

The Phoenix Skeptics News

A Bimonthly Publication of the Phoenix Skeptics

Volume 1, Issue 6

May/June 1988

April Meeting

James Lowell of the Tucson Skeptics gave an eye-opening talk on Mexican cancer clinics, the people who run them, and diagnostic and treatment methods used. These include integrated metabolic therapy, blood crystallization, hair analysis, iridology, laetrile, megavitamins, and a host of others.

The meeting was preceded by a business meeting of the Fellows. Mike Stackpole was added as a Fellow by unanimous consent of all present.

May Meeting

Jim Lippard spoke on psychic detectives and some research he has done into some local cases. See his article in this issue for more information.

Press coverage

The Phoenix Skeptics received some media coverage since last newsletter. In May, the country exploded with the revelations of Nancy Reagan and astrology as revealed in Donald Regan's book. Jim Lippard and Mike Stackpole were on KTAR and KFYI, respectively; Lippard for a short comment and Stackpole for a debate with Terry Warneke, an astrologer.

In the print media, there was a quote from Lippard in "Heavens, Nancy! The fault, dear lady, is in the stars" in the 14 May 1988 *Arizona Republic* by Holly Remy.

Also, in an article about the grave robberies out in the west valley, the article "Who the devil are these people?" by Charles Kelly, also in *The Republic*, 20 May, contains quotes from Hans Sebald.

We took the opportunity of press concern about daily horoscope columns to again issue letters asking for disclaimers. Only one got a response, and there was supposed to be a piece in the *Mesa Tribune* but we have not verified this. Anybody who has a copy is requested to get it to Ron Harvey or Jim Lippard.

This may not count as press coverage, but Hans Sebald's "On the Distinction Between Nonbelief and Disbelief" was reprinted in a recent *BASIS (Bay Area Skeptics Information Sheet)*. The article originally appeared here in our November/December issue.

Turin Shroud Update

By Jim Lippard

Samples of the Shroud of Turin were taken on April 21 and are now in the possession of the three labs doing the radiocarbon dating. In addition to a genuine sample, each lab has been supplied with two dummy samples from the British Museum. Unfortunately, according to Dr. Michael Tite of the British Museum's research laboratory (quoted in an Associated Press story by Robert Barrett dated April 3), while the labs are not supposed to know which of the three samples is from the shroud, that linen's herringbone weave probably gives it away under a microscope.

In a public talk in Tucson on April 28, Professor Paul Damon of the University of Arizona Geosciences Department said that the shroud sample is easily distinguishable from the control samples. Despite this major flaw in the test protocol, Damon seems to think the tests will return an accurate date. He expects UofA will be finished by June 21, though the Oxford and Zürich labs will probably require more time. The results are expected to be announced by the end of the year.

(Thanks to Robert Maier of the University of Arizona Mathematics Department for providing details of Damon's talk.)

Dr. Stranges Lives Up to His Name

By Mike Stackpole

Having heard Dr. Frank Stranges debate Jim Speiser on KFYI, there was no way I could miss his lecture about the government conspiracy to cover up UFOs and Stranges' meeting with Valiant Thor, the man from the interior of Venus. Perhaps an omen, Venus burned brightly in the sky that night, so I reminded my companion we should pretend we were theater critics for the New York Times attending an off, off, off Broadway production.

The room at the Safari resort in Scottsdale provided seating for 300 people, but we estimated that no more than 150-200 people attended the lecture. They asked a \$5 donation at the door and took our name and address to be added to the mailing list. On KFYI, Stranges had mentioned the room cost \$400, so he probably cleared \$450-\$700 on the entrance fees alone. At a table in the back, Stranges' wife sold the three books he currently has in print (*My Friend from Outer Space*, *Saucerama*, and a yellow tome concerning the Nazis and the Hollow Earth). Though they normally would have cost \$8.95 in bookstores, Dr. Frank instructed his wife to sell them to us at \$5 a pop. He also gave books away during the night, with his compliments, if you answered questions correctly.

It would be very easy to lampoon the whole lecture as theater of the absurd. Stranges pointed out one man in the crowd and said he was an "expert on fasting." We were seated behind this man and his family when Stranges introduced him. If the man practices what he preaches, I'd say, just from looking at this expert, fasting is as healthy as a steady diet of fast food burgers and fries. Another man, a minister, was introduced and took a bow. Stranges mentioned this man's book was also on sale in the back—I'd seen the Reverend carry his stock to the auditorium in shoe boxes.

Contrasting the standouts were a typical Scottsdale crowd treating this as a night out. Evenly split between men and women, the most notable group would have been older men who, by their bearing and show of hands during the lecture, were ex-military. The spectators seemed to have attended because they were interested in proof of UFOs. They were to be disappointed.

Stranges, who still refers to himself as a preacher, "though that's not why I'm here tonight," was introduced

by a young man who had come with him from California. Stranges then opened the meeting by asking us to shake hands with three people we didn't know, inviting God's blessing upon them. As the crowd settled back down, Stranges opened his lecture denying the charge he was anti-government, and invoked the flag ("It is the greatest flag in the Universe!"), winning a round of applause.

We wandered into the realm of fantasy fairly quickly. Stranges asserted that his group, National Investigations Committee on UFOs, got referrals from the National Security Agency and the CIA when folks called them with reports of UFOs.

Stranges then told us about Dwight Eisenhower's first encounter with a UFO. It occurred in 1953-54 (Dr. Frank is weak on dates) at Edwards AFB. Three alien craft had landed on the base, then the crew from one abandoned their ship, sealed it, and left in one of the other UFOs. They left their ship to us to mock our technology and, at the very least, it did astound our scientists.

The disk was described as being 30' in diameter, but two men managed to "carry" this craft into a hangar. An officer reported to Ike, as the President looked at this craft, that "none of our science could penetrate the craft, not even a laser." The laser, in fact, had not even warmed up the craft's hull. It was an enigma, indeed.

Then, as Ike watched, the craft "dematerialized for five to ten seconds!" Ike clutched at his chest, experiencing his first heart attack. "Of course," Stranges assured us, "the government covered it up so carefully that the press still has not figured it out." Ike's heart attack actually took place on 24 September 1955.

Dr. Stranges went on to mention abductions. He did not say who or what they were, but he said the government should do something about these "gruesome aliens who are stealing our people." He suggested that these aliens are atypical of the folks out in the stars. He referred to most of them as "Godly messengers" who are bringing the message of the Golden Rule: Do unto others as you would have done unto you.

At this point Stranges got preachy. He presented the standard New Age message of God-inspired salvation from within and suggested that aliens would lead us and teach us and share with us the gifts they had from God.

After the intermission, Frank talked about meeting Valiant Thor at the Pentagon. After a harrowing series of encounters with inept guards at the Pentagon (perhaps the only believable part of this tale), Frank entered a room and met Valiant Thor. The alien amazed Frank because he knew his name before Stranges had introduced himself. Then Val (as Stranges affectionately calls him) showed Stranges a "space suit" that had defied anything our scientists had thrown at it. These attempts to destroy the suit included a "laser, which was experimental at the time," even though this was 1959 and Stranges said a laser had been used back in 1954 at Edwards AFB. [Editor's note: The *Encyclopædia Britannica* gives 1960 as the year of the first operational laser.]

All of this amazed Stranges. Valiant Thor (and his brother Donn and the female Venusian, Jill) said he lived in the interior of Venus. Actually, as Stranges' story was

originally told, they lived on the surface of Venus but, with the landing of American and Russian probes on the surface, the Venusians moved to the interior of the world. (I wonder if cast-off terrestrial spacecraft do to real estate values on Mars, Venus or the moon what abandoned cars do to them in Phoenix?)

Val will reveal himself when the time is right, says Stranges. Val has performed a number of miracles for Stranges, including healing him after his head had been bashed open during a bank robbery. The man who hit him, according to Stranges, has vanished from the face of the Earth and Frank has been told "not to ask where he is."

Stranges also presented a slide show which included pictures of UFOs that were so obviously manufactured that Stranges began to lose his audience right there.

Stranges claims to have been the source for Erich von Daniken's work. He claims there is UFO research going on at the United Nations. He asserted that General MacArthur urged all nations to band together to withstand an assault from space. He said we've had radio signals from Andromeda. He said the moon is a UFO base and that craft regularly head in and out of Clavius.

Stranges used an excellent technique to prompt belief. Showing a slide in which an aura appeared around an astronaut on the moon's surface (caused by ice crystals inside the lens), he said, "How many of you know people can read auras for a fact?" Stranges raised his own hand, as did other true believers, then the reluctant did as well so they'd not be left out. With this technique he verified the telepathic abilities of aliens, the healing power of aliens and a host of other unsupportable claims.

The meeting wound down into an olde-timey religious revival where alien visitors became angels who were going to share gifts with us. The government keeps all of this hidden to protect their own power structure—the obvious implication being that to believe in Valiant Thor is to gain your own power.

Ultimately the whole of Stranges' case rests upon his own anecdotal evidence, or pictures and incidents that have been proven over and over again to be frauds. Stranges' credibility suffers badly in light of information supplied to me by Jim Speiser. Stranges has often promised the attendance of individuals, like William Shatner (Captain Kirk from *Star Trek*) at his conventions—then said that they "canceled" at the last moment.

More important is an incident on 16 September 1972 in which, I am certain, Dr. Stranges wished the incident to involve a UFO—namely the one that he and a companion were trying to fly. The reason he wished this plane to remain unidentified is because it contained 3,500 pounds of marijuana. The plane did not get off of the ground and Stranges got eight months in jail and three years probation for possession of marijuana with intent to traffic.

I wonder if Valiant Thor visited him in jail?

Near-Death Experiences and TV

by Jim Lippard

Channel 12 (KPNX) ran a series during their 10 o'clock news from May 2-5 called "Beyond and Back." The series focused on first person accounts of near-death experiences

(NDEs). Unfortunately, this led to a very one-sided interpretation of NDEs, a rather credulous promotion of the survival hypothesis.

I wrote a letter to the series' producer, Julie Frisoni, protesting its "biased and inaccurate coverage" of NDEs. I listed seven points of complaint:

1. NDE subjects were repeatedly referred to as having "died" and returned. This is inaccurate because NDEs are accompanied by brain functioning. I am unaware of a single case of NDE where the subject experienced brain death and was brought back.

2. It was stated that NDEs are similar across religious and cultural boundaries--implying that their interpretation is not culturally or religiously determined. In fact, NDE interpretations vary according to culture (e.g., NDE subjects in India do not report visions of Jesus).

3. It was claimed that NDEs are not hallucinations because hallucinations do not have lasting effects on people. One need only look at the history of psychedelic drugs to see that this argument doesn't work.

4. It was claimed that NDEs are not hallucinations or dreams because the NDEs felt "real." In fact, hypnagogic and hypnopompic sleep, lucid dreams, and drug-induced hallucinations are frequently felt to be "real," or in some cases, "more real than real." Hypnagogic sleep experiences are frequently mistaken for reality.

5. The series basically took for granted that NDEs involve the separation of the soul from the body. There is no evidence to support the hypothesis that NDEs involve something separating from the body. All of the evidence points towards NDEs being caused by physico-chemical changes in the brain.

6. It was claimed that "up until now it [the NDE] has been virtually ignored." I pointed out that a single book in my library has over 180 references to scientific work on NDEs dating back to 1892. I also stated that "There has been a great deal of research on the subject, but it is apparent that you have not examined any of it." While that was indeed how it appeared to me, I clearly overstated my response. See Frisoni's rebuttal below.

7. The series contained comments from NDE researcher Bruce Greyson, but did not include reference to some of his conclusions about NDEs, such as that NDEs are amenable to psychological explanation, may serve as a defense mechanism for impending death, and that those who have experienced NDEs do not value self-actualization, altruism, or spirituality more than those who have not.

Ms. Frisoni gave a point-by-point reply, writing that "As the producer of the segments and someone who has extensively researched this subject for months...I think I am in a position to reply to your accusations."

1. Frisoni stated that "Most of our subjects in the series had in fact 'died.' In two cases, the doctors told them they were gone and they were trying to bring them back." Her later comment shows that this is not a response to the point I made: "The issue you raise about brain waves is a good one...but not many people are hooked up to EEG machines when they have a near death experience." She went on to say that "There have been

documented cases of people though, who have been hooked to an EEG machine and reported strikingly similar responses. According to the definition of death set by Harvard Law School...these people were clinically dead. I'm sure you have run across these citations in your extensive research though." In fact, I haven't. I was also unaware that the Harvard Law School set standards for clinical death (I had mentioned the Harvard Medical School's standards in my letter).

2. Frisoni stated that "I don't believe we were misleading at all when we stated NDE's are similar across all cultural and religious boundaries. All we are saying is that the basic experiences are similar...but how people chose to interpret them is clearly culturally determined. That is true about anything. We never insinuated that everyone interprets them exactly the same. That was never mentioned. All we said is that people are experiencing strikingly similar stories all over the world. How those people chose to interpret them is up to them. We never made the inference you're stretching to say we did." The show was clearly promoting the interpretation of NDEs as evidence for survival of death. I think the implication was clearly there.

3 & 4. Frisoni responded that "The claim that hallucinations don't have long lasting effects came from a doctor himself...who, by the way, works with patients and drugs daily. He feels he has seen enough of a difference between hallucinations and near death experiences to state a conclusion." Unfortunately, I'm sure the good doctor does not work with hallucinogens.

5. Frisoni states that "We never claimed that there was evidence to support the hypothesis that an NDE involves something separating from the body." No, I don't believe the series ever did claim there was evidence for that hypothesis, but it certainly did put forth that hypothesis.

6. Frisoni's letter says that "I resent the supposition on your part that I have not done my research on this subject. I've been immersed in near death research for months and have read everything I could get my hands on. Doctors and researchers have virtually ignored this topic in terms of research. If you'll look in those bibliographies you speak of, you'll see that a handful of doctors have been studying this for years...but the majority of researchers, scientists and doctors haven't given it more than a passing glance." The second sentence is true enough, but offers no support for the first (against my point of complaint). By this reasoning, every area of science is "ignored."

7. Frisoni did not respond to this point, but instead responded to another part of my letter, saying that "Our token skeptic was the only doctor, researcher or scientist who would talk to us critically about NDE's on camera. I searched for critics for months. Not one would go on camera except for Dr. Blacher."

Ms. Frisoni concluded her letter by saying that "It is a shame that in your search to question what is presented to you...that you sometimes draw inaccurate and even false assumptions. I do appreciate the time you took to write and to bring some issues to my attention. It is my job also though...to be skeptical and question that which is presented to me. That's the job of any good journalist."

NOTE: All ellipses in quotes from Ms. Frisoni's letter are her own.

BIBLIOGRAPHY AND FURTHER READING

- Alcock, James E. 1981. "Psychology and near-death experiences," *Skeptical Inquirer* 3(Spring 1979):25-41. Reprinted in *Paranormal Borderlands of Science*, edited by Kendrick Frazier (1981, Prometheus), pp. 153-169.
- Beyerstein, Barry L. "The Brain and Consciousness: Implications for Psi Phenomena," *Skeptical Inquirer* 12(Winter 1987-88):163-173.
- Blackmore, Susan J. 1982. *Beyond the Body: An Investigation of Out-of-the-Body Experiences*, London: William Heinemann.
- Frisoni, Julie 1988. Letter to Jim Lippard, 17 May.
- Hövelmann, Gerd H. 1985. "Evidence for Survival from Near-Death Experiences? A Critical Appraisal," in *A Skeptic's Handbook of Parapsychology*, edited by Paul Kurtz (1985, Prometheus), pp. 645-684.
- Lippard, Jim 1988. Letter to Producer, "Beyond and Back," 11 May.
- Siegel, Ronald K. 1977. "Hallucinations," *Scientific American* 23(7):132-140.
- Stafford, Peter 1982. *Psychedelics Encyclopedia*, second edition. Los Angeles: J.P. Tarcher.

An Artistic 'Phenom'

by Ted Karren

A Brazilian visitor claiming to channel for Picasso and other well known artists displayed his talents as a teaser for the real purpose of his presence in Phoenix—to teach a class at the cost of \$70 in the public library on the subject of channeling. This man, in his twentieth century body, is known as Luis Gasparetto; but for some reason his body is a fertile temple for any of the great artists who wish to further their work.

Mark Jacquemin, Erv Theobald, and I were on hand at the teaser the Saturday night before his class. As he sat there looking off into space before his performance began, a woman told us what we were about to see: a man with no artistic background surrender both hands and feet to discarnate artists. The woman said that although not normally ambidextrous, Luis under trance is quite capable of painting with either hand, and has in the past even used his feet. Luis comes from quite good psychic stock, she assured us, as his mother and most of his family have performed similar phenomena based on other talents, like playing a musical instrument.

Immediately after the lights were dimmed, Luis took to his trance and painted, just like any other painter you might see in the park on a summer day. He did bring along a cassette tape player that was not of the best quality, but served its purpose of playing some pleasant recordings. At first the feeling was that of curiosity, as everyone in the room stood to see the wonder unfold. The ritual continued, however, somewhat longer than expected, and I noticed people after a time begin to walk around and exit the room. Why take so long to prove a point? My guess is that since the paintings were to be sold after the demo, it was necessary to produce as many as possible, which took time. Could this be considered forgery? I say "probably not" since he did not claim that the paintings produced under trance are original.

During the performance, I did not notice too much activity with his left hand other than to spread some paste onto the canvas. It really disappointed me that Luis couldn't induce any of the artists to use his feet. At one point during the demo (while still in a trance) Luis engaged his late-twentieth century brain and hand to flip over the cassette tape in his late-twentieth century appliance while still using his eighteenth-century-controlled arm to paint.

Our overall impression was that Luis Gasparetto had not proven a thing with this demo since any one of a thousand modern day artists while not under a trance could do the same thing. A background check is necessary to determine if he, while growing up in Brazil, demonstrated any innate or conditioned artistic talents. Furthermore, a test is needed to see if the painting done while channeling significantly correlates to that done by the artists he claims to channel for. Until then, there is no reason whatsoever to consider his channeling of dead artists a phenomenon.

Psychic Detectives

by Jim Lippard

"Psychic detectives" or "psychic sleuths" are people who make two claims: (a) that they possess psychic powers—the ability to foresee the future, to see events remotely, to have access to information by paranormal means; and (b) that they have successfully used these abilities to assist police in solving crimes.

Since claim (b) can be true only if claim (a) is true, it is useful to see what evidence there is for those such claims before we look at (b).

One of the most famous psychic claims is Jeane Dixon's claim to have predicted the assassination of John F. Kennedy. It is claimed in Ruth Montgomery's *A Gift of Prophecy* that Dixon predicted that Kennedy would be shot and killed if he went to Dallas. In fact, though, she made no such prediction. She actually made several predictions. First, in 1958 she predicted (as reported by columnist Jack Anderson): "As for the 1960 election, Mrs. Dixon thinks it will be dominated by labor and won by a Democrat. But he will be assassinated or die in office though not necessarily in his first term." (At the time, three of ten presidents in this century had been assassinated or died in office.) When 1960 arrived, however, she changed her mind and predicted that a Republican, and not Kennedy, would be elected president.

Studies of Dixon's predictions have repeatedly shown no evidence that she has any precognitive ability at all. Some of her past predictions include: Russia would be first to put a man on the moon, Nixon would serve his country well, Fidel Castro was either dead or in China in 1966, the Vietnam War would end in 1966, Russia would invade Iran in 1953, Russia would invade Palestine in 1957, World War III would begin in 1958, and, just recently (in *The Star*, Oct. 6, 1987), that:

"Robert Bork will be confirmed as a member of the U.S. Supreme Court. He will by no means be the last controversial judicial nomination President Reagan will make. Reagan will nominate one more person to the Supreme Court."

“Despite all the recent bad publicity about his ‘copycat’ speeches, destiny still seems to favor Delaware’s Joe Biden among the announced list of Democratic presidential hopefuls, but a late-entering dark horse could upset his chances.”

(These two predictions were wrong even before that issue of *The Star* hit the supermarkets.)

Evaluations of psychic predictions all have had this same result: the psychics do no better than intelligent guessing—in many cases they do worse. One study of earthquake predictions by psychics showed that they were no more accurate than predictions generated randomly by a computer. Psychics, despite their claims of high success rates, may be seen on closer inspection to be rather unimpressive.

Despite the lack of evidence for claim (a), there are still many cases which proponents of psychic detectives offer in support of claim (b). I will now turn to the specific claims of the psychic detectives.

Psychic detectives use a procedure quite similar to that used in giving character readings (see my article “Cold Reading” in the July/August 1987 *Phoenix Skeptics News* and its bibliography). They offer their consultants the verbal equivalent of a Rorschach test—a vague, rambling, verbose statement filled with unconnected details. Often information is elicited from the police (by “fishing”) and fed back in slightly altered form. Other times information is simply obtained from the news media. A detective from the Phoenix Police Department told me that psychics often call in with details about highly-publicized cases the day the resolution is published in the newspaper. When told the information has already been in the media, they respond, ironically enough, by claiming to be unaware of such publication.

The accuracy of the (usually unsolicited) psychic statements is evaluated after the fact in such a way that ambiguous and often contradictory statements fit the true facts. As in the case of psychic predictions, details which are wide of the mark are conveniently forgotten.

A brief example of a psychic detective’s statement is the following: “I get a man, black. I hear screaming, screaming. I’m running up stairs and down. My head... someone bounces my head on the wall or floor. I see trees—a park? In the city, but green. Did this person live there? What does the number ‘2’ mean? I get a bad, bloody taste in my mouth. The names ‘John’ or ‘Joseph’ or something like that. I am running on the street like a crazy. This is a very serious crime.” (Reiser, et al., p. 19)

Psychic detectives and their promoters often point to the fact that they work for free as demonstration of their genuineness. But there is a much more plausible explanation of why psychic detectives offer their services: publicity. Media coverage in such cases is cheap publicity which attracts more clients and allows charging of higher fees.

Several critical evaluations of psychic detectives have been conducted. In 1975, Richard Guarino sent questionnaires to the 100 largest police departments in the United States. Of the 68 departments that responded, seven had consulted psychics. However, none reported that the

psychics had provided any substantial help. On the other hand, many failures were noted.

In 1978, Martin Reiser, director of the behavioral science section of the Los Angeles Police Department, conducted a controlled test of 12 psychics who were asked to look at evidence from four crimes. The report showed little evidence of psychic ability. A followup study showed that psychics are no better at making good guesses than are detectives and students.

In 1980, the Michigan-based Center for Scientific Anomalies Research began a long-term research project to evaluate claims of psychic detectives. As of a 1984 report (Hoebens with Truzzi), the CSAR findings supported the case for skepticism.

In January of 1987, the UK publication *Police Review* published the result of a survey of police investigators on the subject of the usefulness of psychics. The survey, which accounted for 40% of police forces of England and Wales, showed that: “It was commonly accepted that none of the information supplied assisted in any significant way in solving the crime and there were no instances reported of successes which could be investigated. The consensus was that mediums supplied a great deal of irrelevant and inaccurate information. It was accepted that some of the data could contain certain things which coincided with the reality of the case but that the overall result revealed no significant correlations between known fact and the medium’s speculations.” (Riley and Thompson, p. 121) In fact, use of psychic detectives was calculated as a waste of money: “A typical costing for the use of mediums on a murder has been applied to the Sarah Jayne Harper case. If a police decision had been implemented to ‘follow up’ the 600 unsolicited responses from mediums it would take an average of six man hours per medium for officers to visit or contact them and assess their information. A further two hours is required for the administrative and evaluative effort of the control room team. Thus 3,600 detective man hours and 1,200 control room man hours, a total of 4,800 man hours would have been expended. Taking an average fixed cost of £7 (\$12.41) per man hour this exercise would have cost £34,000 (\$60,299) from the inquiry budget.”

Despite this very strong case for doubt, there are still reports of “prize cases” in the pro-psychic detective literature. An examination of these cases turns out to be the most damning argument of all against psychic detectives, as the popular accounts of these cases inevitably turn out to be either grossly misrepresented or totally fraudulent.

One of the earliest (perhaps the first) psychic detectives was the Dutchman Gerard Croiset, who died in 1980. He was promoted by Wilhelm Tenhaeff, a parapsychologist at the University of Utrecht. It has since come to light that Tenhaeff regularly fabricated and altered data in order to present Croiset as an accurate psychic.

One of Croiset’s cases occurred on May 21, 1960, when he was telephoned by a neighbor of a family in the city of Eindhoven whose four-year-old son had been missing for 24 hours. According to the published account, the police “had no clues.” Croiset was quoted as saying, “The outlook isn’t good. Search the area immediately. But

I'm afraid in about three days the child's body will be found in the canal close to the bridge."

The actual facts of the case, according to police reports, are rather different. Piet Hein Hoebens notes: "The victim, three-year-old Anthonius Thonen, while playing with a friend, fell into the Dommel River on May 20. The accident was witnessed by the other boy, who told Anthonius's mother about it when she came looking for him. Mrs. Thonen saw something floating on the water. Presumably, this was the body. It had disappeared when the police arrived. On May 23 (two days after the telephone conversation w/Croiset), Anthonius's remains were found in the river, near the Gessell playground." (Hoebens (a), p. 22) The police report makes no mention of Croiset or a bridge. The police knew from the very beginning that the boy had drowned in the river.

In 1951, Dutch clairvoyant Peter Hurkos identified a 17-year-old son of a respected local family as responsible for a series of arsons near the city of Nijmegen. According to his account, the police had believed the boy beyond suspicion, but he confessed when confronted by Hurkos. In fact, the boy, a mentally impaired son of a local farmer, had been the prime suspect from the beginning. He was arrested after candy wrappers found at one of the fires was identified as a brand the boy had recently purchased in quantity at a local candy shop. Hurkos' attempts to solve the case began the day *after* the suspect had been arrested.

The biggest claim-to-fame of Nutley, New Jersey psychic Dorothy Allison is that she allegedly gave the name "Williams" to Atlanta police long before Wayne Williams was arrested and convicted for a series of murders of black children. But according to Atlanta's Sgt. Grundlach, Allison supplied the Atlanta police with 42 names, none of which was "Williams." Marcello Truzzi of the CSAR spoke to two police officers Allison had mentioned to him as witnesses. One could not confirm having heard the name "Williams." The other recalled that, at one time, Allison had mentioned a number of names, one of which was "Williams."

When Allison made her visit to Atlanta in 1981, TV viewers were told that she had identified the murderer, that there was more than one killer (one perhaps black), and so on. But according to Portenia Jefferson, a spokesman for the Atlanta Police Department, Allison was of no help in the investigation.

Greta Alexander of Delavan, Illinois, has made many claims of psychic sleuthing. In 1976, she was consulted by Bremer County authorities regarding two murders in Waverly, Iowa. As of late 1981, neither case had been solved.

In 1977, a woman named Kathleen Holliday of Grimes, Iowa disappeared while delivering mail. Violence was suspected because \$25,000 worth of bearer bonds were missing. Alexander said that Holliday was dead, that she would be found by three people within five miles of her home, that one of the three would be wearing black boots, and that there would be "some water involved." Her prediction could have applied to thousands of acres around Grimes and was of no help to the sheriff's department—Holliday's body was found by accident in the Saylorville

reservoir by three boaters. Alexander was correct about the water, location, and number of people who found the body. She was wrong, however, about the black boots.

In 1978, Mary Beth Grismore and her car disappeared from Marshall Indiana. Alexander said that Grismore had been shot to death and her body would be found in Turkey Run State Park in Indiana. Grismore's body was found near Columbus, Ohio, in the trunk of her car. She had been strangled.

In 1979, Alexander told the mother of a missing Des Moines teenager that her daughter, who had then been missing for almost a month, was alive and well. In fact, the girl at that time had been bound, stabbed, and thrown into the Saylorville reservoir, where her body was discovered three months later.

In 1981, Alexander was called to help find a young boy who had disappeared. She first told the family that he would be found safe, then that he wouldn't. She said she could see that he was stuck somewhere. She also told searchers to look for windmills, sheep and horses, and something with green paint on it. All of these suggestions were of no help. The boy was found several days later, unharmed.

Scottsdale psychic/astrologer Jonathan Chris (known for making earthquake predictions and his invention of "piology") claims in his literature to have aided the Tempe Police Department in the investigation of the May 9, 1984 of Christy Fornoff, who disappeared while delivering newspapers to an apartment complex. Her body was found in a dumpster two days later and the man later convicted of her murder, Donald Beaty, was a suspect from the very beginning. So how did Jonathan Chris help the investigation? According to Lieutenant Steve Graheling, head of investigations for the Tempe Police Department, "we used no psychics in the Christy Fornoff case." Wondering if perhaps the family had contacted a psychic, I contacted Christy's mother, Carol Fornoff. Mrs. Fornoff said she received some materials from Jonathan Chris on February 10, 1985—after Donald Beaty's first trial (which ended in a mistrial). She said she was not aware that Chris provided any help in the investigation.

After getting information from Mrs. Fornoff, I contacted Sergeant Mike Palmer, who headed the Fornoff investigation. Contrary to Lt. Graheling, Palmer said he had spoken with Chris and even visited his office on one occasion. Palmer said that Chris first provided unsolicited information in the form of "star chart things that showed [Beaty and Fornoff's] paths would cross." He said while they may have received letters from Chris before Beaty was arrested, they definitely did not receive anything before he was a suspect. According to Palmer, "We didn't use [Chris] in any way to identify who the suspect was.... There was nothing he gave us that we didn't already know."

As these cases have shown, psychic detectives are not all they're cracked up to be. It is also clear from their methods that it is relatively easy for them to take on the appearance of being quite accurate by selective editing of facts and ignoring failures. The psychic detective can issue a press release on the accurate 3% of a statement given to

police, but no one bothers to issue a press release on the inaccurate 97%. What this all shows is the need for skepticism when confronted with the claims of a psychic detective.

But despite these facts, police departments still use psychics. The Pomona, California Police Department has gone so far as to adopt a written policy on the use of psychics. The policy allows for police to call on psychics as early as the outset of a case, rather than being a last resort. In a book *Practical Homicide Investigation*, Vernon J. Geberth of the New York City Police Department describes the proper use of psychics as a tool, though neither "encourage[s] or discourage[s] the use of psychics in homicide investigations." Articles in the February 1979 *Criminal Information Bulletin*, the May 1979 *Police Chief*, and the January 27, 1986 *National Law Journal* uncritically describe the use of psychics in criminal investigations. The latter's most critical comments don't question the existence of psychic powers, but whether or not use of them in witness interrogation violates the Fourth Amendment.

Recently, psychics have been branching out into other areas of the legal system. In 1986, a Denver woman excused herself from jury duty because she psychically "knew" the defendant was guilty (the jury later agreed). In 1981, a psychic was hired by lawyers defending Jean Harris in the shooting death of Scarsdale Diet author Dr. Herman Tarnower to aid in selecting sympathetic jurors. Hugh Silverstein of Rochester, New York, is a lawyer who advertises himself as a parapsychologist. Psychics Philip Jordan, Keith Harary, and Kathlyn Rhea have been used in jury selection. Attorney Melvin Belli has consulted psychics for jury selection (Galante, p. 32).

As Mark Plummer of CSICOP was recently quoted, "The law is, by nature, a very precise science. It is based on a very long history of rules to protect the innocent and convict the guilty. Psychics are trying to shortcut that system."

Acknowledgments

Thanks to Marcello Truzzi for providing me with copies of many articles on psychic detectives and to Mrs. Carol Fornoff for providing me with copies of materials sent to her by Jonathan Chris.

Bibliography

- Anonymous. "Use of Psychics in Law Enforcement," *Criminal Information Bulletin*, February 1979, pp. 23-26.
- Eagar, Harry. "How psychic is Greta Alexander? Not very, her track record shows," *Des Moines Register*, 30 September 1981.
- Fornoff, Carol. Personal communication, 5 January 1988.
- Frazier, Kendrick. *Science Confronts the Paranormal*, Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1986.
- Galante, Mary Ann. "Psychics: Lawyers using seers to help select juries, find missing children," *The National Law Journal*, 27 January 1986.
- Geberth, Vernon J. *Practical Homicide Investigation: Tactics, Procedures, and Forensic Techniques*, New York: Elsevier, 1983.
- Gordon, Henry. "Now psychics help lawyers select juries," *The Ontario Skeptic*, 1(Winter 1987/88):7.

- Gordon, Thomas J. and Jerry J. Tobias. "Managing the Psychic in Criminal Investigations," *Police Chief*, 46(May 1979):58-59.
- Graheling, Steve. Personal communication, 4 January 1988.
- Hoebens, Piet Hein (a). "Gerard Croiset: Investigations of the Mozart of 'Psychic Sleuths'," *Skeptical Inquirer*, 6(1, Fall 1981):17-28. Reprinted in Frazier, Kendrick *Science Confronts the Paranormal*, pp. 122-132.
- Hoebens, Piet Hein (b). "Croiset and Professor Tenhaeff: Discrepancies in Claims of Clairvoyance," *Skeptical Inquirer*, 6(2, Winter 1981-82):32-40. Reprinted in Frazier, Kendrick *Science Confronts the Paranormal*, pp. 133-141.
- Hoebens, Piet Hein with Marcello Truzzi. "Reflections on Psychic Sleuths," in Kurtz, Paul A *Skeptic's Handbook of Parapsychology*, pp. 631-643.
- Hunter, Roger and John Derr. "Prediction Monitoring and Evaluation Program," *Earthquake Information Bulletin*, 10(1978):93-96.
- Kurtz, Paul. *A Skeptic's Handbook of Parapsychology*, Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1985.
- Lucas, Ward. "Police use of psychics: A waste of resources and tax money," *Campus Law Enforcement Journal*, 15(July-August 1985):15-21.
- Lundstrom, Marjie. "Psychics win spurs with law officers," *Denver Post*, 2 December 1987.
- Marshall, Eliot. "Police Science and Psychics," *Science*, 210(28 November 1980):994-995.
- Neher, Andrew. *The Psychology of Transcendence*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1980.
- Palmer, Mike. Personal communication, 5 January 1988.
- Palmer, Mike. Personal communication, 2 February 1988.
- Randi, James. "Allison and the Atlanta Murders: A Follow-up," *Skeptical Inquirer*, 7(2, Winter 1982-83):7.
- Reiser, Martin, Louise Ludwig, Susan Saxe, and Clare Wagner. "An Evaluation of the Use of Psychics in the Investigation of Major Crimes," *Journal of Police Science and Administration*, 7(1979):18-25.
- Riley, Michael and David Thompson. "Hearing Voices of Reason?," *Police Review*, 16 January 1987, pp. 121-122.

Editor's Ramblings

This newsletter is being received by Associates of the Tucson Skeptical Society, as well as many *Skeptical Inquirer* subscribers in Arizona. We welcome the new readers and hope that *SI* subscribers who do not belong to either local group will give us a try. For the next issue of this newsletter, we expect joint publication and approximately equal contributions from Phoenix and Tucson groups. As a result, we need a name change for the newsletter that reflects either the statewide or the Phoenix-Tucson scope. Please send all ideas to me.

You may not have noticed, but over the last year this newsletter has grown each month. From six to eight pages, then with smaller and smaller margins, and this month to smaller type. This is to keep mailing costs down, as five pieces of paper comes close to an ounce and would preclude any inserts without additional postage.

Westercon, an annual science fiction convention, will be in Phoenix this year. There will be panel discussions on astrology and channeling featuring Phoenix Skeptics members, as well as a demonstration of channeling. Dates

are July 1-4; call Mike Stackpole at 231-8624 for more information.

Dr. Janet Lee Mitchell, parapsychologist, would like some help in locating a light-tight room and a photo-multiplier that is sensitive to ultraviolet frequencies for a psycho-kinesis experiment. Contact Jim Lippard at 943-2723 with any information.

Prometheus Books, publishers of many skeptical books, have offered us a deal where we can offer a 25% discount to members on books in their catalog. James Randi's latest book *The Faith Healers* is just one of the many titles available.

Mike Stackpole is looking for volunteers for an astrology test. Please contact him for more information.

We've published a newsletter for a year now. Those of you who joined at the beginning will be getting just one more newsletter unless you renew. We hope you join us for a bigger and better year!

TUSKS Tips

by Ken Morse, Chairman, Tucson Skeptical Society
Sorry for the hiatus in publication of "Trunkline"—guess you should have been a little more skeptical, eh? Seriously, we have been working behind the scenes to bring you a joint newsletter with the Phoenix Skeptics. Meantime, all of you will receive this newsletter until current subscriptions have expired, after which you will be asked to cover further costs for postage and publication. A TUSKS board meeting was held on June 16 to confirm this action, and set some plans for next season's public meeting. We hope to publish the fall schedule in September.

TUSKURRENCES: Several members, including Jack Kirwan, Ken Morse, and Dr. Gary Mechler, were asked by the media to respond to "Nancy Nonsense" on the local television stations. Morse also gave a one-hour television presentation on "Lifestyles in the Eighties" which provided a final critique on a series of "psi" presenters. TUSKS Associates are encouraged to become involved with pseudoscience in a critical sense. Media people have shown some willingness to allow public comment. A reminder, though: Public statements should be made as individuals rather than as TUSKS positions unless the Board endorses them officially. Thanks for your support, send all future newsletter correspondence and contributions to Ron Harvey, c/o Phoenix Skeptics.

Upcoming Meetings

Phoenix Skeptics meetings are normally held on a Saturday near the end of the month. Meetings start at 12:30 p.m. and are held at the Jerry's restaurant at 1750 N. Scottsdale Rd. in Tempe (south of McKellips).

June 25. Normal meeting time and place. Meet the New Age head on. We will be given a demonstration of psychic powers.

July 23. Normal meeting time and place. Speaker will be Anita O'Riordan of the state Attorney General's office. Her topic will be scams against the elderly.

If you have a suggestion for a meeting topic or a guest speaker, contact Ted Karren at our address or 993-2600.

The Phoenix Skeptics News is published bimonthly by the Phoenix Skeptics, Jim Lippard, Executive Director. Editor is Ron Harvey.

The Phoenix Skeptics News is the official publication of the Phoenix Skeptics. Phoenix Skeptics is a non-profit scientific and educational organization with the following goals: 1. to subject claims of the paranormal, occult, and fringe sciences to the test of science, logic, and common sense; 2. to act as a clearinghouse for factual and scientific information about the paranormal; and 3. to promote critical thinking and the scientific method. Subscription rate is \$10 per year. All manuscripts become the property of Phoenix Skeptics, which retains the right to edit them. Address all correspondence to PS, P.O. Box 62792, Phoenix, AZ 85082-2792. CSICOP-recognized skeptic groups may reprint articles in entirety by crediting the author, *The Phoenix Skeptics News*, and Phoenix Skeptics. All others must receive Phoenix Skeptics' permission. Copyright © 1988 by Phoenix Skeptics. Opinions expressed in articles are those of the authors.

Phoenix Skeptics
P.O. Box 62792
Phoenix, AZ 85082-2792

Address Correction Requested

Jim Lippard
214 W. Harmont Dr.
Phoenix, AZ 85021

PLEASE RENEW

2