

MARTIN GARDNER

1914–2010

A Tribute and Celebration

Martin Gardner, the polymath writer, critic, and skeptic who is widely regarded as the father of modern skepticism, died May 22, 2010, in Norman, Oklahoma, at the age of ninety-five. He helped found our Committee for Skeptical Inquiry (then CSICOP) and wrote for this magazine since its inception. (His final “Notes of a Fringe Watcher”

column appears on page 10.) Throughout his life, Gardner wrote knowledgeably about an astonishing range of topics with a combination of clarity, wit, and critical intelligence that delighted readers worldwide. Those who knew him regarded him as a dear friend, a modest man, and a national intellectual treasure. In a celebration of his life, writings,

and mind, we here present invited tributes from a number of noted skeptics and scholars. We begin with two of his closest friends and colleagues, Ray Hyman and James Randi. Like him, they were founding fellows of CSICOP and original and longtime members of its executive council.

—The Editor

Martin Gardner: A Polymath to the Nth Power

RAY HYMAN

Persi Diaconis phoned me on May 17, 2010. He told me he recently spoke with Martin Gardner by phone. Among other things, they had talked about me. He also said that Martin sounded fine and seemed to be as cognitively sharp as always. I had not spoken with Martin for quite a while. I made a note on my calendar to call him on Saturday, May 22. On that Saturday, I was about to call Martin when I got a phone call from Martin’s son, James. James told me that his father had passed away a few moments earlier.

Many persons—too many—would seek mystical meaning in this “coincidence.” Martin, of course, devoted much of his life to teaching us how easily our minds create meaning out of post hoc juxtapositions of random events. Although he thought that most believers were impervious to reason, he persevered in his quest to show that most, if not all, paranormal claims cannot be

supported by the evidence. He felt that his background as a magician enabled him to explain how many alleged psychic occurrences were due to trickery or mundane causes.

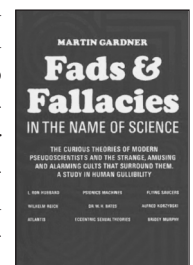
I first met Martin in 1950 at the home of Bruce Elliot in Greenwich Village in New York. Bruce published a magazine on magic, *The Phoenix*, and wrote several books about magic. Every Saturday he hosted a gathering for magicians from New York or who happened to be in the vicinity. I was twenty-one years old when I was invited to attend. This was the first time I met many celebrity magicians such as Dai Vernon, Jay Marshall, and Martin Gardner.

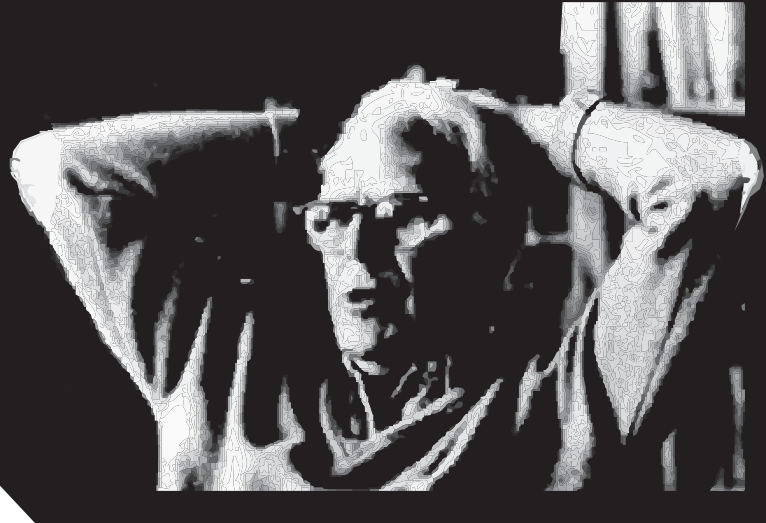
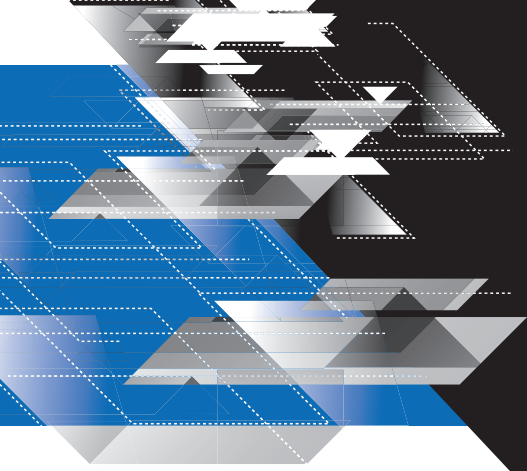
Martin and I became good friends. I knew him as a magician, a creator of magic effects, and a writer of excellent books on magic. In addition, we shared an interest in investigating and challenging paranormal claims. Soon after our first meeting, Martin published his classic

In the Name of Science (1952). The book was re-issued in 1957, with some updating, under the title *Fads and Fallacies in the Name of Science*. It serves as the prototype for modern skeptical criticism.

From 1958 to 1961, while I was doing psychological research for General Electric, I lived in Hartsdale, about twenty-five miles from Martin Gardner’s home on Euclid Avenue in Hastings-on-the-Hudson, New York. During this period my wife and I would get together with Martin and his wife, Charlotte, for dinner. I also was able to visit and talk with him about our mutual interests.

When I moved to Oregon in 1961 to work at the University of Oregon, Martin phoned Jerry Andrus and told him I had moved into his neighborhood. He suggested that Jerry contact me. Jerry did and we became close friends until Jerry’s unfortunate death in August 2007. Martin and Jerry are the two most impressive individuals I have ever known. Both were essentially self-taught in magic, philosophy, science, and other areas.



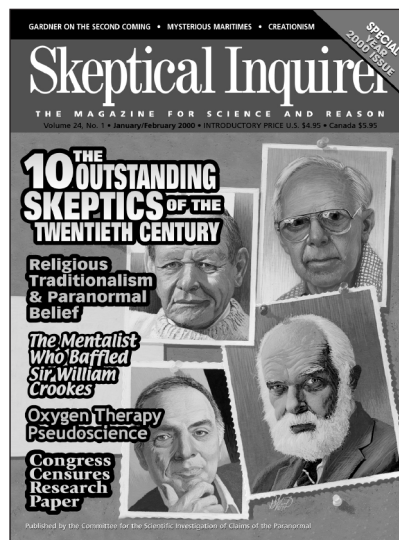


You can gain some insights into the range and impact of Martin's productive life by reading the many obituaries that have appeared online. In the remaining few lines at my disposal, I will discuss only a couple of my many personal stories involving this Renaissance man.

I have always been interested in how productive individuals organize their lives and manage their data. Soon after Martin's operation for cataracts, I asked him how he managed to read and review so many books while continuing his prodigious literary output and maintaining a colossal correspondence. Martin told me that, in most cases, he did not actually read the books he reviewed. Instead, he simply scanned the index, which provided all the information he needed for his review.

I was incredulous at first, but on second thought I realized that this was consistent with my research on information theory and redundancy. I had already discovered that I could scan the indices of textbooks in statistics, perception, and cognitive psychology and know all I needed to know about how the book handled its topic. For example, by noting the topics the author listed and, more importantly, the ones she did not, I could confidently guess her stance on various issues. This was because I already knew these areas quite well. Martin's ability to exploit redundancy induced me to conduct research on speed reading. I discovered that gradu-

ates from speed reading classes who claim to be reading 1,000 or more words per minute are actually skipping over large chunks of text by exploiting redundancy. When they are given text to read from domains with which they are unfamiliar, their reading drops to the same speed as those who have never taken a special course.



Martin not only wrote the seminal textbook for the modern skeptical movement, but he was also central to the actual founding of the movement. In December 1972, I was sent by the Defense Department to observe Uri Geller and the researchers at the Stanford Research Institute (SRI). My report, which I shared with Martin,

made it clear that nothing that this alleged psychic did had anything to do with the paranormal. Soon after that, Randi observed Geller at the offices of *Time* magazine in New York. He, too, saw through Geller's pretensions.

In 1973, Randi phoned me from Portland, Oregon. He was touring with Alice Cooper and asked me to travel from Eugene to Portland to meet him. While I was in Portland, Randi reviewed our experiences with Geller and suggested that we get together with Martin Gardner and form a group to counter false claims of the paranormal. He suggested we call the group SIR (Sanity in Research), which evoked the acronym SRI.

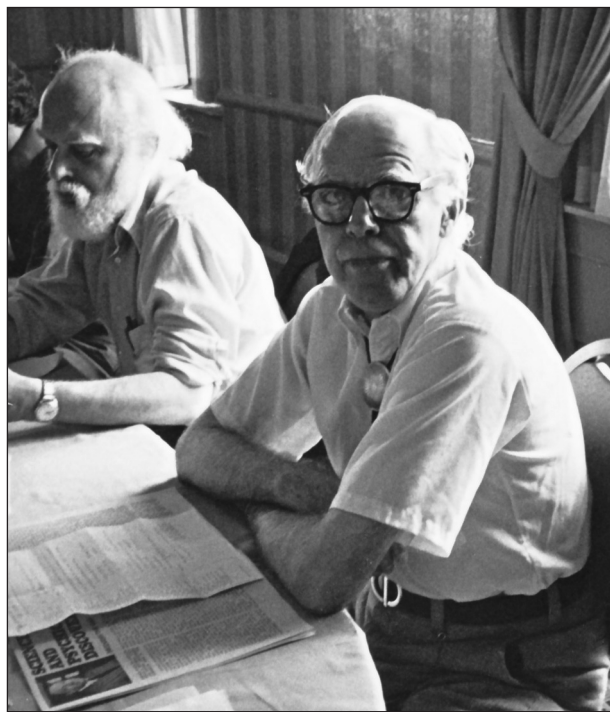
Randi and I soon afterwards spent a day with Martin at his home in Hastings-on-Hudson preparing a detailed document of the goals and hopes for our new group. In 1976, SIR joined forces with Paul Kurtz, who was already publishing skeptical articles in *The Humanist*, which he edited at that time. The resulting organization became known as CSICOP (now CSI), and the contemporary skeptical movement was born.

Ray Hyman is emeritus professor of psychology at the University of Oregon. An expert in the psychology of self-deception, he is a founding fellow of CSICOP and founding member of the CSICOP executive council.

Martin Gardner Has Left Us

JAMES RANDI

Where to begin? I've really no idea where or exactly when I first met Martin Gardner. I believe our first meeting occurred in the offices of *Scientific American* magazine more than six decades ago, but it seems that I have always known him. He became such a fixture in my life, such a dependable part of my world. I was so very accustomed to picking up the telephone to call him or answering a call from him that always resulted in an improvement of my knowledge of the universe.



Martin Gardner (front) and James Randi at the very first CSICOP meeting, August 1977 in New York City.

Traveling the world, as I have done most of my life, I've found that some academics doubt that I actually knew this legendary figure in person. I recall that when I delivered a lecture to the systems engineers of IBM many years ago, a talk during which I referred to Martin, I was besieged by a group from the audience who asked me to settle whether Martin was an actual individual or perhaps an amalgamation of Isaac Asimov,

Arthur C. Clarke, and maybe a magician colleague of mine, since his writings so frequently touched on the sort of expertise that only such a trio could summon up. They were appropriately amazed and edified when I assured them that this paragon was actually a single person, a real human being who was quite as accomplished as he appeared to be.

Another matter on which I was queried from time to time was whether or not Martin actually had academic degrees in mathematics—which he did

not. As he once expressed it to me, after beginning his column in *Scientific American* (SA), he sort of learned it as he went along. And I must say that I believe that was true. He always expressed his delight at something that he had just stumbled upon or that had occurred to his agile mind as he applied it to a problem at hand. Indeed, "delight" was a major characteristic of this man's makeup.

That enthusiasm certainly carried over into his books and his SA column. He was constantly celebrating discoveries, expanding on them, and looking for new ways to communicate them to the public—and especially to young people. He was never happier than when he was in the company of kids to whom he would present a brain teaser, followed by the "Aha!" phase in which he would provide an answer—usually totally unexpected—that made everything quite clear.

That lucidity of his work made him a great teacher. His weaving of a story might have been inspired by his total

admiration for the Alice stories by Lewis Carroll. He pored over every sentence that Carroll had constructed and extracted from them every sort of nuance he could, and of course he recorded his observations in writing—to the delight of his many, many fans over the years and around the globe. Martin's spectrum of interest was very broad. His coterie of friends included major professional magicians, mathematicians of every sort, philosophers, a few scoundrels, and a sufficient variety of weirdos to round out his perception of the world. As an atheist myself, I admit that I was somewhat surprised that this man was a deist. When I inquired about this apparent lapse of logic, he calmly informed me that he was well aware the atheists had a much better argument than he did and that in fact he had no supporting evidence for his acceptance of a deity. It simply made him "feel more comfortable," and knowing Martin as I did, I merely accepted that fact and somewhat celebrated it. Anything that improved Martin's life improved mine.

At our next Amazing Meeting in July, we of the James Randi Educational Foundation will certainly not hold any sort of memorial to Martin Gardner. That would have embarrassed him hugely, I'm quite sure. His son Jim, calling me to announce his father's demise, added that the will he left behind specified that there be no funeral and that cremation would be preferred. That's my Martin, and I expected no less. No, at the July conference we will celebrate the existence of this fine gentleman, one of my giants, a huge intellect, a prolific author, and a caring, responsible, citizen of the world. If we can manage it, we'll have balloons and dancing girls—which would have titillated Mr. Gardner, I guarantee you.

Yes, he's gone away, but his wise words and his great love for reason and compassion will remain with us forever. I loved him dearly, but I leave him to the ages.

Magician, investigator, and writer James Randi is founder of the James Randi Educational Foundation. Randi was an original member of the CSICOP executive council and is a founding fellow.

Martin Gardner's Contributions to the World of Books

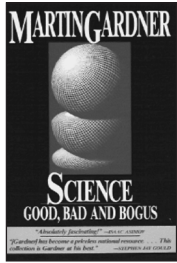
PAUL KURTZ

Martin Gardner was a unique man of letters, a science writer who not only wrote columns for *Scientific American* and the SKEPTICAL INQUIRER but who was a prolific author of over seventy books! Perhaps his reputation in the long run will depend on the provocative books that he authored over the years. Although we may be at “the beginning of the end of the Age of Books” (alas!), Gardner stands out as a heroic author whose books on pseudoscience we hope will be read in the future with relish and delight—as reminders of how easy it is to be deceived.

I know Martin Gardner best as a book author; Prometheus Books published at least twenty-five of his books. Several of these were new editions of books previously published. I founded Prometheus in 1969, and it has devoted more attention than any other press to publishing books on scientific skepticism and the paranormal. Martin was tickled pink that Prometheus Books was willing to take on the paranormalists.

I first got to know Martin when I founded the modern skeptics movement (in the guise of CSICOP, later CSI), so to speak, and invited him to the inaugural meeting at the State University of New York at Buffalo on April 30, 1976. I was delighted when he accepted and even more so when he appeared. His publishing romance with Prometheus began a few years later. He shared with us a devotion to books—the idea that books should be cherished as virtually “sacred” because of their enduring contributions to culture.

Martin's first book with Prometheus was *Science: Good, Bad and Bogus* (1981). *The New York Times* described it as “a valuable book . . . an ally of com-



Martin Gardner (right) talking with Paul Kurtz at 1989's CSICOP Executive Council meeting in Tampa, Florida. Gardner rarely attended meetings, and his legendary elusiveness seems evident even here, with his back mostly to the camera.

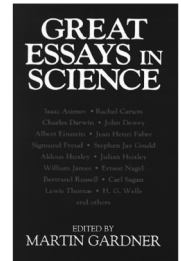
mon sense.” It was a nominee for a national book award. So his career with Prometheus got off to a rousing start. We would hear from him almost biweekly thereafter, as he kept proposing books and then saw them through the editorial process until publication. Martin had a keen intelligence and a sharp wit, which he used with consummate skill.

We were intrigued with the titles that he came up with, such as *On the Wild Side* (hardcover 1992, paperback 2004), which dealt with the big bang, ESP, the Beast 666, levitation, rainmaking, trance-channeling, séances, ghosts, and more. Another one was *How Not to Test a Psychic* (1989). (Incidentally, the complete list of Martin Gardner's books still available from Prometheus Books may be read online.)

It was amazing to me how Martin was able to delve into what many considered nutty claims. He took them seriously and made them seem even nuttier,

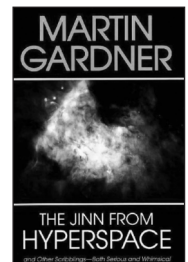
such as in his book *Urantia: The Great Cult Mystery* (1995, revised 2008). Martin told me that he maintained extensive clippings on a wide range of topics and so could bring empirical facts to bear to expose the beliefs held.

An important book by Martin was *Great Essays in Science* (1994), which included thirty-one of some of the best writings in science over the past 100 years. These included thought-provoking contributions that represented the peak of accomplishments in science.



Prometheus also published a novel by Martin called *The Flight of Peter Fromm* (1994), which seemed to echo his own religious beliefs. I was curious that Martin himself clung to his religious faith in God, somewhat apologetically. “I can't prove it,” he seemed to say, “but I am attached to it.” I found this statement rather charming, if only because it contradicts doctrinaire atheists who insist that any true skeptic must be an atheist.

Gardner's last new book with Prometheus was *The Jinn from Hyperspace and Other Scribblings—Both Serious and Whimsical* (2007). *New Scientist* reviewed the book by stating that it was “clear, closely argued, and entertaining . . . a fascinating insight into the breadth of interest and fecundity of the man now in his nineties.”



To which I say amen about all of Gardner's books, an inexhaustible treasury of insight and wisdom. Martin Gardner played a key role in his time as a keen advocate of science, a luminary in the constellation of skeptics. He will be sorely missed.

Paul Kurtz is the founder of the Committee for Skeptical Inquiry, the Council for Secular Humanism, the Center for Inquiry, and Prometheus Books. He is emeritus professor of philosophy, State University of New York at Buffalo.

We Have Lost an Icon

JAMES ALCOCK

It takes a special kind of person to write insightfully about quantum mechanics and mathematics—and literature and religion and pseudoscience and conjuring and philosophy. And it takes a very special kind of person to be able to do so in a way that is comprehensible, enlightening, entertaining to the intelligent layperson, and worthy of the respect of experts. Such a rare person was Martin Gardner, and his achievements are all the more impressive given that he was largely self-taught and without advanced degrees in physics, mathematics, literature, or philosophy.

I knew Martin Gardner the icon rather well, and I owe him a considerable debt for what I have learned from him over the years. When I was an undergraduate physics student, my classmates and I avidly devoured his “Mathematical Games” column in *Scientific American*, along with his published collections of mathematical puzzles and enigmas and his other books on science and mathematics. He helped make mathematics and physics delightful to pursue. Later on, when I switched disciplines and became a graduate student in psychology, I turned to his writings once again when I was asked—nay, virtually ordered—by the department chair to prepare a critical examination of extrasensory perception (ESP) for presentation to undergraduate students who were clamoring for such a talk. I knew nothing of the subject at the time; so where was I to begin, given the

apparent paucity of critical literature on the subject? I dug out *Fads and Fallacies in the Name of Science* and let Martin introduce me to the subject. That simple beginning unexpectedly led me into decades of critical commentary and debate with regard to parapsychology.

Later on, as a young psychology professor, I was researching how people maintain their beliefs in the face of contradictory evidence. I wanted a demonstration that would confront subjects with ostensible evidence that something they held to be absolutely true was apparently false. Where to begin? I turned to Martin Gardner once again: I began re-reading some of his books and articles and soon came across the perfect vehicle for my research—a puzzle, invented a century earlier by Sam Lloyd but preserved and analyzed by Gardner, in which a piece of paper of a certain area, when cut into pieces and the pieces rearranged, appears quite clearly to have gained in area. This was ideal for my purpose, for psychologists had long believed that all of us acquire in childhood a firm belief in “conservation of area,” so that we “know” that area cannot be changed by the rearrangement of component parts.

I had always been very impressed by Martin Gardner the icon, but I was fortunate enough to be able to meet Martin Gardner the man. This came about when I was made a member of the CSICOP executive council. With this appoint-

ment, I was delighted that I would rub shoulders with the man himself, for he was one of the founders of CSICOP and a member of its executive council. I soon learned, however, that he was averse to travel and did not usually attend council meetings. I therefore had to wait to meet him until a meeting was held in Atlanta, which was near enough to his home at the time that he did indeed attend. Martin the man proved to be as impressive as Martin the icon. He was gentle, intelligent, witty, modest, curious, and filled with creative energy and imagination. A longtime fan such as I could not avoid feeling a little star-struck, although it was very clear that stardom was the last thing that he wanted. I remember our first conversation very well: he was a major contributor to the conjuring literature, and when he learned that I was an amateur magician, he immediately and graciously responded by sharing with me a new magical effect that he had just invented. I was struck by his warmth, his lack of pretense, and his excitement about sharing new ideas.

As I reminisce, I see that Martin has had an important influence on me—as he no doubt has had upon countless others who have been devoted to his scholarship—for a very long time. Whether as Martin the icon or Martin the man, he has enriched our lives. We shall all miss him.

James Alcock is professor of psychology at Glendon College, York University, Toronto, and author of such books as *Parapsychology: Science or Magic?* He is a founding CSICOP fellow and became a member of the executive council in 1983.

A World Treasure

KENDRICK FRAZIER

One day back in 1974, when I was editor of *Science News* in Washington, DC, the mail brought a letter from Martin Gardner. I knew of him, of course, as the “Mathematical Games” columnist in *Scientific American* and as author of the seminal work about pseudoscience and crackpots, *Fads and Fallacies in the Name of Science*. I’d had a copy of that fascinating book since a friend gave it to me as a

gift in graduate school. I loved it. Martin’s letter gently but firmly criticized us for a series of three articles we had run over a period of months dealing with some fringe science matters: Uri Geller, Kirlian photography, and Transcendental Meditation. Readers had requested the articles. This was the heyday of Geller’s then-rising popularity, and Geller had some (naive) scientists vouching for his

powers. The other two subjects were likewise attracting a lot of media and popular interest. We had done our best to treat them carefully and with some skepticism, but except for the one on Geller, Martin didn’t think we’d done a particularly good job and was worried we’d put aside our usual scientific standards by writing about them at all.

I wasn’t at all offended by his criticism; in fact, I welcomed it. I wrote him back. I told him science writers and editors like me had few resources for checking the validity of these kinds of claims. I told him we needed people like him who

had the necessary critical perspective and information to help us. Some sort of group of scientific experts was needed to give us that kind of help.

So it was perhaps not surprising that in the spring of 1976 I found myself covering for *Science News* an unusual conference on “The New Irrationalisms: Pseudoscience and Anti-Science” at the brand new SUNY Buffalo campus, at which philosopher Paul Kurtz announced the creation of the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal. It was exactly what I had asked for. My subsequent article for *Science News*—our cover pictured a small knight-like skeptic with only a sword of reason challenging a giant multi-headed dragon of pseudoscience (May 29, 1976)—stimulated more reader response than any other subject we had ever written about, which told me that this was a rich topic meriting much further examination. The nicest and most unexpected letter I received—I just now rediscovered it in my archives of those early events—was from Martin Gardner. He thanked me for the article, praised its accuracy, and called it a “wind of fresh air, long overdue.”

One year later I was an invited guest and speaker at the first meeting of the CSICOP Executive Council, held at the old Biltmore Hotel in New York City with Paul Kurtz, Ray Hyman, Phil Klass, and others including Martin Gardner himself, to my delight. The next day I was asked to join the organization as editor of its new magazine (then called *The Zetetic*, renamed the SKEPTICAL INQUIRER the next year). So Martin Gardner was not only my introduction to any kind of systematic skepticism and one of my early encouragers, but he was also there when I actually joined the effort.

Over the ensuing three-plus decades, it was my—and our readers’—pleasure to have Martin Gardner write regularly for SI. At first he wrote only occasional short articles and reviews. When he retired his *Scientific American* column after thirty years, I wrote and asked if he’d like to consider writing a regular column for SI on pseudoscience and fringe science. I was delighted when he agreed. Let’s give it a try, he answered, and see how it goes. That column (“Notes of a Psi-Watcher,”

which he and I later renamed “Notes of a Fringe Watcher”) appeared in every issue of SI from Summer 1983 to January/February 2002. He recently resumed it on an irregular basis, and his last one, mailed to me May 12, ten days before his death, appears on page 10.

Martin was an editor’s delight. His columns always arrived early, usually weeks ahead of deadline. Sometimes he would check with me in advance about a possible subject; more typically he just mailed in a new column, surprising me

Jean Houston, Doug Henning, and Phillip Johnson to maverick Cornell astronomer Tommy Gold (twice); and everything from James Randi’s Project Alpha (his first SI topic) to weird water, fuzzy logic, reflexology, urine therapy, psychic astronomy, the Klingon language, and the humorous yet profound question of whether Adam and Eve had navels. Every few years he would collect the SI columns, together with a few reviews and essays published elsewhere, in a new book. The first were *The New Age: Notes*



Martin Gardner (with glasses) is at back left in this historic photo of the first CSICOP meeting, in August 1977 in New York City. From left are Lee Nisbet, Ray Hyman, James Randi, Gardner, and (at end of table) Paul Kurtz. (CSICOP archives)

with the topic. A new one’s arrival was always the high point of my day. They were clear, concise, involving, revealing, knowledgeable, relevant, and usually witty—the product of a lively, extraordinarily well-informed, unique mind. His columns were substantive but at the same time eminently readable. He typed them double-spaced on an electric typewriter, and the newspaperman in him (which he had once been for awhile after studying philosophy at the University of Chicago) carefully corrected any typos or made short word changes with black ballpoint pen. Also in the newspaper tradition, he revised sections by cutting and pasting, which was always done impeccably. I seldom had to do any real editing.

Over the years his columns covered everyone from Russell Targ, Margaret Mead, Shirley MacLaine, Arthur Koestler, Rupert Sheldrake, Marianne Williamson,

of a *Fringe Watcher* and *On the Wild Side*. The latest three are *Are Universes Thicker Than Blackberries?* (2003), *The Jinn from Hyperspace* (2008), and *When You Were a Tadpole and I Was a Fish* (2009).

On September 11, 2001 (yes, that same terrible day), I opened a letter from Martin that I had dreaded receiving. His beloved wife, Charlotte, had died earlier of a stroke, and he was getting two columns to me quickly because he knew he would soon go into a depression over her loss and be unable to write any more. And, besides, he was eighty-seven. “I’ve had a long run,” he ended, “and doing the column has been a great pleasure.” It was a sad day for all of us. But in 2005 I saw a new book review he had published elsewhere, and I wrote and invited him to once again write for SI if he felt he could. His first was a two-article series on “The Memory Wars.” We published it in our

January/February and March/April 2006 issues. The first part appears in our latest SI anthology, *Science Under Siege* (Prometheus, 2009).

He was prolific to the end. We had two columns from him during the production of our March/April 2010 issue. So we published the shorter one (about fatal sweat lodge guru James Arthur Ray) as his regular column and the longer one (about Oprah Winfrey and her gullibility on pseudo-medical matters) as an article.

Perhaps surprising for such a towering intellect, Martin was a modest and unassuming man. Kindly, I would say. Obviously highly intelligent and a supremely clear thinker, he showed no sign of ego. A somewhat shy person, he never attended

conferences or spoke at public gatherings. Although this was a disappointment to his myriad fans, I think he felt his time was better spent doing his own kind of research, reading up on the latest claims of nonsense and crackpottery and buffoonery, and giving his unique critical perspective in clear, concise prose. But he was a wonderful correspondent. Any letter to Martin drew an almost immediate typewritten response. That was true of my experience, and I have heard the same from others. His letters were always friendly, direct, relevant, useful, and concise. He never wasted words. I have quite a collection of such short letters from Martin and will always treasure them.

Martin Gardner was—among many

other things—a brilliant and essentially self-taught intellectual who had the respect of the world's greatest scientists and academics. The grandfather of the modern skeptical movement, he was an extraordinarily knowledgeable skeptic with a uniquely whimsical and easily amused mind who never took himself over-seriously; a great teacher through example of what skepticism and skeptical inquiry are all about, a clear writer and thinker, a peerless critic of nonsense, and a steadfast advocate of science and reason—in short, a national treasure. No; make that a world treasure.

Kendrick Frazier is editor of the SKEPTICAL INQUIRER, a fellow of the Committee for Skeptical Inquiry, and a longtime member of its executive council.

Martin Gardner's Presence

JOE NICKELL

Martin Gardner gone? Skeptics, say it isn't so!

From my earliest days as a magician, skeptic, and investigative writer, Martin was there—a presence as reassuring as that of a beloved relative whom one could always count on when needed but who showed up in person only at the occasional family reunion. Extraordinarily shy, Martin avoided public appearances and didn't lecture, grant media interviews, or even accept awards when they were conditional on his appearing.

Still, he was there. When I was transforming myself into “Mendell the Mentalist” as a young magician, Martin helpfully pecked out on his typewriter a suggestion: a mind-reading effect based on a principle usually embodied in a close-up trick that he very cleverly adapted to the stage.

Once, while I was working as a researcher on a certain project, Martin invited me to visit his home in Hendersonville, North Carolina, and use his extensive personal library. (This I declined, of course, for it would have been too great an imposition on too generous a friend.)

When I reviewed an event held in honor of the shy genius (who had made an exceedingly rare appearance) for the

SKEPTICAL INQUIRER, Martin thoughtfully wrote a personal note of appreciation.

And he thought of this same writer in 2002 when he ended his long-running column for SI (since 1983), “Notes of a Fringe Watcher.” Asked who he thought might succeed him as leading columnist for the magazine, he wrote, “Joe Nickell?”

I did not meet Martin in person until 1989 when he uncharacteristically appeared at a CSICOP Executive Council meeting in Tampa, Florida. He did not usually wear ties, but someone got him one for a formal group photo, and I was able to give it a straightening just in time. At the 1996 Gathering for Gardner in Atlanta, Georgia, I brought a tape recorder on behalf of Prometheus Books and recorded Martin in his hotel room reading the introduction to the audiotape version of *Science: Good, Bad and Bogus*. Time spent with him was precious.

But it was as a writer that his presence was most clearly felt. Despite his personal shyness, his writings were those of a polar opposite: a bold, courageous critic, a prolific correspondent, and a towering thinker and polymath. (Never mind that he once said in an interview in these pages

[March/April 1998], “I just *play* all the time, and am fortunate enough to get paid for it.”)

In 1952 he published the first edition of his seminal book, now known to skeptics worldwide as *Fads and Fallacies in the Name of Science*. The book proved to be the seed that blossomed into the modern skeptical movement. Gardner mentored a small group of skeptical activists—including magician James Randi, psychologist Ray Hyman, and several others—a group that in 1976 philosopher Paul Kurtz expanded and turned into an international organization known as the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal (presently the Committee for Skeptical Inquiry).

Now Martin Gardner belongs to history, to the pantheon of great intellects of the twentieth century—many of whom were his admirers. A one-man think tank and the father of modern skepticism, he was a presence indeed. But he remains a presence, still alive in our minds, often smiling amid the juggled words, still teaching us to think—and to not forget to have fun.

Joe Nickell is CSI's senior research fellow and SI's “Investigative Files” columnist. He is author of dozens of books about his skeptical investigations, such as *Real or Fake*, *Adventures in Paranormal Investigation*, *Relics of the Christ*, *Real-Life X-Files*, and *Looking for a Miracle*.

The Humble Demigod

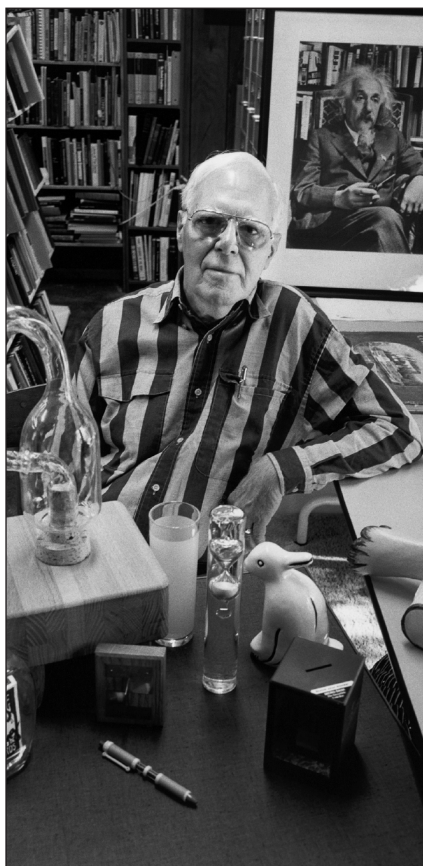
ROBERT SHEAFFER

I was aware of Martin Gardner at least since I was in high school in Illinois during the 1960s. I hung around as much as I could with friends who were interested in science and philosophy, and in such circles Gardner was already considered a demigod, at the very least. I forget exactly when I first read his *Fads and Fallacies in the Name of Science*, but I was enormously impressed by it. He covered so many subjects in such detail, using such impeccable logic. (From a current standpoint, what's sobering is how many of these fads and fallacies, thoroughly debunked almost sixty years ago, are still peddled, usually in nearly the same form!)

I first met Gardner at one of the very early CSICOP functions in New York City in 1977 or '78. He was still living in New York at the time (appropriately on Euclid Avenue in Hastings-on-Hudson). CSICOP held several press conferences to offer itself as a resource for responsible science journalism, as well as to denounce the often-uncritical coverage of "paranormal" subjects in the media. This was long before CSICOP sponsored any public events. I had been working fairly closely with the noted UFO skeptic, the late Philip J. Klass, one of the founding fellows of CSICOP, who helped me get involved with the organization and its activities. Gardner attended all of the CSICOP events in New York City but never spoke to the public or to the press. I remember being awestruck to have the opportunity to meet, and get to know, this soft-spoken, extraordinary man.

I was even more awestruck when he suggested we go down to the hotel restaurant to have lunch together. I realized even at that time that this was an extraordinary privilege. I asked him about his training in mathematics, expecting to hear him rattle off a list of studies and degrees. "I didn't take much math," he replied. "I studied philosophy." I expected to hear that mathematical puzzles flowed effortlessly out of his brain, but that was also not so. He ex-

plained that he was not an expert in mathematical puzzles or even a big fan of them; he just kept writing them up because that was what the readers of *Scientific American* wanted, and typically he was just one puzzle ahead of the magazine's deadline. We also discussed the famous Cottingley Fairy photos, which had fooled Sir Arthur Conan



Elliott Erwitt / Magnum Photos

Doyle, and how at that time UFOlogist Jerome Clark, then an editor at *Fate* magazine, was claiming the photos as proof of some sort of "alternate reality." Gardner wrote about that in the notes and also in a postscript to his essay "The Irrelevance of Conan Doyle," published in *Science: Good, Bad and Bogus*. He also wrote there about my own hoax article suggesting that the Cottingley Fairies were Winged UFO Occupants: "It was printed in *Official UFO* magazine, October 1977, by editors too stupid to

realize that Sheaffer had his tongue in his cheek."

Later Gardner asked me if I wanted him to mail me his UFO files, saying that I would make better use of them than he could. I gladly accepted his offer. The files were not extensive, consisting mostly of clippings from newspapers and magazines of the 1950s and '60s, but they contained a number of hard-to-find items. I gratefully merged them with my own files.

After Gardner moved to North Carolina, I never saw him in person again. But we remained in touch on a number of subjects. I remember one time when I contacted him for information about a specific cult. He said that the most knowledgeable critic of that group was a certain individual who I had never heard of. "But be careful in your dealings with him," Gardner said. "He is obsessed with this cult, and he has a history of unstable behavior." I cautiously followed up on his lead and discovered that, as usual, Martin had gotten it exactly right.

Looking back on his career, perhaps the most surprising thing is not only the quantity and the quality of his output but the fact that all of it was written without benefit of a computer or word processor! I cannot write anything worth publishing unless I revise it three or four times. He had an amazingly clear writing style: everything Martin Gardner wrote, no matter how technical, is explained so well that the average reader can understand it, and every conclusion he reaches follows directly from the information he just set forth.

Some of the late founding fellows of CSICOP, whose names today are household words, had egos the size of Texas, if not Alaska. This stands in enormous contrast with Martin Gardner, a man for whom they all genuinely proclaimed their admiration yet was nonetheless one of the most sincere and likable human beings I have ever met.

Robert Sheaffer is a fellow of CSI and has been SI's "Psychic Vibrations" columnist for more than thirty years.

A Martin Gardner Sampler

Exposing Crackpots and Charlatans

ROBERT CARROLL

Martin Gardner's writings on the paranormal and pseudoscience profoundly influenced a generation of writers, including me, as can be seen by the many references to his works in *The Skeptic's Dictionary*. He introduced us to a bizarre world populated by the likes of L. Ron Hubbard, Rudolf Steiner, Edgar Cayce, Bridey Murphy, and a host of other characters on the fringe. He taught us that crackpots and charlatans are dangerous. They should not be ignored but instead thoroughly exposed for what they are by detailed critical analysis.

My introduction to Gardner was through his *Scientific American* column on brain teasers and logic puzzles. When he gave up writing that brilliant and much-missed column, Douglas Hofstadter picked up the mantle. My obsession with Gardner's writings on the paranormal and pseudoscience began after reading a Hofstadter column titled "World Views in Collision: The SKEPTICAL INQUIRER versus the *National Inquirer*." Hofstadter's panegyric to CSICOP and SI is one of the seminal essays in the history of scientific skepticism. Every skeptic should keep it at the ready for inspiration and revitalization. (The essay, reprinted in Hofstadter's *Metamagical Themas: Questing for the Essence of Mind and Pattern*, includes an account of Gardner's split with Marcello Truzzi over how best to deal with Immanuel Velikovsky and other pseudoscientists.)

Hofstadter's essay inspired many teachers to become followers of SI, which inevitably led us to become followers of Martin Gardner's many inquiries. In fact, many of us became somewhat fanatical about our inquiries into what Gardner called "wild beliefs." We can't stop investigating and writing about them. Thanks to Martin Gardner, James Randi, and others of like spirit, we won't be quiet until the last bit of bogus science is buried with the last charlatan claiming paranormal or supernatural powers.

Robert Carroll is emeritus professor of philosophy at Sacramento City College and creator of The Skeptic's Dictionary Web site. He is a CSI fellow.

Visits to Martin

BRYAN FARHA

It was serendipitous that Oklahoma City University (where I teach) brought in James Randi to speak several years ago. While here, Randi asked me to take him to visit his beloved friend, Martin, in nearby Norman, Oklahoma. Martin had been in an assisted living center there since 2002. Randi introduced us, and this began my personal connection to Martin.

Since that day, I periodically visited Martin in his room. Two visits stand out. On one occasion the visit was professionally motivated because an author asked me to interview Martin for his book. About midway through, Martin turned the tables and *he* became the interviewer. I was surprised at his sudden interest in *me*. What stood out most was his inquiring about my beliefs and view of religion—just before I was going to ask him similar questions on the same subject. He sensed my frustration in not knowing exactly how to “label” my beliefs. After giving him a lengthy explanation, he said, “I know how to label your beliefs.” He continued, “You’re a philosophical theist, like me.” It was great to finally be able to concretize my position. Until that time, I really didn’t know what to call it. When my interview of Martin concluded, I went home and immediately Googled the term. The first thing I found was a Wikipedia definition. The end of the entry now states, “Martin Gardner (1914–2010) was a contemporary defender of philosophical theism.” It was obvious Martin knew what he was talking about.

The other visit that stood out was personally motivated; I took my nine-year-old nephew, Cole, to meet this extraordinary man. Martin amazed Cole with visual illusions, which were displayed throughout his room. Particularly eye-catching to Cole was the “Paper Dragon” illusion—designed for a special gathering honoring Martin. He had a very effective way of using entertainment as an educational tool. It certainly worked for Cole. Although Cole may not have had a full appreciation for the magnitude of



Martin's brilliance, one day he will.

As close as my proximity to Martin was, I'm sorry I didn't visit him more often—my loss. I've had many favorite issues of the SKEPTICAL INQUIRER over the years. I suspect this issue will climb to the top of my list.

Bryan Farha is a professor at Oklahoma City University, where he coordinates the graduate program in applied behavioral studies, and is editor of *Paranormal Claims: A Critical Analysis*.

The Connoisseur of Paradox

JOHN ALLEN PAULOS

A connoisseur of paradox, Martin Gardner had a fittingly paradoxical career. Although he majored in philosophy and took no mathematics courses after high school, he probably did more to stimulate an appreciation for, curiosity about, and discussion of mathematical ideas than scores of us mathematics professors.

I remember reading his books on recreational math as an undergraduate and being eager to explain the puzzles in them to whoever would listen. In a couple of cases I even used them to win small bets. Over the years we exchanged a couple of book blurbs, a benign log(arithm)-rolling that was a signal honor for me, and we also corresponded a bit about his novel *The Art of Peter Fromm* and other topics, jokes in particular. Once he sent me a letter with some quite funny, quite non-Grated examples. Later, in the *Scientific American*, he published a very elegant illustration of a religious hoax I proposed based on Kruskal's theorem.

His interests ranged from Lewis Carroll and the philosophy of mathematics to scientific hoaxes and popular culture. Even in his last essay for the SKEPTICAL INQUIRER (March/April 2010) published in his lifetime, he took on Oprah Winfrey's pseudo-cures. A modest man, a clear-eyed skeptic, and an expositor extraordinaire, he was a cogent beacon of sanity to the end.

John Allen Paulos is professor of mathematics at Temple University and author of such books as *Innumeracy, A Mathematician Reads the Newspaper*, and *Once Upon a Number*. He is a CSI fellow.

Characterizing the Hermit Scientist

SCOTT O. LILIENFELD

I had been deeply interested in scientific skepticism for a solid fifteen years before I read Martin Gardner's classic book *Fads and Fallacies in the Name of Science*, first published as *In the Name of Science* in 1952. In fact, for quite some time I had resisted reading it. No book that old, I assumed, could possibly offer much to us today. Moreover, I thought, Gardner's examples must surely be outdated.

Nothing, I soon discovered, could be further from the truth. Indeed, on finally reading *Fads and Fallacies*, I was amazed by how fresh and relevant it is to modern skepticism—and to the psychology of pseudoscience. As all dedicated skeptics know, in this book Gardner delineated the core characteristics of the "hermit scientist," whom we might regard as the prototypical pseudoscientist. For Gardner, the hermit scientist (1) "considers himself as a genius," (2) "regards his colleagues, without exception, as ignorant blockheads," (3) "believes himself unjustly persecuted and discriminated against," (4) "has strong compulsions to focus his attacks on the greatest scientists and the best established theories," and (5) "has a tendency to write in complex jargon, in many cases making use of terms and phrases he himself has coined."

These psychological attributes ring as true today as they did nearly sixty years ago. Although some of the lyrics of the song may have changed (Hollow Earthers, orgone theorists, and Lyksenkoists are no longer central foci of skeptical inquiry), the music hasn't. In contemporary psychological lingo, we might say that Gardner hit upon many of the features of pseudoscientists that predispose them to confirmation bias: the tendency

to seek out evidence consistent with one's hypotheses and to deny, dismiss, or distort evidence that isn't. When one reads Gardner's twenty-five remarkable case studies of thinking gone haywire, it is not difficult to discern a common thread running through their enormous surface diversity: the persistent refusal of proponents of pseudoscience to allow contrary evidence to penetrate their web of beliefs. More than anything else, Gardner's first book is a powerful cautionary tale of the perils of intellectual hubris.

I regard *Fads and Fallacies* as the most significant work in the history of scientific skepticism, as its message remains every bit as pertinent to the vexing problem of pseudoscience today as it was in the 1950s. Gardner's passing gives all of us an opportunity not only to mourn the loss of one of the founders of the modern skeptical movement but to revisit the wisdom and insights he imparted so many years ago.

Scott O. Lilienfeld is professor of psychology at Emory University, editor in chief of *The Scientific Review of Mental Health Practice*, and lead author of *50 Great Myths of Popular Psychology*. He is a CSI fellow and SI consulting editor.

The Friend I Never Met

CHRISTOPHER C. FRENCH

I never had the pleasure of meeting Martin Gardner, but I feel as if I have known him as a friend for decades. Over a long and prolific career, he published over seventy books and countless newspaper and magazine articles. These include his regular column for the SKEPTICAL INQUIRER, "Notes of a Fringe Watcher," which ran for almost twenty years and his "Mathematical Games" column, which ran in *Scientific American* for some twenty-five years.

I cannot claim to have read everything that this great man ever wrote, of course, but I may well have more books on my bookshelves written by him than by any other author. When I try to think back to

the first publication of his that I ever read, I simply cannot remember which one it was. Memory is a funny thing, as Martin Gardner well knew, and it feels to me as if his books have been in my life for as long as I can remember, like those really good friends that we all take for granted.

By a process of deduction, I can work out that I must have read his collections of recreational mathematics columns from *Scientific American*, published under such titles as *Mathematical Circus*, many years before I read his skeptical classic *Fads and Fallacies in the Name of Science*. The former books entertained and educated me. They made math fun—at least for a self-professed nerd like me!

But *Fads and Fallacies* had a much more profound impact on me than those stimulating collections of brainteasers. It was one of the first books on skepticism that I read, along with James Randi's *Flim-Flam!* and *The Truth About Uri Geller* and David Marks and Richard Kammann's *The Psychology of the Psychic*. The truth is, dear reader, that until well into early adulthood I was . . . well, I guess I have to come clean . . . a believer in the paranormal! The book that actually opened my eyes to the wonderful world of skepticism was James Alcock's *Parapsychology: Science or Magic?*, but I quickly followed that excellent volume with the skeptical works of Gardner, Randi, Marks, and Kammann.

One thing is notable about all five of these books: they have all withstood the test of time wonderfully. Indeed, all five are still on reading lists for the course on anomalistic psychology that I teach as part of the BSc Psychology program at Goldsmiths College, University of London (along with lots of more recent texts, of course!). But it should be borne in mind that all of those classics but one were written in the early 1980s. *Fads and Fallacies* is now well over half a century old and is still well worth reading. It is, of course, somewhat depressing that most of the fads so devastatingly critiqued in this wonderful volume are still going strong today.

Through these works and others (notably, *Science: Good, Bad and Bogus*

"Martin Gardner is one of the great intellects produced in this country in this century."

—Douglas Hofstadter, author of *Gödel, Escher, Bach*, on the cover of Gardner's *The Night Is Large* (1996)

"For more than half a century, Martin Gardner has been the single brightest beacon defending rationality and good science against the mysticism and anti-intellectualism that surround us."

—The late Stephen Jay Gould, Harvard University, on the back cover of Gardner's *The Night Is Large* (1996)

and the delightful *Annotated Alice* books), I felt that I did know Martin Gardner even though I never actually met him. I would like to have met him. I am sure I would have liked him. Like thousands of other fans around the globe, I will miss him.

Christopher C. French is head of the Anomalistic Psychology Research Unit at Goldsmiths College, University of London, and editor in chief of *The Skeptic* (U.K.). He is co-editor of the new book *Why Statues Weep: The Best of The Skeptic*.

Last of the Polymaths

NEIL DEGRASSE TYSON

With a career spanning most of a century, Martin Gardner was the last of the polymaths. Nearly everyone in the skeptic community, across multiple generations, was directly influenced by his writings. As a kid, reading his monthly columns for *Scientific American*, I naively believed that the simultaneous breadth and depth of Gardner's interests was common. Now I am certain it was unique.

Neil deGrasse Tyson, an astrophysicist, is director of the Hayden Planetarium at the American Museum of Natural History and a CSI fellow. His most recent book is *The Pluto Files*.

The Roots of Skepticism

JAY M. PASACHOFF

I have often cited two books as formative of my career: Martin Gardner's *Fads and Fallacies in the Name of Science* (I can picture the cover of the Dover edition, which came out in 1957 while I was at the Bronx High School of Science) and C.P. Snow's *Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution* (which I bought when it first came out in 1959, at a bookstore in San Francisco while attending a summer math research program at Berkeley—just prior to my starting Harvard as a freshman). In the fifty-plus years since, I have tried to conduct my science, my life, and my career with the ideals of both of those authors in mind: eschewing fads, fallacies, and pseudoscience of all kinds and trying to be educated in both science and the humanities.

A few years ago, I started teaching a seminar at Williams College on “Science and Pseudoscience” to about a dozen juniors and seniors. I started out with C.P. Snow's book and ideas as a frame to the seminar and then had one of the twelve weekly sessions devoted to Martin Gardner's work, with a reading list (and library reserve) that included all of his relevant books. The course has been quite popular, straining the limit of twenty that I subsequently adopted, with students begging to be admitted. The discussions have been lively and interesting. I look forward to next spring's version.

So I am back to my roots in Martin Gardner's important plea for rationality, and I am very grateful to him for his ideas. Jay M. Pasachoff is the Field Memorial Professor of Astronomy at Williams College, Williamstown, Massachusetts, and a CSI fellow.

A Blowtorch Turned on Jell-O

MARTIN BRIDGSTOCK

Martin Gardner burst into my awareness in the 1960s. I remember myself as a troubled boy in my early teens, mooching through the weekly market in Grimsby, a U.K. fishing port. I picked up a copy of *Fads and Fallacies in the Name of Science* for five British shillings—about 40 U.S. cents in today's money—and read it. Then I read it again, and again. Here was a grown-up with massive intellectual powers focusing critically upon paranormal claims. It was a bit like watching a blowtorch being turned on Jell-O. I was shocked, amused, and delighted. Why wasn't anyone else doing this?

Gardner taught me a lot. First, that all humans, without exception, can be wrong. And since all books, papers, and paranormal theories are produced by humans, they can be wrong too. There is no way out, except to check the evidence and think for yourself. Second, he taught me the importance of clarity in writing through his ability to skewer pseudoscientists with a few words of description or criticism. I am no Gardner, but these messages sank into my bones.

Years later, I discovered Gardner's mathematical column in *Scientific American*. My math was barely good enough to follow the arguments, but Gardner's delight in human inventiveness shone clearly through every paragraph. He loved producing dizzying paradoxes from simple assumptions and throwing light on whole new fields of mathematical thought. It was the other side of his criticisms of pseudoscience: use your mind, and wonders will follow. Obfuscate, and there is disaster ahead.

In a very real sense, Martin Gardner cannot die. Like David Hume, he is a living thinker whose ideas will remain relevant as long as human foolishness persists. Among much else, he was one of the founders of the modern skeptical movement, and his truth really will go marching on!

Martin Bridgstock is a senior lecturer at the School of Biomolecular and Physical Sciences at Griffith University, Queensland, Australia, and author of the new book *Beyond Belief: Skepticism, Science and the Paranormal*. He is a CSI scientific consultant.

Goodbye, Master of Journalists

LUIS ALFONSO GÁMEZ

Martin Gardner was the master for those of us who believe that teaching science should include denouncing bunk. “I have found that one of the best ways to learn something about any branch of science is to find out where its crackpots go wrong,” he wrote in *On the Wild Side* (1992). Exactly so. In a world in which so many feel attracted to the paranormal, this maxim should guide the work of journalists who inform the public about science. Too often we have irresponsibly avoided criticizing pseudoscience, considering it undignified.

We should take advantage of flying saucers, Atlantis, extrasensory perception, and creationism to hook the public and teach them to appreciate biology, psychology, geology, history—science and knowledge in general. We should use pseudoscience as the hook to teach science and critical thought. Martin Gardner did it for decades with the clarity of someone who considered himself “basically a journalist.” His books are always at hand to consult to remember what he said about so many of the absurdities that surround us.

Today the world is a little darker; reason's flame dims in the darkness because we are without Martin Gardner. We will miss him. I will continue to have him with me daily, as I have since I read him for the first time, as an example of what a scientific journalist must be. Luckily, we have his books to guide us.

Luis Alfonso Gámez is a journalist, scientific consultant for CSI, and author of Magonia (<http://magonia.es>), the most important Spanish-language skeptical blog. He is a CSI fellow.

What Martin Taught Me

BENJAMIN RADFORD

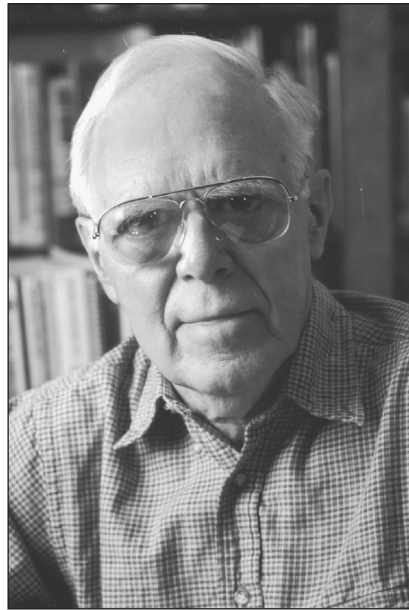
Although I met Martin only once in person, I worked with him as his editor for his SKEPTICAL INQUIRER column for about eight years. When I first started with the magazine, I knew who he was by reputation, but I don't think it was until later, as I was reintroduced to his columns and earlier work, that I really gained a true appreciation for his genius.

I remember getting a column from Martin for the first time. To be honest, I don't remember what the topic was, but I do remember being slightly annoyed. You see, it was typewritten and photocopied (with a few handwritten editorial corrections). I was used to e-mailed attachments and columns submitted on CDs and floppy discs—what was this typewritten stuff? As the years went on I came to treasure and look forward to seeing his three-page, double-spaced columns in the dark black, old-school typewriter font. It reminded me of good, old-fashioned skepticism. It reminded me of notes and letters my grandfather—a veteran journalist and skeptic himself—would write to me when I was a teenager.

One thing I learned from Martin, albeit indirectly, was how skeptical research and investigation can make a real difference in people's lives. It's all well and good to write skeptically about UFOs or ghosts in the abstract, but it's a different matter when you're dealing with real people and real problems.

One day in 2000 I got a call at the office from a man at a payphone somewhere in Arizona. The man had a soft voice—he sounded like he was in his early fifties—and wanted some information on an article he had read a long time ago in the SKEPTICAL INQUIRER but didn't have an issue date or year. "It's an article by Martin Gardner," he said. "It's on a cult." I told him that I'd try to locate the article and issue and forward his call to the front desk where he could purchase the issue, if he wished.

"No, no," he said. "I need it now. Can



you fax it to me?"

While I was willing and able to help, it seemed like a bit of a steep request to stop what I was doing, look through two dozen back issues, find the article, and fax it to the man, long distance, at our expense! Besides, I was skeptical that the payphone would be able to receive the fax. And what was the urgency anyway?

The man put another quarter in the phone and explained that he feared that his younger brother was becoming involved in a cult. He was driving out to see his brother and was desperately trying to think of ways to reason with him. He remembered that Martin had written a column on the cult years before and hoped the information would provide skeptical facts and criticisms. He was calling from outside a copy shop with the shop's fax number handy so he could receive the fax there and go see his brother armed with more than just concerns. I hung up the phone, sifted through the back issues on my shelf, copied the relevant pages, and faxed them off. I never heard back from the man; I hope he was able to reason with his brother using Martin's work, and I liked the idea that Martin's keen mind and research might help save a man's life.

I shared this story with Martin last year as I was preparing my latest book, to which Martin kindly contributed, and he

Some of Gardner's Notable Books

... About Pseudoscience and Fringe Science

In the Name of Science (1952), republished as *Fads and Fallacies in the Name of Science* (1957)
Science: Good, Bad and Bogus (1981, 1983, 1989)
How Not to Test a Psychic
*The New Age: Notes of a Fringe Watcher** (1998, 1991)
*On the Wild Side** (1992)
*Weird Water and Fuzzy Logic** (1996)
*Did Adam and Eve Have Navels?** (2000)
*The Jinn from Hyperspace** (2008)
*When You Were a Tadpole and I Was a Fish** (2009)

*In part, collections of his SI columns.

... About Science

Relativity for the Million
The Ambidextrous Universe
The New Ambidextrous Universe
Great Essays in Science (ed.)

... On Other Topics

Mathematics, Magic, and Mystery
The Scientific American Book of Mathematical Puzzles and Diversions
The Annotated Alice
The Annotated Ancient Mariner
Aha! Insight
The Sixth Book of Mathematical Games from Scientific American
Mathematical Carnival
Aha! Gotcha
Order and Surprise
The Whys of a Philosophical Scrivener
The Magic Numbers of Dr. Matrix
Knotted Doughnuts and Other Mathematical Entertainments
The No-Sided Professor (short stories)
The Wreck of the Titanic Foretold? (ed.)
Time Travel and Other Mathematical Bewilderments
Gardner's Whys and Wherefores
Penrose Tiles to Trapdoor Ciphers
The Healing Revelations of Mary Baker Eddy
Urantia: The Great Cult Mystery
The Universe in a Handkerchief

was very pleased indeed. Martin kept working and writing and corresponding to the very end of his life. I don't believe in an afterlife, but Martin may have; if he's there, he's certainly earned his rest.

Benjamin Radford is a research fellow of the Committee for Skeptical Inquiry, managing editor of the *SKEPTICAL INQUIRER*, and author of the new book *Scientific Paranormal Investigation*.

My Reminiscence of Martin Gardner: A Lesson

TIMOTHY BINGA

Back in 2002, I was asked by Barry Karr, the executive director of CSICOP, if I would be able to leave right away on a trip to acquire some materials for the Center for Inquiry Libraries. It was during our annual Summer Institute, and I was supposed to be teaching our students how libraries organize materials that are associated with our various organizations. I didn't think I should go; couldn't we just have the items shipped? Barry told me I would

The Martin Gardner Collection

The Center for Inquiry Libraries at CFI's headquarters in Amherst, New York, have approximately twelve linear feet of papers donated by Martin Gardner. The papers are arranged as created by Gardner himself: three drawers of materials are organized alphabetically by name; the remaining drawers are organized by topic, including all the various fields of skepticism, the paranormal, religious criticism, etc. Approximately 450 books are similarly categorized. No books or papers concerning Gardner's mathematical interests or his *Scientific American* columns are located at the Center, unless they relate to the above topics.

need to go in order to help select the materials and then help box them up, something not uncommon for some of our acquisitions. I again tried to defer; I had things that needed to get done, and couldn't this wait until the fall? Barry told me that Martin Gardner had decided to give us some of his papers and a collection of books, all related to our mission at the Center. I asked him when I could hit the road.

Martin Gardner, "father of the modern skeptical movement," had asked us to select materials from his collection, box them up, bring them back to our Amherst offices, and maintain his collection on all matters of the paranormal, fringe claims, pseudoscience, etc. His book *Fads and Fallacies in the Name of Science* kicked off this movement. He was a founding fellow of CSICOP, a writer for Prometheus Books, and a fellow *Titanic* aficionado (*Wreck of the Titanic Foretold?*, edited and with an introduction by Gardner, and several short stories and other hard-to-find *Titanic*- and ESP-related materials were included in the collection). I was ready to go right there and then.

We made plans, and I picked up boxes and headed out to Hendersonville, North Carolina, in my wife's van the next morning. I drove all day, staying in a hotel close to his home. I called him early the next day and headed over to his house.

He greeted me at the door, took me into his library, and pointed out what items he wanted me to take. We then began to select the various items from his collection.

I was a little put off at first; I had met him once before in Amherst, but he seemed distracted to me, distant, not wholly there while we went through the books. We continued going through the shelves, placing the materials to one side so I could box them up later. He pointed to a couple of filing cabinets, telling me I should take those too.

I finally got up the courage to ask him about the *Titanic*, letting him know I also had an interest. He told me the same things I had gleaned from his book: the coincidences were not evidence of ESP or precognition but a product of the times.

Statistically, he stated, the fact that this was all coincidental fell within the realm of possibility. He went on to tell me that there is "something" that makes us all want to believe in something greater than ourselves and that those who believe in ESP and related phenomena use *Futility* and the other works mentioned in his book as examples of these phenomena. He then pointed out the idea of selective memory, where one remembers only the hits, not the thousands of misses, which is why some people believe in psychics; they forget all the misses and remember only the things guessed correctly. In the case of the *Titanic*, there were thousands of stories at the time about ships traveling the Atlantic that did not hit an iceberg (but might have had a Captain Smith).

I asked him why the *Titanic* was so popular for those trying to prove the existence of psychic phenomena. He countered by asking me why I thought the *Titanic* struck such a chord with our culture. Because I had studied this myself, I told him that it was because it marked the end of an age: the disaster hit all the various levels of society at one time (the microcosm of society on the boat), and so many half-truths and myths surrounded the *Titanic*. Everyone could find something they could relate to and would find of interest. He looked at me and said that I had answered my own question.

When I finished packing up the books and loading the van with the cabinets and boxes, I went back in to say goodbye. It was with more than a hint of sadness that he thanked me for taking his materials. It was then that I realized that this was a small part of himself being packed up; he was "downsizing" in preparation for a move (to be near his son in Oklahoma, I found out later). I then thanked him for his donation, telling him that I would take very good care of his books and files. He said, "I know you will." I headed back to Buffalo feeling very fortunate to be able to have shared a little time with him.

(See sidebar, "The Martin Gardner Collection.") □

Timothy Binga is director of the Center for Inquiry Libraries in Amherst, New York.