

The A.B.C. Séances
The Survival Files — Case 30 — ESS = 262

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Most men of integrity would be more than a bit suspicious if they received a letter asking them to adopt a false name and travel to a strange city for an unknown purpose; but for George W. Clawson of Kansas City, Missouri, such mysterious letters were intriguing signals that a new adventure was afoot. In this case, the sender of the letter was Clawson's friend, David Abbott from nearby Omaha, Nebraska. Abbott was a professional magician who had spent much of his life studying the tricks of fraudulent mediums. He and Clawson often served as investigators for the American Society of Psychical Research.

Abbott had been hearing a lot of incredible stories about a medium named Elizabeth Blake. These stories told of a woman of humble means, mother of 15 children, who had never been more than 20 miles from her Ohio farm. This farm was near Bradrick, a village so out-of-the-way that it could only be reached by a ferry that occasionally crossed the river from West Virginia. Although she was a marvel to her neighbors, Blake was hardly famous; she had been contacting the deceased for nearly 50 years before the magician caught wind of her.

In an article published in a Chicago magazine¹ in 1906, Abbott tells of his decision to "make an investigation on such lines as would entirely remove the possibility of any kind of trickery being employed." Because of this determination, Abbott went to unusual lengths to make certain that Elizabeth Blake could not obtain information by any normal means. There was no one in the area whom Abbott had met and only one person with whom he had corresponded to set up the visit. That man, Abbott says, "merely knew my name and residence. He knew nothing of any of my relatives, nor of the towns where they resided." Nevertheless, to be doubly certain that no research could provide the medium with information, the magician asked George Clawson to accompany him. Clawson was entirely unknown in the region, but Abbott took still more precautions.

To begin with, he did not tell Clawson where they were going or whom they were going to investigate. He picked up Clawson on his way through Kansas City and did not mention Elizabeth Blake or the village of Bradrick until they had arrived at the town of Huntington, West Virginia, where the ferry crossed the Ohio River.² Furthermore, Clawson traveled under an assumed name and, when they reached their lodgings, Clawson registered under that name.

In short, it was extremely unlikely that anyone in the village knew any details about Abbott, and it was out-and-out impossible for anything at all to be known of Clawson.

When they arrived at the farmhouse in Bradrick, they found Blake "sitting by her window in a willow rocker with her crutches by her side." She had recently been quite ill and so hesitated to give the men sittings because of her feeble condition. But she relented and gave a total of four

¹ *The Progressive Thinker*, September 26, 1906, Chicago, Illinois.

² Nowadays there is a bridge connecting nearby Proctorville, Ohio, with Huntington, West Virginia.

sessions, the first three in her home and the final one in an office in Huntington where a photograph was taken.

Blake was a “direct-voice” medium, meaning that the spirits seemed able to produce the sound of human voices without utilizing her vocal cords or tongue. Like many such mediums, she used a trumpet,³ one end of which Abbott or Clawson would put to his ear, and the other end Blake would hold — sometimes in her hand, sometimes to her own ear. Unlike the typical direct-voice medium, however, Elizabeth Blake did not require absolute darkness to accomplish these spirited conversations. In fact, she worked in normal room light, under the watchful eyes of both investigators.

The voices that seemed to emanate from this trumpet were neither whispers, nor mumbles, nor squeaks. They were generally clear and frequently loud enough to be heard a hundred feet away.

Abbott describes one of the séances thus:

“I took the trumpet, but as the words sounded weak, I surrendered it to Mr. Clawson. Instantly the voice began loud and strong, so that I could easily distinguish the words where I sat. Mr. Clawson said, ‘Who is this?’ The voice replied, ‘Grandma Daily.’ Mr. Clawson then said, ‘How do you do, Grandma? I used to know you, didn’t I?’ The voice replied, ‘How do you do, George? [Note that Clawson had not been using the first name “George.”] I want to talk to Davie’ [addressing David Abbott]. I spoke from the outside of the trumpet and said, ‘I can hear you, Grandma.’ I then said to Mr. Clawson, ‘Keep your position. I can hear from the outside.’ . . . After the voice of my grandmother gave a daughter’s name, it continued with these words: ‘Davie, I want you to be good and pray, and meet me over here.’ With the exception of the words, ‘over here,’ in place of the word ‘heaven,’ these were the identical words which my grandmother spoke to me the last time I ever heard her voice.

“Mr. Clawson now continued, ‘Grandma, tell me the name of Davie’s mother.’ The voice replied ‘Sarah.’ He said, ‘Yes, but she has another name. What is it?’ . . . The voice then said, ‘Abbott.’ ‘This is all right,’ continued Mr. Clawson, ‘but I call her by another name when I speak of her. What is it?’ The voice then plainly said, ‘Aunt Fannie.’ This was correct.

“At this instant the loud voice of a man broke into the conversation. It was low in pitch, was a vocal tone, and had a weird effect. The voice said, ‘How do you do?’ Mr. Clawson said, ‘How do you do, sir; who are you?’ The voice replied, ‘Grandpa Abbott,’ then repeated hurriedly a name that sounded like ‘David Abbott,’ and then the voice expired with a sound as of some choking or strangling and went off dimly and vanished. My grandfather’s name was David Abbott.

“After this Mrs. Blake asked to rest a few moments and turned in her chair so as to use the other ear. . . . When Mr. Clawson next took the trumpet the voice of a girl spoke and said, ‘Daddy, I am here.’ He said, ‘Who are you?’ The voice replied, ‘Georgia,’ which was correct. . . . ‘Where do we live, Georgia?’ The voice replied, ‘In Kansas City,’ which was correct. The voice then continued, ‘Daddy, I am so glad to talk to you, and so glad you came here to see me. I wish you could see my beautiful home. We have flowers and music every day.’ Mr. Clawson then said, ‘Georgia, tell me the name of the young man you were engaged to.’ The name pronounced

³ A tube, generally of metal, in the approximate shape of a cheerleader’s megaphone.

was indistinct, so he asked the voice to spell it. The letters A-R-C were spelled out and then pronounced 'Ark,' which was correct. The gentleman's first name was Archimedes, and he was called 'Ark.' After this the voice spelled the complete name. Mr. Clawson then said, 'Georgia, where is Ark?' The reply could not be understood. Mr. Clawson then asked, 'Is he in Denver?' A loud 'No! No!' and then the words, 'He is in New York.' I was informed afterward that this was correct.

"The voice then said, 'Daddy, I want to tell you something. Ark is going to marry another girl.' Mr. Clawson said, 'You say he is going to be married?' The voice said, 'Yes, Daddy, but it's all right. I do not care now. Besides, he does not love her as he did me.' I will mention the fact that since our return from West Virginia, Mr. Clawson has received a letter from the gentleman in question, announcing his approaching marriage.

"Mr. Clawson then asked the voice what grandmothers were there, and she replied that Grandmother Daily and Grandmother Abbott were with her. He then said, 'Are these all?' The voice said, 'Do you mean my own grandmother, my mother's mother?' Mr. Clawson replied, 'Yes.' The voice then said, 'Grandma Marcus is here.' This was correct. Mrs. Marquis had died shortly before this, and her grandchildren always pronounced her name as if it were spelled 'Marcus.'

"The reader will please to remember that Mr. Clawson's name had so far been given to no one in that section of the country. That, as no one knew he was to be there, he could not have been looked up, and as he did not himself know where he was going, trickery could absolutely play no part in the names given him. I was present at all sittings, and there was no chance of any error. Yet these names came just as readily for him, and as correctly as they did for me whose name had previously been known to one resident of Huntington.

"At this point the loud voice of a man spoke up and said, 'I am here. I want to talk to Davie.' I took the trumpet and the voice said, 'Davie, do you know me?' I said, 'No, who are you?' The voice replied, 'Grandpa Daily.' The voice then said, 'Tell your mother I talked to you, and tell your father, too.' Mr. Clawson took the trumpet quickly from me, and said, 'Hello, Grandpa, I used to know you, didn't I?' The voice replied, 'Of course you did.' Mr. Clawson (whose name had so far never been given), said, 'Tell me who I am?' The voice replied out loud, distinct, and very quickly, 'I know you well; you are George Clawson.'"

Abbott ends his report by pointing out that, in all, nineteen specific names were given by the medium, each and every one correct! Such accuracy, he asserts is "most marvelous." Regarding Blake herself, Abbott concludes that, "the information which her voices furnished is entirely beyond the possibilities of any system of trickery. There can be no question as to this. That she possesses some power not possessed by ordinary mortals must be conceded."

Discussion

This report of the sessions involving Abbott, Blake, and Clawson (A.B.C.) is more evidential than might at first be surmised. As David Abbott points out, there is no question that the information communicated came from a paranormal source. Nevertheless, most of it, in theory, could have been obtained via a lot of marvelous reading of the sitters' minds. But not all. The fact that the man "Archimedes" (a most uncommon name, even for that time and place) was planning to be married was not in the mind of anyone present. And, since no one knew who

Clawson was, there was no conceivable link (astral or otherwise) to follow from him to his deceased daughter and then on to her former fiancé. Finally, the case is strengthened by the humanity demonstrated in the statement: “It’s all right. I do not care now. Besides, he does not love her as he did me.”

For Further Information See: *The Psychic Riddle*, by Isaac Funk, 1907, pages 158-165.

END CASE 30

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