

# ***Houdini's Afterlife Experiment - Did It Work? Yes! But Did Mrs. Houdini want to become a 'nut'? No!***

An essay by *Thomas Razzeto*  
© Copyright 2011 Thomas Razzeto

## **Preface**

First off, I want to say that I am a believer in spirit-communication. Why? Because I have studied the subject extensively, especially the recent work of Dr. Gary Schwartz at the University of Arizona. His book, *The Afterlife Experiments*, reports the results of his blind and double-blind experiments and I found the work to be convincing. Of course, I realize that not everyone who reads Gary's book will be convinced. But hard-nosed skeptics are not my concern. I am interested in doing my best to find the truth, regardless of what the regular "gatekeepers" try to dictate.

Since I am a believer, my exploration of the Houdini afterlife experiment is really just asking, "Is this case yet another example of genuine spirit-communication?" In other words, I am not trying to make it the first break-through case.

Skeptics might instead ask, "Is this the first case that contains evidence that is so strong that the spirit-communication explanation is the only explanation that fits all the evidence?" Skeptics would primarily look for evidence of fraud but, lacking that, they still would not be convinced of the authenticity. In other words, just because there is no proof of fraud doesn't mean that there wasn't any. Someone could have faked it without being detected. And sometimes that's true. But is it always true?

In my opinion, in the Houdini case, all the points that were brought up to prove that there was fraud can be shown to be unfounded. In fact, some of the debunking evidence itself was fraudulently injected into the story!

The lack of proven fraud plus the many supportive element of the story leads me to conclude that there is a reasonable chance that this case is genuine.

The continued fame of Harry Houdini and his dramatic personality makes this story fun and exciting. In addition to having the thrill of learning the secret code, I hope you enjoy the story's many twists and turns!

So without any further ado, here's the story.

## **Introduction**

There are conflicting claims about whether Harry Houdini, after his death, was successful in passing a prearranged secret coded message to his wife through Arthur Ford, a psychic medium. I'll say much more about that in a minute but right now, here's a little background.

Houdini, the world famous escape artist and magician, died in 1926 at the age of 52 after suffering from complications of appendicitis nine days after four very severe blows to the stomach. He claimed he could take punches from anyone, yet this time, he was caught off guard and was not able to firm up his muscles.

While many people claim that trauma to the abdomen has never been known to cause appendicitis, here is what his attending physician, Dr. Kennedy, said: "It is the only case of traumatic appendicitis I had ever seen in my lifetime, but the logic of the thing seems to indicate that Mr. Houdini died of appendicitis, the direct result of the injury."

With this in mind, it is interesting to note that since the death was attributed to the blows, Mrs. Houdini received a \$50,000 insurance payout rather than the \$25,000 that the appendicitis on its own would have yielded. The insurance company looked closely into the matter and accepted the expert testimony of the attending physicians. No matter the cause of the appendicitis, if Houdini had received timely medical attention, his appendix could have been removed before it burst and he might have lived.

Yet he put on five shows between the time of the injury and his death. After all, the show must go on. And so it did, as we shall see, in an unexpected way!

## **The Death of Houdini's Mother and Attempts at Spirit-Communication**

Let's go back to 1913 when Houdini's beloved mother, Cecilia Weiss, died. Harry became quite depressed and he went to several spirit mediums to see if he could communicate with her.

Harry and his wife Beatrice, whom he called "Bess," as a team were quite skilled at faking psychic medium sessions and had done so in their act as early as 1898. They would obtain information about people through sly but non-supernatural means ahead of time and then reveal it during the fake sessions to the astonishment of the audience. Since some mediums added physical tricks such as a floating table or ghost, Harry and Bess also demonstrated these types of things as well.

With his skills as a magician, it appeared to Harry that all the mediums that he visited regarding his mother were frauds taking advantage of grieving people. This upset Houdini and he started to put a lot of time and effort into exposing these mediums publicly. He revealed their secret tricks and wrote books on the subject including, *Miracle Mongers and Their Methods* (1920) and *A Magician Among the Spirits* (1924). Even the playbill for his last act prominently declared that Houdini would be exposing the tricks of fraudulent mediums. The general public was well aware that Harry Houdini did not believe in spirit-communication.

In 1920, he met Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, the famous author of the Sherlock Holmes novels and a prominent Spiritualist. Their friendship lasted several years and the two men often discussed their conflicting views of spirit-communication.

Mrs. Doyle was a medium and, in 1922, she gave Houdini a long but general message from his mother. Harry was emotionally moved but did not consider it proof since, among other things, it did not contain their secret prearranged word, which was “forgive.” When Harry publicly stated that there was not the slightest evidence that his mother had come through Mrs. Doyle, the relationship was strained past the breaking point and the two men soon went their separate ways.

On his deathbed, Houdini told his doctor that, even though he did not believe in spirit-communication, he would still try to send a prearranged message.

It was not until after his death, or so it seems, that he boldly reversed his position. As we shall see later, Houdini wanted his wife to spread the news that life continues after the death of the body.

## **The Secret Coding Method**

Bess sent Harry secret coded messages as part of a mind-reading trick early in his career. They used the same coding method for the afterlife experiment. To code and decode messages, they used the following list of ten key-words:

- 1 Pray
- 2 Answer
- 3 Say
- 4 Now
- 5 Tell
- 6 Please
- 7 Speak
- 8 Quickly
- 9 Look
- 10 Be Quick (the tenth “word” is actually a phrase and can also mean “zero”)

This key-word list always remained the same. It’s the heart of the coding and decoding process. They undoubtedly had the list memorized.

Here's how it worked. The mind-reading trick usually focused on the date of a coin that a member of the audience gave to Bess. Harry was to guess the last two digits of the date. Let's say the coin was dated 1895. So Bess would make the 9 by using the word, "Look," and she would make the 5 by using the word, "Tell." But Bess would not just say, "Look tell;" she would work those two words into a sentence or two so that it did not seem like an unnatural coded communication. Perhaps Bess would say something like, "Harry, you can look into the spirit realms. They'll tell you the date of this coin."

But the afterlife message is full of words, not numbers. Let's see how Harry would use this secret coding method to send a message to Bess. Let's say Harry wanted to send the message, "Hi." "H" is the eighth letter in the alphabet so he would use the eighth word on the key-word list: "Quickly." Since "I" is the ninth letter in the alphabet, he would use the ninth word on the key-word list: "Look." So he would send a message consisting of two words (8\*9):

Quickly \* Look = H I

Now suppose he wanted to say, "Up." "U" is the 21st letter in the alphabet. This is handled by using a pair of words from the key-word list. Since he wants to make the number "21," he would use the second word on the list paired with the first word on the list: "Answer Pray."

The "P" is handled the same way. It is the 16th letter in the alphabet so he would use the first word on the list paired with the sixth word on the list: "Pray Please." So the "Up" message would read (21\*16):

Answer Pray \* Pray Please = U P

When the message was written rather than spoken, he put a star to show how to break up the words into single words or word pairs. When the message was spoken, he used a pause.

## **The Secret Coded Message**

Here is the list of words received by Arthur Ford channeling his regular spirit guide, Fletcher, who claimed to be working with the spirit of Houdini:

Answer \* Tell \* Pray Answer \* Look \* Tell \* Answer Answer \* Tell

Remember, if you do not already have the decoding method and the list of the ten key-words, you may never figure it out. Since we know them both, we quickly see that the secret message has seven letters.

The message starts with "Answer," which is the second word on the key-word list. The second letter in the alphabet is "B." So the message starts with a "B."

The second letter in the message is “Tell,” which is the fifth word on the key-word list. Since the fifth letter in the alphabet is “E,” we see that the second letter in the message is an “E.” “Tell” is also used for the fifth and seventh letter in the message so we now have:

B E ? ? E ? E

The third letter in the message is the word pair: “Pray Answer.” This is the first and second word from the key-word list. So we have 1 and 2 or 12. Since “L” is the 12th letter in the alphabet, we now have:

B E L ? E ? E

The fourth letter in the message is “Look”, the ninth word on the key-word list. The ninth letter in the alphabet is “I,” so we have:

B E L I E ? E

The sixth letter in the message is the word pair: “Answer Answer.” This is 2 and 2 or 22. “V” is the 22nd letter in the alphabet. So putting it all together, we have:

B E L I E V E

Harry’s message to his wife was to believe! What a creative way to affirm the continuation of consciousness after death!

The message also had another part, one word that was not encoded: “Rosabelle.” “Rosabelle” is the name of a short love song that Bess sang for Harry in their very first show together. It was also Harry’s very personal name for Bess.

So the full message was: “Rosabelle, believe!”

## **The Houdini Afterlife Experiment Declared Successful**

In a seance at Bess’ home on Monday, January 7, 1929, Ford and Fletcher not only brought forth the entire message, they also explained the decoding method with the list of ten key-words and went through the detailed steps of decoding the message. This, they claimed, was only possible because of the direct help of Houdini and his mother, who were present with them in spirit form.

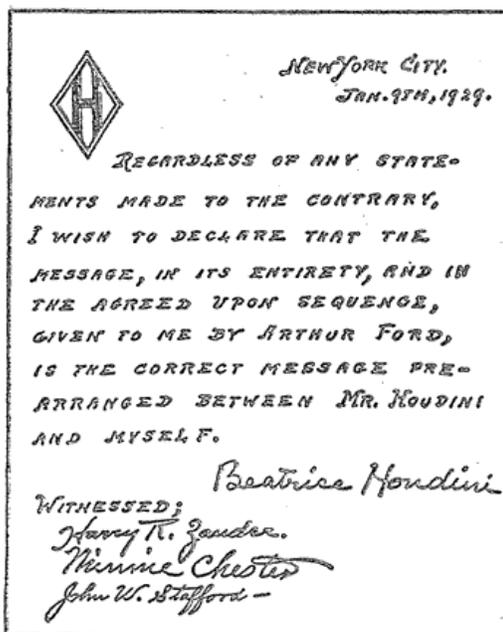
The spirit of Harry handled the occasion as if it were a very special show. There were romantic moments with Bess and a theatrical flare to the presentation of the message and meaning. The theatrics actually involved the direct participation of Bess, as an assistant, very much like one of their real acts together.

Immediately upon receiving the message, Beatrice affirmed in front of several witnesses that it was correct. That evening (Monday January 7), Bess gave an interview to the New

York Times and, speaking of the words delivered by Ford, she said, "They are the exact words left for me by Harry, and I am absolutely convinced that my husband talked to me and that there is life beyond the grave."

The newspaper reported this interview on Wednesday, January 9, 1929, and quoted Mrs. Houdini extensively. Of interest to me is that the article ends with Mrs. Houdini stating that her family and friends were "very skeptical" about spirit-communication. This means that at this time, she is going against the grain of peer acceptance with her newly espoused belief that Harry did come through.

On Wednesday, January 9, 1929, 26 months after Houdini died, Bess signed a brief document, which appears to be on Houdini letterhead, that clearly states the message is accurate:



Facsimile of statement made by Mrs. Houdini the day after receipt of the message. Witnesses: Mr. H. R. Zander, Representative of the United Press; Mrs. Minnie Chester, life-long friend of Mrs. Houdini and Mr. John W. Stafford, Associate Editor of *Scientific American*.

Here is what the document says:

"Regardless of any statements made to the contrary, I wish to declare that the message, in its entirety, and in the agreed upon sequence, given to me by Arthur Ford, is the correct message prearranged between Mr. Houdini and myself." (Signed) Beatrice Houdini

It is also signed by three witnesses: Mr. H. R. Zander, a representative of United Press, Mrs. Minnie Chester, a life-long friend of Mrs. Houdini and John W. Stafford, associate editor of *Scientific American*.

This is a very strong statement formally supported by four important people. So why did the mainstream choose not to believe? Ah, a very good question, indeed. Let's talk more about that.

## **Were People Trying to Muddy the Waters?**

From the beyond, Harry predicted that when the successful communication was revealed to the public, there would be efforts to invalidate the results and charges of fraud would come forth.

On January 10, 1929, New York Graphic reporter Rea Jaure, in a story headlined "Houdini Message A Big Hoax!" wrote that Ford had come to Jaure's apartment for an interview and that Ford confessed that he paid Mrs. Houdini some money for the code. Two people who had hidden in the apartment to witness the interview undetected signed sworn statements supporting Jaure. Yet Ford's attorney produced three witnesses who claimed that Ford had been elsewhere at the time of the interview and an anonymous man stated that he had been paid to impersonate the medium, which caused the confusion.

Ford claimed that the man who impersonated him and thus fraudulently caused the misleading newspaper story confessed his hoax in return for immunity from criminal prosecution.

My opinion is that if Ford hoaxed it, he would not admit it to a reporter; he would just continue to lie. So I find this story to be suspicious.

In response to the article in the New York Graphic, Mrs. Houdini wrote an impassioned private letter to the famous columnist, Walter Winchell, stating emphatically that the message she received from Ford was definitely the one previously agreed upon and that she had not revealed it earlier to Ford or to anyone. She insisted that there was no fraud, as others had claimed.

A New York Times article from January 15, 1929, reported that Mrs. Houdini strongly believed that there was no fraud involved. The article states, "No one but her husband and herself could possibly have known the details of the code. Neither overtly nor covertly could it have been gleaned, she said. To this argument she clung."

Still, it was stated by others that Bess admitted that she accidentally leaked it to the press one year earlier. I personally find this very hard to believe. How could anyone accidentally discuss something so complex? Sure, it's possible that she could have leaked the short message, "Rosabelle, believe!" but that is not enough. She would have had to leak the entire secret message, the decoding method and the list of ten key-words. It is just too much for me to believe that she accidentally leaked all that.

By the way, another point of contention is whether the message was prearrange in its exact, complete form or if it was going to be a surprise to Bess. Obviously, if it was not prearrange in its exact form, it might be much easier to hoax. Bess' signed document and several subsequent quotes underscore that the exact message was prearranged but there is one conflicting newspaper report that she only knew that it would be ten words long without knowing what it would actually say.

## **Joseph Dunninger Claimed that the Code Was in a Book**

Joseph Dunninger, a magician and close friend of Houdini, thought Ford hoaxed the message by getting the code out of a book that was published in 1928. The title of the book is, "Houdini: His Life-Story" by Harold Kellock and was written with the help of Mrs. Houdini. I obtained the book and found that the part that deals with the code is very brief. (The online endnotes contain a link to the pages that I scanned so you can see for yourself what the book contains.)

It talks about how Harry and Bess communicated on stage with secret visual and spoken signals and states, "When one (person) was out of view of the other, the spoken code was used. Their code words for numbers, which the Houdinis kept secret for thirty-five years, were as follows." Then the book lists the ten key-words that you see listed above. After the list, we have one more sentence: "By combining these (words) within sentences, they could signal any one number or combination of numbers." (Note: The Houdini's were actually together for about 32 years: early June 1894 to October 31, 1926.)

That is the totality of the information in the book about the code. It is important to note that the book says nothing about any of the following:

- That the code can be used to form words, not just numbers
- How the clever coding method works to form the words
- That they used the code for the afterlife experiment
- That the secret message would start with the un-encoded word "Rosabelle"
- That the secret message would encode the word "believe"
- The actual secret ten-word message

None of that was in the book!

Yet we can be sure that as soon as Dunninger said that the code was in this book, many people concluded that Ford was a fraud without looking any further. I doubt that Ford even read this book and even if he had, in my opinion, it just doesn't offer enough information for him to form the prearranged secret message.

The suspicion that Ford was a fraud was so strong that two weeks after the message was delivered, Ford was expelled from the Manhattan Group of the United Spiritualist League. Yes! Like-minded people kicked him out of their own group! Yet he was quickly reinstated when no substantial evidence was found against him.

## **Mrs. Houdini Muddies the Waters**

What Harry did not predict was that Bess herself might invalidate the results because of the social pressures placed upon her to remain in the mainstream. These social pressures are very real and come in many forms.

Remember, Harry and Bess did not believe in this while he was alive and their social circles probably had few supporters of spirit-communication. If you believed in it, you were considered a 'nut'. This is a very serious demotion in the eyes of society. It is not an easy thing to shift from being held in high regard to being demoted to a 'nut'. Almost everyone will do anything to avoid becoming an outcast.

Let's examine Bess' shift from initially affirming the genuineness of the spirit-communication to denying that any valid evidence existed to support it.

The first indication that there might be a problem with Bess' honesty came on Jan 10, 1929, just three days after the message was received. The New York Times reported that Mrs. Houdini would not pay the \$10,000 prize that had been offered for about 2 years since, she claimed, the offer was withdrawn several weeks earlier on the advice of some Spiritualists who wanted the motivation for the spirit-communication to be free from monetary gain.

I find this to be a bit suspicious. Let's suppose that she did not want to pay Ford the money for whatever reason. She might at first make the statement that the prize had recently been withdrawn, even if it had not. Then, fearing that that might not be enough to prevent Ford from still trying to make a legal claim to the money, she later switched to the position that the communication was not genuine, even if it was. Of course, there are other possible scenarios.

The first newspaper report that I could find that Bess had clearly changed her position came 14 months later. The New York Times, on March 18, 1930, reported, "Numerous attempts to convince Mrs. Houdini that her husband is communicating through a medium were made, she said, but she steadfastly denied that any of the mediums presented the clue by which she was to recognize a legitimate message."

Notice this story does not say, "Other people could have known the code in an ordinary way." It says that all the messages were not correct, which is in direct conflict with the signed document of January 9, 1929, and the newspaper reports of that time. Did she think that people would just forget those reports? Very strange.

By the way, the same brief article states that she is giving up hope of communicating with Harry. Yet she held high profile public seances on the anniversary of Harry's death for seven more years.

Since Bess is not consistent, her credibility is greatly diminished. Did she ever tell the truth? If she really was tricked by Ford and still unaware of it, her initial support would have been sincere but incorrect. If Ford's message was legitimate, her initial support would have been both sincere and correct. And again, there are other possible scenarios.

No matter the reason, it is clear from the record that Bess shifted dramatically from being initially supportive to later denying the validity of the results.

## **Mrs. Houdini Holds Annual Seances**

I am suspicious about the fact that Bess continued to have public seances every year on October 31st, the anniversary of Harry's death. None of them were successful.

At the last seance in 1936, Bess concluded the worldwide radio broadcast by saying, "Yes, Houdini did not come through. My last hope is gone. I do not believe that Houdini can come back to me - or to anyone. The Houdini shrine has burned for ten years. I now, reverently ... turn out the light. It is finished. Good night, Harry!"

Later, she proclaimed, "Ten years is long enough to wait for any man."

But why would she have seances at all if everyone knew the secret message after 1929? It was in the newspapers. Sure, it might be exciting to have a chat with Houdini about other things besides the secret message but it would be difficult to prove anything.

So it seems to me that Bess was acting in a suspicious way. The seances, in which she acted as the medium even though Ford or others might have been much more qualified, allowed her to remain in the public eye. When Harry was alive, she was very dear to him but she was not that important to the public. With Harry on the other side, she stepped fully into the Houdini spotlight yet she was all alone and did not have anything to do.

Did the annual seances allow her to be in the public eye and feel important? She used them to publicly state that she had not yet received a message from Harry. This statement allowed her to keep her social standing and avoid being labeled a 'nut'.

The seances also allowed her to appear open minded. By holding this position, the seances would attract the attention of believers, disbelievers and those who were simply curious - the widest audience possible. And by acting as the medium herself, rather than using a genuine medium, she practically insured that the seances would all fail and the process would continue the following year.

Beyond the brief interaction with Ford, Bess did not appear to be interested in any research or experiments with psychic mediums. She even told her friends that if a medium ever claimed to have a message from her after she died, it would not be true. "When I go," she said, "I'll be gone for good. I won't ever try to come back."

In the end, she clearly wanted to distance herself from the belief in spirit-communication.

## Arthur Ford's Involvement

Another interesting aspect of the story comes from Arthur Ford himself. He first enters this story on Feb 8, 1928, when he received a short message from Houdini's mother plus the word "forgive."

This message came through when Ford was giving a reading for a small group of friends. The reading was not intended to have anything to do with Houdini, who had died 15 months before.

The spirit of Houdini's mother intruded into the reading and asked for her message to be sent in a letter to Bess. Bess knew that Harry, while he was alive, was looking for a medium that could deliver the word "forgive" to him from his mother. Houdini's mother emphasized this word and asked for it to be in all capital letters and in quotes.

Bess responded to Ford with a letter that validated the message from Houdini's mother by saying, "Strange that the word 'forgive' is the word Houdini awaited in vain all his life. It was indeed the message for which he always secretly hoped, and if it had been given to him while he was still alive, it would I know, have changed the entire course of his life - but it came too late. ... I might also say that this is the first message which I have received among thousands which has an appearance of truth."

Thus Bess signed two documents affirming two messages from the beyond, not just one. But were the messages genuine spirit-communication?

Eleven months before this letter, on March 13, 1927, The Brooklyn Daily Eagle published an interview with Mrs. Houdini. In it, she mentioned that any genuine afterlife communication between Houdini and the spirit of his mother was to include the word "forgive." Ford denied any knowledge of this article or knowledge of any arrangement between Houdini and his mother.

While Ford's denials may, indeed, be true, we now clearly see that it was possible for Ford to know this important piece of information by ordinary means. Because of this, it cannot be proven that this first communication was genuine. Although this puts a cloud over Ford and thus the Houdini afterlife experiment, it should be noted that it has not been proven to have been a hoax and, most importantly, it does not bear directly on the main message between Harry and Bess.

This initial contact between Ford and Bess in Feb 1928 allowed Ford to stand out in the crowd in Bess' eyes but surprisingly, neither Ford nor Bess put any immediate effort into making further progress on contact with either Houdini or his mother. This makes me believe that Ford and Bess did not work in cahoots. I think they would have taken the next step more quickly if that were the case.

In the later part of 1928, over a period of several months and eight sessions, Ford and Fletcher slowly got all the words of the secret message but Ford did not have the decoding method so he did not know what the message actually said. Two of Ford's associates delivered the encoded message in person to Bess on Sunday, January 6, 1929, and she said that it was right but she did not decode it for them. They asked her if Ford could visit her soon in order for them to proceed together. She agreed.

Two days later, on Tuesday, January 8, Ford went to Bess' home along with other witnesses. Through Fletcher and Ford, Houdini playfully and romantically asked Bess about the word "Rosabelle" to which she responded by singing the little love song by that name. The lyrics were inscribed on the inside of her wedding ring. Next, Harry repeated the secret message and then theatrically decoded it for the first time. Bess immediately confirmed that the message was genuine and signed the document on Wednesday, January 9, 1929.

That was the same day that the newspapers reported the success. The New York Times quoted Mrs. Houdini as saying, "Since Harry's death two years ago I have received hundreds and hundreds of messages from mediums, but today (Tuesday, January 8) for the first time the message was repeated exactly by Arthur Ford, minister of the First Spiritualist Church, while in a trance at my home. They are the exact words left for me by Harry, and I am absolutely convinced that my husband talked to me and that there is life beyond the grave."

### **Did Ford Hoax It?**

If the spirit-communication was not genuine, Ford would be the key player since the message came out of his mouth. Bess could have been actively involved with Ford by giving him the message ahead of time or Ford could have gotten the message another way without spirit-communication and simply tricked Mrs. Houdini.

Now of course, Bess knew if she gave the secret to Ford but if she did not do so, she may not have known if Ford cheated in some other way. But if she knew she had not given the complex secret to anyone and was confident that the secret was, indeed, still secret, imagine the emotional impact of hearing Ford, Fletcher and Houdini bringing forth the secret message with Harry's mannerisms and showmanship, which she, as his wife and co-performer, may have recognized as accurate. For someone who did not believe in spirit-communication for fifty years, all that might have come as quite a shock. Would it be enough to make a new believer or would the desire to remain in the mainstream win out?

And let's briefly touch upon one scenario put forth in the book, *The Secret Life of Houdini* (2006), by William Kalush and Larry Sloman. In 1927, Ford went to England for a tour and met Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, who publicly gave him glowing praise. In the book, the authors claim that Doyle sent Ford, now his protegee, to Bess. This was easy to do because Doyle already knew Bess. According to the book, Ford seduced her and she fell in love with him. Then the two of them conspired to fool the public with the

contrived seance. At the time, Bess was almost 54 and over twenty years older than Ford. While stranger things have happened when fame and fortune are the ulterior motives, I simply do not find this scenario even remotely possible. There is absolutely no evidence that the two were involved romantically at any time.

## **Other Problems with Ford's Character and Actions**

It might also be worth noting that in 1931, after the Houdini incident had passed, Ford was seriously injured in a car accident where his sister lost her life. His recovery involved the medical use of morphine and Ford later had considerable trouble with both morphine and alcohol addiction.

I cannot say to what extent, if any, his spiritual abilities were hampered by the use of drugs and alcohol but it would seem to me that they would most likely be diminished, perhaps greatly so. If his skills were gone or almost gone and his judgment was impaired by alcohol, he might resort to fraud to continue his mediumship career.

This may have been what was behind the sharpest criticism of Ford, which came after his death in 1971. A few years earlier, in 1967, Ford held a seance on Canadian National Television that involve James Pike, who had resigned as an Episcopal Bishop. Pike's son had committed suicide in 1966 and on the TV show, Ford brought forth a fake message from the son. It fooled Pike and he was so impressed that he gave Ford a strong endorsement.

After Ford's death, researchers found evidence in Ford's own notes that Ford hoaxed this seance by getting information about the son by ordinary means ahead of time and presenting it on the television show. As damaging as that is, however, it still does not bear directly on Ford's work with Houdini. Yet it most certainly adds another cloud of suspicion.

## **Conclusion**

It is beyond the scope of this essay to discuss every angle of every possibility and obviously, there are so many contradictory claims that whichever way you want it, you can find your justification!

I personally think that there is a reasonable chance that this experiment was a genuine demonstration of spirit-communication. My opinion is that perhaps Bess was never able to truly reconcile her personal experience of receiving the legitimate communication and her desire to not be seen as a 'nut' by most of society. So she switched from being initially supportive to intentionally preventing the clear validation of the experiment and her place in the mainstream was preserved. The financial aspects of the prize money may have also added to her desire to switch her attitude, actions and statements.

While no clear conclusion can be drawn in the Houdini case, I think that it is much more important for us to look into modern, scientific investigations of the afterlife. If you are interested in current research into mediums and spirit-communication, I recommend the book *The Afterlife Experiments* by Dr. Gary Schwartz, Ph.D. Gary works at the University of Arizona and you can get more information online.

I also want to mention one of the most interesting and possibly most convincing method of afterlife research called “cross-correspondence.” It involves one spirit communicating with more than one medium, sometimes as many as a dozen, and delivering only a partial message to each medium. The mediums are told to send the partial message to a central location and the puzzle is put together. One of the most famous cases of cross-correspondence dates back to the first three decades of the 1900s and resulted in over 12,000 pages of spirit-communication. It is known as the Myers case and you can find more information on the internet.

I would like to finish by paraphrasing the final words of Harry Houdini as brought forth by Fletcher and Ford at the end of that successful session.

These are the words of Harry Houdini:

*“Tell the whole world that Harry Houdini still lives and he will prove it a thousand times and more. In my life, I was perfectly honest and sincere in trying to disprove the survival of consciousness, and I resorted to tricks to prove my point for the simple reason that I did not believe communication was possible. I am now sincere in my desire to undo this mistake. Tell all those who lost faith because of my mistake to lay hold again of hope, and to live with the knowledge that life is continuous. That is my message to the world, through my wife and through this psychic medium.”*

To this, I would also like to add a few words of my own:

Harry Houdini, the world famous escape artist, escaped death itself. And so will all of us!

Thanks for listening! And have a magical and mystical day!



Thomas Razzeto

Written January 20, 2007 and revised August 28, 2007