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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

SORT's Next Meeting

**Wednesday,
 December 27, 2000
 7:00 P.M.**

La Sierra Community Center,
 Room 410
 5325 Engle Road
 Carmichael, CA

The **SORTified NEWS**

“Doubt is the beginning of wisdom.”

—Clarence Darrow

December Sort Meeting **SOME MEDICAL QUACKS AND THEIR “MARVELOUS INVENTIONS”**

Keeping a light touch for the holidays, at the December SORT meeting we'll take a humorous look at “Some Medical Quacks and Their Marvelous Inventions.” Through the magic of video tape, we'll walk down memory (or is it nightmare?) lane to view a host of historic quacks-including the notorious Albert Abrams-and their “miracle” cures. See the “Amazing Prostate Gland Warmer,” the incredible “Spectra-Chrome Machine,” and the wonderful “Orgone Accumulator.” Learn the wonders of radiation, and how you can cure any illness with a marvelous family-sized “radio-active drinking water dispenser.” (Or, all you male jocks out there might want to take a look at the superduper “radium filled male supporter”!)

See it all with your own eyes! Hear the truth with your own ears! Join us at what promises to be an entertaining evening as we take a look at some of these zany “cures” of the past. Imagine, at one time people actually paid good money for magnets to cure arthritis, believed in homeopathic medicine, sought magic in herbs, and bought into dozens of other such crazy pseudoscientific beliefs! Doesn't it feel good to see how far we have advanced?

Ah well, we can dream can't we.

Hope to see you Wednesday, December 27th, at 7:00 p.m. in Room 410 at the La Sierra Community Center, 5325 Engle Road, in Carmichael. Remember there will be plenty of free cookies, coffee and soft drinks available. Give yourself a holiday treat and join us.

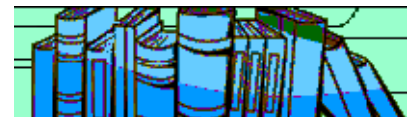
As always, SORT meetings are free and open to the public.

P.S. La Sierra is remodeling! New meeting rooms will soon be available near the gyms, with ample lighting, a much shorter walk from the parking lot, and their own restrooms. In the meantime, we've been promised the restrooms will be open for our meetings!

SOME ADDITIONAL READING

If you are interested in some additional reading on the history of quackery in American medicine, and if you have time during the busy holiday season to get to your local library, we recommend a couple of wonderful older books.

Stuart Holbrook's *The Golden Age of Quacker* (1959) is, as



usual for Holbrook, a good readable starting place. James Harvey Young's *The Medical Messiahs* (1967) is a little drier going and concentrates primarily on the legal attempts to keep such quackery under check. Finally, for a really comprehensive view of this bizarre sideshow of American history, see if you can find *Nostrums and Quackery*, a fascinating and comprehensive 2-volume set published in 1912 by the American Medical Association press.

And, to help keep your perspective, you might want to take a look at what's happening today. Stephen Barrett's *The Vitamin Pushers* (1994) and *The Health Robbers* (1993) will have you shaking your head at how little things have changed. Also highly recommended is *Science Meets Alternative Medicine* by Wallace Sampson and Lewis Vaughn (2000).

YOU SAW THE MOVIE— NOW YOU CAN HAVE THE REAL THING!

Well, apparently the recent re-release of the movie *The Exorcist* didn't exactly break any world records. Guess pea soup doesn't have the same shock value anymore. Still, though, according to the Reverend Bob Larsen, an evangelical preacher, real exorcists are still very much in demand. Larsen, quoted in a story for *The New York Times* by John W. Fountain, says that he has 40 "exorcism teams" up and ready for action anywhere in the United States. "Our goal is that no one should ever be more than a day's drive from a city where you can find an exorcist," Larsen told the *Times* reporter. Larsen isn't alone in thinking that America has need for more good exorcists (and this

article ran before the recent election farce). *Times* reporter Fountain says, "the number of exorcists and exorcisms has increased across the country in the past 10 years." Chicago, the newest target for Larsen's exorcism teams, recently gained a full-time exorcist appointed by the archdiocese of Chicago, while, according to Fountain, "New York City's diocese has four, which, we suppose proves something about New York that we have always suspected." As the *Times* story also adds, "Between 1989 and 1995, the archdiocese of New York examined more than 300 potential exorcism cases, although exorcisms were performed in only 10 percent of the cases . . . Since 1995, the New York diocese has investigated about 40 cases a year." (wonder how many of them were New York cab drivers?) The *Times* article also points out, "In January 1999, the Vatican issued a revised Catholic rite of exorcism for the first time since 1614, essentially reaffirming that Satan exists." The new rules, according to the *Times*, do "call for church-approved exorcists to consult modern medicine and rule out the possibility of mental or physical disorder."

Larsen, however, indicates that modern science doesn't have all the answers. "These are people who have been through therapy . . . they've seen psychiatrists," he says. "They've had medical attention and nothing has solved their problem. We're not telling people that this is a complete fix . . . what we're saying is that if you have a demon, all the other modalities of therapy are only going to get you so far. They will not get you past that hurdle that's keeping you from going anywhere."

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.

Still, Reverend, even exorcism doesn't seem to have kept poor Linda Blair from churning out all those terrible "B" films, one right after another, over and over again.



GREENPEACE AGAIN SAVES EARTH—BUT THE PEOPLE ON IT CAN GO TO HELL

And, while we're speaking of exorcisms, or at least people badly in need of having their heads looked into, we note a recent story in *Reason Online* about the continuing fight of Greenpeace and other anti-science activists to protect the Earth even at the expense of people living on this beleaguered planet. It's another infuriating story about the ill-informed and self-righteous battle against bio-tech grains, this time involving tons of badly needed rice locked away in a grenade proof greenhouse in Switzerland while Greenpeace and other so-called environmental activists are campaigning to have it destroyed. You can find the complete story at <http://www.reason.com>.

TROUBLE BREWING IN PENNSYLVANIA

Continuing with stories of the apparently lobotomized, make sure to keep following the events in Pennsylvania, where the Pennsylvania School Board proposed Science Standards early in December that allow teaching of theories that "do or do not support the theory of evolution." Robert Park, in his "What's New" report of December 1, 2000, quotes one local school board member who strongly supports the move as proclaiming a clear message, namely: "Our beliefs in Butler (school district) are pro-creationist." We can only hope (and one of your newsletter editors is an ex-Pennsylvanian) that the good people of the Keystone state nip this move in the bud before it turns into an ugly blossom.

AND LASTLY: A SAD GOOD-BYE

We note with sadness the death of Morgan Sherwood. Morgan, who taught science history at the University of California, Davis, possessed a fine, eclectic mind and a healthy dose of skepticism that enlivened and enriched all he came in contact with.

Your editors had a chance to meet him only in his final days, but in that too-brief a time were fortunate enough to be honored with exposure to his remarkable intelligence, his quick wit and his well-seasoned wisdom.

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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 34 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)*.

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Our condolences to Morgan's wife, Jeannie, whose graciousness and kindness helped to make a remarkable afternoon even more remarkable. Thank you, Jeannie.

In this age of blandness, Morgan was a unique and remarkable human being—he will be greatly missed.

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*“Educating ourselves
and educating others”*

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