

By Guy Lyon Playfair

RONALDO Barroso committed suicide in his home in a small town in the state of Sao Paulo, Brazil, on January 15, 1951. He mixed a spoonful of poison in a glass of guarana (a popular local soft drink), drank it and died almost immediately. The motive is not known. He was 28 years old, engaged to a local girl named Alice and didn't have any known problems. His death, however, was premeditated. Two days before he killed himself, he told one of his nieces that he was going to

Antonio Munhoz about her dreams, he suggested that they visit the local Spiritist center to say some prayers for Ronaldo.*

Martha and Antonio were both Spiritists, a spiritualist sect founded in the 1850's by a French schoolteacher named Allan Kardec, whose doctrines quickly spread to South America. Spiritists, of whom there are several millions in Brazil today, accept reincarnation as a basic fact of life. They also believe that "discarnates," as they prefer to call people who have died, can be contacted through mediums. And

THE REINCARNATION OF A SUICIDE

From the other side of death a man
announces he will return to life—as his sister's daughter.

do it. He added sternly that if she told anybody he would be very mad at her.

His death was a terrible blow to his older sister Martha, who had always been particularly fond of him. Even five years later she had not recovered from the shock. But in January 1956 she had a series of vivid dreams in which she saw her dead brother running in terror while a thunderstorm raged around him and she saw herself trying to catch up with him. When she told her husband

this is precisely what Martha believes happened.

"My husband began to pray for him [Ronaldo]," she later said, "and then the medium was taken over by his spirit, which was in despair . . . He said he did not know what he had done . . . Now he wanted to come back, with the help of my husband, who had always

*These are pseudonyms. The names of the two witnesses are on file at the Brazilian Institute for Psycho-biophysical Research in Sao Paulo. The names used here are the ones used in their official report on the case.

REINCARNATION OF A SUICIDE

remember?" Jacira retorted. "I was there!" She remembered other incidents of this kind, such as the time when "she" had been running along a river bank and Martha had feared "she" would fall into the water. "I didn't fall in, did I?" she asked.

By the time she reached the age of four, Jacira began to remember more distressing things. One day, while sitting beside her mother on the sofa, she suddenly burst into tears. "You know what I'm remembering?" she sobbed. "Why did I do what I did? I told Juraci [Ronaldo's niece] and said I'd be mad with her if she told anybody . . ."

What had she done, her mother wanted to know, to upset her so now? "I drank that red water," Jacira replied simply.

Antonio Munhoz frequently came home during these months to find his wife in tears after such an outburst from Jacira. This suggested to him that Martha was not making things up or putting ideas into her daughter's head. In fact, even today, both Antonio and Martha are certain they never mentioned Ronaldo's suicide. It was known to only a few close relatives and even the neighbors assumed he had died from a sudden illness. There seemed no normal means by which Jacira could know the true circumstances. Yet she undoubtedly did know and in some detail. Even if the word "suicide" were mentioned in her presence, the child would say something like, "He did it without knowing what he was doing," or "I bet he was forced to do it." When she was seven years old, she remarked one day that she considered suicide an act of cowardice. Asked what she meant by that, she explained, "Don't you remember what I did? I

77
don't want to do that again—I don't want to be a coward."

Jacira's memories of her life as Ronaldo are evidential enough in themselves but perhaps even more evidential is the fact that she frequently behaved as he would have behaved in a given situation. She often surprised her mother by addressing her with the familiar form of "you" (*voce*), instead of the more formal "*a senhora*," the standard way for a Brazilian child to address a mother. She also made several references to her "two mothers," showing strong affection for the mother of Ronaldo who was now her present maternal grandmother.

When the girl to whom Ronaldo had been engaged eventually got married, Jacira remarked, "She won't be happy. It was me she wanted." This was apparently the case. Several years after Ronaldo's death his twin brother Romildo happened to meet the girl on a street in another town. She broke down at the sight of her late fiance's twin and confessed that she could not forget Ronaldo.

Romildo, like his brother, died prematurely when Jacira was 14. At the time the girl recalled "feeling something I'd never felt before—as if part of me had been taken away."

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HERNANI Guimaraes Andrade, Brazil's leading parapsychologist and the founder of the Brazilian Institute for Psycho-biophysical Research (IBPP), first heard of the Ronaldo-Jacira case in 1971 through a friend of the Munhoz family. It seemed a promising case.

After corresponding with Senhor Munhoz, he paid two visits to the family

been like a father to him."

Martha took this to mean that Ronaldo wanted to come back as her son. This impression was almost immediately confirmed by the same medium at another prayer meeting held in the Munhoz home. An entity speaking through the medium and claiming to be her spirit guide announced that Ronaldo was indeed on the way back. Martha was to be his mother, the voice claimed. Martha also was told that it was going to be a difficult pregnancy and that Ronaldo was returning as a girl this time.

Both Antonio and Martha were somewhat skeptical of this news. Their last child had been born four years earlier, in 1952, and they had planned to have no more. In fact, on the advice of their doctor, Martha's Fallopian tubes had been tied.

Even so, she did become pregnant just as the spirit guide had foretold. It was later determined that the day of conception was within days of this second session or perhaps even before it took place. The session was held at the end of February and the baby girl—whom the Munhozes had already decided to name Jacira—was born on October 31, 1956.

It had been a difficult pregnancy for Martha as predicted. Everything she ate tasted as if it had been poisoned and she felt that her insides were being eaten away. Large sores appeared around her mouth and it seemed that she was experiencing a form of stigmata provoked by the symptoms one would expect to find in somebody who had swallowed poison.

When she was eight months pregnant, Martha fainted and fell and her baby

stopped giving signs of life. But in the end all went well and Jacira's birth was normal. So was the baby—except that, like her late uncle, she was cross-eyed. Martha and Antonio were convinced by now that Ronaldo had indeed returned.

Jacira, a precocious child, talked fluently and walked long before her first birthday. And almost as soon as she began to speak coherently, she said things that apparently were related to her past life as Ronaldo. One day as Martha was preparing some red fruit juice, Jacira became extremely upset.

"Put that away!" she cried. "I don't want to take that poison."

On another occasion she cried out, "You can die if you like, but I don't want to!"

After Ronaldo's death the glass from which he had drunk his fatal drink still contained some of the poison liquid; it was a brilliant red. (This violent aversion to red liquids lasted, in fact, throughout Jacira's childhood. If she were forced to drink anything red she promptly vomited.)

Later a photograph of Ronaldo triggered something in Jacira's mind; having found a copy of the memento of her uncle's memorial service on which his portrait was printed, she promptly tore it up.

"What's this? I'm not dead!" she exclaimed.

This was the first time she had unequivocally identified herself with Ronaldo. It was the first of many. When she was 18 months old, for instance, she asked her mother if she remembered "us" being chased by a fierce cow called Morena. Martha could not recall the incident at first.

"What do you mean, you don't

in 1974. Sometime later he and five of his colleagues from IBPP compiled one of their typically detailed case reports—of which their Institute now has one of the largest collections in the world, covering all fields of psychical research and including more than 50 cases of the reincarnation type. This case was published in Portuguese in 1977 as Monograph No. 3 of the IBPP (Rua Dioggo de Faria 239, Vila Clementino, 04037 Sao Paulo, SP, Brazil). A brief account of it, which was written before the completion of the file, first appeared in my own book *The Indefinite Boundary* (St. Martin's Press, New York, N. Y., 1976).

Andrade first became involved in reincarnation research in a rather roundabout way. In 1967, four years after the founding of the IBPP, he was asked by Dr. Ian Stevenson of the University of Virginia (who is currently investigating reincarnation) to look into a case right on his own Sao Paulo doorstep. Stevenson had read about it in a German newspaper. Professor Andrade was already familiar with Stevenson's famous book *Twenty Cases Suggestive of Reincarnation*, which had been first published in 1966. Despite his own lifelong Spiritist beliefs, Andrade was well aware that there can be several possible explanations for cases that suggest reincarnation; these include outright fraud, cryptomnesia (hidden memory), genetic memory, and general extrasensory perception (GESP). In his 37-page monograph, Andrade deals with each of these possibilities at some length.

From the start it seemed unlikely to him that the Munhoz family was making up the whole story. To avoid

publicity, Senhor Munhoz had insisted from the first that his family not be publicly identified and he also stipulated that Jacira herself should not be told the reason for his visit. The girl was now 17 and a normal healthy teenager. Her strange memories and behavior appeared to be things of the past; her father did not want them revived. He feared that if his daughter's identification with her dead uncle were prolonged or intensified, she too might kill herself. As for money, the family never asked for any nor was it ever offered any. The Munhoz family gave Andrade an impression of honesty and openness, and its members firmly adhered to the Brazilian Spiritists' traditionally strict code of moral behavior.

Andrade concluded that the family was telling the truth. His impression was strengthened by the added testimony of three members of the local Spiritist group, including the medium who had channeled the original messages. They all fully supported the essential evidence.

Senhor Munhoz eventually allowed Andrade to question Jacira about her early life and she cooperated willingly. She seemed surprised to learn what she had long ago forgotten—that is, that she had thought herself to be her reincarnated Uncle Ronaldo. She no longer had any specific memories of a previous life, she told the investigator, although she did retain the vague feeling of having lived before in the family of her maternal grandmother, to whom she still felt very close. "I don't think of her as Grandmother at all," she told Andrade. "It's as if she were my mother."

Jacira also retained something of the

tomboy nature of her early years when she had shown a preference for long pants rather than dresses and for playing with mechanical gadgets instead of dolls. Ronaldo appears to have influenced her entire psychological development. She wore her hair short and showed little interest in boys although in her parents' opinion she became noticeably more feminine in appearance and behavior after the age of 15.

She admitted that she was still terrified of cows and that she would not drink anything red. This was doubly strange since she had no objection to red items of clothing or anything else that was red. When Andrade asked if she had a favorite girl's name other than her own, she promptly gave the name of Ronaldo's fiancée. So it seems Jacira, at 17, was still producing occasional conditioned responses and reflexes originating from her period of close identification with Ronaldo. Or perhaps with her previous life.

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THE evidence in the case could be used to support several possible explanations. As the daughter of Ronaldo's sister, Jacira might be expected to share some of his characteristics. Perhaps this is why she was cross-eyed at birth, although her vision soon became normal. It is possible that early in life she might have overheard some reference to her uncle's death despite the fact that her parents believe they never discussed it in her hearing. Certainly they would have had to discuss it in great detail and even if they had, this would hardly account for Jacira's spontaneous reactions to the second engagement of her uncle's

fiancée or to the death of his twin brother. So while parts of the case might be ascribed to cryptomnesia or genetic inheritance, not all of it can be. You may inherit crossed eyes but you can't inherit complete memories or emotions. Nor can you remember information unless that information is *given* to you at some point.

The Ronaldo-Jacira case is unusual in that the supposed reincarnation was announced *before* the event, which might lead one to wonder if the whole case can be explained by suggestion—from the medium to Martha and later from Martha to Jacira.

Everything announced by the medium apparently took place as predicted: Martha *did* become pregnant unexpectedly within days of the February 1956 meeting; she *did* have a difficult pregnancy; her baby *was* a girl; and it spontaneously identified itself with Ronaldo almost as soon as it could speak.

But all of the incidents Jacira described from her past life were fully known to Martha, who would have known her brother well enough to predict how he would behave. It is also important to note that Jacira never provided an explanation for Ronaldo's suicide, which she should have been able to do if she were really he. In fact, she never produced any information not known to one or the other of her parents. So it would be possible to argue that all of Jacira's information was received telepathically from her mother.

But what about the girl's behavior? Again, there is some evidence that behavior can be altered through telepathy. Most recently, the subject of "remote behavioral control" has been