

ELECTRONIC NEWSLETTER OF THE GEORGIA SKEPTICS

VOLUME 5, NUMBER 2
MARCH/APRIL 1992

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Georgia Skeptics is a non-profit local group which shares a common philosophy with the national organization CSICOP (Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal), and seeks to promote critical thinking and scientific inquiry as the most reliable means to gather knowledge of the world and universe. Like CSICOP, Georgia Skeptics encourages the investigation of paranormal and fringe-science claims from a responsible, scientific point of view, and helps disseminate the results of such inquiries.

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Joining the Georgia Skeptics organization is encouraged because membership dues help us to disseminate the results of skeptical inquiries to the public and to hold educational events. Yearly dues are \$17.50 for individual memberships, \$21.00 for families, and \$12.50 for full time students.

THE CONYERS APPARITIONS

by Rebecca Long, Georgia Skeptics

If you believe the believers, the Virgin Mary appears like clockwork on the 13th of every month to a Conyers housewife named Nancy Fowler. On this date, hundreds and sometimes even thousands of anxious believers gather outside the small house where Ms. Fowler and the Virgin Mary visit in the "Apparition Room". The divine message is broadcast over a public address system to the waiting crowd. After the message, many people stare at length into the mid-day Georgia sun, waiting for a sign. Most claim they witness miracles, and many believe they have photographic evidence.

THE HISTORY

According to information published in the Atlanta Journal, Nancy Fowler's first mystical experiences occurred in the early 1980's when she glimpsed heaven and hell. In 1987, she began having visions of Jesus and the Virgin Mary. Originally from Cambridge, Massachusetts, Ms. Fowler moved to Georgia in July 1990, to a site she says she saw in a vision. Her supporters soon purchased and donated a 30-acre site for a shrine, which is located on White Road, off of Highway 138.

In October 1990, the Virgin Mary began appearing to Ms. Fowler on the 13th of each month, with special messages directed toward the United States of America. Following each "Message to the United States", many persons at the shrine claim to see such miraculous phenomena as the sun spinning and pulsating, dividing into multiple lights, or zooming toward the earth. Some people see a cross appear across the sun, or see holy figures emerging from it.

Ms. Fowler says she experiences frequent apparitions, usually in her home. Her personal messages from Mary have included calls to pray while she does dishes, advice to go on a diet, and specifications for building shelves. When she sees Jesus, he most often speaks to her from the cross. On weekday afternoons, Ms. Fowler meets personally with religious pilgrims visiting the shrine.

Only a few Marian apparitions have been officially sanctioned by the Vatican as "worthy of pious belief". Among these are the apparitions reported in Guadalupe (1513), in Lourdes, France (1858), and in Fatima, Portugal (1917). The Catholic Church has historically been cautious of such claims, and tends not to endorse them until many years after the incidents. According to an article in Time magazine, only seven Marian sightings have received official church sanction in this century.

At Fatima, the Virgin Mary supposedly predicted the rise of soviet totalitarianism and also the recent soviet collapse. Many followers believe that the authenticity and validity of Marian apparitions has therefore been confirmed. In fact, many believe that the demise of communism came at the intercession of Virgin Mary through Fatima. These beliefs and other sociological factors have led to a recent increase in the occurrence and popularity of Marian apparitions. The Conyers apparitions are among hundreds of reported sightings of the Virgin Mary in this century.

The most famous sightings in recent years are those claimed by a group of peasant children in Medjugorje, Yugoslavia, over the past 10 years. Although the claimed sightings have not been sanctioned by the Vatican, an

estimated 10 million people have visited the village since 1981. According to Time magazine, there are approximately 300 groups of Medjugorje believers across the US, who publish at least 30 newsletters and hold a dozen or more conferences a year. There are extensive computer communication networks for the believers, as well as approximately 70 telephone hot lines that feature messages from Medjugorje. Residents of Alabama can simply dial MOM-MARY.

Elsewhere in the United States, thousands of devotees flock to the Mother Cabrini shrine near Denver, where the Virgin Mary appears to a charismatic blonde named Theresa Lopez. The faces of Mary and Jesus have been spotted in such unlikely places as a Texas tabletop, a screen door, a linoleum tile, a tortilla chip, and, as we know, a plate of Spaghetti on an Atlanta billboard.

Claims of miraculous behavior by the sun have accompanied a number of famous reported appearances of Mary, such as those in Fatima and Medjugorje. People in Conyers often claim to smell roses when none are present, another phenomenon frequently associated with Marian apparitions.

The Conyers messages, says Ms. Fowler, are similar to those from Medjugorje, as they emphasize prayer, conversion, and sacrifice. Ms. Fowler has also pointed out similarities between her apparitions and those at Fatima. Like the Messages to the United States, the Fatima apparitions occurred on the 13th of the month. The Conyers apparitions began on an October 13th, whereas the Fatima apparitions ended on an October 13th. Ms. Fowler says that the Virgin Mary often appears to her as "Our Lady of Fatima", wearing a white dress with something shining like silver or gold. A crown often appears later.

The Archdiocese of Atlanta has been noncommittal as to the alleged Conyers visions. An official statement issued on September 10, 1991, quotes the Bible (Acts 5:38-39) to advise a cautious approach to events of this nature. Archbishop Lyke has stated that no parish facilities may be used for the fostering of any devotion to matters lacking Church approval, and that priests have been asked to "be ready to offer counselling and reassurance." Nancy Fowler's supporters say that the true test of the Conyers events is the fruit which they bear.

PERSONAL OBSERVATIONS

On October 13, 1991, fellow Georgia Skeptic Larry Johnson and I went to Conyers to see the event for ourselves. Larry phoned ahead to assure that we would not disrupt the worship services by doing this, and we were heartily welcomed. We took along my 13" Dobsonian telescope (stopped down to a 2" aperture and equipped with a solar filter), and about 50 small solar viewers assembled from aluminized mylar chips and index cards. We also had homemade mylar filters on two pairs of binoculars.

Once in the Conyers area, Larry and I stopped at a local motel to request directions to White Road. The motel personnel quickly realized our intended destination, and just happened to have a drawer full of printed maps to Nancy Fowler's place. Although we began at that point to suspect

the notoriety and popularity of the Conyers apparitions, we were still not prepared for the crowds we encountered when we actually reached the site. Larry and I estimated that at least 1000 people were present. The Atlanta Journal later reported the attendance that day as over 3000. (Attendance on January 13, 1992, was reported by the Atlanta paper as around 6,000).

As we traveled north from Interstate 20 on Highway 138, we had no trouble spotting the White Road turnoff due to the many parked cars lining the road and the police directing traffic toward the designated areas. A long line of tour busses was the first thing we spotted as we entered the property. Parking was in a large field and was well organized. We were allowed to park especially close to the house because we had the telescope with us.

Other visitors were friendly and eager to discuss previous experiences with Marian apparitions, both in Conyers and elsewhere. People we talked to had come from all parts of the United States. Many had been to Medjugorje one or more times. A wide socio-economic range was represented, but the crowd appeared to be predominantly middle and upper-middle class. A high percentage were Hispanic, but not the majority. A surprising number of people I talked to were scientists or educators.

Experienced pilgrims described to us what to expect, explaining that the miracles vary with the individual and each person sees something different. Some people see nothing. Similarly, they said that photographs and video-recordings of the miracle show many different phenomena, depending on what the Virgin Mary allows. Although everyone sees a different miracle, the consensus among those queried was that the camera would record what the person holding it was seeing. However, we were told that cameras pointed at the sky frequently revealed previously unseen apparitions when the film was later developed.

Part of the miracle, we were told, is that the Virgin Mary protects the people's eyesight as they stare at the sun. Nonetheless, the 50 solar viewers disappeared within a matter of minutes and I regretted that I had not made more of them.

The worship service started around noon, and had translations to Spanish. When it concluded, the Message to the United States began. Nancy Fowler was inside the house, in the Apparition Room, her silhouette barely visible through a large picture window. In a hushed, sweet voice, she announced that Mary was in the room with her, and was radiant in light. She began to repeat over the public address system what she heard Virgin Mary saying to her.

The message to the United States was a very general urging to return to faith, and was reassuring, comforting, and filled with expressions of hope and love. The children of Mary were advised to stand strong in their faith and to pray.

Ms. Fowler described Mary's appearance throughout the visit. At one point she said, "She has the baby Jesus in her arms." A few seconds later, she said, "Her arms are outstretched." Larry Johnson commented that he hoped there had been a transition between the two descriptions.

Many containers of water and other objects were raised to the sky to be blessed. Supposedly, Jesus has blessed the water of a well on the property, and promised many healings.

After the message from Mary concluded, people began looking skyward. Before long, a man's voice on the PA system announced that the sun would provide a sign. He briefly advised the crowd to be careful of their eyes when looking directly at the sun, but was not specific as to how to accomplish this.

Excitement mounted and people began pointing to the sky and gesturing. Soon the voice on the PA was shouting that the miracle of the sun was occurring at that very moment. I had kept the telescope trained on the sun and could see several sunspots, but nothing moved. Everyone else seemed to be seeing things.

A localized mild hysteria broke out in one section of the crowd when someone shrieked that a host of angels could be seen above the trees. A great many people were pointing in that direction and yelling, and several fell to their knees. Another group saw Mary above the house.

As the miracle continued, people began swarming around my telescope. Everyone wanted to know what I had seen. They all said they had just seen the sun do miraculous things, and wanted a closeup look through the scope. I estimate that well over two hundred people viewed the sun through one of our solar filters, and without exception they saw nothing unusual when looking through the mylar. Many became quite curious about the sunspots, and asked very intelligent questions about solar astronomy. I was fascinated by the sudden switch to a mode of scientific inquiry. However, some did go back to the field to continue staring into the sun.

A number of people were walking around with one eye closed and watering. I asked them to describe how the miracle had appeared to them. Some people said that they had seen the sun spinning. I asked several of them to explain just how one could tell that a featureless ball was spinning, and the usual answer was "You can just tell." One man did elaborate, though, and said that the spinning was apparent because flames were shooting from the sun and balls of light were chasing around the edge.

Most people said that the sun was either pulsating or dividing into multiple lights. The apparent pulsation did not surprise me, since the eye would certainly rebel at focusing on the sun. From the descriptions of the multiple lights, I concluded that these were afterimages caused by looking toward the sun several times.

Of the fifty or so people I questioned, only one admitted seeing no anomalous behavior of the sun. However, he was nonplussed, and said that the important thing was the real miracle that happened inside the Apparition Room.

Several people who had been there before said that part of the miracle was that people could still see the sun's image, even with their eyes closed, for more than a month after going to Conyers. Others said that once you have been to Conyers you can see the miracle of the sun from anywhere,

whenever you stare into the sun. They routinely do so.

When things had quieted down, Nancy Fowler entertained questions from the visitors, on topics such as what Mary looks like, and what clothing she wears. Ms. Fowler even provided the Virgin Mary's recommended reading list, saying at one point, "She particularly enjoyed this one . . ." I wondered if Mary prefers to read in a chair, or in bed.

A bearded man, identified earlier as a priest, was administering blessings in the sideyard to people who waited in a long line. After being blessed, several collapsed to the ground from the emotion. I heard one woman remark, "I faint every time I come here." Several crippled children made attempts to walk or rise from their wheel chairs after being blessed, and I felt saddened.

I returned to Conyers on February 13, 1992, and took a video camera. The weather was cold and rainy, and only a few hundred people were present. Clouds totally obscured the sun, so no miracle of the sun occurred.

However, I did have a chance to talk at length with some of the people present and capture the interviews on videotape. One man claimed that some blessed water from Ms. Fowler's well had been injected into the IV of his mother, who was in a coma, and she had miraculously recovered. This was a most unpleasant - and unlikely - scenario, as the newspapers have warned that the water on the property is heavily contaminated with e-coli bacteria. The man said he also knew of someone with pancreatic cancer who was being treated with holy water from Conyers.

I note that local newspapers and television stations have chosen not to warn the public of the dangers of looking into the sun. To the contrary, some of the news reporters have announced that they themselves looked into the sun. A reporter for the Atlanta Journal told me she saw the sun pulsate.

To the credit of the people hosting this pilgrimmage, there were no overt appeals for money. A truck provided sandwiches at reasonable prices, and a modest supply of literature was for sale in one of the nearby buildings.

THE PHOTOGRAPHIC EVIDENCE

On October 13, as I packed my things and prepared to leave, someone informed me that a boy near the house had a Polaroid photograph that showed the Virgin Mary emerging through a "Golden Door" in the sun. I soon found the boy, and he did in fact have a very unusual-looking photograph. The picture showed the sun against a foreground of trees. Superimposed upon the sun was a striking, clearly-defined rectangle which was brighter than the rest of the photograph. It appeared to be glowing. In the center of this "door" were some shadows suggesting an emerging human figure. Because the boy with the photograph said he was Nancy Fowler's nephew, I left Conyers assuming he had hoaxed the shot. I was later to change my mind.

During that same visit, several people described to me various strange light

patterns which were taped when they pointed their auto-focus camcorders at the sun.

On the side of a building where the religious literature was being sold was a display of pictures of reported sightings of Mary and Jesus in such media as a torilla chip, a screen door, a rose, and in the mushroom cloud from an atomic blast. I entered the building and asked if they had any pictures for sale which were taken in Conyers, and was told, "We don't get into that."

When I returned to Conyers on February 13, a lot of people were displaying pictures of the sun taken during previous monthly apparitions. Most had been taken on the 13th of October. People had albums filled with these photos, and stacks of pictures 4 to 5 inches thick. I looked at several hundred photographs, and eventually even managed to obtain a few.

The supposedly undoctored photograph reproduced on the front page of this newsletter, which seems to show a glowing figure seated in the Apparition Room, was not typical of the majority of the pictures taken by the believers.

Most of the apparition photographs I looked at were photos of the sun and were one of two types. The first type distinctly showed the "Golden Door" previously described, and I noticed that it only occurred with Polaroid cameras. Hundreds of these photos were being shown around, and much emphasis was placed on them as a validation of the Conyers miracle.

Apparition photographs taken by cameras other than Polaroids showed all kinds of interesting glare patterns, in which people so inclined were able to see heavenly beings - usually Mary descending from the Sun, or the face of Jesus. I never cease to be amazed at the human propensity for seeing faces.

I later phoned the Atlanta office of Polaroid Corporation, and was told by a woman in Technical Support that someone had already brought a picture of the Golden Door to their office for analysis. According to this woman, the experts at Polaroid had determined the cause to be a defect in the film. Having personally seen hundreds of the photographs, I could not agree.

Georgia Skeptics members Anson Kennedy and Dale Heatherington purchased inexpensive Polaroid cameras and were quickly able to duplicate the Golden Door phenomenon.

IN THE NEXT ISSUE: HOW GEORGIA SKEPTICS SOLVED THE MYSTERY OF THE GOLDEN DOOR

THE PASTA JESUS

by Lawrence Viele

In May 1991, an article ran in the Atlanta Journal-Constitution about the face of Jesus in a forkful of spaghetti. The story was picked up by

national and international news services, and for a couple of days, eclipsed Elvis sightings.

The following is an educated guess as to the "Mystery of Jesus in the Pasta". It is only the opinion of the author.

The face peered out of the billboard for more than several weeks. Who knows how many noticed before Joyce Simpson did.

But, after a story appeared in the Atlanta Journal-Constitution saying that a woman had seen the face of Christ and took it as a sign from God, the billboard advertising a cheap place of spaghetti at Pizza Hut was quickly taken down. Two days later, it was history.

Everyone, except cynical editors, had the same questions. Do you see it? Do you think it's real? How did it get there?

Yes, I saw it.

In the middle of the forkful spaghetti, is a face. The space between the strands forms hollow eyes. The sauce, noodles and oregano form a blood-drenched mane of hair with a thorny crown, depending on from how far back one views it. Similar to an impressionist painting, the further back one views it, the more one sees. Like optical illusion art, once you see the face, you cannot not see it.

Yes, I think it's real.

The implied question in "Do you think it's real" is "Do you think it's really God, really a supernatural visitation?" The answer to that implication is no.

It is real because people see it, with or without prompting. It is part of the photograph, put there, I think, by the people who set up the shot. It's really a face, whether it's supposed to be Jerry Garcia of the Grateful Dead, Jim Morrison, or most likely, Jesus, similar to the image that appeared on the Shroud of Turin. The real question is how did it get there?

Because someone put it there.

The scenario I propose is one that is an educated guess, unsupported because Pizza Hut would not let me speak to the artists that worked on this particular photo.

Explaining how the photo came into being might satisfy the skeptical mind. Pizza Hut has its own, in-house marketing department. They decide, as we can see week after week, that a new promotion is needed. This week, they decide, to promote an inexpensive spaghetti dish. The gimmick, advertise at spaghetti junctions (interstate junctions) around the southeast, calling the lunch or dinner special "Spaghetti Junction".

Once the marketing folks and copy writers have come up with the concept and the text for the advertisement, the next step is the art. Naturally, this

is a photograph of the dish being sold.

So the order goes to the art department of the advertising agency that has the Pizza Hut account. It calls for a photo of an extremely tantalizing dish of spaghetti.

A bored trio of an art director (the one who decides the details of the photo, such as whether the spaghetti is on a plate or fork, etc.), a photographer, and a food stylist receive the request.

They take the photo, as ordered, but decide to add something, "just to see who'll notice," to relieve the boredom of yet another banal request. The president? Too boring. Elvis? Too overdone. Jesus? Bingo!

The food stylist expertly winds the spaghetti around the fork, leaving spaces that will become hollow eyes, and a small gaping mouth, creating an expression similar to that on the Shroud of Turin. Cleverly sprinkled oregano and tomato chunks become the thorny crown and mane of hair.

This scenario cannot be confirmed because I was not allowed to speak with the artists involved with this particular photo. The gentlemen with whom I spoke said this was one of many stock photos, kept on file for particular promotions. They claimed that there was no telling when the photo was taken and who worked on it.

My only "expert evidence" is from a photographer who explained how the face could have come about on purpose. For lengthy shoots of food, food stylists often design rubber models of the food. Guessing that the photograph required a good four hours of work, she said that the food stylist would have had to use a rubber model of spaghetti. She said that someone could have put the image in the rubber model of the spaghetti.

This particular photographer that I consulted thought personally that the image was an accident.

I want to dispel any notion that Pizza Hut intended this "appearance" in their ad for publicity. It is obvious from the reaction at corporate headquarters in Wichita, Kansas that they wanted nothing to do with it. The billboards were taken down quickly in hopes of quelling the firestorm created by the original story in the Constitution.

That one woman sought solace in someone else's joke is a sign of the times. People are looking hard for easy answers. Many people, mostly religious, were heartened by the crowds that gathered under the spaghetti junction billboard. Salvation and answers to life's questions aren't that easy to come by. The irony is, that despite my skepticism, our skepticism, one woman did find her answer.

"JESUS OF PASTA HARD TO SWALLOW"

If Jesus decided to come back for a little visit, I just can't see God dispatching him to appear on a picture of spaghetti located in Stone

Mountain, Ga.

Can you?

GOD: "Son, I have a little assignment for you."

JESUS: "What's that, Dad?"

GOD: "I want you to go down to Stone Mountain, Georgia, and hide in a picture of some spaghetti on a billboard."

JESUS: "Is this the Big One? Am I supposed to judge the quick and the dead?"

God: "No, that's later, son. Just go down to Stone Mountain and hide in the spaghetti and see if anybody notices you."

The above musings by Lewis Grizzard are an excerpt from a column entitled "Jesus of Pasta Hard to Swallow".

DEPARTMENT OF "BUT WHAT ELSE COULD IT BE?"

EVIDENCE OF EARLY SUPER-CULTURE in JEOPARDY?

By Hugh Trotti, Georgia Skeptics

Was there once a "super-civilization" earlier than our own, that for one reason or another may have vanished from the earth? Claims of "Atlantis" and "Mu" come to mind.

The great preponderance of what we know - (one is tempted to say: "everything we know") - points to a progression from the more primitive to the less primitive throughout time. Nevertheless, some people insist that there may have been very early achievements greater even than our own, and knowledge superior to ours that was lost forever.

Various pieces of claimed evidence surface in the writings of such believers from time to time. One interesting item of this type is the lens said to be found by archaeologists at the site of ancient Babylon in Mesopotamia (now Iraq). Would such a find represent early telescopes, microscopes, or accessories to provide energy to a giant crystal of mysterious and powerful properties?

Monday evening, on the TV program Jeopardy! (shown on Atlanta's Channel 5, CBS affiliate, January 20, 1992), information was provided that the ancient Greeks used a lens to start fires. We know that Alexander the Great and his army occupied Babylon in the 4th century B.C., and his successors remained in the area after his death. We

know that Greeks visited the court of Persia's Great King before Alexander's time, and some lived there (as the accounts of Herodotus show).

Clearly, a lens will concentrate sunlight enough to create fire in proper materials. We also know that glass was available in Roman times and before. While not vouching for the scholarly credentials of the Jeopardy! program, nor for the story of the lens, it does seem that such a find would not produce a startling or incomprehensible thing. Perhaps such seeming anomalies would not appear so strange if we only knew enough. In any event, we here produce a simple explanation for a "strange" item, in keeping with our belief that many times it is possible to give reasonable and simple explanations of "mysteries" - and in the belief that such is a more convincing way of treating various "far-out" claims than making fun of them. Satire may be fun, but it does not exhaust our possibilities of response.

Hugh H. Trotti is a member of the Georgia Skeptics Board of Directors. He is the author of *Beasts and Battles: Fact in Legend and History* (Rivercross Publishing, 1990), and the article "Nostradamus Unmasked", which appeared in the Fall 1991 issue of *Skeptical Inquirer* (Originally published in *The Georgia Skeptic*).

PSEUDOSCIENCE AND THE MEDIA: A LECTURE BY DR. WILLIAM EVANS

by Mary A. Long, Georgia Skeptics

The last regular meeting of the Georgia Skeptics, held on February 16, 1992, (postponed from January due to snow) featured a talk by Dr. William Evans on Pseudoscience and the Mass Media. Dr. Evans, a member of Georgia Skeptics, is a professor at Georgia Institute of Technology, where he teaches a course on Mass Media and Public Conceptions of Science and Technology. An objective of the course is to examine the appeal of pseudoscience as it is presented by the press and on TV.

Pseudoscience is a doctrine or belief system that pretends to be a science. In the past, according to Dr. Evans, the approach of pseudoscientists tended to be a rejection of science as being too rigid and too restrictive. However, there has been a change in strategy over the past 20 years.

Currently, pseudoscientists tend to actively exploit the science they appear to condemn. They have adopted the use of scientific jargon and practices, they make scientific claims for pseudoscientific technologies, and use scientific systems. Furthermore, pseudoscientists appear to be envious of the prestige and authority of scientists.

Dr. Evans listed several reasons for this change in strategy. Pseudoscientists have begun to recognize the success of scientific

methods. In addition, they are cognizant of the fact that public regard for science is high. Surveys show that the general public has more confidence in scientific institutions than in religion, politicians, or the mass media. Therefore, pseudoscientists have found it increasingly difficult to win adherents by challenging science. Instead, they have tried to convince the public that they themselves are scientific.

Pseudoscientists capitalize on the fact that the general public, even though displaying confidence in scientists, actually has little knowledge of what makes scientific claims valid.

Studies show that the segment of the public most disposed to accept pseudoscientific claims tends to have less education and are at a lower income level than average. Many live in rural areas. Psychologists and sociologists agree that this segment of society suffers from feelings of powerlessness and lack of prestige.

This has led to a new market for pseudoscience, through attempts to appeal to those wishing to appear educated. As an example, Scientology targets young, upwardly mobile professionals by making claims for new "religious technology" and devices such as "psychoenergizers" which are supposed to result in a rise in IQ and memory skills.

How are science and technology portrayed in television drama, horror movies, and other media offerings? Dr. Evans stated that the media frequently tends to disparage scientists by portraying them as closed-minded, peculiar, eccentric, and even dangerous. He cited the stereotype of the "mad scientist" as portrayed on TV and stated that on TV shows, scientists have a higher death rate than police officers!

Skeptics are often portrayed by the media as dangerous and irrational. As a result, according to this portrayal, science must admit the existence of supernatural forces. Pseudoscientists, on the other hand, are often portrayed as being enlightened researchers at the very forefront of science. As an example, in the movie "The Entity" the psychologist seeks a rational explanation for the heroine's claims that a malevolent "entity" is abusing her. Parapsychologists, referred to in the movie as "scientists", are the only ones who have the "technology" to confirm the reality of the "entity" and bring about a resolution of the woman's problems. The implied message is that in order to be reasonable and "safe", the skeptical individual must accept that paranormal forces do indeed exist. The scientist must give in and can no longer, in the face of the evidence, deny the existence of these forces.

How is pseudoscience covered in the popular press? Dr. Evans provided several examples of news articles which have recently appeared in the Atlanta Journal-Constitution. These examples included a graphologist who claims to employ scientific methods and tends to appropriate technology and uses scientific jargon along with technological devices in his analysis of handwriting. Dr. Evans pointed out that his claims for analyzing handwriting by using scientific methods were not

specific, but neither were they challenged.

Other articles provided as examples featured astrological advice which varied according to locality. Persons living in a middle-class area were advised by the stars to spend freely. Those of a lower socio-economic background were advised to be frugal and conservative in their spending.

A third article featured an individual who claimed to have used (or developed) a scientific method to predict the winning numbers in the Florida lottery. Again, none of these claims or statements was challenged.

Dr. Evans pointed out that most pseudoscientific articles which appear in the press are not written by science reporters, and science editors do not check the articles. In general, most science reporters are skeptical of pseudoscientific claims.

In summary, most journalists reporting on pseudoscience have a tendency to report claims rather than to evaluate them. These claims are seen as great human interest stories and there is little desire to subject them to critical evaluation or investigation.

COMMENTARY: WHERE'S THE SCIENCE

by Anson Kennedy, Georgia Skeptics

A popular commercial some time ago popularized the phrase "Where's the beef?" After hearing Dr. William Evans address a recent meeting of Georgia Skeptics, many of us felt like asking "Where's the science?" Dr. Evans described just how deficient the popular media is with respect to both science AND pseudoscience reporting.

Extraordinary claims are routinely presented as if they are accepted facts. The people making the claims are invariably shown in the trappings of science, giving them at least the appearance of legitimacy.

As an example, an article in a local newspaper featured a graphologist describing the "science" of handwriting analysis and how more and more often local companies are consulting handwriting analysts about prospective employees. In the picture accompanying the article on the graphologist, he was shown scrutinizing a document with a magnifying glass (ala Sherlock Holmes) and there appeared to be nine degrees hanging on the wall behind him.

But the newspapers and news shows are not the only ones guilty of these kinds of portrayals. Popular media such as movies and television shows also do it, perhaps even more so.

What does all this mean? To put it mildly, the public is being given a dramatically unbalanced view of what science is and what pseudoscience is. As Dr. Evans put it, virtually every newspaper carries a daily astrology column

while those same newspapers only infrequently print a science article.

What can skeptics do about it? To begin with, we can keep an eye out for credulous articles, such as the ones Dr. Evans used as examples, and immediately write the newspapers explaining and protesting the unbalanced and misleading presentation.

If any member of the Georgia Skeptics writes a letter to the editor of a newspaper, we ask that you share it with us so we can reprint it here in the newsletter.

UPCOMING MEETING
HYPNOSIS AND THE PARANORMAL

The March meeting of the Georgia Skeptics will be held on Sunday, March 15, 1992, at the Steak and Ale Restaurant on Savoy Drive (in NE Atlanta, off I-285 at the North Shallowford Exit), beginning at 4:00 p.m. Visitors are welcome to attend.

The speaker will be CSICOP Fellow Dr. Robert A. Baker. Dr. Baker is the author of the critically acclaimed *They Call It Hypnosis*, and *Hidden Memories: Voices and Visions from Within*, and is a frequent contributor to *The Skeptical Inquirer*. He has taught psychology at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Stanford University, and the University of Kentucky, where he was Chairman of the Psychology Department until his retirement.

Dr. Baker will provide factual answers about hypnosis, tracing the history and current status of the hypnotic concept and clearly explaining what hypnosis is and is not, and what it can and cannot accomplish. He will address specific hypnotic fallacies, such as "post-hypnotic suggestion" and "painless surgery", and will discuss the effect of hypnosis, imagination, and suggestion on people who believe they have had supernatural experiences such as past-life regressions, UFO "abductions", and channeling.

THE END