

The Newsletter of The North Texas Skeptics



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Forensic Science at NTS

by John Blanton



Joe Voelkering discusses Forensic Science at the March meeting.

Forensic science was the subject of the NTS March lecture. President Joe Voelkering discussed this topic from first hand experience as he related the events concerning the 1980 fire that killed all aboard a Saudia Airlines flight.

With no survivors to fill in the details, it was up to the accident investigators to reconstruct the events from the material evidence. This is the same sort of activity performed by archaeologists and paleontologists who have to rebuild history from fossils and fragments of past civilizations. However, in the world of forensics, politics and money also call the

shots.

Both the airline and the plane's builder, Lockheed, agreed the victims' estates were owed some money, since they perished for no fault of their own. These two parties put up the funds and paid off the victims. Then they went to court to determine the correct split for the damages. In situations like this an investigator can experience a great deal of pressure to find evidence supporting the position paying his salary. Joe worked for the Saudia team and related in his talk how the group worked to put the picture together. To their credit, it would appear the Saudia team worked diligently to find out what really happened, disregarding the eventual legal consequences.

One interesting thing did come out, however. Depositions of the designers of the aircraft indicated they paid attention to meeting mandated regulations and did not push matters of real product safety much beyond the legal requirements. For example, despite the fact the aircraft had a cargo hold with a volume of several thousand cubic feet, the designers stuck to the fire safety requirements in effect at the time, requirements that had been developed for much smaller aircraft. Joe's team went so far as to reconstruct a full size cargo bay and to start fires inside. They also tested the cargo hold's fire retardant liner material using realistic fires, something the designers had not done. Apparently in matters of business and in law, scientific curiosity is pursued only as far as the money will allow. Once when a particular test failed to produce the lawyers' desired result they asked, "What went wrong?" "Nothing," the experimenters explained. "We just discovered one way it did not happen."

After all the legal wrangling, the verdict hinged on jurors' acceptance of the defense that the designers had met the legally mandated standards. After the trial no money changed hands. Each party was left with paying 50% of the restitution.

THE THIRD EYE

News and Commentary From the Weird World of the Media

By Pat Reeder

Religion (of a sort) is all over the news this month, and I find myself pining for the dear old days when the word "mass," applied to religion, meant a soothing Catholic ceremony in Latin and not mass mailings, mass marketing and mass hysteria.

As I write this, another wacky religious cult has committed mass suicide (sorry, it's not the Scientologists). The story about the Heaven's Gate cult (smart idea: name your religion after the most notoriously wrongheaded disaster in cinema history) is barely 48 hours old, and details are still coming in, so there's no point in discussing it in much detail here.

Suffice it to say that no skeptic was surprised. I've been yakking in this column for years now about how, as the millennium approacheth, we would see more and more cults offing themselves in order to ascend to their various Valhallas via the Express Lane. I've also been grouching about all the Internet-surfing yahoos who think "The X-Files" is a documentary. In this San Diego cult, we see all those things mixed together, with the extra added novelties of mandatory Moe Howard haircuts and a "spiritual leader" named after Homer Simpson's favorite expression ("Doh!") who looked like Ross Perot with his eyelids taped wide open.

There are many lessons we could extract from this cult suicide story: "Don't believe anything about UFOs that you read on the Internet," for example, or "Don't try to move on to a better place when you're already living in a mansion with a swimming pool in San Diego and working out of your bedroom with a computer." But I'll just wrap it up with this simple prediction: There are still three more years to go until 2000, and this is only the beginning.

* * *

I try to stay away from politics in this column, but what am I to do when politicians start acting more like televangelists than the televangelists do? In the past few months, much has been made of President Clinton cozying up to the Rev. Robert Schuller of Crystal Cathedral fame and posturing as our "national minister." I've always thought that if Clinton ever tired of politics, his amazing ability to fake sincerity and call up a single, gleaming tear on command made him a natural for the televangelist racket. Now, I discover that he's adopted more than the TV preachers' personae; he's also appropriated their fund raising techniques.

Boston Globe columnist Mike Barnicle recently broke the story of Eva Piccin, an 81-year-old Connecticut woman of fading health and mental acuity, who was the recipient of an avalanche of fund raising junk mail from the Democratic party during the recent presidential campaign. The letters pleaded for money, warning that if the evil Bob Dole were elected, Mrs. Piccin and others like her would lose their Social Security and Medicare and be thrown out onto the cold, cold streets! Her son and daughter knew nothing about this until her rent check bounced. That's when they discovered that Mrs. Piccin had been so frightened, she had sent in her entire life savings, over \$8,000, and naturally, every donation resulted in more letters, pleading for more money to combat more imaginary Armageddons.

Of course, both major parties work their mailing lists for all they're worth, as I know because I'm on ALL the mailing lists. But the Democrats' letters were particularly scurrilous because they were straight out of the Robert Tilton handbook. Deliberately aimed at seniors, many of whom are easily frightened and live on fixed incomes, the letters used outrageous scare tactics to spur donations, as well as such familiar gimmicks as sending a photo of the President with a letter urging Mrs. Piccin to sign it and return it immediately (with a donation, of course), because Clinton was waiting to hear that she got it (perhaps he'll even pray over it!). Her furious son accused them of using "sleazy psychology to prey on these old people...who have lost their powers of reason."

As of this writing, there have been no refunds from the DNC. Eva Piccin has been moved to a senior care facility in Massachusetts. And Bob Dole didn't win, but Mrs. Piccin is indeed penniless. So at least, something in those letters was true.

Well, as long as I've gotten into politics, I'd better be balanced and talk about a venal windbag on the right. The Rev. Jerry Falwell's latest crusade (and quite a step down from the original Crusades it is) is to convince people not to watch the episode of "Ellen" where Ellen DeGeneres' character comes out of the closet, as if "Ellen's" writers needed Falwell's help to convince people not to watch their show.

I'm on Falwell's mailing list (I told you I was on EVERYBODY'S mailing list!), so I can attest that he is rabidly homophobic (or to put it more nicely, he is "stridently anti-choreographer"). In fact, his main bone of contention with the Clinton administration seems to be that they hired gays to work in the White House. So he is really in a tizzy over this "Ellen" thing (he called her "Ellen Degenerate"), even though at this point, Ellen announcing that she's a lesbian has about as much shock value as Mr. Ed announcing that he is a horse. Falwell is urging his followers to write to "Ellen's" advertisers, including GM, Chrysler and Johnson & Johnson, threatening a boycott unless they pull their support. So if you want to see how powerful the Christian right is in America today, tune in "Ellen." If it's sponsored solely by the Sensible Shoe Company, then we're all in big trouble.

To wrap up our review of religion in politics, Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee, who is also a Baptist minister, recently displayed his Christian charity by holding up a disaster relief bill for a week because he objected to the standard description of tornadoes as "acts of God." The legislature finally agreed to change the term to "natural causes," although I assume Huckabee would've preferred blaming them on "evildoings of Satan."



Psychics have been very busy of late, and I must tip my fedora to my pals at the Wireless Flash for keeping me abreast of their various inanities. For instance, in May, several psychics will be entertaining the suckers aboard a "Psychic Revelations" cruise to Bermuda. But it's charted a rather roundabout course because another psychic predicted that if the ship entered the Bermuda Triangle, a vortex would suck it into the unknown, along with all the psychics aboard, and what a tragedy that would be. Let's hope Kathie Lee Gifford is aboard.

L.A. psychic Judy Heavenly predicted all the major Oscar winners correctly, save one. But before CSICOP sends her any prize money, I should note that she picked the odds-on favorites in every category, including her sole miss, Lauren Bacall for Best Supporting Actress. Bacall's startling loss was the only real surprise of the evening. A spoilsport like me might say it was also the evening's only real opportunity to prove your psychic ability, other than guessing what Geena Davis would be wearing.

And Bigfoot/UFO "researcher" Jack Lapsertis, author of the essential new book, "The Psychic Sasquatch: A UFO Connection," has revealed that Bigfeet are "paraphysical interdimensional nature people" planted here long ago by space aliens to protect humans and to teach them how to use fire. He learned all this through telepathic conversations with aliens and sasquatches. Or perhaps he was just picking up talk radio on his fillings. Either way, it's nice to know that absolutely anybody can get a book deal.

But even I must confess to having a strange psychic encounter this month. I logged onto AOL and had a piece of e-mail waiting. It was from someone named "Jeanne," and the subject line read "I'm sure you know me." Baffled, I wondered if it could be some long-ago college paramour. I then sadly recalled that paramours were so pathetically scarce in my college days, there's no way I would've forgotten one. So I called it up, and to my amazement, it was a letter from psychic Jeanne Dixon!

Jeanne outlined her many accomplishments, assured me that she could relieve my anxieties (I get a lot of junk e-mail with that promise!) and help my career, and said she was looking forward to me calling her psychic hotline. But she did not address the one question that troubled me most, i.e., "How does someone who's been dead for a month send e-mail?" And on America Online, yet! Surely, God would never choose AOL as the net server for Heaven! Not unless His idea of Paradise is sitting on a cloud, listening to a busy signal for all eternity.

Incidentally, I also got e-mail this month from Dionne Warwicke (I know ALL the stars!), who called me her "friend" and invited me to get in touch with her other "friends" at the Psychic Friends Network. All I can say is, if she thinks I'm a friend of psychics, her psychic powers must be running at about the same efficiency level as America Online.



Let's wrap this up with some news from around the world...

In Kenton, Ohio, two Amish brothers are refusing to wear orange clothing when hunting deer because it is a worldly color. They say they will continue hunting in brown and black clothing (coincidentally, the same colors as a deer) and would go to jail (where, by the way, prisoners wear orange coveralls) on principle. Something tells me this is a problem that will solve itself.

Three Catholic families are suing the Bedford, New York, school system for promoting satanism and occultism. They claim that the study of regurgitated bones from a bird of prey in biology class is fortune telling, that a man dressed as Lincoln on President's Day encouraged the kids to believe in ghosts, and that a Dungeons & Dragons-like card game used to teach math really teaches the kids spells, devil worship and human sacrifice. Forget it, kids: I tried all those things, and it still wasn't enough to get me an A in math.

Expecting religious significance from TV is like expecting entertainment at church, but that didn't stop TV Guide from commissioning a poll on viewers' attitudes about spirituality on TV. Two-thirds of Americans say that despite the valiant efforts of Jerry Falwell and the presence of Robert Tilton, TV has become less moral and religious in the past five years.

Della Reese's "Tess" on "Touched By An Angel" is the TV character most Americans would want to teach their kids' Sunday School class. And Homer Simpson's boss, Montgomery Burns, is the TV character who is most likely to go to Hell, followed by Dr. Michael Mancini on "Melrose Place" (who's been touched by everyone BUT an angel) and Cigarette Man from "The X-Files," who would probably enjoy all that brimstone. One interesting postscript: 100 percent

of Americans believe that creepy guy on the Infiniti commercials IS Satan.

Reuters reports that Tibet's spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama, is very upset about an outbreak of hoof-and-mouth disease in Taiwan that could cost the lives of 1.6 million pigs. So he is praying for the "transmigration" of the pig's souls, perhaps into the bodies of lawyers, many of whom have no souls. Failing that, he'll pray that they end up in Hog Heaven.

Finally, my favorite story of the month: Reuters reports that two con men entered the town of Shenzhen, China, claiming to be masters of the ancient mystic religion called qigong. They told the crowd that they must prove their faith by putting their money on the ground, turning their backs, and walking 20 paces. And if anyone looked back, they would be paralyzed by qigong energy. You guessed it: The two grabbed the money and ran. No word on whether the townspeople have turned around yet.

Too bad Eva Piccin and those Heaven's Gate cultists didn't hear this story long ago.

Heaven's Gate

by John Blanton



Cult members, many who worked as Web page professionals, created this page and an elaborate Web site devoted to explaining their philosophy. It was also a means for recruiting new members. The text at the bottom says, "As was promised - the keys to Heaven's Gate are here again in Ti and Do (The UFO Two) as they were in Jesus and His Father 2000 yrs. ago."

The recent cult tragedy in California is made more immediate because of the visibility afforded by the Internet. Members of the cult were employed in the development of Web sites, and they disseminated their philosophy through the Internet and even had their own Web site. As a result, the public and the media did not have to depend on information sifted out by the coroner's office. It was all there on the Web: the cult's philosophy, its teachings, and perhaps its intentions for those who chose to read and interpret.

Cult members believed they were aliens (extra-terrestrials) in human suits, and they planned to rendezvous with a UFO conveniently hidden by the Hale-Bopp comet on its way through the inner Solar System. They even packed their bags

before taking poison.

The Heaven's Gate cult seems set apart from the likes of the Church of Scientology, the Branch Davidians, and the cult of the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. There appears to have been no overt coercion to keep members in line or to punish ex-members. The sole driving force behind the cult was the messianic personality of the leader [Marshall Applewhite](#), also known as "Do." Applewhite was of fundamentalist Christian origins, and his cult was a hyper-extension of his Christian beliefs. Unlike the Jonestown massacre of 1978 and the self immolation of the Branch Davidians, the mass suicide of the 39 cult members was completely voluntary according to preliminary coroner's reports. Applewhite was among the dead.

Into the weekend media heads talked to cult experts such as Rich Ross (who always seems to show up on the tube whenever there is a cult scandal) asking, "How can we protect ourselves from dangerous cults such as this." Obviously, critical thinking would come quickly to mind. A belief system based on "aliens in UFOs" would arouse concern in sound minded individuals. However, when viewed objectively the Heaven's Gate cult strikes parallels with mainstream religion. Cult members were encouraged to believe in things they had no way of verifying, and they believed that when they died they would go to a far away place. They just carried their religion one step further than mainstream belief would allow. They all got aboard the bus.

There are likely those who would challenge critics of this and similar cults. Who are we to say they didn't really achieve their purpose? Who are we to say they aren't right now in that wonderful place promised by their leader? To that I have one observation. I notice that when they left they neglected to take their bags.



"How a Member of the Kingdom of Heaven might appear"

Cult Sites on the Web

The following URLs will be of interest to readers wanting to follow up on the Heaven's Gate cult and other cult awareness issues. Additionally, we have collected a large amount of text from the cult Web site explaining their beliefs and intentions. If you need help obtaining these materials contact me at ntskeptics@mindspring.com, at 972-306-3187 or by mail at the NTS Post Office box:

- Cult Information Center at <http://www.infoman.demon.co.uk>
- Cult Information Center links to other Web sites at <http://www.infoman.demon.co.uk/site2.html>
- Ex Cult Archive at <http://www.ex-cult.org/#cultlinks>

A mirror of the Heaven's Gate Web site is at <http://www.disinfo.com/prop/media/hgate/>. It's best to go to this or one of the other mirror sites rather than try to connect to the original Heaven's Gate site, which is understandably choked right now and will likely be shut down soon.

From Vic Stenger and the Hawaii Rational Inquirer

The following is reprinted with permission from the Hawaii Rational Inquirer.

Critical Thinking At The Core

The University of Hawaii, Manoa is in the process of revamping its core requirements. Included in the skills that likely will be required for graduation is critical thinking. One proposal for implementing this is to reduce the number of required courses in arts, humanities, and sciences and add more courses in cultural studies.

One question that has not yet been tackled is where to find instructors in cultural studies to teach critical thinking. Most are postmodernists who do not regard critical thinking as a "legitimate meta-narrative," to use their own jargon.

Physicists' Elvis Sighting Debunked

Well, they did not actually claim to see Elvis but something more exotic--the extraction of antimatter from the vacuum. An article by Gary Taubes in the January 10 issue of "Science" tells how competent scientists, especially in this day of fast computers, can unconsciously make even the most careful measurements look the way the scientists want them to look.

In the 1980s, two separate experiments at the same lab in Germany reported seeing peaks in the energy spectra produced in heavy ion collisions. The gigantic electric field that was momentarily produced during the collision was thought to be pulling positrons (anti-electrons) out of the vacuum, which according to quantum mechanics is not really empty. The discovery, if confirmed, was of Nobel quality. Many of the peaks seemed to be statistically significant, several as high as six standard deviations. The probability of just one such observation being a statistical fluke is two parts in ten million. The problem was that the peaks came and went at different places and were very difficult to reproduce.

Now after a decade of fruitless effort to confirm the results in improved experiments, the conclusion has been drawn that the original peaks were artifacts inadvertently introduced by the physicists themselves. This apparently occurred during data analysis, as the experimenters massaged the data over and over again on fast computers in an attempt to make the elusive "signal" stand out better against background noise. The recent experiments, with better statistics, show no evidence for the peaks. Furthermore, physicist Rudi Ganz, now at the University of Illinois, has demonstrated how the artifacts probably were produced.

Ganz divided a large data sample from one of the later experiments into two randomly-distributed halves. He massaged the data from one set, using a similar procedure to that used in the earlier experiments, and generated an enormous peak. He then applied the identical sequence of manipulations to the other set and no peak was seen.

Jack Greenberg, the Yale physicist who had pushed hardest to explore the alleged phenomenon over the years, refuses to concede. He has received support from several of his Yale colleagues, including a former President's Science Advisor now president-elect of the American Physical Society, a former head of the High Energy Physics Advisory panel, and the current chair of the APS Division of Particles and Fields. But their pleas are falling on deaf ears as the experiments are being shut down.

Taubes, who wrote "Bad Science," a book about the cold fusion fiasco, does not draw the obvious parallel. Also suggested is another parallel with the 150 years of attempts to confirm psychic phenomena. Today we still hear of "statistically significant" effects purportedly demonstrating paranormal powers of the mind to violate the laws of physics. A look at the procedures in all these cases reveals that they exhibit the symptoms that Nobel laureate chemist Irving Langmuir listed in the 1950s as characteristic of what he termed "pathological science." There is great danger in wanting to believe too badly. Scientists are just as capable of self delusion as other human beings.

This and other issues are archived at:

<http://www.phys.hawaii.edu/vjs/www/rati.html>

To add yourself to the distribution list, simply send a message to vjs@uhheph.phys.hawaii.edu. Please give your name and location. To remove yourself from the list, reply with the message PLEASE REMOVE. You don't even have to say PLEASE.

Web News

By John Blanton ntskeptics@mindspring.com

Continuing a series on Internet sources of interest to readers of The Skeptic. Contact me if you need help accessing these sources.

It's really not necessary to read The Skeptic to learn all about creationism. The Web is an wonderful source of information and misinformation. There are some excellent sites providing discussion and critiques of creationists' arguments, so it should not surprise you that some of the creationist organizations you have come to know and love have their own Web pages. Here are some sources: The talk.origins news group is the granddaddy of all discussion groups on creationism. If you have news reader software just run that and request the talk.origins news group. You can interact with the group using a Web browser by entering news:talk.origins. Be cautioned - with this news group as well as with most, there is a lot of heat and very little light.

Frank Steiger's Page on Creationism and Pseudoscience is a good starting point for exploration of creationism on the Web. Enter <http://users.deltanet.com/~fsteiger> to get started, then just follow the links. Here are some of the listings:

- Models of origins
- Is Evolution only a theory?
- Is Creationism Censored?
- Creationist thermodynamics argument
- Relation between 2nd law of thermodynamics and probability of chemical change
- Vapor canopy; how thick was it?
- Noah's ark; did it really exist?
- Problems with the Genesis flood
- Other creationist arguments
- NBC program, "Mysterious Origins of Man"
- Carbon 14 Dating
- Other Radioactive Dating
- Whale Evolution
- Debunking Center for Scientific Creation Web Page
- Speed of Light Argument for a young universe
- Answers to 20 Questions asked by creationists
- Suspicious Creationist Credentials: log on to talk.origins FAQ
- An Outline of Lenny Flank's Web Page

To check out the creationism side of the issue a good place to start is the Creation Connection page at <http://members.aol.com/dwr51055/Creation.html>. From there you can reach all the creationists' arguments as well as the sites of local creationist groups and pertinent e-mail addresses. The Institute for Creation Research can be contacted at <http://www.icr.org/>. Their Impact series of monthly publications is on line there. You could try contacting the Creation Evidences Museum page at <http://www.texoma.com/~linesden/cem/>.

I don't believe I am being over generous by publicizing these sources of creationism arguments. My personal experience is that creationists provide the best argument against themselves by their own misstatements.

Finally, there is the North Texas Skeptics home page, whose URL you will find elsewhere in this issue. Our home page

will point you to many sources of information on skeptical issues, including Jim Lippard's well provided and maintained page.

Richard Dawkins on PBS

Don't you just hate it when you come across a really great program while channel surfing and don't have a chance to catch all of it, much less tape it. Almost happened here, but the Web came through for me this time. The program was Think Tank on Channel 2, and Ben Wattenberg was interviewing Richard Dawkins on the subject of "Evolution and Religion." Fortunately PBS noted at the end that more information was available on their Web site. Sure enough, they provided the full transcript of the interview plus transcripts of the other editions of *Think Tank*.

They discussed Richard Dawkins' most recent book, *Climbing Mount Improbable*, starting with an introduction by Mr. Wattenberg:

Richard Dawkins is a professor at Oxford University, where he holds the Charles Simone chair of public understanding of science. Dawkins has written many books on the topic of evolution, including "The Selfish Gene," "River Out of Eden," "The Blind Watchmaker," and most recently, "Climbing Mount Improbable."

Dawkins' explanation is:

Living organisms are supremely improbable. They look as if they have been designed. They are very, very complicated. They are very good at doing whatever it is they do, whether it's flying or digging or swimming. This is not the kind of thing that matter just spontaneously does. It doesn't fall into position where it's good at doing anything. So the fact that living things are demands an explanation, the fact that it's [improbable] demands an explanation.

Mount Improbable is a metaphorical mountain. The height of that mountain stands for that very improbability. So on the top of the mountain, you can imagine perched the most complicated organ you can think of. It might be the human eye. And one side of the mountain has a steep cliff, a steep vertical precipice. And you stand at the foot of the mountain and you gaze up at this complicated thing at the heights, and you say, that couldn't have come about by chance, that's too improbable. And that's what is the meaning of the vertical slope. You could no more get that by sheer chance than you could leap from the bottom of the cliff to the top of the cliff in one fell swoop.

But if you go around the other side of the mountain, you find that there's not a steep cliff at all. There's a slow, gentle gradient, a slow, gentle slope, and getting from the bottom of the mountain to the top is an easy walk. You just saunter up it putting one step in front of the other, one foot in front of the other.

In the interview Dawkins defends evolution and the principle of natural selection against attacks from the likes of the American scientist Michael Beahy, who insists that many biological structures are just too complex to develop without an intelligent designer. The exchange is classic Dawkins:

MR. WATTENBERG: There is a scientist in the United States named Michael Beahy -- I'm sure you're involved in this argument -- who is making the case -- he is not a creationist, he is not a creation scientist, or at least he says he's --

MR. DAWKINS: Well, I'm sorry, he is a creationist.

MR. WATTENBERG: Well, he says he's not.

MR. DAWKINS: He says he's not, but he is.

MR. WATTENBERG: He says he's not. But his theory is that of a hidden designer, that there is something driving this process. And could you explain how you and he differ on this?

MR. DAWKINS: Yes. Like I said, he's a creationist. "A hidden designer," that's a creator.

MR. WATTENBERG: You say he's a hidden creationist.

MR. DAWKINS: Well, he's not even hidden. He's a straightforward creationist. What he has done is to take a standard argument which dates back to the 19th century, the argument of irreducible complexity, the argument that there are certain organs, certain systems in which all the bits have to be there together or the whole system won't work.

The discussion also gets into the benefits of religion. Surveys show that religious people live longer than non-religious people. For that reason, is it better to encourage your children to practice religion, even if you are a non-believer? Dawkins concedes that somewhere there might be a trade-off. If people could live (say) ten times as long by being religious, then living a lie might be worth it. For himself, he is sure the benefit is at most a few weeks over a 70-year life span and not worth it to him.

Those of you who had the opportunity to meet Richard Dawkins when we hosted the 1992 CSICOP conference and he and Ron Hastings accompanied us on a tour of the Glen Rose dinosaur tracks will appreciate this further acquaintance with an interesting character. You can get the transcript using the following (lengthy) [URL](http://www.pbs.org/plweb-cgi/fastweb?getdoc+pbsonline+all+14442+16+wAAA+thinktank%26%28thinktank%29%3Ahomepage):

[http://www.pbs.org/plweb-cgi/fastweb?](http://www.pbs.org/plweb-cgi/fastweb?getdoc+pbsonline+all+14442+16+wAAA+thinktank%26%28thinktank%29%3Ahomepage)

[getdoc+pbsonline+all+14442+16+wAAA+thinktank%26%28thinktank%29%3Ahomepage](http://www.pbs.org/plweb-cgi/fastweb?getdoc+pbsonline+all+14442+16+wAAA+thinktank%26%28thinktank%29%3Ahomepage)

If you have trouble typing all of this in, you will find a ready-made pointer to it in the Web edition of The Skeptic at ntskeptics.org. If you don't have Web access, but still would like to read it, let me know, and I will e-mail you a copy or slip you a printed copy.

APS on Creationism

[Press release from the American Physical Society]

Concerned with recent attempts to have the biblical story of creation taught in public schools as science [see The Skeptic, February 1997], the Executive Board of the APS voted unanimously to reaffirm the position adopted by the society 16 years ago. The statement strongly opposes the teaching of "creationism" in science class: "Scientific inquiry and religious beliefs are two distinct elements of the human experience. Attempts to present them in the same context can only lead to misunderstandings of both."

The Skeptic by E-Mail

Since the announcement in February, several members have signed up to receive the newsletter by e-mail. Here is how it will work:

1. You tell me by e-mail that you want to receive your newsletter by e-mail.
2. I will send you a trial issue by e-mail just to make sure you are getting your copy OK.
3. Once you tell me everything is fine on your end, we will stop mailing your newsletter to you and will send it by e-mail. You will get your copy at least a day earlier than everybody who gets theirs by post, and paper will be saved.
4. We expect to send the complete newsletter, leaving out nothing of any significance. Some technology on your part will be required to accomplish this.
5. You can go back to getting your newsletter by post anytime you wish.
6. You can also obtain your copy from the Web using the following URL:
[The North Texas Skeptics Web Site](http://www.ntskeptics.org)

John Blanton

[Mail to The North Texas Skeptics](#)

As seen on TV

We can't guarantee it will happen every time, but Jessica Yu, last seen locally as the feature (by way of video) of the NTS March program, picked up an Oscar for one of her film documentaries. If your career needs a lift, give us a call. We will try to fit you in.