



# The Lonely Sense

By Geoff Ward

VETERAN 'PSYCHIC DETECTIVE' ROBERT CRACKNELL LOOKS BACK OVER A LIFETIME WORKING IN THE WORLD OF THE PARANORMAL, NOT LEAST IN HELPING POLICE SOLVE MURDERS AND FIND MISSING PERSONS.

HERE HE TALKS ABOUT HIS CAREER, LIFE AFTER DEATH, UNNERVING OUT-OF-THE-BODY EXPERIENCES, HIS CONTROVERSIAL STANCE ON SPIRITUALISM, THE EMOTIONAL BACKLASH OF PSYCHIC ENCOUNTERS – AND HOW HE BELIEVES FIRMLY IN THE PSYCHIC POTENTIAL OF EVERYONE.

**In 2008, veteran British psychic Robert Cracknell came down with what he believed was a summer cold.** He couldn't breathe properly and, admitted to his local hospital, found he was suffering from pneumonia. But further tests showed he had chronic lymphatic leukaemia which, he was told, might not develop fully for five years. *'It was the "five years" that probably made the most impression on me,'* he said. *'Now at least I know what I've got. Basically, I'm in much the same situation as everyone else on this planet. I could just as easily get knocked down by a bus or contract some other form of deadly disease. Life's a gamble.'*

It's the kind of bluff remark you come to expect from Robert, now 76. *"I have learned to embrace loneliness without it being manifest to others,"* he told me. *'I can find peace and understanding in loneliness. It would be easy to present myself as a wise old prat but that would be totally false. I am not wise. One of the reasons I left spiritualism was people were crediting me with knowledge, not seeing that it was me that was gaining the knowledge from them. I am still learning – I never was a teacher.'* However, as he mentioned to me at the outset, he's humble in most spheres of life but capable of what many would see as arrogance about the extent of the paranormal powers he can wield.

Dubbed 'the UK's No. 1 Psychic Detective' by the popular press in the 1980s, Robert still receives pleas for help from people worldwide

seeking answers to unsolved mysteries, although, officially, he retired two decades ago - to Cyprus where he lives near Limassol with his second wife Jenny. He says he has been involved in many cases in recent years involving murdered or missing children, but he feels 'duty-bound' to remain silent about most of them and says he cannot open up his casebook. Having earned a 'fair amount of money' at the height of his fame, he does not now charge people for his help.

Taking an object associated with a particular inquiry in his hands, (a technique called psychometry) Robert picks up 'vibrations' that reveal its origin, details about the owner including his or her mental state, and what the future holds for them. As Jenny notes down in shorthand the psychometric impressions he gains, Robert can talk for up to half an hour, apparently unaware of what he is saying. *"It seems as if I have literally crossed the barriers of time,"* he says.

High-profile criminal cases in which Robert was involved in the 1970s and 1980s, and in which his paranormal 'visions' helped police, included the Genette Tate disappearance, where he provided crucial leads, the Janie Shepard murder, when his psychic abilities actually made him a suspect, and the Gaby Mearth millionairess kidnapping, which he also assisted in solving. In the Yorkshire Ripper investigation, Robert predicted details of the final murder and the way it was carried out, and the time of Peter

Sutcliffe's arrest. Robert had earlier shown a journalist the very street where Sutcliffe lived.

*"Police and scientists are misguided fools if they continue to ignore the fact that individuals with psychic ability can unravel new evidence, find fresh clues, and be instrumental in leading them to the final solution",* Robert says with his characteristic bluntness. Diagnosis of his medical condition three years ago caused Robert initial disbelief. After that, it was a case of 'ah well, that's it then – time's nearly up!' But then he thought, no, there was still much to research and discover, still plenty of time to embrace all that was in and around him. Take the whole concept of the exploration of space, for example.

*"Why did we step outside, when we haven't yet fully investigated our own interior?"* he asks, today more than ever aware of his own mortality. *"I think that is a more worthwhile proposition, and so that is what I will do. What a pity I won't be able to express in words my discovery. 'We still look upon death as "finality", that the study of it would in some strange way be a retrograde step. Perhaps the terminology is wrong. There is no limit to our advancing, so why not accept*



death as a natural segment of life and, by doing so, transmute the fear of extinction and finality to a voyage of discovery?"

"We are constantly monitoring a wide range of signals which emanate from within and beyond the known universe, and analysing them in the hope we will find evidence of extraterrestrial life. Is it not possible that in some strange way we are still limiting our perception by confining these signals to the known universe and outer space? Is not death part of our existence? Is it not possible that within this pulsating rhythmic cacophony of signals, which cannot be confined to the norm of time or dimension, there are some that are originating from within the uncharted universe that we call death?"

A dominant theme in conversation with Robert is that every one of us is psychic and capable of experiencing the paranormal, to a lesser or greater degree. Robert believes the riddle of psychic powers can be solved jointly by the psychic and the scientist, to the benefit of humanity, 'not in the repeatability of phenomena, but by working closely together in seeking to unlock this extra sense in those who do not claim to be psychic'. He says: "I believe that not only is the psychic faculty latent in every person but that it can be realised. Since the majority of people live what could be termed fairly ordinary lives, does this exclude them from the possibility of realising their psychic potential? I know it doesn't. 'This is a perfectly normal faculty that everybody possesses, like the ability to ski or speak French, or even to play bingo. I do have some fairly concrete insights into the mechanics of this faculty, although when I try to put them into words I find myself faced with all kinds of difficulties. This is why I have decided that the simplest way to explain it is to tell the story of my life.'"

Involved in the field of paranormal psychology as an active psychic for more than 50 years, Robert says he has witnessed a great many changes in the attitude of the general public and in scientific acceptance of extrasensory perception, mainly due to being able to establish by controlled experimentation that we all possess psychic ability and can recognise what lies beyond the accepted norm. "Thankfully, a great deal of what can only be termed "psychobabble" has been replaced by simple and recognisable terminology," said Robert. 'I was always opposed to being called a medium or sensitive, preferring at all times to be called a psychic. The outdated spiritualist term of medium, which suggests an intermediary, was misleading. It gave the impression that these people were not responsible for what they said or did, that they were simply passing on information received'".

Robert was once closely involved with the spiritualist movement, but came to be convinced that there was no connection

whatsoever between psychic abilities and the spirits of the dead. He is adamant that a psychic person is not someone who has been 'chosen' to receive communications from another world: he or she is an ordinary human being whose natural ability has somehow developed further than the average.

Without the encouragement of spiritualism, he admits he would have found his path more difficult. But he has concluded that most mediums in spiritualism are "unconsciously fraudulent in deceiving themselves as much as they deceive other people". This desire to puncture the mystique of the medium won him no friends in the movement, and even led him to being labelled a 'dangerous man' at one stage. The period during which he parted company with the spiritualist church, he says, was 'possibly the worst years of my life'.

As outspoken as ever, Robert said: "It is interesting that a great many psychics who

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advertise their skills, in expectation of monetary reward, still rely on the old spiritualist doctrines by purporting to make predictions to gullible believers that the "dead ones" are able to look after our welfare and predict the future. In my opinion, these people should be subjected to legal proceedings and be prohibited by law from being allowed to perpetrate such blatant fraud, allowing serious investigations to take place which may further our understanding of life".

However, evidence concerning the survival of the personality, was too great to be ignored or passed off as merely coincidence, said Robert. 'But whereas I am convinced that death is not oblivion or finality, I am not in a position to present any evidence to describe the next stage of life. I'm equally convinced that I am able to tap into an intelligence far greater than mine. "I see little point in simply dying and then meeting my loved ones on the "other side" and progressing through the astral planes into the halls of learning, there to prepare for a return to life so that I can learn the lessons I failed to achieve the last time round. It all seems a little too 'twee', and sugary. Sadly, though, this is a hypothesis that is still being perpetuated by the majority of mediums".

During his professional life as a psychic investigator, Robert probed many crimes, including murder, rape and the abduction of children. His involvement gave him an insight into 'the potential of the true wickedness and mental confusion that lies in the labyrinth of the

human mind'. But using his psychic ability to gather evidence and clues affected his emotional reactions. "Each case resulted in yet another coat of cynicism and prejudice being added to my psyche," he confessed. 'On many occasions I wanted to see the perpetrator of a crime brought to justice and to receive retribution, similar to that which had been meted out to the victim. My whole inner self screamed out. I was a modern-day Judas. No matter how I agonised over this, I could not deny the truth. The act of gazing into the mirror each day caused me pain and suffering, for it seemed I was a total hypocrite. I took my 30 pieces of silver and joined in the ribaldry with the police after they'd been successful in bringing another villain to book'.

He recalled the occasion when he interviewed the parents of a young student who fell victim to the Yorkshire Ripper: 'As they showed me into her room, with a fresh bouquet of flowers in evidence, I became painfully aware of an overwhelming atmosphere of loss. I was soaking up their grief and feelings of desolation, and the total bewilderment and disbelief that had taken over and destroyed their lives. "I have witnessed death many times. But as I sat in the murdered girl's house that day, aware of the grief, misery and total despair that mingled with overwhelming psychic vibrations of revenge

swirling and contaminating what had once been a normal home, it was difficult not to become engulfed and contaminated with the same feelings".

Driving in the UK one day, an elderly man darted in front of Robert's car without warning. The man was knocked down and killed. At the inquest, no blame was attached to Robert but, as he had entered the court, he received a 'psychic blow' of such ferocity he felt driven back. "But I recovered my composure and quickly established the source of such energy," he said. 'It emanated from the victim's family who, for a brief time were given a focal point on which they could project their anger and grief'. Robert says he cannot deny the existence of the inner self, which first prompted him to unlock and develop his psychic powers. It could be argued that it takes a shock or an unexpected psychic experience to jolt the psychic faculties into action. This happened to him when he was seven. He felt an overwhelming love and sympathy for a teacher who had unknowingly embarrassed him. It was the first signification of his psychic gift and his first 'spiritual experience'.

"I should have hated that teacher but was rooted to the spot by this overwhelming feeling that, of the two of us, she was the more distressed," he said. 'I felt so strongly her total sorrow and anguish. That taught me never to judge a person or to put them into categories, but always to look deeper and see your own



inadequacies in them. It taught me never to hate". Indeed, Robert sees his troubled early life as a 'psychic apprenticeship'. Like his brother and sister, he was born illegitimate, and he never knew his father who died before he was born. In World War Two, he was evacuated from London to Nottingham where he was subjected to physical and mental abuse. Later he was put into the care of his grandmother, and then fostered.

Leaving school at 15, he joined the RAF, but developed a fear of the dark and inexplicable pangs of paralysis, and suffered a breakdown. At 21, he was discharged on medical grounds, and went to live with his mother and stepfather, when came one of his most startling early experiences – he 'saw' his natural father, shocking and frightening his mother who had never mentioned or described the man. Lonely and out of sorts, he was referred to a psychiatrist. Unable to find work, he chose to live rough on the streets with tramps and down-and-outs, a time in his life which he regards as being of major importance. He gained first-hand knowledge of people who, like him, were outsiders, although not always through their own choosing. He achieved greater awareness of human behaviour in those days 'than one could possibly hope for in a lifetime's study'.

In the early 1980s, Uri Geller, the Israeli psychic, asked to meet Robert after seeing him on a TV show in America. The pair met in the Waldorf Hotel, New York, but for Robert it was a let-down. He found it extremely difficult to 'tap into Geller's psyche'. Robert suggested a psychic test between him and Geller on TV. It was not to be billed as a competition between Geller, 'spoon-bender', and Cracknell, 'Britain's No. 1 Psychic Detective', but an 'open experiment and demonstration of the psychic ability'. Geller agreed, but later backed out, without explanation.

Robert says he has had 'countless' out-of-the-body experiences. Even today, when he awakes in a state of paralysis, he still has to reason with himself that he has been in this state many times before, and that he must relax and let it happen. "The initial stage involves concentrating on raising the "other me" that is in mental control. I have concentrated on

moving to a point in the bedroom where a full-length mirror is situated. My purpose every time is to see if there is a reflection. The strange thing is that, although I know I am standing in front of the mirror, at no time have I been able to see a reflection".

"At other times when this has occurred, knowing Jenny is in the lounge watching television, I have used all my concentration and forced myself to travel to where she is, with the intention of asking her to check me out! There is absolutely no doubt that I achieve my objective, for I've seen Jenny sitting in the other room, but as yet I haven't been able to communicate with her".

"I have extended my experiments by managing to leave the house and travel outside, to my car in the driveway. But I find these experiments leave me totally exhausted and the snap-back is extremely fierce. My most unusual experience must be the occasion when I was having an afternoon's siesta – virtually essential in the overpowering heat of a summer in Cyprus. Without any warning, or the preliminary bout of paralysis, I was aware of drifting up off the bed and towards the ceiling".

"This was most unusual, but at the same time so peaceful that I wanted it go on and on – and the feeling of tranquillity was almost indescribable. And then, suddenly, bang! An almighty roar echoed around me and there was a tremendous rush of wind. I recall so vividly looking up and seeing what I can only describe as a huge type of eagle, about to engulf me. It was completely unnerving".

"The next moment it was as though I was being thrown down from a great height. I vividly recall hitting the bed, laying there in a state of shock and completely drained of energy. Slowly, I opened my eyes to look upwards, and I became aware of the large overhead electric fan, spinning at top speed. As my, let us call it, etheric double was passing through the fan, a minuscule fragment of third-dimensional consciousness or will translated the incident for me as a danger, and immediately took over".

"I tend to believe that out-of-body experiences are of another dimension. That I have experienced being out of my body is an undisputed fact. I know it to be true. While in that state I have been unable to see myself as a physical being, but I've known that I existed. And, without making any outlandish claim, I can say with certainty that these experiences have strengthened my conviction that death is not extinction".

Robert has five children – Keir, Dawn, Robert, Cheryl and Nathan from his first marriage – stepson Simon, and six grandchildren. Had any of them inherited his psychic abilities? "Each and every one of them did, I am convinced, achieve an awareness of the psychic sense at an early age and embraced it naturally, without criticism," Robert replied. "They grew up knowing that their father's mantra was "treat a child in your home as a guest, for

he doesn't belong to you, he belongs to God". I have seen over the years flashes of awareness in all of my children. But I would not wish for them to have to go through the experiences I chose to embrace. 'I have grandchildren – two from Keir, two from Cheryl and two from Nathan – and perhaps it is to my shame that I do not have what is considered to be natural (grand)paternal instincts towards them. But there is no doubt in my mind that their parents, my children, will pass on the genetic thread".

Robert's has updated and revised his autobiography, 'The Lonely Sense: The Autobiography of a Psychic Detective', which has just been published (Anomalist Books, UK £11 / US \$16.95). The title reflects the down-to-earth and uncompromising rationale which has marked him out as a unique character in the world of the paranormal, as well as his lone lifelong struggle with the profound implications of his psychic gift. In his candid and earthy style, he tells of his traumatic childhood, how he came to terms with his increasing psychic abilities, leading to his working with police forces around the world to help solve major crimes, and his split with the spiritualist church. He also writes of the benefits of meditation, his co-founding of the World Peace Movement, how he was inspired by the Indian mystic Meher Baba, and why he remains silent for one day every week.

He writes too about the collapse of his first marriage due to his unconventional lifestyle, his disturbing time as an orderly in a psychiatric hospital, his days as an insurance investigator for a finance company, his own agency, Vigil Investigations, which he ran for ten years until he retired in 1990. The book has a lengthy foreword by the best-selling British author Colin Wilson, originally written for Robert's autobiographical *Clues to the Unknown* (1981) it still remains pertinent. Wilson, one of the major investigators of paranormal phenomena over the last 40 years, in referring to his own seminal book of 1956, *The Outsider*, sees Robert as typical of the Outsider-type, 'the alienated man who has to learn to turn the powers of his development inward'. As Wilson says, "Robert's life story also raises some extremely important issues, not only about the role of the psychic in society but, crucially, what would happen if we all made the effort to develop the same potential".

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