

Piero Calvi-Parisetti



# APPARITIONS

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proof of survival

# Proof of survival

THIS BOOK is the first volume of a series called Proof of Survival. Each volume explores in some depth one area of evidence pointing to the fact that, in a way which we do not yet understand, human mind – that is consciousness, personality, memory and affection – survives the death of the physical body. The series is not about religion and – although the subjects can easily fit within a spiritual worldview – it is not about spirituality either. These books are about facts (empirical evidence we gather from anecdotes, scientific investigations and laboratory experiments) and the efforts of reason to understand such facts. Reading these books can make your heart soar, but this remains primarily an adventure of the rational mind.

This, therefore, is a serious book - one which has required hundreds of hours of work between research, drafting, editing and graphic layout. Yet, it is given away for free. You, the reader, may ask yourself why and, in this brief introduction, I, the author, will explain. Please do not skip it just because it's an introduction. I will be making a couple of important points, and you will quickly understand if you are going to enjoy reading this book, or if your time is perhaps better spent doing something else.

Writing is for me the best aid to understanding. Like many others, I do think by writing. This series of books is first and foremost a testimony to my own process of discovery of – and reflection about – an extraordinary world. It is a world of wonders which, as a Western-educated medical doctor, I refused to believe even existed until my mid-forties. Researching and reflecting on these issues, however, can be a lonely affair, as there are surprisingly few people genuinely interested in the most important question there is to ask: What happens when we die? Sharing my thought process through my writing is a way to feel less lonely. I offer this

book for free to make people aware of my work, the way I think, the subjects I'm interested in. In exchange, I ask people to sign up to receive my weekly articles on parapsychology and afterlife studies. In so doing, I look forward to building a small community of like-minded individuals who share some of my interests. I also hope that many people will actually like this free book and will consider buying the other books in the series. This is equally important for me as I am an early-retired academic and I now write and self-publish for a living.

Enough said about me, then, at least for the moment (should you ever be interested, you will find a couple of pages of "autobiography" in the appendix at the end of the book). Let's now talk briefly about you, or, at least, about the person I imagine as my ideal reader.

**YOU ARE SMART.** By that I don't mean that you are necessarily brainy or highly educated. I mean that you are curious, interested in learning new things, and that you don't accept the things you're told at face value. You are willing to weigh arguments and counter-arguments, and come to your own conclusions. Above all, you enjoy the process of exploration and discovery, for we live in a world which is more weird, puzzling and ultimately fascinating than we could ever have imagined.

**YOU ARE OPEN-MINDED.** You look at new information and ideas with a healthy scepticism. You doubt, but you are open to changing your convictions and ways of thinking if your reason tells you that the new information and ideas have merit. In short, you are open to be convinced by facts.

**YOU ARE TOLERANT.** In order to learn hopefully interesting things through these books, you are available to put up with my mannerism and style. The fact that I speak to you in first person, for instance. I have done this for 15 years in my university classroom, and old habits die hard. Or the fact that I often quote other authors and give plenty of references. These books are not

as heavy as academic texts, but they are not the literary equivalent of daytime television either.

YOU MAY BE IN PAIN OVER THE LOSS OF A LOVED ONE and seek comfort in the study of evidence for an afterlife. This is not only perfectly OK – if this is the case, you actually are a prime target for these publications. Medical research clearly tells us that learning about the afterlife can have a profound healing effect on the pain of bereavement.

YOU MAY BE SCARED ABOUT DEATH (your own or a loved one's) and seek comfort in learning that our bodies die, but *we don't*. See the paragraph above - every single word applies.

On the other hand, if you blindly accept the dogmas of your religion (be it the religion of a Holy Book or the currently fashionable religion called Scientific Materialism) and will ignore or refute anything that may contradict them, I am afraid you don't belong here. If you don't have the moral courage to *follow the data, wherever they may take you* (which is the *only* true imperative of the scientific method), you don't belong here. At the same time, if you will accept anything that seems to be true – or might be true – just because you would like it to be true, you don't belong here either. If any of these is the case, I suggest that you close the book now, unsubscribe from my mailing list and happily continue with your life.

Now, for the rest of us, buckle up and enjoy the ride!

# Down the tube

LONDON'S SUBWAY SYSTEM, known to Londoners as *the tube*, is the oldest in the world, and possibly the most complex. It began operations in 1863 and today it serves 270 stations with 402 kilometres (250 miles) of tracks. Over the years, the system has expanded to 11 lines and carries over three million passengers every day. Little these people know, as they swarm down the escalators, that they are entering a realm of ghosts.

Yes, because ever since works on the underground started in the mid-1850s, there has been an extraordinary abundance of reports of sightings of what we call apparitions. Many of these were just rumours shared amongst workers, others were full anecdotes, and some of these stories made it to the specialised, and, in some cases, even the general press. If one is to believe that apparitions are manifestations of "souls" or "discarnate personalities" of people who either have died a traumatic death or whose remains have in some way been disturbed, the abundance of such reports from the London underground should come as no surprise. From the early days of construction through to wartime, there have been countless accidental deaths and suicides. Add these to the graves and cemeteries destroyed by the digging work, and you will end up with a comprehensive catalogue of possible causes for sightings. However, as we will see shortly, the sudden/traumatic death or the disturbed remains explanations – if true – only fit a part of the cases we classify as apparitions. Before we go any further, to give you a flavour of the kind of anecdotes that abound concerning the London subway, let's look at a story carried by *Psychic News*, a British magazine published without interruption since 1932 and the recognised voice of the Spiritualist movement.

During a cold November night in 1955, the last train had long gone and Jack Hayden, the foreman of Covent Garden station, was locking the gates. He made a final check of the platforms. All was quiet. Nodding to himself, he turned to leave and suddenly saw a tall, distinguished looking man walking towards the emergency stairs. Jack quickly telephoned the ticket office. "There's someone still down here, Henry - he's coming up the stairs," he said. "Let him out, would you? I'll meet you up there." Jack jumped into the lift and arrived at the booking hall, where a puzzled clerk was still waiting at the top of the stairwell. Together they went down the stairs and then searched the platforms and the tunnels. There was no-one there. Four days later, Jack was in the mess-room, again after the last train, and saw a tall man staring at him through the open door. "He was wearing an old-fashioned grey suit," Jack said later, "with a funny looking old-style collar and some light-coloured gloves."

"Looking for the cloakroom, sir?" ventured Jack. The figure said nothing, but moved away from view. Jack moved to follow him - but there was no-one around. Afraid of ridicule, Jack didn't mention what he'd seen. But a few days later, at midday, he was sitting with one of the guards when they heard a mighty scream. Moments later, a 19-year-old porter called Victor Locker staggered into the mess room gasping that he had seen a tall, strange-looking man in the other room. When Victor had approached him, he'd felt a heavy sensation around his head and the figure had vanished. This time Jack knew he had to make a report. The nearest control point was Leicester Square Station. The managers sent the foreman, Eric Davey - who, by coincidence, was also an amateur spiritualist. They tried to recreate the scene with Victor, who suddenly screamed again. Eric felt something pressing down heavily on his head for a few seconds before vanishing. A few days later, Eric saw the ghost for himself, and he thought it had said that its name was Terry.

Jack and Eric described the figure they'd seen to an artist, who made a sketch. The Psychic News then dug out a number of

Victorian photographs of people connected to the area. Both Jack and Eric pounced on the picture at the top of the pile - a man with an expressive face, sad eyes and sunken cheeks. "That's him! That's him! That's the man I saw in here!" cried Jack. The photograph was of a man named William Terris, and was remarkably similar to the man in the sketch. Unknown to the station staff, people at the Adelphi Theatre had seen a similar apparition a few years before Jack's experience. They had nicknamed their visitor 'Charlie'. Jack saw the ghostly figure several times over the next few years, always around November or December. In the end, it became too much for him and he requested a transfer. But since that day, several staff members at Covent Garden have reported hearing strange noises and footsteps when no-one was there.

Anecdotes such as this one are always interesting, especially since names, dates and locations are provided. Based on such data, the keen investigator can interview the witnesses, research the historical records and cross-check the information. In later chapters we will see how this has been extensively done during over 150 years of psychical research. And, as I said, the London subway system is literally awash with stories like this one. It was not until 2005, however, that a very well-produced documentary by British director Joe Kane looked at these anecdotes from a different, modern-day-information-society angle. *Ghosts on the Underground* is filled with a soberly told, intensifying brew of anecdotes on strange things that have been encountered over the past several decades as related by the very people who experienced them. One thing is reading a newspaper article - a story about a story. Quite another thing is to see the witnesses in flesh and bone telling the story themselves, reliving the intensity of the experience in front of the camera.

From the documentary we learn how, alive with millions of passengers during the day, the tube becomes a lonely, silent and desolate place after it shuts at night. And it is in this eerie, neon-light environment that one of the most puzzling episodes took

place in the summer of 2000. At 2 o'clock in the morning, one of the line controllers who monitor every station by CCTV from a separate location, noticed the figure of a man, in white overalls, standing on the platform of Liverpool street station, in central London. This was most unusual, as the station had long been closed for the night and there were no contractors scheduled to work there at the time. The line controller immediately rang Steve Coates, the station supervisor on shift that night, and asked him to investigate.

And here you can see Mr Coates himself, dressed up for the occasion of the interview, proudly sporting his official ID badge, surprisingly at ease in front of the camera, and yet still astonished at what had happened that night. He had gone to the platform a first time, performed a thorough check, and found nobody, as he had expected. When he called the CCTV centre to report, the line controller almost got irritated: "How could you have missed him? He was standing just besides you on the platform!" Puzzled, Coates went back onto the platform to check again. Again, he saw nobody. He phoned the controller again, who again confirmed that the figure was standing on the platform at the same time as he was carrying out his checks. Coates suggested that it must have been a blip on the CCTV monitor, or some other kind of malfunction, and after a few nervous exchanges the conversation ended. And then Coates says, "As I turned and walked onto the Eastbound platform, to my left there was a bench, and on that bench there was a white pair of paper overalls. At the time, it made a chill go down my spine. Had anybody walked out of the platform at the time I was on the telephone, I would have certainly seen him, and I didn't see anybody wearing white overalls, or anybody placing white overalls on that bench."

When you look at the details, this account is most extraordinary in a number of ways. It directly contradicts many of the common beliefs concerning apparitions, which we will discuss in later chapters, and it clearly defies practically every single one of the theories commonly used to explain away such happenings, which



we'll also review shortly. For the moment, in order to conclude this brief introduction to the subject, we have to look at definitions and agree on what we will consider an apparition for the purpose of this book.

Psychical research considers an apparition as the experience of the presence of a person or animal – living or dead – that is not actually there, which seems to occur primarily through sight, but at times can seem to occur through the other senses (sound, smell, taste, and touch). This definition is rather broad and covers several known types of apparitions that have been documented by psychical researchers and parapsychologists since the late 19th century. As documented by Dianne Arcangel (2005), they include: crisis apparitions, post-mortem apparitions, haunting apparitions and deathbed visions.

A *crisis apparition* appears to a witness at a time when the person whose apparition is seen, is in a state of crisis, whether it is an accident, an illness, or even the threat of death. This form of apparitions is very interesting, as it opens up a Pandora's Box of questions about what is body, what is mind and how people communicate using channels that are so blatantly beyond the five physical senses. However, this series of books is dedicated to evidence for life after life (another common expression synonymous with the afterlife), and we will therefore not delve into crisis apparitions.

A *post-mortem apparition* appears after a person's death, anywhere from several hours to several years after. These are the "ghosts" who have been reported since the dawn of time, by all civilisations, all cultures and within all spiritual traditions in human history. This is primarily what this book is all about, as the fact that people see an apparition of somebody deceased – in many cases, as we will see, *without knowing that the person had died* – provides, when all normal explanations are ruled out, a strong element of proof for the survival of human personality of bodily death.

*Haunting apparitions* are special cases of post-mortem apparitions – special in the sense that they are linked to a particular place. They are part and parcel of the broader phenomenon called haunting, which includes a collection of odd, apparently paranormal, events linked to a particular location. These include odd sounds: footsteps, bangs, scratching, moans, screams, music, whispering; odd sights: flashes of light, shadows, floating lights, things seen ‘in the corner of the eye’; odd smells: often unpleasant, sometimes sweet; odd feelings: headaches, static build-up, cold areas, touches by unseen things; object movement: doors, taps and light switches found open/on, objects lost and sometimes recovered, objects falling; and pet reaction to ‘unseen’ things. In fact, apparitions are a relatively rare feature of hauntings. This, together with the fact that many of the phenomena reported as haunting may have a physical or psychological explanation, makes haunting apparitions less likely to be indicators of survival.

Finally, *deathbed visions* are a common and widely researched form of apparition in which, close to the moment of death, people report seeing visions of what appears to be the afterlife, and of deceased relatives, who are said by the experiencers to have come from the spirit world to accompany and facilitate the dying person’s transition. In a number of well-documented cases, the dying persons reported seeing a deceased loved one *they didn’t know was dead at the time the vision took place*. Deathbed visions are one the key areas of evidence for survival. The importance of the subject and the quantity and quality of available information are such, however, that I will dedicate an entire volume of the series Proof of Survival to them.

This book, therefore, is about ghosts – the ghosts of folklore, the ghosts of thousands upon thousands of anecdotes, the ghosts which have been subjected to in-depth psychological and sociological investigations. The ghosts who seem to defy all normal explanations. Especially, the ghosts of the dead who

interact with the living, show awareness, intentionality, affection.  
The ghosts who resolutely point to one direction: survival.

# Myths and reality

ICELAND is a most beautiful country. Although it is very difficult to rank countries as if they were entrants in a beauty contest, I would personally place Iceland among the top five of over 60 countries I have visited so far. A land of fire and ice, where the bright green of the grass contrasts with the intense black of the volcanic rock, always striped with the white of rainwater streams, this country has one foot in America and one in Europe. And that is not just a poetic way of speaking. Iceland is in fact where the underwater mountain chain known as the Mid-Atlantic Ridge is tall enough to break above the ocean's surface, and the Ridge itself is the manifestation of prodigious natural forces at work. Dragged by colossal convection cells in the Earth's magma under the surface, the Eastern half of the Atlantic Ocean's seafloor constantly moves towards Europe and Africa, whilst the Western half moves towards the Americas. Right in the middle, the Ridge is where the seafloor actually spreads, magma continuously erupts from under the surface, and new earth crust is thereby constantly produced. It is no surprise, therefore, that Iceland has so many active volcanoes, and I remember standing on the Western flank of a shallow valley in the North of the country, looking across a 10 mile-wide depression at the bottom of which I could actually see the very earth surface fractured into a series of gigantic, seemingly bottomless cracks, as the Eastern flank, opposite me, was receding at the speed of 1.5 centimetres per year.

Iceland is the home country of Prof Erlendur Haraldsson, the importance of whom to psychical research can simply not be overstated. As a most respected academic psychologist - currently Professor Emeritus of psychology on the faculty of social science at the University of Iceland - over the years Prof Haraldsson has contributed a number of seminal (I would almost

say foundational) studies in such diverse fields as mediumship, deathbed visions, past-life memories and, critically for this book, apparitions.

Haraldsson's work on apparitions began in 1974-1975, when he and his colleagues asked a representative sample of the Icelandic population, a striking question: "Have you ever been aware of the presence of a deceased person?" The responses were as striking: 31 percent of the respondents said "yes". This research finding is important because it flies directly into the face of the first and foremost myth concerning apparitions: that they are a feature of ancient cultures and superstitious, poorly educated populations. If this was the case, in this era of science, education and widespread secularism one would expect reports of contacts with the deceased to have all but disappeared.

This is certainly not the case, as Prof Haraldsson's findings - coming from one of the most modern and educated populations in Europe - are consistent with several other studies in countries around the world. In 1981-1984, for example, a multi-national survey called the European Human Values Study and initiated by the University of Louvain in Belgium for Gallup International (1984) was conducted in most countries in Western Europe and in the United States. In that study, individuals from a large representative sample of over 18,000 people reported contacts with the dead in 25 percent of the cases in Europe and 30 percent in the US. More recently, a poll of 808 Americans by CBS News in October of 2005 indicated that just over one fifth (22%) have seen or felt the presence of a ghost (Alfano, 2005). Slightly higher figures were indicated in a poll of 721 British adults in February of 1998: 40% believed in ghosts, while 37% had seen or felt one (MORI, 1998).

Claiming that the results from these and many other studies are homogeneous, would be lying. In fact, considerable differences exist not only among nations, but even among different ethnic groups within the same nation. In the European Human Values

Study, for instance, Iceland topped the list with 41 percent claiming to have felt contact with the dead. Italy followed with 33 percent, then Great Britain and West Germany with 26 percent, and the countries with the lowest percentages were Holland with 11 percent, and Denmark and Norway each with 9 percent. And, researchers Kalish and Reynolds (1976) conducted an interview survey among four ethnic communities in greater Los Angeles. Forty-four percent replied “yes” to the question: “Have you ever experienced or felt the presence of anyone after he had died?”, but there were significant ethnic differences: contact with the dead was most frequently reported by blacks (55%) and Mexican Americans (54%). followed by Anglo- (38%) and Japanese-Americans (29%). Notwithstanding such differences, however, the notion that people having alleged contacts with the deceased is a thing of the past is clearly a myth.

This is confirmed by another very interesting consideration. Large-scale surveys like the ones I just mentioned were not “invented” just a few decades ago. In fact, as far back as 1886, the Society for Psychological Research (SPR) in Britain questioned over 5,700 persons about whether they had ever perceived an apparition. The results were published in the classic work, *Phantasms of the Living*. Three years later, a committee of the SPR followed up this inquiry on a larger scale, in what was called the *Census of Hallucinations* in which 17,000 persons were canvassed. Of these, nearly 10 percent reported, while awake, “the impression of seeing or being touched by a spectral being or inanimate object, of hearing a voice; which impression, as far as you could discover, was not due to a physical cause”. The definition of “hallucination” used in the SPR survey was rather different from the one used to investigate contacts with the deceased in modern surveys, so a direct comparison is impossible. However, it would appear that 120 years ago there were even *less* people than today claiming to have seen/heard/touched somebody who actually wasn’t there. Radio, television, the Internet and the technology-filled lifestyle we all have today have certainly *not* made apparitions disappear.

Before considering more interesting statistics and how they defy common myths about apparitions, let's return to Iceland and hear some of the testimonies reported by Haraldsson (2012).

*"It was about a week after my mother was buried. She died here in the house in the attic. She had a room there. I just met her on the stairs. She had just had a stroke – a brain haemorrhage – so she moved slowly and used to move to the side when she met someone on the stairs. In that incident she moved just as usual. It was so normal. Of course I knew immediately that I had made a perceptual mistake or something else. And I kept walking upstairs and it did not have an effect on me. It was not unclear or anything. I saw all of her. My wife was sewing. I went up the stairs and told her immediately. Afterwards I continued walking upstairs because I knew right away that this was in some way very normal. She was dressed pretty much the same way as usual. The stairs are quite narrow and I saw that her skirt touched the upper step, and then I looked down and saw the whole picture. She was wearing normal clothes and looked just like she did before she died. That was it really – I just saw her. I looked up and just saw her, first the skirt and then I looked up and decided not to stop. I just kept going upstairs and did not look back because I was sure I would not see any more. It happened at the end of the day, as it was getting dark, but it was not that dark on the stairs. We met on the third or fourth step."*

*"I lost my husband during the summer. He had been a clergyman. I have never been very sensitive. One night I was ill and not feeling very well and of course I missed him. Suddenly I saw him standing by the bench I was resting on in the lounge and he was looking at me with his eyes sparkling. I was just very happy, I don't know for how long or short a time I was there. I cannot remember whether I saw more than the face but I distinctly remember the face and the sparkling eyes. He had such beautiful eyes. I was most definitely not asleep, that is a fact."*

Incidentally, with respect to the second quote, it is interesting to note that researcher Agneta Grimby (1998) at the University of Goteborg in Sweden found in one study that 80 percent of grief-stricken spouses or partners report having some sort of contact

with their lost loved one, a percentage significantly higher than in the general population. Both the above quotes come from additional research by Prof Haraldsson and his collaborators, who carried out detailed personal interviews with 449 people who had responded with a “yes” to questions about personal experiences with the deceased. Drawing from this goldmine of information, and from the data collected by many other researchers in different parts of the world, we can now critically examine some other common myths about apparitions. In fact, I find it difficult to make a difference between a myth – a commonly held belief which has no grounding in reality – and many of the sceptical attempts to explain away apparitional experiences. We will look at some of these in this chapter and discuss the rest in the following one, dedicated to sceptical explanations, without worrying too much about which is which.

So, ghosts are perhaps not a thing of the past, but certainly apparitions must be a fleeting experience, the perception of something that is “there and not there”, the whitish, translucent haze of certain Hollywood movies... Alas, no. That is another myth. The reality as reported by the percipients is that ghosts are people, in most cases absolutely normal people. So realistic in appearance, in fact, that they are generally mistaken for the real person. Did the two quotes from Iceland leave you with any doubt about that? Was the ghost which appeared on the CCTV cameras at Liverpool street station in London anything less than an immediately recognisable human figure? No. These and the vast majority of the other apparitions in literature are just people – the full sensory impression of a living human being. Haraldsson (2012) writes:

*It was most common to have perceived the deceased person with only one of the senses, with 48% experiencing them visually. However, when all the visual cases are added up, either as the only sensory perception or as one of them, it showed that a great majority – 67 percent – of reported encounters with the deceased involve visual experiences. In about a fifth of the accounts the perception involved more than one of the senses. Some for instance both*



*saw and heard the deceased person (10 percent). Other combinations were sight, sound and touch (6 percent), sight and touch (3 percent) or sound and touch (2 percent).*

<b>How the deceased were perceived</b>	<b>No of cases one modality</b>	<b>More than one modality</b>	<b>Total number of cases</b>
<b>Visual</b>	218	85	303 (67%)
<b>Auditory</b>	53	74	127 (28%)
<b>Tactile</b>	18	42	60 (13%)
<b>Olfactory</b>	18	3	21 (5%)
<b>Only sense of presence</b>	49		49 (11%)

*Almost three quarters of our informants said the deceased person had been physically present until he or she disappeared (73 percent), which could be understood to mean that they felt as if the person was there in the flesh.*

Incidentally, the fact that most apparitions are perceived visually clashes with the hypothesis that these experiences are hallucinations, as the majority of hallucinations are auditory in nature: psychiatric patients mostly *hear* voices rather than *seeing* images. Concerning the physical appearance of ghosts, Carl B. Becker (1993) confirms:

*An essential feature of apparitions is their objectivity. That is, they appear to follow the laws of perspective and parallax as we would expect of solid bodies in three-dimensional space. They are visible inter-subjectively, meaning that they may be seen by many people from their respective perspectives.*

So much, I would say, for “fleeting perceptions” of something that is “there and not there”.

While appearing solid, some apparitions can exhibit physical or non-physical features. For instance, some appear to cast shadows and reflections. One curious example of an apparition casting a reflection, is seen in one woman’s personal account of a crisis case, which Feather and Schmicker (2005) present in their book *The Gift:*

*My mother lived in California and I lived in Wichita, Kansas. At 9:40 A.M. on February 17, I was sitting in my bedroom at my dressing room table, brushing my hair in front of the mirror. Suddenly the room was illuminated with the strangest light, one I can't fully describe. I then felt a rustle of wind across my shoulders, and a faint sound like the brushing of birds' wings. Then I looked in the mirror. My mother was standing behind my chair ... She just stood and smiled at me for a full thirty seconds. I finally said, 'Mom!' and rushed for her, but she disappeared, light and all. I was so upset by this that I shook for an hour. When my husband came home for lunch, I told him about it and got myself ready for a phone call that mother was dead ... Sure enough, about 1 P.M. that same day, the call came that my mother was gone ...*

Also very interesting is the fact that apparitions are much more likely to disappear unnaturally than to appear unnaturally. Generally, percipients become aware of the apparition as it is already completely formed. In many cases, however, the same apparition disappears gradually, like dissolving or fading into the background. In other cases, apparitions have been seen to appear or disappear in enclosed rooms, or pass through doors and walls. Attempts to touch an apparition have either resulted in the figure apparently eluding the hand to where it is unable to be touched, or the hands simply passing through the figure. To be fair to the popular myth, however, it must be noted that about 15 percent of the cases apparitions *are* indeed of the translucent/transparent type as describe in this account (Haraldsson, 2012):

*I clearly remember this incident that occurred in the hospital not so many years ago. I sensed my mother-in-law with me in the hospital bed. She had died about two days earlier. I lay sick and sadly could not be at her burial. She sat there by my side on the bed and held my shoulders in her arms. This was the clear. On the other hand this vision was in fact transparent as if it was seen through glass. She did not look so real that one could think that her body was made of flesh and blood... I felt completely awake.*

A third, very resilient myth, fuelled and maintained by Hollywood "B movies" and horror literature is that apparitions are associated with fear, terror and all sorts of unpleasant sensations. On the one hand, it is true that the appearance of an

apparition can sometimes be accompanied by certain kinds of subjective effects, such as feeling sensations of cold, wind, or touch. In the survey of apparition cases described in his classic book *Apparitions*, G. N. M. Tyrrell (1953/1961) observed that the experience of cold breezes and similar cooling sensations was fairly frequent across witness accounts. For instance, some witnesses gave the following statements: "I ... felt myself grow perfectly cold"; "A cold, shivering feeling came over me"; "The apparition laid a cold hand on my cheek"; "As if a cool wind was blowing about me". On the other, however, fear is rarely associated with the sighting of an apparition, let alone terror. Quite the contrary, it would appear, as according to a survey by the Forever Family Foundation, 52% of the interviewees would be "overjoyed" and would "try to interact" if they were to see a deceased loved one while they were awake. In the Icelandic sample, two thirds of the people who actually saw an apparition felt that they had had a positive experience, and in only six percent of the cases the experience was described as bad or frightening.

Furthermore, as part of my research for this book I came across an article by researchers J.F. Kennedy and H. Kanthamani (1995), who investigated the effects that paranormal and transcendent/spiritual experiences have on peoples' lives. Data from a sample of 120 people who reported having had at least one paranormal and/or transcendent experience showed that these experiences increased their interest and beliefs in spiritual matters and increased their sense of well-being. More specifically, for the majority of respondents the experiences resulted in: increased belief in life after death; belief that their lives are guided or watched over by a higher force or being; interest in spiritual or religious matters; sense of connection to others; and, critically: happiness; well-being; confidence; optimism about the future; and decreases in fear of death, depression or anxiety, isolation and loneliness, and worry and fears about the future. Interestingly, although 45% of the respondents indicated that a paranormal experience had made them very afraid, this fear

appeared to be temporary or mixed with positive feeling because only 9% indicated that their experiences have been scary with no positive value.

True enough, these results came from a sample of people who were actively interested in paranormal phenomena. Therefore, they cannot confidently be extended to the general population. However, these results are consistent with research on the positive after-effects of near-death experiences, and with the conclusions of researcher J. McClenon (1994), who looked at historical autobiographical accounts and field observations, concluding that anomalous experiences indeed promote well-being and spirituality. These findings are also consistent with other studies that found positive effects of anomalous experiences but did not investigate what specific aspects of life were affected. In a nutshell, then, the notion that paranormal experiences in general and apparitions in particular are hellish, scary, traumatising experiences is nothing but a myth.

Finally, we have to attack the myth of darkness and haunted places. The stereotypical ghost of minor literature and supposedly scary movies appears at night, in dark places, and especially in locations known to be haunted. The typical storyline has it that a family moves into a house without knowing - or deliberately ignoring - that there is a history of phenomena happening there. Sure enough, after an initial period of calm, unsettling - at first - and horrible - later - things start to happen. Eventually, it turns out that the house was built on an ancient graveyard, or that somebody was murdered there. Etcetera. Even the more modern versions of this age old cliché - think of the movie *Paranormal Activity*, for instance - follow exactly the same storyline, with the only difference that the scary bits are filmed with night vision cameras, for respect to modernity. Old films or new ones, the popular myth remains that ghosts are seen at night, in haunted places and almost exclusively indoors.

Reality, again, is completely different. Before busting this particular myth, however, I need to make a point of clarification. You will soon begin to notice that, in my reviewing evidence from apparitions, I tend to focus on the so-called “spontaneous cases”. These are post-mortem apparitions typically reported to have appeared only once or a few times and seen by a single individual and not linked to a specific location. A minority of such apparitions are witnessed by more than one person – these are extremely interesting and evidential phenomena and we will review them in a later chapter. The point I am making here is that I do not dwell that much upon hauntings. I do so not because I think that the evidence from hauntings is not solid or uninteresting, but rather because – let me remind you again – my purpose with this book is to provide evidence in support of the idea that human personality survives physical death. And I mean *human personality*. I stress this because much of the evidence from hauntings is, at least in principle, compatible with the “traces” theory. Such theory says that after a person has died “traces” remain somehow imprinted on the environment where the person lived (or died). Most apparitions in hauntings are in fact repetitive – they seem to have no purpose, no consciousness, no awareness. I don’t know if the traces theory is true, but my main interest is in the ghosts that appear as people – often conscious, aware, affectionate people suggesting that our bodies die, but we don’t. Furthermore, I also believe that hauntings are more open than spontaneous cases to some of the “normal” explanations that are commonly put forward. If a person walks at night in a place known to be haunted, would that person not be more likely to be oversensitive, over-expectant, to misinterpret or exaggerate stimuli and sensations and in some way create the experience of an apparition out of normal events? I am not saying that this is always the case, but it’s a possibility. That’s why I consider spontaneous cases a lot more interesting, and convincing, and that’s why I will focus considerably less on hauntings.

Now, back to myths and reality. The popular belief that ghosts are only seen at night and in dark places is, again, simply false.

Looking at a very large collection of cases, psychologist Walter Franklin Prince (1930) found that over 40 percent of apparitions appear in daylight and another 10-20 percent are seen in good artificial light conditions. Much as I looked, I was not able to find detailed statistics based upon more recent cases. So, I carried out a completely unscientific – but, for me, strongly suggestive – little experiment. I took three books in my collection which contain accounts of apparitions and I chose 20 from each book through systematic sampling. By that I mean that I started with the first account, then skipped the next four, looked at the sixth account, then skipped the next four, looked at the eleventh, and so on. Out of my small sample of 60 accounts, in 18 cases I was not able to tell with certainty under which lighting conditions the apparitions appeared. In 32 cases, the apparition was seen in daylight or full electric light conditions. Only in the 10 remaining cases the apparition appeared at night or in darkness.

To sum up our quick review of some of the resilient myths about apparitions, let's remind ourselves that a) seeing ghosts is not only a feature of the "dark ages of superstition": between roughly 10 and 30 percent of the population in the world's most developed countries see them today; b) ghosts are not perceived in uncertain terms: in many cases they are so solid and real-life looking that they are mistaken for the real person; c) far from the depictions of popular literature and films, seeing an apparition is a positive experience for most perceivers and only a minority of such episodes result in fear or other unpleasant emotions; d) ghosts as reported by millions around the world are certainly not "creatures of the night": approximately two thirds of them are perceived in daylight or full electric light conditions.

Now that we have looked at the facts, let me introduce a little gem from the sceptical literature. Robert Todd Carroll (born in 1945) is an American writer and academic. Carroll has written several books and sceptical essays but achieved notability by publishing the *Skeptic's Dictionary* online in 1994. Carroll earned his PhD in philosophy in 1974 at the University of California, San

Diego. Until his retirement in 2007, Carroll was a professor of philosophy at Sacramento City College. In the next chapter we will use some of the entries of Carroll's *Skeptic's Dictionary* to expose what I can only define as the abysmal ignorance (or outright intellectual dishonesty) of some of the sorry souls we call the hard line sceptics. To conclude this chapter, we will start with a good opening salvo.

Before you go on, I would like to ask you to pause for a moment, think back to the several anecdotes I quoted up to this point, and review the conclusions I made in the previous paragraph.

Then, please go on and read what Dr Carroll (2003) has to say:

*It is said that ghosts like to work in the dark because it's harder for people to see them than in broad daylight where their invisibility is more visible. It's also easier to deceive and scare people at night because they can't see what's going on. It's usually cooler and breezier at night, too, and both those elements assist the ghost in producing scary sounds and movements. Ghosts don't like to work in conditions where people can easily see what they are doing because then people would see them for what they are rather than for what they imagine them to be. By appearing only in the dark they can maintain their mysteriousness better. Besides, ghosts have found that many people are afraid of the dark and that fear makes their work much easier.*

# Sceptical explanations

CANTERBURY CATHEDRAL in Canterbury, Kent, is one of the oldest and most famous Christian structures in England and forms part of a World Heritage Site. It is the cathedral of the Archbishop of Canterbury, leader of the Church of England and symbolic leader of the worldwide Anglican Communion. It is an imposing complex, now with turrets and spires rising hundreds of feet into the air, which has stood on the site for over 1,400 years, undergoing a long series of renovations, rebuilding and extensions.

If you were to visit the cathedral, say, around 1300, you would have seen, imposing cloisters and monastic buildings, teeming with monks. The great cloister was surrounded by the buildings essentially connected with the daily life of the monks – the church to the south, with the refectory placed as always on the side opposite, the dormitory, raised on a vaulted undercroft, and the chapter-house adjacent, and the lodgings of the cellarer, responsible for providing both monks and guests with food, to the west. A passage under the dormitory lead eastwards to the smaller or infirmary cloister, appropriated to sick and infirm monks. The very centre of monastic life was the “scriptorium”. First established around 990 AD, it was the room in which the monks spent long hours every day copying manuscripts, thereby preserving much of European culture throughout the Dark Ages.

Such intense activity went on uninterrupted for almost five centuries. The cathedral ceased to be an abbey during the Dissolution of the Monasteries when all religious houses were suppressed. Canterbury surrendered in March 1539, and reverted to its previous status of ‘a college of secular canons’. It is from that very scriptorium, however, that we will shortly begin our



critique of some of the sceptics' attempts at explaining away apparitions.

Before I go any further, I have to briefly apologise for a problem of terminology. This book is written in British English, and the customary way to spell the word "sceptic" in the UK is with a c after the s. In the US, the commonly used spelling has a k in place of the c. In most cases, you will therefore find sceptic spelled with a c. However, when referring to book titles such as *The Skeptic's Dictionary*, or when directly quoting an American author's writing, I have to maintain the original spelling. You will therefore encounter both ways of spelling the same word.

Now, did I mention *The Skeptic's Dictionary*? Yes, I just did. It is straight from the writing of Robert Todd Carroll (2003) that we learn about the first line of defence against the paranormal nature of apparitions:

*As a skeptic, all I can say with confidence is that when one considers the requirements for a ghost story to be true, the most reasonable position is that there is a naturalistic explanation for all these stories, but we often do not or cannot have all the details necessary to provide that explanation.*

Carroll therefore argues that apparitions (and, by extension, any other allegedly paranormal phenomenon) are "normal unless proven paranormal". He claims that we do not have details, but in many cases that is simply not true. Certain episodes have been investigated in extraordinary depth, and the masses of information we actually have point to the paranormal nature of the apparition. Furthermore, I believe that *no amount of additional detail* would be sufficient to support what he calls a "naturalistic" explanation. And here is where our Canterbury scriptorium comes into play. Let's look at this very interesting case reported by Prof David Fontana (2005):

*The security guard at Canterbury Cathedral, Harry Wales, reported to me that one evening in March 2001 at approximately 11 PM he was doing his rounds outside the main building, in a part of the cathedral complex that leads down to*

*the cloisters. The whole area, including the cloisters, is illuminated by powerful electric lights throughout the night. Outside the gates leading into the cloisters he saw the figure of a monk, in his habits and with his hood pulled over his head. Men in ecclesiastical dress are part and parcel of the life of a cathedral, and Harry Wales assumed the man was a guest staying in one of the cathedral precincts taking an evening stroll. He thought no more of it, but when passing the night security post a few minutes later he mentioned the experience to colleagues. They expressed surprise. Harry was new to the job at the time and unfamiliar with the comings and goings of cathedral personnel, but his more experienced colleagues assured him that there were no monks currently in residence, and the figure therefore was suspicious.*

*Harry quickly returned to where he had seen the monk, only to find that the figure was now the other side of the gate and inside the cloisters. The gate is constructed of heavy iron bars which allow a clear view into the cloisters, but which are too close together to allow access even to domestic animals. As part of his duties Harry had locked the gates earlier in the evening, and he found it was now still locked. His immediate response was to call out through the gate to challenge the monk and demand where he was going. The answer was "the scriptorium". The figure then abruptly disappeared, and it was at this point that Harry realised he had seen an apparition. Harry's colleagues back at the security post were puzzled not only by the experience but by the reference to "the scriptorium" (where monks used to copy the Scriptures) which no longer existed, and the following day one of them took it to the Cathedral archives, where their research revealed that there were no references to its existence after the twelfth century.*

Now I ask you – the reasonable reader: What kind of information would be necessary to disprove the paranormal nature of this episode? And, especially, *how likely* that information may be? Let's follow Prof Fontana's reasoning:

*Could Harry's colleagues have obtained the master key to the cloisters, and disguised one of their members as a monk in order to play a trick on him? Possibly, but tricks only work if the person tricked is subsequently told he has been tricked, and there is general merriment at his expense. Nothing of the kind happened. Harry's colleagues remained as mystified as he, and it seems they have little difficulty in accepting his experience. Most of them confess to having seen or heard inexplicable things for themselves during their nightly rounds, and it is recognised that the Cathedral and its precincts are haunted. I spoke to one of Harry's colleagues who confirmed that Harry's experience was*

*well known among the security staff, and accepted at face value. Nevertheless, could it simply be a tall story told to impress a gullible tourist? Hardly. Tourists are locked out of the Cathedral grounds at night, and I was there as a guest not as a sightseer. After Harry told me the story I went back over it, questioning him closely on each of the details. He never wavered or tried to change any of them, and seemed fully convinced, two years after the event, that he had seen an apparition.*

When I ask how likely any additional information may be I mean the following. It is true, for instance, that we don't know if Harry Wales was taking drugs at the time the episode happened. But how *likely* is it that a security guard goes on active duty having taken LSD (a recreational drug that, apart from anything, had almost disappeared by 2001)? Etcetera. My point is that since a proof that would satisfy the sceptics simply does not exist, for them ghosts are by definition a "natural" phenomenon, explainable within the commonly accepted materialistic worldview. Instead, I am convinced that assuming apparitions to be paranormal unless proven normal provides a much, much better fit for the available evidence.

So, as the "lack of information" theory seems to me rather weak, let's look at the second line of defence by the sceptics. R.T. Carrol goes on saying:

*We must rely on anecdotal evidence, which is always incomplete and selective, and which is often passed on by interested, inexperienced, superstitious parties who are ignorant of basic physical laws.*

Although it is not true that we *always* have to rely on anecdotal evidence (I will expand on this in a later chapter on ghost hunting), I will agree that the vast majority of the evidence we have from apparitions is anecdotal in nature. Therefore, the weight of such evidence is directly proportional to the credibility of the witnesses. And here Dr Carrol commits what I see as a serious intellectual crime of arrogance, pompousness and – especially – sheer ignorance.

First of all, he talks about *interested parties*. The assumption he makes is that people report having seen a ghost because they stand to gain something from doing so. This, again, is simply not true. Let's look at what the real scholars have to say about it. Discussing paranormal experiences, Ralph W. Hood (2009) writes:

*Several studies have focussed upon the communication patterns of persons who have such experiences, noting that people do not talk about their experiences with others. [...] The failure to communicate these experiences starts in childhood. This may well account for the persistence of the belief that such experiences are uncommon. The irony is that at least one third of the population claims to have such experiences, but few people talk about them publicly.*

So, the experts who have actually studied the phenomenon tell us that people who see a ghost *do not want to talk about it*. This is also a common experience of any of us with an interest in the paranormal: people are afraid to speak. They believe they will be taken for delusional, gullible, easily impressionable. They think they will be looked down upon, even marginalised. It is only when they understand that you are open and non-judgemental that stories start pouring out. It is amazing to see how practically every other person has a bizarre, puzzling, apparently inexplicable story to tell. What evidence – scientific or otherwise – has Dr Carrol, to be able to say that witnesses are *interested*?

Secondly, he speaks about *inexperienced, superstitious parties who are ignorant of basic physical laws*. Again, an unequivocal, blunt statement based on... nothing. Facts – evidence, Dr Carrol – say otherwise. The most extensive systematic study, The Unusual Events Survey, representing a general sample of Americans, was conducted for the Bigelow Holding Corporation (1992). According to the results, 11 percent of those polled reported they had “seen a ghost”. From the collection of almost 6,000 people, pollsters categorised participants according to their similarities and discovered that the “Influential Americans” group reported the greatest number of afterlife encounters. Influential Americans, according to the research authors, are trendsetter, community

leaders, committee members, and government advocates. They are socially active, college graduates, middle-aged, wealthier than the norm, and married with children. These findings supported and extended the surveys conducted during the 1980s, which determined that highly educated individuals were more likely to experience, and believe in, an afterlife. Is this, dear reader, your understanding of *inexperienced, superstitious parties who are ignorant of basic physical laws*? It certainly isn't mine. Prof Walter Prince famously said:

*I have noticed that if a small group of intelligent people, not supposed to be impressed by psychic research, get together and such matters are mentioned, and all feel that they are in safe and sane company, usually from a third to a half of them begin to relate exceptions. That is to say, each opens a little residual closet and takes out some incident which happened to them or to some member of their family, or to some friend whom they trust and which they think odd and extremely puzzling.*

Now, let's leave Dr Carrol to his speculations and look at other common explanations for ghost sightings. A very popular one amongst sceptics is *misperception*. This is a very well documented phenomenon that has to do with the way our brain processes information. In order to give us a real time view of the world, our brains do not have time to examine everything in a scene in detail. Instead, our brains take short cuts, to speed processing. We examine the edges and corners of an object, for instance, rather than the whole thing, to decide what it is. The rest is frequently filled in from our visual memory. For the phenomenon of misperception to occur, therefore, at least some form of perception must be there – an object, for instance, which is only vaguely perceived. The more vague the object looks, the more memory is used to 'fill in the gaps'. The sceptical explanation goes like this (ASSAP, 2008):

*Consider, for instance, if you saw a shadow in a dark room, your brain might not have sufficient information to work out what it is. So it might decide it is a human figure. Your long term memory may then add 'details' to the sighting that you can't really see, like limbs or clothes,*

*because of expectation. Your brain knows, from experience, that humans generally have limbs and clothes, so it inserts such 'details', even though your eyes can't see them. Because seeing a strange figure in a dark place can be a disturbing experience, psychological suggestion may come into play making you think it might be a ghost. If the figure doesn't move, as it might not if it is a shadow with a mundane cause, this strange 'behaviour' may reinforce the idea that it is not an ordinary human at all but a ghost.*

Interesting. Let's see. *A shadow in a dark room.* Haven't we learned that about two thirds of apparitions are perceived during daytime or in full electric light? *Seeing a strange figure in a dark place can be a disturbing experience.* Haven't we learned that only six percent of apparitions are considered bad or frightening? *The figure doesn't move, as it might not if it is a shadow with a mundane cause.* Let's look at this brief report (Tyrell, 1970), and see how that would fit the "standing figure" bit:

*On opening the door I saw no one; but on going a few steps along the passage, I saw the figure of a tall lady, dressed in black, standing at the head of the stairs. After a few moments she descended the stairs, and I followed for a short distance, feeling curious what it could be.*

Not a very good fit, I would say. We could go on and on, citing collectively perceived apparitions, apparitions who interact at length with the perceiver, apparitions who convey information unknown to the perceiver, which is later checked and found to be true. We will discuss all this in later chapters. For the moment, suffice to say that whilst misperception can certainly account for a large number of apparitional experiences (especially, as I previously said, for those in a haunting setting), proposing it as a blanket explanation for all ghost sightings merely shows ignorance of the available evidence. *Facts* do not support misperception as one-size-fits-all explanation.

From misperception, let's now move to hallucinations, possibly the most common "normal" explanation for apparitions. So

common, in fact, to be almost a “knee jerk reflex”. Technically a hallucination is described as a perception in the absence of external stimulus that has qualities of real perception. Hallucinations are vivid, substantial, and located in external objective space. People see, hear or touch things which are simply not there. If you go by the assumption that ghosts are not there because they *cannot* be there – they don’t exist –, then hallucinations certainly provide an excellent explanation. The critique of this idea will require a considerable effort of synthesis on my part, and quite a bit of concentration on yours.

First of all, we have to look at some facts about hallucinations. The literature about such experiences is vast, and the circumstances under which they occur are enormously varied. Hallucinations are reported, for example, in connection with a wide variety of psychotropic drugs or in alcohol- or disease-induced delirium. They can occur spontaneously in the drowsy states which occur just before falling asleep or just before awakening; they commonly occur in medical situations such as migraine; and they can occur, especially in auditory form, in connection with psychiatric illnesses such as schizophrenia. Hallucinations are broadly divided into two categories: physiological (those produced, for instance, by intoxication or disease) and psychological (those allegedly produced by a particular state of mind). The latter is used as a blanket explanation, for example, for the fact that so many elderly bereaved experience some form of contact with their recently deceased spouse: the stress of the loss “tricks” the mind into imagining things.

The relationship between hallucinations and apparitions is admittedly a tough nut to crack. First of all, we have to be very selective in choosing the exact kind of experiences that we want to use to make a comparison. We begin by looking at the results of a large survey (over 13,000 people) of the general population in the UK, Germany and Italy (Ohayon, 2000):

1) Overall, 38.7% of the sample reported hallucinatory experiences. On the face of it, this is an extraordinary result: well over one third of the general population reports hallucinations! If this is the case, then we have a ready explanation – *all* apparitions are in fact hallucinations. Hang on a minute, though, and consider the following.

2) In over 30 percent of the cases reported by the survey participants, these hallucinations occurred at sleep onset and/or upon awakening. This is a very common experience: I have had this myself several times, and I believe most of my readers would have too. Interestingly, 30 percent is also roughly the number of cases of apparitions reported just before or just after sleep. In our being very selective, then, let's *not* consider any apparition that occurs in these particular states. Let's just assume that if somebody sees a ghost as he or she is falling asleep, there's nothing paranormal about it – it's just what we call "hypnagogic imagery". Same goes with the many reports connected with sleep paralysis. We will therefore stick to the two thirds of apparitions (and of hallucinations) which occur during waking state. Let's see what the survey has to say:

3) During the daytime visual and auditory hallucinations were strongly related to a psychotic pathology, to anxiety and with current use of drugs.

Aha. Now, please ask yourself – If all waking-state apparitions were in fact hallucinations, why should so many people *without* any history of psychiatric disease or drugs or alcohol use report them? The direct link between apparitions and hallucinations already begins to crumble. Moreover – whilst most drugs- and disease-induced hallucinations are fleeting, bizarre, illogical, distorted, why do so many people who report apparitions see... people? And, not any people – deceased people? And, in many cases, deceased people whom the perceivers *didn't know had died at the time of the apparition?*



And here, enter yet another sceptical line of defence: experiencers of apparitions see dead people because *they want* to see dead people. This seems to make a lot of sense: deeply stressed by the loss of a loved one, a bereaved person unconsciously uses misperception, fantasy and memories and conjures up the hallucinatory experience of an apparition. Much as it seems to make sense, however, this explanation does not account for *a lot* of evidence. First of all, it does not account for the innumerable cases of apparitions reported by people who are *not* bereaved or under any kind of particular stress. Secondly, it does not account for the cases in which, as we have just said, an apparition is experienced of a person the perceivers think is alive. Lastly, and most importantly, if all apparitions were wish-fulfilling hallucinations, you would expect experiencers to exclusively see their deceased loved ones. This is clearly *not* the case:

Study	Cases	Close family	Distant family	Friends	Strangers
Persinger (1974)	193	47	22	18	3
Osis & Haraldsson (1977)	418	61	12	7	21
Haraldsson (1988)	127	53	-	10	11
Arcangel (2005)	596	59	11	-	13
<b>Average percentage</b>		<b>55</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>15</b>

My own conclusions, which I offer to you as a basis for your own reflections, go as follows:

- For the reasons we have briefly reviewed above, I believe that hallucinations cannot be used as a blanket explanation for apparitions. In fact, I don't even think that hallucinations as we commonly understand them can explain away the *majority* of apparitional experiences. Like in the case of misperception, hallucinations fail to account not only for a few isolated cases, but

for thousands upon thousands of cases as reported in the literature.

- The catch, however, is in the qualifier “hallucinations *as we commonly understand them*”. By saying that hallucinations do not account for many apparitions, I am not necessarily saying that those who experience apparitions experience something material which is actually there, in the outside world. I am not claiming that ghosts necessarily have substance. Intriguingly, we have some evidence that some ghosts may actually have substance – meaning that they may actually be phenomena in the physical world – and we will look at this in a later chapter. However, I believe that a much more promising line of thought has it that ghosts are phenomena of *consciousness*. During apparitions (exactly as it is the case during deathbed visions, near-death experiences, spontaneous afterlife communication and many other altered states of consciousness), our perception momentarily expands and allows us to perceive aspects of a *nonmaterial* world that surrounds us but which we cannot normally see/hear/touch because of the limitations of our physical body. This may well be the spirit world discarnate personalities are understood to inhabit after the demise of the body. If this were the case, apparitions *would be* hallucinations as we commonly understand them: seeing or hearing things which are not there. Not there materially, in the physical world which constitutes our everyday reality, and yet there in their own reality. This may seem like a far-fetched line of thinking, but in fact it may apply to non-apparitional hallucinations as well. There is a small but growing number of psychologists, psychiatrists and neuroscientists who openly consider the hypothesis that some of what we consider “classical” hallucinations may actually be perceptions of other dimensions of reality. Taking certain drugs, for instance, may “open the doors of perception” and allow the user to peek into other realms. Edward F. Kelly (2007), Research Professor in the Department of Psychiatric Medicine at the University of Virginia, writes, “These studies, and the ones reported in more recent years, call into serious question the long-

prevailing assumption that hallucinations are only pathological in origin.”

Now, to conclude this chapter, I would like to substantially lighten the tone and give you, my reader, a little respite. I do so by going back to Canterbury cathedral and look at a couple of stories I found online. Please take them for what they are – little more than light hearted entertainment. The first story is reported by writer Andrew Green (2010) and provides another take on the ghost of the monk who allegedly haunts the cathedral’s cloisters.

*Another ghost is that of an unknown monk seen by several visitors in the last few years, one of whom is Rhona Martin the prize-winning novelist. When a member of the choir school attached to the cathedral, she was walking round the cloisters one evening and saw the figure of the man approaching her, silently with his head bowed in contemplation or prayer. She merely glanced at him, thinking he was a member of the religious orders who carry out pilgrimage to the holy spot, and passed by. But, as the figure drew level, she suddenly felt extremely cold and turning to see the monk suddenly vanish. “It didn’t frighten me at all” she said, “it just puzzled me. But I heard later that other people had seen the monk and became more interested in the whole field of the paranormal”.*

The second story comes from an unnamed writer on the website [Kentresources.co.uk](http://Kentresources.co.uk) and tells the popular tale of “Nell Cook”, buried alive in punishment for murder and whose ghost is said to haunt the cathedral’s Dark Entry. This is the modern take of an older story, appeared in 1837 as part of *The Ingoldsby Legends*, a collection of myths, legends, ghost stories and poetry by R. H. Barham.

*At the time of Henry VIII there was a Friar who lived near to the Dark Entry in the Cathedral Precincts. The Friar, in rank was supposedly a Canon, had a servant by the name of Ellen Bean. For some reason, and probably to amuse himself, he always called her Nell, or Nelly, Cook. I too shall call her Nell as that’s the way the story’s told.*

*Nell was quite a pretty girl although her real claim to fame was that she was a genius in the kitchen. So much so, that there was a great deal of dissension*

*among the other clerics of the Priory of St. Saviour in that it was considered that the Canon lived too well. None of this bothered Nell who was, of course, gainfully employed at a place of work that she enjoyed. However, this peace was to be disrupted when one day a rather attractive and brash young lady came to stay with the Canon.*

*The Canon stated that this was his niece and that as her Father had been called away on business overseas, it was his Christian duty to take care of the young lady. However, from the time the 'niece' walked into the house, things changed. There were sumptuous meals required every night with lots of wine followed by the couple singing and dancing to music not fit for a cleric. If this was not enough to arouse the suspicions of young Nell, the fact that the young lady's bed did not appear to have been slept in since her arrival, did. It seemed that Nell, unbeknown to him, had 'a bit of a thing' for the Canon.*

*Carefully, one evening, Nell placed a poker and a pair of tongs in the young lady's bed. When she next checked the bed they had not moved from where she left them. As a result, the next night, Nell crept up to have a peep through the keyhole of the Canon's private chamber. What she saw did not amuse her. She decided upon her only course of action and went out the next day to purchase the ingredients for a "Warden Pie" for the couple that night. The Pie was a particular favourite with the Canon but this time Nell added an additional item to the Pie.*

*The morning after, the Canon did not arrive at the Priory and eventually the monks came to his house to find both the Canon and his young lady poisoned as a result of eating the Pie. What a scandal there would be if this was found out! A midnight service was held in the Cathedral by the monks and the Canon and his 'niece' were laid to rest under a flag stone in the nave.*

*Nothing was heard of Nell again until one day, three Masons were called to repair a flagstone that had become loose in the Dark Entry. When they lifted the stone, what should they find but a skeleton huddled in the corner of a pit dug under the stone. Beside the wretched find was a small piece of the crust of a "Warden Pie"!*

*Within a year of making this grisly discovery, all three of the Masons were dead. Two of them were hung for the murder of the third. It was the death of these three unfortunate men that started the legend of Nell Cook. However, there have been others since that have supposedly seen the ghost and suffered the same fate.*

*Consequently, no local person is likely to tempt fate by walking through the Dark Entry late on a Friday night. For whoever sees the ghost of Nell Cook will die within the year!*

# Crisis apparitions

THE NAME "SAN SIRO" may well mean nothing to an American reader. Unless, that is, he or she is a soccer fan – football, as we would say in the old continent. In Europe, where much of the population has some sort of association with the beautiful game, the name San Siro rhymes with football aristocracy. On the outskirts of Milan, Italy, it is the stadium home to two of the games' most renowned teams. In fact, one of the two – AC Milan – happens to be the team which has won the most international titles in the history of football. And, oddly enough, it is from San Siro that we begin our exploration of so called crisis apparitions.

Rather than providing a technical explanation of the term, I find it much better to let – of all people – my Italian brother in law, Bruno, take us back to the late 1960s with a story he told me shortly before I wrote this chapter. I say "of all people" because Bruno embodies the very essence of the person you would never expect to hear a spooky story from. Now in his early seventies, Bruno exudes appeal: gifted with good looks and an in-born elegance, he is the most gregarious, warm, easy-to-love person you can think of. Part of his charm lies in his "light touch" approach to life. He will talk about anything, from cars to travels and – especially – his two great passions, football and golf, but would shy away with a smile from anything too serious or potentially controversial.

Me having lived abroad for most of my adult life, I have seen very little of him for a long time – once per year, perhaps, or even every two years, and always during those extended family gatherings which – as we all know – are really not made for tackling serious subjects. I was therefore very surprised when he came up with this very personal and rather intriguing account.

It was one Sunday afternoon in May 1969 and AC Milan was playing a crucial match against Fiorentina (Milan ended up at the third place in the Italian league that year, therefore securing participation in the following year's Champions' League). A diehard supporter, Bruno was in San Siro, like he did for all the team's home games. The atmosphere was red hot: maybe seventy thousand supporters screaming at the top of their lungs, with little else to think or care about than what was happening on the pitch. And yet, towards the middle of the second half, Bruno has a piercing thought: "I have to go home, because Dad has died". Right away, he leaves the stadium and the game he loves so much, jumps on his Honda motorcycle and rides home. Sure enough, his Dad had suddenly and unexpectedly died of a heart attack, at the exact same time when Bruno had that thought at the football game.

Technically, this episode does not fully qualify as a crisis apparition. Bruno's is an interesting story, one which is difficult to explain away as coincidence, fantasy or hallucination, but it is not a real apparition – there was no ghost. Crisis apparitions, on the contrary, are fully-blown apparitions: people do see ghosts, and often talk to them. And there's a crucial, most intriguing catch: these ghosts appear at the moment the person dies, or shortly thereafter, when the experiencer didn't know the person had died. The next couple of stories, carried by a CNN feature article (Cable News Network, 2011), are typical examples of this kind of events, which have been told in almost exactly the same terms by experiencers all throughout human history.

The first story involves Nina De Santo, a New Jersey hairdresser who was about to close her hair salon one winter's night when she saw a male figure standing outside the shop's glass front door. It was Michael. He was a soft-spoken customer who'd been going through a brutal patch in his life. His wife had divorced him after having an affair with his stepbrother, and he had lost custody of his boy and girl in the ensuing battle. He was emotionally shattered, but De Santo had tried to help. She'd listened to his

problems, given him pep talks, taken him out for drinks. When De Santo opened the door that Saturday night, Michael was smiling. "Nina, I can't stay long," he said, pausing in the doorway. "I just wanted to stop by and say thank you for everything."

They chatted a bit more before Michael left and De Santo went home. On Sunday she received a strange call from a salon employee. Michael's body had been found the previous morning – at least nine hours before she talked to him at her shop. He had committed suicide. If Michael was dead, who, or what, did she talk to that night? "It was very bizarre," she said of the 2001 encounter. "I went through a period of disbelief. How can you tell someone that you saw this man, solid as ever, walk in and talk to you, but he's dead?"

Later, De Santo found a name for what happened that night: crisis apparition. She stumbled onto the term while reading about paranormal activities after the incident. According to paranormal investigators, a crisis apparition is the spirit of a recently deceased person who visits someone they had a close emotional connection with, usually to say goodbye.

And here is the second story, as reported by CNN.

*Simma Lieberman said she's experienced that ominous feeling and has never forgotten it – though it took place more than 40 years ago. Today, Lieberman is a workplace diversity consultant based in Albany, California. In the late 1960s though, she was a young woman in love. Her boyfriend, Johnny, was a mellow hippie "who loved everybody", a guy so nice that friends called him a pushover, she said. She loved Johnny, and they purchased an apartment together and decided to marry.*

*Then one night, while Lieberman was at her mother's home in the Bronx, the phone rang and she answered. Johnny was on the line, sounding rushed and far away. Static crackled. "I just want you to know that I love you, and I'll never be mean to anybody again," he said. There was more static, and then the line went dead. Lieberman was left with just a dial tone. She tried to call him back to no avail. When she awoke the next morning, an unsettled feeling came over*



*her. She said it's hard to put into words, but she could no longer feel Johnny's presence. Then she found out why. "Several hours later, I got a call from his mother who told me he had been murdered the night before," she said. Johnny was shot in the head as he sat in a car that night. Lieberman thinks Johnny somehow contacted her after his death – a crisis apparition reaching out not through a vision or a whiff of perfume, but across telephone lines.*

*She's sorted through the alternatives over the years. Could he have called before or during his murder? Lieberman doesn't think so. This was the era before cell phones. She said the murderer wasn't likely to let him use a pay phone, and he couldn't have called after he was shot because he died instantly. Only years later, when she read an article about other static-filled calls people claimed to have received from beyond the grave, did it make sense, she said.*

Taken at face value, these stories are quite compelling. Let's quickly review the common theories used to explain away apparitions, and see if they fit these cases. In the last case, for example, Simma Lieberman would have had to "misperceive" the telephone ringing, and then the voice of her partner saying something completely out of context. This is clearly laughable. In theory, she could have hallucinated the entire experience. We don't know if she had a history of hallucinations, or if she was taking drugs at the moment she had the phone conversation. If she was, however, she was lucid enough to put the phone down when the line went dead and try to call the partner again. The real strength of the crisis apparition cases, however, is that they convey *veridical* information – information which is unknown by the perceiver at the moment of the apparition, and which then turns out to be true. In this case, like in the cases of Bruno in San Siro and Nina De Santo in New Jersey, that information concerns the death of the person appearing. You have to ask yourself – If these people were hallucinating, how likely it would be that, instead of the bizarre and illogical perceptions typical of hallucinations, they a) perceived a person; b) perceived him at almost the exact moment of his death; c) received veridical information unknown at the moment of the apparition; and d) in two cases had a fragment of a perfectly logical conversation? In my own assessment, very, very unlikely.

However, we are serious about these issues and we want to try to understand not based on impressions (how unlikely all that *seems* to us), but rather, as much as possible, based on hard data. Therefore, I have to ask again for an effort of concentration on your part, as we look into the past and see how the pioneers of psychical research addressed this particular problem already at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. You will remember that in 1889 the Society for Psychical Research in Britain carried out a large-scale survey called *Census of Hallucinations*, gathering data from 17,000 persons about unusual experiences. Concerning the particular aspect we are discussing now, C. D. Broad (2013) writes:

*For the purpose of this enquiry the committee thought it best to confine their attention to the deaths, because there is a perfectly definite event, which happens once and only once to every individual and is officially ascertained and recorded. We begin, then, by noting their definition of a "death-coincidence". This is defined as a case which fulfils the following three conditions. (i) A certain person, A, had a waking hallucination which he recognized at the time, has an appearance of a certain person, B. (ii) Within a period between 12 hours before and 12 hours after this experience of A's, B did in fact die. (iii) At the time A did not know of B's death by normal means, and had no normal reason to expect it. In the census returns there were 80 first-hand reports of death-coincidences, as defined above.*

In the book, Broad goes on at length explaining in detail the procedure employed by the committee overseeing the Census to select only those cases of death-coincidences that would satisfy very strict criteria of genuineness. He then writes:

*When all these collections have been made, and all precautions have been taken, the investigators considered that there remained at least 32 undoubtedly genuine death-coincidences out of the 80 originally reported. Now the total number of reported cases of a waking visual hallucination, in which the appearance of a certain person was ostensibly seen and recognised at the time was 381. In order to compare this with the number of death-coincidences we must treat it in the same way, i.e. we must eliminate reported hallucinations [which do not meet strict criteria]. That reduces the number of reported cases to 322.*

This would give a ratio of one death-coincidence every ten apparition. However - and here things become a little complicated indeed - the investigators realised that, unless some exceptional event occurred such as the death of the person who appeared, hallucinations are likely to be forgotten (you must remember that the survey looked at hallucinations happened during the previous *thirty years!*). With complex calculations, they estimated that a more realistic number of a “waking visual hallucination, in which the appearance of a certain person was ostensibly seen and recognised at the time” was just over two thousand.

We therefore have a conservative estimate of 2,093 apparitions (most of which were forgotten), of which 32 met the strict definition of crisis-apparition (and therefore most likely remembered). This is one case in 63. Now, look at the following with attention:

*Since the chance of a person, chosen at random from the population, who was alive at a given date in the period under consideration, been dead within 365 days was 19 in 1,000, it is plain that the chance of his being dead within 24-hours of a given date is 19 in 365,000. That is roughly one in 19,000. So, if death-coincidences be purely fortuitous concurrences of two events, it is reasonable to conjecture that about one in 19,000 of such hallucinations as we have been considering would be associated within 24 hours with the death of the person to whom the hallucination refers.*

Hello? Do you read me? If the phenomenon was ruled by pure chance, about one apparition in 19,000 would be of a person who had died within a 24 hour period before or after the apparition. Reality says one in 63. If you eliminate the correction for likely forgotten apparitions, this is a staggering *one in ten!*

All this complex analysis on real data suggests that our impression is indeed right: there *is* an extraordinarily strong link between the death of a person and this person “appearing” to another person in an ostensibly paranormal manner. There *is* a

large quantity of well-documented cases in which the crisis apparition conveys information (the death of the person appearing) which is both *veridical* and *unknown* to the percipient at the time the apparition is experienced. Imagine that Duke University's Prof Hornell Hart (1956) and his collaborators analysed a collection of 165 previously published cases in which one of the criteria for inclusion was a written or oral report made of the experience, or action taken because of the experience, *before* the corresponding event was learnt about normally. And our friends the sceptics can only talk about "unsubstantiated anecdotes" ...

These in themselves are enormously interesting finds. Before we look at more and equally interesting data, let's consider another good example of a crisis apparition, as given by Dr Sally Rhine Feather and author Michael Schmicker (2005) in their book *The Gift*:

*A woman and her fifteen-year-old daughter had recently moved to California from their previous home in Washington D.C., where they had left the woman's father very ill. One day not long after moving, they entered the dining room, and to the woman's great surprise, there stood her father. "Why Dad, when did you get here?" she exclaimed. At that point, her daughter turned around to look, and she, too, saw the figure of her grandfather, his hand upraised in a gesture of greeting or perhaps blessing, but he slowly faded away, and they both suddenly realized that he was not really in California in their house. Shortly afterward, they received the news that he had died.*

In addition to representing a crisis apparition, this case has three other interesting aspects to it. First, the apparition was apparently so real looking to the woman that she actually mistook it for her real father. This, as we already noted, goes against the folklore-based view that apparitions are often only misty, translucent outlines. Second, it is a case where the apparition was collectively perceived, meaning that it was witnessed by more than one person. Third, the apparition of the man seemed to acknowledge the presence of his daughter and granddaughter, suggesting that it had some degree of intelligent awareness. We will come back to

the all-important subjects of collective apparitions and the awareness/intentionality on the part of the ghost in the next two chapters. Now, let's look at some very intriguing details that emerge from the analysis of relatively large samples. Prof Haraldsson (2012) writes:

*The number of male agents reported exceeded the number of females [he calls the person appearing an "agent"]; 63 males compared to 19 females were identified as agents. This sex difference was evident for male as well as female percipients, as 77 percent of each sex reported contact with males but only 23 percent reported contact with female agents. Another prominent feature of the agents was how many (whose cause of death was known) had suffered violent deaths, i.e., 23 percent with twelve accidents, three suicides, and one homicide. This percentage far exceeds the 8 percent incidence of violent deaths in the general population in Iceland. This finding is comparable to the findings of the early British researchers who found that 27.5 percent of the agents had died violently. The high percentage of agents who suffered violent deaths is in line with a popular belief found in many countries that persons suffering violent deaths tend more frequently than those dying from disease to be involved in apparitional experiences. Psychical research has also shown that alleged deceased communicators through spiritistic mediums have frequently died violently, and children claiming memories of a past life also frequently report having died by accident, murder, or suicide. The predominance of male figures is to some extent explained by the fact that 83 percent of the agents who died violent deaths were males.*

So, does the way one dies have an impact on the likelihood that one will show up as an apparition? Prof Haraldsson's data seem to suggest so. Very interestingly, this is not at all a new idea, but to fully appreciate this you have to see it in a broader context.

In our modern, Western, secularised societies, the thought of death is simply banished: death recedes further and further from day-to-day human experience. Humans are no longer constantly faced with death, and when they do confront death, it is usually presented in a sanitized form, with the sting of its horror far removed from everyday reality. We witness death through the mass media, but in heavily filtered fashion. When a death is anticipated, the individual is sent to a hospital, and his or her

dying is left to the care of professionals. Our fast-paced, ever-so-busy, overachieving lifestyle is seen by many as a defence – a sort of intoxication – against a powerful fear of death which seems to affect even many people of religious faith. The idea that one should prepare for death, “make friends with death” is simply unthinkable.

What a shame, I would say. Wisdom from ancient traditions had it otherwise. For our ancestors, the idea of an afterlife – the fact that consciousness and personality go on existing after the death of the physical body – was accepted as a fact. And, they appreciated a key feature of the survival process: the state of mind a person finds himself or herself in at the moment of death has a major impact on the way he or she is going to experience life in the spirit world, at least at the beginning. In medieval Christianity, for instance, the book *Ars Bene Moriendi* (*The Art of Dying Well*) was intended as a potent reminder of the inevitability of death and, like other books of the dead, was designed to be studied by the living as well as to be read to the dying. It taught that life is in part a preparation for death and that the quality of this preparation helps determine how well one manages the transition into the next world. The book also describes the challenges encountered as the consciousness slips from one world to the next. Described as “attacks of Satan”, these challenges were seen as the devil’s attempts to divert the soul from its path to heaven. They included a weakening of faith, despair as to the fate of one’s soul, pride in one’s earthly achievements, impatience at one’s physical suffering, attachment to one’s material possessions, concentration upon one’s sins instead of prayer for forgiveness, and grievances over perceived worldly injustices. In a similar way, the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* describes in detail the traditional Tibetan Buddhist method of preparing oneself to navigate the dying process in a calm and aware state. It is thought that such preparation for death gives the dying person the greatest opportunity to maximize the potential for enlightenment while dying and to attain a positive rebirth so that one may continue to work towards enlightenment in future lives.

If you make abstraction from the Christian or Buddhist religious imprint, it is easy to see the deep underlying wisdom, so well captured by the medieval prayer that said "Deliver us, God, from a sudden death". Dying suddenly, unprepared, in the wrong state of mind means not being able to soar towards the higher, more refined, less material planes of existence that await us after we have shed our physical body. It means remaining somehow closer – at least for a certain time – to the physical realm we have left behind. And, as suggested by Prof Haraldsson's data, appearing as a ghost to the living.

# Pitfalls

IF YOU HAVE BEEN READING this book this far, you may by now be under the impression that I am doing a “selling job” on the idea that all evidence from apparitions is valid and that all ghost stories indicate that human personality survives physical death. I am sorry if I gave you such an impression, for this is not what I personally believe. Yes, as we have discussed, I do believe that the common explanations (misperception, hallucinations, fantasies based on wishful thinking, exaggerations of minor events fuelled by ignorance and superstition) do not account for much of the evidence we have. However, I also believe that we must be extremely cautious and continuously watch out for the cases – and there are many – that in fact disprove what may appear to an open-minded, unprejudiced observer as the only logical explanations for the facts – i.e. that we survive physical death.

In the introduction to this book I described you – my “ideal” reader – as somebody who, amongst other things, is not available to believe something just because that something is a nice idea, something that you like, that you would like to be true. I hope that, whilst open-minded, you are also inquisitive and critical and do not accept what seems to be convincing evidence at face value. Why? Because in this series of books we are discussing extremely important things – as I already said, the single most important question there is to ask. Do you want to reach your conclusions based on impressions? On what *seems* to be true? No, I hope that you want your answer to be based on a thorough, critical analysis of *all* the evidence – the masses of evidence in support of the survival hypothesis, and the evidence which may seem very convincing, but for which there is in fact a normal explanation. We find examples of this kind of evidence in all fields of psychical research: potential pitfalls into which we definitely don’t want to



fall! Obviously, we find plenty such examples in the field of apparitions.

We have just seen how crisis apparitions are important as the ghost, by simply appearing, conveys veridical information. "I am dead" he or she says by showing up. That is a very important piece of information, because in many cases the percipient had no means of learning about it by normal means, but it's also very simple. It goes without saying that if, during the apparition, the ghost would convey some additional piece of information unknown to the percipient and later found to be true, that would be extremely evidential. And, yes, a number of well documented such cases can be found in literature. In his book *Evidence for Life after Death: A Casebook for the Tough Minded*, author A.S. Berger (1988) presents a good selection. Perhaps the most frequently written about case is known as the Chaffin Will, which was originally published in the *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research*. This is a perfect example of "veridical apparition". It is also a perfect example of the kind of pitfalls I was talking about. Let's look at the facts, first.

On September 7, 1921, James Chaffin of Davie County, North Carolina, died as the result of a fall. A farmer, Chaffin was survived by his widow and four sons, but the will that he had had duly attested by two witnesses on November 16, 1905, left all of his property to the third son, Marshall.

One night in the latter part of June 1925, four years after James Chaffin's death, James Pinkney Chaffin, the farmer's second son, saw the spirit figure of the deceased standing at his bedside and heard the ghost tell of another will. According to the son, his father had appeared dressed as he often had in life. "You will find the will in my overcoat pocket," the spirit figure said, taking hold of the garment and pulling it back.

The next morning James Pinkney Chaffin arose convinced he had seen and heard his father and that the spirit had visited him for

the purpose of correcting some error. His father's black overcoat had been passed on to John Chaffin, so James travelled to Yadkin County to examine the pocket to which the spirit had made reference. The two brothers found that the lining of the inside pocket had been sewn together, and when they cut the stitches, they found a roll of paper that bore the message: "Read the 27th chapter of Genesis in my daddie's [sic] Old Bible."

James Pinkney was then convinced that the ghost had spoken truthfully, and he brought witnesses with him to the home of his mother where, after some search, they located the dilapidated old Bible in the top drawer of a dresser in an upstairs room. One of the witnesses found the will in a pocket that had been formed by folding two of the Bible's pages together. The new will had been made by James Chaffin on January 16, 1919, 14 years after the first will. In this testament, the farmer stated that he desired his property to be divided equally among his four sons with the admonition that they provide for their mother as long as she lived.

Although the second will had not been attested, it would, under North Carolina law, be considered valid because it had been written throughout in James Chaffin's own handwriting. All that remained was to present sufficient evidence that the hand that had written the second will was, without doubt, that of the deceased. Marshall Chaffin, the sole beneficiary under the conditions of the old will, had passed away within a year of his father, nearly four years before the spirit of James Chaffin had appeared to his second son, James Pinkney Chaffin. Marshall's widow and son prepared to contest the validity of the second will, and the residents of the county began to look forward to a long and bitter court battle between members of the Chaffin family. The scandal mongers were immensely disappointed when 10 witnesses arrived in the courtroom prepared to give evidence that the second will was in James Chaffin's handwriting. After seeing the will, Marshall Chaffin's wife and son immediately withdrew their opposition. It seemed evident that they, too, believed the will had been written in the hand of the testator.

James Pinkney Chaffin later told an investigator for the Journal of the Society for Psychical Research that his father had appeared to him before the trial and told him that the lawsuit would be terminated in such a manner. "Many of my friends do not believe it is possible for the living to hold communication with the dead," James Pinkney Chaffin said, "but I am convinced that my father actually appeared to me on these several occasions and I shall believe it to the day of my death."

It seems strange that James Chaffin should have kept the second will secret, especially in view of the subsequent claim that his disturbed spirit came back from beyond the grave to right the wrong that had been done to his widow and three disinherited sons. Perhaps the farmer had intended some sort of deathbed revelation and had these plans go unrealized when his life was cut short by accident.

At the time, Society for Psychical Research investigators were unable to establish any kind of case for a subconscious knowledge of the will in the old Bible or of the message in the coat pocket. Fraud, they considered, must be ruled out because of the ease in which 10 reliable witnesses, well-acquainted with James Chaffin's handwriting, could be summoned to testify to the authenticity of the handwriting in the will. Charges of a fake will would seem to be further negated by the immediate withdrawal from the contest of Marshall Chaffin's widow and son once they were allowed to examine the document. Evidently they, too, recognized the handwriting of the elder Chaffin.

The Journal's summation of the strange case of James Chaffin's will stated the difficulty in attempting to explain the case along normal lines. For those willing to accept a supernormal explanation of the event, it should be noted that the Chaffin case is of a comparatively infrequent type, in which more than one of the witness's senses is affected by the spirit. J. P. Chaffin both saw his father's spirit and heard him speak. The auditory information

provided by the spirit was not strictly accurate, for what was in the overcoat pocket was not the second will, but a clue to its whereabouts. But the practical result was the same.

Now - based on this information, what else can be said? Does this not look like a watertight example of a veridical apparition? We have witnesses, court proceedings, experts' investigations - the lot. Based on the apparent overwhelming strength of the evidence, this case was cited, time and again, as one of the most evidential in support of the survival hypothesis. Until, that is, April 2013, when, writing in the very same *Journal of the Society for Psychological Research*, Robert Charman (2013) presented things under a different light.

From the brief rendition above, it is clear that the entire case rests on the testimony of the ten witnesses and of Marshall Chaffin's wife and son, who all vouched for the fact that the second will was indeed written and signed by the deceased. Charman correctly notes that Susie Chaffin's withdrawal of her challenge in the face of such united opinion did *not* prove the authenticity, nor did the verdict of the jury, as this had become a matter of legal formality once she had withdrawn her challenge. It was only in 2004 that the matter was definitively settled. Mary Roach, an investigative reporter and journalist, searched through the records of Davie County's Superior Court and was able to see both wills. To test the authenticity of the signatures on the second will as compared to the one on the first will, she hired Mr Grant Sperry, President of the Society of Questioned Documents Examiners, who had been an expert witness in over three hundred federal and state cases. Questioned Documents Examination is a forensic discipline concerning the provenance of documents in dispute in a court of law. Both documents were scanned into a computer and loaded in parallel onto the computer screen so that Sperry could compare the signatures side by side and overlay any two sets of letter formations for comparison. The expert's conclusion was unequivocal:

*The signature on the 1919 will showed no evidence of anyone trying to carefully forge Chaffin Senior's signature. Like the will itself, it was written in a more flowing script and the 1919 signature is more legible than the 1905 signature. Sperry concludes his analysis by saying "if the signatures on the 1905 will are representative of that particular writer's skill level, and I have no evidence that they are not, then the writer could not have written the signature on the 1919 will." The will, Sperry concluded, was a fake.*

A Pandora's Box of thorny questions remain, however. For instance, the expert also concluded that the second signature – and the second will itself – had *not* been written by James Pinkney. Contrary to what one may expect, the son was not guilty of fraud. If not James, then who? Possibly someone who had witnessed the distress felt by the brothers at their father's rejection of them in favour of Marshall and the fact that he had not changed his mind over the intervening 14 years before his accidental death. That person must have felt a strong desire to secretly rectify this perceived wrong on their behalf. It could have been a brother-in-law or sister-in-law of one of the brothers on their wives or, most likely, a very close family friend and frequent family visit. Isn't it difficult even to imagine such a skilled, silent and uninterested benefactor? And, what about the astonishing sequence of events that led to the discovery of the second will? How could this secret benefactor have arranged for an apparently veridical apparition? How could he or she have managed to secretly stitch a piece of paper into an old suit without being noticed by the family? And placed the forged will into a long forgotten old Bible? In his paper, Charman describes a possible scenario for all that to happen. But I must admit that I find very, very hard to believe...

So – welcome to the real world of psychical research! You have here a classic example of a case that at first seems completely solid and watertight and then seems to completely crumble because its key element of proof fails. But then, again, you consider possible alternative explanations and they seem even less believable than the fact that a ghost conveyed veridical information. One *caveat* remains: do justice to your intelligence

and never stop at first appearances, for they can be very deceiving.

# Collective sightings

ON THE COLD WINTER EVENING of December 29, 1972, Eastern Airlines flight 401 rested quietly on the dimly lit jet parking area outside New York's John F. Kennedy International Airport's Terminal One. The airplane was a new Lockheed L-1011 Tristar, - the pride of Eastern's fleet. The huge *Whisperliners* - as the company used to call these innovative airplanes - were the most comfortable airplanes ever built; boasting eight-foot ceilings, indirect lighting, individual temperature control, music headsets and living room comfort. The outside of the plane was painted white with purple and blue. A chandelier decorated the front of the airplane and there was a stand up, padded bar in the back. Perhaps the most interesting feature was the kitchen, equipped to serve dinner for 324, which was tucked below decks and accessible by two elevators from the main cabin. Does this sound as an advertisement for the Boeing 787, *Dreamliner*, which entered into service in 2010? There you go: very little new under the sun, indeed...

The flight that night was to be in the hands of Captain Robert Albin Loft, a tall and trim 55 year old with thirty-two years of seniority, who ranked fiftieth among the airline's four thousand pilots. The engineer and second officer was Donald Louis Repo, 51 years old who had worked for Eastern Airlines for 25 years, just short of half of his lifetime. The cockpit crew was completed by co-pilot and first officer Albert John Stockstill, but it's on the captain and and second officers that we want to focus our attention.

At 9:20 p.m., word came from the tower that it was Flight 401's turn to take off. Once on the runway, the co-pilot released the brakes, applied thrust and the aircraft rolled forward, gathering speed down the runway for more than a mile. Loft, the Captain,

rested his hands on the thrust levers with all the assurance of a man who had flown for twenty-nine thousand hours. As captain, his was the final authority as to whether to proceed or abort the takeoff. He decided: Go. The white jet inched upward toward a night of stars. One hundred and eighty-five tons of metal, kerosene and humanity was airborne.

The flight was routine until 11:32 p.m., when the flight began its approach into Miami International Airport. The weather in Miami that winter Friday night was the main attraction to Flight 401's passengers. The National Weather Service had recorded the day's high temperature at 1:56 p.m. (and again at 2:53) as a balmy seventy-six degrees. Everybody was looking forward to some respite from the rigours of the Northern climate. In the cockpit, however, the atmosphere had suddenly turned tense. After lowering the gear, first officer Stockstill noticed that the landing gear indicator, a green light identifying that the nose gear is properly locked in the "down" position, did not illuminate. The pilots cycled the landing gear but still failed to get the confirmation light.

Loft, who was working the radio during this leg of the flight, told the tower that they would discontinue their approach to their airport and requested to enter a holding pattern. The approach controller cleared the flight to climb to 2,000 feet (610 m), and then hold west over the Everglades. Second officer Repo was dispatched to the avionics bay beneath the flight deck to confirm via a small porthole if the landing gear was indeed down. Fifty seconds after reaching their assigned altitude, captain Loft instructed first officer Stockstill to put the L-1011 on autopilot. For the next eighty seconds, the plane maintained level flight. Then, it dropped 100 feet (30 m), and then again flew level for two more minutes, after which it began a descent so gradual it could not be perceived by the crew. In the next seventy seconds, the plane lost only 250 feet (76 m), but this was enough to trigger the altitude warning chime located under the engineer's workstation. The engineer had gone below, and there was no



indication by the recorded pilots' voices that they heard the chime. In another fifty seconds, the plane was at half its assigned altitude. As Stockstill started another turn, he noticed the discrepancy. The following conversation was recovered from the flight voice recorder later:

Stockstill: We did something to the altitude.

Loft: What?

Stockstill: We're still at 2,000 feet, right?

Loft: Hey – what's happening here?

Less than 10 seconds after this exchange, flight 401, travelling at 227 miles per hour (365 km/h), hit the ground in the Everglades, North-West of Miami. With the aircraft in mid-turn, the left wingtip hit the surface first, then the left engine and the left landing gear, making three trails through the sawgrass, each five feet wide and more than 100 feet (30 m) long. When the main part of the fuselage hit the ground, it continued to move through the grass and water, breaking up as it went. The entire flight crew becoming preoccupied with a burnt-out landing gear indicator light, and failing to notice the autopilot had inadvertently been disconnected. As a result, the Captain and second officer Repo died, along with two of 10 flight attendants and 97 of 163 passengers.

The reason why I went into some details about this tragic story is that, not long after the crash, the ghosts of Loft and Repo were seen on more than twenty occasions by crew members on other Eastern Tri-Stars, especially those planes which had been fitted with parts salvaged from the Flight 401 wreckage. The apparitions of Loft and Repo were invariably described as being extremely lifelike. They were not only reported by people who had known Loft and Repo, but their ghosts were also

subsequently identified from photographs by people who had not known Loft and Repo. Kevin Williams (2014) writes:

*The strange tales of the ghostly airmen of Flight of 401 circulated in the airline community. An account of the paranormal happenings even appeared in a 1974 US Flight Safety Foundation's newsletter. John G. Fuller, the best-selling author of The Ghost of Flight 401, carried out an exhaustive investigation into the hauntings with the aid of several cautious airline personnel. A mass of compelling testimony was produced as a result. Many of the testimonies are extremely persuasive. Many come from people in highly responsible positions: pilots, flight officers, even a vice president of Eastern Airlines, who allegedly spoke with a captain he assumed was in charge of the flight, before recognizing him as the late Loft.*

*Other sightings are convincing because they have multiple witnesses. A flight's captain and two flight attendants claim to have seen and spoken to Loft before take-off and watched him vanish - an experience that left them so shaken they cancelled the flight. One female passenger made a concerned enquiry to a flight attendant regarding the quiet, unresponsive man in Eastern Airlines uniform sitting in the seat next to her, who subsequently disappeared in full view of both of them and several other passengers, leaving the woman hysterical. When later shown a sheet of photos depicting Eastern flight engineers, she identified Repo as the officer she had seen. Another incident occurred when one of the L-1011 passenger planes that had been fitted with salvaged parts was due for take-off. The flight engineer was mid-way through carrying out the routine pre-flight inspection when Repo appeared to him and said, "You don't need to worry about the pre-flight, I've already done it."*

The case of the repeated apparition of the two airline officers is interesting as it is difficult to classify. A case of apparition it is for sure, but can we say it belongs to the class of hauntings? I would say no, at least not in the traditional sense. Hauntings, as we have seen, are typically linked to a specific location. Here we have many different locations - albeit of the same kind (airplanes). We seem to have a link with mechanical parts (apart from anything, I find it absolutely extraordinary that parts of a plane that has crashed killing so many people are salvaged, recycled and reused on other airplanes...). We also know that in rare cases, hauntings are linked to a specific person, but this is not the case either. In

any case, the real reason why I brought up the story of the Flight 401 crash is that it provides us with a brilliant example of “collectively perceived apparitions”, that is a ghost seen by many people at the same time.

This kind of apparitions is much less common than those seen by a single person. Researcher J. Palmer, for instance, who conducted a community mail survey of psychic experiences in 1979, found that only about one eighth of his cases involved simultaneous witnesses. It is important to stress, however, that a major reason for that is that most people who report seeing an apparition state that they were alone at the time. Why is it important to make this point? Because if more than one people were present at one time and, of those, only one reported seeing an apparition, this would indicate a very subjective experience and leave the door open to the fantasy/hallucination explanation. This is clearly not the case. Historically (at the end of the 19th century), in looking at thousands upon thousands of apparitional experiences Frederic Myers concluded that when two or more people are present at the time an apparition is perceived, in two thirds of such cases two or more people perceive it. In a twentieth-century study, Prof Hornell Hart (1932) of Duke University and his collaborators examined 46 cases that “reported other persons so situated that they would have perceived the apparition if it had been a normal person” and found that in 26, or 56 percent of such cases, the experiences were shared. Many of the observers appeared to be sober, intelligent citizens with no apparent motives for fabricating such stories. In fact, as we discussed in first chapter, many of them would have had every motivation for not revealing them, as by doing so they opened themselves to questioning of their veracity and even of their sanity. Out of his comprehensive sample, Prof Hart singles out eleven cases and concludes: “Here then are eleven cases, in each of which two or more percipients (in so far as their accounts relate the facts) saw the same figure in the same location, wearing the same clothes, with the same facial expressions and doing the same things. Although these are perhaps the most striking cases,

much the same thing might be said of the other collective perceptions of apparitions." One of the cases reported by Hart goes as follows:

*In June 1931, Samuel Bull, by occupation a chimney-sweep, died in his cottage in Ramsbury, Wiltshire, England. His aged widow continued to live in the same cottage with a grandson, James Bull, twenty-one years of age. In August 1931, a daughter, Mrs. Edwards, gave up her own home and came with her husband and five children to live with the widow for the purpose of looking after her.*

*Some time in or after February 1932, Mrs. Edwards saw the deceased man ascend the stairs and pass through a closed door into the room, then unused, in which he had died. Almost immediately after Mrs. Edwards saw the apparition, James Bull also saw it. Later all the members of the family together observed it. Even the five-year-old girl recognized it as "Grandpa Bull." The appearances continued at frequent intervals until about 9 April. Whenever the apparition was seen, all the persons present were able to see it.*

Now, let's dig a little and explore some details of collectively perceived apparitions. It is very tempting to say, in these cases, that if two or more persons simultaneously see the same thing in the same place, then we have evidence that the thing is objectively there. But for that to be true we need the different percipients' views of the object to be interrelated in such a way that the rules of perspective are not violated. This condition also seems to be hold in most instances of collective apparitions. There are examples in which the figure has been seen full-face by a person confronting it, in the right profile by a person who is right side and in left profile by a person to its left side. There are even a few cases of a ghost been apparently reflected in a mirror. There apparently are no cases in literature in which a phantasm perceived by several persons in a slightly scattered group has simultaneously appeared full-face to each of them. In his classic study of apparitions, Tyrrell (1970) concludes: "It is not merely the feat of multiple *perception* which is performed in collective cases: it is a feat of *correlation* in which each recipient sees exactly

the aspect of the moving apparition which he would see from his particular standpoint in space if the apparition were material."

This in itself is extremely intriguing. However, the real crunch for the non-objective (or pure hallucination) explanation of apparitions comes when it has to give an account of the fact that the hallucinations suffered simultaneously by the various percipients are so remarkably alike. Some writers have suggested that witnesses' statements often lack enough details for us to properly judge the extent of the similarity, and that, when details are given, these may not in fact agree. Perhaps the hallucinations of the different percipients have merely a common theme, elaborated by each person in his own way.

I find this really hard to swallow. First of all I do not understand why perfectly normal and healthy people, who have not consumed alcohol or drugs at the time of the apparition, should all collectively hallucinate at exactly the same time, so that they could provide their own elaboration of something which is in reality not there. Secondly, if you look at the literature, you realise that the differences between the statements of different witnesses of a collective apparition seem generally not to exceed what one might expect had a real object or event been involved. Rather, similarities are sometimes numerous and detailed.

There are other, even more intriguing cases, in which more than one person is present at the moment and apparition manifests but not everybody sees it. Pay attention here: I am not saying that only one person sees it – I am saying that more than one person sees and *one doesn't*. Let's look at the following example (Cornell, 2000):

*Cornell, a senior member of the SPR and Cambridge University SPR, is invited to investigate a haunting. He and a colleague go to the house separately. Cornell arrives first, in the early afternoon – full daylight. Mrs M., a widow who lives alone, leaves the front door on the latch for the college, and she and Cornell go through the hall to the sitting room, directly in line with the front*

*door. Mrs M. explains that she is not troubled by the ghost but feels it is time it should move on. It is of a man aged about 60, with reddish hair, who is invariably first seen sitting in a particular chair, wearing a green jacket, holding a pipe which he does not smoke. Often, though not always, he rises and knocks the pipe out in the fire, turns and walks to the French window, where he stands looking out into the garden. The entire operation lasts about 40 seconds. He has been identified as the previous owner of the house, who died in 1963. She last saw him three days ago. Leaving Cornell alone, she goes to make tea; on her return, she exclaims, "Look! There he is in the chair." Cornell turns but sees nothing. She describes the ghost as it rises and walks to the fireplace, where he turns and looks at Cornell. At this point the colleague appears in the hall, having let himself in by the front door. They walk towards him, but he brushes past, ignoring Mrs M.'s greeting, and asks, "Where has the man gone?" He explains that a man wearing a green jacket had been standing with Cornell and Mrs M., and had beckoned to him to join them. Then it just seemed to vanish. He describes the figure exactly as Mrs M. did. Mrs M., though watching the ghost, does not see it beckon. She sees the ghost three more times during the next four months, Cornell, though he visits the house on for further occasions, never sees it.*

More puzzlement, more complications to try to make sense of. Why did Cornell not see the ghost whilst Mrs M. and his colleague clearly did? Why did the colleague see the ghost beckoning to him, and Mrs. M didn't? "How P.D. saw something almost exactly as described by Mrs. M, but also saw it beckon, which was not in the scenario created by Mrs. M, remains an interesting mystery to me," says Cornell.

Clearly, the issue is a crucial one. That some ghost experiences are collective seems to indicate that ghosts have an objectively real presence; that others are selective seems to indicate that they haven't. In this case, the sighting is both collective *and* selective. Though we could argue that the agent chooses that only some of those present shall see the apparition, this doesn't seem to square with the fact that Mrs M. sees the ghost looking at Cornell: apparently it is aware of Cornell's presence, but is perhaps puzzled by his failure to see it. And this failure, surely, must be ascribed to some quality that Mrs M. and the colleague possess but Cornell doesn't.

As we continue our discussion of collectively perceived apparitions, we have to consider another and quite intriguing feature: there are cases in which not all of the perceivers are... humans! Let's look at a case documented by survival researcher Dianne Arcangel (2005):

*About four months after her son Tommy had been tragically murdered, a woman was out walking Tommy's dog in the daytime and they were passing by the parking lot where Tommy had kept his Jeep when the dog began barking and pulling on the leash. Looking up, the woman saw a young man standing in a blue outfit about 30 feet away, although she could not see him clearly because she was not wearing her glasses. When finally put them on, she recognized Tommy standing there on the sidewalk and smiling at her, wearing a blue outfit he had bought but never got to wear before he died. She immediately called out to him, and she and the dog began running toward him. But then, the image of Tommy seemed to slowly turn around and glide away, his feet being about an inch off the pavement. Despite how fast they ran, the woman and the dog could not catch up to him, even after pursuing him for three blocks. Then, the woman's sight of her son was abruptly obstructed by some passing schoolgirls, and when she looked up again, the figure of Tommy was gone.*

This case has two other interesting aspects to it. First of all, it seems to suggest an optical effect, as the woman needed her glasses to see the apparition clearly. If the apparition was an hallucination, a fantasy or a misperception, why did she need glasses? Secondly, the apparition in this case was apparently witnessed not only by the woman, *but also by the dog*. In the next chapter, we will see how countless stories exist about animal ghosts – beloved pets apparently returning to pay a visit to their owners. Now, let's remain for a moment with the cases in which an apparition seen by a human is also seemingly perceived by an animal, as this is one of the strongest testimonies to their material reality. The *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* bring to us another example from a bygone era:

*One evening about 6 p.m., my mother was in the salon with her five children, of whom I, aged 16, was the eldest. An old servant was in the room, talking to my mother. Suddenly, our dog Moustache rushed to the stove, barking*

*furiously. We all saw, on the rim of the huge tiled stove, the figure of a boy aged about 5, in a shirt: we recognised André, the son of our milkwoman. The figure left the stove, passed over our heads, and vanished through an open window. All this time – about 15 seconds – the dog barked with all its might, running to follow the movement of the apparition. Subsequently, we learnt that André, who had been ill, died at about that time.*

This seems a clear example of an animal which is totally aware of an apparition seen by seven people. Any explanation in terms of misperception or hallucination simultaneously affecting everybody, dog included, and conveying veridical information unknown to the percipients stretches credibility beyond any limit. Unless we accuse the author of the report of concocting a fiction, the conclusion that there was “something” physically there, and moving across the room, seems beyond reasonable doubt.

Am I now claiming that ghosts always have a physical reality in our world? No, as I said previously, I don't. This particular subject is another perfect example of the difficulties we encounter when trying to make sense of the data coming to us from psychical research. Do you remember the case of the Chaffin will? For over a hundred years we believed that it provided an extremely solid argument for the survival hypothesis – almost a *proof* that we survive physical death. And then we discovered that the key element of that proof (the second will) was in fact a forgery. We were then logically tempted to go all the way in saying that the entire case collapses, but we considered how far-fetched are the “normal” explanations to account for the remaining elements of the case. And we are left with a big question mark. Now, concerning the “physicality” of apparitions, we find ourselves in an even more impenetrable maze. A case like the one we've just reviewed would strongly indicate that the perception by the seven people and the dog corresponded to some physical phenomenon in our material reality. And, we will see in a later chapter that there are at least some examples of the presence of a ghost being detected by scientific instruments. But then, if ghosts are “real” in the physical sense, why did Dr



Cornell not see the man in the green jacket as he appeared to Mrs M. and his colleague? Why did the behaviour of the ghost looked different to the two witnesses? And why do we have countless examples in which the ghost obviously has no physicality at all?

The bottom line, dear reader, is that we don't know. At least *I* don't know – that's for sure. The idea that apparitions are essentially a phenomenon of consciousness (momentarily expanded consciousness, to be precise) remains the most appealing to me – the one that best fits most of the data we have. But how come that an individual or collective consciousness phenomenon can sometimes have correlates in the physical world? This, like so many other psychical research puzzles, questions not only our understanding of the phenomenon we call apparitions, but our very view of the reality we live in – what we call “physical” and “non-physical”, the relationship between the objects in our consciousness and what is (or perhaps isn't...) “out there”. Of one thing I am certain, however. Viewing the entire phenomenon of apparitions as something that can be explained within the current materialist paradigm is a spectacular show of short-changing. As I keep repeating, those who maintain that ghosts are necessarily the product of fantasy, wishful thinking, misperception, hallucinations, false memories are either ignorant, idiots or intellectually dishonest. In some cases, a toxic combination of the three.

Now, before we end this chapter, let's leave the deep philosophical questions and plunge back into the data. You will now have understood that I like, at the end of each chapter, to go back to the opening subject – in this case, the ghosts of Flight 401. Let's first look at some of the stories, and then we'll consider something really, really interesting. This is how author Bill Knell (online article, undated) describes some of the sightings:

*The ghosts appear as any human would. For example, during a 1973 flight from Newark to Miami, a Flight Attendant was doing a head count when she noticed a man in an Eastern Airlines Pilot uniform seated with the passengers. He refused to acknowledge her, so she contacted the flight crew. The Captain of that flight came back to see what was going on and recognized the man as Bob*

Loft. He cried out, "Oh my God, that's Bob Loft!" At that point Loft vanished. Everyone present saw it happen.

During a 1974 flight from San Juan, Puerto Rico to Newark, NJ, the Pilot sees Don Repo sitting in the Flight Engineer's seat. Repo says, "There will never be another crash of an L-1011, we will not allow it." Repo vanishes after speaking. During another sighting, Repo appeared to a Flight Crew member and said he had completed the preflight check. On another occasion, a Flight Attendant saw a man in a Flight Engineer uniform fixing a microwave oven. Thinking nothing of it, she went about her business. Later she asked the Flight Engineer what was wrong with the microwave. He had no idea what she was talking about. Repo also appeared several times in the Hell Hole (electronics room) beneath the cockpit after crew members heard knocking in that area and went to investigate.

While boarding a flight that would take him from JFK in New York to Miami International in 1973, a Vice President of Eastern Airlines entered the First Class Cabin and saw an Eastern Pilot sitting there. When he got close enough to see his face, it was Bob Loft. Loft vanished before his eyes. Loft was seen by a number of flight crews and spoke occasionally warning about problems or potential problems on board an aircraft.

There were some other types of appearances as well. Flight Attendant Faye Merryweather saw the face of Don Repo staring at her from an oven in the galley of TriStar 318. The galley was salvaged from the wreckage of 401. Merryweather summoned two other Flight Attendants. One was a friend of Repo and recognized his face. Repo spoke and said, "Watch out for fire on this airplane." The airliner ended up having engine trouble a short time later on route to Acapulco. After landing, the rest of its flight was cancelled. And it wasn't just flight crews that saw the deceased crew members. Several Marriott Food Service workers saw a Flight Engineer vanish in the galley of an airliner being stocked for the next flight and refused to continue their work. That flight was delayed for over an hour. Airline cleaners and mechanics began to find reasons to avoid working on or in Ship #318 where most of the sightings took place. Some believe that's because parts were salvaged from the aircraft involved in the 401 crash and transplanted into #318. It's as good as explanation as any.

These and plenty of other stories are told in detail in *The Ghost of Flight 401*, an excellently researched book by John G. Fuller, unfortunately not in the bookstores any more. Not one but two

Hollywood movies were made based on these happenings. Now, all that may well be very interesting but what I found *really* extraordinary is that this is very much alive as a subject of conversation *today*, more than thirty years after the events took place, *within the professional airline community!* As I was doing my research for this book, I came across a fascinating online discussion on the forum section of the website *airliners.net*, in which airline employees discuss the same stories. Here is a selection of entries, to give you the flavour – they are rough and uncut, and therein lies their real value:

*I once met a former EAL flight attendant who swore up and down she saw it. She said that she could understand people not believing her, she wouldn't believe it herself, but it happened. There are a lot of stories out there. There are many former Eastern FA's at US Airways. A flight attendant I know once flew with Don Repo's daughter (who worked for US Airways a while back - she still may, I am not sure) and this friend of mine asked her if it was true about her dad and she said "yes it is."*

*For those of you not aware of the story, EA crews would log entries of these sightings into the applicable aircraft logbook. EA management removed these log entries each time, as to not start wide spread hysteria throughout the EA system. Most of the EA crews took these sightings very seriously, with some doubters amongst them, of course. Many flight attendants adamantly refused to work the lower galley of the L-1011, especially on the aircraft with salvaged crash parts, as this was where primarily the spirit of the dead engineer would appear (Don Repo, the engineer killed in the crash, was down in the front wheel well of the L-10, trying to ascertain as to whether the nose gear was "down and locked" for landing, when the aircraft impacted with the dark Everglades). After a while, the crews stopped reporting these sightings to EA management, when it was discovered the top brass would send these crews to the company shrink for analysis. EA management realized if they did not contain these "stories", they were looking at a possibly large P.R. disaster. They subsequently removed all the salvaged parts (galley ovens, etc.) from the L-1011 sister ships. After this was done, no more sightings were reported.*

*My father was an executive with CPAir (the forerunner of Canadian Airlines International), and knew some EA executives and maintenance executives and staff based in MIA. My father was intrigued by this story/legend of EA401. He*

*told us that maintenance staff did in fact remove many salvaged parts and burned them, based on orders from MIA executives, who at that point were extremely frustrated and impatient with the publicity this story was earning for EA (After all, there were pax (passengers) as well who claimed to see these "spirits", if you will). The parts (ovens, trolleys, L-1011 elevators and elevator shaft, etc.) were transported to a remote sight outside of MIA and destroyed. Again, this is what EA friends of my father told him back in the late 70's.*

*There were actually stories at DAL as FA's and Mechs would on occasion see the ghost. I had a mech tell me of reaching for a wrench while working inside an ex-EAL L10. Someone handed it to him and he said thanks. Then he realized that there wasn't supposed to be anyone else on the airplane. He looked back to see who it was and found no one there. He was very sincere in the retelling of his encounter and I believed him.*

# Special cases

SIX DECADES BEFORE THE AMC'S WALKING DEAD, SyFy's Paranormal Witness, late-night radio's Coast to Coast AM, and countless websites, blogs, books, and movies began captivating audiences with true tales of the paranormal – there was FATE – a first-of-its-kind publication dedicated to in-depth coverage of mysterious and unexplained phenomena. FATE was a true journalistic pioneer, covering issues like electronic voice phenomena, cattle mutilations, life on Mars, telepathic communication with animals, and UFOs at a time when discussing such things was neither hip nor trendy like it is today. Recently, FATE celebrated the 65th anniversary of its founding and the publication of its 722nd issue, a rare feat of longevity achieved by only a select few U.S. periodicals.

During all those years, a permanent and key feature of FATE was the readers' own reports about strange or unexplained phenomena that happened to them or to which they were a witness. As we are about to consider one of such reports in our discussion of some "special cases" in the apparitions literature, let me be clear about one thing. I personally consider such self-reported anecdotes, published in a "paranormal" magazine, at the very lower limit on the "evidence weight" scale. Such scale has laboratory experiments carried out by qualified scientists under controlled conditions at one end and, as said, self-reports published in a magazine at the other. I consider such reports *less* evidential than reports provided by the general public, for instance, during a survey. The reason is that I suspect that those who submit their stories for publication in a magazine belong to the minority of people who have anomalous experiences and actually *want* to share them (you will remember that the majority of people are unwilling to share their stories for fear of ridicule). In such cases – my reasoning goes – it is more likely that a person

would exaggerate events, or make up a story altogether, just for the thrill of seeing it published. I am not saying that this is necessarily the case, I am saying that this is a relatively more likely possibility and therefore I consider such reports comparatively “lightweight”. Having said all that, please now consider the following story, published by FATE in September 1957. As you read it –before we make any other consideration – gauge for yourself how likely it is that such a story was fabricated.

*During World War two, I was in the Treasury Department, where I met Hester Marshall. She was considerably older, but we became close friends. After work we often went to Huyler’s Candy Store and ate a light dinner. She was a Christian Scientist and I was a Catholic, but when my fiancé was killed in the Battle of the Bulge, I thought of giving up the Catholic faith. We often talked about death: I told Hester whichever of us goes first should communicate with the other if possible. However, neither of us took this seriously. After the war she went home to Detroit. For a while we corresponded, then her letters stopped. About a year later, I went into Huyler’s to have a soda and saw Hester, dressed in black, sitting at a table, waiting for me. She looked younger than I had ever seen her. Strangely, she was not wearing any of her jewellery. I sat down and ate with her. She drank coffee and ate a sandwich. She said she had come to Washington especially to see me. She told me I must stay with my Catholic faith. I asked what had happened to all her jewellery and she said, “Marie, where I am now I don’t need jewellery”. She walked to the streetcar with me, and when I invited her to come home, she declined. She said she and I would meet again someday and I would understand everything then. When I called the Treasury Office where she had worked, they told me she had died three months before.*

If the events really took place as described, this is a truly exceptional case. First of all, the apparition lasted for an extended period of time. Secondly, agent and percipient had a lengthy and entirely normal conversation. Whilst these two features in themselves are not exceptionally rare, the combination of the two indeed is. Furthermore, the apparent eats a sandwich and drinks coffee. What would the other customers in the café have seen? It is tempting to think that Marie is fantasising the whole episode, but such details as the fact that Hester looks younger than Marie

has ever seen her support the alternative: that Hester herself was in some sense really there.

However, the reason I chose this particular episode is not its apparent exceptional nature. Hester is an example of a “ghost with a message”, and this is truly an entire subset of apparitional experiences. In these cases, the ghost does not simply appear – he or she conveys a specific message which is highly relevant to the percipient. The ghost in the Chaffin will case was another prime example of this. Such subset of experiences is extremely important because they indicate *purpose*, intention on the part of the agent. If apparitions were just tricks of consciousness or some sort of unexplained physical processes, you would not expect them to clearly show intentions. Intention is a mental state that represents a commitment to carrying out an action or actions in the future. Intention involves mental activities such as planning and forethought. All these are prominent and highly specific features of human personality, and the fact that an apparition shows them is strongly suggestive that that personality survives physical death.

Hilary Evans (2002) writes:

*In 1938, Zoe Richmond, a prominent member of the SPR, collected a selection of those cases reported to the Society which seemed the best evidence that ghost experiences are purposeful. We may be surprised that she should feel the need to do so. Throughout history, it has been assumed that ghosts manifest, not because they choose to, but because they need to. Mediaeval commentators took it for granted that ghosts are spirits returning to Earth because they have left something undone in their lifetime, which they had obtained permission from the powers that be, to set right.*

This view – the “unfinished business” motivation – does not capture the full extent of the motivation shown by ghosts. Some, for instance, appear to offer comfort, support, help. The *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research* (1970) published an interesting account by Canon J.B. Phillips:

*The late C. S. Lewis, whom I did not know very well, and had only seen in the flesh once, but with whom I had corresponded a fair amount, gave me an unusual experience. A few days after his death, while I was watching television one evening in full daylight (my wife was in an adjoining room preparing supper), he “appeared” sitting in a chair less than two metres away, and spoke a few words – “it’s not as difficult as you think, you know,” – which were particularly relevant to the difficult circumstances in which I was passing. He was ruddier in complexion than ever, grinning all over his face and positively glowing with health. He was dressed in rather rough, well-worn brown tweeds: I realised later that I had never seen him in ordinary clothes – on the one occasion I saw him in the flesh he was wearing a black cassock. (Later, I learned that it was his habit to wear tweeds that would be comfortable rather than smart, but I did not know this at the time.) I had not been thinking about him at all. I was neither alarmed no surprised, he was just there – “large as life and twice as natural”! A week later, this time when I was in bed reading before going to sleep, he appeared again, even more rosily radiant than before, and repeated the same message, which was very important to me. It seemed obvious that it wanted to speak to me.*

Now, in the case of Marie, by a stretch of the imagination you could think that she created the entire experience out of the psychological stress of losing her fiancé and losing her faith. Perhaps there is, deep inside our psyche, a “doctor” capable of conjuring up a highly complex, detailed and fully realistic waking dream which conveys quite exactly the message we need to hear at a particular moment (in her case, “go back to your faith”). This really is a far-fetched hypothesis, but so is – many would say – the idea that ghosts appear to us from the spirit world... But – in the case of Canon Phillips? If he was under stress due to difficult circumstances in his life (as indeed he was), would the “doctor” not have had a better time in conjuring up the image of a deceased mother, or father, or any relative or friend more meaningful to him at the time? Why, of all people, C. S. Lewis? And why a Lewis dressed in the kind of clothes that – unbeknown to Canon Phillips – he actually wore in life? These kind of anecdotes, if they properly reflect what actually happened, show how any alternative, “normal” explanation is almost *more incredible* than the fact that discarnate personalities come and talk to us from the other side.



Back to the July 1957 issue of FATE, then, to look at a most extraordinary case that combines multiple witnesses with clear signs of awareness and intention on the part of the ghost.

*I was sleeping in my upstairs apartment. My younger brother Ralph, who had been staying with me since the death of her mother 14 months before, had just come in. As he climbed the stairs he had the feeling that there was somebody behind him. Reaching the top, he turned and saw a soft blur ascending the stairs. As it came closer, it took on the shape of our mother, until, in every sense, it was her. He was petrified with fear, but heard her say, "Don't be afraid, Honey. It's just your mother. I just came to see my babies." Ralph lost his fear and followed as she walked into the living room. She embraced him and asked about me. Told I was sleeping, she came to my bedroom, stood looking at me for a few seconds, then gently kissed me on the cheek. She turned to Ralph and said, "I must hurry now, Son. Be good and remember that your mother loves all of you very much." With that, she vanished. Moments later I woke, having dreamed, I thought, that my mother had kissed my cheek. I saw Ralph lying on the floor: he had fainted. He said, "It was no dream, Sis, she was here." I ran to the phone to tell my sister Lockie, who lives 25 km away. She dialled my number at the same time: "Gertie!" She said, "Mother was just here in the house with me!" My elder brother Burnzie, who was home on leave and staying with Lockie, had been drinking and had passed out in his car, parked outside the house. Mother had appeared to him and said, "Oh Son, mother wishes you would quit this drinking."*

To ascribe this to wish-fulfilment, we would have to suppose that four living relatives simultaneously staged a fantasy – not a shared fantasy, but one which adapts to each of them individually. No possible “doctor” explanation in this particular case, which is so complex and indeed stunning that the only alternative I could consider is that the woman who wrote the self-report, one Gertrude Dunlop from Columbus, Ohio, either made up the entire story or took some elements – her dreaming of her mother, for instance – and built the whole scenario around them. Yes – it would be very good to have written, signed statements from the siblings, and yes – it is possible, in theory, that either she invented or grossly exaggerated the episode. I personally find it

difficult to think that way, but I leave the final judgment up to you.

In another case, Dr Karlis Osis (1986) had investigated the apparitional sighting of a young businessman named Leslie, who had died in a plane crash. Following his sudden death, a distant relative of Leslie had sent out a mental appeal to his discarnate spirit, asking him and his infant son (who had died from drowning the year before) to appear before his deeply grieving mother as a sign of comfort and survival. Two nights later, between 1:00 and 3:00 A.M., Leslie's mother suddenly awoke to find someone standing at the foot of her bed. Looking up, she was startled to see Leslie standing there with his infant son:

*There he was, Leslie, with the baby, and he was holding the baby's hand ... they were at the foot of the bed. They looked at each other. I was wide awake then. They were content; they were happy that they found each other, that they were together now. And they were letting me know that it is so; I got that feeling.*

Leslie's mother apparently became so lost in her experience of seeing them that the external world around her seemed to fade away. By her account:

*They were solid. There was like grayness around, like a gray cloud around them. I would say there was a mist in the whole room, nothing you could touch, just the grayness all around. But they were solid, both of them. The room was dark; electric light was coming from outside through the venetian blinds .... but I didn't need light to see them. There is a lot of traffic around my area. No matter what time you got trucks and buses. Not one sound then, all was excluded at that moment, everything, as though the world had stood still. And there was nobody but us three in the world.*

The experience was quite brief, estimated at about 15 seconds total, and then the two figures seemed to recede into the distance and fade away. Despite its brevity, the experience had a profound effect on Leslie's mother, evoking feelings of both elation and sadness within her.

Finally, let's look at another category of messages sometimes conveyed by ghosts – warnings.

*My parents and I had been invited to a party. The night before, about 11 o'clock, my mother and I looked up from our books to see my aunt Barbara, who had died three months earlier, aged 61, standing before us. She said, "I have a message for you. Don't go to the party. Now I can rest." Then she was gone. We decided not to go to the party, and we stayed at home that night. At around 10:30 we smelled smoke. Our television set had burst into flames and the walls of the room were already on fire. We managed to put the fire out before it did too much damage. If we had gone to the party, as we certainly would have done if Aunt Barbara had not warned us, our house would probably have been burned down.*

Here we have an apparitions perceived by two people, conveying a message which not only is veridical but also refers to events which have not happened yet. To deny the reality of the apparition, you have to assume that the perceiver and the mother both had a vivid precognition about an event which would happen almost 24 hours later (very, very few such cases are described in literature....) and contemporarily conjured up the shared hallucination of a recently deceased aunt conveying the message to "dress up" their precognition. Once more, the survival hypothesis seems *less* incredible...

Now, from the special case of ghosts with a message, let's move to the one of... animal ghosts! It has been correctly remarked (Evans, 2002) that countless stories of animal ghosts have been recorded and the vast majority are "revenants" – that is, favourite pets manifesting after their deaths. Since most of us – says Evans, jibe at the idea of animals returning as ghosts, which would seem to be an undertaking more purposefully intelligent than anything they did during their lifetime, that conclusion must be that they are fantasies produced by their grieving owners. What would be, then, a situation which could disprove this easy explanation? A crisis apparition, of course, like in this case published on Issue 14 of the *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research*:

*Mr Bagot, wife Mary, their two daughters and a cousin, are holidaying at the Hotel des Anglais in Menton (France). This evening they go down to dinner. Suddenly Mary sees her dog run across the dining room, and without thinking, exclaims aloud "Why, there's Judy!" – only to remember a moment later, that she can't possibly be Judy, left at their Norfolk home. Could she have mistaken another dog for Judy? The waiter tells them there is no dog at all in the hotel, let alone a black-and-tan terrier who could be taken for Judy. Four days later, Mary receives a letter to say that Judy had gone out with the gardener as usual one morning, apparently perfectly well, but at breakfast-time was taken suddenly ill and died within the half hour. "My impression is that she died the day I saw her".*

Here, again, we would have to assume that Mary received the information about the death of the dog Judy through paranormal means, and that she produced the visualisation of the dog crossing the room. Unfortunately, from the account we don't understand if the dog was seen by other family members as well. In any case, the visualisation seems an unnecessarily complicated way for Mary's subconscious to communicate a piece of information it had obtained paranormally.

The following example belongs to a category of evidence of even lighter weight than self-reports sent to a magazine. This is a self-report allegedly collected by "Paranormal Phenomena Expert" Stephen Wagner and published on the website [paranormal.about.com](http://paranormal.about.com). Nevertheless, it find it interesting, for various reasons.

*It was back in 2005. My husband and I have four daughters, and we were living in this tiny two-bedroom home. We were so cramped in this house, but could not afford to buy a larger home at the time. My husband went to repair the ceiling in the family room when he came up with the idea to take half our attic space and make a loft out of it. He tore out the ceiling and made it vaulted in the family room. He put a wooden set of stairs in so the loft could be accessed from the family room. The loft was only five feet tall, but we carpeted it and dry walled it off. We then took all our girls' toys and put them up there. The kids loved it and played up there every day for hours.*

*One night, after everyone was asleep, I was watching TV in the family room. I fell asleep for a few minutes then woke up. I was in a recliner right at the bottom of the loft steps. I saw movement out of the corner of my eye, so I turned. I saw this skinny, little black cat coming down the stairs. I leaned forward to get a better look, and the cat slowed down, started hunching down, and slowly looked at me, then took one more step and just vanished. I couldn't believe what I had seen. I had a cat at the time, but he was 19 years old and about 20 lbs., and all orange. He never went up those steps due to his feeble body. I shook it off, as maybe I was really tired and not seeing things right.*

*It was winter break, and the kids were all fighting and being really annoying. I said, "Why don't you guys go play up in the loft?" They all said no, they didn't want to. Then my 10-year-old blurted out, "I won't go up there anymore because there is a black ghost cat up there." The other kids started to laugh at her, but I said, "What did you say?" She said she would see it dart by real quick and disappear. She said, "It's just weird, Mom."*

*This house had belonged to my grandparents before I bought it. I saw an old photo of my mom as a teen in the backyard of this house. She was holding a black cat just like the one I saw. My mom is deceased, so I can't really get any more info regarding this ghost cat. We never saw it again since then, and have since moved.*

Let's reason briefly on this intriguing account. First of all, in terms of credibility, this is the kind of testimony which is almost guaranteed to be dismissed out of hand as sheer fabrication. Fair enough – I would say – I would probably not present this as an element of evidence in court. However, I appeal to you, the reasonable reader, and ask you how likely you think it would be that this lady made the entire story up. What would she stand to gain from sharing a somewhat cute, somewhat weird but altogether completely insignificant story? Is the story presented in such a way to make her look as particularly smart, or exceptionally lucky? Is this a desirable set of events, one which you would like to happen to yourself? No, I personally don't think so. Then, the other likely alternative is that the "Expert", Mr Wagner himself, invented not only the story but the very lady who tells it. If this is the case, hat off to Mr Warner for creating

something weird, but at the same time so banal and ordinary, to actually sound entirely credible.

If, on the other hand, this story is *not* a fabrication, then we have indeed an interesting case. A collectively perceived apparition of an animal ghost which actually looks more like an “animal haunting” than just an apparition. The ghost cat is seen repeatedly, by different people at different times, and it is not linked to any member of the family. Rather, as in many hauntings, it seems to have a rapport with the place itself. But then, why is it only seen a few times – apparently until the mother finds out who the cat might have been?

# Hunting for the ghost

ON MARCH 9, 2009, the world of psychical research lost a most eminent representative. Dr Gertrude Schmeidler died in her California home at the ripe age of 96. A Past President of the Parapsychological Association, Dr Schmeidler had a long and distinguished career as Professor of Psychology at the City University of New York. About herself, she wrote:

*I'm an experimental psychologist, and my research was primarily in perception and memory - until a seminar changed my life. In 1942 I began a part-time job at Harvard (seven years after my doctorate there), saw a seminar on psychical research was offered, and listened in to find what could be said for this bizarre topic. Gardner Murphy's lectures, and his suggested readings, left me half-fascinated, half-incredulous. Murphy then offered me a stipend from Harvard's Richard Hodgson Fund to experiment on ESP. I accepted, hoping an experiment would tell me what to think about the topic.*

*The data convinced me. Repeatedly, average ESP scores of subjects who rejected any possibility of ESP success (whom I called goats) were lower than average ESP scores of all other subjects (whom I called sheep). This was inexplicable by the physical laws we knew; it implied unexplored processes in the universe, an exciting new field for research. From then on, naturally, my primary research interest was parapsychology.*

I am introducing Dr Schmeidler here because, amongst the many topic of research she dealt with during her career, she dedicated some time to the study of apparitions, hauntings in particular. This also means that I am going to tackle ghost hunting from the angle of scientific research, and by "ghost hunting" I mean trying to find something - anything, really - that indicates that the experience of an apparition is not exclusively a phenomenon in the consciousness of the observer. Is anybody - or anything - out there? Are we perceiving a physical object - a real body materialised out of thin air? Are we experiencing an illusion, something like a rainbow, which is actually there as a curtain of

rain droplets but appears to us as something else? Or are we perceiving something that has no correlates at all in the physical world - a "pure consciousness" event?

One way that researchers have experimented with apparitions has been to bring psychics and mediums to an allegedly haunted location to see if they could sense an apparition in the areas where it has been seen (haunt areas), as compared to other areas within the location where no apparition has been reported (control areas). This particular method of experimentation was initially developed and applied by the very Dr Gertrude Schmeidler (1966) I have introduced at the beginning of this chapter, and for that reason, we shall adopt the phrase "Schmeidler's method" as a shorthand term. To illustrate, Schmeidler's method generally proceeds as follows: after interviewing the witnesses living or working in the haunted location, the researcher asks each of the witnesses who reported seeing a ghost to fill out a checklist. On this checklist is a series of words that could potentially describe the ghost's actions or personality. The witness circles those words that seem to closely match the ghost, and crosses out those that do not match the ghost at all. Then, the researcher gives each witness a floor plan of the haunted location and asks them to mark the areas where they had seen the ghost (the haunt areas). Once this process is completed, the witnesses' checklists and floor plans are stored in a secure place for safekeeping.

Not long afterward, the researcher brings a group of psychics/mediums to the haunted location at a time when the witnesses are not there. Handing each psychic and medium a blank checklist and floor plan, the researcher asks them to tour the location one by one, sensing for ghosts or anything else unusual. If a psychic or medium receives an impression in a certain area of the location, they are asked to mark that area on the floor plan. If this impression seems to relate to the ghost's actions or personality, they are asked to circle the related words on the checklist. After all of the psychics and mediums had



completed their tour, their floor plans and checklists are also stored in a secure place. Then, on another day, the researcher brings in a group of sceptics and has them do the same thing, instead asking them to guess on the checklist what the ghost's actions or personality must be like, and to mark any areas on the floor plan that just seemed "spooky" or "weird" to them.

To see if the responses of the psychics and mediums matched those of the witnesses to a degree beyond that expected by chance, Dr Schmeidler compared them by adapting and applying the methods of statistical analysis commonly used in laboratory experiments on psychic phenomena. A statistically significant result would suggest that the psychics and mediums were somehow able to sense the haunt areas where the witnesses had previously experienced a ghost (the floor plan test), as well as accurately describe the ghost (the checklist test).

Naturally, one must also consider the possibility that the psychics and mediums, rather than sensing a ghost, may have been responding on the floor plan test to cues embedded in the surroundings of the haunt areas. For instance, a haunt area may contain dark hallways or spooky looking corners that could give the impression that it would be the place where one might find a ghost. Similarly, on the checklist test, the psychics and mediums could have responded based on the stereotypical notions about a ghost that come from imagination, folklore, and superstition. To see if cues or stereotypes could have factored into the results, Dr Schmeidler also compared the floor plan and checklist responses of the sceptics with those of the witnesses to see if they showed any significant matches as a control comparison.

Human behaviour is known to be variable; we all behave differently from each other and patterns occurring in our behaviour can often be difficult to spot for that reason. To get around this, psychologists often employ a method known as meta-analysis when evaluating their experiments on behaviour. For simplicity, we might look at meta-analysis as being a method

of statistically combining the results of many behavioural studies grouped together in order to look for an overall pattern across all of their results, rather than looking at each study result individually. Psychic experiences turn out to be no exception when it comes to variability in behaviour, and so parapsychologists also often make use of meta-analysis when evaluating the data they have collected over the years.

To examine the overall pattern of performance on the floor plan and checklist tests by the psychics/mediums and the sceptics, Dr Michaelen Maher (1999), who had once been a student of Dr Schmeidler, conducted a meta-analysis on five field studies of reputed hauntings conducted from 1975 to 1997 that utilized Schmeidler's method. The results of Dr Maher's meta-analysis indicated that, across the five studies, the floor plan and checklist responses of the psychics/mediums tended to match those of the witnesses to a statistically significant degree, suggesting that they were generally successful in locating the haunt areas where witnesses had previously seen a ghost, as well as accurately describing the ghost they saw. In contrast, the floor plan responses of the sceptics did not significantly match those of the witnesses, suggesting that they were generally unsuccessful in locating the haunt areas.

However, there was a slight tendency for sceptics' responses on the checklist test to show some correspondence with the witnesses' responses, offering a weak hint that the description of the ghost may have been at least partially derived from folklore or imaginative and superstitious stereotypes. In sum, the overall results suggest that the psychics and mediums may have been responding to something at the haunt sites within the location, whether ghost or otherwise. This is very interesting indeed, but it only begins to answer our fundamental question: Is anybody - or anything - out there?

Let's now look at researchers who have attempted quasi-experiments with apparitions during field studies in order to

possibly learn more about their physical composition. One example comes from a field investigation by Drs Dean Radin and William Roll (1994) of haunt reports coming from the owners and patrons of a popular Kentucky music hall. During their investigation, a psychic had sensed a rather strong ghost in the basement of the music hall. Upon following her down to the basement, Radin and Roll were able to place a Geiger counter (which measures radiation levels) both “inside” and “outside” the supposed ghost after the psychic was able to corner it in one area of the room. On two occasions, when placed inside the ghost, the Geiger counter sounded an alarm, detecting the presence of radiation. On two other occasions, when taken out of the ghost as a control comparison, the Geiger counter remained silent. But then, before Radin and Roll could repeat the test, a photographer snapped a photo of the room, which (according to the psychic) the ghost had not liked and caused it to disappear into the wall. This intriguing quasi-experiment offers the hint that some ghosts may be radioactive.

The same Dr William Roll (1991) also investigated the alleged haunting phenomena witnessed aboard the Queen Mary cruise ship, now permanently docked in Long Beach, CA. According to accounts by the ship’s staff and crew, sounds of loud metal impacts, voices, and rushing water are sometimes heard coming from the lower forward compartments near the ship’s bow. However, when the compartments are checked, no one is found in the area, nor is there any sign of damage or a leak. To see if these sounds might represent an objective event rather than being purely subjective, Dr. Roll attempted to record them by leaving a voice-activated tape recorder overnight in the bow. When retrieved in the morning and played back, it was discovered that “... the tape recorder picked up a strange sequence of noises. You could hear heavy blows of metal, sounds of rushing water and voices, one of which, low pitched and gravelly, was almost intelligible”. The recorded sounds were found to be strikingly similar to a description given by the ship’s chief engineer, who heard the sounds on several occasions when he was in the bow

area with no one else around. In addition, the nature of the sounds seemed consistent with a tragic event occurring early in the Queen Mary's sailing history, when it had been used for military transport during World War II. During an evasion manoeuvre off the coast of Scotland in October of 1942, the bow of Queen Mary had accidentally collided with the British battle cruiser Curaçoa, tearing the smaller cruiser in half and resulting in the deaths of over 300 British sailors.

Now, in most other areas of psychical research, the three examples of research we've just briefly reviewed would be just the beginning of a long series of investigations, experiments or case studies. Not in the case of what I would call "physical correlates" of apparitions, I am afraid. Much as I have looked, there does not seem to be hard, credible evidence showing beyond reasonable doubt that ghosts have some sort of physical substance in the material world. Before I try to recap my own conclusions on the key questions we have considered in this chapter, let me briefly tell you why I do not consider one large category of evidence in support of the alleged physicality of ghosts - photography.

Alan Murdie, chairman of the Ghost Club (founded in 1862 and believed to be the oldest paranormal investigation and research group in the world) is somebody who himself has seen an enormous amount of what people believe are ghosts captured on film. He expressed my own position quite well when he said to the BBC, "I think there are very few photographs that might be considered evidence of something paranormal." Likewise, in his book *Fifty Years of Psychical Research*, British psychical researcher and author Harry Price listed many spirit photographers who had been exposed as frauds. Price who had spent most of his life studying psychical phenomena wrote that "There is no good evidence that a spirit photograph has ever been produced." Which, incidentally, is also the view of most psychical researchers today.

This, perhaps, may seem too extreme a position. On the one hand, it is easy to see, with even a modestly critical eye, that the ghost pictures of the Victorian era are just crude deception – childish fakes obtained with the technique called “double exposure” – and many of the more recent alleged spirit photographs are either fuzzy to the point of being not meaningful or can easily be explained away as trickery or over-interpretation. On the other, the anecdotal literature is full of examples in which, for instance, a fully formed and easily recognisable human figure appears, for instance, in just one frame out of an entire film of the same family pictures. My problem with all that is how *easily* things can be tricked, especially using modern technology. Please understand me well: I am not claiming that *all* ghost pictures are necessarily fakes. I claim that most of them are, and I believe that what is left does not constitute a solid enough piece of evidence for the physicality of ghosts. You may think otherwise, and I fully respect your opinion.

Which brings me to a very hot topic, a subset of allegedly paranormal pictures particular popular today – *orbs*. I know full well that I will not make many new friends by questioning the evidential nature of orb pictures, but I owe it to my intellectual honesty to state my position clearly. This position did not come about easily, for I have seen myself a few light phenomena pictures that looked quite intriguing, but I am convinced today that the vast majority – not to say the entirety – of orbs have natural causes. Explaining this position will take a little time, so I once more appeal to your patience and concentration.

Firstly, I considered the experiments carried out by the Association for Scientific Study of Anomalous Phenomena (ASSAP), which determined that orbs are light reflected off an object near the lens and are within a small angle between the digital camera’s flash or IR light on a video camera. This area close to the lens and flash and at a certain angle has been termed the “Orb Zone”. Support for the Orb Zone theory comes from two

studies done by researchers in the UK (Wood, 2005 and 2007), showing that:

- There was no difference in the number of orb photos between haunted and non-haunted locations.
- Increasing the depth of field increased the number of orbs.
- There were more orbs while using a flash in low light conditions compared to not using a flash under the same conditions.
- Increasing the distance of the flash from the camera lens resulted in fewer orbs.
- The 35mm film camera had fewer orb pictures than digital camera pictures.
- There were fewer orbs when using a higher mega pixel setting versus a low mega pixel setting.

However, these studies could not definitively rule out the possibility that some orbs are paranormal in nature and a number paranormal investigators in fact claimed that a small minority of orbs (1 to 2%) could have a paranormal causation. Therefore, more research with a new approach was needed.

Steven Parsons (2014) devised a novel experiment utilizing stereo photography to test the hypothesis that orbs are nothing more than airborne matter that reflect the light of the flash back toward the camera. If an orb was seen in only one picture of the stereo pair and not the other then that would indicate the source of the orb producing material was in the angle of the view between the flash and the lens and it was close to the lens (in the Orb Zone). However, if the orb showed up in both pictures and in the exact same location then the object was outside of the Orb Zone and other origins of the orb should be considered.

Parsons used a Fujifilm W1 3D camera for the experiment. The stereo pairs of the two pictures were identical with regard to flash and flash settings, image systems and exposure. The only difference was in the parallax – the displacement of difference in apparent position of an object viewed along two different lines of sight. 1,870 stereo pairs of pictures were taken at a variety of haunted locations and 1,000 pictures were taken at non-haunted locations. In the haunted locations, 491 pairs had an orb in the right or left picture only and 139 pairs contained an orb in both pictures but not in the same place. The results were the same in the non-haunted locations. The data supported the Orb Zone hypothesis and indicates that orbs have a natural cause. Parsons also noted that if the 1-2% of orb pictures were paranormal, as claimed by ghost hunters and paranormal groups, then approximately 6 to 12 paired photos in the study should have been potentially paranormal (i.e. an orb would have appeared in both images in the same location). This was not the case. None of the pictures indicated a paranormal causation for orbs.

So, where does all that leave us? As usual, in a very difficult place. If you are a person looking for easy answers, I am afraid that you will find very little joy in dealing with psychical research. In the previous chapters of this book we have reviewed a fairly large amount of evidence showing that people do have apparitional experiences, that the common theories used to explain away such experiences do not account for much of such evidence, that ghosts sometimes convey veridical information unknown to the percipient and that they sometimes exhibit awareness of their surroundings and, critically, an intentionality independent from the percipient. All that, I believe, should be rather convincing for anybody but the most close-minded sceptics who will simply not surrender to the evidence, no matter how strong. Then, we went on and asked the key questions of this chapter. Given that percipients experience something that appears “real” and outside of them, do we have any evidence that this something exists as some kind of object in the physical world? My own answer is yes,

but very, very little. Much as I have looked, the research I have briefly reviewed here is pretty much all I was able to find. I do not claim that these are necessarily the only experiments that were carried out to investigate the possible physicality of ghosts. Perhaps there were others, and I wasn't able to find them. But the fact that a relatively in-depth research only showed a few results tells us that, on the whole, the alleged physicality of ghosts rests on extremely thin – close to nonexistent – ground.

We therefore have to live with this apparent contradiction – that people have ghost experiences that are not explainable in “normal”, materialist terms, and yet what people perceive leaves very few – if any – traces in the physical world. In the next chapter, I will propose my own explanation on how to resolve what I consider as only an apparent contradiction. Before we end this chapter, I have to throw more intellectual problems at you, however.

Let's admit that ghosts have no material substance at all, that they are not present in the physical world. Despite the flimsy experimental evidence we've just talked about, I don't think we can say this for all apparitional experiences, but for the sake of the discussion let's just say that ghosts are immaterial. Let's also say that ghosts are what they appear – in most cases – to be: manifestations of discarnate personalities who have gone on living in a different dimension of existence after the demise of their physical bodies. If we admit that ghosts are spirits, then we have to reconcile the fact that the same kind of being (the spirit) has no material substance and leaves no physical traces when appearing as ghost, but then is capable of producing macroscopic phenomena under strictly controlled conditions, such as in physical mediumship, and to influence complex physical processes, such as in Instrumental Trans-Communication.

This is a book on apparitions, and I cannot even begin to discuss physical mediumship (this will in fact be amongst the subjects of the next book in the Proof of Survival series). Just take my word



for it now: discarnate personalities have been shown to produce physical effects in this world beyond what I consider to be any reasonable doubt. And, the amount of evidence from Electronic Voice Phenomena, Direct Radio Voices and other forms of Instrumental Trans-Communication is simply staggering (I will also deal with this in a future book). So, what on earth is the nature of these spirits, appearing at times as mere objects in the observer's consciousness and at times as fully materialised physical bodies? Looking for an answer in "normal", materialist, "common sense" terms, over a decade of passionate study of this subject has left me none the wiser. I began - possibly - to see some light when I started considering the nature of consciousness, and its relationship with that physical world that we assume to be "out there". This is the subject of the next and final chapter of this book.

# In the eye of the beholder

AT THE BEGINNING OF THIS BOOK, in that brief Introduction that I recommended you read, I shared my motivations for writing the series Proof of Survival. Let me quote myself, then, for this is essential to what we are going to discuss in this final chapter:

*Writing is for me the best aid to understanding. Like many others, I do think by writing. This series of books is first and foremost a testimony to my own process of discovery of – and reflection about – an extraordinary world. A world of wonders which, as a Western-educated medical doctor, I refused to believe, even existed until my mid-forties.*

Essential it is, dear reader, because what you are about to read is that very thought process as it happens, in written form. At this very moment, as I write these words, I only have a general idea of the direction my reflections are moving towards. I have a general sort of hunch, or intuition – a “sense” that in order to understand the phenomenon of apparitions we don’t have to look for the ghosts, but, rather, we need a better understanding of what happens inside the perceiver. I suspect that ghosts, much like beauty, are in the eye of the beholder. By that I do not mean that ghosts are not “real” – in a nutshell, I mean that percipients are temporarily allowed to see something that belongs to another world, and others often don’t see. I strongly suspect that ghosts are essentially phenomena of consciousness, *exactly like anything else we perceive and assume to be “real”!*

What happens, then, is that with these hunches, intuitions and suspicions as a backdrop, I do some further research and reading, then I go out for a run, then I do my other things of the day. And then, generally the next day, I come back to this blank page and the reflections of the last 24 hours (some conscious, many unconscious) surface, and I put them in writing. I therefore see

whether the products of an essentially intuitive process stand up to a rational examination based on available evidence.

Now, let's begin this exploration by taking a closer look at that beholder whom I think is at the centre of the equation. In an early chapter, we already dispelled some myths and misconceptions. We will now dig a bit further, and satisfy ourselves that the percipient is not likely to create, imagine, fantasise the experience of an apparition out of sheer nothing.

The default position of the sceptics – and, unfortunately, of much of the social sciences – is that paranormal experiences can be explained away by reference to cultural or social variables. However, these positions do not stand up to close scrutiny. For example, the cultural source hypothesis suggests that paranormal experiences 'are subject to sociocultural influence' and that they may be no more than 'the fictitious products of tradition' (Hufford, 1982) They are thought to merely reflect the myths, traditions and folktales that prevail in a particular society. So, it is argued, in a culture where particular paranormal or occult belief is powerful, people will misinterpret ordinary events in terms of the prevailing paranormal beliefs and traditions, and that these beliefs and traditions will in turn be reflected in the content of their experiences, and so on. However, empirical research shows that paranormal experiences associated with a particular culture may be reported by people who have had *no contact* with that culture. The folklorist David Hufford (1982), for example, studied a tradition of supernatural assault known as the 'Old Hag' in an isolated culture of the province of Newfoundland, Canada. He later discovered that people reported the same experience even though they had *not* been exposed to that particular Newfoundland tradition. A wide variety of other studies also invalidate the socio/cultural hypothesis. Analysis of survey responses from Japan, China, Europe and the US reveal that all groups report ESP and contacts with the dead. Collection of narrative accounts from Finland, Germany, Great Britain and the USA indicate that people from all these cultures report similar

forms of apparitions, waking ESP, paranormal dreams, psychokinesis, out-of-body experience and synchronicity (McClenon ,1994). Crucially for my hypothesis, this evidence implies that these forms of anomalous experiences *have a physiological basis*, just as do dreams and trance perceptions: *something* is happening inside the brain. And, not only culture and beliefs don't appear to influence paranormal experience, but the very opposite is also true: those who have had such experiences *change their beliefs accordingly*. We can therefore conclude that the theory that anomalous experiences are produced by culture is false.

Another dominant assumption in the social sciences is that paranormal experiences (and beliefs) are more likely to be reported by the socially marginal: people who have had limited educational opportunity, receive low incomes, have low social status, are members of ethnic minorities, and who are perceived to have failed to attain goals imposed by culture and society, such as stable sexual relationships and friendships. This perspective suggests that the paranormal, like religious beliefs, provide a form of compensation. However, there are a number of compelling arguments to reject this explanation for paranormal experiences. First, there is a substantial literature that suggests there is little correlation between social marginality and paranormal experience. Moreover, there is little evidence that people who report paranormal experiences are maladjusted, emotionally unbalanced or cognitively impaired. Greeley's (1975) assessment of the evidence leads him to conclude that:

*People who have paranormal experiences, even frequent such experiences, are not kooks. They are not sick, they are not deviants, they are not social misfits, they are not schizophrenics. In fact they may be more emotionally healthy than those who do not have such experiences.*

This argument should definitively put to rest the hypothesis that apparitions and other paranormal experiences are just fantasies or hallucinations. But it doesn't. There is yet another area of

evidence that is often used by the sceptics to say that such experiences are created psychologically and have no basis whatsoever in reality. Interestingly, we will see that not only this assumption – again – is false, but also that this particular area of evidence may in fact support my idea that these experiences have a basis in physiology (the functioning of the brain).

The area of evidence we are talking about is personality types. Is it possible that people who have a strong imagination or a frequent tendency to fantasize are more likely to experience an apparition? This possibility was researched in the early 1980s, when psychologists Sheryl Wilson and T. X. Barber (1983) studied a select group of women who had a “fantasy-prone personality,” meaning that they exhibited a strong capacity for imagination and that they often engaged in fantasy throughout their daily lives. Rather than being the mere mental images of ordinary daydreaming, many of these women’s fantasies were rich experiences involving multiple senses and are often described as being “as real as real”. The researchers found that 73% of these female fantasizers had reported previous experiences with apparitions, some of which resembled deceased people they had known. They note:

*For instance, one subject, who was feeling guilty for not trying to stop her family from cremating her dead grandmother, saw a striking apparition of her grandmother (a figure radiating a brilliant light) who communicated telepathically that she was happy, safe, and not angry. Another subject also saw her deceased grandmother, who told her correctly where her missing will could be found.*

Some of the women reported encounters with haunting apparitions in places that they had just moved into. Some knew beforehand that the residence was rumoured to be haunted, while others did not and came to the conclusion that their residence was haunted.

Again, you see, dear reader, how, when taken at face value, read quickly as one amongst many other pieces of complex information, this particular theory sounds convincing: if people who have a strong imagination and capacity for visualisation report so many apparitions, then apparitions are nothing but fantasies. Hold on a sec, though. Sharpen your critical skills once more and follow me in the “debunking” of this suggestive hypothesis.

First of all, Wilson and Barber estimate that only about *four percent* of the population has a fantasy-prone personality. We have seen at the beginning of this book that in most countries where surveys were conducted, an average 30 percent of the population report experiences of contacts with the dead – in some countries over 40 percent. This, which seems like just a detail, already blows the fantasy theory out of the water. That difference between the four percent who are fantasy-prone and the average 30 percent who report after-death contacts shows that the fantasy theory cannot account for most of the apparitional experiences. Furthermore, how does fantasy-proneness explain crisis apparitions, collectively perceived apparitions and apparitions who convey veridical information? It simply doesn't.

There's even more, however, and this is really crucial. *People who are fantasy-prone perform significantly better in laboratory ESP experiments. And not only that: people who believe in the paranormal also perform better in the laboratory. And people who are creative or highly intuitive perform better in the laboratory.* Please make sure that you understand this correctly, because this piece of information provides one of the bases for my own tentative theory of apparitions.

If a person who is fantasy-prone or has strong beliefs about the paranormal reports a spontaneous anomalous experience, it is reasonable to suppose that that experience was imagined, fantasised or at least exaggerated. But if that person is brought into the laboratory and subjected to an experiment in which all

factors are under the control of the researcher and *performs better* (at telepathy, precognition, psychokinesis...) than another person who is not fantasy-prone or does not believe in the paranormal, *this reveals a fundamental difference between the two persons*. A difference which has to do with how these two people *function*. You cannot *imagine* or *fantasise* PSI performance in the laboratory!

The same kind of differences have been shown for people who are extroverts, the highly intuitive, those with a high capacity for absorption (they can lose themselves into the subject at hand) and artists. All these people *both* report more spontaneous paranormal experiences *and* perform better in parapsychology experiments in the lab. This tells me that these population groups are *different*.

And here, finally, enter the concept of "transliminality". This idea (literally, "going beyond the threshold") was introduced by the parapsychologist Michael Thalbourne, an Australian psychologist who was based at the University of Adelaide. It is defined as a hypersensitivity to psychological material (imagery, ideation, affect, and perception) originating in (a) the unconscious, and/or (b) the external environment (Thalbourne & Maltby, 2008). In other words, subjects that score significantly higher on a transliminal scale are people who appear to be able to tap into their subconscious mind. They are able to cross more easily the thresholds between the levels of consciousness. Thalbourne also suggests that a person with a transliminal personality can also tap into information outside himself/herself which is not accessible by other personality types. Sounds familiar, in light of what we've learned so far?

My own theory - which is in fact more of a tentative explanation than a theory - therefore goes as follows.

- 1) Ghosts are indeed what they appear to be: manifestations of discarnate personalities who have gone on living, after the death of the physical body, in a nonmaterial dimension of existence.

2) Such nonmaterial dimension is normally *not* accessible by our ordinary waking consciousness. It is possibly accessible by our subconscious mind, but most of the content of our subconscious awareness is filtered out by our brain: out of a very vast range of perceptions, we only experience a small fraction. What is filtered out includes, amongst many other things, ghosts and all the material that fuels psychic functioning (telepathy, precognition and the like).

3) For certain people – those who score high on transliminality – the filter applied by the brain is somewhat broader. They can access *a little more* of the perceptions which normally remain at the subconscious level. That is why such people see more ghosts than the average, and why they score better in PSI experiments: such perceptions cross the threshold and become conscious.

But that's not all. So far I have maintained that seeing ghosts has to do with the *eye of the beholder*. But I also believe that somehow the ghost himself or herself is part of the equation, for – apparently – not all ghosts are the same...

4) Those “manifestations of discarnate personalities” I call ghosts have their own “strength”. By strength I mean a measure of their capacity of interfering with (and therefore appearing in) our physical reality. Some ghosts have such “strength” (often because they have very recently passed on into the spirit world) that they are able to be perceived even by people who score low on transliminality. And, perhaps, even leave traces which are detectable with our physical instruments.

Let me now try to explain this theory – explain the explanation... – through what I regard as a very fitting analogy. Imagine that you are sitting in your car, maybe waiting for your child or grandchild to come out of school. To kill the boredom of the idle waiting, you turn on the car radio and tune into one of the commercial FM radio stations. You hear the voice of the speaker,



or the music, loud and clear and with no interference. You may be excused if you believed that that particular broadcast was the only one available – that what comes out of the speakers is *all that exists...*

This is a perfect description of our normal waking consciousness: we tune into the “broadcast” of the physical world accessible by our normal senses, and we take it for reality, *all that exists*. But. Back to our car radio. We know by experience that the broadcast we are listening to is *not* the only one, that there are many more programs being transmitted at the very same time as when we are listening to this particular one. The reality of FM broadcast is much larger than what our radio is accessing right now. And, how come that we hear just the one transmission? Because the radio has a narrow filter which lets through only a very narrow band of frequency. Again, does this sound familiar, in light of what we’ve learnt about apparitions?

Thing is that, in a car radio like in all other radios, that narrow filter *can be tuned*. By rotating the control, we can change the frequency and select another narrow slit in the FM broadcast band, and tune into another station. In the case of the filter applied by our physical brain, we can’t. Most of us are “stuck” on the particular broadcast of the physical world we call reality.

However, there are some cheaper car radios in which the filter is not as well built as in the more expensive ones. What happens then? That the broadcast we’re listening to is *interfered with* by other ones being transmitted on *adjacent frequencies*. I am in no way suggesting that people who score high on transliminality are “cheaper”. They simply have – one would even say they are gifted with – a broader filter, one that lets them tune on more than just one broadcast at the time.

And what about the “strength” of the ghost? The analogy works very well for that too. Even if our particular car radio is the most expensive and best built, if we happen to be parked just under the

building from where another broadcast is being transmitted, on a different frequency, our program is still interfered with. This is because the offending signal is so strong that it can break through the filter and “appear” on top of our program.

In conclusion, I therefore believe that the phenomenon of apparitions can begin to be explained by hypothesising an interaction between perceivers with varying degrees of openness to anomalous experiences and discarnate personalities with varying degrees of “physicality”, understood as the capacity to interfere with our everyday material reality.

The much more fundamental question of whether such discarnate personalities are likely to exist is the core theme of the series Proof of Survival. Stay tuned for the next volumes!

# APPENDIX:

## A science boy and the afterlife

WHEN NEIL ARMSTRONG FIRST SET FOOT ON THE MOON, I was 9. A child of those 1960s that seemed to hold the promise of a better future, that night of July I was in Switzerland, in the mountain holiday house – a second home, in fact, a couple of hours away from my hometown of Milan, Italy – where I used to spend about three months per year. I remember watching the family gathered around the TV in the living room, all transfixed by the glare of the black and white screen showing fuzzy images from another world.

That was a special moment for me, for already then I was a bit of a science buff. From my father I had inherited a passion for science fiction books, and from his father, skipping a generation, a passion for electronics and radio communications. I was moving my first steps in the world of amateur radio, a highly scientific hobby that I pursue today with the same passion, almost 50 years later. And, when I was done with the likes of Isaac Asimov and Arthur C. Clarke, I would read about geology, chemistry, astronomy and, obviously, space exploration. Looking back, I don't think I was what today you would call a "nerd", and certainly not some sort of prodigy. I had many friends, some of whom shared the same interests, and I lived the ordinary life of any child growing up towards adolescence in those years.

I was just childishly excited about most things having to do with science and technology, and that instinctive pull was to last well into my adult life. Growing up, I kept reading little in a way of literature, and much in a way of science books – physics and astronomy in particular. Strong as my passion was, however, I soon understood that I lacked the disposition for the advanced

mathematics needed to pursue higher education and, ultimately, a career in these fields. Following in the footsteps of my dad, I went to medical school instead.

That set me off on a different path – one of practice rather than sheer study, and, especially, one of service. For a few years after graduating I worked in general medicine, until the day I went on a holiday to Kenya, visiting a friend who was working there for the International Red Cross on a humanitarian mission. To use a Biblical reference, it was for me like it had been for St Paul on the way to Damascus: I had seen the light. I too wanted, badly wanted, to become an aid worker.

I was already married by then, with a mortgage to repay and all the responsibilities of a young family. But I had seen the light and I wanted to save the world. I don't say this lightly, as this was exactly how I felt back then. So I invested a lot of energy, time and resources to get where I wanted to be. I did a few international missions as a volunteer, held more than 100 fundraising lectures on my experiences abroad, then went back to university in order to get further education in public health and disaster management. Finally, when the job I so much wanted came, it was all I could have hoped for: in 1993 I was hired by the International Red Cross and sent on a humanitarian mission to the war-torn Caucasus region, in the former Soviet Union.

That marked the beginning of a momentous, quite extraordinary period of my life – possibly the best, as human experiences go, and certainly the most exciting. For a few years I literally felt as I was walking three feet above the ground. I was doing what I wanted to do, working for the most prestigious organisation in the sector, living incredible adventures in most interesting places. Especially, I felt useful – essential, I'd rather say. The nature of humanitarian work is such that the very survival of the populations affected by war and natural disasters depends almost entirely on international aid. I wanted to save the world, and I felt like I was doing it.

And not only that. I was highly motivated, reasonably good at what I was doing, and I found myself in the right place at the right time in a couple of occasions. So I was noticed by the organisation and propelled into one of those inflationary, explosive careers that make you think that only the sky is the limit. I covered technical, health-related roles for just one year and a half, and then was offered a mid-management position in the field, Head of sub-Delegation in Azerbaijan, with responsibility over people and resources for the entire spectrum of emergency assistance. Then, after a ridiculously brief five months in that job, I was bumped up again. I became the youngest ever Head of Delegation for the International Red Cross and sent off to the most sensitive mission: opening the first Red Cross mission in secretive North Korea, which had been devastated by floods.

I not only survived that delicate, stressful mission, but I also came out with flying marks. I was then called to work at Headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland, and put in charge of what was then the largest ever refugee assistance operation of the Red Cross. At age 36, not even four years after joining the organisation, I found myself heading a task force in charge of about 350 expatriate aid workers and some 4,000 local employees assisting 1.1 million refugees in five African countries, managing a budget of over 60 million dollars per year. What about that for fast growth? And yet, even amidst that almost delirious excitement, the science boy in me had not gone away. I remember going home after 14 hour work days and collapsing in bed with a copy of Martin Rees' book *New Perspectives in Astrophysical Cosmology*.

Past performance is no guarantee of future success. This is what you read in the prospectus of any financial product: if a certain investment has performed well for some time, nothing says that it will continue to do so in the future. And this is exactly what happened to my supposedly stellar international career. After two and a half gruelling years at the head of the Great Lakes Task

Force, I took another step towards becoming King of the World. I was called personally by the United Nations Under Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs (the Brazilian Sergio Vieira de Mello, who was then killed in 2003 in the bombing of the UN compound in Baghdad, Iraq) and asked to go to New York and work in his cabinet. Sergio was a moral and intellectual giant, and the job appeared extraordinary, at the very nerve centre of the international community's efforts to alleviate the consequences of humanitarian crises. So I immediately accepted.

The following three years, alas, were a bit of a disaster. The United Nations was not what I expected, and definitely not what I wanted it to be. A born and bred Red Crosser, I had grown used to standards of efficiency and effectiveness that I thought were normal, whilst they most definitely were not. Especially for the UN. I found myself working at the UN Secretariat in Manhattan, two floors below the Secretary General's office, entangled in a toxic network of big politics (the member States' parochial interests) and small politics (the ferocious battle for personal power within the organisation). Month after month, my red hot enthusiasm turned to boredom, mixed with anger and, alas, disgust. So, at the end of 2000, I decided to pull the plug. By then, my ballooning ego had healthily deflated to the size of a small pee, and I took up a late academic career.

I was appointed Professor of Emergencies and Humanitarian Action (some title, eh?), teaching public health and disaster management to graduate and doctoral students at the Institute for International Political Studies in my native town of Milan. At the time, and for the next 15 years, I was living between Geneva, Switzerland, and my adoptive hometown of Glasgow, Scotland. So, that involved a lot of travelling, especially considering that I was later appointed Visiting Professor at a second Italian University and then at the University of York in the UK.

I loved teaching, however. I still do. Interacting with bright, enthusiastic young people helps me remembering why I wanted

to become an aid worker in the first place, and encourages me to share my own values and motivation with them. Plus, my academic position brought me close to that scholarly role that I thought I could never have. I was doing research, a lot of it. Not hard science, for sure, but research nevertheless: collecting and analysing large quantities of data from diverse sources, being able to see the connections, drawing conclusions... Meanwhile, I kept playing with my radios and computers, and reading my science books.

I am telling this long story in order to make you, the reader, understand who I am. Or, rather, who I used to be. I am a Western-educated medical doctor. As such, I am the product of a culture and a system that maintains that everything that exists is matter. If you can't see it, touch it, measure it, weigh it, it doesn't exist. In particular, what we call the human mind is simply the product of the electrochemical activity of the brain: consciousness, according to some, doesn't even exist, it's just an illusion. As neo-evolutionist Richard Dawkins puts it, we are biological robots. This is the philosophical doctrine of materialism, and this is what practically the entire scientific establishment adheres to. Materialism dominates academia as much as it has a stronghold on the world of media. That's what I got at university, and that's what we all get from newspapers, radio and television. Take that and add thirty years of my own passion for science - that is materialist science - and you will find yourself with an academic in his mid-40s who, obviously, would sneer at anything labelled "paranormal" and laugh at anybody believing in it. What happens after we die? Nothing. The light goes out, and that's pretty much it.

That was me, then, one Saturday afternoon in the Fall of 2005, sitting with my wife Angela, having tea in our Geneva house. The day everything started to change. I really have no recollection of how we ended up having that particular conversation, but at some stage she told me a story. A little, almost insignificant spooky story, about events she witnessed in her family home in

Glasgow when she was in her teens. Here is how she described it herself, when I asked her to give me a short account for my first book, *21 Days into the Afterlife*:

*I must have been about sixteen or seventeen at the time, as I was studying for my final exams at secondary school. Every night, as I was trying to get to sleep, I was kept awake by a persistent, rhythmic knocking on the wall just next to the headboard of my bed. At the beginning, it didn't bother me too much, but as time went on it really began to disturb me. I remember asking my Dad at breakfast time one day if he could hear it and he said it was probably a bird stuck in the loft and he would check it out. I said I thought it was highly unlikely – unless that particular bird was wearing clogs! However, he did, dutifully check out the loft, there was no bird and the knocking continued.*

*He then investigated the pipes to see whether it was a plumbing problem – nothing could be found and the knocking continued. As time went on, my nights became increasingly sleepless as I tossed and turned to the knocking sound, but there was nothing to do. I just had to put up with it.*

*Then, one morning, as I made my way out of the house to school with my hand on the front door handle, either my Mum or my Dad called out something to me. I swung round to see what was wanted, and as I did so the bottom right hand corner of my coat caught the lid of a Chinese pottery ornament my Dad had recently purchased at a local market. As the lid tipped over, so did the bowl and its contents.*

*To my astonishment and consternation, I saw what looked like cigarette ash spill out from the bowl. Although my Dad was a smoker I knew he certainly wouldn't have used this precious ornament as an ashtray. At that moment, both my Mum and Dad came into the hall to check out the noise and the three of us looked at each other in silence. I immediately made a connection with the contents of that porcelain bowl and the knocking on the wall and concluded that this must have been the spirit drawing attention to something that wasn't quite right. My parents did the necessary and the knocking on the wall ceased from that day onwards.*

Yes, this is exactly the kind of story that the stiff-upper-lip, know-it-all science boy that I was would have dismissed without so much as a second thought: so evidently a combination of chance events, misperception and exaggeration. But I could definitely tell



that this episode had made an deep impression on Angela and that, after so many years, she was still perturbed. And that felt at odd with my knowing her as an extraordinarily balanced person, calm, realistic, objective – certainly not somebody prone to invent or exaggerate events. So, by the time I had finished my second cup of tea, a thought had formed in my mind, “Let me see if anything serious has been written about this... ehm... shite”.

It took no longer than ten minutes searching the Net to stumble upon a book by a suitable title, *Is There an Afterlife?* A review of the evidence. Especially, what was suitable to me was that – to my utter surprise – the book was written not by some half-witted paranormal investigator, but by Prof David Fontana, an extraordinarily credentialed British academic psychologist.

It is very difficult to properly describe the effect the 500 pages of *Is There an Afterlife* had on me. This book was to all effects a true revelation. Not like a religious experience or some sort of intuitive enlightenment. Rather, it was what I would describe as a rationally transformative experience. To my astonishment, Prof Fontana was talking about facts – an incredible quantity of the most incredible anecdotes, reported by very credible people and investigated under every possible angle by some of the brightest scientific minds of the last century and a half. And not only that. Many apparently unbelievable claims – from the existence of psychic powers to the alleged communication with discarnate personalities through mediums – had been tested experimentally, in laboratory conditions, by many of the same scientific and academic institutions that produce the science I was so passionate about. Prof Fontana was speaking to me in the only language I had spoken thus far, the only one I still speak today – the language of reason.

What happened, is that those initial 500 pages literally set my curiosity alight. I had found a riveting, absolutely fascinating subject, for which the quantity of available information seemed colossal, researched and written about by top scientists, including

a few Nobel Prize winners. I started going in depth on the various subject areas, following on from reference to reference. And I never stopped since: at the moment of writing the draft of this chapter, in June 2015, I reckon I have gone through some 30,000 pages of literature.

Inevitably, at the beginning I kept swinging back and forth between disbelief (“This is not possible – there must be a normal explanation!”) and bewildered acceptance. After about a year, however, I felt I had given in. Like the Swiss physicist Ernest Pictet famously said after considering the evidence for survival of personality of bodily death, I too could proclaim “I am compelled to belief by the invincible logic of facts.”

Pursuing this fascinating intellectual adventure, I became a member of the Society for Psychological Research and of the International Association for Near-Death Studies, two professional scientific research organisations. I went to conferences, study days. I interviewed the researchers, and I even trained personally with one of my intellectual heroes, Dr Raymond Moody in the US.

It was not long before I realised that the materialist view of the world I had taken for granted is in fact wrong. Tons of evidence indicate that the human mind cannot be reduced to the activity of the brain. Consciousness not only appears to exist independently from a functioning brain – like, for instance, in the case of Near-Death Experiences – but also to be able to act upon and structurally and functionally modify the very brain that is supposed to create it. And, yes, the most extraordinary of all claims has equally extraordinary support. The only conclusion an unbiased observer can draw if he considers the evidence with the care it deserves is that, in a way which we do not understand, human personality survives the death of the body.

At the end of 2008, a mere three years into this period of mad and passionate study, I wrote my first book, *21 Days into the Afterlife*.

Initially written for myself, to facilitate my own process of understanding and absorption of a truth that at times I still found hard to digest, it actually went on to become a little self-publishing success, selling thousands of copies worldwide, drawing very complimentary reviews and being translated into four languages.

I certainly could have stopped here. But the medical doctor and humanitarian in me didn't let me. My essential desire to heal, to be of help was – and still is – as strong as ever. And I realised that what I had learnt and understood through my studies could be of great help to those in pain over the loss of a loved one, and those in fear of impending death. I therefore set out working on a gargantuan project: a cognitive-therapy based workbook accompanied by an eight-hour video course on evidence for life after life, specifically tailored for the bereaved and the dying. This project took almost three years and some two thousand hours of work. I donated the full package to the Forever Family Foundation, an exceptional, 10,000 member-strong, nonreligious, not for profit organisation dedicated to enhancing the knowledge of afterlife science. See [www.foreverfamilyfoundation.org](http://www.foreverfamilyfoundation.org) for further details.

Today, as I have explained, I keep researching and writing my books primarily as a personal journey of further discovery and understanding. I hope the series Proof of Survival will prove popular, so that I'll feel less alone in this intellectual pursuit.

Glasgow, August 2015

# A couple of important points

First of all, I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to Dave Haith, whose keen editorial eye was essential to bring my manuscript to a level at which it could confidently be published.

Secondly – and here I refer again to my introduction –, in order to feel less alone in my pursuit of greater knowledge and understanding about survival issues, I would very, very much appreciate hearing from you. Please do write me a note with your comments on this book, or with any idea you may want to share with me on these matters. You can do so by writing at [piero@drparisetti.com](mailto:piero@drparisetti.com)

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