

The Unknown Plot

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At 7:00 o'clock, virtually every evening for 15 years, Alice and Henry Stringfellow would sit down at a table and speak to the spirit of their deceased son, Leslie. When Alice lightly placed her fingers on one edge of a planchette¹ and Henry touched the other edge, it would glide smoothly across a large sheet of paper, writing out what seemed to be Leslie's responses. During this period, and for over a decade after the sessions ended, the family neither sought nor received any publicity about the other-worldly communications.

Henry was a world-renowned horticulturist and author of several books that earned him a place in *Who's Who In America*. Alice, the only daughter of a medical doctor, had attended all the proper schools and was an accomplished musician when she met and married Henry in 1863. Their daughter, adopted after Leslie's death and named Lessie, became a journalist and was deeply involved in the women's suffrage movement. In her position as the national press chairperson for the General Federation of Women's Clubs, Lessie Stringfellow was on speaking terms with John D. Rockefeller, Thomas Edison, and other illustrious people of the day. All of which is related to explain why the family was not anxious to be known as "those kooks who talk to dead people." Nevertheless, in 1926, Alice and her daughter detailed their experiences in a small book titled *Leslie's Letters to His Mother*.

In her introduction to the book, Alice gives her reason for breaking silence: "... the thought came to me that if I could, by writing my own personal experiences, convince one unhappy soul that his loved ones gone before are not dead, nor far away, that under certain conditions they can and do make themselves known, I would feel that the publication of what follows has been justified. ... If those who read will be charitable enough to credit me with honesty, I will rejoice that I may have accomplished some good by giving to the world my sacred secrets which, for fear of ridicule of scoffing ones, I have jealously guarded for so long."²

Most of *Leslie's Letters* is taken up by descriptions of the dimension that Leslie's spirit inhabits and his activities therein — all of which is interesting but beyond confirmation. Very little space is devoted to hard evidence for Survival, but one case is well worth relating. This incident was one of several in which a spirit other than Leslie's seemed in control of the planchette. It is also one of several times that the writing was produced in the "Da Vinci code" style — it seemed to be gibberish until held before a mirror.

The son and daughter of a neighbor named Walker, who knew of the Stringfellow's secret pastime, asked if they might make contact with their recently deceased father. Henry and Alice were happy to make an attempt during one of their normal sessions. In reply, according to Alice, they received a message in what she called the "upside-down, inside-out writing." "By taking the paper to a mirror," she states, "we learned that Mr. Walker wanted his children to know he

¹ There are two types of planchettes (French for "little plank"). Both are small, flat, triangular pieces of wood (or, these days, plastic) with or without short legs. One is used to point at letters and symbols on a board, the other (as in this case) holds a pencil stub and is used to write on a paper over which it glides.

² Alice Stringfellow was 81 years of age when she wrote these words.

owned a valuable cemetery lot in Ohio.” (The families were residing in Texas at the time.) The spirit “said he wanted them to claim the lot, sell it, and use the money.

“They had never known during their father’s lifetime that he owned such a piece of property. Neither had we known it. They wrote to the town, had the property title investigated, found that it belonged to them, [and] sold it.”

Discussion

This is an old account, but it has been carefully researched and there is no reason to doubt its authenticity. The information imparted — the existence and location of the cemetery plot owned by the father of the inquiring children — was not known to any living person. It is true that someone at the cemetery may have been aware that that particular lot was owned by a person named Walker, even so, there was no link that could be followed between the plot and Stringfellow’s neighbors. Also, there was nothing to guide a clairvoyant’s mind to a particular one of the thousands (millions?) of cemetery plots owned by people named Walker.

For Further Information

See *The Afterlife of Leslie Stringfellow: A Nineteenth-Century Southern Family’s Experience with Spiritualism*, by Stephen Chism, 2005.

END CASE 57

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