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## UFO UpDates Mailing List

### Update: Gersten Cares Little For Historical Fact

From: Wendy Christensen <[christensen@catlas.mv.com](mailto:christensen@catlas.mv.com)>  
Date: Sun, 13 Aug 2000 14:10:50 -0400  
Fwd Date: Mon, 14 Aug 2000 19:37:02 -0400  
Subject: UpDate: Gersten Cares Little For Historical Fact

Hello, Moderator of UFO UpDates...

Perhaps you will not consider this relevant (and feel free to not post it to the list, or to excerpt is as you see fit), but today I have had a little exchange with Peter Gersten (the 'UFO Lawyer') that shows that he has little regard for truth or actual historical fact, and is perfectly happy to spread long-discredited tales as historical fact. It may seem a small thing, but he has done this sort of thing before, and it does not speak well for his intellectual rigorousness or respect for fact. This annoys, disturbs and concerns me greatly, as he has so much visibility (with his lawsuits, relentless pursuit of funds, publicity, self-proclaimed champion of the "CAUS" of truth, etc.)

In his "Non-UFO" Sunday" edition of August 13, 2000, Gersten relates the long-discredited urban legend concerning Alexander Fleming (discoverer of penicillin) and Randolph Churchill (father of Winston).

(For reference, this is the tale)

#### THE FARMER'S SON

His name was Fleming, and he was a poor Scottish farmer. One day, while trying to eke out a living for his family, he heard a cry for help coming from a nearby bog. He dropped his tools and ran to the bog. There, mired to his waist in black muck, was a terrified boy, screaming and struggling to free himself. Farmer Fleming saved the lad from what could have been a slow and terrifying death.

The next day, a fancy carriage pulled up to the Scotsman's sparse surroundings. An elegantly dressed nobleman stepped out and introduced himself as the father of the boy Farmer Fleming had saved. "I want to repay you," said the nobleman. "You saved my son's life."

"No, I can't accept payment for what I did," the Scottish farmer replied, waving off the offer. At that moment, the farmer's own son came to the door of the family hovel. "Is that your son?" the nobleman asked. "Yes," the farmer replied proudly.

"I'll make you a deal. Let me take him and give him a good education. If the lad is anything like his father, he'll grow to a man you can be proud of."

And that he did. In time, Farmer Fleming's son graduated from St. Mary's Hospital Medical School in London, and went on to become known throughout the world as the noted Sir Alexander Fleming, the discoverer of Penicillin. Years afterward, the

nobleman's son was stricken with pneumonia. What saved him? Penicillin. The name of the nobleman? Lord Randolph Churchill. His son's name? Sir Winston Churchill.

Someone once said what goes around comes around.

Thinking that perhaps Mr. Gersten (somehow!) did not know this to be just an "urban legend," I informed him of same and received a curious answer:

Me: How can anyone take seriously anything you say when you persist in spreading long-discredited legends such as this?

Gersten:

"I think you miss the point. It's the the message of the story that matters, not the participants. But I can understand your frustration in needing everything perfect, so I will remove you from my list. Sorry to have upset you.

But I can't think of the answer to your question. Maybe its all just your projection of your own imperfection?"

Huh?? This is a person -- a lawyer yet! -- who purports to be a champion of truth?

Every list from which I have ever received one of these "inspirational tales" that I know to be an urban legend, I have informed of the fact. In every case, other than Mr. Gersten, a correction/clarification was immediately sent to the list. (This happened several times recently in the "Man without a face - Mel Gibson" legend that made the rounds -- in fact, I think Mr. Gersten sent that one around, too. Of course, he never sent a correction.)

It's laughably easy to find out the truth behind this legend:

<http://www.snopes.com/spoons/glurge/fleming.htm>

For reference, here are some excerpts:

The facts of none of these versions jibe with what we know of these people's lives. No Churchill biography we've found mentions young Winston's chance encounter with a Fleming, father or son. Alexander Fleming was born in a remote, rural part of Scotland and lived on an 800-acre farm that was a mile from the nearest house -- not the sort of place where a vacationing Winston would have been likely to wander, or to be discovered by anyone if he had. As well, Winston was seven years older than Alexander, so young Alexander would probably have been too small to physically rescue the older and larger Winston from drowning.

But we don't have to speculate about those matters to disprove the tale. Alexander Fleming did not leave the farm to rush off to medical school to become the doctor he had supposedly always longed to be. In fact, young Alec (as he was then known) departed for London when he was 14, where his older brother Tom had studied medicine and opened a practice. Alec attended the Polytechnic School in Regent Street; after graduating, he entered the business world at the urging of his brother, worked as a clerk for a shipping firm for a few years, then joined a Scottish regiment when the Boer War broke out. It was not until after all of this that Alec decided to try his hand at medical school, and even then it was the encouragement of his older brother that was the deciding factor, not a lifelong yearning on Alec's part to become a doctor. Additionally, Alec's medical school education was financed with a £ 250 inheritance from a recently-deceased uncle, not an endowment from a grateful Randolph Churchill.

Nor is the other end of this tale true. Winston Churchill did come down with a sore throat and a high fever while in Tunis (on the way home from his December 1943 meeting with Roosevelt and Stalin in Tehran), and the diagnosis of the medical team called in from Cairo by his personal physician (Charles Wilson, later Lord Moran) was pneumonia. According to Wilson's biography, Churchill was treated with sulphonamide (an antibiotic, but one unrelated to penicillin) and digitalis (for his heart) and sent to bed to rest. By the time a specialist, Professor John

Scadding, was flown in from London, Churchill was already well on his way to recovery. In short, Alexander Fleming was neither present nor consulted when Churchill was diagnosed with pneumonia, nor was penicillin used to treat the British prime minister.

I send this note only because I am really tired of self-proclaimed "ufo spokespersons" making the whole field look ridiculous. If one cannot be bothered to report the truth about a urban legend -- once notified of the undisputed facts -- what credibility can one reasonably claim in anything else?

Purrrrrrs.... (and hissssses to ignorers and distorters of truth)  
Wendy Christensen

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