

PARANORMAL TRAUMA AND THE EMERGENCE OF PARAPSYCHOLOGY

par·a·nor·mal

adjective

denoting events or phenomena that are beyond the scope of normal scientific understanding.

trau·ma

noun

a deeply distressing or disturbing experience.

par·a·psy·chol·o·gy

noun

the study of mental phenomena which are excluded from or inexplicable by orthodox scientific psychology (such as hypnosis, telepathy, etc.).

haunt·ed

adjective

1. (of a place) frequented by a ghost.
2. having or showing signs of mental anguish or torment.

Source: Oxford Languages

I am a Certified EMDR Trauma Therapist, Integrative Counsellor and Coach of nearly two decades in private practice and I have my own paranormal trauma experiences.

My first experience in parapsychology and paranormal trauma was at my birth, while my mother Irene was having a near death experience (NDE). Although I was truly wanted, Irene left her body because of an asthma attack, and she witnessed the later part of my birth from the ceiling of the hospital room at the University College Hospital in Central London, England. She told me of how she witnessed the chaos in the room below as they worked hard to revive her, and that as she returned to her body, I left hers and breathed life into mine.

I was to grow up in a quiet treelined street on the outskirts of London with my family. My beloved mother, a reluctant medium, was hounded many nights by unwanted entities, spirits and ghosts. Irene had been trained in music and opera at The Guildhall School of Music and Drama in her youth and had been a working opera singer before she retired once children came into the frame. My mother would often wake me up in the small hours of the morning with a top C scream.

As far back as I can remember I would run into her bedroom, my heart pounding, to find my beautiful mother sitting bolt upright where she would quickly turn to me: "I'm okay. It was just a bad dream Carmel, go back to bed". I would return to my bedroom, still

terrified, heart still pounding and pull my teddies and covers very close to me and try, for what seemed like hours, to return to sleep.

This was to be a regular occurrence throughout my childhood.

The morning I realised these were not 'bad dreams' was the night her father came to visit. Unknown to us he had died two weeks earlier and, although she had not seen him or heard from him for many years, that night he came to let her know he had passed.

My mother hated her 'gift' and only saw it as a negative experience. It traumatised her, and it vicariously traumatised me. She never got the help she badly needed, as she tried a few times to see a therapist, but all they wanted to do was medicate her and her 'disorder'.

There was very little understanding of the paranormal or parapsychology in those days unless you were blessed to be in those circles. With the fear of ignorance, dogma, and judgment that my mother experienced, she understandably closed to it and just kept it in the family.

This is a very current theme even today that informs my therapeutic trauma work and practice, however fortunately there are those of us who truly 'know' the validity of the paranormal and are out there helping.

In the past I also suppressed my own gifts; observing my mother's experience, I didn't want any part of it. It felt like a curse, at least that was how my mother and I saw hers, being bombarded at night by, what I now understand, were often negative spirits or ghosts trying to get her attention and my poor mother not knowing or understanding how to deal with it or them.

We were both haunted emotionally and literally by the trauma.

Through the late 70s, 80s and early 90's I worked as an editorial hairstylist in London, Paris and beyond in fashion. My work gracing the pages of glossy magazines, catwalks, pop videos and the advertising world. Despite career success, the fashion industry left me feeling completely unfulfilled and questioning life's meaning to the point of total desperation and desolation.

I retired from the profession and left England on the spin of a globe; "wherever my finger lands", I told myself as I spun it "is where I will go". As the globe stopped, my finger had landed nearest to Venezuela in South America.

I spent the next few years of my life living in Caracas, deeply searching for answers only a 'Dark Night of the Soul' could provide. I had known in my heart something was so fundamentally missing in my life that the innate drive in me to find meaning and purpose was immense.

I had lost myself in a profession that wasn't my true calling, to appease my parents, who wanted my financial success in an uncaring world. I had attained that, however the

meaning I had given it completely collapsed one night and I knew my soul was being tortured by the emptiness I felt to the point of my near destruction. I tried so hard to ignore the pain I was enduring until that fateful night when I could no longer avoid it and had to leave my fashion life and home behind to find myself.

The lightbulb Eureka moment came one Christmas in the Amazon jungle while reading a book that had been gifted to me, *The Wheel of Life* by Elizabeth Kubler Ross. This book was to completely change the course of my life.

Elizabeth, like me, was driven to do good in this world. Her drive was around helping those who were terminally ill and the dying and her famous book *On Death and Dying* revolutionised how the medical world supports those transitioning from this world to the next.

It seemed like the most obvious revelation: I had spent years helping people look good on the outside and here it was of course, to help those feel good on the inside.

Elizabeth wanted to help the dying and I knew in my heart my calling was to help the living.

I qualified at 40 as an Integrative Counsellor from The University of Kent in England. That was nearly two decades ago, and after 10 years of being a counsellor and a coach in private practice, I decided to specialise in trauma. I knew that growing up with trauma and witnessing it repeatedly in life, I wanted to help ease the suffering of mankind and I was blessed to learn about and study EMDR trauma therapy.

EMDR is a truly ground-breaking therapy for healing trauma. It is a safe, fast and effective therapy that is particularly suitable to resolving all types of trauma, especially PTSD. Its validity and reliability has been established by rigorous research, with many controlled studies into EMDR making it the most thoroughly researched method used in the treatment of trauma. I found myself absolutely loving this amazing healing modality. I came to see I could process an acute trauma in under 12 sessions; trauma that people might have lived with for a lifetime. It felt like magic, and I felt like I had come home.

My first paranormal trauma client lived in Canada and came to me when I moved from England to Toronto in 2012.

His name is Sean Johnathan Spence, and he was 31 years old.

Sean was still being presently traumatised by what he called 'The Possession Dreams', which had begun a year after moving into the family's new home when he was seven years old. The house was haunted.

The first year had started quiet enough but slowly over that time the ghostly occurrences began to happen.

Sean told me that nights were the worst for him especially between 2 and 3am when something or someone would begin to breathe in his ear.

This was to be one of the most traumatic of the strange occurrences for the eight-year-old.

However, Sean found the shadow figures in the bathroom terrifying as did all the family; the constant banging on his bed, chairs that would be moved downstairs at night, footsteps up and down the stairs and something sinister in his closet. Most peculiar was his pajamas being inside out on waking, when he knew on going to bed, the pajamas had been put on correctly.

Sean found sleep very challenging, and he shared with me that if he didn't get to sleep early enough, he knew he'd missed the window of opportunity and the breathing in his ear would begin. The rest of the night would be spent too scared to move.

His school life was deeply affected as he was often too tired to cope or manage with what was needed of him, and the hauntings continued to get more severe until he left the family home at sixteen.

To his great relief the hauntings stopped when he left home, although the possession dreams didn't. Sean described how in the dreams the location might change but there was always a demonic force trying to get inside of him, wanting to possess him. He would wake in absolute dread, shaking and sweating, terrified.

Sean's partner at the time shared with me her experience of his night terrors. She explained how he would writhe around in bed, or sit up frozen, eyes wide open. She found waking him from these night experiences extremely difficult, as if he was locked into them in another time and place. Sean, however, had no memory of the night terrors, only the dreams.

The possession dreams and the night terrors continued until Sean and I began to work together.

It took us 12 sessions of EMDR Trauma therapy over three months for it all to stop. I am still in contact with Sean nearly nine years later and neither the night-terrors nor the nightmares have returned.

Sean recently shared with me the impact our work had on his life. He spoke of the relentless anger and rage he lived with all those years because of the hauntings, and how it had dissipated with our therapy. He also wanted me to know that once the anger had diminished, he felt such forgiveness for himself, about what he had experienced and how he had managed it. The anger, the shame, the guilt all gone. What stood in its place was an acknowledgement of his resilience, an acknowledgment of the wisdom this experience had taught him and how he could go on to not only survive but flourish in this world.

Sean later told me our work together was completely transformational. He recommended that I use his full name in this paper, as he wanted the world to know how much it had changed his outlook on life for the better, and that people needed to know of the power and magic of EMDR Trauma Therapy.

Working with Sean also changed my life. Until we worked together, I hadn't recognised or fully realised the value that EMDR trauma therapy would have on processing paranormal trauma.

This was a way that I could, at long last, help a group of society that was marginalised and mistreated. If only my own mother had had this available to her, our lives would have been very different.

A lot of clients that come to me with paranormal trauma have extreme mental anguish caused by their paranormal experiences. The medical world assumes, often incorrectly, that the cause of these symptoms is not paranormal in nature but hallucinatory; that the mental disorder being experienced is neurological and therefore medication will control the 'illness'.

This is a two-fold error, not only is this *not* a mental illness but the anxiety and symptoms experienced are a 'result' of the paranormal experiences and not the other way round. These are not hallucinations but very real paranormal experiences that are sufficiently terrifying to cause a trauma response in the brain.

Incorrect diagnoses can cause even more harm and trauma to the individual. The symptoms of anxiety, stress, horror, terror, confusion and shock coupled with 'hallucinations' are often deemed a neurological disorder and diagnosed as such, schizophrenia, bipolar, psychosis or borderline personality disorder to name a few. Psychiatrists believe the patient is not really experiencing anything paranormal but are delusional and therefore medicated and/or even worse committed.

I have come across this bias and negligence too many times in my therapeutic work, as many doctors, psychiatrists, psychologists, or counsellors do not believe in the paranormal or do not want to be seen to believe for fear of judgment, discrimination, or even worse loss of work and therefore do not have the capacity to be objective and support appropriately.

This is extremely problematic and why most people experiencing paranormal trauma do not feel safe enough to come forward and get the help they desperately need.

I do, of course, when taking on a paranormal trauma client, need to be diligent in determining whether this is a real paranormal trauma experience. There are disorders, just discussed, that can genuinely cause hallucinations that mimic the paranormal. Wisdom and assessment are always a necessary application in these cases. However, my first position is to believe and honour my clients' experience real or otherwise.

This is where parapsychology is now stepping up and emerging into the world. More and more courageous therapists or would-be therapists who know the validity or at least are open to the truth of the unseen world, are becoming educated in parapsychology and are willing to be sufficiently curious and open minded to want to bridge the gap between the worlds.

The world of the paranormal and the work of parapsychology have always been with us in varying forms, especially in indigenous traditions where these narratives are understood well.

In a way like science and the medical world, although on the other end of the spectrum, indigenous traditions explain these conditions as predominantly paranormal when there may have in-fact been genuine mental illness present.

Can we walk a more balanced life of understanding both mental illness and paranormal trauma and why is this important? Because both can present; the mental illness caused by the paranormal or hallucinations caused by mental illness.

After years of doing this extraordinary and privileged work, which was born in the Amazon jungle, on a continent where magic and the paranormal are paradoxically deemed normal and accepted as part of life; I have come to understand that we are still seemingly in our infancy of understanding the unseen world. So many of us in the West do not believe in the paranormal, or at least do not admit to believing unless it has affected us directly. Most skirt around the topic often shaming those that do.

Fortunately, however, we are entering into a more curious and willing era of exploration which is building momentum through the emergence of parapsychology and new scientific methods that allow us to observe and treat trauma in more neutral and objective ways. We can hopefully recognise respectfully that maybe we do not yet have all the answers on what is or isn't real whether tangible or not.

So how can we blend the wisdom of the indigenous cultures with the wisdom of science and truly use both to create integration?

For me personally I have come to see that the answer lies in education, parapsychology, awareness, compassion and helping to inform the world of the reality of the paranormal narrative.

In acknowledging the bravery of clients that come forward to process their paranormal traumas and as they share and integrate their stories and experiences, we can also be informed and learn through them.

With this grace I will continue to serve and help those in need, on all sides of the spectrum of the seen and unseen worlds with respect, validation, curiosity and my beloved and phenomenal EMDR Trauma therapy.

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Carmel is currently working on her first book about her clients' accounts of EMDR Trauma Therapy and Paranormal Trauma.