

The Gold Leaf Lady

American philosopher and parapsychologist Stephen Braude describes his investigation of a Florida housewife who exhibits psychic effects, notably the spontaneous, involuntary and seemingly inexplicable appearance on her skin and clothes of flakes of golden-like brass foil.

Introduction

The so-called ‘Gold Leaf Lady’ is a Florida housewife named Katie. She is not a professional psychic and has never demonstrated any aspirations to be one. However, she seems to have a large repertoire of psychic abilities. Katie frequently receives ostensibly apported objects; seeds reportedly germinate rapidly in her cupped hands; and observers have also claimed to see Katie bend metal. Katie is also reported to be both a healer and a medium or channel, and she has occasionally helped law enforcement officials solve crimes.

Moreover, although Katie dropped out of school after the first grade and is functionally illiterate, during her mediumistic moments she has been observed and videotaped writing quatrains in medieval French, ostensibly from Nostradamus, and similar in both style and content to Nostradamus’s actual quatrains. But the phenomenon for which she is best known—and which has received the most intense scrutiny—is the spontaneous and instantaneous manifestation on her body of a thin, golden-colored foil. This sudden eruption of foil has been observed at close range by many people, and as a skilled magician confirmed, it seems impossible to fake under the best conditions in which observers have seen it appear.

An Important Preliminary Distinction

Some truly spectacular and apparently incredible phenomena have been reported throughout the history of parapsychology. Of those, perhaps the most intriguing are ostensible *materializations* and *apports*. Materializations are cases where objects seem to be produced out of nothing. Apportations (sometimes called ‘teleportations’), on the other hand, would be cases where already existing objects disappear from one location and reappear (usually suddenly) in another location.

Many confuse these two phenomena, and it is easy to see why. For one thing, depending on how we explain the process of apportation, it might be thought to involve materialization. According to one theory, an agent (living or dead) performs a feat similar to a *Star Trek* transporter, disintegrating an object into micro-level components and then re-assembling the object at another location. That last stage, of course, might count as a kind of materialization (or re-materialization) of the object. Another reason some confuse materializations and apports is that objects show up unexpectedly in both, without the usual transitions or intermediate stages we perceive when things move from one place to another.

But despite these similarities, materializations and apports still differ in important respects. For example, although objects appear unexpectedly in both and seem to come from nowhere, only in the case of apports do objects actually change location. By contrast, materialized objects seem to be produced *de novo*; they are evidently *created*, not moved. Sometimes these novel objects appear fully-formed, and other times witnesses observe them in the process of formation. In fact, sometimes the newly-formed objects emerge so slowly and gradually that observers have been able to describe their evolution in considerable detail. But at other times the objects seem to appear nearly instantaneously.

Another important difference between materializations and apports is that the former exist only for a short time. Eventually (usually, pretty quickly), materialized objects de-materialize, as if their solidity is inherently unstable. In fact, in many cases observers report that the materialized objects formed or coalesced out of a cloudy or wispy mass, and then later returned to that diffuse state and disappeared entirely.^[1] Similarly, observers sometimes claim that the initially cloudy shapes emerge from, and then later seem to be reabsorbed by, a part of the subject’s body. By contrast, apports only move from one place to another; they do not entirely vanish or dissolve and disperse. Some alleged apports *have* been described in the process of taking shape at their new location. But there may be no case in which a new—not transported—object was *observed to materialize and take solid form*, and then did not reportedly de-materialize later.^[2]

The reason this distinction matters is that Katie’s manifestation of golden-colored foil presents a thorny problem of classification. The foil seems to be created *de novo* and develop like materialized objects, but unlike those objects it does not later disappear. Indeed, investigators have retrieved large quantities of the material by removing it from Katie’s body. However, unlike apported objects, the material does not seem to come from anywhere. Moreover, nothing investigators have learned about the case has helped to resolve this puzzle. Nevertheless, the good news is that, because the foil does not disappear, it has been possible to examine it carefully.

Profile

Katie was born to a poor family in the mountains of Tennessee, the tenth of twelve children. When she was in the second grade, Katie's mother developed serious psychogenic paralysis, and so Katie dropped out of school in order to administer physical therapy to her mother, attend to her mother's other needs, and take care of most chores around the house. However, because Katie never resumed her formal education, she has remained functionally illiterate. She knows how to write her name, she knows the letters of the alphabet, and she knows numbers. But Katie cannot synthesize letters into words, and she can barely do simple arithmetic. She has earned a living primarily doing housework.

Katie's investigators have all held a very positive view of her, both as a person and as a psychic subject. They regard her as intelligent and honest, and she has always been fully cooperative. Moreover, unlike many who find themselves the center of academic scrutiny and media attention, she has always been refreshingly modest and non-opportunistic. Significantly, Katie was never a professional psychic and never demonstrated an interest in becoming one. The only money she ever received in her capacity as a psychic was compensation for time away from work, and occasionally a modest honorarium for the indignity of submitting to intimate physical examinations as investigators search for concealed foil or other objects. Thus, it seems fair to say that Katie neither reaped nor sought financial reward for her psychic activities. Furthermore, unlike some who either are or at least fancy themselves to be highly psychic, Katie has never argued for any particular philosophical or religious point of view. On the contrary, she has shown no pretensions about her understanding of the role of psi in the grand scheme of things. And although Katie attends church, she does not seem particularly religious.

Psychic Detection

Katie has also worked successfully with police and other authorities in the investigation of crimes. One of the more spectacular of those efforts took place near Vero Beach, Florida on John's Island, the location of many luxurious homes. It is worth describing in some detail. The information below about this case came from an interview Stephen Braude conducted in January, 1988 with the island's Director of Security, Jerry Burr.^[3]

Burr and his associates were having trouble solving a burglary from one of the island's homes, and although he said he was skeptical at first, he had heard about Katie's abilities and figured there was nothing to lose by asking for her assistance. All he told Katie initially was that a valuable ring had been stolen from a house. He did not tell her in which house the burglary occurred, and he gave her no other information about the case. He said he wanted to see what Katie could do with a minimum of information.

Burr then took Katie for a drive around John's Island. They were accompanied in the car by two other security officers and Burr's assistant, but only one other passenger besides Burr knew where the burglary had occurred. Moreover, they did not drive directly to the house. They simply drove around the island, waiting to see if Katie could identify the house in question as they drove near it. Burr told Braude he would often take his foot off the gas pedal and coast along the streets, to avoid slowing down suggestively near any particular house, and he did this as well when they reached the street where the burglary had occurred. Burr said he also looked straight ahead as they neared the house, not wanting to give Katie any additional clues.

As they coasted past the burgled home, Katie identified it. She correctly claimed that the room from which the ring was taken was blue and decorated in a Japanese motif. She also described the box from which the ring was taken, and she accurately described the maid as a short, heavy-set blonde. Moreover, although Burr eventually told Katie there were two suspects, Katie claimed that there were three, all of them friends of the family. One she described carefully; another she described more sketchily, and Katie claimed that a third person was driving the getaway car. Burr told Braude that Katie was so detailed and accurate in her descriptions that at first he thought he should regard her as a suspect. He said he failed to realize initially just how good Katie was. In any event, Burr claimed that Katie's information allowed him to solve the crime and recover much of 5,000 worth of stolen jewelry.

As they drove away from the house, they were traveling near the ocean, and suddenly Katie asked Burr to stop the car and pull into a nearby driveway. This was at 1:15 pm. Katie claimed she could hear helicopters and smell marijuana very strongly. She said the smell of pot made her very ill, and she asked the other passengers if they were having similar perceptions. But no one else heard the helicopters or smelled the pot. Katie then claimed that in two weeks marijuana would be washed up on shore near where they were parked. Burr took note of the time of Katie's prediction, but he said he did not think anything more about it until two weeks later, at noon, 25 bales of pot washed ashore near where they had parked, and the area was swarming with police helicopters. Of course, drug traffickers have been known to operate near

the Florida coast, and it is hardly unprecedented for pot to be discovered and seized in this way. But it is also not an everyday event or (arguably) even a common occurrence, and it is certainly intriguing that Katie's prediction was accurate almost to the hour.

Investigating the Foil

Katie's principal investigator for more than a decade was psychiatrist, parapsychologist, and UFOlogist Berthold Schwarz, who lived near Katie in Vero Beach, Florida, and who throughout his career had been a sympathetic magnet for psychic claimants. He wrote some obscure and rather unclear articles about Katie,^[4] and it wasn't until Braude published his book *The Gold Leaf Lady* that a clear and detailed account of the case was both readily available to the public and which also carefully addressed predictable skeptical concerns about the phenomena.

The key facts are these. The gold-colored foil appeared on various regions of Katie's body—primarily on her face, arms, hands, and torso, but occasionally on her legs as well. It sometimes manifested in layers (that is, foil appeared on top of other patches of foil), and eruptions sometimes covered reasonably large areas—for example, 4 x 5-inch patches or larger. Unlike some of Katie's other unusual capacities, manifesting the foil had always been beyond her control. It could happen at any time, and (not surprisingly) Katie regarded it as an affliction. For one thing, the foil's appearance was often uncomfortable, accompanied by a burning or itching feeling and sometimes leaving behind reddened skin when it was removed. And for another, it was frequently embarrassing. Because the foil could appear suddenly while Katie was shopping or dining out, Katie never knew what to say when that happened, and she naturally preferred not to deal with such situations at all. Sometimes, months would pass without any appearance of the foil, but then it would begin again and continue for weeks or months before Katie would be relieved of the affliction.

It is tempting at first to think that the foil was exuded through Katie's skin. And in fact, it often appeared that way to those who saw it manifest and who noted (for example) how Katie's skin sometimes started to glisten and develop tiny droplets before thin layers of foil were visible. But reportedly the foil appeared also on Katie's clothes and on objects in her vicinity (and, Braude was told, sometimes at distant locations). Braude never observed those externalized manifestations, but Schwarz showed him sealed containers from around his office, with large quantities of foil inside.

However, there is another reason to doubt that the foil was exuded through Katie's skin. Several different analyses of many samples reveal that the gold-colored foil is actually brass, roughly 80 percent copper and 20 percent zinc. Considering the quantity of foil removed from Katie's body, for Katie to have 'sweated' the foil through the pores of her skin, she would have needed lethal amounts of the metals in her system. Besides, blood work and other medical tests of Katie never turned up the abnormalities one would expect if Katie had been 'manufacturing' the brass from substances already inside her.^[5]

Braude had Katie's foil analyzed at several labs, and none found anything obviously remarkable about it. Investigators looked at it under scanning electron microscopes at two University of Maryland campuses, and analytical chemists on Braude's campus also began work on a careful study, which (alas) was never completed.^[6] Braude also had the foil scrutinized at Denver University, Johns Hopkins University, and the U.S. National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST). His experience with the Johns Hopkins Department of Materials Science and Engineering is especially noteworthy.

At first, department Chair Robert Green and his colleagues were intrigued when Braude introduced them to the details of the case, including the strong reasons for thinking that the foil manifestations were not fraudulent. They graciously agreed to see whether anything in the foil's underlying structure distinguished it from commercially available samples of brass leaf, usually called 'Dutch metal' or 'composition leaf.'^[7] And their analysis determined that Katie's foil had the same granular structure as ordinary pressed or rolled leaf, like that of the commercial samples.

That was an important piece of information, because it ruled out one skeptical hypothesis as to how Katie might have fraudulently caused the foil to appear as witnesses looked on at close range. According to that hypothesis, Katie could have dissolved brass in a solution which she applied to her skin prior to test sessions. Then, the solution would evaporate, apparently miraculously leaving behind areas of brass. But as the JHU scientists pointed out, any brass evaporated out of a liquid applied to Katie's body would have a *crystalline* structure, not a pressed or rolled structure.

Braude reasoned that the next examinations of the foil should be conducted by analytical chemists. He thought this might shed light on the material's origin and classification within parapsychology. His first collaborator was Michael Epstein, a senior chemist with NIST. Braude provided Epstein with 30 different samples of Katie's foil, taken on 30 different occasions from various parts of Katie's body. He recommended looking first for similarities or differences between the samples, to see what (if anything) they suggested. Braude also provided Epstein with several control samples taken from

Maryland and Pennsylvania art supply stores. He thought they should see whether the control samples differed significantly from the samples of Katie's foil. And eventually, he thought it might be helpful to analyze control samples purchased in Florida. Conceivably, they might help resolve the issue of where Katie's samples came from in case she was apportioning the material (or, perhaps less likely, purchasing it) from a remote location. For example, if Katie's foil was chemically similar only to Florida samples produced by a certain manufacturer, that would be worth knowing, even if it still left open the question of how Katie's foil found its way onto her body.

Of course, this proposed course of analysis was a fairly long-term project, and Epstein could only work on it in his spare time, both at NIST and with his students at St. Mary's University in Maryland. The job remains unfinished, Epstein has left NIST, and so it is clearly premature to draw any sweeping conclusions. Braude subsequently passed some foil and control samples to chemist William LaCourse at UMBC, who along with several of his graduate students, began their own follow-up analysis. However, that enterprise was interrupted by the tragic events of 9/11/2001, after which analytical chemists had more urgent forensic matters to attend to. The preliminary results of the UMBC study can be found in the Appendix to *The Gold Leaf Lady*. And that is where the detailed analysis of Katie's foil stands at present.

Observing and Documenting the Foil

Braude and others have tried following Katie around with video recorders, hoping to document one of the foil's unpredictable spontaneous occurrences. Usually, that proved difficult and annoying to all concerned, and the recorders never seemed pointed at Katie (or the right spot on Katie) at the right time. As a result, it became obvious that a somewhat more formal arrangement would be necessary.

The usual strategy developed for observing Katie was as follows. Katie would be ushered into a back room in Bert Schwarz's office. A chair awaited her in the center of the room, and one or more video cameras would be ready to go, usually mounted on tripods. Since Schwarz was a physician and Katie's confidant, he would search her for hidden foil in a way that would be inappropriate for other observers. He would first examine Katie's body and hair carefully, and then he would ask Katie to remove her false teeth so that he could examine them and look carefully in Katie's mouth. Then the other observers would carefully check Katie's hands and arms, which (since Katie always wore a short-sleeve T-shirt for these sessions) was easy enough to do. They would also ask Katie to lift her shirt to just below her breasts, so that they could determine that no foil was present on her torso or on the underside of her shirt.

Of course, this scrutiny never led to fully relaxed interactions, especially when it was followed by the unremitting observation (staring, actually) of several people along with video recording. Nevertheless, Schwarz and the others would engage Katie in a somewhat forced casual conversation, hoping that something would appear on the exposed regions of her body, or at least manifest under her shirt. But whether or not it manifested before everyone's eyes, observers would eventually ask Katie to lift her shirt, to see whether there had been some undercover activity during their conversation. Schwarz and others reported that on many occasions large quantities of foil would at that point be spread over Katie's abdomen and back. It was clear that if that amount of foil had been hidden under Katie's shirt, it would not have escaped detection by any moderately attentive person.

Braude never observed foil on the several occasions when Katie lifted her shirt. But he did observe stigmata that had not been there originally, both of a cross and of a butterfly.^[8] He also observed several instances of automatic writing in medieval French, and some other displays of ostensible mediumship. Nevertheless, Braude observed spontaneous eruptions of small amounts of foil during informal interactions with Katie, and under circumstances in which chicanery seems highly unlikely. For example, on one occasion Braude was seated across a table from Katie, no more than three feet away. And while they were talking, a small piece of foil appeared suddenly on Katie's face. Braude knew that Katie's hands were nowhere near her face when this happened. In fact, he was certain they were in full view on the table the entire time. He knew also that if her husband, seated next to her, had placed the material on her face, he would have seen it clearly. But nobody's hands had been anywhere near Katie's face. So Braude knew that the material hadn't been placed there; it *appeared* there, evidently without normal assistance.

Regrettably, Schwarz had never succeeded in capturing the emergence of foil on video. Moreover, despite many hours spent making videos of his sessions with Katie, he never produced unbroken footage beginning with the initial search of Katie and continuing through the eventual appearance of the foil when she lifted her shirt.

However, on one occasion Braude managed to videotape the appearance of foil at fairly close range. But unfortunately that unique piece of evidence is problematical. Only one tripod-mounted video recorder was available on that occasion, and Braude operated the camera. As usual, he examined Katie's face, hands, arms, torso, and the underside of her T-shirt

after Schwarz conducted his more intimate inspection. During the ensuing artificially casual discussion between Schwarz, Katie, and Braude, Katie apparently began experiencing an irritation in the outer corner of her right eye. Evidently, it was of the sort that often foreshadowed the appearance of golden foil. As Katie began to rub that part of her eye, Braude zoomed in on her face, hoping to catch something worthwhile at close range. At that point, the tape shows that no foil was near Katie's eye. Repeatedly, Katie wiped the corner of her eye with her finger and then looked at the finger to see if any foil had been deposited on it. On one of those occasions, a very tiny speck of golden material was visible near Katie's eye when she removed her finger. And the next time Katie wiped her eye and removed her finger, the spot had grown to about a quarter-inch square.

Now, Schwarz and Braude had examined Katie carefully beforehand, inspecting her face and hands. Without doubt, no foil was present in those areas at that time. Also, it was obvious that Katie had no access to foil during their conversation and taping. She was in full view, her arms exposed in a short-sleeve shirt, and there was nothing in her vicinity from which she could have retrieved some foil, placed it inconspicuously on her finger, and thereafter transferred the foil to her eye. In fact, as the wide video shots before and after the foil's appearance show clearly, Katie was seated in the middle of the room with no other objects around her. Still, once the video recorder zoomed in on Katie's face, there was no way to determine whether Katie was doing something suspicious when her hand was out of view. Braude was recording Katie with only one camera, in a tight head-shot. So when Katie looked at her finger to see if something had been near her eye, she took her hand out of camera range. Thus, viewers of the video have no way of confirming, from the video alone, that Katie didn't dip her finger into some gold-colored foil that had managed to escape Braude's and Schwarz's detection, and then transfer it to her eye.

However, if one is willing to accept Braude's testimony and trust the minimal observational prowess required to determine that Katie had no foil hidden on her hands or face beforehand, the brief video footage is an important piece of evidence. It documents an instance of what many report having observed, often in more florid form, and quite often at very close range. And it may be the only record of the foil in the process of formation.

No doubt skeptics can insist that Katie somehow managed to hide a small piece of foil and surreptitiously place a speck of it, and then a larger piece, near her eye. But as a highly skilled magician later confirmed (see below), and as any person who handles the foil can easily determine, the foil is clingy and very difficult to manipulate. So no one should be satisfied with the confident-sounding pronouncements of magicians that the phenomenon is easy to fake. Indeed, confidence is easier to feign than the appearance of Katie's foil under watchful eyes and after a close bodily inspection. Magicians need to *demonstrate* that they can do what they claim is easy to do. Significantly, the only serious attempt by skeptics to replicate the phenomenon did not even come close to success, as will be mentioned below.

Why Golden Foil?

All of Katie's psychic functioning began after she married her second husband, Tom. Evidently, this has been a difficult and perhaps psychologically abusive relationship. Schwarz knew many of the details, but of course they were revealed to him in confidence. At any rate, it appears that Katie's case falls within one of the more (actually, one of the few) established regularities discovered in parapsychology.

In many respects, Katie fits the profile of a typical poltergeist agent. With very few exceptions, poltergeist disturbances center around a person, usually a troubled teenager or adolescent—in any case, someone suffering from emotional turmoil that apparently cannot be resolved through conventional means. Thus, it seems that poltergeist agents unconsciously and somewhat spasmodically manage to discharge their intense pent-up feelings. In a kind of brute psychic flailing about, they cause objects to move, break, burst into flame, and so on.

Naturally, teenagers are not the only people experiencing emotional turmoil. Clearly, marriages can also be a fertile ground for deep emotional distress. It is not surprising, then, that Katie's case seems to reveal potent real-life forces shaping both the emergence and the character of her apparent spontaneous PK.

The foil first appeared on March 5, 1986, in the midst of an active period of paranormal physical phenomena—usually, familiar, poltergeist-type disturbances, including apparent apports and the movement of objects. One of those events was the mysterious appearance of a carving set. But when Katie showed it to her husband Tom, he seemed to dismiss her, remarking 'What good is it if it isn't money?' Two days later, the brass foil appeared for the first time.

The underlying psychology of this is not difficult to fathom. Symbolically, the brass foil satisfied Tom's demand for something valuable. But at the same time Katie did not have to worry about being the goose that lays the golden egg. After all, the pressure of being a psychic subject is weighty enough as it is. If Katie could really have produced material of value,

the additional pressure and scrutiny could have been psychologically overwhelming.

Furthermore, the strategy of producing brass rather than gold seemed to play an interesting role within Katie's marriage. It is not difficult to conclude that Katie felt trapped within that relationship. Despite occasional attempts to establish her own independence and on some occasions actually to leave Tom, she seemed unable to extricate herself fully from the marriage. It is also reasonable to assume that no matter how much residual attachment Katie might have felt toward her husband, she still harbored considerable anger and resentment toward him as well. If so, the brass foil might have been a way of thumbing her nose at Tom, expressing her anger or contempt, or retaliating against him. Brass was not what he wanted; in fact, it is a kind of 'fool's gold.'

Although Katie clearly showed no interest in making a name for herself as a psychic, even the reasonably suspicious might still wonder about possible, and perhaps less obvious, secondary gains. Perhaps there are other reasons why Katie might have wanted to manufacture evidence of golden leaf appearing on her body. For example, it would clearly be foolish to claim that Katie received no psychological benefit from her apparent psychic abilities, even if she was genuinely disinterested in fame and fortune. For one thing, Katie enjoyed the respectful attention from people who ordinarily would never have come into contact with her, including scientists and other academics. And it is likely that Katie held the somewhat naive view that these people are distinguished and deserving of admiration, simply because they are members of the scholarly community. (Those who are actually members of that community seldom make that mistake.) Furthermore, Katie's psychic achievements might also have helped to shift the balance of power in her marriage in ways she found advantageous, although Braude's impression was that Tom wavered between liking the attention he received in Katie's wake and resenting the fact that Katie was the real person of interest. In any case, those secondary gains seem rather fragile, relatively minor, and insufficient to motivate fraud—at least in Katie, though perhaps not in someone less modest and more driven to seek the spotlight. Besides, fraud seems out of the question, for the reasons already mentioned and discussed further below.

Television Documentary

Braude's last visit to Katie was in 1990, when he joined the crew from the television series 'Unsolved Mysteries'. The popular television show was preparing a segment on Katie, and they seemed especially interested in the gold-colored leaf. The producers planned to combine dramatizations of incidents from Katie's life with interviews not just of Katie, but also of eyewitnesses and alleged expert commentators. They also hoped to include footage of Katie 'in action'—again, especially the foil manifestations, since they were clearly the most novel and spectacular of her phenomena. And to help gather evidence and lend credibility to the process, they enlisted the services of Los Angeles magician Christopher Chacon and psi researcher Dean Radin.

Braude found Chacon to be skeptical in exactly the right way: on the lookout for possible fraud, but still open to the possibility of phenomena that could not be explained away as sleight-of-hand. And of course, he had an extensive knowledge of conjuring. Schwarz provided Chacon with samples of Katie's foil and someone provided him with purchased commercial samples of Dutch metal. That enabled him to determine easily that the clingy material was very difficult to manipulate. He experimented with methods of moving it around his hands and transferring it surreptitiously from his hands to other parts of his body. But he had great difficulty handling the material even when he was not trying to conceal or disguise his movements. It seemed clear to him that it would have been exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, for Katie to have inconspicuously placed the leaf on her body under the usual conditions in which she had been observed. And he certainly had no counter-explanation to the many reports of the material appearing instantaneously and at close range to observers.

Radin, Chacon, and the crew hoped to capture the foil appearing during their filmed interviews with Katie, but the first days of shooting passed without success. However, some crew members reported brief and minor manifestations of the material when they were relaxing with Katie between periods of filming. So it seemed clear that 'Unsolved Mysteries' had not arrived during one of Katie's unpredictable periods of quiescence. As a result, there was considerable anticipation among the crew that they would get some good footage during a six-hour planned experiment.

As it happened, the experiment was fiasco, demonstrating how the needs (or at least the personalities) of the entertainment industry may conflict with the demands of research. However, the design of the experiment had been sound enough. Schwarz had managed to secure the use of a conference room at a nearby hospital. The crew removed all the furniture from the room, including a very large and heavy conference table. The hospital administrator was horrified when he learned of this, but the point was to have nothing in the room except what the experimenters and crew brought into it. It also enabled Radin and Chacon to examine the room carefully, so that they could state confidently that nothing

suspicious—and certainly no hidden foil—was discovered there.

As far as the test was concerned, the plan was for Katie, Chacon, and Radin to be in one half of the room during a six-hour period. Three video cameras, a camera operator, and Braude were to be in the other half of the room. Katie would be dressed in a flimsy garment, like a hospital gown, provided by the crew. That would prevent Katie from using her own clothes to sneak foil into the room. As an additional precaution against Katie furtively bringing foil into the experimental area by hiding it on or in her body, she was to undergo a fluoroscopic examination before entering the room. Once in the room with the cameras rolling, Chacon and Radin were to directly supervise whatever Katie did, and Braude (the only one present whom Katie already knew and trusted) was there to help Katie feel more at ease under what were likely to be somewhat strained, or at least artificial, test conditions with people she had only recently met. For toilet breaks, a female member of the crew was appointed to accompany Katie and certify that she had not accessed a hidden supply of foil during that time.

Initially, it looked as if everything was running smoothly. Katie felt encouraged that some foil would appear during the six hours, the cameras were ready to record the event from different angles and different degrees of closeness, and Radin and Chacon were ready either to endorse or debunk the phenomena if they occurred. But problems arose right from the beginning. Katie arrived at the hospital at 9 am, in a good mood and ready to go. But the ‘Unsolved Mysteries’ director had other plans. He wanted to shoot various set-up segments before embarking on the experiment. First, he wanted to shoot Katie entering the hospital. Then he wanted to shoot Katie undergoing a fluoroscopic examination intended to detect internally hidden foil. And finally, he wanted to film Katie walking down the hall to the conference room and entering the room. Of course, preparing each one of those video segments is a time-consuming process. The equipment has to be moved to the appropriate location and set up, the lighting and sound have to be just right, and the shooting must proceed to the director’s satisfaction (possibly with multiple takes). Radin and Braude pleaded with the director to shoot these later, since they were required only for dramatic continuity and since Katie was ‘in the mood.’ But the director insisted on doing things his way.

As a result, the experiment scheduled to begin at 10 am actually started at about the time it was supposed to have ended—at 3:30 pm! And by that time, Katie’s mood had changed completely. At that point she was tired and irritated by the delays and by the apparent insensitivity of the production team. And not surprisingly, nothing happened during the experiment. The entire six hours passed very slowly. Chacon and Radin tried gamely to relax Katie and chat with her, and Braude spoke to her as well, hoping to introduce an element of familiarity and trust. But it seemed as if the atmosphere had been poisoned. In fact, it is unclear whether Katie realized that those in the room had nothing to do with delaying the start of the experiment.

It should be mentioned that Katie never seemed to be a particularly delicate psychic subject. After all, she had worked successfully with incredulous strangers in law enforcement, and she had produced foil and apparent mediumistic messages for many people she had only recently met. But she also did not thrive on the skeptical challenges or tests that seem to inspire, say, Joe McMoneagle.^[9] Apart from her apparent psychic gifts (or afflictions), Katie did not seem especially unusual psychologically. In particular, and like virtually everyone else, she could be inspired or discouraged by the situations in which she found herself. Not surprisingly, then, her psychic abilities could flow freely on some occasions but not on others.

Paul Kurtz

So the planned six-hour test was a failure, and the crew had wasted money and time, and squandered an opportunity to study a promising subject under excellent conditions. Nevertheless, the ‘Unsolved Mysteries’ team produced a generally favorable segment on Katie, highlighting her psychic detective work with local authorities, the mysterious foil, and Katie’s apports. Someone close to the production told Braude that the original version of the segment was almost entirely positive, but that the relevant NBC executives felt it needed to be more skeptical. As a result, the team filmed last-minute interviews with the skeptical philosopher Paul Kurtz, some of his students, and a magician colleague from the Committee for Skeptical Inquiry (CSI, formerly CSICOP).

Kurtz’s onscreen appearance was not one of his finest moments. First, he acted as if he really knew the details of the case, claiming, ‘I don’t think there’s any objective, hard evidence that this is exuding from her pores. Most likely, the point is, someone wants other people to believe this, and so they put this metallic paper on them.’ Now, since Kurtz had only just been introduced to the case and had never met Katie or spoken to anyone involved in evidence-gathering, he had no basis for making any authoritative pronouncements at all. It is likely that he knew nothing about the foil except that he had been shown one or two photos or video clips of Katie with the foil already on her body. And it seems clear that he knew

nothing about the conditions under which the foil had been observed. That is the only reasonable explanation of the irrelevant demonstration he arranged with his students, allegedly designed to show how the phenomena could be produced by stealth. The students purchased some Dutch metal, and one of them demonstrated for the camera how she had placed the foil on her body, secured it there with hair spray (except for the foil placed on her tongue), and walked around in that condition for several hours. This, she claimed, is what Katie must have done.

But that demonstration was irrelevant and disregarded the details of the case, especially the crucial facts (a) that many have reported observing the foil appear instantaneously and at close range, and (b) that no foreign chemicals (like hair spray) had been found in analyses of Katie's foil. In fact, Kurtz and his students displayed no interest in even learning those details, which would have been easy enough to do. After all, there were no secrets about who had been studying Katie and examining the evidence. That information was known to the production team of 'Unsolved Mysteries,' and Kurtz could have found it out with a simple inquiry.

Conclusion

As things stand now, the study of Katie remains frustratingly incomplete. More could be done—and needs to be done—in the analysis of the foil taken from her body. If nothing else, that might provide a clue as to whether we should classify the substance as an apport or as a materialization. And of course, one would hope for better video documentation of Katie's foil in the process of formation or manifestation. Nevertheless, the evidence for the paranormal origin of the golden leaf is compelling, even in its current and still somewhat preliminary state. The anecdotal testimony is too extensive, and the conditions of observation have been too clear and straightforward, for the reports to be attributed to malobservation, fraud, or collusion. Too many honest eyewitnesses have seen the foil appear at very close range, or have seen it on Katie's body after prior examination and under conditions that clearly prevented her from surreptitiously placing it there.

Bert Schwarz has since passed away and Braude has lost touch with Katie (despite an unsuccessful attempt to 'friend' Katie's son on Facebook). So it seems clear that this case will remain a fascinating but still only partial examination of an extraordinary subject.

Stephen Braude

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References

Footnotes

1.^ For example, in the case of D.D. Home, there are many reports of materialized hands, usually ending at the wrist, carrying objects around the room. The objects were warm and flesh-like, observers could shake hands with them or poke holes in them with their fingers (the holes would afterward close up), and eventually the hands would dissolve in the observers' grasp. For a description and discussion of these and other cases, see Braude, 1997.

2.^ The alleged materializations of Sai Baba might count as an exception. The jewelry and powdery ash or vibuti he ostensibly produced are permanent objects. But those phenomena, even if genuine, may not fall into this category. Witnesses report seeing the objects already formed, not in the process of coming to be.

3.^ Braude, 2007.

4.^ Schwarz, 1985, 1987, 1988a, 1988b, 1998a, 1998b.

5.^ In that respect, Katie's case differs from the case of Mirna Nazzour, a Syrian woman who, inspired by a picture of the Virgin Mary that seems to exude olive oil, goes into a religious ecstasy and while entranced produces unusual quantities of olive oil on her skin. Here, however, it's reasonable to think that the oil was already a significant part of her diet. See Resch, 1997.

6.^ The preliminary results are provided in Braude, 2007.

7.^ The commercially-available foil is typically purchased as an inexpensive alternative option for gilding picture frames.

8.^ As interesting as those manifestations were, they were no more ostensibly paranormal than the many similar occurrences richly documented throughout the history of hypnosis. See, e.g., Braude, 1995; Gauld, 1992.

9.^ McMoneagle, 2000, 2002