
The Ig Nobel Acceptance Speeches

transcribed by Nan Swift, AIR staff

NOTE: To see video of these speeches, and of the entire ceremony, see the Improbable Research web site: www.improbable.com.

Medicine: Jim Gundlach (co-author of “The Effect of Country Music on Suicide”)

There’s an old country music joke that starts out “What do you get when you play a country record backwards?” AA [Alcoholic Anonymous] works. Guns disappear. Your spouse, your kids, and your dog come back. And the boss’s son-in-law who got that job that should have been your promotion ... got caught in bed with the boss’s secretary. You got your promotion, and the future looks bright.

Now, studies have shown that every one of these reversals -- except the dog -- has been related to reduced suicide risk. And if anybody is interested in funding research on pets and suicide, please contact Steve Stack or me. Thank you.



Medicine Prize co-winner Jim Gundlach.
Photo: Robin Abrahams.



Physics: Ramesh Balasubramaniam and Michael Turvey (hula-hooping researchers)

Turvey: Now that we have resolved the fad of the fifties -- hula-hooping -- I have a grand idea. How about a fad of the thirties -- swallowing goldfish?

Balasubramaniam: I think that we should study swallowing goldfish while hula-hooping.

Turvey: We’ll be back!

Balasubramaniam: We’ll be back next year.

Physics Prize co-winners Ramesh Balasubraminiam and Michael Turvey. Photo: Kees Moeliker.

Public Health: Jillian Clarke (“five-second rule” experimenter)

Hello, I’m Jillian. Has any of you ever heard of the five-second rule? I basically proved the science behind it. We went around at the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign. We swabbed floors to get the microflora counts on the floors, and found that the floors there generally have no bacteria. So if you do drop something on the floor, you can eat it -- and nothing will happen!



Public Health Prize winner Jillian Clarke. Photo: Robin Abrahams.

Chemistry

[The prize was awarded to the Coca-Cola Company of Great Britain, for using advanced technology to convert liquid from the River Thames into Dasani, a transparent form of water, which for precautionary reasons has been made unavailable to consumers. The winner could not, or would not attend the ceremony. To honor the Coca-Cola Company, Nobel Laureate Dudley Herschbach, a Harvard chemistry professor, presented the following personal tribute to water]:

Herschbach: This award goes to the Coca-Cola Company for a variant of its new brand of allegedly pure, bottled water. Marketed in England, it sold there, as here, under the elegant name “Dasani,” launched in England with a seven-million-pound advertising promotion. It was soon discovered, however, that the sophisticated process which was intended to convert water from the River Thames, marking the price up from three pence to 95 pence for a half liter, involved adding chlorine and ozone to shape the taste profile. But it had the effect of leaving bromate at twice the legal limit. Bromate is known as a dangerous carcinogen.

Now the students in the audience, if there are any who took my freshman chemistry class, remember I always emphasize that regular Classic Coca-Cola could only barely be poured down the drain without violating the law. That’s actually literally true. Its acidity is only barely below the legal limit. But here they are well above the legal limit for bromate. There’s a connection with a literary classic. I’m thinking of a poem by Samuel Coleridge: “Water, water everywhere -- and not a drop you should drink.”

Engineering: Scott Jackson Smith and his sister Heather Adams (on behalf of their father and grandfather, who together patented the combover)

Scott Jackson Smith: My sister and I are here to accept this award on behalf of my grandfather, Frank J. Smith. Frank was a true American folk hero. He always had a great sense of humor, and would have enjoyed receiving this award tonight, and would have appreciated the spirit in which it was given.

It’s important to note that Frank Smith did not actually invent the combover. One merely has to view the portraits of Renaissance nobility, or the busts of Roman patricians, to see that the combover was in practice long before Frank Smith came along.

The purpose of patenting the combover was to record, document, and preserve the combover -- for posterity. He knew that there was a movement afoot to wipe the combover off the face of the earth. Many people believe that Benjamin Franklin and George Washington actually sported the combover, and that powerful forces within the government had their portraits altered to erase this historical fact--

[At this point, Miss Sweetie Poo interrupted, saying “Please stop. I’m bored. Please stop. I’m bored...”]

Scott Jackson Smith: Do you know who Britney Spears is?

Miss Sweetie Poo: No. Please stop. I’m bored. Please stop. I’m bored...

Scott Jackson Smith: I would just like to say that the combover is not about hair. The combover is about heritage. Comb on, brothers -- comb on!

Literature: Pamela Chestak (on behalf of her mother, Helen Fisher, the president of the American Nudist Research Library)

This would be a whole lot easier if I were at the library and didn’t have to just imagine you naked.

I’m here accepting the award on behalf of the American Nudist Research Library, which is located on the grounds of the



Scott Jackson Smith and his sister, Heather Adams, accepting the Engineering Prize on behalf of their father and grandfather -- who patented the combover. Photo: Kees Moeliker.

beautiful Cypress Cove Nudist Resort in Kissimmee, Florida. I was recruited for this job by my mother, who is the president of the American Nudist Research Library.

I am not from Kissimmee, Florida. I am from Holyoke, Massachusetts, which is the home of the Volleyball Hall of Fame.

The board of directors and the officers asked me to convey their regrets. They were unable to attend. No one had a thing to wear.

The library is celebrating its 25th anniversary. It's an all-volunteer library, started in 1979. It's a library of over 7,000 volumes. There are researchers from New Zealand, Australia, Japan, England, and Canada who will pilgrimage to Kissimmee, Florida to go look in the archives of the library, looking for things like *Sunshine and Health*, *British Naturism*, and *Travel Naturally*. Let's hear it for the American--

[At this point, Miss Sweetie Poo interrupted, saying, "Please stop. I'm bored. Please stop. I'm bored..."]



Miss Sweetie Poo informs Pamela Chestak that the Literature Prize acceptance speech has gone on long enough. Photo: Kees Moeliker.

Psychology: Daniel Simons and Christopher Chabris (“Gorillas in Our Midst” experimenters)

[Immediately before the Psychology Prize was announced, the audience was shown a 30-second-long video in which several people, some dressed in white, others in black, passed a ball back and forth. The video also showed a person in a gorilla suit strolling across the screen; the gorilla even stopped and waved at the camera. Most of the Sanders Theatre audience failed to notice the gorilla.]



Simons: I'm Dan. This is Chris. Why don't you watch that video again?

[The video was shown again. This time most of the audience noticed the gorilla.]

Chabris: Our research shows just how oblivious people can be to what's going on in the world around them. We did this study as an exercise in a class we taught here six years ago. It worked really well at Harvard.

Because of the student-faculty ratio, we have a lot of people to thank for working on the project with us.

Simons: First, two of the giants of

Psychology Prize winners Chris Chabris and Dan Simons. Photo: Kees Moeliker.

American psychology. Dick Neisser, whose work in the 1970s inspired our study, and Jerry Kagan, who works here, who lent us his gorilla suit.

Chabris: And now the cast and crew. Starring Elisa Cheng as the gorilla...

Simons: Judith Danovitch as White Player Number One, Steve Most as White Player Number Two, Alex Wong as --

[At this point, Miss Sweetie Poo interrupted, saying "Please stop. I'm bored. Please stop. I'm bored..." She, in turn, was interrupted by Elisa Cheng in a gorilla suit. The gorilla picked up Miss Sweetie Poo, slung her over a shoulder, and carried her off the state. Throughout, Miss Sweetie Poo continued to perform her duties, saying "Please stop. I'm bored. Please stop. I'm bored..."]

Economics

[The prize was awarded to the Vatican, for outsourcing prayers to India. The winner could not, or would not, attend the ceremony.]

Peace: Daisuke Inoue (the inventor of karaoke)

Hello, everyone, I am Daisuke Inoue. I am from Japan. I am the last samurai -- but Tom Cruise couldn't come. I am very happy to be here to be awarded the Ig Nobel peace prize. One time I had a dream to teach people to sing so I invented karaoke. I didn't know it would be the start of something big. Now more than I ever, I want to teach the world to sing, in perfect harmony.



Peace Prize winner Daisuke Inoue -- the inventor of karaoke -- is serenaded by Nobel Laureates Dudley Herschbach (left), Richard Roberts and William Lipscomb, and by Karen Hopkin. Dr. Hopkin is, among other things, famed for creating the Studmuffins of Science Calendar. Photo: Kees Moeliker.

[Mr. Inoue then sang a very brief version of the song "I'd Like to Teach the World to Sing...", terminating it with a happy cry of "Coca-Cola!"

At that point, Karen Hopkin and the three Nobel Laureates came up, surrounded Mr. Inoue, and serenaded him with a karaoke version of the 1960s hit song "You're Just Too Good to Be True / Can't Take My Eyes off of You." The entire audience joined in.]



Biology: Hakan Westerberg, Magnus Whalberg, Robert Batty, Lawrence Dill (herring fart researchers)

Westerberg: Thank you. I think this subject is very appropriate for the theme of this evening. A herring swallows air. And if you do that, you get gas, and then if you fart underwater it makes very peculiar sounds.

I want to invite all of you to the lectures on Saturday, when we will explain why and if submarines fart. And I send a special thanks to the Swedish navy, who sponsored this research.

Batty: They didn't sponsor our research. We have to thank others for that, but there are too many to mention. I should remind you of some of the things we heard earlier about many dilutions within water. Just think next time you take a swim in the sea: herring have been farting in there.

The first proof that this was communication was that I heard it over the telephone. Ben Wilson played the sound to me over the telephone, and asked me if I had any idea how the herring might be making this. And so it went from there. Ben couldn't be here tonight. We wish he could. Our other colleague, Larry Dill, is.

Biology Prize winners (left to right) Magnus Wahlberg, Robert Batty, and Lawrence Dill. Ig Nobel Minordomo Julia Lunetta (wearing a tiara) stands by. Photo: Robin Abrahams.

Dill: I just want to explain the communication thing. We believe that the herring are probably speaking to one another to maintain the coherence of the school. It's sort of a bonding thing. But then, preadolescent boys have been doing this for millennia.

I just want to say how flattered we are to be here in this seat of learning. It's been a gas. Thank you.

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