

Professor Ian Stevenson – Some Personal Reminiscences

MARY ROSE BARRINGTON

London, England

e-mail: mary.rose@talktalk.net

My first encounter with Ian Stevenson arose when I wrote a letter to *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research* in 1971 expressing disgust that in a lengthy review article on the subject of animal experiments in parapsychology – mostly involving electric shocks to mice – the ethics of inflicting pain on animals in the interests of intellectual curiosity was not questioned. This viewpoint was not well received by the people to whom it was directed, but Ian Stevenson wrote me a letter thanking me for raising the issue; he said that in reading about these experiments he had been excited by their implications (for precognition) to the point where he had failed to take account of the distress caused to the animals. Whatever view people may take of the issue, that the President of the Parapsychological Association (PA) should take the trouble to write such a letter to one of its most marginal adherents speaks volumes in terms of his integrity and other human qualities.

The following year the PA held its conference in Edinburgh, and I met Ian for the first time, finding him as likable as I had imagined him to be. He had a reserve that some people might have found chilling; it reminded me of what Sibelius said about his own great music, that others may offer wine, but he gives you a glass of pure water. Behind Ian's reserve there was charm, humour, and kindness.

We kept up an occasional correspondence over the years, consisting mostly of my asking and receiving advice, and on Ian's visits to London we would sometimes meet. In 1982, at the joint conference of the Society for Psychical Research with the PA in Cambridge, I gave a paper on the subject of Ossowiecki's retrocognitive clairvoyance, and I learned later that Ian had a strong interest in Ossowiecki. In 1994 he wrote about the desirability of having a translation made of Ossowiecki's autobiography, and this idea surfaced again in 1998. Out of this came *A World in a Grain of Sand* (Barrington et al., 2005), co-authored by Ian, Zofia Weaver, and myself. As a collaborator Ian was entirely responsive to any representations made to him about his own contribution, and he was meticulous in scrutinising ours. We both felt it was an honour to work with him.

Recently I discovered *Old Souls* (Shroder, 1999), a book by the journalist Tom Shroder, who in the late 1990s accompanied Ian on his reincarnation

research travels in Lebanon and India, writing his own account of these enterprises. Only after reading Shroder's descriptions of hours spent in extreme discomfort on dirt track roads, of arduous journeys undertaken in the hope of interviewing a witness or obtaining a document or examining a birthmark, of weeks spent surrounded by squalor, and sometimes by hostile crowds, and in dire conditions, all borne with stoic heroism despite his advanced age and imperfect health – only then did I realise the courageous and unstinting dedication that went into Ian's collection of reincarnation-type case records.

People are sometimes asked: Who, among the illustrious of this world, would you like to have met? My answer is Ian Stevenson, and I did have that privilege.

References

- Barrington, M. R., Stevenson, I., & Weaver, Z. (2005). *A World in a Grain of Sand*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland.
- Shroder, T. (1999). *Old Souls: The Scientific Evidence for Past Lives*. Simon & Schuster.