



The Newsletter of The North Texas Skeptics

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The Third Eye

NEWS AND COMMENTARY FROM THE WEIRD WORLD OF THE MEDIA

By Pat Reeder

Due to early holiday deadlines, I am writing this column just three weeks after my last “monthly” column. While this seems like but a tick of the clock to me, to spooky radio host Art Bell it was enough time to die and be resurrected. True, the same feat took Jesus only three days, but even granting that Art is no Jesus, it’s still pretty darned impressive.

It started, as do many things on The Art Bell Show, with a shocking, sudden and cryptic message, only this time it wasn’t from the Hale-Bopp Comet or the CIA-paid remote viewers. This time, it was from Art himself, who flabbergasted loyal listeners by unexpectedly announcing that he was quitting “forever,” due to a vague and unexplainable threat to his family. Police in Pahrump, Nevada, were so overwhelmed with calls from concerned listeners that they drove out to Bell’s house, from which his wisdom is beamed nightly, to see if he was under attack by terrorists or space aliens or Men In Black (or more likely, men in white), but he assured them that he was in no immediate danger.

Bell’s abrupt and mysterious “retirement” made national news, as his fans burned up the Internet with wild conjectures about what could have frightened him so. Finally, after about three weeks, Bell returned to his microphone, saying that circumstances (which he still could not divulge) had changed and denying that it was all a publicity stunt.

I would never be so crass as to suggest that it was a publicity stunt — for all I know, it might’ve been some actual family emergency — but as someone with over 20 years’ experience in radio, I can tell you that it wouldn’t be the first time I’ve seen a radio announcer make a mysterious exit and a triumphant return, thus assuring that he would make front page news and garner huge ratings just by going on vacation.

For those of you who don’t keep vampire hours like me, KLIF (570 AM) has begun running Bell’s show earlier, starting at 9 p.m., and airing “best of” reruns on the weekends. I highly recommend catching the reruns, because you get to hear all the psychic predictions long after they failed to come true, like the fellow who had it on good authority (direct from his pals, the Pleidians, I think) that a tidal wave would devastate Oregon in September. Guess I missed that story, but the newspapers were preoccupied with the home run race then and could’ve easily overlooked it.

As much fun as that show was, my favorite Art Bell moment of all time came just a week ago. While driving home one night, I tuned in right in the middle of a discussion with the only — brace yourself! — skeptic I’ve ever heard on Bell’s show!

First, an explanatory note: for those of you unfamiliar with Bell, one consistently amusing aspect of his show is that no matter how outlandish the claim of the guest, nobody ever voices even the mildest skepticism. If the guest says he’s in telepathic contact with giant wombats from the planet Freep, no caller will ever ask, “Are you kidding?” or “Did you forget to take your lithium?” Instead, Bell will point out how this dovetails perfectly with the wombat-centered Apocalypse prophecies in Whitley Streiber’s latest book, followed by a caller asking, “What do these wombats look like? ‘Cause I think one’s perched on my tool shed.”

That’s what made the show I heard so startling. The guest was Matthew Alper, author of a book called *The ‘God’ Part of the Brain*, in which he proposes that beliefs in God, the afterlife, mind-over-matter and superstitions have a physiological origin and may be encoded into human DNA, evolved as a defense mechanism to help people cope with the anxiety that comes from being aware of our own mortality. Since a disbelief in wonders and miracles is something new to Bell’s show, he immediately did what he so often does: he began smugly quoting nonexistent statistics.

Bell said (paraphrasing), “Suppose I told you that studies at Princeton had proven that a man could influence a random number generator with the power of his mind alone. Would you say THAT was a hoax?!”

To which Alper replied...“Yes.”

This simple one-word response caused my wife and me to cheer in joy and amazement and seemed to leave Art Bell utterly stunned. I pictured him sitting at the mic with a look on his face like a cow that had just been whacked in the forehead with a 2-by-4.

Bell, however, was only momentarily cowed. Rallying quickly, he insisted that these alleged tests were genuine. But Alper noted, quite reasonably, that if Princeton researchers had actually proven the existence of telekinesis, you wouldn’t have had to learn about it on *The Art Bell Show* because it would have been on the cover of *Newsweek*. He added that if anyone could lift a pin one centimeter off a table using his brain alone and no trickery, nobody would be listening to them on the radio because they’d all watching this miracle worker on TV.

Sadly, at this point, we arrived home, and I didn’t hear any more of the interview. But I did order Alper’s book off the Internet. It’s the least I could do for the only genuine miracle worker I’ve ever heard: Matthew Alper, who actually got a skeptical thought expressed on *The Art Bell Show* !

A postscript to this story: on Friday the 13th of November, the *Skeptical Inquirer* presented its annual “Snuffed Candle Award” to Art Bell. The award goes to the personality who has most dimmed public enlightenment and contributed to the public’s lack of understanding of scientific inquiry by presenting pseudoscience as genuine.

My pals at the *Wireless Flash* news service called Bell to ask what his acceptance speech might be. He answered with a raspberry sound, which was undoubtedly less flatulent than what usually comes out of his mouth on public occasions.



Speaking of public scientific illiteracy, we got a big dose of it this month when a DNA study purported to “prove” that Thomas Jefferson did father at least one child of his slave, Sally Hemings. This study was released just prior to the elections and was cited as a defense of Bill Clinton’s sexual behavior with an intern, the modern-day equivalent of a slave. I’m always suspicious of any “scientific breakthroughs” that get trumpeted just days before an election by politically-motivated groups of any stripe — and in this case, I think I have very good reason.

To begin with, that particular test has an accuracy rating of about 1 in 100. It relies on matching the Y chromosome, passed down through male heirs; but Jefferson's only son died in childhood, so the researchers had to use a DNA sample from a descendant of Jefferson's paternal uncle, Field Jefferson. This Y chromosome would be virtually identical

in every male member of the Jefferson family; and Jefferson's own grandson claimed that Jefferson's nephew, Thomas Randolph (Field's grandson), had admitted fathering Heming's child. Even the head researcher on the project, retired pathology professor Dr. Eugene Foster, stressed that this test does not prove paternity.

The media, however, ignored all the red flags and immediately declared that Thomas Jefferson had been "scientifically proven" to be the father of Sally Hemings' child. The Dallas Morning News even ran two editorials pontificating on the meaning of what we now "know" about Jefferson's sex life. Let's hope that they will soon run an even lengthier editorial about what media people do not know about science, and how they pass their ignorance on to the public, many members of whom will believe anything as long as it's something they want to believe, and thus does it enter the realm of "common knowledge" — i.e., all those things that everyone knows for certain, and that aren't really true.

Incidentally, it doesn't make a whit of difference to me one way or the other whether Jefferson fathered Hemings' child. I just hope that I never get falsely sued for child support and end up with a jury that learned everything they know about DNA paternity testing from reading Dallas Morning News editorials.



As I write this, we are once again massing troops to try to scare Saddam Hussein into behaving, since economic sanctions seem to have done nothing except harm innocent civilians. The A.P. carried a story about an unusual case-in-point.

It seems that the lack of decent, affordable medical care in Iraq has helped create a booming trade for self-proclaimed "psychic healers." Poor Iraqis who cannot afford real doctors and scarce Western medicine pay these charlatans to wave their "blessed hands" over their bodies and cure them of everything from cancer to acne. One particularly wild claim was that a healer cured 15 blind men at once, even though he is blind himself. You'd think that at some point, he would've waved his hands over his own eyes and cured himself. Heck, just rubbing the sleep out of his eyes in the morning should have done the job.

Iraqi doctors have condemned these quacks and begged Saddam to take action against them (maybe chop off their blessed hands?), but the public continues to fork over their money, mostly because their services are cheaper than going to a real doctor. I don't know why we need to bomb Iraq: their own "healers" are probably killing them more efficiently than air strikes ever could.



Lest you think I am exhibiting prejudice against the Iraqis for their belief in quackery, you should know that compared to our fellow Americans, they are models of medical wisdom.

A new Harvard Medical School survey published in JAMA found that visits to alternative medical practitioners" (herbalists, homeopaths, "energy field adjusters," etc.) are up 47% since 1990. Even scarier, it is estimated that Americans made 629 million visits to alternative practitioners in 1997, and only 386 million visits to primary care physicians. In light of this, the AMA finally decided to conduct clinical tests of some of the more popular "therapies," to see if any of them actually work.

The results were mixed. For example, Chinese herbs did help relieve irritable bowel syndrome (which explains why

Chinese food goes down so good), saw palmetto helped shrink swollen prostates (can't comment on that one), and yoga might help with carpal tunnel syndrome. On the other hand, chiropractic spinal

manipulation did not relieve tension headaches, the weight-loss herb *Garcinia cambogia* did not remove pounds, acupuncture did not relieve nerve pain in HIV patients, and the best-selling herbal supplement *Echinacea* was no more effective in warding off colds than a placebo (quick, buy stock in the Placebo company!).

The weirdest finding of the lot: the ancient Chinese practice of burning mugwort next to the little toe of a pregnant woman to make her baby turn out of the risky breech position actually worked in 75 percent of test cases (compared to 48 percent of babies that turned on their own in the control group). Doctors couldn't say why it worked, but they suggested that it might be worth trying since it's cheap and harmless. The only drawback is that burning mugwort smells like marijuana, so if you don't watch him, your kid might grow up to be a reggae musician.

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Finally, as we go to press, I have just received word that prosecutors in Clearwater, Florida, have charged the Church of Scientology with felony counts of abuse or neglect of a disabled adult and unauthorized practice of medicine. This stems from the widely-reported case of Lisa McPherson, who died of an embolism caused by severe dehydration after she suffered a mental breakdown and was allegedly held against her will in a hotel room for 17 days by fellow Scientologists who denied her access to doctors or, apparently, even to water.

Naturally, church spokespeople chalked the charges up to the on-going conspiracy against Scientologists and proudly noted that neither the church nor any members were specifically accused of killing Ms McPherson.

Say, there's a great recruitment slogan for a church! Imagine if other churches adopted it: "Join the Baptist Church: We won't specifically kill you!"

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The Amazing Elizabeth Joyce

by John Blanton

To skeptics, the predictions by psychics often seem deliberately vague and ambiguous. All this, of course, works to their advantage when their predictions don't turn out as promised. For example, saying "A great man will fall from grace soon" will be confirmed if subsequently some movie star gets dumped by his wife. Hard to miss.

On the other hand there is Elizabeth Joyce. She demonstrates the hazards of stating the future in more certain terms. Ron Butler (ButlerRN@aol.com) has been tracking the good Elizabeth for us this year. Here is his story:

Elizabeth Joyce first came to my attention during an idle lunchtime Web search of newspapers and magazines on the 28th of January. A short piece in the Los Angeles Times [see the box] noted that Ms. Joyce had predicted that Bill Clinton would never give his 1998 State of the Union address—he would resign in favor of Al Gore that very day, brought down by one of the numerous scandals swirling around his administration. "A brave woman and a bold seeress," I thought. Also dead wrong, since the State of the Union address had come and gone the night before, but still a brave woman...

With a little searching, I found Ms. Joyce's "Predictions for 1998" on the Web ("Visions of Reality" Home Page, <http://www.elizabeth@new-visions.com>). It was different from the usual run of New Year's prophecy laundry lists in that there were concrete dates attached to a number of the predictions. Others

were at least specified to the first or last half of 1998 and that's more than most free-lance prophets are willing to do.

Fascinated, I scanned down through the document and picked out a dozen-plus-two events with solid-looking dates attached to them. I ignored a few, mostly having to do with events in the lives of Hollywood celebrities because either 1) it would be tough to get hard confirmation of some of the predictions, or 2) the lives of Hollywood celebrities bore me to tears. Deaths, major economic events, resignations from high political offices, wars, earthquakes and violent volcanic eruptions looked like straight up/down, yes/no propositions, though. And I threw in "A major auto corporation closes its doors, as well as an airline (US AIR?)" without quibbling about "major," just because I work in the airline industry.

Aside from Billy Graham and the Pope, who got separate and specific death predictions, I declined to guess which septuagenarian-and-up notables would die during the year. Some things are too ghoulish even for me, and none of those listed looked like good prospects to see 1999, just based on common sense and the actuarial tables.

The result was Table 1.

Table 1.

	PREDICTION	DATE DUE	PROVED BY	TRUE
1	Clinton resigns	1-31	2-1	No
2	Iraq attacks Israel	3-5	3-6	No
3a	Oscar for K. Bassinger	3-23	3-24	Yes
3b	Oscar for R.Duvall	3-23	3-24	No
3c	Oscar for Titanic	3-23	3-24	Yes (Best Picture)
4	Mt. Fuji erupts + two others tidal waves	3-98	4-1	No
5	East coast earthquake	5-98	6-1	?
6a	Stock Market crash - 1	3-98	4-1	?
6b	Stock Market crash - 2	10-98	11-1	?
7	Pope John Paul II dies	Early 98	7-1	?
8	Billy Graham dies	First half 98	7-1	?
9	California quake	8-98	9-1	?
10a	Major auto corp. closes	1998	1-99	?
10b	Major airline closes	1998	1-99	?

In the table Ron has noted the results for predictions through March. Later events would prove surprising, as you will see. Read on:

Subscribers to the Georgia Skeptics mail list may have noticed that I've been tracking the success of psychic Elizabeth Joyce's "Predictions for 1998." And some may recall a message I recently posted ("Tracking Elizabeth Joyce — The Future Ain't What It Used to Be!") that pointed out that Ms. Joyce had begun revising her "Visions of Reality" Web site to excise or modify those of her predictions for the first quarter of '98 that hadn't exactly panned out. Specifically, she had "whited-out" the January date for Pres. Clinton's resignation and the March 5 date for the start of the Iraq / Israel War. And I noted the omissions to GS mail list readers. But I missed something...

I really hadn't expected this sort of chutzpah from a nice little old lady psychic. But since I now have to anticipate more of the same from her as the year wears on (the simultaneous eruptions of Mt. Fuji and Mt.

St. Helens are overdue, after all), I laid out the Jan. 25 and Mar. 18 versions of the “Predictions” side by side in a Word document and found—something shocking...

One section of the ‘Predictions’ I refused to get involved with is headed “Some of the Famous - expected to cross over in 1998.” Some things are just too ghoulish even for me, and the eight names on the list were all poor actuarial risks to see 1999, due to either sheer age (Bob Hope was born in 1903!) or known medical conditions. For the record, here they are:

Frank Sinatra
Johnny Cash
Bob Hope
Mel Torme
Katherine Hepburn
Ronald Reagan
June Lockhart
Sid Ceaser [sic]

When the January and March versions of that section were laid down next to each other, though, I found nine names on the later version:

Frank Sinatra
Johnny Cash
Bob Hope
Mel Torme
Katherine Hepburn
Ronald Reagan
June Lockhart
Sid Ceaser [sic]
Lloyd Bridges

A quick search of obituaries confirmed that Mr. Bridges had died on March 10. Now, this certainly gives an appearance that Ms. Joyce retroactively (one could even say “posthumously”) added his name to her “expected to cross over” list to improve her record as a prophetess! Since I didn’t check her list of predictions on March 9, I can’t positively say she didn’t add the famous TV frogman to the list prior to his passing (if not before he began his final descent, so to speak).

It’s getting late in the year now, so we can do a quick follow-up on Table 1.

- The East Coast earthquake was a clear miss (I am sure this means United States East Coast).
- We had better give the stock market crashes another look. Are we sure we read those dates correctly?
- John Paul and the Reverend Graham are both strikes.
- So was the California quake, although I don’t know why.
- Hey, American acquired Reno Air, and Chrysler has disappeared into the folds of Mercedes-Benz (which is no longer M-B either). So what does that tell you?

Unfortunately for Frank Sinatra, Ms. Joyce was right-on for once. Readers are going to have to help me with the rest, because I’m not diving into the morgue files for the latest information. However, I am sure that ex President Reagan is still running strong and will be through the rest of the year, at least in body. Did Ms. Joyce fudge her predictions and add Lloyd Bridges to the list after the fact? Ron Butler says he was not able to tell. Maybe someone else was tracking the list more closely and will report back to us. Hopefully Ron will track the Joyce page in the future and keep us

informed of new developments.

On Elizabeth Joyce's Web you can read some glowing testimonials. I am sure she will not mind if I reprint them here without her permission:

Elizabeth Joyce is NAMED one of the TOP 20 PSYCHICS in the country! American Woman Magazine - September 1997 Issue.

Elizabeth Joyce will be appearing on Unsolved Mysteries on CBS in late December 1998 or early January 1999. The show is Suddenly Psychic and reenacts how Elizabeth began to notice and use her magnificent gifts.

The Reputable Psychics, a new book by Dr. Hans Holzer, lists Elizabeth Joyce as "a clear seer with a remarkable gift."

About Elizabeth Joyce [from the Web page]

Elizabeth Joyce was born one of two sets of Identical Twins. She is a "Natural clairvoyant" from birth. She was not completely aware of her intense psychic abilities until 1979, when she and her son were hit head on by a drunk driver and she went into an "Out of Body" experience.

From that day forward she has believed in God and Afterlife. Elizabeth is from a corporate background and has her degree in Business Administration. Her varied experiences allow her to relate to many people in many walks of life. She has published articles on Relationships and Alternative Medicine with a monthly column, "The Metaphysical Corner," and an Astrology column.

She brings her training with Deepak Chopra, Louise Hay and "A Course In Miracles" into her work. Her radio show, Unlimited Realities was received well and she is in the process of planning a Cable TV program. Her accuracy is astounding and has been recorded over the last fifteen years. She has worked with the FBI and Police on many cases. She appears in Dr. Hans Holzer's book, The Directory of Psychics, and Elaine Landau's book, ESP, as a genuine natural clairvoyant who uses her gift to help people.

I guess I have been underestimating these psychics all these years. I have just not appreciated all they go through. I, for one, am going to stop being so quick to condemn. Obviously reading all those tea leaves is not as easy as it appears at first look. With psychic soldiers like Elizabeth Joyce hanging it all out to deliver tomorrow's news today and getting nothing but snide remarks in return, it's beginning to look as though they earn all those dollars. So, Elizabeth and the rest of you, take care. Don't worry if you miss a few predictions, or a bunch. Just keep on pitching. Never give up. Call them like you see them—in the future. But be careful. It's a jungle out there.

LOS ANGELES TIMES (1-27-98)

"Off-Kilter"

By Roy Rivenburg

You Saw It Here First: In our continuing quest to bring credibility to the world of the paranormal, we now turn to New York psychic Elizabeth Joyce, who predicts that Bill Clinton will not give the State of the Union address tonight. She claims the beleaguered commander in chief will instead resign and let Al Gore deliver the speech. Oh, and by the way, Gore will dispatch American troops to

war in the Middle East in March, she says.

Web news

By John Blanton

Speaking of creationism

Here is another posting from the Skeptic list server:

The October issue of Acts & Facts, the bulletin of the Institute for Creation Research, announces that the ICR's Internet creationism course, "Creation OnLine," is now up and running. You can learn about it by going to:

<http://www.icr.org/online>

Did you know that

American health authorities are considering a complete change of policy in the face of strong evidence that all cases of polio are caused by the polio vaccine.

No? Actually, we didn't either. But check out the following URL:

<http://www.cw2.com/nlight/bane.htm>

What's new (from Robert Park)

DKL Lifeguard: Randi throws down a challenge. Tom Clancy's hero used the Lifeguard to pinpoint terrorists through 500 feet of concrete and steel in the novel Rainbow Six (WN 25 Sep 98). The devices, at \$14,000 each, are marketed to defense agencies, law enforcement agencies, and rescue organizations. DKL claims LifeGuard detects electrical impulses of the human heart, but in double-blind tests, Sandia Labs reported it did no better than chance. Both Sandia and NIST have been asked to test the device by the National Institute of Justice and the Defense Technology Security Administration, but Sen. Arlen Specter (R-PA) reportedly intervened on DKL's behalf. Specter's office refused to divulge to WN the contents of his letters to the agencies. Meanwhile, the James Randi Educational Foundation issued a challenge: The Foundation will pay Howard Sidman, president of DKL Enterprises, or Senator Specter, the sum of one million dollars immediately upon a successful demonstration of the DKL LifeGuard device.

The URL for DKL Labs is <http://www.dklabs.com/>

Step right up! (From James Randi)

The centennial meeting of the American Physical Society (APS) is coming up. I'm proud to say that I'll be one of the speakers. When I was asked to suggest a possible speaker from "the other side" of rational thinking, I named Dr. George Johnson, the science honcho of the DKL company (look them up on the Internet). DKL manufactures and sells a dowsing rod – the "Lifeguard" — that contains electronics. The electronics are not connected or powered, but the "idea" is there, the "vibrations," very much as in homeopathic notions. Dr. Johnson, a trained physicist, could have appeared at the APS meeting and explained the science behind the DKL rod, and how (in his expert opinion) Sandia Labs in Albuquerque flubbed the tests they recently conducted of this silly device, on behalf of the Department of Energy (DOE). Those tests were negative. Failures. Rejections. It didn't work, even though the top official of DKL himself operated the Buck Rogers toy.

Dr. Johnson has declined the APS invitation, saying that his financial backers would not permit him to attend. Now, Johnson is a full member of the APS. To speak at their Centennial is a distinct honor, and if there were nothing amiss here, he should have embraced the opportunity. The actual fact is that the scientific claims for the DKL "invention" are spurious, the device does NOT work, and in my opinion the creators of this farce should be charged with fraud. They

are selling this useless thing to federal agencies, and should be taken to task for that reason alone. Why doesn't it happen? For one reason, Senator Arlen Specter's office has fired off a letter to the National Institute of Justice (NIJ), who are investigating the matter, inquiring why they are "bothering" DKL. The NIJ's reply was that they have compared two reports, the one from Sandia and the other from an independent agency hired by DKL, and concluded that the Sandia report was good, and the other report was junk.

One further bit of perhaps significant evidence: though I have offered DKL the opportunity of taking the JREF one-million-dollar prize by performing a simple 2-hour test of their claim, they have declined. Why? You may be able to arrive at a probable solution to this question.

Now, as the most recent development, the NIJ has funded Sandia Labs to do an analysis of the electronics — unconnected and unpowered — that are sealed into the LifeGuard. Alert, Senator Specter! They may discover — again! — that the DKL Lifeguard is a piece of technological junk, a re-invention of a medieval notion that pops up among quacks every few years. Time to fire off another senatorial letter to quash an investigation?

The last dowsing rod version of any note was the "Quadro Locater" that the FBI put out of business last year ONLY after I alerted them that FBI employees were buying franchises to sell the toy. Until that morsel of data was dropped before them, they ignored my complaints. Seems a fraud has to hit the home office before it's worth going after.

An open challenge, here formally stated: the James Randi Educational Foundation (JREF) will pay Howard Sidman, president of DKL Enterprises, or any of his officers, customers, or colleagues, or anyone from the office of Senator Arlen Specter, or the good Senator himself, OR ANYONE, the sum of one million dollars immediately upon a successful demonstration of the DKL Lifeguard device. No ifs or buts. Our address and telephone number is below. We await any takers.

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