

Biography of Minnie Harrison – (1895 – 1958)

Minnie Rose Harrison began as a clairvoyant and clairaudient, then developed to a trance medium, producing trance voice, direct voice, telekinesis, apports, spirit lights, spirit writing, partial materializations and finally full materializations with voice. She was the medium of the “Saturday Night Club,” a circle of friends that met weekly in Middlesbrough, England beginning in April 1946 and continuing until her death from cancer in 1958.



“If she had sought publicity, Minnie Harrison would have been one of the sensations of the immediate post-war years,” Professor David Fontana, a leading psychical researcher of more modern times, remarked.¹

According to Tom Harrison, her son, Minnie had been clairvoyant and clairaudient since her teenage years. Four of her siblings were also mediumistic, including Agnes, (“Aunt Agg”) who was 10 years older than Minnie. Agnes Abbott worked as a professional medium at the Marylebone Spiritualist Association in London and was one of the mediums who sat for the Church of England’s investigation of mediums in 1937. She died in 1942 at age 57. “I well remember in later years when I was ‘chairing’ the meetings at Middlesbrough Church how nervous my mother

would be, afraid that no spirit would communicate,” Tom Harrison wrote. “As soon as she stood to give that contact with the spirit world she would go into the sleep-like state of deep trance and her sister, Agg, would control her and give all the contacts for the people there.”²

The Saturday night home circle began after Tom was discharged from the British army, in which he served as an officer during World War II. The circle members included Minnie, her husband Thomas (“Tosher”), Tom Jr., Tom’s wife, Doris, Sydney and Gladys Shipman, Florence Hildred and William Brittain Jones, the latter a senior surgeon and superintendent of Middlesbrough General Hospital. Jones was instrumental in taking infra-red photographs of the ectoplasm and materializations. “We were told that for the ectoplasmic materializations there was a team of about 20 chemists and scientists working behind the scenes to enable those spirit visitors to build and meet us face to face,” Tom Harrison wrote.³

He added that, although Jones was a scientist, there was never any intent to have more professional researchers join the Circle, thereby subjecting Minnie to extremely uncomfortable controls, such as roping her to the chair, taping her mouth, etc. “We were all aware of her sincerity to sit for the benefit of our spirit friends and we all knew the phenomena were absolutely genuine,” he explained, adding that their objective was to have regular meetings with friends on the other side, not a scientific research circle.⁴

Indeed, it is difficult to believe that Minnie Harrison would be motivated to carry out imposture with her son, husband, and close friends on a weekly basis for some 12 years, especially considering the fact that most of the sittings were at the home of the Shipman’s. Since such phenomena would require much in the way of stage props,

there would be no way that the Shipmans would not know about it. If the Shipmans were in on the “fraud,” the question then turns to their motivation, since there was no profit incentive connected with it. In fact, guests were rare during the first two years the Saturday Night Club met.

While Minnie had demonstrated the trance voice before, the first indication that she was capable of producing the direct-voice came at that first Saturday meeting when Aunt Agg spoke through Minnie and told the group to sit with a trumpet (a light weight megaphone) in future meetings. A spirit named Sunrise, said to have been a North American Indian when alive, became her primary control for both the direct voice and later the materialization sittings. “He was our circle leader and doorkeeper in the spirit world, protecting my mother from any interfering or malevolent spirits who do not realize the serious damage they can cause by their spontaneous actions,” Tom Harrison explained, adding that Sunrise’s English was very limited in the beginning but improved over time.⁵

It was not until their 32nd meeting, on December 7, 1946 that they witnessed their first fully formed materialized spirit person. “We sat for at least half an hour and nothing had happened – which was most unusual,” Tom Harrison wrote, further mentioning that the room was illuminated with a red light. They then saw a disc begin to build into a vertical white column which grew to about five feet of solid ectoplasm. “We then expected the column to simply gradually diminish and let the ectoplasm return to my mother – but that did not happen,” Tom continued the story. “The column remained still for a few minutes while we all stared at it, getting more and more excited. Then, as I was watching it, the top of it twisted towards me and I could just see there was the semblance of a face in it, but I could not have recognized who it was.”

Two hands and arms emerged from the column. Tom grasped the hands and then realized he had something in them – four carnation apports. “The hands and arms went back into the

column of ectoplasm and it then shrunk,” Tom further recorded, “slowly towards the floor, as the ectoplasm returned to my mother and we were all left exceedingly breathless after such a unique experience.”⁶

They later learned that it was Aunt Agg who had materialized. It took another five months for Aunt Agg to make herself fully recognizable and to walk away from the cabinet and carry on a conversation with the members of the circle. Other friends and relatives then began to materialize. Tom Harrison noted that Aunt Agg was able to tolerate more light than others and that “first timers” needed a much dimmer light. It took another 10 months or so before Sunrise would allow infra-red photography, as there was concern that the flash required for infra-red photographs would injure the medium.

Roy Dixon-Smith, a British career military officer serving in the Indian army, was one of many guests sitting in with the Saturday Night Circle after guests were allowed in 1948. His wife Betty had died during her early 30s in 1944 while they were living in India. After returning to Scotland and depositing his four-year-old daughter with her aunt in Falkirk, Dixon-Smith went to London and began exploring mediumship. Over the next five years, he had numerous evidential sittings in which Betty communicated. They came through clairvoyance, automatic writing, trance voice and even the direct voice, but as of July 1948 he had not yet experienced the materialization phenomenon he had read so much about. Therefore, he requested a sitting with the Saturday Night Club at the home of the Shipmans.

“For evidential reasons I revealed no details of my private life before the séance was over, and for the same reason they would have refused to have listened to them, since they were just as anxious as I for genuine evidence,” Dixon-Smith wrote in a 1952 book, *New Light on Survival*.⁷

His first sitting with Mrs. Harrison took place on October 9, 1948 with 10 people, including himself and the medium, present. The first phase of the sitting was the “direct voice” in which a

trumpet hovered in front of the sitter to be addressed. Some voices came through loud and clear, while others were difficult to understand. When the trumpet settled in front of Dixon-Smith, Sunrise gave an "excellent description" of Betty and then allowed her to speak directly. "Betty then attempted to speak to me," Dixon-Smith recorded. "After prolonged and seemingly painful effort and a few exclamations to the effect that she couldn't do it, she managed to say, 'I am your Betty'."⁸

At the conclusion of the direct-voice phase, the red light was turned on and the room was well illuminated, so that Dixon-Smith had no difficulty in observing forms and faces. Minnie Harrison, who had been in the circle and not in trance during the direct-voice phase, then took her place behind the curtain.

Dixon-Smith observed a half-dozen materializations of friends and relatives of the other sitters. "I rose from my chair, walked up to them and shook them by the hand, and we made conventional remarks to each other just exactly as everyone does when first meeting a stranger," he wrote. "They were swathed in white muslin-like draperies and cowls...They were solid, natural, and except for their apparel, exactly like ordinary living people. In fact, had everyone been dressed similarly, it would have been quite impossible to distinguish these materialized forms from the rest of the company. Their hands felt perfectly natural and life-like in every respect and their handgrips were very firm. They smiled, laughed, and chatted to me and the others; all their features, complexions, and expressions being perfectly clear in that ample light...There were mutual cheery good-byes as they departed, sinking apparently through the floor in precisely the same manner as the forms at Buckie."⁹ (Just before sitting with the Saturday Night Club, Dixon-Smith sat with another materialization medium in Buckie, Scotland.)

Then the guide announced the coming of Betty and asked them to sing, "I'll walk beside you." As they sang, Betty emerged from the cur-

tain and stood silently in full view. "I rose from my chair and walked up to the figure, taking the extended hand in mine," Dixon-Smith further recorded the experience. "I examined the hand, and it was just like Betty's and quite unlike the medium's. I stared into the face, and recognized my wife. We spoke to each other, though what we said I cannot remember, for I was deeply stirred and so was she and her voice was incoherent with emotion."¹⁰

One of the sitters asked if Dixon-Smith could kiss her and Betty responded in the affirmative. "I then kissed her on her lips which were warm, soft, and natural," Dixon-Smith went on. "Thereupon she bent her head and commenced to weep, and in a moment or two she sank. I watched her form right down to the level of the floor at my feet where it dissolved, the last wisp of it being drawn within the cabinet."¹¹

In concluding his book, Dixon-Smith wrote that he realizes that the reader will find it difficult to believe such amazing accounts of life after death as he has related, but, nevertheless, they are true.

Tom Harrison said that he knew most people would resist believing it. "But I know it happened," he emphatically stated. "I was there. I met these real people, materialized from the world beyond death, hundreds and hundreds of times. And I have the written records, the tape recordings, the photographs, the solid objects – gifts teleported through the dimensions – as evidence."¹²



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¹ Harrison, Tom, *Life After Death – Living Proof*, Saturday Night Press Publications, 2004, p. 2.

² _____ p. 21.

³ _____ p. 60.

⁴ _____ pp. 65-66.

⁵ _____ p. 60.

⁶ _____ pp. 98-99.

⁷ Dixon-Smith, Roy, *New Light on Survival*, Rider and Co., London, 1952, p. 217.

⁸ _____ p. 217.

⁹ _____ p. 218.

¹⁰ _____ p. 219.

¹¹ _____ p. 219.

¹² Harrison, p. 9.