
April 1993 "BASIS", newsletter of the Bay Area Skeptics

Bay Area Skeptics Information Sheet
Vol. 12, No. 5
Editor: Chris Muir

APRIL FOOLS
Chris Muir

Chris Muir is the 1989 winner of the James Burke Lookalike contest. He is also the semi-illiterate editor of a vile, contemptible, disgusting little pipsqueak newsletter, the title of which we have the good manners not to mention.

Every Year, on April 1.st (or soon thereafter), some people like to play silly little pranks. At Sun Microsystems, they do something with the boss' car and lots of water. Newspapers and radio announcers produce unbelievable stories, and too many people believe them. (Of course the supermarket tabloids treat every day as April Fools.)

This year, a radio announcer said that the space shuttle would land at the local airport. People jammed the road to go see it, ignoring the fact that there was no shuttle flight on that day, and the airport was too small! The East Bay Skeptics published a story about a homeopathic researcher, "Dr Lizzy," getting nominated for a Nobel prize for using NMR scanning for homeopathic research!

The April fools prank this year in BASIS is having the March issue distributed in April! (Well, that`s better than admitting we had a late start and a very slow printer.) If the April issue is late, we'll blame taxes and the IRS.

Of course, there are those news articles that we wish were Aprils fools, but aren't:

* The President of Peru, Albert Fujimori, said: "When there is something that does not concern the national interest, I consult my seer." The seer was not named. (San Jose Mercury News, April 2, 1993) [Who does he consult for national interest questions? -Ed.]

* Increase bust size through hypnosis? Michael Stivers, founder of the Professional Hypnosis and Research Center in Largo, Fla. said, "I use hypnosis to take my clients back to puberty, where they visualize their breasts growing again. The therapy tricks the body into reactivating hormone production." He claims success in 75% of patients. (San Jose Mercury News, April 2, 1993)

* "A Current Affair" showed how Susan Stone allegedly took Bill MacDonald away from his wife. Naomi McDonald said that Bill's abrupt

departure caused her miscarriage. Why was Stone playing homewrecker? According to Naomi, a psychic told Stone that she and Bill were lovers in a past life.

* 10% sought alternative medicine in 1990. Americans spent \$10.3 billion for alternative medical care, compared with \$12.8 billion on hospital bills. (from a study published in the New England Journal of Medicine, reviewed in the San Jose Mercury News, January 28, 1993)

* A Manhattan doctor who thinks he was abducted by aliens and believes UFOs are part of a Nazi plot to eliminate Jews can continue treating patients, the Board of Regents ruled yesterday. (According to an article in the New York Post, Nov.21, mentioned in the Skeptics UFO Newsletter, Jan. 1993.)

* Pete Wilson's nominee for Superintendent of Public Education, Sen. Marian Bergeson, opposed Prop. 98, supported the governor's attempt to cut \$2,3 billion from the school budget, and voted against legislation to give school districts more authority to raise local revenues. (from article by Willie Brown in the San Jose Mercury News, March 23, 1993)

* Sofia P. Pandazides flunked the exam for her public school teaching certificate. She filed a lawsuit, claiming that the test was unfair because she is "learning impaired," and that she should have unlimited time for the test. She lost her lawsuit. (from San Jose Mercury News April 21, 1993).

FROM THE BATTLEFIELD

(The following letters were sent by e-mail to Geller watchers around the world. I'd like to thank Rick Moen for bringing these wonderful letters to my attention. -Ed)

From: James Randi (12/18/92)

I've just been informed that Geller has entirely dropped the case against Prometheus et al. in Florida. Just recently, he was saying he'd settle for \$50,000 instead of millions, and now he wants to drop it all. Verrrry interesting!

From: James Randi (3/24/93)

This morning I was notified by the media that a Japanese court has awarded Geller 500,000 Yen as a result of his lawsuit there against me. That's \$4,310 (just 1/3 of one percent of what he demanded!) and I'm appealing that decision, since I never had a chance to present my case to the court. I responded to the summons last year by saying that I could not afford to retain a Japanese lawyer, but I never heard *anything* from the system. Then the media started calling this morning. No one, not Geller's lawyers nor the court clerk there, have ever responded to me. Even now, I only know of all this from the media.

Eppur si muove . . .

From James Randi (3/22/93)

On March 16 in Federal Court for the District of Columbia, the Honorable Stanley S. Harris ordered that Mr. Uri Geller must pay, by April 16th, the sum of \$106,433,97 to CSICOP, in satisfaction of CSICOP's action for payment of fees and costs incurred as a result of Mr. Geller's suit against James Randi & CSICOP.

Any fees and/or costs incurred by CSICOP in the period since their action for satisfaction, that is, from June 30th, 1992 to the present, may also be required of Mr. Geller. That might amount to several tens of thousands of dollars more.

This order is of course of great interest to others involved in lawsuits with Mr. Geller.

The scoreboard now stands:

- *Geller suit brought against Timex: Timex wins.
- *Geller suit #1 brought against James Randi: dismissed.
- *Geller suit #2 brought against James Randi: dismissed.
- *Geller suit #3 brought against James Randi and CSICOP (the case referred to above) : pending.
- *Geller suit #4 brought against James Randi (Japan) : pending
- *Byrd suit brought against James Randi, trial date set for May 25.

MANTRA AWAY CRIME

Cris Muir

As noted in a San Francisco Chronicle article (Dec. 23d) the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi has offered to rid several cities of crime by having some of his followers meditate (for a fee).

He placed ads in the San Jose Mercury News, trying to sell his program there. All he wants is 10 cents per person per day - about \$53.4 million per year! City manager Les White said the offer was interesting, but he wouldn't contact the Maharishi anytime soon. Eliminating crime is a worthwhile goal, but there are some problems:

(1) The 10 cents per person per day fee would add up to millions of dollars per month for large cities, and most cities are financially strapped.

(2) The Maharishi's "transcendental meditation" program is based on Hindu Vedic scriptures. No city, state or federal government could fund this program without violating the constitutional separation of church and state. (A nongovernmental citizens group could fund it privately, if they wished.)

(3) Extraordinary claims require extraordinary proof, and the Maharishi's claims are most extraordinary. What proof is there? Is there a small town or tiny village anywhere rendered crime free by the Yogi's technique?

Existing evidence seems to indicate otherwise. India, the place where Transcendental Meditation originated, has not been rendered crime free, and is now wracked by religious riots unknown in the U.S. It would be a poor bargain if we got religious wars in exchange for a reduction in crime.

BAS APRIL MEETING

The "Hot Hand" fallacy and all it implies

Speaker: Lee Dembart

Date: Wednesday, April 28th, 7:30 p.m.

Place: El Cerrito Public Library, 6510 Stockton Ave., El Cerrito.

Admittance and parking are free.

Lee Dembart is a former reporter at The New York Times, science writer, editorial writer and book critic at The Los Angeles Times, and editorial page editor of The San Francisco Examiner. In 1987, he received a Responsibility in Journalism Award from the CSICOP. He holds a J.D. from Stanford (1992) and teaches Mass Communications at UC Berkeley.

Lee Dembart's statement:

Sports fans will tell you that a basketball player gets a "hot hand" and makes several shots in a row, or goes cold and can't make a shot. Similarly, baseball hitters have streaks and slumps. Though fans believe that these different performances reflect some difference in the athlete, the fact is that they are nothing more than normal and predictable statistical variations, indistinguishable from tossing coins. Random events occur randomly, which means that they are not evenly distributed in time or space. Since they are not evenly distributed, they seem to bunch up and spread out. But these interpretations are not in the data; they are in our minds. After we "see" the pattern, we look for an explanation. So we try to find the cause of a "cancer cluster," which probably is just a statistical variation. There is no cause because there is no cluster.

BAY AREA SKEPTICS

17723 Buti Park Ct.

Castro Valley, CA 94546

Norman Sperling: Chair

Vice Chair: OPEN

Wilma Russell: Secretary

Lucinda Ben-David: Treasurer

Barbara Bowman, Shawn Carlson, Larry Loebig, Rick Moen, Cris Muir,
Eugenie Scott, Kate Talbot: Directors.

BASIS STAFF:

Chris Muir: Editor

Wilma Russell: Distribution

Kate Talbot: Meeting Coordinator

SUBSCRIPTIONS:

One year for a contribution of \$18.00 or more. An "S" on the mailing label shows the month/year of expiration. Please renew well in advance. "I" means inquiry or courtesy copy.

MATERIAL FOR PUBLICATION:

Editor
1443 Hervey Ln.
San Jose, CA 95125

This heavily cut down electronic version of the Bay Area Skeptics Information Sheet for April 1993 has been copied by hand from the printed version by Ottar Sande at the Norwegian Bulletin Board for Skeptics, Firda BBS. tel +47-57-65435/+47-57-66564.
