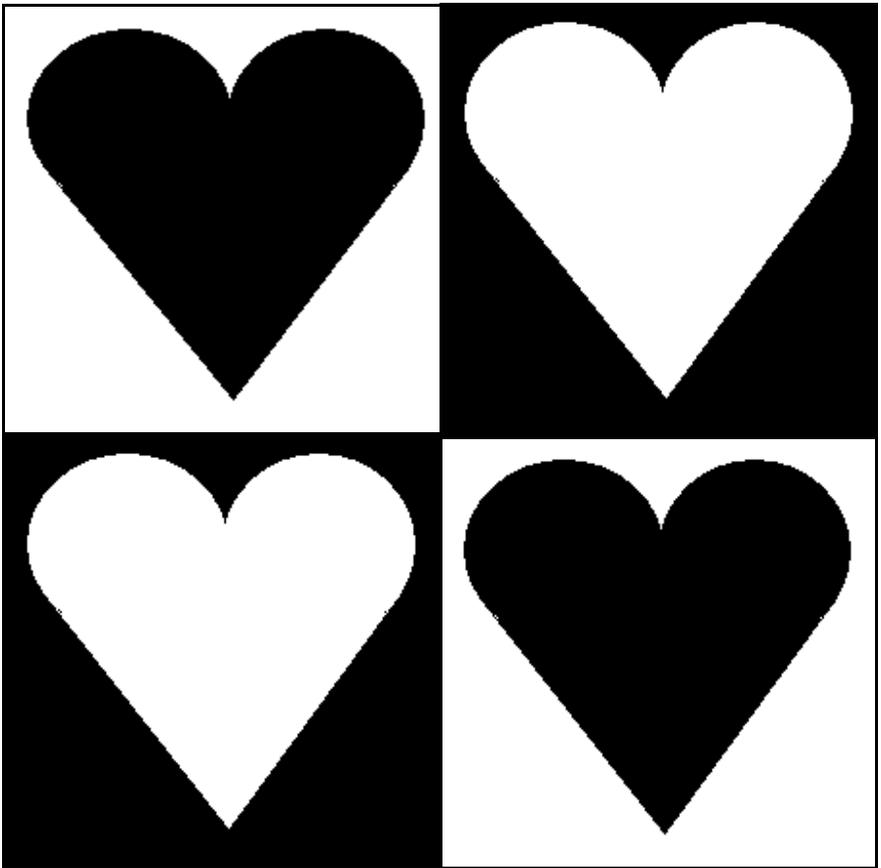


The

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Happy Valentine's Day!



The
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Volume 23, No. 2
February, 2005

WRITER'S BLOCK

Mike Moakley, SCAM Editor

Although I am not much of a country music fan, one tune that does come to mind is one that uses the line: “*One step forward and two steps back...*”. Such as it is in the wonderful world of Trial and Error. In publishing The SCAM each month, I believe it is more accurate to state that line as “Two steps forward and one step back.” Of course, the benefit to all this is my continuous learning experience.

This month, you will notice that the calendar grid has returned. This is in response to some member feedback on my (I thought) new and improved calendar. I do concur that the grid is more “user-friendly” and will continue its use for the foreseeable future.

One thing you will notice is that Mensa testing has been removed from our calendar. Be assured that we continue to test prospects. If you know of anyone wishing to join our fine organization, simply have him or her contact our Proctor Coordinator for testing arrangements.

As a member of the NomElCom, I am seeking candidates for the next ExComm. Please answer the call. As for me, I plan to continue as Editor.

I would also encourage you to volunteer to host a SCAM event. It takes *all* of us to make our group membership worthwhile.

Most of you know that I am a SCAM columnist as well as Editor. The downside to this is the need to balance my attention between producing a quality column and, at the same time, produce an error-free newsletter. I must admit that I have fallen short in the latter.

As you may have noticed, there have been numerous errors that, as Editor, I should have caught and corrected. I offer no excuse for this, as you, the member, deserve a better quality newsletter. I will be paying more attention to the editing side in this and upcoming issues.

All submissions must be received by the Editor before the 10th of the month preceding publication. Please allow extra time for mailed submissions, which may be **typed** or **legibly handwritten**. Whenever possible, we prefer submissions via e-mail. They may be in **e-mail text** or any of most **word processing** formats. **All** submissions should be sent to the **Editor**, whose contact information appears above.

The Financial Status of Space Coast Area Mensa
Semi-Annual Report
June 1, 2004 through November 30, 2004

Scholarship Savings Account

Beginning Balance	756.14
Income	2.84
Expenses	0.00
Ending Balance	758.98

General Fund Certificate of Deposit

Beginning Balance	3000.00
Income	0.00
Expenses	0.00
Ending Balance	3000.00

USPS Drawing Account

Beginning Balance	162.77
Deposits	500.00
Withdrawals	393.04
Ending Balance	269.73

General Fund Checking Account

Beginning Balance	1722.73
Income	1029.71
Expenses	1035.17
Ending Balance	1717.27

RG Checking Account

Beginning Balance	915.71
Income	895.00
Expenses	1601.41
Ending Balance	209.30

The Savings Account and Certificate of Deposit are interest bearing accounts.
Physical property is accounted for.

— *Helen Lee Moore, Treasurer*
Space Coast Area Mensa

We get several columns for The SCAM of a political nature. Mensa and Space Coast Area Mensa both, claim to hold no political or religious views. Of course, this declaration for the group does not prevent the individual from holding an opinion and expressing it. That is the great thing about Mensa and, in fact, about this Country, an individual can express an opinion, informed or not, as desired. So, now I'm going to express my own views and observations about a variety of subjects.

The Ten Commandments: In the Mel Brooks movie, History of the World Part I, Moses drops and breaks a stone tablet containing 5 additional commandments so he went with just 10. One might wonder what the other five were. Much is made in today's world about the appropriateness of putting the Ten Commandments in public places because of the "Separation of Church and State" supposedly proscribed in the Constitution. Since there is no such proscription, I guess the point becomes moot.

Many arguments fly back and forth with most folks who enter a dog in the fight trying to justify, once and for all a specific one of the arguing points. That is completely ridiculous. Of all of the common arguments I've heard, none are actually substantive. However, what about the Ten Commandments, as they stand, would be offensive to anyone if not in the context of religion? I suppose the sticking point is that the nominally known first one is about declaring the God defining the Ten Commandments as the Primary God. There is nothing that says other Gods cannot be worshipped and adored, just that the Hebrew God is primary.

Okay, so what if the individual has no God to worship? Is this Commandment offensive? No way. Only someone worshiping another God would be given pause until realizing that the rule only applies to those believing in the God who said that so there goes that offense. Now, looking at the rest of the Commandments from the Judeo-Christian God, what else might be offensive? Pretty much all of them give a good outline for living your life with the least amount difficulty of among people as possible...not a bad thing at all.

So, it is suggested the entire Ten Commandments be thrown away because the God who inspired them wanted to be the ONLY God. Those who so believe cannot be offended and those not believing in this God can ignore it...end of the difficulty. However, since there more than one version of the Ten Commandments exists, which one will be chosen for use in these public places? That should be the real question. It might be supposed the oldest set would be authoritative so we have to take them from the Torah. All of you Christians okay with that?

I have available a PDF document showing the Catholic, Protestant and Hebrew versions (shortened) of the Ten Commandments should anyone not believe there are differences. Lost in all of this is the Hebrew first commandment or preamble about being freed from Egypt. This preamble

makes the Ten Commandments binding only upon those who came up out of Egypt (and their generations);...the converted Europeans are not of the generations of the Hebrew and should not have much say in the wording and usage of the any of the trappings of the Hebrew religion.

To my view, the only ones who could be offended by any printing or public display of the Ten Commandments would be the Jews unless their version is the one used. All other versions should be retired from usage. No one else can sustain proof of offense from the sight of those words. One defense of allowing the trappings of Christianity in the public forums is the fact “you have to swear to God, on a Bible” in court. Of course, the lie to that is “no such requirement exists. One can always use the word “aver”.

At a swearing-in during Voir Dire for jury duty, I used that term, the judge looked a bit surprised (my voice carries and he heard me over the others). He nodded to me, with a smile. Another juror asked me why I said “aver” and did not say, “so help me God”. I stated I do not believe in God and have the right to not use those words in the courtroom or anywhere else. It is my right to not acknowledge that form.

The other juror was not aware that such an accommodation had been made for non-believers. She wanted to know if I would have been forced to place a hand on the Bible if I were a witness. I assured her my rights continued that far...I could keep my “Bible hand” down and continue to “aver”. The judge was listening to my explanations and assured her of the validity of my statements. I do not have to believe in the Bible, God or other trappings of any religion, though, to realize the majority of the Ten Commandments are simply good words to live by and ignore what does not seem to pertain to me.

Of course, to be completely correct in any display of the Ten Commandments, one should write them as the paragraph form in which they are written in the Bible, and, in fact, they should be written in Hebrew.

**AND ...NOW A WORD FROM
THE NOMELOM!**

Clara Woodall-Moran, NOMELOM Chair

We have 5 seats to fill for the ExComm and only two of the current committee have agreed to run again.

Frequently Made Statements and Questions:

1. What do I have to do? Each office comes with a set of duties. We have 5 seats on the ExComm: Local Secretary (LocSec) as the Chief Executive officer; The Assistant LocSec (figure it out on your own); Treasurer (again, figure it out on your own); Recording Secretary (keeps the minutes and gets them to the Editor for publication while maintaining all of the other records); Member-at-Large (a basic representative for all of the members). The group uses its own Bylaws, the National Bylaws, the guide lines and Standing Rules and Roberts Rules of Order for the conduction of business meetings.

2. Do I have to attend meetings? – no more than 1 per Month. Our by-laws state we will have meetings at least quarterly. If you cannot attend a meeting, send a report to the Recording Secretary. Generally, the recording secretary would be hard-pressed to not attend all of the meetings.
3. I don't know how to do any of the jobs: Let see: we print the minutes of every meeting in the newsletter. The minutes demonstrate how the meeting is run (call to order, attendance, greeting guests, voting on the previous minutes, discussing correspondence; then reports from the officers and reports from the volunteer officers. Old and New business and close the meeting. My record was a 4-minute meeting for the shortest and a marathon meeting taking all told (added up from three separate session) to 6 hours. It all depends on what is going on – my average meeting was around 1/2hour. On the other hand, the Treasurer simply keeps the money and the books for the group, the recording secretary records what transpires within the group and assistant locsec says “no report” and the Member-at-Large brings forward any concerns from the individual members (so generally, “no report”). Tell me truthfully that you are unable to do any of these duties.
4. I'm too busy – I have worked incredible overtime and received two college degrees while an officer (generally LocSec) of the group. Convince me your life is busier.
5. I don't know anyone – (and you never will if you never come to anything). JT Moran (my loving husband) ran for an office the first year of his membership. He served on RG Committees and the ExComm for most of the first 10yrs of his membership. Trust me, he did not know anyone when he started doing this. On the other hand, I hid from the group for the first 10years of my membership. Since then, for these last 10years, I have been actively involved until this year. Now, I am just the circulation chair – I label and mail the newsletters – let me know if you need help getting yours.
6. How do we decide who does what? At the first meeting, the elected officers figure out that part, you do not run for a specific seat. If you are chronically afraid, for instance, to be the treasurer (as am I – hate being responsible for someone else's money), say so. If you specifically want a chair, speak up. There are rules, though to follow for each seat. These are described in the rules, in the bylaws, etc.
7. Do I have to do anything? To run for office you must agree to do so and you can provide a campaign statement, to hold the office you have to attend the meetings and fulfill the obligations of the office.
8. Can I get paid for the job? What part of volunteer confused you?
9. Will the group buy equipment for me or reimbursement for items I might need for the job? Depends on what you want. You can always ask, the rest of the ExComm might agree or they might turn you down. Let me explain...some of the treasurers use a Microsoft program for keeping the books, others use Quicken and some use a pencil and paper. The group will help pay for the pencil and paper. Let's

(Continued from page 6)

- face it, we cannot afford to buy each person who agrees to be treasurer a computer and the software as we do not have sufficient income to do so. We could never keep sufficient control of the items. We have already lost a lot of property over the years that had been purchased with the group's money. And, some things have just worn out over the years but were not really repairable nor were used any longer so they simply disappeared. If a member of the group donated the requested equipment it would not be turned down.
10. I hate meetings. Only a person who loves to filibuster actually seems to derive enjoyment from meetings.
 11. What if there is a controversy? Help resolve it. If you don't like the resolutions to the previous controversies, put yourself in a position to influence the results.
 12. I like the current officers. They thank you but they would like a break.
 13. How long do I have to serve?...terms are one year but if you like it you can run again.
 14. Are there term limits? No. However, most have burned out after two times at bat as the LocSec.
 15. Do I have to be on the RG committee if I am on the ExComm? There does not even have to be an RG committee – the choice belongs to the ExComm. If you want an RG, you might want to be on both.
 16. Why is it so hard to get someone to run? I don't know, just apathy I guess.
 17. If I run will I have to run again? No.
 18. Do I have to progress through the offices? No.
 19. Is there any good reason I should not run? Nope.
 20. What if I lose? I have and the world did not come to an end.
 21. What if I win? Congratulations will be in order.
 22. What if I don't like the other officers? All the more reason to be on the ExComm. You have no influence off of it so if you do not like what the officers are doing, you should run.

This will be in the newsletter after I have started my phone calling. Please don't turn me down...Space Coast Area Mensa is depending upon you.

Clara Woodall
Chair, NomeICom

Well, it's that time of month again. It's the sixth of January and the SCAM deadline looms. It's tough that it had to be today, for on the sixth of January there is really only one story that can be written:

The Greatest Story Never Told

Once upon a long, long time ago, there was a royal prince. And from a related tribe, a royal princess. Even though the prince was considerably older, the priests agreed that their marriage would unite the tribes and produce a lasting royal dynasty.

At this time the country was ruled harshly by an imperialist empire, and unity was essential if these people were ever to overthrow the invaders and the puppet monarch that had replaced their own King. One day, they hoped, a great warrior would lead them to victory and the throne would be restored.

And so, they were married – but only sort-of married. In this land they did things a little differently, especially if you happened to be royalty. For a start, the future King had to be born in the holy month of September. Also, the firstborn had better be a boy. To make sure this was the case, for a trial period they were only half married, a kind of engaged or espoused condition to see if they could produce a male heir.

Fortunately, they did, and the politicians rejoiced. Unfortunately, he arrived in the not very holy month of March. This immediately divided the priesthood, a few accepting the young prince, which they desperately needed to unite their people and help overthrow the oppressive invaders. But in these embattled times the more conservative priests won the day, rejecting him as not being holy enough.

Seven years later, the Royal couple did it again. This time, it was a boy and, more importantly, he arrived in the holy month of September. The priests were overjoyed, arrangements were made and the future King was hailed amid great celebration. Even their calendar was reset in his honor to the year number one. (This was a long time ago, before zeros were invented.)

The years passed, and the Princes grew. The ancient tradition of ultimogeniture, of leaving everything to the youngest son, had long since been abandoned by these tribes. But these were strange times and now ultimogeniture was looking a safe bet as the younger prince was groomed for Royal stardom by the priests. Sadly, things were not going well on the political landscape. Bands of guerrillas regularly attacked the empire's troops, who responded with brutal reprisals in an increasing cycle of violence.

If ever a new King were needed to unite the people against their common enemy, it was now. The time was ripe, and the politicians looked to the younger prince for leadership. Problem was, the priests had done a

good job, for the younger prince was devoid of political ambition and instead sought to join the priesthood.

There was no alternative – the situation was getting desperate, it would have to be the oldest prince. The time was ripe, and attention shifted to the firstborn. More plans were made. There would be a coordinated series of attacks to support an uprising, at which point the new King would be introduced to the people.

In addition to the new King, there would be a new religious leader, just like the old times when they were a proud and independent nation. Back then, the joint leadership of King and chief priest had gods on their side as they led the country to military victory and territorial gains. For once, the priests and the politicians agreed – this was the right time and the eldest prince was destined to be King.

Being royalty, the King's birthday was celebrated not only on the actual day he was born (in this case, the 19th of March), but also the first day of the month, which was a holy day. In addition, he had a royal birthday, rather like the Queen of England today who celebrates both her own birthday and the royal birthday. The new King's royal birthday was the first day of the season, which day corresponds to January 6th in our calendar.

Before the daring plan could be carried out, the future head priest, a cousin to the princes, was arrested and executed, leaving a gaping hole in the plot and a corresponding vacancy in the priesthood. Vain attempts were made to persuade the younger prince that a career move to head priest was in everybody's interest. Apparently self-preservation was high on his agenda and he declined, for the position was then offered as a last resort to the first-born prince. In a ground-breaking move, he agreed to become both the King and the head priest. Never before had the dual roles of King and priest been undertaken by one person.

Of course, things didn't quite work out as planned. The eldest prince was anointed both King and High Priest and presented to the populace in the exact manner forecast by the ancient prophets. Hungry for their own royalty to replace the usurper, word spread and he was accepted by many as the new King. This was too much for the authorities. As part of an increasing crackdown by the empire, he was arrested and executed.

Pity, for he would have made a good King. By all accounts, he was wise and compassionate. As royalty, the number one prince was given the best education possible. He was fluent in three languages and an excellent scholar, with a profound understanding of their holy works. If things had worked out a little differently, he might have helped his people throw off the yoke of the empire and led them to a new age of both political and spiritual freedom.

Instead, the King and his works were banished to history, if not to obscurity. As the years passed, legends were grafted onto his accomplishments and, instead of fading away, his supporters increased in number. In time, the myth grew until it completely outgrew the King. Even the King's

name was forgotten, replaced by a foreign name, and his story acquired curious snippets from other times and other lands. His return was widely forecast, even though he would never recognize himself buried under all that mythology.

So far did his fame travel that eventually his story was celebrated throughout the empire, even in the capital. And, of all people, it was the Emperor, supreme ruler, that one day moved the King's birthday in an attempt to bring peace to the empire. Or so it is said. Rather, he moved the birthday in a staggeringly brazen act of political appeasement and self-promotion. For the King's new birthday coincided with the Sun's birthday, and the Emperor who proclaimed himself the reborn King was none other than the Sun God himself.

The King's original birthday was the 6th January, and this is still celebrated in many countries. The pagan Emperor called a hasty committee of obsequious yes-men and, inter alia, bullied them into moving the official birthday to the 25th of December, that day when sunlight gets perceptibly longer.

I don't have enough imagination to make up a story like this, and in any case no one would believe it.

Cast of Characters:

Prince and Princess:	Yusef and Miriam	(Joseph and Mary)
Youngest Prince:	Yacov Tsedek	(James the Just)
Future Priest:	Yohannan	(John the Baptist)
Eldest Prince:	Yehoshuah	(Jesus)
Naughty Emperor:	Constantine	(Head of Sol Invicta)
Committee	Council of Nicea	

Why not write for The SCAM??

The SCAM welcomes written submissions on just about any subject matter. It must be your own work. Remember, deadline is the 10th of every month for the upcoming issue. Please see Page 3 of every issue for details.

Your work could appear on these pages!!

Here we are again, facing another SCAM deadline. It feels like I just wrote the January column! This is likely to be short, since I don't have much to say this month.

One thing I would like to say is please visit the blog, which can be found from a link on the upper left of the homepage at <<http://spacecoastareamensa.org>>. I wrote about this a bit last time, but there are a few new items that need your attention. Most important are two polls that require some input to help determine the way we use the blog as time goes on. Please vote for how you would like to see it progress.

In other website news, there isn't any other website news, sorry.

The February calendar is a bit sparse -- not as many activities are going on as usual. CABAGE South is cancelled this month since I'll be out of town. The MENSA testing is currently unscheduled until a new place to hold the tests can be found. (But if you know someone who wants to be tested, please refer them to our Proctor Coordinator, Helen Lee Moore, who may be able to find a way to do it in the meantime. She can be reached at <proctor@spacecoastareamensa.org>)

Just a reminder: Please let me know if you want to schedule an event. Email is preferred <calendar@spacecoastareamensa.org>, but you can also phone me at 432-9703 with the information. To get your event in the SCAM I need to have the information by 5 pm on the 8th of the month, but you can send it any time for inclusion in the online calendar.

Till next month, then -- ciao-miaow!

Kat



Welcome to SCAM:

Irma Garbarino
Robert Loomis

**Welcome to SCAM
and Mensa:**

Bradley Carlson

Welcome Back:

Jane Williams

February Birthday Greetings!



04-Dana Stetser
05-John Dibble
06-Dorothy Hickam
07-Heather Howard
11-Michael Moakley
13-Craig Reynolds
14-Wynn Rostek
16-Christopher Rawlins
17-Robert Lipton
23-Robert Hartman
24-Phyl Sopkin
24-David White III
26-Linda Martin
29-Sherry Nutter

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*But if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted?
- Matthew 5:13*

For culinary purposes salt is the chemical compound NaCl, a molecule containing one atom of sodium and one atom of chlorine. Other salts do not concern us here. Most of the salt (Sodium chloride) produced is used for industrial purposes. Salt as a culinary item is only a miniscule portion of the total amount of the salt produced. As a culinary item, salt is the only flavoring or food item that is only tasted, it has no aroma. The 'flavor' of other condiments is actually more dependant on aroma than taste.

There are two basic categories of culinary salt. Refined salt and unrefined sea salt. Refined salt may be derived from halite (rock salt) found in salt mines, dissolved from underground salt domes, or evaporated from salty ocean waters. Evaporated sea salt is often sold unrefined.

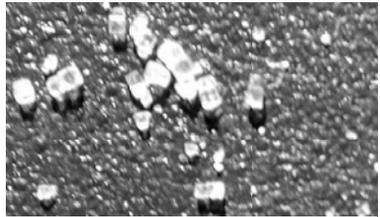


Table Salt

Salt is refined by dissolving and removing impurities and then recrystallizing. Not all the impurities can be economically removed in the refining process, the amount of impurities remaining after refining is dependant upon the source of the raw material and the refining process used. For culinary use, salt is sold in various sizes and shapes of grains, with or without additives.

Sea salt is obtained by drying in flat beds of ocean or sea water. Usually it is not refined as the impurities are a desirable element. Ordinary table salt is highly refined and comes in rather uniform small cubic crystals. It can be purchased without additives as picking salt, but the most common packaging contains a sodium or potassium iodide to prevent goiter and sodium or magnesium carbonate to make the salt less susceptible to caking. Salt is hygroscopic, that is, it attracts and absorbs moisture from the air, and will form cakes or lumps without the additives. The additives are generally tasteless, but are sometimes noticeable nevertheless.

The iodine is not necessary in the diet of most Floridians as we eat enough salt water seafood to supply our needs. The carbonates are not soluble and thus will make a more cloudy solution than plain salt. This is particularly important in making pickles in order to obtain a clear brine. The carbonates also will darken the vegetables.

Kosher salt has become a recent favorite among many serious cooks. It is preferred because it is considered to be purer than ordinary table salt and because of the shape of its crystals, which may dissolve faster and thus, when put on the surface of a food, has an extra 'bite'. But Kosher salt may or may not be additive free. Diamond Crystal Kosher salt has no addi-

tives and therefore is preferred by many cooks for canning and pickling. Morton's Kosher salt contains an anti-caking ingredient.

Kosher salt may be made by pressing salt crystals between rollers to produce flakes or, as in the case of Diamond Crystal, is grown on the surface of saltwater pools. The surface salt 'loom' is in the shape of small hollow pyramids. The pyramid shapes are more open and dissolves more easily than the cubic shape of table salt crystals. Both forms of Kosher salt bulk up more than ordinary table salt so that if you substitute it for table salt in a recipe, you must measure an equal weight of salt rather than an equal volume.

Popcorn salt is a very fine grained salt made especially to adhere to popcorn. Margarita salt is pressed into small flakes to stick to the rim of moist glasses. Pretzel salt is a flaky salt designed to stick to the moist surface of pretzels and bagels before they are baked.

Rock salt, also commonly found in the food section of grocery stores, is a coarse-grained, less refined salt, not used for eating but used in ice cream churns. Salt lowers the temperature of the ice in the bucket so that the cream can freeze. Do not substitute ordinary table salt for rock salt in this process. The smaller grain will dissolve too rapidly and lower the temperature of the ice too rapidly and make a grainy ice cream.

Sea salts are generally not used in cooking. Their subtle flavors would be lost in most cooked dishes. They are expensive and are best used at the table in small quantities as a finishing touch for a dish. The number of sea salts are vast. The most common obtainable generally are made by several producers and the final products, although similar in each category, do differ from supplier to supplier. The following is a list of the more common sea salts.

Malden Sea Salt. From England. Made by boiling sea water to form hollow pyramid-shaped crystals.

Sel Gris (gray salt). From France's Atlantic coast. Shallow basins are flooded with ocean water and left to evaporate over the summer. The layer of salt is scraped up to be packaged and sold. The gray color comes from clay used to seal the basin's bottom.

Fleur de Sel (salt flowers). From the same beds of Sel Gris. When the conditions are right, crystals of salt form on the surface of the salt beds. These crystals are raked up to become Fleur de Sel. This is a form of refined salt. It is also the process used to make Diamond Kosher salt.

Red Alae Hawaiian sea Salt. A sea salt that has an iron taste from the soil that is added to give it the famous red color.

Black Alae Hawaiian Sea Salt. Sea salt with a sulfuric aroma from the added powdered lava.

In addition to naturally flavored salts, there are flavored salts in which flavorings are added to ordinary table salt. The variations are almost limitless.

Garlic salt

(Continued on page 15)

In last July's issue of The SCAM, my column, "*A Fellow Mensan in Need*" attempted to relate to you the plight of a fellow Mensan. In that column, I introduced you to Dr. Robert M. Strippy, a retired history professor, who is Past LocSec of Thomas Jefferson Mensa (Virginia) and past Editor of the *Sally Hemings Memorial Newsletter*. Bob, 70, is in poor health and is, indeed, very fortunate to still be alive. This is despite the fact that Bob has been incarcerated for approximately the past year and a half for what was, at best, a questionable conviction. One item worthy of note here is that when Bob entered the system, his Social Security benefits were stopped, as required by law (*).

Moreover, it is evident that the Virginia Department of Corrections is ill equipped to handle the needs and medical problems of its elderly prisoners. I am led to believe that Virginia's situation is far from unique, and that the problem, nationwide, is bound to worsen as our population ages and we begin to feel the full effect of popular "zero-tolerance" and "mandatory sentencing" laws passed over the last 10 – 15 years. At this point, I would encourage the reader to reread my original article in order to place this Update in its proper context. If you do not have a copy of the July 2004 SCAM, visit <http://spacecoastareamensa.org>, click "newsletter", then "July 2004". It is a .pdf file of the entire newsletter. You will need Acrobat Reader (it is free) to read it.

Here, then is the update, provided by Didi Pancake a close friend to Bob Strippy:

"Bob and I have just received word from Bob's lawyer that the Appeals Court declined to hear his appeal. Evidently, when one requests an expedited review, the case is reviewed by only one of the three judges...this one denied it.... The other side of this coin is that the lawyer has skipped the idea of requesting an addition review by all 3 judges at the Appeals Court level and has taken the whole thing directly to the Virginia Supreme Court. This at least saves about 3 or 4 months of time at the Appeals Court level. Bob is, of course, quite discouraged by this development. He was hoping that the Appeal Court would grant him a new trial which would be conducted properly and allow the evidence that was not able to be presented the first

(Continued on page 16)

(Continued from page 14)

Onion salt
Chili salt
Smoke flavored salt
Italian seasoning salt
And so forth.

Last month, I posed my question, "How do you think the Bush Administration proposes to resolve the Social Security crisis without raising taxes, raising the eligibility age or lowering the benefits?" Below, one possible solution is offered:

Inflation is a subtle tax imposed by crooked or incompetent governments. Since the late 80's, the government has lied about inflation to cheat on cost-of-living increases.

1. Private account: no effect except to line the pockets of rich investors and brokers.
2. No tax increase: keep the rates the same.
3. Benefits: freeze the dollar amount.

- George Legters

*(Continued from page 15)
time.*

He is also having trouble with his medications again. A week or so ago, the doctor allowed him to take responsibility for his own medications, but now, as he runs out of individual types of pills, he is having trouble getting more. Also, when he went to see the doctor a few days ago, it turns out that none of the records from (prior medical facilities) and all the tests and diagnoses done at those places were sent along to Greensville (a previous prison facility), and this doctor is now talking about starting over to diagnose his various problems. Sheesh. I wish there was something we could do from outside here to help with this, but I am seriously afraid that if any of us start writing to various prison officials about this situation, we will only worsen Bob's situation...."

There you have it. The good news, of course, is that Bob (for now) is still among the living, albeit only by the grace of God. The question remains, as it did back in July, will Bob Strippy live to be exonerated? The larger question, of course, is how long will we, as a society, allow conditions such as these to continue? Or will these problems merely be seen as "collateral damage" in our current leaders' quest for solutions for what they deem to be our pressing social issues of the day (perhaps like "saving" Social Security)? If our conservative brethren have their way, most of us will not see any improvement in our lifetimes.

(* See www.ssa.gov, click "questions", and select "benefits".

**There can be no Christmas?
The Dickens, you say!**

The continuing assault on Christianity continues in America, with the latest salvoes against the public display of anything relating to the reason for celebrating December 25th: the birth of Christ.

Now, I grant you, the actual date of birth of Christ is unknown. However, it is a fact that December 25th has been celebrated as the birth date since the Roman Emperor Constantine and Pope Julius I established it as such in 340A.D.

Christmas first became known as *The Feast of Nativity* around 336A.D. The word “Christmas” was first used in English around 1050A.D., taken from the Old English phrase *Christes maesse*, meaning “festival of Christ”. “Xmas”, the popular shorthand usage, came into play as early as the 13th century; the “X” represents the Greek letter *Chi*, which is an abbreviation of Christ (Khristos); it also stands for the cross on which Jesus was crucified. The nativity scene was first introduced in 1223A.D. in Italy by Francis of Assisi. The good saint is also credited with the earliest introduction of Christmas carols, songs about the Nativity. Carols as we know them came into being over 500 years ago, with most of the carols we are familiar with composed in the 18th and 19th centuries

So, to recap: the celebration of the birth of the Christian savior is a tradition going back over 1,800 years, with the current date of December 25th being celebrated over 1,600 years. The english word “Christmas” itself has been in use for this celebration for almost 1,000 years, and the depiction of the birth of Jesus goes back nearly 800 years. We’ve even been able to sing about it for more than half a millennium.

Why am I going over all this? Because in these days of Political Correctness, “Christmas” has become a four-letter word to the Determiners of Diversity.

Traditions extending back the greater part of two millennia have become, to the preachers of Tolerance, insensitive... offensive... intolerable.

“I have endeavoured in this Ghostly little book, to raise the Ghost of an Idea, which shall not put my readers out of humour with themselves, with each other, with the season, or with me. May it haunt their houses pleasantly, and no one wish to lay it.” Thus wrote Charles Dickens about “A Christmas Carol” in 1843. No mention of Jesus, no deep religious connotations. Dickens is considered the father of today’s secularized Christmas. Yet in 2002 South Orange Middle School in New Jersey cancelled an annual trip to see the play in New York because there was some concern that it had something to do with... Christmas.

The same South Orange/Maplewood School District has also banned

the playing of instrumental Christmas music (lyrical versions having already been banned) by school bands. I can't believe that anybody in this entire world can find anything offensive about the instrumental "Carol of the Bells". It is simply one of the most beautiful pieces of holiday music there is. Even the lyrics are secular. There are no religious overtones at all, unless, as the Liberals believe, the four mentions of the word "Christmas" is egregiously religious.

In Pittsburgh, PA there is no Christmas Season. For the past decade it has been celebrated as "Sparkle Season".

In Texas, Plano Independent School District policy "prohibits students from wearing the colors red and green at their 'winter break' parties because...they are Christmas colors."

In 2001 The school board in Covington, GA voted to "remove" the word Christmas from the school calendar after threats from (who else) the ACLU.

The mayor of Sommerville, MA issued an official apology to city residents for daring to call the city's seasonal celebration a "Christmas Party", and declared that it would henceforth be known as the "City Holiday party".

In Denver, organizers of the Parade of Lights, an event that has taken place for 30 years, told the Faith Bible Church that they and their Christmas carols would not be welcome because they might offend some along the parade route. The parade, billed as an *"international procession to celebrate the cultural and ethnic diversity of the region"*, included German folk dancers, a gay and lesbian Indian group, and belly dancers, but a Christian themed float was banned because it would have included a message reading "Merry Christmas." Yeah, real tolerance and diversity there.

New York City School Chancellor Joel Klein has ruled that a Nativity scene is banned (during Christmas) from the city's 1200 public school displays, while the Jewish Menorah (during Hanukkah) and the Islamic Star and Crescent (during Ramadan) are allowed. According to the chancellor, the Menorah and the Star and Crescent are religious symbols, but they are permitted because in his opinion each demonstrates a "secular dimension."

Similarly, in Florida, Nativity scenes are banned while the Menorah is displayed. Bay Harbor Islands has adorned its lampposts with Jewish menorahs and stars of David to commemorate Hanukkah and has allowed a synagogue to display its 14-foot Menorah in the most prominent public location at the entrance of the city, while a privately funded Nativity crèche is denied similar usage.

Then vice-mayor Isaac Salver is quoted as telling the Nativity owner: "It is sad to see one get deeply offended by something as trivial as holiday decorations", when denying her request.

"The University of Alabama's Office of Cultural Diversity recommends that all nativity scenes should be banned because they are 'religion-centered.' The menorah, which is a Jewish religious symbol, is 'fine' be-



cause it is really a 'secular' symbol."

After a local school multicultural committee in Pennsylvania set up a holiday display that included a crèche, a menorah, and a Kwanzaa scene, the principal demanded that the crèche be removed, although the other items could stay.

Christmas trees around the country (at least in most liberal bastions) are taboo: now only "Holiday Trees" or "Giving Trees" are acceptable for public display.

Now, for a little history lesson...

Hanukkah commemorates the rededication of the holy Temple in Jerusalem after the Jews' 165 B.C. victory over the Hellenist Syrians. For the celebration, the Maccabees wanted to light the menorah. They looked everywhere for oil, and found one flask that contained only enough oil to keep the menorah burning for one day. Miraculously, the oil lasted for eight days. This gave them enough time to obtain new oil to keep the menorah lit. Today Jews celebrate Hanukkah for eight days by lighting candles in a menorah every night, thus commemorating the eight-day miracle.

Nothing religious in that tradition, is there?

The Star and Crescent of Islam was first hoisted on behalf of the Muslims by Mahomet II after the capture of Constantinople in 1453A.D. Although the origins of the two symbols are deeply religious, Islamic scholars deny any religious meaning to them for modern Muslims.

Kwanzaa is a creation of Ron N. Everett, a black nationalist radical of the 1960s. By 1965 he had changed his name to a more ethnic Maulana Karenga and, a year later, invented Kwanzaa. After a four year stint in the California Penal system for torturing two women with soldering irons and vises, he founded Kawaida, (Swahili, meaning tradition and reason). Kwanzaa is an adjunct of Kawaida, and both were intended as an alternative to Christianity, which Karenga views as mysticism.

One need but take a few seconds to think about media coverage, as well as official observances by various level government agencies to see that of these four "cultural" events, these days Christmas not only gets the shortest shrift, it is constantly under attack by the purveyors of PC for being exclusionary, whereas Kwanzaa, Ramadan, and to a much lesser degree Hanukkah, are celebrated for their secularity, and for their unique "cultural" relevance.

Yet Christmas can only be defined as the celebration of the birth of a belief and culture that has survived 2000 years, numerous schisms, and self-inflicted scandals with the underlying message still intact:

"PEACE ON EARTH, GOOD WILL TOWARD MEN"

How much more relevant to hundreds of millions of believers can you get?

I hope you and yours had a joyful Christmas season surrounded by the love of those nearest and dearest to you.

It is a bedrock article of faith among modern conservatives that the private sector is universally efficient and responsive to customer demand. The right wing holds that the for-profit model is therefore the solution to all society's ills, in contrast with the government sector, which conservatives invariably characterize as bungling, out-of-touch, and corrupt.

During a working vacation in the middle of this past summer, the author had an experience that calls into question the paradigm stated above, at least the first portion.

This author had scheduled a delivery by one of the nationwide mega stores that in recent decades have become a prominent part of the American economic landscape. This particular chain has executed the classic “mega store strategy,” in that it has used its size to leverage prices, thereby undercutting local competition until the small retailers are driven out of business, and the mega store has achieved a regional monopoly, with consequent limited selection and limited service.

The delivery was scheduled for Wednesday July 7. When no delivery (and no notification of a problem) had occurred by mid-afternoon, the author contacted Megastore, and immediately encountered an obstacle to satisfactory resolution. It turns out that Megastore has outsourced its delivery service to another company, which in turn, had subcontracted with yet another company, who will be identified here as “Velocipede Express.” Every inquiry had to be relayed, with a promise to call back. After numerous phone calls and broken promises by Megastore, that evening the author was assured that the delivery would take place by noon on Thursday July 8. If the quality of *A View From Somewhere Else* suffered during this period, it was because the author was prompted to abandon his word-processor and rush outdoors every time he thought he heard a delivery truck.

In the early afternoon on July 8, the author again attempted to ascertain the status from Megastore. No doubt weary of the author's repeated inquiries, Megastore suggested the author contact Velocipede Express directly. On the telephone, a disinterested (and quite rude) employee of Velocipede Express refused to provide any status, since Megastore and Velocipede use different tracking systems for their shipments. The author responded to this information by expressing his displeasure in rather frank terms, but fortunately the conversation ended before any of the words on George Carlin's list were actually uttered.

Before the author could call Megastore and cancel the order, the deliveryman entered the picture in time to provide comic relief. It appears the deliveryman had gotten lost and was calling for directions. Several hours later, a second phone call by the deliveryman indicated he was still lost, but now in a different part of town. Upon the third (and increasingly panicky) telephone call by the deliveryman, in the late afternoon, the author

was able to determine the shipment's location, and advised the deliveryman to stay where he was. The author then found the deliveryman, and shepherded the shipment to the intended destination.

Once the shipment was received, the author provided the deliveryman with a hand-drawn map to accomplish his next delivery (which was a prominent local landmark), and upon further inquiry, added directions for the return trek to Velocipede's fulfillment center in Orlando.

In contrast to this anomaly in the inherent goodness of the free market, within a few days of his unpleasant interaction with Velocipede, the author viewed a network news program that included a segment on the practice of "boosting."

"Boosting" is a term used by law enforcement to describe organized shoplifting. Boosters (usually non-U.S. citizens) operate in teams, and are able to steal large amounts of luxury goods (typically high-end clothing) and depart the premises before the retailer even realizes that he has been victimized.

Boosters are trained to carefully select both their target stores and the products to be acquired. A boosting hit is a high-precision operation, with team-members coordinating their assignments so that some members block the lines-of-sight from the security cameras and from the proprietor, while others collect merchandise. Boosters are coached to dress and act in ways that will not arouse suspicion. They are equipped with special containers, which appear to be ordinary shopping bags but are configured with hidden foil liners so as to circumvent the automatic security systems.

Geographically savvy, boosters may travel hundreds of miles to stage an operation. Boosters and their managers also have a working knowledge of the U.S. judicial system, in that shop-lifting is treated as a relatively minor matter, so that the members are usually released and working a new location within days. Members of the boosting team are responsible for taking care of the others, including posting bail money and evading deportation, if necessary.

It is ironic to note, at least in these two cases, that criminal enterprise seems to have learned lessons that legitimate private enterprise neglects- the value of employee training, preparation, and teamwork.

No doubt, Megastore's outsourcing to Velocipede represents financial savings on paper. But there are hidden costs when this author (and others who are similarly inconvenienced and lied to) are reluctant to ever do business with Megastore again. Granted, there are few alternatives, but it is nonetheless a case of false economics from short-sighted decision-making.

Obviously, this author is not overjoyed to hear that Velocipede Express is on the way, and he is somewhat skeptical when others suggest that we "let the private sector handle it."

Note: The preceding story is true. The names, however, have been altered to protect the guilty.

Cercise your brain to get ready for CultureQuest®! Here's a tough question to ponder:

Name a feat that became one.

a. A woman in Brazil tapdanced for exactly 23.58 days in 2001. She was allowed to eat and use the bathroom, of course, but those feet had to keep going as she did both.

b. Now here's a weird one. A 38-year old magician in Quebec learned how to swallow his entire hand [up to his watch]. In 1987 he managed to keep it engorged for 28 hours and 17 minutes. He claims he could have gone longer but got hungry.

c. A young man in Milwaukee (just 17 years old) made 604 successful foul shots in a row in 1999. The oddest thing about it is that this fellow named Kevin Humphries was not even on his high school basketball team!

d. In 2004 a man in Germany took only 11.8 seconds to calculate the 13th root of a randomly given 100-digit number in his head. The big question now is: Can he balance his checkbook?

While you're pondering the answer (or maybe Googling to find it), mark your calendar for Sunday, April 10, CultureQuest day. CQ rules and application are available under Event Registration in the Member Resources area of the Mensa website: <https://secure.us.mensa.org/members/eventreg.php>. Or email CQ Chair Mick Richmond at CultureQuest@us.mensa.org. The answer to the silly question will be in this column next month; it's true that one feat is documented fact and the others are total fiction. If you can't wait, contact me.

Have you renewed your membership? At the end of 2004, Mensa went over the 50,000 mark, doing better than 2003's 49,337. Renew via the website to save time, www.us.mensa.org. To make things even easier, Mensa now accepts American Express and Discover in addition to Visa and MasterCard. You can also do a debit from your checking account. So there's no excuse. Do it today!

Have a sweet and loving Valentine's Day!

Coming Events:

Colloquium 2005, Earth in Mind: Fueling the Future, : March 4-6, 2005, Tucson, AZ, www.colloquium.us.mensa.org

MindGames, April 15-17, hosted by our very own Tampa Bay Mensa, Double Tree Hotel-Tampa Westshore Airport. Registration-\$65 to 4/1. Send registrations to MindGames 2005, 1229 Corporate Drive W, Arlington, TX 76006-6103.

FloRanGe '05-Suite Mayhem, Broward Mensa's RG over Memorial Day weekend, May 27-30, Tampa Bay Mensa's traditional spot on the calendar. Since that group is doing MindGames, Broward Mensa is hosting the 3-day RG in Fort Lauderdale. Can't miss a chance to party! Contact Robin Rhea, 954.575.1639, robinrhea@bellsouth.net for information.

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The ExComm met at the Cocoa Public Library on Sunday, January 9, 2005. Called to order at 4:08 pm by LocSec Sam Kirschten.

Members present: Sam Kirschten, Helen Lee Moore, Joe Smith and George Patterson. Suzanne Leichtling was unable to attend.

Welcome guests: Clara Moran, chairman of the Nominations and Elections Committee, and Mike Moakley, editor of The SCAM.

Minutes for the November 14, 2004 meeting were approved as published.

Moved by Joe, approved 3-0 with Helen abstaining.

Officer Reports:

Treasurer: December 31, 2004 report distributed by Helen.

Testing: Helen (Proctor Coordinator) reported that a testing session was scheduled for Saturday, January 15, at the Cocoa Public Library. She also reported that we had yet to find a permanent location for these sessions, since some public buildings were denied to us because we charge \$30.00 for the test.

There were no other officer reports.

Committee Reports:

NomElCom: Clara reported that the committee currently has identified six viable candidates and hopes to add several more.

Old Business: Following the minutes for Nov. 14, published in the January SCAM, the RecSec told of an ExComm vote conducted by Email confirming the NomElCom. It was decided that the proper way to legitimize such actions was to acknowledge them at the subsequent ExComm meeting. Accordingly, Joe moved and Helen seconded that the RecSec's commentary regarding the vote be entered into these minutes. Passed unanimously. The comments follow, slightly rearranged and parenthesized for clarity.

The appointment of Clara, J.T. and Mike (to NomElCom) was briefly discussed on Oct. 31, but not acted upon in the Nov. 14 meeting.

An Email sent by Helen to all ExComm members on Nov. 15 requested Ex-Comm members to move, second, and vote (on this matter).

An Email sent by Helen to all ExComm members on Nov. 17 reads, in part, as follows:

“ . . .I've notified the NomElComm of their appointment so that they can get started finding a slate of candidates. . . . Let the next set of minutes reflect the vote on the email ballot: Moved, H. L. Moore, Seconded, George Patterson and Joe Smith, that the Executive Committee appoint Clara Woodall-Moran, J. T. Moran and Michael Moakley to the Nominations and Elections Committee for the 2005 election. Passed. FOR- Moore, Patterson, Smith; Kirschten and Leichtling not voting. (Leichtling later concurred)”

New Business: none.

The next meeting of the ExComm is scheduled for Sunday, February 6, at 4:00 pm at the home of Helen Lee Moore.

Joe moved to adjourn at 4:55 pm, passed by unanimous vote.