

Featured story:

PSYCHIC SEMINAR

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We don't always look to new places because we feel the lack of something. Sometimes it's simply a desire to explore unknown territory, to find out more about something we are curious about.

In my younger days, younger meaning late teens to early/mid-twenties, I set a lot more weight on paranormal activity. There were literally dozens of books lining some of my shelves, ranging from ancient civilizations (and their lost secret powers) to extraterrestrial civilizations (Gods from Outer Space) to civilizations and higher level consciousness in unexpected places (as in the secret life of plants).

I can't say I believed in all of that but the contents of those books were thought-provoking and I felt inspired to consider that what we familiarly like to interpret as reality may not be the complete picture. There were other genres, too, not so far from those books, and they contributed much to this idea. Many modern theories of physics set in layman's terms, religious and respected philosophical articles, meditation and eastern perspectives, books on how to approach art and one's life. Many, many ideas that added to the seemingly simple view that we hold of the world, sometimes daring us to reconsider that familiar view.

There does, for example, seem to be some evidence suggesting plants can experience pain and communicate information such as pending danger to other plants some distance away. Perhaps what we humans like to consider our exclusive domain of high level abilities may be not be so exclusive after all. And what we believe impossible or highly unlikely today could be turned around as technology and discoveries continue to rush us into the future.

A better understanding of ourselves and the world we live in may present a possibly more harmonious existence for all concerned. Or maybe not. Sometimes factual or very specialized knowledge could estrange us from the integrated world and I wondered that should I uncover the secret to telekinesis, for example, would I be a better person for it? Would I be happier, wiser, more at peace? If telekinesis or any other paranormal ability became acknowledged and accessible, would world governments work together, or would the military and political and economic machines be caught up in their own priorities?

To this day I still like to claim an open mind to many of the issues raised from those initial books lining the shelves of my old library. Keeping me somewhat up-to-date are a number of documentaries, discussions and a few occasional reflections thrown in. But my passion for investigating these topics further has stepped aside for other concerns, like my family, work and special projects.

Back in those younger days, though, I did dedicate more time to those pursuits and they sometimes led me to interesting places.

Much of it was second-hand, mostly hearsay which I took with a big grain of salt because I often suspected the people telling their story had a tendency to embellish or overlook some details to add to its interest value. Like some acquaintances in the school band dabbling in witchcraft or experiencing unexplainable phenomenon during a séance or trying out an ouiji board.

I stayed four academic years in an orthodox seminary and occasionally some of the theology students spoke of ancient scriptures, of how the orthodox viewed certain events (unlike the Catholics who believe the wine they sip at communion is a symbolic representation of the blood of Christ, they believe it *is* the blood of Christ), and even of someone called upon to perform a rare exorcism. They took these notions very seriously and our conversations provided me with perspectives and details not always familiar to my own experiences.

I did a little exploration on my own, but I can't say it filled me with inner peace or understanding. Typically I was left even more unsettled and acutely aware I was in unknown waters.

I'd like to tell you of one such experience. It was in that period when I had more time around me. I was finished university and single. Time for anything I desired. Time for going out with friends, time for projects, time for the arts and time for exploring. I was working but it still left me with a lot of extra time. I suppose much of it was from that free perspective of not having any pending assignments or exams.

So one day while enjoying the summer air on one of my walks, I engaged in the typical pastime of listening to the birds and reading the posters on walls. If something caught my fancy, I'd linger over it a bit longer. No rush. No need to rush.

There was a slip of paper informing any interested people that there was to be a seminar held at such-and-such address down west on Portage Avenue. It would be the following Saturday afternoon, a time which I had free and I copied the address and phone number down. I tossed the idea around for a couple of days and that same Saturday I decided I would give it a try.

When I entered her home, the host welcomed me and introduced me to a handful of others sitting in the living room. We made comfortable small talk, waiting for the hour and any later coming people.

She told us that today's session was dedicated to 'seeing', something not too complicated. We shouldn't be disappointed if we weren't successful in our endeavours, but she'd like to introduce us to some of the principles involved.

Most of us had little or no experience, were 'normal' people living lives not connected with this field, but had some curiosity and would like to find out a little bit more.

The woman spoke well, easily and without any airs. I think this comforted all of us and made it easier for us to participate. We were to take the person next to us as a partner and shortly would take turns trying on the role of 'see-er'. The medium, she explained, was to a great extent unimportant. You could read tea leaves, grains of sand, tossed turtle bones, tarot cards, anything that will help you make the connection.

Today we would be using a personal object of the person receiving the reading and that would serve to act as the vehicle. She went on to issue a warning, that if we receive an image, or imagine one in the vein of something fairly discomfiting or negative, then it would be best to say you see nothing. If there were any doubts we were to call upon her to advise us what the best course would be to take.

I don't remember anything of my partner's reading of me from my personal object but something interesting took place when it was my turn to read hers.

I followed the instructions, placing the object in my hand and closing my eyes. I tried to start with the blank black slate and not to impose or encourage any images into it. Simply permit what will enter to enter.

I had no idea who my partner was, never having met her before. But it wasn't long before something began to take shape. I told her in words what I was witnessing, making a running commentary although the images were not that many. It was more what I felt was behind them.

It started simply enough. The dark expanse I was beginning with, that black canvas before my closed eyes, opened a sliver and then widened a bit further, showing what I interpreted to be a door opening. There was a bright light, yellow and strong, contrasting with the blackness which surrounded it on all sides. It was more like a geometrical rendering with sharp lines defining both that brilliant wedge and its outlining counterpart. There didn't seem to be any degrees of lesser light or darkness, nor identifiable objects or spaces. It just seemed like a door had opened partway.

I faltered a moment, thinking what I was saying was nonsense and that maybe I should stop. I looked at her and she encouraged me to go on, so I did. As I continued I tried to not let my normal filters of what I interpreted to be

appropriate play too great a role in this. I hadn't lost the image and was able to return more deeply to it. I let what I felt or interpreted come to be voiced and continued to narrate.

I felt there was a child present, perhaps on the other side of the door. The child felt lonely. Sad. Was crying. Was alone in that room and didn't want to be.

And that's where my vision stopped. Just prior to that, I ceased narrating what was appearing to me. I didn't know where the limit was of what could be considered to be excessively negative and sought the advice of our host. She said that that description was acceptable and I could convey it in its entirety to my partner.

She was deeply moved after hearing all of it. She took a few moments to compose herself and proceeded to tell the host and me about her current situation.

She was a single mother and not long ago her daughter had turned twelve. She was old enough to leave alone for short spells but until now, had never been. This was the first time and the mother was quite torn about it. Even though it was a Saturday afternoon and only for an hour or two, she hated to do it. She had forced herself to come, wanting to do so with many reasons in favour of the action, and many against.

The object she had given me was something that represented the bond she had with her daughter (perhaps a pen that was identical to the girl's) and she was overwhelmed at how simply and accurately the image I experienced spoke to her.

A few minutes later she gathered her things and quickly returned to her home.

People say there is no hard proof of psychic abilities, at least not in a form that scientific testing can have accessibility. Perhaps that is true in the definition and limits imposed. But I have experienced directly too many things that indicate otherwise. That is not to say that in time 'science' won't be able to catch up. It very well might, perhaps after undergoing a number of fundamental changes. It won't be the first time. And along the way there is an occasional mini 'breakthrough', like that previously unaccountable uncanny feeling of somebody observing you behind your back. Apparently it can now be scientifically explained (and measured). Our eyes can transmit and receive certain frequencies and we do have sensors that can pick up on such transmissions. Now that 'sixth sense' has entered the realm of the familiar and does not have to be regarded as something mysterious or ethereal.

But until such time that all phenomena falling under the category of the paranormal can be transformed into science speak or be definitely discounted, there is much that is open to debate.

AFTERWORD:

While I don't know how the paranormal could potentially fit in with science, I am one of those who acknowledge that there is something to it. I have made some explorations into that world but typically have found it too big for me. It's exciting and interesting at a superficial level, but I lack the direction and knowledge to go much further. Any attempts to do so leave me more unsettled and vulnerable, and with the very keen awareness that my life is not the better for it.