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**D. Scott Rogo**  
1950-1990. One of the most widely respected writer-journalists covering the field of parapsychology. Attended the University of Cincinnati and then San Fernando Valley State College from which he graduated in 1972 with a B.A. in music. Served as a visiting researcher at both the Psychical Research Foundation (then in Durham, North Carolina) and the (former) Division of Parapsychology and Psychophysics of Maimonides Medical Center in Brooklyn, New York. He published three papers reporting experimental research on the Ganzfeld and conducted a study on personality factors of successful ganzfeld subjects. Scott was also active in field investigations of hauntings and poltergeists. Not only did he produce many books and popular articles, but in addition he published full papers in all of the professional, English-language, refereed parapsychology journals. Scott was also consulting editor for *Fate* where he wrote a regular column on parapsychology. Tragically, on August 18, 1990, Scott was found stabbed to death in his home.

### Spontaneous Contact with the Dead

- D. Scott Rogo -

THE DRAMA began on 21 February 1977 when the Chicago police found the body of 48-year-old Teresita Basa. She was lying on the floor of her fifteenth-floor high-rise apartment stabbed to death and partially burned. Ms Basa had come to the United States from her native Philippines in the 1960s, and there seemed little possible motive for the crime. She worked as a respiratory therapist at Edgewater Hospital on Chicago's north side and she was popular among her fellow employees. The police at first felt that her killing may have resulted from a lover's quarrel, but they withdrew this idea after interviewing her boyfriend. Once again they were left without so much as a clue.

Teresita Basa's ghost, spirit, revenant, or whatever; was restless, so another act in the mystery took place four months later at the home of Dr and Mrs Jose Chua. Dr Chua was a Filipino physician whose wife had worked at Edgewater Hospital at the time of the murder. He was surprised one evening when his wife inexplicably entered a trance-like condition while they were home together in nearby Skokie, walked to the bedroom, laid down, and began speaking in her native tongue 'She spoke in Tagalog [a Philippine dialect] but with a strange Spanish accent', he later testified. 'She said 'Akoy' [I am] Teresita Basa.' The doctor admitted being scared, especially when Teresita explained that her murderer was another hospital employee. As accused an orderly named Allan Showery, whose motive had been the theft of her jewels. Mrs Chua arose from her trance after the strange voice finished its message, but she remembered nothing about the brief episode Dr Chua didn't quite know what to do.

Whatever intelligence was controlling Mrs Chua certainly was persistent. Another one of these peculiar trances followed a few days later. This time the voice complained that Showery was still in possession of her jewels and that he had given her pearl cocktail ring to his common-law wife. A third communication was received a few days later once again, after which Dr Chua finally decided to call the police.

The inspectors handling the case Joseph Stachula and Lee Eppien, were naturally sceptical but were willing to follow up on any lead offered them. Normal sources of information hadn't given them much to go on, so they met with the Chuas mixing hope with a touch of cynicism. Nonetheless, they went about their work with professional decorum. When they arrived at the Chuas' apartment, they first asked whether 'Teresita Basa' claimed rape as part of the murder. Dr Chua replied negatively and explained that the voice only said that Teresita was murdered. The investigators were impressed by this answer, since their blatantly leading question had been a ploy. They knew from the autopsy report that Ms Basa died a virgin, so it was obvious that the Chuas weren't tailoring their testimony. Then Chuas explained about Showery and the jewels.

'To this day,' Detective Stachula wrote some months later, 'I'm not quite sure that I believe how the information was obtained. Nonetheless, everything [was] completely true.'

True it was. Working from the clues given by Dr Chua and the self-proclaimed ghost of Teresita Basa, the Evanston police began focusing their attention on Showery. A search of his apartment uncovered the jewels and the pearl cocktail ring was found adorning his girlfriend's hand. Showery was arrested, confronted with the evidence, and signed a confession admitting to theft and murder. The case was officially closed in August.[1]

[1] Sussman, Lesley, Did voice from grave name killer? *Fate*, 1978, 31 (7), 61-7.

The strange story of the dead woman who named her own murderer would probably have sunk into obscurity had not the local Philippine press in Chicago caught wind of the story. The *Philippine Herald* ran into a brick wall while trying to get information about the case from the police, but a break came when the paper's managing editor, Gus Bernades, realized that the ghost was the Chua's. He was able to dig deeper into the case and eventually learned about several other bizarre psychic twists to the story. He learned, for instance, that several workers at the hospital had complained about Mrs Chua's behaviour during the week preceding the break in the case. She was entering trances at the hospital during which she would sing in Teresita's voice and the episodes had frightened many of the workers. The *Herald* reported the case in their 16 August issue, but the story didn't receive national prominence until 5 March 1978 when the Chicago *Tribune* ran it on its front page. Allan Showery was then coming to trial, which prompted renewed interest in the case. The Chuas' testimony was bound to be brought up, so the sceptics and believers alike were soon having a field day with the story.

The problem was that Mrs Chua had known Ms Basa fairly well ... at least a lot better than she originally let on to the police. It was also well known that she knew and openly disliked Allan Showery. These new insights led one hospital spokesman to suggest that Mrs Chua's 'spirit voice' messages were ploys she used to express her own suspicions. 'I think she might have known something about Showery but also knew she would be taking chances with her own life and her husband's life if she went directly to the cops,' he told the press. He also suggested that Mrs Chua may have seen Showery with some of the jewels.

This theory doesn't explain several curious aspects of the case, however. First was the curious fact that Mrs Chua's whole personality had begun to change sometime prior to when the summer 1977 messages were received. The ordinarily good and mild employee was even fired from the hospital for insubordination because of the sudden and inexplicable changes in her character which immediately predated the crucial trances. Nor does the spokesman's charges explain why the Chuas simply didn't phone in an anonymous tip to the police. With such a grisly murder on their hands, certainly the police would have acted on any reasonable information. Some further testimony on the psychic aspects of the case came to light in 1979 as well, when the Chuas co-operated in the publication of an obscure little book on the case[2]. They eventually admitted that the summer 1977 trance communications were actually an answer to a challenge. During the investigation immediately following the murder, Mrs Chua once quipped to her fellow hospital employees that Teresita's ghost came to her if the police failed to catch her murderer. She had seen the woman's apparition a short time later; and the critical trance messages were the outcome of a long-drawn-out invasion of her personality by Teresita.

[2] Mercado, Carol and O. A. *A Voice from the Grave*. Oak Park, Ill.: Carolando Press, 1979.

The case of Teresita Basa's murder and its uncanny denouement is now closed and only the psychic aspects of it remain controversial.

Cases of murdered victims who return from the grave to name their assailants may sound like the stuff from which campfire-side ghost stories are made. The story of Dr and Mrs Chua and their strange psychic journey seems more like something from Edgar Allan Poe than a case study in psychic research. But the case of Teresita Basa's spirit return isn't unique in the annals of psychic science since similar cases can be dated all the way back to the turn of the 20th century. It played a key role in a West Virginia trial that followed the death of a young bride in 1897. The victim, Zona Heaster Shue, was found dead by her blacksmith husband at the bottom of their home's staircase, and the body was buried quickly without a medical examination. Not everybody was convinced that her death was an accident, especially when Zona's mother began receiving visits from her daughter's ghost complaining about her murder. City officials in the Greenbrier Valley ordered an exhumation and found that the girl's neck had been broken. Her husband was immediately arrested, murdered and reportedly exposed himself on the witness stand with his conflicting testimony. Mrs Heaster testified at the trial that her daughter appeared to her four nights in a row, explaining that her husband beat her in a rage for not preparing his dinner. The jury deliberated for only ten minutes before finding the husband guilty.

An even more graphic and better documented story was published by Professor James Hyslop of the American Society for Psychical Research in 1911. It concerned his investigation into the claims of Mrs Rosa Sutton, a resident of Portland, Oregon who began receiving visits from her deceased son in 1907. He had been a lieutenant at Anapolis and apparently committed suicide after a fray with some fellow officers. His apparition appeared over and over again, describing how he had been beaten and then murdered by the other officers. The apparition described in great detail where he had been wounded. Exhumation of his body confirmed that the young man was beaten in the very way the apparition claimed, though no one was ever charged with his murder.[3]

[3] Thatcher, George A. and Hyslop, James. *The case of One and Two*. James B. Sutton. *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research*, 1911, 5, 597-664.

A more recent case of this nature was reported by UPI in 1970 when Mr Romer Troxell, a 42-year-old resident of Livittown, Pennsylvania, came to Portage, Indiana to take charge of his murdered son's body. It had been found by the side of a road devoid of any identification. The 'voice' of the murdered boy kept nagging at Mr Troxell's mind from the time he and his wife first arrived in town by car. He told police that the voice of his son led him to the murderer as he drove about the city looking for his son's stolen car. The voice told him right where to go, and he soon spotted the vehicle.

'I made a U-turn and followed the car about a block behind,' he explained. 'I wanted to crash into the yellow car but Charlie warned me against it.' So he merely followed the car until the driver stopped and got out. Then I confronted him about the trauma of the whole and he immediately fetched the police. The officers later arrested the driver on the basis of their own confidential information ... information they had never leaked to Mr Troxell.

'Charlie left me after we caught the killer,' Troxell said. 'Charlie's in peace now. The police were on to the killer, though. I came to realize that when they later showed me what they uncovered in their investigation, but when I heard my son guiding me, I acted. Maybe the Lord wanted it that way.[4]

[4] Voice of murdered son led him to suspect, father says. *U.P.I.*, 30 May 1970.

### Survey Evidence on the Prevalence of Subjective Contact with the Dead

Romer, Troxell, Mrs Rose Sutton, and Mrs Chua all believed that they were confronting the living presence of the dead. None of them doubted for a moment that they were experiencing anything but direct contact with the world beyond the grave. Of course it is possible that Mrs Chua's trances were psychological episodes during which her subconscious mind expressed deep-seated suspicions about Showery. It is also possible that Mr Troxell and Mrs Sutton produced their post-mortem contacts through their deep need to believe that death is not the end, perhaps reinforced by telepathically derived information. But could these episodes have actually represented genuine contacts with the dead?

This is an idea that may seem very old-fashioned and out of vogue today, but it is a theory that has to be seriously considered if for no other reason than that such reports are surprisingly common. Even though not all of these cases are as dramatic as the ones cited above, there is growing evidence that contact with the dead - or at least experiences which people believe represent such communication - is relatively frequent in our culture.

Psychologists first made this discovery in the early 1970s when they began studying the psychology of death and the mourning process. Dr W. Dewi Rees published the first major study in 1971 when he reported on the hallucinations of widowhood in the *British Medical Journal*. It was an eye-opening Rees polled 293 widows and widowers about their experiences following the deaths of their spouses and found that close to half of them (47 per cent) believed that they had been in momentary contact with them since that time. These contacts not only came immediately after the deaths, Rees learned, but sometimes even many years later. Some of the episodes were fleeting telepathic interactions, while others were fully fledged apparitional experiences. Obviously a new psychological (?) dimension to the mourning process was being uncovered. When the Rees findings were made known, researchers at Wayne State University were so intrigued that they decided to replicate the study. They obtained very similar data.

These pioneering researchers did not believe that their respondents were really communicating with the dead. They preferred to believe that they were examining some peculiar psychological aspect of the mourning process. Unfortunately, research on this idea, by Dr Richard Kalish and a colleague from the University of Southern California, in 1974, failed to demonstrate that the trauma of widowhood induces any severe psychological changes. He found no psychological difference between the widows he interviewed and a matching group of elderly women. His only significant finding was to learn once again that the bereaved reported contacts with the dead fairly commonly. But there was simply no data in his study which suggested any theory which could explain why.[5]

[5] Kalish, Richard A. and Reynolds, David K. *Widows view death: a brief research note*. *Omega - the Journals of Death and Dying*, 1974, 5, 187-92.

One of the problems with Dr Kalish's study was a point he couldn't have appreciated at the time. The psychologists and medical authorities pursuing the psychology of bereavement during these pioneering years worked from a questionable premise, since they believed that contact with the dead was a phenomenon restricted to the elderly or recently bereaved. What they didn't take into account was that contact with the dead is commonly reported by all segments of the general public. This discovery was first made later in the 1970s and has been confirmed several times since. The key study was once again the work of Dr Richard Kalish and David K. Reynolds, who conducted their interviews in southern California.[6] They interviewed a cross-section of the public in hopes of finding cultural differences in how people deal with death and its aftermath. The two researchers interviewed 434 adults from black, Japanese, Mexican and white (European) backgrounds and then broke their data down by race, age and sex.

[6] Kalish, Richard A. *Contacting the dead, does group identification matter?* In *Between Life and Death* edited by Robert Kastenbaum, New York: Springer, 1979.

The interviewers produced some amazing findings. Over 50 per cent of the women interviewed claimed spontaneous post-mortem contacts, while over a third of the men answered affirmatively as well. The experiences most often took place in dreams, but dreams described by the respondents as more vivid than usual. Visits from the dead by way of voices, apparitions, or psychologically felt presences were also mentioned.

This last feature was a little out of keeping with the experience of widowhood, where the 'felt presence' is rather commonly reported. The psychologists also noted that the experiences they heard about were pleasant more often than frightening, and that on rare occasions other people who were present shared the experiences.

This was an amazing admission, though it was a feature that the psychologists ultimately ignored when they came to interpreting their findings. They were obviously more interested in the demographics of what they were finding. Culture obviously didn't influence the expression of the experience since Kalish and Reynolds found that all ethnic groups reported similar types of cases. Their most significant findings were that blacks and Mexican-Americans reported the experience more often than Caucasians or Orientals. The two former groups also found the experience more frightening and reported more visual and auditory contacts. These two features may not have been mutually independent, since one finding may easily have arisen from the other.

Despite its pioneering nature, the Kalish/Reynolds study was - in the long run - somewhat flawed in its conclusions. Reporting bias may have played a significant role in the overall statistics, a problem the psychologists did little to explore or even acknowledge. They concluded that culture definitely affected the subjective experience of contacting the dead, without considering whether certain groups in American culture merely report such contacts more readily. It might also be that people from different ethnic and social backgrounds are more willing to talk about such experiences or, on the other hand, more prone to rationalize them away. The two psychologists should have been aware of this possibility since the actual mode of the experience (i.e. what form it took) did not vary with any demographic factors. Obviously they were dealing with a cross-cultural phenomenon.

The two Californian researchers couldn't even find any correlation between the strength of the witnesses' religious beliefs and the likelihood of their reporting post-mortem contacts. In fact, those respondents who did not consider themselves especially religious actually reported spontaneous contacts with the dead more often than did the devoutly religious. The less educated tended to report the experience more often than other respondents, but this finding probably resulted from an important confounding variable I will describe later. The researchers also discovered, to their amazement, that "... widows and other people who have lost intimate relationships [did] not account for as large a proportion of the experiences as we had anticipated.' The only exception was the black sub-group.

In short, no purely psychological basis for these experiences, however. This did not keep Dr Kalish from personally dismissing the metaphysical reality of post-mortem contact experiences, however. His final conclusion was that 'I do not believe that these people have engaged in communication with the dead' He added that 'So believe that the experiences were both very vivid and seem very real, that they are neither dreams nor indications of emotional disturbance.' 'I do just what does he think these encounters do represent?'

'They are signals,' he has explained, 'that the intensity of the loss or other experience is extremely great and extremely enduring; and that the previously formed associations with the dead person were extremely strong.' His conclusion is that the alleged contact springs from the witnesses' own minds.

Despite his personal conclusions, Dr Kalish's pioneering work has helped to illuminate this aspect of the psychology of death. It is clear that 'contact with the dead' is a very common feeling and that such experiences occur in divergent cultures, are expressed very similarly, and are experienced by people of all age groups. This counters the idea that such experiences primarily result from bereavement. Yet the Kalish/Reynolds data are not unique. Very similar features cropped up when a team of researchers in Chicago replicated the Kalish/Reynolds work.[7] They found that 25 per cent of their subject population of close to 1500 respondents reported spontaneous contacts with the dead. The elderly and teenagers were especially prone to report the experience. The researchers also found (like their predecessors) that blacks were particularly prone to claim post-mortem contacts, and that Jews and Protestants reported the experience more often than Catholics. Unlike their colleagues in California, however, the Chicago researchers were well aware that many of their findings might merely represent artefacts. The experiences of widows and widowers did not bias the data, though once again it looked as if the less educated more freely experienced or discussed the experience than the better educated. The researchers were able to show definitively that this finding was spurious. It resulted because elderly people in our culture, who are most prone to report such experiences, are typically less educated than younger Americans.

[7] Greenly, Andrew. *Death and Beyond*. Chicago: Thomas More Press, 1976.

### Spontaneous Contact with the Dead

If there were any glaring problems with these surveys, it was that they were experiential rather than statistical ones. Neither those researchers working in California nor those in Illinois really seemed to be very interested in the content of what their respondents were reporting. They never concerned themselves with the human dimensions of what they were learning. Were their people really in contact with the dead or not? The answer to this crucial question cannot be answered through statistics, but only through case studies.

This problem was partially corrected in 1980 when Julian Burton decided to study the same issue but from a more humanistic framework. Burton was working on his Ph.D in psychology when he decided to use his data as the basis for his doctoral dissertation. Dr Burton has explained that the idea for his project grew out of a dramatic personal experience. His mother died in April 1973 at the age of 67 after suffering a massive stroke. 'I had always felt a strong bond between us,' he later wrote, 'but by September most of us in the family had returned to our normal routines, reconciled to her death.'

But this was not to be the end of the bond between Dr Burton and his mother. 'One evening that September my wife and I were entertaining relatives,' he explains. 'I was in the kitchen cutting a pineapple when I heard what I thought were my wife's footsteps behind me to the right. I turned to ask the whereabouts of a bowl but realized that she had crossed to the left outside my field of vision. I turned in that direction to repeat my question and saw my mother standing there. She was fully visible; looking years younger than at the time of her death. She was wearing a diaphanous pale-blue gown trimmed in marabou which I had never seen before...'

No sooner could he call out to her than the figure gradually dissolved. 'The next morning I called my sister Jean and told her what had happened,' the psychologist continued. 'She was upset and began to say, asking if my mother had not come to her. I felt bad about this and asked her if she believed that I had told her, whereupon she said she knew it was true. Why was she so certain? She replied that she and Mother had gone shopping together two weeks before the stroke and Mother had tried on the pale-blue gown I had described. Although Mother looked attractive in the dress and wanted it very much, she had balked at paying \$200 for such a garment.[8]

[8] Burton, Julian. *Contact with the dead: a common experience?* *Fate*, 1982, 35 (4), 65-72.

The result of this visit was that at the age of 42, Burton probably had to go back and finish his doctorate. 'My mother's appearance gave me the idea for my research,' he admits. 'I felt that many people decided to have similar experiences to tell.'

Burton thereupon devised a questionnaire which asked the respondents whether they had ever experienced visitations from the dead, their relationship to the revenants, the nature of the experiences, whether they were repeated, and so forth. He first gave the questionnaire to psychic research groups and classes in the Los Angeles area, but he soon changed his strategy when he noticed the extraordinarily high percentage of affirmative answers. His suspicion was that his respondents were biased by their interest in psychic matters, so he sent out questionnaires to the psychology departments of three Los Angeles colleges. Fifty per cent of the students still reported post-mortem contacts! Dr Burton has, to date, collected data from 1500 respondents and has added important data to the earlier polls from the majority and Illinois. He too, found that the elderly are especially prone to such contacts though they have no monopoly on them. The majority of experiences were either dream contacts or subjective sensations, although voices, waking visions, and apparitions were also reported. These experiences were obviously dramatic since 60 per cent of those between the ages of 16 and 60 changed their attitudes about death on the basis of them.[9]

[9] Burton, Julian. *Survivors' Subjective Experience of the Deceased*. Doctoral dissertation: International College, 1980.

What really impressed Burton, though, were the cases themselves. Some of them were so similar to his own. 'Nearing the completion of my dissertation,' he later wrote:

... I was working at home while my occasional housekeeper Lita Canales, a woman in her 30s, was cleaning. She came to me and told me two stories, one of which happened while she was in my home.

While cleaning my bedroom one day Lita heard a 'whistle whistled'. Thinking a workman outside the window was working in (although I live on the third floor) she continued her work. The whistle sounded again. When she looked up she heard a woman's voice call her twice by name. She looked through the other rooms and found no one. Despite a cold chill and goose bumps she thought no more of it until she arrived home to find a letter from El Salvador with the news of the death of her best friend. Her friend's mother wrote that Lita's gift of a pair of new shoes arrived three hours before the death. This news triggered Lita's memory; the wolf whistle had been a girlhood signal between her friend and her. The clarity and simplicity of this report are typical of many that I have heard and read in the course of my research.

Another case was reported by Burton by a young college student and concerned the death of his great-uncle. They obviously didn't share the type of bond that might give rise to a strong emotional attachment, thereby inducing an apparently anomalous psychological experience:

I heard of her death as soon as I got home from school. I stopped and hurly off, however, to go to my catechism class. I went up to my room to get my book and as I was reaching for it, I happened and slowly turned around. Sitting on my other bed was a slightly transparent woman with her hands folded in her lap. She just sat there smiling at me. I had not seen her since I was six months old but somehow I knew it was my great-uncle who had just died. We had corresponded for years through letters and I still correspond with his sister, with whom she lived. I realized what was happening but I wasn't frightened because I was almost overwhelmed with this intense feeling of love. There was nothing threatening or disturbing about the experience at all. I stood very still and purposefully started memorizing details of what she looked like; what dress she was wearing and so on. When she was gone I went downstairs and told my mother and the sister what had happened. If I was ever afraid of death, I'm not anymore. I strongly believe in some sort of life after death. I'm not sure that if another family member had had an experience, they would have said so.

What is also significant is how Dr Burton came to view his data. He feels that experiences such as his own and those he has collected tend to go unreported all too often. He argues that many people are simply afraid that their sanity will be questioned if they report such encounters. This problem has been exacerbated, claims the psychologist, by mental health professionals who try to 'explain away' such episodes. These experiences are usually dismissed as attempts by the witness to 'hold on' to the dead or as hallucinations deriving from the grieving process. 'But do we have the right to do this?' he asks. 'I hope others will investigate this phenomenon,' he urges, 'and from their information to the growing pile of evidence that these experiences are normal and common. Perhaps eventually the sensational and scary nature of "campfire"-type ghost stories will give way to the realization that experiencing visits from the dead may be a commonplace function of day-to-day living.'

Despite the very emotional and often impressive nature of these human experiences, the sceptic could still have a field-day dismissing them. Few such cases ever turn out to be as veridical as Dr Burton's, and even fewer are of the quality that would have impressed the founders of psychic research a hundred years ago. Most of the reports can easily be dismissed, as Dr Burton suggests, as simply the wish-fulfillment fantasies of generally unhappy and bereaved people. Even the more complex cases in which some psychic play acted an obvious role can often be reduced to more 'this worldly' explanations. For instance, perhaps Dr Burton used some homespun clairvoyance while unconsciously generating the apparition of his mother; and so forth. Survival research often becomes bogged down in such cases, the same issues that so confounded the first psychical researchers back in Victorian times.

### Dream Contact with the Dead

It is significant that most researchers interested in spontaneous contacts with the dead have found dream contacts to be the most common mode of expression. Yet this is the easiest form of post-mortem contact to dismiss. This fact, however, has not led researchers to abandon the line of inquiry completely. The late Dr Robert Crook, a British scientist who died four days later ... but Gwen didn't initially learn about the death through normal channels or family channels. Early that morning her mother came to her in a dream and told her that everything was 'all over' now. Gwen woke up and saw that it was 7 o'clock. The husband phoned only later to say that her father had died at 7.10 that morning. When she retired the night after the funeral a few days later, she asked if she might see her father in her dream and talk with him. Her mother came to her dream and explained that such a meeting could only come later; after the elderly man adjusted himself to his new spiritual existence. This once again contact came in due course six months later.

It is Mrs Solem's opinion that something more than simple dreaming is being manifested in such cases. 'Some authorities believe that dream activity is simply a way of restoring emotional balance by riding ourselves of the stress and tension of the day ... it is arguable. 'But when some clean straightforward and therefore unambiguous information comes through our dreams, it must be more than this ... its impossible. Such dreams come through the help of our own higher selves, but when the dead appear in our dreams it seems logical to conclude that a mutual working relationship is manifesting.'

This is, of course, the fatal catch. Is it ever possible to determine where the activity of ones mind ends and that of an external intelligence begins? This is the problem the researcher faces when trying to evaluate subjective human experiences, always so complex and subtle.

### Other Forms of Post-Mortem Contact

Some researchers have begun studying the literature on death-bed visions to help resolve this issue. Such cases represent an important addition to the literature on survival evidence, but they can only be briefly discussed here.

Patients on the verge of death often 'see' apparitions of the dead coming to greet them and take them to the 'other side.' The early psychical researchers even collected a few cases in which the dying person saw a friend whom he did not know had only recently died. But these cases are rare. The real breakthrough came in the 1960s and 1970s when Dr Kerlis Osis at the American Society for Psychical Research was able to show that many of these dying patients were not suffering from any disease or responding to any medication known to prompt the emergence of hallucinations. Later he and his colleague, Dr Erlend Haraldsson of the University of Reykjavik in Iceland, were able to show that deathbed visions were a cross-cultural phenomenon.[11] The significant point is that, once again, psychological inquiry has shown that subjective contact with the dead (be it through visions, dreams, or felt presences) simply can't be explained by any known normal mechanism.

[11] Osis, Kerlis and Haraldsson, Erlendur. *At the Hour of Death*. New York: Avon, 1977.

Even Dr Osis would admit that such cases cannot serve as indisputable evidence for life after death, though. Some undefined psychological factors may be underlying their emergence. So he has personally gone back to the study of apparitions in general, in hopes of finding some evidence for survival. The one case to which he points most proudly was a complex one that he first reported to the 26th annual convention of the Parapsychological Association at Fairleigh Dickinson University in 1983 [12].

[12] Osis, Kerlis. Characteristics of purposeful action in an apparition case. Paper delivered at the 26th annual convention of the Parapsychological Association, August 9-13, 1983.

Dr Osis began his presentation by entertaining the possibility that not all apparitions represent the outcome of a single psychic process. 'I have stressed on other occasions,' he reminded his audience, 'that apparitional experiences make much more sense when we allow ourselves to postulate special interpretations of each of the different kinds of apparitional experiences, rather than to lump them all together as if they were of the same fundamental nature.' He added that 'this present case is a specimen of one type of apparition experience [in which] the appearer seems to have a purpose of his own.' These were brave words about a phenomenon currently out of vogue among parapsychologists exploring the survival controversy.

Since the parties involved in the report insisted on absolute anonymity, Dr Osis had to disguise their identities. The case revolved around the death of a middle-aged married businesswoman named Leslie, who was the father of four children. The other *persona dramatis* in the story was the gentleman's deceased son, Rusty, who had died as a young child eighteen months before. Leslie's death occurred in 1962 when the private plane he was piloting across the southern part of the United States crashed. What actually caused the accident is still unknown, and the family was informed of the accident the next day. Their main concern, apart from their own grief, was with Leslie's aging mother Marge, who was experiencing health problems of her own. They were afraid that the news of the death would be too great a shock for her to handle. A friend of the family shared this concern. Being devoutly religious, she asked her own mother - who was the same age as Leslie's mother - to pray for the departed soul. This woman knew that Leslie's mother was rather materialistic and 'haired' or not involved in anything psychic or spiritual. So she prayed directly to the deceased man and asked him to appear to his mother as a 'sign' of his continued existence. She also asked in her prayer that, as a personal sign to her, he should appear holding hands with his recently deceased son. The woman told no one except her husband about her prayer, and she repeated the petition about three times over the next couple of days.

Marge was home in her room about ten hours after these prayers were being concluded. She awoke from sleep suddenly to see two apparitional forms at the foot of her bed.

'There he was, Leslie, with the baby,' she later told Dr Osis, 'and he was holding the baby's hand ... they were at the foot of the bed. They looked at each other and 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.'

She also explained to Dr Osis:

They were solid. There was like grassiness around, like a gray cloud around them. I would say there was a mist in the whole room, nothing you could touch, just the grassiness 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 at what time you got trucks and buses. Not one sound then, but at that moment, everything as though the world had stood still. And there was nobody but us three in the world ...

I felt them as if they were breathing into me, breathing my life into me. He was giving my life back to me. And it's the most lasting feeling. I will never, never forget this. It never happened before and never happened since. They were just to give me, I believe, to give me peace of mind. It really helped. I have not gotten over [the grief] yet, but I made me able to live through very dark and times without killing myself, because I was very despondent. I tried to keep them longer and they just went ... They got snickered and faded out.

But Marge wasn't the only person who experienced a phantasmal visitation that night. Leslie's little six-year-old niece came about a hundred miles away. She knew about her uncle's death and saw his apparition three hours before the visitation to Marge. She later told Dr Osis that she was 'up and awake when I saw a cloud in my room and there was Leslie and Rusty holding hands. They looked just regular ... it looked just like him [Leslie]. It is interesting that the woman who prayed to Leslie could hardly have been thinking of the girl; she didn't even know that he had any nieces.

Dr Osis feels that the super-ESP hypothesis would have to be extended completely out of proportion to account for this case, since Marge didn't really respond to the purported telepathic message until several hours after it had (allegedly) been sent. He also found it odd that the little niece would have responded to such a message, since she didn't know the woman who prayed. Nor does it look as though she picked up the information from the older woman, since the little girl's experience came three hours before Marge's. They weren't even very close.

The presentation of this case to the Parapsychological Association ended with both a conclusion and a warning. 'One case alone cannot decide the survival issue,' advised Dr Osis. 'Different scholars will interpret the data differently, each according to their own belief system. The manifest characteristics of this case certainly do not suggest the notion that apparitions are static images void of consciousness. Something much more powerful and purposeful seems to be indicated.'

So as parapsychology enters into its second century of enquiry, those researchers studying the survival question have apparently come full circle. From the study of real-life encounters with the unknown, they have searched through the realm of trance mediumship, out-of-body experiences, deathbed visions, and near-death encounters to demonstrate man's immortality. It now seems as though parapsychologists have found themselves once again focusing on the apparitional experience as their most potentially fruitful source of study.

**Source:**  
D. Scott Rogo's 'Life After Death. The Case for Survival of Bodily Death' (London: Guild Publishing, 1986).

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