

or hallucinated their experiences? Of course not. The question is ludicrous. Many, in fact, did not believe in the paranormal until they had a personal experience. For example, the bereaved parent whose vivid dream of a child who had died offered stunningly accurate messages of future events. Mere coincidence or chance? Very unlikely, when you consider that I've heard of thousands of such experiences. There is no mass conspiracy by more than 100 million Americans who've had psychic experiences of all kinds. That's a plot too farfetched even for *The X-Files*.

In my research, more women than men have shared their psychic experiences. Whether that means more women have psychic experiences, or women perhaps are more open about reporting them, is hard to determine.

PSYCHIC HOT LINES

In July 1996 a *Newsweek* cover story titled "Out There," reported Americans have "been captivated by all things paranormal, from psychic hot lines to out-of-body experiences." *Newsweek* went on to ask, "How did this far-out stuff get so mainstream?" One answer is that in our technological and scientific society, millions of people, discouraged by traditional religious dogmas, are searching for that elusive spiritual "something."

Why do we believe? Because psychic experiences are not only genuine, they can be helpful.

My life was once saved by a psychic's warning that my car was having a steering wheel problem—about which I knew nothing. I've seen people given up by traditional medicine find relief through psychic healings. In one instance, California-based healer Douglas Johnson brought pain relief and made swelling go down in someone close to me who had been seriously ill. I've been told of lifesaving angelic encounters. Many who've had NDEs reported less fear of death and discovered more meaning to life after their experience. Past-lives therapy has helped many people deal with psychological traumas and phobias. Many bereaved people say visions of deceased loved ones are of immeasurable comfort in times of grief. Countless premonitions have averted acci-

dents, injuries, even deaths.

For many, the paranormal is related to religious faith. A study of more than 200 patients found that those with religious faith had a survival rate three times higher than those with no faith. Someone once asked me, "What is wrong with wanting to believe there is more to life than this world?" The answer is, there is nothing wrong with it.

Disheartened by the impersonal nature of so much in our lives, and disturbing levels of violence in our society, we are seeking something deeper and more humanly personal that connects us all. Many have found that psychic phenomena is a means of getting in touch with oneself as well as with those who have passed on. Increasingly, even grief therapists are integrating contacts with deceased loved ones into the therapeutic regimen.

No one suggests that all psychic events are genuine. However, to impugn all paranormal incidents is to impugn the integrity of millions of people in virtually every country of the world. In fact, in the countries of the East psychic events are accepted far more readily than they are in the West.

NEW DARK AGE DESCENDING

A recent *Cosmopolitan* Magazine article about the paranormal warned ominously, "Many scientists see a New Dark Age descending, or a society divided into superstition-bound masses and ruling technocrats (like those in H.G. Wells's *The Time Machine*.)" But the paranormal and those open to it are not attacking science, nor will witnessing a spirit entity set back society to the Dark Ages. The fact is that those who are open to the paranormal are more likely to be interested in light than in darkness. There is little evidence to support the claim that we are a society of lemmings following psychic Pied Pipers and marching to our doom in the sea. Even the Pentagon recently admitted to having funded twenty years of secret projects to develop "psychic spies."

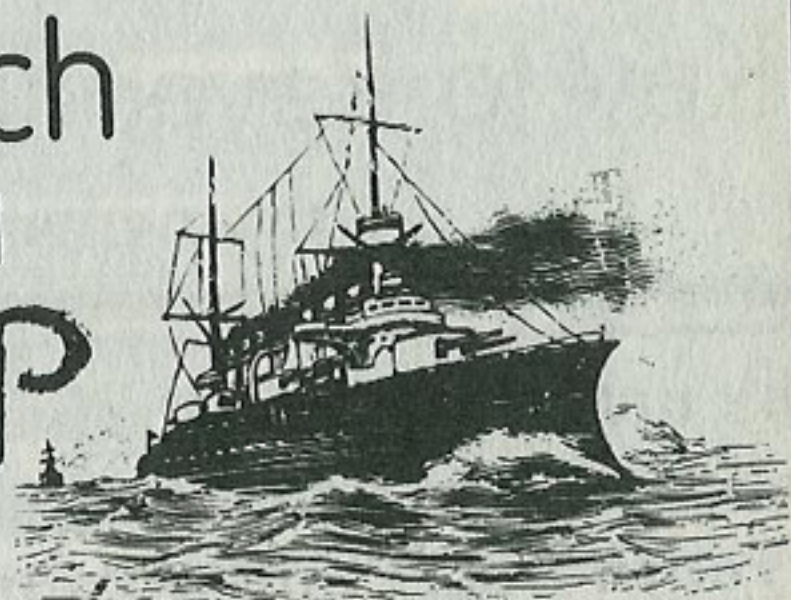
Nancy Reagan employed an astrologer in her White House years. First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton reportedly consulted with a spiritual advisor and held imaginary conversations with deceased historical figures—which

one newspaper editorial snidely described as "a harmless bit of New Age nonsense."

Sadly, mainstream science and many in the media have yet to catch up with the millions who know they've had genuine psychic experiences which, in some cases, have personally enriched and helped them. The paranormal has much to teach us "about ourselves, our capabilities and our deep interconnectedness," Dean Radin told *The New York Times Magazine*. Some have called it "nontraditional spiritual searching."

So look around. Who believes in the paranormal and why? The answer is, it could be anyone, at any time, and for many positive reasons. Forget the stereotype of the storefront fortune teller, the kind portrayed by Whoopie Goldberg in the movie *Ghost*. If you've had a psychic experience you are far from alone. If you've never had such an experience, when you do you might want to share it. Tell a friend, a relative or a colleague. Just don't be surprised if they tell you they've also had a paranormal adventure. ★

A Royal Watch Encounters a GHOST SHIP



The sea was calm and the sky was clear as the *HMS Inconstant* rounded the coast from Melbourne to Sydney, Australia, on the early morning of July 11, 1881. Suddenly the lookout on the fore-castle called out that a vessel was closing in on the port bow. Thirteen officers and crew members crowded the rails to see for themselves the vessel that had approached so silently.

The journals of two royal midshipmen who were aboard, Prince George (later King George V of England) and his brother, Prince Albert Victor, described the vessel as having "a strange red light as of a phantom ship all aglow." Her "masts, spars and sails stood out in a strong relief." But minutes later, the apparition vanished and there remained "no vestige nor any sign whatever of any material ship."

The witnesses believed they had seen the *Flying Dutchman*, a legendary ghost ship that has haunted sailors for centuries. According to the legend, a Dutch captain

sailed his ship around Cape Horn in a furious gale, ignoring the pleas of his terrified crew, who begged him to put into port. The Holy Ghost appeared to support their pleas, but the satanic captain fired his pistol and cursed God. For his blasphemy, the captain was condemned to sail the seas for all eternity, never to set foot on land again. Sailors believe an encounter with the *Flying Dutchman* bodes disaster.

And so it was for the unfortunate *HMS Inconstant*. According to the royal journals, later that morning the unlucky lookout fell from the fore-topmast crosstrees and "was smashed to atoms." The curse seemed to continue, for upon reaching port, the admiral of the ship was stricken with a fatal illness and died.

Apparently not even the presence of two of Queen Victoria's royal offspring, one of them a future King of England, could stave off the curse of the *Flying Dutchman*. ★