



Selected articles from  
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## **Therapeutic Touch, Energy Therapy featured in *St. Petersburg Times***

**by Gary P. Posner**

On July 29, the front page of the "Tampa & State" section of the *St. Petersburg Times* featured [an article](#) entitled "Healing with Touch." According to the subtitle, "Patients and doctors in mainstream hospitals are coming to rely on therapeutic touch." If that claim were literally true, the American physician's sad devolution back to "Medicine Man" would have neared its completion.

Staff writer Dong-Phuong Nguyen does accurately define therapeutic touch (TT) as "a controversial form of faith therapy . . . which claims to temporarily rid the body of pain and discomfort through the shifting of energy." And she does acknowledge that TT "has its critics." She quotes Dr. Stephen Barrett, an expert on quackery: "The whole idea is based on delusion. It makes as much sense as saying we're having Ghostbusters come to the patient's bedside [to] get rid of the ghosts. . . . If it is represented as healing activity, that is fraud."

The term "therapeutic touch" is itself a misnomer. The practitioner does not touch the patient at all. Describing a session that took place at Tampa General Hospital with an ailing cardiac patient, Nguyen writes: "Eileen Weber's hands scan the air above [the patient's] body, gently, rhythmically. . . . She sweeps a few inches above the woman's head, down her body, all the way to her toes, feeling for an energy field. When she senses imbalance, Weber motions like she is wiping it away."

Local cardiothoracic surgeon Cristobal Alvarado had read about Weber in a Tampa General Hospital newsletter and called her in to treat that patient, who "has been sick for many years and is going to be in the hospital for many months. . . . I don't know if . . . I believe [in TT] or not. . . . But we need to address our patients' psychological and spiritual needs." TGH spokesman John Dunn told reporter Nguyen, "If this process helps a patient to relax and [better cope] with pain . . . who is someone from

the outside to judge whether a patient feels better or not? . . . As long as it is understood for what it is, who's anyone to shoot arrows at it?"

And just [what is TT](#)? At issue is the very existence of the "energy fields" that its practitioners claim to be able to detect. Two corollary issues are: (1) Even if such energy fields exist (and there is no scientific evidence that they do), can practitioners truly sense them? (2) If TT practitioners can sense them, can they really restore the fields into "balance" by waving their hands above the patient's body?

As I pointed out in a letter to the *Times*, "One of the hot human interest stories in the summer of 1998 was that of a Colorado girl whose 6th-grade science project, demonstrating the imaginary nature of Therapeutic Touch's purported "energy fields," became [a major article](#) in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*. How soon we forget."

I went on to add: "The Tampa Bay Skeptics' '[\\$1,000 Challenge](#)' prize, and a place in history, awaits any local practitioner able to demonstrate to us, under proper testing conditions, that Therapeutic Touch is genuine. Its effectiveness as a placebo, in making suggestible subjects feel better, is not in doubt. In that respect, it works every bit as well as 'psychic surgery.' How unfair that hospitals such as Tampa General employ one such 'healing' modality and not the other."

Not only did the *Times* not publish my letter, but on August 6 it ran a nearly full-page [feature article](#), "The Force is With Us All," about Donna Eden and her book, *Energy Medicine*. The 59-year-old self-described "energy healer" claims to teach in her books and workshops (like the one in St. Pete. on Aug. 11) how others can redirect their own body's "lattice of force fields" for better health. It sure works for her (allegedly)! She claims to have been so severely afflicted with multiple sclerosis in her early 30s that she was bedridden and unable to "even take vitamins and herbs because my body would throw them up."

Fortunately, Eden discovered her brand of "energy healing," which differs from TT in that it involves physical touch and can be self-administered. I'm sure it works as well as a warm bath. But as for curing MS . . .

## On ghosts and gullibility

by Jack Robinson

Sara Stone "collects scientific data to prove the existence of supernatural energy," according to a July 20 *Tampa Tribune* article. If true, this would be fascinating, so I attended her presentation at the Jimmie B. Keel Regional Library on the evening of July 24.

The program called for Stone to "present a history of investigations and ghostly hoaxes and share her personal experiences." I had hoped this meant that she would give an unbiased talk, and discuss one or more cases in detail -- so we could clearly perceive her methods and judge the validity of her conclusions. Alas, no.

The room was the same large one where TBS has held meetings. But this time there were chairs for 90 people, and latecomers were turned away when all seats were filled. How sad that skeptical programs cannot get such effective publicity and such large attendance!

One of the library staff members welcomed the audience and introduced Ms. Stone with a virtual endorsement, as if the occurrence of paranormal phenomena has been proved. This apparent participation by the library -- a public, educational institution -- disturbed me. I learned later, however, that endorsing programs is not in accord with library policy.

Also disturbing was the apparent gullibility of the *Tribune* reporter, Jill M. Revelle, and Stone's announcement that "the girl from the *Tampa Tribune* will work with [Stone] in preparation for an October presentation -- a big article will come out."

A sophisticated lecturer, Stone presented an interesting history of paranormal beliefs and investigations. Unfortunately, however, it included many unsubstantiated claims. Stone said she herself has contacted Abraham Lincoln, experienced ESP, and perceived ghosts. "Ghosts are everywhere, in all cultures." (She should have said that people everywhere *believe* in ghosts.) She takes eyewitness accounts of ghosts at face value, and thinks that surveys have furnished proof of them. She believes in reincarnation, and thinks she has a connection with the Victorian age.

Stone claimed that the Society for Psychical Research has used scientific data to validate the concept of ghosts. SPR created standards which, if followed, would properly indicate the occurrence of a haunting: unaccountable movements of objects; unaccountable noises, smells, etc.; touches; feelings of cold or heat; feelings of horror, disgust, or fear; feelings of being watched. But are these experiences caused only by ghosts?!

Stone's toolkit for investigators includes a flashlight and extra batteries -- the extra batteries are needed because "an entity can steal energy from batteries." She stated that a compass will be affected by the presence of ghosts. And there are magical ways to dispel ghosts.

Occasionally Stone made what sounded like properly skeptical remarks: Investigators now believe that 98% of ghostly occurrences are hoaxes, and we must rule out natural explanations. But she also presents, as evidence for ghosts, photographs with small spots that she calls orbs." TBS member and photographer Guss Wilder has examined them and comments, "Her photos consist of the type of 'orb' pictures that you or I could take, plus one that looks like the lab spilled some chemicals on it." [Take a look](#) for yourself.

In my opinion, Stone's most enlightening remark was that people believe ghosts exist because they reinforce the concept of life after death.

The program concluded with a score of questions and comments -- all in total agreement. It was truly a gathering of gullibles.

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**A phone call to TBS re: Dennis Lee**

A man in Tampa called TBS seeking advice about purchasing a "dealership" from Dennis Lee. I referred him to the [Skeptic's Dictionary write-up](#) about Lee, who has been touting his "free energy" devices for a quarter century. When the caller asked, "Then what's that machine he demonstrated?" I reminded him that he's probably also seen a woman sawed in half. I think he got my point, and hopefully saved himself \$50,000.

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## **TBS \$1,000 Challenger fails to follow through**

Our last newsletter announced a possible TBS "\$1,000 Challenge" that was tentatively to have been conducted immediately after the June 29 TBS meeting. Charles Mueller, a representative for an elderly gentleman named Arthur Hartman of Fort Pierce, had negotiated with TBS the conditions for a simple test of Art's ability to dowse for brass. However, as the meeting date approached, Charles ceased responding to our e-mails. Subsequent e-mails from TBS have gone unanswered as well.

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