

BOOK REVIEW

Things You Can Do When You're Dead: True Accounts of After Death Communication by Tricia J. Robertson. White Crow Press Books, 2013. 164 pp. \$16.99. ISBN 978-1908733603.

This book presents an opportunity for those who have not studied the research literature on apparitions, mediumship, life after death, poltergeist activity, paranormal healing, or reincarnation. The reader encounters the richness of case studies with systematic scientific questioning. The author examines how these experiences influence the lives of those who report these phenomena. What follows is a brief summary of a typical case study that Robertson presents:

A shopkeeper saw an apparition on the ceiling of his shop of a man whom he immediately identified as a customer who had died more than six years before. The apparition pointed and told him, “Tell them not to do it, everything will be all right.” The following day the widow of the customer who had died visited his shop as usual. When he told her about his experience, the lady’s reaction was completely unexpected. She threw her arms around him and thanked him, saying that she had already been given similar advice by someone else. Two weeks later this lady explained that her son had been wrongly accused of a crime, but the evidence was such that, if found guilty, he could have been given a jail sentence in an adult jail. The family had thought of taking him to Southern Ireland to hide, which would mean that he would not appear at court, and therefore he would not be able to return to Scotland. However, the woman took the “advice” from her husband (via the shopkeeper), and when the boy appeared in court the case was dismissed. The shopkeeper never experienced anything like this before or after this event (pp. 11–13). The author then offers her analysis of the case.

The strength of the book is that it is easy to read and clear in the way each case study unfolds. Each chapter offers a picture of the persons involved, their stories, and a complete evaluation of the relationship between the environment and the anomalous events investigated by Robertson. What is more, readers will obtain information about the paranormal investigator’s personal thoughts and questions during each case study. It appears that the author seeks to show her readers the field study process. She presents analyses of the different probable explanations until the most likely are found.

The book begins by reminding the reader that anomalous experiences are common and widespread. The author clarifies that although some experiences are explained through normal means, others may involve a phenomena produced by a deceased person. Because of such experiences, Robertson notes, the Society for Psychical Research was founded in 1882 as an organized scientific effort to objectively understand such phenomena. Following the psychical research tradition in Scotland, the author investigates the reported testimonies, while revealing the struggles that occur when dealing with strong beliefs and disbeliefs.

The reader experiences Robertson's compassion for the persons she has interviewed—a marked contrast to mainstream studies where pathological behavior may be assumed. In addition, the author alerts us to the dilemmas associated with the concept of “reasonable doubt” of the evidence used to assess such phenomena. The author debates how to resolve each case depending upon what readers and researchers consider the appropriate weight of proof. Robertson states, “We have to examine every reported account of anomalous phenomena in its own right, judging each and every case on its own merit.”



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