

OBITUARY

ROBERT L. VAN DE CASTLE 1927–2014

BY ERLENDUR HARALDSSON

Dr. Robert L. Van de Castle passed away on January 29, 2014, at the ripe age of 86. To me he was a very memorable man. I met him first at the Spring Review Meeting at the Foundation for Research on the Nature of Man (Institute for Parapsychology) in Durham, North Carolina during the year that I spent there in 1969–1970. Rhine held review meetings twice a year and invited a dinner speaker from outside. This time the speaker was Robert (Bob) Van de Castle, who had in the mid-50s spent some time with Rhine at the Duke Parapsychology Laboratory. There he investigated personality correlates of PK performance and was a research assistant to Gaither Pratt in his project for the military involving homing behavior of pigeons.

After Bob's talk at the review meeting, we got into a conversation. This conversation had a decisive effect on my life, for which I will always be grateful. He invited me to join a 1-year internship program in clinical psychology that was being established at the Department of Psychiatry at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville. He also guaranteed me time to work on my doctoral dissertation that I was writing with Professor Hans Bender in Freiburg, Germany. That was the beginning of a long friendship. Whenever I visited Charlottesville in the ensuing years I always made it a point of seeing Bob and to spend some time with him.

Bob was born in Rochester, New York, on November 16, 1927, as the son of Omar Van de Castle (translates to "Omar from the castle"), who was born in Belgium, and a Canadian mother. He studied at the Universities of Syracuse and Missouri and obtained his PhD in Clinical Psychology from the University of North Carolina in 1959. A turning point in Bob's life was his pioneering work with Calvin Hall at his Institute of Dream Studies in Miami, Florida. Their joint book *The Content Analysis of Dreams* (Hall & Van de Castle, 1966) became a classic on quantitative research on dreams. It established norms and revealed prominent differences in the content of dreams between men and women, just to mention one of their findings.

When Bob was invited to join the Department of Psychiatry at the University of Virginia, he was offered the opportunity for further research on dreams and sleep, and the Sleep and Dream Research Laboratory of the University of Virginia Medical Center was established with Bob as director. There I took part in weekly research meetings and found it an enriching experience to follow what research Bob and Peter Hauri—his associate—were doing at the time.

Apart from his clinical work, Bob's life was divided between his research and writing on dreams and on the paranormal, of which the dream part was much greater. He was the author of *Our Dreaming Mind* (Van de Castle, 1994), which was described as a "landmark" by Monte Ullman, a "masterpiece" by Henry Reed, and "a sweeping compilation unsurpassed in the literature for its scope" by Stanley Krippner.

Bob published over a hundred papers in peer-reviewed journals, wrote articles in many leading newspapers and popular magazines, and discussed dreams on national TV and radio shows. He felt it important to familiarize the public with research on the fascinating realm of dreams. He played a prominent role in the International Association for the Study of Dreams, was their president in 1985, and presented regularly at their conferences, both in the US and abroad. He conducted numerous workshops on dreams on both sides of the Atlantic.

I read in his bibliography that his first publishing venture—on May 14, 1950—was in no less a newspaper than *The New York Times*. The title of the article was "Honeymoon Abroad: Cycling and Hitch-hiking Helped to Stretch \$100 All the Way Across Europe" (Van de Castle, 1950). Bob was always an enterprising man; he travelled widely and knew how to enjoy life.

For the readers of the *JP*, Bob's involvement with the paranormal will be of particular interest. We know of the time he spent with Rhine at the Duke Parapsychology Laboratory. Indeed his next four papers after "Honeymoon Abroad" stem from 1953–1959 and were published in the *JP* and the *Journal of the American Society for Psychological Research*. They all dealt with some aspect of the paranormal, from correlates to ESP performance to the sheep-goat scale.

Bob became well known for his study of psi abilities among the Cuna Indians on the San Blas Islands off Panama. In the 1960s he made several trips to the islands, where he tested a large number of Cuna adolescents in a school setting with traditional ESP cards that he had altered to make them more interesting and relevant to the Cunas: namely, a jaguar in a jungle setting, an underwater view of a shark, a conch shell on sand, a large canoe with a sail, and a propeller airplane in the sky. All the cards were in natural colors. Over 900 runs of 25 cards were administered in 1968, 1969, and 1970. The girls obtained a mean score above chance in each of the 3 years, resulting in a CR (z) of 3.67, which is highly significant. The boys scored slightly below mean chance expectation every year. The difference between the sexes was significant at the .0002 level. A possible explanation for the difference in scoring was that the girls appeared to be more cooperative and attentive than the boys. I still recall vividly when Bob reported on his work with the Cuna Indians in his Presidential Address at the 1970 Parapsychological Association convention at the Barbizon-Plaza Hotel in New York.

A notable contribution was his chapter "Sleep and Dreams" in Wolman's *Handbook of Parapsychology* (Van de Castle, 1977). Bob's last paper on the paranormal was "Dreams and ESP," which he presented at the international conference of the Parapsychology Foundation in Utrecht in 2008. Its theme was Charting the Future of Parapsychology (Van de Castle, 2009). The convention was held to commemorate the first post-WWII conference on parapsychology in Utrecht in 1958.

Bob was not only a researcher and tester of subjects. Twice he acted as a receiver in dream telepathy experiments and obtained positive results on both occasions: first with Calvin Hall (1967) and later with Montague Ullman and Stanley Krippner at the Dream Laboratory of the Maimonides Medical Center in New York (Ullman & Krippner, 1970).

In the Maimonides experiments, the participants slept in the laboratory, and their rapid eye movements (REMs; indicators of dreaming) and EEG data were recorded. An agent elsewhere in the building was informed when the participant started a REM period. On each of eight experimental nights with Bob, the agent opened by a random procedure one of eight envelopes containing the target, looked at it, thought about it, and tried to interject this target into Bob's dreams. After 10 min of each REM period, Bob was awakened over an intercom by the monitoring experimenter. He was asked what he had been dreaming, to describe it in as much detail as possible, and then go back to sleep. Upon awakening in the morning he was given the eight targets and asked to rank how close each of them was to his dreams. For the eight nights the results were highly significant, eight hits and no misses ($p = .004$). An additional ranking made by three judges was also highly significant ($p = .001$). Bob became the star subject at Maimonides.

Bob was an active member of the Parapsychological Association, a council member for 10 years, and its president in 1970.

Robert Van de Castle led a remarkable and productive life. He was easily approachable, treated everyone as his equal, was a very likeable man, and indeed a great friend.

References

- Hall, C. (1967). Experimente zur telepathischen Beeinflussung von Träumen [Experiments on the telepathic influence of dreams]. *Zeitschrift für Parapsychologie und Grenzgebiete der Psychologie*, 10, 18–47.
- Hall, C., & Van de Castle, R. (1966). *The content analysis of dreams*. NY: Appleton Century Crofts.
- Ullman, M., & Krippner, S. (1970). Dream studies and telepathy. An experimental approach. *Parapsychological monographs* 12. New York: Parapsychology Foundation.
- Van de Castle, R. (1950, May 14). Honeymoon abroad: Cycling and Hitch-hiking help to stretch \$100 all the way across Europe. *The New York Times*.
- Van de Castle, R. (1977). Sleep and dreams. In B. B. Wolman (Ed.), *Handbook of parapsychology* (pp. 473–499). New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold.
- Van de Castle, R. L. (1994). *Our dreaming mind*. New York: Ballantine Books.
- Van de Castle, R. (2009). Dreams and ESP. In C. Roe, W. Kramer, & L. Coly (Eds.), *Utrecht II: Charting the future of parapsychology: Proceedings of an international conference* (pp. 72–114). New York: Parapsychology Foundation.

University of Iceland
101 Reykjavik, Iceland
erlendur@hi.is