

THIS WEEK

Hail Columbia	244
Proton-antiproton collision	246
Cleaning the environment bacterially	246
2,4,5-T marches on	247
Behavioral problems: Biochemical basis	247
Smoking and abnormal sperm	247

RESEARCH NOTES

Chemistry	248
Biology	248
Earth Sciences	254
Physical Sciences	254

ARTICLES

Elegant number crunchers	250
Memory: A matter of feelings	253

DEPARTMENTS

Letters	243
Books	249

COVER: At 3.983 seconds past 7 o'clock on the morning of April 12, the first space shuttle, christened Columbia, takes off on its near-flawless maiden orbital flight from launch pad 39A at Kennedy Center in Florida. See p. 244. (Photo: NASA)

Publisher	E. G. Sherburne Jr.
Editor	Robert J. Trotter
Senior Editor and Physical Sciences	Dietrick E. Thomsen
Behavioral Sciences	Joel Greenberg
Biomedicine	Joan Arehart-Treichel
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Science Writer Intern	Bruce Bower
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Art Director	Dale Appleman
Assistant to the Editor	Betsy Gordon
Books	Jane M. Livermore
Business Manager	Donald Harless
Advertising	Scherago Associates 1515 Broadway New York, N.Y. 10036 Fred W. Dieffenbach, Sales Director

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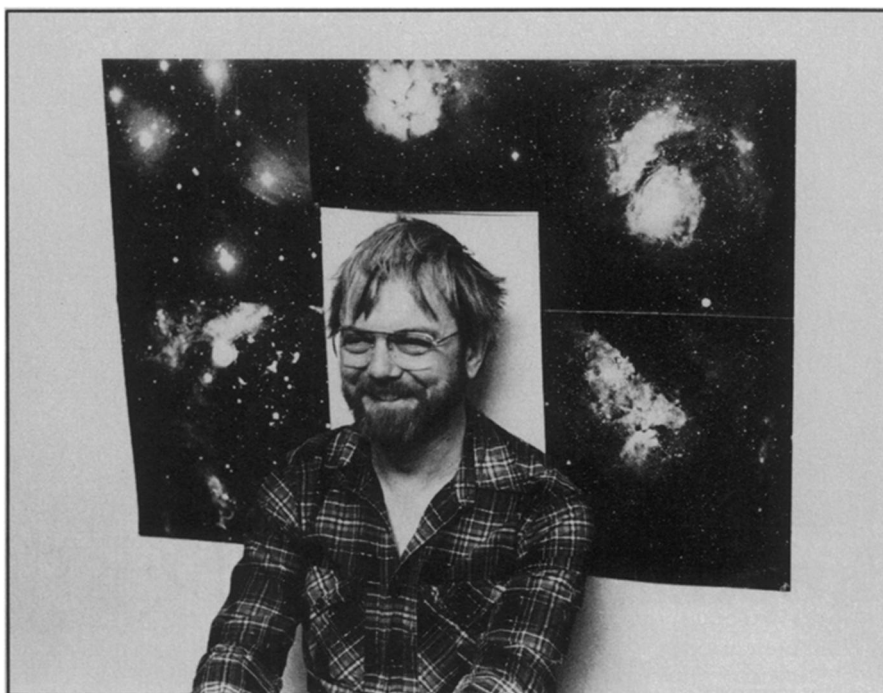
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Another Award Winner

Senior Editor Dietrick E. Thomsen — Physical Sciences Editor at SCIENCE NEWS since 1968 — has been awarded the Dorothea Klumpke-Roberts Award for 1981.

This award, presented by the Astronomical Society of the Pacific, was established in 1972 to recognize "outstanding contributions to the public's understanding and appreciation of astronomy." Presentation of the award will be made this July in Seattle at the society's annual scientific meeting.

For years, we at SCIENCE NEWS have relied on Thomsen's thorough knowledge of astronomy and the physical sciences, and our readers have told us how much they appreciate his unique ability to communicate effectively and entertainingly even the most difficult of concepts. We are pleased and proud that Thomsen's efforts now have been recognized and rewarded by a nominating committee that includes scientists, journalists and educators.

Congratulations,
E. G. Sherburne Jr.
Publisher

LETTERS

Much-maligned vitamins

Your brief mention of our study of megadose vitamin B-6 with autistic children (SN: 3/7/81, p. 154) is accurate. It is also true, as SN reports, that "other researchers tend to minimize the potential of megavitamin therapy," and that "Rimland remains unfazed and continues his investigations." So far so good.

What your article failed to report is that there are now at least nine studies in the world literature showing vitamin B-6 to be helpful to autistic and autistic-type children, that four of these studies are of the classic double-blind placebo-crossover design, and that highly significant improvement has been demonstrated not only in the children's behavior, but also in the urinary excretion of abnormal metabolites, and in the electrical activity of their brains, as measured by evoked responses. There are no studies which contradict these positive results. In none of the studies have there been any significant side effects. Vitamin B-6 is undoubtedly an extremely safe and inexpensive treatment, as well as a rational one. Normal, as well

as autistic children, require B-6 daily — no one requires Thorazine.

Further, quite apart from the often dramatic behavioral improvement B-6 frequently brings about, the studies of vitamin B-6 have provided some extremely important insights into the biochemical nature of autism, and are perhaps the best lead now available toward solving the enigma of autism.

Medicine's failure to follow up the use of B-6 in treating autism is not an isolated instance. Medicine has a long and sordid history of studiously ignoring the therapeutic potential of vitamins. It is well-known that it took two and one-half centuries, and hundreds of thousands of lives, between the time citrus juice was demonstrated to be the treatment of choice for scurvy, and the time that its use was finally adopted. The real reason there has been such wide neglect of the therapeutic potential of vitamin B-6 in autism may be found in the long-standing, deeply-ingrained hostility of the medical profession toward the concept that something as simple and innocuous as a vitamin can have profound effects upon human health and wellbeing. That situation, at long last, seems to have improved a bit in recent years, but there is a long way yet to go.

Bernard Rimland Ph.D.
San Diego, Calif.