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IN MEMORIAM
Pat Linse
1947–2021

THE RECENT GOVERNMENT UFO SIGHTINGS

- THE *60 MINUTES* INVESTIGATION ANALYZED
- THREE THINGS THE UFOS COULD BE

IN MEMORIAM

Pat Linse

1947–2021

Pat Linse in
1968 (age 21)

All Our Yesterdays

A Remembrance of Pat Linse

BY MICHAEL SHERMER

Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow,
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,
To the last syllable of recorded time;
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
—Shakespeare, Macbeth, Act 5, Scene 5

Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow Pat Linse would be there at the Skeptics headquarters, an endless future with my business partner and friend of 30 years, until Saturday, July 24 when I learned of her passing to dusty death, her brief candle out. "What?" was my initial response, stuttered in utter disbelief. How can that be? She'd been there all our yesterdays and would be there all our tomorrows. Or so I thought.

Pat was the backbone of the Skeptics Society and Skeptic magazine. Because I was the public face of the organization—inasmuch as Pat was exceedingly shy, introverted, and disdained public recognition of her work (the quality of the work itself and its impact on people and society was her sole motivation)—many people either underestimated her contributions or were simply unaware of them. That is unfortunate, and one point of this tribute section of the magazine is to make clear how central a role her contribution was not only to the Skeptics Society and Skeptic magazine, but to the entire skeptical movement and its long and rich history. People know of the marquee names—Martin Gardner, James Randi, Stephen Jay Gould, Richard Dawkins, Steven Pinker, Neil deGrasse Tyson, Bill Nye, and the many other giants of skepticism over the past century—but there were many lesser known but no less important people who brought about this movement, and Pat Linse was first among equals on those pedestals. To punctuate the point of skepticism's central role to a functioning rational society, here is how Stephen Jay Gould explained it in the Foreword to my first book, *Why People Believe Weird Things*:

> Skepticism or debunking often receives the bad rap reserved for activities—like garbage disposal—that absolutely must be done for a safe and sane life, but seem either unglamorous or unworthy of overt celebration. Yet the activity has a noble tradition, from the Greek coinage of "skeptic" (a word meaning "thoughtful") to Carl Sagan's last book, *The Demon-Haunted World*.
>
> Skepticism's bad rap arises from the impression that, however necessary the activity, it can only be regarded as a negative removal of false claims. Not so. Proper debunking is done in the interest of an alternative model of explanation, not as a nihilistic exercise. The alternate model is rationality itself, tied to moral decency—the most powerful joint instrument for good that our planet has ever known.

Rationality and moral decency. I cannot conceive of a more noble description of Pat Linse, whose role in that force for good was central and, while understated, was as important as anyone's. Pat was so much more than the Art Director of Skeptic (her official title), as she also helped me select and edit articles, steered the movement of which we are a part in productive directions, and, personally, helped me develop my own ideas about science and skepticism. It has been my good fortune to meet a great many really smart people in my job—many Ph.D.s and Nobel laureates among them—and Pat was as smart, insightful, wise, and creative as anyone I've known. She was truly one of a kind.

I met Pat in the Fall of 1991, when she contacted me about a journal article of mine she read on a creationism case that went to the United States Supreme Court. I began that article ("Science Defended, Science Defined") with a description of an *amicus curiae* brief on behalf of 72 Nobel laureates in support of the appellees in *Edwards v. Aguillard*, the case testing the constitutionality of Louisiana's "Balanced Treatment for Creation-Science and Evolution-Science Act." That brief was organized, in part, by the Southern California Skeptics, a local group that, along with many others, emerged after

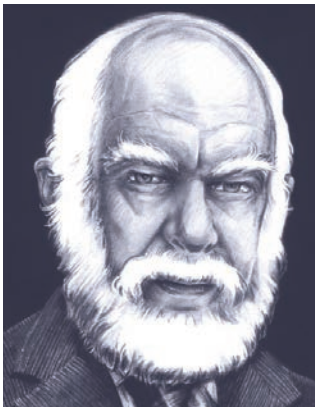
Pat in the first office of the Skeptics Society—Michael Shermer's garage

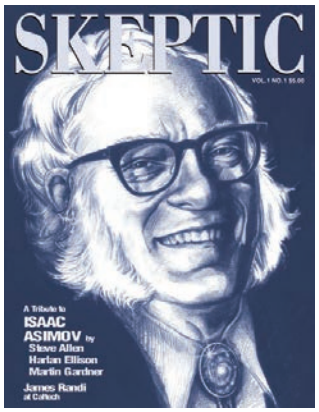
the successful growth of CSICOP (Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal—now CSI, Committee for Skeptical Inquiry). Pat had much more to tell me about how that brief came about, and especially the inner workings of the local skeptics group and why it collapsed the previous year because of the personal shenanigans of the organizer. We got together and three hours later I had a much deeper understanding of not only that creationism case, but of the skeptical movement. While I had attended some of the SCS meetings at Caltech (at the behest of the engineer Paul MacCready, whom I knew through racing human-powered vehicles), I was completely in the dark about the goings-on behind the scenes. Shortly after that meeting, Pat and I hatched the idea of relaunching the local group—only we thought we might as well make it a national and even international group and even start our own magazine.

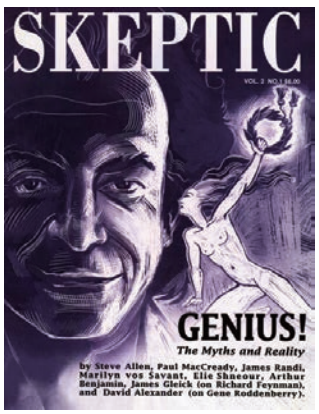
At that time I was teaching at Occidental College during the academic year, and in the summer directing the Race Across America, the 3,000-mile nonstop transcontinental bike race, for which I had created a magazine called *Ultra Cycling*. I had learned about the magazine business from my first job out of college at *Bicycle Dealer Showcase* (a trade publication), that motivated me to become a bike racer in my 20s. So when Pat and I started discussing producing a skeptic magazine of our own (*Skeptical Inquirer* was the publication of CSICOP and we admired that magazine), I brought to the table some production knowledge, and Pat had vast experience working in Hollywood producing movie posters, promotional art, marketing materials, and more, working on anything from the animated Smurfs to the cigarette-smoking Joe Camel poster. I suggested the lame title of *The Rational Skeptic*, but Pat understood marketing better than I and came up with, simply, Skeptic. "The magazine, and the group and whatever has to be named the nickname," she told an interviewer.
"You want the short quick memorable name."

As you can see in the accompanying photo with Pat on the phone taking an order, we started Skeptic in my garage, and in addition to designing covers and writing lead articles, we answered phones, stuffed envelopes, picked up the mail, processed orders, staffed tables at our resurrected Caltech science lecture series, and the like, until we had the funds to hire some staff, which took several years. I love how Pat described those early days in that interview:

> When we first started out, we were packed into this little garage, with triple-shelved books and so forth. Big networks would come out to film us. They could not believe that we were in this tiny little garage, rather than some grand building. That's because of the façade we put out.







By this Pat meant our image, our profile, our reputation. Pat never cared about appearances; she cared about content. Who cares (or even needs to know) what our office is like? The only thing that matters is the work we put out. And for our first five years we published quarterly magazines and hosted monthly lectures out of that space. Still, working and living in the same environment is not sustainable, so in time we needed to expand the office. Fortuitously, a philanthropist friend and supporter of the organization purchased my home and donated it to the Skeptics Society, which by then was a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation. We converted the house into an office, and there we remain.

From there we expanded Skeptic by adding *Junior Skeptic* magazine (bound into the back of every issue), inspired by an episode of the animated television series *The Simpsons*, in which Homer has an alien abduction experience while his daughter Lisa explains to him, "Dad, according to Junior Skeptic Magazine the chances are 175 million to one of another form of life actually coming in contact with ours." The skeptical researcher, writer, and artist Daniel Loxton took the reins of *Junior Skeptic* and has produced dozens of classical skeptical investigations. And as the world shifted to digital, we added Skeptic.com and eSkeptic, both artfully and brilliantly produced by William Bull. Together, Daniel and William will henceforth take up the mantle of Pat's production. On that front, let me highlight a few of the initial Skeptic covers that I find especially emblematic of Pat's deep insight into the subjects she was illustrating.

Our very first issue, Vol. 1, No. 1, was originally scheduled to feature a portrait of James "The Amazing" Randi (see illustration, top left), but just before publication Isaac Asimov died, and we felt we should pay tribute to one of the founding fathers of modern skepticism. Pat's illustration of the great one is masterful.

Vol 1, No. 2 was our special issue on the scientific search for immortality: "Can Science Cheat Death?" Here the grim reaper is un-fooled by the pair of aces science is hiding. Nearly 30 years later I'm afraid the prospects for an affirmative response to the cover question remains grim, including and especially for cryonics, mind uploading, and other sci-fi scenarios. This one is especially poignant to me at this moment since Pat did not believe in an afterlife and now she's gone. I'd like to believe she's wrong, and that her essence continues on elsewhere in some quantum field or cyberspace cloud, but what I want to believe is true and what is actually true do not necessarily align.

I absolutely loved Pat's cover for our issue on genius and creativity, Vol 2, No. 1, for which she selected the quintessential genius Richard Feynman to portrait, along with the muse iconography of how most people (wrongly) think of genius.

Sometimes Pat aimed to capture a complex phenomena through a minimalist cover, which I think is best captured in Vol. 12, No. 4 in our issue on 9/11 conspiracy theories, illustrated by Daniel Loxton. One of Pat's greatest gifts as Art Director was her ability to spot and nurture talent, inspiring creativity and personal loyalty in artists all over the world with her generous and heartfelt encouragement and advice.

But in general Pat preferred more complex covers with many design features. One in this genre is her cover Vol 14, No. 3 on historical revisionism and the white washing of Hitler and the Nazis (separate from Holocaust denial, the topic of another issue). I think Pat's cover perfectly captured that theme.

And I know a favorite of Pat's in this vein was the cover of Vol. 17, No. 3 on whether or not the United States is a "Christian nation." Here's how she described that cover in an interview:

> The background is a composite of about 20 different tree shots and George Washington is in a completely impossible

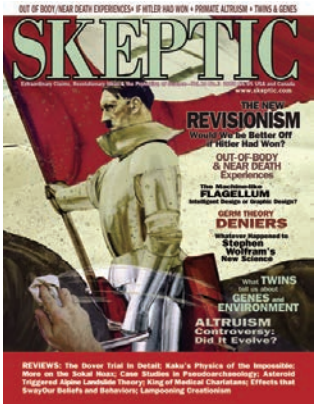
pose that is actually patterned after a 1930's *Saturday Evening Post* cover. You have a problem when you have a monumental figure and they're in a prayer posture because those are two contradictory things. You do a lot of cheating, fudging, and so forth to keep that monumental, grand figure look and still have them in an attitude of prayer. That's probably 20 different shots, photo-composed together, But since I can illustrate completely realistically, I don't have a problem putting stuff together. I used to paint right on photos for the film industry, so I have a pretty solid background there.

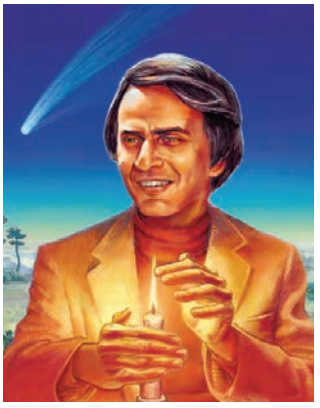
My favorite cover by Pat was that of Vol. 2, No. 2, which she called the "Gort Pietá" (after Michelangelo's famous marble statue in St. Peter's Basilica of Mary holding Jesus after the Crucifixion). The issue was on the relationship of science and religion, and we included an article on the theme of resurrection and immortality in science fiction. The author, Steve Smith, discussed Robert Wise's 1951 film *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, a Christ allegory in which the alien Klaatu (Michael Rennie) comes to Earth with his killer robot Gort to warn Earthlings about the dangers of nuclear weapons and the arms race. Klaatu tries to meet with authorities but is rejected and (like Jesus) ends up mingling among the common people and takes up residence with a single mother (and her son) named Helen Benson (Patricia Neal), who is Mary Magdalene to Klaatu's Jesus. (To reinforce the allegory Klaatu's Earthly name is Mr. Carpenter.) Out of fear and ignorance, government authorities kill Klaatu, so Gort is instructed by Benson (through one of the now classic lines in all science fiction, "Gort: Klaatu barada nikto") to rescue Klaatu out of the morgue and take him back to the ship to be resurrected.

Klaatu now brought back to life, the astonished Benson exclaims, in reference to the seemingly omnipotent Gort, "You mean, he has the power of life and death?" The original screenplay called for an affirmative answer to this ultimate "how-far-can-science-go?" question, but the Breen Censorship Board (a self-policing committee of the film industry in the 1950s) nixed the line, insisting that Americans might be offended by the implications. In its stead, Klaatu answers, with ecumenical sensitivity: "No, that power is reserved to the almighty spirit." Klaatu then emerges from the ship to deliver his stern warning to the authorities:

> The universe grows smaller every day and the threat of aggression from any group anywhere can no longer be tolerated. There must be security for all or no one is secure. Now, this does not mean giving up any freedom, except the freedom to act irresponsibly. I came here to give you these facts. It is no concern of ours how you run your own planet. But if you threaten to extend your violence, this Earth of yours will be reduced to a burned-out cinder. Your choice is simple. Join us and live in peace or pursue your present course and face obliteration.

Having delivered his message of threatened destruction and potential redemption, Klaatu's Jesus ascends to the heavens.





Photos by David Patton

As for what it was like working with Pat, it would be virtually impossible for any two people to work together every day for 30 years without conflict. Of course Pat and I had our differences—professionally, politically, and personally—but in the end we followed Thomas Jefferson's sage advice, in which the great statesmen recalled, "I never considered a difference of opinion in politics, in religion, in philosophy, as a cause for withdrawing from a friend." Whenever we had a fight about something professionally, *someone* always said "I'm sorry"… and Pat always said, "That's okay."

Politically, some of our contributors in this issue have commented that Pat's liberal leaning ideas sometimes conflicted with my own more libertarian preferences—but in Abraham Lincoln's "team of rivals" model, each side grows through debate and disputation. I would listen carefully to Pat's reasoning over particular issues and, at some time in the future in the privacy of my thoughts, would course correct my political ship. At least that's how I remember it in a *l'esprit de l'escalier* (the wit of the staircase) perspective.

Finally, personally, Pat treated my family as if they were her own. She had no children, so she treated my daughter Devin, and later my son Vincent, with love and respect and the nourishment any mother would give to her own issue. And not just my charges, but those of our other employees and especially the daughter of a friend, Shoshana Cohen, who came of age, along with Devin, at so many Skeptics Society public events at which they worked. Pat's loving and nurturing essence shone most brightly in those personal connections.

There is so much more I have to say about Pat, some of which is well captured by the other voices in this tribute, so allow me an emotional reflection on the absence of my friend and partner, and how the two of us thought about life and death. Namely, we focused on the former and largely ignored the latter, inasmuch as no one knows—or can know—what happens after we die. To ask that question is the equivalent of asking where you were before you were born…nowhere. If Pat lives on anywhere it is in the hearts and minds and memories of her family, friends, colleagues, and co-workers; in her creative art and writing; in her kindness to strangers and her empathy for those less fortunate; and, as we hope to convey in this tribute, in her legacy that will carry on indefinitely into the future. Her work will remain valuable long after my own time comes, and hopefully for many generations more. Inasmuch as skepticism—to close the loop on this reflection from where we began—is a core constituent of a rational and civil society, then we all owe a debt of gratitude to Pat Linse. S

The Soul of Science

Collected Tributes to Pat Linse

Ralph Lewis, psychiatrist and contributor to *Skeptic* magazine:

I was very fond of Pat from the first time I met her. She was a very likable person, in all her angsty, introverted shyness. She clearly preferred pulling the strings from behind the scenes. She once told me with a sly smile that she enjoyed arguing with Michael about political positions, with her seeing herself as more liberal and him (back then) as more libertarian. She joked that he would disagree vociferously with her and then she'd overhear him a short time later using her arguments in a conversation with a conservative—which gave her great satisfaction.

Despite her narrow geographical comfort zone, she was a most worldly person. In her preferred social mode of 1:1 interactions she was very personable, caring, helpful, lively, and good humored. And she was certainly a talented artist, a meticulous editor, a sharp thinker, and an astute observer of the human species.

I'll miss her, in all her endearing quirkiness.

Carol Tavris, social psychologist, "Gadfly" columnist for *Skeptic* magazine:

When a death comes this suddenly, with no forewarning to friends and colleagues, we are left with all those unsaid words, all those unexpressed appreciations, that we wish we had had time to say—especially to someone as shy and reserved as Pat. Though we exchanged many a merry email over the years, I'll never know if she was aware of how much I appreciated her artistic talents. I'd get a proof back from some Gadfly column, and see that she had left a big space for the art; and I'd say, "What in the world will you do here for this impossibly complicated or contentious topic?" And she would reply, "Oh, I have a little idea in mind…" and then, boffo, it would be perfect: an illustration that was never boringly on the nose, but rather an elbow, a wink, sometimes a kick.

Stanley Milgram had a term for the people in our lives whom we feel attached to, but don't really know—a fellow train commuter, that person down the hall in our office, a neighbor we greet every morning: "familiar strangers." We don't realize the importance of those connections until they are gone, and that is how I'm feeling now. Pat was a stranger to me in terms of her personal life, but familiar through so many years of Skeptic assignments, and I now feel bereft of that sweet, enjoyable, reliable connection. She gave so much to Skeptic and to skepticism, and to all fortunate enough to work with her.

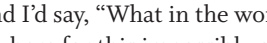


Photo by David Patton

Photo by David Patton

Brian Dalton, writer, film producer, creator and star of *Mr. Deity*, designer of *Skeptic* magazine in our early years:

I've known Pat Linse since the early 1990s when I was just coming out of religion. Amazingly in retrospect, I found the Skeptics Society and Skeptic magazine through Dr. Laura Schlessinger (true story), the noted conservative radio talk show host who was an early board member of the Society when she publicly denounced the pseudoscientific notion of recovered memories (that turned out to be false memories). I met Pat for the first time when I attended one of the Skeptics Caltech lecture series events and purchased a bunch of back issues of the magazine. Her gentle spirit and kind manner stood out immediately. But as I got to know her over the years, I realized what a force she was. That's exactly how I came to think of her—a force of nature.

We got to know each other better when she asked me to redesign Skeptic in the late-1990s. I was doing graphic design then, and Pat felt it was time for a new look. Quite a bit of our time together then was spent helping her convert everything over in the layout program she was using (it was different from the layout program I was using). It took her almost no time to get everything up and running, her intelligence and creativity on full display.

When I began writing and producing the *Mr. Deity* show, Pat and Michael were a great source of support. She pushed the *Mr. Deity* DVDs I brought to the monthly Skeptics Caltech events, and she was always enthusiastically helpful in spreading the Deity gospel. I would almost call her a disciple, but Pat was no one's disciple!

Our personal conversations over the years tended towards liberal politics, on which we mostly agreed. Aside from her kindness and intelligence, my most accessible memory of Pat revolves around my desire—I had it almost every time I saw her—to grab those glasses from her face and clean them! I never understood how she could see through those cloudy lenses!

Being a force of nature, the possibility of her absence never even occurred to me. I'm sad about this tremendous loss, but at the same time I feel incredibly fortunate to have known such a powerhouse of a human being. Most of all, I will remember that Pat never failed to make my life just a little better, somehow, in some way, every time we met.

Harriet Hall, M.D., "SkepDoc" columnist for *Skeptic* magazine, critical expert on pseudoscientific medical claims, and long-time colleague:

I was devastated to learn that Pat had died. She was the soul of Skeptic magazine. Her duties may be assumed by others, but she can't be replaced. She was a unique combination of artistic talent, skepticism, and hard-nosed critical thinking skills. And of course, she was the magazine's corporate memory. I wish I could have gotten to know her better. Ours was a long-distance relationship. Our only close encounters were brief contacts at conferences and one memorable occasion when I was in the area and she invited me to the office and gave me a tour.

She emailed me with galley proofs of my articles and promptly and accurately made any corrections I suggested. She did the illustrations for my SkepDoc columns, and it was always a delight to see what her creative mind had come up with. I thought the illustration for my column on Mark Twain and alternative medicine was pure genius (a steamboat on a river filled with floating bottles of quack medicines).

Pat was easy to talk to and was always very supportive. I came to trust her judgment (perhaps because she

always agreed with my opinions about individuals and about controversial issues!) She impressed me as well-organized, efficient, generous, friendly, self-effacing, and uber-competent in every sphere. I frequently emailed her with questions and comments about anything and everything. I came to think of her as a true friend and a kindred spirit. I will miss her terribly.

Kevin McCaffree, co-director (with Anondah Saide) of the Skeptic Research Center, sociologist of religion, secularism, criminology, and cultural evolution:

I met Pat for the first time in 2010. She was helping to sell admission tickets behind a folding table just inside the entrance to the Caltech auditorium at which the Skeptics Society hosted its Distinguished Science Lecture Series. I was there to hear one of the speakers and in time I came to enjoy the environment and show up early (with Anondah Saide) to help set up and sell tickets.

Anondah and I came to find Pat as interesting as any speaker in the series. She was conversant about many facets of science, she was precise in her thoughts, and she was utterly immune to bullshit. She was going to tell you the truth as she understood it, and aspects of that truth that were interesting to her, from the Cambrian explosion to the evolution of deception. She'd expect an informed and thoughtful answer! I'd not realized it at first, but in meeting Pat I was seeing the "soul" of science: naturalism, skepticism, curiosity. Let me explain.

I'm not sure where it was, maybe it was behind a book display at one of the speaker events or James Randi's The Amazing Meeting event in Las Vegas, but I distinctly remember her telling us about Michael's libertarianism and, more pointedly, his appreciation for Ayn Rand. This was fantastically unacceptable for Pat who, of course, was precise in her diagnosis of the many ills and societal misfortunes that befall people quite independent of their wills or desires or drive. She understood that selfishness and self-actualization are not bad in themselves and can do incredible good—as in the case of successful business entrepreneurship—but this by itself isn't enough, at least yet, to adequately ensure that everyone born today will have a roughly equal shot at success. Pat insisted that this required some kind of government intervention; highly scientific, rational and realistic government intervention. I remember finding her persuasive about this. I also remember asking her if she had changed Michael's mind on things. "Oh yes," she said, "he is much better now."

On another occasion, there was some debate over email about what to do regarding a contributor's credentials. At the end of this person's article on a serious and important topic, they'd claimed to have Ph.D. in a scientific field though, in fact, they had no such degree. Pat found the professional misrepresentation unethical, of course, but she made a point to insist that it shouldn't matter on principle whether a person has a Ph.D. What mattered was whether they knew their stuff or not. Her point was deeper. This person shouldn't have felt the need to inflate their formal education and degrees—Skeptic would publish anyone capable of interesting, informative scientific commentary. My own experience as a professor confirms her intuition that a lot of credentialism is just fluff. Pat's vision, implicitly, was for a magazine that anyone could be a part of.

There are other exchanges, other little jewels here and there, that Pat gave me. She was shy, so sometimes it took a bit of effort to get her to begin sharing. But I'm glad I tried and I'm glad she shared with me.

There are many nuances and niches and nooks in nature and in life, and one needs a certain dexterous and stubborn curiosity in order to properly peek at the world in its fullness. Pat helped me with this.

Donald Prothero, paleontologist, geologist, teacher, and director of various Skeptics Society Geo-Tours:

I've known Pat since the early 1990s when I became an active early member of the Skeptics Society and began to contribute articles to the magazine. But our longest interaction was through books and publishing. When I began to design and produce my own books for my publishers in QuarkXpress (the software that printers use), she taught me all the tricks and always knew how to troubleshoot any problem. She was not only a Master of Quark, but also a master of design and illustration. She did the cover of the first edition of my paleontology textbook in the grand movie poster tradition (she had done the art for many movie posters in her time). When my publisher needed someone to redo all the line art for the third edition of my paleontology textbook, she worked on every piece of art so that they all had consistent line weights and type styles. She also did the art for several other of my books. For many of my Skeptic articles, she took crude images I had provided her and rendered them as masterfully clear drawings.

My other long-term interaction with Pat was during the Skeptic Geo-Tours that my wife Teresa LeVelle and I ran from the early 2000s until 2016. I would write up an elaborate guidebook for each trip, and she would design it, illustrate it, and then get it bound and printed with a great cover. Then she would help with the trip logistics, from feedback on planning the trip, to pitching in at lunch to get all the folding tables and coolers out and the food laid out so we could feed an entire busload of people in a few minutes.

We spent a lot of time together when we set up the Skeptics booth at

The Amazing Meeting (TAM) and at our monthly lectures at Caltech. The running joke was that all the tables and boxes of books had the most educated moving crew in the business, with several Ph.D.s among us. But we got it moved upstairs to display, then broken down and put away in record time, with Pat supervising every step and making sure everything got done right.

Most of all, I will miss Pat as a close friend and sympathetic ear. Sometimes she would tell these amazing stories to me, just hanging out when the booth was not busy, or we would talk about all sorts of topics, skeptical, political, religious, and scientific, whenever the opportunity arose. She was a frequent dinner guest at our house. As others have noted, she was the quiet force behind the Skeptics Society and especially Skeptic magazine. Other people may take over parts of her job, but she can never truly be replaced.

I will miss her terribly.

James Gurney, artist, author, *Dinotopia* creator, and classmate of Pat Linse's at ArtCenter College of Design, Pasadena:

Pat and I were classmates at art school. She was the only student who saw through the nonsense in most of the introductory classes. She invented the term "artificial grief" for the assignments that seemed designed to waste the student's time with pointless effort. She would run every idea through her invisible "crap detector," a mental mechanism that we had never heard of before.

In the basic color class, while the rest of us struggled and failed at painting smooth, bright color swatches, she ignored the pigments and the method that the teacher assigned, and she bought her own specialty colors, applying them with an airbrush instead of a regular brush, with spectacular results.

She put herself through art school by airbrushing the packaging art for the Smurfs. To us she had that exotic air of professionalism, and her view of things carried a lot of clout, sometimes more than the teachers.

I was not surprised to hear later that she was involved in launching Skeptic magazine, and I wish I had been a little more skeptical myself back in those days.

Tim Callahan, author, and Religion Editor for *Skeptic* magazine:

I was shocked and stunned to hear of the sudden and unexpected death of Pat Linse. As a fellow artist, I admired her level of skill, craft, and competence.

However, what most impressed me about her was her quiet common sense—or perhaps I should say *un*common sense, since that quality is so lacking in so many people. She also had an easy-going, approachable nature. Whenever I dropped by the office of Skeptic for whatever purpose, I found it a calming delight to converse with her and I was, on a number of occasions impressed by her history of previous world travels. She was the complete opposite of anyone I've encountered who was vain and self-aggrandizing. I will miss her terribly.

Bill Nye ("The Science Guy"), science communicator:

You don't have to be psychic to know that, right now, you're reading Skeptic magazine. Note well though, this is the first one you've ever read that Pat Linse didn't finish before it got to your in-box, be it ground-service or electronic. You can't run an organization like this, without someone like Pat behind the scenes, writing, producing, editing, and laying it all out in readable fashion. Michael confessed to me how lost he feels without her. Turns out, she co-founded this outfit. Without Pat, your critical thinking skill would be that much more diminished. Her hard work was valuable; her wisdom was priceless.

Readers of this magazine are not much for the afterlife. If it turns out there is one, we'll all be surprised—and so will Pat. From the background, she influenced all of us in the very best way. She left our world better than she found it. She will be missed indeed. S

Art and Skepticism

An Appreciation of Pat Linse

BY DANIEL LOXTON

My first email exchange with Pat Linse took place in 2001. We talked about farm animals.

I had sent an unsolicited art submission query email to my favorite magazine, not even knowing if the Art Director was a man or a woman. I'd finished art school a year earlier, and was hoping to move away from the trade that funded my life during my 20s—herding large flocks of 1500 sheep in the wilderness on the Canadian side of the Alaska panhandle. I wasn't qualified to write for Skeptic, I said, but I'd be honored to volunteer for some illustration.

"Cold call" mailing to publishers and art directors can be a lonely, demoralizing affair for unknown young artists. Often you get nothing back. A good response is a form letter checklist with something ticked off, or perhaps a more generous handful of sentences on what you need to improve.

To my great surprise, Pat emailed back immediately. "You herd sheep?!??" she asked. "How many do you take care of?" She excitedly welcomed me to the "agricultural art club," naming several skeptics she knew with livestock backgrounds. "I myself won first prize at the international livestock exposition in Chicago judging dairy cattle some years ago," she said. (Not only can you win prizes for a gorgeously perfect cow—*judging* the perfection of cows is itself a competitive event.) She threw out several questions related to the sleeping habits of sheep and her personal skeptical subspecialty, the urban legend of cow-tipping.

"Oh yes, your artwork," she added as she wrapped up. "I like your style. Send me some stuff."

And I did.

Twenty years later, I am mourning my friend, boss, and mentor. As I think about who she was, I'm recalling for some reason the postscript she appended to the second email she ever sent me: "P.S. I am a cowgirl, not a cowboy."

I think that may be the title of the story of her life.

Pat Linse grew up around cows—a 1950s All American 4H farm girl from a big rural Wisconsin family. This photo from her young life moves me so much. Just look at that kid: chin up, eyes bright and curious, full of big questions and the courage to seek answers. It's right there, clear as day: this country girl is going places.

Getting there wasn't easy, though. She was the first of her sisters to go to college—one of millions of pioneering young women in a changing world. "*Sputnik*'s influence on the school system, the pill, the hippie era which made it OK to dress down…all of those things made my escape easier," she recalled. "Yes I worked my friggin' tail off, but it wouldn't have worked without all of those things."

Throughout her career, Pat was keenly aware of an uncomfortable truth: talent and hard work are rarely enough for success in the arts. Most working artists get where they are through a combination of hustle, unreasonable sacrifice, practice—and blind luck. For many, the deciding factor is that someone in power chose to open a door for them that remained closed for the next hundred hopefuls in line. For others, the deciding factor is even simpler: do their parents have money?

Pat was already a hardened veteran of a decade in the thankless trenches of commercial art when she put herself through her Masters degree at Art-

Photo by Daniel Loxton

Center College of Design in Pasadena. She made friends, but generally found her classmates an entitled, privileged lot. Many were merely "upper class kids with no real job experience," while others were "*real* rich people"—"sons of Saudi Sheiks" and the "wives of oil barons." As she recalled, "ArtCenter students are not a rebellious lot. They have been told if they just make it through the school the world will be theirs on a platter." Perhaps, for them, it would be. But Pat felt their "concept of how the world works is so astronomically out of line that they are practically unemployable until they've been knocked about by the real world a bit."

Pat was "not a cowboy" in the sense that she was deliberate, humble, and soft-spoken by nature. It seems that ArtCenter may have been the exception. By all accounts she swaggered there with the confidence of a young person more skilled than some of her teachers. She laughed to recollect stupid assignments from a woman Pat believed "got her teaching job via some monied connections." When another teacher assigned his class to draw a group of people reflected in a mirror, Pat made one of her people a vampire, just to be a smartass. "ArtCenter was so humorless," she said. Pat had little patience for pampered, pretentious people—not when she had to do things the hard way.

"My biggest life regret is that in my 20s and 30s pickings were pretty slim for me to use my talents," she reflected. For her, these were "basically wasted decades—sitting around begging for work doing production and paste up for grubby newspaper ads, and drawing tennis shoes and basket balls." She was a hardcore commercial artist who often worked as the only woman in *Mad Men*-type advertising environments. She did uncredited, poorly paid, creatively impoverished work advertising cigarettes and laying out the Yellow Pages. She did work for *Hustler* magazine. She endured the humiliations of wandering hands, stolen ideas, and open sexism for the privilege of doing the one thing she lived to do: making pictures, any way she could.

What kept her going were the too rare occasions when she got to flex her creative muscles: album covers, movie posters, or even packaging for the Smurfs. "The best thing about [the Smurfs] for us artists," she said, "was that the company grew so fast that nobody was watching the art department and a lot of people created some really great stuff. Until the suits got organized enough to take control again."

"We actually didn't plan to start Skeptics Society as a big deal," Pat reflected. "We just wanted to do a good job." When the magazine started, maverick no-budget work in an unheated garage was old hat to Pat. Everything in her career was a guerilla campaign. But Skeptic was different for Pat in one crucial respect: *she got to make the pictures she wanted for a cause she believed in*. She never looked back. She devoted the rest of her life to that work.

It wasn't always picnics and rainbows. She and Michael were very different people. There were lean and chaotic years, staff who didn't work out,

distributors that went bust. The magazine industry took one hammering after another.

Pat stuck it out, year after year, decade after decade. "I always say to myself, 'Its better than doing Joe Camel," Pat said. But it was more than that. The truth is, Pat had a quiet, patient, implacable determination to make the world a little better through her work at the Skeptics Society.

She came to the city with the realism, stoicism, and toughness of life on the farm. She had few illusions about humanity, and absolutely no delusions of grandeur. She was an incrementalist, not a revolutionary. She just believed, truly and deeply, in the value of plugging away.

"Do not expect to create a rational Utopia," Pat cautioned. "You are moving the ball down the field—scoring a victory here, raising your voice against irrational thought there, and lighting the proverbial candle in the dark whenever you can."

That was a mission I could believe in.

Having come up the hard way, Pat delighted in mentoring emerging illustrators. As we struck up an online friendship by email, she insisted on reviewing my portfolio. She gave me frank, generous, real world advice—pitfalls to avoid, pro tips about the industry, and plenty of straight up critiques of my art. Meeting Pat made me a better artist almost overnight.

I don't quite know how to describe this to non-artists, but Pat's art was utterly old school. She was a *really* good illustrator whose practice was oriented in a very specific way.

When we look around our homes or the grocery store, almost every object we see was made by an artist. We don't know the names of the people who designed that shampoo bottle or the ketchup label or the hood of your car. We never even think of them. Pat was part of that invisible legion.

Her practice was forged in a world where artists are uncredited service workers and clients demand fast, cheap, *and* good, all at the same time. Her illustration was without frills, without ego, and lightning fast. Most of her work was unsigned. Every piece was exactly what it needed to be—no less, and no more. Commercial artists aren't there for flair or personal style. They're there to serve the client's needs and (hopefully) get paid.

Pat's command of fundamental drawing skills was phenomenal, but surprisingly easy to overlook. Her illustrations were designed to tell the stories they needed to tell. If "simple" would do the trick, simple is what she would do. None of her work was designed to make us think, "Wow, this artist is really good!" She didn't care about being seen. In fact, she mostly preferred not to be. She toiled in service. She never showed off. "I do about 10 different styles in Skeptic," she told me in those earliest emails. "If there is not an artist mentioned in the margin, chances are I did it."

Her goal was not to be known, but to craft an aura of competence in support of the *ideas* discussed in the magazine. As she explained in an interview, "People often don't understand [art's] purpose, but they know it when they see a good job." She considered her job done well if Skeptic's production values gave readers a subconscious impression of professionalism. "They don't even realize that it's the design work or the artwork that's making them think that."

You'd better believe I paid attention to Pat's lessons! I didn't always follow her exact advice, but I made darn sure I strengthened any weakness she found in my work. One of the first things she taught me was a greater willingness to "kill my darlings." Let's say this corner of a piece has the most virtuoso lines, the most perfect detail, and that draws the eye. That's only a good thing if your eye is *meant* to go there. If not, that detail's got to go. Pat was ruthless about painting out beautiful details that didn't belong. She was precious about nothing. The "read" of the finished piece was the only thing that mattered.

I did various volunteer illustrations for Pat for a year or so. We kept up a cheerful correspondence. And then, one day, out of the blue, she unexpectedly became that powerful person who opened a life-changing door of opportunity for me as a young artist.

When *Junior Skeptic* was first created, nobody quite knew exactly what it was meant to be. Various people tried to make it work in short stints with middling success. The task kept falling back on Pat herself. Problem was, making *Junior Skeptic* was basically a full time job—and Pat already had one.

There was a need for another person who could take *Junior Skeptic* and run with it on an ongoing basis without much supervision. The surprising suggestion that I could perhaps be that

Photo by David Patton

person arrived as a casual email postscript: "P.S. If you were going to do a whole *Junior Skeptic* on some major topic—writing and art—what topics might you like to do?"

Me? Really? I had *some* background in creative writing, but no thoughts at that time about writing professionally. I'd never even considered non-fiction, let alone non-fiction for kids.

As it turned out, I owe my entire career as an author to this bit of blind, dumb luck: veteran artist, skeptic, and cow enthusiast Pat Linse just happened to like the way I wrote emails.

Often about sheep.

"As soon as I noticed you had a knack for simple straightforward writing," Pat explained, "I thought, 'I ought to give him a try on *Junior Skeptic*.'"

I was very nervous going into my first issue, *Junior Skeptic* #14. I picked a topic that shored up my confidence—the obscure cryptid Cadborosaurus, which I already knew a lot about. Then I threw myself into research and scrambled to learn how to use Skeptic's layout software and become proficient with Photoshop. Pat guided and encouraged me the whole time. I think I spent five months working on that story for a small honorarium. The cover alone took weeks. It featured a hand-sculpted monster model composited into heavily modified location photography.

Here I'm going to share some absolutely glowing compliments Pat gave me when she saw the finished art for that cover—not for vanity, I hasten to add, but because this so perfectly captures Pat's expansive generosity as a mentor and boss:

> You probably know that it's a great piece—but if you are like me you are still seeing all the little things that might have been a problem, so you don't know how really, really, really, *really* good it is. It's fabulous. I love it. Great. What I like is it radiates the delight you took in the subject matter.

Thinking back on those comments still fills my heart with love and loyalty for Pat. Here's the thing: this wasn't a transaction for her. She genuinely cared about the creative success of the artists she worked with. "I really hope you can work with us a lot," she said, "so you can continue to work in this area, and produce some more great stuff in an environment that nurtures your talent."

And so, *Junior Skeptic* became my baby. Pat and I worked together as a creative team for almost two decades—trusting and supporting one another, griping together, geeking out together. We had each other's backs. We accepted each other's quirks. I don't think a harsh word ever passed between us.

Over the years I had many opportunities to thank Pat for putting her faith in me. She always waved it off, saying she just had good judgement in finding a self-starter she could rely on. The deeper truth is that she did not want to see younger artists squander their talents on "wasted decades" as she was forced to do. As she told me, "just be glad you got into something you could really sink your teeth into before you wasted too much time!"

Many of these tributes mention Pat's shy and private nature. It's true. She was very private. In some ways, perhaps I never knew her well. Indeed, I worked with her for two or three years before we even spoke on the phone. I had no idea what Pat looked like when I started.

We were work friends. But we were *close* work friends, for a very long time—and *Pat's work was the vital center of her life*. She shared a house with her adult niece, but she spent all her time at the office. She was routinely still at her desk late into the night. She rarely took vacations, weekends, or even sick days off. When she spoke, she spoke about art and skepticism. When she socialized, she socialized with skeptics.

Outside of art and skepticism, her life was positively spartan. When I visited the California office, Pat kindly put me up at her house. I slept on the floor in a room without any furnishings whatsoever. The only object in that room was an almost life-sized cow cutout she painted in art school. The brush strokes on that cow were dazzling.

Pat and I were kindred spirits in many ways, but we were hardly clones. She was amazingly set in her ways. I mean, she literally used an AOL email account until the day she died. I was shocked when I first saw her scrunched in her office, peering owlishly through her foggy, scratched, oversized eyeglasses at her old CRT monitor. There was a travelling scan line glitch endlessly scrolling down her screen. "How on Earth are you making art like this?" I exclaimed.

She steadfastly refused to upgrade software or hardware until they simply stopped working. She would not change makeshift kludges she'd discovered decades earlier. If she had a solution that worked for her in the past, that was what she did.

Much has been mentioned about her liberal politics. She was progressive by the standards of her generation, but I regarded her as a bit conservative in some ways. Like some other feminists of her age, she seemed a little suspicious of some newfangled intersectional ideas that I found pretty useful.

But we spoke the same language about art and skepticism. Pat's vision of skepticism was very practical. She wanted to keep her personal political and religious beliefs out of her work. She wanted skepticism to be a reliable source of science-informed insight and information for *anyone who wanted it*—not just people like her. She wanted to give every idea a fair shake, too. Paranormal proponents would phone the office all the time, and she was happy to respectfully engage with them.

We were similar in another respect, too. There are people in this world who want to be front and center— metaphorically Harry Potter, King Arthur, or Captain Kirk. Then there are people who want to be Hermione, Merlin, or Mr. Spock. Pat was emphatically one of the latter. She did not want to be famous. She just wanted to get things done.

At a certain point I reluctantly decided that my ideological priorities were more important to me than my own shyness. I had ideas about skepticism I wanted to share. No one was going to listen to my ideas if they didn't know who I was. Pat never made that decision. Instead, she deliberately chose to remain in the background—largely unknown to the public, yet a wise and firm leader and den mother to her skeptical friends and colleagues. *They* could carry Pat's convictions into the public sphere.

Her influence on modern skepticism was invisible, yet immense. She was never the one on stage, but she was known and respected by the people who were. My friend Barbara Drescher accurately described Pat as "one of the most competent persons I've ever met."

Pat may have preferred a low profile, but it bothered *me* that she so rarely received the credit she deserved. I promoted her work whenever I could. When I cajoled Pat into contributing written remarks to a large group project in 2009, another organization described the participants collectively as "luminaries." Pat was tickled by this, chuckling, "Cool—I'm a 'luminary'!" I responded with fondness and exasperation, "You always were, silly! You just forgot to tell anyone for 20 years."

But that's the very thing, isn't it? Pat lived and died on her own terms. She spent decades digging her way out from under the constraints of small town life, traditional roles, mediocre teachers, sleazy clients, and other people's expectations. If she had some quirky way she liked to do things, well, she was the boss! We could damn well adapt.

Pat Linse lived as she liked, doing the things she loved, for reasons that mattered to her. She was stubborn as hell, and sharp as a whip. She made her own mold. We will not meet another quite like her. S

IN MEMORIAM

Pat Linse

1947–2021