

Can psychics really put you in touch with dead loved ones? Read the surprising results of our investigation ...

Self-confessed sceptic Conor O'Neill asked medium Tom Colton to contact his late uncle ... so how did he get on?

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Psychic Tom Colton gave journalist Conor O'Neill detailed facts about his dead uncle

Tom Colton's eyes are a piercing steely blue, his demeanour and voice radiate calm.

Meeting Tom (34) at the Balmoral Hotel, Belfast, where he was hosting a night of psychic readings, was an interesting experience. In these times of increasing secularism, more and more of those disaffected with traditional churches are finding meaning in the spiritualist movement.

Formerly an accountant, Tom, who hails from Kildare, was in Belfast to expand his Spiritual Union of Ireland from its base in Dublin. The Dublin branch has 100 members and is an organisation of like minded souls who seek contact with the spirit world. Such goings on have long raised eyebrows from both the clergy and lay people alike, but a night in Tom's company and witnessing the reactions of those having readings was compelling viewing.

No fan of the term 'fortune telling', Tom prefers to look upon the service he provides as creating a connection between those who've left this world and those they may wish to contact. Unlike many mediums, Tom works from pictures of deceased loved ones.

Presented with a picture of my dad's deceased cousin, who we kids affectionately called Uncle Laurence, I didn't hold out much hope of any great revelations. I didn't expect anything other than perhaps wishy-washy half guesses and vague generalisations. And yet the information gained from an innocent looking photograph was astounding. Details of Laurence's life, death, family and messages to both my father and other family members were uncannily accurate. Of course, a sceptic would argue deduction is the key to any psychic reading. But deduction alone can't pinpoint names, dates, cause of death, number of brothers, occupation, favourite tittle and other little idiosyncrasies.

Tom's shift from the straight-laced, analytical world of accountancy to the intuitive, mystical world of spiritualism was triggered by the death of his much loved uncle Richard Kealy in January 2001.

Rather than experiencing a road to Damascus type epiphany, Tom believes a slow realisation led him to explore the spiritual side of both life and death. Since 2006 he has performed between 600 and 700 readings and if no connection is made, or the person is unhappy with the reading, no money changes hands.

Tom said: "Until my uncle's death I would never have considered myself to be a particularly spiritual person. And I don't think this is anyway a gift.

"People who attend the workshops can learn this craft. I've been running development circles for two years and after studying under Tony Stockwell at the world famous Arthur Findlay College at Stansted in England, I decided to set up my own organisation here in Ireland.

"I prefer not to use the word 'church'. I look upon our union as a sanctuary. Our services include inspirational speeches, some rousing songs such as Westlife's Love Can Build A Bridge, followed by some medium readings. There's always variation as the mediums and congregations change from week to week.

"There's no hierarchy and though there are eight trustees and I'm president of the union, this is solely on an organisational basis. I still get regular readings from other mediums.

"My own belief is that everyone goes to the same place and individuals are usually reunited with family and friends.

“Looking back on some of the terrible atrocities committed by certain people, its hard for some to imagine that Hitler would end up in the same afterlife as regular people, but I believe some good comes from every act.”

Tom added:“Ireland has always been a very spiritual nation dating back to the druids and beyond.

“The Church monopolised such religious expression and since then the clergy have been in control. Spiritualism is people regaining control with the connection to the afterlife and after meeting Patrick Doat, a very highly regarded medium from here in Belfast, we decided to bring workshops to the north.

“We’re currently obtaining charitable status in the Republic and our main aim here in Belfast is to get the right people on the ground and develop that way.

“Our response down south has been very encouraging and since 2006 we’ve only had one person protest against our union.

“Spiritualism does get some bad press but I think we’re providing a worthwhile service. I rarely read for any individual more than once and while some people dealing with severe grief want regular contact with deceased loved ones, I’m quick to point out the spiritual contact is no substitute for bereavement counselling.”

Leanne Kearny (25) a manager at the Balmoral Hotel from Belfast, said:

“I’ve been to other psychics and while I’m naturally curious I thought Tom was fantastic. I brought along a picture of my dad who passed away in 1995 and Tom began with no information other than the image.

“First, he started giving me information that only my dad or those close to him would know. Then I felt my dad’s presence. It was very moving and I was in tears afterwards.

“Speaking through Tom my dad relayed the message that he wasn’t frightened of death but he didn’t like leaving his wife and children behind.

“I’m not really a massive churchgoer, but I do have a faith and I don’t think using a medium in anyway contradicts traditional teaching.

“This brings comfort to people and has strengthened my belief in the afterlife.

Working in the hospitality business means I work unusual hours, but I think if I had more free time I’d definitely explore this in the future.”

Francine McIlhatton (22) is studying for a degree in politics at the University of Ulster at Jordanstown and is currently living in Belfast. She said:

“I’m a member of the Spiritualist Church on the Lisburn Road but this was my first reading with Tom. I brought along a Mass Card of my cousin Thomas who was 31-years-old when he died in August 2008.

“Tom began by giving me a description of Thomas then proceeded to tell me his distinct personality traits. In early readings there can be feelings of sadness and fear but I now know he’s alright. Contact with him involves him giving me comfort and sometimes reassuring me about particular situations. It’s not advice as such, but he has helped through some difficult times.

“I think some people do go along to readings expecting contact, but on some occasions other people in the room need contact more than others and the spiritual world recognises that. In other cases groups of relatives come through. For this reading Tom was in contact with both Thomas and my grandmother Margaret.

“Most of the female members of my family are involved in the spiritualist movement but I don’t believe men are less susceptible; there’s a certain bravado with most men and they’ve been conditioned by society to hide emotions.

“I was brought up a Catholic and while they don’t believe in spiritualism I see no harm in it. If it’s entered into with a positive attitude everything will be fine.”

Brenda Morrison (42), a home maker from Belfast, said:

“Tom is amazing. My daughter Jordonna has had psychic powers for a long time and I advised her to get involved. Watching Jordonna getting her reading was an experience in itself. Her arms were raised and she couldn’t put them down. For tonight I brought my grandmother’s handbag. I felt her energy and Tom told me things only I would know.

“Tom is very humble and down to earth. In my eyes I’m still a Roman Catholic, yet years ago this would have been the sort of thing I kept away from, but now I see God and spirits all around us. I would have once thought what I’ve seen is impossible but now I’m more open.

“Tonight in the ballot I won a private reading with Tom when he’s next in Belfast. These readings are a lot more in depth than what he’s able to do tonight when working with such a large crowd, so I’m really looking forward to that.”

Brenda’s daughter, Jordonna McCartan (17) is a student from Belfast. She said:

“I’ve been to mediums before and I’ve always believed in this sort of thing so I had no fear or anticipation. I brought along a photograph of my cousin Jordan who drowned when he was 14-years-old six years ago.

“The reading was very relaxing. And through Tom I felt Jordan’s energy and presence.

“I attended Tom’s workshops on Monday and Tuesday at the Centre of Angels on the Falls Road, and I’m attending Patrick’s workshop this coming Monday. I can’t see any contradiction

with spiritualism and traditional Catholic faith as it teaches a person to get more in touch with their spiritual side.

A friend of mine came along tonight and also had a good experience. I've been aware of my psychic side for a long time and hope by attending the workshops I'll be able to develop this skill."

Tom Colton is holding more one-to-one readings at the Centre of Angels, Falls Road, Belfast today and will run workshops tomorrow and Sunday. For more information, tel: 028 9024 9444 or visit www.tomcolton.com