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THE BEGINNINGS OF CHESTER CARLSON'S INTEREST IN PARAPSYCHOLOGY

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I think it is very rash of me to attempt to say anything at all this evening, especially in the presence of a group of learned parapsychologists who are making such profound contributions to our knowledge of the nature of man. However, you might be interested to hear how one person who, as a result of his environment and formal education, was a physical scientist, and yet came to be interested in parapsychology. Because of this environment and education, Chester Carlson was supposed to be a materialist; but perhaps by nature he was not fully equipped to be an out-and-out materialist, although he always maintained the standards of the physical scientist.

About twenty years ago, in our home, a series of paranormal experiences began to occur, apparently through my instrumentality. Sounds—for the most part words representing personal names and places—were heard clairaudiently, and images of known or unknown persons and events were seen in "objective" form, frequently when my eyes were closed. And there were various precognitive experiences which were often verified days, or even several weeks, later. These psychic experiences were shared with my husband, and I think they may have disturbed him at first because he recognized their implications for his theoretical outlook on the world and on the nature of man.

Looking back, it seems to me as though I were "used" as an instrument to draw my husband into the field of parapsychology. I felt like a nonentity, to tell you the truth, although this was an exciting process for me too. But these experiences seemed to involve Chester also. He was not the type of person to be satisfied merely to read about the measurements and statistics of other

people's work and research; it was not enough for him merely to hear about other people's experiences. He felt that he had to test the research itself by having the experience himself. He was very quiet, very busy every day in his laboratory where he was trying to improve and discover new applications for xerography, and he usually did his thinking without talking much about it. Anyway, these psychic phenomena started to occur and there were many aspects to them; they came one after another, and as soon as one type would be expected, that type would cease and another type would be introduced. This was without any effort on his part or on mine, though it could be said that I tried to cooperate in the process. I was being constantly surprised by these phenomena. As I said, if one type was expected, that stopped and another took its place; thus, there was always an element of spontaneity and freshness, an element of the unexpected in these phenomena.

In regard to the precognitive experiences, I early learned not to anticipate the source from which verifications would come because the conscious, logical mind was usually wrong when it tried to interfere with an area of the deeper self which seemed to know more than this so-called "logical" mind. I early learned that paranormal experiences flowed more easily and with less distortion when body and mind could serve as an open, unobstructed channel without interference from preconceived notions or opinions. Now, since manifestations of such phenomena have developed in new and more subtle ways, I see that I am functioning at a higher level when the mind can become as nearly like a white sheet of paper as possible.

I should say here that I do not believe psychic phenomena have any value as an end in themselves; however, I do believe that they may point to one aspect of the potential development of man which is little tapped—that is, *consciously* little tapped today.

In the beginning, I had no idea that my husband was observing these occurrences with such profound interest. He did not let me know exactly how he felt about them. But he made his own tests. The first time he made a test he did not tell me that

he was going to do so. Often in the evening he would sit in silence with his eyes closed, concentrating on some problem that he had in the laboratory. On this particular evening he sat in his chair beside the fire, I sat across the room on the sofa reading, and our little cocker spaniel was lying asleep on the floor. My husband, as I said, had his eyes closed, and I thought that he was concentrating, as usual, on a laboratory problem. Later on, after the experience had happened, he told me that he had determined to make this test because of what he had witnessed in connection with my own experiences; that is, the words I heard clairaudiently and the clairvoyant images which would sometimes be verified days later by something that would happen unexpectedly to *him*, by something that would come in the mail, or the like. And Chester thought that if I could do this, perhaps he could too. So, on this particular evening, he concentrated on hearing a sound. He had thought, he told me later, of hearing the sound of a voice. He concentrated for about fifteen or twenty minutes and nothing happened. He became discouraged, felt that there was nothing to this at all, and decided to give up. At that instant, in the center of the room, away from any wall and away from the ceiling and away from the floor, so that it could not be said that the boards were cracking or anything like that, there came an *explosive noise*. This noise sounded somewhat as though a large paper bag had been filled with air and then burst. This was not a subjective experience—not only did my husband hear the sound, I also heard it and was startled by it. And the sleeping dog was startled by it and jumped up.

You can easily imagine what this experience did to deepen Chester's interest in parapsychology. And then he did a sensible thing: he saturated himself with the literature of the research which had been carried out in past years, and he also tried to discover the present aims of parapsychology. In doing this, he became convinced that the study of the paranormal might be an important means of adding to man's knowledge about himself. And so he became very much absorbed in parapsychology. And he greatly admired the men and women he met who are doing parapsychological research. So far as I can tell, and knowing his

temperament so well, I believe that Chester encouraged these men and women to *develop their own ideas* for research; he never tried to direct or to limit what they sought to accomplish. He merely gave moral and financial support to the investigations to which others were dedicated. My own position through the years was one of not becoming *directly* involved, but loving the dedicated men and women in the field and encouraging my husband to support their work.

In the field of science there are those who take measurements and compile statistics. This is like coming into a mango orchard and measuring the size of the trees, counting the branches and twigs, in order to understand the mango and then compiling statistics about the findings. Funds are allocated for this purpose; dedicated men and women come into the orchard and work very hard at this one aspect. But then one day a man comes to the orchard who also burns with a desire and need to *understand* the mango, so he simply selects a few mangoes and *eats* them. Who really understands the mango better? Surely *both* types are necessary to the process of adding to man's knowledge about himself.

Chester's training, as I have said, was that of the physical scientist, but he was also uniquely an "eater of the mango." Perhaps the so-called "subjective" experience of testing the fruit itself might add a new dimension of understanding to "objective" research. At any rate, Chester's life took an entirely different turn when he made his own experiments and succeeded in "hitting the target." He was a shy and modest man and, so far as I know, he did not tell parapsychologists about these experiments. But at any rate, he had some very definite reasons for supporting the field of parapsychology.

To return to our personal experiences, one of the most interesting phases was that of sharing dreams. We discovered that we were having the same dream on the same night—this was one of those unexpected developments mentioned earlier. There would be little differences in the dreams, of course, little distortions that would come through, but the two dreams would be recognizable as concerning the same person or the same incident. Dr. Montague

Ullman might have planned an experiment such as the little one I will now tell you about:

One morning I jotted down the things that I heard and the images that I saw; these were just disconnected fragments and they didn't mean anything at all to me. I had no idea that Chester was going to dream about them. I would often tell him what I heard or saw, but on this particular day I did not. Many hours later, Chester had a dream *so vivid* that he called out with great emotion in his sleep and I had to awaken him and ask him to tell me what was taking place. As he related the details of this moving dream-experience, I clearly recognized the material which I had received and recorded some sixteen or seventeen hours earlier. Whether this experience involved a telepathic interchange between Chester and myself (as in the experiments of Dr. Ullman utilizing a sleeping percipient and a waking agent), or whether I had a precognitive awareness of what was later to appear in the content of Chester's dream, I cannot presume to say.

Here is another experience that came during this same period: One day, while working around the house, I heard the word "Lilliput" and I knew that it was significant. I knew that I must record it and that it would relate to something which would occur in the future. Five or six weeks later we went to Toronto, where we had never been before, and checked in at a hotel. While Chester was registering, I went over and glanced at the magazines on the newsstand to see if there was an English or Canadian magazine I might want to buy. Then I noticed a magazine called *Lilliput* (I had never heard of it before). I immediately recalled my earlier clairaudient experience and knew that I must buy the magazine. I did so, and in it was the story of a man and woman who had the same dreams on the same night!

Chester was impressed with the seeming intelligent planning and preparation for this and other types of psychic phenomena. I have no explanation for the source of such happenings. Perhaps you do.

We did not often discuss business, but we frequently talked about the meaning of life and the possible implications of parapsychological research. We wondered where it might go wrong;

how it could be used for the benefit of man; how it could lead to clues to the next step in possible *conscious* evolution; what the new discoveries and developments might be.

In this connection, you might be interested in something that Chester told me about people who make new discoveries or do very important and unique research. He said that the very great inventions and discoveries are made by lone individuals—by the person working alone here and there, having his own dream, his own faith in himself, and thinking in untraditional, unconventional ways. He said that often many people arrive at the same invention at the same time because they thought in logical, conventional ways. These are the run-of-the-mill ideas, and the Patent Office bears this out because many people seek to patent the same invention at the same time. But the really great research is almost always done by the lone, and sometimes lonely, person working by himself. He is usually not a part of a large organization, nor is he being controlled by those who cannot share his inner vision of the meaning of what he is attempting to create. This concept would surely also seem to apply to parapsychologists, because their field is not a popular one; they have been severely criticized and have had to work alone under many handicaps. And so a great deal of admiration has gone out from us to them.

I suppose that once any science is established, there is the danger of the barnacles and accretions of what had become the traditions of that science adhering to it. But this need not be the case with parapsychology, which seems to be breaking ground in ever-widening new territories. I am sure that if Chester Carlson were here tonight, he would salute those who are working so hard in this field.

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