

# Ted Owens

Ted Owens (1920–1987) was an American who won notoriety by claiming macro-psychokinetic (PK) powers: an ability to control the weather on a large scale, direct lightning strikes, and cause or predict accidents. He claimed he was the agent of alien ‘space intelligences’ acting through him. Certain observers were impressed by the frequency with which his predictions of future events matched the reality.

Most of the information in this article is drawn from a biography of Owens by parapsychologist [Jeffrey Mishlove](#): *The PK Man: A True Story of Mind Over Matter*.

## Life

Owens was born in Bedford, Indiana, USA on 10 February 1920. His father was a gambling addict. He was raised by grandparents who, he said, both had psychic gifts. His grandmother’s mother reportedly had been known for an ability to find lost objects and predict deaths, and his grandfather was a [dowser](#).<sup>1</sup>

Owens claimed his first psychic experience was a spontaneous levitation at age four, followed by another at age thirteen. He said he had an ‘imaginary friend’ who taught him to read precociously, and that he learned hypnosis by reading about it, going on to perform demonstrations at parties as a teen. By his own account, he graduated from high school by blackmailing a teacher with a photograph of an embarrassing moment.

From 1941 to 1945, Owens served in the US Navy, first assigned to learn electronics at Purdue University, then deployed in the south Pacific in 1943. During this time he felt he had gained mind-reading ability, and contacted parapsychologist [JB Rhine](#) at Duke University, who gave him a job as a typist. Rhine never considered Owens one of his star subjects, and he is not mentioned in any of Rhine’s books. Owens claimed to have PK powers at this time. Mishlove asked other people who’d been with Owens at Duke, and none were able to recall specific instances of him performing PK, though they said that ‘odd things’ happened around Owens, without elaborating.

Owens studied at Duke until 1947, after which he started a construction job in Houston. Here he claimed to have acquired the ability to control lightning by invoking a female spirit named ‘Big Lornie’. In 1963, he claimed, he and his second wife were suffering from blistering heat on a summer day when he decided to invoke rain, pointed his finger at the sky and projected the words ‘rain, storm, lightning’ into the air. A storm followed in a short time, and to ensure it was not coincidence, Owens repeated the feat numerous times in the next two weeks, according to his claim.

By 1965, Owens had concluded that his PK powers came from space intelligences (SIs) who had been trying to contact him from childhood, and who had been the

cause of his sighting a 'cigar-shaped' UFO while driving in Texas in 1955. The SIs telepathically explained to him why they'd chosen him to be their prophet:

I'm an experiment with them – to find out just how much of the PK power a human being can absorb and stand. It took them literally ages to find a human being, myself, with whom they could communicate back and forth.[2](#)

Later he would compare himself with the biblical figure Moses, and Mishlove notes that this comparison 'engendered a belief in Owens that, whatever harmful consequences resulted from his demonstrations, they served a higher purpose'.[3](#) Henceforth Owens felt he need not answer to earthly authorities but only the SIs.

From 1965 to 1969, Owens repeatedly attempted to control storms or produce Atlantic hurricanes, and began repeatedly informing US government agencies about his claimed abilities, to no avail. By 1969, when Owens published his book [How to Contact Space People](#), he had begun trying to document his actions by announcing them in writing to other people beforehand and having witnesses write out and sign affidavits. It is only through seeing this documentation, Mishlove writes, that he was able to put any credence in Owens's claims.

In 1969, Owens gave up regular work altogether to concentrate on paranormal efforts. For the rest of his life, he did so, moving with his children from one place to another in the continental United States.

In 1987, he called a sympathetic tabloid journalist, Wayne Grover, to say that he had moved his family to New York State to be picked up by UFOs. He sent drawings of UFOs by his son and an affidavit from a neighbour affirming local UFO sightings. This was followed by a flurry of phone calls whose contents Grover did not disclose, saying only that the predictions made at that time changed his life.

On 28 December 1987, Owens died of cirrhosis of the liver.

## Claims and Predictions

Mishlove identifies four researchers who were open to receiving correspondence from Owens to document his claimed PK actions, starting in 1968: clinical psychologist Leo Sprinkle, astronomer J Allen Hynek, psychiatrist and parapsychologist Berthold Schwarz and popular UFO author Otto Binder. They kept files up to the early 1970s. Sprinkle and Hynek eventually ceased corresponding with Owens due to his increasingly threatening approach to self-promotion.

From these files, files by other scientists and from his own correspondence from Owens, Mishlove compiled the phenomena he considered the most impressive:

### Lightning Strikes

According to a Philadelphia lawyer, Sidney Margulies, he and Owens were watching a rainstorm in the city on the night of 8 May 1967 when Owens offered to make lightning strike any place Margulies chose, and apparently succeeded, producing the only bolt in the rainstorm. Later Kenneth Batch and Charles Jay, both of Merton, Pennsylvania, wrote in an affidavit that they had witnessed three lightning

strikes directed near the town's city hall after requesting that Owens produce them there, and another in a different area of the sky when they asked him to produce one there.

## **Nixon's Resignation**

Owens's prediction that US president Richard Nixon would resign or be forced out of office was published by Warren Smith in *What the Seers Predict for 1971* and in *Saga Magazine* the same year, before the Watergate scandal became public. Mishlove notes that no other American president had resigned or been forced out of office before.

## **Revenge on Cleveland**

In 30 May 1972, after a disappointing reception to his claims in the American city of Cleveland, Illinois, Owens wrote to several contacts saying he would wreak destruction on the city in the form of heat, drought and people acting strangely. He told another friend there would be electrical disturbances, lightning storms, plane crashes and shipping accidents; he later also predicted odd animal behaviour, high winds and blackouts. That summer, lightning caused three fatalities and an unusual amount of damage, including a blackout; a week-long heat wave was blamed for an unusually high number of people claiming to 'hear the voice of God, receive messages from outer space, or be secret agents on secret missions' phoning City Hall.<sup>[4](#)</sup>

## **Warm Winter**

On 25 October 1972, after US government officials had warned Americans they could face fuel shortages if winter were severe, Owens wrote to Sprinkle and others announcing his intention to create unseasonably warm weather in the nation, particularly Virginia. News reports from the US eastern seaboard did reveal an unusually warm winter, especially in Virginia.

## **Texas Weather**

After being badgered for a demonstration by radio broadcasters in Dallas, Owens wrote to one of them on 12 February 1974 that he would cause freakish weather including heat, storms and lightning attacks, but promised no one would be killed. These things did happen, destroying a good portion of the Texas wheat crop. Some people were killed in car accidents caused by freezing rain.

## **Chicago Chaos**

In a letter dated 8 October 1975, Owens wrote to a radio announcer in Chicago responding to a request for a UFO demonstration. He said he would cause UFO sightings, and that these would be accompanied by people doing strange things; there would also be electromagnetic anomalies, poltergeist phenomena, equipment and human errors at O'Hare Airport. Finally, he promised to sabotage the Chicago Bears football games for several months, without anyone being hurt.

Mishlove notes newspaper clippings reported a 'mysterious radio signal' coming from a bridge in the city, the slaughter of animals by a UFO group from Oregon, unusual traffic jams at O'Hare, unusual weather and a disastrous season for the Bears, characterized by mishaps and ineptness.

## **Freak Storm**

On 1 June 1977, Owens telephoned Charles Powell, the chief of police for Cape Charles, Virginia and told him that he would bring a hurricane to the area. On 6 June an intense storm with high winds and golf-ball-sized hailstones struck the coast, causing five deaths.

## **Australian Drought and UFOs**

An Australian man who identified himself only by the initials BK, wrote to Owens on 9 April 1980, requesting that he act to end a disastrous drought that threatened to turn the southern part of the island into a dustbowl and had killed thousands of kangaroos. BK asked that Owens start on the northern tablelands and the north coast of New South Wales. Sudden storms brought flooding rains, starting in the area that BK had specified; the *Sydney Morning Herald* declared the drought over on 30 May. At the same time, a rash of UFO sightings over Australia was reported by the media.

## **California Drought**

On 30 January 1976, Owens wrote to parapsychologists [Harold Puthoff](#) and [Russell Targ](#) that he would end a drought that was approaching disastrous proportions, with crops and livestock in danger, by using storms, lightning attacks and high winds and rain until the state was 'swimming in water'.<sup>5</sup> On 5 February, as reported in multiple new stories, the first snowstorm to hit San Francisco since 1887 also brought lightning, and was followed by several weeks of snow, lightning, and rain so severe that millions of dollars of damage was caused by flooding and some lives were lost. Many UFO sightings in the area was reported by news media.

## **Florida Drought and Hurricane David**

In early 1979, southern Florida was suffering the worst drought in forty years. Owens proposed to Grover a year-long demonstration of weather control starting 1 March, about which Grover was to write a story for the tabloid paper *National Enquirer*. On 7 March, Owens wrote Grover saying he intended to create electromagnetic oddities, violent freak storms, blackouts, heat waves, hurricanes and UFO appearances. On 15 April, after a request by Grover to end the drought, Owens promised over the phone to send rain in a few weeks: ten days later a storm inundated the coast.

However, Owens felt he had been double-crossed by the tabloid after it killed the story due to a failed UFO filming session. Accordingly, he wrote Grover on 15 May that he'd bring the drought back to Florida. The summer of 1979 was virtually devoid of precipitation, as reported in a newspaper at the time; water rationing was imposed in Florida Keys.

On 22 August, Owens phoned Grover saying that a hurricane he had promised in February, that would not cause 'unnecessary deaths', was now in the making.<sup>6</sup> The monster storm Hurricane David threatened Florida on 2 September; Grover phoned Owens to say that thousands of people would be killed if it struck the state directly. Owens wrote back the next day to say he'd 'cooled the cane',<sup>7</sup> and it did indeed weaken unexpectedly before hitting the state. Grover reported that Owens had phoned to say he'd turn the storm away from where Grover was living; this happened also.

## **Sports Sabotage**

Mishlove devotes a full chapter to Owens's apparent ability to wreak havoc on team sports competitions, noting that this received more newspaper coverage in sports sections than his purported ability to control the weather received on the front pages. Owens said he could not help a team he favoured but could hinder one he opposed by causing human error. Sports writers are said to have witnessed him on different occasions effectively sabotaging the Philadelphia Eagles, the Baltimore Colts, the Los Angeles Rams, the Baltimore Bullets, the Virginia Squires, the Dallas Cowboys and many more teams.

## **Destruction**

In June 1972, Near Chesapeake Bay in Virginia, Owens demonstrated an ability to make PK-energy show up on radar, according to an affidavit by Bill Richards, a friend who had access to the equipment. Owens then predicted that rainstorms and plane crashes as well as other accidents would happen as a result. There were indeed rainstorms, and several accidents including one Navy jet crash. Owens also claimed to have inadvertently caused the crash of a plane and the deaths of more than one hundred passengers in New York. He also warned that he would cause a severe fire season in California, declaring the state would become 'hell on Earth'<sup>8</sup> – due to annoyance at the refusal of newspapers to give him credit for ending the drought.

## **Decline**

As the 1980s progressed, Mishlove reports that Owens became more and more angry that he was not receiving the recognition that he felt he deserved. His communications became more grandiose and threatening. At this time he was homeless, and said the SIs would launch a war on the US if he was not provided with luxurious lodgings and an enormous salary; this war would only end when a book about him, being written by Mishlove and paranormal writer [D Scott Rogo](#), was published.

His relations with Mishlove soured when Mishlove pointed out that Owens's declarations were increasingly failing to materialize, and chastised him for his threats and destructiveness. However, the pair later reconciled.

## **Criticisms**

Mishlove notes that Owens took credit for more events than he himself found reasonable, even assuming such large-scale PK events are possible. He points out, ‘the newspapers are full of unusual events. Every day something unusual occurs, and it is not always the result of psychokinesis’.<sup>[9](#)</sup>

Robert Todd Carroll in his *Skeptic’s Dictionary* calls Owen ‘a man many others would call delusional and in need of professional mental health services’.<sup>[10](#)</sup>

## Video

Mishlove devoted three episodes of his video blog *New Thinking Allowed* to Ted Owens:

[Interview with Stephen Braude](#)

[Interview with Debra Lynne Katz](#)

[Interview with Jason Reza](#)

KM Wehrstein

## Literature

Carroll, R.T. (2016). [Psychokinesis \(PK\)](#). [Web page on *The Skeptic’s Dictionary*, last updated 11 July 2016.]

Mishlove, J. (2000). *The PK Man: A True Story of Mind Over Matter*. Charlottesville, Virginia, USA: Hampton Roads.

## Endnotes

### Footnotes

- [1](#). Mishlove (2000).
- [2](#). Mishlove (2000), 65.
- [3](#). Mishlove (2000), 65.
- [4](#). Mishlove (2000), 96.
- [5](#). Mishlove (2000), 12.
- [6](#). Mishlove (2000), 125.
- [7](#). Mishlove (2000), 128.
- [8](#). Mishlove (2000), 208.
- [9](#). Mishlove (2000), 8-9.
- [10](#). Carroll (2016).