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Organization for
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(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

**October
SORT Meeting
Tuesday,
October 26, 2004
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

Oct. 26 SORT Meeting WHAT IS LOVE?

The Beatles sang “All you need is love.” George W. Bush tells us how much he loves America. John loves Mary and everybody loves Raymond. Susan loves her work and Sally loves her dog. Ronald Reagan loved jelly beans and Bill Clinton loves....well anyway, you get the idea.

This month at SORT we will be taking a look at love. And, as our favorite resident cynic is certain to ask—how do we define that word? Is it an uncontrollable emotion, an intense appreciation, the comfortable warmth of satisfaction, or the white heat of desire? Is it the mystical golden grail of the romantics or the practical “plan A” of the Yuppie? Obviously it means different things to different people. Can we approach it rationally, or is it beyond rational analysis? What, then, is this thing called love?

Join us at our SORT open round table this month and let us know what you think. As usual free coffee (regular and decaf) will be available along with free soft drinks, cookies and other treats, to keep the conversation around the table warm and comfortable. Bring yourself, bring a friend. As always, all SORT meetings are free and open to the public.



**MEETING DAY:
TUESDAY EVENING
LOCATION:
ROOM 800**

Hear ye, hear ye!

We are back in Room 800 at La Sierra Community Center in Carmichael this month and next, but shifted to the last Tuesday of the month for the autumn months of October, November, and December.

Driving directions on page 3.

NOTE: We'll return to the last Wednesday in January 2005.

FROM THE BOOK SHELVES

Sick Societies: Challenging the Myth of Primitive Harmony by Robert B. Edgerton, published by Free Press.

Your best bet for this one is to check your local library. It's a few years old, originally published in 1997, but still timely in its arguments—especially in attacking the post-modern belief that societies cannot be judged as healthy or unhealthy. As indicated in the title Edgerton takes a close look at a broad range of primitive societies and dispels quite a few idyllic myths along the way. Unfortunately, according to Edgerton, the great majority of those societies were neither healthier nor more harmoniously operating than our modern ones. Often, in fact, they demonstrated a capacity for cruelty and violence equal to if not surpassing some of the terrors of our own age. The knife that Edgerton uses to slice through the myths is tempered by his argument that many problems

of societies, both ancient and modern, come from their insistence on holding on to outmoded beliefs, rituals, and traditions. While these old belief systems may once have been beneficial, they often outlive their usefulness and end up becoming destructive rather than constructive patterns of behavior. Edgerton also points out in a reminder useful to us today, particularly given the present climate of America, the dangers a society faces when tensions or fears drive it to seek answers in the imagined solace of the traditions and superstitions of its past.

FROM THE WIDE WEIRD WEB WORLD OF THE WEEKLY WORLD NEWS (And a few other places besides)

It's been a while since we've looked into our favorite ironically wacky web-site—the on-line Weekly World News, but we are glad that we dropped in recently to pick up this delicious tidbit.

According to the WWN, the ghost of the gentle and kindly children's show host Mr. Rogers ("It's a wonderful day in the neighborhood") has been pretty lonely "on the other side." Not enough children there, WWN lets us know. So the ever-friendly Mr. Rogers is starting to turn up again in the neighborhoods. Trouble is, according to Amy Specter, described by the WWN as a "professional ghost hunter," "...His ghost is the same as he was in life—sweet, friendly, soft-spoken—but when you're a floating, transparent wraith, the effect is totally different. Saying 'howdy neighbor' and 'can you say death?' to a five-year old when you're a spirit is terrifying to them."

WWN adds dryly that "the effect (on children) has been far from what Mr. Rogers intends. Children have gone running into their parents' bedroom screaming "Mommy, there's a strange man with a sweater flying around my room!"

WWN reports that Specter operates a ghost-busting operation called "Not A Ghost Of A Chance" and that she

explains to parents that "like a lot of apparitions, Mr. Rogers's ghost is confused...he doesn't really understand that his situation has changed. I tried to explain it to him," Specter said, "but he just doesn't get it." Her best advice to parents, as reported by WWN: "If your child does see Mr. Rogers's ghost, teach him or her to try to be friendly. Have them say, "Hi, Mr. Rogers's ghost! Can you say ghost?"

WWN reports Sue Banshee, a child psychologist notes that the entire situation is pretty tough on Mr. Rogers's ghost as well.

"Fred Rogers spent decades building a reputation as a friend to children. Now his ghost is scaring children, and that will come back to haunt him."

Now wait...let's think about that a minute...uh, hum, ah...Maybe we had just better forget the whole thing.

All right, so there might be something a little fishy about the whole story. (Specter? Banshee?) Surely, though, you have to admire the WWN for following up on the great river of beer story. You can't easily dismiss any story that begins "A previously undiscovered natural river of beer has been found deep in Germany's Black Forest."

A grabber, right? WWN goes on to report that the river now named "Krautlager River" is the result of a natural fluke of nature, explaining, "Fresh water from an underground spring flows down a riverbed surrounded by wild hops and barley plants. As the plants are periodically washed into the river, fermentation eventually occurs. The result is a delicious golden lager, which bubbles through the woodlands." WWN reports that famed German historian and alcoholic, Gunther Kaisersteiner calls the river "the discovery of the century!"

I mean you've got to love these guys for brewing this stuff up.

And finally, this last story from WWN. It seems that there is this alien couple, and we mean REALLY alien—from the planet Zertonia—who have hired an Earth lawyer to help them reclaim Michael Jackson,

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.

who they claim is their son. According to the lawyer, Bentley Leavent, "They are disgusted and appalled at his life here and they want him to come home now." Leavent also explained that the couple, who were young at the time, gave Mr. Jackson up because they couldn't face the rigors of raising a child 46 years ago. Leavent added "Mr. Zortron (Michael's father) was just beginning his four-year training to become a flying saucer mechanic." The couple felt that young Kerz-na (Michael's real name) needed an older more secure couple to teach him "proper solid values and a moral background." Leavent added that the alien couple "were shocked to discover that the Zertonian adoption broker had shipped their son to Earth." "They were even more concerned," Leavent continued "when they got a peek at him frolicking at the Neverland ranch."

"We were most displeased," the Zertonians stated in their law suit filed in Los Angeles.

Hold it! Stop! We can't go on with this. Our heads are spinning... See you at SORT.



**SORT FALL SCHEDULE:
LAST TUESDAY**

ROOM 800

7:30–9:30 p.m.

La Sierra Community Center
5325 Engle Road
Carmichael

**Tuesday, October 26
Room 800**

**Tuesday, November 30
Room 800**

**Tuesday, December 28
Room 800**

See you there!!

REMINDER:

1–2–3, SHIFT!

**SORT CHANGES TO THE
LAST TUESDAY TO AVOID
YEAR-END CRUNCHES**

To avoid scheduling conflicts (and get Room 800 back!), SORT has adopted the schedule above for the rest of this year.

Current plans call for a return to the last Wednesday of the month in January 2005.

BOARD OF ADVISERS

Electronics Engineer

Terry Sandbek
Psychologist

Robert Sheaffer
UFO Specialist, Author

Bob Steiner
Magician, Author, Bunco Expert

Lauress Wise
Mathematical Psychologist

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 24 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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for Rational Thinking)**
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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!

RATIONAL COMMUNITY CALENDAR

October 26: *SORT Meeting*

Topic: "What Is Love?"

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. (In November, mark your calendar for November 30.)

November 12: *Sacramento Skeptics*

Second Friday: Dinner followed by meeting.

Topic, Time, and Place: To be announced.

For details, contact Liam McDaid, (916) 558-2005, mcdaidw@scc.losrios.edu

November 14: *Atheists and Other Freethinkers (AOF)*

Time: Second Sunday, 2:30–5:30 p.m.

Place: Sierra II Community Center, 2791 24th Street, Room 10. (South of Broadway).

Visitors welcome. *Cost:* Free



*Educating Ourselves
and Educating Others*

**Sacramento Organization
for Rational Thinking
P.O. Box 2215
Carmichael, CA 95609-2215**

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED