A colleague in California recently contacted me about a card she had received. It was addressed to me, care of her home address. We assumed it was a congratulations card, as I had just been married a week before. I forgot about the card until it arrived in the mail a few weeks later. I opened the pink envelope and slid out the card, expecting to see a typical image of a bride and groom kissing, or clinking champagne glasses. Instead, I was stunned to see the words “With Sympathy” printed across an inspirational landscape. Upon reading the disturbing message in a handwriting style that looked affected, I realized that I had received a death threat, in an ominous sympathy card.

The card contained an anonymous threat in response to an article I had written about Theresa Caputo for Swift . Caputo is the boisterous “psychic medium” on TLC’s the Long Island Medium. In this article I discuss the show, her cold reading methods, and the possibility that she also uses hot reading techniques. The article isn’t the most inflammatory one I’ve ever written. However, it somehow prompted the author of the card to threaten my life in protection of Caputo’s purported psychic abilities.

For several months, the JREF has been raising awareness of Caputo. In an article for the Huffington Post , D.J. Grothe issued an invitation to Caputo to accept the Million Dollar Challenge. So far, there has been no reply.

Unfortunately, this is not the first threat I’ve received. My first occurred fifteen years ago, following an interview about alternative medicine on Australia’s A Current Affair. A viewer tracked down my home phone number and called. He argued with me that his aura-reading therapy was legitimate, and that he’d silence me if I continued to speak out against alternative practitioners.

Over the years I’ve received dozens of threats via phone calls, letters, and emails. In discussions with other skeptics, I am concerned to learn that receiving serious threats is a common problem in our community. We’re not just talking threats of legal action for exposing psychics, or curses of “Go to hell!” Skeptics have been victims of a wide range of threats, intimidation, bullying, stalking and harassment by members of the paranormal and

pseudoscientific communities.

Some bloggers and writers report receiving so many threats online that they have become numb to them. Several skeptics have accumulated entire collections of hate mail, like Peter Bowditch of Ratbags.com. Rather than shy away from the bullies, they post the threats online to shame them. Most threats are made behind the safety of a keyboard, but many occur face-to-face. A few skeptics have reported receiving physical threats at metaphysical fairs and lectures, simply because they had asked questions. Often there is no confrontation or direct antagonism. One woman was run off the road by a carload of men because her car featured an atheist bumper sticker.

Friend of the JREF Kitty Mervine told me that she has been the victim of occasional threats. Two alien abductee “therapists” spat on her, while alleged abductees have passed on death threats to her “from the aliens.” A crazed fan of a well-known “psychic” tracked down her home address, and followed her as she was driving her car. The harassment ended after the stalker received a visit from the police.

The most aggressive threats appear to come from anti-vaccination proponents, UFO fanatics and conspiracy theorists. A UFO believer warned one skeptic that he’d better watch his back and “start wearing a flak jacket." These people are willing to protect their theories with our lives.

I have reported the threat to the police, and the matter is currently under investigation. I urge other skeptics to be careful about posting personal information online, to retain any threats received, and to report these to the authorities.

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