



The North Texas

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In Memoriam

Robert Baker: Unmasked Ghostly Apparitions

By John Blanton

Skeptic Robert Baker died August 8 in Lexington, Kentucky, at the age of 84. He was most famous for his studies of false beliefs in ghosts. He often collaborated with skeptic Joe Nickell, and together they produced *Missing Pieces: How to Investigate Ghosts, Ufos, Psychics, & Other Mysteries*.

His early interest in the occult came through his encounters with religious extremism. A preacher his family knew as a mild-mannered man turned into a raving fanatic at the pulpit. His father assured him that "Religion makes some people crazy." Early life experiences also clued him in to the absurdity of ghosts.

He served as an (Army) Air Force cryptographer during World War II, and later earned a Ph.D. in psychology from Stanford University in 1951. He eventually retired from the University of Kentucky in 1988.

He met Nickell while the latter was a student at the U of K. Besides *Missing Pieces*, Baker also produced *Hidden Memories: Voices and Visions From Within* (1992) and *Mind Games* (1996). He edited *Child Sexual Abuse and False Memory Syndrome* (1998) and *A Stress Analysis of a Strapless Evening Gown and Other Essays for a Scientific Age* (1963).

The Washington Post tells of some of the cases he studied:

In the 1960s, he visited a traumatized young Kentucky wife who was convinced that she was seeing a "golden-haired 3-year-old girl" in her home.

"After talking with her and her husband," he wrote, "I quickly learned that she was the only one who ever saw or heard the child. Moreover, I learned that she and her spouse wanted children desperately but had no luck. I urged them both

EVENTS CALENDAR

September Program

Saturday, 10 September at
2 p.m.
Center for Nonprofit
Management
2900 Live Oak Street in Dallas

Exorcism and Deliverance

Is this stuff still going on?

Danny Barnett gives us the sad but true news that it still is.

NTS Social Dinner and Board Meeting

Saturday 24 September at
7 p.m.

Good Eats Grill
6950 Greenville Ave
Dallas, TX
(214) 691-3287

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to consider adoption, and as soon as they took these steps, the
 3-year-old spirit disappeared forever.”

He is survived by Rose Baker, six children, and seven grandchildren.



The previous was excerpted from a story by *The Washington Post*. See
 the following link. Buy books by Baker from Amazon.com by clicking
 on the links in the on-line copy of this newsletter.
http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/08/11/AR2005081102036_pf.html

In Memoriam

Philip J. Klass: A UFO (Ufologist Friend's Obituary)

by Gary P. Posner

Philip J. Klass, a co-founder of the Committee for the Scientific In-
 vestigation of Claims of the Paranormal (CSICOP) and a friend and
 mentor to me, died on August 9 at age 85 following several years of de-
 clining health.

Though best known to the general public as the world's leading UFO
 skeptic – and reviled as such by many “believers” – in “real life” Phil
 was one of its most honored aerospace journalists. Readers of *Skeptical*
magazine may be familiar with his cutting-edge *Skeptics UFO Newsletter*
 (which I copy-edited), but his professional peers knew him as a ground-
 breaking reporter on more serious matters, having been the first – in the
 mid-1950s – to publish articles on such topics as inertial guidance tech-
 nology, infrared missile guidance and detection, and the future micro-
 electronics revolution. His one non-UFO book, *Secret Sentries in Space*
 (1971), was the first to deal with spy satellite technology. Phil's six
 books on UFOs include *UFOs Explained* (1974), which is still widely re-
 garded as the best in the field.

My relationship with Phil began in 1977, during my metamorphosis
 from “believer” to “skeptic,” when I received a copy of *UFOs Explained*
 in the mail – free of charge – in response to a letter I had written to him.
 At about the same time, I had also written to Dr. J. Allen Hynek, the
 country's #1 pro-UFOlogist. Hynek was also gracious in replying, but his
 letter's references to Phil's book were so demonstrably false that, armed
 with my new present, I proceeded to write Hynek four pages, including a
 point-by-point rebuttal. Upon reading a copy of that letter, Klass replied
 in part, “What you have dared to say to the “Galileo of UFOlogy” [as
 Hynek had recently been dubbed in *Newsweek*] has long needed to be
 said ... You are the first, to my knowledge, to brazenly comment that the
 Emperor is NAKED!”

Most of Phil's long and distinguished professional career was spent in Washington, D.C., with *Aviation Week & Space Technology* magazine, as senior editor for its avionics coverage (a term he coined from "aviation electronics") until his official retirement in 1986. In subsequent years he continued to put in comparable hours for *Aviation Week* without portfolio, until his health no longer permitted. Some highlights of his avocational career in UFOlogy, which typically occupied several hours a night, were discussed in my 1999 *Skeptic* interview with Phil (Vol. 7, No. 4).

With his wife Nadya, in 2003 Phil moved to Merritt Island, Florida, but I don't think he ever had an opportunity to enjoy his new environs. My last communication from him was a cryptic instant message, in response to mine, upon his return home following a hurricane evacuation last year. My most recent e-mail several months ago was never answered, and his *Washington Post* obituary indicates that he spent his final days in a nursing home.

To say that Phil Klass' shoes can never be filled may risk cliché. But in this instance, I'm afraid the shoe fits. □

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Web news

by John Blanton

Intelligent Design

School is back in session, and the circus is in town. Well heeled, with financial and moral support from religious conservatives, the Discovery Institute is mounting an attack on evolution on a broad front. The World Wide Web is a cornucopia of information, not all of it true.

The National Center for Science Education is one source of reliable information. Their weekly e-mail newsletter is free. Here is an excerpt.

Evolution education update: Evolutionapalooza in *The New York Times*

The big news from last week was the major three-part series in *The New York Times*, running August 21-23, 2005, devoted

to the ongoing evolution/creationism struggle in the political, the scientific, and the religious sphere. Accompanying the series in addition were a William Safire "On Language" column investigating the etymology of "intelligent design" and "neo-creo" and a marvelous editorial column by Verlyn Klinkenborg on deep time and evolution. (In a further acknowledgement of the importance of the issue, the *Times*'s website now has a special section devoted to its evolution coverage.) Overall, despite a number of minor errors, the series succeeded in portraying "intelligent design" as what it is: a religiously motivated, politically active, and scientifically bankrupt assault on the teaching of evolution in the public schools.

"Politicized Scholars Put Evolution On The Defensive"

First, on August 21, Jodi Wilgoren's "Politicized Scholars Put Evolution on the Defensive" appeared on the front page of the *Sunday Times*, focusing on the Discovery Institute and its Center for Science and Culture (formerly the Center for the Renewal of Science and Culture), described as "at the helm of this newly volatile frontier in the nation's culture wars." After sketching the history, tactics, and composition of the Discovery Institute, Wilgoren comments, "But even as intelligent design has helped raise Discovery's profile, the institute is starting to suffer from its success. Lately, it has tried to distance itself from lawsuits and legislation that seek to force schools to add intelligent design to curriculums, placing it in the awkward spot of trying to promote intelligent design as a robust frontier for scientists but not yet ripe for students."

Following the money, Wilgoren also writes that the Discovery Institute receives "financial support from 22 foundations, at least two-thirds of them with explicitly religious missions," such as the Crowell Trust, which describes its mission as "the teaching and active extension of the doctrines of evangelical Christianity," and the Stewardship Foundation, which seeks "to contribute to the propagation of the Christian Gospel by evangelical and missionary work." Although the Discovery Institute also receives funding for work unconnected with antievolutionism from secular foundations such as the Gates Foundation, its antievolution efforts are apparently unwelcome to the Templeton Foundation and the Bullitt Foundation, whose director was quoted as describing Discovery as "the institutional love child of Ayn Rand and Jerry Falwell."

According to the article, "Since its founding in 1996, the [Center for Science and Culture] has spent 39 percent of its \$9.3 million on research, [Stephen C.] Meyer said, underwriting books or papers, or often just paying universities to release professors from some teaching responsibilities so that they can ponder intelligent design. Over those nine years, \$792,585 financed laboratory or field research in biology, paleontology or biophysics, while \$93,828 helped graduate students in paleontology, linguistics, history and philosophy." Wilgoren failed to report what the scientific payoff in terms of published results in

the peer-reviewed scientific literature of Discovery's funding was, but the science journalist Carl Zimmer (author of *Evolution: The Triumph of an Idea*) provided the details on his blog, concluding: "Someone's not getting their money's worth."

Perhaps because of the scientific sterility of "intelligent design," the Discovery Institute turned instead to the "teach the controversy" slogan — teaching evolution, that is, in such a way as to instill scientifically unwarranted doubts about it. NCSE executive director Eugenie C. Scott commented, "They have packaged their message much more cleverly than the creation science people have ... They present themselves as being more mainstream. I prefer to think of that as creationism light." Yet not all of the Discovery Institute's supporters have received the message: for example, "this spring, at the hearings in Kansas, [Discovery Institute's president Bruce] Chapman grew visibly frustrated as his supposed allies began talking more and more about intelligent design." And it was not teaching "the controversy" but "intelligent design" that President Bush's remarks seemed to endorse.

Although the article initially misdescribed Ohio, New Mexico, and Minnesota as having "embraced the institute's 'teach the controversy' approach" in their state standards, a correction was later issued. The article also contends that fellows of the Discovery Institute "successfully urged changes to textbooks in Texas to weaken the argument for evolution" during the textbook adoption process, a claim rejected by Texas Citizens for Science, whose president Steven Schafersman writes, "The DI 'urged' the textbook changes, but they weren't successful, since the Texas SBOE voted 11-4 to adopt the biology textbooks explicitly *without* the changes demanded by the DI. The DI worked very hard indeed to diminish and distort the evolution content in the biology textbooks that were adopted, but they failed, and the textbooks were uncompromised."

To read "Politicized Scholars Put Evolution on the Defensive," visit:
<http://www.nytimes.com/2005/08/21/national/21evolve.html>

For NCSE's article on the Center for Science and Culture's change of name, visit:
http://www.ncseweb.org/resources/articles/8325_evolution_banners_at_the_discov_8_29_2002.asp

For Carl Zimmer's survey of "intelligent design" in the scientific literature, visit:
http://www.corante.com/loom/archives/2005/08/21/the_big_picture.php

For NCSE's article on President Bush's remarks, visit:
http://www.ncseweb.org/resources/news/2005/US/926_more_on_bush39s_remarks_on_8_8_2005.asp

For a discussion of the *Times*'s error about state science standards, visit:
http://www.pandasthumb.org/archives/2005/08/new_mexico_scie.html



What's new

By Robert Park

[Robert Park publishes the What's New column at <http://www.aps.org/WN/>. Following are some clippings of interest.]

The war: presidential wannabes get "that old-time religion."

Senator John McCain made it clear last week that he too can read polls. In an interview with the Arizona Daily Star, McCain said "all points of view" should be available to students studying the origins of mankind. WN was unable to reach Senator McCain for clarification, but by "all" we think he means just evolution and intelligent design. Or maybe he hopes to corner the votes of those who worship "the giant frog from whose mouth the river of life flowed." McCain's appeal to evolution deniers came just four days after Senator Frist made a pitch to the scientifically challenged (WN 26 Aug 05).

The poll: Intelligent Design is in the right Pew far right.

The respected Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life found that 64% of Americans favor teaching creationism along with evolution in public schools. A scary 38% want to REPLACE evolution with creationism. The tiny glimmer of hope for civilization was the number of inconsistencies in the responses, suggesting confusion over the meaning of the terms. There is room for education.

The science advisor: is there a White House science advisor?

Actually, no. The President didn't consult his science advisor about intelligent design because he doesn't have one. George W. Bush eliminated the job when he named John Marburger Director of the Office of Science and Technology Policy. Previous OSTP directors held both titles, and WN always referred to Marburger as "Science Advisor." We were wrong, but not alone. We Googled "science advisor" and got

597,000 hits on a nonexistent job. As they used to say at Stony Brook when he was president, “this would never have happened if Jack Marburger was alive.”

The chimp: complete genetic map confirms Darwin’s theory.

Scientists at MIT and Washington University, St. Louis, announced Wednesday that they have determined the precise order of the 3 billion bits of genetic code needed to make a chimpanzee. There is only a 1 percent difference from the human genetic code. But for that 1 percent, chimpanzees would have a seat in the UN. Robert Waterston, who led the Washington University team, was quoted in yesterday’s *Washington Post* saying, “I can’t imagine Darwin hoping for a stronger confirmation of his ideas.”

National Prayer Day: President Bush invokes Intelligent Design.

Yesterday was also the 54th annual National Day of Prayer. In an East Room ceremony, President Bush said, “Freedom is our birthright because the Creator wrote it into our common human nature.” Sigh. He went on to say “we celebrate the freedom to pray as you wish, or not at all.” Oh good. On Capitol Hill, Tom DeLay (R-TX), speaking from his soapbox in the Cannon House Office Building, called for spending, “less time on our soapboxes and more time on our knees.”

The president: maybe the White House could use a dictionary.

Conservative Christian supporters are gloating. On Tuesday, in an interview with Texas reporters, the President of the United States came down on the side of equal time for intelligent design. Referring back to his time as Governor of Texas, Mr. Bush said, “I felt like both sides ought to be properly taught.” Which two sides are those Mr. President? I don’t think we can teach the Genesis story in science class, even after you pack the Court. Surely you’re not talking about the “intelligent design” thing? Can someone tell us who or what is doing the designing? I think that will tell us whether it’s science or religion.

The founder: Discovery Institute doesn’t need a dictionary.

The *Washington Post* on Saturday had a little-noticed letter from Bruce Chapman, founder and President of the Discovery Institute. Director of the White House Office of Planning and Evaluation under Ronald Reagan, Chapman learned from the master. Facts are not important, what matters is conviction.

“The only religious believers in all this,” he writes, “are the Darwinists, who are out to punish scholars who see the weakness of Darwin’s theory.” And who are these scholars? This brings up another alarming trend, conservative think tanks manned by “scholars” who do no research, but spew out books laden with conviction. Chapman perfected this by recruiting bright young believers to the cause and assigning them the task of becoming biology PhDs.

The science advisor: the president has a science advisor?

Asked by the *New York Times* to comment, John Marburger responded, “Evolution is the cornerstone of modern biology intelligent design is not a scientific concept.” Good response. It would be nice if the President’s science advisor advised the President.

The war: Senate leader joins president on intelligent design.

Back before he began humming Hail to the Chief to himself as he walked the Capitol halls, Bill Frist headed the bipartisan Senate S&T Caucus (WN 14 Feb 97), and pushed for increased science funding. Recently, he reversed his opposition to stem cell research, supporting it despite strong opposition by the President. Bush said he believes “human life is a gift from our Creator.” Some scientists saw Frist’s action as a calculated move to demonstrate independence. Although Frist had never voted in an election prior to running for the Senate, he does know how to count votes, and he knows there are a lot more born-again Christians in this country than scientists. Friday, Bill Frist, sided with the President on intelligent design, calling for teaching it in science class with evolution.

The Vatican astronomer: Catholic church splits over evolution.

A cardinal close to the pope has ties to the Discovery Institute (WN 15 Jul 05), but in today’s issue of *The Tablet*, Britain’s Catholic Weekly, Father George Coyne, an American Jesuit priest and a distinguished astronomer, directly attacked Cardinal Schoenborn’s position on evolution.

God’s hand: Catholics don’t have to believe in Adam and Eve.

On Tuesday, at the National Press Club in Washington, Cardinal Theodore McCarrick told reporters that Catholics can believe in evolution — as long as it’s understood to have been guided by “the hand of God” rather than chance. The Church cannot accept the belief that “this is all an accident,” he said.

Creationism: *ABC News* and getting the dinosaurs on Noah's ark.

Earlier this year, WN asked a rhetorical question, "Is *ABC News* nuts?" (WN 11 Feb 05). There is new information. Last night, *ABC Evening News* took viewers to the Museum of Earth History in Eureka Springs, Ark. Disputes are different in the Bible world. Genesis says a pair of every kind of air-breathing animal was taken on board Noah's Ark and in a world that's only 10,000 years old, that must include dinosaurs. Or it may be that the reporter, Jake Tapper, went to school in Kansas. "Religious views of creation that challenge accepted science are gaining support across the country," he told viewers, "The Kansas Board of Education this week tentatively endorsed new standards allowing more criticism of evolution in explaining the origins of life." As further proof, ABC showed President Bush delivering his "intelligent design should be taught in schools" remarks. To balance the President, science had AAAS CEO Alan Leshner, "I have no problem with people talking about religion as religion or belief as belief." Hmmm. "It's dangerous to talk about religious belief as if it were science." So what was ABC's conclusion? "Science is increasingly on the defensive."

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encourages the critical investigation of paranormal and fringe-science claims from a responsible, scientific point of view and disseminates factual information about the results of such inquiries to the scientific community, the media, and the public. It also promotes science and scientific inquiry, critical thinking, science education, and the use of reason in examining important issues.

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Privileged religion: Smithsonian will show a faith-based film.

Saturday's *NY Times* had a story about the premiere of a movie, "The Privileged Planet," to be held at the Smithsonian's Museum of Natural History. The museum would co-sponsor the showing in return for a \$16,000 contribution from the Discovery Institute. This is the organization that's pushing "Intelligent Design" as a Bible-friendly alternative to evolution. If it's the money, James Randi announced, he would offer \$20,000 not to show the film. It apparently was not the money. Yesterday, the museum director stated that on further review the film is not consistent with the Smithsonian mission. The museum will not sponsor the film and will return the money — but space for the event is still being provided. Is this the Supernatural History Museum? Yesterday, the WN team viewed the film. It went beyond the "intelligent design" of humans. It seems the busy Designer-In-The-Sky also designed a planet for us. Not just a place to live, but a room with a view, perfectly situated to let us discover the rest of the universe. It's the old anthropic argument that the laws of Nature are fine tuned to make life possible, but with a discovery requirement tossed in. So what does the Smithsonian do? It lets them in free. That means taxpayers are subsidizing the Discovery Institute. Which brings up the next question: this is an expensive production — where does the money come from?

Intelligent Design: "This doesn't look like Kansas Toto."

It's not, Dorothy, it's Holland. According to *Science* magazine, Maria van der Hoeven, the science and education minister, wants to stimulate a debate about intelligent design. It certainly stimulated a discussion, but not exactly a debate. They do love the idea in Kansas, but in the Netherlands things are a little different. Van der Hoeven, a member of the Christian-Democratic Party and a Catholic, got no support from either one. She's been too busy defending herself to explain just what she has in mind.

Intelligent design: still debating the non-debate in Kansas.

The front lines have shifted to Dover, PA where a federal judge will consider a lawsuit charging the School Board with violating the separation of church and state by requiring that children hear about Intelligent Design in science class. However, the Discovery Institute is still getting mileage out of the refusal of scientists to engage in a rigged debate in Kansas. This time it's Dr. John West, a senior fellow at the Discovery Institute, who seems to be in charge of explaining that ID is science. West teaches Political Science at Seattle Pacific University, where "we ground everything we do on the gospel of Jesus Christ." So much for science.

Skeptic Ink

by Prasad Golla and John Blanton. © 2005.
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Homeopathy: it doesn't work. but didn't we already know that?

A study at the University of Berne, reported in *Lancet*, compared 110 trials each of homeopathy and conventional medicine and found benefits attributed to homeopathy were merely placebo effects. The editors of *Lancet* called for an end to further investment in research on homeopathy, and for doctors to be honest with their patients about homeopathy's lack of benefits.

Global warming: another dispute seems to have been resolved.

Homo sapiens has been around for maybe 50,000 years, but most of what we've learned about our universe, from how big it is to how small its pieces are, has been learned in the span of a single human lifetime. What made it possible was the development of a scientific culture that is open and conditional. The effect of homo sapiens on Earth's climate is perhaps the most complicated problem humans have tackled, and conceivably the most important. The system is working. We have a consensus on warming; disputes remain only over the details. One detail was records that were interpreted by a group at the U. Alabama in Huntsville as showing that the troposphere had not warmed in two decades and the tropics had cooled. However, three papers in *Science* this week report errors in the Alabama-Huntsville calcu-

lations. It seems that warming of the troposphere agrees with surface measurements and recent computer predictions. The group at Alabama-Huntsville concedes the error, but says the effect is not that large. That's the way it's supposed to work. It's a textbook example of science in the process of resolving a very complicated problem.

The miracle study: Columbia prays the scandal will go away.

The prayers aren't working. Bruce Flamm, MD, Clinical Professor at the U. of California, Irvine Medical Center, is the reason (WN 4 Jun 04). A 2001 study from Columbia University Medical School, published in a respected, peer-reviewed journal, reported in-vitro fertilization was twice as likely to result in pregnancy if patients were prayed for without their knowledge by total strangers halfway around the world. WN gently explained that they must be crazy (<http://bobpark.physics.umd.edu/WN01/wn100501.htm>). Bruce Flamm dug deeper, publishing his findings in *Sci. Rev. Alt. Med.* In four years he has not let up. Under pressure from the Dean, the lead author, Dr. Rogerio Lobo, has removed his name from the study. Another author, a notorious scam artist, is in jail on separate fraud charges. The University has never retracted or apologized for the study, but has now told the journal to remove all links to Columbia. Maybe an intelligent eraser could help.

The prince: wealthy British farmer looks to the moon for help.

Tormented by fears of nanorobots turning the planet into "grey goo," and poisoning by genetically modified foods, Prince Charles fights science by embracing homeopathy, coffee enemas, organic farming, and now "biodynamics," which involves planting according to cycles of the moon and signs of the Zodiac. In a monarchy you are stuck with what you get, while in a democracy we can pick the best qualified among us to lead. But it's only a theory.

Bob Park can be reached via email at opa@aps.org

Future meeting dates

Unless otherwise indicated, all our meetings will be held at—

Center for Nonprofit Management
2900 Live Oak Street in Dallas
(corner of Live Oak Street and Liberty Street)

- October 8, 2005
- November 12, 2005
- December 10, 2005

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