



The Newsletter of The North Texas Skeptics

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CSICOP Eyes Dallas for 1992 Convention

Special to The Skeptic

By Mike Sullivan

CSICOP Executive Director Barry Karr has asked the North Texas Skeptics to host the 1992 CSICOP annual convention in Dallas next fall. In a letter to NTS President John Blanton, Karr said that CSICOP would like to hold the meeting in Dallas, slated for October 31 through November 1, 1992.

The convention will be planned as CSICOP struggles with finances in the coming year. CSICOP is in serious financial trouble, as described in the July issue of The Skeptic. CSICOP founder and chairman Paul Kurtz warned at the 1991 convention in May that the Committee may not be around for the next annual convention.

Karr said in a telephone conversation on July 2 that CSICOP is "95% decided" on Dallas as the city for the 16th annual gathering of the Committee, and that they would like NTS members to help the Committee organize and host the convention.

"We've been thinking about doing something in Texas for quite awhile, and this year we finally said, 'Let's do it'," Karr told me. "We were going to have the '92 meeting in Buffalo, but then decided to go with something that's a little easier to get to. Dallas looks like a good place," Karr said.

On the same date, the NTS Board of Directors authorized Blanton to send Karr a letter stating that NTS would be willing to host the event and that the group will work hard to win the 1992 meeting for Dallas.

Dallas Chamber of Commerce officials are working with NTS and CSICOP business manager Mary Rose Hays to negotiate and plan the meeting, which would attract up to 500 people from across the country and around the world. Several major hotels have been contacted and are planning to submit proposals for the meeting.

If Dallas is selected, NTS members would be asked to serve as volunteers to help organize and run the meeting. Workers would be needed to handle many of the routine functions that go along with an event of this size, from check-in desk staff to audio-visual coordinator to hotel liaison to security.

Watch for additional reports on the NTS effort to host the 1992 meeting in Dallas in future issues of The Skeptic.

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Overtones: One-Stop Psychic Shopping

by Mike Sullivan

If anyone doubts that there is an adequate supply of gullible Texans willing to be separated from their money by psychic scamsters, they need to pay a visit to Overtones. This tiny retail store is located between "Cats Only" and "Travel Mart," behind the gas station at 14902 Preston Road, just south of Beltline. A visit on a recent weekend uncovered a cornucopia of New Age nonsense, psychic flummery and pseudoscientific gibberish.

The first few feet of the store is packed with display cases and stands crammed with quartz and other shiny rocks and minerals, which the Overtones staffers are quite convinced have medical and psychic powers. Displayed in groupings by both size and type, the tags next to each rock listed its price and its gemological name. Overtones gets anywhere from \$1 for a pebble-sized fragment on up to several hundred dollars for basketball-sized hunks, and the Overtones staffers are quite happy to explain the imagined benefits each type of mineral will have on the new owner.

I asked how a little \$5 chunk of silica could help me be a better person. The clerk told me that computers and stereos have crystals in them and that they are used to magnify the electric signals; in the same way, she said, crystal jewelry can help magnify my psychic powers and help my body's internal psychic signals work in harmony. When I replied that I didn't know I had either of those, she assured me that everyone does to some degree and that a crystal would be just the thing to help bring them out.

I suppose I could have tried to give the Overtones staffer a short lesson in electronics by explaining that the crystals used in electronic equipment do not magnify anything -- they simply provide a precise time base that gives the device an internal frequency needed for other circuitry. But there didn't seem to be much point in injecting some cold, hard high-school science into a store so jam-packed with unscientific claptrap. I took a pass on her offer of a \$30 "Essential Crystal Kit" starter-sized combo-pack.

The half of Overtones that is not devoted to crystals and crystal jewelry is crammed with books, tapes, posters and associated trinkets representing every possible fringe of psychic hooey. Shelf after shelf of books, neatly organized by their respective "discipline," offer help in areas ranging from learning how to channel to connecting with the Gaia goddess within us to astral projection to tarot reading to numerology to understanding how our birth sign influences our career ambitions, our auras and even our weight!

It's sad enough that most mainstream bookstores offer a modest selection of tarot cards along with an assortment of astrology, psychic and occult pulp. Overtones puts them all to shame with a complete rack of tarot decks, displayed under the warning, "Please do not break the wrapper of the Tarot cards! Ask for assistance!"

The Overtones book department also has a literature display rack crammed cheek-and-jowl with flyers and business cards from local hucksters offering the lost and confused any number of goofy goods and services. The sampling given here is taken from their monthly newsletters and from other cards and flyers presented on my visit.

"Viewpoint" is a regular newsletter feature by Kristey Henderson, who lists herself as a practicing numerologist and tarot reader. Kristey writes that she has seen at least two ghosts, one named Ramon, who Kristey's mother says is the dead husband of their landlord. Kristey says her sister's house is also haunted. Kristey says that "your reality is not necessarily the same as that of other people; alternate realities do exist." She closes by letting us know that Overtones stocks a book by ghost-hunter Hans Holzer. Kristey also offers classes at Overtones on tarot reading. You can call her at 601-1632.

Caveat Emptor

Overtones lists a number of merchandise specials for smart shoppers:

- Celestite is one of the "Stones of the Month." Overtones says this piece of crystal will tune your consciousness to higher planes, improve your mental powers, and work on your fifth through your seventh chakras. You'll need something else for your first four chakras.
- Titanium earrings are now in stock at Overtones. We're told that titanium is a "strong metallic (sic) chemical," and that these titanium earrings are made of titanium, which may not be obvious to the typical Overtones patron.
- Past life readings and psychic readings are done on demand for only \$60/hour.
- Lasaris personal growth cassettes are on sale for only \$24.95 each. Lasaris is the non-physical entity who has never had a physical form but is channeled by Jach Pursel. Lasaris, the copy on the box tells us, is a "spark of love, a spark of spirituality, and a spark of God/Goodness/All That Is," and he/she/it stops by to help us poor humans reach our fullest spiritual potential. Tape titles in the Lasaris library include "Lazaris and the Dolphins," "Lazaris Remembers Lemuria," and the ever-popular "Lazaris Interviews, Book II."

Bonnie Ireland says she is a "Ms.D. - Dr. of Metaphysics - Mystic." Bonnie, or perhaps Dr. Ireland, works by appointment only from her Garland home, but hosts a special Metaphysical class there every Wednesday from 7:30 to 9:30 PM. Let her know if you'll be stopping in by calling 840-2260.

There is no need to stop by Margaret Mitschke's place to get a reading on friends or relatives, living or dead! Just send her a snapshot of the person concerned, and she'll provide insight with her special gift. Call Maggie for info at 601-1303.

"Let's Play Psychic with Dolly Hollis." This 2-hour, \$50 workshop will give us a "hand's on (sic) opportunity to explore the physical translations, touching on psychometry, auras, intuition, the Tarot, and vibrations." Don't miss it!

"Rune Magic with Kveldulf Gundarsson" is a \$67.50 course where we can get a firm grounding in the Elder Futhark runes. As an added bonus, we get to carve our own set of runes for meditation and divination!

Fred Carrico asks only \$20 or an "energy exchange" for his 3-hour seminar on Spiritual Life Path. He'll give you "five (5) characteristics to help determine if you are on your life path or if not, what direction you can take." Bring your jumper cables if you can't spare the \$20.

Patsy Bridges will conduct ongoing channeled talent sessions, teaching us to be in tune with our guides and developing our own talent. Stop by Tuesdays from 7:00-9:00, and bring your "love donation" for Patsy.

Trance medium Abby Pielet invites you to meet and chat with the "loving entity Ruth from the Old Testament." \$50 per session, audio cassette recording included, although Abby's doesn't say if videos of Ruth are available. You can call Abby at 492-6717.

Jo Burt bills himself as a "Psychic, Certified Hypno Therapist, Crystal Energy Practitioner." Jo Burt also dabbles in behavior modification and past life regressions, although I think those are just sidelines because he lists those services in the upper corners of the business card. Call Jo Burt at 289-BURT for an appointment.

Rose Ernst Kaimana provides "Aromatherapy Massage," which her flyer says "enhances the function of joints and muscles, improves general body tone, and gives one a sense of well-being." Make an appointment with her at 521-2001. Rose lists her "Texas # 2066" in the ad as pest control and irrigation contractors are required to do, lending an air of credibility to her smelly services. But S. Perry Brown may be trying to horn in on Rose's scent scam, because he offers a \$20 class of his own at Overtones in this "ancient art of using essential oils." Be careful, though, because S. Perry doesn't list his "Texas #."

Call Plutonics at 501-623-4846 to get a pyramid frame for meditation or healing. Better yet, stop by the Golden Eagle Sanctuary Pyramid Center and Wholistic Bed and Breakfast and visit their 36-ft. pyramid attic, crystal healing chambers, and 5th dimensional hot springs baths. Ben from Golden Eagle asks that we stop by and take in the Valley of the Vapors, and get a FREE dodecahedron session! Ben is even offering Overtones customers a big 20% discount, available Monday through Thursday nights only.

Golden Eagle has a smorgasbord of activities to keep you busy while you're there, including the Gaia Workshop, Vortex Hiking, Light Body Activation, Crystal Mining, and a big Sacred Geometry Symposium. The light body activation gig sounds neat: Ben writes, "From Einstein's $E=MC^2$ we are crystallized light, from the auras to what we think - we can interface with it all. \$55."

Hands On Productions Innergy in Denison sponsors a gigantic 4-day gala. Some of the exciting events planned for the \$250 camp out include a Sweat Lodge (optional), Talking Leaves, Walking The Sacred Hoop, Touching The Vision Quest, Being Your Truth, Walk In A Good Way, and Alphabiotics.

Kaye T. Stewart is a self-taught One Brain Facilitator who provides classes on "Reflexology, Stress Management, and Soft Inner-Connective Tissue Release (MFR)." Kaye adds the letters "N.C.C." after her name, but gives no indication what they mean. Maybe you can get through to her at 492-2540 to find out; all we got when we called was her answering machine.

We're Not In Kansas Anymore, Toto!

"A Catalog of Astrological Reports Written in Plain English!" This amazing breakthrough is brought to us by Wirtel of Oz in Plano, where you can get a 2-page natal birth chart for only \$5, or a 12-page compatibility report for \$20. Based on the page-per-dollar pricing scheme offered by Mr. Wirtel, I'd go with the latter and take the bulk discount.

Simone Septima is a "trained practioner (sic)," but we are not told in what. Whatever it is, she uses it to release the cellular memory that brings poor health. She can also call forth the Light Potential that lies within us and get us ready for the Transformation of Self. Simone may not be all that confident in her skills, however, because she calls on the usual disclaimer that all her healing comes from "the Divine Energy of Love--God--the Universal Source." Simone also "has direct affect and benefit to the solar-plexes (sic) and heart Chakra," and "produces an altered state of consciousness to a higher level of spirituality." Call her at 350-9859.

And darn if I didn't miss the big "UFO Connection" show Mark Roberts held at the Harvey Hotel/LBJ on April 5th. Mark explained the Crop Circles/UFO connection for only \$7 at the door, and gave a tantalizing hint of his theory in the cartoon of a flying saucer zooming skyward that was shown in his ad.

Overtones certainly is a full-service outfit. No matter what zany fringe of the New Age you're interested in, the Overtones folks are ready and willing to get you together with any number of crackpot specialists. Their complete selection of useless junk will help lighten the pocketbooks of the uncritical while keeping the burgeoning New Age industry humming along.

Since Overtones accepts advertising in their newsletter, I suggest that The North Texas Skeptics attempt to buy an ad asking for proof of any of the paranormal claims made by the other advertisers. Although the Overtones newsletter contains some of the wildest New Age sewage available today, I doubt if they'd be interested in running our ad.

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News Notes

by John Blanton

(Just in case you missed these items)

Sore Toes

It seems at times to me that some outcry is in response to a *nerve* being touched. Edson Hendricks in a letter to Scientific American writes, "If Scientific American has chosen to address the UFO topic, it might find a book reviewer more qualified than Philip J. Klass ..." Hendricks goes on to cite a quote from Klass that he thinks proves unscientific bias on Klass' part, and he further relates regular Scientific American book reviewer Philip Morrison's comparison of the current UFO issue to the meteorite controversy of the 18th century, when skeptics dismissed reports of stones falling from the sky. In a response, Klass pointed out that the meteorite controversy was soon resolved with the acquisition of (literally) hard evidence, while the UFO flower has been barren for over 40 years.

Soviet AntiScience

In an article titled "Antiscience Trends in the U.S.S.R." in the same August 1991 issue, Sergei Kapitza describes the rise in superstitions, cults and antitechnology in this once Stalinist society. Kapitza is with the Institute for Physical Problems of the U.S.S.R. He is a professor at the Moscow Institute for Physics and Technology and is president of the Physical Society of the U.S.S.R. Professor Kapitza is editor of the Russian edition of Scientific American.

Professor Kapitza expresses the belief that the Soviet people are reacting to the removal of a powerful source of authority in their lives and are seeking a replacement in the spectrum of authority figures offered by the world of pseudoscience. One photo shows an "extrasensorial Healer" at work before an enthusiastic audience. A chunky woman claims to have thrown away her crutches and can now jump "as many as 70 times." The "healer" admonishes her to do even better. Another photo shows a packed audience attending a meditation seance held at the Central Army Sports Club Hall in Moscow last October. The Soviet news service Tass reports that an Indian healer is teaching "moral self-perfection, self-regulation and self-treatment." The healer, we are told, plans to establish a school in one of the city's clinics. Another photo provided by Tass shows a 10-year-old girl with the ability to attract metal objects from spoons to irons. And sure enough, she has an electric iron stuck to the palm of one hand and four pieces of plated flatware stuck to the other. Of course her hands are inclined slightly backward so the items won't just fall to the floor. A final photo depicts a scene at a center for folk medicine recently opened in a Moscow hospital. The caption says that Tass reports "now specialists in ... unconventional medicine may at last give legal and open treatment" and that thousands are on the waiting list of the center, which is sponsored partly by the city's Depart of Health Protection.

With the relaxation of state control over religious practice in the Soviet Union, which had previously amounted to an official mandate of atheism, there is a resurgence of root level religion. With this has come the importation of creationism from American fundamentalists. In reaction to official Darwinian indoctrination, people are taking up the foreign-grown creationism rather than the home grown Lysenkoism.

To illustrate the popularity of these pseudoscience trends, Kapitza uses the example of a certain "extrasensorial healer": "Anatolii Kashirovskii has appeared on many occasions on television. For an hour or more, he speaks, persuading the audience that their ills will leave them if they trust him. The medical profession has voiced only feeble opposition, which can in no way countermand Kashpirovskii's huge popularity. On New Year's Eve in 1990, the Communist party newspaper Pravda devoted half a page to the support of this 'doctor.' The same issue contained a detailed and sympathetic report on a seer from India who offers advice on political and personal matters. A few days later the same newspaper supported a woman who has novel ideas on 'rotational' gravitation. In none of these issues was there a single item on science and technology."

Unhexed

From TV news comes word that consumer products giant Procter and Gamble is giving up its traditional product logo which has in recent years been plagued by association with satanism. A number of people (with a lot of spare time on their hands) have charged that the crescent moon and thirteen stars in the logo have unmistakable satanic implications. P&G will introduce what appears to be a stylistic embodiment of the letters P and G that will give detractors the least amount of foothold. If you think you are going to miss this landmark of the American scene, don't despair. It's still going to be around. In a two-page, full color ad appearing in the July issue of Scientific American, P&G announced the charter members of its Victor Mills Society, twelve scientists and engineers who have made significant contributions to P&G technology. Pictured in the ad is a medal bearing the traditional company logo with the moon and stars. Hopefully the distinguished recipients will not embarrass the company by wearing the medal in public.

Bad News From the Bible Science Newsletter (P.O. Box 32457, Minneapolis, MN 55432; write for a free sample issue), April 1991, p. 13:

"ILLINOIS SCHOOL BOARD VOTES UNANIMOUSLY TO INCLUDE CREATION --After residents reviewed recommended textbooks in Morton, Illinois they expressed their concern that creation was completely omitted. After discussing the matter the school board unanimously directed administrators to come up with a creationist supplement by next fall.

"[...] Ransom Trexler of the St. Louis thought police (the St. Louis Association for Teaching of Evolution) responded with the usual noises about evolution being science and creationism being religion. State officials pointed out to the Missouri evolutionists that Illinois has no law against teaching creation. Nevertheless, Trexler will try to set up a lawsuit to challenge the dangerous behavior of mentioning that there is an alternative to evolution."

Failures of Skeptics

Jim Lippard has previously published in The Arizona Skeptic (Box 62792, Phoenix, AZ 85082-2792) an article titled "Some Failures of Organized Skepticism." The article treats various instances in which Lippard feels that organized skeptics have seriously mishandled investigations of claims of the paranormal, and in particular he relates his experiences investigating reports of the March 18, 1988 debate between creationist Duane Gish of the Institute for Creations Research (ICR) and Ian Plimer, [associate?] professor of geology at Newcastle University. The description appeared in the Australian Skeptics' publication The Skeptic, and Lippard found this description to be seriously at odds with the debate as depicted on video tape. Read Lippard's full article for details (we have a copy). Lippard has also published a postscript that relates his further confrontations with the Aussies over this issue, and a copy of this is available to interested members.

Your Tax Dollars at Work

"Feds seize Tilton's residence" read the headline in the July 20 Dallas Times Herald. It was not another crackdown on a televangelist, however. Br. Bob was only renting the Las Colinas residence that the feds claim was bought using profits from the illegal drug operations of a California trafficker. While the drug agents go after the house's owner, Tilton will pay his \$6000 per month rent to his new landlord, the U.S. Government.

If a report from the Trinity Foundation's Ole Anthony is correct, Br. Bob will not have any trouble making the payments. At a recent meeting of the NTS, Mr. Anthony stated that Tilton's Word of Faith operation, which includes a fair amount of faith healing, pulls in a million dollars a week.

Tax free.

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The James Randi Fund

Here is an item we recently received from the Bay Area Skeptics :

STEINER STATEMENT

Robert A. Steiner, National President (1988-1989) of the Society of American Magicians stated categorically, June 16th, that URI GELLER does magic tricks which are well known to those who study magic. These tricks are described in the vast literature associated with the art of magic. Steiner further stated that Uri Geller is a skilled, talented and creative performer, but there is no validated evidence that this is of a supernatural nature.

The following individuals, engineers, computer professionals, businessmen and women and scholars, endorse Robert A. Steiner's statement. Organizations are listed for identification purposes only.

Yves Barbero, Editor, *BASIS* Lawrence Jerome, Director, Bay Area Skeptics Larry Loebig, Chair, Bay Area Skeptics Rick Moen, Secretary, Bay Area Skeptics Eugenie C. Scott, Ph.D., Director, Bay Area Skeptics Kate Talbot, Director, Bay Area Skeptics John Taube, President, Senior Citizens Weekly Forum

Steiner has opened an account to allow friends of James Randi to donate funds to assist in his defense. Please make out checks to:

The James Randi Fund c/o Bob Steiner P.O. Box 659 El Cerrito, CA 94530

Speaking on behalf of the directors of the NTS, I think the above is a commendable statement and the James Randi Fund is a worthwhile cause.

-- John Blanton

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The third eye

by Pat Reeder

Despite all the commercials for 1-900-Tarot lines and TimeLife Books Series on the Occult, it appears that Madison Avenue is harboring a few skeptics after all. In the past month, two new commercials have appeared based on paranormal themes, and both are presented with tongues pressed firmly in cheeks. A new television spot for Daihatsu begins with familiar shots of a UFO, Bigfoot, and the Loch Ness monster, before sequeling into another great "rarity" -- the wonderful new Daihatsu! At the end of the spot, we see the car driving through foggy woods, past a Bigfoot who's out on his evening walk. It's an amusing spot, although it does by extension cast some doubt on the existence of the Daihatsu. On the radio dial last month, you could catch a clever comedy commercial for Chevron, promoting an "everybody wins something" contest their gas stations were running. In it, a fortune teller informs the announcer that she has been batting a thousand with her customers, ever since she started telling all of them their luck would change if they went to Chevron. When the announcer asks her for a more specific prediction, she snaps, "What am I? A mind reader?" Anyone wishing a one-minute crash course in a lucrative field that requires little or no skills should be sure to give this Chevron commercial a listen.

During the past month, ghosts have been making a lot of noise in the courts. First came word that the Louisiana legislature had voted to prevent home buyers from backing out of a deal because they claim the house is haunted. Now, a New York Appeals Court has ruled that ghosts are indeed a good enough reason for pulling out of a home purchase. The case in New York involved a Nyack woman who believed her home was haunted by several Revolutionary War-era spirits. She said the ghosts were good company and had even given her various gifts over the years, such as a ring and a knick-knack box. One of them even looked like Santa Claus (no doubt he's the one who hands out the gifts). She had even granted an interview to Reader's Digest about her ectoplasmic family. Somehow, though, when it came time to sell the house to a doctor and his wife, the ghosts slipped her mind. When the doctor's wife heard the stories about her new home being haunted, she didn't want to move in. So the husband (who thought the whole thing was ridiculous) tried to pull out of the deal. The court ruled that since the previous owner had fostered a belief in the ghosts, she had an obligation to reveal their "existence" to the buyers. Besides, her contract said she would deliver the house "vacant" ... and God knows, it was anything but, what with all those ghosts bumping around! The judge's conclusion: "As a matter of law, the house is haunted." Further proof that New Yorkers are much more enlightened than us poor dumb Southerners.

Speaking of Louisiana law reminds me of the defamation suit now being fought between Marvin Gorman and Jimmy Swaggart down in New Orleans. The trial took several days to get rolling, because Swaggart's lawyers insisted on quizzing all prospective jurors on their religious beliefs, their Bible-reading habits, and whether they believed in Satan and demonic possession. Apparently, they're planning to mount a "devil made him do it" defense. During the early days of the trial, a woman burst into the courtroom, shouting "This is for you sheep in defense of the shepherd! I am from God!" Deputies quickly removed her, although Swaggart's lawyers may want to recall her later as evidence of possession.

According to the Associated Press, the natives were restless during the recent eruption of Mt. Pinatubo in the Philippines. The primitive, hill-dwelling Aeta tribe was forced to flee to the lowlands, where they told reporters the volcanic eruption was the fault of the national oil company. Seems the oil company angered the mountain god by drilling around Mt. Pinatubo and befouling nature. They could have something there. If so, look for volcanic eruptions in Prince William Sound in the very near future.

Finally, a tip of the hat to our friends at MUFON, whose twenty-second annual convention in Rosemont, Illinois, got written up as a feature by the Associated Press. The wire story included brief comments from a couple of "UFO abductees," both of whom remembered amazingly similar experiences AFTER they were hypnotized ("Explain that, you old skeptics, you!"). There was also a passing reference to a new book, The Elvis UFO Connection. This, I have to read. It all wrapped up with some typical words of wisdom from that renowned scientist, Stanton Friedman, whose name shows up in goofy pseudoscience features about as often as Phil Collins shows up on the pop charts. Friedman noted that "most people believe in UFO's, but most people believe that most people don't believe in UFO's." Deep, Stanton. And getting deeper.

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Up a tree: a skeptical cartoon

By Laura Ainsworth



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