

• encourages critical and scientific thinking • serves as an information resource on extraordinary claims • provides extraordinary evidence that skeptics are cool



photo by Helen Hester-Ossa

Last October, in the spirit of Halloween, the National Capital Area Skeptics sponsored "Ghostbusting 101," a full-day program that examined investigations of the spirit realm, from the 19th century to present day. The sessions offered diverse viewpoints on attempts to apply science and technology in the assessment of age-old traditions and beliefs.

Kari Coleman, who posed as a psychic for a segment of Penn & Teller's Sin City Spectacular television show, discussed her personal experiences and the methods she used in giving readings. She is an actress whose skeptical writings have been published by the James Randi Educational Foundation in Swift, particularly (Vol. 2, No. 3&4), "My Psychic Adventure."

This article is the final installment in the "Ghostbusting 101" series.

## Ghostbusting 101 - Part 3

# Would You Trust This Woman?

by Helen E. Hester-Ossa

Yeah, you probably would. Anyone would, but especially someone who is looking for a psychic to give them hope about a loved one, a dream, a goal, or their life.

Kari Coleman is a beautiful woman with a beautiful smile who radiates sincerity. She's also a very good actress. And smart—she's got to be smart to hang out with magic's bad boys, Penn & Teller, and help them with some of their scams. Actually, she WAS one of their scams, a tarot reading psychic by the name of, you've got it, Kari Coleman.

Kari began her adventure as a psychic advisor at Caesar's Magic Empire in Las Vegas, in a "Spurina" costume (purple flowing gown with built-in bosom of gravity-defying proportions, a black Cleopatra-meets-Las Vegas wig, and heavy theatrical makeup). She had prepared thoroughly for her role by researching and reading up on tarot cards; talking to skeptic Ray Hyman, a psychologist and expert at the cold reading school of palm reading; and watching a tape provided by *Skeptic* magazine's Michael Shermer of James Van Praagh, a psychic medium claiming to talk to dead people.

Kari was nervous. After all, she was a fraud, wasn't she? Surprisingly enough, using a set of canned lines she had memorized and her own insight into human nature, she was

letters  
2

prez sez  
3

A Weekend at  
the DC MUFON  
Symposium  
(Part 2)  
4

media notes  
9

Alternative  
Engineering—  
A Postmodern  
Parable  
10

American  
Lunacies  
12

16th & 17th  
Century  
Parodies of  
Astrologers  
15

Science Fair  
Judging  
17

the write stuff:  
NCCAM Focuses  
on Solid  
Scientific  
Investigation  
19

continued on page 18



# letters

## Ghosthunter article could have had more critical slant

by Mike Jawer

In a May 2000 email that Paul Jaffe, president of NCAS received, Mike Jawer stated:

I was amazed by the writeup of Joe Holbert in the last *Skeptical Eye*. I would have thought his presentation would have been written up with a more critical slant. By the

same token, he was thoughtful and even humorous and that seems to have stood him in good stead.

---

## Condon Report inquiry

We were recently approached by someone wanting to use images from the Condon report for a documentary. See email fragment below:

On Tue, 13 Jun 2000 INDIGOFILMS 999@aol.com wrote:

“ ... we are interested in using some of these images in an upcoming documentary for The History Channel. Is it possible to obtain usage of these photographs? Please contact me and let me know.”

NCAS Reply:

The copyright is owned by the University of Colorado, and the copy of the report that we used is in the University’s library. They were very cooperative with our effort, and I’m fairly sure they would be equally cooperative with yours. At the time we did our project, the contact person was Milagros Carabello, secretary to the Board of Regents. Her e-mail address from that time (1998-99):  
milagros.caraballo@colorado.edu

*“If you would like to receive the Shadow of a Doubt monthly calendar via email or participate in the ncas-share online forum, please send an email to [ncas@ncas.org](mailto:ncas@ncas.org) indicating your interest.”*

---

**National Capital Area Skeptical Eye (ISSN 1063-2077) is published by the National Capital Area Skeptics, PO Box 8428 , Silver Spring, MD 20907.**

Copyright © 2000 National Capital Area Skeptics. Signed articles are the opinions of the authors. Opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the position of the editors, the Board of Directors, or the National Capital Area Skeptics.

24-hour phone number: 301-587-3827  
e-mail: [ncas@ncas.org](mailto:ncas@ncas.org)  
Skeptical Eye input: [s\\_eye@ncas.org](mailto:s_eye@ncas.org)  
Internet: <http://www.ncas.org>  
NCAS discussion group: [ncas-share@ncas.org](mailto:ncas-share@ncas.org)

### NCAS Board of Directors

Paul Jaffe, president  
Gary Stone, vice president  
Marv Zelkowitz, secretary  
Grace Denman, treasurer  
Chip Denman, spokesman

Barry Blyveis  
Jonathan Boswell  
Herb M. Federhen  
Jim Giglio  
Stephen Goodson  
Rita Malone

Eugene Ossa  
Mary Susan Pastel  
Scott Snell  
Jamy Ian Swiss  
Walter Rowe

**Editor/Designer**  
Helen Hester-Ossa

**Guest Editor**  
Virginia Vitucci



recycled paper

Dear Skeptical Eye reader,

Welcome to our new members who joined as a result of our recent membership drive! I'm confident you will find NCAS a cause worthy of your support. Your membership and tax deductible donations help support our programs and projects, including our public lecture series, media feedback, online document library, educational programs, and other activities. NCAS also offers the opportunity to volunteer and get involved in the promotion of critical thinking and the battle against pseudoscience.

You can now support NCAS when you shop online! Sign up with one or both of the sites below, then simply shop at any of a number of major online stores, including Amazon, Barnes & Noble, CDnow, Buy.com, Priceline and literally hundreds of others. Forward the purchase confirmation email that the vendor sends you to the site you've signed up with and the vendor makes a donation to NCAS, from 3% up to 40%. NCAS has already received several sizable checks from members' purchases. The URLs are <http://www.igive.com/skeptics> and <http://www.consumersaints.com/>

Recently, NCAS reviewed and commented on the draft of the five-year strategic plan of the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM), for-

merly NIH's Office of Alternative Medicine. Board member Jim Giglio headed the effort, with support and feedback from other members. NCCAM recently came under the direction of Stephen E. Straus, M.D. Dr. Straus' professional credentials are impressive, including many awards and commendations in the field of clinical research. We hope that under his direction, NCCAM will determine if "complementary and alternative medicine procedures and products do what they purport to do".

See NCAS' comments letter in this issue of the *Eye*. The specific change recommendations can be found at <http://www.ncas.org/>. Reading NCCAM's strategic plan at <http://nccam.nih.gov/nccam/strategic/> is recommended for context.

NCAS has received coupons for \$8.00 off admission to Six Flags America for our members. These coupons will be available at upcoming programs, or you can contact me directly at [pjaffe@mindless.com](mailto:pjaffe@mindless.com) or 703-329-0270. I welcome any comments, suggestions, or ideas you may have.

Yours truly,

Paul Jaffe ([pjaffe@mindless.com](mailto:pjaffe@mindless.com))  
President, National Capital Area Skeptics



photo by H. Hester-Ossa

*Your membership and tax deductible donations help support our programs and projects, including our public lecture series, media feedback, online document library, educational programs, and other activities. NCAS also offers the opportunity to volunteer and get involved in the promotion of critical thinking and the battle against pseudoscience.*

**Shop online, support NCAS!**

# NCAS Meetings for 2000-2001

This year's NCAS meetings will be held at the Bethesda Public Library, 7400 Arlington Road, Bethesda, Maryland, on the following dates:

September 16, 2000  
October 14, 2000\*  
November 11, 2000\*  
December 16, 2000

January 20, 2001  
February 17, 2001  
March 17, 2001  
April 21, 2001

May 19, 2001  
June 16, 2001

*\*October and November are the second Saturday of the month.*

# A Weekend at the Washington MUFON Symposium (Part 2)

by Scott Snell

The Saturday (July 3) evening session of the 1999 Mutual UFO Network (MUFON) Symposium began with Budd Hopkins and his recounting of “A 1961 Car Levitation UFO Abduction Case.”

Hopkins is a painter and sculptor who became interested in UFOs when he witnessed one in 1964. In 1975 he began investigating UFO reports himself. By the early 1980s, he was the best-known proponent of the claim that many people are victims of abduction by extraterrestrials. Hopkins believes that many of the victims do not realize that they have

***Hopkins sometimes hypnotizes the claimant to obtain further information about the incident. Some cases that initially seem mildly peculiar become spectacular after hypnosis.***

been abducted, or at least are not aware of the otherworldly aspect of what they have experienced. One of the most useful clues for identifying such cases, Hopkins suggests, is the “missing time” that some abductees report, sometimes in conjunction with a UFO sighting. A victim may glance at his or her wristwatch and be surprised to see that the time is much later than expected. They may be unable to account for some significant stretch of time or cannot recall parts of a journey.

Hopkins sometimes hypnotizes the claimant to obtain further information about the incident. Some cases that initially seem mildly peculiar become spectacular after hypnosis. Details emerge of encounters with alien beings that conduct what are interpreted as medical exams on the victims, sometimes involving extraction of sperm or ova. They also describe meeting “alien/human hybrids,” presumably created from the extracted sex cells of abductees. Hopkins attributes the fragmentary or submerged quality of the victims’ memories of their experiences to some unknown alien technology that is used to erase recollections of the incident.

However, some UFO investigators are concerned that Hopkins’ use of hypnosis is somewhat reckless. Critics allege that he asks “leading questions” of the abduction victims while they are under hypnosis. Also, many hypnosis experts are leery of testimony given while in the trance-like state, arguing that it is often a mixture comprising unknown proportions of reality and confabulation. Hopkins claims to guard against unintentional suggestions to the hypnotized, and notes that many abduction victims do not require hypnosis to remember their experiences.

Hopkins is the author of three—soon to be four—books dealing with the alleged abduction phenomenon. His presentation focused on a tale he investigated while preparing his first book, entitled *Missing Time: A Documented Study of UFO Abductions*, for its 1981 release. “Solid as this case appeared,” he said, “some of its details were so strange that, erring on the side of caution, I decided not to include it in the book.”

Speaking to the MUFON audience, Hopkins gamely battled to be heard above a chorus singing Baptist hymns in the neighboring meeting room. His efforts provided him with the grist for a few witty remarks that sprinkled the early parts of his presentation, recounting a 1980 guest appearance he made on a New York City radio station’s call-in program. On the show, he was expounding on his hypothesis that “missing time” could be a sign of an unremembered UFO abduction. One of the callers, (given the pseudonym “Sean McIntyre” by Hopkins) phoned the station to describe his own “missing time” story. Hopkins was intrigued enough to arrange a meeting with the caller.

Meeting with Hopkins in early 1981, McIntyre related his story in detail. In April of 1961, as a recently commissioned second lieutenant in the Army, he drove from his home in New Jersey to a new assignment in Fort Jackson, South Carolina. (Note that the date precedes the famous Betty and Barney Hill abduction case, considered to be prototypical, by several months, although McIntyre did not

*Scott Snell is a charter member of NCAS and serves on its board of directors. He received his Bachelor of Science degree in physics from the University of Maryland. He is employed as a flight software engineer by Computer Sciences Corporation at NASA’s Goddard Space Flight Center, tending the onboard computers of several Earth-orbiting astronomical satellites.*

come forward with his tale for 20 years.) With about a hundred miles to go, he noticed that his fuel gauge showed only a quarter-tank of gas remaining. Most gas stations closed at dusk back then, and it was late enough at night that he decided to stay at a motel in the next town, somewhere along Route 301 in North Carolina.

But before he reached the next town, he encountered a man standing in the middle of the road, signaling him to stop his car. When he pulled up to the blue-uniformed figure, apparently a police officer, he was told to take a detour along a narrow lane that the man pointed out to him. McIntyre said he was tired and probably not thinking very clearly as he complied with the request. The lane turned out to be a two-rut path. He also realized, with some shock, that the mysterious man had addressed him by his rank, even though he (McIntyre) was dressed in civilian clothes.

At that moment, his engine died, and his headlights and radio went out. The car kept moving. Hopkins, relating the story, said, "When I asked [McIntyre] in what direction [the car was moving], he answered, 'Forward, and up.'" (This comment got a hearty laugh from the symposium audience. But is it "nit picking" for me to wonder why Hopkins would've asked that question? Did he merely rearrange his account of the exchange with McIntyre to make it more entertaining to the audience? If not, it seems a peculiar question to ask of someone who says that his "car kept moving" after its engine died. Why not assume it had kept rolling in the direction it was going when powered, especially when McIntyre apparently had not suggested otherwise? Perhaps this was an example of a "leading question" that some claim Hopkins poses to alleged abductees.)

The car ascended quickly enough that McIntyre never had a chance to jump from the car before it was too high for him to safely reach the ground. He began to pray.

His next memory was of awakening in a motel room. Morning sunlight was visible through the curtains. Still dressed in the clothes he wore during his car incident, he ran to the front desk of the motel to find out

**At that moment, his engine died, and his headlights and radio went out. The car kept moving. Hopkins, relating the story, said, "When I asked [McIntyre] in what direction [the car was moving], he answered, 'Forward, and up.'"**

where he was and what time it was. To his relief, the motel turned out to be near Fort Jackson, and it was the morning of the day he was supposed to report there for duty.

Venturing into the parking lot, he found his car. It seemed undamaged, and his luggage was in the trunk. The fuel gauge was still at the quarter-tank level. The odometer reading was about the value he'd remembered it being the night before. But somehow it hadn't changed after he and the car had traveled roughly 100 miles.

When he arrived at Fort Jackson, he began to wonder if perhaps the Army was responsible for what had happened to him. Hopkins described to the MUFON audience what was going through McIntyre's mind at the time: "The whole experience must have been some sort of test by the Army, perhaps to see if he would breach security by discussing his experience. He may have been drugged, and the car transported by flatbed truck. But he realized the theory made little sense, and said nothing about it to anyone at Fort Jackson. He didn't even discuss the incident itself until he told his wife several months later. By then he had dismissed the idea that the Army was involved, but had no other guesses as to what could have happened."

McIntyre agreed to undergo hypnosis by a psychologist colleague of Hopkins. At that time, Hopkins was still undergoing a "seven-year apprenticeship" in hypnosis techniques.

Under hypnosis, McIntyre described what he believed happened after his car began to



continued on page 6

**Later hypnosis sessions brought out details of his examiners. They were small gray creatures, each with “a head shaped like a parking meter.”**

levitate. He and his vehicle were drawn into a bright light above him. Suddenly he was on a table, unable to move. He was surprised that he was sexually aroused, felt something over his groin, and then dampness there, as if he had “wet himself.” These comments had surprised and embarrassed Hopkins, and neither he nor his colleague followed up on them while questioning McIntyre.

Later hypnosis sessions brought out details of his examiners. They were small gray creatures, each with “a head shaped like a parking meter.” (The analogy impressed Hopkins and suggested to him that McIntyre had a genuine experience.) McIntyre spoke of his strange helplessness on the table, noting that “I was the giant in that room, but I was the baby.” McIntyre tried to focus his will and fought for mastery of his muscles by thinking of patriotic images like the American flag and Abraham Lincoln, but could not overcome his paralysis. (Again, the emotional depth and color of McIntyre’s description seemed compelling to Hopkins.)

McIntyre’s account resumed with him being returned to his car, but accompanied by one of the beings. They drove together along the highway. (Presumably they didn’t drive very far, because the odometer reading allegedly didn’t change very much, but Hopkins didn’t comment on this.) They pulled into the motel parking lot and the alien led him by the hand into the motel lobby to register.

There the part of the story obtained under hypnosis ended.

Hopkins interviewed McIntyre’s wife, who confirmed that her husband had told her the original (pre-



hypnosis) tale several months after it had allegedly occurred. But Hopkins let the investigation drop there. The incident had happened too long ago, and too much was hard for Hopkins to believe (although he found McIntyre credible). The levitating car, the distance traveled, and the induced ejaculation were all too “far out” for him to accept then.

Now Hopkins regretted not digging deeper into the story. In retrospect, he wished he had found McIntyre’s friends, relatives, and military colleagues to find out what they had heard about the incident over the years. He would have tried to find the motel and any records of McIntyre’s visit that night. And his hypnosis sessions would have been much more probing. As I listened to Hopkins’ regrets, I wondered if the investigations he wished he had conducted would really have been sufficient to answer the core question: Did this incident actually occur as described?

One element of McIntyre’s story that Hopkins found most significant in retrospect was the induced ejaculation. Apparently Barney Hill, describing his own (famous) 1961 abduction incident, stated that the aliens had collected his semen. Hopkins said this detail was not publicized, and noted that this was fortunate, because when McIntyre and these other subsequent similar cases came up, the skeptics couldn’t say that the abductees had merely read the Hill account. Hopkins reasoned that anyone reporting the same thing was probably telling the truth.

But is Hopkins mistaken? I found relevant excerpts of Hill’s hypnosis sessions on pages 121 and 127 of John G. Fuller’s *The Interrupted Journey*, 1966 edition, which contains the primary account of the Hills’ abduction story. Hill claimed that his groin “felt cold” and that he felt a cup was placed over it. An imaginative reader might extrapolate from this that a semen or urine sample had been collected. But more pertinent is author Fuller’s own foreword to the 1980 edition, which contains the following passage (see <http://www-public.tu-bs.de:8080/~y0001095/Fuller.0a>): “In one instance, [Hill] had reported that he felt the humanoids placing an instrument over his genitals, ostensibly to draw semen out.” A



British press published this edition, so it may not have been available to McIntyre. However, it was released in the same year as McIntyre’s initial contact with Hopkins, and Fuller’s matter-of-fact conveyance of the semen-collection detail suggests that the book’s foreword was not the first place that it had been described.

Hopkins’ critical thinking skills might be gauged from these excerpts of his presentation as published in the MUFON symposium proceedings: “Was the policeman, who ordered him to detour, ‘real’—an alien or co-opted human—or was he only some sort of quasi-hallucination imposed on the young lieutenant’s mind? It is worth noting that, so far in my experience, screen memories [clear but generally trivial memories that blanket more significant yet troubling experiences] always turn out to be relatively prosaic images that conceal or transform images of aliens and their craft. Thus, a six-car pileup turns out to be a landed UFO, and a four-foot-tall owl, a UFO occupant. . . . What McIntyre saw was probably a UFO occupant rather than an imposed, bodiless hallucination.” Also, “The idea of an alien technology of willed invisibility [allowing the alien to lead McIntyre into the motel lobby, presumably without the desk clerk witnessing anything unusual] was simply unacceptable to me twenty years ago, though subsequent investigations and new data have forced me to change my mind.” Hopkins is probably referring especially to incidents described in his book, *Witnessed: The True Story of the Brooklyn Bridge UFO Abductions*, 1996. However, critics have noted serious problems with the case. See, for example, <http://www.csicop.org/si/9703/hopkins.html>.

Equally disconcerting are other passages in his published remarks at the symposium. He describes another alleged abduction incident in which a woman “went on to present [to Hopkins] a few more questionable recollections about the communication she had with the [aliens] and the information they had given her. Subsequent years of experience validated something I merely sensed at the time: abductees’ recollections of an elaborate exchange of information with UFO occupants

are almost always an unreliable mix of deliberate alien deception and human wishful thinking.”

Unfortunately, his methods for differentiating between reality and “alien deception” or “wishful thinking” appear to consist mostly of comparing anecdotal elements with those of other abductee stories and focusing on aspects he believes were not widely available in UFO-related literature at that time. He seems to believe that those particular details are then sufficiently established enough for him to accept.

Hopkins concluded his talk on the McIntyre incident by stating that his earlier rejection of it showed that the skeptics are wrong about UFOlogists like him. That actually he and his colleagues were overly conservative in their evaluation of UFO abduction cases and it has taken decades for him and other investigators to finally come around to



**“. . . abductees’ recollections of an elaborate exchange of information with UFO occupants are almost always an unreliable mix of deliberate alien deception and human wishful thinking.”**

accepting the more bizarre aspects of the phenomenon. But actually most skeptical observers of UFOlogy see this trend from a different perspective: that “. . . the willingness to believe on the part of the UFO movement has steadily grown with each passing year, and today the mainstream of UFOlogy has expanded its credulity . . .” (Robert Sheaffer, *The UFO Verdict*, 1980 p. 5)

Hopkins finished his allotted time by rambling a bit from topic to topic. He cited a similar tale of a man and his fiancée who were driving on the New Jersey Turnpike, with their toll ticket and exact toll ready on the dashboard. They felt nauseous and disoriented, then realized that they were no longer

*continued on page 8*

on the Turnpike, yet the money and toll ticket were still in their car. Hypnosis seems to show that they were levitated in the car and abducted by aliens, then returned to the road somewhere beyond the Turnpike tollbooths.

Hopkins recently came upon a quote in a book he read that he found relevant: "No matter what, I can't really look back after all these years and really believe that this actually happened." "This man was not an abductee," Hopkins said. "He was a survivor of Auschwitz." Hopkins took care to say he realized that Holocaust and alien abduction experiences are not comparable, but he stated that they share one element. "They are both unbelievable. People cannot really accept the idea, easily, [that] the Holocaust happened. It's unbelievable, just as people can't accept the UFO reality. It's unbelievable for a different set of reasons. The man who was there [at Auschwitz], like an abductee, would be saying 'I can't believe it.'"

Hopkins contrasted the Holocaust survivor with a friend of his who is a Holocaust researcher. "He has this mass of data about the Holocaust, he's inundated with it, and there's no way he would ever say, 'I can't believe it really happened.'" Hopkins said, "Again, I'm not making an analogy between

***I can't reject or disbelieve the abduction phenomena that I've been hearing about from so many different people. . . . I feel sadness that I no longer have the luxury of disbelief.***

the content of the [Holocaust and UFO] experiences, but I know what he [the Holocaust researcher] is going through. He can't reject it and disbelieve it even for a second. He's too steeped in it. I can't reject or disbelieve the

abduction phenomena that I've been hearing about from so many different people. . . . I feel sadness that I no longer have the luxury of disbelief."



"The large majority of mainstream scientists have a 'rock-hard' belief system: it [alien abduction] cannot happen. They are the 'true believers' [for rejecting its reality]. But they know nothing about it," Hopkins said. He claims that physicists are "setting the rules" so other scientists (for instance, zoologists) assume that the physicists must be right and give the subject no further thought.

Hopkins spoke of a recent guest appearance he'd made on a Canadian TV talk show. He shared the stage with an astronomer who represented a skeptical perspective. He said that the astronomer made the usual arguments against the likelihood of aliens visiting Earth: ". . . it's too hard to get here from there [across interstellar distances]; [aliens] wouldn't look like that' . . . et cetera. So I asked him about [several famous UFO cases, including the Travis Walton abduction incident]." Hopkins apparently believes the Walton case is genuine, despite the substantial evidence presented by investigator Philip Klass in his books *UFOs: The Public Deceived* and *UFO Abductions: A Dangerous Game* that it was a hoax.

Hopkins asked the astronomer what he had read about UFOs, and his reply led Hopkins to conclude that the answer was "Nothing." "So what are you doing on this program?" Hopkins inquired. Hopkins told the MUFON audience, "I felt like Clarence Darrow must've felt when cross-examining William Jennings Bryan at the Scopes trial. This skeptic had no more accurate information about the UFO phenomenon than Bryan did about evolution." Hopkins noted that Bryan resisted evolution for religious reasons, and suggested that the skeptical astronomer similarly couldn't accept the truth about UFOs for "quasi-religious" reasons.

After his talk, I had a chance to speak with Hopkins briefly. I said, "Do you think the aliens know about you and your work?" "I think so," Hopkins replied. I asked, "What do you believe they think of what you do?" Hopkins smiled and said, "I think they probably see me as 'cleaning up' after them." I then asked, "So the aliens know that you've beaten their 'amnesia device' through your





use of hypnosis . . . and yet they continue to use it. Doesn't that strike you as strange?" The next moment could have been in one of the MasterCard television commercials broadcast recently. ("Admission to MUFON Symposium: \$65. Copy of published symposium proceedings: \$20. Budd Hopkins' facial expression: Priceless.") His quizzical expression lasted a moment until an acquaintance of his greeted him.

About 10 years ago, Hopkins founded a group named the Intruders Foundation ("IF," at <http://www.intrudersfoundation.org>), which provides support for abductees and investigates the alleged abduction phenomenon. I had the opportunity to chat with a young fellow (probably in his early twenties) who was working at the IF table at the symposium. He said that Hopkins guards against asking leading questions by phrasing them against his own expectations, such as, for example,




"What color was his [the alien's] hair?" That way, the hypnotized person has to resist the sug-

gestion that the alien has any hair at all (which they are typically reported to lack). I asked how Hopkins can guard against

***"I felt like Clarence Darrow must've felt when cross-examining William Jennings Bryan at the Scopes trial. This skeptic had no more accurate information about the UFO phenomenon than Bryan did about evolution."***

his own identity (and the books he has published) being the ultimate "contaminant." After all, someone seeking Hopkins knows full well what Hopkins believes. The man replied, "His own superb disarming manner keeps the abductee from focusing on UFOs and aliens before undergoing hypnosis."

Hopkins' thinking processes seemed muddled. For instance, the IF sells T-shirts bearing a favorite saying of his: "An extraordinary phenomenon requires an extraordinary investigation." It's a strange twist on Carl Sagan's famous "extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence" line, because it's not clear that the "extraordinary phenomenon" actually exists. So the quote essentially means "Extraordinary claims require extraordinary investigations." Using this criterion, would a claim that Santa Claus exists merit the costs of an extraordinary investigation?

More to come in Part 3. 



Folklore and Skeptics NCAS member **Stephanie A. Hall's** article "Folklore and the Rise of Moderation among Organized Skeptics" is available online in the e-journal *New Directions in Folklore* Impromptu Journal Issue 4: March 2000 at: <http://www.temple.edu/isllc/newfolk/skeptics.html>

Skepchik and NCAS member **Sheila Gibson**, chairchick of the New England Skeptics Society (NESS), now has a regular column called "For Entertainment Purposes Only" in Michael Shermer's *Skeptic* magazine.

# Alternative Engineering—

## A Postmodern Parable

by Steven Novella, M.D.

*Note: The people named in this story are fictitious, but the dangers of applied pseudoscience are real.*

A new phenomenon is sweeping the country, gaining the attention of both consumers and manufacturers alike. Increasingly disenchanted with the cold metallic world of modern technology, people are looking closely at more natural alternatives. Collectively called Alternative Engineering (“Alt Eng”), a host of new and old methods are gaining scientific and journalistic respectability.

Alec Waterstone is one such self-styled alternative engineer. He has no degree or formal training in engineering, which, he explains, is an advantage: “My thinking is not limited by mathematics, logic, or any stodgy old mechanistic paradigm. I do not have to pay homage to the likes of Newton or other Western male pedagogues. My complete lack of training frees me to consider unique and innovative solutions to engineering problems, unfettered by the annoying constraints of “reality.”

### Energy-Based Bridges

Alec’s latest project is a design for a 1,200-foot non-suspension bridge. He claims the bridge will be able to span this distance without pylons or overhead suspension, and will be supported only by the ancient art of Feng Shui. “This wisdom, which is thousands of years old, is the art of channeling energy through design and form. This energy can be used to support a 1,200-foot bridge, or even larger structures.” City planners are intrigued by these designs, because such bridges will cost less than half as much as conventionally designed bridges.

Alec is also quick to point out that ancient Chinese documents reveal absolutely no accounts of collapsing suspension bridges. His technique’s safety record is, he argues, unparalleled. “How else would it have survived all these years if it didn’t work?”

Anthony Trellis, a professor of engineering at State-of-the Art University, claims that Alec’s designs run contrary to basic principles

of physics and materials science. An exasperated Trellis commented, “A bridge based upon Waterstone’s designs simply could not stand. It would be unsafe in the extreme.”

But Alec is not perturbed by such criticism. “Of course professor Trellis does not like my designs, because they challenge his precious status quo and turn his world upside-down. But the protectionism of the old guard is starting to crumble, like one of their obsolete buildings,” he retorted at a recent symposium for progressive thinkers who agreed that those who fail to jump on the bandwagon will be left behind. His talk to a standing-room-only crowd also accused the American Society of Civil Engineers, the steel industry, and other “vested interests” of trying to suppress his views.

Skeptics have suggested that before we spend millions of taxpayer dollars on such projects, and subject American motorists to the unknown risks of driving over a Waterstone bridge, Waterstone’s basic principles should at least be tested to see whether they work. This is especially true since his designs seem to run contrary to conventional wisdom. But Waterstone responds:

I’m too busy designing bridges to jump through some skeptic’s hoops. They will never be satisfied, anyway. The American motorists should be free to decide for themselves if they wish to drive over one of my bridges. I respect their intelligence and ability to make smart decisions for themselves. They don’t need to be told by some bureaucrat, or professor in an ivory tower, which bridges are safe and which are not.

Professor Trellis and other naysayers argue that individuals should not have to be scientists or engineers in order to drive safely over our bridges. Regulations are not designed to limit freedom, but to provide a basic level of safety and protection for the public. This attitude, however, is increasingly being dismissed as overly paternalistic and protective. ➡

*This article originally appeared in the New England Journal of Skepticism, a publication of the New England Skeptical Society <http://www.theness.com/> and is reprinted with the permission of Dr. Novella. The text is available from [http://www.quackwatch.com/01Quackery/Related\\_Topics/alteng.html](http://www.quackwatch.com/01Quackery/Related_Topics/alteng.html)*

### Intuitive Cars

Civil engineers are not the only ones gravitating toward the ancient wisdom of pre-technological societies. The auto industry is also catching on. Natural Designs is a new car company based in Kansas. Its president and CEO, Andy Wily, received a degree in engineering from Harvard 20 years ago, but was fired from his subsequent teaching position after excessive drug use nearly destroyed his life. Now he has returned with a new company and a new philosophy that many consumers find appealing.

“I am advocating a mixture of the best of modern scientific engineering with the antiscientific and superstitious ideas of earlier times,” explains Wily. “I call this approach Integrative Engineering.”

What has this new approach created? Natural Design’s newest model sedan, the Millennium 2000, does not use air bags, or even seatbelts. “Seatbelts are dangerous, and air bags are kid-killers,” complains Wily. So he has come up with something better. The interior of the Millennium 2000 is coated with a patented psychoactive material, called Natural Safe. “All a driver or passenger has to do is think safe thoughts, and this miraculous material will do the rest. In a crash, the material will gently repel any safe thinking person in the vehicle, leaving them free from injury,” Wily asserts.

When skeptics point to deaths or disability for Millennium 2000 passengers, Wily replies that the passengers clearly weren’t thinking as “safely” as they should have been. “Besides,” he adds, “the Millennium 2000 only goes 50 miles per hour on a good day with a happy wind behind it. If the motorists who were killed had been driving something developed by the International Automaker’s Cartel like a Ford or Chevy, they’d have been travelling much faster with an even greater chance of death. When Ford quits murdering thousands of people a year on our highways, then their complaints about us will look like something besides protecting market share. In fact, we have a study right here that shows that if everyone quit driving tomorrow, the death rate would go down in America! Until we can con-

***DeAngelis points to recent studies which seem to indicate that drivers of Wily’s cars are twice as likely to die in a crash as are drivers of conventional vehicles.***

vince the American people of the millions killed needlessly by modern ‘automotive science’, Natural Safe remains the safest choice.”

Many consumers are convinced. Not to be outdone, GM and Ford both have started putting Natural Safe coatings in their cars. Amy Zinger, of Arkansas, survived a 40 mph head-on collision in one such vehicle. “I was wearing my seatbelt, and the air bag did deploy, but I know it was the Natural Safe that saved my life,” she asserted recently. “Besides,” she points out, “If it didn’t work, they wouldn’t be allowed to sell it.” Motivated by such testimonials, more and more consumers are insisting on only buying cars treated with Natural Safe.

One problem faced by Natural Designs, however, is that outdated safety regulations, such as those requiring seatbelts, do not account for these new integrative designs. Recently, however, this has all changed. Senator Hackem, from Natural Design’s home state of Iowa, has pushed through legislation that will exempt manufacturers that use Alternative or Integrative principles from regulations designed to protect consumers. This was hailed as a great step forward.

Still, hard-headed skeptics will not go away. “All I’m asking for is a simple crash test” exclaimed noted skeptic, Perry DeAngelis. “If the stuff really works, heck, I’ll buy it.” Skeptics have been increasingly calling for such tests, arguing that testing should take place before implementation, especially when human lives are at stake.

But Wily explains why such tests won’t work. “Crash dummies are not people. The psychoactive material will therefore not respond to them. The fact is, these innovative designs cannot be subjected to the same testing and principles as traditional engineering.

*continued on page 6*

But consumers who drive our cars feel safer. How can you argue with that.”

Still, DeAngelis points to recent studies which seem to indicate that drivers of Wily’s cars are twice as likely to die in a crash as are drivers of conventional vehicles. But Wily merely scoffs, “What are you going to believe, numbers on a piece of paper, or people?”

### Political Achievement

Despite the skeptics, Alternative Engineering seems here to stay. Wily has just been named chairman of the new Integrative Engineering Department at Zones University, where he hopes to train the next generation of engineers in his philosophy. Meanwhile, Senator Hackem has pushed through Congress a bill to create Center for Alternative Engineering. This new office will divert money being wasted on maintaining this country’s infra-

*Dr. Novella is an Assistant Professor of Neurology at Yale University School of Medicine and an Associate Editor of the Scientific Review of Alternative Medicine.*

structure and use it to study and promote alternative principles in engineering.

Finally, in what is characterized as a landmark coup in the making, the Canadian College of Rainbow-Coloured Integrative Engineering—after spending more than 100 years as a scientific pariah—is finalizing negotiations to become part prestigious Dork University. Despite howls of dismay from Dork’s math and science faculty and several Nobel laureates, Dork’s Senate has pushed onward with its plans for affiliation. The \$25 million dollars that the Integrative Engineers have promised to give the University has not, according to Dork’s President, influenced the deal.

The president characterized critics of Integrative Engineering as “crybabies” who espouse “long disproven misinformation” about Alternative Engineering. ☒

# American Lunacies

by Paul Jaffe

“Is there anyone here who can claim to have seen a UFO? Is there anybody here who believes in ghosts? Out of body experiences? Is there anybody here who belongs to a cult?” So began the panel discussion “American Lunacies: Exploring the Beyond” at the Sixth Annual Virginia Festival of the Book.

**Michael Shermer . . . asked, “‘What do you think of crop circles?’ and the response was, ‘Aliens made them’. So I asked them to picture the government inquiry back on Vega or wherever that would take place: ‘We’ve spent enormous amounts of money to master interstellar travel and find this planet, and best we could do is leave graffiti?!’ Without missing a beat this woman responded ‘They don’t use money on Vega’.”**

Held in scenic Charlottesville, Virginia this year’s festival took place on a sunny weekend at the end of March. Authors from all around the country came to host talks and participate in panel discussions to promote reading and literacy. “American Lunacies” and selected other panel discussions were filmed to be shown on CSPAN-2’s “Book TV”.

The opening questions were posed to the audience by the moderator, Avery Chenoweth, who has written for Harpers, People, and the New York Times Magazine. The other panelists were Michael Shermer, Jodi Dean, Alex Heard, and Joel Achenbach. Stephen Greer of the Center for the Study of Extraterrestrial Intelligence (CSETI) was not on the panel or listed in the program, but had been on a preliminary list of panelists. Judging from the few hands that were raised in the audience in response to the opening questions, most of those in attendance were decidedly skeptics.

The first question to the panel set the theme for the discussions: “Are things getting ➡

worse, that is, are people believing more weird things than just a few decades ago?"

Alex Heard, the executive editor of the popular technology and cyberculture magazine *Wired*, and also the author of *Apocalypse Pretty Soon* responded frankly "I don't really have any data with which to make a determination. I think that the millennial activity garnered a lot of media attention, but these kinds of things have always been with us."

*Washington Post* journalist Joel Achenbach, author of the column "Why Things Are" and the book *Captured by Aliens*, felt "There's been a big change since the 1960s. UFO's used to be very much of a 'hardware issue'. People saw things in the sky – lights and such. More recently, people have direct, deeply personal experiences. Some people even think they are aliens! If I were to wake up one morning and find several little bald-headed creatures with three fingers each chewing on my foot, I still wouldn't believe in aliens. But I don't try to convert people because I know how personal the belief is to them."

Skeptic magazine publisher and author of "How We Believe" Michael Shermer cited an encounter he had prior to a TV talk show with some astrologers. "I asked, 'What do you think of crop circles?' and the response was, 'Aliens made them'. So I asked them to picture the government inquiry back on Vega or wherever that would take place: 'We've spent enormous amounts of money to master interstellar travel and find this planet, and best we could do is leave graffiti?!' Without missing a beat this woman responded 'They don't use money on Vega'. I don't make this stuff up!" Shermer went on to mention some troubling statistics about the percentage of the population that believes in psychic powers and UFOs, but figured "that hopefully, living in the age of science, we've made some progress since the 1500s."

Jodi Dean, a professor of political science and author of *Aliens in America: Conspiracy Cultures From Outerspace to Cyberspace*, responded "The biggest change since the 60s is media and technology. A lot of stories that previously had only been known to small subgroups are now known to everybody. What's

***"It amazes me that so many people take all the things in our daily lives that have been possible through science for granted, and then go off and say that science is narrow-minded," Achenbach lamented.***

interesting is not that people believe weird stuff – people have always believed weird stuff – but why everybody else cares. I think the reason people care is because we're fascinated with those folks who are willing to doubt mainstream reality, and the reason we're fascinated by those folks who are willing to doubt mainstream reality is because most of us DO. Things are so complicated now. Technology makes things complicated and raises the stakes."

Heard commented that many people who are drawn to pseudoscience are people who don't have the money or intellect to pursue a formal education. There is a strong element of disenfranchisement among them. "They're reacting against the way current reality is ... a lot these people think they are scientists; they're not, they're crackpots. They're trying to invent perpetual motion machines or prepare for the landing of their space brothers."

"It amazes me that so many people take all the things in our daily lives that have been possible through science for granted, and then go off and say that science is narrow-minded," Achenbach lamented. "Science has repeatedly given us these mind-boggling models of reality ranging from the expanding universe, the existence of dinosaurs, tectonic drift ... it is the combined effort of thousands of men and women over a long period of time trying to find the reality behind the world as we perceive it."

Chenoweth asked Shermer, "So then does it become simply a matter of faith over proof?"

"They are two separate things. Trying to prove the tenets of faith leaves you a step be-

continued on page 14

**Shermer recounted the time he had been “abducted by aliens” late one night on a lonely rural highway in Nebraska. During the Race Across America transcontinental bike race, a sleep-deprived road-weary Shermer was picked up by the motor home that his support crew used to follow him.**

hind science, which is ever-changing. You’re always trying to make things fit in retrospect.”

Dean added, “I think there are many things in science that we think we’re certain of that we’re actually not. Health experts and scientists disagree about salt, diets, how mad cow disease is transmitted ... it’s important to remember that what seems to be a clear-cut set of facts is not clear-cut at all.

“People who defend science against pseudoscience say ‘Science has amazing ideas – it’s not just common sense,’ then they turn around and say ‘Those UFO people don’t have common sense – they’ve got amazing, wild ideas.’ I start to worry that no matter how it’s sliced, the people who are doing wild stuff always end up getting trashed.”

Achenbach discussed the “wild idea” that Carl Sagan once entertained: that Mars’ moon Phobos might be a hollow object constructed by an intelligent civilization. “Sagan is sort of the hero of my book because he entertains these wild ideas, but he has the ability to pull back at the last minute and say, ‘But what do we really know?’ He was willing to go to his deathbed knowing that he hadn’t found proof of extraterrestrial life. It takes a lot of courage to say ‘I don’t know’.”

Shermer recounted the time he had been “abducted by aliens” late one night on a lonely rural highway in Nebraska. During the Race Across America transcontinental bike race, a sleep-deprived road-weary Shermer was picked up by the motor home that his support crew used to follow him. In his exhausted state, having been awake for more than 80 hours and having biked over 1200 miles, his mind connected his experience with a science fiction story from his youth and he felt as though he had been abducted. Shermer used

his story to illustrate that often times there may be a more prosaic explanation for unusual accounts. “I think we can actually say in some instances whether things are true or not. In any case, you certainly act as if they are true or not. We make those decisions, even if intellectually we qualify it by saying ‘maybe’ or ‘perhaps’. Behaviorally, no one’s an agnostic. When you wake up Sunday morning, you’re either going to church or you’re watching football. For me, the decision is that aliens are not here. I could conceivably change my mind, but I’d really need to see one of those ‘probe’ instruments I keep hearing about.”

Dean countered with, “A lot of abductees would like the kind of certainty of reality that Michael describes ... the hero of my book, Budd Hopkins, an abduction researcher, has a saying. He says he is more skeptical than Carl Sagan because he is willing to question everyday reality. Abductees don’t believe anything for sure. They’re not 100% convinced of the existence of UFOs, aliens, or anything. All they know is that they’ve experienced something they absolutely can’t explain or understand and they’re not getting much support. In their willingness to question everyday reality, they go a lot further than some so-called skeptics.”

Heard commented on how it can be difficult for alleged abductees to objectively examine their own experiences and beliefs. “It’s not a choice. They can’t step aside and look at themselves as a specimen. They say, ‘It’s not a belief. It’s the truth.’ Most of them pursue these beliefs without hurting anyone – there are major exceptions to that. What I like in a skeptic, like Shermer here who operates like I think they should, is he reads their material and says, ‘I disagree with all of this, here are my counterarguments.’ There’s a strain in skepticism though that goes farther than that, almost puritanically, saying ‘it is bad by definition that anybody believes these things, we have to do something beyond providing counterarguments.’ I defend people’s right to have goofball ideas.”

Speaking about the tension between orthodoxy and change in science, Shermer quoted, “You want to be open-minded



enough to accept new ideas, but not so open-minded that your brains fall out.' I don't want to be a grumpy old skeptic that misses out on the great new discovery of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. But so much of what I encounter is just utter bunk, that it seems to pay to be conservative. There's only so much time and money to run around exploring and testing these claims."

Chenoweth asked, "To what extent are these beliefs a function of class or income? Are they spread around the world? Why haven't aliens landed in New Delhi?"

"It does seem that there are entire countries where aliens do not visit for some reason," commented Achenbach. "But it doesn't seem as if it's 'smart people don't believe, dumb people do.'"


Heard added "Most of the people in my book and many well-educated people who are knowledgeable about physics and space travel just seem to take it a little bit further. 'Maybe the aliens are using element 115.' What is element 115? We don't know. Most of these people use all the tools of modern life, they use the Internet, and they love technology."

Delving deeper, Achenbach continued "My impression is that the people in the UFO

world try very hard to prove their point by amassing evidence that validates their point. They are less willing than a typical scientist to really grapple with evidence that may invalidate their point. In sitting in on one of these abduction groups, I learned the number one rule was 'You will not invalidate the experiences of others.' That's the opposite of how science works, where scientists are sort of 'trigger-happy invalidators'."

Bolstering Achenbach's point, Dean pointed out "We're in a therapeutic culture, a talk show culture. My original scholarship was in feminist work, and in a lot of feminist groups you're supposed to respect other people's experiences, listen and approach the discussion with a caring attitude. It could be the case that there's an unfortunate clash when this caring discussion style becomes the basis for a scientific, factual claim."

"We have agreement!" blurted Shermer, and the audience laughed.

For more information about next year's Virginia Festival of the Book, please visit: <http://www.vabook.org/> 

# Sixteenth & Seventeenth Century Parodies of Astrologers

by Richard Dengrove

"Thys is bycause of the Eclyps of the Mone  
"Some shal supe theyr potage for lack of a spon  
"In the somer tyme shalbe suche an heat  
"The people would fare well, if they could get meat."

Something like these words are found in the earliest English parody of astrological almanacs, *A Mery Pronosticacion* (1544), a year before the first known serious one by an Englishman, although 52 years after the first foreign almanacs arrived. I say something like these words because the last line is missing from the original and I have replaced it with

the last line of a similar poem in the 1623 *A New and Merry Prognostication*.

If you have trouble reading this, and other 16th and 17th Century works, read them closest to the way you would pronounce them. Also, 'u' is often used in place of 'v', and vice versa; and 'i' in place of 'j', 'U' and 'j' being new letters at the time.



continued on page 16

**In England, the first targets of these parodies were ‘lower-grade’ almanacs, such as *Erra Pater*. There was more than a dollop of class snobbery in this.**

In the 16th and 17th centuries, parody astrological almanacs were a popular genre. However, they were not anti-astrology; belief in it was too ingrained. They were anti-astrologer; against pretenders to that sublime art.

Parody almanacs such as the German *Lasstafels* existed in Europe by 1480. In 1533, Francois Rabelais published his own, the *Pantagrueline Prognostication*, in which he says the summer shall be warm with occasional sea breezes; and he advises his readers not to sell their furs during the winter. Also, he announces that the Governor and Lord of the Ascendant for the year will be God and that none of the planets will have independent influence.

In England, the first parodies were of ‘lower-grade’ almanacs, such as *Erra Pater*. There was more than a dollop of class snobbery in this. In one allegory of the period, Superstition’s only Bible is *Erra Pater*.

Some early parodies were by Ffrauncis Fayre Weather (1591), Adam Fouleweather (1591), Adam Evesdropper (1604), and Simon Smel-knave (1591). 1591 was a good year for that sort of thing.

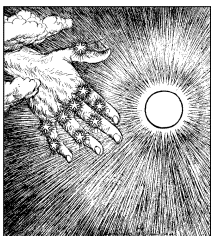
Adam Fouleweather said of Summer:

*“Through the influence of Cancer, bottle Ale shall be in great authoritie, and wheat shall doe knightes seruice vnto malt.”*

Smel-knave said of farming:

*“They that are borne,  
Under Iupiter I knowe:  
May perhaps catch corne,  
If they have lande to Sowe.”*

Other early parodies included the *Raven’s Almanacke* (1608), *The Owles Almanacke* (1618), the *Iacke Dawes Prognostication* (1623). Adam Evesdropper’s was *Platoes Cap*.



The full title of *The Owles Almanacke* includes *Calculated as well for the meridian mirth of London, as any other part of Great Britaine. Found in an Iuy-bush written in old Characters, and now published in English by the painefull labours of Mr. Iocundary Merrie-braines. London, 1618.* In finding this almanac in an ivy bush in old characters, the Owle poked fun at the prophecies the common folk believed.

Fouleweather’s title includes *Wherein if there be found one lye, the Author will loose his credit for euer.*

Smel-Knave’s title includes the prediction *wherein both man and woman shall find theyr naturall inclination, and accidentall and necessarie mischiefes.*

Smel-Knave apparently tired of ridiculing lower grade almanacs and the uneducated, and aimed instead at scholars. He takes in vain the names of famous thinkers and astrologers, and makes up one, Rabbi Salomon and his *Nullatenus*, Latin for “in no way” or “by no means.”

Often these parodies were more satires on society in general than of astrologers. Adam Evesdropper had this to say about a “hotte coniunction.”

*“They [wealthy widdowes] shall haue many gallant suiters, that will carie all their Lands vpon their backes, and yet sweare they haue grounds, Backsides, & yards when they haue no amore Ground tha the Kings high way.”*

*Poor Robin* (1664), was more popular than most serious astrological almanacs. Its title page indicates it was: *“Calculated for the Meridian of Saffron Walden where the Pole is elevated fifty-two degrees and six minutes above the Horizon.”*

Poor Robin’s prognostications include:

*“If Mars and Venus happen to be in conjunction this year, you may chance to hear of some wenches being gotten with child about the season of the year icleaped Haytime.”*

With the waning of belief in astrology, the more popular astrologers were lampooned. William Lilly appears in several parodies, as well as John Partridge. In 1675 *The Character* ➡



parodies continued from previous page


of a *Quack Astrologer* was published. This predated Jonathan Swift's 1708 *Isaac Bickerstaff*, where he called Partridge a quack.

These anti-astrologer parodies later influenced anti-astrology almanacs like Benjamin Franklin's *Poor Richard's Almanack*.

"[When Mars and Venus in Conjunction lie]  
"Then, Maids, whate'er is ask'd of you  
deny."

### BIBLIOGRAPHY

Allen, Don Cameron. *The Star-Crossed Renaissance: the Quarrel about Astrology and Its Influence in England*. Durham, NC: Duke, 1941, Chapter V, "Elizabethan and Jacobean Satires on the Almanack and Prognostication," pp. 190-246.

Thompson, C.J.S. *The Mystery and Romance of Astrology*. Barnes & Noble, 1993, p266-69. First published in the 1920s, contains material on *Poor Robin*. 

Richard Dengrove is the librarian for the Food and Nutrition Service, Department of Agriculture. He lives with his wife, Heidi, in Alexandria, Virginia. His ambition is to write a history of occult magic one of these days.

# NCAS Members Judge Area Science Fairs

NCAS sponsors educational programs and other activities. Recently NCAS member Walter F. Rowe judged the Fairfax [Virginia] Area Science Fair on March 25, 2000 and the PG County [Maryland] Science Fair on April 8, 2000; and members Mike Epstein and Walter Rowe judged the Montgomery Area [Maryland] Science Fair on April 2, 2000.

### Fairfax County Regional Science and Engineering Fair—March 25, 2000

**Certificate and book:**

TA6 Marisa Albanese and Harmony Walczuk—Word of Life Academy  
*Subliminal Messages*

### Prince Georges County Science Fair, April 8, 2000

**Certificate and book:**

J0311 Alyse Hollomon—St. Peter's School  
*EMFs: A Shock to Life*

### 44th Annual Montgomery Area Science Fair, April 2, 2000

**Certificate and book:**

JL113 Emily Kopilow—Sligo Middle School


*Overnight Fame: Is It Possible to Distort Source Memory*

SL1114 David Sanderson—Thomas S. Wootton High  
*Native American Medicine: Fact or Fiction*

SL1503 Mary Murphy and Carla Smith—Montgomery Blair High School  
*ESP: Is It Real?*

**Certificate:**

SL1505 Emily Prevo and Aynesleh Sinclair—Montgomery Blair High School  
*Self-Fulfilling Psychology*

SL302 Kenneth Carrick—Montgomery Blair High School  
*Do Magnets Affect the Growth of Plants?* 



Walter F. Rowe



Mike Epstein

**By the end of the evening, Kari was emotionally drained and feeling guilty.**

surprisingly accurate in her readings. It didn't hurt that the people she was "reading" cooperated fully and gave plenty of indicators, both verbally and with their body language, that she was on the right track in her readings. It also didn't hurt that she made general, flattering statements that anyone could interpret as pertaining to themselves. She even guessed that one woman was a nurse, and that a man surrounded by wife and friends was thinking about changing jobs. Still, there was always the fallback that she was seeing pictures that didn't mean anything to her, but might mean something to them.


By the end of the evening, Kari was emotionally drained and feeling guilty. She tried to end her sessions by telling the people they had responsibility for their own lives, that they made the magic happen for themselves but, somehow, she still ended up feeling like a fraud.

Then it was time to tape Penn & Teller's show. Under the guise of a booksigning, Kari posed as a tarot-reading psychic, complete with a published book in her own name, posters, and camera crew. She used the standard paragraph she had worked up and then started fishing. "I'm getting an M" she said to one man, who responded that his mother, whom he had cared for, had died. Almost everyone

has a mom, so "M" is a pretty good bet. And so it went.

After each session, Kari turned off the cameras and confessed her deception to her "victims." She tried to turn the experience into a positive one, explaining that she wasn't psychic, but that in talking to the people, she could tell, just from human experience, that they were loving caring people. She apologized for deceiving them, sometimes moved to tears by their understanding and kindness. For the most part, her clients felt they came away with a good experience, despite Kari's deception. Kari felt like a monster.

As Kari stated in her article in *Swift*, "What you cannot know until you've done it is that when you are reading someone, they trust you. They open themselves up to you, and you tell them nice things about themselves. Sometimes they offer up very personal hopes and dreams. This happened several times today. I then had to face them and tell them I'd lied. It was the hardest thing I've ever done."

Kari cares. Deeply. What about other "psychics" who don't? 

*Kari Coleman is an actress living in L.A. Her film credits include Multiplicity, Sour Grapes, and T-Rex, an I-max 3-D movie. Television appearances include JAG, Seinfeld, Mad About You, Home Improvement, and other sitcoms. She has been known to eat fire with Penn & Teller in Las Vegas.*



***"What you cannot know until you've done it is that when you are reading someone, they trust you. They open themselves up to you . . . I then had to face them and tell them I'd lied. It was the hardest thing I've ever done."***



In the spirit of encouraging skeptical activism, from time to time we will use this column to acknowledge NCAS members who have let us know about skeptical correspondence they have sent (letters to newspaper editors, television producers, etc.) or other actions they have taken proactively or in response to various articles, programs, events, etc. of concern to skeptics.

So please send us a copy of the text or even just a mention of your skeptical correspondence. Send hard copy to the NCAS mailing address. Copies of email can be sent to NCAS officers at [ncas@ncas.org](mailto:ncas@ncas.org). OR, if you already participate in the NCAS interactive email exchange, NCAS-SHARE, then consider sending copies or references to [ncas-share@ncas.org](mailto:ncas-share@ncas.org) to share with others.

When you write, be sure to encourage good skepticism when you see it, as well as positively expressing your concerns about uncritical thinking or disregard for established science. Please do not put overt cc's to NCAS in your original letters or emails to others (send us a bcc).

### NCCAM Focuses on Solid Scientific Investigation

NCAS president Paul Jaffe signed the following letter to Stephen E. Strauss, M.D., Director, National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine

Dear Dr. Strauss:

National Capital Area Skeptics is a local, independent, nonprofit educational and scien-

tific organization that promotes critical thinking and scientific understanding, with a focus on paranormal and fringe-science claims. Recently, NCAS officers and board members became aware of certain statements you have made concerning the future policy and programmatic direction of NCCAM. We were especially favorably impressed by the two below, as they indicate that under your direction

*continued on page 20*

## Don't be mystified.

Yes, I want to: \_\_\_\_\_ join NCAS.  
\_\_\_\_\_ renew my membership.

Membership Options				
	1 year	2 years	5 years	Lifetime
Single	\$20	\$35	\$85	\$200
Double*	\$30	\$50	\$100	\$250
Full-time student**	\$10	—	—	—

\*(2 members at same mailing address)

JOIN? RENEW?

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Street \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ e-mail \_\_\_\_\_

\*\*Students: List institution attending \_\_\_\_\_



Make checks payable to NCAS and mail to:

NCAS  
PO Box 8428  
Silver Spring, MD 20907

Check the mailing label for your membership date . . .  
you'll find a renewal form above

the write stuff continued from page 19

The text of NCAS's specific suggestions is available at <http://www.ncas.org/>. Reading NCCAM's strategic plan at <http://nccam.nih.gov/nccam/strategic/> is recommended for context.

NCCAM will make solid scientific investigation the central focus of its activities:

"NCCAM's mission, in its simplest terms, is to assure our citizens, through the use of excellent science, that CAM procedures and products do what they purport to do."

"I believe well-designed and well-executed clinical research must be the essential factor in NCCAM's search for scientific truth. My professional life has been dedicated to pursuing excellence in clinical research, and it is that concern and that training that I hope will be the hallmarks of my time as director of the Center."


Members of the board also noted that the NCCAM draft Strategic Plan is available for public examination and review, and suggested that NCAS might usefully comment. Accordingly, a subcommittee of the NCAS board was directed to prepare a commentary on the NCCAM draft, which is incorporated in this letter. We note NCCAM's commendable effort, as reflected in the draft strategic plan, to emphasize rigorous scientific evaluation of alternative health care practices in its programs.

Our attached comments are intended to ensure that this focus on rigorous research is emphasized clearly, consistently and concisely throughout the document. We hope that you and your staff find this commentary useful in developing the final version of the NCCAM Strategic Plan.



For your convenience, we have also submitted this letter in electronic form to the NCCAM web page, utilizing the on-line comment form provided for the Draft Strategic Plan.

We request that NCAS be made a party of record for comments on the NCCAM Strategic Plan and its revisions, and that you add NCAS to your announcement list for any other NCCAM requests for public comment.

If there is a need for clarification or amplification of any of these suggestions, please feel free to contact NCAS by telephone at 301-587-3827, or by e-mail to [ncas@ncas.org](mailto:ncas@ncas.org). I can also be contacted personally at 703-329-0270. 

## What would YOU like to see in the *Skeptical Eye*? Write us at

e-mail: [ncas@ncas.org](mailto:ncas@ncas.org)  
[s\\_eye@ncas.org](mailto:s_eye@ncas.org) (newsletter business)  
Internet: <http://www.ncas.org>  
or call our  
24-hour phone number: 301-587-3827

*We'd like to hear from you.*

**National Capital Area Skeptics  
PO Box 8428  
Silver Spring, MD 20910**

**Nonprofit Organization  
U.S. Postage  
PAID  
Merrifield, VA  
Permit No. 895**