

# Anna's Amazing Abilities

— Case 67 —

There is credible testimony for some people possessing inexplicable powers such as absorbing the contents of a book by sleeping with it under one's pillow, writing symphonic pieces as a toddler, or calculating what day of the week a particular date falls upon. As fascinating as any such transcendent talent may be, it is usually easier to assume a genetic anomaly or fortuitous accident as its cause, rather than crediting the involvement of spirits from another realm. Having two or three such talents, though, makes the spirit explanation more likely. Demonstrating a half dozen or more widely diverse and totally inexplicable abilities provides evidence for spirit involvement that cannot be reasonably refuted. This is the story of an 11-year-old girl who did just that.

Her name was Anna, and she was the daughter of the reverend Dr. Horace Westwood.<sup>1</sup> Westwood was a Unitarian minister who believed that tales of a spirit realm were pure fantasy. This attitude is well illustrated by the reverend's own words:

"The summer of 1914, though I did not realize it at the time, proved itself the prelude to a series of experiences the nature of which could not possibly have been anticipated. If by chance any individual had ventured to predict them, my immediate reaction would have been, 'impossible and absurd.' If anyone had told me that, as a result of these experiences, I would come to accept as *factual* what I later accepted as based on indubitable evidence and that, as a consequence, I would come to hold the views I now embrace concerning the meaning and destiny of human personality, I would at once have replied, 'If this ever comes to pass I shall regard my mental processes as seriously open to question. The entire thing is utterly foreign to the world of fact I think I know. Also, it leads to an outlook

upon life which I regard as inimical to the best interest of mankind. Such a possibility is entirely beyond the range of any consideration I could entertain, even for a moment.' All of which goes to show how little we can anticipate the future and how unsafe all predictions are, particularly when they relate to our individual unfolding. For what I regarded as impossible did actually happen, and that which I had denied, by providing its own evidence, not only compelled recognition, but necessitated a revision of what, hitherto, had been fundamental to all my thinking in relation to human nature and destiny."<sup>2</sup>

When a prominent business executive whom he thought to be intelligent and hard headed revealed an interest in psychic phenomena, Westwood concluded that the man was either gullible, self-deceived, or "a trifle off."<sup>3</sup> When World War I broke out, Westwood's disillusion with the idea of heaven was exacerbated. "To be concerned with the question of individual survival beyond death when there is so much misery and suffering upon earth is the essence of selfishness," he thought. "To seek for personal consolation, in the hour of bereavement when millions are facing the perils of battle that we may live and that the blessings of democracy shall not perish, seems the height of ingratitude." Furthermore, he opined that psychical researchers were "trifling with nonsense while the world was in flames."<sup>4</sup>

It is difficult to imagine a man less likely to champion the cause of spiritualism. But then, that was before Anna became involved.

A couple who were members of Westwood's church lost their son in the war. They were, of course, both devastated and depressed. But the wife's mood quickly changed to happiness because,

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<sup>1</sup> In an effort to shield her from unwanted publicity, Westwood initially referred vaguely to the girl as a cousin, but his sons later revealed that Anna was actually their sister.

<sup>2</sup> Westwood, Horace, *There is a Psychic World*, Crown Publishers, 1949, pp. 3-4.

<sup>3</sup> \_\_\_\_\_, p. 5.

<sup>4</sup> \_\_\_\_\_, p. 9.

she told her husband, their son had begun communicating to her from beyond the grave. This caused the husband increased anxiety as he considered such delusions to indicate the onset of mental illness. So he went to his minister for advice. Westwood tried to console the distraught husband and promised to visit the wife to see what he might do to help her. Before he could schedule such a visit, however, the husband returned with a completely changed attitude. Now, he proclaimed, his wife was not delusional at all! In fact, their son had, indeed, been communicating with his mother, and now was communicating with his father also. Wouldn't the good reverend like to come and see these marvels for himself?

Westwood admits he was reticent to go, not only because he was skeptical, but he "did not wish to be placed in the position of having to tell them that they were the victims of self-deception." Finally, however, he felt he could put off their invitation no longer, so he and his wife went to the couple's home to see what there was to see. The couple had developed the practice of sitting with their daughter at a table on which sat a wood plank hand-lettered with the alphabet. One or more of the group would place their fingers on an inverted drinking glass and the movement of the glass around the board would spell out messages purporting to come from their deceased son.

As he observed this process, Westwood became convinced that the messages were the result of what he termed "sympathetic thought transference" between mother and daughter, rather than the involvement of dead people. But when Westwood gently hinted at his skepticism and asked for a more convincing demonstration, he got more than he, or his hosts, could have expected. With only the fingers of Westwood, his wife, and the couple's daughter lightly touching the top surface of the 24"x18" plank of wood, it suddenly began to race back and forth across the table so rapidly that the trio had trouble keeping their fingers in touch with it. The plank next moved off the table's edge, floated slowly downward to within an inch of the floor, and

then back up again to the tabletop, where it started racing around once more.

All five (living) folks in the room were flabbergasted. None had ever seen the like before. No known principle of physics could explain how the heavy plank had risen through the air when no one was touching it at the bottom. Had it somehow been a mass hallucination? Westwood and his wife discussed the evening's events on their way home and decided the matter required further investigation.



At first, they tried a makeshift Ouija board of stiff cardboard. When, after several hours, that failed to produce results, Westwood bought a "real" one. Still nothing happened. Then the children in the household wanted to try out this new "toy." Westwood explains: "So we let them try, one by one, and each pulled a blank, much to their chagrin, until Anna placed her little hand on the planchette. She had hardly touched it, when the indicator began to move with startling rapidity and with equally startling accuracy, spelling out words and sentences in complete and intelligent sequence." Westwood does not reveal the content of these messages, so we cannot judge their evidential value.

Turning the board around had no effect on Anna's remarkable ability, nor did blindfolding the girl. The next day Westwood drew the letters of the alphabet "higgledy-piggledy" on a large piece of

paper. "Indeed," he explains, "they presented such a confused picture that if I wanted to spell out any word, and with my eyes wide open, it was an effort to find the letters." Such precautions proved pointless. When Anna was blindfolded and led to the scrambled board, the tumbler flew just as rapidly and the messages came just as intelligently as before. Furthermore, to Westwood's great surprise, "the first message to come through was to the effect that I was a fool for my pains ... and that 'they' would prove they were invisible entities seeking to communicate on the physical plane."<sup>5</sup>

Several different entities communicated through Anna, at first via the talking board, but soon via automatic writing, and ultimately using her own vocal chords. At first, there were two spirits calling themselves Ruth and Ralph. These claimed to have been stenographers who had worked for the government in Washington, DC. These two introduced an ethereal musician named Kate. Next appeared a spirit of apparently loftier intelligence which identified itself only as "X." And finally, came the entity who was initially viewed with the most suspicion but who ultimately proved the most convincing, a Chippewa Indian named Blue Hide.

Anyone reading Westwood's account of these events, must be struck by how stubbornly he resisted accepting these entities to be what they claimed to be. In fact, he steadfastly refused to follow up when information was given that might be confirmed. It wasn't until he had experienced several other mediums that he began to admit the possibility of a spirit realm. And so, we are left with a story sincerely told by a most trustworthy source, but a story lacking in the usual confirmable information that makes the best cases so convincing. Nevertheless, as hinted at in the opening paragraph, the inexplicable skills demonstrated by this 11-year-old child, could be sufficient unto themselves to convince many readers.

Being able to rapidly pick out letters on a board, while blindfolded, when the letters are randomly scattered, is not a unique skill,<sup>6</sup> but it is exceedingly rare. It is also a skill which no one has ever demonstrated sans the claim of spirit involvement. Yet, Anna demonstrated a number of other astounding abilities. All of which, by the way, were accomplished while the girl was wide awake and perfectly lucid.<sup>7</sup> Among these other transcendent talents were:

- A great improvement in her ability to play chess. Under normal conditions, Anna was no match for Westwood, who had taught her the game; but when she allowed the spirit of Ralph to take control, she always challenged her uncle and usually beat him. She did not win every time because Westwood was pretty good and Ralph made no claim to be a master of the game. But Ralph played with equal skill and moved the pieces with equal deftness when Anna was blindfolded.

- An even greater improvement in her ability to play the piano. Although most every child of that era and social status had some training in tickling the ivories, Anna's skill was no more than average for her age. When the spirit of Kate took control, the difference was astounding ... despite Anna being blindfolded.

"As long as I live I shall never forget that night," Westwood recalls. "She began with a slow melody, the like of which I had never heard before, for it was solemn in its majesty and almost unearthly in its beauty. As I watched the child play, the bodily action and the finger technique were entirely different from Anna's own. Moreover, I had this strange reaction—a feeling that the instrument was incapable of expressing what the player wished to play. As though reading my thoughts, the alleged Kate (through Anna) took pencil and paper and began to write with rapidity. The purport of the message was to the effect that "their" scale structure was different from our own, allowing for greater variety

<sup>5</sup> \_\_\_\_\_, p. 24.

<sup>6</sup> See Top 40 cases 40 and 49, for example.

<sup>7</sup> Westwood insisted that Anna always be a willing and aware participant. He allowed no hypnotism and vowed to stop the experiments if Anna showed any indication of being in a trance.

in tonal expression, hence the inadequacy of the instrument in its power of expression.”<sup>8</sup>

- An entirely new ability to operate a typewriter. Prior to the arrival of the spectral stenographers, Anna had never touched a typewriter. Under their influence, her small fingers flew over the keys with professional speed and accuracy. A good typist, of course, never looks at the keys; Anna didn’t either — she couldn’t see through her blindfold. Neither could she see the notes that Westwood would type on the paper in the machine; notes that the spirits would answer quickly and intelligently.

Occasionally, Westwood would engage his young typist in conversation about other matters, but this had no effect on the typed responses. When she wasn’t blindfolded, Anna would sometimes turn to her uncle and express her disagreement with the ideas that her fingers were busily putting on the paper.

- An unparalleled control of her neuromuscular system. One evening, Westwood relates:

“Ralph proposed that we take a ‘rook’ and balance on the top of it a small celluloid ping-pong ball. Having done this, each of us, using a long briar tobacco pipe (the Chesterfield type) as a golf club, was instructed to hit the ball without knocking down the rook, and to try to aim the ball at a given object. We each tried and we had lots of fun. It was a task requiring the greatest delicacy in co-ordination and skill. Not once did any of us succeed. Usually, we knocked down the rook with the ball. Where we succeeded in hitting the ball without knocking down the rook, it went wild and we missed our object. Even Anna tried, with like results. (If the reader wants to know how hard it is, try it!) Evidently sure that we recognized our incompetence, Ralph wrote that if we would blindfold Anna, he would try. Through Anna, he assumed a stance, then swinging the pipe as a club, he struck. He did not miss, the rook did not fall and the ball flew with precise aim and hit the object. We set ourselves up as targets around the room, and, one by one, he caused the ball to hit us all.”<sup>9</sup>

- The ability to read at a distance. Without seeing the title, Westwood randomly took a book from its shelf in one room and laid it open to an unseen page on a table in another room. Anna, sitting blindfolded in an adjoining room then correctly wrote the page number and opening lines of the first paragraph on the right-hand page.

- The ability to do outlandish things. The spirit known as Blue Hide brought with him the deep and detailed knowledge of woodland lore that one might expect from a Chippewa Indian. When he was in control, Anna could converse as an equal with the most seasoned guide or hunter. She could also do things she had never before seen done, things that she would otherwise find frightening or repulsive, such as quickly and expertly skinning a woodchuck and curing its hide, or killing a rattlesnake and making a totem from its carcass.

Anna’s amazing abilities began with the arrival of Ruth and Ralph and ended with the departure of Blue Hide some half-dozen years later. Although never intrusive or demanding, the spirits came and went on their own schedule. With the going of the Chippewa, all unusual phenomena ceased in the Westwood household.

An inordinate amount of psychokinetic events seem to revolve around pubescent girls, so Anna’s age and gender may have been favorable to the spirits working through her. Nevertheless, the suddenly demonstrated skills at chess, piano playing, typing, seeing while blindfolded, clairvoyance, animal gutting, and “ping-pong golfing” are so far beyond typical poltergeist activity that they argue strongly for the actual involvement of spirit entities.

#### Update 16 May 2011

William Stoney, M.S., a retired aerospace engineer and current Research Institute Liaison for AECES, recently submitted written testimony that he interviewed Westwood’s son in the early 1970s while the son was serving as a minister in the First Unitarian Church in Houston, Texas. The son,

<sup>8</sup> Westwood, p. 49.

<sup>9</sup> \_\_\_\_\_, p. 40.

Horace Westwood, D.D., confirmed the accuracy of his father's book, noting that he was 8 to 10 years of age when he witnessed his sister perform the events described above. Stoney later interviewed another of Westwood's sons, also a Unitarian minister, who had been too young to remember his sister's mediumship but was well aware of all of it from having his father live with him for several years. He was so

confident in its accuracy that he arranged a reprinting of *There Is a Psychic World* to make it available to his congregation.



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