

The REALL News

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The official newsletter of the Rational Examination Association of Lincoln Land
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Electronic Version

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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.

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REALL

P.O. Box 20302

Springfield, IL 62708

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From The Editor -- Bob Ladendorf

As this newsletter was about to go to press, I heard on National Public Radio and read an article in the Chicago Tribune about the new information exposing the famous 60- year-old Loch Ness "monster" photo as a hoax. According to an investigation by a London newspaper, the photographer has now admitted it as a hoax. The "monster" turns out to be a toy submarine.

Although there may be skepticism about this truth professed by the photographer, his story certainly seems to vindicate many scientific investigations of Loch Ness essentially casting doubt on the lake's ability to hide such a behemoth. As we have learned before at REALL, extraordinary claims deserve extraordinary proof_ by the claimant.

Some may be saddened that another whimsical creature is only a twisted figment in somebody's imagination. I don't feel that way; arriving at an answer to a vexing question is much more illuminating about the human condition. This hoax, along with the retraction of child abuse in the Bernardin case (see David's "REALLity Check" on page 4), are two bright spots in the struggle of reality against tyrannical scamming.

Two other articles in this issue concern debates between skeptics and and paranormal supporters. The lead article by Dr. Karen Bartelt is a report about the Till-Hovind debate about the validity of purported ancient events, such as the rescue of animals in Noah's Ark and the physical cause of the great worldwide flood. The other one by Inv. Bruce Walstad details a TV debate between a psychic and him. Both articles illustrate how important it is to confront the unscientific presentations of paranormal advocates without alienating audiences from understanding scientific facts.

Hope you enjoy this issue.

/s/ Bob Ladendorf

From the Chairman -- David Bloomberg Wow! We're going to have to have Professor Malcolm Levin come speak to us again!

Besides the fact that the presentation was very interesting and enjoyable, we had one of the best attendances of the year. Plus we brought in two new members, two renewals, and a new Patron in the person of REALL's longtime friend Ranse Traxler.

Other renewals from our first group of members have also been rolling in, though it looks like there are a few who will miss this issue. If your label says this is your last issue, don't let that happen to you!

It's been a busy month for me. I was interviewed by Randy Dean on KROC in Rochester, Minnesota, and one in Texas, and have been called by a station in San Francisco, California, though I haven't yet been able to finalize anything with them as of this writing. Plus it seems that I've been bombarded with pseudoscience this month, with acquaintances talking about how great their "psychics" are while ignoring obvious flaws, a local store selling homeopathic "remedies", and a greater-than-usual bunch of stories in the media. Phew.

But enough of that. It's *PLUG TIME*.

Go to Barnes & Noble, pick up the most recent issue of Skeptic magazine, take it home, and read it. This issue focuses mostly on false memory syndrome, but also has articles by James Lippard and yours truly on the Sun Pictures/Noah's Ark hoax. If you can't get to the bookstore, or if they're out, let me know and I'll make sure you can buy a copy!

Creation/Evolution Info: If you hear about anything related to the teaching of creationism in Illinois public schools, Ranse Traxler would like to know about it. He will even keep you anonymous if you so request. Send any info to him at P.O. Box 462, O'Fallon, IL 62269-0462.

/s/ David Bloomberg

===== On the Till-Hovind Debate by Prof. Karen E. Bartelt, Ph.D.

On Sept. 11, 1993, Kent Hovind, a "creation-scientist- evangelist" from Pensacola, Florida, and Farrell Till, English professor and editor of The Skeptical Review, met in public debate at Faith Baptist Church in Pekin, IL. Although the topic of the debate was "The Genesis story of the flood is scientifically accurate in all details," Hovind distributed to the audience a handout ("Debate #7") that was a generalized attack on evolution. The paper warned the audience to watch for "desperate measures" and "illogical ideas" that the evolutionist could be expected to use during the debate. Among other things, the paper listed ad hominem arguments, ridicule and scorn, citation of majority opinion, and various appeals to scholarship. Additionally, the paper stated that the evolutionist would "change the subject to avoid answering the opponent's questions and comments."

The debate was supposed to be comprised of a 30-minute opening statement each, 20 minutes of rebuttal each, and a question-and-answer period (questions sent in by the audience). Hovind's opening statement was nothing but his well-traveled slide show. He opened by stating that all evolutionists believe that anyone who is a Bible-believing Christian is ignorant. Some other highlights: An 11-foot skeleton has been found in a coal mine in West Virginia_proof positive that pre-flood humans were bigger (so where is this skeleton now, Kent?); the geologic column doesn't exist anywhere in the world; Noah's ark contained only babies, and only single "kinds." There was a relatively new (for me, at least) twist_the 23.5 degree tilt of the earth happened during the flood. A giant "ice meteor" which, because of its low temperature was magnetic, banged into the North Pole, dropped mammoths in their tracks, the vapor canopy collapsed, and the earth was flooded to a depth of 12,000 ft. As Dave Barry says, "I am not making this up." The presentation was rapid-fire, leaving no time for the audience to digest a topic before the next slide was flashed. Indeed, for someone who told the Peoria Journal Star that he does the show 700 times a year, the presentation was unpolished, and the slides were of poor quality.

Farrell Till accurately defined science as being outside the realm of the supernatural. He spoke of the polystrate Specimen Ridge trees in Yellowstone Park as evidence of multiple volcanic burials and attacked the seaworthiness of the ark. The audience was asked to consider how probable it was for a lone man or small group to build a huge ark without modern tools. All-wooden ships have a maximum length far below the purported length of the ark (indeed, this was one reason that the shipbuilding industry turned to steel), and the audience was encouraged to search the references Till provided concerning shipbuilding. Till asked if such a ship did manage to stay afloat, how did the cargo survive the rough seas described by other creationists? How did the crew handle the 40 tons of manure produced by an elephant in a year? Finally, if, as Hovind asserted, only a few "kinds" were present on the Ark, then Hovind must also admit that all forms of bovids, from bison to cattle to deer, evolved rapidly after the flood_something no "evolutionist" would ever state.

Hovind's rebuttal was to place God in the same bracket as electrons and gravity natural particles/forces which cannot be seen, either! (Never mind that the effects of electrons and gravity are easily observed). He stated, without evidence, that humans "back then" were not only bigger and longer-lived, but had higher IQ's. Thus they could build the pyramids, a feat we humans of today could never accomplish. (Two points here. Apparently not very many skeletons/mummies have been found associated with the great pyramids_grave robbery took its toll on archaeological evidence. However, those that have been recovered are normal- to-small-sized humans. Second, no archaeologist has ever referred to water damage either inside or on the outside of the pyramids). Hovind stated that the Specimen Ridge trees have no roots (flatly false_roots are clearly visible in photos of the trees). God brought the animals to Noah and took care of all the little incidentals (like tons of manure). Hovind encouraged the audience to be polite to Till because after all, "He is not the enemy, he just works for him." Hovind admitted he couldn't prove most of his assertions, but that Till could not, either. Admitting that, one is forced to wonder why he agreed to debate the affirmative in the first place!

Till pressed the issue that since there were seven pairs of each type of clean animal on the ark, that meant 14 giraffes slopping about the ark on stormy seas, like it or not. How did they survive? He pointed out that the largest pyramids are in the Americas, not Egypt, and even according to Hovind's chronology must, therefore, be "post-flood." He closed by pointing that Hovind's assumptions_a vapor canopy, a level antediluvian earth, smarter people, were not supported by evidence.

The audience was asked to submit written questions for the final session.

Concerning a question on missing links, Hovind stated that "Lucy" was not a missing link at all but a chimp that was assembled from bones found at sites miles apart. He said, "I wish I could have seen the train that hit that chimp." Of course, it is well known that Lucy was recovered over about 50 square meters of ground.

Hovind was asked what the anteaters ate the day the ark landed. He replied that they were vegetarians_pre-flood and immediately post flood_and that special diets were not necessary then or now. Even now "Pandas don't eat just bamboo. They love meat. Ask any zookeeper." Perhaps that is why pandas are doing so well in the wild right now! Till replied that you can't have generalist animals on the one hand, and then, on the other hand, argue that the yucca plant and pronuba moth were obviously created for each other.

Till pointed out that it was an anachronism that the ark would have been sealed with pitch, because this is obviously a coal (post-flood) by-product. Hovind stated the word "pitch" could have meant any oil_corn oil, for instance. I will have to pass this new use for corn oil on to the Illinois Department of Agriculture_let's grease up those boat bottoms. Till stood by the translation of the Hebrew word; it had to be a petroleum product.

Hovind was taken aback by my question on the tremendous amount of heat that would have been released by 40 days and 40 nights of rain (Soroka and Nelson's J. Geol. Ed. article). He talked instead about craters being evidence for an "ice meteor" and said this was all on faith. He changed the subject! Till, who had the article in hand expanded on the problem and made the reference available to the audience.

As I reread Hovind's handout, it became clear to me that Hovind is his own best example of "illogical ideas" and "improper tactics." He certainly resorted to an ad hominem argument and "ridicule and scorn" when he implied that Till worked for the devil, or the blanket statement that evolutionists considered "Bible-believing Christians" to be ignorant. He changed the subject frequently when backed into a corner, and had to resort to "It's all on faith"_essentially falling back on the "majority opinion" in the church at the time. And although his academic credentials remain somewhat of a mystery (He claims B.S., M.S., and Ph.D. degrees in education but has never said from where), it was clear that with his breathless presentation, his intention was to wow the audience with largely unsubstantiated "facts" so that they would see him as the authority, and "see his diploma."

Was anyone swayed? Unlikely. The bulk of the audience was clearly unable to understand how science differs from the supernatural. They became defensive and irritated whenever Till mentioned, "...but it's just not science." They were for the most part quiet, although a few choruses of "Amens" resounded when they felt Hovind had made a point. The moderator/minister is to be complemented. He was polite to both parties and clearly kept a lid on what could have been a volatile situation. [Dr. Bartelt is an assistant professor of chemistry at Eureka (Illinois) College. Reprinted from The Skeptical Review (Winter, 1993-94), with revisions by the author in February 1994.]

===== Another Psychic Encounter by Detective Bruce Walstad

In October, as the 1993 Professionals Against Confidence Crime (PACC) Seminar was being held, PACC Board of Director Dave Binasz received and returned several phone calls to a talk show producer from CLTV News, a 24-hour news network here in Chicago. The producer was putting together a show on fortune telling and was looking for someone to present the skeptical point of view on a panel, which included three psychics, an attorney representing a local Gypsy fortune teller and a lawyer from the ACLU. Dave and I both talked it over and figured it was not a good plan to get involved. We begged off and told the producer to look into fortune telling a little on her own before she did the show.

A few weeks passed and the producer called Dave and me again, and it seemed her opinion and beliefs in fortune telling had changed a bit. She had gone to several fortune tellers, including a local rock reader, and came away quite convinced she had been taken. She again asked Dave and I to participate, which we agreed to.

The show format was now to be video tape of the encounters she had, one psychic, Melody Joy, and me.

As I arrived at the studio, I noticed a woman entering ahead of me. As I got to the security desk, she was signing in. I peeked over her shoulder, and saw her signature, "Melody Joy." I stepped back, and a moment later, she turned and saw me standing there. I put my hand to my forehead, squinted a bit, looked in her eye, and said, "Melody Joy, right?" She

was not amused or amazed.

We were ushered off to the green room where Dave was already waiting. We were not in the room two minutes, and Melody, who appeared to be a bit on the nervous side, went to the washroom. She returned just in time for the producer to take her and me to the set.

While we were sitting on the set waiting, Melody asked me if I had ever done this before. I said, "Done what?" She replied, "debate a psychic on TV." I told her I had and then ran off the list of shows I have been on and the names of the psychics I had debated. She said this was her first time and seemed a bit nervous.

The live show began, and the hostess said a few words and then showed her videotape encounters with the psychics she had visited. She also showed a few taped interviews with a lawyer and another police officer.

The videotapes and the hostess's remarks were not exactly complimentary to psychics.

The hostess's first question was to Melody, asking her about her psychic powers. Well, her response almost caused me to fall right out of my chair. She said she has no secret or special power, only a talent she has developed over the years. Not once did she mention she had any kind of gift, power or paranormal ability.

As the show continued, I brought up the tactic of "cold reading" that most psychics use. She explained she does not use that method of fishing for information, then did a complete turnaround and admitted she did. She did come out with a few off the wall remarks which did not sit well with me, and the camera caught me rolling my eyes back and squirming in my seat..

They then took a few phone calls from viewers, the first saying that only "gypsy fortune tellers" were crooks, but the other psychics were real. The second caller wanted to comment about some psychic horse she knew of. They did not let her on. Too bad, I thought that would have been interesting.

The show concluded, and Melody did not have much to say to me afterwards. All in all, I felt the show was done very well. We were both given equal time, and the hostess seemed pretty skeptical of the whole matter. I think any open-minded viewer would have walked away from it with a skeptical point of view regarding psychics. [Reprinted from the Jan. 1994 PACC Bulletin. Det. Bruce Walstad is president of PACC and a frequent writer for The REALL News.]

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REALLity Check
by David Bloomberg

Man, oh man. I feel like I've been hit by a truck or something. The media's been overflowing with items of interest to us this past month! For one of these, see the "REALLity Check Extra" in a separate article. Here, we'll start with some good news.

Unreliable Memories and Cardinal Bernardin

As most of you have probably heard by now, the charges of sexual abuse brought against Chicago's Cardinal Bernardin have been dropped by his accuser, Steven Cook. In Cook's motion to dismiss the charges, he said, "The memories of sexual abuse by Cardinal Bernardin which arose during and after hypnosis are unreliable." At a news conference, Cook added that, since filing the suit, he had obtained information which convinced him that his memories were unreliable. He further stated, "If I knew at the time I filed the lawsuit what I know now, I would never have sued Cardinal Bernardin."

What does he know now? Well, it might have something to do with some information mentioned in the Chicago Tribune_ (March 1) or Newsweek (March 14) articles on the dismissal . They point out that Cook had been hypnotized in the late 1970s until 1980 by therapist William Wester, Jr., regarded as an expert on hypnotism who worked for the FBI and other agencies, and who has written a book on how to properly hypnotize a patient and make sure the testimony is untainted. No memory of abuse by Bernardin was recalled during these sessions, according to Wester.

However, when Cook went to Michele Moul, a Philadelphia therapist who is unlicensed and runs a graphic arts business, he recalled "memories" of sexual abuse during his second hypnotic session. Moul did not document his memories before, during, or after the session, and she did not tape the sessions either. According to the Tribune, she "would testify that she followed none of Wester's safeguards." Readers may also be interested to note that Moul got her master's degree in applied psychology from, according to Newsweek, "a school founded by a New Age guru, John-Roger, who claims to be the embodiment of a divine spirit."

With all of these problems stacking up, and the fact that there appear to be no independent confirming witnesses or other evidence, it seems that Cook had to take a look at his own memories and decide what to do. I wish that more apparent sufferers of false memory syndrome (FMS) would do the same. Perhaps then there wouldn't be as many problems like the one below.

FMS and Family Disaster

In an unrelated article which appeared in the Chicago Tribune Magazine on Feb. 28, a man explains in detail what FMS has done to him and his family. This is a powerful article to which I cannot do justice here.

Briefly, the author had a college-age daughter who started therapy due to a date rape she had suffered. That therapy brought out "memories" of being abused by his brother-in-law when she was a child. He found this hard to believe, but it got worse. As the therapy progressed, she then accused him of abusing her. His wife, with whom he was having problems anyway, and his son both believed the daughter, so he moved out and had little contact with them for a while. Whenever he denied the abuse, he was told that he just couldn't face it and that he was repressing the memories which showed how horrible he is. When he finally did speak to his wife again, she related that the daughter's therapy had progressed further, and that his wife was also now accused of taking part in the abuse, and that abuse had taken on almost "satanic ritual" qualities. Now she understood how he had felt when wrongly accused.

The son still believes the daughter, and neither are speaking to either parent. Both have unlisted numbers, and the only communication the author has gotten was a letter from his daughter telling him how sick he is.

As I said, I can't capture the feeling of the article very well at all in this short a space. It is a powerful statement on just what FMS can and does do to individuals and families.

Recycled Prophecies

Turning to the lighter side and the world of television, NBC aired Ancient Prophecies on March 1. Even I only made it through half of this two-hour broadcast. When it began, I almost fell out of my chair due to the very long disclaimer. It appears somebody may have learned something from the Sun Pictures/Noah's Ark fiasco. The disclaimer essentially said that it wasn't a news show, that it only showed one side of a controversial subject, that much of the information was only anecdotal, that some of the "psychics" featured on the show had been proven wrong in other of their predictions, etc.

At first I thought this was great! Then REALL Secretary/Treasurer Wally Hartshorn pointed out to me that this disclaimer essentially gave them free reign to say anything they wanted to. They didn't have to present any counter-evidence now. They didn't have to worry about skeptics writing letters to them complaining about the one-sided nature of the show—they admitted it was one-sided! They could basically put any bunk they wanted to into these two hours (and believe me, they did) and have absolutely no repercussions whatsoever.

Maybe I'm dreaming, but wouldn't it be nice to have a show that didn't need a disclaimer, but actually presented both sides of a debate like this in the proper format?

Maharishi, Mozambique, & Medicine

The Maharishi Mahesh Yogi made it to the pages of the Chicago Tribune twice in February! First (Feb. 20) is an article discussing his plans for creating "Heaven on Earth" in Mozambique, a country which only recently came out of a 16-year civil war and a nasty drought.

Several high-ranking officials of the country are taking up meditation with the Maharishi's people, and say they can

"feel the positive effects" on their country. What does the Maharishi get out of all this? Well, he wants to set up three tracts, each with 2.5 million acres, and plant cotton, timber, and fruit. Then his followers would farm and meditate there while he collects a royalty and 80 percent of the profits. I certainly have doubts about whether it will help Mozambique, but it looks like there is at least one person who will be better off.

His other appearance in the pages of the Tribune came within an article about herbal "medicine" (you didn't really think we could go two full months without "alternative medicine" being mentioned in this column, did you?). As I have come to expect in these articles, most of it deals with the claims made by the practitioner and only gets around to the "doubting doctors" in the last few paragraphs. And those darned doctors, they "tend to react with skepticism." Well, imagine that!

According to the article, there are two Illinois "physicians" (one is an acupuncturist and chiropractor) who are trained ayurvedic consultants (wouldn't want to go to an untrained one, would you?). One of these guys is here in Springfield. I'd love to talk to this person, so if any of our readers know who it is, please let me know! Hey, maybe he'd set me up with some Raja's Cup or nectar and ambrosia.

Close Encounters of the FOX Kind A REALLity Check Extra
by David Bloomberg

The FOX network broadcast UFO Encounters on February 22. This has to be one of the worst UFO shows I've ever seen, and that is saying something, folks. Three "cases" were featured on the show.

One, the Carp (Canada) case was determined by UFO believers to be a hoax several years ago (heck, it was the subject I discussed at REALL's very first meeting!). The "investigator" of this case, Bob Oeschler, had been on Sightings and Unsolved Mysteries_ to talk about this case, and he seems to have left a few details out of his version this time. As a very brief overview, this case involves an unknown person (calling himself "Guardian") who sent out videos of a claimed UFO night landing to several investigators; he also sent bad photos and supposed Canadian government documents alleging a conspiracy. What was said in earlier stories about the supposed Canadian government documents was that they were almost certainly fakes, and he wondered why somebody would send them with such a great video. In this show, however, he makes no mention of the likely fraudulent nature of the documents, and the story just mentioned "Canadian government documents" which were sent along with the video. In other words, far from using that information to cast doubt on the case, they use it to support the case!

The other cases featured were a supposed UFO base in Puerto Rico and a UFO crash in Long Island. The Long Island case had been declared a hoax, again, a while back by notables in the UFO camp and even by UFO cheerleader extraordinaire Bill Knell (see Volume 1, No. 3 for article on Knell) in a press release of his. I don't know much about the Puerto Rico case, but I get the impression, from various discussions with people in the UFO area, that it has mostly the same standing as the other two.

Below are some quotes taken from prominent people in UFOlogy. These were in their "reviews" of the show and were in messages written on one of several UFO-related discussion areas on the computer networks: Don Ecker, Director of Research ,_UFO Magazine_:

"Unfortunately for the viewing public, one of the poorest UFO cases in recent years was presented as fact: the Guardian case, or as it was known 4 years ago-the Carp case."

"_UFO Magazine received this case in January of 1990, and we almost immediately determined it to be a hoax. This was stated on ParaNet at that time." Michael Corbin, ParaNet:

"[This show] featured three of the biggest hoax cases to come along since Gulf Breeze. . . .

"Don Ecker received the CARP material several years ago, uploaded it to ParaNet, and quickly determined that it was as smelly as a dead carp with no truth to it. . . .

"All in all, it was a very big waste of airwaves." Chris Rutkowski, Swamp Gas Journal:

"I was one of the recipients of the original Guardian "crash documents" back in the late 1980's, and immediately recognized it as a silly fabrication. Since then, I received more "official" documents from "The White Brotherhood" and the Guardian, which claim that an "Inner Circle" of military/government officials know "the truth" about alien contact and crashes in the West Carleton region.

"The reality is that Clive Nadin, an Ottawa researcher, went to the alleged site of the crash, interviewed many witnesses and surveyed the area. There was **absolutely no evidence** [author's emphasis] of any crash or close encounters."

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