



REPORT

VOL. 8 NO. 1 SUMMER 1995

“Therapeutic Touch” (TT) touches Tampa Bay

by Miriam Blake and Gary Posner

A skeptical article written by science editor Leon Jaroff regarding “therapeutic touch” (TT) appeared in the November 21, 1994, issue of *Time* magazine. Jaroff described TT as “a controversial form of therapy that is spreading throughout the ranks of nursing and already claim[ing] tens of thousands of practitioners in the U.S. and many foreign countries.” Noted Jaroff, “Leading the attack [on TT’s use by health care professionals] is Rocky Mountain Skeptics, a group of scientists and other professionals” similar to Tampa Bay Skeptics.

Following publication of the article, we decided to follow-up on a suggestion by the Rocky Mountain Skeptics to survey the use of therapeutic touch in the Tampa Bay area. Miriam Blake, a part-time resident of Colorado and Florida and a member of both organizations, volunteered to telephone hospitals in Pinellas and Hillsborough Counties to obtain information on their use of TT, while Gary Posner did most of the work of compiling the obtained information into this narrative form.

According to a promotional brochure obtained from the St. Petersburg-based Nurse Healers Professional Associates, Inc. Cooperative, “Therapeutic Touch is a contemporary interpretation of several ancient healing practices. . . . a consciously directed process of energy exchange during which the practitioner uses the hands as a focus to facilitate the healing process. . . . developed in the early 1970s [by] Dolores Krieger, Ph.D., R.N., a professor at New York University, and Dora Kunz, a natural healer. . . . scientifically based. . . . currently taught in over 80 universities [in] 30 countries and practiced by an estimated 20,000 to 30,000 professionals in the United States, Canada and around the world.”

The “science” of TT is briefly explained in the leaflet: “Therapeutic Touch is based on the idea that human beings are energy in the form of a field. When you are healthy, that energy is freely flowing and balanced. In contrast, dis-ease [*sic*] is a condition of energy imbalance or disorder. The human energy field extends beyond the level of the skin and the [TT] practitioner attunes him or herself to that energy using the hands as sensors.”

Is “hocus-pocus” being passed off as a healing technique? From the brochure: “Generally [TT

practitioners] will pass their hands over your body from head to toe, front and back, holding them 2-4 inches from the skin. . . . They may then use rhythmical, sweeping motions . . . as if they are smoothing out wrinkles in your energy field. . . . [TT] can help facilitate the body’s natural healing processes, such as wound healing, mending fractures and fighting infections. Symptoms that are associated with stress are particularly sensitive” (as would be expected from the placebo effect). The text in this pamphlet is used as promotional literature by Integrated Health Care Systems, a professional nursing practice of which Shirley Spear Begley, R.N., B.F.A., C.C.H.T. is the founding director.

A second brochure, adding the additional initials “N.C.T.M.B.” behind Begley’s name, advertised her two-part TT course, which was held on March 25 and 26 (each part was approved by the Florida Board of Registered Nurses for seven hours of continuing education credits). In bold lettering the brochure announced: “Bayfront Community Resource Center Presents. . .” This center is affiliated with Bayfront Medical Center, one of the most prestigious hospitals in the state of Florida. A phone call from Gary Posner to the Resource Center coordinator, Ilea

(continued on page 5)

My “alien” encounter on the *Kathy Fountain Show*

by Brent Yaciw

I’d like to share a few comments concerning my recent experience (from the studio audience) on the *Kathy Fountain Show*, which as you probably already know has since been cancelled by WTVT-TV 13. This particular show, which aired on March 7, began with three people on stage talking about their “UFO abduction” experiences. As I remarked on the show, they dragged out every paranoid delusion in the book: secret government conspiracies, Hitlerian medical experimentation, powerlessness, etc.

What I found especially ironic was the woman who claimed that she originally went to a psychiatrist “hoping to be told she was crazy,” but supposedly instead was told that she really *was* being abducted by aliens (I’m not sure how a psychiatrist could come to this conclusion without any physical evidence). However, when I stood up and said *I* thought she was suffering from paranoid delusional

(continued on page 3)

TAMPA BAY SKEPTICS Statement of Purpose and "\$1,000 Challenge"

Tampa Bay Skeptics, Inc., is a non-profit educational and scientific organization devoted to the critical examination of paranormal and fringe-science claims, and the dissemination of factual information about such claims. TBS does not reject claims on *a priori* grounds, but rather is committed to objective and critical inquiry. We share the philosophy of the international Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal (CSICOP) and with other local groups like TBS throughout the United States and the world, though TBS is an autonomous group not formally affiliated with CSICOP or with any other organization.

TBS's "\$1,000 Challenge" is open to anyone claiming verifiable scientific proof of the reality of ESP, UFOs, dowsing, astrology, or any paranormal phenomenon. Please contact us for complete details.

Tampa Bay Skeptics Report is published quarterly. We welcome news clippings, and articles and letters for publication (subject to editing for length, clarity, and taste), and solicit opposing views. Please submit on 3 1/2" discs (in Mac or MS-DOS-ASCII format) or by modem or e-mail, if possible.

Views expressed in articles and letters are those of the author(s), and not necessarily those of Tampa Bay Skeptics.

TAMPA BAY SKEPTICS REPORT

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CHAIRMAN'S

ORDER

Science in the Courtroom

by Terry A. Smiljanich

The "trial of the century," watched daily by millions of television viewers, has lately concentrated on DNA typing, a new but generally recognized field of forensic science. Experts have attempted to explain to jurors how genetic codes composed of guanine, cytosine, adenine and thymine sequences, together with population studies, can identify a person. The O.J. prosecutors have the unenviable task of keeping these explanations aimed at the lowest common denominator while still establishing a record that could withstand a rigorous appellate review. The defense team, meanwhile, takes every available potshot at the overall reliability of such evidence, especially in light of some questionable evidence collection by the police.

How does the law judge such evidence? Is DNA typing sufficiently reliable science to warrant consideration by a jury? What criteria do courts use in judging the admissibility of scientific evidence? In short, how skeptical is the law about new "science"? A few years ago, a Florida court allowed a jury to consider whether a defendant's negligent actions had injured a plaintiff's psychic abilities, and that jury awarded monetary damages based on such alleged injuries (the award was later overturned by the judge). How does the law ferret out pseudoscience in the courtroom?

In 1923, an appellate court in Washington, D.C., enunciated a general rule for admissibility of scientific evidence that became widely accepted across the United States. In *Frye v. United States*, the court held that for claimed scientific evidence to be admissible, it must have "gained general acceptance in the particular field in which it belongs." Although much criticized over the years, the rule does recognize a core concept about scientific principles — their social character. Scientific principles certainly evolve over the years, and some contemporary principles may later prove to be wrong, but at any one time, the only viable anchor to judge science is its general acceptance in the community of scientists. That is why, for example, creationism should not be taught in biology classes — it, unlike evolution, has failed to pass the bar of science and is not accepted as a consistent, verifiable theory.

Still, some have argued that the *Frye* rule improperly excluded "novel" scientific evidence that was scientifically reliable but too new to have "gained general acceptance." Critics pointed to the rapid pace of new scientific developments in the twentieth century. By and large, however, the scientific community was pleased with the *Frye* rule and its ability to keep out much "junk science" from the courtroom. State courts in Florida, as in most other states, adopted the *Frye* rule.

In 1993, however, the United States Supreme Court upset the apple cart with a new standard. Interpreting the new Federal Rules of Evidence, the Court held in *Daubert v. Merrill Dow Pharmaceuticals, Inc.* (involving birth defects allegedly caused by Bendectin) that *Frye* no longer applied. Instead, the courts should determine reliability by a much more flexible standard which looks at principles and methodology rather than general acceptance. While failing to adopt clear-cut definitions, the Supreme Court suggested that the trial court judge admissibility on a case-by-case analysis of scientific validity, scientific method, appropriate validation, testability (i.e., falsifiability), peer review, and, lastly, but not exclusively, general acceptance in the scientific community.

The *Daubert* rule has been widely hailed by plaintiffs' attorneys, always seeking new ways to admit far-fetched ideas (the reader can certainly ascertain on which side of the law I usually practice), and roundly criticized by scientific groups fearful that the floodgates of "junk science" will open with this new flexibility. Interestingly, Florida courts have refused to adopt the new federal *Daubert* standard, and have continued to stick with good old *Frye*.

There is no guarantee that either rule will provide unerring guidance. *Frye*

(continued on page 7)

Renier again on *Sightings*

Although we caught only the final minute, Orlando "psychic detective" Noreen Renier was once again featured on the nationally syndicated TV program *Sightings* (the episode aired locally on the night of April 16). Hopefully no innocent citizens will be picked up for questioning about an unsolved St. Louis murder simply because they may resemble Renier's "psychic" police sketch, which has so impressed the police department.

Sagan recovering after bone marrow transplant

From the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center, May 19 (via e-mail relayed by CSICOP):

Carl Sagan, astronomer and author, is making "remarkable progress" after his bone marrow transplant on April 7, according to doctors at Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center in Seattle, Wash. He has been released from the Center's inpatient transplant unit to the outpatient department. As with all transplant patients, there are still a number of potentially serious obstacles before full recovery.

Sagan's disease, myelodysplasia, a form of refractory anemia, is nearly always fatal if left untreated. The transplant donor, a perfect match, was his sister, Cari Greene of Charleston, West Virginia.

Randi soon to be columnist for *Scientific American*

Excerpted from James "The Amazing" Randi's June 10 announcement (via his e-mail "Hotline"):

As of the October issue, I'll be a regular columnist for *Scientific American*. It will be called "The Skeptical American." With this announcement, I expect that the usual pile of crap will begin pouring in to the administration . . . the usual poison-pen technique . . .

Scientific American will run a profile on me in the next [July] issue. Rather strong, but it's done now, and I'm awaiting the fallout.

My first column for *S.A.* will deal with Luigi (Gigi) Garlaschelli and his battle with the blood-weeping Madonnas of Italy. How's that for the title of a really "B" movie?

I'd appreciate any suggestions for columns, etc.

[Randi's e-mail address: randi-hotline@sr.com]

"Alien encounter" (from page 1)

psychosis, she went on about how I had "hurt her feelings." Apparently she no longer wanted to be told she was crazy, but just wanted support. I wonder if her psychiatrist recognized that this was what she wanted all along, and hoped to placate her. There are hundreds of questions I'd like to have asked, but time was very limited.

In the latter half of the show, three other "abductees" joined the ones already on stage. One claimed she had been impregnated by aliens who returned to steal her baby. Another claimed her "missing twin" had been abducted before birth and was now living on an alien ship. The third claimed he had an "implant," and brought his x-ray!

Another Tampa Bay Skeptics audience member, Pat Welsh, asked for "physical evidence." In short, what he got instead were excuses. The x-ray was held up as "proof"; I pointed out how easily forged photos and x-rays are, and said I'd like to go right now to a hospital and have the "implant" removed. "Oh, it's been sent away for study" to a Harvard professor. Funny how the results of these "studies" never make the *St. Petersburg Times*, I remarked. "Government cover-up" was the response. Actually, I later learned that many scientists have been sent "implants" for study by this crowd, and they come up with the same conclusion time after time: nothing inconsistent with earthly origin and/or human tissue. Bone masses, small tumors, etc., are common causes of "spots" on the x-rays. Claiming they are "being studied" makes it sound as if there is still a possibility they will "prove the existence of aliens." No such possibility seems even remotely likely, unless you buy into the "secret government conspiracy" claims. But I've never known our government to be able to keep a secret, have you?

I'll admit to having been outspoken, aggressive, perhaps even "rude" on the show. But that's exactly what they were looking for, and I was invited back to be on a panel the following week to debate the school prayer issue. TV talk shows are not designed for calm, rational, and decorous conversation — confrontation equals ratings (although, in Kathy's case, not high enough to compete with the national talk shows). These shows are also not the place to hope for "conversion," but are a rare opportunity to plant the seeds of doubt into the minds of true believers. Simply put, we haven't the time or the numbers to refute every erroneous claim made by UFOers, psychics, TV preachers, etc. We have to get the individual supporters of these movements to start questioning things on their own. Sometimes, the most effective way to do this is to make them angry. So be it.

[Editor's note: This article appears in another form, with a full discussion of the author's "school prayer" TV appearance, in the April issue of the *Humanists of the Suncoast* newsletter, News and Views.]

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SNIPPETS

As alluded to in Brent Yaciw's article, the *Kathy Fountain Show* has been cancelled by WTVT-13 after a 5 1/2-year run. The reason given was sagging ratings due the show's inability to compete with the growing number of steamy national talk shows.

(*Tampa Tribune*, March 25;
St. Pete. Times, March 25 and 28)

Tampa International Airport's new "Airsides A" terminal, which opened in March, "paid attention to travelers and took steps to accommodate them." One example: "There's no Gate 13 because American Airlines did not want to alarm superstitious passengers."

(*St. Pete. Times*, March 5)



Saudi Arabia's ailing ruler, King Fahd, is creating turmoil in the kingdom by his devotion to the occult. But he is hardly alone. A series of tragedies, including a soothsayer beating a man to death to rid him of an evil spirit, has forced the government to "arrest dozens of soothsayers, astrologers and fortune tellers who presumably failed to forecast their own futures."

(*London Observer via St. Pete. Times*, March 8)

41-year-old Tyrone Bell of Lakeland is said by detectives to have a "booming business" in the occult. Sporting a business card claiming such talents as "spiritual counselor" and "jinx removed," Bell has been arrested for desecrating a grave with a pig's head and issuing written threats. Detectives found over 100 voodoo dolls in his home (some stored in the freezer) and a Satanic shrine in a backyard shed. Beneath his underwear, they found (presumably in addition to the standard equipment) "in a red cloth pouch . . . more than 100 small, square slips of paper with bizarre drawings and messages such as 'Mephistophilis' [*sic*] and 'Provides invisibility' . . ."

(*St. Pete. Times*, April 22)

And, for you holiday shoppers, where might you expect to find a dead chicken, a dead lizard or two, a cow's tongue, white powdery dust sprinkled about, a dead goat,

From Don Addis' March 19 *St. Petersburg Times* column: "Now the 'psychics' are at each other's throats. TV ads warn us to avoid those hokey, fraudulent clairvoyants and deal only with these 'certified, authentic, professional' seers. But how can we tell the hoaxers from the truly gifted? . . . What am I, a mind reader? [And what agency] does the certifying? . . ."

or perhaps just some goat's blood? (Hint: *not* in Tyrone Bell's underwear.) That's right — in Miami's Metro Justice Building. Cuban inhabitants of Miami who believe in Santeria, and Haitian devotees of voodoo, are fond of using sorcery at the courthouse, leaving behind quite a mess. "Sometimes we find [only] one chicken. Sometimes . . . three or four," says a member of the building's janitorial staff. "It depends on who is on trial."

(*St. Pete. Times*, April 10)

A \$30 electromagnetic field detector, used to measure emissions from household appliances, has become a popular tool of trade among paranormalists seeking out the presence of ghosts. "I find it quite humorous," says Joseph McDonnell, president of Enzone USA. "It was the furthest thing from our minds in developing the E.L.F.-Zone in response to a rather serious health threat."

(*St. Pete. Times*, May 21)

To promote its new Orlando theme park, Disney has produced an hour-long TV special, *Alien Encounters From New Tomorrowland*, which aired nationally in March (locally on Ch. 44). "Midway through this extravaganza, a woman relating how she has been stalked, repeatedly, by [ETs], cries out, 'Oh my God! Not again!' So might we all say at the prospect of yet another visit with the legions claiming harassment by visitors from other planets. . . . It is an hour packed with accusations of a sinister government conspiracy to conceal the news of the alien life all around us — and about to descend. . . . Narrator Robert Urich comes forth further to offer ringing assurance that Galileo, too, was once mocked."

(*Wall Street Journal* (TV review), March 6)

In honor of April Fools' Day, the "Letters" page of a respected scientific journal was devoted to odd but "real mail from real readers." Tampa Bay was twice blessed:

For every evolutionary advance, there is an equal and opposite regressive step to be offset. At present, the *L. bifidus* [bacteria] in mother's milk provides a turning point in evolution, protecting us from returning to something like Neanderthal man or even the monkey. The existence of "negative evolution," which might broadly be described as "inertia," is being ignored.

—J. Gordon Roberts, Clearwater

Having discovered the "Harmonic Cube," I will wager \$10,000 that I am the wisest human of all time.

—Gene Ray, Cubic
St. Petersburg

(*Scientific American*, April)

["Snippets" are derived and rewritten from the referenced sources. Please send your clippings to the editor.]

“Therapeutic Touch” (from page 1)

Newman, revealed that Ms. Begley merely “rented a room here.” The advertised course was neither “presented” nor officially endorsed by the Resource Center, and Newman said that she was not informed in advance that this claim was to be made on the brochure.

During a telephone conversation with Miriam Blake (who conducted the remainder of the interviews for this report), Begley said that in her nine years of teaching TT, she has taught the method to 700 nurse-healers and has lectured at the University of South Florida (USF) and St. Petersburg Junior College (SPJC). Although admitting that TT is not a cure-all, she claims it to be beneficial — e.g., bone fractures are purportedly made to heal two-thirds faster. She also told of an “unruffling” technique that is supposed to render the skin more receptive to intravenous fluid infusion. Since she has lectured at SPJC, the question arose as to whether TT is otherwise taught at its nursing school. She answered, saying that since the college has a short two-year curriculum, there is insufficient time for TT to be taught there.

A call to SPJC requesting information about TT led to Delores Kukla, who works in the nursing school laboratory. She confirmed that TT was not officially taught at the school, but mentioned that the local branch of the American Holistic Nurses Association holds regular meetings in the area, which sometimes include members demonstrating various healing techniques. When Kukla was asked if she knew of any circumstances in which TT should *not* be used, she thought for a moment and then said that since TT produces energy, she would not use it on cancer patients: “Cancer does not need to be over-stimulated.”

Of the sixteen hospitals surveyed in Pinellas County, contacts at the following nine said that TT was neither taught nor encouraged there: All Children’s, Bayfront, Clearwater Community, Edward White, Physicians Community (formerly Gulf Coast), Largo Medical Center, Northside, Palms of Pasadena, and Veterans (VA).

Two hospitals (St. Pete. General and Sun Coast) did not return calls. A representative of the nursing education department at Morton Plant Hospital said that although TT is not officially endorsed, a program on TT had been presented there, and nurses possibly perform it “on their own.” Likewise, Metropolitan General does not endorse TT, but referred me to Lois Schultz. Both University General and Women’s Hospital, located in Seminole, said TT *is* practiced in their hospitals. When questioned further about TT they also suggested I contact Lois Schultz, who works in the nurse education department of both hospitals. Educator Schultz said that she regards TT as a “viable alternative,” and in turn referred me to Charlotte Gildea, who works for Hospice of the Suncoast.

Gildea mentioned a double-blind study on wound healing that was conducted by lawyer Daniel Wirth, and sent a two-page “Healing Touch Reference” list and two pages of “Research Report References” (Wirth’s name does not appear on either list). She said that Hospice nurses are trained in the technique and that she uses TT as a comfort measure: “It is used with pure intent. TT creates

an environment for the body to heal itself and it diminishes pain.” Unlike Delores Kukla, who advised *against* the use of TT on cancer patients, Gildea remarked that almost anyone would benefit, most assuredly *including* cancer patients.

Christine Vollstedt, R.N., works both in home health care and in the physical therapy department at St. Anthony’s Hospital. Vollstedt said she uses healing touch in addition to, but not instead of, other methods of patient care. “There is no approved protocol,” she said. “It can be used on most people,” including the dying patient, and even on the patient’s family (to promote relaxation). Delores Kukla had said that Vollstedt uses TT in “enterostomal” wound care (e.g., colostomies); however, Vollstedt didn’t offer any information when asked if she used TT for wound care. She did cite a study that was shown on a TV show produced by the BBC. The “double-blind” study was conducted by the above-mentioned lawyer, Daniel Wirth. Forty-four volunteers allowed one of their upper arms to be cut with a surgical instrument. Roughly half of the study group was then treated with TT, while the rest were left untreated. The TV production, which aired on the Discovery Channel in 1991, showed a volunteer inserting his arm through a ten-inch hole in a specially modified door. TT was directed on the wounded arm, and a claim was then made that the wounded arms treated with TT healed faster than those in the untreated group. Vollstedt didn’t sound terribly impressed with the study, which was also published in *Subtle Energies* (V. 1, No. 1, 1990), saying, “I don’t see those kinds of wounds.” (It was Vollstedt who originally suggested a phone call to Shirley Begley, who in turn sent us her brochures.)

Seven hospitals in Hillsborough County were surveyed (Town & Country did not return our call). St. Joseph’s, University Community, H. Lee Moffitt and Tampa General had no interest in or experience with using or teaching TT. A representative at Brandon Hospital said that TT is occasionally used there on pre-natal patients, apparently as a relaxation technique (rather than to treat congenital abnormalities in the womb).

When asked for the nursing education department, the Memorial Hospital switchboard operator provided an R.N. named Kevin, a former massage therapist who says he is very familiar with TT, which he has used to end a massage rather than taking his hands abruptly away from the body. Replying to the question of whether TT had any healing value, he said he thought it might as a placebo, but was in general skeptical about its purported curative properties.

Interestingly, although St. Joseph’s Hospital is officially skeptical of TT and does not teach or promote it, the situation may not be quite so clear-cut at St. Joseph’s Women’s Hospital. The person surveyed there said that she believes in TT through personal experience — she has seen it work with her own eyes and has even had it performed on herself! □

CORRECTION: In Miles Hardy’s article in our last issue, the USF professor identified as Bill “Himes” is actually Bill Heim.

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Other skeptical sources on the paranormal

• *Prometheus Books* •

50-page catalogue
(30% discount available through TBS)
59 John Glenn Dr. • Buffalo, NY 14228

• *Skeptical Inquirer* •

Flagship journal of
CSICOP • Box 703 • Buffalo, NY 14226

• *Skeptic* •

Published by the Skeptics Society
2761 N. Marengo • Altadena, CA 91001

• *Skeptics UFO Newsletter* •

by Philip J. Klass
404 "N" St., S.W. • Wash., DC 20024

TBS Statement of Income and Expenditures for fiscal year 1994 (6/1/94 - 5/31/95)

I. Beginning balance from previous year	\$ 796.84
II. Income	
A. New memberships/subscriptions	\$ 120.00
B. Renewals	560.00
C. Donations	220.00
D. Sales of back issues (incl. P&H received)	5.00
E. Sales of Clinton/Alien T-shirt (donated by T.A.S.)	10.00
F. Prometheus book orders	327.05
TOTAL	\$ 1242.05
III. Expenditures	
A. Newsletters	\$ 642.66
B. Postage, fax, shipping	194.23
C. Stationery (letterheads, labels, mailers, etc.)	14.04
D. Photocopying	7.99
E. Florida Corporation 1995 Annual Report fee	68.75
F. Prometheus book orders	302.49
TOTAL	\$ 1230.16
IV. Current financial assets	
A. Checking account	\$ 802.19
B. Stamps, post cards	6.54
TOTAL	\$ 808.73
V. Current liabilities	\$ 0.00
VI. Net balance (I + II - III; IV - V) as of 5/31/95	\$ 808.73
VII. Est. cost of printing/ mailing V.8, No.1 in 6/95	\$ 210.00

All financial records are available for inspection.
Faithfully submitted,
Gary P. Posner, Treasurer

TBS community and media affairs

Gary Posner was a featured speaker at Tampa Bay Mensa's "Beach Bash" on May 20. Posner is national coordinator of a Mensa "Skeptics" information service, and has written nearly 20 "Skeptically Speaking" columns for Tampa Bay Mensa's *Sounding*.

Posner was quoted in a May 12 article by *Tampa Tribune* TV critic Walt Belcher about television's coverage of the paranormal, and in *Ft. Lauderdale Sun-Sentinel* religion editor Jim Davis' May 21 article. Another Davis interviewee's story of a "miraculous" healing was also recently told on NBC-TV's *Unsolved Mysteries* (look for Posner's report on that claim in our next issue).

A Dec. 25 *Lakeland Ledger* article, quoting Posner and picked

up by a national wire service, led to a call from an *Oprah* producer about being on their Apr. 14 show on miracles. Posner deferred instead to Joe Nickell (*Looking for a Miracle*), who did a great job.

Sessions "psychic" moves to Tampa Bay

John Monti, one of the dozens of "psychics" to whom Hillary Sessions has turned in her effort to find her missing daughter Tiffany (see *TBS Report*, Winter '91-92, Spring '92) has moved to Dunedin from New York. He now claims to be in possession of the O.J. murder weapon (see *St. Pete Times*, Mar. 28). Meanwhile, Mrs. Sessions continues to seek "psychic" counsel, as she did from Karyol Barendregt on the May 2 *Maury Povich Show*.

LETTERS • READERS' FORUM

Editor: I had no intention of beginning a theological debate on these pages with my Winter article; in fact, I specifically stated: "I'm not going to get into my personal views on how a person can be considered skeptical and still accept religion, nor criticize the valid points made by the interviewees." However, I find a few things which beg for a reply in Tom Leckrone's response last issue.

I think we would certainly waste a considerable amount of time re-testing all the "tentative truths" we hold, not to mention the patent absurdities promoted daily in almost any form of media. I too look for a "preponderance of evidence," but that is not the same thing as accepting the "collective wisdom of the day." "Collective wisdom" has often been shown to be an oxymoron: witness the treatment of Galileo and Copernicus by the "wise men" of their time.

My article did not "paint all of a given group with the same brush." I recognize a difference between, for example, the new recruits into MUFON, the long-time members, and those who dedicate their lives to it and hold leadership positions. Holding a leadership position in an organization based on faith is far from fitting my personal definition of being a "skeptic," even if that organization is officially skeptical of some of the claims of competing groups.

I see no difference between ministers preaching gospels written by men 2,000 years ago and gospels written by men today, no matter who ordains them or how sincere the believers. Tom's comments, "Unfortunately, since ministers do not need to be licensed by the state . . . self-ordained . . . spreading their own gospel . . ." mean about as much to me as similar comments on "psychic hotline" commercials claiming that *theirs* are the "certified" psychics. Such comments reinforce my observation about true skepticism vs. "protecting their territory." As a skeptic, I can make no "leaps of faith."

Contrary to Tom's comment implying that my attitude is one of "knowing all there is to know about everything," I claim my knowledge to be as limited as that of the clergy, and vice versa. I am an atheist: I have found absolutely no

reason to suppose that there is a god. Therefore, I reject unproven assertions of a god as nonsensical. As Robert G. Ingersoll said, "The clergy know, I know, that they know that they do not know. . . . Every church cries, 'Believe and give.'" The churches of today are based on the psychics, faith-healers, and UFO promoters of yesterday. I am skeptical of them all, no matter how much respectability time may have given them.

Brent Yaciw, Seminole

Dear TBS: The Oasis of Living Waters Foundation is a [Christian ministry] research and education facility dedicated to the investigation of paranormal and occult activity and the education of individuals regarding satanism, New Age and occult religion. I would be entirely grateful if you would lend me your expertise in this area . . . as we seek to come to the knowledge of the truth.

Eric Gryka, Director
Oasis of Living Waters Foundation, Ormond Beach

We have thus far provided copies of a number of pertinent articles from Skeptical Inquirer. —G.P.

"Chairman's Corner" (from page 2)

leaves unanswered some troubling questions. Who should count in determining "general acceptance in the field"? The parapsychology departments at several universities? The Parapsychological Association was admitted to affiliation with the American Association for the Advancement of Science in 1969, and publishes the *Journal of Parapsychology*. Surely that ought to count for something, shouldn't it? Yet anyone who has read the literature knows that parapsychology is fraught with sloppy procedures, unrepeatable results, and unverifiable conclusions. Daubert, on the other hand, asks a court to

(continued on page 8)

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.....
"Chairman's Corner" (from page 7)

weigh and consider methods of science and concepts of peer review foreign to the judge's training and experience (keep in mind that if judges share common cultural attitudes, at least half of them believe in UFOs, miracles, angels, and Adam and Eve).

I believe the scientific community was wise in opposing the Daubert rule. In my experience, the more leeway and flexibility given to consideration of these issues, the more likely pseudoscience will creep into our courtrooms. Frye may be narrow-minded in its attempt to define "science," but it has the virtue of simplicity. It is much easier to demonstrate to a court that abduction by UFOs is not generally accepted by psychologists as a factual phenomenon, in spite of what some Harvard professors may think (indeed, it's not even accepted in Dr. John Mack's own department!). It is a much iffier proposition to convince a scientifically illiterate judge (no disrespect intended) that Dr. Mack is not using accepted scientific methods or subjecting his claims to peer review.

As the O.J. Simpson trial demonstrates, new science has an appropriate place in the courtroom. Our courts, however, need to be appropriately skeptical in judging scientific claims of dubious quality.

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...are assisting in defending against lawsuits brought by proponents of the paranormal. Both funds hope also to be able to provide assistance to other skeptics in need. Please consider a donation.

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