
July 1987 issue of "BASIS", newsletter of the Bay Area Skeptics

Bay Area Skeptics Information Sheet
Vol. 6, No. 7
Editor: Kent Harker

W. V. GRANT'S WATERLOO

[Our own inimitable Don Henvick, veteran of the Healing Crusades, has been a very busy man indeed over the last three years. Plagued by everything from heart conditions to ovarian cancer (you heard it right), he has been thankfully released from them all (albeit under sundry aliases) by the best of the healers, including Peter Popoff and W.V. Grant. In the grand expose of Popoff by Randi and company, BAS played a significant role; Don was a leading character. The coverage was nationwide in TV and print media -- Don was featured or mentioned in many of them.

Grant has been much more difficult to pin down because he doesn't use mechanical or electronic devices, so tracking him, in hopes of getting a plant "called out" is a time-consuming, tiring ordeal. Imagine what it is like to have to listen to hours of Grant drivel while hoping to catch him off guard. Grant knows Henvick -- probably even in disguise. In spite of the time and effort required -- most of it ending in failure to get hard evidence -- Don has continued.

Finally, the many feet of heretofore wasted video and audio tape paid off in Oakland, CA. Grant was caught with his hand in the jar. All of this comes on the heels of the Bakker scandal, which, if not sounding the death-knell of TV ministry and slick hucksterism on the revival circuit, certainly plants a large black eye on the glib profiteers who ask money from the faithful while, as Jackie Gleason put it, they tell their listeners to ask God for their own money! Jesus admonished his apostles to "feed my sheep". Grant et. al think it says shear my sheep.

Don has transcribed major portions of the recordings of W.V. Grant sessions and provided them for "BASIS" along with the unedited tapes. BAS can't thank Don and company enough. The following are some salient statements from those tapes.... -- Ed.]

(Typical comments from services on Aug. 1, 1986.)

"When you come through the envelope line, don't be talking to me or asking me to pray for you or I can't call you out after awhile and ask you if I've ever talked to you before. How many understands [sic] that? And I'll be calling out many people individually before the prayer line and I might wanna ask you if I've ever talked to you before and I don't want you saying, `Yes, in that envelope line

I told you this, I told you that.' So don't tell me anything. It's not because I don't like you that I don't want you talking to me. It's because I love you and I may want to minister to you later. How many of you understands that?"

In a session on May 11, 1987, San Francisco skeptic JOHN TAUBE is called out with a non-existent malady and phony doctor and was then healed by Grant. The (false) information was given to Grant directly by Taube when Grant was sizing up his prospects almost two hours before the ceremony -- not in the prayer line.

Grant approached John, asked his name, what was wrong, and who his doctor was. In the service Grant asked, at the calling out, "Has any of my STAFF talked to you?" The careful way in which Grant phrases his approach -- that one must not talk to him in the prayer line leaves it to him to contact people before the meeting and have the victim answer honestly. But that honesty is cloaked in the worst deceit because the crowd easily infers that Grant has never talked with anyone and therefore any information he has is of supernatural origin. It is vile deceit because it involves cold cunningness, while the perpetrator can stand back and say he has clean hands.

The following Wednesday (the 20th), John attends another gathering in Oakland, this time accompanied by BAS advisor EUGENIE SCOTT posing as his niece. John's account of that conference and his encounter with Grant follows. (John arrived at the Kaiser Center about 5:30 for the 7:30 meeting when Grant again approached him in the lobby. Grant noted John's cane....)

Grant: Have you been in an accident?

Taube: No, Rev. Grant. Don't you remember me? I think you are the most wonderful man in the world.

G: No, Jesus is.

T: Well, what I mean is that it was through you last week in our S.F. revival that Jesus cured me of rheumatoid arthritis. I will never forget that night. I always carry a cane because when I get tired, I use it. The reason that I am here is because I am concerned about my niece who is blind.

G: IS SHE COMPLETELY BLIND?

T: Oh, no. She sees a little.

G: We are going to have a laying on of hands and we'll pray for her. What's your name?

T: I guess you forgot from last week. My name is John.

G: What is your niece's name?

T: Victoria.

G: Who is her doctor?

T: Dr. Rice in San Francisco.

[Now, the transcript of the healing of Genie Scott, a.k.a. Victoria, after she is called out.]

Grant: How many think God can heal this blind sister? Everybody say "Praise the Lord". What church are you a member of?

Scott: Church of Madeline.

G: Have you told me your name. Have you told me your needs? Have you told me anything about yourself?

S: No.

G: Everybody stretch your hands out. Since you been here anyone walk up and ask you anything?

S: No.

G: You've had this blindness for several years.

S: Yes.

G: Your doctors have done about all they can do. In fact God says the next time you see Dr. Rice, not only are you gonna see Dr. Rice for the first time, but God says he's gonna be astonished that you're even... in fact, in the past, you've just heard Dr. Rice. Who is your doctor?

S: Dr. Rice.

G: Have you told that to me or anybody? I mean, have you told that to anybody?

S: No. Not a soul.

G: Everybody say, "Praise the Lord". Now lift up your left hand. Is it... I wanna say Victoria?

S: Yes.

G: Victoria. How many believes God? How long have your eyes been that way? [Note: He doesn't clearly say blind when he asks her a direct question... always let the audience infer.]

S: Three. Three years.

G: [To the audience] Do you believe God can let you start seeing? Everyone say, "Father, in the name of Jesus, touch her". [To

Victoria] I want you to turn this way for a moment. Face me. Now please don't be afraid -- this is my hand you feel over your eyes. Just lift up your left hand. I'm just crazy enough to believe God can heal a blind eye. How many believes that? I'm gonna start praying. When I say the name Jesus, Victoria, I'm gonna take my hand off your eyes. I want you to take this hand and reach out and grab my nose as soon as I say the name Jesus. How many believes see can start seeing? Everybody say, "Lord lift up your eyes". Victoria, say "Jesus, you healed blind Bartimaeus".

S: You can heal blind Bartimaeus.

G: You can heal blind Victoria.

S: You can heal blind Victoria.

G: In the name of Jesus. It's not God's will for her to have a white cane and walk around with dark glasses. How many believes God can heal her? Victoria, in the name of Jesus, open your eyes, take this hand, reach out and grab ahold of my nose. Reach out and grab ahold of my ear. Reach out and get ahold of this one. How many fingers do I have up?

S: Two.

G: How many is that?

S: Three. Two.

G: Everybody wave at her. Victoria, if you see them, wave back.

S: I see them! Thank you very much!

G: Everyone give Jesus a big hand. I believe, I believe; now you can see the faces, you can count my fingers, and your eyes aren't 20/20 yet and I believe they're gonna get better every day because God's letting you see tonight. Praise the Lord. Look back there and tell everyone who healed you.

S: Dr. Jesus.

G: Jesus. Everybody give Jesus a big hand. Hallelujah!

That was Wednesday, May 20, 1987. On Friday the 22nd, after careful preparatory work with reporter Don DeMain of the "Oakland Tribune", a six-column article broke in the morning edition detailing Grant's charade -- probably the most scathing and denunciatory press Grant has ever received. Henvick had presented Mr. DeMain with the carefully prepared evidence (tapes, pictures, eye-witness testimony, etc.) and we got the coverage.

Don then took the article, reduced it to letter-size, wrote, "Happy Birthday, Rev. Grant!" and "'Anything of God can stand investigation. Anything not of God ought to be investigated.' --

W.V. Grant" in the margins, made copies, and handed them out at the door of the evening rally! A copy was obviously hurried to Grant, so he prepared a reply to the soon-to-be shorn. The reply was not a threat of litigation for defamation of character or slander, which, if the preceding were not true, Henvick and the "Trib" would be roundly guilty. Now the Friday meeting.

"How many believes God gives you wisdom on how to deal with things? You know, about a year and a half ago -- make it two years ago -- the Amazing Atheist [James Randi] and all his followers started following us around trying to set us up. In fact many of his people many times would beg me to pray for them and if you'd come back and lay hands on them and pray for them at the altar, wish for them - - that that person wasn't even sick. And, uh, of course they don't know that you wouldn't be much of a minister if you didn't pray for someone who requested it in the first place. How many knows that?"

"But God wants you to use wisdom. We had some, uh, all week long. We had people coming on national talk shows lying on our ministry and said that we carry thirty wheelchairs on our revival trucks. Some people come up and act like they're crippled and I go back later and pray for them. I don't even tell you why. And, uh, when people had the short leg lengthened they said it was with the sleight of hand -- it's God's hand because the leg grows out!"

"But, uh, I thought about filing suit on these people and a lot of people wrote me and said why don't you do that? And I was praying and I read the Bible and I really believe God gave me this. It says Jesus was spat on, he was mauled, he was ridiculed, he was maligned; it says, 'Yet he spake not a word'. And God said, 'Vengeance is mine saith the Lord'. Jesus always wins in the long run."

"In fact, we even had that happen here the night before last. There was, I walked in the door and there was this little man, one of the best actors you've ever seen [Congrats, John Taube. We wonder why God didn't inform Grant of your thespian gift.], about seventy years of age. He said, 'This is my friend. Her name is Veronica - - or Victoria. Please pray for her, she's blind. Won't you PLEASE pray for her?' I said, 'All right, I'll pray for her.'"

"Well, then later on in this service in fact there are maybe you that were here. Of course I didn't call her our and say, 'Have I ever talked to you before?' like I do with the others, but I said, 'Victoria, I believe God can heal your eyes!' I think it was Victoria; it might have been another name. And she said, 'I can see! I can see!' And then later on somebody said they wrote in a newspaper article yesterday or today morning that that was a plant."

"You know I believe that if you get on your feet and pray for those that have needs, see God will take care of it in the long run. Amen. And I've said this before and I'll say it again. Anything that's of God will stand investigation and anything that's not of

God ought to be investigated. In fact, later on in this service, and I know how many of you that's been healed in this revival stand up and testify what you've been healed of. And I was talking with this brother back here that's receiving tickets -- I don't know his name -- one of our ushers. And he was saying that one of his friends was healed out of a wheelchair in San Francisco last week if you were there, and he saw him today and he was running! In fact he couldn't walk or talk and his wife or his mother was saying now that he's been healed." [Note: This man was walking with the assistance of two people and the head usher refused to give the name of this man or other information. The man was able to speak his name with difficulty but certainly couldn't testify for himself. -- Don]

"So anything of God will stand investigation. Somebody say Amen. You know, they had secular humanists and atheists back in Jesus' day; everywhere they went they followed him. I don't know if they passed out leaflets or not but they followed him trying to downgrade his ministry. How many's ready to have church tonight?"

Our many thanks to Don Henvick and crew: Judy Bullock, Gabrielle Fitzmaurice, Shawn Carlson, Bill Hoch, Ray Howard, Ivars Lauersons, Larry Loebig, Gary Morgan, Elizabeth Olim, and Mika Sadai to name a few.

100 PLUS 1 FROM A DALMATIAN by Robert Sheaffer

On May 28, the Bay Area Skeptics held one of its most interesting monthly meetings to date, as we hosted in the Campbell Library a very intelligent Dalmatian named Sunny who has a reputation as something of a whiz in mathematics. The dog, or more precisely the dog's owner, was seeking the prize of the BAS's \$11,000 Challenge; this evening was to be a preliminary demonstration, to be followed up by a rigorously-controlled test, if the demonstration was successful.

Sunny and his owner, Jim Todd, are becoming local celebrities because of Sunny's reputed penchant for mathematics and knowledge of languages, as well as his reportedly excellent recall of an alleged past life. They have appeared together on television, in schools, and in library programs, where Sunny has astounded one and all with his abilities. Not only does Sunny apparently know how to do addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division, barking out the answers to problems written on flash cards, but he can also calculate square roots, cube roots, and simultaneous algebraic equations in two unknowns. As if these were not impressive enough, Sunny will even respond to math questions in Spanish, Portuguese, or Yiddish.

I arrived early for the session to find that a number of Jim Todd's friends were already on hand, setting up video cameras, lights, and

microphones to record the expected miracle. Of course, the skeptics set up cameras and monitors of their own. I have seen press conferences at which there were fewer cameras and microphones! The first hint we had that there may be any difficulties for Sunny came when Don Henvick returned from Todd's house, which was nearby. He had gone there to get to know the dog a little so Sunny might be more at ease during the demonstration. Don had witnessed an impressive demonstration of Sunny's skills. He reported, however, that while Sunny normally will bark out the answer to practically any problem so long as it is between one and ten, today he was having problems barking out 1 and 2, and also 9 or 10. Therefore, we were requested to keep the answers to all problems between 3 and 8.

Sunny and Jim soon arrived, both looking relaxed and confident. A big, handsome young Dalmatian, Sunny proved to be friendly as well as clever. (Indeed, I suspect that Sunny is probably one of the more intelligent dogs I have ever seen, although his skills probably incline more towards psychology than math.) The mutually-agreed agenda was that for the first fifteen minutes Jim Todd could demonstrate Sunny's skills in any way he wanted, then for the next fifteen minutes Don would attempt to test Sunny's knowledge. Further tests would be performed if Sunny was successful.

Jim, an easy-going and likable retiree, put on an impressive show of Sunny's skills. Holding up cards with a number written on each, he would ask, "How much is 3 and 4?" Sunny would bark out the correct amount. Problems like this were repeated several times, usually with success. Sunny also did subtraction, square and cube roots, and even solved a pair of simultaneous algebraic equations. Occasionally, the dog would get the answer wrong, sometimes by barking hesitantly or quietly, or with unclear "enunciation." Jim would berate him and Sunny would usually get the correct answer the second time.

Then came Don Henvick's turn to question Sunny. He held up cards, exactly as Jim did, but held them so that only the dog, and a video camera, could see what was written on the face. Shuffling the cards, even he was unaware of what each read to eliminate the possibility of unconscious cuing. Sunny's math abilities deteriorated immediately.

With Jim standing behind him, Don held up a card, and asked Sunny what number it was. Sunny barked eight times. Don then turned the card toward the audience. It had a five on it. Sunny barked eleven times for the next card; it was a three. The positions were rearranged, this time with Sunny between Jim and Don; a movable blackboard screened Jim's face from the dog. Strangely, Sunny seemed to not even be paying any attention to Don and the cards; he kept turning to face Jim. The dog's arithmetic skills were now failing badly: 7 plus 3 made 9; 4 plus 5 made 13. It became evident that Sunny was simply barking randomly, unsure of what it was he was supposed to do. An attempt at this point to answer math questions posed in Spanish was likewise a failure. "Dos y dos"

became "siete" when it should have been "cuatro."

Jim was becoming visibly upset. He began explaining how Sunny was getting tired, that it was past Sunny's normal bedtime. His sincerity was painfully obvious -- Jim really expected Sunny to be able to answer Don correctly.

Jim then began to explain to us about Sunny's recall of his past life, and his ability to answer questions about it. Sunny would bark three times to indicate yes, and two times for no. In this manner it was not only learned that Sunny had been a human in his previous incarnation, but the name under which he lived was also determined: in his previous life, the dog was Harry Houdini.

Every ready when needed with a bit of magicians' trivia, Bob Steiner quickly scribbled something on a paper, and handed it to Jim. Bob explained that if the dog had been Houdini in his past life, and could answer questions about that life, then he should certainly remember his mother's maiden name. Steiner asked if there was anyone in the audience of about 60 who did not know his or her own mother's maiden name; there was not. Therefore, it would seem reasonable that Sunny, or Houdini, could answer the question correctly.

Steiner had written five names on the paper. As it is well-known that Houdini's family was Jewish, Bob chose five common Jewish names. Jim seemed a little distressed, but bravely posed the question to Sunny. Jim obviously did not know the answer, so cuing, conscious or otherwise, could not take place. The fact that Jim pressed on at this point proves his sincerity beyond any reasonable doubt, for if he did not think that Sunny could correctly answer the question, he would have found an excuse not to continue.

The questioning halted after four names. Houdini, or Sunny, had answered yes to three of the four names, and the only one he had answered no to turned out to be the correct one! Jim was extremely distressed by this time. He noted again how late it was getting, and that it was past Sunny's bedtime. He and the dog then left, before the meeting was over. The remaining time, about forty-five minutes, was given over to a discussion led by Bob Steiner on the Clever Hans phenomenon and related issues.

Exactly how Sunny receives Jim's involuntary cues was never precisely determined. Apparently Sunny has been trained so that whenever someone holds up a card and speaks to him, he begins barking. While accumulating the required number of barks, Jim stands very stiffly; his labored breathing is often clearly audible. Probably a subtle change in his posture and breathing pattern tells the dog to stop. Sometimes Jim breaks his stance as soon as the required number of barks are received, pulling the card down, an obvious sign to the dog. Sunny apparently cannot correctly answer questions except when his owner knows the answer.

In any case, not long after Jim left, his friends packed up their

tripods and cameras, and quietly departed, too. Of those people remaining, not one was convinced that Sunny actually understood the questions posed to him, and could answer them.

EARTHQUAKE PREDICTION CLAIMS

by Robert L. Showen

Keith Morin presented a talk at the Technology and Society Committee's bi-weekly meeting titled "Earthquake Predictions: Forecasts and Imminent Warnings". This talk described a very low frequency acoustic and magnetic system which he has developed to predict earthquakes. Mr. Morin had two of his cigar-box sized acoustic detectors in operation, which he has displayed on local TV stations recently. He made spectacular claims as to the effectiveness and location accuracy in detecting incipient earthquakes.

Mr. Morin began by stating that birds detect earthquakes, and that his work evolved in part from his interest in understanding how birds make the detections. He said he had spent four years perfecting his system, first using low-frequency acoustic sensors, and then special non-cryogenic magnetic detectors, which he claims are ten to the fourth power times more sensitive than conventional SQUID detectors.

He mentioned his near-success in predicting an earthquake two weeks previously in the East Bay, in a prediction given to a Bay Area TV station (he was off in the time by about one day). His measurements allowed him to predict the quake's arrival two weeks in advance. He said that a few days before the earthquake, a change in the measurements occurred that would have permitted him to correctly revise the prediction, BUT HE DID NOT COMMUNICATE THIS TO ANYONE BEFORE THE EVENT.

Near the beginning of his talk, Morin asserted that Jim Birkland's syzygy theory for earthquake prediction was 80% accurate. In this theory, the likelihood of an earthquake increases when the earth, moon, and sun are lined up, because the tidal forces are then greater. (A statement from a USGS scientist claims that the Birkland method, not original with him, has a random probability for predicting earthquakes produced along faults, but may be slightly better than chance for earthquakes associated with volcanoes.)

Morin explained that his method uses an elaborate syzygy calculation taking into account the eccentricity and inclination of the moon to determine the lunar distance. Although not clearly stated, it seems that these calculations, together with the acoustic and magnetic sensors permit him to determine the location of an incipient epicenter to within a claimed accuracy of 3 square km.

Several statements or claims were confusing, mostly due to a disjoint presentation, but in part due to interruptions by the audience. He said that using his complete method (not specified as to what that entailed), he could begin detecting a future event many months in advance, and that he could distinguish between the large number of events in progress. He claims that when the time to an event decreases to within a week or so, he can determine the time remaining until the earthquake to within an accuracy of one day. The range of his system is such to cover the entire West Coast, and a statement he made seemed to indicate he could also detect events in Asia.

He made specific forecasts of increased earthquake activity to be upon us in a given month, and a lessening of occurrences thereafter, for a specified interval (I have forgotten the months and years that he stated). He also stated that his system can detect volcanoes, and that an eruption in California was coming, but that he wasn't yet ready to reveal the location or time.

A single acoustic detector (which is just part of the overall system) is claimed to give a three-hours warning of a local quake for a magnitude 3.5 quake or larger. The stated detection range is up to 40 miles away in a city, and 60 miles away in rural areas. In high altitude terrain, the range is even more. The acoustic sensor has to be within 60 ft. of the ground to be able to function, and it would work better in the earth or under water.

His system is ready to be implemented. In fact, he has 50 sensors installed, including one in a fire station in Mountain View. He is currently negotiating for funds to begin production of the acoustic units, which he envisions as initially costing \$120 to private individuals.

His precise methods are proprietary and cannot be revealed, since he does not want to jeopardize his patent applications, which are in progress in 12 countries. He has already received a patent on the acoustic sensor. The following description of his method is as precise as he would give: The acoustic and magnetic sensors detect the same discrete frequencies coming from the future earthquakes, within a frequency range of 5 Hz to 1 MHz. A set of five frequencies spanning 300 MHz (at an undisclosed place in the given interval) arrive at the sensors, beginning with the lowest frequency. As the time to the quake nears, the higher frequencies in sequence are detected.

If, as sometimes happens, the next frequency in sequence does not appear, the putative earthquake will not occur. On either the 4th or 5th frequency, if a beating, or string-of-pearls type amplitude behavior in time is exhibited, this then indicates that the earthquake is imminent. The magnitude of the future event is also related to the strengths of these frequencies.

Mr. Morin stated that he does not understand the cause of the effects he has observed. He is working with a physicist to try to

develop a theory to explain these observations. (In a subsequent discussion with Mr. Morin, he stated that he was working with two physicists and part-time with an astrophysicist, and that five major scientific breakthroughs were in progress. The results would be published in scientific journals, but probably not before the end of 1989.)

Mr. Morin punctuated his talk with several comments on the side: a lady in southern California can predict earthquakes (presumably locally?) with 100% certainty; birds do not sing before a quake, and cluster in the middle of trees, because the magnetite (?) in their skulls -- used to sense the direction to the earth's magnetic field -- is overwhelmed by earthquake-produced disturbances; if your cat runs away during an earthquake, go looking for it in a line directly away from the epicenter.

When challenged that extraordinary claims require extraordinary proofs, Mr. Morin readily agreed. He will, however not give a set of predictions to the USGS or other organizations, because he has been advised by his lawyers that to do so would jeopardize his patent rights. Some of the audience did not accept this statement, and seemed to feel that demonstrating success statistically was a necessary task, unlikely to harm his rights.

The impressions gained of Mr. Morin and his method were contradictory. At first he seemed to be presenting new work in a field that has not had much success. He spoke with some knowledge of other workers' accomplishments, and in private discussions knew about one of the papers claiming Russian and Japanese detections of electromagnetic precursors of earthquakes. During his talk, however, he began to make seemingly too spectacular claims. He said he can determine to precise locations and magnitudes of hundreds of incipient events -- both earthquakes and volcanoes -- over months. And he seemed to expect the audience to believe these claims without any evidence. No data were presented, just words and flashing lights from his detectors. Scientifically, there is no substance upon which a judgment could be made.

Mr. Morin was given a chance to comment on this report, which was sent to him on 3 May. In a telephone conversation on 15 May he said that he was very busy arranging for production of his detectors. He promised to respond by 25 May, but that did not occur.

[Only one comment: Watch out when he advertises them for sale. -- Ed.]

CHEAP FIREWALKING

by Don Henvick

The Whole-Life Expo in S.F. was a gold mine. I found a Tony Robbins' firewalking brochure and start scheming. He's coming to Burlingame May 8 to shear the sheep at \$125 per. Can't let him get

away without a greeting. A call to Southern Cal. Skeptics produces the bad news that they've sent all their firewalk stuff to Phoenix. Call Phoenix. They say Robbins had his firewalk roped off there and they couldn't get in but did hand out fliers. Okay, I'll do that.

They send the stuff but I don't get it until May 7. Much running around. I copy the flier and call around for more bodies -- nuthin'. Party poopers! Okay, I go myself. Drive down from San Francisco, get to the place and they're still building the fire. Plenty of time. I reach for my fliers and come up with air. I left them at home! Maybe I should take Robbins' class so I won't need both hands to find my head. Home at warp speed hoping I'll get back before it's over and won't make an ass of myself (again).

Not to worry. I get back while they're still fiddling with fire, go into the hotel and find the seminar is still going on. They've been doing this for five hours already so nobody's keeping track of attendance. The door's open, so I stroll in and mingle. This could get interesting.

Maybe two, three hundred people are standing around yelling and shaking their fists. Has the revolution come? Nah, it's just Robbins winding up his five-hour pep talk. He tells us the way to survive the 1,200-degree burning coals is to make a fist and yell, "Yes!" and then look up and chant, "Cool moss!" while walking and punching the air and then celebrating when you finish the firewalk. Hmm. Everybody walks around doing practice chants, then we're told to leave our shoes in the room and all go outside. Great!

"Oh, and make sure you have your name tag."

Oops. Okay, I know I have no shame; I go up to the table and ask for a "replacement" name tag -- I get it and join the mob.

Outside they've arranged the coals on a couple of strips of astroturf. Two firewalks, no waiting. Robbins takes charge of one and his wife the other. He invites people to get close to feel the heat. "Careful!" he warns. I put my hand an inch above the coals. If this is 1,200 degrees, I'm Queen Elizabeth. You could pitch a T-bone onto this Bar-B-Q and get a medium rare by, oh, the middle of next week.

Robbins goes first -- a steady walk -- five steps. LOOKS good, if you don't know better. Everybody lines up, still chanting and punching the air. Some walk fast, some slow; everybody's feet are hosed off as soon as they reach the end. No burns that I notice. My turn come.

I try to remember what physicist Bernard Leikind wrote about firewalking. Wood coals have poor thermal conductivity compared to heated metal, hot stones or even sand. A walk on the beach on a really hot day will do you in faster than this stuff. I remember the baking cake and the oven example. You can reach into

the oven and touch the cake, but if you touch the pan (which is the same temperature as the cake) you're looking to get burned. I say a quick prayer to Saint Bernard L and hope he's right. It's put-up-or-shut-up time, so here goes nuthin'.

Mrs. Robbins tells me to look up. I look up. She says to yell "Yes!" I yell "Yes!" She says to chant, "Cool moss!" I chant "Cool moss!" She says, "Go!" and I look DOWN and chant, "Hot rocks!" and make it across in four even steps. It feels a little warm with a few scattered hot spots on my feet. They hose off my tootsies and I check 'em out. No burns, no blisters, no muss, no fuss. Laugharama.

I'm tempted to pass out the fliers now but people re still punching the air and I don't want them punching me instead. Besides, my shoes are still upstairs and if I tell who I ma now they might charge me \$125 to retrieve my walks, so I sneak upstairs to get them and the room is empty.

Idea! I go get the fliers and pass them out on the empty chairs. I don't have enough to go around but maybe some of the people will see them and read them before the Robbins folks throw them away. Call me chicken, but I ain't in the mood for a confrontation. These people are even more pumped up than the folks at the may faith healings I have attended, and they are certainly not receptive to the fact.

Well, we do what we can. I tell you one thing, though. If you have the choice of paying Robbins \$125 to listen to five hours of mumbo-jumbo, or taking the free, 15-minute cram course I walked in on, take the latter. It's cheaper, quicker and just as effective. Mingle!

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 July, 1987 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.

Copyright (C) 1987 BAY AREA SKEPTICS. Reprints must credit "BASIS, newsletter of the Bay Area Skeptics, 4030 Moraga, San Francisco, CA 94122-3928."

-END-