

Helping Donna Eden Write *Energy Medicine*

The Inside Story

David Feinstein, Ph.D.

By the early 1990s, my beautiful and brilliant wife, Donna Eden, was receiving offers and overtures to write a book about the healing work she had already been doing for well over a decade. She, however, wasn't inclined to write a book. She was far too stretched with a tenacious cascade of people lining up for her healing services, pulling her away from her friends, personal life, and worst of all, from her most precious role as Tanya's and Dondi's mom. Where would she ever find the time to write a book? And how could a book really capture the magic of what happened between her and her clients?



David skeptically observing Donna enthusiastically at work.

Donna had followings in several cities. She would go to London each year to the popular Body-Mind-Spirit Festival, and around 400 people would come to everything she presented. She was one of their biggest draws. The London crowd loved her presentations where her ability to “see” the body's energies (a gift that was already there in early childhood) was vividly demonstrated on the stage. But they were becoming increasingly vocal in wanting the live classes to be supplemented with written material. Donna would hear their pleas and awkwardly agree that she should write a book about her healing work. But she would then promptly get caught up in the demands of doing that work, not writing about it. Once during this period, when she first came on stage during one of her London visits, someone asked if she had started her book yet? She sheepishly acknowledged, “No,” she still hadn't gotten around to that. Someone responded with a loud “boo.” This spread, and soon she was being boo'd by the same crowd that had in the past always given her standing ovations. Make no mistake, it was good-natured jeering meant to spur her onward, but still, it left an impression.

Encouragement to come out with a book persisted from several corners, but it remained low on her crowded priority list. I remember, however, the night that I believe that changed. We lived in a rural section of Oregon about 15 minutes outside of Ashland, where we each had our offices – Donna as an energy healing practitioner and me, a block away, as a clinical psychologist. Due to our busy schedules and different rhythms around meals, we rarely ate together, but we had a hot tub in our forest-like back yard, and our “breakfast” and “dinner”

conversations were held there each morning and each evening instead of over meals. In the tub, under the stars one evening, Donna recounted her day, describing her work with several clients. I was amazed, as I'd been many times before, by the remarkable impact she could have in a single session as well as the health outcomes that were regularly being reported to her. I commented on how miraculous a couple of the sessions seemed. She reflected for a moment and then said, "You know, David, it would be a shame for my work to die with me." Tanya and Dondi were both already off to college and starting their own careers, and I believe that moment was a turning point in Donna feeling ready to try to capture her healing work in a book.

I had by that point written two popular books, both of which had attained some success, along with dozens of articles, and Donna asked me for some guidance about how to proceed. From those discussions, it emerged that I would help her with this giant project. I knew how to write a prospectus, having placed both my books with top publishers, and we pulled one together. I must confess that I did not understand Donna's work at the time. We'd been together since 1977, the year before she opened her practice and started teaching classes. I attended her first class, and subsequently many others. I had no doubt that she was effective. I had no doubt that people loved her and were enthused about what she was teaching. I just couldn't discern the theoretical foundation. I had entered college as a science major and had a pretty good grasp of biochemistry and the electromagnetic forces in the body, but the "energies" she claimed to be influencing were not so simple. Far more than electrical connections between the cells, she was talking about vastly different types of energy than those spoken of in physics, such as thermal energy, kinetic energy, chemical energy, electrical energy, or nuclear energy. This energy, she claimed, was "intelligent"! It stored memories and could be influenced to bring about healing. If it existed, I questioned, why hadn't science been able to discover it?

But clearly something was going on that was beyond my understanding, so I approached the invitation to help with Donna's book with curiosity about where it would go and enthusiasm to find out. My career had actually prepared me for this assignment. My first teaching position as a psychologist was in the Department of Psychiatry at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine. I was asked by the Department Chair, Joel Elkes, to review the new therapies that were emerging at the time, more in growth centers like Esalen than in departments of psychology or psychiatry, such as the one Dr. Elkes was running. He wanted to know if his program was missing something of substance. I investigated 46 approaches, often spending hours interviewing the founder or a primary proponent, asking tough questions, probing for contradictions or theoretical lapses, and sorting out the solid evidence and explanations from the fluff and hype. That project was career-changing for me, leading to a model for personal/spiritual evolution that integrated the best elements of these systems into an approach that became the cornerstone of my career.

My first book, published in 1988, presented that model and was a best-seller for its genre (its third edition was named the *U.S.A. Book News* Best Psychology/Mental Health book of 2007). Our publisher (I was first author with Stanley Krippner, who was mentoring me in helping the idea mature) was Jeremy P. Tarcher, Inc. (now an imprint of Penguin Random House), and

perhaps the most highly respected publisher for cutting edge ideas in healing and consciousness. I interested them in the project, resulting in a sizable advance to write a book on Donna's healing work. This provided us with the luxury of cutting our practices down to half-time so we could give serious focus to the writing. It took a full two years from the contract to the completed manuscript, and it was the most amazing intellectual adventure of my life.

At the beginning, I believed the book would be a memoir, something like: *My Favorite Healing Stories* by Donna Eden. I didn't think that it would have much of a theoretical foundation. If we could simply capture the power of the sessions she had described to me in the hot tub upon coming home from work on so many evenings, I felt it would be a winner. I was, however, also very curious about what she did to accomplish the outcomes she was seeing. I knew from my project at Hopkins that what therapists or healers believe are the reasons for their successful outcomes aren't necessarily the active ingredients in the approach. Sometimes it had more to do with the therapist's charisma, caring for the patient, or belief in the method than the method itself. Such placebo effects aren't a bad thing – the patient can still receive great benefit – and Donna certainly had enough charisma, enthusiasm, and natural caring to have a positive impact on people. Plus, frankly, much of what I'd seen her teach from the stage looked like so much hocus pocus. I'd watched puzzled as she used her hands to make spiraling circles without even touching the person she was supposedly healing, pressing on various points of the skin that seemed unrelated to any meaningful physiological process, and invoking odd postures and movements. Really, how could any of this be an ingredient in the cure of early-stage cancer or multiple sclerosis!

We developed a way of working on the book. A big piece, initially, was me interviewing Donna about clients she had described, about what she taught in her classes, and about the rather thin set of home-spun handouts she had developed to give to her students, hoping in part to mollify the eager Londoners. I brought the same inquiring, skeptical attitude I'd used in the Hopkins study to my dear wife. What was most interesting to me was that she had answers I never could have anticipated, and they painted a picture of unfamiliar territory that nonetheless began to make sense. It gradually became clear that there was more method to her machinations than I had been able to discern. Amidst all her enthusiasm and assuring words was a highly systematic way of assessing the body's energies and coming up with corrections where she had determined that the energies were blocked or running wild or out of harmony with the rest of the body. My attitude underwent a palpable shift in those initial weeks, from skeptical mind to beginner's mind.

In retrospect, Donna's most important part in writing the book had already occurred by that point. It was in the "field research" she had done during the two decades prior to starting the book, where she had seen, by our best estimate, some 10,000 clients in sessions of at least 90 minutes each. And before that it was in her own struggle to overcome multiple sclerosis, figuring out how to work with the energies in her body after several doctors had advised her to get her "affairs in order." It had never occurred to her before focusing on her own illness that her ability to see energy could be a tool for physical healing, but it became a vital tool. To my surprise, I actually began to think of her work as being quite empirical. "Empirical" means based

on observation and experimentation. Granted, her “observation” was through an unusual lens (though other gifted energy healers are able to corroborate what she “sees”), but she would see where the body’s energies were deficient, blocked, or out of harmony, and she would use the energies in her hands or other physical interventions to get those energies into a healthy flow. She would then check to see if what she did had the intended effect or look to find why it didn’t as she sensed into her next move. Observation and experimentation in action!

With few maps when she began her healing practice, beyond her own experiences healing herself, a cartography of increasing depth, breadth, and texture was developing in her being for how to work with the body’s energies to heal a widening range of maladies with a broad range of people. With incredible determination, compassion, and patience, she would figure out how to get the energies moving in a manner that promotes healing. Every client was not only an opportunity to invoke the gift of healing but also, in a secondary way, a research project for her. And another entry into a growing inner encyclopedia. Her intuition was becoming ever-more informed, developing generalizations, internal guidelines, and a growing array of procedures: “When the person describes this symptom, look for this in the energies.” “When the energies are stuck in this manner, try this technique” (which she might have, for instance, invented for a lung cancer patient but found that it seemed to help with emphysema as well).

My job, as it turned out, was not just to evoke her stories. It was to mine the wealth of knowledge that she had developed in a fascinating blend of concepts, intuition, and kinesthetic know-how, and to then help her forge what had been mined into the currency of words. This was not an easy task for her or for me. She would take a topic we were working on, go off for a few hours or a few days, and write about it. Other times I would continue to interview her. Even evoking the stories was a challenge. Donna often works with a client in what seems like a deeply meditative state. The fire that people see in her on the stage is not the earth mother personality her clients come to know. And to fully recall a session, she had to get back into the state she was in during the session. Known as state-dependent memory, this is a well-known phenomenon. Memory retrieval is most efficient when people are in the same state of consciousness they were in when the memory was formed. While you might think that after 10,000 sessions, hundreds of client histories would be readily at hand, but that was not the case. Evoking the state that would allow the memories to resurface in enough detail that we could analyze the session and begin to formulate concepts and draw conclusions was challenge enough.

An even bigger challenge, however, was the sheer enormity of information she had within her. Just as physical anatomy – from cells to organs to the respiratory, cardiovascular, immune, and reproductive systems – is enormously complex, the energy fields that regulate all of these physiological systems is overwhelmingly complex, interactive, and nuanced. How were we going to chunk all this down and organize it into a book! Fortunately, I am known – as was once expressed by a psychiatrist who was the editor of a journal that published one of my papers – for being able to discern the relevant from the irrelevant and to see patterns that other people often miss. But I had met my match with this corpus of material!

I sorted through it a hundred times in our first year before really coming up with an outline for the book. While it may seem like a no-brainer when you look at the table of contents to have organized it the way it is, this was not self-evident in the beginning. Donna “sees” as many kinds of energy systems as there are kinds of tissues, organs, and physiological systems in the body. Far more than the eight major systems emphasized in the first edition of the book (we escalated one of the minor systems in the second edition to a major system, so we now speak of nine major systems). But we had to figure all that out. Yes, the meridians, chakras, and aura were clearly major systems. They were studied, worked with, and appreciated in ancient healing and spiritual traditions, and they had been written about in the West. But what of all the other systems? Which ones should get primary emphasis? And what of systems that didn’t quite fit their traditional categories? Triple Warmer, for instance, is widely recognized in Chinese medicine as a meridian. But it has so many more functions than the other meridians, governing the immune response to internal threats and the fight/flight/freeze responses to external threats. Giving it the status of a separate system, as we did, required an intellectual leap. One of many.

Once we had identified the systems that – based on her experiences as an energy practitioner – Donna believed to be the most important to be aware of and work with, we had a framework for organizing the book. But as we proceeded, we realized that this was not enough. This was an anatomy of the energy body, of sorts, but it was not the book on energy healing that we were realizing was the purpose of this project. So the anatomy of the energy body became Part 2 of a three-part volume. If you look at the other two sections, you will get a sense of the additional territory we felt was important to cover.

As the outline for the book began to take shape, the task of actually writing it was making a new set of demands. After compiling Donna’s handouts on a particular topic, passages she wrote as the book unfolded, and my copious notes, which included my having typed verbatim many of her comments during hundreds of hours of discussion, my job as the “with” author was to cull through this mass of Donna’s class material, writings, and interviews and organize it into a first draft of each small section of the book. Donna would then review and approve it, edit it, or throw it away as being off-target. But writing these drafts never occurred in a straight line. In trying to distill all the information at my disposal, gaps in my understanding would always appear. I was actually getting tired of “beginner’s mind,” but I kept being brought back there. And off to Donna with another round of questions.

What we found was that she was so fully engaged in her work that it didn’t occur to her to state out loud parts of her experience that just seemed obvious to one who sees energy and is so immersed in energy healing. So my job was to pull out of her words to describe these experiences and knowings. We got very good at it. Sometimes, as we struggled to find the terms and concepts that would fill an intellectual gap, it almost felt like I would start to channel her. After even convoluted discussions trying to capture an elusive idea, I would suddenly be moved to start typing on the computer and we’d both be amazed at how the words born in that moment nailed it.

An interesting part of our collaborative writing was in the “both filters” principle. Donna and I think so differently that it is amazing we were able to come up with any kind of shared voice. The way we finalized this shared voice was that by prior agreement (or it could have led to a lot of arguments), every sentence in the book had to pass through her more right-brained filter and my more left-brained filter. If it passed those two tests, we figured that almost anyone who might be interested would be able to understand it. That was the icing on our baking a rather complex but most gratifying cake! It has also become Donna’s “professional voice,” used in our three subsequent books as well.

Energy Medicine was published at the end of 1998. While we were writing it, we never gave much thought to the impact it might have. We just wanted to share what Donna had learned in her own healing journey and her subsequent experiences participating in the healing journeys of others. Two decades later, however, the book has been translated into 18 languages, sold more than a quarter million copies in the U.S. alone, been the textbook in hundreds of energy healing classes, and won golds in both the *U.S.A. Book News* and *Nautilus* competitions. Throughout this time, we have been receiving appreciative letters and e-mails from people we never met and will never meet, telling us how information and techniques in the book helped them overcome tough health challenges. And the biggest surprise has been that the book provided the blueprint for a certification program that has resulted in more than 1200 people becoming competent energy healing practitioners, themselves offering dozens of classes every month and seeing thousands of clients all around the world.