

BOOK REVIEW

Among Mediums: A Scientist's Quest for Answers by Julie Beischel. Windbridge Institute, 2013. \$4.99 (e-book). 76 pp. ASIN B00B1MZMHM.

We have certification procedures for all sorts of professions—from physicians and pilots, to electricians and teachers. Why not one for mediums who claim they can talk to the dead?

Dr. Julie Beischel, co-founder of the Windbridge Institute for Applied Research in Human Potential, needed to assemble, from a field filled with fraud, a team of genuinely talented mediums to experiment with. So she created exactly that—a rigorous, eight-step screening, training, and certification process, then ran volunteers through it. Each candidate performed readings under various blinded conditions; if their accuracy score achieved a certain level, they qualified for part two of the multi-month program, learning about the history of modern mediumship research as well as regulations governing scientific research on human subjects.

It cost the Institute \$7,000 to \$10,000 to test each hopeful, and one in four washed out. But some 20 survived (18 of them female) to become Windbridge Certified Research Mediums, or WCRMs. (Applications are now closed. “We’re in the business of performing cutting edge research, not certifying mediums,” Beischel says. The 20 they now have are enough to answer their current research questions.)

What Dr. Beischel is doing with her newly minted WCRMs, and what they’ve scientifically nailed down to date, is recounted with impish humor in her short, self-published, 76-page e-book.

Here’s six things we know to date, per Beischel (my summary):

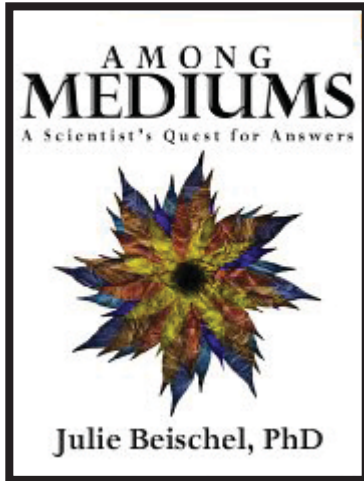
1. Some mediums can and do regularly communicate with the dead.
2. Some mediums can deliver accurate and specific information about the dead—the discarnate’s physical appearance, personality, hobbies, cause of death, and messages for the sitter.
3. WCRMs can do it under tight protocols which rule out typical skeptical explanations—fraud, cold reading, experimenter cueing, and rater bias by the sitter. In her experiments, Beischel employs a quintuple-blind methodology (it’s described in detail in a paper posted on the Institute’s website www.Windbridge.org).

4. The most parsimonious explanation for the source of the information received by Windbridge mediums is the dead—not psi on the part of the medium (telepathy, clairvoyance, precognition), or some posited psychic reservoir of information (e.g., the Akashic records).
5. Windbridge mediums seem to be physiologically and psychologically different from you or me. For example, 83 percent of Windbridge mediums fall in both the Intuition and Feeling categories of the Myers-Briggs personality test, while only 16 percent of the general U.S. population does. They suffer more chronic health problems—seven times the incidence of autoimmune disorders; twice the incidence of diabetes; more than twice the number of migraines as the general female population. Why, we don't know, but Windbridge is collecting additional physiological data on its WCRMs (EEG, blood chemistry, etc.) and hopes to land a grant to conduct fMRI imaging as well.
6. Mediumship has some promising applications. They include helping law enforcement officers catch criminals or find missing persons; and therapeutically treating grief caused by the loss of a loved one.

Beischel is as fascinating as her science.

She believes it's important to know the background and potential biases of anyone serving up controversial science. Consequently, Beischel spends the first quarter of her pint-sized book recounting her tumultuous early life raised in a Catholic family of German descent—which included earning a Ph.D. at the University of Arizona (UA) in the hard sciences (Doctorate in Pharmacology and Toxicology; minor in Microbiology and Immunology/Immunopathology), and the suicide of her mother. The latter triggered her first and only personal sitting with a medium. Some of her professors automatically dismissed her visit, irritating Beischel so much that she sought out Dr. Gary Schwartz in his VERITAS lab at UA where he was employing celebrity mediums such as John Edward and George Anderson to test the hypothesis that consciousness survived death. He offered her a post-doc fellowship, and when his funding ended Beischel wasn't ready to end her own intellectual quest. She and husband Mark scrambled to assemble a website, logo, scientific advisory panel, and chase grant money to create Windbridge.

Passionate as she is about her work, Beischel wants readers to understand she's an "honest-to-goodness real person, not some kind of single-minded science machine." To prove it, she provides possibly the funniest, quirkiest list of Facebook-style tidbits ever shared with the public by a research scientist: Beischel sleeps 10 to 12 hours a night; she owns a 90-pound dog named Moose ("My husband recognizes the pecking order—Moose came



first.”); she’s a huge Denver Broncos fan (“thanks in part to two different boyfriends”); she knows a clever trick to treat ‘brain freeze’ caused by eating ice cream too fast; she subscribes to an online comics service; she’s a practicing vegetarian but hates vegetables (“I’m more of a fruitarian”); and just in case you’re wondering, she’s not ticklish.

Among Mediums is hard science with a shot of humor, less than five bucks, instantly downloadable on your smartphone or iPad, and readable in 90 minutes. Skip the Starbucks today and spend the change on a look at the

latest research addressing Science’s ultimate puzzler—does consciousness survive death?

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