

The REALL News

The official newsletter of the Rational Examination Association of Lincoln Land

"It's a very dangerous thing to believe in nonsense." — James Randi

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Exclusive!

Update: Bennett Braun Case *Poznanski Settles; Agrees to Testify Against Braun* by David Bloomberg

The story of Bennett Braun and his treatment of the Burgus family and countless others has never been a straightforward one. But now it has taken several new twists.

As discussed in previous issues (Vol. 6, No. 8-10; Vol. 7, No. 2 & 6), the Illinois Department of Professional Regulation filed a complaint against psychiatrist Bennett Braun, a leader in the repressed memory movement. They also filed complaints against child psychiatrist colleague, Elva Poznanski, and psychologist Roberta Sachs. The Braun proceedings were originally scheduled to be in May, but they were postponed until November so the Burgus children would not have to miss final exams. Also, as of May 26, Braun's attorney had not provided any defense material to the prosecution, as is required. The administrative judge gave him until June 1 to provide this material, or else it would be disallowed in the proceedings. In response, Braun's attorney provided a little information, but asked for a 60-day continuance to provide the rest. This despite the fact that the attorney has had Braun's case since the civil trial (at least a couple years ago). The Sachs case has not been assigned a hearing date yet.

The surprise, however, was that the Poznanski case had been settled without any action being taken against her license to practice medicine. Thomas Glasgow, chief prosecutor in this case, explained in a telephone interview why they settled with her.

A number of factors came into play in this decision. The most important was

that Poznanski, unlike Braun and Sachs, has only apparently been involved in this one case that brought the complaint. The other two have had several complaints filed against them, and played major roles in the treatment of those involved. Poznanski is a child

Glasgow noted that Poznanski has already lost much of her good reputation because of this case, and as part of the settlement, she must step down as the head of child psychiatry at Rush

psychiatrist who was brought in because of the treatment of the children. She played a minor role in the grand scheme of things and treated the children as though they had been abused – not as if they were part of a satanic cult.

In addition, Poznanski "took remedial action" by withdrawing cooperation from Braun and Sachs less than halfway through the treatment, when Braun allegedly brought guns in with the children. Up until then, she had agreed to work with Braun due to his

standing in the psychiatric community, but she finally decided things had gone too far. After that, she did keep the children under her care because she did not feel Patricia Burgus was a fit mother at the time. (Burgus was still under Braun's care.)

Glasgow noted that Poznanski, in her seventies, has already lost much of her good reputation because of this case, and as part of the settlement, she must step down as the head of child psychiatry at Rush hospital. In addition, she will fully cooperate with the prosecution in this case – testifying against Braun and Sachs – and also with any federal, state, or local prosecutors that may undertake further cases. (When asked if this meant there were going to be further such cases, Glasgow said he is not at liberty to discuss any cases or investigations that might or might not be ongoing.)

In addition, the settlement mandates that she write to the Board of the Illinois Department of Professional Regulation, explaining what she did wrong and why. And she can no longer work with any form of recovered memory therapy or patients alleging satanic ritual abuse.

Glasgow said they agreed to take no action against her license due to her age, her cooperation, and the fact that she is

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Purpose

The Rational Examination Association of Lincoln Land is a non-profit educational and scientific organization. It is dedicated to the development of rational thinking and the application of the scientific method toward claims of the paranormal and fringe-science phenomena.

REALL shall conduct research, convene meetings, publish a newsletter, and disseminate information to its members and the general public. Its primary geographic region of coverage is central Illinois.

REALL subscribes to the premise that the scientific method is the most reliable and self-correcting system for obtaining knowledge about the world and universe. REALL does not reject paranormal claims on *a priori* grounds, but rather is committed to objective, though critical, inquiry.

The REALL News is its official newsletter.

Annual Membership Rates: Regular, \$20; student, \$15; family, \$30; patron, \$50 or more; subscription only, \$12.

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From the Editor

Welcome to another issue of *The REALL News*. This issue begins with an exclusive report on a recent development in the Bennett Braun case, thanks to the ongoing efforts by David Bloomberg. Way to go, David!

Our other feature, “Dr. Isadore Rosenfeld’s China Acupuncture Story Questioned,” comes to us courtesy of Gary Posner and the Tampa Bay Skeptics. Apparently we weren’t alone in thinking this was a good story for reprinting — the new issue of *Skeptical Inquirer* is carrying the same article! Unfortunately, by the time we learned this it was too late to find a replacement. Oh well. Not everyone gets *SI*, anyway.

This issue also features a farewell retrospective from Bob Ladendorf, who stepped down last month after being editor of *The REALL News* for six years! Bob has some thoughts about the newsletter’s past and future that are certainly worth reading.

If you need some summer reading, be sure to begin by reading the first in a new series of book recommendations. David Bloomberg begins by explaining a scale that will be used to rate books from one to four stars. He then proceeds to rate several books, using a scale from zero to five stars. A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds, I guess.☺

Lastly, David Bloomberg brings us another installment (or would “episode” be more appropriate) of “REALLity Check.”

That’s all for this month. Everyone have a great Independence Day holiday!☹

REALL Contacts

REALL Hotline.....217-726-5354
Chairman, David Bloombergchairman@reall.org
Editor, Wally Hartshorn.....editor@reall.org
Web Site..... www.reall.org

Predictions

- More Weird Web Sites
- Book Reviews
- Skeptic Music



From the Chairman

Well, Skeptic Jeopardy was a hit! While turnout wasn't quite as good as I'd hoped (it turned out to be a bad day for several regular attendees), we had enough people to play with two 3-player teams, a scorekeeper, and a host (that would be me).

And what a battle it was! In the end, the scores seemed, well, a bit lopsided, but it was fairly close for most of the game. The final score was: Wally, Dave, & Harry: 9000; Jim, Rich, & Ken: -600.

I should note that Wally is not just REALL's editor and webmaster, but also the webmaster of Skeptic News (www.skepticnews.com), and thus had somewhat of an advantage in that he is rather immersed in the topics of skepticism almost every day. In other words, even though two of the opposing team members had Ph.D.'s, it may still have been an unfair fight. [Note to myself: I must get a life. — Ed.]

Those of us who attended enjoyed it so much that we will probably play again next year. So study up on your skepticism and pay attention to the articles in this newsletter – you never know when you might need that information!

I'd also like to extend a special thanks to Dave McMaster, who put together a button system with lights to show who "buzzed in" first to answer the questions. (He didn't have buzzers on it yet, but might add them later.) Previous local skeptics groups who played a similar game didn't have such a system

and encountered some play problems in trying to do things differently. Dave's creation made it that much more fun!

July Meeting

On July 6 (back to our normal first-Tuesday schedule), we will be featuring a videotaped presentation that Susan Blackmore gave to the Skeptics Society on her new book, *The Meme Machine*.

You may have seen my review of this book in the *State Journal-Register* (if not, shame on you). To summarize, Blackmore has taken the concept of "memes" – originally proposed by Richard Dawkins in his book, *The Selfish Gene*, and greatly expanded on it. A meme is, according to this theory, a replicator like a gene, except it copies ideas and behaviors, not DNA. Blackmore has proposed the use of memes to explain things like the development of language and the expansion of pre-human brain size. In her book she talks about meme-gene co-evolution and also times when the interests of memes might fight the interests of genes. I found it an interesting discussion, and I'm sure you will too.

(For those who find Blackmore's name familiar, she used to be more involved with studying near-death and out-of-body experiences; we featured an article on her back in October 1993 and a review of her book on near-death experiences in June 1994.)

Book Recommendations

By David Bloomberg

This semi-regular column will feature very brief descriptions of skeptic-related books I (and hopefully others) have recently read, along with a recommendation. This one will be longer than most, since I'm catching up on about 7 months of reading. If you'd like to contribute a recommendation, please e-mail it to me at chairman@reall.org.

Guide

- ★★★★: Fabulous, wonderful, don't miss it, etc.
- ★★★: Worth the read
- ★★: Read it if you have nothing better to do
- ★: Don't bother even if you have nothing better to do

Probability 1: Why There Must Be Intelligent Life in the Universe, by Amir

Aczel (Harcourt Brace & Company, \$22): A book that seems to have a bit of a split personality. In parts, Aczel wants to educate the general public as to why there must be intelligent life out there somewhere. In other parts, he uses complex statistical equations that will lose many readers. If you can make it through, it's interesting, but hardly Earth-shattering. ★★

Unweaving the Rainbow: Science, Delusion and the Appetite for Wonder, by Richard Dawkins (Houghton Mifflin, \$26): Dawkins wants the public to better understand science. One problem is that the public often perceives science as destroying the charm of a mystery (such as by unweaving the rainbow into different wavelengths of light). Dawkins argues that this is not true at all, and describes the poetry of science. He is perhaps at his best in showing how pseudoscience is "meaningless

pap" compared to real science.

★★★★★ (Yes, that's right, it goes off the scale.)

Noah's Flood: The New Scientific Discoveries About the Event that Changed History, by William Ryan and Walter Pitman (Simon & Schuster, \$25): A book that would have been better as an article, the authors do present some intriguing information, but do so in a format that is almost guaranteed to bore the reader. They contend that the myth of Noah's flood was based on stories told by people forced out of their homes when the Black Sea flooded in pre-historical times. The evidence seems fairly solid, though not 100% certain (there are apparently some underwater archaeological explorations going on right now to look for further info), but the reader has to plow through so much unnecessary verbiage that it's just not worth it. ★★

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Dr. Isadore Rosenfeld's China Acupuncture Story Questioned

by Gary P. Posner, M.D.

What's wrong with this picture?" That familiar refrain came to mind as I was reading the paragraph, in Dr. Isadore Rosenfeld's August 16, 1998, *Parade* magazine article about acupuncture, in which he describes an extraordinary Chinese operation witnessed by him in the 1970s. That same question echoed upon my inspection of the accompanying picture – a documentary photograph of that operation, taken by the author himself.



Dr. Rosenfeld, a cardiologist and professor of medicine, has appeared on national TV talk/interview shows since the 1960s, and has authored several books, including the 1996 best-selling *Dr. Rosenfeld's Guide to Alternative Medicine*. Upon locating the book, I found a discussion of the operation in question on pages 30-32. My quotations herein are from the *Parade* article, the book, and several e-mail communications to me from Rosenfeld.

Accompanied on his China trip by several other prominent American physicians (now deceased), the Rosenfeld party watched as a 28-year-old female patient was wheeled into an operating room at the University of Shanghai and prepped for heart surgery to repair her mitral valve. But in lieu of standard anesthesia, a practitioner placed "an acupuncture needle in her right earlobe" (per *Pa-*

rade), with an electrode attached to supply a mild electrical current.

Rosenfeld observed as "the surgeon ... cut through the ... breastbone with an electric buzz-saw [and] her chest was split in two [and] spread apart with a large clamp to expose the heart" (per his book). Rosenfeld shortly thereafter snapped the photograph that appears in *Parade* (it was not used in the book). Because Rosenfeld has denied me permission to reprint his photograph, *TBS Report's* Don Addis has faithfully reproduced its image, which is rotated 90 degrees counterclockwise (see sketch).

Only the patient's face and incision are visible through the gaps in the surgical sheets. Let us assume, as the photo appears to indicate, that her head is essentially "face up" as opposed to being significantly rotated right or left. (Her eyes are focused to her left, as if she is attempting to observe the operation but cannot rotate her head.) Drawing a vertical line down the midline of her body, the operative field appears to be displaced far to the patient's left, rather than being centered where the breastbone and heart are situated. In fact, it appears so far to the left as to exist beyond the border of the patient's body (see 2nd sketch by Don Addis). There does not appear to be any appreciable distortion in the photo such as might be encountered from the use of a wide-angle lens.

Rosenfeld says that this apparent leftward displacement "must be due to the angle at which [the photo] was taken" (per e-mail to me). He teased me with the fact that one of the others present (Dr. Wilbur Gould, ENT) had also taken photos and that his widow "... no doubt has all his ... pictures in her possession." But he would not assist me in contacting her to obtain the photographs for review, saying that he did not wish to "participate in your project to prove that my four colleagues and I

did not see what we saw."

In addition to the photographic oddities, I asked Dr. Rosenfeld how such surgery could have been performed without artificial ventilation: With the chest split open as described, the negative pressure produced by chest-wall expansion could not be created, the lungs would collapse, and the patient asphyxiate. I pointed out other problems as well, which are explored in a more extensive article on this matter that I have co-authored with Dr. Wallace Sampson, tentatively planned for publication in the Fall/Winter 1999 issue of *The Scientific Review of Alternative Medicine*.

I suggested to Dr. Rosenfeld that his party may have been taken in by a hoax perpetrated for propaganda purposes – a well-documented propensity of the Chinese during the Cold War. But Rosenfeld scoffed at the notion (as he does in his book), and suggested that I contact Dr. Michael DeBakey, one of the world's foremost cardiac surgeons, who "witnessed a similar procedure one year later [and] can explain your legitimate technical questions about ventilatory support. I spoke

Rosenfeld observed as "the surgeon ... cut through the ... breastbone with an electric buzz-saw [and] her chest was split in two [and] spread apart with a large

with him yesterday ... " (per his e-mail). I asked Dr. Sampson to speak with DeBakey on our behalf, and the results of that interview were quite enlightening.

DeBakey informed Sampson that despite his conversation with Rosenfeld of just a few days earlier, he had neither read Rosenfeld's accounts of the operation nor seen his photograph, and he was thus unacquainted with the precise de-

tails that were of concern to us. As for his own experience in China, DeBakey recalled that the mitral valve surgery that he had witnessed involved a patient who, it turned out, had been given pre-op medication intravenously prior to having the acupuncture administered. Additionally, DeBakey told Sampson that artificial ventilation had not been needed in the operation that he saw because it had been performed through an incision between two right ribs, thus sparing one (the left) lung. He added that, in his opinion, a midline, split-breastbone approach, such as described by Rosenfeld, would likely cause both lungs to collapse, just as we had suspected.

Before I knew of Dr. Sampson's own interest in this case, at about the time I was initiating my correspondence with Dr. Rosenfeld, Sampson had written to *Parade* editor Larry Smith (Rosenfeld is the magazine's health editor), pointing out some of the incongruities noted herein (and others) and asking how he might assist *Parade* in rectifying "the incorrect impressions given by the article." Sampson, a professor of medicine at Stanford University and editor in chief of *The Scientific Review of Alternative Medicine*, did not receive the courtesy of a reply.

A few additional observations are in order with regard to the precision of Dr. Rosenfeld's recollections and his attention to detail in recounting them. He ac-

(Continued from page 1)

the least culpable of the three. He noted that having somebody from the "inside" of this therapy will be a powerful piece of testimony that overrides any need to prosecute her separately. He said it furthers the Department's aims and goals in this case to have Poznanski testify against Braun and Sachs. Also, the Burgess family – the victims in this case – were consulted and agreed before the settlement was reached.

Glasgow took pains to point out that he would never make a deal like this with Braun, and the only thing he would settle for, should Braun seek a deal, would be the indefinite suspension of Braun's license to practice medicine – which is what he hopes to gain from prosecuting Braun anyway. ☹

knowledged to me that, not being a surgeon, he actually "did not pay any particular attention at the time to the surgical technique used." He says in his book (contrary to the *Parade* version) that "needles" (plural) had been placed in the patient's "left" (not "right") earlobe. He explained to me that this "was a typo, which was not picked up since I did not use the photo" in the book. But the image was presumably indelibly imprinted in his mind. From the book: "I



took a color photograph of that memorable scene: the open chest, the smiling patient, and the surgeon's hands holding her heart. I show it to anyone who scoffs at acupuncture." Yet, the photo clearly shows the surgeon's hands to the lower-left of the patient's heart – hardly another "typo."

Toward the end of our correspondence, Dr. Rosenfeld told me that, in publicizing the China story, his motivat-

tion had simply been "to draw attention to the possible use of acupuncture to alleviate chronic pain and suffering.... I thought acupuncture was worth looking into. I still do, as does a panel convened recently by the NIH.... I continue to keep an open mind on the subject." While I expressed my appreciation of that position, I also conveyed my concern that many of *Parade's* 80-plus-million readers could easily have drawn a conclusion that Rosenfeld says he did not intend – that acupuncture appears to possess mysterious and unexplained, perhaps even supernatural, anesthetic properties.

To this point about the important role that authorities such as Dr. Rosenfeld play in educating the American public on health-related issues, he replied, "As far as your fear that my readers will opt for acupuncture anesthesia during heart surgery, I think I can reassure you not to worry about it." Oh. Well, never mind, then.

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Reaching to Heaven, by James Van Praagh (Dutton, \$22.95): As I discussed at one of our meetings, Van Praagh's new book is simply bursting with nonsense packaged to sell. While his message is comforting in some ways, it is also horrifying when viewed from both sides (if you have cancer, it's your fault for not thinking happy thoughts). He argues against rational thinking, which is not surprising since if more people thought rationally, his sales would decrease accordingly. **0 Stars (Yes, this one goes off the scale too.)**

The Complete Idiot's Guide to Being Psychic, by Lynn A. Robinson and Lavonne Carlson-Finnerty (Alpha Books, \$18.95): An incredible collection of nonsense portrayed as reality. It's frankly difficult to understand how the authors could really believe all this stuff and still function in society. Did you

know that in Alabama, a "glittering, 12-foot-tall Liberace, along with his equally oversized piano, descended to Earth from a banana-shaped spacecraft" in 1989? The authors do, and count this as an unexplained mystery of the paranormal. That's just the tip of the iceberg. Surprise: **0 Stars**

The Complete Idiot's Guide to Tarot and Fortune-Telling, by Arlene Tognetti and Lisa Lenard (Alpha Books, \$16.95): Not quite as bad in content as *Being Psychic*, but still horrible in its own way. The card descriptions are vague and virtually meaningless, yet they take 140 pages to discuss them. Even a believer in Tarot would find this almost useless, as there are better Tarot books out there. (Thanks to Derek Rompot for additional info on this one.) **0 Stars**

[To-Do List: Explain to David proper use of rating scale. — Ed.] ☹

REALLity Check

by David Bloomberg

A History of Skepticism

Those of you in the Springfield area are probably aware of the *State Journal-Register*'s series, "A Springfield Century." In it, current *SJR* reporters (by far mostly **Doug Pokorski**, but occasionally others) take a look back at stories from 1900 onwards.

The June 20 story, written by Pokorski, looked back to an article that appeared on the same date in the *Illinois State Journal* in 1913. This article, by **Octavia Roberts**, took a skeptical look at fortune tellers.

Even then, Roberts wondered why so many people wanted to have their fortunes told. And she found her answer in a startlingly honest fortune teller who said, "I tell everyone what they want to hear." If only today's "psychics" were so forthright!

Roberts further explained that the fortune teller talks about the subjects of most interest to the customer – the life of that customer! "No wonder there have been fortune tellers since the beginning of the world," she says.

I was glad to see not only that a reporter had been skeptical even then, but that the skepticism was brought forward to today's reader.

Unfortunately, it was run two weeks after *SJR* reporter **Dave Bakke** included an unexplained remark about the late **Greta Alexander** in an article about an unprosecuted attack (6/6). Near the beginning of the story, Bakke said, "Before psychic Greta Alexander died, she was consulted by [the victim]. Alexander's theory was close to what the police investigation eventually revealed. But psychic vibrations aren't evidence."

He certainly got the last part right, but never explained what the supposed theory was, what was actually said, etc. It was just sort of left hanging there, automatically implying to the reader that it was as true as anything else in the article, but never supported with a shred of evidence. Frankly, it was a rather strange piece in an otherwise normal article. Per-

haps Bakke should have consulted with Ms. Roberts.

No Surprise

In the category of "news that isn't news," a *Chicago Tribune* article noted that yet another report has concluded that silicone breast implants do not cause systemic diseases like lupus, connective tissue diseases, etc. (6/21).

This one was put out by The Institute of Medicine, the medical arm of the National Academy of Sciences, and therefore has some amount of prestige behind it. It follows reports from other scientists, including panels appointed by federal judges in Alabama and Oregon.

The *Today* show, on NBC (6/22), even discussed this non-news, with Katie Couric talking to two doctors, one who agreed with the report and one who danced around her opinions. Couric seemed to be doing her best to get one of them to come out against the study. The doctor who was dancing avoided directly answering Couric's questions about the systemic diseases, and kept coming back to the localized problems (breast scarring and hardening, problems with mammography, etc.) – which nobody really is arguing against. That doctor eventually finished by making a classic illogical statement about how Dow Corning had settled instead of fighting to prove their innocence, as if this had any bearing on the facts of the cases. The simple fact is that Dow Corning had **already** lost several suits and had no reason to believe the future juries would be any better at distinguishing cause and effect from chance; it was thus in their financial interest to settle (indeed, they had already declared a form of bankruptcy when it happened) rather than continue to fight – even if they knew they were right. The travesty is that the courts moved too quickly for the science, and juries decided in favor of the poor sick women and against the big evil corporation.

NBC's chief science correspondent, Robert Bazell, addressed this fairly well in his segment before Couric's interviews. First they showed an actress who said she **knows** her implants caused her lupus, so there. But Bazell pointed out that it's simply not that easy – that you can't base such a cause-and-effect statement on a single case, but must look at the statistical rates of disease in those women with implants and those without. Those studies show no greater incidence of these types of diseases in women with implants. Just because two things happen to a given person does not mean one caused the other (correlation is not causation).

Considering how little useful information was passed along by Couric's interview, I was glad to see Bazell's good report come first.

Later, the *Tribune*'s editorial folks got into the act, (6/25). They noted, "If the nation's civil courts relied always on rational thought, empirical evidence and scientific fact to determine the validity of legal complaints, then the newest findings of an expert scientific committee would certainly signal the end of litigation over the medical risks of breast implants." They further stated, though, that if that were the way courts worked, the "outrageously expensive and badly misguided" suits would have stopped years ago.

The *Tribune* also went a step further in listing some of the costs of these claims, including: women who want silicone breast implants (whether for simple enlargement or after a mastectomy) either cannot get them or have a very difficult time getting them due to a 1992 FDA moratorium; Dow Corning was forced to declare bankruptcy in 1995; many women with these diseases may not have sought proper treatment because they believed their ills to come from the implants; and the financial effects on implant makers may deter future development of lifesaving medical devices, especially those made with silicone.

The editorial ended by noting correctly, "this has been about law, not

From There to Eternity

by Bob Ladendorf

Having ended a six-year stint in May as your newsletter editor, I passed the torch back to Wally Hartshorn, who first edited *The REALL News* when he, Chairman David and I formed REALL. Despite the many deadline crunches and lack-of-sleep-due-to-late-night-editing/typesetting marathons, I have been proud of the fact that we cooperatively managed to produce 8- to 12-page newsletters monthly (with two double issues) — a feat that few, if any, local skeptic groups have matched.

Through the years, we've brought you many fascinating articles on alien phenomena by the prolific Martin Kottmeyer, and one of them was reproduced in CSICOP's "Skeptical Briefs" newsletter. There was the ongoing controversies with therapeutic touch and false memories. Feature articles on most skeptic topics — from alien abductions to urban legends — have appeared. Chairman David has brought us memorable "REALLity Checks" that praised and skewered vari-

ous media for their reporting on paranormal and pseudoscientific subjects. Book reviews, weird Web sites, even a three-part series on tabloid coverage of these subjects by yours truly have filled the pages of *The REALL News*, all in support of REALL's mission to enhance critical thinking in Central Illinois. The newsletter, along with the monthly meetings, unofficial Web site and contacts with other skeptic organizations and conferences have helped all of us become a little wiser.

My only real disappointment has been the lack of feedback from our readers, members and supporters. I suppose that I could look at the near absence of feedback as an indication that our readers are happy with our efforts. That may be, but voluntarily producing monthly newsletters and meetings in our spare time outside of jobs and family life is exhausting. We are always open to article suggestions, articles written by our members, letters to the editor, newspaper clippings, suggestions for speakers

or activities, and volunteers to help make those activities a reality. Alas, only a handful have ever done the real physical work needed to make REALL an active organization.

That said, I am nevertheless quite grateful for the continuing financial support provided by our members. Many of you renew year after year, and many live outside the Central Illinois area. So I do understand that the only support you can give is financial. For that support, many thanks.

As Wally continues to edit the newsletter into the future, do consider providing any additional help or suggestions that come to mind. It's been a great start, and I look forward to working with you to fight the ongoing battles against irrational thinking, superstitions, and unfounded paranormal and pseudoscientific beliefs that have no place in a rational future.

— *Bob Ladendorf is the secretary-treasurer of REALL.* ♡

medicine — and certainly not justice.”

No Worry Dolls, Be Happy

The *Chicago Tribune* also reported on a court case that mostly deals with church-state separation, but also deals with the teaching of superstition in the classroom. Surprisingly, I agreed with every part of the ruling!

It started off as one of those silly cases of parents claiming a game is “satanic.” In this case, the game in question was *Magic: The Gathering*. Several parents complained about that game, and then brought other problems at the school into the mix. Among those things were yoga lessons, teaching about a Hindu god, selling “worry dolls,” and Earth Day rituals at an altar.

The judge ruled against the parents on *Magic* and yoga (somewhat to the dismay of the parents who were *certain* the game taught some weird satanic religion), but for them on several others. The

main one of interest to us is the use of “worry dolls” — small stick and yarn figures made by students in class and then sold in a school store as a way to keep bad dreams away.

The judge said, “The business with the worry dolls is a rank example of

teaching superstition to children of a young and impressionable age.”

Hooray for the judge! ♡

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Our Next Meeting

Video: The Meme Machine
By Susan Blackmore

Imagine a world full of brains, and far more ideas than can possibly find homes. Which ideas are more likely to find a safe home and get passed on again?

Susan Blackmore presents a theory of evolution by memetic selection, where memes are idea replicators that propagate like genes. Blackmore's theory includes memes as spurring on human brain evolution and even language.



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