

**The Gift: ESP, the Extraordinary Experiences of Ordinary People** by Dr. Sally Rhine Feather and Michael Schmicker. New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 2005. 284 pp. \$23.95 (hardcover). ISBN 0-312-32919-9.

Research in parapsychology has tended to follow at least two different avenues of exploration. Many researchers have continued the work of J. B. Rhine by using applied statistics and experimental controls to study ESP in the lab. Others have followed in the tradition of Louisa Rhine, collecting and analyzing the reported spontaneous ESP experiences of people in everyday life. Through decades of research, both methods have yielded clues to solve the mystery of ESP and how it works. Yet as much as the Rhines had hoped that these differing methods would complement one another, it is sometimes difficult for researchers of these different methods to enter into dialogue.

Sally Rhine Feather wears many hats. She is an experimental and clinical psychologist, the director of the Rhine Research Center, a friend, a wife and a mother, as well as the daughter of the late J. B. and Louisa Rhine. If we would hope for anyone to create a constructive dialogue between the experimental and case research methods, it would be her. With the assistance of Michael Schmicker, author of *Best Evidence*, Feather has created a personal and provocative book that rises to this challenge.

At first glance, it looks like *The Gift: ESP, the Extraordinary Experiences of Ordinary People* might be concerned only with case research. Indeed, the majority of these pages contain accounts of people's spontaneous ESP experiences in their own words. These experiences are clustered around several different themes, such as premonitions about death and disasters, ESP between people who are romantically involved, the ESP of mothers and children, and so on. There is also a unique chapter on the premonitions surrounding the terrorist attacks on September 11th, as well as a chapter discussing the inevitability (or not) of fate. Feather does not rely entirely on the Rhine Research Center's extensive collection of self-reported experiences for the material in *The Gift*. Sometimes she provides experiences as related to her colleagues or excerpts from her mother's journal. Sometimes pseudonymous characters are introduced, and the variety of their experiences emerges at different points throughout the book.

Feather is not concerned with arguing about the reality of ESP. Within the first chapter, she states, "there is ample evidence that it exists" (p. 17). Rather, she frames the case material with discussions of what parapsychologists have learned about the relationship between ESP performance and variables such as IQ, gender, age, personality, states of consciousness, and personal belief. When Feather is not discussing laboratory research, she contributes her own perspective while speaking from under one of her various hats. This creates a cohesive whole out of the personal, the anecdotal, and the empirical facets of the phenomena under study.

The result is an excellent introduction for general audiences to ESP phenomena as well as the field that studies it. At the end of the book, there are additional resources for individuals who might wish to learn more. *The Gift*

could serve as a prequel to any of the excellent introductory texts that are recommended in its final pages. However, parapsychologists and lay readers will still enjoy reading about these extraordinary experiences as well as reviewing the history of the field from an insider's point of view.

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**A Mind for Murder** by Noreen Renier with Naomi Lucks. New York: Berkley Books/Penguin, 2005. i-x + 310 pp. \$7.99 (paper). ISBN 0-425-20289-5.

Police detective Tom Atkinson sent Noreen Renier (pp. 137–142) an earring from a woman who had been stabbed to death, hoping to discover the identity of the murderer. The police investigation had produced no clue and the woman's mother had asked Atkinson to contact the psychic. I knew Renier. Several years before, when the Psychical Research Foundation (PRF) was at Duke<sup>1</sup>, she had been a volunteer subject for us.

With the earring in one hand and the phone in the other, Renier "closed my eyes, targeted my mind on the earring, and all of a sudden, it was like I was looking in a mirror. I could see the murderer washing his hands and combing his hair. I could see him perfectly. I saw the tattoos on his arm, I saw his whole face, and I described him over the phone." The detective asked if Renier could see what was happening to the woman. This brought her back, "and this time I was being murdered by the tattooed man. He was holding me tight by the wrists . . . as the razor-sharp knife tore into my body over and over and over. The pain was like ice and the blood flowing out of my body was hot." (p. 138) The detective asked her to continue and Renier gave a description of the house and location and also saw a small child. When asked what happened to the child, Renier found herself "in the messy bedroom of a child," and then "I was the girl. I heard my mother screaming from the other room." (p. 139) The child hid in her closet but was found by the killer and also stabbed to death.

Atkinson said that he first thought Renier had somehow learnt about the crime. "Then I realized that the information she had, no one knew." Speaking of the murderer, Atkinson said, "His physical appearance was as she described. His social background was as she described. The tatoos she described were accurate." (p. 141). Renier says, "My mind taps in to the turbulent energy left behind by a moment of explosive violence and I relive the turbulent event." (p. 1). (Her impressions were not always on target; sometimes she would only get a partial picture, other times she would latch onto the wrong person.)

Psychometry, the ESP procedure where an object is used to learn about people who have touched the object, has been used to reach the departed (Sidgwick, 1915; see also my review, Roll, 2004) and to trace the location and fate of