



AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE OF PARAPSYCHOLOGICAL RESEARCH, INC.

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THE A.I.P.R. NEWS

On Expertise in Parapsychology by *Tim Martain*

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When I was asked to write this column, the first thought that went through my head was: How am I qualified for this? And on reflection, it is perhaps an odd question, because in the field of paranormal research and study, what real qualifications are there? I do not hold a PhD, I have never held an official position with any parapsychological organisation and I have never had a paper published. On the other hand, I have read some books, done a few ghost-hunts, and I co-host a weekly paranormal talk show on community radio, Edge 99.3FM. Is that all it takes to be "qualified"?

My on-air colleague Hannah Jenkins and I

were recently asked to be part of a team of investigators that was being assembled for the purpose of filming a documentary about ghost hunting in some of Tasmania's most haunted locations. We were asked to be a part of the project because the producer wanted to take advantage of our "expert knowledge" and "experience in the area."

At the time, we both found this situation quite amusing, as neither of us had previously looked at ourselves as experts, and saying that you are "experienced" at wandering around dark rooms in the middle of the night, making tape recordings of total silence is usually likely to get you laughed at.

But when we met the rest of the team—which comprised first-timers as well as other paranormal "experts" like ourselves—we found that we did have a certain level of experi-

ence and expertise that proved valuable.

While we had never played with some of the high tech gadgets that the film crew had at their disposal, our own low-budget investigations had taught us that quite often the simpler pieces of equipment were the most useful. For all the electromagnetic fluctuation meters and infrared night vision video cameras floating around, the most interesting results were gleaned from simple audio recorders.

And while some investigators jumped at every bump and scratch in the darkness, those of

Stephen King novels, although I am still a great fan of both.

I spent a great deal of time searching for books about real ghost stories and case studies written by the people who investigated them. I never found the Patterson Bigfoot film to be anywhere near as fascinating as some of the other accounts of similar sightings that did not come with video footage. And while UFO photos bored me somewhat, I was always transfixed by the stories people told about their first-hand encounters with the supposed visitors and my interest in astronomy most likely flowed from there.

But I never tried to formalise my interests by way of proper academic study or qualifications. One is hard-pressed to find a university anywhere that can present you with a degree in "Parapsychology" and trying to legitimately study any topic branded "paranormal" by crossing it over into a more conventional area of academia is a difficult path to follow.

My interests remained nothing more than a slightly odd hobby for many years until I joined an internet forum for like-minded people. On that forum I met other people who were not just enthusiasts with a penchant for tall stories and fun gadgets, but serious investigators who spent much of their own time and money trying to conduct their own research into various areas of the paranormal. People who did not just sit around swapping ghost stories, but who took their cameras and tape recorders and tried to replicate the results from

"I was always fascinated by the unexplained and supernatural"

us with more "experience in the area" focused on trying to work out what the source of the bump or scratch might be.

I found that the old Peter Underwood books I had read many years ago about ghost hunting finally came in useful in terms of using simple equipment to rule out simple explanations for unusual phenomena. The stories I had read of real haunted house investigations helped prepare me for what I was actually likely to experience—rather than the pop-culture preconceptions of ghosts people often expect—and meant I was only slightly disappointed and completely unsurprised when I saw nothing at all.

Growing up I was always fascinated by the unexplained and supernatural—much like any young boy, I suppose. But my fascination did not end with B-grade horror movies and

At My Desk

Like many of you, I like to surf the Net. One of my favourite websites is "Wikipedia", which is an online encyclopaedia. I find it very helpful for a quick, oftentimes accurate and scholarly account of a wide range of topics. I was curious, and decided to see what 'Wiki' had to say on 'parapsychology': <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parapsychology>.

The article was fair, in spite of the many inaccuracies. You might not be surprised to learn that mention was made of the infamous magician and debunker James Randi, albeit rather brief, in a section on fraud. There are errors in the account about so-called Project Alpha (and I have this on good authority from Dr. Michael A. Thalbourne who was actually there in the 1980s at Washington University's McDonnell Laboratory where Randi's "hoax" took place). Randi sent two young magicians to the 'Mac lab' to see if he, with the assistance of his accomplices, could pull the wool over the eyes of the parapsychologists working there. Here's what Wiki said: ". . . both of Randi's trainees reportedly deceived experimenters over a period of four years with demonstrations of supposedly telekinetic metal bending." Not True! Those vigilant experimenters constantly caught out the two magicians. The fraudsters would sneak in at night through windows they deliberately left open to plant their props; they were caught tampering with equipment, etc. Fortunately, 'Wiki' entries can be edited by users—we plan to fix the errors. But here's an idea: Randi could cheat on his tax return just to see how vigilant the IRS people are. I wonder if he's up for it. ♣

* * *

Got something to say about parapsychology or the paranormal? Submit your contribution to:

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Enjoy this third issue of

The A.I.P.R. News!

—Lance Storm

On Expertise in Parapsychology (cont'd from page 1)

other studies. People who did not simply ingest popular conspiracy theories, but who did their own reading and tried to unearth new material. People who did not just tell campfire tales of giant black cats roaming the Australian bush, but who went out and attempted to track the animals themselves.

Through talking to these people and eventually meeting some of them, I was directed to new books and texts, learned from their hands-on experiences and became even more determined to follow in their footsteps.

Some years later, I am now the co-host of a radio show discussing all of these issues that we file under the word paranormal and to this day I still have nothing in the way of

formal qualifications.

While we do not consider ourselves to be authoritative speakers on most of the topics we discuss, we pride ourselves on taking a balanced and objective approach and always look for the normal explanations first, before jumping to other conclusions.

So perhaps being a paranormal "expert" does not necessarily come from formal study and qualifications, although I have the greatest respect and admiration for those who have invested the time to become more proficient in their area than I could ever hope to be.

In a field as misunderstood as the paranormal, being regarded as an expert or an authority is just as likely to come from simply being

open minded and willing to look at the topic objectively and without prejudice.

In this field, it is collective knowledge, balanced attitudes and dedication to seeking actual proof of phenomena that separate the "experts" from those who are simply enthusiasts or blind believers.

And we must continue to maintain that delicate balance between debunking and evidence-gathering in order for this field to be treated as seriously as it deserves.

I still do not consider myself an expert by any stretch of the imagination. But I am proud to be considered "qualified" enough to have a voice in such a fascinating community of study. ♣

The Role of Psi by Colin Mitchell

In his editorial for the latest *AJPara* (Vol. 7[2]), Lance Storm advanced the idea that psi may function in our lives largely unnoticed. This would fit with evidence that psi tends to operate at an unconscious level. We don't yet have a physical explanation for psi but maybe we can see a role for it. Personally, I like the idea that psi ability plays a useful, practical role in the survival of a living organism. The theory of evolution explains why we are the way we are—it would be surprising if psi ability did not have survival value for us, and for any other animals that may have it.

Some have speculated that psi could be a primitive function of the brain which played a greater role in the past before we evolved our higher brain functions. If so, it would explain psi's link with the unconscious and often with the emotions. Our conscious minds may or may not become aware of psi information which may influence us even without conscious awareness. But, if it does come into consciousness, can we take conscious action to our advantage?

It is easy to see how telepathy could have survival value for a species. There is strong evidence, at least anecdotally, for telepathy, particularly on an emotional level between individuals who are related or who have emotional ties. "Crisis telepathy" is common. It is as though the individual in physical crisis who is injured or whose life is threatened, sends out a telepathic distress call to nearest and dearest (or is it a general distress call which is more easily picked up by those with an emotional attachment?). Such telepathy can result in action

by the recipients to help the person—an obvious survival advantage for a social species. It is pretty easy to imagine that this kind of telepathy would be advantageous for tribal groups depending on mutual aid and support for survival.

On two occasions I have had dreams about female friends being in medical trouble in a hospital. In one case I think it was telepathic—I took action to find out where she was and went and saw her. In the other case it could have been telepathy or precognition. I dreamed my friend was in hospital, then I got woken from sleep by her sister to tell me she had been admitted to hospital.

"Crisis apparitions", where an apparition appears to someone coinciding with the death of someone close to them, are relatively common. This could have a similar explanation in terms of a psychic distress call sent out at the moment of death or shortly before. The telepathic information could be converted by the conscious mind into the hallucination of an apparition which may or may not resemble the person in distress. My grandmother had such an apparition in the form of a dark spectre holding candles on the death of a relative. The apparition did not resemble the person, but coincided with their death.

But what would be the evolutionary advantage of crisis apparitions, since these often mean the death of the person? Perhaps the general ability to send out a psychic distress call in times of crisis is what has survival value, and the pay-off is in those situations where someone can come to their aid.

Precognition would seem to be

very handy, if it is accurate. Yet instances of possible precognition which result in beneficial action appear to be rare. There is also an issue about whether it would be even possible to "change the future." I don't agree that intervention following precognition is ruled out by this seeming paradox. There could be an explanation in terms of 'alternative futures'. There are some rare anecdotes of people acting on precognitive visions. One such person found that acting on the vision brought the actual situation about that they were trying to avoid. Others claim to have successfully avoided the situation they were acting to avoid.

One explanation that has been advanced regarding precognitive dreams about bad situations is that they "prepare" the dreamer for the event psychologically, even though they do not help to avoid it. However even just awareness of the future "changes the future", because that awareness would not have been there without the precognition. But this is not catastrophic to physical theory. Closed causal loops are not banned by physics, so such precognition would not really be altering the future—the precognitive event would have been there in the future "all along." What needs explaining is precognition of disasters that are then avoided. These can possibly be explained in terms of multiple futures.

One thing I have noticed about some of my own possibly precognitive dreams is that they concern danger to the physical body (or physical pain). In one I dreamed stones were flying past my head dangerously close. The next day I saw a movie about (cont'd page 4)

The Weird and the Wonderful by Dr. Hannah Jenkins

On post-doctorate career paths (or lack thereof) and the naming of names in psi research: The astute reader will notice that I've now got two new letters in front of my name. Yes, I've recently been conferred with a doctorate in philosophy which qualifies me for, well, not much except that I can now legitimately call myself Dr. Jenkins on all those bills that make their way to my letterbox. (That's a doctorate in philosophy, *not* parapsychology, the importance of which will become apparent in a moment.) And a wonderful moment it was too—I got to don the black gown and floppy red-tasselled velvet hat and wave at my proud family in the audience as the academic procession exited the auditorium. But now the champagne has been drunk and the celebrations ceased, I am left pondering the cold hard question: How best to proceed from here? There are no guaranteed career paths in academia and I realise now that I've successfully managed to gain a degree in one of the most fiscally challenged disciplines, and within that specialised in the most under

funded and maligned research field: Psi. 'Yay me'. As you can imagine, fascinating though psi research still is to me, I've had a few 3-o'clock-in-the-morning teeth-grinding moments: Whatever was I thinking? And, will my bank account ever recover?

The confusing territory of post-doctorate psi-focussed career prospects aside, the conferment of said degree has also left me pondering about the nomenclature associated with people who have decided (for better or worse) to focus their research efforts on psi. This came to the fore not so long after I graduated when I had a strange experience—someone called me a parapsychologist. I didn't take it as an insult; I've the greatest respect for parapsychologists. But, I would never deign to call myself one given my higher education degrees were all firmly grounded in that most ancient of disciplines, philosophy. It seems, however, that such distinctions are blurred in the popular conception of who it is that studies psi and what they are to be officially labelled.

As far as I am aware, there is, in fact, only one person who actually holds a higher education degree conferred explicitly in parapsychology (that's Jeffery Mishlove and he was awarded the degree from Berkeley in the 1970s—that heyday of a resurgence of interest in all things psi). By the way, you can look at a copy of the degree at <http://www.williamjames.com/diploma.htm>). However, everyone else who is working in the field of psi research in academia hold degrees from mainstream disciplines, usually psychology, and, as I see it, it is only this latter category of people who have also dedicated the bulk of their careers to investigating psi who are entitled to the label parapsychologist.

I blame TV shows like *Most Haunted* and *Ghost Hunters* for popularising the notion that anyone with a degree of some kind and a passing interest in psi can be called a 'parapsychologist' or, even more disturbingly, if they've read the Bible as well—a 'demonologist'. Don't get me wrong though, I love a good trashy ghost-busting documentary to laugh (or cringe) at on a

rainy evening. My concern, however, is that in the popular representation people are taking liberties with the labelling of 'parapsychologists', which would not apply if say, an expert in physics or chemistry were called upon. Once again, any hard-won respectability is quashed and it lessens the work of those who have seriously dedicated their scientific careers to the study of psi within psychology.

More broadly, I also have reservations about limiting the investigation of psi to one particular discipline such as psychology and, within that, parapsychology. Traditionally contributions to understanding psi have come from other disciplines as well as psychology. Contemporary researchers from philosophy, biology and physics, to name just a few, are all currently contributing to further developing psi theory. Furthermore, high-level research into psi and other paranormal phenomena have been undertaken from without the confining walls of academia, most likely due to its misunderstood status in the mainstream disciplines. The independently sup-



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(see page 4)

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- To collect, assess and disseminate factual information about claims of psychic (paranormal) phenomena.
- To support and encourage parapsychology (the scientific study of paranormal phenomena).
- To undertake or promote activities (e.g., fundraising, social activities, etc.) in support of the above.

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- The human aura

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The Weird and the Wonderful (cont'd from page 3)

ported life-long investigator/researcher is well represented in the history of the study of the paranormal. If one must get into the business of naming names, then I suggest that all those involved in research on psi at a professional level should be called psi researchers, and only those who have specialised in psychology and, within that field focussed predominantly on psi, be called parapsychologists.

But that's enough about the nomenclature of psi . . . I've already pegged you—the reader of THE A.I.P.R. NEWS—as intelligent and informed with a good sense of humour, so I doubt you

will make any such gaffs. I also promised in my first column that we should all get to know each other soon. You are probably getting some idea of what goes on in my weird and wonderful world of the paranormal—now is your chance to let me know about yours.

So, if you have any ideas, stories or theories you want to share with this column, please email me at hjenkins@utas.edu.au (especially if you've got some bright ideas on career paths for psi researchers specialising in philosophy, or failing that, any pertinent information on next week's lottery numbers!) Ψ

The Role of Psi (cont'd from page 2)

astronauts blowing up an asteroid which featured graphic scenes of huge rocks flying past the viewer. In another, I dreamed of being stung or pricked all over. A day or so later I selected a bad camping spot at a festival amongst prickles which did that very thing. In another I dreamed I was being lashed. An hour or so later I went for my customary morning swim and was forced from the sea by stinging jellyfish. I was used to the occasional sting but never before

or since have they been so thick as to force me out of the water.

But of what use are precognitive glimpses like these? Why are there also a lot of precognitive dreams about trivial things that are of no consequence to survival? One explanation could be that they come along with the ability to foresee a crisis. Just as your eyes see all sorts of things, not just things that are a danger to you, so you may have some sort of precognitive facility that can 'see'

into the future. Yet, against this theory is the fact that many crisis situations occur to people without any precognitive warning whatsoever.

In conclusion, physics has no theory to explain how psychic functioning could occur in the

brain. However, we know that natural selection favours organisms that are adapted for survival and successful reproduction. That means I think, that any psi ability we have is likely to have evolved to be useful to us from that perspective. Ψ

Comments on Mitchell's "The Role of Psi" by Lance Storm

I find myself in agreement with the points expressed above in Mitchell's article "The Role of Psi". There is a psi function. From the theory of evolution that various selection pressures on our species would be minimised if there was a psi function. Prior knowledge through telepathy, clairvoyance or precognition, could reduce many of those life-threatening pressures. Those that survive because of their psi capability, would then live on to pass their psi ability onto their progeny.

On that basis, the counter-argument (and therefore a paradox) would have to follow that psi ability introduces a selection pressure of its own. Both arguments have been put forward a number of times, but Richard Blumenthal (*AJPara*, Vol. 8[1]) presents the argument again that mind-reading by others could put you at risk. For example, if your tribe's psi is weaker than your enemy's psi, they could ultimately vanquish your tribe. The Remote Viewing

research by the US military followed this logic. So, psi works for and against a given group, but generally works for the species as a whole, because only those with the stronger psi gene pass it on, whereas the weaker psi gene becomes extinct. Theoretically, then, psi should be at its *strongest* by now. A sobering thought!

Mitchell's point about "trivial dreams" begs comment. I feel that interpretation at the synchronistic level works here. There are cases where it seems fore-knowledge has no 'practical' use. In my editorial to which Mitchell refers, I made appeal to von Lucadou's Model of Pragmatic Information, which is similar to Jung's synchronicity—physical events parallel mental events, which recalls the alchemical *Unus Mundus* (One World). If outer events meaningfully represent mental events, perhaps the species gains when the psychological (symbolic) dimensions are realised. An even more sobering thought! Ψ

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