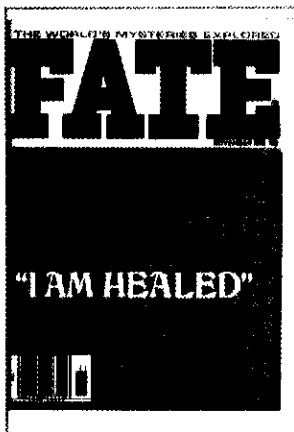

Back to the Future/Forward to the Past

Twenty-five years ago



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The Return of Patience Worth

by Harold O'Neal

Our Christmas Ouija board involved my skeptical family in spirit communication but could we contact the most famous spirit of all?

WHILE PLAYING with an Ouija board in July 1913 Mrs. John H. Curran of St. Louis and her friend, Mrs. Emily Grant Hutchings, were suddenly astounded when the small wooden pointer began to glide from letter to letter spelling out: "Many moons ago I lived. Again I come. Patience Worth my name."

Startled, the ladies paused a moment to stare at one another. When they replaced their fingers on the pointer it rapidly spelled: "Wait, I will speak with thee. If thou shalt live, then so shall I."

Thus began the most remarkable case of Ouija board communication in the annals of psychic research. For a period of some 25 years Patience Worth dictated novels, epigrams and poetry through Mrs. Curran. A cynical newspaperman named Casper S. Yost investigated Mrs. Curran. Intent on exposing her as a fraud, he ended up a staunch believer in the phenomenon and wrote a book titled *Patience Worth* (Henry Holt and Co., 1916).

Dr. Walter Franklin Prince, research officer of the American Society for Psychical Research, conducted the most thorough of all the investigations of the Patience Worth communications. And he too published a lengthy book (recently reprinted by University Books) presenting his conclusion: "Either our concept of what we call the subconscious must be radically altered so as

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to include potencies of which we hitherto have had no knowledge, or else some cause operating through but not originating in the subconsciousness of Mrs. Curran must be acknowledged."

When Mrs. Curran died in December 1937 the lively wit of Patience Worth was believed stilled—or so I thought until 1968.

* * *

FIRST LET IT be understood that I am not a medium, nor is any member of my family—which consists of my wife and five children aged 14 through 24. On Christmas 1967, however, my youngest daughter gave me an Ouija board. To a full-fledged agnostic like myself this seemed like a joke but she begged me to try it.

By myself I could not get the pointer to budge so I asked my son Gary to work it with me. Just as skeptical as I, he jokingly agreed. But for the two of us the pointer began to move. "My name is Jacob," it spelled. From this small beginning came scads of information about the supposed previous lives of each member of the household. For several months we kept up the Ouija communications as an amusing pastime. Friends and neighbors often laughingly participated.

But Jacob often related events in ancient history that research proved were cor-

rect. This made me truly interested in the occult and I purchased and read books by the dozens. Many of these referred to the story of Mrs. Curran and Patience Worth. I finally concluded that my own doubts about a life after death would be resolved if I could contact Patience Worth.

"Do you know a Patience Worth?" I asked Jacob one night as we sat with the talking board. His reply was, "Never heard of her!" The possibility of contacting Patience Worth thus seemed remote but the idea lingered.

One day while browsing in the game department of a large discount store I came across an "ESP Board," complete with a pendulum that was supposed to be swung above the letters on the board. I purchased this but the pendulum seemed to take forever to spell out words. When I complained about this one of the girls suggested we use the pointer from the Ouija board.

It worked, bouncing joyfully over the middle fold of the board as it spelled. My daughter Kathy, by now a proficient Ouija operator even when blindfolded, took over the controls. The communicator gave her name as Patty Starry and related the horrifying tale of a 17-year-old girl caught alone near dark on a school ground in Colorado by an attacker who ravished and killed her. When I asked, "Where are you now, Patty?" the reply was "Heaven."

At this point one can truthfully state that we hesitated. In all our previous contacts the entities had told us they were in Limbo. After due commiseration with our unseen communicator I asked, "Do you by any chance know a Patience Worth, Patty?"

"She is my best friend," spelled the pointer.

"She's there?" I asked a bit breathlessly.

The reply was slow in coming, almost as if something was trying to stop the movement of the pointer. Kathy looked up at me and asked, "Do you suppose she left?" Then the pointer slowly began to move again.

"Why do you wish to speak to Patience Worth?" it spelled.

"I admire her poetry which came through Mrs. Curran," I replied. "I would like her to recite for us."

The pointer hesitated then quickly swung to H, then E; H, then E; H, then E. It took a moment for the meaning of this to penetrate—"He, he, he!"

"She's giggling," said Kathy incredulously. "She's actually giggling."

The girlish enthusiasm for a compliment could be felt if not heard and we all broke into laughter. After another pause the pointer began to move rapidly as if a torrent of words needed to be expressed: "I am Patience Worth." The message seemed unnecessary as I thought I already had identified the communicator. Many

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months had passed since my initial desire to communicate with her; now finally she was here.

"Will you recite for us?" I asked.

Without hesitation the pointer began to move between the letters. My wife Wanda, my daughter Karen and my son Michael each copied down letters as they were called out by Kathy: "OHGREAT..." Divided into words this eventually came out as: "Oh, great God, thine wisdom is great, yet I have not believed thee. I will let thee tell me, now I must, for thou has given me a great power which is love and also

hath let me be loved. Thine wisdom is truly great and now I love thee forever and ever."

Both the speed of dictation and the content of the message reminded me of Patience's dictation through Mrs. Curran.

To further test the identity of our new communicator I asked if she remembered Mrs. Curran. "I remember she," the board responded.

"Do you recall the first message you transmitted through the Ouija board to Mrs. Curran?" I asked.

The pointer rapidly spelled out: "Many moons ago I lived. Again I come."

This correct response was impressive in view of the fact that Kathy, who was operating the board, did not know these words. In fact I was the only one present who did know the correct response. As a skeptical friend pointed out, it could have been telepathy between Kathy and me. But if this were true, I wonder why I never am able to think Kathy into helping her mother with the housework!

When I asked Patience whether she had liked Mrs. Curran the board replied, "That woman!" When I said I understood Mrs. Curran eventually was able to put aside the Ouija and receive Patience's messages through her mind, the pointer fairly flew across the board: "I DID NOT RESIGHT THROUGH HER MINUTE BRAIN!" breaks down into "I did not resight through her minute brain!"

"If you had such little respect for Mrs. Curran," I asked, "why did you choose her Ouija board to communicate through?"

"Well," she replied, "I was anxious to have one."

* * *

AS WORD OF our Ouija communications spread we often found our dining table surrounded by interested friends. I began to realize how Mrs. Curran must have felt when she asked investigator Walter Franklin Prince, "Won't you remove for good from the minds of the public that I am a medium with a gold shingle and trances?"

On one occasion the visitors included some young married couples, acquaintances who came to see the strange kooks who thought they could communicate with

spirits of the dead. After much hilarity we were persuaded to break out the communication board. Patience Worth graciously acknowledged the introductions. We told her that one of the young men, Kenneth M., just had been discharged from army service.

"Will you recite something appropriate, Patience?" I asked.

Quickly the pointer spelled out: "Sons of liberty, O God, forgiveth them, for they are not yet believers in thine noble strength but I fear shall soon be."

The ex-soldier pursed his lips thoughtfully and then asked, "Patience, can you tell me something that only I know?"

Without hesitation the pointer began to describe a vicious barracks fight at the army base in Fort Lee, Va. A knife had been pulled on Ken. The young man's face paled visibly as this account was given. Patience later apologized for embarrassing him in front of the other guests. He told me later the incident had occurred exactly as Patience had described it.

In her message through Mrs. Curran, Patience Worth made comments that seemingly repudiate reincarnation. Statements made through our ESP board, however, seem to support this concept, although the first such message came at a time when we weren't asking about reincarnation as such.

I had asked, "Please, Patience, give in 15 words or less the reason for immortality."

The pointer glided rapidly back and forth across the board: "Thee cannot be good enough to have only one life on this plane of existence."

At a later session Patience was more explicit and announced she had had five earth lives. I naturally assumed that her life as Patience Worth had been her most recent but when I asked her one day she replied, "I last lived as Nora Fleming in Scotland, 1828." Unfortunately this is all the information she gave about this alleged life and it thus would be impossible to verify that such a person lived. I was puzzled that she preferred to identify herself with a much older incarnation than that of Nora Fleming. Her explanation was sim-

ple: "I liked the life of Patience Worth. I learned from it."

Some of the messages from Patience hinted that she had a collaborator during her contacts with Mrs. Curran. Early in 1969 I asked her, "Who helped you write through Mrs. Curran?"

"Hannah Pringle," was the reply.

"Where is Hannah?"

"Limbo, if she hasn't been reborn."

This suggested the idea of trying to contact Hannah Pringle through the Ouija board. After much conversation with other entities, I finally did contact Hannah, a wild extrovert who called me Charles and intimated that we had been more than a little close in merry old England in the 1500s. Alas, my memory does not extend that far back and I am unable to verify Hannah's statements.

**"Where is Patience?" I asked.
"Reborn!" was the cryptic reply.**

I informed Hannah that her old friend Patience Worth wished to say hello. The conversation from the Ouija board grew spirited as Hannah recalled to us her old friend. She wondered if she could speak directly to Patience herself. This posed a problem. Those in Limbo seemed to speak only through the Ouija board while those in Heaven used the ESP board. We finally decided to try with the two boards side by side—with my left hand on the pointer of the Ouija and my right on the pointer

of the ESP board.

The two pointers circled for a while without spelling anything, as if they were testing the automatist. Shortly the hair on my arms raised and I felt an electric-like charge course through my body. The pointers began to move rapidly.

"How are thee, Hannah?" asked Patience.

"I have missed thee," replied Hannah.

The pace grew hectic. As fast as the pointers could move on the respective boards Patience and Hannah spelled messages to each other, often at the same time. I raised my hands until only the middle fingers still made contact. If only one pointer was spelling the other would spin under my fingers and seem to look at the other board. Perhaps the ghostly friends were seeing each other; they never said.

After repeated requests to slow down the pointers eventually did so. As the two communicators supposedly had collaborated on literary works through Mrs. Curran, I asked if they would communicate something through me. After considerable discussion between them they decided to write a play entitled "The Unhappy Child." We had managed to receive only the first scene when a visitor commented, "Well, it's not very good." Apparently indignant over this, Hannah and Patience refused to continue.

During the first half of 1969 circumstances prevented me from continuing with the boards. When I finally was able to resume in July we made contact, on Patience's board, with an entity named Mobley with whom we had talked before.

"Where is Patience?" I asked.

"Reborn!" was the cryptic reply. Then he explained that Patience had been reborn as a beautiful baby girl to a couple in Connecticut on June 17, 1969. He told us the last name of the couple which I agreed not to publish.

Permit me to say, in conclusion, that my attitude toward this life has been changed considerably by this experience. For, if this is only one phase of everlasting existence then Patience was right when she admonished, "Be thouself; love each other; ye shall meet again." ✕