

SACRAMENTO AREA SKEPTICS NEWSLETTER

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GENERAL SCIENCE AND SKEPTICISM NEWS

New JREF President

Earlier this month Dr Phil 'Bad Astronomer' Plait stepped down as President of the James Randi Education Foundation to pursue a television opportunity that he has been working on.

Replacing Plait is DJ Grothe, who is best known for being the host of the popular radio show and podcast *Point of Inquiry*. Grothe was once a professional magician and evangelical Christian. Most recently, he has been the Vice President, as well as Director, of Outreach Programs at the Center for Inquiry.

SkepDoc hired as O columnist

Skeptic Magazine columnist and contributor to the *Science-Based Medicine* blog, Dr Harriet Hall (SkepDoc), was hired as a regular columnist for *O* magazine. *O* or *The Oprah Magazine* is the official magazine of the media mogul and day time talk show host Oprah Winfrey, famed among skeptics as one of, if not the top, promoters of woo-woo. Starting in January, Dr Hall will have a column limited to 250 words dedicated to 'debunking' medical myths. The very tip of the wedge for skeptics in the Oprah wackiness.

Man wakes up from coma ... communicating!

Twenty-three years ago Rom Houben was in a horrible car accident that left him paralyzed. Doctors initially diagnosed his condition as a persistent vegetative state. However, neurologist Dr Steven Laureys, an expert in the field, this month

announced that Houben's brain function was more intact than originally thought.

That is where the facts disappear and the woo-woo begins. The media ran this story with the heart-warming tale of Mr Houben writing out his feelings and thoughts on his condition. Problem – the mechanism by which he was talking to the world was the long ago debunked practice of facilitated communication. This is where a 'facilitator' takes hold of the subject's hand and can tell what they mean to say by having them type on a keyboard. Sometimes used with autistic children, the practice is disgusting as there is little doubt that it is the 'facilitator' who is actually communicating.

Shermer appears in divorce case

No, Michael Shermer wasn't cited as 'the other man', but skeptics across the country were surprised last week to see him called as an expert witness on *Court TV* in the divorce case of a woman whose husband had squandered the family savings and sold his wife's family heirlooms to build some kind of cosmic bombshelter against the coming 'end of the world' in 2012.

After Dr Shermer explained that the Mayan calendar didn't end in 2012 and that Nasa was not the tiniest bit worried about solar flares, the woman won a settlement for her lost property.

Must see video

Tim Minchin 'Storm' <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v+Widsglt3lfw>

Upcoming events

Jan. 15: Jan. Drinking Skeptically

Jan. 21: AGASA Presents PZ Meyers at UC Davis

Jan. 26: Sac City Freethinkers Presents
PZ Meyers at Sac City College

Feb: (Date and venue TBA)

SAS Lecture by NCSE Deputy Director Glenn Branch on the history and prospects of creationism.

Feb. 7: Sacramento Darwin Day