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THE A.I.P.R. NEWS

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Parapsychology and Academic Writing by *Poppy Katsikaros* (pp. 1-2). After graduating from the University of Sydney with a B.Sc. in psychology and biology, and an M.Sc. in zoology (1994), Poppy went on to teach in the School of Biological Sciences at the University of Sydney. She changed career in 1999, working as an animation artist for Walt Disney Australia and Southern Star Productions. In 2007, while at home with her two young children, she began editing medical and scientific papers for academic journal submission. Currently, Poppy is an academic casual, teaching at the University of Western Sydney in the Schools of Nursing and Midwifery, and Humanities and Communication Arts. As the title suggests, our feature article is a report by Poppy on a course she conducted this year at the University of Western Sydney.

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Parapsychology and Academic Writing by *Poppy Katsikaros*

What does the scientific study of the paranormal, including ghost stories, poltergeist phenomena, and ESP, have to do with grammar? These elements all came together last semester as a vehicle for teaching Analytical Reading and Writing at the University of Western Sydney. The course, coordinated by Dr. Adrian Hale, is a core unit for Humanities and Communication Arts students and is intended to teach grammar, critical thinking, and academic research and writing skills. The appeal of the course is that each tutor is encouraged to choose a subject upon which to base their lessons.

With only a few days to prepare my first lesson, my background in biology did not inspire me, so I chose parapsychology as the subject matter for my four classes. I am fascinated by parapsychology and, with my scientific background and teaching experience, I felt up to the task. However, I knew it was a gamble: The students were of varied religious and social backgrounds and enrolled in such courses as Economics, Law, and Education. I had no idea how they would react, but I knew it was a polarising, emotive subject and that there was an enormous amount of material

from both proponents and critics. I went ahead and it proved an unexpected success.

During the first lesson, I invited students to share stories of inexplicable personal experiences. Their initial reluctance turned to enthusiasm after I shared an experience of my own. It had taken place ten years earlier while I was on a historical tour of the Female Orphan School at Rydalmere, now part of the university campus. After that, stories of precognitive dreams, ESP,

bias against parapsychology in academia and the media. This made clear the necessity of developing a balanced analysis based on research and primary sources, rather than relying on the interpretations of others. Almost all the students were completely ignorant of the huge body of research in these areas and the credentials of the scientists involved.

Of course, not everyone was pleased. I had to deal with the disbelief that I could be serious, 'intellectual' opposition and even mockery from some students.

"I had to deal with the disbelief that I could be serious."

ghostly occurrences and poltergeists were forthcoming.

My lessons linked the course curriculum to parapsychological topics: The sense of being stared at coincided with the lecture on semiotics and depictions of the eye in history; I used after-death communication (ADC) to teach incremental responses to texts by first explaining spontaneous ADCs and getting their initial (largely sceptical) responses to the issue, then relating the way that induced ADCs have been used successfully in therapy.

Another projected course outcome was to teach academic argument. We looked at the controversy and blatant

However, it was the students who stayed back to tell me excitedly that they had always had an interest in such phenomena but never realised it was a subject for serious study, and others who were grateful to be reading interesting material in a class on grammar that encouraged me to continue.

A third or more of the students shared an unusual experience over the course of the semester. The numbers were surprising, but what struck me most was their sincerity and need to have their experiences heard. I found it fascinating. By taking such issues seriously as an 'academic', I had given them permission to do the same. Many questioned previously held beliefs as the

At My Desk

Et tu, Brute? Major events in history tend to involve conspiracies. Empires, kingdoms, governments, and corporations have even fallen because of them. Political lecturer G. Edward Griffin will tell you the so-called "conspiratorial view of history" is a valid one for it's a fact that governments deceive. Yet those who question government commissions and official reports; those who adopt alternative explanations, are often mockingly labelled 'conspiracy theorists' and their opinions are disparaged. Researchers should be mindful of these facts, and they should think twice about the validity of the measures they use for their studies. So, what do I make of a recent JP article which finds that paranormal believers (sheep) are poor at reality testing, and indiscriminately endorse conspiracy theories? In particular, it is implied that sheep tend to prefer an alternative (conspiratorial) explanation of the JFK assassination as opposed to the Warren Commission Report and its conclusion that Lee Harvey Oswald acted alone. However, alongside that now unpopular "official" explanation, there's one by the US House of Representatives Select Committee on Assassinations (HSCA) from 1979. Yes, it's official—the HSCA found that the assassination of JFK was a conspiracy, though the nature of that conspiracy or its other participants (besides Oswald) could not be determined. The HSCA's evidence included an investigation of Oswald's CIA and FBI connections. So that's one validated conspiracy. Can we expect that other more reasonable conspiracy theories will be validated? I say yes. As for sheep—maybe it's this simple: Psi-believers actually bother to check the facts, and they opt for explanations that best fit those facts without needing the countenance of official bodies. Watch out for 'establishment science'—that brand of science that pathologizes a belief if it doesn't bear a hegemonic imprimatur. And remember this—truth is often stranger than fiction, and psi (also thought to be a fiction), and those who believe in psi, may be closer to the truth than the establishment is prepared to concede.

* * *

Got something to say about the paranormal? Submit to:

Dr. Lance Storm,
School of Psychology,
University of Adelaide,
SA 5005

or e-mail me at:

aiprinc@yahoo.com

Enjoy this edition of *The A.I.P.R. News!*

—Lance Storm

Parapsychology and Academic Writing by Poppy Katsikaros (cont'd from page 1)

weeks wore on. One particularly memorable occasion involved a female student. Every week, she debunked whichever topic I introduced—until I talked about ADCs. To my surprise, she related to the class a very moving ADC with her late grandmother. She was in tears by the end of it, as was I.

Far from proving a problem, religion provoked interesting conversations: A Buddhist student wondered why the study of reincarnation was even under question; a Muslim student spoke to me in private about the Jinn and her belief in inter-dimensional beings; and a Catholic student alarmed her priest by asking about possession and exorcisms.

The official student feedback at the completion of the course was overwhelmingly positive, and many made a point of commenting on the interesting subject matter. Students reported that their preconceptions about what was knowable and unknowable, and what could be objectively studied and scientifically researched had been challenged.

Parapsychology proved to be a surprisingly good choice to teach the basics of academic research, writing and critical thinking to a diverse group of students. On the strength of the positive feedback, I am preparing to use it again next year. I have already received some

useful advice from Dr. Tony Jinks, who is also based at UWS, and would like to take this opportunity to thank Dr. Lance Storm for allowing me to use his online resources (www.aiprinc.org/index.asp) in setting last semester's final essay questions. ♣

The following references were used in the course:

Introductions to parapsychology: Dean Radin's *The Conscious Universe* (1997), and *Entangled Minds* (2006); Rupert Sheldrake's *The Sense of Being Stared At, and Other Aspects of the Extended Mind* (2003); Harvey Irwin's *An Introduction to Parapsychology* (2004); *Science and the Taboo of Psi* (Google Tech Talk Jan 16 2008), Retrieved from http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qw_O9Qiwqew; Volk, S. (2011). Fringe-ology: How I Tried to Explain Away the Unexplainable—and Couldn't. *Noetic Now*, 12. Retrieved from <http://noetic.org/noetic/issue-twelve-july/fringe-ology/>; Tart, C: TASTE: The Archives of Scientists' transcendent Experiences [online journal]. Retrieved from <http://www.isc-taste.org/main/introduction.shtml>.

After-death communication:

<http://www.healingafterthewar.org/IADC.html>; <http://>

www.adcrf.org/; Moody, R. (1992). Family reunions: Visionary encounters with the departed in a modern-day psychomanteum. *Journal of Near-Death Studies*, 11(2), 83-121.

Bias in articles written for the general public:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2001/sep/30/robinmckie.theobserver>; Lawton, G. (2011, June 14). Sheldrake Book review: Did we really say that? *New Scientist*. Retrieved from <http://www.newscientist.com/blogs/culturelab/2011/06/did-we-really-say-that.html>.

Poltergeists:

Wiseman, R., Watt, C., Greening, E., Stevens, P., & O'Keeffe, C. (2002). An investigation into the alleged haunting of Hampton Court Palace: Psychological variables and magnetic fields. *Journal of Parapsychology*, 66(4), 387-408. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.uws.edu.au/docview/195038865>; Roll, W. (2006). A discussion of the evidence that personal consciousness persists after death with special reference to poltergeist phenomena [online]. *Australian Journal of Parapsychology*, 6, 5-20. Retrieved from <http://search.informit.com.au.ezproxy.uws.edu.au/docu-mentSummary:dn=287463201594540:res=IELHSS>.

Premonitions by James Barker

My name is James Barker from Kingsley in Western Australia. I'm a 53 year old retired IT Project Manager—retired due to arthritis.

In 2007 I approached the President, of the West Australian Skeptics Association (WASA), John Happs to enter their Skeptics Challenge, which states that they will pay \$100,000 to anyone who can demonstrate paranormal abilities, such as ESP, or predicting the future. I told them how I have dreams that come true, and have done so since child-

hood. During the 12 months I registered with them I had six of these vivid dreams, which I submitted to them. These were the only dreams submitted. It wasn't a case of me firing off hundreds of dreams, and then picking a few that sounded right. Every dream I sent them resolved itself, normally within weeks or days.

For example, in the first dream, I dreamt of Kevin Rudd's wife (I didn't know her name at that stage, or what she looked like, I just knew who she was), standing next to a

hole that looked like a grave. This had come out of the blue—I'd never seen her before, and there had been nothing recent in the media about her.

I forwarded this dream to John Happs, wondering whether, based on the grave-like hole, she was going to die? Three weeks later, Kevin Rudd and his wife attended a funeral at the Perth Cemetery for a soldier killed overseas two weeks previously. This was before these unfortunate deaths were to become an almost com-

Premonitions (Part 1) by James Barker (cont'd from page 2)

mon occurrence. The footage on Sky News (The only news I watch) showed Mr. Rudd and his wife standing next to the grave. A clip of this footage was then included in the 'promo' for Sky News, and was repeated many times over the following weeks—so I got to see them standing by that grave quite often.

It should be noted that if I'd have had this dream any closer to the date of the funeral, WASA would most probably have claimed it was based on my being aware of the unfortunate soldier's death. Even so, WASA told me that this dream and others of mine which resolved themselves similarly were coincidences, and told me that for them to accept that they weren't coincidences, I had to provide them with the dates and times the dreams would come true, and the locations. This is a bit like telling a hang-glider pilot that they won't believe he can fly until he goes supersonic. They were changing the rules so that I would fail. I never told them I could provide exact dates or times. I told them this was impossible as my dreams are like watching a silent movie.

I did tell them though, that I had dreamt that the share price for West Australian Newspapers (WAN) would drop to \$8.30. At the time, they were at \$13.00, and rising. I still remember having an argument/discussion with my work colleague who said you can't make money from a psychic ability (ironically, his wife is a psychic healer), but I was adamant that the price was going to fall to \$8.30. My sister told me that there would have to be a major crash for it to do so. I had told her to sell as she had quite a few shares in that company (I still have the email). This is the only time I've done this. I also emailed WASA on January 31, 2008, advising them of this dream, and I told them I didn't know the exact date the price would fall, but I said I was getting ready to buy when it did. On June 13, 2008,

I purchased WAN shares for \$8.33. I sold the WAN shares when they reached \$9.00 on October 3, 2008.

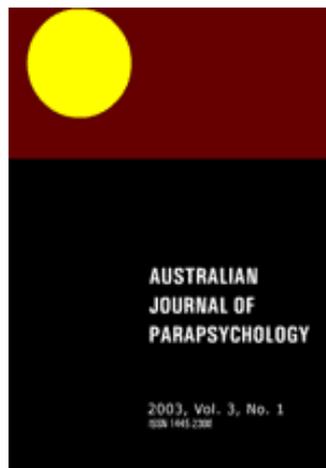
A more recent 'coincidence' was, after buying Myer shares for \$1.96 on May 28, 2012, a few days later I had a premonition (very rare), that they would go down to around \$1.55. Based on this, I sold my shares in Myer for \$1.85 on June 4, 2012, making a small loss. I even emailed my family (June 7, 2012) about the premonition and the price of around

\$1.55. At this stage, Myer shares were trading well below their historical price, and I resisted the urge to buy back in. I was so confident that around \$1.55 was the bottom price, that on June 28, 2012, not only did I buy a substantial amount in my Superfund, but also a small amount privately.

Financial Experts will explain that it is almost impossible to pick the bottom of a share price—with the Myer shares, I did. The chart below confirms that I purchased the

shares on the day they were at their lowest. I did not, and have not, purchased any more Myer shares at the time of writing. Again, this is the only time I have had a premonition on shares, and also emailed my family about it. You can also see from the chart below that at the time of my premonition, the shares were actually going up! It's very rare for me to get 'share' dreams or premonitions, but when I do, I listen! ♣

(cont'd March, 2013)



The Australian Journal of Parapsychology features research articles on ESP (extra-sensory perception), PK (psychokinesis), and the afterlife.

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(see page 4)

The Australian Institute of Parapsychological Research is a non-profit community association. Based in Sydney but with a worldwide membership base, it was established in 1977. The aims of the organisation are:

- 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.

Looking for information on the paranormal? The AIPR has fact sheets on:

- Psychic and mystical experiences of the aborigines
- Psychic and psycho-spiritual development
- Healing
- Mystical experiences
- Apparitions, ghosts and hauntings
- Out of body experiences
- Near-death experiences
- The human aura

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Quid Nunc by Hannah Jenkins

I was in Venice last Monday. It got me thinking. As I traipsed the quaint streets and marvelled at how the place remained so charming despite the tourists and decay, I started to think about the time when it was a haven for those who had thoughts which challenged the authority of the day. The time when the canal-based city thumbed its nose at the authority of Rome and maintained a place where people were free to think and investigate those things considered out of bounds by church authorities.

Some of the controversial things they discussed in the salons are related to what we now call psi today and are still subject to repression by religious and scientific authorities (works in the hermetic tradition for example).

An offshoot of all the intellectual pursuits was the establishment of many publishing houses, fulfilling the need to disseminate ideas. The new printing companies also helped develop new ways of sharing information. One such company, Aldine Press, founded in the late 1400s in Venice is credited with inventing italic type face, introducing the comma and

semi-colon as well as the production of more affordable books (the paperbacks of the day). It must surely have been quite a place to experience.

On the plane home to Australia—with the sleep deprived mind-widening idleness that accompanies long-haul flights—I started to think more. Where is the Venice of that era today? And I came to the conclusion that we don't have one, which made me wonder if we should try somehow, to create one.

The internet has brought the parapsychology community together online in a way that wasn't possible even 10 years ago. Without the ability to find like-minded researchers operating in universities far beyond our shores I doubt I would have pursued my interest in psi as I have. Since it is costly to travel, and Australia remains a small and isolated place to pursue such interests, it is still critical. Though I am glad I established strong connections before the social media explosion, inane content and Google-ads changed the online landscape.

Despite the internet and the increase in ease of communication, we still find ourselves in

our own institutions, searching for research income, and battling the ignorance in the mainstream presses and academia. There is no Venice where we can gather, work, live, meet and publish without the prejudices inherited from even before the time Venice provided such a haven for free-thinkers. By free-thinkers, I don't mean those who have wild and crazy notions of utopia or unfounded speculative theories about the nature of reality. I mean those who, like psi researchers now, have seen past the blocks that unnecessarily prohibit our expansion of understanding of phenomena such as telepathy and psychokinesis.

Universities sprinkled around the place (like Edinburgh in its heyday) have at various times provided small harbours in the stormy sea of ignorance. And I never cease to be inspired by the groups that formed in the 1970s and produced remarkable applicable psi experiments (like the Mobius group or the Stanford Institute researchers).

But there doesn't seem to have evolved any one institution, let alone a city, where you would move to in order to pursue the study of psi and live and work amongst those who are similarly inspired and, most importantly, have the unequivocal support of major funded institutions.

To create a modern version you would need a city with a supportive university or institute, big enough to provide employment for various researchers, small enough to create a connected community, and robust enough to support related commercial activities to keep it vibrant. Most importantly it needs to be a place that welcomes outsiders, and allows residential opportunities for those who might choose to move to the city, but who do not hail from the country it is in. It is perhaps this latter point that is the greatest barrier in modern times.

When Venice experienced such a flourishing of thought, passports were not required and anyone with a bit of capital or smarts could move to and set up in the city regardless of where they originally hailed from. The

internet has broken this boundary and created online publishing opportunities, but I still think there is a value in being able to meet and talk and discuss and share information in person. Places renowned for producing some of the influential thinkers today have often been places where disparate people are provided with the opportunity to exchange pleasantries, say in a tea room, and these exchanges then lead to collaboration and sharing of ideas across disciplines. (I am thinking here of a place like MIT's Building 20 famous now for seeding thinkers like Noam Chomsky). Imagine then a whole living community within a city where such opportunities arise. This sort of crucible is what Venice probably provided all those centuries ago.

As an intriguing addendum—as I was writing this column, concentrating quite intently as I was already running late on the deadline, my phone rang. It was a friend of mine, also an Australian psi researcher. It turned out she'd rung my number completely by accident and was actually trying to reach someone in the UK. At the time she rang, I had been focussing intensely on the thought of creating a new Venice somewhere (the idea behind this column) and was imagining a future where Hobart (where I currently reside) had successfully become such a hub for radical thinking. (It fulfils most of the criteria—it has a university which, though isn't currently supportive of psi research, at least has a history of parapsychology studies, it has a population of around 250,000—a sizeable enough city without being too big. It is a charming town situated in beautiful surrounds. Perfect!)

It was exactly at the moment as I was imagining the delightful reality of such a future when the call interrupted my thoughts. Was the phone call just a coincidence, or was there something more at work. We'll never know from just this one incident. But it made me happy to think someone out there in the psi research community might have picked up on this thought. Now, how to make it a reality. . . .

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