

Tampa Bay Skeptics

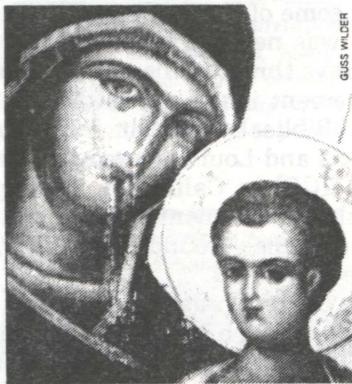
REPORT

VOLUME 2 NO. 2 FALL 1989

"Weeping Icon" fiasco in Tarpon

by Gary P. Posner, M.D.

On Tuesday, July 18, alleged miracles began occurring at the Greek Orthodox Shrine of St. Michael in Tarpon Springs. Tears began to flow from the eyes of the Virgin Mary on one of the numerous icons hanging in the shrine, and within hours, tears were reportedly flowing from five other icons. The Tampa Tribune reported that the Rev. Christos Matos of St. George's Greek Orthodox Church in New Port Richey, who had been presiding over the proceedings at St. Michael's, told the faithful that "It's a sign from God we are sinful, and we shall repent", although the Rev. Tryfon Theophilopoulos of St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Cathedral in Tarpon Springs speculated that "It's a sign of happiness from...the holy mother". But whether happy or sad, Mary's tears have attracted visitors by the thousands, and donations of thousands of dollars.



I received a phone call from Channel 10 (WTSP-TV) on July 21 requesting that I accompany one of their reporters to the Tarpon Springs shrine. So on Monday, July 24, I went to have a first-hand look at the miraculous weeping icon. In my pocket was the large color photograph taken on July 19 that appeared in the St. Petersburg Times on July 20.

After making my way to the front of the line, I was greeted by the Rev. Matos, who anointed me with what news reports stated to be a mixture of the miracle tears and olive oil. As I examined the huge painting of Mary and Jesus hanging high on the wall behind him, I noted that the image, although similar, was not the same one that appeared in the newspaper. I then saw beneath the painting, in a glass-covered frame, a much smaller color photograph matching the newspaper image exactly.

The photograph, as seen in the papers and on TV, is remarkable for its dramatic pattern of apparent tears beneath Mary's eyes. Even more remarkable was my

discovery that the tear pattern in the photo on the wall was an *exact* match to the newspaper photo that had been taken five days earlier! According to the Rev. Matos, the tears had continued to flow daily, requiring him to repeatedly dab them away with cotton balls (he told me that he had just cleared them away again minutes before my arrival). But it was evident that dot-for-dot, the "tear" pattern had remained absolutely undisturbed. When Tampa Tribune reporter Carlos Moncada informed Matos of my observation, he quoted Matos as replying, "It has (changed). The (tear) tracks appear deeper."

Matos explained to me that the white "tears" were not actively flowing during my visit because from time to time they "crystallize", only to later resume their flow. I thus placed my head against the wall to the picture's left, and looked across the plane of the photograph. What I observed was a flat piece of photographic paper, with no "tears" or "crystals" adherent to it or etched into it. Press reports have carried speculation that the "tears" might be due to "humidity", but there was *no* visible moisture present, liquid or crystal. And contrary to Matos' assertion, there was *no* depth at all to the "tear tracks".

Another remarkable aspect of the dots comprising the

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"\$1,000 Challenge" Update:

Test of "psychic" produces chance results

With inspirational hymns playing softly in the background at her Spiritual Center Church, Pinellas Park "psychic" Joan Morin sat in meditation, establishing the crucial link between her mind and the spirit saint who guides her through her performances of psychic powers. Years of reliable information from this inner voice have convinced Morin, and her church peers, that not only is she psychic, but the *most* psychic among many such gifted members of her congregation.

When given the word by Morin that all was in

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TAMPA BAY SKEPTICS
Statement of Purpose
and "\$1,000 Challenge"

Tampa Bay Skeptics, Inc. is a non-profit educational and scientific organization devoted to the critical examination of paranormal and fringe-science claims, and the dissemination of factual information about such claims to interested parties throughout the Tampa Bay area and environs. TBS does not reject claims on a priori grounds, but rather is committed to objective and critical inquiry. We share the philosophy of the international Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal (CSICOP), although we are an autonomous group with no formal ties to CSICOP.

TBS is presently sponsoring a "\$1,000 Challenge" for anyone able to provide evidence of the existence of any paranormal phenomenon. Further details are available upon request.

TBS REPORT is published quarterly. We welcome news clippings, and articles and letters for publication (subject to editing), including opposing points of view. As we are non-profit, **stamped, self-addressed return envelopes are requested with all correspondence!**

Views expressed in articles and letters are those of the author, and not necessarily those of the Tampa Bay Skeptics.

TAMPA BAY SKEPTICS
REPORT

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Perspectives on "Scientific Creationism"

by Jerry L. Touchton

I was a mathematics and science teacher in Louisiana in the late 1970s and early '80s. During my term there, the state legislature passed a law requiring that whenever evolution was discussed in a public school classroom, equal time should be given to "scientific creationism". This edict followed on the heels of the disastrous Arkansas creationism affair, in which a similar law had been passed, but was struck down on constitutional grounds by a judge at the conclusion of a much publicized federal "monkey trial". In an effort to prevent the Louisiana law from suffering a similar fate, creationist forces had the bill rewritten to circumvent constitutional problems. But the law was ultimately struck down anyway by a federal judge without a jury trial.

I was a witness in the Louisiana law proceedings. Although we never got to trial, I did give a court deposition representing the classroom teachers' point of view. I was forced to read up on the creationism movement, and learned quite a bit about their ideas and activities. I found much helpful material, including the publications listed at the end of this article. But the most interesting materials by far were the writings of the creationists themselves.

The creationist movement has established schools and agencies supposedly devoted to non-religious scientific research in support of the idea of Biblical-type creation, and against evolutionary theory, and publishes prodigious amounts of material for use in church schools, libraries, etc. Some of the writing appears deliberately deceptive, some of it merely incompetent, and a great deal of it is quite hilarious. But it was necessary to take these people seriously in court, because they posed a grave threat to the quality of science education.

The creationist movement is not monolithic, but has various camps whose beliefs vary within a Biblical literalist framework. The main camp most involved in the Arkansas and Louisiana movements sprang from the Institute for Creation Research (ICR) in California. Their primary spokesmen, Henry Morris and Duane Gish, are frequently found headlining "creation/evolution" debates at schools and churches around the country, and their early books were crucial to spreading the movement.

The most prominent of creationist books at the time of the Louisiana case was Scientific Creationism, which boasted a list of editors that included Morris, Gish, and a bevy of well-known creation advocates. The book was written in two versions - one for religious schools, and one for public schools (leaving out the Bible verses). I have no doubt that this book is very impressive to people with little knowledge of geology, paleontology, biochemistry, population genetics, nuclear chemistry, or the nature of modern science in general. A carefully written book could persuasively argue that the world is flat, by advancing certain facts and withholding others, arguing out of context, employing faulty premises that seem logical to the uninitiated, etc. This is precisely what the authors did. They argued that the earth is only about 10,000 years old, that man and dinosaur roamed the earth together, that the fossils in the ground were laid down by Noah's flood in 40 days, etc.

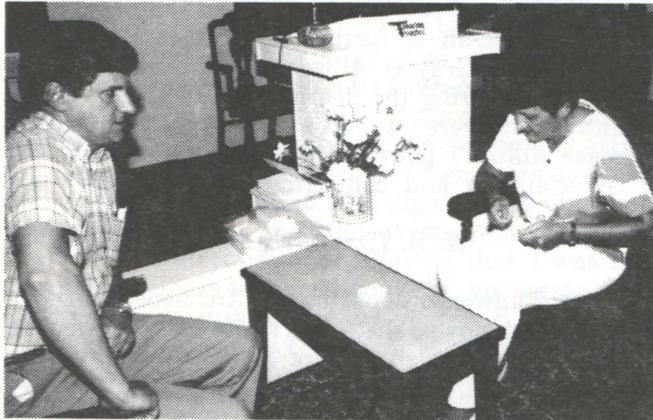
As much as this book did for the creationist cause, it did even more for the opposing forces, for it made claims in black and white that could be responded to. In the years following, a large number of books were written by scientists who carefully showed the errors in creationist argumentation. Very often, the writers explained things that specialists in the field had known for years, but which had not filtered into popular knowledge. In other cases, they gave lessons in elementary logic. These books were welcomed by libraries and schools to provide balance to the issue (the first four references below are among those I recommend).

I'll be writing more on this issue in future articles. In the meantime, you may wish to do some reading on the subject. In reading creationist writings, I always

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("\$1,000 Challenge" continued from page 1)

order, TBS Council member Terry Smiljanich began placing the boxes before her, each either containing an object (facsimile dollar bills supplied by Morin, with Jesus' picture replacing George Washington's), or empty. As the test was blinded, no one in the room, unless psychic, could possibly have known which boxes were which. One by one, Joan meditated, listened to the inner voice from her guiding saint, and declared each box either filled or empty (see photo below).



GUSS WILDER

The boxes were placed in labeled "baggies" which were then stapled securely to prevent any possibility of tampering. Before the test was officially concluded, Morin was allowed to meditate over the baggies, to be certain that there were no "filled" boxes sealed among those that were supposed to be "empty", or vice versa. After so doing, she explained that the feelings she received from the "empty" and "filled" baggies were so different that she was confident of success. And because (to save time and mental strain) she had made a late request that we change the test so as to use the fewest number of boxes necessary to achieve the odds required by TBS before certifying a performance as an apparently true psychic feat (+/- 8,000,000 to 1 by chance alone), she needed to get all 23 boxes correct to be so rewarded (we had previously arranged a format with 100 boxes that would have allowed a 20% margin of error).

The results of this first TBS "\$1,000 Challenge" were unsealed at the press conference that immediately followed. The first baggie opened was labeled "Empty". The first box was removed from it. The lid was removed by Smiljanich, who tilted the box toward the spectators and cameras. The box contained a dollar bill. So did the

second box.

All in all, of the 12 boxes declared "empty" by the saint, as interpreted by Morin through her "psychic" power, 6 were in fact empty, and 6 contained one of her own dollar bills. Of the 11 supposedly "filled" boxes, only 4 actually contained a bill.

Morin's 10 out of 23 performance was well within the +/- 50% range expected from chance alone, and provided no evidence at all in favor of her claim of psychic power [but see Morin's comments on page 7, and below].

TBS Community / Media Affairs

Comments by Posner, Chairman Pat Strong, and Bob Steiner (TBS' guest performer at our Summer meeting) were variously covered by the TV, radio, and print media in recent weeks (see related stories in this issue). Posner also addressed a meeting of the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship in St. Pete. Beach on July 30, and has accepted an invitation to speak at Eckerd College in St. Petersburg on Sept. 20 to a group of faculty, science students, and members of the local Sigma Xi group (the national scientific honors society).

Channel 13 (WTVT) premiered its new daily "Eye on Tampa Bay" on September 5, and as those of you on the "TBS Update Service" were aware (and hopefully some others as well), the topic of its second program was "psychic power", with Posner invited as the skeptic.

Hostess Kathy Fountain, at the suggestion of TBS, had attempted to find an area psychic agreeable to accepting TBS' "\$1,000 Challenge" (to be tested backstage earlier in the day, with the results to be unveiled on the live program). Although several were contacted, and were agreeable to appearing on the program, none was willing to be subjected to a test to determine whether or not his/her claim of psychic power is demonstrable.

The featured "psychic" was "Rev. Geri", who is billed as "the psychics' psychic". She claimed, among other things, that "pyramid power" is a proven fact, and was generally unimpressive. Another guest, Charles Johnson, who claims to be a skeptic-turned-believer, did little more than name-dropping of local psychics who have impressed him. He claims to have psychics' predictions sealed in several safe deposit boxes for eventual release and confirmation. Joan Morin, who was an audience participant, misrepresented her 10-for-23 failure (see above) as a "43% success". Posner (with several TBS members in the audience) effectively presented the rational perspective.

TAMPA BAY SKEPTICS EXECUTIVE COUNCIL AND BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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COUNSEL: Terry A. Smiljanich, J.D., St. Petersburg (Blasingame, Forizs & Smiljanich, P.A.)

SNIPPETS

Dr. Ju Woong Jung, a Toledo, Ohio physician, has filed a religious discrimination suit against St. Luke's Hospital, which had fired him from its staff for "insubordination and willful neglect of duty" for a prolonged pattern of allegedly distressing patients by praying at their bedside. In one instance, according to the hospital, while treating a chest pain patient, Jung engaged in a Bible reading so prolonged and distracting as to upset the patient. Jung was also cited for treating a patient with acupuncture, which is a violation of the hospital's bylaws.

(Washington Post / St. Pete. Times, May 14)



G. William McDonald, director of enforcement for the California Department of Corporations, has released a report documenting how an increasing number of "false prophets" are bilking thousands of people out of millions of dollars. Religion-oriented scams by "Christian" financial planners, involving "divinely inspired" investments in coins, precious metals, and oil and gas partnerships, have cost investors in at least 15 states more than \$450 million in the past five years alone.

(St. Pete. Times, August 8)

Reports from Holy Trinity Church of a life-sized statue of Christ closing its eyes during a Good Friday service and reopening them several days later have been officially discounted. A July 5 report by the Roman Catholic Diocese of Pittsburg stated that there was "no convincing evidence" that the reports were accurate, despite the claims of the parishioners that had attracted thousands of visitors to the small town of Ambridge, fifteen miles northwest of Pittsburg. Photographs taken before and during the period in question were examined, and found to appear "virtually the same."

(St. Pete. Times, July 7)

A Christian Science couple in Santa Rosa, California has been found guilty in the 1984 meningitis death of their 8-month-old daughter. Although acquitted of involuntary manslaughter, Mark Rippberger and Susan Middleton await sentencing on October 12 for child endangerment.

(St. Pete. Times, August 5)

Glasnost has brought not only a taste of democracy to the Soviet masses, but the allure of the paranormal as well. Morning TV now features a healer named Alan Chumak, who waves his hands and cures heart disease (on Tuesdays), allergies (on Fridays), and other ailments on the other days.

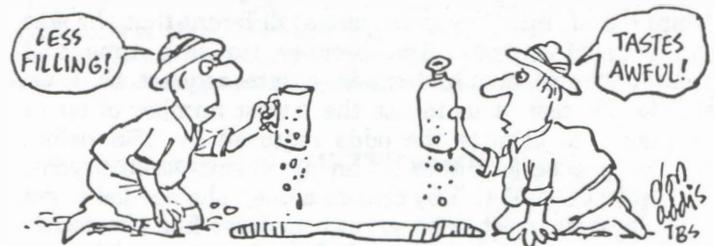
(AP / Tallahassee Democrat, August 11)

In parts of Africa, it is widely assumed that politicians engage in witchcraft to further their careers. Liberia's Defense Minister Gray D. Allison was arrested in June, charged with ordering the death of a policeman, whose blood and organs were used by a sorcerer (a "heart man") to increase Allison's power. Allison has been dismissed from the Cabinet, and conviction could result in his execution.

(L. A. Times / St. Pete. Times, July 23)

From our Budweiser department - Archaeologists have discovered what may be the oldest known beer brewery in the world, in the ancient city of Hierakonpolis, on the banks of the Nile, 450 miles south of Cairo. Jeremy Geller, archaeologist/anthropologist from Washington University in St. Louis, prepared an extract of his recently discovered "iridescent gunk" (apparently composed of Nile water, wheat malt, and date juice), which was found at the four-vat, dung-fired brewery. Said Geller, "I'm describing the beer as gruel with a kick."

(Washington Post / St. Pete. Times, May 21)



All is not well in Cassadaga, the community of spiritualists 25 miles north of Orlando. Bickering and lawsuits, culminating in a bitter March election to determine the members of the board that governs the activities of most of the town's psychics, has "drained the positive energy from this place", according to a local who has formed a rival spiritualist group. And despite the town's overwhelming belief in communication with the dead, the basic tenet of spiritualism, one inhabitant has erected a *Ghostbusters* movie logo on his property. Most of the town's residents make their livings by doing private "psychic" readings, for fees averaging \$35 per session.

(AP / St. Pete. Times, March 26)

[Please send your Snippets to the editor at TBS REPORT]

("Weeping Icon" continued from page 1)

"tears" is their opacity - they are intensely white, obscuring the underlying color of Mary's garment. One might expect "tears", even of the miraculous variety, and even if temporarily "crystallized", to be translucent if not transparent. But this "icon" appeared to my eyes to be simply a professional quality color photograph of a painting that had itself perhaps been dotted with white paint in an effort to simulate the appearance of tears.

Taped to the top of the icon's picture frame was a commercially-printed caption bearing a February, 1987 copyright. The text of the caption began: "The Guiding Mother of God Weeping Icon", and indicated that the photograph had been taken in Chicago, on December 6, 1986 at St. Nicholas Albanian Orthodox Church, where the original painting resides. This painting had attracted national attention at St. Nicholas' two years ago when it reportedly began to weep, although church officials had denied requests for a scientific investigation of the affair.

Somewhat startled, and believing that I was merely observing a mass-produced souvenir photograph of the Chicago icon as it appeared two years ago, I was assured by the Rev. Matos that this was not the case. He told me that this photograph had been hanging in the shrine for seven months, without any "tear" pattern present until the miraculous flow commenced on July 18. I wondered how it was possible that a captioned photograph of the Chicago "Weeping Icon" could have ever appeared tearless, but held my tongue.

Kathi Belich, the Ch. 10 reporter on the scene, interviewed me for that evening's 6:00 newscast, portions of which were also shown at 11 PM. On my drive home from Tarpon Springs, I was "beeped" by Kathryn Bursch from Ch. 44 (WTOG), and stopped at their studio for an interview. Moncada's Tampa Tribune article ran the following day. Al Gardner of WFLA radio interviewed me at length on the morning of July 26, and WTKN's Tom Bowerley the following morning. I was the only source providing skeptical commentary to the press and public on this "hot" story.

I then obtained from a press source an AP Laserphoto of the Chicago icon dated 12/12/86. The "tear" pattern of white dots, although similar, was clearly not the same as that on the Tarpon Springs photo. I contacted Jim Zaluba of the Midwest Committee for Rational Inquiry (MCRI), the local skeptics group based in Chicago. He made a trip to St. Nicholas Church, and informed me that there was by now barely a hint of the original tear pattern visible on the icon. Although no photography of the icon is now allowed by the church, Jim purchased and sent to me the 8x10 color souvenir photograph that they have mass produced. On the back of the photo is the identical caption as in Tarpon Springs. However, the souvenir photo differs substantially from the one hanging in Tarpon Springs, and from the AP newspaper photo of 12/12/86, in that the tear pattern does not consist of white dots, but rather of continuous dark linear streaks.

But it was not until Rev. Matos announced on August 8 that the icons were *again* beginning to weep that reporters began to indicate some skepticism of their own.

On Ch. 44 news on Aug. 9, Kathryn Bursch noted that she had seen no sign of any weeping of the icons that day. The St. Pete. Times article on Aug. 9 stated that the Times requested permission to commission a scientific test of the reported tears, but that the request was denied. Not remarked upon by the reporter was a contradiction now apparent in Matos' story - he was now claiming that numerous icons, including the picture discussed in this article, had wept from July 18-20, stopped, and had only resumed weeping within the past several days. He had claimed in their July 25 article (and to my face) that the picture had been weeping continuously from July 18 through at least the day of my July 24 visit.

Although a few witnesses did report "moisture" on some of the shrine's contents from time to time (the building is muggy, without air conditioning), dissension began to evidence between the two priests overseeing the Tarpon Springs attraction. While Matos continued to allege miracles, Theophilopoulos began in late August to exhibit a more cautious approach. Despite Matos' claims to having regularly witnessed tear flows, and his having been quoted in a July 25 S. P. Times article as asserting, "I tasted those (tears) that came from the icon. There was a sense of salt", Theophilopoulos was quoted thusly in the Times on August 25: "We cannot bill them as tears. I'm not here to deceive the people. I'm here to say the truth."

Theophilopoulos proceeded to call in a representative of the Greek Orthodox Dioces of Atlanta to arbitrate the dispute, and although both the professional press and TBS were denied interviews with the parties involved, Matos is reportedly no longer permitted to operate at the shrine. And press reports as early as August 10 had noted that Rev. Matos has also been transferred from his position at St. George's Church, and is awaiting assignment elsewhere. Furthermore, Theophilopoulos is now refusing to even discuss with the press the matter of the "Weeping Icon" controversy.

But the isolated reports of moisture were not the initial "draw" that attracted the news media, resulting in publicity that attracted thousands of other visitors. The dramatic white "tear tracks" shown in the newspapers, and on TV, which Matos claimed (on Ch. 10's videotape) to have suddenly appeared on July 18, was the main attraction. And in an August 2 conversation with TBS member Guss Wilder, Matos belatedly acknowledged that the streaks had actually been there all along! This second crucial contradiction, which fatally weakens an already pitifully feeble case for a "miracle", has not been reported upon by any of the area's professional journalists.

There remain a number of unanswered questions regarding the Tarpon Springs "Weeping Icon". We know that the photograph is of the Chicago painting, but it is not the same photo that is being mass marketed out of the Chicago church. Who took the photograph? Who developed the negative? Were the white dots on the original painting? Were they the result of tampering of the negative? Who donated the photograph to the Shrine? Was there really moisture on the icons? If so, was it the result of condensation? Or did someone sprinkle water on the artifacts? Or salt water, so that it would taste like tears? Or did the icons truly "weep"??? □

("Creationism" continued from page 2)

like to keep in mind the words of H.L. Mencken: "One belly laugh is worth a thousand syllogisms."

References:

(1) Abusing Science: The Case Against Creationism, by Philip Kitcher (MIT Press, 1982) - May be the best single book, and the most useful if you are familiar with creationist arguments.

(2) Science and Creationism, ed. by Ashley Montagu (Oxford University Press, 1984) - A good collection of essays on various aspects of the creationist problem.

(3) Science on Trial: The Case for Evolution, by Douglas J. Futuyma (Pantheon Books, 1983) - Futuyma is an expert on evolutionary biology, and his book goes into technical detail in explaining why creationist claims are wrong. A very readable book for the average person who wants to dig deeper.

(4) Darwinism Defended: A Guide to the Evolution Controversies, by Michael Ruse (Addison-Wesley, 1982) - Ruse is a historian and philosopher who here restates succinctly the case for evolution.

(5) National Center for Science Education, Box 9477, Berkeley, CA 94709 - publishes a newsletter, and keeps a watch on the creationist movement state-by-state.

(6) Creation/Evolution - quarterly journal available from NCSE.

(7) Judge Overton's Arkansas decision - excellent, and widely published in *Science*, *Academe*, and numerous other journals. Copy also available from me for stamped return envelope.

(8) Scientific Creationism, edited by Henry Morris - the best (worst?) "textbook" on creationism, and the only one you really need, if you ask me. Gives a rather complete view of the creationists' methods and techniques. I don't know about its availability now, but try your library before a religious book shop (don't give these guys any more profit than necessary). Morris has written many books on the subject, so chances are that if you can't find this one, you may find another. And when you read about how the moon's craters were laid down by battles between angels, think about how close we came to having to give equal treatment to this junk in our schools.

* * * * *

Other skeptical sources on the paranormal:

- 1) The Skeptical Inquirer - critically-acclaimed flagship journal of CSICOP.
Box 229 / Buffalo, NY 14215
- 2) Free Inquiry - leading secular humanist journal.
Box 5 / Buffalo, NY 14215
- 3) Prometheus Books - leading publisher of skeptical works. 35-page catalogue.
700 East Amherst Street / Buffalo, NY 14215
- 4) CompuServe Skeptics Teleconference - computer forum for anyone with a CompuServe ID, on the last Tuesday of each month, at 9:30 PM. Type "GO SCIENCE", then after entering the forum, type "CO 2" to enter the conference room.
5000 Arlington Centre Blvd. - P.O. Box 20212
Columbus, OH 43220

"Desperately Seeking You's'n" Department

Tampa Bay Skeptics is desperately seeking:

a) for our members and subscribers whose renewals are past due to *please* forward them *immediately*. Additional tax-deductible donations are also needed and would be greatly appreciated.

b) members who wish to become actively involved in the workings of TBS, including new candidates for our Executive Council, or for our list of Consultants (presently being compiled). Please contact TBS ASAP with your expressions of interest.

c) contributions to the newsletter. If you are not a polished writer, your friendly TBS editor is available to assist you.

d) to know whether or not there is sufficient interest in TBS logo T-shirts to warrant our placing an order. Please write (with stamped return envelope) ASAP.

2nd Randi TV special planned for November

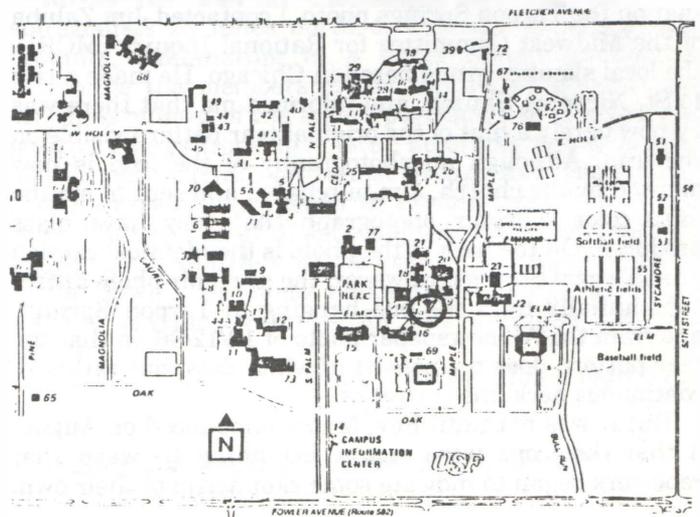
The second installment of "Exploring Psychic Powers - Live!", starring James "The Amazing" Randi, is tentatively scheduled to be televised in November on the Fox network. Presumably, as on the first program, Randi et al. will subject alleged "psychics" to testing, with \$100,000 to be given to anyone who performs successfully.

Monthly CompuServe Skeptics Teleconference

Anyone with a CompuServe ID may participate on the last Tuesday of each month at 9:30 PM by typing "GO SCIENCE", and once in the forum, by typing "CO 2" to get into the correct conference room. **On Sept. 26**, Richard Hoagland, author of The Monuments of Mars, will argue that the "face" on Mars, and other such "anomalies", are the results of extraterrestrial civilizations. **This special conference will begin one hour early, at 8:30 PM.**

Directions to Nov. 13 TBS meeting (see p. 8):

Take I-275 to Fowler Ave. exit. Go east 2 1/2 miles to USF (on left), and enter campus. Make 2nd right onto Elm. Parking area will be immediately ahead on the left. University Lecture Hall is two buildings further on the left (see circled bldg. #48 on map below).



READERS' FORUM

Editor: This is a brief explanation of my interpretation of the outcome of the "\$1,000 Challenge" test taken by myself on July 22. I now believe that to be tested successfully, the situation needs to be a real-life happening in which there is a true need. I am sure that such a situation can be arranged and tested for. Creating an artificial situation was not the right thing to do. I wish to be tested again by TBS, and feel very confident that the next time the test will be successfully accomplished. I would like to thank Dr. Posner and TBS for the wonderful opportunity that was given to me, and for the chance to be tested again.

Joan Morin, Pinellas Park

Joan's excuse fails to explain her confidence during and immediately following the test, before the results were unveiled. At the time, she believed that she was in communication with the guiding saint whose voice she hears, and who is responsible for her psychic ability. Her comments above imply that either the saint did not participate as expected because of the artificial nature of the test (in which case the voice she heard was imaginary), or the saint played a practical joke on her by providing incorrect information approximately 50% of the time. A much more likely interpretation of events is that the test was successfully accomplished, which would explain why the results were exactly as chance would account for. We are agreeable to a retest when Joan is ready (perhaps on a future "Eye on Tampa Bay" program), but will not permit any such excuses for failure should the results be the same.

We also wish to express to Joan our appreciation for her letter to the editor of the St. Petersburg Times (published along with ours on August 3), regarding our offense taken to the unfortunate language used in a July 20 article which erroneously stated that the contract between Morin and TBS "will provide that if Morin fails, the group will be able to smear her name in newsletters and videotapes, saying she is a phony." --Ed.

Editor: I am very pleased and impressed with the professional manner in which TBS is being run, and my membership renewal is enclosed. I am an air traffic controller and devoted skeptic in Miami. Please feel free

to call upon me if the need ever arises.

I am also interested in a TBS logo T-shirt, and enclosed is my stamped return envelope.

William Cooley, Miami

We received an underwhelming two responses to the T-shirt notice in the previous issue (three including myself). We presently do not plan to place an order unless a reasonable number of requests are received. Please contact us (with stamped return envelope) if you have any interest in a TBS logo T-shirt. --Ed.

Editor: Unfortunately I received no responses to my letter in V.1 No.4 requesting titles of practically-useful anti-astrology books. Culver and Ianna's opus has the potential to be reshaped into something really excellent, but I suspect it *won't* be. Lawrence Jerome's rambling Astrology Disproved turned out to be even worse than I had feared. But his bibliography led me to Robert Eisler's Royal Art of Astrology (pub. 1946) which is truly authoritative and in some ways unsurpassable. For example, we learn in detail how ancient astrology was concerned solely with omens for the guidance of governments, and (with appropriate sarcasm) the fanciful original "reasons" for all of the characteristics variously assigned to constellations and planets (believers might well find their confidence shaken by these damning catalogues). Yet I find even this book to be incomplete in some ways, and too copious and scholarly to serve as the introduction to astrological skepticism so urgently needed in all our libraries. I wish I could get the ear of that national repository of valuable knowledge, Isaac Asimov.

Alexander Mebane, Venice

75 copies of each issue of TBS REPORT are sent to CSICOP for distribution to its Executive Council, subcommittees, and other local groups like ours across North America and around the world. Perhaps someone, somewhere, will respond to your plea, or pass it along to Dr. Asimov. --Ed.

TAMPA BAY SKEPTICS MEMBERSHIP / SUBSCRIPTION / DONATION / BACK ORDER FORM

- YES, I wish to support the Tampa Bay Skeptics in its efforts to examine and report upon paranormal and fringe-science claims. Enclosed is my check for \$10. Please enroll me as a member of TBS, and begin my annual subscription to *TBS REPORT* with issue _____ . Renewal Please accept this donation of \$ _____ .
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Note: Memberships, subscriptions and donations are tax-deductible.

Tampa Bay Skeptics
6219 Palma Blvd. #210
St. Petersburg, FL 33715

V2N2



*Tampa Bay Skeptics
Quarterly Membership Meeting
including Board Meeting and
Annual Election of Executive Council*

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 20 --- 7:00 - 9:00 P.M.
(OPTIONAL DINNER BEGINNING 6:30)
MORRISON'S CAFETERIA / GATEWAY MALL
9TH ST. N. & 83RD AVE. N., ST. PETERSBURG

and announcing...

*USF / Tampa Bay Skeptics
Special Fall Presentation*

Featuring HENRY GORDON (Canada)
Magician and Author
Topic: "ExtraSensory Deception"

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 13 --- 7:30 P.M.
UNIVERSITY LECTURE HALL
U.S.F., TAMPA CAMPUS

(See directions on page 6)
General public welcome to
Tampa performance

July 24 TBS meeting attracts TV coverage

Channel 10 (WTSP) and Ch. 44 (WTOG) featured Bob Steiner and TBS members Pat Strong and Gary Posner on their late newscasts on July 24, and attendees to the TBS meeting were witness to an impressive demonstration of "psychic" feats by Steiner, a renowned magician and investigator/debunker of psychic claims.



GUSS WILDER

Steiner's new book, available from the author for \$14.95 + \$2 postage (Box 659, El Cerrito, CA 94530) is entitled Don't Get Taken - Bunco and Bunkum Exposed, and Steiner's performance illustrated just how easily the unsuspecting can be deceived by a talented charlatan.

--- New TBS Telephone Update Service ---

TBS now has a telephone service for information about any late-breaking TBS events, possible last-minute changes in meeting plans, etc.

You may call (813) 867-3533 on weekdays between 9 AM and 5 PM, and you may also leave a message after the "beep". Those who prefer may continue to send a stamped return envelope for the mail Update Service.



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FIRST CLASS