

INCUBUS..... OR ILLNESS?

Judy Jaafar

PREAMBLE

From time to time, and more often than you'd think, BUFORA becomes involved in a case that has nothing to do with UFOs, aliens or alleged abductions. The following case came to my attention, in May 2000, through my then colleague, Malcolm Robinson of SPI (Strange Phenomena Investigations). The very disturbed witness called Malcolm for help; we discussed the situation and decided to take up the case in the hope of providing some support and perhaps helping the witness understand and come to terms with her experiences – at least that was my remit.

The case turned out to be very harrowing, and much more complex than we at first envisaged. Malcolm Robinson removed himself mid-way through the investigation and refused to answer the witness's calls thereafter, even though events were escalating. He cites, in his own account of this case, that he believed Elizabeth to be seriously disturbed and in need of medical help, and his further involvement would profit nothing. In all conscience, I could not so easily walk away from someone who was so clearly distressed and disturbed, so decided to proceed with the case investigation on my own without any further involvement with SPI.

Malcolm, despite his lack of interest in pursuing an unfinished investigation, immediately published on his website an account of his three visits to the witness, although there were in fact five such visits. Interested readers may conduct a web search to find the relevant material, although I believe the SPI website is no longer active.

I have thought long and hard over these years about the wisdom (and the ethics) of summarising this case owing to its deeply personal and private nature, but have decided in the interests of accuracy and truthfulness that the results of my interaction with the witness ought to be recorded.

THE INITIAL REPORT

In late May of 2000 SPI received a call from Elizabeth (pseudonym), a 47yr old white English woman living in a council house in a suburb of

west London. She was in a deeply distressed and disturbed state and reported that she had been subjected to the attentions of an invisible entity that was raping her on an increasingly regular basis. In demonology, this type of predatory entity, if indeed an entity is the true agency, is called an *incubus*, if male, and a *succubus* if female.

Elizabeth had not slept for weeks, certainly not in her bedroom at night, and had taken to trying to catch a few hours on the living room couch during daylight hours. However, the attacks had increased in frequency and now she felt the entity with her at all times, even when doing such mundane things as shopping. She told us that she had made several attempts to contact religious agencies to help relieve her of this burden, including inviting the local Anglican priest to bless her and her house. The vicar had come with three women from the church, said some prayers, sprinkled holy water and asked the “spirit” to leave. This did not help at all, and things got worse afterwards. Elizabeth had also been on a residential retreat with nuns at a rural convent in an attempt to rid herself of whatever it was that was plaguing her. She felt peaceful and relaxed whilst at the convent, but events resumed as soon as she returned home. As a last ditch attempt, she had contacted a paranormal organisation in the hope that a different approach would be more successful.

THE FIRST VISIT

On 21st June 2000 Malcolm and I made our first visit to Elizabeth. Her house was small and ordinary, not very clean and poorly furnished and decorated – in fact many of the walls were bare plaster and hadn’t been painted. I noticed this immediately, as lack of pride and effort in a “high strangeness” witness’s immediate environment (and in their person) has become such a common feature in my investigations that it merits study in and of itself. The aforementioned details are in no way intended to be critical or judgemental; I draw them to attention only because they may have a bearing on the nature of Elizabeth’s troubles. They could mean many things, but are certainly possible indicators in psychology of depression or other more serious forms of mental illness. Within the spheres of paranormal and psychical research, received wisdom tells us that disturbed emotions coupled with a disordered or dirty environment appear to attract unwelcome attention and provide a fertile feeding ground for negative energies or malevolent entities.

Martin, Elizabeth’s 22yr old son, lived with her but was frequently absent and I got to meet him only briefly on one of my five visits. Martin was sceptical of his mother’s claims and was impatient with her, thereby

denying her the support and understanding she so badly needed. He may have had his reasons, though, as we shall see shortly.

Some general chatting followed, allowing witness and investigators to get to know each other over several cups of tea. Elizabeth had moved to her current address in 1992 from another nearby suburb after a divorce from her husband, but maintained she had never had any odd experiences in her previous homes.

Upon asking when these unpleasant manifestations first occurred, she told us that they'd started in January of that year, for no apparent reason as far as she was concerned. I asked what else was going on in her life at that time, and she appeared hesitant and embarrassed. By dint of some gentle cajoling, she finally admitted that she'd been deserted by her lover around that time and had been inconsolable with grief and longing. Some more gentle probing revealed that she'd been having a very secret, very passionate and all-consuming sexual relationship with her son's best friend. She had been in love, and felt loved, for the first time in her life, but as is the way with things, her son had found out and he was horrified and enraged. The relationship ended there and then, not at her insistence, but at her young lover's. She was devastated. Soon after this the trouble began.

She couldn't eat, couldn't sleep, and couldn't do anything except obsess about her lost love. The first physical sensations began with pins and needles moving over her head, then a sensation of something pushing down on her legs whilst lying in bed. She felt a constant "breeze" blowing around her head and also the sensation of someone/thing gently stroking her hair. She began to wonder if she was losing her mind when she started to detect a foul, musky smell in her bedroom accompanied by visions of small, human faces with intensely black eyes staring at her from mid-air above her bed.

Things just went from bad to worse after that. As soon as she lay down to sleep, she would feel invisible hands touching her all over, becoming increasingly rough. Cold breezes would play all around her and then her breasts would be pummelled followed by a weight descending onto her body. Ultimately she would be penetrated by what felt like her to be a penis, all the while finding herself powerless and unable to fight back. This would go on and on until she was exhausted. It would then stop and allow her a few hours of fitful sleep before starting again. When asked if she felt sexual arousal, even against her will, during these episodes, she refused to give an answer. In the absence of a vehement "no", one can

only assume that she was too ashamed to answer in the affirmative. This is common in such cases, and also in incidents of childhood sexual abuse.

At one point, while Elizabeth was in the kitchen making tea, I had a look at her bookcase. I discovered around ten hefty tomes on witchcraft, the occult and demonology, most borrowed from the public library service. I mentioned this when the witness came back into the room, asking why she would have such a collection of disturbing books in her home. She assured me that this had never been an interest of hers in the past, but she had, in desperation at her situation, decided to do her own research on the subject, hoping to gain some understanding.

Malcolm and I later discussed at length the possibilities and probabilities in this case. Did some supernatural force genuinely oppress Elizabeth? Was she suffering from a type of delusional psychosis? Was she fabricating the whole thing for reasons best known to her? At the time I was training as a mental health practitioner (psychotherapy and hypnotherapy) and I was well aware of the mental health implications of this case. I asked the witness if she'd been to her doctor about these "symptoms", or was she taking any type of medication, but she said no. I advised her to go to her GP and ask for a referral (schizophrenia or sexual psychosis were on my mind), but she refused this advice on the grounds that any doctor would automatically diagnose her as "mad", without even considering the possibility of entity oppression. She was convinced that a spirit was plaguing her, and nothing would shake that conviction.

It was not lost on me, however, that the details of her oppression exactly matched those of the woman whose allegedly true story was immortalised in the film, "The Entity", which came out some time in the late '70s, I believe. The foul smell that signalled the "presence", the breeze blowing through the victim's hair, the touching, the sexual arousal, the free-floating, strange faces, the manhandling of the breasts, the pinning down on the bed by a heavy weight, the penetration, the pain and exhaustion...and finally the self-loathing, all exactly the same in both cases.

Malcolm then took the step of contacting a psychic medium, with Elizabeth's consent, and asking her if she would come and meet Elizabeth, find out what was going on and do something about it. I was very much against this approach, as I know that such efforts often compound the problem and in principle I prefer not to work with those who claim themselves to be "psychic", as their testimony is purely subjective and cannot be validated, or denied for that matter, in any

objective, empirical way. It all comes down to faith in the psychic's ability and an acceptance of whatever they might feel and say. However, it was initially Malcolm's case, and I could not dissuade him from this course.

THE SECOND VISIT - THE PSYCHIC

On 8th July, we made another visit to the witness's home, this time with Jenny (pseudonym), a well-known clairvoyant medium from the south of England, accompanied by her grown-up son. Malcolm had, unfortunately, fully apprised Jenny of Elizabeth's take on the situation – I would have preferred to have given her minimal information. We spoke with Elizabeth for some time and I had a chance to see how the psychic was approaching the situation. Jenny then startled us by asking us to leave, as she did not like performing “cleansings” in front of an audience. We had no option but to retire to a local café for an hour, thus being denied any chance of documenting proceedings and, most importantly, observing the dynamic between psychic and witness. The following testimony, therefore, comes solely from Jenny and was related to us when we returned from the café – Elizabeth herself had little to say after the cleansing.

After Jenny had questioned the witness for some time, Jenny's spirit guides informed her that there were two spirit presences in the house – one good, and one not so good. It was decided, by whom I don't know, that the benign presence was that of Elizabeth's stillborn daughter of 28yrs ago, who had grown up in the spirit world and was now attempting to protect her mother. Elizabeth had been very surprised and moved by this revelation, and Jenny had encouraged her to spiritually embrace this daughter and give her a name – Susanna. The other, malevolent entity was a scruffy-looking man of around 50 yrs, 5ft 9ins in height, gaunt and thin with long, greasy, curly hair and a long wiry beard. He was an earthbound spirit who liked being where he was and did not want to go to the light. He had latched on to Elizabeth when she was mentally and emotionally at a low ebb in the aftermath of her relationship break-up, and when she was experiencing unfulfilled, intense, sexual longing. Jenny told this spirit that his actions were predatory and despicable, that he had to leave, and that “the light” would be shown to him now. At this point the spirit threw himself on the ground, apologised for his actions and indeed went straight to the light that had appeared like an elevator shaft in the corner of Elizabeth's bedroom. To facilitate this process Jenny had asked her guides to manifest the man's father to help him “go over”.

And so it was all sorted. Jenny at this point had administered psychic healing to the witness and provided her with a protective cocoon that would allow nothing negative to come through from the other side. She also advised her to take positive steps to change her life, get herself an interest or hobby, get out more and generally “smarten up” – all very sound advice. Elizabeth was smiling and looking decidedly bemused by the whole thing, but averred that she was feeling much better and that a great weight had been lifted from her. So far, so good – or was it? The following paragraph is lifted from my initial thoughts on these events, as written at the time.

*“I was totally unconvinced by Jenny’s well-intentioned performance. I have never seen anyone so adept at asking leading questions and putting thoughts and words into another’s mouth. As an investigator this angered me, although I am absolutely sure that Jenny was doing her very best to help Elizabeth. I was very concerned that she was reinforcing Elizabeth’s total belief in a spiritual explanation for her distress, and possibly making matters worse. If this didn’t work, then Elizabeth would be plunged into even greater depression. It all just seemed far too pat, far too easy to me. **I had an overwhelming sense of deception, either on Elizabeth’s part or on the part of the alleged entity, if it existed at all.** Jenny was insistent that the possessing entity was a human soul, lost and unloved. She did not believe in the existence of non-human entities. Hundreds of years of conventional wisdom about incubi and succubae dictates otherwise. They are invariably manifestations of an evil that has never been human, and are incredibly difficult to banish. At the moment I can see two distinct scenarios emerging – that of a depressed, delusional, mentally-ill woman, or a non-human force that is cunning and deceptive, or even a combination of both. **There is something we are missing here, and I am sure that Elizabeth has not told us all the information about herself that we must have in order to make a proper and responsible evaluation.** I fully expect Jenny’s spirit deliverance not to have worked. We researchers take on an enormous responsibility when trying to handle a case like this. Neither Malcolm nor I are clinical psychologists, nor are we trained exorcists. But we are catapulted into a distressing case where we have to make judgements about what is the right way to proceed, because people like Elizabeth have nowhere else to turn. I personally want Elizabeth to go to her doctor, but she won’t. What do we do? Wash our hands of the whole case and leave her to the hell that’s she’s living in, be it created by herself or not? If Elizabeth were to go to her doctor and be wrongly diagnosed as psychotic, it would be a travesty, and thus I understand her reluctance. But if she is in need of psychiatric help and*

we don't try to ensure that she receives that help, then that would be a travesty also. This brings into focus a huge problem that we have in Britain in paranormal and UFO research. More and more what we term "high strangeness" cases are being reported, and who in all honesty is qualified to deal with them? There are no diplomas in spirit possession or alien abduction. If you leave it to psychologists, you can be sure before you even start what their evaluations will be. They have been trained to think in a certain way, and believe in certain things. Very few have the courage, or the curiosity, to embrace this kind of thing with open minds, and open hearts. This is not to say that I believe all witness reports on the paranormal can be taken at face value and a supernatural explanation be arrived at. Not at all. The majority of weird experiences do have a natural or psychological stimulus, and this is in itself an interesting field of study. But there will always be some cases where this just does not apply. We'll keep you posted on Elizabeth's case, but I can guarantee you that there's more to come, lots more."

Now is when my stern and disinterested objectivity takes a firm knock, however, just when I thought I had put the psychic's performance into a sensible, sceptical perspective. At the end of this second meeting, we all got up to take our leave and were saying our goodbyes to Elizabeth. I reached over to shake her hand and looked at her face whilst speaking to her. Quite involuntarily I let out a cry of, "Oh, my God," as I watched spots of a beautiful aquamarine colour play all over her face and head, following the contours of her nose, lips and brow. They were not lights, just spots of colour and elliptical rather than round in shape, moving in the way that projected lights do over the walls and ceiling in clubs or discos. Before I could say anything, Malcolm piped up, "Can you see them too, the blue lights on her face?" We were both stunned, to say the least. Jenny then informed us that this was the healing energy she had left with Elizabeth. We studied the room, but there was nothing I could see that could have produced such an effect, nor any light source that could have left an after-image on the retina.

As if that were not enough strangeness for one day, as I walked down the hallway behind Jenny's son, I watched this time elongated bars of a deep golden-orange colour rippling up and down the young man's spinal area on top of his beige sweater and trousers. I told him this as we exited the house, and he informed me that his mother had done healing on his back that morning to alleviate a painful football injury. I have seen nothing like this before, nor since and am quite willing to concede that Jenny does indeed seem to have genuine paranormal abilities, at least as far as healing is concerned.

As I expected, the mediumistic intervention had not helped. Two days after Jenny's ministrations, Elizabeth called Malcolm and told him that things had escalated and were worse than ever. He suggested contacting Jenny and asking her to come for a second visit, which she had offered to do anyway, but Elizabeth was adamant that she didn't want this, and revealed that she had not "taken to" Jenny initially. Curiously, or perhaps not, this same reaction was evinced by witnesses to whom Malcolm had introduced Jenny in the investigation of a haunting/poltergeist case in south London. They didn't like her and didn't want her coming to see them for a follow-up visit. I was also present at the investigation of that case, and can well understand the witnesses' discomfort, but that is the stuff of another report.

THE THIRD VISIT – THE THERAPIST

I decided to confide in David (pseudonym) my tutor and supervisor, the man who, at the time, was guiding me through my postgraduate diploma in clinical hypnotherapy. He is a man of many years experience in psychology, and quite the most adept hypnotist I have ever met. I gave him the bare bones of the story (not wanting to contaminate his perceptions), and he agreed to come with me to meet Elizabeth. Malcolm did not accompany me on this visit for personal reasons of his own. This was now a whole different kettle of fish: no psychics, mediums or paranormal investigators, just clued-up psychology at work.

We arrived at Elizabeth's house of an evening, a couple of weeks after Jenny's unsuccessful "cleansing". David immediately noted the bare walls and general state of the house, communicated to me by just a "look". We settled down with cups of tea and started the psychologist's case taking, an integral and very important part of the therapeutic process. I was now at liberty to ask questions and go down routes I was previously unable to do when accompanied by a paranormal researcher with little idea of what is truly required in such cases. David said little at the beginning and allowed me to go with my instincts, possibly as an appraisal of my abilities as a potentially fully qualified clinician. We went over all the old ground (for David's benefit), and then some new. And the new was startling. Elizabeth obviously felt comfortable, or forced, into revealing hitherto guarded secrets; she was seeing a psychiatrist at a the local hospital, she had been sexually abused by her father as a child over a period of 10 years, she had lived in Ghana when she was young, and her father had been involved, whilst in Africa, in black magic. At this point we took a cigarette break and Elizabeth went to the kitchen to make more tea. David and I went to the garden and discussed whether these new

revelations were offered to us because she knew we were psychologists, and this was just the sort of stuff she thought we would love to hear. Could false memory syndrome be applicable? We also discussed something that I have not mentioned so far, the fact that the witness had such enormous breasts that they would constitute a medical deformity. I only mention this because it could possibly have a bearing on how Elizabeth perceived herself, in a female, sexual sense. We decided to ask her about this, and ascertain if it were the reason for her visits to the psychiatrist, as therapy is always offered before women go ahead and agree to breast-reduction surgery.

First things first – the breasts. No, her psychiatric visits were nothing to do with breasts, but to do with her life “issues”, although she was indeed in the NHS “queue” for breast-reduction surgery at the local teaching hospital. Was she on medication? No, and she wouldn’t take it anyway. What were her issues? Depression, lack of motivation, insomnia. What was the treatment? A six-monthly 10 minute visit with an Italian doctor at the local hospital, she understanding little of what he said, and he understanding even less of what she said. Outcome – nothing of worth. This, of course, is what Elizabeth told us. It would be interesting to hear what the Italian psychiatrist had to say, but that is not an option - medical records are confidential, totally. Did these hospital appointments pre-date the onset of her recent troubles? Couldn’t give an answer. But if these appointments were every six months, then it’s obvious that she had been to her GP some time ago about something, and he would have had to set up psychiatric referral, on the NHS, at least some time before she contacted us, as it sadly takes ages to get a mental health referral, even if the subject is suicidal, unless a sectioning order is issued.

We decided then to follow the clues she had offered, and see where it took us. The obvious question was about the alleged childhood abuse. Elizabeth told us that she had been sexually abused by her father from the age of four until she was fourteen, at which time he had attempted to have full penetrative intercourse, as he regarded her at that age to be “up for it”. This was when she managed to gather her strength and say, “No, no more,” realising that she was about to be raped by her own father. The family were living during this time in Ghana, as her father had secured a job there. No mention was made of her mother or siblings and this was a point I wanted to come back to in subsequent meetings.

We discussed with her, in light of this revelation, without putting ideas in her head, the profound effect this might have had on her self-image as a woman, and on her subsequent behaviour with men. She volunteered that

as an adult she had only ever seen herself as a sexual object (huge breasts were a part of this) and that she felt she had no worth except as an object of sexual desire to men. Her ability to provide sexual favours (without love) was a huge part of her life. A lot of discussion ensued, too detailed to go into here, but much of it about love for the self and love for others.

At an appropriate point, David suggested that he hypnotise her and try to get to the bottom of all these tangled issues, access the “part” of her that was living all the issues, and determine how it was impacting on her present life. She agreed, with some initial diffidence, and I sat back to observe. Unfortunately it was a complete non-starter. I watched the fear in the eyes as David approached her, the tensing of the body and the clenching of the fists. She was totally resistant, whilst maintaining that she wished to be compliant. David tried and tried, every sneaky technique that he knew, but to no avail. Eventually he gave up, whilst reassuring her that this was normal, and that next time it would work, and there would be a next time. We left it at that, and had another tea break. David seemed edgy and uncomfortable, something I had never before witnessed.

Next up was the revelation of the childhood life and sexual abuse in Ghana, and how she knew that her father had become involved in African “occult” practices and how he would disappear for evenings and days, refusing to tell her mother what he had been doing. He had an extensive library of occult books that, whilst being unaware of their true potency, she had nevertheless dipped into with her childish curiosity. She had an unarticulated feeling that she was somehow more involved than that. This, of course, gave the lie to her earlier assertion, when I espied her books, that she had no knowledge of, or interest in such subjects. There were good times also when she would accompany her father to a local creek where they would swim and fish together for hours.

Elizabeth then mentioned that she would see, fairly often, strange little lights in her bedroom, lights that she associated with the unwelcome presence in her home and her life. David then suggested that we all go upstairs and see what we could see in her bedroom. The three of us stood in her room as Elizabeth pointed out the usual place for this manifestation, up in the corner above her wardrobe and just near the ceiling. Try as I might, I could see nothing. We waited a while until Elizabeth excitedly exclaimed, “There they are! Can you see them?” I still saw nothing, but David, my rock of rational objectivity, turned and nodded to me in the affirmative, whilst saying nothing to Elizabeth. I was stunned. We went downstairs, had a parting cup of tea, and discussed the next visit, where David had assured Elizabeth, in respect of her entreaties,

that he would definitely get to the bottom of her troubles and hopefully banish them.

We weren't a second out the front door when I asked him, "What was all that about, the lights?" He assured me he had seen them, describing them like 5th November sparklers and was astonished that I hadn't seen them as well. David was absolutely the last person I would have thought susceptible to suggestion, seeing as he used it as his stock in trade and knew very well how the whole dynamic worked. But his next statement was really to shake me to the core. He looked at me intently and said, "Did you see the other face?"

The other face? Now this was something I hadn't mentioned to anyone, not David, not Malcolm and certainly not Elizabeth. Yes, I had seen her other face, right from the first visit, and it had discomfited me greatly. Just fleeting glimpses of what appeared to be another intelligence behind her eyes, cruel and mocking and in essence apparently inhuman. It was the face I saw when David was attempting to hypnotise her and he had obviously seen it too. Quite frankly, it was scary, and set off the "hairs on the back of the neck" response. I have seen this before, in very different circumstances, so perhaps wasn't as surprised as might be expected. I had done some research on the topic and found that this type of transfiguration was common to both extreme psychological states (including mental illness) and possession, if indeed the two are separable. We discussed this briefly and David took his leave, agreeing that I should contact him to set up the next meeting with Elizabeth. In the event, this second psychotherapeutic visit never happened – David refused to go back with me to the witness, saying that he never wanted to be in her company again and apologising for breaking the promise that he'd made to Elizabeth to continue her therapy. I tried hard to cajole him into staying with the case, but obviously he had been so spooked by what he saw in that house that no inducement was going to be successful.

I had to relay this information to Elizabeth, who had been calling me to find out when we were coming back, and told her that David's heavy work and family schedule precluded a further visit. She begged me then to try and arrange an exorcism, something she had been wanting all along, and a route I had adamantly resisted. She knew I was a Catholic so therefore thought I had some influence with the Vatican and their trained exorcists, which of course I don't have, but I do have knowledge of the precepts of possession and exorcism. From this I know that exorcism is an absolute last resort for the Catholic Church, and will only be sanctioned after exhaustive medical and psychological testing has come

up with no answers. I also know that there are certain signs of possession that must be in evidence before an exorcism is contemplated, such as a distinct sense of presence (felt by all observers), unnatural displays of physical strength, outbursts of foul language uncharacteristic of the person, displays of psychokinesis and telepathy, speaking in tongues (glossolalia), unaccountable temperature variations in the vicinity of the subject, fear and loathing of any religious symbols or words, levitation and idiopathic wounding, obscene sexual speech and actions, etc. Some of these, of course, can be found in severe mental illness, but there is a “quality” about true possession by negative forces that is unmistakable, or so conventional wisdom dictates, and it is this, taken together with all the above, that the Church looks for before countenancing an exorcism. Elizabeth displayed none of these characteristics.

Before full-blown possession however, there are mounting degrees of affliction, the two distinct stages being obsession and oppression. Could it be possible that Elizabeth, with her history of interest and possible involvement in the occult, through her evil, abusive father had been tainted by something “other”, something that took over her life when she was at a mental and spiritual low ebb? It is certainly an idea that many people believe is possible, and one that I knew Elizabeth was convinced of. I wasn’t convinced myself, but as a student of psychology I was well aware that often beliefs wield more power over people than reality does. If Elizabeth truly believed that she was haunted by a discarnate entity, would her parallel belief in the efficacy of religious exorcism be the very tool to fix the problem?

I was dubious, ambivalent and very concerned not to do anything to worsen Elizabeth’s condition, nor interfere with what little medical help she appeared to be receiving. I had been unhappy with the intervention of a psychic, so how could I reconcile that with allowing the intervention of an exorcist? But she was calling me incessantly begging for help, so I made up my mind to discuss the matter with a work colleague of mine, an evangelical pastor and deliverance minister (when not a company manager).

Nancy (pseudonym) was of Caribbean origin, an island woman of great strength and presence. We had had several talks in the past about her religious work and some of the stories she told me about deliverance were truly astonishing, and somewhat disturbing. I approached her with Elizabeth’s case, only relating a few relevant details. She listened, and then stopped me, saying that she would go home and consult with a higher authority and let me know whether she could be of assistance.

Little did I realise that the higher authority was God (female), who told Nancy that Elizabeth was both psychologically impaired and demoniacally possessed, and that the doctors could only help her with her emotional dysfunction once the invading entity had been expelled. Nancy believes she has the gift of “discernment”, a Christian grace bestowed on special people enabling them to identify spirits and demons, as opposed to manifestations of mental malfunction. She agreed to meet the subject and attempt to help her.

I called Elizabeth and asked if she would be happy for Nancy to intervene. She was grateful and enthusiastic, and so the next visit was arranged. I was still very much in two minds about this whole thing, concerned that taking such action would exacerbate the situation, as had happened with the psychic. I suppose it all comes down to what you believe, and Elizabeth surely believed that this was what she needed.

I gave Nancy Elizabeth’s details as she had intimated that she initially wished to see and speak to Elizabeth alone in order to assess the situation. A few days later Nancy called me to say that there was indeed work to be done, and that during her brief visit with the witness when she had been praying and asking for God’s assistance, loud banging and rapping had been heard from somewhere upstairs. Upon investigation of the upper part of the house, nothing untoward was found. She asked if Malcolm and I would like to be present during the forthcoming exorcism, and we readily agreed.

THE FOURTH VISIT – THE EXORCISTS

On the 16th August, Nancy met us outside Elizabeth’s house at 7.30 pm and we chatted whilst waiting for two assistant ministers to turn up. Both were black, and I assumed Afro-Caribbean like Nancy, and as we were shaking hands and introducing ourselves, I had the distinct impression of being under somewhat cool scrutiny. I wasn’t to find out why till a little later in the proceedings. I told them only what I thought was necessary, that Elizabeth believed she was oppressed or possessed by a sexually predatory entity, and that the oppression had started around six months before when her love affair had ended. I deliberately withheld information about her sexual abuse as a child in Ghana, partly as an investigative protocol but mostly because this information was private and it was up to Elizabeth to decide if she wished to divulge it to strangers.

After tea all round and the exorcists chatting to Elizabeth about her situation and her religious faith, the business started in earnest and continued for the next three hours. I had stated that I wished to take no part in the proceedings and that I would be there as an observer only, staying in the background and taking notes (Malcolm equally stayed in the background recording the events). At first it was simply all participants praying together, including our witness and that went on for some time. Many passages were read out from the Old and New Testaments mostly involving supplication to God and Christ for strength in the face of demonic adversity. To me, as a bystander, it seemed that this lengthy prayer period was part of a “psyching up” process for the ministers, allowing them to divest themselves of the trappings of the normal day they had just had and to slip into a very different mental and emotional state.

Elizabeth seemed at ease with all of this and although she was not much of a churchgoer, I did notice that she joined the others in a halting attempt to recite the Lord’s Prayer. After the formal praying had ceased, Elizabeth was invited to vacate the sofa she had been sitting on and to sit on a dining chair that Nancy had now placed in the centre of the room. Nancy’s request was stern and brooked no disagreement; in fact Nancy had suddenly become stern and commanding in every way. I noticed an immediate change in Elizabeth – she looked scared and hesitant. She nevertheless complied and the exorcists gathered round her, all of them exuding a sense of purpose and power which I would think anyone sitting in Elizabeth’s chair might have found slightly intimidating.

Immediately the onslaught began, the barracking and badgering of the putative possessing entity to show and name itself. The “spirit of schizophrenia” was particularly mentioned, even though the commands to the entity to name itself had been unsuccessful. The Bible was held to the witness’s head many times, whilst entreaties were made that the blood of Christ be allowed to flow down over witness and exorcists alike. (I asked Nancy about this later, as I was unaware of such a particular invocation in any Catholic ritual. It seems this is the preferred protective mechanism for Evangelicals, where Catholics would use saints and angels and a crucifix). At one point during proceedings, loud banging noises were again heard from upstairs, but this time we managed to ascertain that they were coming from the adjoining property and were totally unrelated to the exorcism. Demands were made for the entity to leave and return to the Pit whence it came etc. etc., exactly like all of us have seen in films or TV programmes about exorcism. All the while I was watching Elizabeth who was becoming more and more uncomfortable and distressed, but also

remaining resolutely silent. There were no howls or screams, no abusive or blasphemous language, no attacks on the ministers and interestingly no “other face”. In fact, as much as the exorcists were behaving as expected, Elizabeth wasn’t. I began to doubt the wisdom of this course of action, and was glad when Nancy called a halt to proceedings at 11pm.

Nancy explained to Elizabeth that the invading demon was very strong and cunning and was hiding deep within and that they would need to come back to continue and hopefully finish the deliverance process. I intervened at this point and asked Elizabeth if that was what she wanted, because she could stop everything right now if she wished. She stated that she did indeed want the women to come back as soon as they possibly could, as she felt their intervention was helping. I was surprised, to say the least. We left then, having arranged an evening of the next week for a follow-up visit and with Elizabeth having been instructed to start reading from a prayer book that Nancy had left for her, and to get all the books on demonology and witchcraft out of her house, even if she had to burn them.

Once outside the house, I spoke to the women and asked them what they really thought. They told me it was quite normal for the demon(s) to hide at the first session, hoping to trick everyone into thinking that the person possessed was just mentally ill, and that exorcism was not going to be effective. They were all three convinced that there was indeed a demon latched on to Elizabeth, and equally convinced that they would get it to reveal itself next time. During this conversation I also discovered why the other two women were wary of my presence – I was a Catholic, and they had no truck with Catholics, perceiving us, I suspect, to be not much better than demons ourselves. I had a quiet smile to myself and thought, “So much for Christian solidarity in the face of the Devil”. However, after meeting me and observing how I comported myself and how much I cared about Elizabeth’s mental and spiritual welfare, they decided I was “all right” and perhaps Catholics weren’t so bad after all. In fact, I was the only Catholic they’d ever had occasion to deal with, so where they got their prejudiced opinions from I do not know.

Next visit they were going to mean real business and up the ante, as the stakes were high and they’d never engaged in an unsuccessful exorcism to date. For me that last statement could mean many things, and I was mildly disturbed by it. Was it a case of convincing some poor, dysfunctional soul that they were possessed even when they weren’t, and then driving out a non-existent entity? It made me wonder whether I

wanted Elizabeth to be possessed or not – which was the lesser of the two evils?

THE FIFTH VISIT – THE EXORCISTS AGAIN

I had a real sense of foreboding about this next visit, which I put down, at a conscious level at least, to ambivalence about the nature of the “treatment” to which I had acquiesced and, to be honest, facilitated. But I knew Nancy well and was confident that she would do her best to help and would not put anyone through such a procedure if she didn’t believe it to be appropriate. Apart from her persona as a minister, she was a highly intelligent, skilled and compassionate woman. This I decided to put my faith in.

Malcolm had declined to be further involved in the case as he couldn’t be bothered any more with Elizabeth’s constant phone-calls for help and had decided that she was mentally ill, so I was on my own again.

There were no pleasantries this time, straight to work. Elizabeth was questioned about how she had been feeling in the intervening days between visits – still under attack but feeling less depressed and much more hopeful for the future. They decided it was a good start. Strangely, I was asked if I had brought any Catholic paraphernalia with me, to which I answered no, but that wasn’t strictly true. Because of the sense of foreboding I had been experiencing (and maybe a lack of faith in my own rational objectivity) I had retrieved my Rosary beads off my bedroom mirror and slipped them over my head to be worn unseen under my sweater. There was method in my apparent madness, but those are stories for another time.

The hard chair was placed in the centre of the room and Elizabeth was told to sit in it. This time she balked and said she had back problems and the chair caused her discomfort. The response from Nancy, “Satan doesn’t deserve comfort. Sit in the chair designated for you.” Wow, we were off and running! The prayer ritual started, the three exorcists stationed around the witness, encompassing her like an impenetrable barrier. I was seated at the other end of the room, well back from proceedings, on the sofa.

I was listening intently, whilst thinking my own thoughts. Elizabeth was much more agitated than last time, although silent. She was rocking and fidgeting in the chair and turning her head towards me for support. She didn’t like this at all. I had to make a decision – do I intervene and stop

the process, or do I let it continue? I decided to move near her and hold her hand, a conciliation between two opposites. Her hand was icy cold, and I mean icy, as was her gaze. I didn't know whose hand I was holding. Nancy intimated to me with her eyes that I should retreat back to my corner, in a glance that conveyed more meaning than a thousand words. I obeyed. I was obviously the weak link in their understanding of what they were doing, or so I thought.

A moment later, as I was writing down some notes, I became aware that all three exorcists had, at exactly the same time, slipped into a strange, yet familiar-sounding language. I looked up to find them with heads raised to heaven and eyes closed, unaware of each other and possibly of their surroundings. I recognised the trance state immediately. The physiology of trance is unmistakable. What amazed me were the speed of induction and the simultaneousness of its effect. I listened, and listened well, looking for patterns in the unfamiliar words within the familiar cadences. Was this gibberish, some made-up language inculcated in fevered imaginations, or did this have the hallmarks of true human language? Was I, for the first time in my life, a witness to glossolalia?

The familiar cadences unnerved me but were immediately recognisable, although the vocabulary was foreign to me. I have spent twenty years of my life, on and off, living in Nigeria and during that time my ear became attuned to four distinct languages although I learned to speak only one, Hausa. The language of the exorcists was a language unlike Hausa (which is Arabic based, and very different), but akin to other West African tongues like Yoruba or Ibo. It was similar, but not the same. To say I was startled would be an understatement. The same phrases were repeated at different times by the three women, but they were not talking to each other, in fact they seemed oblivious to others around them. I mustered all my linguistic skills to analyse this phenomenon and it did appear to me that the women were speaking an intelligible language. The apparent connection with West Africa was not lost upon me, especially as none of them knew that Elizabeth had lived there. How I wished I'd had a tape-recorder with me! Such a tape would have been sent off to SOAS (School of Oriental and African Studies) with some alacrity, considering I have a good friend there who is an expert in African language. I didn't have a tape recorder as I prefer to work with my own notes and Malcolm, who records everything, was not with me. I learned a valuable lesson from this mistake.

(I later asked Nancy and her assistants what language they had been speaking, but all seemed puzzled by this question. Further discussion

elicited the fact that when the Spirit entered them they had no knowledge of what was being said, a kind of amnesia descended as one would expect in a deep, somnambulistic trance. They asked me what sort of language I thought had been spoken, and when I said West African, Nancy pronounced that it was a “spirit language” from that part of the world. I then wondered what that had to do with Christianity, as spirit languages are invariably “occult” in origin and anathema to received Christian wisdom. Latin seems to be the only permissible (and effective) tongue when expelling the Devil during Christian (or should I say Catholic) exorcism. Protestants don’t have a history of “tongues” of their own and usually use the language with which they and the possessed person are familiar. I would have been much happier if the spirit language had been Latin as it is a tongue with which I am very familiar and I would have been able to attempt translation).

The apparent glossolalia continued for some time, maybe five minutes, and Elizabeth was becoming more and more wild-eyed. She really didn’t like this at all. Why? Suddenly, as if on cue, all three women stopped speaking, and there was a moment’s silence. One of the assistants then placed her hands around Elizabeth’s head, waited a while, then announced to all, “I know what this is, Jesus be praised”. She then spoke to Elizabeth, “I am now talking to Elizabeth and Elizabeth alone. Does this spirit try to talk to you?” Elizabeth answered, “Well, I think so, but all I can hear is a gurgling sound, always in my left ear, like running water with a mumbling sort of voice in it. I can’t make out any words.” Jesus was praised some more, a lot more, and I got the distinct impression that the tables had turned and the exorcists now knew they had the upper hand – they were smiling.

This lady assistant then proceeded to tell us that, with God’s help, she had managed to identify the invading entity as a “Ghanaian water spirit”, although she was puzzled as to why such an entity had latched onto Elizabeth, a white English woman. She knew about this sort of entity because she herself was from Ghana (although with an English accent), and not from the Caribbean as I had assumed. Such spirits, according to her, enter vulnerable (godless and sexually excessive) people whilst they are bathing in lakes or streams, and always through the ears. They then inhabit the body and mind of the victim, urging them on to sexual excess as their satisfaction is always to be found through human sexual congress, as much and as often as possible. Communication with the hapless victim is always through watery sounds in the ear through which the initial entry has taken place.

I was stunned, to say the least. This woman knew nothing of Elizabeth's life in Ghana or of her regular forays to the creek with her paedophile father. Elizabeth sat motionless and expressionless throughout this discourse, until I gently suggested to her that she might want to tell the ministers of her prior history. Her total lack of emotional response to what was being said was in itself startling. Reluctantly she confided the history of her childhood in Ghana and it was all the exorcists needed by way of corroboration, if indeed they needed any. There are coincidences and there are coincidences, and if this were one then it was a biggie.

Back to business now and the expulsion of an identifiable entity. The onslaught really started, with two women speaking English and the other speaking Ghanaian. This went on for quite some time and followed the normal format of an exorcism with abjurations and exhortations in the name of Christ. I was sitting back watching and taking notes as usual, very much a non-participant. Suddenly, from out of the blue, something struck my body with such force that it made me jolt and cry out, "Oh, my God," and I was aware of my face contorting and my eyes opening wide. Nancy saw this and silently communicated again with her eyes, "Are you all right?" I nodded in the affirmative, although I must admit I wasn't quite sure. I had felt something entering my body from the front with great force, and then exiting through my back, leaving an icy coldness in its wake. I shivered for some minutes after and so caught up in my own drama was I that I hadn't noticed how things had been progressing with Elizabeth – she was now slumped forward in her hard chair and was weeping uncontrollably, the first sign of any emotion from her other than wariness and fear.

They knew then that it was over, but continued to pray over Elizabeth whilst touching and embracing her and filling her with healing from the Lord. Nancy then came over to me to check I was all right, and to advise me that whatever had left Elizabeth had exited through me, and that I ought to be particularly prayerful over the next few days, and ask for God's protection. I could not understand why I had been singled out, as I was not a participant in the exorcism (exorcists are often attacked by beleaguered entities during the expulsion process, as the literature attests). She asked me what exactly I had felt and I told her something had hit my abdomen with great force, like a blow or hard punch and then gone out through my back, which was still feeling icy cold. She asked to see my stomach, so I lifted up my sweater and much to my consternation and her surprise there was red, raised and very visible the exact shape of the crucifix on my Rosary beads imprinted into my solar plexus area. She looked concerned for a moment, and then smiled a knowing smile, "I

knew you'd bring Christ with you, but I didn't realise it would be this literal. He told me that you would be the most important person in this deliverance." The redness turned to purple bruising before finally disappearing a week or so later.

(Upon reflection, I wondered if I, quite unwittingly and directly contrary to my detached, investigative status, had been caught up in a kind of group "hysteria" engendered by the beliefs of the deliverance ministers, to the extent that it had actually impacted my physical body. Such effects are not unknown in the annals of paranormal research).

All of us were exhausted, none more so than Elizabeth, who yet had seemed so detached from proceedings right up until the last moments. The Ghanaian woman averred that the entity had been with Elizabeth for so long, right from her childhood, that she would now probably find some difficulty in living without it. She had no true knowledge of who she really was, and now was the time for the doctors to step in and administer their type of psychic/psychological healing. We all extracted a promise from Elizabeth that she would indeed go back to her doctor and insist on a referral to a clinical psychologist, with whom she would be totally honest about her life experience and even about the exorcism.

But somehow, even after all this, I wasn't totally convinced that Elizabeth was taking everything on board. There was a slyness about her that still persisted, I felt, and I wasn't sure that she would take the well-intentioned advice. I hoped I was wrong. I asked her not to call me again until she had made such an appointment, as I was worried that she had become too dependent on me, and that having made said appointment I was more than happy to go along with her to her GP or a consultant psychologist as moral support.

For the next 48 hours I felt like I had a block of ice attached to my back. I spent hours on end with an electrically heated pad placed on every chair I sat in, and also in bed, but not even that could shift the feeling of bone-deep cold. It gradually faded on its own, but left me with a sense of having encountered something terribly alien (not for the first time in my life, I might add).

Undaunted, Elizabeth attempted to contact Malcolm several times after this, leaving messages to the effect that there were "new" things happening in the house – ghosts in the bedroom, white mists and disembodied singing voices. Malcolm did not respond. Meanwhile I was waiting for her to contact me to tell me she'd been to see her doctor.

Unfortunately there is no real, happy resolution to this story. Elizabeth did indeed call me again, quite some time later, to tell me that a ghost-hunting lady had been in touch with her via the offices of Malcolm Robinson. This woman was also a well-known author who wished to include her (Elizabeth's) story in her latest book on hauntings, based on Malcolm's appraisal and a cursory conversation with the witness, and minus the therapists' (David and myself) intervention which Malcolm didn't think appropriate to tell her. Indeed, this author later lectured at an SPI meeting hosted by Malcolm and discussed the case as purely paranormal. I was in the audience, but no mention of my being involved in the case was made. If Malcolm had honestly believed that Elizabeth was ill and in need of medical care and counselling, why was her situation fodder for a ghost book and lecture? I walked out of the lecture, angry of course at the blatant disregard for professional honesty and ethics, but also very sorry for Elizabeth, in that her complex and very personal story was being publicised, inaccurately, for other people's gain. (Indeed, whilst the investigation was on going, Malcolm had cajoled Elizabeth in to making a personal appearance at his group meeting to talk about her experiences to a public audience. I was aghast at this suggestion, and she only reluctantly agreed, but thankfully she wisely decided not to turn up on the day).

As an adjunct to this contact with the paranormal author, she had been contacted by a popular women's magazine, raring to tell her sensationalist story to their readers – what could sell better than sex with a demon? Elizabeth had agreed, and it was duly published. Had she been to see her doctor to seek counselling? No, not yet.

At that point, I walked away, mentally and emotionally. If it weren't for "the other face", the real physical effects I experienced and the inexplicable "knowing" of the Ghanaian exorcist, I'd have to conclude that Elizabeth was purely and simply an attention-seeking, deluded and mentally ill woman, and that's quite probably what any psychologist who might happen to read this case report will think also. It's what I thought, in my heart of hearts, right from the beginning but I don't know for sure and I undoubtedly never will. Perhaps it was a bit of both, as Nancy told me God had advised her.

I saw Elizabeth in a local pub about three years after these events. I watched her for some time before she saw me. She was leaning on the bar, focused on the man she was with, or talking to. The breasts had not been changed and her demeanour, as I perceived it at least, was that of a

sexual predator (women know these things about other women, although they're not so good at recognising this behaviour in men). She eventually turned her gaze slowly toward me, in a manner that suggested she'd been aware of me all the time, and gave me such a sly, knowing smile that it made me very uncomfortable and unnerved. I told my companion that I wanted to leave, immediately. I had a total and utter sense of failure. Sometimes, you just can't win.....

Judy Jaafar ©
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