

THE EXCEPTIONAL MEDIUMSHIP
OF
REVEREND FLORENCE HARWOOD BECKER

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Florence Marie Harwood was born in Reno, Nevada on February 16, 1892. She grew to young womanhood on her family's large ranch in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada Mountains near Susanville, California, approximately 35 miles north of Reno, Nevada. She was the seventh child of a seventh child and was born with a double "veil" or membrane covering her head and face. Being born with a veil has long been associated with psychic and spiritual power. Cora Scott Richmond, a noted medium of the nineteenth century and the first Vice President of the National Spiritualist Association, was born with a veil. Florence Harwood was born with a double veil.

Raised in strict Methodist tradition, the manifestations of spiritual gifts throughout Florence Harwood's childhood and adolescence greatly distressed her family. Exorcism was attempted a number of times. Around 2 years of age, she would wander off to be found preaching a learned and spiritual sermon near a stile. She would tell her parents of coming events. When these events came to pass, she would be punished for the fulfillment her prophecies by being sent to the attic.

Little Florence did not mind being sent to the attic. There, a beautiful Spirit, Lady Cologne, would manifest and sit beside her. Lady Cologne taught Florence many higher Spiritual Truths and described for her the life of service that she was to lead.

Florence Harwood married Donald Smith when she was 16. Marriage at ages 14, 15, and 16 was common for girls in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. She quickly had 5 children. A set of twins were still-born prematurely, a daughter Lolly passed to Spirit within a few hours of birth where she would grow into a powerful angelic Spirit and, from the Spirit side, assist her mother in her Spiritual work. Two sons, Harvey and Donald, grew to manhood and passed to Spirit within a few years of their mother's passing in 1970.

Mr. Smith left Florence with the two small sons when she was barely 20. Her life was difficult. She had to support and raise two small children. Honest jobs for women were few in the early twentieth century. She supported them by first taking in laundry, then as a seamstress. Florence Becker was employed for many years in this capacity by The Emporium, a major downtown San Francisco department store.

She had to deal with physical manifestations from the Spirit world that could occur around her without warning at any place and at any time. She told of being on the streetcar in San Francisco with the two little boys when a voice manifested loudly near her, announcing, "That man is going to lose his watch." A brief moment later the vest pocket watch of a man sitting a few rows ahead and on the aisle jumped out of his pocket and landed on the aisle floor, "Plop." She said it caused such a commotion on the streetcar that she and the little boys had to get off the car and walk.

Spirit had directed Florence to go to San Francisco after her husband Smith passed to Spirit. There a friend took her to Doctor Allen who had been a Methodist minister but was now a Spiritualist. As a Methodist minister, Doctor Allen was preaching a sermon in his Methodist church when a strong wind came through the church and blew his written sermon off the podium. Having no written speech in front of him, he started to talk the Truth, which, Reverend Becker said, "was his undoing as a Methodist Minister. He had a heresy trial and all the rest."

At her first séance with Doctor Allen, a trumpet (paper cone similar to a megaphone) moved around the circle of people and touched Florence Becker. After the séance, he asked who the trumpet had touched. Rev. refused to tell him it was she, thinking a sales pitch to buy one was coming. Instead, he presented her with a trumpet and told her she was a natural physical medium.

She took the trumpet home, took all the clothes out of a clothes closet, sat down in the closet with the trumpet and said, "Now, I'd like to see someone hit me with that trumpet." She said she never got such a beating in her life. Her American Indian guide Jonquil said, "See Squaw, I told you that you had work to do." She held her first séance about 6 months later.

In her twenties, Florence Harwood Smith married Doctor William Becker, a physician. They remained married until Doctor Becker's passing many years later. Florence Harwood Becker became a certified medium, was ordained a Spiritualist minister, a National Spiritualist Teacher, and for many years a national missionary for the National Spiritualist Association, all under the name of Florence Becker. She was known as Rev. Florence Becker in her public work for almost her entire adult life.

Rev. Florence Becker was a staunch supporter of both the National Spiritualist Association (later the National Spiritualist Association of Churches) and the California State Spiritualist Association. Rev. Donald Haddick, the second secretary of the Golden Gate Spiritualist Church and its second pastor some years after Rev. Becker passed to Spirit, was very close to Rev. Becker for many years. I learned from Rev. Haddick that Rev. Becker always took the month of October off from serving the Golden Gate Church so that she could travel to the National Spiritualist Association conventions where she served the convention platform as its principal message medium during services.

Rev. Becker served the platforms of the evening services of both the California State Spiritualist Association and National Spiritualist Association conventions regularly as a medium for decades. Rev. Anne Gehman of Virginia told me she participated in an all-day workshop on the *Science of Being* given by Rev. Becker at a National convention. Rev. Becker's support for both organizations was based on Principle. She would express this Principle, "In Unity there is strength."

As a young adult, Reverend Becker's contact with the higher realms of the Spirit World became better organized through her considerable effort and the guidance of the Spirit band who gathered to work with her. Her mediumship manifested in many beautiful ways.

During the first 15 or so years of her public work, Spirit worked directly through her after she entered a deep trance. Doctor E. J. Briggs, a physician in the 17th century Plymouth Colony during his earth life, gave learned addresses through her. A Native American woman who called herself Squaw Sally gave messages to the assembled crowds while entrancing Florence Becker. At different points in her career, first Doctor

Briggs, then Squaw Sally, pulled back, allowing Reverend Becker to directly give the addresses and do the message work.

Reverend Becker first began doing message work without Squaw Sally working directly through her in deep trance by using her considerable gifts of clairvoyance and clairaudience. While doing so, she found the pull of the desires of those in the audiences for Spirit contact so great that it interfered with *her* Spirit contact.

To circumvent the mental interference from the audience, Reverend Becker devised a method of contact with Spirit that was unique (so far as I have been able to determine) at the time. People entering the service were asked to write the question they wished to pose to Spirit on a piece of paper or "billet." They would place the billet in an envelope and write some form of identification on the envelope. Reverend Becker found that if the billets were not placed in envelopes, the vibrations of the various people handling them would be all mixed together, as the papers contacted one another in the basket. She was unable to distinguish one from the other. Placing them in envelopes, she said, allowed her to feel only the vibration of the person who wrote the billet.

Rev. Becker would have the conductor of the service blindfold her by tying two very large white linen diner napkins very tightly around her head, across her eyes. When the blindfold was removed at the end of the service, she normally had deep creases across her face from the tightness of the linen cloth. Her original purpose for being blindfolded, I was told, was to shift the mental focus of those in the audience from her to the billets.

Doing message work while blindfolded, Rev. Becker would take an envelope from the pile of envelopes in front of her and hold it up. Spirit would read the identification on the envelope to her, which she would call out. Thus establishing voice contact with the individual who wrote the billet, she would remove it from the envelope and hold it in her hand, discarding the envelope.

Through her highly developed gift of psychometry, plus her considerable gifts of clairvoyance and clairaudience, Rev. Becker was able to "read" the question written on the billet. She announced aloud what the question was that was written on the billet, then proceeded to answer the question, getting confirmation from the billet writer as she went along. Additional information from Spirit was often communicated after the question was answered or as part of the answer. All this was done while she was completely and securely blindfolded. I was privileged to witness these demonstrations on many occasions.

Reverend Becker's work was characterized by rapid-fire delivery and very accurate descriptions of persons on the Spirit side and the events they relayed to her that were recognized by the person who wrote the billet. During the many years when her mediumship was in full flower and her health permitted it, Rev. Becker would deliver a spirit message to everyone who put in a billet, and even those who did not.

The Golden Gate Spiritualist Church, after 1951, held approximately 200 people. It was normally full, or almost so, for nearly every service. Services were scheduled to begin at 8:00 P. M. Around 9:30, there was a break in the service so those who had already received a message could leave, if they wished. Then the service would continue until the rest of the congregation received a message, sometimes, I am told, the service would continue through midnight.

Reverend Becker told us that she tested every unfamiliar spirit that came to her in her message work three ways to determine the veracity of what they were telling or

showing her before she would speak it to the person in the audience who was to receive the message. She told us, "The purpose of mediumship is to identify people." She sometimes described seeing people from the Spirit side standing in line down the aisles in the church, waiting their turn to make contact with a loved one on earth.

For decades Reverend Becker held weekly séances. During these séances, she would be placed in trance and Spirit voices manifested through trumpets to those gathered for the séance. Spirit also spoke through her entranced body during these séances and Spirit voices manifested independently of her and of the trumpets anywhere in the room. Music boxes played while floating about the séance room. The trumpets, cones of papier maché resembling cheerleaders megaphones, floated about the room as Spirit voices manifested through them, communicating with and touching the various sitters.

Beginning in 1913, Spirit asked Rev. Becker to hold special séances for the manifestation of Spirit paintings. She was asked to put a piece of canvas of a specific size in the séance room, some kind of specified pigment, and a piece of wood to represent a frame. Once Spirit asked only for a piece of pencil lead and canvas.

The sitters sang the *Marseilles*, the French National Anthem. Reverend Becker would be taken into trance. The sitters would sing the song over and over, sometimes for up to 2 hours, I am told, until they would hear a loud "Clap." After hearing the "Clap," they knew the painting was on the canvas. They could turn on the lights or open the curtains and look at the painting then, but were told to cover it with a black, light proof cloth afterwards and keep it out of the light for a year. After that, they could display it.

At least 27 paintings of various sizes and subjects that manifested in this way are on display at the Golden Gate Spiritualist Church in San Francisco. Reverend Becker asked Spirit to stop using her for this particular demonstration after several years as it was taking too much from her spiritually, mentally, and physically. She told us that after a painting séance was held, she would find a large black-and-blue area about the size of a saucer somewhere on her body where substance had been drawn from her by Spirit to be used in creating the precipitated painting.

Perhaps Reverend Becker's most significant contribution to Spiritualism and humanity came through the teachings from the Spirit World that were revealed through her mediumship. Her trumpet and trance guide, Doctor E. J. Briggs, delivered some lessons through her. Some came from her direct contact with Spirit. As her mediumship became better organized from the Spirit side, Reverend Becker gradually became merged with the Spirit World. She could put herself into trance and go into the Spirit World where she actually taught classes. She was completely aware of what she had done in Spirit after she returned to her body and became conscious.

After beginning her public work, those on the lower planes would still bother her. She was taken into trance for 16 hours where she learned the nerve currents. After this, she said, "I perceived these things." Still, she said, "A nagging force would come." She finally asked for help, praying "for a little help" for 7 nights and 7 days. The 7th day, her doorbell rang. She answered and saw an East Indian who said, "You sent for me. Are you ready for the test?"

She answered, "Yes."

The East Indian opened his coat, revealing a huge cobra coiled around his torso. The cobra raised its head and spread its hood in front of Reverend Becker. She told us she

was afraid of snakes but, "My mind never wavered a bit." The East Indian gentleman spoke three words to her. She subsequently studied with him for a period of time.

Reverend Becker told of a time in her earlier days of public spiritual work when she was directed by Spirit to go to San Quentin Prison to see a young man on Death Row awaiting execution for murder. For a number of years Reverend Becker did "institutional work" in prisons, holding services in San Quentin and Folsom prisons. San Quentin is across the San Francisco Bay from San Francisco near San Raphael, California.

Warden Smith of San Quentin was a distant relative of Reverend Becker's. George Pierce, a guard at the time at San Quentin, had been a boy friend of Reverend Becker's for a while. Warden Smith did not want Reverend Becker to see the young man who was in solitary confinement. He was apparently very angry, volatile, and quite large. Reverend Becker and George Pierce finally convinced the Warden to take her to see the young man.

San Quentin is an old prison, built in the nineteenth century. As the three of them approached the young man's solitary confinement cell, Reverend Becker grabbed the glass mantle from one of the gas lights lining the corridor they were walking along. The Warden tried to dissuade Reverend Becker from taking the mantle into the young man's cell but she managed to anyway.

Once she was inside the cell, the young man rose and came towards Reverend Becker in a threatening manner. She held the glass mantle outstretched in her had. Spirit used the mantle as a trumpet and the voice of the young man's mother spoke from it, telling him that he had broken a law and must pay for it but that she would be waiting for him on the other side. The young man dropped to his knees in front of Reverend Becker and assured her this was the voice of his mother.

In the mid-1930's, Spirit told Rev. Becker they planned to take her in trance for an extended period of time to bring teachings from the Spirit world through her. Spirit instructed Rev. Becker to select five of her students to write down lessons as Spirit dictated them through her entranced body. The students were asked to obtain a large roll of butcher paper, then take turns writing down what Spirit dictated through Rev. Becker.

The necessary preparations having been made, Spirit took Reverend Becker in trance for a period of 36 continuous hours. During this time the five students took turns writing, resting, and eating.

The lessons dictated by those on the Spirit side through her entranced body were shared by Reverend Becker with classes throughout the balance of her time on the earth. After she passed, her last husband published these lessons in a book entitled *The Science of Being*. Copies of this book are available through the National Spiritualist Association of Churches bookstore (bookstore@nsac.org), or from the Golden Gate Spiritualist Church in San Francisco (engeltie@aol.com).

As the years passed, a great deal more was revealed from Spirit through Rev. Becker's mediumship. Many lessons on the Faculties of our Being, through which we develop our spirit bodies, were brought through her. The 7 Planes of Consciousness, already revealed in *The Science of Being*, were further described. In this body of work, each of the 7 Spheres in the Spirit world, where we pass from the earth plane, is explained in detail along with the meaning of each of the 7 Planes or Schools within each

Sphere. How we progress through these Schools or Planes, and how this is related to the unfoldment of our Faculties of Being, is also revealed.

A previous article in *The National Spiritualist Summit* (September, 2005) told of the trance mediumship of John Houldsworth of the Golden Gate Spiritualist Church. Two people in Spirit primarily spoke through Mr. Houldsworth's entranced body, Moonface, a Mohave Indian, and Benjamin, a Rabbi and Moonface's teacher on the Spirit side.

Benjamin is in the 7th or highest sphere in the Spirit world, where he is about to move on into the next phase of progression, beyond the first 7 Spheres. The development of John Houldsworth's trance mediumship was guided by Rev. Becker in the several years before she passed to Spirit.

Of interest is the fact that both Moonface and Benjamin spoke at length and on numerous occasions, about the teachings that were given from Spirit through Rev. Becker. Both would allow those in attendance to ask questions about these teachings, as they sought clarification. The Spirits of Benjamin and Moonface would discuss these lessons with the questioners and try to guide them to better understanding.

I was privileged to participate in some of these question and answer sessions with Benjamin or Moonface and have listened to tape recordings of most of the other sessions. These meetings helped those seeking Spiritual progression through the teachings brought through Rev. Becker. More importantly, these sittings with Benjamin and Moonface further served to confirm the high Spiritual source of these teachings.

Moonface had told us early on that his birthday on the earth plane was July 12. One notes that Reverend Florence Becker passed to Spirit on July 12, 1970. Moonface many times expressed his reverence for Reverend Becker, whom he called the Lady of Promise, both publicly and privately

President Abraham Lincoln availed himself of the guidance of Spirit through the trance mediumship principally of young Nettie Colburn, as we in Spiritualism are aware (See the important book *Was Abraham Lincoln a Spiritualist?* by Nettie Colburn Maynard, also available from the National bookstore, bookstore@nsac.org, or from the Golden Gate Spiritualist Church (engeltie@aol.com).

History records that other presidents sought the guidance of Spirit from mediums. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, during the years of World War II, sought the best Spirit guidance he could find and came to Reverend Florence Becker. The writer was told by those who were around Reverend Becker during those years that President Roosevelt sent a plane to San Francisco for her, on 7 or 8 different occasions, to take her to Washington to sit with his Cabinet and advisors. There she would go into trance, much as young Nettie Colburn had done before her, and the higher realms of the Spirit world communicated with President Roosevelt and those around him, giving them important guidance during this critical period for humankind. This was also reported in the Spiritualist periodical *The Progressive Thinker*.

As an interesting sample of her mediumship, an article was published in the United Kingdom periodical, the *Psychic News*, in its July 12, 1980 edition, exactly 10 years from Reverend Becker's passage to Spirit. The lead article on the front page of the *Psychic News* that week told of the many communications the widow of the famous Russian ballet dancer Vaslav Nijinsky received from her husband on the Spirit side. Some were communications through Reverend Florence Becker. According to the *Psychic News*:

“He proved the truth of this (that life goes on past death in another form) in dramatic circumstances years after his passing at a San Francisco demonstration of blindfold billet reading given by one of American’s foremost mediums, Florence Becker.

“Mme. Nijinsky, arriving late, had taken one of the last two vacant seats. She was unknown to the medium and had not realized it was necessary to use a sealed envelope containing questions for the medium’s answer.

“At the end of the meeting, she was about to leave, disappointed, when the medium called out unexpectedly,
“Romola, please don’t go away. Vaslav is sitting next to you. He wants to talk to you about your daughter Kyra.” She stayed and was given further evidence.

On another occasion this medium(Reverend Becker) brought through to her a grandmother, Therese, whom she had never known on earth. Her message was, “She wants you to wear her pearl earrings. You don’t have them now but you will get them.”

The medium also told her, “I see a revolution in Hungry.” The séance took place in 1953. Three years later, the predicted revolution took place and Mme Nijinsky’s younger daughter fled to Canada. When they met, the daughter presented her mother with the only heirloom she had managed to bring with her - the grandmother’s earrings!

Reverend Becker’s life on earth was one of almost continuous service humanity through her close connection to those in Spirit. She served her church at almost all services with rare exceptions. When this writer knew her, services were twice weekly, Wednesday and Sunday evenings.

Before the present Golden Gate Spiritualist Church building was purchased by the congregation in 1951, Reverend Becker’s schedule was something like this:

Tuesday evenings – Class for her students.

Wednesday evenings – Church service.

Thursday evenings – Social at some member’s home to benefit the Building Fund.

Friday evenings – Séance.

Sunday evenings – Church service.

Reverend Becker took the month of October off to travel to and participate in the National Spiritualist Association conventions.

Her days during the week were crowded with individual appointments and readings. Doctors came to her for difficult diagnoses. Law enforcement officers visited her with difficult cases. The writer had the privilege of talking to Reverend Becker privately in her home on two occasions. During the second visit, I noticed the phone ringing quite a bit and commented on this. Reverend Becker smiled and called out to her

housekeeper, “Faye, when we kept track of phone calls the other day, how many did we get?”

Faye responded, “85, Mrs. Becker.”

This was an average day’s total of telephone calls from people seeking her help and guidance. I have no knowledge of her ever turning anyone away.

Reverend Florence Becker was deeply revered by many who knew her. The writer had the privilege of knowing her, witnessed her work for the last 2 – 3 years of her time on earth, and was privileged to be a student in the last class she held in 1969.

Some of what I know about her I learned from those who were close to her for much of the time she worked publicly. Reverend Donald Haddick, who finally succeeded her as Pastor of the Golden Gate Spiritualist Church, shared much of what he knew about her with me. Reverend Haddick had been the church secretary for a number of years prior to her passing. He and his wife Jessie had been members of the church and students in her classes for many years before that, going back into the 1930’s.

The writer had the privilege of knowing and talking to one of the charter members of the church and its first secretary, Sam Allison. Mr. Allison was probably closer to Rev. Becker than almost any other person. Others who were close to Reverend Becker, Charlotte Detels, and our present Pastor the Reverend David Burr, also have shared information about Rev. Becker with me. Reverend Becker’s last husband, Virgil Simmons, wrote the informative Forward to the *Science of Being*, another source for this article.

During their later years, the writer interviewed two others who were members of the church during the 1930’s, Jessie Haddick and Sandra Dibble. These tape-recorded interviews were held to elicit remembrances of the two ladies about Reverend Becker, those around her, the scope of her mediumship, and church activities during this earlier time.

If one did not know her, one can only guess at the magnitude of the privilege it was to be in the presence of Florence Harwood Becker.