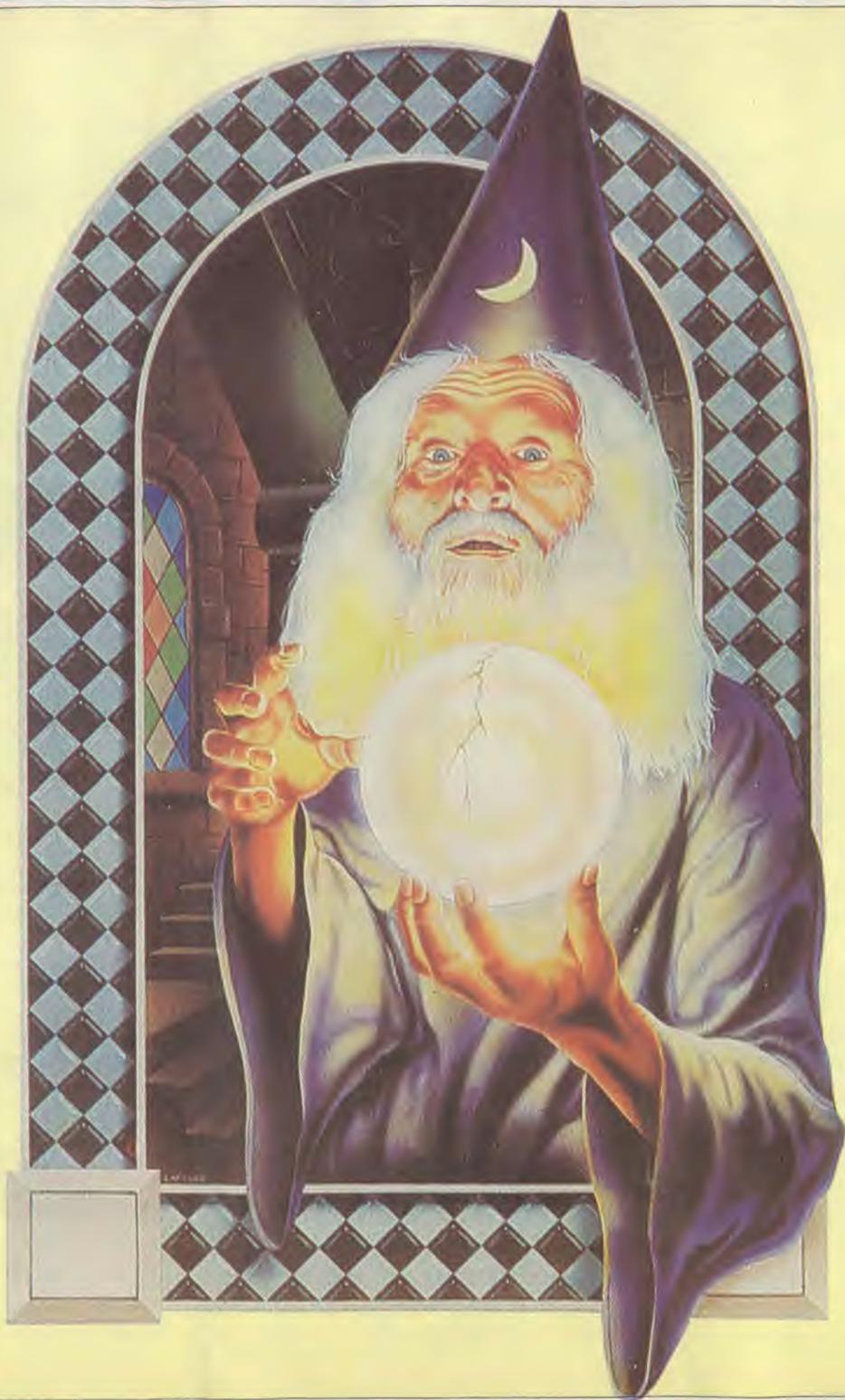


March/April 1991

Our Times

A FAMILY MAGAZINE FOR BETTER LIVING

CHASING LUCKY STARS



Chasing Lucky Stars

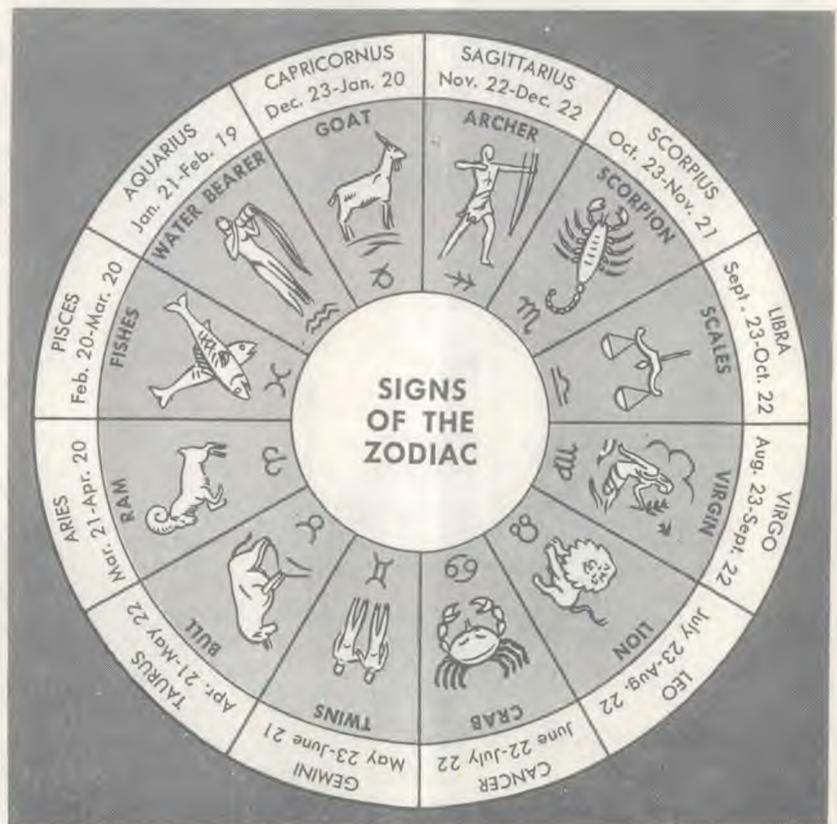
by George Vandeman

Astrology. It's fun. It's popular. It promises so much. Too bad the facts don't support it.

What do you see when you look up at the countless stars? Random specks of light ...or something more?

For centuries, people have traced the outlines of exotic creatures in the patterns formed by the stars. These patterns (or "constellations") were given the names of mythical figures, like Orion (the Hunter), Ursus Major (the Great Bear), and Pegasus (the Winged Horse). All in all, some 88 constellations were named.

Ancient astronomers noticed, however, that the track of the sun's path through the sky (astronomers call this "the Zodiac") seemed to pass through twelve "signs of the zodiac" took on a special significance because of that fact.



In time, as a matter of fact, these twelve signs took on godlike powers. People came to believe that the stars actually controlled their destinies.

"Individual wills," ancient astrologers said, "are pushed and pulled by heavenly bodies no less than are the tides. Our fates are written in the stars."

This is what people believed a long time ago.

But surely no one believes such things today—or do they?

Fact: today astrology is taken seriously, according to a Gallup Poll, by as many as 32 million Americans!

Fact: today there are more professional astrologers casting horoscopes than there are professional astronomers using telescopes!

Fact: today and every day, an American is more likely to check his horoscope than he is to read his Bible!

The space shuttle, it seems, isn't the only way America seeks its future in the stars! To be sure, progress is still the watchword of our age; science still steers our civilization. Like Nancy Reagan after her husband's near-assassination, however, an astonishing number of Americans seek help, not from super-colliders or semiconductors, but in the ancient, unscientific beliefs of astrology.

"Now how can you call astrology 'unscientific'?" some will object. "Who's to say that stars don't affect people

much the same way the moon causes tides?"

Whatever "heavenly influence" the stars may have upon us, however, must be incredibly small. How small? Well, when we were born, for instance, the gravitational "pull" exerted by the obstetrician's just being in the delivery room with us was many times greater than that of the moon, the planet Mars, or the constellation Musca (the Fly) put together!

"Now wait a minute!" you might say. "No astrologer says that Musca is in the zodiac!"

That's true, but then again, no constellation is where the astrologers say it is—not even the signs of the zodiac! As the earth spins on its axis, you see, it wobbles slightly. Granted, it's not much of a wobble, but given the thousands of years since astrologers last updated their astronomy, it's been more than enough to throw off all their calculations.

For one thing, this wobble (it's called the "precession of the equinoxes") shifts the constellations a little bit to the east each day. Over time, this shift has been enough to move back the ascendance of each sign of the zodiac by one full month. If your horoscope says you're a Gemini, in other words, you're really a Taurus; if it says your sign is Libra, it's really Virgo!

If that wasn't bad enough, the earth's wobble has skewed the zodiac enough

that it now includes an additional constellation. There are no longer twelve signs of the zodiac, in other words, but thirteen. You'll have to search your newspaper's horoscope column a long time, however, before you find any advice for people born under the sign of Ophiuchus (the Serpent-bearer)!

Now the fact that astrology is bad science could be excused, I suppose, if it gave us good advice. Time and time again, however, it's proven to be no more accurate than simple guesswork.

One physicist, for instance, checked the birth dates of thousands of scientists and politicians listed in *Who's Who*. According to astrology, after all, those born under certain signs are more likely to enter science and politics. What he found, however, was that their astrological signs were as randomly distributed as those of the general public.

A psychologist at Michigan State University, to give another example, obtained the records of hundreds of couples who had gotten married and divorced. He discovered that those born under "compatible" signs married—and divorced—just as often as those under "incompatible" signs.

Another scientist—a French statistician—did the most thorough study of all. He examined the zodiac signs, moon signs, planet

signs, mid-heaven signs, and ascendant signs of over 15,000 successful professionals. The result? You guessed it! The correlation between profession and astrological influences was no better than random chance.

Random chance, you see, is really the key to most horoscopes. Most of the personality profiles given by them are so general, there's a good chance most people will see something of themselves in them. Besides, generic, fortune cookie-type predictions (such as "You will meet someone special" or "It's not too late for a second chance") have a pretty good chance of coming true, anyway.

A good example of this comes courtesy of the French statistician I just mentioned. He placed a newspaper ad offering free, personalized horoscopes. One hundred fifty people responded. After sending each respondent exactly the same information, he asked how well the description fit. Ninety-four per cent said they recognized themselves—94 per cent of the people who'd received the horoscope of a massmurderer!

Yet with all this, people still believe in astrology—more so than at any time since the Renaissance. Twelve hundred of the nation's 1,700 newspapers still carry horoscope columns, after all. Ten thousand full-time, and 175,00 part-time astrologers still conduct a

thriving business. Books on astrology continue to sell millions of copies.

Why is that? Why is it that, no matter how thoroughly science may destroy the scientific basis for astrology, no matter how completely predictions made by the stars may fail, no matter how interchangeable horoscopes may be, why is it that people still believe that their fates are written in the stars?

We long to be significant—and astrology offers us that. The thought that the cosmos has a personal message for us is an attractive one, specially in this mechanized, impersonal age.

More than that, it promises us power. Astrology claims to reveal the right day for concluding that business transaction, the right time for making that new friend. Success is made to seem to be a matter of finding the lucky day.

We long to be significant—and astrology offers us that. More than that, it offers us power.

But of course, success requires far more than that. We need to know *how* to have good relationships, *how* to be good spouses and parents and friends. That's what brings success—not just some supposedly fortuitous time of place. We need to know *how* to conduct our lives with love and wisdom. That's

what brings us success—not some pattern in the stars.

That is why astrology is so dangerous; that is why astrology is a fraud. It pretends to tell us how we might heal our failed relationships and mend our broken dreams. It pretends to offer us the secret of success. It pretends to offer us a short-cut to love, riches, and happiness. In reality, it does nothing of the kind.

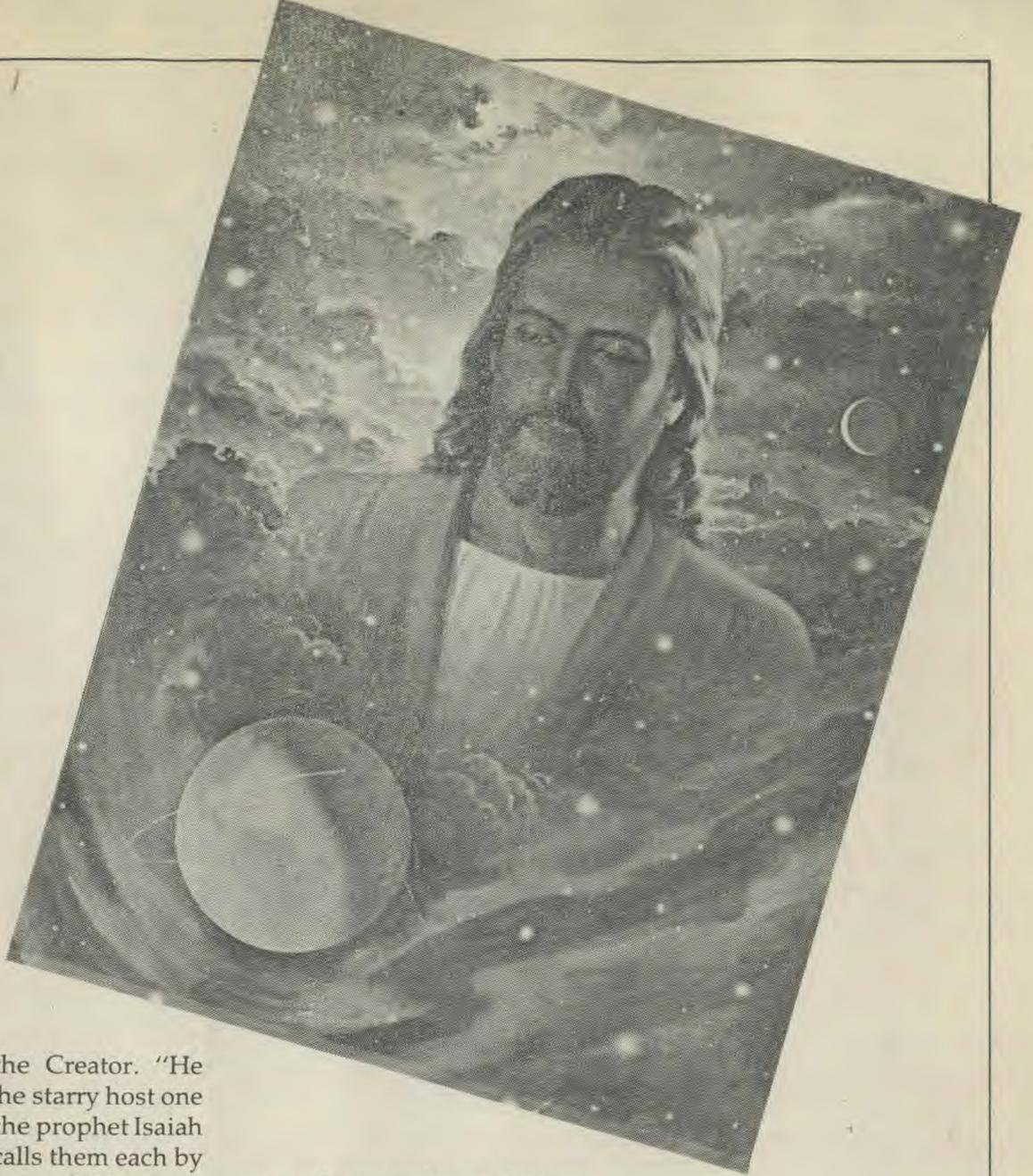
That's why the Bible speaks so strongly against astrology. Time and again it warns us against those who look to the stars for wisdom. Time and again it warns us not to seek our future in the stars. And time and again, it tells us to listen to what the stars are *really* telling us.

According to the Bible, the stars aren't just meaningless dots of light in the vast vacuum of space. They do have a voice. They do speak to us. And this is what they say:

"The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge" (Psalm 19:1,2, NIV).

And what is that speech? What is the knowledge?

It is praise, praise for the



glories of the Creator. "He brings out the starry host one by one," as the prophet Isaiah says, "and calls them each by name. Because of His great power and strength, not one of them is missing" Isaiah 40:26, (NIV).

When we look at the stars, you see, we should be reminded of God's infinite wisdom and power. We should take comfort in His infinite abilities—not in the assumed powers of twelve (or thirteen) constellations. We should look for guidance,

not to the stars, but to the one who guides the stars themselves.

So the stars *do* speak to us! The information they share, however, is much more profound than any fortune-cookie phrase. They tell us about a Creator whose wisdom and power are available to us here on earth. And the Bible tells us that this same God—the God who set the

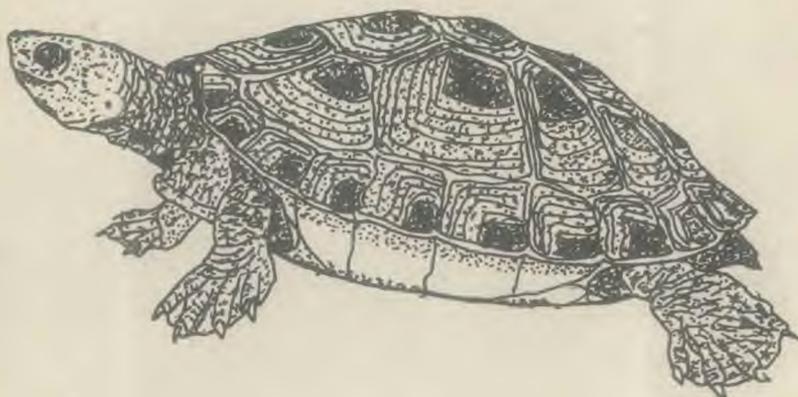
Heavens in place—is interested in our individual problems, in our hopes and in our dreams.

So what do you see when you look up at the night sky? Random specks of light? Something more?

Or the One who is the greatest of all? ●

Thank You for the Turtle that Died

by J Stephen Lang



Pets can help children learn how to face the realities of life—and death.

Every night when my little cousin Scotty says his prayers he concludes, "And thank You, Lord, for my turtle that died." This is hardly a typical way to end a prayer, but I can never hear it without being touched.

When my cousin Andrea's children (they live across the street from us) were old enough for pets, they began the inevitable accumulation of puppies, finches, kittens, lizards—and Abner, the turtle. I frequently served as the

family baby-sitter, as I still do, and I shared Andrea's hope that keeping pets would teach the children patience, responsibility, kindness—qualities that would help prepare them for life. But being around the children has made me realize that pets can do even more. They can help a child face the very difficult problem of death.

People instinctively try to shield their children from death, the great unknown, the thing so shrouded in fear and

mystery. (Even some Christian parents do this, though surely the symbol of the cross should remind us that death cannot—should not—be something we try to push from our consciousness.) The day I found the little turtle lying so small and cold in his little box, my first impulse was to hide him and tell Scotty that his turtle has gotten out of his box and crawled away into the woods. I even thought about trying to catch another turtle and replace the

one that died. I remembered that the turtle Scotty had caught was the first pet he had ever owned. And he loved it dearly.

While I was trying to decide what to tell him, the problem was taken out of my hands. Scotty came in from playing outside and ran to see his beloved turtle. He came running to me, carrying the pitiful little brown body, and cried to me to "fix" his turtle.

I tried to help my youngest family member learn this first hard lesson of life, that even his tall, bearded cousin Stevie could not fix everything. This situation could only be accepted, not changed.

We buried the turtle in the backyard. Later we talked about how it would become a part of the earth, of the yard, of the trees and flowers, and that in that way he would still be with us.

His face pensive and earnest as only a child's face can be, Scotty asked, "But where is the *real* turtle? Where did *he* go?" Already my little cousin was asking a question that has puzzled mankind for centuries.

I knew what he meant by "the real turtle"—the bright, beady eyes, the curious motion of his plodding limbs, the awkward yet appropriate symmetry of his armoured body—all the living things about the turtle that Scotty loved. I tried to help him to see that the "real" turtle

would live on in his memory, and we could always talk about him and remember him even though he wasn't there to touch anymore. The turtle had a purpose on earth, as every living thing does. He had been there to eat insects that harm our gardens, and he had been there to bring delight to human beings.

As we patted the soil over the small grave, Scotty suddenly smiled and said, "Well, anyway, I *had* my turtle." He didn't know it, but he had taken a great leap forward in understanding that nothing in this life is ours forever. He had leaped forward in understanding how to be grateful for the privilege of loving, even if only for a short time.

Scotty has had many pets since the turtle, some of which, I must sadly say, met with untimely deaths. After the first death, the death of the turtle, I told Scotty's parents that they should encourage the children not to remove creatures from their natural habitat. But the children have gone right on acquiring other pets nonetheless. And cousin Stevie, their favourite babysitter, has been on hand when some of the creatures died.

I have sometimes heard parents, even Christian parents, say, "I don't want my child to have a cat or a dog because it might be killed and then my child would grieve." This puzzles me, for grief seems to be a natural,

normal emotion. I'm not sure we have the right to deny children the right to experience it. We might just as well deny them the right to be angry, to feel fear, to be disappointed. We would certainly have to keep them from hearing the Bible being read, for the Bible abounds in sad stories. Assuming we could coddle a child to such an extent, we would surely stunt his emotional development. Loving widens and heightens the heart. Sadness and disappointment, unpleasant though they are, make us a little more ready to love again. The Christ we adore and strive to imitate is the one who overflowed with compassion for those who were grieving. And He proclaimed that those who mourned would be comforted.

Coming from a large family, I know that people are never closer than when they try to comfort each other. Experiencing the sadness of the death of a pet provides a reason to give and receive comfort, a reason to draw together in understanding. The death of a pet can show a family reservoirs of strength and faith in the face of loss. (You do not have to be a child to know how grievous the death of a pet can be.)

Scotty's parents, accustomed by now to the inevitability of pets in the home, and to the inevitability of the death of pets, do not replace a pet immediately. I

agree with their view that rushing right out and buying a replacement seems to cheapen the child's emotions. Not too long ago their cocker spaniel, Bojangles, died. I was present when my cousin Andrea explained this to her children.

She said, "There will never be another Bojangles, because Bojangles was his own special self. Someday we will get another dog, but he won't exactly replace Bojangles. We will always have a special place for Bojangles in our hearts. But we will love the new dog just as much and will have just as much fun with it."

I tell my little cousins about pets that I have had over the years, including Bernardo, the blue-headed parrot that could whistle a dozen tunes. My pet stories usually end with "Finally, Dorsey died," or "The little lamb grew up, became a sheep, and finally died." Somehow this reassures the children that death is a natural event, that biting, bitter grief eventually changes into gentle, mellow memory.

It is not easy to tell children that death is part of the natural, normal processes of the world. We adults have too many questions of our own about death. It was and is one of those taboo subjects we prefer not to think about. And though children are constantly exposed to the formerly taboo subject of sex, especially in the media, they are not exposed much to real

death and the very real grief that accompanies it. But, fortunately for themselves and for adults as well, children have a way of speaking of the unspeakable, of shoving into the light the things we would prefer not to discuss. (Remember the story of the emperor's new clothes?) In discussing death with my young cousins I have found that I have clarified my own thinking on the subject.

As Christians we believe that those who belong to Christ will live with Him in heaven. We have no such assurance about our pets, though I am sure many sensitive animal lovers like to think their beloved pets will be with them in the new

earth. The death of pets can remind us that, though animals and humans have different destinies after death, they have one thing in common—they pass from the sight of those who remain alive, and those who remain no longer possess them as they were. We are reminded that nothing in this world is ours to possess forever, though having once loved something, we never really lose it completely.

My little cousin Scotty still closes his prayers at night with "Thank you for my turtle that died." He loved that turtle, still misses him, still remembers him, but is not bitter or angry. We should all join Scotty in thanking God for the turtle that died. ■

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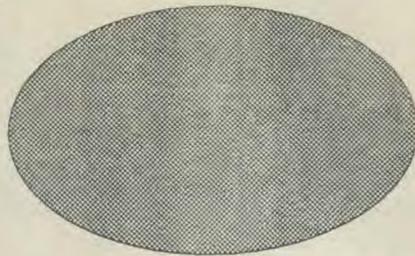
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Solo



Voyage

by Ken Long

"When you are old and grey, will you be disappointed that you didn't follow your dream when you had the chance?"

On June 5, 1988, Kay Cottee fulfilled a childhood dream. After 189 days at sea and more than 22,000 nautical miles, she became the first woman in history to complete a solo, non-stop and unassisted voyage around the globe.

Sailing her Cavalier 37 yacht, *Blackmores First Lady*, the 34-year-old Australian crossed the world's great oceans, rounding the five capes of the southern hemisphere and surviving galeforce winds and mountainous seas.

She faced both natural dangers (icebergs, whales, rocks and loneliness) and those made by humans (ships, rogue containers and even pirates). For more than six

months she didn't experience regular, uninterrupted sleep or the simple joy of fresh food. But aided by her native commonsense, grit and humour, she overcame all these hazards.

Kay Cottee had sailed from almost the moment she was born. At the age of two weeks she was on board the family boat. By the age of 11 she was ocean racing. The sea was destined to become her home.

After leaving school and a brief stint in the commercial world, she went into boat building and then founded a charter business on Sydney's Pittwater. During these years her dream took shape.

Kay purchased the bare hull and the deck of a Cavalier 37. For more than two years

she and a dedicated band of friends and helpers—riggers, sail makers, boat builders, engineers, electronic experts, nutritionists and weather forecasters—worked quietly and tirelessly to get *Blackmores First Lady* and her skipper ready for the voyage. These friends and willing helpers sailed with her, in spirit, around the world.

When Kay Cottee and *Blackmores First Lady* finally made their triumphant entry into Sydney Harbour, recognition of her courage was spontaneous and overwhelming. The young Australian was showered with accolades from a nation bursting with pride.

In a climax befitting the

Continued on page 13

by Ailee

Not many years ago the US prided itself on being the best-fed nation in the world. We don't hear this anymore. Instead, we hear that we are eating ourselves into premature disease, suffering, and death. What has happened? Where have we gone wrong?

A considerable part of the answer can be found in the Western diet. (Other factors in degenerative disease are alcohol, smoking, and a sedentary lifestyle.) When we compare present knowledge with what was believed and taught in the past, we find several important areas in which errors have been made. These mistakes have helped lay the foundation for degenerative diseases—diseases of environment and lifestyle, such as coronary artery (heart) disease, stroke, high blood pressure, arthritis, most diabetes, and several kinds of cancer. Let us look at seven serious problem areas.

Flesh Foods

The Lord made a major

change in the human diet at the end of the Flood, when He gave Noah and his family permission to eat certain animals (see Genesis 9:3,4; 7:2,3). The Bible implies that He did this not only because of the absence of garden produce, but also to shorten the human life span because people had devoted their long lives to violence and evil (Genesis 6:3). While Noah lived more than 900 years (as did most people before the Flood), his son Shem lived but 600 years, and Shem's son lived only 438 years. A few generations later, life spans levelled off at around 70 to 120 years.

We know now that a heavy meat diet provides more protein, fat, and cholesterol than the body can use. Healthy kidneys work hard to eliminate the extra protein, but the excess fat and cholesterol gradually damage and ultimately destroy blood vessels.

In past years overestimation of the body's requirement for protein perpetuated the problem, since most

foods high in protein are also high in fat, and usually in cholesterol, also. Today science recognizes that a diet containing less protein, and much less fat and cholesterol, is more conducive to longevity.

Refined Foods

Refining foods has become another serious nutritional mistake, since this process strips food of fibre and nutrients. At first, refined foods were eaten mostly by the wealthy, who as a result became the first to develop degenerative diseases. But today refined foods are cheap and widespread.

For much of the first half of this century, people thought that refining got rid of roughage that wasn't needed by the body because it was excreted. The pure food that resulted (pure starch and pure sugar) could be more quickly and completely utilized by the body. Now we know that this very rapid absorption can lead to metabolic problems such as obesity, hyperglycemia

Even Deadly ns

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(diabetes), and hypoglycemia.

Sugar

A third problem occurs in the widespread use of sugar. Not only are soft drinks, candy, cookies, ice cream, and other desserts heavily loaded with sugar, but it is added liberally to nearly every canned or processed food. Sugar has become so prevalent in the American diet that it makes up an average of 22 per cent of our daily calorie intake.

When we add sugar to the fat (40 per cent) and refined flour and cereals (18 per cent) consumed by the average American each day, we have only a small percentage of food left to supply the fibre and most nutrients. This lopsided arrangement weakens the body and sets the stage of disease.

Salt

We find a fourth problem in the area of salt intake, which amounts to about 15 to 20 gms per day (3 to 4 teaspoons) in the United States—

this is several times more than we need. We used to worry about not getting enough salt, particularly in hot weather, when some of us even took salt tablets. But now we know that most Americans eat too much salt, which becomes an important factor in hypertension (high blood pressure), heart failure, and other problems related to fluid retention.

Fat

A fifth mistake is adding fat to our food. Americans eat a much larger amount of fat every day than is healthy for them. Although natural food contain adequate fat for human needs, we find nearly all bakery products and many processed foods loaded with extra fat. Nuts, already high in natural fat, are usually roasted in oil and salted. Potato and corn chips more than quadruple their caloric load by the oil absorbed in deep frying, and often come heavily salted as well.

These products, along with the butter, margarine, gravy,

sauce, cheese, salad dressing, eggs, sour cream, milk, meat, and other fried and deep-fried foods that we've learned to like, have boosted our daily intake of fat beyond what our bodies can handle well. As a result, we suffer from coronary artery (heart) disease, strokes, and obesity, among numerous problems.

Beverages

A sixth harmful health habit is the consumption of beverages, both with and between meals. Americans seldom drink water anymore. Consumption of beer and soda pop has skyrocketed the past two decades, until it now averages several glasses of each, per person, per day. Then there are coffee and tea, as well as other sweetened drinks; wines and other alcoholic beverages; and fruit juice, from which most of the fibre has been strained out.

All these caloric beverages require digestion and assimilation into the body. The high sugar content,

without the slowing effect of fibre, causes too rapid absorption into the bloodstream, which stresses the body and weakens its defenses. In addition, we receive added damage from the alcohol, caffeine, phosphates, sodium, and other chemicals contained in many beverages.

Snacks

The seventh mistake we have made in nutrition involves the snack habit. Eating between meals has become ingrained in our society. In some places day care centres and schools require that snacks be provided or at least made available. Hospitals offer snacks to patients unless they are on special diets. The coffee break remains standard in work places, as do after-school and TV snacks at home.

These habits disrupt digestion and add greatly to the load of the stomach. One result is an epidemic of obesity, with one third of our population overweight. Another result is gastric distress. Watching TV commercials, one might conclude that as a nation we survive on stomach medication. Who hasn't experienced gas, indigestion, bloating, burning, pain, and other stomach problems?

These seven problems serve to highlight some of the failings of the American diet today. We suffer from too

A look at what we're eating shows what's eating us.



much of nearly everything—too much sugar, salt, fat, protein, cholesterol, and refined foods; too many calories too often, and not enough fibre and complex carbohydrates (fruits, grains, and vegetables).

The result is an epidemic of premature suffering, disease, disability, and early death from degenerative diseases.

The Solution

Fortunately, we can avoid most of the above problems by returning to the original diet God gave mankind (see Genesis 1:29; 3:18). Glimpses of the blessings resulting from adherence to God's choice of diet can be seen in Israel's wilderness experience. After 40 years of manna, thought to be a type of grain, they remained free of the diseases of the Egyptians (Deuteronomy 7:15; Psalm 105:37), which studies of mummies have shown were much like our own.

Daniel and his friends also flourished on a plant-food diet with water to drink (Daniel 1:8-20).

God again brought this knowledge to His people in considerable detail more than 100 years ago, when nutrition was but dimly understood (The Ministry of Healing, pp 295, 296). It has stood as sound and safe instruction ever since.

Scientists today are rediscovering and reconfirming these basic nutritional principles. They have concluded that if disease did not intervene, the human life span could still reach approximately 120 good years.

God's original diet has proved itself fully adequate for human needs today. Not only can it prevent and delay the onset of degenerative diseases; it can also help heal them as well. Better yet, God's diet will promote optimum health and energy for a lifetime. > ●

voyage, Kay was awarded the Order of Australia. Then came the highest honour of all—being 1988s Australian of the Year.

What a feat!

During her historic voyage her greatest fear was being disqualified from receiving her record by some inadvertent act of assistance—"I dreamt I put the boat aground and had to get off above high water mark." The rules of the voyage were that I could anchor if it was necessary, and even beach the boat at the low water to effect repairs, but I could not touch land above the high water mark and could not accept so much as a glass of water, or anything at all. And no one was to touch the boat."

"At the back of my mind was the story I heard just before leaving about a poor chap attempting the same journey. He had accepted a roll of film from a passing vessel after his had got wet, and he was disqualified!"

And yet while hers was a solo voyage and while she received no physical assistance during her historic journey. "It seemed everyone was barking for me, and I felt their spirits were on board to help guide the way."

The Christian's journey through life is comparable. "Think about when you are old and grey, maybe in a nursing home, maybe in a wheelchair and you look back

This challenge made Kay Cottee more determined as she contemplated her journey. If our Christian experience isn't what it should be, now is the time to act. There's "so much to do—too much to waste even one minute of life."

on your life—will you sit there contented, or will you be thoroughly disappointed, that you didn't follow your dream when you had the chance?"

This challenge made Kay Cottee more determined as she contemplated her journey. If our Christian experience isn't what it should be, now is the time to act. There's "so much to do—too much to waste even one minute of life."

Being a Christian is an individual experience—a solo voyage. While it's possible to obtain the advice of experts (theologians), boat builders (ministers), engineers (teachers) and weather forecasters (other Christians) both before and during the voyage, it's nevertheless a

personal experience. No one can sail *our* voyage.

When we round the spiritual Cape Horn and experience life's squalls, when our faith in our task and our determination is tested by mountainous seas, when we experience "the highs" and "the downs," our goal must be paramount in our minds. Other Christians have passed this way before and successfully negotiated these same obstacles. Calmer waters lied ahead.

As we approach the completion of our solo journey, as we enter triumphantly into our final berthing place, and as we hear the words "Well done, you good and faithful sailor," we'll be able to say, as did Kay Cottee, "I have achieved my dream."

Suicide Can be Prevented

by George Nichols

What you can do to help before it's too late.



My son Bill killed himself the summer before last. Two years later we still miss him and the sorrow is slow to disappear.

We hear a lot in the news about the tragedy of suicide, but not nearly enough about its prevention. As a doctor and as a father, I am very concerned that the topic of suicide be presented properly. We now know enough to look at suicide with more understanding, and this can save some precious lives.

People who study society often express the opinion that suicide prevention is rooted in a more caring and loving environment, and in better parenting. They want to help by establishing programmes to improve family quality. Although their goals are commendable, they may do little to prevent suicide, because suicide is not based primarily on problems of society. Suicide is usually based on an unrecognized depressive illness.

Depression is an illness

It is very common. It occurs in good families, in all social classes, and all around the world among all kinds of people. It affects about 10 to 15 per cent of all women some time during their lives.

Yet surprisingly and sadly, most people fail to recognize depression either in themselves or in their loved ones. What makes this especially tragic is that depression is so curable.

Many who suffer don't come to the doctor for an official diagnosis. They appear normal, functioning in public, interacting among friends, and at the same time displaying classic signs of depression. But usually they meet no one who understands what the signs mean, so their illness remains unrecognized. Many recover; some die.

Recognizing the signs

Family and friends can help to avert a

tragedy if they recognize the signs of serious depression. Almost all of us have the "blues" now and then. And any of the following symptoms, by itself, may be normal. But when they occur in combinations and persist, real depression may be indicated. Everyone should learn these 12 signs of depressive illness.

1. *Recurrent thoughts* of death and suicide.
2. *Sad and unhappy moods*, sometime irritable and anxious. (some deny mood change.)
3. *Feelings of hopelessness*, self-reproach, and of being worthless.
4. *Crying* or inability to cry.
5. *Withdrawal*.
6. *Loss of interest* and pleasure in things.
7. *Neglect of personal appearance* and self-care.
8. *Trouble thinking* and concentrating.
9. *Sleep problems*. May have trouble falling asleep, then often awaken too early. Or may sleep too much.
10. *Change in appetite* or weight.
11. *May feel physically* slow and tired, or may be agitated and restless.
12. *Physical complaints*: fast heartbeat, headache, constipation, chronic pain, and others.

Symptoms such as these are common but misleading, disguising underlying sadness. Such complaints may indicate the person is worried about himself and is asking for help in "approved" (nonemotional) terms.

Some depressed people, especially youths, may not appear sad and hopeless, but instead may act rebellious, become involved with alcohol and/or drugs, fail in school, or stop attending altogether.

Occasionally your first suspicion that someone is seriously depressed may occur when you yourself feel gloomy after talking with him or her.

Life's problems are especially difficult for a depressed person; depression can easily mimic a normal reaction trouble. Even a pastor may not always be able to tell the

difference between a person's risky depressive illness and the hard but normal struggle with personal problems.

Suicide becomes even more of a threat with these danger signs:

1. *Increasing distance* and withdrawal from family and friends.

2. *Absence of hope.*

3. *Hearing voices* and other disordered thinking.

4. *Talking of suicide.*

5. *Giving away* prized possessions: "I won't be needing these anymore."

6. *Putting affairs in order*—for example, returning long-borrowed items, making final contact (unspoken goodbyes) with friends and relatives.

7. *Sudden improvement* (no longer painfully undecided).

Counsellors, ministers, crisis centers, social programmes, and people willing to talk with us when we are troubled—these are wonderful resources for many problems, *but not for depressive illness*. Serious depression is not primarily a social or counselling problem. It is an illness where sadness has grown beyond words and beyond self-control.

If you suspect depression or if you are concerned that someone is suicidal, don't just watch, wait, and leave it to the individual to do something about his or her problem. That person cannot do something about his or her problem. That person cannot help himself, because he is not himself. His thinking and judgment are impaired. This is not the time for merely sympathizing, just listening, or trying to restore hope. And don't just lecture and tell him or her to "shape up"—that person is not able.

Delaying treatment is risky. So step right in and take the person to the doctor or to a psychiatrist, who can verify four amateur diagnosis and prescribe the medications needed along with psychotherapy. The outlook then will improve.

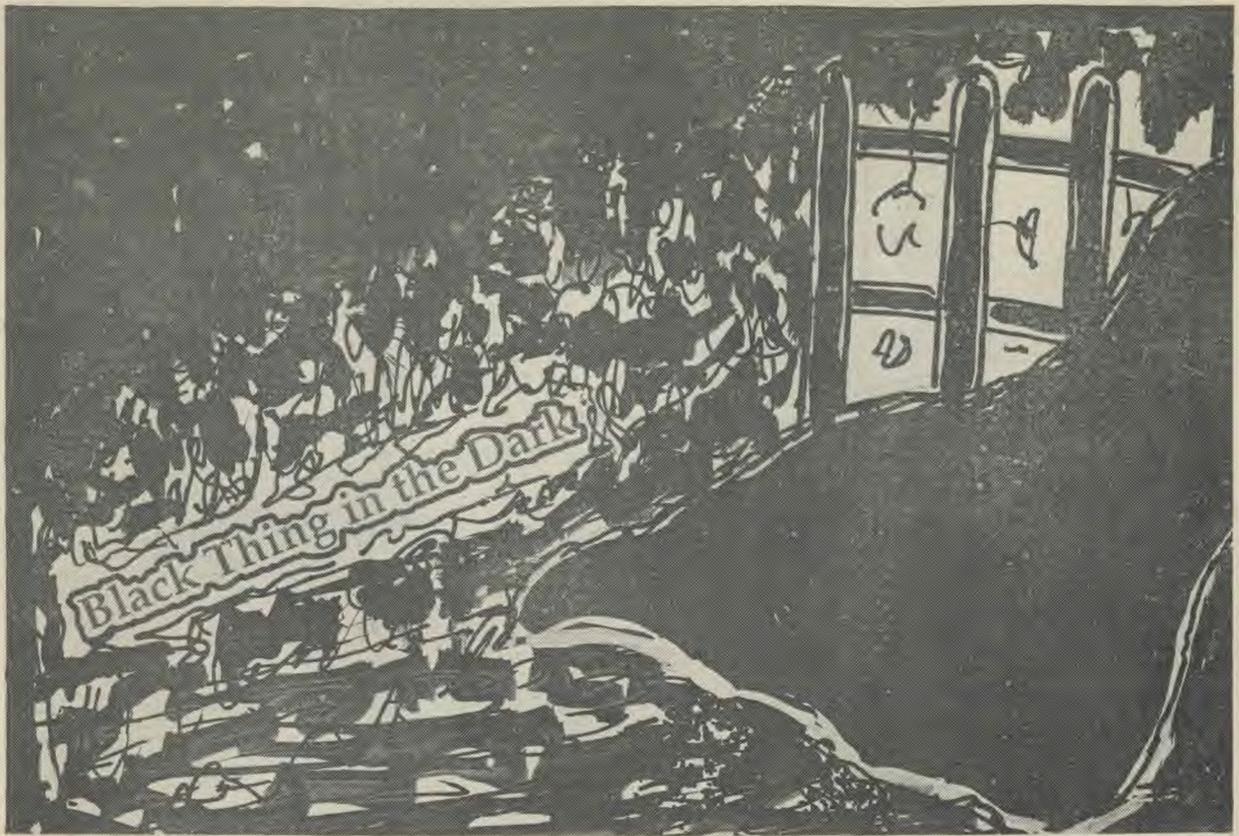


Religion and Suicide

It is only natural that we often misplace the role of religion with regard to depression and suicide, because suicide appears to be based on a wrong decision, and we believe faith and prayer strengthen people in making good decisions. But a person with depressive illness has lost his or her ability to think and judge normally. That person's brain is sick. We cannot blame him or her for making a wrong decision when depressed any more than we would blame a person sick with schizophrenia for faulty thinking. Fortunately, depressive illness usually responds well to medical treatment.

Understanding suicide may be difficult, but preventing suicide is not a complicated social problem. Prevention depends mainly on recognizing the depressive illness that usually comes first. Spotting depression is not only for teachers and counsellors; it's time now that all of us learn how.

We publicize the signs of cancer and heart attack, but public recognition of depression as an illness is almost nonexistent. Shame and stigma have held us back. Let us wake up now!



Alice and Jeanie lived in a large house in the woods. Their father had given them a horse, and every day after school they were supposed to comb and feed it.

One day Mother became seriously ill and had to be taken to the hospital. Daddy wasn't home at the time, and the two girls were afraid to sleep in the house by themselves. The nearest neighbours, who lived half a mile away, said they could spend the nights with them.

"Remember to hurry home from school, so you can take care of the horse and still have time to reach the neighbour's before the sun goes down," Mother said.

For the first few days Alice and Jeanie did exactly what Mother said. But one afternoon they got into a game after school and couldn't tear themselves away.

By the time they reached home and took care of the horse it was long past sundown, and they still had to walk to the neighbour's. If only it wasn't so dark! They lighted a lantern and set out on the fearsome journey.

The lantern cast such a small circle of light! And beyond it was the DARK! They clutched hands tightly and pressed against each other. It felt safer that way.

Suddenly they remembered! There was an in-

sane asylum not far off. Every so often an inmate escaped.

Three days ago they were talking to one of the farmers and he said he saw a mountain lion by the creek. He didn't have his gun, so the huge creature got away. But mountain lions come back.

The moon was shining dimly through the trees. It made long shadows that reached out like fingers on hands. The girls heard strange noises. Leaves rustled in the breeze—or was some creature sneaking up behind them? A night bird called—or was it the secret signal of wicked men?

Suddenly Alice screamed and stood stock still? "I can't

go on!" she cried. "That thing—ahead."

Jeanie saw it too, and the blood in her veins stopped flowing. It was nearly as tall as they were, dark and black and wide. And it m-o-v-e-d!

Several minutes the girls stood there, petrified.

"We've got to go on," Jeanie said. "It's not coming any closer."

She almost had to drag Alice. She had to push herself.

Closer they came to the horrible black thing. It grew as they came nearer, but it neither fell back nor came on toward them. Occasionally it swayed.

Suddenly the wind blew Jeanie's skirt and for a moment the light from the lantern shone ahead and revealed—

The gate to the neighbours' field! The big black thing was the shadow of Jeanie's skirt falling on the gate!

Both girls laughed till they had to hug each other to keep from falling; they were so relieved. "But I'm going to come home when Mother says after this," Jeanie announced. "No more walks in the dark for me."

Alice agreed. And both girls kept their promise. I know, because Jeanie herself told me.

—Uncle Lawrence

You Are Not Alone

by N J Christensen

You are not alone. God's strong and loving hand is reaching down right now to grasp your weak and trembling one. He knows all about your present circumstances, and His voice is whispering, "Do not be worried and upset." John 14:1, TEV.

He stands ready to comfort and strengthen you no matter what the need.

One who has suffered greatly is Martha Snell Nickolson, yet in one of her poems she gratefully acknowledges God's promise in Matthew 28:20.

*Lo, I am with you always,
Softly the promise steals
Like sunlight into my shadows
And brightens and warms and heals,
Heals my anguish of spirit
And horror of loneliness,
Flooding my heart's dark chambers,
Words that comfort and bless.*



Strength for every need

In addition to God's presence, the Bible also promises that "he giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength." Isaiah 40:29.

This is why He invites us to commit our needs into His hands. "Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee." Psalm 55:22. Not just part of your burden or some of your care but throw all your worries on him, for he cares for you. See 1 Peter 5:7.

Light in your darkness

To countless individuals life is a dark street, a meaningless riddle.

But Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the world, has declared, "I am the light of the world . . . Whoever follows me will have the light of life and will never walk in darkness." John 8:12, TEV.

Happy, indeed, is the person who, with the psalmist, can say, "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?" "When thou saidst, Seek ye my face; my heart said unto thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek." Psalm 27:1,8.

If circumstances around you appear dark just now, remember that "God is light, and there is no darkness at all in him." 1 John 1:5, TEV.

God's invitation to you

Yes, someone cares for you and right now is reaching down to grasp your hand. It is God Himself; and "he that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" Romans 8:32.

If you will open your heart to His voice, which through the centuries has come to suffering humanity, you will hear the Lord calling, "Come to me, all of you who are tired from carrying your heavy loads, and I will give you rest." Matthew 11:28, TEV.

Won't you come and find rest in Him, for "the eternal God thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms." Deuteronomy 33:27.

"Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." Hebrews 4:14-16. ●

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Six Things Astrologers Don't Want You to Know

1. Astrology is based on "bad" astronomy.

Modern astrologers base their predictions on the location of the constellations in the zodiac—not as they appear today, but as they appeared almost 2,000 years ago! Because of a scientific phenomenon known as *precession of the equinoxes*, the zodiac (the portion of the sky containing the apparent paths of the sun, moon, and the principal planets) has shifted enough so that a person who astrologers say was born under the sign of Libra, for example, was really born under the sign of Virgo. Modern astrologers attempt to regulate our lives according to the positions that the constellations *would have been in* if we had been born in the 2nd century A.D. In spite of its detailed scientific terminology, modern astrology is based on poor astronomy.

2. Astrology denies that the sun is the center of the planetary system.

Although astrologers are reluctant to admit it, their entire practice rests on the idea that the *earth*, not the sun, is the center around which the other planets revolve. This idea was the accepted theory until Copernicus debunked it in 1540 A.D. Astrology still hasn't adopted the "new" view, and it isn't likely to do so. The fact of a sun-centered

planetary system deals a devastating blow to the theory underlying modern astrology.

3. Astrology doesn't know what to do with those born

Astrology has difficulty charting the future of anyone born above 66 degrees of latitude. Consequently, if you were born in Alaska, northern Canada, Greenland, Finland, etc., you have no future as far as astrologers are concerned. Above 66 degrees of latitude it is impossible to calculate precisely what constellation is rising above the horizon, and without that knowledge astrology cannot function in the ordinary way.

4. Astrology has problems explaining twins.

Twins pose a special problem for astrologers. Based on the "laws" of astrology they are influenced by the same planets and have the same hereditary traits. Logically, if two children are born minutes apart under the same sign of the zodiac, their astrological future should be nearly identical. Yet it isn't, and astrologers have been unable to explain this discrepancy.

5. Astrology has problems with "extra" planets.

The so-called prophetic arrangements of constella-

tions and planets on which Mesopotamian priest based their pagan astrological superstitions naturally included only those planets which they knew about and could observe. The discoveries in modern times of three additional planets—Uranus, Neptune, and Pluto—therefore greatly complicate the work of modern astrologers who have taken over the celestial configuration of the ancients. Modern astrology simply has no place for these new planets (except to conveniently blame their influence for failure when predictions go wrong)!

6. Astrology rejects the person of God.

We must believe that the planets themselves possess consciousness if we are to believe in astrology. In their reliance upon pure pagan concepts, astrologers now advocate the idea that the solar system possesses a oneness of consciousness and will and that it can beam this will at its discretion to influence and affect affairs on earth. They believe in a superconsciousness that operates without God and beyond God. It is pantheistic philosophy in which God's power permeates everything—certainly one of the clearest indications of astrology's pagan background.