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‘Real TV’?

How TVNZ Turned a Hoax into a Documentary

Vicki Hyde

*The Skeptics make their first-ever complaint to the
Broadcasting Standards Authority.*

Few would disagree these days that a great many programmes broadcast on television are pretty much rubbish, but never before have the New Zealand Skeptics felt obliged to bring a complaint to the Broadcasting Standards Authority. Until now....

Your poor Chair-entity and long-suffering committee members have watched some awful material on your behalf, sometimes in the process of deciding Bent Spoon Awards, sometimes from the resigned but all-too-accurate prediction that we'd be asked to talk about the latest alien artefact claims or Turin Shroud revelations and so would need to see what we had to comment on.

It was with this in mind that I made myself watch *Alien Abduction: Incident in*

Lake County, broadcast by TV2 in early February. This programme apparently depicted an American family's fateful encounter with extra-terrestrials via home videotape footage purporting to show alien attacks, culminating in an apparent abduction of the surviving mem-

bers of the group. The videotape was interspersed with clips from commentators including alleged US government agents, scientists, abductees, medical personnel and even Michael Shermer, respected US arch-skeptic!

Mike Dickison had alerted me to the fact that the item was showing, and that it had caused comment when it aired in the States. Quoting from UPN's website¹, Mike told me that the special received an overwhelming response from the viewing public the day after its initial airdate. UPN's Web site had received over 350,000 hits by viewers seeking

⇒ p3

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The Home Schoolers Guide To The Galaxy

IT'S a damned rotten trick, I know, but I rang up my mum and asked her a simple question, does the Earth go round the Sun, or is it the other way around? She wasn't sure, but felt the most obvious, correct answer was that the Sun orbits the Earth.

"No, I'm sure about it. Of course it does. But maybe you could ring up a local astrologer?"

Now, my mum is not stupid; she worked as a practice nurse most of the time she wasn't raising the Hell-hounds that were the five Taylor children. She may get the name wrong but she knows what's happening in Sierra Leone. And she can bake scones. Mum is not alone on this question. Over half of the adults in the United States of America are similarly vague on the Sun's orbitary perambulations, so says a study by the National Science Foundation.

I've been thinking about all this while homeschooling young Iris recently. At seven, Iris knows the Sun rises in the East and travels across the... "No, the Earth is moving, the Sun stays still!" she shrieks delightedly at me.

To put the whole thing into context and give us all a feeling of insignificance (the kind which Charlie Brown has to cope with) we carried out a little exercise, as suggested by Richard Dawkins in the latest *Skeptical Inquirer*. We put a leash on the retired cattle dog, (she wasn't involved in the process but needed to answer the call of nature) collected a pocketful of pins, some peppercorns, a marble and a small orange off the tree. We also carried a plastic ball with pictures of Pocahontas on it.

Coming to a nice large park, we placed the Pocahontas ball at one end, which represented the Sun. Ten adult paces from this we put a pin in the ground, through a sheet of A4 paper, (we feared our planets would get lost amongst the verdant swards.) This pin had the honour of standing in for Mercury. Another nine paces beyond this and a peppercorn represented Venus. March another seven paces and down went Earth, another peppercorn. (At this stage we had to assure the dear little old lady that no, we weren't littering, we were doing something very important, and asked her to remove her dog which was on the verge of eating ours.) One inch away from the Earth, we put down a pinhead for the Moon. Fourteen more paces to Mars, ninety-five paces to Jupiter (the orange) and one hundred and twelve paces to Saturn, a marble.

As we had run out of park, we couldn't mark out Uranus, Neptune and Pluto. To show the nearest star, we'd have to fly to Singapore, so we gave that a miss too. It was pretty impressive, and certainly helped put things in perspective, for Iris and us. Space, as Douglas Adams says, is big. We've been on this planet only seconds (on a geological time scale) and there's so much more to find out, but we have got some things sussed — the Earth is not flat, nor does it sit on the back of a cosmic tortoise. We know a few things about the way the world works and yet so few people know the basics. There's probably some basic basics I could do with brushing up on (like baking scones for one). So how best to teach our children these fundamentals? It's heartening to see people like Emily Rosa, who at age nine, can do competent, publishable science, even if she did have a little bit of help from her mum [see page 5].

Being a homeschooler, the question is closer to home. I hope that we are teaching Iris the wonder of the world, and the wonders of science — that we don't have all the answers but let's keep on trying. And testing things — is gravity always on the job? Let's throw the cat out the window and see.

My mum just rang me back to tell me she'd been sitting there, scratching her head, and thinking back to her school days, and was sure the Earth orbits the Sun, not the other way round. A rocket scientist. Explains where I get it from. (And by the way, I fibbed about the astrologer.)



Contributions

Contributions, whether written articles or newspaper clippings, should be directed to:

Annette Taylor
122 Woodlands Rd
RD1, Hamilton

Email: number8@icarus.ihug.co.nz

Deadline for next issue: 10 August 1998

Preference will be given to copy supplied by email or sent on an IBM-compatible disc in ASCII text, Word or WordPerfect formats. Discs will be returned if clearly labelled.

Please indicate the source publication and date of any clippings.

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⇒p1 additional information about the show, and hundreds more had called the network directly.

"The show apparently caused a huge furore from US skeptics, because it's fictional. (I nearly said obviously fictional, but apparently about a third of the viewers were taken in). There's even credits at the end listing the actors who play the family members, the sheriff, and (wait for it) Alien 1 and Alien 2," Mike said in his email.

He made the excellent suggestion that we should lobby TV2 to screen a disclaimer before the programme began. As it happens, we didn't act on that and the rest, as they say, is history....

To our horror, we saw that, when broadcast, TV2 had actually manipulated the material and its presentation to try and make it look factual, with the aim of boosting ratings. They did this by taking the highly unusual step of cutting the credits off the programme. So no-one watching had any inkling that many of the people — from the family under siege to a number of the "experts" — were, in fact, actors.

Not only that, but they added a notice at the front of the programme which said:

"This programme on TV2 Alien Abduction: Incident in Lake County' was obtained exclusively from America's UPN Television Network and is presented as received. Its authenticity is still under much debate in the United States. We invite you to decide for yourself."

There are, to put it nicely, at least two "deliberate errors of fact" in this notice.

(1) The programme was edited by TVNZ to remove the credits revealing the fictional nature of the show, so it was clearly not "presented as received". When screened in the US on January 20th, the credits showing the programme's fictional nature were broadcast as part of the programme.

(2) Having taken the trouble to remove the credits, TVNZ would then have been well aware that there was *no question* regarding the authenticity of the programme — that it was not an authentic documentary dealing with an authentic alien encounter and abduction, but merely a "spoof". TVNZ knew that the show was fiction, yet chose to present it as a documentary "under debate" to boost ratings by "adding to the mystery".

When challenged the day after the screening, TV2 spokesman Simon King said that the decision to remove the credits was to "keep the mystique going", aiming to gain a larger audience by obscuring the fictional provenance of the show. Mr King stated that this was done deliberately for promotional purposes and compared it to TVNZ's previous promotional campaigns for *Millennium* and *X-Files*.

We are disturbed that TV2 does not apparently recognise the difference between presenting an entertaining dramatical fiction series such as the *X-Files* (well, some people like it!) and trying to make a piece of fiction look like fact by removing information.

Mike Dickison had a good analogy at this point:

"Imagine you make a video of actors dressed up as police beating up actors dressed as transvestites. Imagine TVNZ screens it as a documentary just noting that its "authenticity was under debate". Imagine they omit the credits for "promotional" reasons to "heighten the mystique" of whether the item is fact or fiction...."

There's no way that that would be condoned and neither should TV2 get away with something comparable just because it involves something as silly as aliens. How will we know what they will choose to change next?

The other explanation TVNZ came up with was that the credits were removed to "aid in a seamless transition to another science fiction fantasy" — i.e. to discourage people from changing channel. Gee, if that's so important, why don't they get rid of all those time-consuming credits, not to mention those ever-lengthening ad breaks?! It was the lack of credits at the end which made me sit up in my seat that night, and which led to the to and fro of a number of letters since.

Had TV2 actually run the programme as received, we wouldn't have bothered worrying about it — the Skeptics (and the rest of the nation) sees more than enough junk on the box to bother getting upset about yet another second-rate time-waster. However, TVNZ's cynical attempt at manipulating the public in order to get and keep view-

ers was more than we could — or should — stomach.

Broadcasting Standards An Oxymoron?

A quick check of the Code of Broadcasting Practice, and a discussion via the Skeptics committee mailing list, led us to decide that we had reasonable grounds to complain and that it was our duty to do so. So off went the first letter, directed to TVNZ, citing five breaches of the codes.

We told TVNZ that we thought the action was in breach of G1 requiring broadcasters to be truthful and accurate on points of fact. The programme was indeed a piece of fiction, but in choosing to eliminate indicators of that and in the wording of the disclaimer run prior to the programme, TVNZ as a broadcaster was neither truthful nor accurate in their representation of the programme.

We said that G7 had been breached, as broadcasters are enjoined to "avoid the use of any deceptive programme practice in the presentation of programmes which takes advantage of the confidence viewers have in the integrity of broadcasting". TVNZ programme standards manager David Edmunds responded that this was "usually taken to refer to technical trickery" and was therefore irrelevant in this case.

However the code is as quoted, and does not have anything in it which states that deceptive programme practises are limited to "freeze frame and the like".

We said that TVNZ undertook deceptive program-

ming practices in the presentation of this programme by deliberately misleading viewers as to the provenance of the item.

This is one of the more serious breaches, we believe, as it has major implications for the confidence viewers can have in the integrity of broadcasting. It affects the credibility of all documentaries broadcast on TVNZ. How are we, as viewers, to know that other documentaries have not been similarly manipulated? What does this say for the integrity, such as it is, of other "reality" television offerings?

We cited other standards, G16 and G19, which state respectively that "news, current affairs and documentaries should not be presented in such a way as to cause unnecessary panic, alarm or distress" and "care must be taken in the editing of programme material to ensure that the extracts used are a true reflection and not a distortion of the original event or the overall views expressed".

Mr Edmunds claimed that G16 and G19 were not relevant because both refer to News and Current Affairs programming, into which *Alien Abduction* did not fall. However, the codes clearly state that these apply to News, Current Affairs and Documentaries. In presenting *Alien Abduction* as a documentary, much in the same manner as other low-budget documentaries common to TV2's programming, we believe that TVNZ should be held accountable to the standards required of documentaries. G19, regard-

ing the care required in editing a programme to avoid distortion, is also appropriate, given the editing that TVNZ undertook to make the programme appear to be a documentary.

Mr Edmunds admitted that the events depicted may have misled or alarmed viewers in accepting one of the breaches we cited; it would, we contended, follow that G16 should also apply.

The one breach which TVNZ did accept was related to the following code:

G11 To refrain from broadcasting any programme which, when considered as a whole:

i) Simulates news or events in such a way as to mislead or alarm viewers.

TVNZ did accept that the programme could have been regarded as alarming. It was easy to see why — the people in the home videotape looked genuinely upset as they were menaced, injured and put under very strong psychological pressure over a period of hours.

Ironically I had thought this the possibly weakest charge in our case, as the acting was so bad and the special effects so low-budget that I couldn't believe anyone could take the thing seriously. Nonetheless, plenty of Americans thought it real enough — and they had the benefit of seeing the credits!

So what did TVNZ promise to do to remedy this deplorable action on their part. They promised that if and when the show was rescreened they would reinstate the credits. Gee, how kind....

This was not acceptable, in our view. We wanted TVNZ to make a formal statement admitting to their deception and informing viewers of the fact that this occurred. We wanted them to be aware that this sort of practice is unworthy of a professional organisation in the media business, and that they have a responsibility to deal fairly with the public.

So off went the next letter, this time to the Broadcasting Standards Authority itself, then the follow-up to the response TVNZ made to them — the whole thing has been an educational, if lengthy, process.

In rather aggrieved tones TVNZ told the BSA that the whole thing was “clearly a spoof from beginning to end” and that “it could be implied...that New Zealand Skeptics believes there is no place for a ‘spoof’ in the entertainment business”.

Gee, is this man saying we’re humourless busybodies who should get a life?

I dug out an old *New Zealand Science Monthly* editorial of mine where I talked about how valuable the spoof genre was to skeptical thought, how it encouraged people to question what they see on television (I was talking about Peter Jackson’s *Forgotten Silver* spoof documentary at the time). That should demonstrate that we know spoofs are a “perfectly legitimate genre of programme making”.

“However”, I went on in my response to the BSA, “we do not feel that it is the place of TVNZ, an organisation with no connection to the programme makers, to ma-

nipulate the programme to make it appear something that it is not.

“Our argument all along has been with the way TVNZ eliminated the end credits and ran a deceitful disclaimer beforehand, all in the rather cynical attempt to manipulate public interest by presenting a spoof item as having greater provenance than the original programme itself would claim.”

The programme was *not* clearly a spoof — I must confess that Michael Shermer’s appearance had had me seriously wondering if there was something in it! Rather, as presented, it was much like many of the poor quality documentaries featured on TV2, such as “Mysteries of the Ancients”, none of which are spoofs but all of which utilise the same style of technique and presentation as “Alien Abduction”.

In closing, we said that we thought TVNZ should be made to admit that they had manipulated programme content and presentation so that the people of New Zealand would be aware that our national broadcaster is not above lying in their quest for better ratings.

This has important implications for the integrity of our broadcasting system, and we hope that you will concur with us in this view and support our call for TVNZ to acknowledge and apologise for their action.

As this goes to print, we are still waiting for the BSA’s final ruling in this matter. We’ll let you know what, if any, action they take.

1 <http://www.upn.com/livewire/morealien.htm>

So why *are* the Skeptics Giving Money to Convicted Child Abusers?

Chair-entity Vicki Hyde responds to a letter from a member who resigned from the society over the Skeptics’ donation to the Peter Ellis Defence Fund. We reprint her letter as a clear statement of the Society’s position on a controversial issue.

Dear —,

We are sorry that the decision to donate to the Peter Ellis Defence Fund meant that you feel you can no longer support the Skeptics. The donation was made after considerable discussion at the AGM and, to my surprise, was agreed unanimously by those present.

If you will bear with me, I would like to explain the background of this and why it was germane to the Skeptics (in the same way that OJ Simpson or, indeed, your parking fine defence fund, would not be).

At the time of the Civic Creche case we were well aware of similar events in the US, following very similar patterns, and had even predicted that we would soon see in New Zealand a major child abuse case with claims of ritual Satanic abuse involving a day-care centre. We were very sorry to be proved right.

The case followed hard on the heels of ritual abuse "classes" being held in Christchurch where police and social workers (some of them later involved in the creche case) were taught that Satanic ritual abuse is a worldwide phenomenon (this despite the fact that protracted investigations in both the US and the UK have failed to find any evidence of such).

It was also during the depths of the recovered memory/false memory debate when increasing evidence was being presented

number of truly bizarre or impossible events. These tended to be produced by the children of people with counselling backgrounds who had bought into the ritual abuse paradigm and who had questioned their toddlers over and over again about events at the creche. This included, as I understand it, the woman whose child made the first complaint and who was pivotal in organising other like-minded parents.

What really concerned us, as Skeptics, was the apparent unwillingness to consider the likelihood that mass cannibalistic rituals, child murder, the disinternment of Jesus Christ and other unsavory — and in some cases lengthy — activities could take place in an open-plan creche which was accessible at any time.

While some of the parents involved apparently still consider that these events did take place, the police were sufficiently concerned to weed out the more bizarre claims and present only the most believable. Selection of evidence to suit the desired aims is deplored in the sciences; it should be abhorred in the courtroom.

There are many other aspects of the case that we find questionable, but I think that the above action really strikes at the heart of the matter. How can we, as members of the public or, worse, as members of a jury, be expected to decide on a case if 80% of the evidence is not even presented because it is considered to be too unbelievable!

The analogy I have used is the following:

Imagine if I was a witness in the OJ Simpson trial and the jury were told that my statement said "I saw OJ Simpson kill his wife."

Imagine that the full text of my statement read that "I was walking down the road after a couple of quick whiskies and a UFO picked me up and we went to visit Shirley Maclean and Elvis on Mars and then headed back to good ole Earth and I saw OJ Simpson kill his wife".

I presume that you would agree with us that the earlier part of the statement has major implications for the credibility of the latter. We contend that the police should be required to reveal "the whole truth" as part of their responsibility to provide all the relevant information to a jury so that the latter can decide on guilt or innocence.

Sadly it appears that our justice system does not operate like that. Certainly I know that I now have major qualms concerning jury service — how will I ever know whether the police are concealing pertinent evidence in their desire to present a "good" case?

The Skeptics would not have made the donation to the Ellis fund were it not patently clear that an injustice had taken place. We did so realising that it would be a controversial decision but one that we could not, in all conscience, ignore were we to hold to our principles.

Thank you for your support in the past — we hope that you will reconsider your decision given the above.

Whatever you choose, we wish you all the best.

Selection of evidence to suit the desired aims is deplored in the sciences; it should be abhorred in the courtroom.

on the malleability of memory and the ease with which it can be tampered with or modified in adults, let alone small children. Poor science and pseudo-science was being used to try to bolster the idea that memories are always true, and we even had doctors (obviously not parents!) declaring that children never lie.

When the Civic Creche case broke, the initial allegations seemed reasonable enough — we know, sadly, that child abuse does happen in our society, and we all share a responsibility to see that it does not occur and that, when it does, those involved are treated appropriately.

However, we were concerned to see an increasing number of allegations of various classic Satanic ritual abuse elements, including a

Touch Therapy Critic Hits Nerve

EMILY ROSA of Loveland, Colorado, designed and carried out an experiment two years ago that challenges a leading treatment in alternative medicine. Her study, reported in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, has thrown the field into tumult.

Emily is 11. She did the experiment for her fourth-grade science fair. The technique she challenges is therapeutic touch, in which healers manipulate what they call the "human energy field" by passing their hands over a patient's body without actually touching the patient.

The method is practised in healing centres and medical centres throughout the world, and is taught at prominent universities and schools of nursing. Tens of thousands of people have been trained to treat patients through the use of therapeutic touch. Its practitioners insist that the human energy field is real and that anyone can be trained to feel it.

But Emily asked a sort of "emperor's new clothes" type of question. Could therapeutic touch practitioners actually detect a human energy field? Her method was devilishly simple.

It was a question critics of alternative medicine had asked before. But only one practitioner agreed to submit to a test, said James Randi, a magician who conducted the test. Emily, however, was able to recruit 21 practitioners. Her mother,

Linda Rosa, a nurse who is among the critics of therapeutic touch, said she believed Emily succeeded because practitioners were not threatened by a nine-year-old girl.

Rosa said Emily originally was designing a science fair experiment involving different colored M&M's candy. Then she glanced at the television screen in her home where her mother was watching a videotape about therapeutic touch. Suddenly, Emily piped up, saying she had a way to test the premise of therapeutic touch, her mother said.

Emily designed an experiment in which the healer and Emily were separated by a screen. Then Emily decided, by flipping a coin, whether to put her hand over the healer's left hand or the right hand. The healer was asked to decide where Emily's hand was hovering. If the healer could detect Emily's human energy field, he or she should be able to discern where Emily's hand was. In 280 tests involving the 21 practitioners, the healers did no better than chance. They identified the correct location of Emily's hand just 44 percent of the time; if they guessed at random, they would have been right about half the time.

Emily wrote her study with her mother, a member of the National Therapeutic Touch Study Group, a group based in Loveland that questions the method. The study's authors included Larry Sarner of the Thera-

peutic Touch Study Group and Dr. Stephen Barrett, board chairman of Quackwatch in Allentown, Pennsylvania, a nonprofit group that is putting information about questionable medical practices on the Internet. The report on the study is accompanied by a note from Dr. George Lundberg, the journal's editor. In it, Lundberg says that "practitioners should disclose these results to patients, third-party payers should question whether they should pay for this procedure, and patients should save their money unless or until additional honest experimentation demonstrates an actual effect."

Lundberg said the journal's statisticians thought the study was well done. "They were amazed by its simplicity and by the clarity of its results," he said. Practitioners hardly agree. "I do hope it's an April Fool's joke," said Dr. Dolores Krieger, an emeritus professor of nursing at New York University who is a developer of therapeutic touch.

Krieger and other therapeutic touch practitioners insist that they and anyone else who is trained can easily feel human energy fields. In her book, *Accepting Your Power to Heal* (Bear & Co. Publishing, Santa Fe, N.M., 1993) Krieger said the field feels like "warm Jell-O or warm foam".

Practitioners of therapeutic touch say that patients who are ill have hot spots or cold spots in their fields or areas that feel tingly. By "rebal-

ancing" a person's field, practitioners say they can calm colicky babies, relieve symptoms of Alzheimer's disease, treat cancer and more.

Krieger says that since she developed therapeutic touch 26 years ago, she has trained more than 47,000 practitioners. Her acolytes have gone on to train thousands more. The method has also been the subject of numerous doctoral dissertations and post-doctoral studies.

Krieger said it is taught in nursing schools and colleges in 70 countries and is used in hospitals around the world. "It works," she said, adding that Emily Rosa "completely misunderstood what the nature of basic research is."

Another practitioner of therapeutic touch, Marilee Tolin, who teaches the method at colleges and universities throughout the country, said Emily's study was poorly conceived. Practitioners, Tolin said, rely on more than just touch to sense the human energy field. They also use "the sense of intuition and even a sense of sight", she said.

As for Emily, she is on a roll. She recently got a letter from the *Guinness Book of Records*, saying she may be the youngest person ever to publish a paper in a major scientific journal.

And she is now planning her next experiments to test assumptions of alternative medicine.

Gina Kolata New York Times

Reprinted from the
Charlotte Observer Web site

Risky Business

Chances are, you're worried about all the wrong things.

What are the chances of slipping on a banana skin, choking on a fishbone or being struck by a meteorite? These are not the sort of unlucky events that most people spend their time thinking about, unless perhaps one has already happened to them.

A surprising number of people have at some time in their lives imagined with dread the thought of being buried alive. Some even have recurring nightmares about it, whereas relatively few are afraid of dying from influenza, even though it is a far more common experience.

Irrational fears are intimately linked with our ideas of risk. No doubt many people who smoke — by far the single biggest avoidable risk — or who go rock climbing or bungee jumping will be among the same people who drink bottled water on the grounds that it is safer than the stuff from the tap.

Only a decade ago the great fear was of annihilation in a nuclear holocaust. Today some of this panic about global destruction has switched to worries about the Earth colliding with a giant asteroid.

Even Edward Teller, the American nuclear physicist and father of the H-bomb, has suggested that the one-in-a-million chance of colliding with an object in space is big enough to justify the risks involved in building bigger nuclear weapons to knock a rock off course.

If Teller's line of argument seems a touch irrational, he is not the only one to be a bit off beam about real and imagined risks. We are all at it.

The fear of flying is far greater than the fear of driving, even though the statistics show that going by plane is far safer than by car. The best explanation is that people dread far more the possibility of dropping out of the air rather than crashing on terra firma.

Imagining the dreadful outcome of a particular risk strongly influences our perception of whether it is ever likely to happen or not. Few men had ever seriously imagined waking up without a penis, but this changed soon after the story of John Wayne Bobbitt, who suffered this fate in 1993 after annoying his wife who was handy with a sharp knife.

In an attempt to educate us all in the real and imagined risks of life, the Department of Trade and Industry has asked scientists to construct a Richter scale of risk that the public can use to compare any new and unfamiliar risks in terms of real events, such as cancer, being run over by a car or being struck by lightning.

The impetus comes from a series of scare stories that have exasperated those who are officially responsible for alerting the public to potential dangers.

A prime example occurred in 1995 when research into a new, third-generation con-

traceptive pill indicated that women who took it were twice as likely to develop potentially lethal blood clots.

After the official watchdog on drugs, the committee on safety of medicines, issued a stern warning, it was not surprising many women were scared off the pill. One result was an extra 8,000 abortions and an unknown number of unplanned pregnancies where the risks far exceeded the dangers of continuing with the pill - estimated at resulting in just two extra deaths a year.

The Royal Statistical Society suggested that a scale of risk would have helped people to judge sensibly what the added danger really was. But John Adams, a professor at University College London and a leading expert on risk, is not convinced that such a simple scale of risk is going to be as informative as some experts believe. He explained the pitfalls in a lecture to last week's British Association for the Advancement of Science's conference.

Take the probability of dying in a road accident, which is usually found about half-way along the scale of risk, between the fatality risks of smoking 10 cigarettes a day (1 in 200) and being struck by lightning (1 in 10 million). The typical risk of a lethal accident on the road is 1 in 8,000, which is derived by dividing the total number of traffic deaths by the total population.

"There are a number of problems which place in doubt the utility of the table as a guide to individual risk-taking decisions," Adams says. A more detailed look at

road deaths shows that a young man is 100 times more likely to die in a road accident than a middle-aged woman.

"Someone driving at 3 am on Sunday is 134 times more likely to die than someone driving at 10 am on Sunday; someone with a personality disorder is 10 times more likely and someone 2.5 times over the alcohol limit is 20 times more likely," Adams says.

If you take all risks into account, the differences within the traffic accident group can be dramatic: "One could predict that a disturbed, drunken young man driving at 3 am on Sunday would be 2.7 million times more likely to die than a normal, sober, middle-aged woman driving to church seven hours later."

An average risk, therefore, covers up the huge differ-

ences between individuals doing the same thing, which is exploited by the insurance industry. "Insurers depend on ignorance of this enormous variability because they need the good risks to subsidise the bad," Adams says. "If the good and bad risks could be accurately identified, the good ones would not consider it worthwhile to buy insurance and the bad ones would not be able to afford it."

But even the best attempts at insuring against risks can be made to look ludicrous by our desire to take them. As Alison Hargreaves, the mountaineer who died while climbing in the Himalayas, once said: "It is better to live one day as a tiger than a thousand years as a sheep."

Steve Connor

London Sunday Times

Curly Water

Bernard Howard proposes an answer to a curly question.

During the recent drought I was asked by a friend if I could explain why her cucumbers were growing with such a pronounced bend. Some indeed were almost complete circles. At one time the reason for this would have eluded me, but recent discoveries in the realm of homeopathy quickly suggest a probable answer.

Cucumbers are particularly watery vegetables, and in the dry summer we were having in Canterbury, I reckoned that most of the water in my friend's cucumbers had reached them via her garden hose. An examination of her irrigation arrangements made everything clear. The plants were growing quite close to the garden tap, so, my friend being a tidy person, the excess hose was neatly coiled.

Obviously the passage of the water through the coils impressed a twisty character on the water molecules, and this shows itself, at the macroscopic level, in the cucumbers.

I reluctantly had to tell my friend that her cucumbers would not return to the straight form of growth until the water molecules they contain returned to the linear form which was imparted to them by falling straight down from heaven, as nature intended.

Mars Face does an about-face

Dominion 8 Apr 98

PASADENA

THE Mars Face has had its picture snapped for the first time in two decades.

The formation in the image beamed back to Earth from the Mars Global Surveyor and published yesterday looks like everything from a sandal print to a stuffed chili pepper — everything, that is, but a face.

"It's a butte, a mesa, a knob," said Michael Ravine, advanced projects manager at Malin Space Science Systems in San Diego, which operates Surveyor's camera.

The "Face" was photographed more than 20 years ago. Though mainstream scientists say the image is a trick of light and shadow on natural features, some say it may be part of an ancient city on Mars.

But under the scrutiny of the modern camera, the gape-mouthed "Face" with empty eye sockets seen in images from a 1976 Viking mission is gone.

Richard Hoaglund, chief proponent of the "Face" view, said too much data had been stripped from the image in enhancing it and the result was of too poor quality to draw conclusions.

Mr Ravine said he would have been overjoyed to find signs of intelligent life on Mars. — AP

Newsfront

I know where couple is — cl

EVENING POST 8 APR 98

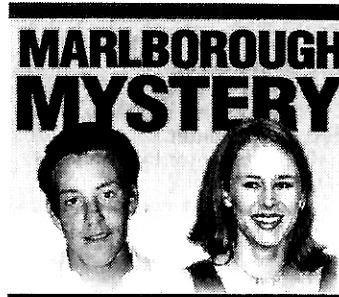
A search for missing Blenheim friends Ben Hope and Olivia Smart will go ahead this weekend after Nelson clairvoyant Margaret Birkin said she knew where they were.

Ms Birkin said three professional divers from Wanganui had volunteered to go to Marlborough later this week and join the search.

The search crew would head into Pelorus Sound on a boat lent by its owner and would use a borrowed metal detector.

Last week, Ms Birkin said she believed the pair, missing from the Marlborough Sounds since New Year's Day, were dead and that she knew where they were.

She and four other psychics



took part in a private family search on Waitangi Day.

The four psychic women on board had begun to feel emotional and sick at the same time as they neared the spot where she believed the friends lay.

She said this weekend's search would start earlier in the

day and have the benefit of better-equipped divers.

"This time we'll be more prepared. We're going out to do another search of the area and this time we intend to be successful," she said.

But Miss Hope's father, Gerald Hope, has called for clairvoyants offering information about the case to be discreet.

Mr Hope said yesterday he was sceptical of the motives of psychics who made their claims through the media.

Information about the case should be treated confidentially and not used to gain headlines.

The families had already allocated their resources and it would take some substantial information for them to switch

Absolutely positively God's

EVENING POST 14 MAR 98

By ANGELA OTS

Wellington is the chosen city — according to an Auckland.

Auckland Pastor Rawiri Love says he's had a vision that Wellington has been chosen by God to become a spiritual capital and will draw visitors from around the world.

He says the city will live up to its Maori name Poneke, the dispeller of darkness.

So convinced is Mr Love of the vision he has had for Wellington, that he has given up a fulltime job, braved howls of protest from his teenage family and come to live in the Capital.

Mr Love's move stems from a dream in the early hours of January 16. A dream so vivid that he woke three times, only to slip straight back into it where he had left off. He dreamed of a luxury liner from England in port in Wellington, a ship called the Glory of God.

Mr Love had no doubt that the ship symbolised a spiritual awakening that would make the name of Wellington known to the world. "Nations will come to our Capital to see the glory of God."

The dream followed a strong spiritual impression — "next to the audible voice of God" — two years earlier, again foretelling the glory of God descending on Wellington.

No longer would the Capital be a city of

legislators and diplomats, he told The Post. "It's time for the Church to match the authority that's vested in the Beehive."

He left a secure living in Auckland to become an instrument of God, reliant on sponsors, in Wellington. "Shipley ain't the only one that's going to make decisions here from today — there's going to be a manifestation of God's government in Wellington."

Mr Love was short on details, but said improvements would be noticed in the economy and there would likely be other miracles — blind people would see and deaf would hear.

Staunch supporter Robin Corner, the Wellington Christian who claimed Auckland's power blackout was the wrath of God on a city that had held the Hero parade, will join forces with Mr Love tomorrow.

Mr Corner will launch a campaign for Jesus, and Mr Love a new church, in Wellington College's Brierley Theatre.

Tourism Wellington's Gretchen Leuthart said her organisation was delighted that Wellington might become an international destination.

"Maybe we can use [Mr Love] for ambassadorial projects along with the Duke of Wellington."

"We love people like that. Probably they're attracted by Wellington's passionate heart."

Longevity linked to men's initials

NEW O

THERE'S more than just irony involved in initials that form acronyms like P I G, B U G H — they don't live as long as the initials like V I P and W I N, a California researcher has found.

A study of death certificates shows that whose initials have negative connotations average of 2.8 years sooner than the control whose initials were meaningless, N Christenfeld, associate professor of psychology at California University, said at the weekend.

Negative initials appeared to have no impact on women, he said. He said the study focused on males because they typically retained their initials throughout their lives.

Men with positive initials lived an average of 3.36 years longer than the control group, while those in the same category lived 3.36 years longer.

The research was presented at the 19th meeting of the Society of Behavioural Medicine, an organisation that focuses on the role of biology and psychosocial conditions on human disease.

Dr Christenfeld and fellow researchers analysed the death certificates of people who died in California from 1969 till 1995.

"We found 2287 negative initials like R A T, B U M and A S S, and 1200 with initials like A C E, W O W, J O Y and G."

Suicide and accidental deaths — the two most affected by psychological states — were more common in the negative group, Dr Christenfeld said. Reuter

irvoyant

their search from Queen Charlotte Sound to Pelorus Sound, he said.

But Mr Hope encouraged Ms Birkin to search the site if she believed it would help solve the case.

"I say go for it. If she feels strongly and can organise something, we would be grateful."

He said the families had been contacted by so many clairvoyants, he did not bother to keep count any more.

While many were genuinely trying to help, Mr Hope said they should be prepared to go out and conduct a search themselves as it was not possible for the families to devote resources to them. - NZPA

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Clairvoyant funds New York headhunting trip

EVENING POST 9 MAR 98

Clairvoyant Mary Fry is so certain that singer Dalvanus Prime will be successful in his attempt to have preserved Maori heads repatriated that she and her husband Warwick have paid for his airfare to New York.

Prime flies to New York tomorrow in his bid to repatriate the preserved heads, moko mokai, held by the Museum of Natural History.

He had hoped to get some financial help from the Ministry of Maori Affairs but none was forthcoming.

"I wanted to work hand in hand with them to repatriate the heads but never heard back from them.

"I had a meeting with [Maori Affairs Minister] Tau Henare but he told me there was no funding for this type of thing," Prime said.

However, the Waverley, Taranaki, couple have paid for Prime's airfare to New York and are keen to help him in his bid to bring the 35 or so heads back to New Zealand.

"Because we feel so strongly about taha Maori we will support him all the way.

"We are talking about putting to rest the spirit of the moko mokai. They belong here," Mrs Fry said.

Mrs Fry has been working as a clairvoyant for 30 years. She feels very deeply about the spirituality of Maori and first met Prime seven years ago when he came to her for advice.

Prime will take with him a letter of support from Prime Minister Jenny Shipley, and Mrs Fry has no doubts about the success of his bid.

"I know he will be successful and bring them home," she said.

Hundreds of tattooed Maori heads are held around the world after a lucrative trade in them developed last century. Although some museums still display them, most are considered too gruesome to show. - NZPA



Dalvanus Prime

Cynics scoff at spook tales

WAIKATO TIMES 4 JAN 98

HUMPTY DOO — Residents who say a disturbed spirit is haunting their house in Humpty Doo, south of Darwin, may let Australian Skeptics Inc test their claims — after their television contract is finished.

One of the residents, who claims the spirit has broken windows in the house, thrown knives and written messages in gravel and scabble pieces on their bathroom floor, said they would only decide whether to do so once their "contract" with a Channel 7 programme was over.

The "challenge officer" of the Darwin Skeptics branch, Simon Potter, said one of its members was so confident there was no poltergeist haunting the house, he was prepared to hand over his own \$NZ216,700 house if he was proved wrong.

Mr Potter said Brian De Kretser would be prepared to bet his house if the residents of the so-called haunted house put up \$A10,000.

He said Australian Skeptics Inc was prepared to pay another \$A100,000 if the residents' poltergeist claims could be proved.

This afternoon, one of the residents of the house, who refused to give his name said "What? Do they think we are making this up? It's not like we went to you, you came to us. There's no way they are going to beat us."

Another resident, David Clarke, said the household would consider letting Australian Skeptics Inc run its tests, but only after they had finished their contract with the Today Tonight programme in about a week.

He refused to say how much the programme was paying them.

He did, however, reject the challenge. "That's ridiculous, we don't have \$A10,000."

Father Tom English, a priest in the area for 20 years, said he saw a bottle of mercuriochrome fly out of an unoccupied bathroom.

Fr English said he blessed the house five times to try to rid it of what the residents said was the restless spirit of a friend who died in an horrific car crash in January. "I have certainly seen a few strange things happening at that house, and the last time I saw a few things flying around." — AAP

Imagining exercise increases muscle

DOMINION 30 MAR 98

LONDON

COUCH potatoes rejoice. All those well intentioned thoughts about exercising may have paid off.

Research presented at the annual meeting of the British Psychological Society at the weekend revealed that just thinking about exercise can increase muscle strength.

It will not replace hours of pumping iron in the gym or pounding the pavement in a marathon, but imagining how the physical action would feel has its benefits.

"The brain activity when you imagine doing something vividly, with all the feeling you would get if you did it, is very, very similar to what occurs when

you actually do it," sports psychologist Dave Smith said.

"It's no substitute for the real thing because the results aren't as good ... but they are still quite impressive."

Mr Smith and two other sports psychologists tested their theory on 18 male students at Manchester Metropolitan University.

The students were split into three groups. One group exercised a finger daily, the second group imagined bending a finger, and the third group did nothing. After four weeks, the finger strength of the physical and mental practice groups significantly improved, but there was no difference for the third group. — Reuter



False memory victim sues

DOMINION 19 MAR 98

Gillian Harris reports on a family launching Britain's first case against recovered memory therapy



Jim Fairlie — devastated by false claims

JIM FAIRLIE was at work when he received an unexpected call to his eldest daughter's house. He arrived to find his wife and four of their five children waiting, grim-faced, to confront him with allegations that he had sexually abused his youngest daughter, Katrina, since she was a baby.

Katrina, 28, then a psychiatric patient at Murray Royal Hospital in Scotland, told doctors that her father and 17 other men, including two MPs, had raped her, and that her father had killed a six-year-old with an iron bar. Her claims were made

when she was medicated and experiencing "flash backs". Six months later, she withdrew the allegations and wrote begging forgiveness, saying she had undergone "recovered-memory therapy", which led her to make false accusations. Now father and daughter are suing Perth and Kinross Healthcare Trust and the area social work department in the first case of its kind in Britain. Mr Fairlie, 58, a former deputy leader of the Scottish National Party, said: "I don't think the recovered-memory lobby have any idea of the damage they do to families, but I am determined to hold them accountable."

The court case will again focus attention on the contentious treatment that has split the medical profession. Next month, the Brandon Report, which blames recovered-memory therapy for thousands of false accusations, is to be published in the *British Journal of Psychiatry*. It has led to such controversy that the Royal College of Psychiatrists, which commissioned the first study, refused to allow the findings to be published under its name.

For Mr Fairlie, the reverberations of that day in 1995 will never disappear: "When I walked into that room where my family was sitting, these people were the closest to me in the world. By the time I walked out 15 minutes later, knowing that they believed the accusations and couldn't look me in the eye, I wanted to be as far away as possible."

Later, his wife Kay admitted that she and their other children had reluctantly believed the accusations put to them by psychiatrists and social workers, but his outrage when confronted made them realise he was innocent. "That was the turning point," he said. "We started acting as a family, though relationships remained strained. For a while, I stopped seeing my grandchildren. I had always had a super relationship with them, but even now I stop them sitting on my knee. I still won't stay in the house on my own with them and I would never see them in the bath."

At the time, the Fairlies knew nothing about recovered-memory therapy. "We thought we were the only people in the world this had happened to," he said. The British False Memory Society has 1000 cases on its books.

Mr Fairlie did not blame Katrina, who had been ill since June 1994 after suffering alleged psychosomatic symptoms which caused her pain.

In the psychiatric unit, she was prescribed various drugs which made her experience "flash backs". Psychiatrists encouraged her to keep a journal and note down what she remembered.

The allegations were reported to the police, who established there was no evidence. Mr Fairlie said: "It was a terrible time. I was so angry."

It was not till Katrina received treatment at The Priory, a private psychiatric hospital in London, that she began to get better. Now she has her own flat in Perth and a part-time job in a charity shop.

Until recently, her father could not be alone with her in a room: "I know that hurt her very much, but it took a long time for me to feel comfortable. It's great to see Katrina better, but this whole thing has to be resolved through our legal actions. My daughter has been robbed of years of her life."

Perth and Kinross Healthcare Trust said it could not comment on individual cases because it was bound by patient confidentiality.

— The Times

Faith healer cops heavy flak

EVENING POST 23 APR 98

LONDON. — England manager Glenn Hoddle's decision to recruit a 57-year-old faith healer has sparked whole-hearted support, cautious scepticism, outright ridicule and an editorial in The Times newspaper.

Hoddle startled a news conference on Monday when he announced Eileen Drewery would stay at the team's hotel until today's World Cup warm-up match against Portugal at Wembley.

"She is a healer, physically and mentally, and she can certainly help out," Hoddle said. "It is not a situation that I am forcing these players to go, but it is an option that is open to them."

Drewery was unable to help midfielder Paul Gascoigne who withdrew on Wednesday from the England team. She did, though, get an endorsement from injured Arsenal striker Ian Wright who said he had been visiting Drewery regularly for nine months.

"I truly think she is blessed," Wright said.

Former England captain Terry Butcher also backed Hoddle. "In this day and age when you play at the highest level one small advantage might be just enough to beat the opposition," he said.

Sports psychologist Craig Mahoney politely differed. "It would seem more logical to make use of what we know works rather than what we think might work," he said.

Daily Mirror sportswriter John Dillon cited Mahoney in an openly critical article. Dillon said nobody could explain Drewery's "mysterious magic".

"I am all for open-mindedness," he wrote. "But not to the extent of being asked to believe in some

mumbo-jumbo for which there is not one shred of real evidence."

The Sun agreed.

"England's secret weapon is a pub landlady turned faith healer," it said. "The players must be baffled."

Daily Mail columnist Ian Wooldridge said Hoddle "should speedily indulge in a lot more lateral thinking of this nature".

"Medieval courts moved nowhere without a retinue of priests, jesters, astrologers, jugglers, post-asters, troubadours, sentinels and minstrels and though several of these posts may now be judged archaic, others are definitely not," Wooldridge wrote in the Daily Mail.

The Times' editorial quoted Hoddle's assertion that other countries had used faith healers "for thousands of years".

"And he is right. Zaire brought their official witch doctor to the World Cup in 1974. And chicken's blood and rarer fluids are still shed in dressing rooms and used as prophylactics to protect exotic goals," it said.

"As a profession, athletes have been famously superstitious. Those with the strongest bodies do not have the strongest minds.

"But among the class of athletes, footballers are the most superstitious. From the way in which they tie up their bootlaces to such other prematch rituals as the sequence in which they step on to the pitch, footballers honour their tribal totems and taboos."

The Times concluded soccer fans had to believe in something. "They do not have to believe in luck. "But how else can they explain the other team winning?" — Reuter

Skepsis

Neil McKenzie

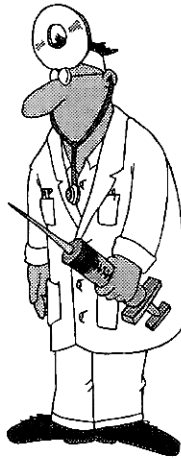
Often Overacting Syndrome

A ruse by any other name smells just as fishy, and it seems RSI, OOS and OOI are good examples, if a UK surgeon is to be believed. According to Murray Matthewson, the condition, whatever you choose to call it, is not what it's cracked up to be.

"It's not a disease; you don't see a dose response; it's not a clinical condition," he told registrants at the International Orthopaedic Association meeting in February (NZ Doctor 4/3/98). He says upper arm pain is "almost ubiquitous" and has a variety of causes, none of which he ascribes to daily keyboarding. "There is no way keyboards harm you," he says.

Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) consultant Frank Darby agrees the worst pain is felt when people are most unhappy, but thinks most orthopaedic surgeons do not understand pain, and to say RSI doesn't exist is unhelpful. He would, wouldn't he. Mr Matthewson is scathing of "emerging" organisations such as OSH as they try to establish themselves with promoting ideas such as "keyboarding is harmful".

"But if you apply science to what they are saying, it doesn't work," he said. What a breath of fresh air, Mr Matthewson.



Herbie's Revenge

Tauranga's normally responsible postgraduate medical educational group, whose meetings attract upward of 40 local GPs, took a backward step last month by inviting herbalist Dr Nicky Baillie to speak. The subject was Herbal Medicine — Back To The Future.

Herbs are big business, and sold by pharmacists, naturopaths, acupuncturists, iridologists, chiropractors, and, sadly too often, the medically qualified. These products are marketed as "foods" or "dietary supplements", without health claims on the labels, so as to evade laws protecting the public against unproven, unsafe drugs.

In many cases, their contents are unquantified, contain no useful ingredients, have no nutritional value, and are frequently toxic. Varro E Tyler, former dean of the Purdue University of Pharmacy and leading authority on pharmacognosy (the science of medicines from natural sources)

said, "More misinformation about safety and efficiency of herbs is now reaching the public than any time previously.... Particularly insidious is the myth that there is something almost magical about herbal drugs that prevents them in their natural state from harming people."

It never ceases to disappoint me when a doctor, trained scientifically at enormous expense to the taxpayer, ruins a perfectly good professional career by resorting to such nonsense.

Many believe they do it to engender greater public importance, "specialist" status, and larger salaries. They use anecdotes and testimonials to promote their practices, and political manoeuvring to keep regulatory agencies at bay. They are usually intelligent but, illogically, appear to believe in what they are doing. And of course, they charge.

Dr Michael Shackleton, NZMA Ethics Committee chairman says there is a conflict of interest when GPs practise alternative medicine, because they risk making that practice their prime focus instead of giving their patients the benefit of proper and full scientific investigation and treatment.

"Patients will see the fact doctors have letters after their names as a guarantee about their products' safety. However, these products may not have been subjected to clinical trials and doctors

cannot guarantee their safety," he says. Article 34 of the NZMA's Code of Ethics states: "Doctors should avoid advocacy of any non-medical commercial product if one is identified as a member of the medical profession."

In my reply to the invitation to Dr Ballie's meeting, I suggested they changed the title of her talk to Herbal Medicine - Back To The Past.

Quack On The Rack

I listened with delight to Kim Hill grilling another of these medically qualified defectors on Radio NZ on 16/03/98. Dr Tessa Jones was being put through the wringer for selling Neo-life supplements to cancer patients for \$286 a course. She flapped and struggled on the end of Kim's meticulous and ruthless dissection. There were a number of prolonged silences where Dr Jones seemed utterly stumped. Riveting listening!

God help us if Radio NZ loses its independence, and there's nothing left but the endless consumer-driven drivel from the likes of Radio Pacific.

Dr Jones was also criticised by *Consumer Magazine* for her behaviour. Article 41 of the NZMA's Code of Ethics states: 'Motives of profit shall never be permitted to influence the free and independent exercise of professional judgement on behalf of a patient.'

When will they ever learn?

The Last of the Mohicans

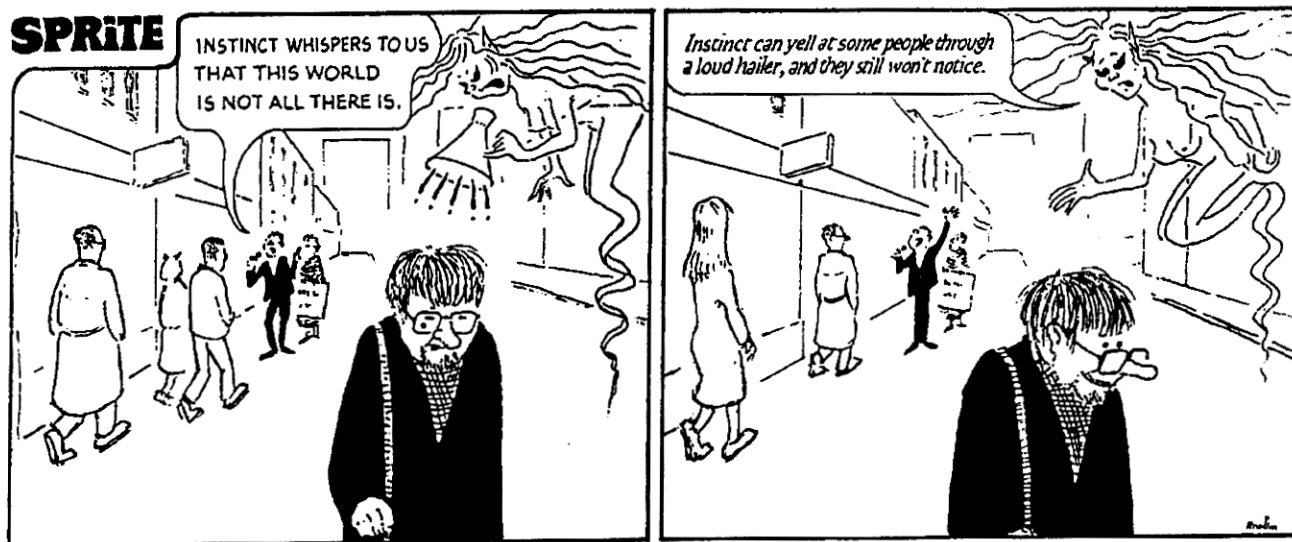
I feature yet another of these medical cowboys, whose extraordinary practices will hopefully die with his retirement.

Tauranga's seasoned anti-amalgam, anti-drugs, anti-immunisation and anti-you-name-it Dr Michael Godfrey is the ultimate alternative medical practitioner. This time he's in the media for slamming a recent Ministry of Health report on amalgam fillings backing their continued use. The report found scant evidence of a link between people's health and micro-leakage of mercury from fillings, or that removal of dental amalgam has health benefits.

The ministry says there remains "no substantive scientific evidence to indicate an existing or emerging public health problem linked with continued use of amalgam fillings." (*NZ Doctor* 4/3/98)

Dr Godfrey was involved with the review but opposes its findings. He vows to continue fighting to get ministry recognition for his beliefs. It's just as well he's here, as in some American states, those practising amalgam filling removal are disbarred.

Dr Godfrey's other love, chelation, has now been thoroughly and exhaustively discredited worldwide by every reputable scientific body. I would thoroughly recommend biochemist Saul Green's article on chelation which can be found on the Internet's *Guide To Health Fraud, Quackery and Intelligent Decisions*, at <http://www.quackwatch.com/01QuackeryRelatedTopics/chelation.html>. The Web site's a must for everybody, especially Dr Godfrey.



Donald Rooum, *Skeptic* (UK)

Politically Expedient Miracles

Jim Ring takes a look at canonisation and finds the lives of the saints less than miraculous.

THERE may soon be a New Zealand saint — so should we be excited? Canonisation is a process making testable claims and thus a legitimate field for inquiry. You may have heard that the church does exhaustive research before canonisation, with a “Devil’s advocate” to disallow extravagant assertions. A look at some examples might be instructive.

The case of St. Francis Xavier, a Jesuit and protégé of the founder, Ignatius Loyola, was studied by Andrew White. Xavier went to Asia about 1540 as a missionary for 12 years, first to Southern India, then China and Japan. In his letters and all contemporary stories of his life, there is no account of any miracle worked by him. Xavier himself detailed the great difficulty he had with languages.

Twenty years after Xavier’s death, Joseph Acosta, another Jesuit, wrote a biography. This discussed miracles and why the work of a modern missionary was so difficult. Acosta decided that as the early apostles were illiterate missionaries, preaching to educated people, God gave them ability to work miracles. But contemporary missionaries were literate people with illiterate audiences. God had decided that they did not need miracles.

In spite of this overwhelming evidence, later stories about Xavier told of the miracles he had performed. According to the legends,

Xavier had healed the sick, cast out devils, stilled a storm, and raised the dead. In 1622 the proceedings for canonisation started, where Cardinal Monte described in detail, ten great miracles performed by Xavier.

Xavier’s own letters show the difficulty he had in communication. He coped by using interpreters, by learning a little of the language, and by signs. The papal bull of canonisation stressed that Xavier had had the gift of tongues and that he spoke to the various people with ease in their own language. The pope who signed this lying document was the one who persecuted Galileo, Urban VIII.

Surely in modern times the church is more honest? Joan of Arc is a recent case. Many think she has been a saint for centuries, but Joan is a genuine 20th century example. Her story illustrates the use of canonisation this century. In May 1430, Joan was captured by mercenaries serving John of Luxembourg. Important prisoners were valuable, and were put up for ransom. Joan was expected to attract a ransom from the Dauphin, but none was offered. The University of Paris claimed her but she was eventually transferred to the English in November 1430 on the understanding she was to be handed over to the church. The agreement was that her trial should be in Rouen, the English stronghold, not Paris.

In January 1431 the church received Joan for trial by the inquisition. There were two presiding judges: Father Peter Cauchon, bishop of Beauvais, and Friar Jean Lemaitre. A hundred and twenty-three other clergy were involved as subsidiary judges, assessors, prosecutors etc. Of these only eight were of English extraction.

The English had called Joan “a witch” but in spite of Shakespeare’s *Henry VI Part I* they were not involved in these proceedings. Nor was she accused, tried, or convicted of witchcraft. The trial by a regular tribunal of the Holy Office of the Catholic Church was lawfully and canonically constituted, thus Joan was not a martyr.

On 30th May 1431 Joan was burned alive after conviction on the charges: heresy, idolatry, apostasy, relapse. The formulae of sentence by the inquisition ended, “...as a corrupt member...you should be cast from the Church, cut off from her body and abandoned to the secular power. And thus we cast you out and abandon you, praying the said power to moderate its sentence against you, and to treat you with gentleness, without destruction of your life or of any member.”

Joan was a participant and victim in a three-way civil war in France, and a two-way struggle in the papacy. To some extent she was the victim of the struggle between pope and antipope,

which she did not understand. She used phrases in her letters, which suggested involvement in the cults of the antipope, all the time declaring her loyalty to the "true" pope.

By 1449 Charles VII (the ex-Dauphin) had triumphed. He had united France under one rule, the cause for which Joan had campaigned. He had made things very difficult for the papacy but both pope and antipope were dead. Charles had needed Joan out of the way, but her legend was politically valuable. He now wanted a revision of Joan's trial and rehabilitation. Nicholas V, the new pope, wanted reconciliation with France.

Many of the witnesses at Joan's trial were still alive and gave depositions for the inquiry. These were not statements: they were each asked 27 questions and had to reply "Thus and it was true". All the witnesses who had been hostile to Joan now changed sides. Jean le Fevre was a judge on both occasions and each time the verdict was unanimous.

A pontifical rescript of 4th July 1456 stated: "...pronounce and decree that the said proceedings and sentences have been and are null, without validity, without effect, and abolished." How a death sentence can be "without effect" is a mystery.

Little attention was paid to the memory of these events for most of the next centuries except in Orleans. But in the 19th century the myth of the "Saviour of France" developed at an amazing rate.

This legend became the property of the right wing: Catholic, reactionary, ultra-nationalist, anti-Semitic. During the Dreyfus affair a catch-cry was "Down with the Jews, up with Joan of Arc". In recent years, the far right Front National party under Jean Le Pen has captured around 15% of the French votes. Joan of Arc is their primary political symbol and Le Pen addresses her directly in his speeches, expressing the firm belief that he will meet her in the near future and together they will "save" France.

In 1869 the bishop of Orleans asked the pope to canonise Joan. This was not well received, but by 1894 anticlericalism in France had reached such peak it alarmed Leo XIII. In response he started the process needed for beatification. Joan had been asked to perform miracles but she had just laughed. It was documented that she had not performed any but, although a beatification requires well-attested miracles, these can be performed after death.

Three French nuns claimed they had been suddenly and completely cured after praying to Joan to intercede in their favour. This was enough. However relations between the Vatican and France became more difficult. The pope recalled his nuncio in 1904 and France broke completely with the papacy in the following year. Church and state were finally separated and France became a secular state.

In 1908 Anatole France (a splendid skeptic) published his (definitive) *Life of Joan of*

Arc. It had taken 20 years to research. This asserts that nothing supernatural occurred in her life, and that she was manipulated in a savage civil war for the purpose of fabricating a patriotic myth to support a monarchy and a unified France. The Burgundy/England group wanted her dead and forgotten; Charles VII wanted her dead and mythologised.

On 18th April 1909 the pope declared Joan "Blessed", ie. beatified. In the First World War, French people prayed to Joan for deliverance from the Germans. After the war Benedict XV wanted better relations with France which after all was on the winning side.

On the 16th May 1920 Joan was canonised. It was declared she had performed two more miracles. These were similar to the first three, and significantly all five were on virgins. The bulls explain why Joan was made a saint, but what they omit is of more interest than what they contain. They make no mention of Joan's visions, nor do they mention her political or warlike actions. They do not endorse the divine mission she claimed. None of these most important issues in Joan's life contributed to the decision.

Instead Joan was canonised because of her true Christian virtues. As a virgin she was a perfect example of true Christian womanhood.

On 20th November 1920 France renewed diplomatic relations with the Vatican.

Jim Ring is a Nelson skeptic.

Counselling, Criticism and Skepticism

An article by Gordon Hewitt in *NZ Skeptic* 47 states, "In June 1995...an article appeared in this publication saying counselling was no use. This judgement was based on a single study conducted in 1939." This is not true, but as the author of the article I am obviously biased. May I urge all skeptics to read it for themselves?

My article in June 1995 elaborated the Cambridge - Somerville experiment mentioned by Dr John Welch in an earlier issue. It dealt with an experiment started in 1939 and lasting until 1978. Why did Gordon Hewitt not mention that this study ran for nearly 40 years when using such phrases as, "lack of rigor in analysis", and "shallow analysis"?

I suggested that this was the only "large-scale, long term study of counselling which can reasonably be regarded as good science." Far from saying that counselling was "of no use" the study found that counselling harmed the recipients.

Gordon Hewitt seems impressed with a survey that found, "Members who had been to psychotherapists were overwhelmingly of the view that psychotherapy was helpful." Is this what he understands by "rigor in analysis"?

He also claims "The development of effective techniques in counselling is at an early stage." As counselling has been used for longer

than antibiotics, should we not have expected it to make as much progress as modern medicine? Might not this lack of progress be attributable to the rejection of scientific methods of analysis by its practitioners?

Jim Ring

Look Forward not Back

Gordon Hewitt expresses disappointment about *NZ Skeptic's* counselling criticism (Autumn 1998). A large body of research has assessed effectiveness of "counselling" and other forms of psychological intervention. Little evidence supports the theory that psychotherapy focused on re-living and "working with" past events, especially past trauma, is effective in changing people's behaviour.... Literature reviews suggest that observed benefits are due to placebo rather than specific treatment effects.

Many publications now question the general usefulness of "the talking cure", especially delving into the past to redress the future. They argue psychotherapy is often little more than a "Rent-a-Friend" business — that it is unethical and harmful for psychotherapists to replace family, friends, lovers and colleagues as the most important people in clients' lives.

Many "dissident feminist" commentators warn that feminist social science and therapy has taken a dangerous direction. They criticise advocacy research which magnifies needs while as-

serting the scientific validity of these large numbers, a phenomenon at least partly fuelled by funding competition. They claim the price of feminist political activism and ideology is loss of academic scholarship, integrity and intellectual freedom.

Promotion of women as victims of male oppression requiring long-term psychotherapy to deal with traumatic pasts is counter-productive to women claiming their status as autonomous responsible adults equal to their male counterparts. There currently is no evidence that psychotherapy based on gender-feminist theory leads to improved mental health.

The indications are that preferred psychological interventions should be those shown to be effective and safe by controlled outcome studies. Effective psychological interventions facilitate change aimed at goal achievement: programmes based upon cognitive, behavioural or interpersonal theories.

In general these are short-term and involve active participation. They focus on helping people change the way they think or react, the way they behave or the way they relate to others, in a goal-orientated direction, with homework exercises to incorporate skills into everyday life. For a wonderful examination of psychological intervention's pitfalls, read Tana Dineen's *Manufacturing Victims*.

Felicity Goodyear-Smith

References available from editor.

Beer and Skittles

The Strange Case of the Psychic Detectives

John Riddell contemplates how the newspapers would read if psychics really had the powers they claim

Missing Persons Department Disbanded

(WELLINGTON) In a press conference held this morning Police commissioner S. Holmes announced the Missing Persons Department of the New Zealand Police Force would be disbanded later this month.

"It simply isn't necessary to maintain the department any more," Mr Holmes said. "We recently contracted the locating of missing persons to Mr and Mrs Johnson of Takapuna. The Johnsons are both psychic. They have helped us on previous occasions and it became obvious they were much better at finding people than the police could ever be.

"Each day, we telephone Mrs Johnson at 9 am and let her know who is missing. She rings us back at lunchtime and tells us where the missing people are. We have been using this system for a number of weeks now."

Union representatives initially expressed concern over the loss of so many police jobs but Mr Holmes said those police presently employed in the missing persons department would be retrained and take up positions in another police department.

Christchurch Casino Goes Belly Up

In a shock move Christchurch Casino manager Donald Corleone has announced the casino will be declaring bankruptcy later today. Mr Corleone said that an elderly Auckland couple, who wished to remain nameless, walked out of the casino yesterday after winning 200 million dollars on the roulette wheel.

"We don't know how they did it," said a tearful Mr Corleone, "We just aren't able to sustain this kind of loss in one day. I'm afraid we're going to have to close."

Child Cancer gets \$100 Million

In Wellington today the Child Cancer Foundation held a brief ceremony at which they accepted a cheque for NZ\$100 million. Foundation chairman Arnold Smith told reporters he received a call from well-known Auckland philanthropists Mr and Mrs Johnson yesterday telling him they wished to make a small donation.

"Mr and Mrs Johnson have been on holiday in Christchurch this week. They dropped the cheque into the Child Cancer Foundation this morning on their way home to Takapuna. Mr Johnson refused to comment on the donation but he did

have a kind word for Christchurch. "Christchurch is such a lovely town. We think we might go to Las Vegas next."

New Police Department To Be Established

The New Zealand Commissioner of Police, Mr S Holmes has announced the establishment of a New Zealand Police Transcendental Meditation Division. Mr Holmes said that American trials using 4000 trained meditators had reduced crime in New York City by 16%.

"Transcendental Meditation raises the consciousness of the community to a level where people just don't want to commit crime any more.

"We have been running a pilot scheme for six months with only 500 meditators and already the crime in Invercargill has halved. It is expected that in New Zealand, with our low population, all crime will be eliminated within 12 months.

"As crime levels drop, those police who would otherwise be made redundant will be retrained as meditators."

The Law Society described the move as "radical." Ms R.U. Waiting from the Law firm, Going Going and Gone, commenting on behalf of the Law society, stated, "We really have to

give this a lot of thought before we make a move like this. I mean, we have to ask ourselves the question, Do we really want to live in a society with no crime? I don't think we should be rushing into this."

Skeptic Convinced

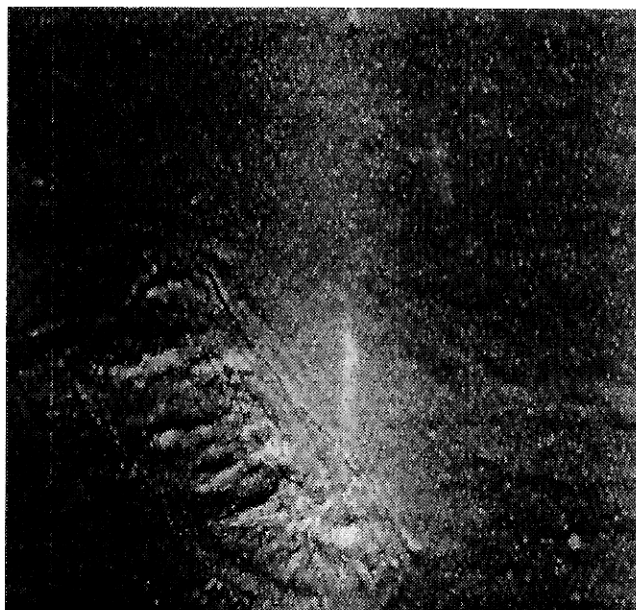
New Zealand Skeptics spokesperson Denis Dutton today admitted he was convinced that Mr and Mrs A Johnson were in fact genuinely psychic.

"I heard the Johnsons were in town, so I rang them up and asked if they would mind if I tested their abilities. They agreed so I set them a test that would have been impossible for a non-psychic person to solve. I told them I had lost a watch. It had my name engraved on the back. I didn't tell them any other details.

"Mrs Johnson told me not to worry. She held my hand briefly and then told me to get in the car. She then drove me to New Brighton beach where I had lost the watch five years before. Without hesitating she walked onto the sand and down to below the high tide level. She then pointed to the clean sand and told me to dig.

"About six inches below the surface I found my watch. It wasn't working at the time, but I took it home and on Mrs Johnson's advice, held it in my hand while watching an old Uri Geller video. Of course it's working perfectly now."

"Face" on Mars a Trick of Nature



There is no "face" on the Red Planet, according to pictures sent back from the orbiting Mars Global Surveyor. The BBC's science correspondent says the news will dampen down the controversy that has raged since images were transmitted back to Earth in 1976 from the Viking spacecraft.

In the Cydonia region, an area of isolated mountains and shifting deserts, Viking spotted a mountain that looked like a human face staring up into space.

While scientists said it was just a trick of nature, others argued that the so-called face was artificial, having been built by a long-dead Martian civilisation. They agreed though, that only with better pictures could the issue be resolved.

Now, at the start of its two-year mission to map the planet for landing sites for future unmanned probes, Mars Global Surveyor has finally settled the issue. Looked at in more detail the "face" becomes just a pile of rocks and sand.

We see faces all around us, in clouds and in the patterns on curtains and carpets. Is it surprising that our attention was drawn to a face-shaped mountain on Mars?

There are thousands upon thousands of mountains on Mars and it isn't all that surprising that one of them looks like a face. Humans are programmed to see faces. Show two black dots on a piece of card to a newborn baby and it will smile because it believes it's seen its mother's face.

But of course there are some who won't see a pile of rocks for what it is. There is a conspiracy it is claimed and some have accused us of going along with it.

No doubt there are some who will scrutinise the new image of the "face" and point out that this group of rocks and that group of rocks form a structure that couldn't be natural. All they're doing is fooling themselves into seeing patterns in natural formations.

Look at the image again. It is just a pile of rocks and sand. If the image sent back by the Mars Global Surveyor was the only image we had of this region we wouldn't have looked at it twice.

Sadly, there is no evidence of an ancient civilization among the crumbling mountains and shifting sand dunes of Mars.

From the BBC News Web site

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1998 Skeptics Conference

We have reasonable evidence to support the belief that our 1998 Conference (the thirteenth...or is it 12A?) will be held at the Old Government Buildings in Wellington, from August 28th-30th.

Check out the flyer and registration form inserted in this issue.

Or see <http://www.spis.co.nz/conference/>

or email mike.dickison@vuw.ac.nz Tel: (04) 475-7674

New Zealand Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal (Inc.)

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