

ACTOR'S EVIDENCE IS ON TAPE

by
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Guy Playfair is one of the UK's most experienced and highly respected psychical researchers, the author of several books on the paranormal. In this specially written feature, Guy tells how an actress neighbor received a stream of Survival evidence from her "dead" actor husband through a series of taped sittings from London medium Ronald Hearn.

When my friend and neighbor, Hana-Maria Pravda, asked me if I could recommend a medium who might be able to provide some evidence of the survival of her husband, Czech-born actor George Pravda, who died suddenly on May 1, 1985, at the age of sixty-eight I was surprised, for neither he nor she had shown much interest in psychic matters. George had been an almost total skeptic, while Hana-Maria was unimpressed by her single visit to a medium. Yet she had always felt a strong telepathic rapport with George, and wondered if it still continued.

Ten years on, there is an astonishing body of evidence that indicates that it did and still does. It consists of a long series of tapes made by Ronald Hearn, whom I originally asked if he could help, telling nothing at all except George's first name and the date of his death. Mr. Hearn, unlike most mediums, rarely meets his sitter, working alone in his London home, dictating his impressions into a tape recorder. Thus he can hardly be accused of any of the tricks of the false medium's trade such as muscle reading, "fishing," cold reading (messages that apply to almost everybody) or obtaining information by entirely normal means. The fact that he embarked on this series of tapes with no idea who either his client or his communicator were adds considerably to their evidential value.

The first tape, though not exceptional by Mr. Hearn's standards, included ten statements that were entirely correct. For example: "He speaks in a funny way. No, it's not a stutter, but it's strange. In spite of this he did a lot of speaking - some kind of public speaker ...He mentions the writer Priestly..."

George, as an actor, spent his working life speaking, and never lost his strong Czech accent. His last important part was as the doctor who "comes

back" in the play, "I Have Been Here Before," by J. b. Priestley. Hana-Maria was quite impressed and asked for more. Two further tapes were made when Mr. Hearn was still unaware of George's identity.

The accurate information continued. Especially convincing were the names. How many of us can claim personal connection with Elstree, Munich, Oxford, Nita, Bob Hope and Chess Game? George had close connections with the last three:

Nita was the unusual name of an old friend killed in a road accident

He worked with Bob Hope, who always sent him a Christmas card

He had appeared in a television film called "Chess Game," although this was never broadcast because of a strike.

Hana-Maria was even more impressed, and persuaded Mr. Hearn to give her a personal sitting, something he rarely does. This was a total failure, but Hana-Maria asked him to keep the line open, as it were, and send a tape along when he felt it appropriate.

This trust was not betrayed. There followed more than eighty tapes, many containing very specific information. This soon resolved itself into three main categories: comments on recent events, proper names, and - most intriguing of all - precognitions.

The twentieth tape is fairly typical. It opens with a reference to Mount Pleasant, a name that meant nothing to Hana-Maria. Just over a week later, however, she found herself coming out of a London building and looking at the Mount Pleasant Hotel. Mr. Hearn said something about Red Indians. A month later, on a visit to Vienna, of all places, Hana-Maria suddenly came across a group of native Peruvians in a national costume making some kind of protest. Then came a description of "a lady in an old costume riding an old-fashioned bicycle." Two weeks later, on a visit to a house she had never been in before, Hana-Maria was startled to find just such a scene on a poster.

Trivial stuff, one might say, yet as such incidents accumulate the odds against guesswork - or that old favorite of the resolute skeptic-- "coincidence" -- become enormous, even more so when two separate statements are found to be not only relevant but connected. For example, after repeating the title of a German drinking song several times, Mr. Hearn mentioned the name Gretchen. Hana-Maria had a friend named Gretl (near

enough, surely?) who sung that very song on a holiday they shared and, unknown to her, had died three months previously.

Some of the precognitions were of scenes that seemed unlikely to Hana-Maria at the time. On one tape, Mr. Hearn spoke about seeing her surrounded by lots of silver, like an Aladdin's cave. A few days later she received, quite unexpectedly, an invitation to the Hallmark Silver Selection, where she was indeed surrounded by a cave full of silver.

On another tape she was told she would "have something to do with the Pope" which did not seem at all probable. However, three months later Hana-Maria (who is Jewish) did visit Rome with a group of Czech Catholics...and saw the Pope no less than three times.

On the same tape were ten other correct statements, one or two remarkably specific. For instance, "Too much sugar stored at home." Shortly afterwards she found a couple of jars full of very ancient sugar in a cupboard. Then---

"You will see somebody unexpectedly from Vienna." Hana-Maria did, when a distant relative came over from Vienna without warning.

"Something about Brighton." Correct again, when a surprise invitation came from there.

Dozens more examples could be given of this kind of evidence, which might be called meaningful trivia. One often has the impression of an invisible George hovering around and commenting on the events of everyday life, including both recent incidents and others just about to happen.

Not that all were trivial. In a tape made on July 26, 1990, Mr. Hearn suddenly mentioned "a lot of ammunition, a lot of weapons. It's like a Spanish Armada." Less than a week later, Kuwait was invaded and overrun by Iraqi troops, whereupon what was frequently referred to in the press as "an armada" assembled in Saudi Arabia to repel the invaders.

Other apparent premonitions of imminent and violent disturbances included a reference, in a tape made on March 30, 1990 to "a lot of broken glass." The following day there was hardly a window unbroken from Trafalgar Square to Portland Place after the so-called poll tax riots. And a day or two before the great October 1987 hurricane, the communicator mentioned "a lot of timber being sawed."

For the most part, however, the communicator seems to give priority to scenes from Hana-Maria's everyday life that could not reasonably be

predicted. True, there are references to such predictable matters as "something to do with your health" or "you will have a surprise." Yet there are far more very specific references to names and incidents that probably mean little or nothing to most of us. Ask yourself how many of the following have any special significance to you: A little owl. A big pineapple. White doves in an old square. A mangle. An opera with dragons. A golden coach. A Swiss roll. An Italian waiter who is really Spanish. A strange-shaped spoon. Glastonbury. Rumbelow. Greek dancers. A very old gramophone. A rowing machine. A repair with a rubber band. An unusual wedding dress. A musical box with a ballerina on top. Liquid gold. A green waistcoat. An old village pump. Shields on a wall. A gift of wineglasses. Gibraltar. Snowdon. Jessie. Jacob. Nadia. Hazel. Esther. Alice.

Only four of the above thirty names and items are even remotely relevant to me. Yet not only were all of them - and dozens more - very meaningful to Hana-Maria, but some came to be so in quite unusual ways:

The name Rumbelow meant nothing to her, for example, at least not until she saw a van from the store of that name parked in her street, and the very next morning received a letter from the gas company signed by a Mr. Rumbelow.

On the day the tape mentioning the Swiss roll arrived, a visitor brought one with her. Hana-Maria had not bought one for twenty years.

A neighbor moved out and presented her with several wineglasses.

The doves turned up on a holiday in Menorca

The village pump appeared in the Euro-capital city of Strasbourg while she was making a film there.

The tapes have not been uniformly accurate over the years, the very high rate of hits in those of the first two or three years not being kept up, and some tapes apparently missing the target altogether. One thinks of analogies such as crossed telephone lines or fading radio signals. However, just when Hana-Maria might have been thinking enough was enough and it was time to stop the tapes, the quality would suddenly improve. This was especially so when she began to work in a new play or film. There would be numerous comments on all the trivial bits of business that can be so important to stage people. One or two could not have been more specific and accurate.

"Walking in a strange and funny way on stage," says the communicator in an April 1993 tape. At this time, Hana-Maria was doing precisely that in her part as the housekeeper in Noel Coward's "Present Laughter."

The play was on tour and did not open in London until two months later when her funny walk was widely noted by the critics.

Before then, there was another reference to it, "Someone else walks in a funny way." The play's star and director, Tom, Conti, was indeed imitating her funny walk after she had left the stage.

There were several other references to trivial events related to the play, including private conversations with her fellow performers. Does all this amount to evidence for survival or merely to an unusually prolonged and accurate display of clairvoyance and precognition? It must surely be one or the other?

Some parapsychologists cling to the "general ESP" hypothesis, which can be used to explain anything despite the lack of evidence for its existence. Its champions have yet to demonstrate that a medium can produce material similar to that described here originating from a living communicator who can easily verify it.

If we reject general ESP, coincidence and deception, what is left" G. N. M. Tyrrell said it all nearly fifty years ago in "The Personality of Man":

"It comes to this. The phenomena of psychical research...point strongly towards communications from the dead. It is possible to escape from this conclusion, but only at the expense of introducing a still more extravagant hypothesis."

"The facts are quite clear. They cannot be got rid of by maintaining a masterly silence, by looking in the opposite direction or by making false statements about them."

"Sooner or later they will have to be faced. Those who wish to know the truth about the nature of the human individual might as well face it now."

Almost without exception, the names mentioned throughout the series of tapes are those of people George knew in his lifetime; he makes no direct reference to any of the numerous new acquaintances Hana-Maria has met since his death. Moreover, at least three of those named had died shortly

before the tape in question was made. As for "Jessie," whose name was repeated with a sense of urgency, it so happens that a couple of days later Hana-Maria's goddaughter - Jessy - was involved in a serious accident that could have been fatal, though fortunately it was not.

If the source of all this information is not George, then what on earth (or anywhere else) is it? How, to mention just one more example, did Mr. Hearn manage to produce no less than twenty-four specific and correct statements in a single tape made in 1991? These covered everything from Hana-Maria's eyebrows, an insurance problem, a duvet, a missing diamond and a wasted bottle of champagne to a fish tank, a blueberry pie, a large heart on the wall and Fortnum & Mason's. All of them direct hits.

"I am going on with the tapes," said Hana-Maria, "partly from curiosity, partly from the feeling of hope for an unexpected surprise and revelation, and partly as a serious experiment in a field so little researched."....."I have read many so-called serious books about life after death, but none of them is clearer or better than my own experience from Mr. Hearn's tapes."