

characteristic sensation whenever something paranormal is likely to occur; he has what might be called an epileptic constitution and always has sensations of fulminality lasting a few tenths of a second, either in the right hemisphere or in the occipital region of his brain, whenever phenomena occurred.

Another member, mathematician Professor Hideo Izumi, described his experience with a clairvoyant who claimed to see his spirit guides behind him. This clairvoyant was good at characterising Izumi's two spirit guides, and Izumi was quite surprised that one spirit was very like his deceased nephew, while the other was like his late aunt. Izumi also gave his opinion on how one can develop psi ability through Aikido, an ancient Japanese martial art that manipulates the subtle energy *Ki*. Izumi has long been a practitioner of Aikido and insisted that such training could encourage psi.

As to the induction of psi ability, we discussed another Japanese training system called *Soroban* (the term 'Soroban' has the same meaning in Japanese as 'Abacus' does in English). As I'm sure you know, an abacus is a calculating instrument with a number of beads that slide back and forth along rods. In Japan we have a school of 'abacus' which has many students, including many children. Abacus training is conducted as a form of mental calculation, and through this training, some students seem to have developed ESP ability. Perhaps, the fact that it is a form of mental discipline explains why abacus might stimulate some potential ESP ability although this is very speculative.

We also discussed psi in children, and considered the case of Tsukushi-Chan, who is a young girl at Elementary School. In one demonstration she grasped a button in her right hand and it apparently moved to her left hand just through an act of concentration. She has been observed by one of our members, but we don't know where she now lives so are unable to follow up her case. Another problem we face, which I am sure is common among psychical researchers, is that this kind of gift is easily inhibited by parents and peers. In the Tsukushi-Chan case, classmates were always suspicious that she used her clairvoyant ability to cheat in exams, and so she found it difficult to get on with them. When trying to encourage psychic ability we need to bear in mind the social implications of our work.

### 5. Future perspectives

In a view of our present situation on spontaneous cases, we recognise that we are only just beginning. In particular, there are relatively few cases to be studied seriously in Japan compared with the cases reported by members of the SPR. We are sure that many phenomena occur in Japan, but perhaps Japanese people tend to keep such experiences private. Clearly, we need to be more patient than researchers in other countries. But Japanese research can make an important contribution in balancing the experiences from different cultures. We like to think that experimental and spontaneous case studies are complementary; as one progresses, so does the other. In a future issue I hope to be able to inform you about more research from Japan.

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## SSP 2000: A PATH TO OBJECTIVITY

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THE RHINE RESEARCH CENTER (previously known as the Institute of Parapsychology) is world-renowned. It has every reason to be. The association with the founding Father and Mother of parapsychology, the Rhines, and their original dreams, has developed the Institute from an active research centre into one of the most effective disseminators of parapsychology knowledge. At the forefront of this dissemination is the 'Summer Study Program'. As we fast approach Summer 2001

and the annual influx of students that grace the RRC in North Carolina I'd like to share with you the experience that is SSP.

The SSP is an intensive eight-week exposure to all areas of the science of parapsychology. The word 'all' is the key to the programme's content. Despite its presenting itself as a scientific establishment, however, I always had a concern that due to the vast volume of work and subject matter to be passed on, it would be almost impossible to

prevent biases and that, because of its origins, the bias, consciously or not, would favour evidence for psi.

Potential SSP students were put through a selection procedure. The initial application form had to be supported by references and there did appear to be a sorting process as over half of those who applied in 2000 were rejected. But as for the criteria involved in such a process, I cannot imagine. The reason for my saying this is the veritable melting-pot of students present on the program. An attempt is made annually to invite students from a variety of backgrounds, ages and cultures. There is a range of academic experience, from undergraduate degree level, to PhD and beyond. As in any research programme, where the participants are plucked from their own environments and literally thrown together, substantial intellectual rewards are gained from merely interacting with one's new-found colleagues. Going back to the first day: everybody introduced themselves, talked about their interests, their background, their reasons for being at the SSP. It became apparent to me that 'healthy scepticism' appeared to be in the minority, that people's individual experiences, often one-off, had moulded strong beliefs in the area, and that, in most cases, they were at the SSP to find out answers only to their own experiences: Why? What?

My perceptions were wrong. Within the first week, as a result of very informative lectures, a comprehensive library, the social interaction of the group, and staff of the RRC, my initial apprehension about spending the summer with staunch 'sheep' disappeared. I had come to realise that everyone in the group shared an equal passion of the area, a thirst for answers. Yes, people were looking for different answers, but they were listening to every other answer and quietly (sometimes openly) discussing their views, their thought processes, with the likes of John Palmer, Richard Broughton, Ed May, Kathy Dalton (to name but a few). More importantly, discussions arose naturally, without the malice that can so easily be found in any scientific area between diametrically opposed researchers. Even *more* importantly, everyone in the group was listening to (and arguing with) everyone else.

What had the hallmarks of being, for me, a shepherding session in the extreme, turned into a wonderful summer of exploration and

knowledge sharing, with students and staff alike. The social forum of the group of attendees, and the format of the SSP itself, created not a 'road to enlightenment', but a 'path to objectivity'.

On arrival, students were presented with the schedule for the entire eight weeks. Every single day was filled with a topic whose content would normally require the equivalent of several days of lectures, including additional reading. Topics ranged from poltergeists and hauntings, physical mediumship and psychics through to meta-analysis, ethics, and Decision Augmentation Theory. The majority of the topics listed were within the realm of parapsychology, but the range of speakers made the SSP a unique opportunity. Unique, because presentations came from psychologists, psychiatrists, sociologists, historians, philosophers, anthropologists, physicists, including some of the most renowned in the field. In some cases this diversity of opinion riled students. In those circumstances where several different issues had to be presented by the same person, an unbiased account is delivered, supported by a comprehensive summary of the key points and texts. Indeed, filing all lecture notes, summaries, and photocopied articles from the SSP allowed us to build a definitive parapsychology library.

After the first week of lectures, and after jet-lag recovery for some, brains were exhausted and Friday night provided the first opportunity for students to relax and unwind. My housemates, another Englishman and a bearded Canadian, and I provided the venue and the music and prompted others to supply food (most memorable of which was the chocolate culinary delight from a Brazilian chef, no less!). The environment was perfect for friendships to begin their road to bonding. Inhibitions were lowered, students danced and sang, and an impromptu Tarot session even held us all transfixed. In the early hours of the morning the hardcore revellers (with assistance from a German drinking song entitled 'Zigger Zigga' — excuse the spelling) clumsily revealed personal secrets which were to playfully haunt them in the guise of nicknames throughout the summer. Though the first Saturday morning disappeared under bed-clothes and recovering headaches, the rest of the summer built upon friendships and discussions cemented the night before.



Durham, the home of the Rhine Research Center, provided the venue for these friendships. It is also home to Duke University, closed for the vacation, which means the town was severely lacking in population for the duration of the SSP. Despite this the few bars, cafés and restaurants soon become regular haunts and every attempt was made to venture out of the town and sample the scenery of North Carolina (including a trip to the Monroe Institute later in the Summer). This was difficult for those from other countries that arrived without transport, and there did seem to be pressure on the car-owners to provide a sort of taxi service. The immediate setting, though, of the Research Centre is wonderful, and the daily stroll across Duke's campus to Ninth Street and a plethora of cafés was a refreshing break to the intellectual onslaught. On many evenings, small groups trawled through the shelves of the two bookstores on Ninth, always finishing up at the Mexican round the corner, or downing a cheeky Guinness at the Irish bar in town. This particular bar soon became the battleground for a Tuesday night quiz, at which the SSP 2000 team made Durham history for being the only team that attempted to lose every week!

Other 'battlegrounds' that added to the flavour of the summer included the rivalry between various European factions over the Football European Cup. One afternoon a group gathered in front of a TV and watched the Germans and the English battle it out for a

place in the quarter-finals. Emotions ran high, as cheering deafened the neighbours, and enjoyment was had by all. Later in the summer a road trip to the coast echoed this frenzied joy. This quickly gave way to pain as several were 'blessed' with severe sunburn.

And so to more details about the 'intellectual onslaught' that was the SSP. Dr Palmer's introductory overview of parapsychology on the second day provided a neat framework for the lectures to come. It was primarily a presentation rife with diametric ideas: ontological vs. operational approach; proof vs. process-oriented; ESP and PK; the experimental and the spontaneous approach; historical roots and modern research. It was an onslaught as it presented the magnitude of the area, daunting to some listeners whose only familiarity was of popular psychology or New Age texts. The first week, as with the following weeks, expanded on this initial overview, taking us through poltergeists, witchcraft, reincarnation and pseudo-psychics. There is no doubt that all presenters employed in the Rhine Research Center attempted to give an unbiased lecture. This approach faded away with a lot of the visiting lecturers, but though this could otherwise be a weakness, in this situation it was not. Because students were given comprehensive information on every aspect of parapsychology (chiefly from Dr Palmer, Dr Dalton, Dr Zingrone and Dr Alvarado) when a visiting presenter brought in biases from other fields (e.g. anthropology) students were aware

of counter arguments and other approaches and could field informed questions. One Canadian SSP student became infamous for his challenging questions. Often other questions came out over lunches organised by the RRC. One such lunch, with Dr Daryl Bem, was rated the most popular because of the impromptu magic show that followed. Having a more informal atmosphere, these lunches with the speakers were fertile ground for interesting discussions and frequently during the summer the informality was expanded on by invitations to barbecues with, for example, the Rhine family, or Dr Jim Carpenter.

Questions were encouraged at these informal gatherings, and the fact that all staff and presenters were easily approachable, makes it an effortless thing to do. Answering questions seems to be the theme of the research program. All students came to the programme with their biases (in parapsychology and other areas) and the summer sought to correct those biases and answer the questions or at least provide a training that enabled students to formulate a process by which to answer the questions. This was the idea behind the 'Research Jam Sessions' and the encouragement to conduct research whilst at the RRC. One notable contribution to this research came from an inventive idea that suggested we incorporate psychodrama (a group therapy tool use in psychotherapy) into the ganzfeld method. Participants were to act as receivers in a traditional ganzfeld, but then were to act out their interpretations of the target. An American undergraduate and I conducted fieldwork, investigating spontaneous cases in the area, including a claimed sighting of a troll which, after conducting open-ended interviews and an objective scout of the area, was revealed to be a vertically-challenged, rather plump, builder from Mexico. Additionally, one of the presenters, Dr Kathy Dalton, conducted some dream research in which all students were participants. Although, as is my trademark, I question the results, the experience gave a valuable insight into being a subject in a psychology experiment, a sorely neglected experience for many experimenters.

The impact of SSP 2000 extended beyond Durham, NC., when several of the students were reunited at the Parapsychological Association Convention in Germany (a photograph of which appears below). The

group slipped immediately back into the cohesive group it had formed by the end of the summer. Echoes of German drinking songs still reverberate in my ears. I continue to correspond with many from the SSP and since leaving the programme there has been a divergence of paths. One student has continued his professional involvement with BMX Flatland Freestyling and is in the process of filming a video. Another has run Ganzfeld sessions since, and another still is in the process of completing a PhD on Religious Studies. Many of us look back fondly on a cartoonist's representation of the centre and the caricatures it painted of some of the SSP students and RRC staff. There is no doubt that the influence of our experiences on SSP 2000, whether academic or social, will continue for years to come.



Being bestowed with all the theories and approaches of parapsychology: Physical Theories of Psi by Dr Broughton; Psi and our View of the Physical world by Professor Braude; Integrating Parapsychology and Psychology by Professor Morris; Sociology of Psi Controversy by Dr Palmer; and all the others,

1. Being an integral part of essentially a 'team' of research students.
2. Experiencing parapsychology first-hand in Ganzfeld Experiments, Alternative Healing practices, Ethics discussions, and readings from an experienced psychic.
3. Researching, listening, and reading in the setting of the seat of parapsychology.
4. The development of a socially diverse group of students.

All of these points form the essence of SSP and why it was such a rewarding and knowledge-gaining experience for those involved, students and staff.