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TO: People interested in the truth about Mr. Randi

RE: Why serious scientists, and other serious people, ignore Mr. Randi:
 Failing to keep his "Peanut down Times Square" promise

Numerous individuals have emailed me recently informing me that Mr. Randi has once again, on his website, disseminated half truths [as well as explicit lies] about me and certain research mediums who have participated in serious research addressing the survival of consciousness hypothesis.

It is time to correct Mr. Randi's false statements about his attempt in 2001 to examine the raw data from our research purportedly so that he and his "Independent Qualified Panel" could reach a fair and balanced opinion about the conclusions we had drawn.

When Mr. Randi wrote his letter to Mr. Richard Imwalle, President of the University of Arizona Foundation, and the Foundation asked me for my opinion, I informed the Foundation of Mr. Randi's unfortunate history of documented trickery and deceptions. I further pointed out an exemplary and important misstatement of fact in Mr. Randi's letter which severely compromised the integrity of its purported request.

Mr. Randi's letter claimed that Dr. Stanley Krippner was one of four proposed members of an "Independent Qualified Panel" who would evaluate our research data. Randi wrote that all four members "were Ph.D. scientists who have already agreed with this Foundation to examine the data gathered by Dr. Schwartz." He went on to say, "They are all informed, willing, specialists, who I believe will be acceptable to Dr. Schwartz."

Mr. Randi's recommendation of Dr. Krippner was certainly acceptable to me. However, when I contacted Dr. Krippner directly to see if Mr. Randi's statement about him serving on the panel was correct, Dr. Krippner was concerned. Dr. Krippner explained that he had previously emailed Mr. Randi stating that he would not agree to serve on such a

committee. The truth is, Dr. Krippner was not willing to serve on the panel, and he made this clear to Mr. Randi.

Given that Mr. Randi apparently misrepresented his purported “Independent Qualified Panel,” the Foundation wisely decided not to take any formal action on Mr. Randi’s request.

I did not wish to embarrass Mr. Randi, so I kept this issue (and others) out of the public eye. [Mr. Randi seems to enjoy voicing his opinions and criticisms on his website]. However, I did share privately with a few people [who pressed me about Mr. Randi’s letter] the fact that Dr. Krippner had clearly not agreed to serve on the committee, and this became a concern to the Foundation and me. One person was sufficiently incensed by Mr. Randi’s behavior that she emailed him about it.

Mr. Randi was not happy. Below is what Mr. Randi reported on his website. I have inserted comments and corrections with the phrase VERITAS.

Note: our research directed at testing the survival of consciousness hypothesis is termed the VERITAS Research Program (veritas.arizona.edu). The latin word “veritas” is Harvard’s motto, meaning truth.

Mr. Randi’s claims, and my VERITAS corrections, speak for themselves.

From Mr. Randi's column - May 11, 2001:

RANDI: Pam Blizzard, I'm told, is a fanatical supporter of John Edward. He's the man who does the guessing-game about dead people on the Sci-Fi Channel.

VERITAS: Pam Blizzard is a fan [not fanatical] of John Edwards. She is very impressed with what he does, and for good reason. What John does can not be explained as a “guessing-game”. The three experiments reported in my book THE AFTERLIFE EXPERIMENTS convincingly rule out guessing as a plausible explanation of the data.

RANDI: She told a correspondent: In an email I just received from [Dr. Gary E.] Schwartz, he states that Randi misrepresented his "Committee." Schwartz contacted one of the four purported members — he said that he had not been contacted by Randi, and if he had been, he would have declined.

VERITAS: Dr. Krippner told me had been contact by Randi, but that for various reasons he declined to serve on this proposed committee. Randi got half of that statement wrong, and half right.

RANDI: If Pam Blizzard — whoever she is — said that, either she is a blatant liar, or Schwartz has misrepresented the situation. I very much doubt that Schwartz e-mailed that to Pam. All four of those persons have agreed to be listed and to serve on the committee.

VERITAS: Pam is not a blatant liar, and Mr. Randi's "doubt" was in error. Pam and I were in email contact about this.

RANDI: Here's a challenge: If Pam Blizzard will identify this proposed person — who I notice is not named! — and provide the statement in which he said that if he had been contacted by me and asked to serve, he would have declined, I'll push a peanut across Times Square with my nose, naked. How can she pass up that offer?

VERITAS: I contacted Dr. Krippner, and asked him if I could share his email to me stating the truth. He agreed. I shared this information with Pam. She passed this on to Mr. Randi. Did Mr. Randi honor his public challenge and "Push a peanut across Times Square with his nose, naked"? No. What he did was ignore the fact that he made this challenge, and he continues to ignore the fact that his failure to represent the panel correctly was one of the reasons why the Foundation did not take him seriously.

RANDI: Pam, you're a liar. Unless, that is, Dr. Schwartz — or someone claiming to be Schwartz — did make such a statement, in which case he is the guilty party. Inescapably, someone here is lying. It is not I.

VERITAS: According to Dr. Krippner, Mr. Randi is lying – unless Mr. Randi is suffering a severe form of self-deception and selective amnesia.

RANDI: What's your response, Pam? Who is it, and where's the evidence? Derived from Tarot cards? Or just a plain old LIE?

VERITAS: Pam sent Mr. Randi the evidence. It did not come from Tarot cards; it came from Dr. Krippner.

RANDI: Hello, Pam???? Where are you? Keeping company with Sylvia?

VERITAS: I do not know if Pam knows Sylvia Browne personally.

Lest the reader conclude that the above reflects an anomalous moment in Mr. Randi's life, I include in Appendix A an early attempt to correct some of Mr. Randi's misstatements in a column he wrote on October 25, 2002. I quickly learned that my feedback not help Mr. Randi discern fact from fiction, evidence from bias. It is my hope that someday the public will become conscious of the unfortunately deceptive, and maybe, pathological tactics of Mr. Randi and others like him. Their behavior does not serve the pursuit of truth.

APPENDIX A

Examples of errors of fact and deceptions about Dr. Gary Schwartz from James Randi on October 25, 2002, with commentary by Schwartz.

Below are comments by Randi on the James Randi Educational Foundation website (October 25, 2002). For the sake of integrity, I quote RANDI's claims word for word, followed by VERITAS, the facts.

RANDI: Dr. Gary Schwartz, of the University of Arizona, just might realize someday, not only that he was deceived by clever performers, but that he himself fell into his errors carelessly, willingly, and eagerly."

VERITAS: If Randi had read the book THE AFTERLIFE EXPERIMENTS, he would recognize that we have continuously searched for fraud by "clever performers." We have had skilled psychic entertainers review our experiments. If Randi read the book, he would know that over a succession of increasingly controlled and complex experiments, that whatever minor experimental "errors" were made (e.g. not having a divider screen taped in an early experiment), they were certainly not done "carelessly, willingly, and eagerly." The published facts do not support Randi's extremist and erroneous claims.

RANDI: Such scientists *never* reverse themselves. I include Ted Bastin, John Hasted, and many others in this naive assembly. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, though not technically a scientist *per se*, shines in this group.

VERITAS: Again, the facts do not support Randi's extremist statement. My scientific record, over 30 years, documents my careful, willing, and eager efforts to revise or reject hypotheses and theories as a function of data. If anyone has a history of discovering surprises in data, and actively falsifying specific theories and explanations that initially inspired experimental research, it is me. Randi ignores more than 400 published scientific papers that document my openness to revise or reject explanations that turn out to be wrong.

RANDI: While on the subject of Schwartz, I'd like to offer this analogy of what that scientist thinks science is all about. Schwartz never tires of telling us how well-educated he is (Harvard, no less!) but that doesn't say anything about how smart he is.

VERITAS: It is true that newspaper reporters comment on my Harvard and Yale history. The "never tires" comment is grossly exaggerated – which is Randi's persistent style of communication. If Randi were educated, he would understand that though clever exaggeration is sometimes cute, it is not intelligent, especially in science.

RANDI: As Richard Wiseman points out in the current *Skeptical Inquirer* (Nov/Dec 2002), Schwartz admits (as if he had any choice!) that there were sources of sensory leakage in his tests of John Edward (see <http://www.randi.org/jr/03-23-2001.html>) yet he is still convinced that Edward is the "real thing."

VERITAS: Randi again ignores the facts. By the third experiment conducted with Edward, the possibility of "sensory leakage" was eliminated to the point where the sitter was not allowed to speak. No semantic or visual feedback was given to John what-so-ever during Part I of each reading. John continued to obtain highly accurate information. Randi acts as if the later studies were not conducted. His cognitive strategy is to ignore experiments and findings that do not support his biases.

RANDI: The basic question here, is why Schwartz allowed the possibility of sensory leakage and judging artifacts to be there at all? The principle of isolation of the subject and the "medium" is rather simple, not expensive nor difficult to implement, and simply *must* be an element in such experiments!

VERITAS Again, if Randi read THE AFTERLIFE EXPERIMENTS, he would know we have conducted long distance studies, both single blind and double blind, and the results continue to come out positive. Randi's mistaken conclusions are based upon ignorance of the facts.

What follows below is Randi "shipwright" analogy. My comments are at the end of his cute but not very intelligent story.

RANDI: My analogy: suppose that Schwartz were not only an experienced sailor, but a shipwright — one who designs and builds boats. He invites us to the beach, where we see that a fine-looking boat of his design and construction is about to be launched for the first time. We and the media are assured that Schwartz obtained his training in his specialty at a leading school where such matters are taught. We're appropriately impressed. We admire the appearance, the paint job, and the general "cut of his jib." The boat *looks* just fine.

Schwartz invites folks aboard. The launch takes place, and the craft sails smoothly out into the water. We cheer in appreciation. The media people snap photos, then they quickly depart to report this happy news: that Captain Gary Schwartz has designed, built, and successfully launched his boat. The captain is exuberant, smiling, and satisfied.

But then the boat is seen to be listing to one side. The passengers begin leaping off and swimming to shore as a definite settling in the water becomes evident. The boat, it turns out, is not seaworthy. It settles to the bottom. Captain Schwartz admits that there were some leaky spots that he didn't quite seal up, but the basic design, he says, is sound, and very soon he'll build another that will be properly sealed. He points out the fine appearance of the boat, but offers no reasons why he didn't have it water-tight before launching it.

VERITAS: Again, Randi should read THE AFTERLIFE EXPERIMENTS. I carefully explained why the first experiment with John Edward and other well known mediums ended up being "naturalistic" and how it evolved over time. If Randi were a scholar, he would know that the original experiment (which was not conducted) was designed to be a tightly controlled mechanism study investigating alternative hypotheses. Randi also ignores the fact that previous experiments with Laurie Campbell, conducted prior to studies with John Edward, were conducted double-blind.

VERITAS: If we were to use Randi's ship analogy intelligently, we would say that with John Edward, I first built a row boat that showed the possibility of a vehicle floating on the water. The row boat leaked a little, but it most definitely floated. Each successive boat was designed to be larger, more sophisticated, and more sea worthy. Today's ships can weather virtually any storm.

RANDI: However, it's evident that he's ahead, because a few hours later the newspapers — who weren't informed of the leaks and subsequent sinking — run photos and glowing accounts of the launching. Captain Schwartz receives further support, even from his disappointed colleagues — because he's very well educated, and he's confident that when he gets around to sealing those leaks, the *next* boat will be just fine.

VERITAS: If Randi would only cite the history accurately, he would construct an analogy that was meaningful. But that's not Randi's mode of operation. Randi's behavior fits the following well-known phrase: Don't let the facts get in the way of a "good" story.

RANDI: This simple soul asks, "WHY WAS THE FIRST BOAT, WITH ITS KNOWN FLAWS, BUILT AND LAUNCHED? SURELY HOLES IN A BOAT SHOULD BE PATCHED BEFORE LAUNCHING?" To the uncharitable, it might appear as if Captain Schwartz was in a rush and only wanted the media coverage he got...

VERITAS: It appears that Randi can see only one possible explanation for why with John Edward we ended up conducting a "naturalistic" experiment first — it must be that we "only wanted media coverage." However, if Randi read THE AFTERLIFE EXPERIMENTS, he would discover that his biased conclusions are simply mistaken and inconsistent with the facts.

RANDI: And yes, it would appear that the captain should admit his poor construction without urging, but if no one makes a fuss — or if no one cares — he'll continue as a captain and he'll still think he can build boats.... Even I, with my inferior education, know that a leaky boat is a useless boat.

VERITAS: The straight forward way for Randi to correct his “inferior education” is to read the account of the research in THE AFTERLIFE EXPERIMENTS. Randi’s chosen lack of education enables him to draw simplistic, biased, and erroneous conclusions.

CONCLUSION: As I have said on numerous occasions, when Randi is correct, I applaud him; when Randi is incorrect, I try to educate him. Randi behaves as if he loves applause and hates to be educated. If I were Randi’s professor, I would discourage him from flaunting his “inferior education.” I would encourage Randi try to improve his knowledge and learn through data. However, despite my repeated efforts to encourage Randi to learn the facts and draw conclusions based upon the evidence, he seems reluctant to do so. Randi is not alone in this behavior - other professional skeptics have a similar style, Wiseman and Shermer included.

***** Note added January 15, 2005*****

PS: I have read multiple books on fraud and cold reading, and also taken a course on cold reading and how to be a fake medium. Any intelligent, open minded person who reads THE AFTERLIFE EXPERIMENTS, and also examines subsequent experiments with Laurie Campbell, Allison Dubois, Janet Mayer, George Dalzell, and other research mediums, can understand how these controlled experiments convincingly rule out fraud and cold reading as an explanation of the totality of the findings.

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