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**Sacramento
Organization for
Rational Thinking
(SORT)**

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For past issues, bibliography, links to other skeptics, and more, check out the SORT Website:

www.quiknet.com/~kitray/index1.html

For more about the co-founders of SORT, see

www.spangenburgandmoser.com

**February
SORT Meeting
Wednesday,
February 26, 2003
7:00 P.M.**

Room 1, Library
Kinney High School
2710 Kilgore Rd., Rancho Cordova
(See map and driving instructions)

The **SORTified NEWS**

“Doubt is the beginning of wisdom.”

—Clarence Darrow

Special Announcement NEW LOCATION

**SORT meetings
now take place at:**

**Room 1 (Library)
Kinney High School
2710 Kilgore Road
Rancho Cordova**

See directions page 3.

SORT Meeting, February 26 VIEWING THE FUTURE— FROM A RATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

Why should the psychics have all the fun? Every year they shower us with a rain of predictions about the future, take credit for a hit or two amongst the dozens of misses and bask in the admiration of the gullible. This month at SORT let's cut ourselves a piece of their pie. Well, not for the gullible, of course, but for ourselves—and probably some mutual edification and enlightenment. Where do you think we are going and where will we be fifty years from now? What will science and technology look like, the social and political scene, education, medicine and entertainment? Not “blessed” by psychic powers, of course, the discussion will center on the group's best informed lines of thought based upon readings, reason, and maybe more than just a few educated guesses. Give it some thought and bring your ideas to our open roundtable dis-

cussion at the February SORT meeting. It promises to be an informative, thought-provoking, and entertaining meeting. Soft drinks, free coffee (decaf and regular) cookies and assorted goodies as usual will be on hand to keep the discussion warm and relaxed.

The new location for SORT meetings is the library at Kinney High School, 2710 Kilgore Road, Rancho Cordova. (See driving directions on page 3.)

JOHN EDWARD AND HIS ILK—UNDERACHIEVERS!

Let's face it—John Edward, James Von Praagh, and their ilk are pikers. When it comes to communicating with the spirits the spiritualists of the late 1800's and early 1900s had them beat by a mile. Next to a gentleman by the name of Daniel Dunglas Home (1833–1886), John Edward looks like a fraternity boy practicing a parlor trick and Van Praagh a somewhat shifty insurance salesman. Tall, thin, angular dressed in the finest fashionably black suits, longhaired and bedecked with expensive jewelry, Home, with his long serious face and pious manner looked every bit the part of the practicing medium. Plying his trade in the largest and most expensive of British sitting rooms, Home never stooped so low as to pander to the types of audience who view the television appearances of Edward and Van Praagh today. His bag of

tricks also quite simply put Edward and his ilk to shame. Home (he liked to pronounce it “Hume”) didn’t simply talk to the dead he stretched and shrunk his body three or four inches at will and in front of admirers (try that Jim and John!) levitated during his seances and teleported himself from room to room. In short, he offered his clients quite a show and never charged a penny for it. Of course he wasn’t averse to accepting such gifts as expensive clothing and jewels, free lodging and gourmet meals in some of the finest hotels and homes in England, Russia and Europe.

Daniel Dunglas Home wasn’t the only medium to claim conversation with the dead during the latter half of the nineteenth century and into the early years of the twentieth. Kicked into gear by the so-called “spirit rappings” of the Fox sisters beginning in 1848 talking with the dead became all the rage in America, England and Europe.

Though the Fox sisters finally got around to confessing to fraud in their late middle age, they had opened up the dam and communications from the beyond apparently flooded the western world over the next few decades. Just about every city could boast (but few wanted to) of hundreds of mediums working their seances in darkened rooms, and most small towns could lay claim to at least one or two. Obviously the waiting lines in the beyond for celestial telephones must have been a thing to behold. Here on mundane Earth though all this spirited congestion was actually hurting business for the average working medium. There was just too much competition around. Imagine dozens of John Edwards all on at the same time and on every channel of your television set, and always doing the same thing. Even talk-

ing to the dead can get pretty boring after a while, especially given the lack of intellectual rigor demonstrated by most of the spirit communicants.

As they say in show biz, what was needed was a new shtick. Most of the simple “yes” one rap, “no” two rap routines of the Fox sisters had already been abandoned in favor of communication by OuijaTM board or “automatic” writing, in which the hand of the medium was guided in writing out messages by the communicating spirit. Slate writing, a slight of hand trick too easily exposed by professional magicians who had already begun their assault on fake mediums and psychics, was still in the repertoire of a few but direct voice communication was just the color and spice the spiritualistic stew needed. And, for a gourmet delight, materializations of so-called ectoplasm (a rather disgusting substance oozed from the medium’s orifices), body parts (usually hands or heads) and full body appearances of hand shaking, peekabooing, and even dancing “spirits” topped the bill of fare.

Picture if you will then John Edward, James Van Praagh or any other of today’s televisionary spirit-workers being tossed back in time to the 1890s.

Dull! Dull! Dull! O.K, Mr. Edward, let’s see what you can do. (For those of you old enough to remember Shelly Berman’s or Bob Newhart’s voice here—go with it) Let’s see now. People come up to you, and these people have dead relatives or friends, and then you tell these people that the dead people are talking to you and telling you things. Oh, I see. Not just any thing but things that only the dead people would know. Like you had a dog named Rover and you know somebody whose name started with a J. and

The Sacramento Organization for Rational Thinking (SORT). . .

- Is dedicated to the promotion of rational thinking in all areas of life.
- Upholds the superiority of science over the mystical.
- Promotes and supports all efforts of intelligent communication that provide a counterpoint to the strong waves of anti-rationalism, irrationalism, and mysticism sweeping the world today.

Toward these ends we . . .

- Host a monthly discussion group.
- Publish a monthly newsletter.
- Host special events, talks, and presentations.
- Host a web page.

While SORT began with and still continues to be concerned with the promotion of critical thinking in areas dealing with the pseudo-scientific, the paranormal, the mystical, and the fraudulent, we strongly promote critical thinking in *all* areas of human thought and endeavor.

The core of SORT activities is our discussion group. The art of intelligent conversation is not dead. We at SORT believe that rational conversation--the meeting of minds, the free exchange of ideas and the provocative stimulation of critical questions-- is one of the most civilized and enlightening of all human activities.

SORT discussion topics have ranged from UFOs to the Holocaust, from “alternative medicine” to the problems in communicating science to the public, from classic and recent cons and scams to the teaching of critical thinking. Our discussions are hosted by one of the SORT founders, and participants are by no means limited to experts (although they may include experts) but are made up of intelligent and questioning people concerned with the topic of the evening.

you don't like the laundry to starch your snorts..Oh, shorts. I see. Yes. Good. Then what do you do? Yes. I know you take their money, but what else do you do before you take their money? Come on guy, you know, where are the funny voices. The spirits? Great Chief "Sitting Bottom" or "Mahatma Kane Jeeves" When do you do the funny voices? Oh, you don't do funny voices. What about famous ones? Do you do George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, Plato? No, not Pluto, I know he's a dog...Plato? You don't do voices. I see. What about hands? Can you do that spooky thing with hands? No hands, I see. Bodies? Do you do bodies, spirits materializing? No spirits? Nothing, huh. Not even ghostly music? No trumpets, or harmonicas. I see. You don't do music either. Well, gee, John, I don't know. I mean, you really don't have much of an act there do you? But what? But you can't get caught cheating either. Because you don't really do anything. Well, yeah John, I know. But I don't think anybody is going to buy into this. I mean, it's 1890 after all, not the dark ages. You really expect people just to take your word for it, that you're, you know, talking with the dead? I don't know, John. I don't think that you've got something that's really going to fly here. Why don't you come back in a few years, after you've jazzed up the act a little bit? Yeah, well, I'm sorry too, John baby, but lets do dinner some time soon, huh? Yeah, good luck to you too kid. See you around. Miss Jones! Miss Jones; all right send in the guy with the talking mule!

AROUND THE NET

Well, its been a busy month for

us, but we have stumbled upon a few interesting spots on the net that you might want to hit on in your leisure time. If you are interested in what the Catholic Church has to say officially about the New Age, try:
http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/interelg/documents/rc_pc_interelg_doc_20030203_new-age_en.html.

Interested in learning a little more about the history of the spiritualism movement? There are lots of good sites around the net but one of the more interesting is:
<http://www.spirithistory.com>

It is one of the more interesting and it includes many fascinating original documents from early spiritualist newsletters and magazines. You can find James Van Praagh's web site at <http://www.vanpraagh.com/>. And John Edward at <http://www.johnedward.net/index2.htm>.

DON'T FORGET WE HAVE A NEW MEETING PLACE

And thanks to Jack and Louise Throne for making the arrangements. (And this time the lights in the parking lot will be on! Thanks again to Jack!)

WHERE IS KINNEY HIGH SCHOOL? (NEW MEETING PLACE FOR SORT!)

Just off Highway 50: Traveling east, Zinfandel Exit to Folsom Boulevard; traveling west, Sunrise exit to Folsom Boulevard. Then:

- (1) Traveling west on Folsom Boulevard, turn left on Kilgore Rd., just past Sunrise. Or, traveling east on Folsom Blvd., turn right on Kilgore.
- (2) Turn right into the Kinney High School parking lot. The library is in the building just south of the parking lot, and the entrance is on the west side of the building.

BOARD OF ADVISORS:

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About the Founding Members:

Ray Spangenburg and Kit Moser are a husband-and-wife writing team specializing in science and technology. They are co-authors of 52 books and over 100 articles, including publication in the *Skeptical Inquirer*, and they are former co-editors of the *Bay Area Skeptics Information Sheet (BASIS)*.

For more information, contact:

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RATIONAL COMMUNITY CALENDAR

February 26: *SORT Meeting*

Topic: "Viewing the Future—From a Rational Perspective"

Time: Wednesday, 7:00 p.m., Room One (Library),

Place: Kinney High School Library, 2710 Kilgore Road, Rancho Cordova.

Everyone is welcome and all meetings are free.

February 21: *Sacramento Skeptics*

Dinner meeting.

Topic: "A Skeptics View on Bio-technology" (A take-off from the Darwin Day speaker's presentation.)

Time: Friday, 6:00 p.m.

Place: Buggy Whip Restaurant, 2737 Fulton Ave. (between Marconi and El Camino), 486-1416.

For details, contact Richard Kowaleski at

kowaleski@earthlink.net

March 9: *AOF Meeting*

(Co-sponsor with Americans United for Separation of Church and State and other organizations)

Topic: "God and Government: Montgomery, Alabama, and the Ten Commandments Case"

Speaker: Edwin Gaustad, eminent scholar of religious history

Time: Sunday, 2:00 p.m.

Place: CSUS Hinde Auditorium

Parking: Free, Lot 4 and Lot 6

Free lecture. The public is welcome.

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SORT

*Educating Ourselves
and Educating Others*

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for Rational Thinking
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