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Editorial, Business, and Advertising Offices
1719 N St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036
202-785-2255; scinews@sciserv.org

Subscription Department
P.O. Box 1925, Marion, Ohio 43305
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Cover: Elderly people may compensate for normal memory losses by collaborating with others. New research finds that long-time spouses allowed to consult with one another remember as much about a recently heard story as young adults operating singly or in married pairs. (Illustration: Dan Skripkar)



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Letters

Health risk from raw honey?

In regard to the letter about healthful honey (SN: 7/12/97, p. 19), cases of infant botulism caused by ingestion of *Clostridium botulinum* present in raw honey were reported in the MORBIDITY AND MORTALITY WEEKLY REPORT several years ago. I have for years suspected that raw honey may also be responsible for cases of visceral larval migrans (canine and feline roundworm in tissues other than the skin) in children for whom no other mode of infection has been determined.

Ted M. Reynolds
Notasulga, Ala.

Microbial contamination can indeed be a problem (the fungus that produces aflatoxin is a known culprit). Garon Smith was referring to trace metal contamination when he said that eating honey was safe.

—C. Wu

Red dust

Your article "Return to the Red Planet" (SN:

6/28/97, p. 402) and others describing Sojourner's activity on Mars have brought a home-ly question to mind: Why doesn't the accumulation of dust on the solar panel block penetration of sunlight to the solar cells?

Patricia Schwarz
El Cerrito, Calif.

Dust accumulates on the solar arrays steadily but slowly and has not interfered with Sojourner's ability to gather energy from the sun. A measuring device indicates that dust settles on the rover at a rate that each day reduces the transmission of sunlight by about one-third of 1 percent from the previous day's transmission.

Over the next few months, as late summer gives way to fall, dust storms may start to form and accumulation may increase. —R. Cowen

Staph scenario

I must admit to an anxious response to the final sentence of "Natural antibiotic found on human skin" (SN: 7/5/97, p. 15). "The researchers are now looking for additional antibiotics, especially ones that defend against

bacteria such as *Staphylococcus aureus*."

If the researchers are successful, pharmaceutical companies will soon join the race to develop a synthetic form of the antibiotic agent that has helped protect humans against staph infections for eons. The successful company will market it intensively, driven to reap a profit. Eventually, the casual attitude with which so many people use antibiotics—taking them too often and too briefly—will once again lead to a drug-resistant strain of a potentially lethal organism.

The drug that is no longer effective will include, of course, the one we humans produce naturally.

Sheila Sperber Haas
New York, N.Y.

Send communications to:
Editor, Science News
1719 N Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20036
or: scinews@sciserv.org
All letters subject to editing.