

The REALL News

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The official newsletter of the Rational Examination Association of Lincoln Land
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Purpose:

The Rational Examination Association of Lincoln Land (REALL) is a non-profit educational and scientific organization. It is dedicated to the development of rational thinking and the application of the scientific method toward claims of the paranormal and fringe- science phenomena.

REALL shall conduct research, convene meetings, publish a newsletter, and disseminate information to its members and the general public. Its primary geographic region of coverage is central Illinois.

REALL subscribes to the premise that the scientific method is the most reliable and self-correcting system for obtaining knowledge about the world and universe. REALL not not reject paranormal claims on a priori grounds, but rather is committed to objective, though critical, inquiry.

The REALL News is its official newsletter.

Membership information is provided elsewhere in this newsletter.

Board of Directors: Chairman, David Bloomberg; Assistant Chairman, Prof. Ron Larkin; Secretary-Treasurer, Wally Hartshorn; Newsletter Editor, Bob Ladendorf; At-Large Members, Prof. Steve Egger, Frank Mazo, and Kevin Brown.

Editorial Board: Bob Ladendorf (Newsletter Editor), David Bloomberg (electronic version editor), (one vacancy).

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From The Editor -- Bob Ladendorf

In this special expanded issue, David Bloomberg takes a long, close look at the controversy surrounding the production

and broadcast on CBS of purported documentaries about Biblical mysteries. While REALL takes no position on religious beliefs, it does monitor any claims of authenticity, such as the existence of wood from Noah's ark, that can be dispassionately examined by scientific means. Because recent "documentaries" deal with matters like these, we feel that the REALL News is an excellent forum for evaluating media productions.

Having a personal and professional interest in filmmaking, including the writing of a thesis on a political documentary filmmaker, I know the manipulative ability of filmmakers to make the point they want to express while claiming objectivity. Documentaries can be wonderful films portraying real life and providing needed information, but they also can be purveyors of blatant misinformation. Caveat emptor!

I hope the articles in this newsletter stimulate further examinations of media accounts of real life. Let us hear from you about this controversy, or on any other topic of interest to you.

/s/ Bob Ladendorf

From the Chairman -- David Bloomberg

Since my "Gilligan's Island" theme went over so well last month, I thought I'd make it a regular feature to use the songs from old sitcoms in my columns. This month I'll feature The Brady Bunch.

Here's a story of a man named...

Ok, ok, I'll stop. The Editor threatened my well being if I did it again, anyway.

Since this issue is practically "The Bloomberg REALL News" anyway, I won't make this column too long. I'd like to thank Robert McGrath for coming to Springfield and giving a great presentation! Every-body there seemed to enjoy it very much, and we had practically double our normal attendance. I was ex-tremely happy!

This brings up the only other subject I'll discuss now: We are going to be needing speakers from now until, well, forever. If you would like to give a presentation on a topic you think would be appropriate to REALL, or even if you just have a suggestion about a possible topic, please let us know! We're doing our best to get good speakers, but we can always use some help.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Book Sales: As mentioned in the two previous issues, we have a special discount from Prometheus Books: 20% off, and only \$1 for shipping (if you can pick it up at a meeting). So far, we have about five books ready to be ordered, but we need 10. I know there are people out there who want to order books at a great discount, so please remember to bring your order to the next meeting, or just send it in to us.

September Meeting: As mentioned elsewhere, our tentatively scheduled meeting in Champaign-Urbana featuring Ranse Traxler has been postponed for several months due to circumstances beyond anybody's control. We promise we'll have him talk to us soon, though!

Instead, we will be having a roundtable discussion of media treatments of fringe-science and paranormal issues, such as the Sun Pictures controversy featured in this issue.

/s/ David Bloomberg

{SPECIAL REPORT}

Incredible Mysteries of Sun Pictures

by David Bloomberg

Over the past few months, CBS has shown several specials produced by Sun International Pictures, Inc. These shows have all dealt with the Bible in one way or another and have been biased towards the pro-literalism, pro-creationism

side. Skeptics are included for short segments that believers then seemingly tear apart, along with acting clips supporting the stories as they appear in the Bible. REALL has reported on the most recent two of these shows, The Incredible Discovery of Noah's Ark, which aired on February 20th ("REALLity Check", March 1993; "REALLity Check", July 1993) and Ancient Secrets of the Bible, Part II, which aired on May 15 ("Logic Abuse and CBS", June 1993), but new information makes it necessary to take another, much closer, look at Sun and their methods.

As reported in the July "REALLity Check", Time magazine and the Associated Press (AP) had stories claiming that George Jammal, one of the people who appeared on the Noah's Ark show to tell his story about finding the Ark, has actually fabricated the entire story to expose Sun's shoddy research. This he allegedly did with the help of Dr. Gerald Larue, a professor emeritus of biblical history and archaeology at the University of Southern California, who had appeared in an earlier Sun production.

Jammal's story, as told on the Sun show, was that he and a companion had gone to Mt. Ararat to search for the Ark. According to the story, they found it and took a number of pictures, but Jammal's companion was killed and buried in a landslide, along with all the photos. Jammal had one piece of evidence to show for his trip, a piece of wood that supposedly came from the Ark. This was the story that Larue claimed had been fabricated by Jammal and himself.

Sun fired back with a six-page response to the Time_ article. CBS has remained mostly silent. The Sun response seeks to address four issues: Who is making the claim that Jammal fabricated his account? Did Sun perform due diligence in its research of the Jammal account? Was the piece of wood alleged to have come from the Ark authentic? Is Mr. Jammal's account still factual?

In answer to the first question, the response talks about Dr. Larue. They bring up the following information:

"Dr. LaRue (sic) is probably conducting some type of a vindictive campaign against Sun. This may be the result of his appearance as a skeptic in our show, Ancient Secrets of the Bible I which aired on May 15, 1992. According to Time_ magazine, Dr. LaRue felt he was 'set up as a straw man.'" They go on to say, "Since 1982, Dr. LaRue has served as chairman of the Committee for the Scientific Examination of Religion, a group dedicated to refuting Bible claims; was the consulting editor (1987-1989) and Emeritus President of the National Hemlock Society, a euthanasia advocacy organization; and is the senior editor of Free Inquiry, a humanist magazine published by the U.S. Council for Democratic and Secular Humanism, another group with goals of removing religion from society and Bible oriented programs from public broadcast."

But what does this have to do with whether or not Larue coached Jammal? Apparently Sun is trying to imply that because Larue is a secular humanist and is upset at Sun, his claims of having aided Jammal are automatically suspect. Rather than trying to defend against his claims or find out the truth behind them, they begin by attacking the man making those claims.

The Sun response then goes on to defend their research of Jammal's story. They say they interviewed Jammal, looking for flaws and inconsistencies in the story, and then gave the interview tapes to a psychiatrist, Dr. Paul Meier, who served as the field physician on an earlier Noah's Ark expedition. Meier told Sun's Chief Researcher, David Balsiger, that he found the accounts "totally believable." Meier recorded an interview that had to be cut from the show, in which he said of Jammal, "we would call him an 'obsessive-compulsive with histrionic features.' What this really means is that he's a perfectionist performer." Later in the interview, he says that Jammal wept while discussing his alleged companion who had been killed by a rock slide. He uses this show of emotion as evidence to support the reality of the story. But earlier, he had already admitted that Jammal is a "perfectionist performer"! He knew Jammal was an actor, but apparently ignored the possibility that Jammal was acting.

In that interview, Meier also admits that he does not know Jammal personally and has only studied him from the tapes. So, there is a psychiatrist who is certainly not unbiased, working from tapes of an interview done with an actor, giving testimony that it is accurate. This is what Sun considers research?

In addition to the psychiatrist, Sun claims they analyzed a map Jammal gave them showing expedition routes. According to Sun, "it could not have been drawn by anyone who did not have experience with the mountain." Sun does

not, however, explain why this is so.

The third portion of the response deals with the piece of wood Jammal showed, claiming it was a piece of the Ark. Sun begins by bluntly admitting that they do not know whether it is real. However, contradictions then appear in their response. They say, "It has not been the practice of Sun or other production companies to spend money or time testing and documenting artifacts shown on the air by interviewees." That sounds fine, until it is compared with Balsiger's comments in the AP article. He said, "We couldn't test the wood in time for our deadline." On one hand, Sun is claiming it is not their practice to test such things, on the other, they are claiming they didn't have time to test it.

The remainder of that section defends Sun's refusal to test such things by saying their shows are "entertainment" and that they would have been creating news if they had run the tests. This brings up the question of why they tested Jammal at all, through the psychiatrist and the map. Where does Sun draw the line? How much research is too much?

The final section deals with the question that sums it all up, "Is Mr. Jammal's expedition account of seeing the Ark still factual?" Sun says they still stand by the account as being accurate, even in the face of the evidence given by Larue. "Our position is not expected to change unless there is an admission by Mr. Jammal of an elaborate hoax, and how he managed to execute such a clever hoax to convince a professional psychiatrist and several experienced Ark-Ararat explorers that he was telling the truth...or until third party collaborating evidence can substantiate Dr. LaRue's (sic) account of the hoax."

So what does Jammal have to say about all this? According to the AP article, he refused to talk to reporters. According to Skeptics Society Director Michael Shermer, and Dr. Larue, Jammal is not saying anything because he is afraid of getting sued. When REALL contacted Mr. Jammal, he said that, under his lawyer's advice, he had no comment at this time. But the September 1993 issue of Freethought Today has as its cover story an article saying that Jammal will be speaking about the story at the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) convention on October 23. Larue adds that Jammal will lay out the entire story at that convention. The story identifies Jammal as an actor and mimmer, and an FFRF member since 1986.

When REALL asked Sun's David Balsiger what would happen if Jammal came out and admitted that the story was fabricated, Balsiger said that there may be legal implications to hoaxing a network. He also said, "CBS attorneys were trying to speak to Dr. Larue and he would not get back to them." Larue said that he has never been contacted by CBS or their attorneys. Balsiger added that he has talked to Jammal's attorney, and that Jammal won't make any statements until he sees what legal ramifications might result from Sun or CBS against him and Larue.

But even without a direct admission from Jammal, there are questions about Sun's methodology in writing and producing these shows. For example, as the Time article stated, Larue does believe that he was set up as a straw man by Sun. In an interview with REALL, Larue said that when Sun came to him for their piece on the fall of the walls of Jericho, they brought a statement and asked him to read it. He said it wasn't exactly the statement he would have made, but it was mostly in accord with his views. He went on to say, "I read this and was given the opportunity to expound on why I didn't believe it was a genuine historical happening." However, all of that was cut out, and all that was left in when the show aired was the original statement that Sun had brought to him. This was followed, according to Larue, by Dr. Bryant Wood, who went on to give a lengthy discussion of his point, which countered Larue's and favored the Biblical interpretation to which all three of Sun's shows have been slanted.

Farrell Till, editor of The Skeptical Review, feels the same way of his own appearance on Ancient Secrets of the Bible, Part II ("Logic Abuse and CBS", June 1993). Sun came to Till with a script, the same way they came to Larue. Till was told he could change it, and he did so, with the understanding that his changes would remain in the show. Instead, his time was cut down to very little, mostly representing what had been originally scripted, and he was dropped altogether from one scene, replaced by Carol Dickinson, a professor of psychology who simply read the script.

In his interview with REALL, Sun's Balsiger discussed the interviews. "Being entertainment, it's a scripted show," he said. "But when it comes to the experts, they have the liberty and the rights to [put] what they're saying any way they want, the only requirements being that they cannot be excessive on time, make [their] point fairly quickly, and [they] can't go off on a tangent where [they're] going to get five minutes, because it doesn't happen. Most of our experts always

changed something in the script." He said they try to base the script on what they think the expert will say, based on research that they've done, but they don't hold them to it.

In the case of Farrell Till, Balsiger said, "he had three scenes and wrote a better argument for all three scenes and that's the way we shot it." But, he said, "even though we shoot an interviewee doesn't guarantee it's going to get in the show, it doesn't guarantee that their piece may not be shortened, it doesn't guarantee that it won't be edited in some way."

Why is the editing necessary? Again according to Balsiger, "the show was over 2 hours too long. We haven't done a show yet that hasn't been at least an hour [too] long. What happens is that we attempt to keep as many interviewees in as possible, [so] we have to shorten their pieces. Maybe they were speaking for a minute, they get shortened to 30 seconds. A sentence or two is cut off the end or somewhere, not to change their point of view or anything, but to let them make the longest point they are making in shorter period of time."

"I'm not sure exactly what happened in [Till's] case. It may not have been the duration of what the interview was. We also have some other requirements that we attempt to meet in each show: What is our ratio of women in each show? Also, does a person make more than two appearances? He could have been dropped on his third appearance because he already had two appearances and another factor may have been that ... we were way down on our females. There's a lot of factors that go into these shows, and to the viewer it looks like we're rigging something."

Indeed it does. For example, if they only allow a person in twice, why shoot three scenes with him? If they base the script on their research of a particular person's views, why did the psychology professor who replaced Till read the exact remarks that Sun presented Till? Did their research indicate that she had the exact same views as he, and would express them in the same way? Why were both scenes with Till and Larue cut down such that essentially only the original statements, scripted by Sun, were left, even though Balsiger admitted that Till came up with better arguments? Why doesn't Sun ask the interviewees ahead of time which of their arguments should be cut first, if necessary? Balsiger said that they have NEVER done a show that hasn't been too long, so shouldn't they think about editing ahead of time? Why give the interviewees the impression that most or all of what they say will be in the show when it simply doesn't happen? Sun needs to answer all of these questions about their procedures if they expect viewers to stop wondering if they are "rigging something."

So Larue did feel that Sun was setting up a hoax upon CBS viewers, and his friends and acquaintances knew of his feelings. George Jammal knew Larue for approximately seven years, so when Sun came to him about his Noah story, he contacted Larue. According to Larue in his interview with REALL, Jammal started his Ark tale several years earlier to expose faulty research by religious organizations, and had been interviewed by a creationist organization then. Sun saw this interview and called Jammal when they decided to put together their show. Jammal saw this as a perfect opportunity to expose Sun's lack of research. To help in this endeavor, Larue says Jammal got a piece of wood from his backyard, soaked it in various juices, baked it in the oven, accidentally charred it a bit, scraped off the charred material, soaked it in soy sauce, and put it back in the oven. Thus he had his chunk of Noah's Ark. Jammal concocted the story about his companion Vladimir, who supposedly fell to his death, to account for his lack of photos.

Again according to Larue in his interview with REALL, Jammal has never been to Mt. Ararat. He was coached by Larue on what to say to help back up his story. Larue said, "Jammal's part was designed to expose the hoax that Sun International was pulling on the people. We felt that the whole CBS program was a hoax."

Larue went on to say, "It talks about the discovery of Noah's Ark. That's a lie. They never discovered Noah's Ark." He said that calling it "The Search For Noah's Ark" or something similar would have been much more honest. Larue was very blunt in describing his views. "There was no discovery. The title is a lie. The idea that it was a documentary is a lie. The third lie is that they are now explaining it as entertainment only. That was never given clearly in the text."

In fact, the host of the Noah's Ark show, Darren McGavin, stated at the beginning that this was a "non- religious, scientific investigation." To the average viewer, this makes them think of a documentary, not an entertainment show. But Balsiger said all of Sun's shows are contracted under the entertainment division; they're not news, nor documentary. He calls them reality TV shows and says they are "actually not allowed to create news. I personally have gotten in trouble over this issue in the past. Being a researcher, it is my inclination to check this or check that, but on an

entertainment type show, we are not mandated, and matter of fact we [cannot] make news or create news. On an entertainment show, we are actually forbidden from doing that and instructed not to do that. I did it on another occasion and when it was discovered that I had tested an artifact, [which] proved what the interviewee was trying to make, it ended up getting not used, period."

When asked about the narrator calling it a "scientific investigation," Balsiger said it "may be splitting hairs on something that was said by the host, but it should have been pretty clear that our show was an entertainment." Asked how this should have been clear, he indicated that it should have been obvious from the context. He said that news shows and documentaries are produced by the network news side of the network, while this was not. He added, "We've only done entertainment shows over the years. Reality TV shows are entertainment. Always have been, always will be." Balsiger said that he considers shows such as Unsolved Mysteries to also be reality TV shows. However, Unsolved Mysteries makes a point of telling the audience before every airing of an episode, "This is not a news broadcast."

According to Balsiger, we can look forward to more "reality TV" from Sun and CBS. Even though the AP story says that CBS claimed they had no other Sun programs scheduled, Balsiger said that they have a show, Ancient Mysteries of the World airing on CBS in November, which is presently in production, and one on UFOs that will probably air in December. He said there are others under development with CBS. Why didn't CBS mention these in the AP story?

It seems that there are a number of unanswered questions regarding Sun and CBS. L.A. Times TV critic Howard Rosenberg has called for an explanation from CBS (July 7, 1993), but has gotten none. He called their stance an "incredible double standard regarding truth in news and entertainment programming."

So where are the answers? If Jammal admits to having made up the story, will Sun and CBS retract the story publicly and admit that they need to check into their research procedures? Or will they both continue to say that, as "entertainment," they don't need to do any research, and can just present claims? The line between news and entertainment is getting dangerously blurred. When a narrator calls a show a "scientific investigation" but the viewer is expected to somehow realize that it is just "entertainment," that line has been removed altogether. [David Bloomberg is an environmental engineer and Chairman of REALL. He writes the monthly "REALLity Check" column in this newsletter and has several writing projects in progress.]

{CBS DOCUMENTARY CONTROVERSY}

Farrell Till's Letter to CBS [Editor's Note: This is the complete text of Farrell Till's letter to CBS criticizing the network for broadcasting the Sun Pictures' shows as documentaries. He sent a similar letter to Sun and got the form response dealing with the Time article (see earlier article). To date, he has not received a reply from CBS. Till gave his permission to REALL for reprinting the letter.] CBS 51 West 52nd Street New York, NY 10019 Sir/Madam: I am writing to register my protest of biblical fundamentalist programs such as The Incredible Discovery of Noah's Ark and the Ancient Secrets of the Bible_ series. Since I appeared as a critic on the second segment of Ancient Secrets, I trust that my complaint will be judged worthy of more than just a form-letter response. Shortly after The Incredible Discovery of Noah's Ark aired, I was contacted by Sun International Pictures, Inc., to appear in Ancient Secrets of the Bible II. Having seen the original Ancient Secrets as well as the farce about Noah's ark, my reaction was to laugh when the company representative told me why she was calling. I thought that would end the matter, but company officials kept calling the switchboard at the college where I teach to leave messages for me. Finally, I returned the calls and was promised that I would be permitted to write my own script if I would agree to appear on the program. The writer-director David Balsiger sent me a faxed copy of the script for the Samson and Delilah segment on which he had written a message telling me that my scenes could be "worked over to make stronger arguments if we don't get too long, change the subject completely, or get so complex the viewer can't understand the point being made." When I read the script, I was appalled at the shallowness of the scenes that had been assigned to critics of the story. After I had rewritten my three scenes to put some real critical substance into them, I called Balsiger and read my script to him. He approved it and assured me that this would be the script that would be used in the filming. During the filming, I did about ten takes of these scenes, each of which followed exactly the script I had submitted. When the program aired, much of what I had said was cut from one of my scenes, and another scene was cut entirely. In my place, Carol Dickinson, identified only as a "professor of psychology," did the third scene and read the superficial statement that was in Balsiger's original script. Needless to say, I had a bit of difficulty understanding how a "professor of psychology" would have the qualifications to pass critical judgment on a biblical issue, especially when she was doing nothing except reading from a prepared script.

This criticism may sound strange coming from me, since I myself am a college English instructor. However, I do have recognized credentials in religion, including degrees from a religious institution and work experience as a clergyman and foreign missionary. Perhaps Ms. Dickinson also has credentials other than her teaching experience in psychology, but nothing was stated in the program to indicate that. All that she did was to read a prepared script, and any person literate in English could have done the same. For your information, I am enclosing a resum, that will verify my qualifications to criticize the way this program was presented. The obvious intention was to further the cause of biblical fundamentalism. On this subject, I consider myself knowledgeable enough to affirm without fear of successful refutation that biblical fundamentalism runs completely contrary to the conclusions of responsible biblical scholarship. For your network to present a program so flagrantly intended to convey the fundamentalist view that the Bible is accurate in everything it says was completely irresponsible. If you wish to schedule productions like these, you certainly have the right to do so, but they should be presented as movies and not as documentaries. The general public is appallingly ignorant of the Bible, so the average person seeing these productions will assume that there are scholarly reasons for believing that the Bible is the inerrant word of God. The falsification of facts on news programs aired by NBC cost an executive his job. The cost should be the same whoever is responsible at CBS for the airing of such programs as these fundamentalist productions from Sun International Pictures.

Sincerely,
Farrell Till

Predicting the Lottery by David Bloomberg

Recently, a self-proclaimed psychic has been touring the Midwest, claiming that he can and has predicted correct lottery numbers. I have studied his methods and determined that you, too, can make a living by doing this. Here is a step-by-step instruction manual.

1. Contact radio/TV stations and/or newspapers in the town you wish to visit. Tell them you'll be around for a few weeks and get them to interview you when you come to town - it's free publicity.
2. When on the radio or TV, pick 3 numbers. Say that these are the numbers that you predict will come up. However, you don't know in what order they will appear, so people should "box" them (meaning play them in every possible order). Also, let people know that these numbers may not come up for three weeks or so.
3. Mention a phone number at which you can be reached for private readings.
4. Sit back as the calls for personal readings come in, and you make money.
5. Meanwhile, the lottery is played every day. Your chances of hitting are as follows: Random pick is 1 in 1000 chance for a 3-digit drawing. But you have told people to "box" the numbers, so that increases it to a 6 in 1000 chance. It may not come up for 3 weeks, so multiply by 21, for a 126 in 1000 chance. And if the numbers happen to come up in the fourth week, you can take credit then, too, which brings the chances to 168 in 1000. If you do several different readings on the air, say 3 (which this supposed psychic did), you have just tripled your chances to 504 in 1000, or better than 50%.
6. If your numbers hit, people will remember your prediction (or you can remind them), and you will become temporarily famous in town, with lots of people wanting you to do readings for them. You can stay in town and let the money roll in for as long as your celebrity status lasts.
7. For an added bonus, try picking the 5-number Little Lotto or 6-number Lotto once in a while. If you miss, see number 8 below. If, on the off chance, you actually hit, you could become famous across the country and may make as much as if you had actually played those numbers.
8. If the numbers don't hit, it's no big deal. You were only planning on staying 3 weeks or so, and can be out of town by the time your numbers were "supposed" to have hit, so nobody can follow up. Besides, very few people remember failed predictions anyway. You've already made some money from readings during those weeks, and you can move on to

another town, to start the cycle all over again.

There you have it. But if anybody makes any money off of this plan, I want 10%.

REALLity Check by David Bloomberg

What a combination I have for you this month. From witches to creationists, from alternative medicine to the American Medical Association.

REALL in the News

Of course, the item of greatest interest to REALL members (I hope) is that REALL made it into the newspaper again, in several ways. Doug Pokorski of The State Journal-Register wrote a great article about Robert McGrath's presentation the Friday beforehand (August 13). A quick survey of attendants at the presentation showed that the article drew about 10 people that otherwise would never have known about it! See below for other newspaper mentions.

Can't Break With Tradition

In the finest "REALLity Check" tradition, we have another bit on "alternative medicine". The State Journal-Register, Health and Fitness Section (8/23), had two articles about alternative medicine and the recently established Office of Alternative Medicine, under the National Institutes of Health.

Overall, the article was mostly a report, not taking any sides. Personally, it would have been nice to see a little more research on the specific "therapies", but it could have been worse. Several things that could have pointed out are that the existence of such a governmental office does not validate the supposed therapies. It is because so many people are spending billions of dollars on these methods that the office was formed, to try to figure out if any of them have merit. Until scientific testing is done (double blind tests, etc.), we cannot know which, if any, of the methods are valuable.

Hopefully, strict testing will eradicate some of the myths and perhaps put and end to some of the wilder claims made by some alternative health proponents.

REALL Chairman/"REALLity Check" author David Bloomberg had a letter to the editor published on this topic on September 12th. The letter went into a few details about alternative medicine that regular readers of this column have already seen, especially those who just read the preceding paragraph. In particular, homeopathy was singled out as having been tested a great deal already, with no positive effects, though there is always the possibility that actual scientific tests may show some use for other alternatives.

Creationism in Vista Schools

Out West, in Vista, CA, the school board has managed to figure out a way to get creationism into the public schools. According to a Chicago Tribune front page article (August 25), the board was opposed by the school district's own teachers' association, but apparently ignored them.

The resolution that was passed called for enhancing scientific education by having teachers present "scientific evidence that challenges any theory in science." Heck, any good science teacher should do that! It certainly sounds innocuous enough. However, the first draft of the resolution shows the real intent. It said, "to enhance positive scientific exploration and dialogue, weaknesses that substantially challenge theories in evolution should be presented." (Emphasis added) Somebody at the first hearing pointed out that the school district was likely to get sued, and lose, due to the original language, so they changed it. But the intent is still clear. Further evidence is that the lawyer who drafted the Vista board's policy change, David Llewellyn, does "legal work on behalf of conservative Christian causes across the region" according to the article.

The article was well-researched, and brought out most of the points that need to be shown about creationism and the public school system. The most important fact is, of course, that a 1987 Supreme Court decision said the teaching of creationism as science in the public schools is unconstitutional, as it violates the separation between church and state. Now it looks like creationists are trying a new direction to sneak creationism into schools without calling it "creationism". In case anybody wonders how a situation in California is pertinent to schools here in Illinois, remember

that most textbook manufacturers look to California and Texas for guidance in writing textbooks. Also, the situation in Vista is only one part of a national campaign to get creationists elected to school boards. According to the article, last year this campaign succeeded in getting 3,611 "conservative Christians" into school boards across the country.

On a heartening note, the two letters which were published in response to the Vista article were both against the teaching of Creationism in public schools (September 4). A later letter (September 13), apparently in rebuttal to those two, attacked science in such a haphazard way that the writer managed to contradict himself several times in only a few paragraphs.

Extra Credit: Turn Your Classmate Into A Newt

Also out in California, and also reported by the Chicago Tribune_ (August 10), school vouchers are being put to a vote. These would, among other things, allow parents to use some money that would have gone to the public schools to send their children to private schools. It is often, though not by any means only, supported by the same people who want creationism taught as science. Why? Because this would allow them to use public funds to teach religion.

But that isn't really what this portion of "REALLity Check" is about. It seems that some witches have decided that this voucher system would be a great idea, but not exactly in the manner many other proponents want. The Contra Costa Pagan Association said that they intend to form a school if the voucher proposal is passed. According to the article, a pagan school would teach regular classes, plus one period per day of pagan lore, including "how to burn sage to `cleanse energy.'"

How can they hope to teach science in such an atmosphere that is so contradictory to scientific method. Or do most schools mix physics class with energy cleansing? Most readers would probably hate to think all their energy has been dirty up `til now.

False Memory Syndrome The State Journal-Register had an article (August 20) about a \$3.5 million lawsuit being brought by Steve McCaffrey against the Rev. Robert Vonnahmen for alleged sexual abuse from 12 years ago, which McCaffrey just remembered recently. One portion of the article said that McCaffrey claimed that it is common for victims of childhood sexual assault to repress those memories. What The State Journal-Register didn't say was that there is little or no scientific evidence that these sorts of memories really can be suppressed. There is evidence that they can be created by therapists and/or improper use of hypnosis. There is no way to tell, from this one article, if this may be true here, but it bears watching.

A letter on this subject, written by REALL Secretary/Treasurer Wally Hartshorn was printed on September 6. In that letter, he pointed out much of the above information (OK, "REALLity Check" borrowed much of the above paragraph from his letter).

Speaking of False Memory Syndrome (FMS), Pamela Freyd, of the FMS Foundation, sent in an article from Clinical Psychiatry News (August 1993) about the American Medical Association's (AMA) position on "memory enhancement" techniques. In summary, the article states that the AMA regards such techniques in child sexual abuse cases "to be fraught with problems of misapplication." This statement is part of a resolution adopted without comment during the annual meeting of their House of Delegates. The resolution also called for their Council of Scientific Affairs to evaluate "the validity of techniques used to help patients recall childhood experiences."

A 1985 AMA report had stated that accounts of events elicited through hypnosis "can involve confabulations and pseudomemories," but did not deal directly with "repressed memories" of childhood abuse.

She Should Have Known

Those people who heard Detective Bruce Walstad speak at the REALL meeting in April may recognize the name "Ruby Stevens." Walstad mentioned her as one of the "fortune tellers" he has met. Well, it appears she has found herself in trouble with the law.

Again, those who were at the meeting should remember that fortune telling itself is not a crime. However, promising something, such as curing a curse, for a sum of money is. According to a Chicago Tribune article of September 9, Ruby Stevens has been charged with accepting \$300 in return for removing the "black aura" and "curse" from a Bloomingdale

resident.

Stevens' lawyer argued that the charge of theft should be dismissed because it doesn't state that the client held a "reasonable belief" that Stevens could actually help solve her problems. The lawyer also argued that "a reasonable person would know that Stevens couldn't really purge an aura or a curse from anyone's life." (_Tribune quote) The judge denied the motion to dismiss.

This case is interesting in that the fortune teller's own lawyer is apparently arguing that a reasonable person wouldn't actually believe the claims allegedly made by the fortune teller. Well, "REALLity Check" has to agree, but should the court be making judgments about what is a "reasonable" belief and what isn't? Luckily, the judge didn't seem to think so.

Hello X-Files

A few months ago, "REALLity Check" said good-bye to the Fox show, Sightings. To replace that show, Fox has put on a new show, The X- Files. At least they admit this one is fiction, though they call it drama when it should probably be labeled as a comedy.

It's pretty easy to sum up this show in a few words: The government is bad. UFOlogists are right.

Ok, in a few more words: There is a conspiracy to cover up evidence dealing with aliens. The FBI sends out agents to debunk everything, and evidence is hidden away in a secret Pentagon warehouse (remember the scene from Raiders of the Lost Ark_?). When a rogue agent with political connections starts examining some of these cases, the FBI assigns a scientifically-trained agent to report on him. Of course, the rogue is right and the scientist is all wrong.

The script of the premiere could have been taken out of almost any generic pro-UFO book. Already there are rumblings within the UFO community that this show is using "real" case histories, and that the government is preparing us to eventually reveal the reality of alien contact. Of course, that has been said for years about various TV shows, movies, etc., but that doesn't seem to phase some.

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