



The Newsletter of The North Texas Skeptics

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Healthy Skepticism

By Tim Gorski, M.D.

Orthopractic: The Beginning Of The End For Chiropractic

As with dowsing, "psychic powers," UFO abductions, and every other kind of flimflam and nonsense, the skeptic is always forced to contend with those well-meaning people for whom "well, then, how do you explain _____?" is reason enough to accept even the impossible as fact.

This is certainly the case with medical quackery of every kind. Indeed, it's a certainty that no matter what sort of treatment an individual receives for a given disorder, even if it's no treatment at all, the eventual result will not be the same for everyone and some people will get better despite the most terrible of prognoses. A 5-year survival rate for a serious malignancy may be as low as 10%, 5%, or even 1%, for example, none of which would be likely to encourage a physician to convey much optimism to a patient so stricken. But the fact is that those 10, 5, and, yes, even that 1 person in a hundred is out there, just waiting to "prove all the specialists wrong."

This is really the only viable way to understand those rare situations in which a chiropractor has supposedly cured a cancer or some other medically confirmed ailment with nothing but spinal "adjustments." But there are many more cases in which spinal manipulation by a chiropractor is said to have benefited back pain and other musculoskeletal complaints. This is not entirely due to the placebo effect. As I noted in the April *Skeptic*, "there has come to be a recognition that there is a limited role for physical methods, including spinal manipulation in the management of certain musculoskeletal conditions. The existence of hospital physical therapy units, the ancillary medical profession of physical therapists, and even the medical specialty of physical medicine and physiatrists attest to this."

Yet it should be clear that spinal manipulation therapy and chiropractic are *not* the same. It has been out of this realization that a new designation for an old therapeutic approach has come: Orthopractic.

Orthopractic is the banner under which a new attempt to gather practitioners of manipulative medicine is forming, and which offers chiropractors in particular the opportunity to shed the pseudoscientific baggage of their profession's historic origins. The Orthopractic Manipulative Society of North America, a multidisciplinary consortium of chiropractors, physical therapists, and medical physicians of Canada, joined by the reorganized National Association for

Chiropractic Medicine which this past March became the Orthopractic Manipulative Society of the United States, have adopted guidelines that place orthopractic on a solid scientific basis. Explicitly rejected are the notion of chiropractic "subluxations" and the idea that spinal "adjustments" represent a general system, a "holistic" approach, or an "alternative" to scientific medicine.

The new guidelines state that examination of the heart, lungs, reproductive organs, and internal examinations are not appropriate for orthopractors, and that X-ray studies have no value except as a negative diagnostic tool or as a means of contraindicating manipulative treatment. Also singled out for avoidance by practitioners of orthopractic are anti-science, anti-medicine, and anti-surgery attitudes, opposition to immunizations, homeopathy, naturopathy, "nutritional" health care, preventative treatments, the treatment of children as a specialty, and claims of benefits for the immune system or correction of any organ system dysfunction.

The Medical Post, Canada's largest medical newspaper, carried an article about orthopractic last month in which it noted that "there is nothing in the guidelines that a scientific practitioner can argue with." It also noted that at the founding meeting of the U.S. branch in March, "there was so much interest that it was decided to limit registration to 1000 chiropractic members in the first year. This is not many compared to some 50,000 U.S. chiropractors. However the *curriculum vitae* of the chiropractors who are becoming orthopractic are very impressive. They appear to represent the cream of the mental crop." Considering the ground swell of interest in orthopractic and the amount of support from within the mainstream medical community that it's already incited in Canada and is anticipated to elicit in the U.S., the *Post* declared orthopractic "a hit."

The benefits of orthopractic are obvious for the public, which will now be able to distinguish between ethical practitioners of manipulative medicine and adherents of a discredited pseudoscience. For the mainstream medical community, too, orthopractic offers a way out, since all that physicians and others need do is to favor orthopractic methods, by whomever offers them. Credentialing of health care provider networks are expected to eventually adopt just such a stance, so that over time the die-hard chiropractors will gradually take their place among psychic surgeons, crystal power promoters, and faith healers.

Most importantly, orthopractic offers a means for ethical chiropractors to salvage their careers and their profession in the face of an onslaught of changes in the medical care system of this country. Ron Slaughter, past president of the National Association for Chiropractic Medicine, and Executive Director of the new Orthopractic Manipulation Society of the U.S., puts it this way:

"Chiropractic is faced with a threat so real and so devastating with national health legislation — regardless of what is finally passed — that it probably means the 'end' for many in the profession. Expected legislation is expected, even by the American Chiropractic Association, to mean 'neither inclusion nor exclusion.' Meaning the 'health alliances' and the 'gatekeeper' will control 'who' treats who for 'what.' The *majority* of the population has a serious economic reason to choose the 'HMO' format over 'fee for service.' Workman's compensation and personal injury are expected to be rolled into the national legislative package for 'cost containment.' Think what it means to the small business man in premiums for workman's comp! Workman's comp coverage is a devastating expense. Consider the chiropractor with a 'medical gatekeeper' for all workman's comp and personal injury!!! Consider half the population of the USA (or more) in a HMO type format - *either* as a medical gatekeeper *or* with 'in house' spinal manipulators in competition with the 'sole proprietor' chiropractor 'fee for service.' Few in the profession realize exactly what is getting ready to happen. Or, alternatively, simply have their head in the sand and do not understand forces beyond their control. Now comes another threat — orthopractic. But, this time with the opportunity to be a part of it and the chance to get past the 'philosophical' 'alternative to medicine' stigma with which we have all lived our entire careers."

These changes won't take place overnight. Indeed, there are probably enough philosophical proponents of chiropractic pseudoscience that the entry of orthopractic may touch off something like a civil war among chiropractors. But there can be little doubt about the ultimate outcome.

For more information, or for ethical chiropractors interested in becoming orthopractic, the area coordinator for OMS-U.S.A. is John Pearson, D.C., (817) 274-0222.

This information is provided by the D/FW Council Against Health Fraud. For more information, or to report suspected

health fraud, please contact the Council at Box 202577, Arlington, TX 76006, or call metro 817-792-2000. Dr. Gorski is a practicing physician, chairman of the D/FW Council Against Health Fraud and a North Texas Skeptics Technical Advisor.

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Skeptical news and views

OPEN FORUM *This column is the "readers' forum" open to any and all! Each piece will be individually signed — using the format displayed below — for the reader's convenience. Please send your items to the Editor by the 15th of each month for inclusion in the next month's issue.*

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RIGHT IS WRONG — In an earlier SN&V column (*The Skeptic*; March 1994) I wrote about creationists/fundamentalists' claims the USA was "founded on Christianity." I contended their assertion is factually incorrect, cited references for my position and encouraged readers to supply "resources to validate, augment (or repudiate) my preliminary findings." To date, I've had numerous responses from individuals both supplying and seeking data — with all new materials solidly verifying the preliminary findings. As previously noted, I do not feel the "USA is a *Christian* nation" mischaracterization is a religious issue, per se — but, rather, a factual issue that could ultimately have a profound effect on our freedom to pursue scientific objectivity. The result of the recent school board election in Plano points out the problem very vividly. "Conservative Christian" candidates reportedly won a clear majority — with fundamentalist faith-healer Pat Robertson's Christian Coalition frequently noted as a key factor. (The same group is credited with capturing a majority of delegates in the Texas Republican Party — via his "Operation Precinct.") While sex education classes appear to be an initial priority, it's a fairly safe bet that science courses involving the teaching of evolution are on their eventual "hit" list. I discovered a great resource for those who want to "get up to speed" on the issue: *Why The Religious Right Is Wrong About Separation Of Church & State*, by Robert Boston (1993, Prometheus Books, Buffalo, NY). Boston is an editor with Americans United for Separation of Church & State — and the book can also be ordered (postpaid) from them for \$14.95 (via credit card) at 800-875-3707. The book details not only the history of the First Amendment, but the history and agenda of the "Religious Right." In the book's introduction, The Rev. Barry W. Lynn, Executive Director of "Americans United," notes "efforts at subterfuge and worse." Later, in one of the handy summary appendixes, Rob Boston details concentrated grass-roots "efforts to capture local school boards and city councils" and a planned bid "to take over the Republican Party from the ground up." As he points out, they've learned low-profile local elections can easily be won by merely getting a high percentage of those with fundamentalist views to vote — because *over-all* voter turnouts tend to be very low. Much of " ... *Right Is Wrong* ... " seems to describe our local situation with alarming accuracy. Most "mainstream" religious groups apparently have a very high regard for "Americans United," so I (personally) feel the situation outlined by Boston should disturb anyone that values *either* scientific *or* religious freedom. As before, call if you want to exchange information and ideas...

— **JV**

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NTS "HIT SQUAD" — An NTS member was recently berated by her sister for our "uncaring attack" [my paraphrasing] on Facilitated Communication at the April meeting. I didn't realize an objective — albeit rigorous — evaluation was regarded as either "uncaring" or an "attack." If anyone resents having a favored "truth" questioned, I'd suspect their confidence in it is rather minimal. If a contention *really* is valid, even the most demanding questioning would seem to merely produce additional confirmation! I've used that premise for many years in my accident analysis work — and have *welcomed* objective questions. It's about the best way I know of to refine my efforts to the point

where I have an extremely high confidence level in the work product. If someone catches me in an "oops," they've simply pointed out I'm going down a blind alley — which gives me a much better shot at discovering the *real* solution. In short, questions have always helped — rather than hurt — *my* search for valid answers. As to the "uncaring" assertion: Blind credulity can be very dangerous while rational skepticism is essentially benign. I think people that blunder on with false confidence are the *real* ones that "don't care" — *not* those who feel ethically compelled to make sure a "cure" is effective.

JV

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SKEPTIC DISCRIMINATION? — One of our members advises that she's received a fair amount of criticism from a supervisor *because* she's a skeptic. Whenever she tries to explain to the supervisor why something is technically impossible with their digital graphics system, the response is, in essence: "You skeptics always come up with a bunch of reasons why something won't work." It sounds like the supervisor (who apparently doesn't know a bit or byte from a banana) thinks you can upgrade your graphics capabilities with *faith*. Well, I tried it — as I'm typing this — and it doesn't work on *my* system! (Wonder if that's because I'm a skeptic — or because I didn't place my hands on the screen and send in a "pledge of faith"?) The supervisor also appears to have a severe case of inverted understanding regarding philosophical skepticism. I'd contend that virtually all progress has been guided by rational skeptics: those willing to question; to reevaluate; to seek a more valid answer. Without skeptics, state-of-the-art graphics would likely be some crude marks scraped on the wall of a cave!

JV

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MORE FRONTIER SKEPTICISM — In my review of Louis L'Amour's work (*The Skeptic*; March 1994) I missed one of his better "skeptic" quotes. It merits being passed on: "... what the world has always needed is more heretics and less authority. ... Authority, in this world in which I moved, implied belief in and acceptance of a dogma, and dogma is invariably wrong, as knowledge is always in a state of transition. The radical ideas of today are often the conservative policies of tomorrow, and dogma is left protesting on the wayside. "Much of the conflict [is the basic one between] doctrines based primarily on faith and Greek philosophy, which was an attempt to interpret experience by reason. "Civilization was born of curiosity, and can be kept alive in no other way." Louis L'Amour; *The Walking Drum*

JV

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IN RELENTLESS PURSUIT OF THE TRUTH ... — The Florida Department of Citrus (FDC) recently gained new notoriety by hiring conservative radio and television talk-show host Rush Limbaugh to help promote citrus products from the state. Less well known is that the FDC, a quasi-governmental entity which is funded by the taxation of the state's citrus production, has published a booklet containing misleading nutritional information. Vitamin C, for example, is claimed to "offer remarkable protection against heart disease" and "help prevent tuberculosis," and is said to be necessary on a daily basis. The FDC has made reckless statements in the past as well, most notably in 1987 when it suggested that the potassium present in grapefruit could help reduce hypertension.

T.G.

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NO EFFECT OF PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT ON SURVIVAL — *The Journal of Clinical Oncology* (11:66-9, 1993) recently published the results of a ten year follow-up study on the survival effects of supplemental psychosocial

support on 34 breast cancer patients. The subjects were enrolled in the Exceptional Cancer Patients program in New Haven, Connecticut, which is the program highly recommended by Bernie Siegel, M.D., in his two books and included individual, family, and peer counseling and support, positive mental imagery, and instruction in relaxation and meditation techniques. Compared to 79 matched controls, there was no difference in the survival curves.

T.G.

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IT DIDN'T WORK FOR HIM — Dr. Stuart Berger, nationally acclaimed author of *Dr. Berger's Immune Power Diet*, a 1985 #1 bestseller, as well as *The Southhampton Diet*, *How To Be Your Own Nutritionist*, and *Forever Young - 20 Years Younger in 20 Weeks: Dr. Berger's Step-by-Step Rejuvenation Program*, died this past February. At his death, Berger, who claimed his methods could cure arthritis, hypertension, and even cancer, was 40 years old and weighed 365 pounds.

T.G.

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PHYSICIAN TOUTS "NUTRITIONAL" SUPPLEMENTS — Fort Worth plastic surgeon David A. Grant, M.D., is claiming in newspaper advertising that "nutritional supplements are proving beneficial in promoting body fat reduction without traditional concepts of dieting" and that these products "afford a significant increase in energy levels and the enhancement of health and well-being." Grant is promoting a line of nutritional supplements from Body Wise International. The Carlsbad, California, company's promotional literature, which Grant distributes through his medical practice, offers the usual parade of testimonials. Readers are also informed of the amazing fact that "your body is composed of tiny electron messengers (electrolytes) that feed on soluble minerals found in the blood stream and body fluids. When those electrolytes run down ... so does your energy." The suggested supplement is said to contain "a 22nd century breakthrough" ingredient! Body Wise supplements, like many products for which such ridiculous claims are made, are sold through multi-level marketing arrangements.

T.G.

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THE FACTS ABOUT *ECHINACEA* — *Echinacea*, also known as cone flower or purple cone flower, is sold as an herbal remedy for a wide range of medical conditions. Expectant mothers, it seems, are also being urged to take supplements of this material on the basis of claims that "it's good for pregnancy." Native to the central United States, several pharmacologically active substances have been found in the roots and rhizome of this plant. Among these are a caffeic acid glycoside with bacteriostatic properties and a complex isobutylamide with insecticidal activity. As an anti-infective and wound-healing agent, therefore, *echinacea* may be of some use. But as a cure-all or a general "tonic," and particularly for pregnant women, its use should be discouraged. An added caution is that preparations sold as *echinacea* frequently consist of, or are adulterated with, less expensive inactive materials, most usually the related species *Parthenium integrifolium*.

T.G.

SN&V Contributors this month: J.V. — *Joe Voelkering*; T.G. — *Tim Gorski, M.D.*

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The third eye

By Pat Reeder

Let's start off with some good news: if you are reading this, the world hasn't ended yet!

That's quite an amazing piece of news, considering the tidal wave of apocalyptic predictions that has swamped us in the past month. Over a year ago, on the occasion of the Branch Davidian conflagration (I really should be a professional psychic), I predicted that as the millennium approacheth, with it shall come countless cults and prognosticators, all claiming to have the inside skinny that the Last Days are upon us. And in the past month, it seems that the Four Horsemen have been galloping across every TV screen and printed page.

Here is just a short rundown of what I've seen ... and believe me, I have NOT been going out of my way to ferret this stuff out:

Stephen King's *The Stand* was a big ratings winner for ABC, with its quasi-Biblical end-of-the-world scenario ... NBC repeated its two-hour prime time special on prophecy, Biblical and otherwise ... NBC aired a special about angels appearing to humans, with yet another such story on the next night's edition of *Unsolved Mysteries*, and local NBC affiliate KXAS-TV Channel 5 jumped aboard with similar angel stories on their 10 p.m. newscast ... David Gold became convinced that the world is ending and started bringing various guests onto his KLIF radio talk show to support this notion ... and of course, there were similar stories in magazines, newspapers, and on all the tabloid TV shows. It's Apocalypsemania!

Few of these reports bother to mention the countless identical predictions which have flared up around all other major calendar dates for centuries. If you are interested in getting some historical perspective on doomsday cults, check out the Appendix in James Randi's book, *The Mask Of Nostradamus*. It is a chronological listing of soothsayers who have been predicting the end of the world with absolute certainty for over 1500 years.

Incidentally, all this talk of the End Times has given me a wonderful fund-raising idea. We (and all other skeptics groups, for that matter), should take the money we now offer to people who can prove supernatural abilities and offer to bet the many proponents of the Apocalypse that, in fact, the world will NOT end by the year 2000. This is a true sucker bet. Think about it: if we're right, we double our money ... and if they're right, we'll never have to pay off, because the world ended!

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Each of the three major network affiliates featured nonsense as news in the past month. KXAS-Channel 5 provided us with the aforementioned angel story. WFAA-TV Channel 8 offered a report on "the healing power of touch" (not a nice relaxing massage, but the type of "touch therapy" where you don't even physically touch the patients, but merely wave your hands above them, emanating your healing essence). One patient swore he could tell where the therapist's hands were, even though she wasn't touching him. I can, too: at the end of her arms.

Channel 8 also presented a profile of the Eclectic Viewpoint Society on their "PrimeTime Texas" weekly news magazine. The cameras followed them as they accompanied a parapsychologist to my own haunts, Waxahachie, to try to scare up the famous ghosts in the Catfish Plantation Cafe (where I eat quite often, although I've never seen a ghost ... not even a ghost of a catfish, which seems the most likely thing to spot, statistically speaking). The ghost hunter lurked about the kitchen with a device which measures electromagnetic fields. The needle moved slightly, proving conclusively that there was a ghost somewhere between the electric coffee maker and the electric dishwasher!

The spokeswoman for the Eclectic Viewpoint Society said that people are interested in all this stuff instead of traditional (i.e., "real") science because many of the theories scientists put forth are proving to be wrong. True, but that's because real scientists are constantly seeking to disprove their own theories. New Age and occult beliefs are appealing precisely because they are held to no standards of proof whatsoever, and therefore, believers never have to worry about having their theories disproved by some inconvenient truth. It is the same nonsense yesterday, today and tomorrow. What a

comforting feeling it must be to know that!

Finally, KDFW-TV Channel 4 ran yet another week-long series on end-of-the-world prophecies which left no doubts that we are living in the Last Days. I begin to agree, every time I watch Channel 4 news. By the way, yet another sign of the Apocalypse recently came to pass, as the Fox Network obtained a string of VHF stations, including several major CBS affiliates such as Channel 4. Here's a money-saving tip for Rupert Murdoch: replace the 10 p.m. newscast with reruns of *The X-Files*. Nobody will notice the difference.

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Frankly, I don't know why we should care about the world ending, since we'll all soon be dead anyway. In the past month alone, we have been informed by the mass media (trumpeting the questionable findings of various advocacy groups) that the following items are going to kill us: movie popcorn popped in coconut oil, hot dogs, margarine, oysters, UV radiation (weather forecasts will soon become even longer, because they must include a UV warning, or what I call the "George Hamilton Factor"), barbecue grills, lawn mowers, the aroma of baking bread (now an ozone-depleting pollutant), cow burps (the EPA has given Utah State U. \$500,000 of our money to attach devices to cow's faces which measure how much methane they burp into the atmosphere ... I propose we just feed them big bales of tax money: we'll get the same end result, plus milk, too), and too many other things to list, not to mention the certain death we will all face if we inhale within sixty yards of a smoker.

The movie popcorn hysteria is courtesy of the Center for Science in the Public Interest, the same folks who recently told us that both Italian and Chinese foods would kill us (they neglected to note that their fat counts for Chinese food were from portions meant for at least two people).

I have no quarrel with warning the public about some genuine health hazard ... but once you've told me, YOU CAN GO AWAY NOW!!! Unfortunately, these health Nazis are not satisfied with avoiding unhealthy habits themselves; they must prevent everyone else from indulging as well. Notice that several theater chains have already stopped selling the type of popcorn many of us grew up (and grew old) on. And labeling fettucine Alfredo "death on a plate" (as the Center for Science in the Public Interest did) is transparent fear-mongering. Nobody eats a steady diet of movie popcorn, and the only people who are in imminent danger of dying facedown in a plate of fettucine are Mafia dons. So if you like movie popcorn as an occasional treat, you'd better buy a lifetime supply while you can (one Family Size Box should do it). In the meantime, here's a discussion topic: "The Center for Science in the Public Interest is neither scientific nor in the public interest." Talk amongst yourselves ...

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Speaking of alarmist, anal-retentive busybodies, ABC aired an excellent special in April examining just how we have turned into a nation of Felix Ungers. On "Are We Scaring Ourselves To Death?" consumer reporter John Stossel took a skeptical look at hysterical news reports on topics ranging from asbestos to apples with alar, and wondered what all the fuss was about. Stossel showed that, in actuality, driving to the supermarket was far riskier than eating the alar-treated apples you bought there. The highlight for me was when he dug out footage of himself reporting from a "contaminated" toxic waste area, where men in space suits were walking around 20 feet behind him. He was in a coat and tie. He said that at the time, he never thought to ask why it was safe for reporters to walk around without space suits, but not environmental scientists.

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For the first time in living memory, a story broken by the *Weekly World News* has made it to the legitimate news outlets, albeit as a joke. In late May, the tabloid printed a story naming 12 U.S. Senators as "space aliens" living undercover. They include such top Senate leaders as Sam Nunn, John Glenn (no surprise), Orrin Hatch (Orrin is a very popular name

on Jupiter), Howell Heflin (if you watched the Clarence Thomas hearings, you'll find this one easy to believe), and our own Sen. Phil Gramm.

Gramm got the ball rolling by "admitting," tongue-in-cheek, that yes, he is a space alien. He told the *Weekly World News* he was surprised that it took people so long to figure out the Senate was being run by space aliens (hey, I've suspected it for years, Phil!). Gramm's playing along with the gag propelled the story from the tabloid to the wire services. When asked which planet his boss hails from, Gramm's aide replied, "Remulak, I think. I don't know what planet the others are from." Don't believe him. Everyone knows that people from Remulak are Coneheads, whereas people from Congress are Pinheads.



UFO proponents were no doubt happy with CBS' recent *48 Hours* show on UFOs. It included a new "witness" to the Roswell, New Mexico, saucer crash (naturally, he would not give his name nor allow his face on camera, due to fear of the Pentagon or the Men In Black or the D.A.R. or something). The show also featured John Mack, a Pulitzer Prize-winning Harvard psychologist who has written a book declaring alien abductions to be real. Here are some things you should know about John Mack ...

1. His Pulitzer is NOT for his ability to recognize delusional schizophrenics. It's for writing a biography of Lawrence of Arabia.
2. Being on the Harvard staff doesn't mean you know what you're talking about. Many of President Clinton's economic advisors came from Harvard.
3. Mack has already been fooled by a skeptic, who lifted her story straight from the UFO abduction literature and found herself declared "genuine" by Mack.

Newsweek's recent review of Mack's book said that as you read it, alarm bells the size of Big Ben should be going off in your head, particularly when he admits that he didn't have time to screen all of his abductees for mental or emotional problems. *Newsweek's* verdict: if scientists ever embrace alien abductions as real, they will in spite of this book, not because of it.



I caught a promo for the May 19 episode of *20/20*, in which Barbara Walters said she would interview a woman whose story "will make you BELIEVE in reincarnation!" Wish I could tell you whether it did or not, but unfortunately, I missed *20/20* because I was out seeing Penn & Teller that night. Hey, you only go around once in life, so grab for the gusto, I say!

For those who weren't able to see Penn & Teller, you missed a terrific show: noticeably shorter than their Broadway show, due to the two-a-night schedule, but well worth seeing. The show consisted of some of their "greatest hits," such as the knife-through-the-hand-through-the-card trick, along with a couple of newer effects, such as the finale from the recent "Penn & Teller Nude" show they devised for Las Vegas. They both strip behind a screen as embarrassed "volunteers" verify that they are, indeed, "butt naked." They then put on long T-shirts and proceed to pull things out of thin air, starting with flowers and scarves and proceeding to wine glasses full of fake blood.

Naturally, Penn made sure that even these abbreviated shows included his famous rant against psychics, channelers, faith healers, fortune tellers, and anyone who claims to have the power to predict the future above the level of pure chance. He pointed out that he and Teller refer to the New Age as "newage" (rhymes with "sewage"). He also took a few digs at Kreskin, who was coming soon to the same theater ("Oh, well, Kreskin, he has REAL psychic powers!").

It gives me a warm feeling, here in the Last Days of mankind, to know that two naked guys soaked with fake blood are traveling the country delivering such an important public service message.

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