

Ian Stevenson: Gentleman and Scholar

LISETTE COLY

Parapsychology Foundation
New York, New York

As many will no doubt come to realize, the science of parapsychology has sustained a grievous loss in the death of Dr. Ian Stevenson. Wearing our “administrative hats,” both the Parapsychology Foundation’s President, Eileen Coly, and I as the PF’s Executive Director acknowledge on behalf of our organization the immense vacuum created at his passing. Since the PF’s inception at the hands of Eileen J. Garrett in 1951, we have been privileged to work closely with those striving to understand the complexities of our field. It is by no means hyperbole to state that in our experience over the years working with parapsychologists the world over, we have seldom been graced with the opportunity to work with someone of his academic acumen and overall patrician gentlemanly demeanor.

The PF remains justifiably proud of its early support for Dr. Stevenson’s research in 1961 when at the request of Garrett he took a trip to India and Sri Lanka to investigate reincarnation memories in children, a trip which spawned a lifetime of research. Dr. Stevenson graciously acknowledged this support in the “Remembrances” section of the Helix reprint of Garrett’s autobiography, *Adventures in the Supernormal*. Referring to Garrett, he stated: “Later I obtained much other funding; but I remain deeply indebted to Eileen for encouraging me and for making possible my first endeavors to study the children who claim to remember previous lives. Without her I could not have even started.” The PF remains most gratified that in this manner we contributed to Dr. Stevenson’s research efforts, which culminated in such a prodigious amount of valuable work.

Over time we continued to have a much-valued association with him, which included his publishing articles in PF publications and participating in our International Conference series with continued grant support. But now, switching our “hats” to our personal recollections, we remember with gratitude his warm good counsel and support as we sought to administer and guide the Foundation through the turbulence caused by the death of Garrett in 1970, and also the kindness he showed us as we personally came to grips with the loss of our mother and grandmother.

Perhaps at first blush thought to be difficult to approach, Dr. Stevenson was in truth an extremely kind man and consummate gentleman. He will always hold a revered spot in the hearts of many, myself included, for I am sure there were

many acts of kindness – such as what I experienced that I hold most dear – that will stand testament to the man. He had just published his first book on the reincarnation research, *Twenty Cases Suggestive of Reincarnation*, and had come to visit Garrett at our offices, then at 29 W. 57th Street in Manhattan, with his book proudly in hand and with gratitude for the Foundation’s initial support of his studies. I was a young girl of 16 who had started her apprenticeship by doing odd jobs at the Foundation, drawn within the orbit of Eileen Garrett, who, as many will attest, was hard to resist. After a brief meeting with her in her tastefully appointed office, and fully expecting a private *tete-a-tete* luncheon allowing for the opportunity to discuss at length various research projects and future directions for more advanced study, he was ushered out of her “inner sanctum” and introduced to me. Garrett, with her arms waving expansively, stated: “Now, Ian, my granddaughter Lisette will be happy to take you to lunch!” thus rendering him unceremoniously saddled with a somewhat clueless young teen. Now others in that same situation might well have declined the invitation for understandable reasons; but not so Dr. Stevenson. He gallantly and with good humor shared an elegant formal luncheon at Mrs. Garrett’s favorite “of-the-moment” French restaurant, Le Baroque, all the while patiently introducing me to the concept of reincarnation and the ramifications for its continued study for humankind. How I would appreciate having the opportunity for that private tutorial to be replayed so that I could experience it as an adult! Not only did he gamely escort me to the restaurant and back to the office, but I was so impressed to receive by mail a few days later a copy of his book inscribed to me personally – a habit he continued, sending me all his subsequent titles and usually with an inscription alluding to our first meeting. He watched me grow up literally and figuratively within the Foundation and was a quiet and ever available resource that both my mother and I were free to draw on for support. He inspired many students – myself included – to investigate more closely the mysteries raised by psychic functioning.

Parapsychology and the PF family are greatly diminished by his loss.