

Sophia Williams

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Nº 265
APRIL 1.972

WHISPERING VOICES

The timid etheric messages coming from above her head could be amplified, even recorded.

By Leslie M. LeCron

IT WAS THROUGH Harwood White, brother of Stewart Edward White, that I first met the late Sophia Williams. Mrs. Williams is the medium who worked with Hamlin Garland and concerning whose work he wrote his book The Mystery of the Buried Crosses. Not a trance medium, she was able to write automatically, claimed to see clairvoyant-

Messages might come through while Mrs. Williams read calmly during seance or even when she was smoking or drinking a cocktail.



ly and produced a voice something like a whisper which would purport to be some deceased relative or friend of the sitter. In his book Garland states that this voice guided them to dig up a number of crosses which had been buried or lost by Mexican priests in the early days in California. The crosses now are in the state museum in Sacramento.

At the time I was introduced to Sophia electronics was hardly known. Harwood was trying through Mrs. Williams to develop some mechanism which would permit direct communication with the "departed." Mrs. Williams' control seemed to be an Arab who called himself Hassan. He would bring in on the voice engineers and other scientists from the "other side" who would tell what needed to be done to develop such a device. Evidently they knew little about electronics for they never succeeded in developing such a gadget!

Sophia became a close personal friend of ours and my wife and I had many sittings with her. At first I was skeptical and suspicious, although I had read Garland's book and knew of her supposed abilities. She knew nothing about me at this time but said she "saw" around us some of my defunct relatives — two aunts

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and a cousin whom she correctly named and described. The cousin had been named Theodore, a name usually shortened to Ted, but my cousin always had been called Thede. Sophia called him Thede. My surprise certainly was great and I wondered how

she could be faking, although she might have gotten this knowledge telepathically from me.

At all times Sophia was perfectly willing to cooperate and to be tested in any way. We sealed her lips with adhesive tape to prevent ventriloquism. The voice would come while she was inhaling a cigarette or drinking a cocktail. Usually it came from near her left shoulder but sometimes from other places in the room.

Many of our sessions with her were held at the home of Aldous Huxley, the writer, who was very skeptical at first but became quite a convert and close friend of Sophia after participating in some of our tests. In one of these which was most convincing we put Sophia in a distant part of the house with a microphone beside her. My wife stayed with her. The rest of us were in the living room with the loudspeaker to which the microphone was connected. Sophia could not possibly hear us, as my wife testified. But when we asked questions the whispering voice answered through the loudspeaker. Huxley held up his wristwatch and asked what he had in his hand. "Your wristwatch," the voice replied.

During one session at my home Sophia did some automatic writing. The voice, as Hassan,

announced that he was now bringing in Patience Worth who would write through Sophia. As most of you know the case of Patience Worth startled researchers soon after the turn of the century. A St. Louis housewife, Mrs. Curran, began using a Ouija board in 1913 and for some 20 years Patience Worth apparently wrote through her. She claimed to have lived in England during the 17th Century. Among her productions was a volume of acceptable verse, written in a very unusual and distinct style, and some books of fiction, all of which were published. Patience often used obsolete words in her writing and scholars judged it to be in 17th Century style. All this was far beyond the abilities and knowledge of Mrs. Curran.

When Sophia began to write as Patience Worth it was stated — all in verse — that she, Patience, would be glad to produce more "literature" through Sophia. I carefully saved what was written but unfortunately filed it so well that I'm quite unable to find it now among my papers! I showed it to Huxley who remarked that the language was such as could be expected from a 17th Century person. In the verse she used one word with which I was unfamiliar. Huxley knew its meaning and found it in an 18th Century dictionary which he owned.

All this took place a number of years ago, in 1962. Present with us were James A. Hixson, a dentist, and his wife. The Hixsons also were friends of Sophia and attended many of the sittings usually held at Huxley's or my home in Pacific Palisades, a suburb of Los Angeles.

Sophia also produced raps and did table tilting, although it bored her because she considered it amateurish. Nevertheless, she was always willing to do it at our request. Our dining room table was a very heavy Danish modern, probably weighing 60 to 70 pounds. With my knees under its edge I could move it slightly with great effort. But I have seen the table levitate so that only one leg touched the floor when Sophia was sitting so her knees could be watched and were not touching the table and she had her hands flat on the table's top surface. However, the table never lifted completely off the floor.

My older brother Jim, who was assistant to Henry Wallace when he was Secretary of Agriculture, was aware of Sophia's reputation but he was a confirmed skeptic. During a sitting with Sophia at a time he was visiting me he watched her closely, even getting down on his knees to look under the table to see if her knees were lifting it. He remarked

—ANOTHER POINT OF VIEW—

I knew Mrs. Williams for about 15 years and tested her extensively, both formally and informally. As a consequence I am sure I know more about her effects than most other investigators.

First, Mrs. Williams was a brilliant "mental" medium on the order of Mrs. Leonard, etc., and she made splendid "hits" frequently, of a spiritistic nature. I am the first to admit her extraordinary abilities.

As to her voice and other "physical" abilities, she possessed none whatsoever in my experience. I repeated Hamlin Garland's experiments, for instance, as he detailed them in *The Mystery of the Buried Crosses*, and as a result I believe that his tests were badly defective. However, on a few occasions test answers were received when she was isolated in one house under observation and we were in another building recording.

Her voice was a product of ventriloquism! This conclusion was reached after careful observation and rigid testing. There was absolutely nothing paranormal about it. Those who believe it to have been psychical did not know what to look for.

Her "physical" phenomena — raps, table tipping, etc. — were all of perfectly normal origin. Again, those who believe otherwise are not skilled in cautious, knowledgeable investigation.

It is true, however, that Mrs. Williams would submit to any test and, I repeat, she was a brilliant "mental" medium of great ability.—*Raymond Bayless.*

treasure is well known in Arizona and it has been sought by many treasure hunters.

Sophia and a woman friend who does not want to be identified made three trips to Arizona to the locale of the treasure in the early 1950's. But despite the guidance of the voice they never were able to locate the cave or the treasure. Sophia did take a photograph of her friend standing beside a rock on which a cross was plainly carved. Sophia said such a rock was one of the landmarks described by the voice. They had become tired from searching for landmarks and Sophia had sat down on this stone whereupon the voice had said, "Turn it over. This is the stone you are looking for." When the two women turned the rock over there was the cross!

Some of the "conversations" with Father Kino took place at my home in Pacific Palisades, others at Huxley's. Some were recorded on tape and others merely notes. The voice was very convincing and provided some historical data which later were verified by Sophia — such as the displacement of one order of priests by another and the date given for their recall to Mexico City.

It seemed odd that Father Kino spoke good English. Asked about this the voice claimed it

spoke English well because the medium spoke English!

Sophia never went into a trance and hence could ask questions of the voice herself. One of our sitters at some of the sessions was a physician who became so interested in the treasure story that he advanced some funds for her last expedition, although at first she had refused any financial help.

Their first trip to hunt the treasure was made in 1953. On a second expedition a year later Sophia sprained an ankle climbing in the rough mountain terrain and was forced to return home. These trips were a financial drain on Sophia's small resources, although her friend paid her half of their expenses, and there can be no doubt Sophia was fully convinced she would be led to this hoard of gold and silver. Unless the treasure could be located she had everything to lose and nothing to gain.

Some years before Sophia's first expedition a Mexican cowboy had brought a gold bar to a Tucson bank and bragged of having found the cave. He had proceeded to celebrate wildly and that evening got embroiled in a gun battle in which he was shot and killed. Sophia claimed to have checked on this tale and found that the bank had bought such a gold bar. She also said

later, "I saw it and she wasn't lifting the damned table but I still don't believe it!"

Sophia's paranormal raps would answer questions by rapping twice for yes and three times for no. Thus it was possible to communicate with whatever entity was producing the knocks.

Many people consulted Sophia wishing to contact relatives and friends through the little voice and for many years she made no charge for this work. Finally Aldous Huxley persuaded her that she was very foolish not to charge some reasonable fee. Thereafter she did make a small charge, usually three dollars. "I suppose I should charge something," she told Huxley, "but I hate to become a professional."

An amusing incident occurred when Sophia held a sitting in Texas, in a town near an army airfield. During this sitting, which had been arranged by some of her friends and was attended by some high ranking officers, her control seemingly spoke for a deceased general. Some highly classified information was brought out by the voice, top secret data which Sophia had no possible means of knowing. One of the officers, a thorough skeptic, became alarmed at this and reported it to the F.B.I. As a result Sophia was interrogated, as were all of

her close friends including Huxley, Dr. Hixson, Dr. Edgar Lutz and I. But the F.B.I. man found himself far out of his depth and finally remarked that obviously Mrs. Williams was no spy and was cleared of all suspicion. But, he asked, how on earth could she have gained this top secret knowledge? He went away shaking his head, completely mystified.

Most impressive and convincing was Sophia's belief in her own mediumship. She spent considerable time, and money she could ill afford, hunting a treasure which the voice insisted could be found through its guidance. The voice purported to speak for Father Kino, a Spanish-American priest who established several of the Arizona missions, I believe in the 17th Century. The voice, as Father Kino, told of his and the other priests of his order having been recalled to Mexico City and being replaced by priests of a different order.

At the Tumacacori mission near Nogales gold and silver had been mined in the nearby mountains and slag heaps still can be seen there. The gold and silver was smelted into bars and before they left Father Kino and his priests hid these bars in a cave and sealed the entrance, hoping to return soon. They never were able to do so. The story of this

she had verified the death of the cowboy.

At one of our sessions with Sophia at Huxley's an Egyptian psychologist was present. To my surprise, and his, the voice spoke to him in Arabic and Sophia also wrote automatically in Arabic for him. She certainly had no knowledge of this language. Particularly she did not know how to write Arabic.

Another convincing incident involved a Hungarian motion picture and television producer. During the evening the whispering voice spoke to him in Hungarian which he translated for our benefit. The voice claimed to be his uncle and gave the uncle's name but the producer insisted he had had no uncle by that name. But the voice insisted and claimed to have been a cavalry officer killed during World War I. The producer was puzzled and also somewhat disdainful and skeptical.

The next day he phoned me. "Something strange happened," he said. "I told my cousin about our session with Mrs. Williams and what the voice had said. 'Why, you ass,' my cousin said. 'You did have a great uncle with that name and he was killed during the First World War. You were a child at that time.'"

Another odd thing occurred at the time my brother Jim died at

his home in Berkeley in 1960. I was informed by telegram of his death on the afternoon it occurred. The next day Sophia, who had met him once, telephoned me to ask if anything had happened to him, stating that she had seen him clairvoyantly. "And I couldn't see him if he was still alive," she said.

Mrs. Williams wrote a book titled *You Are Psychic** in which she tells of her own mediumistic development and states that she believes everyone has psychic ability which can be developed by the methods she advocates.

Sophia lived for a time in Kansas City, Mo., but left home when she was in her teens to become a dancer on the stage. After being married and divorced she lived in Chicago with her father. During this time he attended a seance given by a woman medium. Greatly impressed by what he had witnessed he told Sophia about it. She visited the medium herself and also was impressed. Then she decided she could develop along the same line. After reading several books on the subject, she began to practice meditation, sitting motionless for certain periods. After some weeks she found her latent abilities increasing and the voice began to make itself heard, claim-

*Available from the Venture Bookshop, P.O. Box 249, Highland Park, Ill. 60035.

ing to be her control Hassan. She never was able to go into trance, however, as many mediums, including Arthur Ford and Eileen Garrett, have done. Sophia always worked in the light claiming that darkness was unnecessary and lends itself to faking.

While living in Chicago she was thoroughly investigated and tested by several members of the faculty of Northwestern University. Later in Los Angeles she was vigorously tested by Hamlin Garland, as he relates in his book. She also was tested thoroughly by a group headed by Raymond Bayless. I think Sophia never was found to be faking and there is no doubt that she firmly believed her voice was that of discarnate entities.

Unfortunately, shortly after beginning the automatic writing as Patience Worth Sophia suffered a stroke — in 1962. She was in a hospital for a time; then she was moved to a sanitarium where she remained partially paralyzed. She was there until she finally suffered another massive stroke and died in 1968 at March Air Force Base hospital.

Her stay in the sanitarium was

quite expensive and Sophia had only a very small income. During this time her expenses were met by a multimillionaire who was a close friend of Sophia's son, a colonel in the United States Air Force. Before her death she was moved to the air force hospital.

It is not easy to evaluate Sophia's psychic abilities. In discussing them with Huxley she insisted her subconscious mind could not be responsible for some of the incidents that occurred, especially for the voice's ability to speak foreign languages she did not speak. She was eager to permit Patience Worth to communicate through her automatic writing and was prevented from following up on this by her stroke.

Yet we understand so little of the subconscious mind that it remains possible it produced all the effects she obtained and that she unintentionally deluded herself and us.

It should be added that after her stroke and during all the time of her partial recovery in the sanitarium all her psychic abilities were lost. The voice never spoke again.

NEED TO STEP UP SPACE TRAVEL

THE ANDROMEDA galaxy, the most distant object in space visible to the naked eye, is so far from the earth that even a spaceship traveling 10,000 times faster than Apollo 11's seven miles a second would take four and a half million years to reach it.