



The Newsletter of The North Texas Skeptics

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September 1994

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## July Meeting Review

By Ginny Vaughn

If you missed the North Texas Skeptics public program held on July 29, you missed a wonderful presentation by NTS President Joe Voelkerling addressing the issue of pseudohistory. I wish history had been taught this way in school! I might have paid more attention. Michael Shermer has pointed out that pseudohistory is as important to the skeptic community as is pseudoscience (see *Pseudohistory: Proving the Holocaust* by Prof. Shermer in the August issue of *The Skeptic*).

Specifically Joe addressed natural law and how our founding fathers based their historic decisions on natural law. Jefferson (and Madison, who was Jefferson's like-minded friend) is clear in his letters that the basis for the Declaration of Independence was the doctrine of natural law and natural rights. He based these concepts on great thinkers' writings such as Aristotle, Locke, etc. The prevalent thinking of colonial people in regard to our independence from England was not Christian law.

Several special interest groups interpret the constitution and declaration of independence according to their own agenda. It is the position of certain right-wing fundamentalists that this country was based on Christian teaching. This position is completely false and Joe demonstrated the fallacy by reading from Thomas Jefferson's own letters. It was not that the founding fathers were not religious. They recognized the danger of a particular religious doctrine dictating policy for an entire nation.

A gentleman was present at the meeting who, after listening politely to Joe's program, began asking questions. One question was (my paraphrase), "What percentage of the pursuit of happiness is gained by owning property?" Huh? Joe, using remarkable restraint, told him that it was quite subjective. The gentleman then announced that he represented a "conservative discussion group." He attempted to discredit Joe by asking if Joe had read certain fundamentalist esoteric books implying that Joe's presentation was one-sided. I consider myself fairly well read and have never heard of the titles or authors mentioned.

Several people walked out at this point and I suspect they were members of the unnamed conservative discussion group. The Dallas Philosophers group had a contingent present as well and took the liberty of fielding some of the more outrageous assertions made by the conservative discussion leader. The Philosophers did a beautiful job on philosophical rather than skeptical "just the facts" grounds.

The Unnamed Conservative Discussion Group leader invited us to pick up their literature but, at least while I was there, nobody obliged. I personally have better things to do than to ascribe to fundamentalist credulity — I have to wash my cat.

*Virginia Read Vaughn is a member of the North Texas Skeptics. She has worked in cardiac research and now works at UT-Southwestern Medical Center in medical graphics technology.*

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## Healthy Skepticism

Powerful Placebos

By Tim Gorski, M.D.

Modern medical science is continually attacked for supposedly ignoring "the power of the mind" where health and disease are concerned. But is the charge true?

There are at least three reasons why a drug, a surgical procedure, or some other therapy can appear to be effective. The first, of course, is that the treatment actually exerts specific therapeutic effects. The second is that the symptoms of many illnesses naturally wax and wane. Coupled with this is a phenomenon known as regression towards the mean. This effect occurs because sufferers of disease tend to seek help, and even participate in scientific trials of new treatments, when their symptoms are at their worst. (People rarely visit doctors when they're feeling better.) Finally, there are nonspecific effects of treatment that are attributable to a wide variety of factors, often called placebo effects, which is where "mind-body" effects come in.

It so happens that a fair amount of information exists concerning these nonspecific effects. Much of this appears in a fascinating article reviewing the subject in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* this past May [271:1609] by Turner, et. al. entitled "The Importance of Placebo Effects on Pain Treatment and Research."

The authors reviewed a total of 204 scientific articles identified by a computerized search of the medical literature as well as 75 articles and 3 books uncovered by other means. They present a variety of interesting findings, such as that:

- Response to placebos varies widely, from lows of 15% or less right up to 100%.
- Surgical procedures generate placebo effects. In one study, 40% of patients who underwent disc surgery for back pain problems *who were found not to have disc disease at the time of operation* had complete relief of their symptoms postoperatively.
- Placebo effects demonstrate time-effect and peak-effect behavior, dose-response, and other characteristics of real drugs. They also cause side effects such as drowsiness, headache, nervousness, insomnia, and nausea.
- Yellow capsules tend to be viewed as more stimulatory, while white pills tend to be seen as analgesics and narcotics. Injections may have greater effects than oral agents.
- Placebos can have adverse effects, including that of making symptoms worse. In one study, 70% of subjects told that an electric current was being applied to their scalp (when it was not) experienced headaches.
- Even therapeutic agents have greater effects when patients expect benefits as compared to when they do not. Nor is this phenomenon a subjective one. Asthmatic subjects in one trial, for example, showed twice the reduction in airway resistance when given a bronchodilator (a drug known to reduce airway resistance by dilating the bronchial tree of passages in the lungs) that they were told would have such an effect as compared to when they were told the therapy would have the opposite result.
- Positive expectations of physicians and others involved in a patient's therapy are similarly associated with better outcomes, of active treatments as well as of placebos. In one double-blind study comparing anti-hypertensive agents, just the physician learning prematurely that a new drug was working as well as others (instead of better) was followed by an increase in measured blood pressures for all subjects after that point in the trial.

Curiously, the explanation most often advanced as an explanation for placebo effects, namely the notion that they arise through altered endorphin ("the body's own morphine") levels, is not supported by evidence. Instead, it appears that more subtle influences are at work. Placebos, for example, appear to have a general anxiety-reducing effect. They may also make patients more likely to notice small improvements, ignore minor negatives, and err on the side of interpreting equivocal events as beneficial. At least a portion of placebo effects may also have their genesis in learned responses from subjects' past experiences with taking medication or undergoing procedures.

The authors of this article conclude by considering some of the pitfalls in conducting controlled trials of new drugs and other medical therapies. They point out, for example, that because everyone involved in such research knows that some subjects are getting placebos, expectations, and therefore outcomes, are apt to be influenced by this knowledge. This would explain why controlled trials often yield much less spectacular results than isolated and uncontrolled uses of new therapies. The authors also emphasize that an untreated subset of study subjects is not the same as a group receiving placebo, and that any clues as to whether patients are receiving an active agent versus a placebo may skew the findings.

Thus, an adequate understanding of nonspecific effects, including those attributable to "the power of the mind," far from being missing from modern medical science, is paramount to its continuing progress.

It should be noted that there are legitimate ethical concerns in conducting studies comparing a possibly helpful therapy with placebo when other effective treatments are already known. In such cases, after all, the question of interest is not whether a proposed therapy is better than "nothing" or a placebo, but whether it is better than existing treatments which are already known to be superior to such alternatives. A recent editorial in *The New England Journal of Medicine* [331:394, 1994] discusses this issue, calling for the use of ethical guidelines that would bar the inappropriate use of placebos.

Nevertheless, on the basis of the above it should be clear that should the use of placebos in controlled clinical trials ever be substantially reduced or even eliminated, the need to take into account placebo or *nonspecific effects* will not disappear. Rather, matters will simply become a bit more complicated.

### In other news:

#### Sugar, Aspartame Fail To Affect Children

*The New England Journal of Medicine* reported earlier this year (330:301-7, 1994) that a double-blind controlled study showed no effects on behavior or cognition, as measured by standardized tests, of table sugar or aspartame (NutraSweet®), even when taken in amounts that would exceed typical dietary levels. Two groups of preschool children were studied: 25 normal 3 to 5 year-olds and 23 school-age children aged 6 to 10 whose parents described them as sensitive to sugar. All the diets were essentially free of additives, coloring agents, and preservatives, varying only in content of sugar or aspartame versus saccharin, the placebo.

#### False Claims For Natural Products

The results of an intensive investigation of natural product substances, most claiming to have muscle-building and/or strength and energy-enhancing properties, were published last year in *The Annals of Pharmacotherapy* [27:607-15, 1993]. The substances were found as a part of advertising for supplements in body building magazines, on product labels, and in fact sheets for sales representatives in health food stores. The authors of the report searched the medical literature with the aid of the MEDLINE computer database (1966-1992) to assess the strength of the evidence relating to claims made for the substances, finding no published scientific evidence to support the promotional claims made for bull testes, boron, cyclofinil, dibenzozide, gamma oryzanol, *Menispermum canadense*, plant sterols, and saw palmetto berries.

Six of the substances had some scientific evidence in support of their associated claims, but were judged by the authors to be marketed in a misleading way: chromium, clenbuterol, guarana root, inosine, kola nut, and Ma-huang. One product, yohimbine, was noted to have some animal data in its support. But for only four of the 19 were there any documented human trials supporting claims made for them: ornithine/arginine, carnitine, *Gymnema sylvestre*, and ginseng. Even for these last, though, the authors note problems with their being combined with other substances in an almost indiscriminate fashion, and the lack of good quality safety information.

#### God Eats Algae?

Great Life Products out of Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, is promoting a nutritional supplement of *Chlorella* algae as a means to "detoxify daily." Supposedly the "78% yield" of chlorophyll "rid[s] the body of excess toxins," making "foot odor ... a thing of the past." The supplement is also claimed to reduce the "abnormal desire" for and the "overt response" to alcohol experienced by alcoholics and to "benefit" diabetics "whereby the immune system is enhanced." The company's literature further claims that *Chlorella* "is a 'God' food" and can favorably affect "Body pH balance," promote "excess fluid release [and] blood sugar normalization," regulate the menstrual cycle for women, and "contains growth factor for children," all without any side effects and the assurance that prospective users "cannot be allergic to *Chlorella*." The product itself is likely harmless, but the claims made for it are clearly outrageous and unsupported by scientific evidence. The little green pills smell and taste like grass clippings.

#### Science Education Project Solicits Volunteers

The Science Place in Fair Park is participating in a unique national program called Science-By-Mail. Originating from the Museum of Science in Boston and funded by the

National Science Foundation, the program is hoping to enlist volunteer science and technology professionals to correspond with children and their families in solving three "science challenge packets" over the course of a year. The topics planned for 1994-1995 are Weather, Magic and Garbage. Anyone with a bachelors degree in a science or science-related technology is eligible for mentoring, while students in grades 4-9 are the targeted participants. A group of up to four children can participate for a fee of \$56 and donations for program scholarships are accepted. For more information, contact Susan M. Grubbs at The Science Place at (214) 428-5555, ext. 338.

*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 & Views

**OPEN FORUM** This column is the "readers' forum," open to any and all! Please send your items to the Editor by the 15th of each month for inclusion in the next month's issue. - Ed.

**EXPANDING THE ENVELOPE** — That's a "right stuff" term for "higher, faster and farther." Last month's excellent article on pseudohistory by Michael Shermer of the LA-based Skeptics Society was sort of a launch vehicle for NTS "expanding the envelope." Jay Stuart Snelson (also of the Skeptics Society) and Shermer have been advocates of the idea that the *methodology* of rational skepticism and science can (*and should*) be used in social, political and economic realms, etc. (Some examples are: [1] "human resource management"; [2] the results of Soviet Communism; and [3] market testing and the "Laffer curve.") Snelson and Shermer point out the key factor is that claims being examined must involve objective data that can be tested and subjected to rational analysis.

My July lecture presentation on "Rational Skepticism, Natural Law and Our Founding Fathers" was a parallel effort along the same lines. Virginia Vaughn has a mini-review of it elsewhere in this issue. My summary would obviously be biased, so I'll defer to her for a more objective evaluation. (It's hard to be objective when you're struggling to keep your tongue from getting tangled with your eye-teeth, and, thus, can't see what you're saying.) I did, however, note a few things worth mentioning:

1) There were a high percentage of people in the audience that I don't recall seeing before, including a number of members of The Dallas Philosophers' Forum. One of the DPF directors later stated that at least two of their members used to be regular NTS attendees but stopped coming because certain pseudoscientific subjects tended to be "recycled" a bit too frequently. He strongly encouraged us to have more programs along the lines suggested by Snelson and Shermer.

2) A self-proclaimed [presumably "Christian"] "conservative" appeared prepared to challenge my research on the foundation of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. The potential problem was neatly resolved by: (a) a member of the audience that provided some very convenient "leading" questions, and (b) having my source data laid out for verbatim citation, as needed. Lesson: It's nice to have friends in the audience and references handy.

3) In researching "Founding Fathers," I learned the terms "philosophy" and "science" were essentially synonymous through 1800. (Generally, "seekers of [objective] wisdom.") That would seem to put a whole new "spin" on the "scientific method," since Descartes formulated it in the 1600s. Thus, the Snelson/Shermer contentions regarding "science, per se" vs. "other subject areas" appear to have an excellent historical basis.

Tentatively, we're planning a December program to explore the (new) venue a bit further. As usual, I solicit (and welcome) your suggestions, reactions and comments, pro or con.

Two final items: (a) I audio taped the "Founding Fathers" presentation at the request of a member that couldn't attend; a copy will be available from the NTS library maintained by John Blanton, and (b) a "Mark II" version of the program has already been prepared for use in forums where the "USA was founded as a Christian nation" issue (and its companion, so-called "creation science") is being debated.

— JV

**THOMAS JEFFERSON: RATIONAL SKEPTIC?** — Far and away the best reference I found for the "Founding Fathers" program was *The Life and Selected Writings of Thomas Jefferson* (Edited by Koch and Peden, New York, 1993, Random House). It contains nearly 700 pages of Jefferson's own writings, ranging from formal public papers to personal letters, that give the reader a tremendous perspective on Jefferson, himself. It really deserves a full-blown review, which I hope to do in the near future. In the interim, I'd like to note three things regarding it:

1) Jefferson's letters show a fairly consistent disposition of rational skepticism almost equal to that of Richard Feynman.

2) In correspondence, Jefferson clearly notes the Declaration of Independence (and also, by implication, the Constitution) was based primarily on the (natural law) doctrines of Aristotle, the (natural rights) concepts of Locke, etc.

3) The (reproduced and, generally, virtually full-text) source documents in it allowed me to see where at least two of Jefferson's biographers had put some "spin" into their respective works. Typically, they'd done it by citing partial quotes that implied a meaning different from the context of the full version. (Score one for Michael Shermer's scientific methodology applied to pseudohistory.)

*The Life and Selected Writings ...* is a "must have" resource for anyone seriously interested in debating the "Christian Nation" proponents.

Also, *Thomas Jefferson: Scientist* (New York, 1952, Schuman, and thus, regretfully, apparently long-out-of-print) has some *very* excellent material in it. It also "tracked" extremely well with "full text" documents I found matches for in *The Life and Selected Writings ...*. Although I photocopied the most relevant pages, I'm eager to find a copy for sale on the used book market. So, if anyone happens to run across a decent copy of it for less than a "collector's edition" price ...

— JV

**IS IT NOW REVEREND CLINTON?** — In remarks from the pulpit at a Methodist church on August 14th, President Clinton announced that passing his controversial crime bill was "the will of God" and that his presidency is now "a ministry" which begins with making America's homes and neighborhoods safe. Remember that the Administration denounced Haitian leaders a few months ago when they invoked the name of a Voodoo god to help them fend off the return of exiled President Aristide. Now, when normal political means seem to be failing him, our President feels justified in making such incredible proclamations, as if to say that those who disagree with his bill on a reasonable basis are disobeying the will of God.

Americans should be very skeptical of anyone in a position of power, most of all the most powerful man in the world, who claims to have special, unverifiable knowledge.

What difference is there between statements like Mr. Clinton's and those of Pat Robertson or Jerry Falwell? Each have claimed to speak for God and to justify their political stance based on divine knowledge. If the President purports to know the will of God, or to have special, supernatural knowledge of any kind, it seems hard to separate such pronouncements from those of confirmed theocracies.

— M.S.

**WELCOME ECHO** — I recently called a friend that receives a courtesy copy of our newsletter as a principal in a group that we frequently trade favors with. He expressed appreciation for our sending it, mentioned he likes the material in it and noted that he looks forward to finding it in his office mail.

The conversation switched to the claims of a self-proclaimed "scientist" that was highly offended when questioned about his methodology by Mike Androvett of KXAS (Channel 5). My friend opined that the "scientist's" objections seemed really silly, since, if the claims were true, Androvett's objective questioning certainly couldn't hurt his contentions; they would only produce additional validation for them.

I agreed wholeheartedly, and made sure his free subscription is on our "long term list."

— JV

**IF IT AIN'T BROKE, DON'T FIX IT** — Sounds reasonable ... However, "if it can be improved, fine tune it," might be a better idea. We've had a fair-sized turn-out at numerous recent monthly combined directors' and social (dinner) meetings. We've also noted that MENSA hosts their general monthly get-together at the Alamo Cafe on Composite Drive in the Restaurant Row area along I-35 E in a room set aside for them starting with a dinner at 6:30 p.m., followed by the lecture, etc. at 8:00. It's apparently followed by refreshments and follow-on chit-chat until whenever ...

The Dallas Philosophers' Forum has a similar arrangement with the Wyatt Cafeteria at Forest and Marsh Lane. Their dinner is at 6:00 p.m., with the presentation at 7:00. Both groups claim that the format works well for them.

Since I've had a number of people mention that our Saturday afternoon meetings present a schedule problem, we're giving some thought to trying the MENSA/DPF format at least on a trial basis. Our present meeting facility, the Center for Community Cooperation, is open Tuesday through Thursday until 9:00 p.m., which seems to be a *very* limited evening "window," but it's an option. Perhaps some type of "split" schedule may work out best, if we can avoid a situation that leaves one consistently wondering "When is this month's NTS meeting and where the heck is it?"

If you have an opinion, preference (*or a better idea*), PLEASE ADVISE! (A convenient way, for both the caller and recipient if a two-way exchange is not particularly appropriate, would be to leave a message on our Metro Information Line, 214-558-1047.)

— JV

**"BUT THE BOOK SAYS IT'S TRUE ..."** — When someone hits you with the "true word" argument, here's an interesting comeback — ask them to respond to the following: If one is willing to accept self-authenticating documents as "the truth," what's their reaction to some of the "really great" people we've trashed in this century alone? Then cite a number of examples, such as Joseph Stalin, Adolph Hitler, Saddam Hussein, David Koresh, etc. You can even hypothesize that the sayings of Chairman Mao may not have been in error, but were simply interpreted incorrectly.

The typical reaction appears to be a bit like watching a goldfish: the mouth open and closes, but nothing seems to come out. If they do start to make some coherent sounds, adding a few more names such as Jim Jones, Fidel Castro and Charles Manson, usually produces a repeat "goldfish attack."

Oh, by the way: Acting a bit perplexed — but definitely *very* sincere — seems to add a certain touch of class. Also, if fellow skeptics happen to be present, you might forewarn them so they can discretely turn away if they get an attack of the "giggles."

— JV

SN&V contributors: M.S. — Mike Sullivan; J.V. — Joe Voelkerling.

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## The third eye

by Pat Reeder

Before getting to the news, I am proud to announce our very first "YOU BE THE PSYCHIC" contest!

The idea for this exciting contest arose while I was listening to a political panel show. The participants were discussing the possibility of an "October Surprise" ... that is, with the polls looking bad for Democrats in Congress, what unexpected action might the White House, Congress, or both take to push the election news off the front pages just before the election?

Well, it struck me that here was a rare opportunity to test our psychic powers! A completely open-ended news event with a definite deadline: whatever it is must happen in October, 1994. Unlike predicting election results, there's no way you can flip a coin or check the polls to make an educated guess. If you can predict this one, it would be like predicting a month in advance that O.J. Simpson would be arrested for murder (something which NO professional psychic ever did, incidentally).

Here are the ground rules: the "October Surprise" has to be a huge news story set in motion solely by the president and/or Democrats in Congress. Examples might be "an invasion of Haiti," "an assassination attempt on Castro," or even a brand new domestic policy initiative, like employer-paid cosmetics for ugly people or free clothes for the fashion-impaired ... anything, as long as it makes big headlines. Of course, you may also predict that there will be no "October Surprise." Entries must be in by September 30. Prizes will be awarded in two categories: "Most Accurate" and "Most Creative." This is important, because well-paid tabloid psychics are obviously chosen more for their imaginations than for their precognitive abilities.

The prize will be a colorful, top quality, American-made T-shirt, accidentally mislabeled "North Dallas Skeptics" by a T-shirt shop with no psychic abilities whatsoever. I'll also give appropriate credit to the winners in this column, which will really impress your friends! Just send your predictions to me, c/o *The Skeptic*, or E-mail me via Prodigy at MJTT27A or via CompuServe at 71371,375. Please include your name and mailing address.

Finally, in the event of a tie, all correct entries will be placed on the ground, and the winner chosen by dowsing rod. Now, get out there and start predicting!

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I suppose I should describe and critique *Roswell*, HBO's TV movie about the alleged saucer crash in New Mexico. Okay, here's my detailed analysis:

It's *J.F.K.* with Martians.

Like Oliver Stone's epic, *Roswell* presents us with a much maligned seeker of truth (Kevin Costner/Kyle MacLachlan) being frustrated at every turn by a deep and murky government conspiracy. Like *J.F.K.*, *Roswell* takes everything that was ever said about this subject, from the merely improbable to the utterly insane, and throws it all on the screen like a plate of spaghetti, to see if any of it sticks. And like *J.F.K.*, it eventually realizes that its imaginative theories are unsupported by evidence, so it takes the easiest possible way out: a "deus ex machina," a fictitious mystery man who conveniently appears out of nowhere to fill in all the details for our hero (in *J.F.K.*, it was Donald Sutherland; with *Roswell's* limited TV budget, it's Martin Sheen). No explanation is ever given as to who he is, how he could possibly know so many highly classified secrets, and why he is choosing to blab them to our hero.

Even so, my final reaction to *Roswell* (aside from the thought that if you spread all that fertilizer over the real Roswell, it could make the desert bloom) was fairly positive, but not in the way the filmmakers obviously intended. Actually, I think it did us skeptics a service. By taking all the crashed saucer stories, paranoid conspiracy theories and crackpot ancient astronaut tales literally, and placing every one of them on screen together, particularly in the last half hour, *Roswell* brings the utter absurdity of it all into much sharper relief than any book or panel discussion ever has before.

In this way, it reminded me of the recent film, *The Rapture*, which made fundamentalist apocalypse prophecy look silly, simply by putting on screen exactly what they say is going to happen. After watching that, you couldn't help but think, "Either God is a complete idiot, or else this stuff is nuts." Simply by dramatizing actual fundamentalist dogma, it showed fundamentalism to be zero percent "fun," 1 percent "mental" and 99 percent "duh." Let's hope that *Roswell* has the same effect.

One final aside to the producers about those silly statistics tacked on to the end credits: the fact that a poll shows that many Americans believe in UFOs from space has no meaning whatsoever, other than that they have been watching too many goof ball movies on HBO. If mass wishful thinking made things real, then the IRS would have been abolished a long time ago.

•••

Speaking of ridiculous statistics, politics and UFOs, a recent Washington *Post*/ABC News poll of 1,523 Americans put those subjects together and came up with some interesting findings ...

- Only 28 percent of Americans who believe they are reincarnated describe themselves as Republicans, compared to 60 percent who are Democrats. The national average is 49 percent. Now we know why Bill Clinton calls himself "The Comeback Kid!"
- 65 percent of those who believe it is possible to communicate with the dead view President Clinton favorably, while only 36 percent of dead communicators have a positive impression of Sen. Bob Dole (perhaps he reminds them of a particularly nasty cadaver they once encountered).
- Finally, while Ross Perot's overall favorable rating is only 39 percent, he has a 59 percent approval rating among people who think they have seen a "spacecraft from another planet." And among the ten people surveyed who believe they've had direct contact with aliens, nine like Perot. This jibes with the findings of a recent Los Angeles *Times* poll which found that only four percent of Bush and Clinton voters claim to have encountered aliens, while eight percent of Perot voters have.

Expect to hear any day now that Ross Perot is starting a chapter of "United We Stand" on Jupiter.

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Just a few quick stories from around the world ...

Summer being the time for sequels, we could have another *Inherit The Wind* brewing in Snellville, Georgia, where high school government teacher Brian Bown was suspended for refusing to observe the state's new law requiring a moment of silence in class. The state says it isn't school prayer, but Bown claims it is. Personally, I think he's wrong. I say that if you can get a class full of today's high school students to shut up for a full 60 seconds, it's not a prayer, it's a miracle!

Hungarians can rest easy, knowing that their new Defense Minister, Gyorgy Keleti, is prepared for an invasion ... by flying saucers! Keleti, a 48-year-old, chain-smoking ex-Army colonel, says, "It's not like I have seen little green people." Still, he has written articles for *Ufomagazin*, with titles such as "We don't have a chance in a UFO invasion" and "They have already mapped Szolnok" (that's a town in Hungary). And if you don't believe that space aliens are breeding with Hungarians, then how do you explain the Gabor Sisters?

Finally to India, where 45,000 Hindus were upset after they took a pilgrimage to the top of a mountain to worship their god, Lord Shiva, and discovered that his phallus had melted. Shiva is represented by an ice sculpture of a big phallic symbol, and one week before the pilgrimage, an unexpected warm spell melted the frosty member. One Hindu priest believes it's a sign that Hindus have been sinning too much.

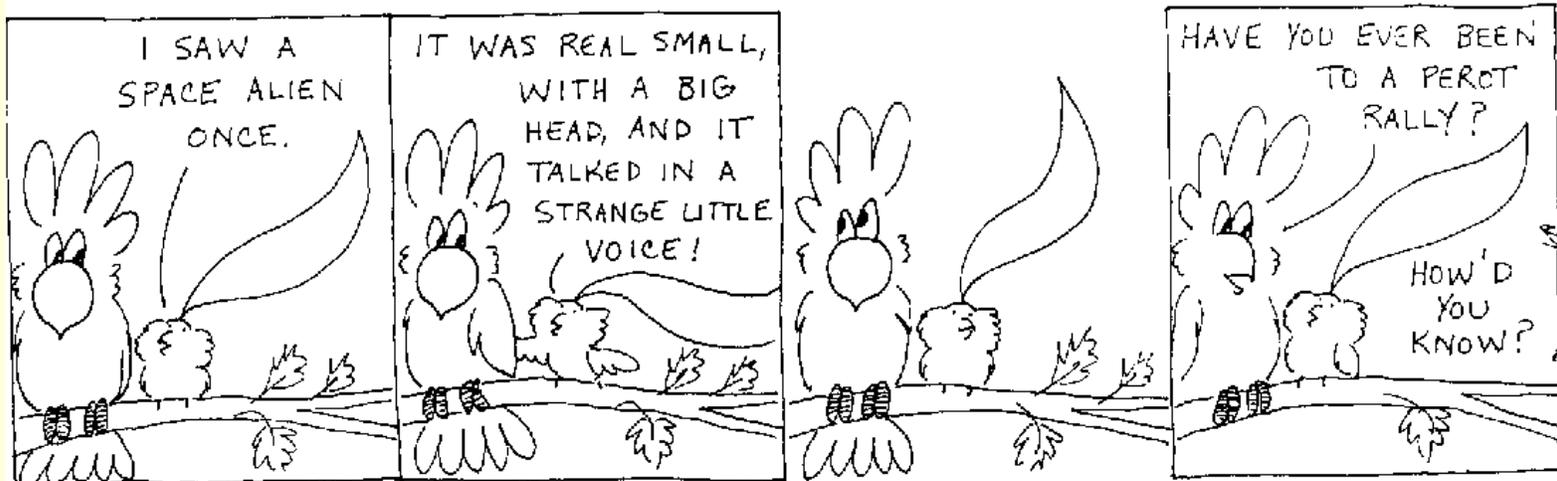
Or it could just mean that Madonna got there first.

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## Up a tree

A skeptical cartoon by Laura Ainsworth



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