



Woman found murdered following visit by TBS members

by Glenn Thompson

No, we swear we didn't do it! But here's the little we do know about the "spirited" life and untimely death, at age 47, of Ms. Janice Nugent.

At a TBS quarterly meeting a couple years ago, Miles Hardy related the seemingly bizarre request of a woman who had originally called the USF Dept. of Psychology seeking help to explain the "faces" that were appearing in her fireplace (there were also "spirits" and other strange events happening in her home). Accepting the invitation, TBS members Michael Kleineschay and I volunteered to ferret out the source of these "faces." We've both always wanted to see something that we can't explain, and I was happy to serve as videographer. We didn't know, until she later told us, that about 60 other people had already been through her home to view the "faces."

On March 4, 1995, Michael, his two children (Alex and Evette, ages 10 and 12 at the time) and I arrived at the modest, bungalow-style home in the 300 block of West Chelsea, in the Seminole Heights section of Tampa. Ms. Nugent graciously greeted our little entourage and quickly ushered us into her tastefully decorated home. With permission to tape, Michael conducted the interview. Within the short space of fifteen minutes it was learned that the spirit of an eccentric old lady (who possibly died there) still roamed the house, the back bedroom was always strangely cold (even in summer), the floors creaked from someone (or something) walking around at night, the kitchen cabinets would swing open and shut by themselves, strange voices could be heard, and on and on.

When we finally got to the fireplace, we were told that it had been rebuilt the previous year, and had first been used about six days before Christmas. By the time Christmas rolled around, the soot-stained brick had developed various Rorschach-like patterns which, to the mind of Ms. Nugent, resembled angels and demons. To most people with a modicum of skepticism, these patterns would seem no more "real" than patterns divined in clouds. It thus became readily apparent that, to Ms. Nugent, cause and effect were not paramount principles. And, like many who feel plagued by such apparitions, no rational, scientific

explanation would likely satisfy her regarding the ambiguous soot patterns found on the brick.

Even Michael's children, in spite of their tender years, independently reached the same conclusion — there was nothing remarkable at all about the patterns. Yet both behaved in a manner that would make all skeptics proud. As Nugent swirled into ever-more-convoluted explanations/descriptions of the bizarre events that would reveal themselves to her, the children sat politely and listened respectfully, without a trace of a snicker, smile, or even a "rolled" eye. They both waited until the interview was over, when they were out of her earshot, to express anything negative. And never once did they say anything judgmental — they just asked basic questions and made common-sense observations.

Because of the obvious non-event of the "faces," plus the fact that plainly this was a person with a deep psychological need for spiritual coping mechanisms, it was thought best not to write about the episode, lest she conclude that we had just been looking to make her the object of ridicule. But events have since transpired that have caused us to publish this report.

In early February of this year, Nugent was found beaten and strangled in her home, and the case remains unsolved to this day. I was out of town that week at Mardi Gras (I swear I have an air-tight alibi!), and didn't even become aware of her death until August 23, when I happened to recognize her name in a *St. Petersburg Times* article about the more recent murder of another woman, Leanne Coryell. Nugent's superficial resemblance to Coryell (both were attractive, with blond hair) had investigators wondering if Ray Johnston, arrested for Coryell's murder, might be a serial killer. Another possible link was the fact that Johnston was known to frequent Malio's bar/restaurant, where Nugent was last seen alive.

My recent attempts to get more details from the Tampa Police Department about Nugent's murder merely resulted in my being told that the case is still under investigation, and that they can't release any information.

It seems to me that as a single woman, living alone, who had invited some 60-odd people into her home to view her "apparitions," Nugent could have been more careful as to whom she let in. The *real* "demon" turned out to be something in human form. The tragic irony of her demise is that her concern over demons was legitimate enough, but would have been better placed in concern for the *real* variety as opposed to the paranormal.

Can anyone recommend a good psychic sleuth?

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

Tampa Bay Skeptics, Inc., is a nonprofit educational and scientific organization devoted to the critical examination of paranormal and fringe-science claims, and the dissemination of factual information about such claims. 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) and with other local groups like TBS throughout the United States and the world, though TBS is an autonomous group not formally affiliated with CSICOP or with any other organization.

TBS's "\$1,000 Challenge" is open to anyone claiming verifiable scientific proof of the reality of ESP, UFOs, dowsing, astrology, or any paranormal phenomenon. Please contact us for complete details.

Tampa Bay Skeptics Report is published quarterly. We welcome news clippings, and articles and letters for publication (subject to editing for length, clarity, and taste), and solicit opposing views. Please submit on 3 1/2" discs (in Mac or MS-DOS-ASCII format) or by modem or e-mail, if possible.

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

TAMPA BAY SKEPTICS REPORT

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Chairman's

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by Terry A. Smiljanich

Why do some people *not* believe "weird" things?

Earlier this year Michael Shermer, publisher of *Skeptic* magazine, had a book published entitled *Why People Believe Weird Things* (which I highly recommend). In it, Shermer explores a wide range of "weird" beliefs — pseudoscience, creationism, pseudohistory, the paranormal, and other topics very familiar to members of TBS. He concludes that the following strong human desires and motivations lead to belief in such "weird" things: the need to believe in things that make us feel better; immediate gratification with respect to love, understanding and health; simple explanations in a complex and contingent world; a ready-made system of morality and meaning.

Says Shermer, many, if not most, people cling to "unrealistic promises of a better life, and in the process embrace intolerance and ignorance."

Reading the book got me to thinking about the converse to its title. Why do we skeptics *not* believe weird things (at least to the extent that others do)? Is it a matter of psychological make-up, or did something happen in our lives to cause us to leave pseudoscience and hocus-pocus behind? And how do my experiences compare to those of my fellow skeptics?

First of all, I do not believe it is a matter of psychological predisposition. There was a time, at twelve years of age, when I conducted my own psychokinesis study by repeatedly rolling a die while thinking of the number four. I recorded my findings and, to my astonishment, found that "four" had come up much more often than chance would allow! It was only later in life that I realized that I had probably fudged (albeit subconsciously) in my recordings and runs (e.g., I'm sure I stopped whenever I had come across a series of "fours"). I also thought for years that there *must* be something to all those UFO sightings I kept reading about, and I half expected a real flying saucer to land on the White House lawn any day.

I know for a fact (he will "confess" it to anyone) that our esteemed founder Gary Posner was himself a confirmed believer in UFOs when he was younger. A close encounter with UFO-debunker Philip Klass thankfully turned him away from this youthful indiscretion.

No, it's not a matter of predisposition. I think we have to look elsewhere for the makings of a skeptic. I will describe my own "Education of a Skeptic," in the hopes that members of TBS will write to me and share their own experiences. If I get some responses, I will write another column about any commonalities in these experiences.

At a very early age, I became fascinated with astronomy when I was given a copy of *The Golden Guide to the Stars* for my eighth birthday. This was a time (mid-'50s) when Saturday morning television carried *Rocky Jones: Space Ranger*, *Space Patrol*, and my favorite, *Tom Corbett: Space Cadet*. In 1957, the same year in which my parents bought me a small telescope and the Soviet Union launched Sputnik, I fell hopelessly in love with all things scientific. The more I read, the more I came to understand the rigors of science. As a member of the "Moonwatch" program just a couple of years later (a voluntary group of citizens tracking artificial satellites and recording their timings of transit), I understood that in calculating the probable position of a satellite, intuition or wishes played no part. I became impatient with people prattling on about mind readers, UFOs and creationism, when I knew that the rings of Saturn were waiting for me on those cold, clear, crisp Texas nights.

During this same time, I was a member of the Catholic Church. I was even an altar boy! I did eventually abandon Christianity, as I came to appreciate more the beauties and majesty of science and found unacceptable the answers I was getting in parochial school (although I must add that when I attended public school for the first time in the ninth grade, I realized immediately the superiority of the education I had received to date). I was, however, a confirmed skeptic in the sense that I found the scientific method infinitely more reliable than the Bible.

(continued on page 7)

“Malcolm the Magnificent” hosts Tampa Bay Skeptics

by Jack Robinson

On the evening of November 13th, Gary Posner and I were invited guests on the Tampa public access TV show hosted by “Malcolm the Magnificent” Hathorne (on Time Warner Channel 20). The subject was supposed to be UFOs, but other paranormal topics were brought up also.

During the broadcast, I felt somewhat frustrated because the discussion seemed to be dominated by the host. But after viewing my tape recording at home later, I perceived that Gary and I had made a number of good points.

A recurring theme during the discussion was the credibility — or lack of credibility — of anecdotal evidence. One of the cases I brought up was a famous one from 1966 involving a couple of deputy sheriffs who chased a “UFO” halfway across the state of Ohio and into Pennsylvania.

Malcolm immediately (and correctly) recalled that they had actually been pursuing the planet Venus; he is skeptical to the extent of agreeing — and even asserting — that many supposed UFOs are really hoaxes or misidentifications of natural phenomena. He also stated, however, that he believes some UFOs are spaceships from other worlds, their occupants are interacting with humans, and these ideas are conclusively supported by evidence that skeptics reject as anecdotal. I had difficulty getting in my main point (though it may have been adequately implied): The deputies’ descriptions and sketches, if accepted at face value, would clearly rule out Venus and indicate a spaceship; hence their anecdotal evidence was unreliable. The problem then becomes: How can one know which anecdotes are believable and which are not?

Before the broadcast, Malcolm had sent Gary and me an article of his that began: “Former Army Master Sergeant Robert Dean is one of the most important spokespersons in the UFO community. During the 1960s he maintained a COSMIC Top Secret Clearance within SHAPE, the military arm of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and in 1991 he broke his security oath to tell the truth about UFOs and the United States Military coverup.” I brought up this article, and suggested that before one accepts such anecdotal evidence as fact, one should at least do a background check on the witness. Then Gary quoted from a report by Philip Klass about Sergeant Dean’s service record, which indicated that Dean had not served in the position he claimed, and had not received intelligence training. Malcolm responded that Dean’s position and clearance were not in his service record because they were military secrets. How then does

one choose between the two possibilities? Gary indicated how, by quoting from Carl Sagan: “Extraordinary claims require extraordinary proof.” And that made a nice conclusion for the program.

If any readers happened to see the show, Gary Posner and I would appreciate hearing from you about your impressions. Send mail or e-mail to Gary (see p. 2 box for addresses), or e-mail me directly at JHRobby@aol.com.

Psychology Club learns about TBS and skepticism

by William W. Hall

I have recently joined TBS and the James Randi Educational Foundation, having been a long-time member of CSICOP and The Skeptics Society. I thought my fellow TBS members might like to hear how I have been working to introduce my college students to a skeptical, scientific approach toward pseudoscience and all things paranormal.

For the last seven years I have taught Developmental English at the Clearwater campus of St. Petersburg Junior College. Yet, most of my formal training is in philosophy, primarily philosophy of science and epistemology, and one of my long-time hobbies is magic. As an amateur magician specializing in mentalism (ESP, telekinesis, precognition, telepathy, etc.), I use this special branch of conjuring to help teach critical thinking in my English and study skills classes. I often use a telepathic or some similar effect as a springboard to a class discussion regarding the paranormal and pseudoscience, occasionally even developing it into a related assignment. The students love such discussions and are deeply interested in my perspective. They have in general been quite receptive to the rules of thumb for critical/skeptical thinking that I present; in fact, some go home and challenge friends and relatives who are prone to paranormalist thinking.

Recently, one of my students asked if I would speak to the campus Psychology Club about ESP, astrology, UFOs, and various other paranormal topics. I have been aware for some time that the Psychology Club has invited speakers to lecture on topics ranging from past-life regression and crystal healing to the use of auras in psychotherapy. Where the club members find these speakers is a mystery to me. I was, therefore, excited by the offer, and relished the chance to hopefully balance the scales a bit or, better yet, perhaps to even tip them in the direction of rational inquiry.

I gave my lecture, titled “Skepticism, Critical Thinking, Science, and the Paranormal,” on September 29.

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TAMPA BAY SKEPTICS EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

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Snippets

As is so typical of our gifted "psychics," apparently none was able to foresee that Princess Diana, perhaps the world's most well-known woman, would be killed this summer. But God had telegraphed his punch in the book of Exodus, according to Michael Drosnin, author of one of this year's best sellers, *The Bible Code*. The day after the tragedy, Drosnin claims to have decoded a biblical passage saying, "Diana/car accident/death," followed by "5757" (this year on the Hebrew calendar). But if God was "hip" enough, even back then, to refer to the automobile as a "car," what's with all that "thou spaketh unto ye" stuff?

(*St. Pete. Times, Sept. 19*)

Now on to our gifted "trance channelers." According to a letter published in Ann Landers' column, J.Z. Knight, the American woman who since 1978 has channeled Ramtha (a 30,000-year-old warrior from Atlantis), has successfully sued a German woman for tuning into the same frequency. The legal battle over custody rights to the warrior began in 1992, when Knight apparently filed suit in Austria, claiming that the German, by contacting Ramtha herself, had created interference on Knight's psychic channel. The letter-writer reports that the Austrian Supreme Court has now awarded Knight a copyright, ruling that she shall possess the sole right to a relationship with Ramtha. The "other" woman was also fined \$800 to compensate Knight for her period of "spiritual limbo." Replied Landers, "I am at a loss to comment. . . . Shirley MacLaine, I need your help."

(*Ann Landers' column, Aug. 12*)

And let's not shortchange Rebecca Nolan, writer of the quarterly *Financial Astrology* newsletter. Her Sept. 1 - Nov. 28 issue predicted the Oct. 27 crash pretty clearly: "It looks like an earthquake hits the market in October hurting overvalued stocks on Oct. 9, 16 and 27 in particular." But the reason for the market's plummet should have been obvious to anyone — it seems that Mars has been sitting in a "retrograde position" for much of the year.

(*St. Pete. Times, Nov. 3*)

More than half of the American adults surveyed in a recent Gallup Poll admitted to being superstitious. But this may serve a useful mental health purpose, according to speakers at the recent annual meeting of the American Psychological Association. Tom Gilovich of Cornell University says that adherence to rituals, or belief that a higher power may be bringing them good fortune, "seems to help people respond under pressure." Stuart Vyse of Connecticut College, author of *Believing in Magic: The Psychology of Superstition*, told the reporter (with a wink) that "Maybe it's better to be safe than sorry."

(*Cox News Service via Tampa Tribune, Sept. 14*)

St. Petersburg Times reporter Jeanne Malmgren, accompanied by staff photographer Kathleen Cabbie, set out recently (no dates given) to find Florida's notorious "Skunk Ape," undoubtedly a first cousin to Bigfoot and

second cousin (twice removed) to the Abominable Snowman. There had been several reported sightings (and smellings) of the malodorous mirage this summer in remote areas of the Big Cypress National Preserve in southwest Florida. The two-page article covered the search as well as some background material about the noxious beast, whose blurry image on a photograph taken in Ochopee (just east of Everglades City) resembles the more well-known photos of Bigfoot. If the stinker does exist (the *Times* crew never found it), one reason for its aroma may be the "bait" that locals are using to lure it into the open — piles of beans left in the swamp.

(*St. Pete. Times, Nov. 2*)



Last spring, 14-year-old Nathan Zohner of Idaho Falls devoted his science fair project to a theme that had been sweeping the internet — the environmental threat caused by "dihydrogen monoxide." His accurate, yet tongue-in-cheek, report on DHMO described the compound as being caustic enough to "accelerate the corrosion and rusting of many metals" and, in its gaseous form, to cause severe burns. The compound, reported Zohner quite correctly, is a "major component of acid rain, [and] has been found in excised tumors of terminal cancer patients." Even more ominously, "for those who have developed a dependency on DHMO, complete withdrawal means certain death." When Zohner distributed his report to 50 classmates, 43 of them voted to ban DHMO because of its lethal nature. And David Murray, research director of the nonprofit Statistical Assessment Service in Washington, DC, says, "The likelihood is high that I could replicate these results with a survey of members of Congress."

But why are Zohner and Murray not happy with such survey results? The reason: in addition to "DHMO," dihydrogen monoxide can be abbreviated in a more familiar way — "H₂O." James K. Glassman, the author of the syndicated column from which this "Snippet" is derived, has now coined the term "Zohnerism" to mean "the use of a fact to lead a scientifically and mathematically ignorant public to a false conclusion."

(*St. Pete. Times, Oct. 22*)

["Snippets" are derived and rewritten from the referenced sources. Please send your clippings to the editor.]

Should Princess Diana's "psychic" be sued for malpractice?

The following is excerpted from the Sept/Oct NCAHF Newsletter (National Council Against Health Fraud):

Please, do not think that we are poking fun at Di's tragic death. Princess Diana was highly admirable. . . . Unfortunately, she also had an irrational side which led her to visibly practice, and tacitly endorse, certain forms of quackery. The most serious was her reliance upon the advice of psychics.

The world has been playing a "blame game" in Di's death. The paparazzi, the tabloid-buying public, the driver, her bodyguard, and the Royal family have all been named as sharing guilt. Add one more to the list: her psychic who failed to forewarn of the accident that took Di's life.

Think about it. Had the psychic warned her, three people would still be alive, several news photographers would be out of legal difficulty, and millions of us would have been spared from our terrible grief. Di's [psychic] astrologer stated in a television interview that she had "sensed" that Di would have a short life and a tragic end because of two dreams. However, she stated that she had never mentioned this to Di because she did not want to upset her!

Psychics are notorious for claiming credit for having predicted big events after they have occurred, but to claim that life or death information was withheld for fear of upsetting the client is the lamest excuse by a psychic caught in failure that we've ever heard. . . . Perhaps the fact that Di's alleged psychic blew the biggest call of her life [can help] demonstrate the reality that there are no genuine psychics — only opportunists who exploit fear of the uncertain future.

Psychic advisers engage in a form of mental health quackery. . . . True psychic ability has never been demonstrated under scientifically controlled conditions. The James Randi Educational Foundation [see p. 6 box] offers over \$1-million for anyone who can do so [TBS offers \$1,000].

Also, understand that there are two general categories of psychics. Type I are con artists — conscienceless scoundrels who prey upon the emotionally vulnerable. They are schooled in the art of deception. Outwitting people is their forte, and the more prominent their prey is, the more satisfying it is to the con man. Type II are delusional people who really believe in their psychic powers. For instance, one believes that by concentrating on traffic lights she can make them change from red to green; another says that she can guess who is on the telephone before she answers it. . . . These people confuse coincidence with cause, and work backward from effect to cause. They are fantasy-prone in their personalities and find a deeper reason behind even the most mundane events.

It is sometimes difficult to determine whether a psychic caught in deception is a Type I or II. Some Type II psychics use deception because their "powers do not always work" and they do not want to disappoint their clients. . . .

Ben Bova lectures in St. Petersburg

by Valerie Grey

Ben Bova, author of more than 80 science and science-fiction books and winner of numerous awards, addressed an enthusiastic and appreciative audience of about 150 at the USF St. Pete. campus on September 20. Thanks to a few days' advance notice via a TBS e-mail "Update," I was able to make plans to attend.

The witty presentation, sponsored by the Florida Humanities Council, concentrated on Bova's lengthy tenures as editor of *Analog* and *Omni* magazines, and touched more briefly on matters such as his consulting work for NASA and other scientific organizations. His talk was illustrated with slides of imaginative cover paintings depicting sci-fi stories from the two magazines, interspersed with actual photos of astronomical and space-technology subjects.

The only aspect of the lecture that I personally found slightly disturbing was when Dr. Bova ostensibly left the field of science fiction and started making bona-fide predictions about the future. His prognostications, based on subjects that he had explored at some length in his science-fiction novels, bore an almost "uncanny" resemblance to the paranormal subjects that had been debunked in videos at the TBS quarterly meeting earlier in the day. For example, Bova confidently predicted that we will very soon be:

- experiencing human life spans of 200 to 1000 years
- drinking "cocktails" of "nano-machines" (machines the size of viruses able to act upon individual atoms) to cure all manner of presently incurable diseases and to perform the equivalent of cosmetic surgery from the inside
- vacationing on the moon in a pressure-dome facility (an artist's rendering put Disney World's Contemporary Hotel to shame) which, because of the low gravity, will allow tourists to fly around with wings strapped to their arms.

Science has unquestionably been able to accomplish awesome marvels in the past and will doubtless continue to amaze us in the future. But these predictions certainly sounded a lot like the same tired, old, empty promises of immortality, perfect health and levitation that for millennia have lured people to embrace the paranormal.

== Visit TBS Online ==

<http://members.aol.com/tbayskept/tbs.html>

To enable users to find out easily about additions to the TBS web site, we have added a new link at the top of the TBS Home Page. Clicking on "What's New on the Site" leads to a list of recently added items worthy of note.

Please keep your suggestions coming — we're listening!

Have an e-mail address? Send it to us (garypos@aol.com) so we can add you to our electronic TBS Update Service.

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Local cable news channel has remote 'Renier' link

Elliot Wiser, general manager of Time Warner's new Tampa Bay-area cable TV news channel, is mentioned in Gary Posner's chapter on Noreen Renier in the book *Psychic Sleuths* (Prometheus Books, 1994). Wiser (spelled "Wizer" in the chapter as a result of having been misspelled in the referenced newspaper article), had been news director of a Virginia radio station in the early 1980s, and host of Renier's weekly call-in program. In a 1991 telephone interview, Wiser told Posner, "I went into the show a skeptic of hers but I came away a believer. . . . She hit [the Reagan assassination attempt] right on the head — I was there when she did it. She even predicted things about me that came true. . . . I found her to be the most accurate [psychic] that I've seen in the business." An additional footnoted reference to Wiser discusses his failure to honor his agreement to send Posner a copy of the *National Examiner* article containing the "Reagan" prediction.

"Psychology Club" (from p. 3)

Since the club had posted a flier all over campus inviting everyone, the turnout was wonderful — virtually every seat was taken. Although I did run out of time and was unable to discuss all that I had hoped to, the speech was a rousing success. Even the Q&A session at the end went well, until a UFO "true believer" began to rant about how CSICOP and its scientist members were all biased and conspiratorial, and how debunkers like myself were pushing a religious(?) agenda (I neglected to point out my atheist-leaning agnosticism). When he claimed that the Gulf Breeze sightings and photos were the best evidence yet of alien encounters, I had to point out that Gulf Breeze had long ago been exposed as a hoax (which he, of course, denied). When I encouraged him to read some of the skeptical literature I had listed in the handout, he said that he refuses to read such material because skeptics are just out to debunk claims instead of searching for the "truth we know is out there." I smiled at the reference and recommended he pursue future investigations with agent Mulder.

Several of the students who attended have since approached me for more information about skepticism in general and to ask about assorted paranormal topics (Nostradamus and Edgar Cayce top the list). I am plugging TBS and have shared contact information with those interested, so perhaps we'll recruit some new members. And the club president and faculty adviser have both asked me to speak again next semester. I'm already getting some keys and spoons ready to bend . . .

Other skeptical sources on the paranormal

• *Prometheus Books* •

90-page catalog • 30% discount thru TBS
59 John Glenn Dr. • Amherst, NY 14228
800-421-0351
pbooks6205@aol.com
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• *Skeptical Inquirer* •

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• *Skeptics UFO Newsletter* •

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TBS Dues Increase

At the recommendation of the Membership Committee, the TBS Executive Council has voted unanimously to increase the membership/subscription fee to \$13. This marks the first increase since TBS was founded in 1988. Knock on wood, the new rate will bring TBS good luck both financially and in the battle against irrationality.

TBS in the Media

Gary Posner was quoted in Ace Atkins' Sept. 14 *Tampa Tribune* article on Ybor City's "7th Heaven Psychic Cafe." He and Exec. Council member Jack Robinson were on Tampa public access TV on Nov. 13 (see p. 3).

CFI Institute Winter Session

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and

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Contact TBS or CSICOP for details

Letters • Readers' Forum

To TBS: Thank you for your prompt response to my e-mail inquiry, and for sending the complimentary copy of *TBS Report*. The web site and newsletter are very interesting and extremely well done. I didn't catch even a single punctuation or spelling error — not that I was looking. But the contrast to a religious newsletter I recently received from someone in California — chock-full of the most outrageous grammar errors, not to mention faulty reasoning — was nothing short of astounding.

Enclosed is a check for membership. I hope to be able to attend the upcoming (September) meeting. It will be refreshing just to be in the same room with people who are not worshippers of Deepak Chopra!

Valerie Grey
Nokomis

My "psychic" powers tell me that not only will Valerie ultimately attend that meeting, but that, within a few short months, she will go on to become TBS's Membership Officer and, rarest of all breeds, a contributor to the newsletter! I may even have to rethink my position on the power of prayer! —G.P.

Editor: I work nights at the Arnold Palmer Children's Hospital here in Orlando and I was flipping through some channels on my break and saw that Princess Diana had been involved in an accident. Well, I followed the story overnight and during the night it was mentioned that two days prior to traveling to Paris, Diana and Fayed had visited the Queen's personal psychic.

I think the Royal Psychic missed something rather significant.

John Klaers
Orlando
jdklaers@magicnet.net

Yes, indeed. See the related article on page 5. —G.P.

Dr. Posner: How delight-filled I am to have received your mailing in response to my inquiry about your Mensa "Skeptic" Service. Enclosed please find my check for

membership in TBS. It is with great anticipatory pleasure that I look towards the opportunity to interface with fellow skeptics.

Cele Newman
Coconut Creek

.

"Chairman's Corner" (from page 2)

Much to my continual great regret, I never became an astronomer, physicist, marine biologist, or astronaut, as I had once fantasized. College majors in the mid-'60s turned from astrophysics to English literature instead, and dreams of graduate school at Cal Tech became law school at Florida. I retained, however, my love for science and my respect for the scientific method.

In my case, it is clear to me that an early infatuation with science was the impetus to my eventual skepticism of the paranormal. I've said it many times before in these columns — the majestic whirl of the Milky Way above our heads is a thousandfold more interesting and exciting than any palm reader or Uri Geller. Why do I *not* believe weird things? Because I find this complex, contingent world more acceptable both intellectually and emotionally than any ready-made philosophy promising easy answers.

Why do *you*, members of TBS, not believe weird things? If you used to, when did you stop, and why? Write to me at: 1000 Brightwaters Blvd. N.E., St. Petersburg, FL 33704, or via e-mail at tsmiljan@aol.com.

Editor's Note

TBS's presence on the World Wide Web is having an impact on the world — at least a modest one. We are aware of several people who, via the internet search engines and links from other web sites, have found their way to the TBS site for skeptical information on the "Amazing Kreskin," "psychic" John Monti, and other subjects. Our web site has registered nearly 500 "hits" in the past five months.

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 \$13. 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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Announcing...

Press and
Public
Welcome

Tampa Bay Skeptics Quarterly Meetings

3rd Saturday of every March, June, September,
and December (barring unforeseen conflicts)

Our next meeting will be:

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 20 --- 10:30 A.M. - 1:30 P.M.
AUDITORIUM (1st FLOOR)
PUBLIC LIBRARY, 900 N. ASHLEY DRIVE, TAMPA

Scheduled: Video of media coverage of the
paranormal, Open Forum, and other fun stuff
(and let's all go out for lunch afterwards)

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Possible Tampa Bay Center for Inquiry

The Center for Inquiry (CFI), the Amherst, NY, home to CSICOP (publishers of *Skeptical Inquirer*) and the Council for Secular Humanism (CSH, publishers of *Free Inquiry*), has announced tentative plans to establish a regional Center for Inquiry in the Tampa Bay area. Speaking on November 16 at a CSH/CFI-sponsored seminar in St. Petersburg, CFI's founder, Paul Kurtz, expressed a desire to find a suitable piece of real estate in the Bay area upon which to build a regional Center. CFI has already established regional offices in Los Angeles, Kansas City, and Boulder.

If and when a local CFI does materialize, it would become home to one or more of the area's humanist groups, and possibly the Tampa Bay Skeptics as well, assuming that a philosophical "wall of separation" could be maintained such that TBS would not be misperceived as a "secular humanist" organization.

We will keep you apprised of events as they unfold.

—Gary Posner

Watch for a feature-length article by Gary Posner
on the Noreen Renier / Williston Police case in
Skeptic magazine (Vol. 5 No. 4, due out in February).

TBS and James Randi "Psychic" Challenges

Tampa Bay Skeptics has offered **\$1,000** since 1989 to anyone able to provide TBS with verifiable scientific proof of any paranormal phenomenon. This notice represents an open invitation to all UFOlogists, psychics, astrologers, dowzers, and the like.

James Randi has compiled a group of skeptics (the "2000 Club") who have now collectively pledged more than **\$1,000,000** to be awarded to the first person who is able to successfully demonstrate paranormal power to Randi.

These challenges offer both a monetary reward and a place in history for the first person able to demonstrate the existence of the paranormal to skeptics. Please contact TBS for complete details.

The James Randi Legal Fund

and

The CSICOP Legal Defense Foundation

...are assisting in defraying the costs of defending against lawsuits brought by proponents of the paranormal. Both funds hope also to be able to provide financial assistance to individual skeptics in need of legal counsel. Please consider a donation (see addresses for James Randi's Foundation and for CSICOP in page 6 box).

30% Discount on all Prometheus Books

...ordered through TBS. Please include \$4.45 P&H for first book, and \$2.25 for each additional book. Make check payable to "Tampa Bay Skeptics."

UFO Abduction Insurance

Tampa Bay Skeptics members are now covered by TBS's **\$10-million UFO Abduction Insurance policy** through the St. Lawrence Agency, Altamonte Springs, FL (800-728-5413 • www.ufo2001.com). A copy of the policy (and an informative newspaper article on the Agency) is available from TBS for a stamped return envelope.



1113 Normandy Trace Road
Tampa, Florida 33602

*TBS wishes you a
FIRST CLASS
Holiday Season and
New Year!*

