
The South Shore

Skeptic

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Web Surfing for Skeptics and True Believers

Friday, September 19

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Date: September 19, 1997

Time: 7:30 PM

Place: Room 18, The Life
Sciences Building

Baldwin-Wallace College
3036 Front Street

Berea (see map below)

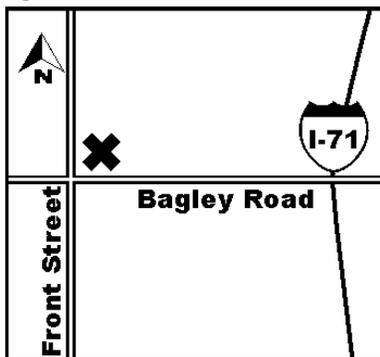
The World Wide Web is a wild and woolly place. Both skeptics and believers are selling their wares on-line. Wil-

liam Cohen-Kiraly, a Cleveland graphic designer and web surfer will be showing some of the more interesting Internet Web Sites of interest to those with a skeptical bent. Besides touring some of the better sites put up

by skeptics, we will also venture to enemy territory.

This should be an interesting meeting as Bill will web surf before our very eyes and give us an idea of what is out there.

-- Page Stephens v



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The South Shore Skeptic is the newsletter of The South Shore Skeptics, a non-profit organization with aims similar to those of CSICOP: The Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal.

We are located in northeast Ohio and dedicated to science education and the investigation of paranormal and pseudoscientific claims.

Our activities include investigating pseudoscientific claims, presenting lectures, publishing *The South Shore Skeptic* six times a year, and maintaining the Skepticism SIG on the Cleveland Free-Net, a free access community based computer bulletin board.

We also provide the public and news media of Northeast Ohio with scientific perspectives on pseudoscientific topics.

Membership in *The South Shore Skeptics* costs \$15.00 a year. The money is used to pay for the publication and distribution of *The South Shore Skeptic* both to members and to the media. We also send two free copies to everyone who asks for information about our activities.

If you would like to receive two free copies of *The South Shore Skeptic*, care to take part in our efforts by joining us as a member, or submit an article for publication in *The South Shore Skeptic*, write us at:

The South Shore Skeptics
P.O. Box 5083
Cleveland, Ohio 44101

If you would like to take part in our activities on The Cleveland Free-Net, dial 1-216-368-3888, with your computer modem, and take part in our discussions.

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Journalistic Contributions to *The South Shore Skeptic* are Welcome

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For Cleveland Free-Net users, my local address is: aa470

You can send me files or ASCII text on line to my Internet address:

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Sound and Other Waves

by John D. McGervey, Ph.D.

When you are in a concert hall, did you ever wonder why some sounds are hard to hear in some locations? These dead spots can have many causes, but sometimes they depend on the pitch of a musical note. At certain places in the hall, for specific sound frequencies, the music reflected from one side of the hall cancels out the sound from the other side, and you hardly hear anything. But just a few seats away you can hear that frequency quite well.

This effect, called interference, can be seen on a rope as well as in sound waves. To see it, place a rope on a smooth floor, hold one end, have somebody else hold the other end, and place a tin can alongside the rope at its midpoint. If you now jerk your end sideways (while the other end is held tightly), a wave will travel along the rope and knock over the can. But if the person at the other end jerks the rope sideways in the opposite direction at the same time that you jerk the rope, the waves will cancel each other out and the can will not be disturbed. The center of the rope will be a dead spot,

similar to the dead spots for sound in the concert hall.

This effect may show up in some unexpected places. A woman recently wrote to *The Guardian* (published in Manchester and London, England) with a puzzling question. She had put some food in her microwave oven to heat it, and when she took it out she found that live ants were in the oven. No, the oven didn't create the ants, but the question was why hadn't it killed them. After all, you are often warned about the possible danger of stray radiation from such ovens if they are not properly shielded, and the poor ants weren't shielded at all!

One thing working in the ants' favor is that they don't have much liquid in their bodies, so the microwaves (which cook meat by heating the water content) would act more slowly on ants than they would on us. That could buy them some time to save themselves. But how?

Remember the dead spots in the concert hall? There are also dead spots

in a microwave oven. In the older ovens you often would find cold spots in your food when you took it out. The cold parts had been in the dead spots. The newer ovens have a rotating plate to heat your food more evenly.

Back to the ants. The ants probably are quite uncomfortable when they are bathed in microwave radiation, so they try to get away. If they find a dead spot they feel better and they stay there and thus survive. What if they are on rotating turntable. Then they can keep moving to stay in the dead spot. How do we know this? We're just guessing. We'll have to put some ants into an oven and watch the ant races to prove it.

v

John D. McGervey, Ph.D. is a professor of Physics at CWRU

What's cooking in the microwave?



I think it's cousin Melvin!



Sonic Booms and Air Travel

by John D. McGervey, Ph.D.

A FEW BOOM-TIME

QUESTIONS:

Q. Out of the clear blue you hear a sonic boom and look up and spot the plane. Can you conclude it just "broke the sound barrier"?

A. Actually, it may have exceeded Mach 1 -- the speed of sound, over 700 mph - hours ago. To observers on the ground, there isn't just one boom but a continuous series of booms that trail behind the plane, much as the wake of a boat reaches different points on shore at different times.

Q. Does the pilot hear the boom?

A. No, because at the point where the plane goes supersonic, it begins outracing the sound.

Q. Is there really a sound "barrier"?

A. Not a barrier but there is a high pressure region in front of the plane caused by the "piling up" of sound waves as the speeding aircraft overtakes hem. But there's nothing magical involved, and no sudden extra energy is required to push on past Mach 1.

Q. How does this wave compression create the boom?

A. Instead of hearing the plane's noise as a continuous drone, you hear all the sound waves at once, squeezed into one loud shock wave or thunderclap.

Q. Sonic booms will sometimes occur in pairs. Why is this?

A. Because both the front and tail of an aircraft create separate booms. Usually these are too close together to be heard as distinct sounds, but with lengthier craft like the space shuttle, nearby observers may hear two booms in succession.

Q. How do cracking whips and bullets create their loud reports?

A. Both unleash sonic booms in miniature (the tip of the whip actually exceeds the speed of sound).

FEAR OF RUNWAYS

A colleague of ours confided: "I know it's a lot safer to fly than to drive. I've seen the statistics. But still I get white-knuckled on takeoffs and landings, and I never feel the least bit queasy behind the wheel. I must have some sort of irrational phobia about

planes. Let's take a look at this:

The risk of being killed in a car is indeed much greater per mile traveled. Some estimates put this at about 20 to 30 times greater for a motorist who's driving in the city and not wearing a seat belt, as compared with a passenger on a commercial flight. The driving mortality risk overall is about 1 in a million per 2 hours behind the wheel (for good drivers). On a plane while cruising, there's virtually no risk at all, but during take-offs and landings, the risk jumps to one in a million per the several minutes required to get in the air or onto the ground.

In fact, as this computes, the per-minute risk during these critical fly times is roughly 10 to 20 times as great as that in a car. While these high-risk periods are extremely short on any given flight (so flying overall remains much safer than auto travel), they're unavoidable and understandably nerve-racking.

Continued on page 8

Future Meetings and Other

Future Meetings

From this date on, South Shore Skeptics meetings will be held every 3rd Friday of alternate months beginning with our September meeting.

Steve Hilliard will be in charge of our November meeting, and Page Stephens will take care of the January meeting. Our next two meetings will be in March and June.

If anyone would care to take care of additional meetings please contact Page Stephens at 216-676-4859.

There is no law which says we are restricted to meetings on alternate months, but we would need someone to step up and organize one.

Board Meeting

There will be a board meeting after the September presentation at which we will discuss our application for non-profit incorporation under US statute 501 (c)3.

Our Apologies

Our apologies for not getting back earlier to those who wrote us asking for information about The South Shore Skeptics in recent months. Our thanks to Jill Sell whose article in The Plain Dealer

made you aware of our existence.

Two summer meetings which would have featured outside speakers unfortunately fell through for a variety of reasons, and as a result this is the first newsletter we have published in 4 months. Our next years schedule has been set up so there is no danger of this happening in the near future.

Your names have been added to our mailing list, and you will receive two free newsletters so that you can look over The South Shore Skeptic and see what we do.

This issue will also be mailed to the people who signed the attendance sheet at the recent joint SSS/FINO meeting.

We hope to see you at one of our meetings, and if you attend please don't be shy. Introduce yourself to us so that we can get better acquainted.

Summer Board Meeting

The South Shore Skeptics held a reorganizational meeting this summer at which we both planned future events and looked into the possibility of incorporating ourselves. As a result we are in much better shape than we were

previously, and for the first time in memory have a complete schedule of meetings for the coming year.

This may appear to be a small achievement to those who have never run a volunteer organization, but it is the first time we have managed to achieve it in recent years.

We also agreed to go forward with plans for an online presence which Bill Cohen-Kiraly will announce during his presentation on September 19.

Elaine Hilliard is in charge of looking into incorporation, and Bill Cohen-Kiraly and Jim Kutz are in charge of our future online activities.

CSICOP to Hold Coordinator's Meeting

The Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal (CSICOP) will be holding a meeting of representatives of groups with similar aims for groups located in the eastern US and Canada over the Columbus Day weekend in order to coordinate our activities.

Steve Hilliard has agreed to represent the SSS at the conference and will be reporting on the outcome of the

conference in the next edition of *The South Shore Skeptic*.

We are hoping that this meeting will result in new and exciting programs and activities for the South Shore Skeptics.

If anyone has any ideas they think should be brought up at this meeting please contact Steve at the September meeting or call Page Stephens at 216-676-4859.

JREF to Hold a Conference

The James Randi Educational Fund will be presenting a workshop entitled **SOLVED MYSTERIES: a Workshop for Examining Paranormal Claims** on the weekend of October 31-November 2 at the Wyndham Hotel, 1825 Griffin Road in Dania, Florida.

Randi will host the workshop, and he writes that "By the end of the seminar, even participants with no formal training will be of conducting proper examinations of psychic claims and arriving at decisions that are authoritative and valuable."

Having known Randi for some fifteen or so years and having had to call him up on numerous occasions in order to ask him how to deal with problems about how to test paranormal claims I believe him.

"Two major classes of phenomena will be examined at this seminar. The first

consists of consciously deceptive performances, in which the performer uses trickery to produce the effects observed. The second class is made up of the far commoner self-deception errors that naive persons accept as genuine phenomena. The workshop will focus on five main aspects: 1) evaluating the validity of a claim, 2) investigating the quality of the evidence offered, 3) testing the strength of the evidence, 4) controlling the performance, and 5) demonstrating the probable modus operandi of cheating (or error), and offering a compassionate and yet unambiguous means of revealing where the errors lie.

"In addition, research psychologist Dr. Suzanne Hadley, from George Washington University, will reduce the dreaded matter of statistics to a workable set of easily-applied rules, showing participants how to quantify and assess the data they collect."

"Participants will have the opportunity to examine several topics during the workshop including: 'Psychic' James Hydrick and the claimed phenomenon of psychokinesis; a Russian performer who causes objects to roll about and spin dramatically on a sheet of plastic; a would be psychic who offered to take the JREF million-dollar challenge by a 'remote

viewing' demo; a girl in the U.K. who can bend spoons by gentle stroking; a young Japanese girl who can read the symbols written on a scrap of paper held by her inside an opaque cloth bag; 'therapeutic touch', which is practiced in leading hospitals as a healing modality and appears to be only hand-waving witchcraft; and dowsers who claim they can detect objects or substances by means of a forked stick, a pendulum, a pair of stiff wires, or some other 'magic wand' that moves in response to a 'mysterious force.'"

This seminar is open to the public but is not free.

"Prices of registration range as follows, and include all conference lectures, meals and receptions: until September 14, JREF members \$245 and general public \$270; after September 14, JREF members \$270 and general public \$295. To register for the seminar, call JREF at (945) 467-1112. JREF encourages participants to bring video cameras, still cameras, and/or audio recorders. In addition, the organization will provide transportation from the Fr. Lauderdale Airport, and special room rates are available at the Wyndham Hotel." ❖

Dr. Bauer is a surgeon who many will remember for his talks before the South

THE BEST DOCUMENTED UFO CASE OF ALL TIME

Review by Bill Bazik

A talk by Dr. Joe Bauer given at Baldwin-Wallace College, Berea, Ohio, May 16, 1997 for the South Shore Skeptics.

Shore Skeptics entitled "The Alien Abduction Syndrome" and "The Alien Autopsy." Applying his knowledge of surgery, he was particularly devastating in his critique of how the reputed "medical experts" dissected the reputed "alien."

Dr. Bauer started off by noting this is the 50th anniversary year of the "Roswell incident" (the discovery of the remains of an "alien ship" outside of Roswell, New Mexico in July of 1947). He prefaced his talk with the suggestion that the South Shore Skeptics give consideration to changing its name to "Society for Rational Inquiry" as he has found many people think of a skeptic as a person with a closed mind.

He observed that many of the occult and psychic events claimed in current news announcements demonstrate the need for more rational investigations. He urged members to volunteer to aid Page Stephens in conducting investigations in this ever growing

area. He cited how best selling authors, such as Deepak Chopra, cater to the desires of many for magic cures. Local author Belleruth Naparstek, in her book *Your Sixth Sense*, even suggests the dulling of your psychic capabilities may be due to formal education! Dr. Bauer called attention to the \$1,000,000 standing offer by James Randi to anyone that can prove the existence of a psychic phenomena.

In the 50 years since the "UFO crash" at Roswell not one shred of hard evidence has surfaced. However, an entire industry devoted to UFOs has developed. He recommended reading Robert Baker's *They Call it Hypnosis* to understand how "hidden memories" are quite often actually planted by the "hypnotist." He also recommended Graham Reed's book *Psychology of Anomalous Experience*.

The main portion of Dr. Bauer's talk related to the amazing amount of "UFO documents" a self styled "plain

farmer" in Switzerland, Edward Billy Meier, has produced and sold to the media and to the credulous. He has offered over 1,000 photos, 12 movies (8mm) and several video tapes to the public.

Kal K. Korff has detailed this story in his book *The Spaceships of the Pleiades: The Billy Meier Story*. Billy Meier started out in 1973 with a small ad enticing susceptibles to a talk. His claims resulted in an avalanche of support for this charismatic teller of tall tales. His main theme is that he has been chosen to receive telepathic messages from the Pleiades (a cluster of stars in the constellation Taurus). He claims to receive telepathic messages from ladies, such as Asket d Nera of the DAL universe, which direct him to locations where the next UFO will appear.

Dr. Bauer presented portions of a video made by a Japanese TV team interviewing Billy Meier. The interview is studded with

statements such as "only my camera can see the ships" and "the negatives were lost or stolen."

Kal Korff was able to locate some of the first generation pictures. Many of the current pictures are photos of photos and are very blurry. By use of photographic techniques, such as edge enhancement, guy-wires can be made visible. This photo technique also indicated a UFO was not behind a tree branch as claimed, but in front of it. A small model supported by a helium filled balloon and positioned by fishing line guy wires enable Kal Korff to duplicate the photos. Interestingly the shipment of US. helium was first permitted to be shipped to Switzerland in 1974. Korff has demonstrated the reputed UFO landing tracks can be simulated by placing plywood discs on the grass overnight. Meier claimed to have photographed a 21 foot diameter saucer circling a 60 foot fir tree. When questioned about its apparent pendulum motion, he replied that the aliens were only trying to fool us! Oddly, the "60 foot fir tree" does not appear in photographs taken before or after the reputed UFO appearance. In addition, the tree was said to glow for three nights due to radioactivity induced by the spaceship. However, no one living in the

area reported seeing this unique glow in the night.

Meier had been observed buying astronomy books at a local bookstore. Soon after, he claimed to have taken a trip aboard a UFO and to have photographed Venus and "God's Eye." The photos appear to be out of focus versions of well known published photos of Venus and the Ring Nebula.

Dr. Bauer concluded his presentation by noting that much of the general public gives credence to the claim that there is a "government cover-up" regarding UFO landings. Even 50% of a group of college students surveyed believed likewise.

In reply to a question from the audience as to why he was so interested in UFOs, he said his interest is in how the human mind handles such misinformation. He called attention to a new test method utilizing PET scanning. By adding positron-emitting isotopes to glucose, a map may be made indicating locations of brain activity. If only one brain area is affected, it indicates induced information, however, information input from an actual experience results in several areas becoming active. Dr. Bauer observed that fantasy prone personalities do tend to become imaginative and interesting writers.

Asked if he believes life exists elsewhere in space, Dr. Bauer said, as Arthur C. Clark said years ago, that statistically it is very probable. The key word is distance. If life forms superior to us exist on a planet a million light years away, what does it matter to us? ❖

Sonic Booms and Air Travel

(continued from page 4)

THE GREAT PLANE/TRAIN RACE

People say trains are slow. I'd rather fly, they say. It seems obvious that a 500-mph plane will beat a 100-mph train. But those are only top speeds. It's total trip time that counts. On a recent flight from Cleveland to Chicago (320 miles), we kept track of the time from downtown to downtown (typical of business travel).

Getting to the Cleveland airport and checking in took about 40 minutes.

Waiting to board ate up almost an hour (we had to arrive early to avoid being bumped).

Taxiing to the runway and waiting for clearance to

In Memoriam Bill Voss

by Page Stephens

The other day The South Shore Skeptics received the news that our good friend and member, Bill Voss, had been killed in an accident at a railroad crossing in Lakewood, Ohio.

A few months ago those of you who read the SSS read Bill's moving obituary for his close friend Charles Hughes who along with Bill worked so hard to keep the teaching of creationism as science out of the Lakewood school system.

Now, unfortunately, there is no one who can write as moving an obituary for Bill although Rick Rickards and I will do our best to speak about his life and contributions to the rest of us at his memorial service next week.

If you knew Bill you would have loved him. If you didn't I feel sorry for you because his presence at skeptics meetings and after meetings when we would spend time at Pizza King shooting the bull- Bill always was ready with a joke--were memorable.

Here's to you, Bill.

take off consumed another 20 minutes.

After landing, there was more taxiing and more waiting to deplane, 20 minutes, followed by 20 more minutes to grab a cab and then 40 minutes in rush-hour traffic to our destination in the Loop.

Now add the 80 minutes of actual time in the air (some of it spent stacked up over O'Hare airport), and the total was over 4 1/2 hours. Our top speed was 500 miles per hour--but our average speed was about 70 mph.

On the other hand, that 100-mph train averages 80 mph (with four stops) between New York and Washington, DC. Run it from Cleveland to Chicago and you could make the trip in four hours while having dinner on the train. Of course, for longer trips (400+ miles) the plane

will usually get you there a lot sooner, providing bad weather doesn't delay you--or your luggage.

