and success to you in your new location! Give us a shout when you visit. (Ken intends to stay in touch with Bay Area Skeptics.)

AND YOU CALL YOURSELVES SKEPTICS

What started out as a whimsical editorial insertion turned out to be an experiment (of sorts) in curiosity.

Please look at the last item on page one of this issue. How many of you out there know the meaning of "H.A.N.D."? How many of you were curious about it? How many of you thought about it at all?

How many of you even noticed it?

"H.A.N.D." has been tucked away in large type in every issue of "BASIS". Why didn't you ask?

To my knowledge, there are only two people who receive "BASIS" who knew the meaning of "H.A.N.D." Ken Bomben was one of only three people who asked!

For your information, "H.A.N.D." was originated by Martin Grosswirth of New York. Having been bombarded by everyone from executives to waitresses to cab-drivers, to everyone else with the greeting "Have a nice day", Martin envisioned the day when computers would sign off with that. Computers being what they are, this would eventually be shortened to "H.A.N.D." Martin then envisioned a dictionary three hundred years hence defining:

"hand. n. a concluding or parting remark. (Origin unknown. Probably from the time when humans lived in caves and waved good-bye with their hands.)"

To Stan Bercovitch goes the credit for the Southern version: "H.A.N.D.Y." That's "Have a nice day, y'all."

I know, I know! But Ken did ask, and you were entitled to a full explanation.

Seen on a T-shirt worn by Ron Hipschman, Scientific Consultant to Bay Area Skeptics: "WHEN EVOLUTION IS OUTLAWED, ONLY OUTLAWS WILL EVOLVE."

"People who leave their bodies are not all there." -- Bob Steiner

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A CHALLENGE TO ALL PSYCHICS

We are the Bay Area Skeptics (BAS), a group of people who support

the testing of paranormal claims, but are unconvinced by any of the supposed proofs of psychic powers that have been presented so far. We are committed only to finding out the truth about so-called psychic powers, whatever that truth may be. Nothing would be more exciting than to discover the existence of a genuine psychic power, if such a thing exists. However, experience has sadly shown that the field of psychic research is so filled with self-delusion, evasion, and fraud, that we are frankly skeptical that any genuine paranormal powers exist at all.

We hereby issue the following challenge to any and all psychics and psychic researchers in the Bay Area: Show us just one psychic power, of any kind, that can be demonstrated to be real under controlled conditions. Claims of psychic powers are abundant -- but we want to see somebody who can DEMONSTRATE a genuine ability at prediction, clairvoyance, telekinesis, paranormal healing, or any other alleged psychic power.

If you are a psychic, why is it to your advantage to accept this challenge? First, because of the monetary reward being offered, and second, because of the recognition and prestige you will achieve as the first person to successfully demonstrate such powers to a group of knowledgeable skeptics.

Robert A. Steiner, director of Bay Area Skeptics, is a professional magician of many years' experience. He is personally offering a reward of \$1,000.00 to any person who can demonstrate ANY psychic power under controlled conditions, provided that Steiner is unable to duplicate or explain it by normal means. Furthermore, James Randi of New Jersey, a famous stage magician known as "The Amazing Randi," has for years offered \$10,000.00 for proof of any psychic power performed under properly controlled conditions. Bay Area Skeptics will promptly report to Randi anyone whose powers seem worthy of testing. (In both cases, the conditions of the test will be arranged in advance with the would-be psychic, and the test will not begin until both parties are satisfied that the arrangement is fair.) Thus, anyone with genuine psychic powers can easily collect \$11,000.00 from these two men.

The Bay Area Skeptics is a local chapter of the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal (CSICOP), a worldwide organization of scientists and researchers who are skeptical of paranormal claims. CSICOP is the largest and best-known group of its kind in the world. Anyone who appears to possess genuine psychic powers will be reported to CSICOP's Executive Council, which will arrange further testing.

Think of the enormous recognition that would be given to the first person to convince the world's most outspoken skeptics of the reality of psychic powers! Think also of the tremendous benefit to science and humanity if the existence of miraculous powers for healing and for obtaining knowledge could at long last be proven!

There is probably no other place in the United States where the

number of alleged psychics, and the degree of belief in psychic powers, is as high as here in the Bay Area. Psychic readers, healers, etc., abound in San Francisco, Berkeley, San Jose, and throughout the Bay Area. Purportedly scientific investigations of psychic powers are frequently carried out at SRI in Menlo Park, as well as at many other organizations in the Bay Area. Many of the area's colleges offer credit or extension courses in astrology, astral projection, aura reading, etc. We at BAS are proclaiming that "The Emperor Has No Clothes", and we challenge anyone to prove us wrong.

We are not difficult to reach. We all live in the immediate area. If you believe you have genuine psychic powers, the advantages of accepting this challenge are considerable.

WELCOME, ANDY!

Andrew Fraknoi, Ph.D., Executive Officer of the Astronomical Society of the Pacific, has joined the Board of BAS.

Andy's investigations into the paranormal are considerable. His media appearances have been numerous. He handles himself quite well in front of the microphone and camera.

His enthusiasm and ideas are a welcome addition to the BAS Board.

Welcome, Andy!

WE AT UP-OVER RECEIVED...

We are pleased to hear from Mark Plummer, Editor of "The Skeptic", newsletter of the Australian Skeptics. From across thousands of miles of water came warm good wishes:

"Congratulations on getting a Bay Area chapter of CSICOP going. Congratulations too on a brilliant name for your chapter: `Bay Area Skeptics' Now where did you get the divine inspiration for such a title?"

We are all tickled pinker than a galah's belly that there is another group of `Skeptics'"

Mark, we from the Land Up-Over wish you and the Australian Skeptics well. Thank you.

SACRAMENTO SCENE
by Terence J. Sandbek, Ph.D.

Gullibility knows no boundaries: It infects young and old, rich and poor, male and female, educated and uneducated. What happens in Sacramento happens in San Francisco and Chico. People who fall for psychic foolishness here are no different from people all over the world. As we report happenings in our area, remember that we in metropolitan Sacramento are neither more nor less gullible than people elsewhere.

Several months ago, Bob Steiner and I appeared on a local radio talk show. The hostess introduced us as "two gentlemen who claim to be psychics". She went on to say that "if anyone wants to call in and talk, feel free to do so." Almost instantly, the telephone lines were full. This is interesting in itself. Since I had been on that particular show several times concerning other issues, I was familiar with the trickle of responses common to most talk shows. At other times, I have listened, and it appeared that the host or hostess was trying desperately to get people to call in.

This day, that was not a problem. The first caller, of course, wanted information about her life in terms of how something was going to turn out in the future. Bob did a standard "cold reading", which lasted several minutes, and the caller's response was one of satisfaction. After twenty minutes and six cold readings, the hostess asked Bob if he would mind giving his credentials as a psychic. His response was: Sure, I'll be glad to. I'm a fake! I'm no psychic. I can't read people's minds." Bob went on to explain that what he had been doing was something almost anyone can learn to do.

After some more questioning by the hostess, it was quite obvious that Bob had fooled everybody into thinking he was really a psychic by using the age-old trick of cold readings. The difference was that Bob claimed nothing supernatural, merely a skill capable of being learned by almost anyone.

No sooner was this explained than the phone rang and a man asked Bob to tell him how his job was going to go next year. Incredulous, the show hostess asked the caller if he had been listening to the show. When he said "yes", Bob inquired whether the man had understood the explanation of what had occurred. The incredible response from the caller was:

"Yes, I understand fully what you are doing, but do it anyway."

NEXT MONTH: Update on Scientific Consultants and media appearances.

Opinions expressed in "BASIS" are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of BAS, its board or its advisors.

The above are selected articles from the September, 1982 issue of "BASIS", the monthly publication of Bay Area Skeptics. You can obtain a free sample copy by sending your name and address to BAY AREA SKEPTICS, 4030 Moraga, San Francisco, CA 94122-3928 or by leaving a message on "The Skeptic's Board" BBS (415-648-8944) or on the 415-LA-TRUTH (voice) hotline.

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