



The Newsletter of The North Texas Skeptics

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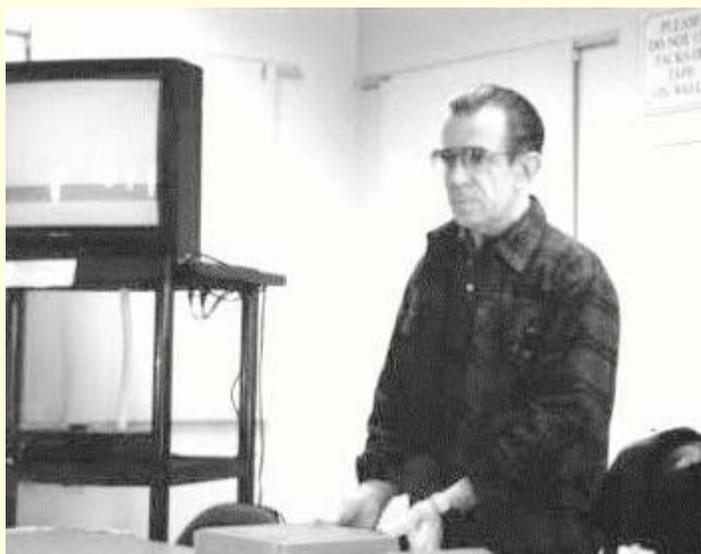
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## Joe Voelkering



**Joe Voelkering addresses the NTS in 1997**

The North Texas Skeptics lost a good friend in January with the passing of former NTS President Joe Voelkering. Joe was one of the founding members of the group in 1983 and had been active in NTS operations until the last year.

Joe served as Vice President when I was NTS President in 1990 and 1991, and he was a long-standing member of the Board of Directors. As a professional investigator of aviation industry accidents he was valuable to The Skeptics as a Technical Advisor, a task he had managed for many years. He had a law degree and was a professional aircraft pilot with an Airline Transport Rating. From what I could tell he had flown a wide variety of aircraft, including both helicopters and fixed-wing. His investigations had included the notorious incident in which a Saudi Airlines flight burned, killing all aboard.

It was no surprise that one of Joe's main interests was the UFO craze, which he followed closely and on which he occasionally lectured. His expertise in scientific investigations and UFOs caught the interest of the local media, who sometimes called on him for interviews.

We are going to have to get along without Joe in the future. Someone else is going to have to needle the UFO and conspiracy buffs for us. Someone else is going to have to write the humorous letter-to-the-editor spoofs. Someone else is going to have to order the fajitas when we go out for Mexican food. Any volunteers?

John Blanton

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## January Elections

The membership of The North Texas Skeptics met in January and elected a new board of directors. Following the election of the board, those new board members conferred to elect new officers to run the day-to-day operations of the NTS. The proceedings were subdued, since just hours prior to the meeting we learned of the sudden death of former NTS President Joe Voelkering earlier in the week.



**Left to right: Curtis Severns, Mark Meyer, John Blanton, Keith Blanton, Danny Barnett**

New Board of Directors:

- Greg Aicklen
- Laura Ainsworth
- Danny Barnett
- John Blanton
- Keith Blanton
- Curtis Severns
- Virginia Vaughn

The positions filled by the new board are:

- President—Danny Barnett
- Vice President—Curtis Severns
- Secretary—John Blanton

- Treasurer—Mark Meyer
- Editor—Keith Blanton
- Web Master—Greg Aicklen
- Meeting Coordinator—Virginia Vaughn

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# The Third Eye

## NEWS AND COMMENTARY FROM THE WEIRD WORLD OF THE MEDIA

By Pat Reeder

Last month, I wrote about the Fox TV special that exposed the “Alien Autopsy” and other hoaxes, and it turned out to be merely the first welcome bit of debunkery in a remarkably good month for skeptics.

The next breath of fresh air came with an ABC News special on Scientology that detailed the genesis of L. Ron Hubbard’s cash cow and aired some of the many charges of coercion and intimidation made against this organization by former members and employees...all of whom, we are assured by official Scientology spokespersons, are either vindictive, disgruntled liars or else mentally deluded. On the other side of the coin, we heard from celebrity Scientology defenders John Travolta and Kirstie Alley, who insisted that they had never seen anything like this (as if they’d be allowed to). The more they talked, the more I kept thinking of the term the Kremlin used to use for American apologists for Stalin: “useful idiots.”

You might be interested to know that Scientology has done so much to straighten out Kirstie Alley’s life (as a gentleman, I shan’t discuss her recent acrimonious divorce, well-publicized relationship difficulties and weight problems), that she is dedicating much of her TV income to building Scientology centers all over the globe to propagate it. Reason #4,723 not to watch Veronica’s Closet.

Speaking of appalling gullibility, CBS’s Sixty Minutes also weighed in with a fascinating piece about a TV “news” producer named Michael Bourne (sic?), who made quite a handsome living by faking documentary footage for German television. The appalling part was how easily misled both his bosses and the viewers were. For a piece on Third World child labor, he hired a boy to sit at a loom and wave a spool of yarn back and forth. He obviously wasn’t weaving a rug; heck, he was even smiling at the camera! But nobody questioned it. Nor were they suspicious of the “terrorist bomb makers” he filmed (Middle-Eastern immigrants from his apartment building, playing with prop weapons) or the “dope fiend” who licked toads to get high (one of his buddies who must’ve been really desperate to get on camera). What finally tripped him up was a story linking the American KKK to the German skinhead movement. For this one, he actually did some legitimate research and proved a connection, but his TV bosses said the footage wasn’t “sexy” enough (“Where’s the burning crosses?!”). So he took some friends into the woods and faked a Klan rally. At long last, someone figured it out (one clue was that the swastikas on the Klan robes were backwards), and his many hoaxes were exposed to the world.

At the end of the report, Bourne revealed that if he hadn’t been caught, his next project would have been to convince people that there was a secret Mars landing by the Russians in 1989. Asked by Ed Bradley if he really thought he could make people believe something so patently absurd, he replied, “Sure. Sure.” I wouldn’t be at all surprised if he goes ahead with that project, after laying low for awhile until the public forgets about his previous hoaxes. Look for that “Russians On Mars” special on the Fox Network sometime in 2001.

The next fun story to arrive on my doorstep was a tale about Bigfoot. We’ve all seen the Patterson-Gimlin Film, that famous, grainy footage from 1967, supposedly showing a Sasquatch traipsing through the woods. It’s the Zapruder Film for people who believe in big, hairy missing links. Well, two Washington state Bigfoot buffs, Cliff Crook and Chris Murphy, greatly enlarged frames of it and saw what they believe is a bell-shaped costume fastener at Bigfoot’s

waist. This means either that it is nothing more than a man in a monkey suit, or else that Sasquatches are born with built-in zippers.

Naturally, such heresy is not sitting well with their fellow Bigfootophiles, who have based almost all their Bigfoot lore on images from that snippet of film. They are furious at Crook and Murphy for poking holes in their cherished icon and are feverishly urging them to “zip it!” One insists that the creature must be a wild animal because its fluid, shambling gait could not be replicated by a human (even though it’s exactly the way Clint Eastwood walks). Another claims that the object is not a zipper, but what they are looking at is actually just a piece of feces.

I couldn’t agree more.

Another healthy debunking arrived this month from syndicated columnist James Glassman, who has been researching the Y2K bug, which he says may turn out to be the biggest hype of the millennium. While noting that it is a problem, and one that could cause sporadic headaches for a short while, it is nothing like the society-destroying monster that many are depicting it to be. A lot of people are making big bucks by holding “preparedness seminars,” telling people how to survive the downfall of society when the computers all crash by hoarding cash, bottled water, dehydrated food and ammo to shoot your scavenging neighbors with.

Glassman told the New York Post that the mounting hysteria is “kind of a secular manifestation of millenniumism. Instead of having emotional, spiritual outpourings, and believing that the world is going to end, what we have is an expression of the same thing in a technological age.” He chalks it up to three underlying causes: hatred of technology, fear of the future, and apocalyptic paranoia.

Still, if you don’t accept Glassman’s assurances, you’ll be happy to hear that the Utne Reader, the Reader’s Digest for the Ed Begley Jr. crowd, has published a “Y2K Citizens’ Action Guide” to help its environmentally-correct, ultra-liberal readers survive the looming disaster. A sample tip: stockpile water, and if you run out, you can drain your water heater and plumbing or melt ice cubes. As a last resort, drink the water in the reservoir of your toilet tank, but be sure to purify it first. Try straining it through your Earth Shoes.

For the life of me, I can’t even imagine how Y2K could affect an Utne Reader subscriber. Would it make his commuter bicycle come to a sudden halt?

Our final bit of good news comes from China, where authorities have finally nabbed a slippery “mystic healer” whom they describe as an “infamous quack.” Hu Wanling claimed to be a “Qigong Master” with miraculous powers that gave him a 90 percent success rate in curing cancer, hepatitis and other illnesses. But police say he was actually poisoning patients by giving them herbal medicine laced with sodium sulfate. Hu fled from town to town to avoid arrest, setting up hospitals and clinics in each new place. He allegedly killed 20 people at one clinic, 30 at another, and 146 at a hospital (hospitals are obviously more efficient than clinics). All told, he’s believed to have offed at least 190 patients, a record even Dr. Kevorkian would envy. No word yet on whether prosecutors plan to imprison him, execute him, or deport him to America to work in an HMO.

Finally, since I hate to give you nothing but good news, I think I should close by letting you know that the Pope will die this year (he’ll be the last pope, replaced by a committee), World War III will begin in Turkey within the next five years or so, and Earth will soon experience massive earthquakes and continental shifts which will split the U.S. into two large islands, leaving the Mississippi River greatly widened and England, Japan, south Florida and most of the western U.S. underwater.

Bummer, eh?

I know all this because I happened to flip by The Roseanne Show as she was interviewing “prophet” Gordon-Michael Scallion. This is a guy who gets mystical messages about the future from an inner voice, mostly predictions that are reminiscent of that outrageously unctuous 1950s “psychic” and ham, Criswell, of “Plan Nine From Outer Space” fame. He made similar wild predictions in his long-running column and TV show, Criswell Predicts! and even cut a record album. My pal George Gimarc of KRLD’s Lost Tapes show recently found a copy, and it’s a hoot. Some of the things he predicted actually came true by sheer dumb chance, but most are hilariously off the mark.

While Scallion seems to have Criswell’s flair for making his predictions big and scary, his soft-spoken, New-agey

schlump demeanor leaves him falling far short of the entertainment value provided by Criswell's over-the-top delivery. Still, since he was new to me, I logged on to Amazon.com to see if he had any books out. And surprise! He does!

There were two books, one new and one out of print, but sadly, no synopsis was available. Just a few reader-written reviews, all of which were five-star raves, of course (the reason for this literary insanity is obvious: only people who've read the book can write a review, and nobody in his right mind would read it). Most of the reviewers were also subscribers to Scallion's newsletter (naturally, there's a newsletter, you silly-billy!). Well, as much as I'd love to report on what's in the book, I'll be damned if I'm going to buy it. You're on your own on this one. But I might order that older, out-of-print volume. As Criswell's LP proves, prophecy is a lot more entertaining when it's way past its shelf date.

Well, gotta go. I have an appointment with a real estate agent who's helping me buy up vacant lots all around Waxahachie. I hear it will soon be oceanfront property. I'm getting in on the ground floor, suckers!

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## Web news

**By John Blanton**

*The Internet is one of the least reliable sources of accurate information, but it's free. Read with caution.*

**What's new—by Robert Park**

[whatsnew@aps.org](mailto:whatsnew@aps.org)

**HYDRINOS: NEW CHEMISTRY USES PRE-SHRUNK HYDROGEN.** Remember Randy Mill, MD Harvard '86? He pointed out in 1991 that cold fusion wasn't fusion at all — it just puts hydrogen atoms into a state below the ground state, shrinking them into tiny little things he calls "hydrinos," releasing lots of energy (WN 26 Apr 91). WN has been told that Mills' company, BlackLight Power, has raised a few million from utilities companies, such as PacifiCorp and Conectiv, and is ready to go prime time. But he wants to avoid the endless arguments over "excess heat" that plague the cold fusion guys. So, he plans to reveal the discovery of a class of novel chemical compounds he calls Hydrino Hydride Compounds (HHCs) that will revolutionize chemistry and physics. Stay tuned.

**MAGNETIC THERAPY: STUDY RELIES ON ALTERNATIVE STATISTICS.** According to an Associated Press story, a new study reports that magnetic insoles lessen foot pain of diabetics. The author was identified as a neurologist at New York Medical College, but NYMC says he's "a volunteer" at the College. His office says they're flooded with calls, but have no copies of the paper and didn't expect to for "weeks." We'll update you when we get a copy, but here's what we've learned so far: There were 24 patients with chronic foot pain from various causes in the study — except 5 dropped out. Of the 19, 12 (half the original group) reported some reduction in pain. We don't know how many reported an increase. Ten of the 19 were diabetics. Of these, nine reported some pain reduction — uhh, at the end of four months. The only other serious study of pain reduction from magnets claimed relief came in minutes. Take a group of 19, break it into subgroups, and wait long enough, something's bound to show up. WN awaits word on whether the insoles had alternating poles (WN 18 Dec 98).

*Also, John Thomas has forwarded the following URL for those interested in magnetic therapy:*

<http://www.discovermagnetics.com/index.html>

—JB

**THE UNDEAD: A REVIEW OF "NUCLEAR TRANSMUTATION."** The subtitle of this thin volume by Tadahiko Mizuno is "The Reality of Cold Fusion." The publisher is Infinite Energy Press, which probably tells you everything you need to know. This year marks the tenth anniversary of the announcement by the University of Utah that Stanley Pons and Martin Fleischmann had achieved deuterium fusion in a simple electrolytic cell (WN 24 Mar 89). Within a matter of weeks, a DOE panel officially pronounced cold fusion dead, amidst revelations of altered data and suppression

of evidence. But the corpse does not rest peacefully. This personal account by one of a small corps who have not given up on cold fusion is wonderfully revealing — but not for what it tells us about science. “If you limit your goal to finding fusion products,” Mizuno snorts, “anyone can see you will not learn much. This is why the focus is now on transmutation.” He says of his fellow believers, “They have been treated like heretics by the rest of the scientific community. This has formed a bond of solidarity between them. Working with practically no funding against a tide of opposition ...they have slowly but surely brought about a new discovery.” It is an eloquent statement of how pathological science survives. In the final chapter Mizuno asks rhetorically, “What sort of reaction is cold fusion? As you have seen in this account we still have no clear idea.” After ten years, nothing has changed.

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## Elizabeth Joyce blows it again in ‘99!’

by Ron Butler

Well, deja vu all over again. Seems like just this time last year I was reporting the failure of an Elizabeth Joyce prediction that Bill Clinton would resign from office by the end of January. Come to think of it, it was this time last year that I was doing just that.

I believe I will have to institute a new rule in evaluating Ms. Joyce’s prophecies: Three strikes and you’re out! After all, if you keep guessing a particular event will occur, odds are it will come to pass eventually. In the case of the Clinton resignation, Ms. Joyce has so far called for it to happen:

- ? By the end of January 1998
- ? Sometime in November 1998 (after a fuzz-out to “the end of 1998”)
- ? January 20, 1999

— so this prognostication goes into the “once-too-often-to-the-well” pile along with the predicted deaths of the Pope, Billy Graham (and a lot of other elderly, sick people).



Elizabeth Joyce (from the Elizabeth Joyce Web site, <http://www.elizabeth@new-visions.com>)

Ms. Joyce received a compliment for one of the few 1998 predictions she made that had any degree of uncanniness, in “The Wolf Files” on ABCNEWS.COM. (The article is still in the “Wolf Files” archives and can be found by searching on that title at ABCNEWS.COM.) As Ms. Joyce tells it (on the 1-20-99 version of her Web page):

“Elizabeth Joyce was just named Psychic of the Year 1998 by ABC News — Click Here for the article written by Buck Wolf of ABC News.”

I suspect Mr. Wolf's superiors at ABC would be nonplused to hear that Ms. Joyce had been awarded any such title by their respectable major news-gathering organization (as opposed to a citation in a semi-humorous column authored by one of their producers). I think Mr. Wolf is safe, though: Try as I might and as many times as I read his article, I don't find the phrase "Psychic of the Year" anywhere in it. Nor any sort of ranking of the various psychics quoted. Maybe that "PotY" award is another of those things Ms. Joyce's spirit guides have told her about that mere mortals are not privy to... Nor does Mr. Wolf seem to be exactly awe-struck at Ms. Joyce's psychic prowess. He ends his four paragraphs on her by noting: "But before you bet the farm on her prophesy [sic], keep in mind that she believes your birth sign determines how you drive." You mean it doesn't?

(BTW, Ms. Joyce's Web site also says that she "...is NAMED one of the TOP 20 PSYCHICS in the country! American Woman Magazine — September 1997 Issue." (Has anyone out there ever run across American Woman magazine? It seems to have no presence on the Web at all. Any information would be greatly appreciated; I'd love to see this article and listing.)

'Fraid Ms. Joyce's next dated prophecy isn't due until June. But it's a doozy: A "meteor and storm" will devastate New York City, obliterate Washington and Cape Cod, and inundate Florida and Hawaii. See y'all on 1 July. Bring your swim fins.

Ron Butler ([ButlerRN@aol.com](mailto:ButlerRN@aol.com))

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