

Mblem

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Event Calendar **insert**

View from a Southern Porch RVC Column, by Mike Seigler RVC5

It's a new year with a new attitude. Let's make 2006 a yearlong Mensa party. (Okay that's my old attitude, but it's still a good idea.)

There's a lot happening in Region 5 and this is the place to be in American Mensa. First, we have a new Assistant RVC, Lewis Gosnell. Lewis is a member of Piedmont Area Mensa and has served on their ExComm as Member-at-Large, Second Officer and LocSec. Lewis also filled in as the PAM Treasurer, was on the RG Committee and is the local CultureQuest coordinator. He's one of the people that makes Piedmont Area Mensa succeed and will be a real asset to the members in our region.

While we're talking about Piedmont Area Mensa, I want to remind everyone that the Carolinah RG will be held on the weekend of March 24 this year. (Thanks to Central Alabama Mensa for agreeing to exchange RG dates with PAM.) This is always a great party with great speakers, good meals and will feature an elegant masked ball.

In addition to attending a great party members will get a bonus this year. The AMC will be holding its quarterly meeting in conjunction with the RG. This is everyone's opportunity to meet with the national leadership in an informal, intimate setting. You can watch the AMC in action. (Sometimes that's one word.) The meetings are open and occasionally

provide some unintentionally entertaining moments. (Though on the whole the meetings are pretty dull.)

It's been several years since an AMC meeting was held in Region 5 and I hope that many members and officers from around the region will be able to come. I want to show the AMC a good time, but they also need to hear your concerns.

On a different note - It's always nice to see local groups reaching out to their communities. Several groups in Region 5 participated in Make-a-Difference day this year and it HAS made a difference. Mensa's images in their communities have improved and the members justifiably feel proud of their contributions.

As an example, by the time you read this Mensa in Georgia will have conducted a major Medicare Part D program for seniors in the Atlanta area. Guest panelists included a consumer health reporter from the Atlanta Journal Constitution, an elder law attorney, an economist from the Center for Disease Control and several other prominent health officials. This provided seniors with the information they needed to make informed decisions and greatly increased Mensa's profile in Atlanta by building partnerships with other organizations.

Finally, don't forget that the Owlabama RG will be coming up in May. Central Alabama Mensa will be hosting the 2007 AG in Birmingham and this is your chance to see why they got the award.

See you soon!

Some One Reads Mblem Editor

I have solid proof that some one reads us – at least two. Since the publication of last issue, two people wrote me to point out that Ed's Feghoot, "Oldie but Goodie" missed the punch line. (The punch is on my face.) One almost correctly pointed out the punch line which should have been "transporting gulls across a staid lion for immoral porpoises". Now that you have the hoot, do you still remember the feg part?

The other one was the proofreader who told me once before that I missed the line when he proofread. He also happened to be the author of the article. How embarrassing.

Coming Election

The 2006 election news: We have 7 members on our ballot. Some may choose to make a statement in this issue of Mblem. A formal ballot and return form will be provided in next issue, March Issue, of Mblem. The 7 members are, in alphabetic order of last name:

Suzie Bolotin
Ann Lewis
Kim Oliver
Dan Singer
Brian Stumpfifg
Nina Ward
Tom Zavist
Three Cheers,

I Don't Know What You're Talking About

by David Skaar

For those of you who weren't here for last month's column, and even for some who were, a quick recap. First, and most important, it is Culture Quest time coming up. Test date is April 30, registration is due in March, so it's time to get a team together. The team is coming along nicely, but we've still got spaces to fill; volunteer now before I start twisting arms, you know I will.

To recap the theme from last time, which I am now continuing, I was ranting and rambling over the ever-changing English language, the fluid nature of word meanings, and some crackpot theories of mine about what it all means. I feel I have so much left in my diatribe, that I will now carry on this month. But first, a disclaimer.

In my previous column, I referenced both the Oxford English Dictionary and Wikipedia and perhaps implied by this usage that they were equivalently reliable sources. Right after that, there were reports of problems with Wikipedia's reliability. Given that it is an open-source encyclopedia,

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SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

- *Really nothing interesting in this issue*
- *Could try What You are talking about, actually about Culture Quest*
- *Learn about calendars in "Chinese New Year" P. 4*
- *Get insight of Independence Day P.6*
- *There are no LocSecond and Editor's column because we have more interesting things this issue.*

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built by anybody on line with something to say on the subject, I always took its information with a grain of salt. It's the sort of project, that should be pretty reliable on average, as most contributors mean well, but the facts are only as good as these people have at their disposal or in their memories. The problem is that it is in a constant state of flux, with existing entries always subject to revision. As one person commented, a persistent idiot can ruin anything on it. He then went on to call it a quantum encyclopedia, which may or may not have accurate information on any given subject at the time you look (Jerry Holkins, aka Tycho Brahe <http://www.penny-arcade.com/2005/12/16#1134748680>, beware, strong language). All I have to say about this is check your source. I can be pretty sure that the OED is intended to be comprehensive, fair, and accurate, and that Wikipedia can be just about anything. Therefore, I do not try to use Wikipedia for anything of importance, or something that I can't easily verify the details with another source. As I used Wikipedia to reference The Simpsons last time, I figured that it was a sufficiently rigorous source for that.

And so, regarding the power of references, as I mentioned in last month's article, the OED might be viewed as operating circularly. The OED will put in anything that is used as a word, and if a word is in the OED, then people accept it as a legitimate word. This causes consternation for some, as the OED also includes every obscene, insulting, or just plain filthy word in the language. The fact that these words are in the dictionary then gives them legitimacy as acceptable words, giving people the impression it's OK to use them (goes the theory). The dictionary defends this by saying that it is a descriptive work, not a prescriptive work. They only give the definition of a word as it is actually used, they warn that it is obscene or vulgar, and leave it up to the users to behave themselves.

This neatly brings me to my main topic for this month, dirty words (as I promised last time). Obscenities are one of the most fluid parts of modern English, and pretty much as one word becomes bad enough to be labeled dirty, a new one will take its place. Conversely, some previously dirty words have also become acceptable enough for more general usage, and they too are replaced with new versions considered bad enough to be banned. There are also a remarkable number of perfectly usable words that substitute for the dirty ones. They are used exactly as the dirty ones would be used, for the same reasons, and for the same effect. Just last night on Jeopardy, one contestant's response to Final Jeopardy was "What is 'I have no freaking idea'". No one even batted an eye, and most thought it was pretty funny, but I certainly know the essence of what he really meant. Now, if you're getting nervous, I will not be including any dirty words in this piece, or even any potentially dirty ones, so it's OK for any youngsters to read. Of course, I may be giving some ideas that result in questions like, "What word is he talking about?"

Some of the most flexible words for coming and going from completely obscene and unusable to usable but edgy are racial slurs. Certain words used to be the standard ways to refer to people of specific ethnicities, then became insulting ways to refer to people, and now have become sure ways to start a fight. Others have gone the opposite direction, and can be used jokingly, as long as care is taken. As a result, new words are deliberately adapted to be used as insulting, and sometimes completely innocent words are perceived as slurs. One famous case is the statement that got Howard Cosell in trouble on Monday Night Football (that may have gotten him fired, or just in trouble, depending on the reference). Howard, with his unique usage of the English language, and his excitable personality, referred to a 'minority' player making a particularly good run as a "little monkey". It's unlikely that he was making a racial slur,

it's just more probable that he was being himself.

A second case was on a college campus when a student trying to study was being disturbed by noisy people outside, yelled at a 'minority' female student to shut up, and called her a "water buffalo". Why did he come up with "water buffalo"? Had he been working out some particularly good name to call this person, or was he reading about Southeast Asian agriculture? This got him in a lot of trouble, and there were a variety of questions (and jokes) about appropriate language, banned phrases, and whether any animal reference to a person is a slur. A number of animal names have been used that way for some time. If I get overheard talking about mule deer, or perhaps even newts, could someone be offended?

This example shows a strong example of language evolution that I enjoy, the fact that *any* word can be a bad word if used correctly with the proper emphasis. Already, a great many names of animals, fruits, and vegetables are what George Carlin calls "two-way words". They can be used completely appropriately in conversation with your mother or high-church officials, or can, with leers and chuckles, be terribly crude and disgusting. I will not name any of these words, and if any kids are reading this and don't know all these words already, don't use my name when you ask your parents and teachers about them.

Another neat thing about dirty words is they're usually one of the first things people learn when studying a new language, partly because they're useful, and partly because they're fun. Also, many languages invented for fictional purposes are sure to include words that are meaningless, but are used as obscenities. It seems to give these languages a little more realistic. Klingon has them, Interlac from DC Comics has them, Zaphod Beeblebrox uses them in The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy, and Farscape has three words that, strangely, are not converted by the automatic translator into English when everything else is. In the 1960s and 1970s, Larry Niven wrote a number of stories set in the late 20th-early 21st century in which "censored" was actually used as an obscenity. His feeling was that if "censored" kept being used in place of dirty words, it would take on that connotation. NYPD Blue once tried to get around the censors by using nonsense syllables for an anatomical reference. The context made it perfectly clear what it was though, and the censors said they couldn't use it. Result – instant creation of a new dirty word.

A particularly good story comes from the British television show "Red Dwarf". Set several centuries into the future, the writers knew that obscenities changed over time and wanted to invent a new all-purpose word that could be used as a 'colorful' noun, verb, adjective, and adverb, and came up with something they thought was meaningless, but fit the pattern of a four-letter, one syllable, fun to say, snappy word. Unfortunately, the four-letter word they came up with was somewhat similar to a currently existing word, which while not truly obscene, is slang for something pretty gross. This was pointed out to them by an irate viewer who thought they had done it on purpose. Maybe they did, maybe they didn't, there's evidence for both sides. (If you really want to know the words and the story, ask me, but don't say I didn't warn you, emphatically. Please don't ask unless you're really, really serious.)

Finally, in closing, a couple short stories of personal experience I've had with changing word usage and changing perceptions of word meanings. The first comes from a story that went around a few years ago, one of those internet propagated stories without basis. A group I was in had scheduled a picnic, when one of the organizers got the story that the word picnic originally referred to lynchings and the follow-up activities. Despite the fact that the etymology explanation was sketchy, at best, and it was simple to look

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up the origins of the word as coming from medieval French and German, people were still upset by the connotations. Even when the explanation was given, showing that this meaning was completely bogus, some people still didn't want to use the word picnic. Now this story was linked in their mind to it, so it left a bad taste in their mouth, or they were worried that if they used it, other people who'd heard the story, but not the explanation would be offended. And thus the English language evolves.

A second story is set off annually for me, a little more each year around this time. I grew up in New Mexico, where it has been traditional for a long time to put out the paper bags with the sand and the candles as decorations on Christmas Eve. These go back quite a long way in Mexican culture. They are most accurately called "farolitos", meaning "little lanterns". They are more commonly called "luminarias" (which MS-Word just tried to correct, annoying me further, for reasons that may become clear). A luminaria was originally a traditional Mexican Christmas-time bonfire, but that word has been commonly used for the paper bag lanterns for a long time, annoying the purists. Now that luminarias are becoming more and more common across the country, the name is being changed again. I first heard someone miscall them "luminaries" (which is what MS-Word wants to change luminarias to) about 15 years ago, and the fact that they had been told the name correctly, and were now immediately calling

them the wrong thing annoyed me. I wrote this off to just plain ignorance on the part of the person, who is just the sort of person I'd expect that from, coming as they do from one of the most homogeneous and xenophobic places in the US. I didn't have to deal with this misuse for years, until recently. My neighborhood in Raleigh puts out luminarias around Christmas, and while some people call them the correct name, the actual organizers call them luminaries. The idea of people who are outstanding in their fields and notable for their expertise and intelligence lining the streets on Christmas Eve amuses me, but misuse of the word annoys and saddens me. I doubt that I could do much to correct this misuse on a large scale (at least outside of the southwest), as I'd probably come off as a zealot, and most people don't care. Luminaries is not a completely inappropriate word, as it can refer to things that emit light, although the standard definition is just used for stars. If this usage continues to become more frequent, then by the existing system of word creation, which I have described and even defended, it will become a correct word to use, and that's just the way it is, whether I like it or not.

(A humorous post-script to this story - in one of the neighborhood newsletters, an article about activities and work being done in the area not only mentioned the "luminaries" but also talked about "beatification" of some of the public areas. Truly I live in an amazing neighborhood.)

Join the Culture Quest team! Email me at das3@acpub.duke.edu

And now, a word-centric series of trivia questions.

- 1) What common word comes from the Latin for the meeting of three roads?
- 2) What extremely common acronym (you've probably seen it several times today) actually takes longer to say than the words it replaces?
- 3) Along with grammar and logic, what subject is part of the educational trivium, and is the art of speaking effectively to inform or persuade?
- 4) According to the OED, this word's origins are as a description of temporary movable shelters, as well as tents used as sanctuaries by the Israelites. It now refers to structures that are anything but temporary and portable.
- 5) What word for a person who incessantly talks nonsense comes from Scottish, as a compounding of the words for nonsense and a contemptible person?
- 6) What words for geographic areas mean, respectively, a sea surrounded by land, and the land between the rivers?
- 7) Name the two words often used interchangeably (and incorrectly) that have similar spellings and mean A] tilting to the side or swaying from side to side, and B] moving headlong at high speed.
- 8) Would you find hausteria in a gourmet food store, a forest, or an electronics assembly plant?
- 9) Is a brank used in tunneling equipment, carpentry, or torture?

— See answers on P. 6

Greensboro Coordinator's Corner

by Ellen Muratori

Games Night continues to be my favorite Mensa activity. No need to conjure up some topic to chit-chat about, it's right there in front of you! David S. of Raleigh joined us in December and introduced us to "Ticket to Ride:Europe". I still think it should be named "Tracks Across... (whatever continent)". Boy, what a game! My imagination ran wild. I revisited Provence, since my RR track-trip took me from Barcelona to Zurich. Another trip took me to Amsterdam where I visited (mental gymnastics) my cousins. And a final trip brought me to Moscow. Brrr. Brian S., Melinda K., Tom Z. and Ellen M. stared in amazement when David finished with a flourish of 42 points! Spectacular! The game, Perudo, thrived

next, with several Calza's. Olay!

If you don't know what I'm talking about, join us on Feb 24th! Or attend the RDU games night on Feb 11. You'll find the same kind of enthusiasm there.

Tweaky Tuesday Lunch in Greensboro, is a cafeteria experience, giving you lots of food choices from the calorie-laden chicken stew to any of the sizeable, sparsely calorie-laden salads. No waiting for someone to bring you the food, no surprises, no tipping. The December crowds will have thinned out (I'm writing this on Jan 4!), and we can expect to have two tables-ful again.

And lastly, our Saturday Night Special continues to give us an opportunity to ponder deeper subjects. (Ha!) We usually have a group of 6-8 persons and anything can be expected.

Till next...

Volunteer for a Valentine! by Marion Gaskins

Here we are in the New Year. The holidays are over and store shelves are packed with those heart-shaped boxes of Valentine candy. Windows of lingerie shops are filled with red lace. What should you get for your significant other? Or are you starting another year with no one special? Volunteering with Mensa can change that. For decades, Mensa has been "The Place" to meet potential mates. There are a number of well-known couples who have met, married, and been living Happily Ever After since meeting at Mensa Gatherings.

The upcoming World Gathering to be held at Disney World in Orlando this year has the potential of setting a

new record for number of couples created with Mensa as matchmaker. Even if you're shy and reluctant to talk to strangers, you have the opportunity to meet hundreds of intellectual equals in comfortable and supportive surroundings. Just bring your smiling face to help Registration Chair, Eddie Truelove. (Eddie, by the way, met his Maggie, Region 10 RVC, at a Gathering.) It's a great way to meet a wide variety of people under positive circumstances without feeling awkward. If you're a little more outgoing, try Hospitality. (Hospitality Chair Jerry Fortner met Merrell through Mensa and they were married at the Central Florida Mensa RG.) If you're secretly longing to perform or are already an established

musical artist, there'll be plenty of opportunity to show off your talent to a captive audience. Dave Bryant and his handpicked Hunks (or is that Hulks?) will be there to assure Security, so there's no need to worry about disobeying your mother - it's safe to talk to strangers at the Mensa World Gathering, August 8-13, 2006.

Check out CONTACTS on the National website and let Kay Klasen, Volunteers Coordinator, know what you want to do to help. (Incidentally, Kay met her husband, John, at one of the first MENSAs events that she attended!) Of course, volunteering could create a problem for you: What to do with all those valentines you'll receive in 2007! — Service to out-of-area, the Editor

Candidates statements (one entry):

Dan Singer:

I've lived in Durham for 15 years, work with computers at Duke University, and have been a member of Mensa and MENC for two years. Last year I wrote a series of articles on homebrewing for Mblem, and I've

regularly participated in the menc-forum. Last spring, I was asked to accept an appointment on the MENC ExCom as Treasurer to fill a vacancy. I guess someone figured that beer and money make a good combination. After taking a few months to familiarize myself with procedures and requirements, I produced my first annual fi-

nancial report for the December issue of Mblem. The current issue should include an article with other details of recent Treasurer activities and planning. Being as I now have a system in place and am familiar with the procedures, I would like to continue as an ExCom member, and in particular continue as Treasurer.

Chinese New Year's Celebration

LG News, by Shiangtai Tuan

Even though the Chinese New Year's day this year is on January 29, we follow our tradition to celebrate in the February LG. We have made this tradition for two reasons. The first is that Chinese New Year's day is more likely to be in February than in January. The second is that we have enough celebration in January. Let's spread out the fun

Why is it more likely in February? One approximate way to guess the CNY day is that it is the new moon nearest to February 4. The last time this estimate was wrong in 1985 and the next time this will be wrong in 2015. So we can use this as the rule of the thumb for the next nine years. Well, how do you know if this is right or wrong and what is the real way to decide what day the CNY day is? To answer this question, we have to go into Chinese calendar a little. In general, there are three ways to define a calendar. A lunar calendar is when people use the moon alone. A month is defined as from a new moon to another new moon (as in Jewish calendar) or from a crescent moon to a crescent moon (as in Muslim calendar). A solar calendar is defined by the position of the sun (say, at noon time) alone. The Gregorian calendar is of this kind. (See David Skaar's article, "It's Later than You Think" in the November issue of Mblem.) Since a lunar month is about 29.5306 days and a solar year is about 365.2424 days (from one March Equinox to the next), there are 7 extra months in 19 years, only off by about two hours! The Jewish calendar add a "leap month" at the end of the "leap year" every three years three times, then two years, then every three years two times, and then in two years. (The 3, 3, 3, 2, 3, 3, 2 rule, sort of like the whole notes and half notes on the piano key board.) The Chinese calendar, however, use both the sun and the moon, and therefore, is a "lunisolar" calendar. Since the earth axis (of spinning) is not parallel to the axis of the earth orbit, the sun appears to the north in the summer and to the south in the winter. The ancient people did not know of the orbiting stuff but the Chinese astronomers knew exactly where the sun was in the sky (using stars as background), the two solstices (the sun appeared to be northern and southern most), and the two equinoxes (same length for day and night). They added two more "markers" between each of these four basic markers by equally dividing the path of the sun in the sky. Effectively, as we understand it now, they divided the earth orbit in twelve sectors by equal angles. Since the earth orbit is elliptical, and since the earth travels faster when it is near the sun, these twelve markers do not divide the year into twelve equal time slots. Usually, there should be one of these markers in between two new moons. Since these markers define approximately one twelfth of a year, once a while (more precisely, seven times in 19 years), two new moons will fall between two markers. The month lying between these two markers is defined as a leap month. So, you see, the Chinese calendar is defined precisely by the position of the sun

as well as the moon and therefore the only true "lunisolar" calendar. Few more definitions are need to define a calendar: the time of the day is defined by the meridian at 120 E, from midnight to midnight; the first day of a month is the day in which a new moon fall; and the month in which the winter solstice (about Dec 21 or 22) falls is the eleventh of the year. So, wouldn't you say that the next new moon is the twelfth month and the "second new moon from the winter solstice is the Chinese New Year's day"? Well, close enough but not necessarily so. You see, there could be a leap month stuck in there. In that case, it would be the third new moon. Wouldn't you say that might happen once every twelve years in average? Things are lot more complicated than that. It so happens that the earth is closer to the sun and moves faster in the winter so that the "markers" are closer in time in the winter and it is less likely to have two new moons (29.53 days apart) in between two winter markers (the four in the winter at intervals: 29.55, 29.44, 29.59 days). This has not happened since 1645 but will happen in 2033 when the CNY day will be on the third new moon after the winter solstice. Well, how late could a CNY ever be if it is the third new moon after winter solstice? The latest date of CNY day before 2644 is February 21 in the year 2319, the only time in one thousand years between 1645 and 2644. Neither you nor I can live to see it.

I got all the above information from an article called "the Mathematics of Chinese Calendar" by Helmer Aslaksen at the department of Mathematics, National University of Singapore. He has a website at <http://www.math.nus.edu.sg/aslaksen/calendar/chinese.html> and you can find this article at <http://www.math.nus.edu.sg/aslaksen/calendar/cal.pdf>.

Independent of how we define CNY, we are to celebrate the beginning of the year of Dog by having a potluck party at my house on the third Saturday of February. Every year I invite friends to my house to celebrate Chinese New Year with me. You, my extended family in MENC, are all invited. Come and enjoy the evening, share with others your favorite dish and drink, and chat with other friends, Mensans or not. (Please do not ask other guests: "Are you a Mensan" as been done before.) There will not be a kitty. I will prepare some soft drink and some "boxed" wine. Otherwise it is BYOF(ood), BYOB(ooze), BYOM(usic instruments if you wish) ... Please come with family, significant others, friends
Date: 2006. 2.18, the third Saturday.
Time: 6:30 PM till late.
Contact info, directions: See back of calendar page.

Carolinah RG

Sez Mary Ann Cox of Piedmont Area M: It is time to be working on your costume for the Carolinah RG March 24-26. Of course you can wear your toga, your pirate's outfit, your HalloweeM (or Halloween) costume, or something imaginative from the thrift store. Check out the Bulletin or www.piedmontareamensa.org.

People I have known - Phil Agee by Ed Williams

Several months ago, I wrote about the KGB trying to recruit me when I was serving at the US Embassy at Montevideo, Uruguay. They apparently had better luck with another person who worked at the Embassy - Philip Agee. That name was notorious back in the '70s and '80s, but you don't hear much about him any more - not since the fall of the Soviet Union. Nowadays, Phil is living in Cuba and runs a travel agency.

In 1963-66, I was working in the Economic-Commercial Section of the Embassy in Montevideo. Phil Agee was there in the CIA. The CIA had at least 2 "divisions" in most countries: an office attached to the Embassy's Political Section (kept separate from what we thought of as the "real" Political Section), and some agents under deep cover on the outside. My fiancée and I became friends with an undercover CIA couple who were business people. They never told us, but it didn't take us long to figure it out. Phil was one of the agents with an office in the section we called "Pol. 2". He was not well-liked by the Embassy people, not even his own CIA colleagues. My fiancée and I were friendly with the CIA Station Chief and his wife, and got that impression from them. Phil was not married and did not socialize much. I saw the in-house CIA people a lot, because the Communist terrorist organization "Tupamaro" was getting started, and was attacking American businesses. I was the "go-to" guy in the Embassy for the business people. Phil always seemed to have the attitude "what I am doing is secret and is more important than what you are doing", but I don't think any of us

would have thought that he was likely to defect to our enemies, as he did.

Phil had entered the CIA in the late '50s and served in several Latin American countries, until he was forced to resign in 1969, reportedly because of alcoholism and misbehavior with Embassy wives. Over this period of time, he appears to have become a Marxist, opposed to capitalism and the US's support of capitalist regimes. (Later, in 1975, he told Esquire Magazine that he aspired to be a Communist and a revolutionary.) After leaving the CIA, he lived in several countries and wrote a book, "Inside the Company - A CIA Diary", and helped found the journal "CounterSpy", which revealed the names and locations of CIA operatives. One notorious result of this was the 1975 assassination of Richard Welch, the CIA Station Chief in Athens by a Greek Communist gang, after his name and home address had been published in "CounterSpy". This, and other incidents, did much damage to CIA morale, and to its intelligence-gathering abilities. Agee's US passport was revoked in 1979, and I don't know if he is still a U.S. citizen or if he has renounced his citizenship; but he seems to be content to live under one of his Marxist idols in that free, progressive, multicultural island to our south. I wonder where he will go if Cuba again becomes a (horrors!!) capitalist country. Maybe Venezuela or Bolivia. Incidentally, in 2003, when fraudulent charges were brought against Bush Administration officials for "outing" a CIA "undercover" agent (Valerie Plame was NOT an undercover agent, and had not been one for over 5 years), Agee spoke out in support of Plame and her husband, Joe Wilson.

Extracting Qi from Thin Air At Large Column, by Shiangtai Tuan

If I tell you this is about exercise, you would probably skip over and go to the next article. So, this is what I am to say.

There is an essence of life everywhere, filling up the space, occupied space or not. It is in you, in me, in the chair you sit on, in thin air surrounding you. It has been called Qi, the Tao, the Force (as in "May the Force be with you"), the fountain of youth ... It is up to you to extract more of it from the surrounding to benefit yourself and I am going to teach you how.

It is easy to learn. However, you have to be able to do two things - to count and to breathe. Now try to count from one to seven. Why seven, because it is prime; it is not too big, it is not too small like two or three; and it is a mysterious number. Now, try to count to nine. Why nine, because it is also mysterious and it signifies "very many", at least in ancient China. You also need to be able to count in groups of four as in 1, 2, 3, 4; 2, 2, 3, 4; 3, 2, 3, 4; ... up to 9, 2, 3, 4. (By the way, if you have not noticed, it is enough to count only to 8, 2, 3, 4 to be a musician. You need to be able to go one step further than them.)

We can start now. Lie on your back on the floor, on a mat, in bed ... or anywhere you can spread out comfortably. If you cannot lie on your back or if it is not comfort-

able, on your side is fine. Counting one, breathe in smoothly and deeply and then exhale in the same smooth fashion. Now, do not try to do something simply because you think you are trying to capture the essence of life. Just the opposite, you are to relax and NOT to do anything, not even thinking of anything. While breathing, concentrate on parts of your body to check if they are relaxed. Say, starting from your forehead. Is it relaxed? Then, down to your eyebrows, to your closed eyes, are you squinting? Press your eyelids together hard and then relax them. It is very effective to tighten your muscle and then relax them. This way you check to see if your body is completely relaxed several times when you breathe seven times. Don't worry if you lost count and cannot reach even seven because you are so relaxed or fall asleep. Just start over again. If you are not bored and feel good about it, you may try the big number and go for nine. You can do this any time of day or night, as many times as you wish. Do these seven or nine breathing/counting before doing any of the following.

Well, what is the counting in groups of four? Still lying down, breathe twice on the counts of 1, 2 while bending your pelvis forward, tightening your lower abdominal muscle. On the counts and breathing of 3 and 4, relax your abdominal muscle but pull your pelvis backwards as hard as you can. Repeat all this on your next groups of four

counting as in 2, 2, 3, 4; 3, 2, 3, 4 ... up to 7 or 9, 2, 3, 4. Of course, you can do all these any time of the day too: when you first wake up, before going to bed, on your office chair, giving dictation to your secretary, or taking dictation from your boss ...

After you are used to doing this, say, after seven days, you can make some extensions. It can be done either in quality or quantity. Extending on the same thing: on counts of 1, 2, tighten the whole stomach muscle, not emphasize only the lower part; on the counts of 3, 4, pull the whole body backwards. One step further: on counts 1, 2, try to lift up your head, shoulder, feet, and legs; on counts 3, 4, try to lift up the body with only the back of the head and the heels on the ground. Extending to other things: say, holding your hand together in front of your chest, push against each other to the left and then to the right on the count of 1 and 2 then pull against each other on the counts of 3 and 4. Use your imagination. Push your hands against each other in and out; bend your head left and right; push your head left and right against a hand on that side to hold it in place; push against the ground (usually known as pushups); involve your legs or other parts of your body ...

Why do I suggest to starting at the lower abdomen? According to Chinese medicine, tradition, and superstition, qi is stored; starts

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Treasurer's Sporadic Report

by Dan Singer

Just a brief report to update everyone on a few issues.

CD investment: As mentioned in the previous Treasurer's Report, the MENC Ex-Com decided to invest excess funds in CDs (Certificates of Deposit, not Compact Disks!). This has been done, and we now have two \$5000 CDs at Self Help Credit Union. The two CDs have staggered maturity dates to allow better access in case we need to access some portion; without intervention, they will renew. The CDs also require two signers for redemption, for greater security. I see these as being a small endowment for MENC: the CDs should generate about \$300 - \$500 in interest per year (depending on available interest rates). Some portion of the interest can be reinvested when the CDs are renewed, depending upon current needs; thus the endowment may continue to grow.

Bank account: Our Wachovia account has been converted from an interest-bearing business checking account to a non-profit account. The business account paid only about 1/10 percent interest (about \$1 per month), and had a \$2500 minimum balance. The non-profit account pays no interest, but has no minimum balance. As I write this, our most recent bank statement (end of De-

ember) shows \$3312.81 in our checking account.

Newsletter expense: Someone brought up the issue that newsletter expense seemed excessive when comparing the figures from the recent Financial Report to the previous year's. I did some research and concluded that the 2005 report covered 14 newsletter issues (a couple carried over from the previous year), and the 2004 report covered only 6 newsletter issues, thus the large difference. The difference in the amount spent per issue between the two years averages to only a \$14.55 increase. I'll be happy to provide anyone with more details on this or any other treasury-related issues. While on the newsletter subject, I want to acknowledge once again that the newsletter crew are among the hardest working volunteers of this organization; an incredible effort goes into newsletter production every month!

When I prepared the recent financial report (see 12/2005 Mblem), I was only concerned with the numbers and producing the report (and figuring out how to do that); I paid no attention to their meanings. As with the newsletter expense (making no comparison to the previous year), someone also pointed out the difference in income from testing reimbursement. The amount for 2004 was \$250, and for 2005 it was \$1300. In this

case, that's a \$1050 increase, or 420%. Now, I know that the purpose of Mensa testing is not for revenue generation, but this does show what a great job the test proctors are doing in making testing available. So, I'd like to take this opportunity to acknowledge another group of generous and hard working volunteers! Generally, reimbursement is \$12.50 per testee; you can do the math.

Annual financial review: According to the American Mensa local group 'Minimum Standard Bylaws Requirements' and the American Mensa 'Treasurer's Handbook' (these can be viewed at www.us.mensa.org), each local group should conduct an annual financial review shortly after ExCom elections and officer selection. This review "must be conducted by someone who is not involved in the issuing or collecting of money during the review period". Ideally, this would be done by a CPA or someone with related financial background, but it should be noted that this is an informal review and not an audit. I don't think this issue is specifically addressed in MENC's bylaws (can be viewed at www.menc.us), but I think it's something we should do in order to insure that finances are being handled properly. At the time I write this, we have not yet had elections, but I hope that this will be acted upon whether or not I continue as Treasurer.

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moving; goes back to a place called Dan Tien – the field of essence. This mysterious Dan Tien is about two or three inches below your navel and a little below the surface. I am not a Qi Gong practitioner so I will not mislead you by telling you what to do with the qi you collected. However, I can tell you what I have heard. Rumor says that a Qi Gong expert can move his/her qi from Dan Tien to circle in the body, to concentrate, say, at the tip of the finger and knock over a bull by one touch. Good luck. According to the Western theory of exercise, stomach muscle is also essential. Without strong tummy muscle one cannot do weight lifting, boxing, skiing, or even running. Many people, especially women, say that they are not athletes, not wanting to box but only want to take a walk now and then. Well, a mild walk or a trip to the mall will give you a backache if you have weak stomach muscles. Do the first thing I suggested above for a

while and you will see that you will not have those nasty backaches any more. However, this is not to replace your exercise which you need to get your heart beat up once a while. Lots of the above suggestions help to build muscles. The recent finding is that men and women need some sort of mild muscle building especially when they advance in age. A high IQ brain needs a matching body to hold it up. One more thing, in the above suggestions, you may notice there are things you push or pull hard, helping to build muscles. There are also things you simply bend left or right. It helps to stretch. Use your imagination to get all your muscles involved and all of them stretched afterwards. May the Force be with you. (Or the fifce, the sevence.)

War for American Independence

by Ed Williams

Back during the War for American Independence (often mistakenly called "The American Revolution"), General Benedict Arnold was, at first, a very good officer. He played an important part in the American victory in the Saratoga campaign. But he was embittered when Congress promoted 5 junior Brigadier Generals to Major General, but not him. He was given command of the

fort at West Point, and started his plan to sell out to the Brits. Gen. Clinton sent Major Andre to firm up the plan to open the Hudson River to the British forces. Andre walked up the Hudson alone one night to West Point, met with Arnold, and in the very early morning hours began to walk back down the river. He passed a farm where there were many cocks and hens. One of the cocks, awakened too early, saw him and began crowing. The farmer thought this was unusual, went out with his musket to see what was going on, and captured Andre. This was the first "chicken catch-a-Tory".

Answers to "... Don't Know ..."

- 1) Trivia. Surprise, surprise.
- 2) WWW, for world wide web (9 syllables vs. 3. Maybe 6 syllables, depending on where you're from.)
- 3) Rhetoric
- 4) Tabernacle. Interestingly, references dating back to at least the 14th century refer to the human body as a tabernacle, not meaning that it is holy, but that it is temporary.
- 5) Blatherskite
- 6) Mediterranean and Mesopotamia
- 7) A) careen B) career
- 8) A forest, it is the equivalent to roots for mistletoe
- 9) Torture. It is clamped onto the head and nose, and is pretty unpleasant.



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February
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Let's Go UNC-TV

Every year some of us from MENC go volunteering to answer phones at UNC-TV for their fund-raising "Festival". See photos of previous years on <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/menc/> our e-mail group website. This year, our MENC's slot is Sunday, February 26, from 2:30 PM to 7:00 PM. If you are going to MENC Chapel Hill Brunch, you may go right after that. We will be in a large TV studio with lots of phones to answer pledges. We may occasionally be on camera. We will be "on the phones" when they have a program brake. The rest of the time, about 80% of the total time, is "free time", while fed with the local restaurant donated food and drinks. You could chat with other volunteers from MENC or otherwise. Please wear solid colored clothing or Mensa outfit. We have some extra Mensa T-shirt you can borrow for the event, if you wish. If you intend to go or want further information, please call or e-mail the contact for this event, Shiangtai Tuan, (see contact page).

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