

Truth-Driven ThinkingSM

Excerpted Podcast Transcript

May 10, 2006

www.truthdriventhinking.com/audioblog.htm

Joe Nickell - Paranormal Investigator

Notice: All rights reserved. Copyright 2006, Truth-Driven Strategies L.L.C.

Transcription is approximate and not certified as verbatim accurate by any participants or party. It is offered as a proximate overview for those who prefer a written summary to podcast listening.

Truth-Driven Thinking for Wednesday May 10th, 2006. Paranormal Investigator Joe Nickell.

Welcome back to Truth-Driven Thinking. I am Steve Gibson. I am delighted you're here at Truth-driven thinking. We challenge emotion driven thinking and overly simple conventional wisdom, and we focus on two main questions; what do we know that just isn't so as estimated by science, reason or evidence and what's the harm in taking action based upon certain emotion driven conclusions, if in fact they are not real. At Truth-driven thinking we do have four important disclaimers; I am an emotion driven thinker, fallible like the rest of us; I have no unique claim to what is true and what is not; we will never know for absolute certain what is true and what isn't, but I do believe that one truth exists for all questions, extremely complex though it may be; and also that science, reason and logic are the most appropriate tools for estimating truth and for taking action in the world that will result in the greatest benefit for the greatest number of people.

Housekeeping items; hey, transcribed reports for a couple of our early podcasts are now available up on the website. Just click on truthdriventhinking.com; in the upper left you'll see the podcast page. Now, because there is fairly significant cost and if I keep doing these, you'll have to hear me whine for donations; but there is some cost to getting those up there. So, currently we have John Shelby Spong, retired Bishop from Newark, New Jersey and Brooks Jackson from factcheck.org and we're working on some others; but check out those transcripts, for those who want to be able to see and read what was said rather than listen. A reminder also, that if you want to support us here at truthdriventhinking.com, you can do so by just clicking through our affiliate link to the iTunes music store. Next time you are going to buy an audio book or some music, just come through truthdriventhinking.com; there is a banner on the front page and links whether you are buying a hardware or just buying some music, or netflex, the giant DVD by mail rental firm -- big fan of netflex and it's a great way to have a lot of foreign films, documentaries, and ways to expand your horizon. So, we are very happy that both netflex and iTunes are affiliates, and we can get a little bit of return if you'll just click though when you are going to make a purchase or when you are going to sign up for netflex. Upcoming episodes and air dates; next week's guest is Paul Campos, the author of "The Obesity Myth." And this is one you will not want to miss. In fact, this could a great example of human fallibility, bias and prejudice -- in this case, against naturally non-thin people, even entering into the way mainstream science reads the scientific studies. So, agree or disagree, you will want to check that one out. And while we are on that topic, I will warn you that next week's episode could be a day or two off from the normal Wednesday air date. As I may have hinted at last week, I have had this spontaneous pneumothorax -- apparently, that's a partially collapsed lung, and apparently that's fairly common among tall, relatively thin people. I am in decent shape and -- just one of those crazy things, but the recovery could take a little bit of time. I am very hopeful that we can still conduct interviews and not get behind on podcasts, but just bear with me if I'm a day or two off in one direction from the normal Wednesday air date. Also request your help with

ratings; please, for some reason this is so important in the podcast world. If you could do me a huge favor, there are links on our front page at truthdriventhinking.com to iTunes or Podcast Alley or Podcast.net; we would just love it if you could write some reviews or at least give us ratings on those sites. Also your feedback; 888-247-2103 is our voice feedback line -- 888-247-2103 -- would really appreciate you giving me your comments. Let me know what you like, what you don't like, what you'd like more of; that type of thing -- also sgibson@truthdriventhinking.com. Reminder that our store of course is also another way you can support us up at the website; there is some videos in my book "Truth-driven thinking."

But with all that said, let's move on to today's guest, Joe Nickell. Now from the Shroud of Turin, the countless haunted dwellings and Crop Circles and Lake Monsters, Joe Nickell has the real life job of investigating mysteries. He is the Senior Research Fellow for the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal -- that's a mouthful, we call it CSICOP, and is an accomplished magician turned expert detective, a forensic document analyst, English professor, he has done it all. Author of 20 books including his most recent book "The Mystery Chronicles: More Real-Life X-Files", and "Secrets of the Sideshows". Joe's intellectually honest approach to mysteries, sightings and investigations has made him a common media resource, and in fact, Joe is hot off a big profile story on the NBC "Today" Show a few weeks back. Now, when Joe and I talked recently, we began with Joe's explanation of why he thinks the term "debunking" is not an accurate description of his work. Here is the full interview.

You know Joe, when I contacted you -- and maybe a good place to start is, I use the word debunker, and you kind of corrected me on that. Can you kind of give us the background on why you don't consider yourself a debunker?

Joe: Yeah I don't like the term because, if people were using it in probably the way you intended, it is a complimentary term and just saying that "bunk" needs to be debunked -- and it is a fact that over more than 30 years of doing this, I have debunked a lot of things; that's true and I am proud of that. But when someone labels you as a debunker and just stops there, just let's that label hang in the air, it sounds like one is starting out to debunk; that, meaning a sort of prejudging attitude; a sort of rush to judgment -- letting the answer get ahead of the evidence. And so -- and I think some skeptics do that. I run into a situation where people come by the office and they say, "Hey Nickell, found any ghosts lately? ha ha ha, as if to say of course, there aren't any, and a kind of implication maybe, I have wasted much of my life looking for them.

Steve: Yeah, yeah.

Joe: And I don't think so;. I say to them, well, if the question is just, are there ghosts or are there not, then your point is well taken -- but I don't think that's the question. And they look at you like you are on drugs or something like, what does it mean? Of course that's the question, there are or there aren't? And I said, no, I think the question is this -- and I am using ghosts just as one example to mean the other paranormal, say Crop Circles or Psychics or whatever. I say that -- I think the question is, do people believe in such things? Do they believe in ghosts? And of course the answer is, of course they do in huge numbers. And they report strange things; honest, sincere people report unusual things. And my very first case, my first big case, the McKenzie House haunting in Toronto, I found the people really were hearing footsteps on the stairs late at night, where there was no one in the house -- and there were multiple ear witnesses to that. So, that's a mystery -- and just saying, well, its not a ghost -- I don't know what it is, but its not a ghost is not really a satisfactory response. And suggesting that people are lying or crazy or drunk or something -- which I have seen skeptics do out of hand is not only not kind, its just not intellectually honest. So, what I try to do is actually investigate the claims with a view towards solving the mystery. And I am confident that if we do that -- solve the mystery, any need at

debunking will take care of itself. So, in the case of McKenzie House, I discovered that people were hearing sounds of footsteps at night, but they were coming from the building next door about 40 inches away where there was a parallel iron staircase ...and a late-night cleanup crew.

Steve: Interesting.

Joe: So that taught me a lesson early on that what you have to do, is not start with the answer; I fear that sometimes the skeptics may also start with the answer the same way the true believers do, they just have a different answer.

Steve: Fair enough.

Joe: And what I want to do is, start with the evidence and let the evidence lead to an answer. And I am confident that if we do a good job at that, that we'll find the truth and be better off for it.

Steve: I know I am guilty of those types of things as well; to start offhand, dismissing things. But I think your point is well taken, and that's the need for intellectually honest pursuit of these questions.

Joe: Yeah, I mean -- does it mean that I think that the next haunted house is a 50-50 proposition whether its haunted or not. I mean, obviously I benefit from past experience and since there has never been -- science has never authenticated a single haunted house, obviously I think its unlikely that the house will be haunted, but I just put that aside, sort of Samuel Coleridge's phrase, "The willing suspension of disbelief" when you approach art. You don't sit in a theater and say, oh those are just actors, that he really shouldn't be up here and that shouldn't (voice over lap). No you get into the, you suspend your disbelief and allow yourself to appreciate the art, the drama and I do something like that, I just suspend the question of both belief and disbelief as much as possible, not suspending of course by critical thinking and saying, "What's going on here"?

Steve: Yeah.

Joe: Is this explainable or some, you know, to there be some other source for the phenomenon. There is somebody playing the trick. Is it some physiological thing? Was the person possibly having a waking dream and so forth and going through that exercise is good for everybody,

Steve: Well, and obviously the skills and this approach help you, if we shift gears a little in and talk about, for instance, when I first heard you speak, you were talking about the alleged ossuary that contain the bones of Jesus' brother James.

Joe: Yes.

Steve: And the story behind that and it's funny, I wanted to ask you because not two or three nights ago and it might have been with one of these Judas Gospel stories but I heard a reference in the History channel or one of the cable channel's documentaries that some still believe that this ossuary is Jesus' brothers James.

Joe: There are people who, who will continue to believe that the Shroud of Turin is genuine. I suppose that the world is flat or we didn't go to the moon or there are going to be some die hard, no matter what the evidence, but the James ossuary was an interesting case for me, still among my favorite cases. I was here in Buffalo and I was being shown just, just a little place up North in Toronto at the Rolandtorium [Ph] museum and I was watching just the kind of thing that we were talking about earlier about people rushing to judgment. Here's biblical archaeology magazine just practically gushing over Jesus' name

written in stone and with very little hedging, we are just rushing to imply strongly this was proof of Jesus and so on. At the same time there were skeptics who were sort of dismissing it, oh another obviously bogus claim and so forth. And it was just burning me up because I was mad at everybody, you know...

Steve: Yeah, fair enough.

Joe: ...like wait a minute, there could be an ossuary that has Jesus' name on it, might be a different Jesus, might be this Jesus, this is not defying any laws of science or any thing. It would seem unlikely but very unlikely things turn up historically and are great treasures when they do and why are we rushing to any judgment. I told her, a Texas Reporter, I said; we need to stop this idea of deciding something when we don't have the evidence yet. And ultimately the skeptics were right that to be that it was not authentic, the inscription wasn't, but some of their arguments were proven false. I mean you can say they were right for the wrong reasons, well, that's not a very good track record. So what I did, I got a group together here and we drove up in our van and one of the guys read Aramaic, he was a classics scholar and could read Aramaic and we went up, Kevin Christopher and we went into the display and walked around, we noticed that everybody was sort of rushing up and peering to look at the inscription and I specifically avoided doing that, it's something of the opposite. I stood back and walked around it carefully just surveying the whole thing, looking at the ends of the box and back of the box. And I said, Kevin; come here; I said do you see these thin rosette like designs on the box. I said, look there, you see these circular, he said Oh absolutely, unmistakable and I said because you and I can see them but biblical archaeological magazine has assured us there are no designs on the box, only the border carving and inscription and Kevin and I have been studying these ossuaries 14:43 and looking into this general context to this and I said you know what this means. This box has two fronts and he looked at me and smiled and because most boxes would have a front and a back.

And the ossuaries were carved on the front, they said in the niches and only the front side would be carved, it'd be pointless to carve the backside and then stick it back, push it back into recess out of sight and it was just unheard of being carved on both sides. Now you can always say, well, somebody might have done this or that, it could be an explanation but it was raising a big red flag and these designs looked faded and blurred and ruffled with age and looked absolutely authentic, authentic ossuary in science of real age, We have looked in several ossuaries and then we walked around to the inscription side, it looked like as I said to Kevin, it looked like it was done last week with a dentist drill. And so we, I then wrote an article for Skeptical Inquirer magazine, the accuracy of which I stand by because they subsequently arrested Oded Golan and found the dentist drill and other fake antiquity.

Steve: So you literally said, half jokingly or not jokingly that it looked like it was done with a dentist drill.

Joe: Well, of course dentist drill was just, you know, something like that I did, I was surprised specifically as to (voice overlapping). Nobody but in fact, we were pretty dead on with that, I mean it was, here with these small very sharp edged letters, compared to this faded blurred weathered carvings that you can barely see on the other side and so what it looked like, as if somebody got an old ossuary, probably didn't pay much attention to what was on the backside and may be didn't even noticed, like I say, you could miss it and then or noticed them and decided to ignore them and then use the other side to carve a fake modern inscription. And so that was, to me a good lesson and how to approach things. I would have been quite happy to have found that there was an ossuary that actually read James or Joseph.

Steve: Sure. Well, absolutely, that would be huge...

Joe: That would be intriguing and then we could discuss whether, you know, which James and which Jesus' and so forth and what the arts were. Some people were already discussing that but the discussions were in my mind effectively ended when we see that this is a bogus; bogus production.

Steve: You know, one of the...

Joe: I have a new, let me just mention, I have a new book, at least the title so far is Relics of the Christ, that should be out next year from the University Press of Kentucky and I have a chapter on James ossuary there and a drawing, reconstructing the rosette designs.

Steve: Oh! Good.

Joe: I was able to take a good photograph enlargement and trace enough of the designs to see and then to draw over that with an inking compass, I once had a course in drafting and so I did a reconstruction of the rosette designs on the back and we can see what the original genuine ossuary which had no lettering on it, most of them were just decorative, they did not, it's very rare to have names on them.

Steve: You know what is interesting to me is and I wish I could go back now and listen to make sure I heard correctly what I thought I heard in this television show that seemed to still imply there is some question or some belief that this ossuary could be legitimate and that relates this Shroud of Turin, work that what you have done because certainly I still see TV shows debating both sides of that, but in your mind there's not a lot of debate left on the Shroud of Turin.

Joe: Nothing on the bottom line issues, certainly we haven't settled for sure whether the forger is right handed or left handed And thank you for laughing at that joke. I had someone recently at a conference in Buenos Aires of all places, came up and said; you know what's the latest topic Shroud of Turin and I in a moment of good humor, I said it's still a fake There again, I think we start such issues with the evidence and when we look at the Shroud and you find for example that this long fourteen foot links of linen with a front and back image of a crucified man that would have wrapped under and over a body to get that effect, that's not how the Jews bury their dead and so right away there is a problem with it.

And then when you look in the Gospels, religious believers will see in the Gospel of John that there is talk of multiple burial clothes and plural, the plural **20:19** and the verbs *tying* and *binding* and a separate cloth which John calls the napkin, placed over Jesus' face, well, this is all contradictory to the Shroud of Turin and just very difficult to make it. You can stretch things and reinterpret and so if you start with a dogma and try to make it fit but on the face of it we are already, the Shroud is already in trouble. And then John says a hundred-pound weight, of burial spices **20:49** again perfectly consist of what he says is perfectly in a code which Jewish burial practices but not Shroud of Turin, not a spec of those spices has been founded on the cloth. And no burial cloth of the history of the world had such an image and if it did and one satisfy himself by making some simple experiment trying to imprint a face on cloth, you get wrap around distortion, you get a grotesque wrap around distortion due to the laws of geometry. And the Shroud is this thin long looking face and the blood on which is still bright red and of course, real blood would darken with age and when samples were taken from the Shroud and analyzed by the famous **Macron laboratory in Chicago** [Ph], probably the world's best in doing such things. Dr. **Macron** [Ph] found and I have been there and gone over his results with him and everything. He found that the image was made of red ochre and from millium temper paint and all of this is confirmed by radio carbon dating, which dates back to the middle of the fourteenth century and there is no history from the time of Jesus' death to this particular incident in North Central France about 1350-55, there is no record of this cloth. Where was it for 13 centuries? And when we go back we find that there is bishop's report to proclaim it, the earliest document relating to the Shroud, saying that his predecessor had found the artist who admitted it to having so cunningly painted it and that it had been used as a part of faith

healings scam that people had been hired to pretend they were sick and they would, the Shroud would be unveiled before them and they would pretend to be cured. So then there is bishop writing to claim it and the pop, the avenue of pop, saying holy father, it's only talking about the scandal and in my diesis and these are why they are hiring people and he said, "So that money might be cunningly rung from the pockets of the unsuspecting pilgrims" I mean that's virtually an exact quote.

Steve: Now, honestly, not that I paid lot of attention to this issue but there is a historical document and admission of forgery and that's certainly something I had not heard on the headlines of these TV shows.

Joe: What the pro-Shroud people do is they, since they have the answer already, see this is and again, I can go back in the time criticize some skeptics with the Shroud as having made off handed dismissive remarks as well and when I started, I just determined, I was not going to do that, I was going actually follow the evidence just as clearly as I could and forensically I put together a team that had **Dr. Michael Borden** for example, a very famous pathologist was on the Shroud team and we looked at the evidence and review the evidence very clearly and it's interesting if you start with the answer and that's what the pro-Shroud people do, they say this is the Shroud of our lord.

Now you are supposed to counter that with your evidence so you say, well, what about the Gospel records? Well, that's open to interpretation. What about the missing **provenance 24:46**, where was it? Well it was hidden away? Forger's confession? Trumped up. What about the temper paint? Hh! Maybe splashed on when someone tried to copy it or may be touch it up later.

Steve: Carbon? - 14 unreliable.

Joe: Yeah unreliable and maybe altered by Jesus' radiant energy at the moment of resurrect and so on. And so they have, but notice that each explanation for a problem has, you are just a special rationalization, it has nothing to do with the other pieces of events, you just make up this rationalization with this a different one for that another one for the other one. And so you can see what are they doing, there's not collaborative evidence anywhere along the line that they have but then you come to the scientific position, you say one sentence, this is the work of a reported forger at a middle of 14th century, look at how everything collaborates that, everything that's on the face of it is the prima facie evidence that there is no history because it didn't exist. It's the contrary to Gospels and looks like medieval depictions of Jesus' Shroud because that's when it was done. It looks like, in fact the medieval gothic Jesus on the Shroud. The blood is still red because it's temper paint. It's temper paint because that's what an artist would use and radiocarbon dating dates it not to the time of Jesus' death, not to the time, some other time but to the very -- practically to the month of the Forger's confession you see. So this is powerful collaborative evidence and the trick today is that pro-Shroud people, who may or may not believe, there is certainly, some of them seem to me that they indicate that for them it's matter whether they can make people believe so that they can leave them to the truth what they regard as the true religion and sort of in the end it's supposed to means but they are constantly putting out new reports, new claims that oh! We just discovered this and invariably these claims are often released around Easter time, don't withstand scrutiny. And what people need to realize is that the issue of the Shroud has been very carefully assessed and it just clear that science has proved that it is a medieval forgery and the die hards; they need to give it up.

Steve: Well, very interesting. We are talking with Joe Nick who is the senior research fellow for the Committee For the Scientific Investigation of claims of Paranormal and I have to ask you about a little bit of personal issue here too Joe. Not about two years ago, I live in Kalamazoo, Michigan and after the whole crop circle thing, was I thought put to bed, this was long after your work and your appearance, I think it was on NBC. We had a crop circle here in some corn not far from my house and the local paper...

Joe: That was in you say, corn, you mean corn stop corn because it's usually an sweeter drier oat.

Steve: I'll look in we the article as we are talking here.

Joe: Because sometimes you see, in British reports you see them refer to the corn field because in Britain corn means grain and so it was hilarious to me when unsolved mystery is reported on the corn fields of England, you see giving an American (voice overlapping) the impression on corn stocks and one of the first ones that appeared in America was actually, crudely trampled in corn stock.

Steve: Well, I just printed this article so I will look as we read here but I think that it is corn actually.

Joe: Now that would be just hilarious.

Steve: Well, here is what I found interesting was, a group came into town and it was called the, and it Jeffery Wilson, Director of the Independent Crop Circle Researchers Association. Are you familiar with that at all?

Joe: Well, they 're either just numerous of this amateur groups, crop circles and ghost groups and flying saucer buffs and they're invariably, very rarely are they scientists and very early are they trained investigators, they are just buffs and they often start with what they want to believe and primarily they are mystery mongers, that is their goal is not to prove something or settle a mystery but to stir up the mystery and convince you that there is something strange going on that science can't explain and they won't commit what that is. They told, we don't know but they want you to, they write with science, they want to confront science, have science sort of rendered impudent and they want to sell a mystery and the implication is this much as paranormal was done this way. The application is if we don't know the explanation it must be paranormal or supernatural.

Steve: You know, you nailed this; as I look at this too, and as I remember, this was a couple of years ago but the interesting thing in the first article when they come to town is they have all these scientific instruments and they talk about the cellular construction and they measure, and they have to go back to the lab and they do and then -- the follow up article says exactly what you said, which is, it wasn't caused by human pranksters.

Joe: Yeah. Well, how they determine that you see is, we have a name for that which looks superficially like science; you know, the ghost hunters have infrared imaging devices and electromagnetic detection devices, and you know, they have obviously paid a visit to radio shack or somewhere. But we have a name for that which looks superficially like science, but fundamentally is not science; it's called pseudoscience.

Steve: Sure.

Joe: And the more people measure and -- looks like they are doing science -- if they are not scientists and they are not using basic scientific principles, then they are not doing science. And the Crop Circle phenomenon didn't really appear until relatively modern times, though they will go back and refer to this ancient case of the moving devil, you know, and centuries ago -- that wasn't like modern Crop Circles, that was totally different effect, it was a one time kind of incident where somebody down some grain. And the modern crop circle phenomenon had several features; forensic analyst John Fisher now decided to look into this several years ago. And we realized early on the problem of looking just at this circle or that circle because how do you know whether you are looking at maybe a hoax one, maybe the other one's genuine -- some real phenomenon; how do you sort these out? So, what we did was, we

looked at Crop Circle data and by that time, people had recorded quite a number of these for several seasons.

Steve: Interesting. Sure.

Joe: We started looking -- in other words, on the theory that you may not be able to see the forest or the trees; we decided to look at the big picture and we found that there were four aspects of Crop Circles that were very revealing. One was, they were occurring in increasing numbers each year; started out, there were few Crop Circles; the next year, twice as many; the year after that, twice as many again and so forth. They were increasing in number, which struck us as kind of a bandwagon effect. Secondly, they were becoming increasingly elaborate; the first ones were simple swirl circles, then circles with rings, rings with satellites, eventual pictograms, messages, elaborate geometric designs -- much larger, but each season, you can trace this. You can put this out and just trace this season by season and you can see that it's a one-upmanship.

Steve: Yeah.

Joe: A third criterion was the geographic issue; they were happening primarily only in Southern England in Wessex and some other counties. And only later in Japan and US and Canada and so forth, after the media took that that virus to those places and then you got a copycat phenomenon starting there. And the final phenomenon was what we call the "Shyness Factor." The Crop Circles didn't like to be seen while they were being made; they occurred in distant fields and you -- almost always at night. And so, we put all that together; we saw -- and we were ready to go to print in "Skeptical Inquirer Magazine" where they had a big report on this. When we had to sort of stop the process, Doug Bower and Dave Chorley came forward and confessed that they had started this and made many of the crop circles, and to reasonable people, proved that they could do it because they want to automate one and fooled some of the top serologists.

Steve: Well, and that's what was interesting about this article is, here we are in Kalamazoo, Michigan, after all this has been truly debunked -- and yet, you know, I laughed at the time because I went online to kind of, find some your work or James Randi's Forums or someone who would have some information about this particular group, and I laughed because the first group that came up in the search was a professional company that does for the film industry and for television commercials, they make these Crop Circles -- and I laughed and thought, Gee, I wonder if this organization's found out that there is another organization out there making these things.

Joe: Yeah. Well, you could make them quite well; I am looking as we talk and looking in my curio shop office which is filled with, you know, shrunken heads and plastic aliens and the like, and I am looking at a picture of the three of us that went out and made a Crop Circle in Steuben county. We made it in the -- I believe it was the farm adjacent to the one used for the movie "Signs." And we made one, and really, I know that the public looks at some of these beautiful aerial photographs of elaborate geometric Crop Circle designs, and just as well they're breathtakingly, you know, intricate and beautiful -- and some of them indeed are.

Steve: Yeah.

Joe: The public is convinced that these are incredibly difficult to make; they just look at them and they are just convinced of that. And I urge people who think that, to think otherwise; because we found that anything you can draw with a simple drawing compass and straight edge and if you've done any work in geometry class at school or something, drawing rosette designs or hexagrams or whatever, you know, bisecting your circle and connecting the lines and so forth, making these, sometimes very elaborate

designed -- they just take a little work, they are not hard to do. And anything you can do with a compass and straight edge on paper, I can do out in the field with a using a rope to scribe the circle. And most of the fields have some straight lines just from the tram lines -- the lines that the tractors use. Or, you can just make a straight line, you know, just pull a rope taut -- and they are not difficult to do; there are some more physical work to do them, but they are not more intellectual not more difficult intellectually or anything other than just sort of working it out on the ground. And all the early reports claimed the Crop Circles were, you know, the stocks weren't broken they would say. When you talk to agronomists, they say of course they are not; they are very green and pliable at this time of the year. And then, they would say, "Oh, there are no footprints you know." Well, no rhyme; you walk right down those tram lines which are like footpaths, walk to where you need to be, and to pick your steps carefully, any steps within where your design's going to be don't matter because you are going to flatten that area -- and I mean its just -- these statements, its amazing how the public were fooled by these exaggerations of how difficult it would be for human beings to make Crop Circles, the same way the "Shroudies" make claims that, you know, no human being could have produced a negative image like the shroud of Turin. Well, its not true; you can make such images at will.

Steve: Interesting. And just real quickly, I -- for the record, before we leave the Crop circles here; I said that they claimed these circles were not caused by humans; they said that they weren't caused by human pranksters, just to be clear -- and it was corn; it was corn.

Joe: Yeah. Well that's -- I find that kind of amusing, because as I say, the ones in England are in grains, which is cold corn; and you know wheat and rye and barely -- and they'd lay it down to make these swirled patterns just wonderfully -- use a plank with a piece of rope and you -- called a stock stopper device. Again I am looking at one leaning up in the corner in my office that we used, and you hold the loop up about waist high put your foot on the plank and then push down, and you make a big swaff (ph) immediately with it and then you step forward and do it again, and you walk around -- its really amazingly easy. And of course you work from the center out or from the out in, and you produce a nice swirl -- it's really not difficult at all if you do it systematically. And when you get way up in the air an take an aerial shot, any fine -- any small roughness and so forth disappears, just because anything looks sharper when its reduced down to the eye; you know, graphic artist grow larger and reduce, so your artwork looks more perfect -- and that's just all that is.

Steve: Before I get to my big question -- and I appreciate your time. I know we've gone a little long here; do you have time for two more questions?

Joe: Oh! I am at your disposal.

Steve: You are too kind; we are talking to Joe Nickell from CSICOP; I have to ask you about the "lake monster" thing.

Joe: Oh yes.

Steve: Yeah, from Loch Ness to -- you have done some work out in the Great Northwest as well. Can you tell us a little about that?

Joe: Sure. Ben Radford and I have a new book out called "Lake Monster Mysteries." And we had much of the book done, we've done like Champlain and I have gone and done some of my own, he had done a couple. And we were putting this together into a book and we realized we really needed to have some information on Lake Okanagan, a very important one -- we have been neglecting that and the phone rang and National Geographic wanted to know if we knew of a good lake -- well, yes we did. British Columbia lake Okanagan and where Ogopogo lives. And National Geographic financed the expedition

and we -- for the television show, their series is, "Is it real?" and they rented a boat and a diving crew and side scanning sonar team and sea plane and the whole bit. And we went out and were able to really thoroughly look into the claims, look in people's homes, and photographs and videotapes, and we came to some conclusions about it. I think that in many of these cases of Lake Monsters, people really do see -- and this is instructive -- people reporting that they see a long neck, multi humped, undulating serpentine swimming creature up to 70 feet long; they really can see something very much like that. And the scientific name for it is *Lutra Canadensis* or Northern River Otter, or in Loch Ness, *Lutra Lutra*, the European Otter, but these animals are -- its not one giant animal, it's a series -- Otters swim in a line; and they swim in an up and down fashion that if you see a line of them and you think of one creature, it looks like a multi humped or sinuous snaking figure.

Steve: No kidding.

Joe: Its very deceptive. Now, we are not claiming that all lake monsters are Otters; of course that would be ridiculous, this would be like saying, "All UFOs are weather balloons." What we are saying is, that some very good sightings that really look like what people are saying, would fool a skeptic on a good day, that looks pretty much like what you are expecting to see. And that's a lesson -- Rupert Gould wrote a book on Loch Ness. And he coined the term, "Expectant Attention", meaning that when you expect to see something, and you see something that looks somewhat like that, then that's what you see, you see it.

Steve: Sure. The expectation bias in science.

Joe: Absolutely.

Steve: Interesting. Well -- and that is the case with the Loch Ness -- some of the prominent Loch Ness sightings?

Joe: Absolutely. The large European Otter is well known as a -- and Binn's book, "Loch Ness Mystery Solved" is filled with sightings that can be attributed to otters -- and singly or together and in a line. And I would say that if you plotted lake monsters sightings on a map and overlaid that with the population of otters, you would find a very interesting correlation.

Steve: Isn't that interesting? Now, one question that came to mind for you is, have you ever done the "Art Bell Show?"

Joe: I have. Years ago, we gave "Art Bell" an award; we have a, sort of, good guy, bad guy award that we give from time to time. The good award is just called, "A Candle in the Dark" and its from Carl Sagan's -- a subtitle of one of his books, "Science as a Candle in the Dark." And our bad guy award is called "The Snuffed Candle Award." And we gave that to Art; and Art was mad and he was furious, and he called here, practically dared someone to come on his show at night and debate him and so my name...

Steve: So you drew the short straw.

Joe: Yeah, why is everyone looking at me? And so I went on -- and I attempted to mollify him a bit, saying well you know Art, I didn't personally, you know...

Steve: I didn't make this.

Joe: I didn't personally engrave the plaque and it wasn't my idea alone to do this, but you need to take this with some -- there is a point behind this, you are basically having these people on and ...44:46. Anyway, someone later said that -- wrote us that I was the only person who had ever made Art Bell look like a fool on his own show. And I don't know if that's true that I did that; that was not my intention.

Steve: Sure.

Joe: But he would -- you know he would start off talking and I would say, well you know that's -- but that's an argument from ignorance; you can't say because we don't know what caused the UFO in the sky, therefore its an extraterrestrial craft.

Steve: Right.

Joe: That's, you know, Argumentum ad ignorantiam; its faulty logic.

Steve: Right.

Joe: And, you know, and he would -- we would go on to more and I would say, well, Art, you know, actually I don't have the burden to disprove this, the burden is on someone who makes the claim, and they have to have some pretty good evidence before someone else would have to respond; you can't just make a claim and then say, let's see you prove, it isn't so. But that's what people try to do, and a lot of people take that bait and -- but you know, anyway it was... I was on for about three hours I think.

Steve: Wow! Well I was just curious -- and you know, it kind of relates to my final question for you which is clearly -- and you have articulated I think very well; your approach is largely case by case without bias and as you describe it, not this -- its more bottom up, not this top down...

Joe: Right, not the ivory tower approach of -- I don't need to go to the haunted house, so I can tell its not haunted. I can see this is not appropriate...

Steve: Right.

Joe: ...and so forth; and mine is wanting to do a more "CSI" approach and a "Crime Scene" approach -- let's go there, roll up our shirt sleeves, let's not get ahead of the evidence, let's see where the -- let the evidence speak; see where it leads. That's -- I'm an advocate of that philosophy.

Steve: And you know I respect that; at the same time, I am going to try to push you over the edge here just a little and say, after, you know, decades of looking into these things can you speculate it all about why -- about why we tend to seek paranormal solutions before we go after natural world?

Joe: Sure. And I think that's an important question and then its fair enough I mean I do say categorically that, you know, not a single house has been proven haunted, not a single UFO has been shown to be extraterrestrial and so forth. I mean, its not that I think these are -- it's just as likely as not that these things exist. Just that, given the next case, we shouldn't dismiss it for those reasons; we should just investigate and try to solve it. We will learn something more about our world and ourselves if we will do that. And not that I expect we will find something extraterrestrial. But I know those impulses, I remember when my grandmother died when I was a boy and how much I didn't want that to be the case...

Steve: Yeah.

Joe: I mean I understand those feelings, we tend to be creatures who could think rationally with the organ above the neck and then we can feel emotions; I mean, I for example, I am an artist and Poet and...

Steve: Excellent!

Joe: And so I am in touch with my feelings and -- but we shouldn't be deciding matters where logic and evidence are appropriate and deciding on the basis of our feelings. And I think the paranormal -- too much of that, people approach it with their emotions. The paranormal taps into our human hopes and our fears; we are hopeful that we live after we die and therefore ghosts could exist, we are fearful of the future or monsters so we look to fortune tellers or we check things out with a view towards protecting ourselves from frightening things; we are hopeful again that we are not alone in the universe; so we buy into extraterrestrial claims. And its not that we shouldn't be hopeful and fearful about things; those are good impulses if used correctly, but we shouldn't be governed by them and we shouldn't let them override better evidence. And so I think the problem with skeptics and believers is, too often where ships passing in the night, we skeptics are talking with our head, saying there is no evidence for this, this is not measuring up, this can be explained away and so forth. And the people we are talking to are paying no attention because they are not listening to that kind of factual evidence, they are feeling things, they have seen, they are like monster...

Steve: Sure.

Joe: Or they have heard a ghost. And they are emoting and we are just not talking on the same wavelength. And if we could learn to bridge that gap -- and part of that for me is being respectful of sincere reporters. I don't make fun of people who believe in -- that their house is haunted; I don't make fun of people who encountered a lake monster, I don't say I have never done it in my callous use of something that I didn't...

Steve: Sure.

Joe: ...you know occasionally act as a closed minded unfeeling debunker or something but I am -- when we skeptics are at our best, we don't do that. We save our vilification for hoaxers and fraud artists, and hucksters, and hustlers; and those people deserve criticism and condemnation -- people who are misleading others -- but not a sincere perseveant (ph) -- I think they would say that they would find me a sympathetic listener. And I have been in many haunted houses and sat at many séances and been at many miracle sites and been as respectful as I could be and yet trying to actually find an explanation.

Steve: Well, to your point too, we are humans and this is about a human experience, this whole thing, life.

Joe: Absolutely.

Steve: And I too, among many disclaimers, appreciate your admission and certainly I have been emotion driven, that's kind of my mantra these days, is the older I get the less I know, but we are all emotion driven thinkers. But I guess one of the things that I have realized is, there can be unintended negative consequences of taking action based upon beliefs that I fabricate based on my need to fabricate them. Are there examples in your work -- I mean is there any harm to -- what's the down side here of haunted houses or whatever else -- or is it just harmless?

Joe: Well, certainly we have to keep a sense of proportion; obviously if someone has a feeling -- if they have a guardian angel or something that may be relatively harmless, if its just an occasional little feeling or something but to the extent that people start, one set of beliefs could encourage other magical beliefs,

and pretty soon people are -- they may have gone to the fortune teller once, it's kind of a lark (ph) but then they, kind of, bought into it, now they are going back and back, and pretty soon they are seeking out new age councilors and getting medical advice from quacks, and then we can start getting into the serious realm. Some of it is relatively harmless but even the relatively harmless aspects feed the bigger picture, so that overall I think we are living in a time where there is a great irony that we know more and more scientifically and we have a much more rational view of our world and everything available to us and at the same time, we see people lapsing into a kind of anti-science mantra and adopting new age attitudes and feelings about things, and engaging more and more and more in magical thinking. We're seeing a lot of that.

Steve: Sure.

Joe: And I kind of see these summed up in a case in Campbell, Ohio, where I went to investigate some glowing statues; and they weren't glowing at all, they were shining because the gold leaf was simply catching sunlight or at night ambient light. And the priest and the bishop were in full agreement with me; there was no question about it. And I did some tests with a spotlight and stuff, no doubt, but this lady asked me the next morning when I was at the church taking some measurements and some photographs and things and she came up and asked what I thought and I told her and she said pretty cheerfully, she said "Well, I prefer not to believe that."

Steve: Fair enough.

Joe: That was the end of that discussion. And I just think that we ought to want to find the truth, ought to want to live in a world that's real and factual and not deceive ourselves and be deceived with fantasies. And I look for the truth; I am not pretentious enough to think that I am someone who is in command of it.

Steve: Yeah absolutely, I see that.

Joe: But I certainly -- I certainly think it's a worthy goal; I spend time trying to find what's true and do it as honestly and carefully as I can and to admit any error and correct things the way -- in a scientific spirit and believe that -- we human beings are the better for that.

Steve: I think that's well said, and I appreciate you saying it on truth-driven thinking where I too as I say, have so many disclaimers, have no unique -- all I have done is simply realize that in my simple Midwestern existence, I too have believed in an awful lot of things that turn out not to be supported by science, reason and evidence. And I think you have said very well what I believe too, which is that, to really make the world as good as possible for as many people as possible, probably figuring out how it really works is the best solution.

Really appreciate having you here Joe, and I wish you well with "The Relics of Christ." Maybe you can come back and talk with us about that when your book comes out.

Joe: Sure.

Steve: Wonderful. Thanks again for joining us.

Joe: Thanks for having me.

Steve: And that sends a couple more baby steps in pursuit of ever elusive truth and how the world might really work. Join us next week with Paul Campos in "The Obesity Myth" and don't forget to support us

by buying your iTunes, audio books, music and any Apple Hardware at all only after clicking through our affiliate links at truth-driven thinking. Special thanks again to Joe Nickell of CSICOP; you can visit CSICOP at www.csicop.org. Have a great week. Thanks again for joining us and we'll see you again on the road to Truth-driven thinking.