

What is our life legacy?

As Spiritualists today, we have benefited from the stories of those who have gone before us, but what stories are we leaving for future Spiritualists? Alv Hirst spoke to Karen Frances McCarthy, medium and author of *Till Death Don't Us Part: A True Story of Awakening to Love After Life* (White Crow Books 2020), about the importance of storytelling for our own spiritual growth, as a tool to allow us to engage more fully in our lives and as a legacy for future generations.



AH: One thing that interested me about your story is that it's a narrative about moving from scepticism to awakening after your fiancé passed. You went from being a sceptical war correspondent to a practicing medium with three CSNUs. That's a big shift in identity, and one that shows the power of Spiritualism to transform people's lives. Was that a motivation for you to communicate your story to people?

KFM: Honestly, it took me many years to work up the courage to tell that story. I'd been a journalist and a sceptic, and even a cynic, when the weird experiences after his passing began. Getting from there to accepting that he had survived death was an incredibly hard turn to make. We hear stories of this, maybe not as extreme, but certainly stories of people noticing strange and sometimes scary things. Fear around this – either that they're losing their mind or that something terrifying is happening – can rob them of the beauty of the experience. It seemed important to tell the story so that other people could better understand their own experience. I knew that to make my story relatable, I would have to tell it from a very honest place. It wasn't easy. There was a lot of pain in those years, and a lot of self-consciousness in the journey, but I knew I had to tell those stories honestly for the reader to be able to follow that journey from scepticism to awakening and make up their own minds.

I learned fairly quickly that the more presence I brought into the stories, the better the writing became. But something unexpected also happened. The honesty engendered some intense healing. I found that bringing secrets and judgements out of the dark into the light was immensely liberating. This is another reason why I believe it's important for Spiritualists to write their stories, not only does it leave new Spiritualist literature for future generations, there is a powerful opportunity for transformational growth and healing in telling our stories.

AH: It sounds not unlike working with mediumship and trying to convey the essence and story of the communicator. One of the challenges of mediumship is how to bring the essence of a communicator through to be felt instead of offering a list of facts.

KFM: It's a good comparison. I believe to understand the presence of another, we need to understand our own presence. As mediums, we can often focus more on what's going on up there with the communicator or right here with the recipient than we do on how present we are in our own lives and how much that allows us to be present with the beautiful and quite ordinary details of life. This again presents an opportunity for new Spiritualist literature to really look at what's going on internally, in our inner refuge, in our own incarnate spirit as we move through time. What does being present look like in your life? How does your pain, or despair, or joy, or hope feel in this moment? To be immersed in those moments, and then write and share them is a powerful practice, a mindfulness practice. It's a state of attunement. A state of being present moment to moment.

AH: When you talked about the spirit world looking different for everyone depending on perspective, it reminds me that we generally relate to the spirit world as a kind of glorious place that we'll one day reach and then everything will be okay. But when we're distracted by the promise of the future, we can become indifferent about injustices we see today. It can easily become 'This is temporary, things will change for those people in the Spirit World.' We can fail to see how we can transform our lives and the lives of those around us today. Making radical changes is part of our history, how can we get back to that today?

KFM: I think one thing is to take responsibility for our own healing and growing – it's hard work. The more we face ourselves and heal our wounds, the less reactive we are in life, and the less we are triggered by events around us. This can help us take rational action rather than have knee-jerk responses. Some people choose it; others have it foisted upon them. As you mentioned earlier, this is part of the reason why it's so important to document our own stories. It helps us look inward and become more aware of our own spiritual presence. The page is like a mirror looking back at you in black and white, showing you when you're hypocritical, or evasive, or phony. These stories don't come easily. They usually come after we've been dragged through a hedge backwards, but telling them helps us and others to grow.

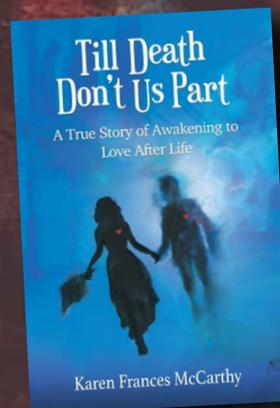
AH: The history of Spiritualism is derived heavily from personal experience. How is what you're calling new Spiritualist literature different?

KFM: Since the mid-1800s, there has been a big emphasis on investigation and rationality. This was what made Spiritualism appeal to me initially. Lately, there's been a trend towards what happens when we get to the Spirit World. What does the afterlife look like? These are interesting questions because they assume that there's one answer. But how can we know if what's true for me is true for you? I mean, if you line up a group of people from different classes and cultures from the planet and asked them to describe their world, they would give us a lot of different stories. How can we possibly have a uniform description or experience of the Spirit world, when we don't have one of this world? I would love to see a new generation of Spiritualist literature that focuses on what we're doing in the here and now instead of focusing on the future.

AH: We hear all the time that someone got to the Spirit world and reflected on their life and regrets, but we have to remember that we can reflect on these issues now and change our lives now. The wisdom of these personal narratives are what we need to leave for people one hundred years from now. We need more inquiry into the fullness of life and our experiences today. If we're not careful, the only thing we'll leave behind is a trail of tweets!

KFM: I agree. There's a huge opening for personal inquiry in Spiritualist literature. It's a platform where we can share the wisdom and insight that we've gathered from reflecting deeply on our own experiences and recording them. I'd love to see more stories of people changing their lives based on earnest and humble growth. When I was writing my book, I tried to present the inner life of my stories to also create a narrative that could be helpful to others. I would love this to inspire other people to do likewise. It would be marvellous to see more work that's inspired by the wisdom of the life experiences of the spirit incarnate. We could create a new library filled with that inspiration and knowledge. That would be a beautiful sight.

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Karen's book 'Till Death Don't Us Part: A True Story of Awakening to Love After Life' (White Crow Books 2020) is available now.