



Shadow of a Doubt

THE MONTHLY CALENDAR OF THE NATIONAL CAPITAL AREA SKEPTICS

NOVEMBER 2000

WITCH TRIALS ALIVE AND WELL IN THE GOOD-OLD-USA

A 15-year-old Tulsa high school student allegedly accused of being a witch and casting a spell on a teacher filed a federal lawsuit in October against public school officials who suspended her last year. Brandi Blackbear, 15, was accused by school officials of casting a hex on her teacher. While the ACLU has defended students' religious beliefs in Wicca and other minority religions, Joann Bell of the ACLU said the Oklahoma lawsuit is believed to be the first in the country involving actual accusations of witchcraft. "It's hard for me to believe that in the year 2000 I am walking into court to defend my daughter against charges of witchcraft brought by her own school," said Timothy Blackbear. "But if that's what it takes to clear her record and get her life back to normal, that's what we'll do." The ACLU complaint is available online at www.aclu.org/court/blackbear_complaint.html.

ADIEU STEVE ALLEN

Most of you have heard by now, skeptic, humanist, free thinker, song writer, comedian, author, scholar, gentleman, and a Renaissance man for our time, Steve Allen, 78, died in his sleep on October 30. He played to a sold-out house Sunday night, rocking the audience with humor, music, and creative thinking for an hour and a half, then spent Monday with his grandchildren, carving pumpkins and enjoying life. He was tired, so he lay down for a short nap, and simply never woke up. It was assumed a heart attack was the cause of Steve's death.

Steve Allen will be missed by all skeptics and free thinkers of all stripes, for his wit and humor in the face of nonsense and irrationalism. His many books on the subject, most notably DUMBTH, focused on the declining thinking skills of people, while his many television shows, most notably MEETING OF THE MINDS, focused on the triumph of the human mind. Steve was the keynote speaker/performer at the Skeptics Society conference in 1997, served on the Editorial Advisory Board of Skeptic magazine, and most recently submitted a letter to be read in honor of Stephen Jay Gould at Festschrift at Caltech. The letter was vintage Allen, mixing humor with an important message about clear thinking. [By Michael Shermer, Skeptics Society]

UFOS

WBFF (45, Baltimore) obtained a tape of a "flying saucer" and interviewed Paul Jaffe, NCAS president, and several other NCAS members for their opinions. The taped interviewed are scheduled to be aired on the 10pm news on November 17th.

GHOSTS AND GOBLINS

With Halloween just over, you may be interested in the following ghost tours that are in the NCAS vicinity (although, with the disturbing story from Oklahoma above, we hasten to add - this is only entertainment folks) [From Washington Post]:

- Capital Hauntings, McPherson Sq. Metro Station, Fri & Sat 7:30, 202/484-1565 www.washingtonwalks.com/tours.html
- DC Ghosts, members.aol.com/ht_a/Waniehol/DCGhosts.html
- Alexandria Ghost and Graveyard tour, Fri & Sat 7:30, 703/548-0100 ww.cais.com/webweave/ghost.htm
- Baltimore Ghost hunters, Box 191 Timonium MD 21094 www.ghostpage.com

TIME TO RENEW?

Check your mailing label. If the renewal date has passed, please send \$20 (for 1 person) or \$30 (for 2-member households) for a one-year renewal to the NCAS address at the top of this page, or you will be dropped as a member.



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Junk Science and the Munchausen Syndrome by Proxy Epidemic

Howard Fishman, M.Ed., M.S.W.

Howard Fishman will explain the evolution of the Munchausen Syndrome by Proxy (MSBP) diagnosis, which provides grounds for accusing parents (usually mothers) of inducing or fabricating illness in their typically medically fragile children. These accusations frequently result in termination of parental rights and criminal convictions up to and including murder.

Mr. Fishman's position is that there is essentially no such thing as MSBP, and that a persuasive body of research is available that implicates medical ignorance, malpractice, and evidence-free ideology as the driving forces behind these diagnoses and prosecutions.

Howard Fishman, M.Ed., M.S.W., is the former director of continuing medical education at Massachusetts Mental Health Center (a teaching hospital of Harvard Medical School) and the Menninger Clinic. He has an extensive and successful record as an expert witness in MSBP cases that have gone to court. He will describe the history of several typical MSBP cases in which he has participated, focusing on the elements of an effective defense in such cases.

Saturday, November 11, 2000, 2 pm - 3:30 pm
Bethesda Branch of the Montgomery County Library
7400 Arlington Road, Bethesda, Maryland
(a short walk from the Bethesda Metro station)



National Capital Area Skeptics Public Lecture Series

FREE admission - Everyone welcome - members and non-members

For more information call the 24-hour NCAS Skeptic Line recording at 301-587-3827

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www.ncas.org