



D. Scott Rogo

1950-1990. One of the most widely respected writer-journalists covering the field of parapsychology. Attended the University of Cincinnati and then San Fernando Valley State College from which he graduated in 1972 with a B.A. in music. Served as a visiting researcher at both the Psychical Research Foundation (then in Durham, North Carolina) and the (former) Division of Parapsychology and Psychophysics of Maimonides Medical Center in Brooklyn, New York. He published three papers reporting experimental research on the ganzfeld and conducted a study on personality factors of successful ganzfeld subjects. Scott was also active in field investigations of hauntings and poltergeists. Not only did he produce many books and popular articles, but in addition he published full papers in all of the professional, English-language, refereed parapsychology journals. Scott was also consulting editor for *Fate* where he wrote a regular column on parapsychology. Tragically, on August 18, 1990, Scott was found stabbed to death in his home.

Psychical Research and the Survival Controversy (Part 1)

The Case of James Kidd

- D. Scott Rogo -

ONE OF the more curious chapters in the history of American jurisprudence dates back to 1967, when an eccentric Arizona prospector named James Kidd was declared legally dead. He had disappeared into the desert surrounding Phoenix in 1949. Such an occurrence probably would have gone unnoticed by the papers and the public ... except for a bizarre catch to the case. When the prospector disappeared, he left about \$175,000 in cash and stocks in his bank account. He also left behind a handwritten will dated 2 January 1946 which stated, in part, that the bulk of his estate should go towards '... research of some scientific proof of a soul of the human body which leaves at death...'

When news of the will was made public, it caused somewhat of a furore. Soon the superior court in Phoenix was deluged with claimants, each hoping to profit from the will. There were psychics, churches, philosophers, research institutes, and a variety of eccentrics, all laying claim to the money. The hearings held by the court over the next few months were filled with deep philosophical discussions as well as humour. One 'psychic' woman from Los Angeles demonstrated for the court how her 'spirit guide' could answer questions through her, while she kept a hair-drier running so she couldn't hear what was being asked! A philosophy teacher from a junior college in California testified that he could prove the existence of the soul through logic, while the Arizona-based Barrow Neurological Institute petitioned to conduct brain research with the funds. Parapsychologists were intrigued by the will as well, and both the American Society for Psychical Research (ASPR, from New York) and the Psychical Research Foundation (PRF, from Durham, North Carolina) sent representatives to testify.

The hearings finally became known as 'The Great Soul Trial', and the court's final decision was rather anti-climactic. Judge Robert J. Myers awarded the funds to the Barrow people, arguing that the money would best be used in some practical research pursuit.[1]

[1] Fuller, John. *The Great Soul Trial*. New York: Macmillan, 1969.

The decision enraged several of the claimants, who pointed out that the institute had previously disqualified itself by its own testimony. Representatives sent by the Institute explained during the hearings that they wouldn't conduct research on the soul, so the

critics were justified in their protests. Eventually both the American Society for Psychical Research and the Psychical Research Foundation, which had been founded in 1960 expressly to research the survival problem, filed appeals. The state supreme court was more sympathetic than the superior court, and after reviewing the case, Judge Myers was ordered to re-rule his decision. This left him little alternative but to award the money to the ASPR, since the Society aptly demonstrated during the earlier hearings that it was historically concerned with finding evidence for life after death. They in turn, decided to share the bequest with the PRF.

The strange case of James Kidd and his will provided parapsychology with a curious precedent. It publicly and (in a sense) legally acknowledged that the question of life after death could be scientifically studied. It also established that the science of parapsychology was best qualified to undertake the challenge. The re-ruling of the lower court was probably influenced by the testimony of the late Dr [Gardner Murphy](#), who was the president of the ASPR at the time and also an eminent psychologist. Murphy took pains to explain during his testimony that the field had long devoted itself to the study of apparitions, deathbed visions, mediumship and other psychic phenomena. These were rare occurrences that suggested that occasionally we among the living can glimpse the world unseen. Now the court found itself agreeing on the matter.

But if parapsychology has been exploring the survival question for so long why is the case for life after death still open? For; while a rich historical literature exists on the subject, the ultimate proof of life after death remains elusive.