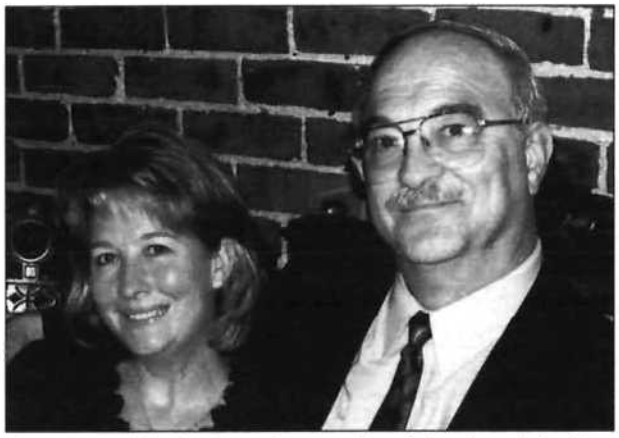
Intuition: The Case of the Unknown Daughter

In the fall of 2003, my life was transformed by the news that I was the father of a beautiful, thirty-six-year-old daughter. She had confronted her mother on the basis of "intuition" that told her the man who helped raise her was not her actual father. Instead, as soon proved by DNA testing, we discovered that she was *my* child. As one who had long been skeptical of much that is labeled *intuition*, I had to admit that *something* had just happened—something both wonderful and mysterious. With the approval and assistance of my daughter, Cherette, I decided to investigate. As I learned, understanding intuition depends in part on how it is defined.



The author and his daughter, who sensed her father through intuition.

Sixth Sense?

To New Age writers like Patricia Einstein, author of *Intuition: The Path of Inner Wisdom* (2003), intuition is an "inner awareness" that functions as a "sixth sense"—that is, a form of extrasensory perception that includes psychometry (an alleged psychic skill in which information is gleaned about people, or even places or events, by touching objects that are associated with them).

Like other New Agers, she maintains that people have auras (or energy fields) that stem from a larger "universal energy flow" which the ancient Chinese termed *chi*. "Connecting with your intuition," she declares, "is the act of tuning in to the never-ending flow of universal energy." Intuition has frequencies, she explains, and so, "In a sense, tuning in to intuition is like tuning in to a radio station" (Einstein 2002, 1–2, 40–41, 105).

Actually, Patricia Einstein is no Einstein. Although she insists that "Instances of psychic healing and psychokinesis (telepathic movement of objects) have been well documented" (Einstein 2002, 37), she herself provides no documentation. In fact, such claims have been repeatedly discredited. For instance, many ballyhooed psychokinetic marvels have been exposed as the product of deceivers using magic tricks (Randi 1982; Korem 1988).

Much effort has been expended in the search for extrasensory phenomena, including the pioneering work of Britain's Society for Psychical Research (SPR), founded in 1882, and the scientific research of Dr. J.B. Rhine at Duke University in the 1930s. Rhine was a sincere and dedicated, but credulous, parapsychologist. His first published report on the subject, coauthored with his wife Louisa, was "An investigation of a 'Mind-Reading' Horse," appearing in 1929. They believed the mare, Lady Wonder, was telepathic. However, magician and paranormal investigator Milbourne Christopher (1970, 39–54) visited Lady undercover and determined that she simply responded to subtle cues used by her owner to relay information that had been gleaned from the subjects.

Rhine's later card tests engendered considerable controversy, but proof of ESP did not materialize (Christopher 1970, 19–37). Despite the work of others who have followed in Rhine's footsteps, ESP remains unproved, and its existence has not been accepted by mainstream science. (See for example, Kurtz 1985; Hansel 1989; Stenger 1990.)

Nevertheless, the belief that intuition is a psychic process persists. It ranges from the relatively harmless, such as

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New Age shops touting gemstones like hematite and tiger's eye as having the power to enhance intuition, to the dangerous, such as "medical intuitives" who claim to diagnose illness by reading a person's aura (Nickell 2001).

Dual Processing

But if intuition is not a sixth sense, what is it? Does it exist at all? Do people merely make guesses, then count the hits and disregard the misses? Certainly, our hunches are not always accurate. Elizabeth Loftus, past president of the American Psychological Society, cautions: "Intuition is hot. But often it is perilously wrong." She recommends the book *Intuition* by David Myers who, she states, "marshals classic and contemporary science and masterfully shows us why." And skeptic Michael Shermer wrote for the *Los Angeles Times* Book Review, "Myers' book brilliantly establishes intuition as a legitimate subject of scientific inquiry."

As Myers relates, many studies show that quick, impressionistic judgements—while often mistaken—can nevertheless predict some behaviors more successfully than rationally analyzed ones. Myers (2002, 4) observes that we have two quite different ways of knowing things. He explains:

> . . . [R]ecent cognitive science reveals a fascinating unconscious mind—another mind backstage—that Freud never told us about. More than we realized over a decade ago, thinking occurs not on stage, but off stage, out of sight. . . . [S]tudies of "automatic priming," "implicit memory," "heuristics," "spontaneous trait inference," right-brain processing, instant emotions, nonverbal communication, and creativity unveil our intuitive capacities. Thinking, memory, and attitudes all operate on two levels (conscious and deliberate, and unconscious and automatic)—dual processing, today's researchers call it. We know more than we know we know.

As noted psychologist Robert A. Baker told me—with specific reference to my daughter's intuitive revelation—we humans are constantly responding to subtle cues. Unconsciously, we collect and assemble bits of data—much like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle—often arriving at the realization of some larger concept. No single piece of information may be sufficient, but, taken together, the clues may produce something greater than the sum of its parts.

In using intuition, because we are not *consciously* (i.e., deliberately and analytically) processing data, the result can be quite startling—bordering on revelation and seeming quite mysterious. When my daughter's mother, Diana, asked her why she thought her father was not really hers, she replied, "I don't know. It just came into my mind."

Identifying the Clues

In the case of my daughter's intuition, I sought to identify the clues that might have led to her sense of "knowing" that she had a different father.

Diana describes her in growing up, as not having much of a "whimsical mode," but instead being typically serious and inquisitive. Among the things she wondered about were her eyes, which matched neither her father's nor her mother's. (See photo. They resemble my ancestors' even more than mine.) Although many people remarked that she and her sister did not look like sisters, she knew she resembled her mother and did not become suspicious of her parentage—at least not consciously. Nevertheless, her younger brother was adopted, so at some point the idea that she could have been adopted too would have presented itself. (In fact, her sister once thought all three were adopted.)

There were other clues. At Cherette's wedding, when she was twenty-six, a friend of her mother's inadvertently revealed a family secret: that her parents had not been married when she was conceived. Again, that bit of information was not in itself very revealing, but it can now be seen as potentially suggestive, another piece of the puzzle.

Following some medical tests, in March 2001, she announced to her mother that she had learned her blood type. Although she did not then ask her parents' blood type—so she did not yet know hers was different from each of theirs and incompatible with her father's—nevertheless the announcement may have put a thoughtful expression on her mother's face that Cherette then read, unconsciously. At least it subtly presented, however obliquely, the issue of genetics.

In June 2003, while she was talking on the phone with her mother, the fact that she was conceived before her parents were married again came up. She said she did not care about that, so long as her father was indeed her father. Her mother assured her that that was so and that he had raised her. In a way that would be appreciated by fortunetellers using "cold reading" (an artful method of fishing for information), Cherette thought she detected some possible equivocation and challenged: "What else haven't you told me?" and "Mom, who is my daddy?"

Soon, Diana conceded there was a chance it was someone else, but that there were only "two possibilities": If her father was not her actual father, she said, then it was a young poet she had been with for a short time before resuming her relationship with her old boyfriend, Cherette's supposed father. At this, Cherette says, she felt that she probably did have a different father, and by the time her mother had tracked me down both were convinced I was indeed Cherette's "Daddy" (as she now calls me)—a fact we confirmed by DNA testing.[1] (Not entirely lost on me during our Thanksgiving 2003 first meeting was the irony that as a paranormal investigator I was myself being investigated—the result of intuition, no less!)

Assessment

Although not arrived at consciously, nevertheless my daughter's sense that she might have had a different father could *logically* be inferred from the data: That her brother was adopted raised the question of her own parentage; since she resembled her mother but not her father, and especially since her eyes were not similar to either's, she could expect that she might have a different father; that possibility was enhanced by her parents not having been married when

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(The absence of a flash was later confirmed when data were released from sensitive surveillance satellites that constantly scan Earth from above.) They also evidently did not make craters when they struck the Moon. Finally, the amount of water vapor they would dump in the upper atmosphere was inconsistent with the known dry conditions in the stratosphere.

Although many scientists assumed that the dark spots were just noise in the spacecraft detector, they were unable to work with the raw data to verify this speculation. The media story persisted, aided by NASA news releases supporting the mini-comets. While they shook their heads in wonderment, few of Frank's colleagues wanted to challenge him personally. His advocacy of mini-comets became an obsession—he even wrote a book called *The Big Splash* to market his ideas directly to the public. There seemed to be no polite way to make the story go away. One scientist tried, however, to counter with humor, when he proposed that the mini-comets be called Louis A. Frank Objects, or LAFOs.

Impact News in Great Britain

Based on the large sampling of press reports from both sides of the Atlantic collected by anthropologist Benny Peiser of Liverpool John Moores University, there seem to be significant differences in the press treatment of impact science stories between the United States and the United Kingdom. Many British science reporters like to play such stories for their humorous possibilities, as opposed to the straight science reporting that is standard in America. Ridiculing the "boffins" seems to be a popular way to treat scientific controversy. Another approach is to start off a story in a hyperbolic vein, only tempering the initial overstatements several paragraphs down. For example, an opening assertion might be made that an asteroid is on a collision course with Earth, but a few paragraphs later it is revealed the the probability of the impact is only one in 100,000. My impression is that the British reading public does not take this very seriously, and that their news reporting in general is intended to be more entertaining. A problem can occur, however, when such stories are picked up in other countries, where this tongue-in-cheek tone might be taken seriously. Let the reader beware.

Space science research dealing with impacts often makes a good story, especially when it is controversial. The public is likely to find science more interesting if they realize that research is carried out by real people working in a competitive environment. The controversy is very real in some cases, such as finding the cause (or causes) of the great PT mass extinction. In other cases, such as the KT mass extinction and the contemporary rate of impacts on Earth, a consensus exists based on multiple lines of evidence. While there are still many media-worthy stories, we should be skeptical of reports that the consensus has been overthrown by a single new result.

As Carl Sagan often said, "extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence." A similar admonition might be that before revolutionary theories are widely publicized, they need to be given a reality check. This is best done by the scientists deciding whether to issue a news release. But if the scientists are not self-policing, the burden falls upon the journalists to filter the signal from the noise, or upon the skeptical attitude of the reader.

Note

1. This quote is from a perceptive article ("In Extinction Debate, Dinosaurs and Science Writers are the Losers") by Rob Britt at Space.com, 14 October 2004; see www.space.com/scienceastronomy/dinosaur_debate_041014.html. □

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she was conceived; and, I believe there were other, more subtle clues.

If my assessment is correct, it further demonstrates that clues can indeed be rationally assembled unconsciously to uncover a mystery. Myers (2004, 128) observes "that, more than we've realized, our lives are guided by subterranean intuitive thinking." Giving "evidence of intuition's powers," he says, are "*right-brain thinking*—split-brain persons displaying knowledge they cannot verbalize"; *thin slices*—detecting traits from mere seconds of behavior"; "*intuitive expertise*—phenomena of nonconscious learning, expert learning, genius"; and, among many others, "*creativity*—the sometimes spontaneous appearance of novel and valuable ideas" (Myers 2004, 127).

However, he also cautions against the perils of intuitive thinking, including "powerfully flawed intuitions about gambling" (Myers 2004, 225). He warns of the following: "*Memory construction*—influenced by our present moods and by misinformation, we may form false memories and other dubious testimonials"; "*misreading our own minds*—often we don't know why we do what we do"; "*hindsight bias*—looking back on events, we falsely surmise that we knew it all along"; "*overconfidence*—our intuitive assessments of our own knowledge are routinely more confident than correct"; "*illusory correlation*—intuitively perceiving relationships where none exist"; and others (Myers 2004, 128).

Cautions notwithstanding, I must admit to a new appreciation of intuition, without which I would not have known of my wonderful daughter—and two grandsons! It is enough to warm an old skeptic's heart.

Note

1. For a follow-up, see my poem, "The Discovered Daughter" (with a brief commentary), in *Family Matters: The Newsletter of the Secular Family Network* 7:3 (Fall 2004), p. 7.

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