



*The North Texas*

# Skeptic

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<http://www.ntskeptics.org>

## Can you “see” me now?

by Prasad Golla

### The story of how we kept our money

Let me say this upfront. For a person who claims to be brain damaged, Shirley is very articulate. Her piercing blue eyes give indication of an intelligent person. A little bit of conversing with her paint a picture of a woman proud of herself, her family, and her life. There is nothing amiss about her. She seems smarter than an otherwise “normal” person.

That is, until we hear her claims. Maybe her claims set her apart. Remember thus far, she hasn’t done all that good for herself; her claim to be brain damaged doesn’t seem to hold water. (She mentioned that she has had MRIs taken in VA hospitals but they couldn’t locate anything abnormal.) As with her other “mundane” claims, such as her exposure to nuclear waste in Hawaii while on US Military duty as a journalist — which are somewhat of relevance to skeptics — her paranormal ones are likely to do more than raise eyebrows.

John Blanton noted previously in his article, Challenge Activity,<sup>1</sup> the spate of paranormal challenges we have been receiving recently. In that article he mentioned Shirley Potter from Nachadoges, Texas. Shirley claims she has the ability to see “energies”



Prasad and Shirley Potter discussing the effects of caffeine on human brains in a local coffee shop (Greg Aicklen, another underwriter of the challenge, is behind the camera.)

## EVENTS CALENDAR

### March Program

Saturday 8 March 2008  
at 2 p.m.  
Center for Nonprofit  
Management  
2900 Live Oak Street in Dallas

#### Biofuels: Separating The Facts From The Hype

John Brandt will discuss ethanol, biodiesel, and the various sources proposed for each.

### NTS Dinner/Board Meeting

Saturday 15 March at 7 p.m.  
**Sushi Ichiban**  
12101 #112 Greenville Avenue  
in Dallas

Good news, Skeptics. **Sushi Ichiban** has a full menu. You can get a hot meal! Let us know if you are coming. We need to reserve a table. NTS Hotline: 214-335-9248

## North Texas Skeptics

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Shirley Potter next to the kitchen door which has the spots marked, A, B, C, and D on both sides.

around people and that she can tell their past (as opposed to their future) accurately.

Since then I've mentioned to Shirley that her claim that she sees auras or energies is a much better paranormal proposition than merely reading people's past. (Our own past experience as paranormal challengers has revealed to us the quagmire we can drag ourselves into when we base our selves on opinions rather than hard facts. 'Readings' are baseless.)

Shirley was enthusiastic to give us a demonstration of her ability to see energies around people from day one. After weeks and months of discussion on-line which centered on the Sun's coronas and thickness of barriers, Shirley finally came to Dallas on January 27th to talk to us face to face and demonstrate her abilities. Our meeting would have been sooner had it not been for those "wrenches," such as her claim that she can see energies around both animate and inanimate objects. Aren't the "energy signatures" different between living beings and non-living things? That made us doubt that she has some physiological problems with her eyes.

Prior to coming over, Shirley tested herself to see if she could tell where another person's hand is positioned when placed behind a barrier (such as a door), when she can't actually see any part of the person. (According to Shirley, the person cannot be behind the door — only the hand — or the energies overlap. She says this ensures that the person's energy doesn't mesh with the hand's energy.) To make it a probability game, I told her to designate only a few spots the subject can place her/his hand on. Shirley message came back with an affirmative that she indeed can.

### The trials

So this is what we did. We designated 4 spots on the door on either side: A, B, C, and D (see photo). We did 2 sets of tests, with 5 trials each. Here are the results:

**Set 1**

Trial	Actual	Shirley's Observation
1	B	C
2	C	A
3	D	D
4	A	A
5	A	B

**Set 2**

Trial	Actual	Shirley's Observation
1	C	B
2	B	A
3	D	D
4	A	B
5	C	C

As you can see, Shirley got only 2 out of 5 correct both times. One would expect a 100% success rate, given that she had already assured us that she could see the “energy of the hand” through the barrier just before we began the trials.

Greg Aicklen, one of the other underwriters, joined us. Together over some coffee and drinks, we took Shirley on a journey down our memory lane. We described how some of our past paranormal claimants came, and went home empty handed. It was a bit awkward for us to explain it to her. But despite that, we managed to keep the conversation pleasant enough, mainly because Shirley was such a good sport.. (And then, however, Shirley mentioned a spate of her other claims, such as her ability to “see” malign organs and how she can cure them by touching the diseased energies.)

Let me bid you farewell with this — Shirley showed her Military training when she arrived early before the appointed time for the tests. I was only 10 minutes early. She was playing Sudoku on her PDA when I arrived. I bet you wouldn't suspect many “brain damaged” people playing Sudoku, would you?



*Prasad Golla is a member of the North Texas Skeptics Board of Directors.*

**References**

- 1 <http://ntskeptics.org/2007/2007december/december2007.htm#challenge>

## Retail skepticism

by Kristine Danowski

I've always been a bookaholic, or biblioholic, if you prefer. <sup>1</sup> So when a large DFW-area bookstore I'll call Big Ass Books advertised for seasonal help, I applied. I wasn't sure what to expect since I hadn't worked retail since college, but I kept an open mind. I'm always curious to see what people are reading and whether or not I should buy my own copy. At Big Ass Books I was more like Apu than Mr. Humphreys. Working for Big Ass Books was enlightening and disturbing. Seeing what people are reading, I think the general public is more screwed up than I previously thought.

Here's what I mean. Big Ass Books sells a lot of magazines. The most popular periodical was *People*, followed by *Us Weekly* and many other, even sleazier, celebrity-gossip rags. This was no contest; *People* and its copycats easily outsold everything else. Spending upwards of \$50, many people bought copies of all of Big Ass's celebrity-stalking magazines, including the infamous British tabloids. I often wonder about people whose own lives are so devoid of meaning that they have to know how Britney Spears' latest meltdown is, how Jennifer Aniston styles her hair, how much Paris Hilton spends on party clothes, or who is sleeping with George Clooney. Occasionally a copy or two of the *People* ilk found its way to the staff break room. Glancing through them, I was simultaneously disgusted with both celebrity antics and celebrity followers. Compared to both, my own life is quite fulfilling, and I am a clerk in a bookstore.

I also wondered about women who bought *Glamour*, *Cosmo*, or their clones. So many women bought stacks of these “women's interest” mags that I was appalled. Paging through even *one* of them in the break room was enough to have me questioning my own freshness. <sup>2</sup> And I am a seasoned skeptic who gives the fashion and cosmetics industries the middle finger. Yet women of all ages devour these magazines. I just don't understand the mentality. Why would anyone pay to be told that they don't measure up to some arbitrary, unattainable ideal?

Interestingly, many men appearing over 50 also bought *Cosmo* and its clones. I wonder if they bought them for someone else, and if not, did they enjoy the articles.

In my time at Big Ass Books, I must have cashed out a thousand people at least. Only a minority of people bought magazines with any redeeming social or educational value. After *People* and the fashion mags, computer, financial, and photography periodicals followed in popularity, albeit distantly. Unfortunately, I think I sold three copies each of *Scientific American*, *Popular Science*, and *Discover*. I sold no *Skeptic* or *Skeptical Inquirer*. Of course, that doesn't mean that skeptical publications didn't sell, only that I didn't sell any. However, if I was representative of all the cashiers at Big Ass, and there's no reason to think I was not, then not many skeptical or scientific periodicals sold. Then again, maybe readers of scientific periodicals subscribe rather than buy them at the newsstand. However, that people read mostly trash is disheartening to me.

Sometimes people just fit the stereotype. I had one guy in wraparound sunglasses and a trench coat buy one copy of every weapons magazine Big Ass Books carries. As Didactylus used to say, you had to laugh.<sup>3</sup>

Some customers' behavior in the store was deplorable. Big Ass Books has a nice children's section that unfortunately, yet conveniently, doubles as a children's lavatory. Kids (and their adults, who knows?) pee, poop, and puke in the kids' section. I guess this is the dry land equivalent of peeing in the baby pool. And the poop just lies there like what a dog does on the sidewalk. Even worse, adults occasionally forgo the baby-changing stations in the rest rooms and change their babies' diapers in the children's section, leaving the dirty diapers just sitting out in the open to cause a stink. If the next bookstore you're in smells funny, you know why. Customers' excretory behavior was, well, execrable. Big Ass Books didn't pay me nearly enough to clean up after its customers.

Speaking of lavatories, many men would "read" Big Ass' pornographic magazines in the men's room. These men would then leave the used magazines in the rest room for us to discard. Guys, get a room that's not our bathroom.

So what books are people reading? A nonfiction bestseller was *Eat. Love. Pray.* by Elizabeth Berg. This is a self-improvement book (Big Ass Books wisely changed the name of the oxymoronic "self-help" category.) Women often bought multiple copies to give as gifts; one woman bought 15. The other nonfiction bestseller, and purchased in multiples, was *The Secret*, especially the Spanish-language edition. The *You* series of books, including *You on a Diet* and *You Staying Young*, also sold well. These were the closest to science books that I sold. I sold one copy of *The Selfish Gene*, which I recommended to the buyer. He said he had heard it was a good book, and we conversed briefly about it. I sold one copy of *The God Delusion* and a critique of intelligent design whose title escapes me. I sold no copies of any other skeptical books, and few copies of any general science books.

I sold two packs of Tarot cards. Big Ass Books keeps these behind the counter since they are frequently stolen. One customer had to pick up and examine each deck so she could "get the feel of them."

Many people bought several new age and/or paranormal-type books. Books on alternative medicine (especially crystal healing and reflexology for some reason), astrology, angels, and psychics were popular. Once again, I had to wonder how people could read such garbage. I knew this stuff was nonsense when I was in grade school, yet people continue to believe in it. I don't get it.

Another popular book was an epic called *Sextrology*. This claptrap tells the enlightened reader how to use astrology to improve his sex life. See, there are people whose sex lives are worse than yours.

Fiction bestsellers were *Pillars of the Earth* and its sequel *World Without End* by Ken Follett, *The Kite Runner* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns* by Khaled Hosseini, and the latest novels by John Grisham, Steve Berry, and Sue Grafton. Children's favorites like Dr. Seuss, Curious George, and Nancy Drew also sold well, as did the Harry Potter books and His Dark Materials trilogy.

Please don't get the impression that I judged customers too harshly. When someone brought a load of books to my cash register, I didn't do a Simon Cowell-esque "oh that's rubbish." I just cashed them out. Occasionally I would comment if I knew a book was good, but most of the time I kept my mouth shut. I just noticed if people bought books on topics which interest me.

The only time I had to resist a strong temptation to comment on a customer's purchase was when a woman bought a copy of *The Hidden Messages in Water*. Endorsed by a veritable who's who of crackpots, this magnum opus concerns the things water molecules can tell us about healing and cleansing ourselves. I wanted to ask the customer, who otherwise seemed like an intelligent person, why she was wasting her time with this drivel. But I did not, since clerks are not supposed to be critical of customers' choices.

My employer also deserved scrutiny. The next time you see a business sponsoring a charity drive, be skeptical. Big Ass Books sponsored a children's book drive for a preschool for poor kids. While this is certainly commendable, Big Ass Books *customers* purchased and donated approximately 2000 books. Big Ass Books itself donated *nothing*. Even the nonprofit groups who gift-wrapped at the store had to bring their own wrapping paper and ribbons. Big Ass Books donated not one penny of its own money. Big Ass made an incredible sum of money over the shopping season. *An incredible sum*. Doubtless the store will issue a press release proclaiming its own generosity, but it will be misleading at best. Big Ass Books' *customers*



did all the donating, not the store. I'd be very surprised if other businesses didn't do something similar.

There is a place for skepticism outside an e-group. Discussing belief in pseudoscience and the paranormal is distinctly different from witnessing it daily among the general public. Real people spend real money reading real trash. Maybe I'm the only one who's still amazed at the depths to which the general public sinks. □

*Kristine Danowski is Vice President of the North Texas Skeptics.*

## References

- 1 Raabe, Tom. *Biblioholism: The Literary Addiction*. Golden, CO: Fulcrum, 1991.
- 2 Laura Kightlinger, comedian.
- 3 Pratchett, Terry. *Small Gods*. New York: HarperCollins, 1992, p. 341.

## Web news

by John Blanton

*The World Wide Web is a wonderful source of information and news. Some of it is true, and some of it is not.*

I will step away from the creationism pulpit this month. I'm sure the creationists are thankful for the generosity. For March it's a page from a very old book. Alternative medicine is an industry that never seems to run out of fuel. And why should it. It's powered by our own pocket books.

### Dr Frank's pain relief spray

You have to believe this is for real. It's advertised on TV.

[http://www.nopainspray.com/indexPRP\\_12\\_20\\_07.asp?tid=100](http://www.nopainspray.com/indexPRP_12_20_07.asp?tid=100)

At last, a highly effective () pleasant tasting, non-prescription oral spray that stops the pain SAFELY. Just spray several times daily under your tongue to stop or significantly reduce chronic joint and muscle pain and stiffness whether mild or severe. Dr Frank's pain relief spray is designed to be absorbed through the mucous membranes of the mouth so as to rapidly enter the bloodstream and get to all parts of the body where it stops joint or muscle pain from any cause including Fibromyalgia and sports injuries.

If you have joint or muscle pain from osteoarthritis or any cause, try this product today risk free (with a 30 day product money back guarantee). For every initial bottle ordered, over 85% are reordered. **You can now stop the pain safely and effectively.**

I have to tell you that some skeptics believe homeopathy is a bunch of hokum. They claim that, because any active ingredients have been diluted out of existence, the final remedy is at best pure water.

So, how does this reconcile with the earnest testimony of all these satisfied users? I mean, people wouldn't make this up, would they? Here is some of the praise being heaped on Dr. Frank's potion:

### Dr. Kevin Khalili, DC Placed some of his most difficult patients on the Pain Relief Oral Spray

"I placed some of my most difficult pain patients on Dr. Frank's Joint & Muscle Pain Relief. Most of them had taken other medications and were no longer taking them. These patients mostly had pain from injuries due to auto accidents, sports or work related injuries – pain challenges common to my practice. They suffered from sciatica, neck, back, knee, and leg pain. Most of them responded well to Dr. Frank's Joint and Muscle Pain Relief with some now having no pain. It continues to be an invaluable asset to my practice."

Dr. Kevin Khalili, DC  
Chiropractor  
Santa Barbara, California

Dr. Khalili is a serious practitioner of pioneering medical concepts. His MySpace page provides further insight into his unconventional approach. Quickly scroll down to the visual at the bottom of the page.

<http://profile.myspace.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=user.viewprofile&friendid=282566544>

KoreMana, means "global life force" and is a company dedicated to providing innovative Daily Scentsual Pleasures for the body and mind. Co-founders, Dr. Kevin Khalili and his wife Misty Khalili, reside in Santa Barbara, California. Kevin is an active practicing doctor of Chiropractic specializing in health and wellness for over 16 years. Misty has a background in artistic design, event promotion, and sales management. We pledge to create natural products that are truly made from only Eco-friendly plant based materials. At the 2007 International Esthetics, Cosmetics and Spa Conference in Las Vegas, we unveiled a time release muscle & joint relief creme, Touch360, and an

aroma-therapeutic body massage candle, Aroma360, as our debut innovations...

I guess that's all that needs to be said.

## Kinoki Foot Pads

Having nothing much else to do, I caught the ad for Kinoki Foot Pads on TV. The claims were simply astounding. Just apply these pads to the soles of your feet like an adhesive bandage. Then, sleep if off. While you're dozing the pads are working—sucking a variety of toxins from your body. The video shows the pads being removed, apparently having turned brown from the absorption of toxins. It doesn't get much better than this.

Unfortunately, I don't have any ad copy to show you. I am going to rely on the hard industry of others to bring you the wondrous story of Kinoki Foot Pads. However, there is a brief video that was previously posted on YouTube. It's been cached on Wired Science at the following link.

<http://blog.wired.com/wiredscience/2008/01/the-biggest-inf.html>

Justin Leonard's Infomercialratings.com gives the ads only three stars out of a possible five. Here is what Justin has to say:

[http://www.infomercialratings.com/product/kinoki\\_foot\\_pads\\_reviews](http://www.infomercialratings.com/product/kinoki_foot_pads_reviews)

### Manufacturer

Unknown

### Product Description

Kinoki Foot Pads is billed as the "ancient Japanese secret to perfect health." The infomercial claims Kinoki Foot Pads will detoxify your body and remove toxins while you sleep. The infomercial shows Kinoki Foot Pads removing "heavy metals, metabolic waste, toxins, parasites, chemicals, cellulite, and more." Check this page often for Kinoki Foot Pad reviews.

### Average Retail Value

\$19.99 (prices may vary)

Encyclocentral has a bit more to say:

[http://www.encyclocentral.com/17384-Kinoki\\_Foot\\_Pads\\_Detoxification.html](http://www.encyclocentral.com/17384-Kinoki_Foot_Pads_Detoxification.html)

**Kinoki Foot Pads** are pads containing certain herbal mixtures inside them. The marketers of this product

claim that these pads help in drenching out heavy metals, metabolic wastes, toxins, microscopic parasites, mucous, chemicals, cellulite from the body and help in achieving detoxification of the internal systems.

The **Kinoki Foot Pads** package comes with one-two punch of powerful detox ingredients along with tourmaline, a mineral that generates negative ions. The company promotes the product saying negative ions help restore balance to the nervous system, boost immunity, improve metabolism, and assist the body in healing itself naturally.

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*Alternative medicine is an industry that never seems to run out of fuel.*

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**Kinoki Foot Pads** has been touted as a 100% natural product which delivers multiple benefits. It has been said that the pads can absorb toxins released by the body and subsequently relieve the burden on the immune system. They help in the natural cleansing of the lymphatic system enhancing the extraction of toxins from the body. The pads support normal blood circulation and improve quality of sleep, contributing towards health and wellness

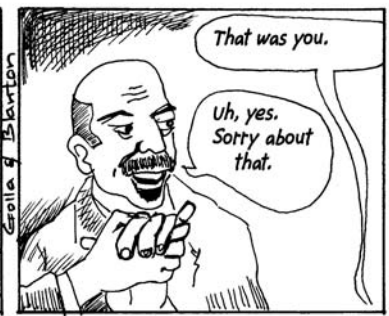
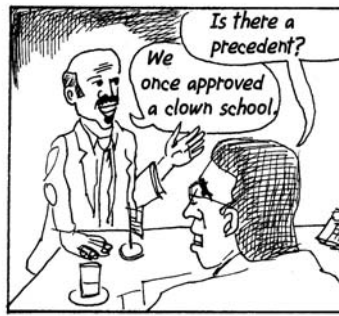
**Kinoki Foot Pads** are big patches to be wrapped around the soles of the feet and kept overnight. The company says that this will improve detoxification as all the toxins in the body will be drawn towards the soles and will ultimately be soaked into the pads. The company says that the extent and speed of detoxification may vary depending on the individual. Some may require two to three weeks or longer in the case of greater toxicity build-ups. The pads are shown to become lighter in color and less viscous as toxic lymph gets extracted.

The color of the **Kinoki Foot Pads** change as one uses them making them absorb more and more toxins. The color stain typically ranges somewhere between a green, grey, black, brown, or tan coloration, depending upon what specific toxins are removed. The product's marketers say that some customers have noticed positive health results within a few days while some others, they suggest, may take a couple of weeks to sense anything positive happening

**Kinoki Foot Pads** are said to incorporate the knowledge of ancient Chinese reflexology which suggests that the human body consists of 360 vital pressure points or acupuncture points, 60 of which are present in the soles and that the stimulation and toxicity release from these sensitive mirror points, may also lead to vitality and wellness for the associated body parts.

# Skeptic Ink

by Prasad Golla and John Blanton.  
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**Kinoki Foot Pads** are said to contain only 100% pure & natural ingredients, harvested and blended at the peak of their potency. The ingredients include bamboo vinegar, tourmaline, chitin and detox herbs. The pads like most other seen-on-TV products are very costly, coming at \$19.95 a set. The company claims that the products are not at all fads saying that such products are becoming more popular throughout the world, and in Japan only, annual sales reach \$ 1.8 million.

## ExtenZe

OK, Skeptics, this is going to be a delicate topic.

<http://www.4extenze.com/>

One photo shows an obviously happy couple, embracing, looking at the camera, smiling. Family fare, so far. Not so much the next photo. A comely young lady you would not be ashamed to take home to meet your mamma and a strapping young man face each other. The man is wearing only boxer trunks, and the lady stretches out the elastic band with a free finger. She is looking inside. She's smiling, as well.

No Gimmick... Just Real Science

...

ExtenZe Male Enhancement is the proprietary blend of herbs and medical grade substances that can truly make a difference in your life. Being larger is not impossible and it doesn't require surgery, prescriptions, gadgets or exercises. All it takes is taking a simple tablet. A tablet may seem too simple, but it's not. Simple tablets have been making a difference in our lives for over half a century . . . from relieving pain, improving our health, managing our weight and increasing our energy. "Simple tablets" can be considered the mini-miracles of modern times.

There's a short video, too. Check it out, guys. Needing no extension is well-sculpted hostess Bridgetta Tomarchio shown

gyrating and extolling Extenze's obvious benefits. Who needs science?

What's in it? Here are details from another Web page.

<http://www.tongkatali.net/tribulus.html>

The herbs in Extenze include L-, Ginseng-Eluethero, Oat Straw, Palmetto, Terrestris, , Calcium, bark, Extract, Catuaba, Miura Puama, , Astragalus, Cayenne, Biloba Extract, Boron, and Zinc.

How can you beat a lineup like that? Sooner or later something's got to work.

Scanning the Web for skeptical comments, I noticed the obvious. It's wall-to-wall ExtenZe out there. ExtenZe ads, ExtenZe endorsements, where you can get Extenze. OK, there was one sore head complaining about not getting his promised refund. Talk about a brave soul. Who's going to get out there and say, "Even Extenze didn't help me?"

Call me psychic, but I predict this product is going to grow.



*John Blanton is the Web Master for the North Texas Skeptics.*

## North Texas Skeptics

### Future Meeting Dates

March 8, 2008

May 17, 2008

April 12, 2008

June 21, 2008

North Texas Skeptics  
P.O. Box 111794  
Carrollton, Texas 75011-1794

**FIRST CLASS**

Address Correction Requested

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Membership agreement:

Yes, I agree with your purposes in exploring paranormal and pseudoscientific claims from a responsible and scientific point of view, and while I do not endorse the a priori rejection of paranormal phenomena and pseudoscientific claims, I believe that such claims must be subjected to the fair and systematic testing which rational enquiry demands.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

The North Texas Skeptics, P.O. Box 111794, Carrollton, Texas 75011-1794 (972) 306-3187

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