

Carlos's First Steps in Parapsychology

Alfonso Martínez-Taboas¹

Interamerican University

I was 19 years old and I already had a serious interest in parapsychology. I was a member of the Society for Psychical Research (SPR) and wanted to know if there was another member in Puerto Rico. Therefore, I wrote to its secretary and she replied that indeed there was another member: Carlos S. Alvarado. I was delighted but fearful because I assumed that Carlos would be a much older person and that I was to be dismissed by my young age. We shared our phone and to my surprise Carlos was one year younger than I was. Not only that, our respective mothers had been friends when they were much younger!

In a couple of months, we began to share not only our interest in parapsychology but also a friendship that would last for five decades. I clearly remembered that we both had a passion for the history of the field, specifically mental and physical mediums. In addition, we developed an interest in spontaneous psi phenomena, like poltergeist. Much of our money was spent in buying books in antique bookshops where we obtained many historical treatises. I remember that we shopped a lot in a bookstore located in New York by the name of Samuel Weiser.

A couple of years later we founded a privately published journal titled *Explorando lo Paranormal* (Exploring the Paranormal). We only had about 20 people subscribing to the journal, but it brought us immense satisfaction to have the opportunity to elaborate our ideas. We also tried to group a few people to talk about the field but were unsuccessful in that task. Nobody else in Puerto Rico was a member of the SPR or the ASPR. We eventually joined a group of enthusiastic people, but their main interest was UFOs. Although I developed also a strong interest in UFOs, Carlos was never curious enough to read systematically or write about UFOs.

As part of our joint efforts, I remember that we tried to investigate some ostensible mediums and psychics. We never encountered a single incident that convinced either

¹ Address correspondence to: Alfonso Martínez-Taboas, Ph. D., amtaboas@coqui.net



of us of a genuine paranormal effect. We investigated also hauntings and apparitions. I remember that we traveled to a small town in Puerto Rico where an apparition of a woman was repeatedly seen by night floating in front of a tree. We talked with the family and passed the entire night trying to see something unusual. Once again: nothing.

After a decade of friendship, we decided to write two papers. One was a critique of the psychopathological model of poltergeist phenomena. The other paper questioned some basic assumptions of the super-psi hypothesis to explain mediumistic phenomena (Martínez-Taboas & Alvarado, 1981, 1983). Moreover, many years later we published in Spanish an article about some common misunderstandings that Puerto Rican psychologists had about parapsychology (Alvarado & Martínez-Taboas, 2002).

As time passed, I decided to study clinical psychology. Carlos's father tried, unsuccessfully, to convince Carlos to study a more conventional field like psychology. Carlos was very clear that he wanted to dedicate his life to parapsychology. Therefore, he was accepted to a Master's Degree in Parapsychology at J. F. Kennedy University in the USA, and so his formal commitment to the field began.

Even in those early years, Carlos's passion to the field was remarkable. As a very young man, he dedicated much effort to maintain an impressive private collection of books and journals on the field: especially on the history of the field. We dedicated countless hours discussing historical figures such as Eusapia Palladino, D.D. Home, Mrs. Piper, and many others.

With the passage of time, he became one of the most respected historical scholars of parapsychology and psychical research. I am glad that we both shared those precious moments when we vigorously debated parapsychological phenomena with an open mind. When he departed to the J.F. Kennedy University, I already knew that he would become a notable scholar. His splendid memory for details, his passion, and commitment were evident. Thank you Carlos for sharing with me such remarkable memories and for your friendship. You are sorely missed.

References

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