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

**Inside This Issue**

- 1** May 29 SORT Meeting  
SO YOU WANT TO BE A  
CELEBRITY?
- 2** THIS MONTH'S BOOKS
- 3** GLOBAL WARMING
- 3** DIRECTIONS
- 4** RATIONAL COMMUNITY  
CALENDAR

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For past issues, links to other skeptics, and more, check out the SORT Website: <http://home.surewest.net/kitray>

For more about the co-founders of SORT, see [www.spangenburgandmoser.com](http://www.spangenburgandmoser.com)

**MAY  
 SORT Meeting  
 Tuesday, May 29, 2007  
 7:30 P.M.**

La Sierra Community Center  
 Room 800, 5325 Engle Road  
 Carmichael, CA

(See driving directions, p. 3)

# The *SORTified* NEWS

“Doubt is the beginning of wisdom.”

—Clarence Darrow

**May 29th Meeting  
 SO YOU WANT TO BE A  
 CELEBRITY**

Who was it that said that some-day everyone would have 15 minutes of fame . . . . ? We seem to have forgotten, but like so much in America, that 15 minutes got spread around a little differently than was originally conjectured, a small percentage of the populace got lots more, but most of us get lots less.

Seriously, though, fame these days appears to be the great American dream. Few countries create as many celebrities as America. Sports heroes, movie stars, rap singers, and television personalities all bid fair to become this year’s great American heroes. Television shows allow us to create our idols and radio, television, newspapers, and celebrity magazines keep us informed about them. Amazingly enough, it doesn’t always take special gifts, talents, or even charisma to become famous in America. Witness Paris Hilton. All it takes sometimes is a bit of behavior outrageous enough and a few paparazzi.

This month we’ll be taking a look at people’s fascination with celeb-

SORT . . .  
  
**HERE’S TO THE  
 NEXT 10 YEARS!**

rities, why are they created, what do they do for us and what do we expect of them? Are they projections of ourselves, our dreams, idealized extensions into worlds beyond us? Do those we have created, given fame and often money, have an obligation to us? What rights do we have over their behavior public and private? Why do we expect more “proper behavior” from our sports heroes than our movie stars?

Join us at we look at “Celebrities” this month at SORT.

*For directions, see page 3.*

**CAMP FOR SKEPTICAL  
 KIDS: YOU CAN HELP**

Camp Quest West: Needs camp counselors at summer cabin camp. Freethought for the children of atheists, humanists, skept-

tics and others with a naturalistic worldview. Swimming, boating, campfires, hiking, crafts, skits along with critical thinking, science and respect. Held at Camp Watanda about 70 miles north of Sacramento, in the California Gold Country.

Call for more info. Age 9-14, Dates 1 wk session July 8-15, 2007. Cost to campers: \$390 Info 650-949-3192 [www.campquestwest.org](http://www.campquestwest.org)

## SHORT TAKES ON THE BOOK BEAT

For fans of the deeply troubled but brilliantly gifted Philip K. Dick, one of the best books we've found this month is *Philip K. Dick: Four Novels of the 1960s*, published in a compact volume by The Library of America. If you haven't read any of them yet or are holding on to that battered and torn paperback copies you shouldn't pass this one up. The book includes four of Dick's best works : *The Man in the High Castle*, *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldrich*; *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* and *Ubik*. For those unfamiliar with the dark and enigmatic works of Dick, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* was the inspiration for the darkly fascinating movie *Bladerunner*, and the rest of this Dick collection remains just as powerful and haunting as they were when first published.

Our second pick of the month is *The Canon: A Whirlgig Tour of*

*the Beautiful Basics of Science* by Pulitzer Prize winning Natalie Angier. We haven't had a chance to finish it yet, but what we have read is a graceful and stirring look at the present state of scientific knowledge, including evolutionary biology, physics, probability, chemistry, molecular biology, astronomy, geology, and a neat introductory chapter called "Thinking Scientifically: An Out of Body Experience." Will report more next month.

## GLOBAL WARMING

by Don Michael Payne  
(reproduced by permission)

Confusing, isn't it? I remember several years ago (the mid eighties) while I was getting an Astronomy degree and taking a planetary geology course where the instructor noted that geological record indicates that the solar constant varies by ten percent. That is a lot. Now, I have no idea the accuracy of the claim. Most stars vary the light output by some amount and some vary greatly in a few hours. It makes you wonder about the little effects caused by human beings but, in any case, the debate is about our sun, our world, our climate, and our future.

I can already see the climate narrative in the eyes of the religious. Global warming is either God's will, punishment, and/or design. The spirituals/newage are characterizing it in environmental terms as they usually do. Gaia is sick or tired or fighting back. I am not religious but from time to time consider that the world is spiritually inhabited though, as a bit of a mathematician, I also consider statistical trends a spiritual thing. The underlying point to all this is a question that was considered

## 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.

in the late sixties and early seventies but has since been ignored: overpopulation. How many people can the world sustain? Perhaps we can answer that question. Perhaps a little analysis can give us perspective. Say each human being to live needs 3000 calories/day, which works out to about 3.5 kilowatt-hours of energy per day. The sun, on average, provides about 4 kilowatt-hours of energy per square meter per day. There are 500,000 billion square meters on the surface of Earth. If we assume that the energy conversion is 5% (like a typical solar cell), then the earth could support 25,000 billion people. This sounds big but that is one person standing in each square meter over the entire planet. If we then restrict these numbers to the 30% of the planet that is not water this number becomes 7500 billion people. Now, we are not solar panels. We do not convert sunlight into energy so 5% may be optimistic. This is why the ecosystem is so important, but I digress.

What if everyone had a car and drove it 12,000 miles a year. A gallon of gasoline contains 33.4 kilowatts of energy. So if I have a car that gets 32 miles to the gallon it works out that my car consumes the equivalent energy to one gallon per day. Driving now reduces the human capacity to 224 billion people. If we throw in the average lifestyle of an energy efficient 1000 square foot American home with all the normal amenities, that requires another 33 kilowatts of energy per person. So now we are down to 6.78 billion. Just to live in a nicely air conditioned/heated 1000 sq ft space and have some transportation and using the energy coming from the Sun, which is the only non-nuclear source the Earth has, the Earth can support 6.78 billion people. But before you relax, about half of the Earth is covered

by clouds at any given time. If the clouds only filter 50% of the Sun's light then we get a reduction of the Earth's capacity to support human life of 25% and thus 6.78 billion becomes 5 billion people.

I think this is where we start the conversation of what to do about Global Warming. We have time to save the planet viz a viz fossil fuels but we must come to grips with the fact that Earth, at best, can only support roughly the number of people on her now at a lifestyle that we all seem to aspire to. We can work on efficiencies and we can work on quality-of-life expectations, but if we are to attain a truly sustainable human civilization we must deal with the number of human beings: an old issue we thought we left behind in the late sixties but has never stopped being relevant. Global Warming is a symptom. We can reduce the consumption of fossil fuels to address Global Warming but unless we address the human population we will only be having a shot of whiskey to ignore the pain.

## BOARD OF ADVISERS

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## About the Founders

Ray Spangenburg and Kit Moser are a husband-and-wife writing team specializing in science and technology. They are coauthors of more than 50 books and over 100 articles, including publication in the *Skeptical Inquirer*, and they are former coeditors of the *Bay Area Skeptics Information Sheet (BASIS)*.

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## GETTING TO LA SIERRA COMMUNITY CENTER

**From Highway 50:** Take the Watt Avenue exit and head north. Turn right on Marconi, by the Raley's store. Travel east on Marconi to Walnut and turn left. Travel north on Walnut to Engle and turn right. Turn left at La Sierra Community Center. Follow the road past the main parking lot and along the east side of the building. Room 800 is in the second building on the left (just past the open, grassy area). Park, look for the SORT sign, and come on in!

**From I-80:** Take the Madison exit and head east. Turn right on Garfield and head south. Turn right on Gibbons and left at La Sierra Community Center. Follow the road along the east side of the building. Room 800 is in the last building before the open, grassy area. Park, look for the SORT sign, and come on in!

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## RATIONAL COMMUNITY CALENDAR

### **May 29: Sacramento Organization for Rational Thinking (SORT)**

**Topic:** “So You Want to Be a Celebrity?”

**Time:** Tuesday, 7:30–9:00 p.m. (social period until 9:30)

**Place:** La Sierra Community Center, Room 800, 5325 Engle Road, Carmichael  
Everyone is welcome and all meetings are free.

### **June 9: Atheists and Other Freethinkers (AOF)**

**Speaker:** Check <http://aofonline.org/events> and <http://aofonline.org/generalmeetings> for more details.

**Time:** Second Sunday, 1:30–4:30 p.m. (Please note new time.)

**Location:** Sierra 2 Community Center, Room 10, 2791 24th Street (So. of Broadway). The public is welcome.

### **July 8–15: Camp for Freethinking, Humanist, Atheist kids and others with a naturalistic world view**

Info 650-949-3192 [www.campquestwest.org](http://www.campquestwest.org)



*Educating Ourselves  
and Educating Others*

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for Rational Thinking  
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