

OBITUARY

Eileen Coly (1916–2013)

It is with a sad heart that we write about Mrs. Eileen Coly, past president of the Parapsychology Foundation (PF), who passed away on November 18, 2013, after a long service to the field of parapsychology. We first met her during a Parapsychological Association convention in the mid-1980s, and got to know her a little bit better in 1986 when we stopped off to visit the PF, were ushered into her office, basked under her meaningful smile, and were both pleased and startled when she said “We’ve been watching you two.” But we really got to know her during 2000 to 2003 when we worked for the PF in



Eileen Coly on her 97th birthday.
Photo credit: Robert Narholz

New York City. Many are the memories we have of her personality: She was charming but serious, a woman with a biting and intelligent sense of humor and an enormous amount of spunk that not everyone in the field got to see.

Mrs. C., as we called her—although others called her Babs—was the daughter of Eileen J. Garrett, the first President of the PF (founded in 1951) and a well-known medium, publisher, and businessperson. After her mother’s death late in 1970, Mrs. C. assumed the leadership of the PF.

Born in England in 1916, Mrs. C. worked early on as a traveling companion and assistant to Mrs. Garrett. During World War II, Mrs. C. stayed in England and was separated from her mother. Later on, in 1947, she went to live in the United States working in two of Garrett’s early projects, Creative Age Press and *Tomorrow* magazine. Furthermore, Mrs. C. was a member of the PF’s Board of Trustees, something that must have helped her to understand the organization when she became its President after Garrett’s death.

When people think of the contributions the PF has made during its history, they tend to talk about Eileen Garrett. But almost everybody forgets that Mrs. C. was President of the Foundation for more than twice as many

years as Garrett served, and that she led the PF very effectively, continuing its well-known programs to support the field via grants, conferences, and publications.

Mrs. C. was a no-nonsense person. She had a straightforward approach to life and a talent, as we saw more than once, to just “cut through it” when a decision had to be made about PF affairs. At the same time she was not dogmatic. She solicited and carefully considered opposing opinions and new ideas, and was not at all adverse to giving a fair chance to other ideas or to changing her own views. We saw this process many times when Mrs. C. and her daughter Lisette Coly, the current President of the Foundation, discussed the PF’s affairs in our presence, and when they invited us and other PF staff into the conversation.

Many workers in parapsychology benefited from her administration of the PF, particularly in the form of grants. Some of the grants processed during Mrs. C.’s time as President were bestowed on the who’s who of parapsychology in modern times, many of them well before they became known. On Mrs. C.’s watch, the Foundation—taken from the 1975 annual report—gave grants to, among others, Heinz Berendt, C. T. K. Chari, Yvonne Duplessis, Charles Honorton, Robert Morris, Russell Targ and Harold Puthoff, and Charles T. Tart. The 1978 report listed John Beloff, James Carpenter, Irvin Child, John Palmer, William Roll, Rex Stanford, and Rhea White among the grantees.

Mrs. C.’s work, sometimes invisible, was geared toward supporting the field in its scientific, scholarly, and educational endeavors, a task she accomplished well and with modesty. When we came to work onsite in New York, Mrs. C. was already in her late eighties. She was less active then, but no less pivotal to the important decisions, no less in charge. We were all grateful for her guidance, and loved that she often started her comments on Lisette’s plans or our suggestions with “Now, children . . .” There wasn’t ever a hint of a put-down in that phrase. It was just an affectionate reminder—even though we were all heading into our 50s—that something important that grew out of her long experience with the field was about to be said.

Many conferences were held under Mrs. C.’s tenure as PF’s President. Among them were: Parapsychology and the Sciences (1972, Amsterdam); Parapsychology and Anthropology (1973, London); Quantum Physics and Parapsychology (1974, Geneva); Psi and States of Awareness (1977, Paris); Parapsychology, Philosophy, and Religious Concepts (1985, Rome); Spontaneous Psi, Depth Psychology, and Parapsychology (1987, Berkeley, CA); Psi and Clinical Practice (1989, London); Women and Parapsychology (1991, Dublin); The Study of Mediumship: Interdisciplinary Perspectives

(2005, Charlottesville, Virginia); and Utrecht II: Charting the Future of Parapsychology (2008, Utrecht).

In addition to conference proceedings, publications under Mrs. C.'s administration included most of the PF's magazine *Parapsychology Review*, and additions to the *Parapsychological Monographs* series of the PF. Some examples of the latter were *Experimental Studies of the Differential Effect in Life Setting* by P. Sailaja and K. Ramakrishna Rao (1973), *Methods and Models for Education in Parapsychology* by D. Scott Rogo (1973), *The Application of Learning Theory to ESP Performance* by Charles Tart (1975), *The Paranormal Perception of Color* by Yvonne Duplessis (1975), and *Altered States of Consciousness and Psi: An Historical Survey and Research Prospectus* by Edward F. Kelly and Ralph G. Locke (1981, reprinted with a new introduction in 2010).

Eileen Coly's contributions to the advancement of parapsychology are undeniable and of a magnitude that our brief comments cannot possibly acknowledge properly. Those of us who met her and knew her will also remember, and always miss, her insightful, witty, and charming personality. Her presence enriched our lives and will not be forgotten.

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