

CORRESPONDENCE

To the Editor:

Has the accurate location of a stolen small harp by someone living 4,000 km away offered a fundamental challenge to sensory system information only neuropsychology?

This case of a non-visually detected location of a stolen harp was recounted by Dr Elizabeth Mayer, then Associate Professor of Psychology, University of California and living in Oakland, a large port in the Bay area, in her book *Extraordinary Knowing* (Mayer, 2007). Her daughter's valuable small harp was stolen during a 1991 pre-Christmas concert. In late February 1992, she contacted Harold McCoy, then President of the American Society of Dowsters, who lived in Fayetteville, Arkansas, some 4,000 km east of Oakland, to ask if he could locate the harp. He requested a street map of Oakland and replied by saying that "It's in the second house on the right on D— Street, just off L— Avenue." She fly-posted two blocks locally, offering a reward for its return, and was contacted by someone willing to act as a negotiator. A meeting was arranged, and she returned home with an undamaged harp.

The effect upon Dr Mayer by this apparently impossible feat of detection was to 'Irrevocably change my familiar world of science and rational thinking ... If Harold McCoy did what he appeared to have done, I had to face the fact that my notions of space, time, reality, and the nature of the human mind was stunningly inadequate' (Mayer, 2007, pp. 3–4). The intellectually comfortable world of mainstream scientific thought that Dr Mayer had taken for granted had no apparent answer, including a basic principle of neuropsychology that the only way in which we can obtain new information about the world external to ourselves is through our sensory nervous system.

Given this outcome, it is worth asking who was Harold McCoy. Arkansas born, McCoy was an ex-army man who had completed twenty-four years of military service as an intelligence officer before retiring with the rank of US army major in the late 1970s to live in Fayetteville, home to the University of Arkansas. Over the years, he had come to believe that he had a gift for healing together with a talent for finding lost objects through the medium of dowsing. In the mid-1990s, he obtained a grant from the State of Arkansas to found the Ozark Research Institute (ORI), Fayetteville, as an educational non-profit

organisation, chartered by the State of Arkansas to conduct classes and research into 'The Power of Focussed Thought'. Before Dr Mayer sought his help, he had been practising as a dowser for thirty years.

In response to Dr Mayer's inquiry as to how he could locate distant objects, McCoy said that in answer to a request to locate a lost object, he needed to engage in the mental procedure of dowsing. When doing so he transitioned into a very different state of mind from his everyday sensory input state of mind, and this was an essential precondition for distant object location. He described it as an "intuitive sense of knowing", saying that once he had entered it, "The rods just show what your subconscious mind knows already" (p. 170). When the rods had indicated the location of a lost object, it would appear in the front of his mind as a clear mental image, and he could then inform the owner of the precise location of the missing item. In an interview with Dolores Cannon (Cannon, 2006), McCoy details the yes/no questions he asked of his pendulum on this occasion and resulting mental imagery while locating the stolen harp. To first determine whether the harp was still in Oakland he says "I used my pendulum to ask and the pendulum said 'yes'." After receiving a posted street map of Oakland together with a photograph of the harp, McCoy says:

I laid that map out on the dining room table, and I held the picture of the harp in my hand and said, "Is this harp in the area represented by this map?", and my dowsing told me it was. So I've got this map laying on this big dining room table ... and I started on the left side of the map and I got a straight edge with a yardstick, and I said, "OK, I'm going to bring this yardstick across the map and when the edge of the yardstick is at the intersection nearest the harp, give me a 'yes'." So I'm bringing that yardstick across, and pretty soon I got a "yes". So I drew a line right down the edge of that yardstick. Then I went to the top of that line with the yardstick, and I was coming down, and when the edge of the yardstick gets to the intersection nearest the harp it gives me a "yes". So this thing was coming down very slowly, very slowly, and pretty soon it said "yes", so I drew another line. Now that X just happened to be in the very centre of an intersection, so I just mentally placed myself in that intersection. I was facing one way, and I just asked, "Is the harp up this street?", and it said "no", so I turned to the right and looked up that street in my mind's eye, and said, "Is the harp up this street?", and it told me "yes". I said, "Is it on the left side?", and it said "no"; "Is it on the right side?", and it said "yes". Y'know, a series of yes/no questions. So I said, "OK, I'm going to count houses on the right side of this street ... the corner house is number one, the next one is number two, etc." I asked the dowsing system can I do this, and it said "yes". So I had a picture of the harp in my left hand, and said "Is this harp in house number one?", and it told me "yes" ... When I got a "yes" I just got a flash of somebody carrying that harp into the house from a pick-up truck. It happens frequently, just another mind phenomena thing.

When McCoy telephoned Dr Mayer to say "It's in the second house on the right on D— Street, just off L— Avenue", he also told her about his momentary picture of seeing a pick-up truck and a man carrying the harp into the house. When Dr Mayer drove to check the location, she saw the pick-up truck in the

driveway, thus confirming the address (this detail is not mentioned in her account of the case).

Following the recovery of the harp, Dr Mayer asked McCoy if he could discover who had stolen it from the theatre during a Christmas concert:

So I told her go to the theatre and get the names of everybody who had a key to that theatre within the last two years ... someone had a key and went and got it. So she went, and she faxed me about fifteen or sixteen names, and so I was just going down the list saying. "Did this person take the harp?", and pretty soon the pendulum told me "yes", so I called her up and told her, "I think this guy might have taken the harp." So she took his name over to the theatre manager, and said, "I think this guy might have taken the harp", and he said. "Oh yeah, he used to be a maintenance man here", so he looked in the card file and said, "Where did you say the harp was found?", and she told him the address, and he said, "That was probably him because that is where he lives." So it works, it really does work [not mentioned in Dr Mayer's account].

Neither the questions asked, the yes/no response of the pendulum that led to the location of the harp and sighting of the thief, nor the resultant mental imagery described by McCoy can be accounted for by sensory-system-only neuropsychology. This implies that sensory system input only is not an absolute requirement for the acquisition of new mental information concerning the external world. There is a different state of mind in which such non-visual location is possible. This implies that which of the two states of mind is engaged seems conditional upon the form of interaction required with the external world. For everyday interaction, sensory system information is essential. But to answer some forms of client need, intuitive 'knowing' is required. When in this state of mind, physical distance is an irrelevant factor. Professional intuitives, dowzers, and healers have learned to transition from their sensory-based mind into the intuitive mind in response to the personal need of someone else. Sometimes, this change of mind may occur spontaneously as in, for example, an involuntary sense of 'knowing' that someone has been taken ill and needs help.

McCoy's intuitive location of the stolen harp indicates that such 'knowing' is possible in mental principle, so can occur in practice. Its factual occurrence gives credence to what, in parapsychology, is termed extrasensory perception (ESP), which can be defined as the acquisition of new knowledge not explainable by present sensory circumstances or prior knowledge. Since its establishment in 1882, the Society for Psychical Research, together with fellow societies in other countries, has collected thousands of reported ESP experiences for which the experiencer could find no sensory-based explanation. Such experiences are studied under the heading of parapsychology, and have been collated according to similarity of ESP experience as in telepathy (mind-to-mind communication), clairvoyance or remote viewing (perceiving beyond the limits of sensory perception), retrocognition (awareness of a past event not known through prior information), and precognition (seeing a future event later

confirmed in detail beyond chance coincidence) (e.g., Feather & Schmicker, 2005; MacKenzie, 1997; Mayer, 2007; Playfair, 2012; Rhine, 1961). There is also empirical evidence demonstrating that ESP is a genuine mental phenomenon (Broderick & Goertzel, 2015; Vernon, 2021). To account for such experiences, a mental faculty termed psi has been hypothesised that can induce an intuitive state of mind during which such phenomena, known as psi phenomena, can occur (Charman, 2025). Unless mainstream neuropsychology can provide an explanation for McCoy's feat of non-visual location, the answer to the question in the title seems to be a definite 'yes'.

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