

Six Modern Apparitional Experiences

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Abstract — The early investigators of paranormal phenomena, in the late 19th century, gave much attention to "hallucinations" occurring in ostensibly healthy persons. The term "apparitions" became applied to perceptions of persons who were not physically present to the percipient. The investigators attached special importance to apparitional experiences that either coincided with the death of the perceived person or contained verified details of which the percipient had no normal knowledge. In recent decades interest in apparitions on the part of investigators has greatly diminished, but this is not because the experiences no longer occur. A 1948 survey in Great Britain reported that 14.3% of respondents had had such an experience and a 1979 survey in the United States gave an even higher figure of 17%. This paper reports the investigations of six modern apparitional experiences occurring in the United States and the United Kingdom between 1955 and 1989. The percipients were interviewed in the 1980s and 1990s. Corroboration before verification was only obtainable in one case. Other confirmatory information, such as death certificates, was, however, obtained for some cases. In four of the six cases the experience coincided with the death of the perceived person or occurred close to the time of the death. In the other two cases the percipient saw a deceased relative of a dying person just before the death of that person.

Introduction

Several surveys during the past century in Great Britain (Sidgwick et al., 1894; West, 1948, 1990) and the United States (McCready and Greeley, 1976; Palmer, 1979) have shown that between 10% and 27% of the general population state that they have had, at least once in their lifetime, a sensory perception, often visual, of another person who was not physically present with the percipient. The perceived figure is usually called an apparition, and the experience an apparitional experience. That persons in good physical health often have experiences that might be called hallucinatory has been known to psychologists for more than a century (Galton, 1883; Parish, 1897). The word hallucination implies, etymologically, a wandering of the mind, and should properly be restricted to the abnormal perceptions of the mentally ill. This led me to suggest a new word, *idiophany* (meaning a private perception), under which we could subsume both the hallucinations of the mentally ill and the private perceptions, such as apparitional experiences, of persons not mentally ill (Stevenson, 1983). I had hoped that this neologism might avoid the stigma attached to hallucinations, thereby making it easier for persons having

unusual perceptions to report them to interested scientists. The word has not become current, but apart from that, the distinction it was intended to emphasize is still not often made, and confusion persists between the abnormal perceptions of persons who are mentally healthy and of those who are not.

Scientists should study the abnormal perceptions of mentally healthy persons for several reasons. First, they occur more frequently in certain conditions of life, such as in bereavement (Malinak, Hoyt, and Patterson, 1979; Marris, 1958; Parkes, 1970; Rees, 1971) and when death approaches (Barrett, 1926; Callanan and Kelley, 1992; Osis, 1961; Osis and Haraldsson, 1977; 1986). Physicians can help persons in these situations better if they improve their understanding of the unusual psychological experiences such persons may have. Second, a substantial number of apparitional experiences have veridical elements, that is, the details of the reported perception correspond to details of an event taking place elsewhere, outside the percipient's normal sensory range (Gurney, Myers, and Podmore, 1886). (Exact contemporaneity between the perception and related event does not always occur, but that is a separate matter for investigation.) Third, persons who have an apparitional experience are likely to report having had other apparently paranormal experiences (Palmer, 1979). The ability to have such experiences does not appear to be normally distributed in the population, and we need to learn what factors influence its more frequent occurrence in certain persons than in others.

Apparitional experiences were commonly reported and accounts of them frequently published in the late 19th century. Today they are rarely reported and accounts of them are only published sporadically (Green and McCreery, 1975; Haraldsson, 1987; Mackenzie, 1971; Owen, 1965; Stevenson, 1964, 1965). Yet the surveys I have cited — some of them fairly recent — show that these experiences still occur with notable frequency and are acknowledged, at least in surveys. The decline of published reports of such experiences may derive from a fear on the part of percipients that they will be identified as having had only "hallucinations" and that therefore, by implication, they are mentally ill. The failure of reporting may also, to some extent, be due to lack of interest in such experiences on the part of investigators. A consequence of this would be ignorance in the general public about researchers to whom they might communicate information about such experiences.

In this paper I report six modern (visual) apparitional experiences. The earliest occurred in 1955, the most recent in 1989. In different ways they illustrate the features of apparitional experiences reported by the 19th-century pioneers of the investigation of paranormal phenomena.

Case Reports¹

Case 1

N. E., the percipient of this case, is a woman resident of Charlottesville, Virginia, who was born in 1921. She had an apparitional experience following her mother's death in 1971, when N. E. was about 50 years old. She described the experience to me during a meeting in 1984, and then furnished a more detailed account during another meeting with me in 1993. N. E. said that she has had numerous other apparently paranormal experiences.

N. E. was strongly attached to her mother. She did not believe that she was her mother's favorite child among eight siblings; but she did believe that she was the only one of them to have "psychic" abilities. About one month before her mother died, N. E. asked her mother to try, after her death, to give her (N. E.) a signal of her survival of death. Her mother agreed.

When her mother died, N. E. was grief-stricken. The funeral took place two days after the death. N. E. returned home from the funeral in a desolate state and went to bed. Her husband was also in bed. She did not sleep, but kept thinking about her mother. She became aware of a light, which was so bright that she thought it might be coming from a neighbor's automobile. Then the light came into N. E.'s room. It seemed to be yellow-green. N. E. was at first frightened and pulled the bed covers over her head. She then seemed to receive the word "Mother," and uncovered her head. Then she saw her mother, but not in full length; only the upper part of the body and the face were visible. N. E.'s mother seemed to be laughing at N. E. At first N. E. was so awestruck that she could not talk. The apparitional figure seemed to move across the room. N. E. was then able to ask it whether she (her mother) was in heaven. The figure bowed, as if to say "yes," but did not speak. N. E. then asked: "Is Daddy with you?" The figure again bowed. By this time it had moved near the window, and then it disappeared.

N. E.'s husband was awakened by the sound of her voice and asked her with whom she was speaking; but she did not reply.

N. E.'s younger sister furnished me with a statement (in 1984) from which I quote the following:

This is to certify that my sister, N. E., told me [that] two nights after our mother died she was in bed and a great light with different colors appeared in her room and a vision of our mother floated toward the bed. N. E. asked mother if she was in heaven and she smiled and nodded her head. N. E. also told our brother G., and possibly other members of our family, about this.

The statement was also signed by N. E.'s brother G.

¹The percipients and informants for all cases in this report, with one exception, have been identified by pseudonymous initials. The exception is Case 4, which has been published in a shorter account with real names.

N. E. told me that at the time of her vision of her mother she had not been thinking about her mother's pact to communicate with N. E. after her death.

Comment. This apparitional experience is typical of those occurring during bereavement. Although the percipient denied that she was consciously expecting a communication from her mother, the expectation was at least latent in her mind and might have stimulated the experience. For N. E., however, the vision was satisfying evidence that her mother had survived death and rejoined her husband in a heavenly realm. The appearing figure communicated no information outside the knowledge or expectations of the percipient.

Case 2

R. N., the percipient in this case, is a resident of Cardiff, Wales, who was born in 1945. She has had a number of apparently paranormal experiences, including at least two apparitional ones.

The experience of this report occurred on July 20, 1989 in R. N.'s office in Cardiff. I learned about it in 1992 from Mr. Jeffrey Iverson, also a resident of Wales, who put me in touch with R. N. (Mr. Iverson, a television producer, had recently made a documentary film in which my research had figured, and he was aware of my interest in apparitions.) She wrote out for me an account of the experience dated June 3, 1993. Subsequently, on June 7-8, 1993, I met her in Cardiff and discussed details of the experience with her. R. N. took me to the office where she had had her experience. I examined the area and sketched the office, locating the place where R. N. had stood when she saw the apparition and where the apparition had seemed to be. I obtained some additional information later through correspondence.

The person figuring in R. N.'s experience was T. I., who had formerly been employed by the company for which R. N. worked. He had quarreled with his associates (not with R. N.) and quit the company abruptly. R. N. had known T. I. well when they were employed together, but did not keep in touch with him after he left their company. At the time of her experience she had not seen him for what she described as "yonks," meaning a time of indefinite length, not precisely remembered. R. N.'s husband (in a later conversation with me) estimated that a month had elapsed between T. I.'s leaving the company (where he also worked and had known T. I.) and R. N.'s apparitional experience.

The experience occurred on the afternoon of July 20, 1989 at around 3:00 p.m. R. N. remembered that she had had that afternoon an appointment with a fellow-employee whom she was advising. (She showed me the entry in her appointment book for this meeting.) R. N. and her visitor were seated in her office, but several telephone calls interrupted their conversation. When these occurred, R. N. had to get up from her chair and walk over to her desk in order to answer the telephone. The outer wall of the office behind her desk was a full sheet of glass (from floor to ceiling), and this gave a clear view of a flat walkway between two stairs that led from a parking lot to an entrance for the building. As R. N. answered the telephone on one occasion, she noticed T. I.

walking past. He was wearing a navy blue shirt, a navy blue sailing sweater, and navy trousers. She remembered his "sailor's gait." (T. I. had sailed a great deal and had developed this kind of gait.) R. N. thought that T. I. seemed to be in a hurry. T. I. ordinarily had a ruddy complexion, but on this occasion — to quote now from R. N.'s account — "he was very red and he looked very troubled. He appeared perfectly solid, and I did not attract his attention through the window. I thought no more about this, it was nothing unusual." The distance between R. N. and the appearing figure of T. I. was about 10-12 feet.

On the following day, July 21, a secretary of the company told R. N. that T. I. had died. R. N. commented that his death must have been sudden, perhaps from a traffic accident, because she had seen him just the day before. The secretary replied that this could not be so, because T. I. had died in the hospital. I was able to obtain a copy of T. I.'s death certificate, which confirmed that he had died in the hospital on July 20, 1989. Mr. Iverson further learned from T. I.'s widow that T. I. had been unconscious for almost the entire day before he died and that he had died late in the evening, perhaps around 11.00 p.m.

I obtained a copy of the "clinical notes" of T. I.'s admission to the hospital. They were lamentably sketchy. The notes for July 20 stated that he was unconscious that day before he died, on the same day. They did not record the time of death.

Comment. According to the ascertained facts, R. N. saw T. I. in clothes that seemed natural for him at a time when he was not dead, but dying and unconscious in a hospital 4 miles away. There he would have been dressed in hospital clothing. For investigators of paranormal phenomena there is nothing especially unusual about a person appearing as an apparitional figure while still alive. In their classic study of apparitions, Gurney, Myers, and Podmore (1886) considered an experience to be coincident with death if it occurred within twelve hours before or after the death. It is also common in such experiences for the percipient to perceive the appearing figure in clothes familiar to the percipient, but different from those in which the appearing person was then dressed.

Some readers may suppose that a stranger unknown to R. N. passed the window of her office as she was at her telephone and that she misidentified this person with T. I. The short distance between R. N. and the appearing figure make this unlikely. Even if R. N. had misidentified a stranger as T. I., however, this would leave unanswered the question of why she mistook the stranger for T. I. instead of for someone else. Because T. I. had left the company, R. N. had no reason to expect that she would see him back at the company where he had worked.

Could R. N. have overheard the secretary talking earlier about T. I.'s illness without registering this consciously and yet having this information influence a misidentification of someone else for T. I.? I cannot exclude this possibility, but it seems unlikely. The apparent sight of T. I. would surely have brought into R. N.'s consciousness an awareness that T. I. was ill and unlikely to be

walking around. On the other hand, the hypothesis of misidentification receives some support from R. N.'s noting that the appearing figure looked even ruddier than T. I. usually did.

It occurred to me that perhaps as T. I. was dying he had thought about the company with which he had worked and from which he had parted disagreeably not long before he became ill. He might have — I speculated — even considered meeting his former colleagues and making peace with them. If so, he might have mentally projected himself, as it were, back to the company's building, and this might have stimulated R. N.'s perception of him. I was unable to obtain any confirmation of this conjecture. Mr. Iverson learned from T. I.'s widow that T. I. had not discussed the company with her before he lapsed into unconsciousness.

Case 3

D. X., the percipient of this case, was born in 1939. She lived in Birmingham, England. Her experience occurred on June 2, 1983. An informant for another apparitional experience mentioned that of D. X. to me, and I wrote to her and asked her to send me an account of it. She did this, and subsequently I interviewed her and her husband at their home in Birmingham on September 12, 1992. I obtained some further information about details in correspondence and a telephone call. I also obtained a copy of the death certificate of S. T., who was the person figuring in D. X.'s experience.

S. T. lost his sight when he was 17 years old. Subsequently, he trained in wood crafts and then for many years taught the making of cane furniture in a college for handicapped persons. D. X. worked at the same institution and there knew S. T. well and liked him, particularly for his honesty, his independence, and his sense of humor. Because of his blindness, S. T. had a restricted social life, and D. X. and her husband were the only colleagues at his place of work who invited him to social occasions. In about 1980 S. T. retired, and thereafter D. X. did not continue social relations with him, even though he lived not far from her. S. T. continued to be physically active. He mowed his lawn, and he went for walks with a seeing-eye dog (guide dog) he had. D. X. learned that he was not in good health, but had no reason to think his life was in danger at the time of her experience.

On Saturday June 4, 1983, D. X. and her husband went for a pleasure drive in their car. D. X.'s husband was driving. As they passed a place near where S. T. lived, D. X. saw him on the street, standing close to a bus stop. The place was "not far" from where S. T. lived. D. X. mentioned seeing S. T. to her husband. He (her husband) did not see D. X., but he later confirmed to me that D. X. had told him she had just seen S. T. Later, D. X. had a clear memory of how S. T. appeared at the time of her experience. He did not have his seeing-eye dog with him. D. X. thought this unusual, but quickly surmised that perhaps the dog was hidden by the shelter at the bus stand. Also, although S. T. was seen close to his home, he was not on the street or park where he ordinarily

ly walked. D. X. particularly remarked that S. T. had an angry expression on his face. This made her feel "dreadfully guilty," and she made a mental resolution to visit him the following week.

On the first day back at her work the following week, D. X. learned from a colleague that S. T. had died. She wrote: "I was on the point of saying that I had seen S. T. on [the previous] Saturday, and was shattered to learn that he had actually died earlier the previous week." As mentioned, S. T. was known not to be in good health. He had heart disease, but was not considered seriously ill. After mowing his lawn, he was walking to meet his wife when he "dropped dead" on the street. S. T.'s death certificate recorded his date of death as June 2, 1983. That day was a Thursday. Therefore, D. X.'s experience occurred two days after S. T.'s death. (D. X.'s husband later estimated the interval between the death and his wife's experience as "about a week," but it was less than that.)

Comment. This case also lends itself to the interpretation of misidentification of a stranger for a person well known to the percipient. The appearing figure was seen at a place where S. T. would not ordinarily walk and without his dog. Against that interpretation, however, one can point to the various details figuring in D. X.'s experience that made her quite certain that she had seen S. T. and no one else. She shared this certainty with her husband.

The interval of two days between the death of the appearing person and the experience exceeds what investigators of these cases consider "death-coinciding," and places the case instead under the heading of "postmortem apparitions." Gibson (1944) studied the relative motivations to communicate of the percipient and the presumed surviving (after death) personalities who figured in postmortem apparitions — so far as these motivations could be known or reasonably conjectured — and found that, in general, the motivation to communicate was stronger in the agent (appearing person) than in the percipient. In the present case the percipient experienced guilt for not having visited S. T. after his retirement; but we cannot conclude from this that the angry expression on the face of the appearing figure of S. T. was intended as a reproach to D. X. for her neglect.

Case 4

E. W., the percipient of this case, was born in 1907. She has lived all her life in Scotland, much of it in Skye. She had had numerous apparently paranormal experiences and was reputed among persons who knew her and knew about her to have what Scottish Highlanders refer to as "second sight." This phrase refers to a somewhat specialized type of paranormal perception, particularly of persons who are near to death or have died (Cohn, 1994). E. W. contributed a chapter to a book about seership (Davidson, 1989) in which she described some of her experiences, including the one I am here including. I am able to furnish some details that E. W. did not mention in her account.

The case came to my attention through reading the book in which E. W. had

given a brief description of her experience. I wrote to E. W. and after some correspondence went to Vatten, Skye, where E. W. was then living, on September 3, 1992. I tape-recorded a long interview with her. In essentials, E. W.'s account of her experience to me did not differ from the one she had published, but it was more detailed.

Subsequently, I went to Dunfermline where I met and interviewed Betty McKay, the widow of the person (Ronald McKay) who had figured in E. W.'s apparitional experience. The experience had occurred in Dunfermline, and in 1992 I saw the place where it had occurred and formed some impression of the distance between E. W. and the appearing figure that she saw. Later, I believed that I had not adequately examined the site of E. W.'s experience. Therefore, when I was in Scotland again in August 1994, I returned to Dunfermline and, accompanied by Betty McKay, examined the site closely. I made a sketch of the relevant roads and buildings.

I also obtained a copy of Ronald McKay's death certificate. I learned about a further detail in subsequent correspondence with E. W.

The experience occurred early on the morning of May 29, 1975. E. W. went to the outside door of her house (which faces the main road) in order to bring inside the delivered bottles of milk that had been left on her doorstep. She later thought she had done this between 10:00 and 10:30 a.m. She looked across the road and saw her neighbor Ronald McKay walking out of the driveway of his house and then along the road or drive as if going toward the nearby factory of which he was the manager. E. W. and her husband had known that the McKays had been away on vacation and believed that they were still away. When E. W. went back inside her house, she said casually to her husband: "I see the McKays are back." Her husband asked her when they had come back. E. W. replied: "I don't know, but I saw Ron go down the drive." About half an hour or perhaps an hour later, a senior employee of Ronald McKay's factory came to the house and spoke with E. W.'s husband. He then asked her when she had seen Ron McKay, and she repeated what she had said earlier. Her husband then said that the factory employee had information that Ronald McKay had died that morning while on vacation in England about 150 miles away from Dunfermline.

The temporal coincidence between E. W.'s apparitional experience and Ronald McKay's death must have been close. The interval could not have been more than 3-4 hours. Ron McKay's widow, Betty McKay, told me that he had died at 7:00 in the morning. She and her husband had not yet dressed for breakfast. Ronald McKay had awakened with a headache, had taken a mild analgesic tablet, and gone back to sleep. A little later, when his wife tried to arouse him, she could not do so and realized that he had died. The death certificate attributed his death to "severe coronary sclerosis."

E. W. saw Ronald McKay wearing a nylon shirt tucked into flannel trousers. Betty McKay told me that this was his customary clothing for work. As men-

tioned, at the time of his death Ronald McKay had not got up and dressed. He was in fact naked; he always slept naked and was in that state when he died.

I estimate that E. W. had the figure of Ronald McKay in view for at least 10 seconds, because she watched him come out of the driveway behind his house and walk along the road toward his factory. The garage of this house and the driveway to it were at the back of the house as was a door of the house. Part of the driveway near the road was visible from where E. W. stood. She would have seen Ronald McKay's face as he came out of the driveway, but when he turned to walk toward the factory his back would have been toward E. W. The distance between E. W. and the appearing figure would have varied during the period of her observation. When they were closest they might have been about 50 feet apart. The figure was lifelike, and E. W. did not think she had seen a dead person until she learned about Ronald McKay's death an hour or so after her experience.

Comment. Given the facts that the appearing figure came out of Ronald McKay's driveway and that E. W. watched him for, I have estimated, 10 seconds, misidentification seems an unlikely interpretation of the case. Moreover, at the time of E. W.'s experiences there were no other houses in the immediate area except those of E. W. and her husband and the McKays. Betty McKay was quite certain that no other human being would have been walking out of the driveway at the back of their house at the time E. W. had her experience.

In this case, as in Case 2, the percipient saw the appearing figure wearing clothes that the percipient was accustomed to seeing him wear, but that the appearing person was not wearing at the time.

Case 5

D. I., the percipient of this case was born in 1951. The experience she reported occurred in Groton, Connecticut. She later moved to a small town in North Carolina. Her experience occurred when she was 14 years old. She described it afterward to members of her family, but they told her not to talk about it and forget it. She could not forget it, but she seems to have discussed it with almost no one else until she communicated it to our Division in a letter dated July 17, 1991. I corresponded with D. I. about details of the experience and on February 13, 1993 went to the town in North Carolina where D. I. then lived and tape-recorded a long interview with her. D. I. showed me copies of the death certificates of her maternal grandparents.

By the time I came to investigate this case (in the 1990s) two persons who might, at least to some extent, have corroborated D.I.'s account of the experience — her mother and stepfather — had died. From what she said, however, it is doubtful whether they would have made willing informants.

D. I. was a girl just under 14 years of age at the time of her experience, which occurred on January 4, 1965. Her maternal grandfather was living with her, her mother, stepfather, and two brothers. He was dying of leukemia and in such an enfeebled condition that it had been decided to admit him to a hospital.

The day before his transfer to the hospital he had been heard calling for D. I.'s father (not her stepfather, who was a member of the current family). Later, D. I.'s mother thought that her father was calling for her first husband (whom she had divorced) because he wished to become reconciled with him before he (her father) died. Such a wish on the part of a dying person for reconciliation with persons from whom the dying person has been alienated occurs not uncommonly (Callanan and Kelley, 1994).

On the day of this planned transfer to the hospital, D. I. had a throat infection and stayed home with her grandfather. Her siblings, mother, and stepfather were all out of the house, at school or work. Her stepfather was due to return home in time to be there when the ambulance came to take D. I.'s grandfather to the hospital. The apparitional experience occurred in the late morning of that day not long before D. I.'s stepfather was due to return to the home. I quote now from D. I.'s first letter about the experience:

Granddaddy called to me to give him a drink of water. I failed in my attempts to lift him enough to wet his lips. The disease had reduced his once tall, strong stature to [that of] a frail, weak invalid. I called mom at work to ask for help, but she told me it would have to wait until dad [D. I.'s stepfather] returned from work at noon.

Shortly thereafter I heard granddaddy calling out to his wife, Hazel. Grandmom had died nine years prior [on October 13, 1956], so I thought he must be losing his mind. I ran down the hall to make another attempt to help him. I was amazed to find him sitting up, smiling with his arms reaching out. The room was filled with a warm, bright light. He spoke to grandmom, who was standing at the foot of his bed. Neither of them acknowledged my presence. She was there but a brief moment, and when granddaddy laid back down, his soul escaped with her. He died with a smile on his face.

During my interview with D. I., I asked her about details of her vision of her grandmother. One question concerned her assurance that the figure she saw (and her grandfather seemed to see) was really that of her grandmother. Her grandfather's calling out the name "Hazel" was part of the evidence, but apart from that D. I. had known her maternal grandmother well; D. I. had been five years old when her grandmother had died.

D. I. furnished some further details about the clothing that her grandmother seemed to be wearing, or rather not wearing:

I remember that question in the first letter [of I. S.] and I have given that a lot of thought and I don't, I honestly don't recall clothes. I just recall that it... a very bright white light and that her face is there and I see her hands. I can see an image of arms but I don't see clothing. She is either in all white or the white light is so bright I can't see the clothing.

I. S.: But you saw her face?

D. I.: Her face, right.

I. S.: And her arms?

D. I.: I can tell that the arms are out reaching but the light is so bright and I am not focusing so much on detail. I don't really recall.

I also asked for more details about how D. I.'s grandfather had called for "Hazel" and how the light had appeared. She replied as follows:

I heard him calling me. But when he starts calling my grandmother's name I am at the other end of the hallway... I don't remember exactly what I was doing but I heard him call, "Hazel." But it was in a very nice voice. It wasn't the command he had given me. And I was trying to figure out why is he calling her. He was calling my father last night and he knows my father doesn't live here and now he is calling my grandmother. So I went on down the hall and as I got down the hallway; the room is set where the door is here [meaning in the room where we were talking] and the room goes off in this direction from the hallway. And his bed is facing here and the pot is here. Now we were very cramped there. There is a bunk bed that is sitting here that my two brothers slept in the same room, and my bedroom is here. And I can still visualize it. If this was the room and his bed was here the light came out of that corner there of the ceiling and it came, shone right down at the very foot of his bed. And she was not on the floor. She, her, I didn't see her feet. But she was above the floor. And if a conversation was held between them it was not to my ears. You could see very beautiful, peaceful expressions on their faces. That is the most vivid part of it for me. That they both were just so at peace at seeing each other. And he raised up. By the time I get to the room he didn't even acknowledge that I had come to the room. He raises up and he raised his arms up to reach her and he just laid back. And when he laid back down he had a smile on his face and his eyes were open. And she. And when I am looking at him, then I look back and she was gone. And I got hysterical because I knew without even knowing how. I didn't know how to check for vital signs or anything. I just knew that he was dead. That he had passed.

Comment. Given that 26 years elapsed between this experience and its first recording in written form some doubts may be expressed about the accuracy of D. I.'s memory. I will discuss the question of the accuracy of memories in these cases later.

If we assume the accuracy in essential details of D. I.'s report, the case fits in the category of what Osis and Haraldsson (1977/1986) described as "take-away cases." By this term they referred to the phenomenological appearance that the perceived figure has come to receive the dying person into the life after death.

If we assume that D. I.'s grandfather perceived his late wife, Hazel, at the time he was calling out her name — and he certainly acted as if he perceived her — the case is also one of a collective apparitional experience. These are defined as experiences shared by two or more persons present at the time and in a position to perceive the appearing figure; definitions vary slightly according to the detailed requirements for "being present." Among all apparitional experiences collective ones occur in about a third of cases (Sidgwick et al., 1894) or perhaps in as many as 56% (Hart and collaborators, 1956).

Case 6

B. I., the percipient of this case was born in 1921. He is a physician, who practiced as a pediatrician and has lived most of his life in a large city in North

Carolina. His apparitional experience occurred on June 30, 1955. He first described it to my colleague Dr. Emily W. Cook (E. W. C.) in July 1983, and she made a written record of it on August 12, 1983. In 1992 I wrote to him and asked him to write an account of the experience, which he sent in a letter dated November 5, 1992. On December 12, 1994 I went to B. I.'s home in North Carolina and had a long interview with him. He mentioned at this time some additional details about his experience.

The experience occurred at the time B. I.'s mother-in-law, F. C., died. His father-in-law, G. C., had died 7 years earlier, in 1948. I quote now from B. I.'s letter of November 5, 1992.

F. C. had had several minor cerebral vascular accidents in the year before she died, but the one 3-4 days before her death was a devastating one. She never regained consciousness. Her children and her physician agreed to keep her comfortable at home and to avoid any life-extending procedures.

I was standing by her bed and no one else was in the room. She had an agonal inspiration, and at that moment I had a very clear picture of G. C. [her late husband] standing across from me with his arms outstretched, and he said: "Flora, I've been waiting for you."

I did not really have to look to see that my mother-in-law had died, but the physician in me pushed me to verify that.

At our meeting in December 1994, B. I. told me that the figure of his father-in-law was quite opaque, as he would have seen him in life. B. I. saw the figure only from the waist up, but he believed that the furniture in the room might have prevented him from seeing more of the figure if it had been visible.

E. W. C. remembered from her conversations with B. I. about his experience that the appearing figure of B. I.'s father-in-law had addressed his dying wife as "Flossie," her nickname in the family. When asked about this discrepancy, B. I. checked with three other members of the family (with whom he had discussed his experience) and found that their memories of the name agreed with that of E. W. C. B. I. said that he deferred to their memories of what he had told them earlier.

On the question of his acquaintance with his father-in-law, B. I. said that he and his wife married in 1950, two years after his father-in-law died. He thought that he might have met his father-in-law once or twice some years before his death. He was, however, familiar with his appearance from photographs in the family.

As a pediatrician B. I. had often treated children who had died. He had sometimes prayed for their sufferings to end. Sometimes, after a child had died, he had a kind of inner "flash of seeing" the child running around and playing after being released by death. B. I. attributed these images to "my own hopes that they were at last free to do so [run and play] and my own somewhat vivid imagination." He was sure, however, that he had no expectation of see-

ing his father-in-law at the moment his mother-in-law died. He wrote: "I was surprised but comforted by what I saw."

Comment. As with the preceding case, a long interval — in this one 28 years — elapsed between the experience and the first written account of it. Again, we confront the question of the accuracy of the percipient's memory over such a long interval.

Investigators of apparitions classify this case as one of the "bystander type." The phenomenal aspects of the experience, assuming survival after death, suggest that G. C. (B. I.'s deceased father-in-law) had come to receive his wife as she died. He (G. C.) had no special interest in B. I., whom he may have met once or twice. Yet B. I. perceived him, whereas his dying mother-in-law showed no evidence of having done so. (She was in a coma.) This is why the appearing person is described as appearing to a bystander rather than to the person with whom he or she presumably would have wished to communicate. Gurney (1888-89) and Haraldsson (1987) reported other bystander cases.

Discussion

As I stated in the Introduction, my purpose in publishing this paper is to draw attention to the continuing occurrence of apparitional experiences. I said that we know little about the incidence of such experiences because of a failure of full reporting, and I hope this paper will help to sustain interest in the subject until we or other researchers can conduct a systematic survey of these experiences and investigate the cases ascertained in the survey.

An important advantage of such a survey followed immediately by investigation of the cases ascertained would be the likelihood of studying at least some of the cases closer to the times of their occurrence than I could study the six cases here reported. The interval for these cases between the apparitional experience and my investigation of it varied between 4 and 37 years with a mean of 18 years. In one case 26 years and in another 28 years elapsed between the experience and the first written record of it.

The folk myth about memories of such cases over a period of time is that they become embellished over the years. The evidence points away from this as a generalization. I have argued elsewhere, with supportive examples, that although in some persons fading and inaccuracies of memory occur in others they do not (Stevenson, 1971). Moreover, the greater the intensity of the emotion associated with an event, the more likely it is to be remembered accurately. Until recent years psychologists have often neglected this aspect of memory. Dutta and Kanunga (1975), however, reported experiments that showed a definite correlation between intensity of affect in an experience and memory for it later. In most experiments the results of which tend to discredit eyewitness testimony the subjects have been college students or other persons with little motivation to remember a testing event accurately. Yuille and Cutshall (1986) studied the memories of witnesses for an exciting event that occurred in real life — a shootout between a thief and his intended victim on a street in

Vancouver. A comparison of the witnesses' memories with verified features of the incident showed that memories for such events can be highly accurate, even after several months (the study by Yuille and Cutshall did not report the accuracy of the memories over years). Seeing an apparition is certainly an unusual experience and one nearly always fraught with strong emotion. Such experiences are likely to be remembered accurately. Unfortunately, given our limited knowledge, we have no way of telling which percipients have accurate memories for the events they narrate and which do not. I only contend here that there are no grounds for asserting that all memories of such unusual events become lost or distorted with time.

It would be inappropriate for me to make any generalizations from six cases, and I will therefore limit further discussion to a few additional remarks about these cases. First, I would draw attention to the ways in which I learned about the cases: through personal contact with persons who knew about my interest in such experience~N. E. lived in my community, knew about me, and reported her experience to me; a friend notified me of R. N.'s case; colleagues informed me about the cases of E. W., D. I., and B. I.; and E. W., in turn, told me about the case of D. X. In short, personal acquaintances — call it a network, if you will — brought these cases to my attention. This suggests that many other cases occur that are never notified to investigators.

Second, although N. E. and E. W. were the only two percipients of the six who said that they often had paranormal experiences, each of the other four reported having had some other experiences that they considered paranormal. These data accord with Palmer's observation, mentioned earlier, that persons who report apparitional experiences tend to report having had other apparently paranormal experiences (Palmer, 1979).

Third, readers will have noticed that every case coincided or nearly coincided with a death. I do not wish to attach any significance to this from these six cases. It has been argued, however, that apparitional experiences involved with death are more likely to be remembered than those in which no death figures. This assumption, in turn, has been used to devalue the role of death in such experiences. Such a question can only be resolved by the analysis of a large number of cases. This was accomplished in the Census of Hallucinations conducted in the 1890s by the Society for Psychical Research, and careful analysis of the data support the conclusion that the frequent occurrence of death in the reported cases is not the result of differential remembering, but a significant factor in the occurrence of many — certainly not all — apparitional experiences (Sidgwick et al., 1894; Broad, 1962).

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