

CREATIVE EXPRESSIONS PRESENTS

ROBERT RILEY

SHADOW INVESTIGATOR

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#4. The Fifth Passenger

One thing I would never choose to do in my life unless I really had to: jumping out of a plane, be it with or without choice, but always with a parachute, I still wouldn't want to do that. It was to my relief that when I was asked to visit the lower Lincolnshire airfield - which shall remain nameless – I was assured I wouldn't be thrown out of any aircraft. Never-the-less, I felt nervous. I don't fly very well, but in my life so far, I've flown around the world with my head stuck in a book, daring never to look up regardless of turbulence reports coming direct from the captain. As far as I am concerned, the seatbelt sign is always lit.

This airfield was a private strip, owned in part by the royal air force, loaned out to companies such as the Lincolnshire Freefall team of parachuting enthusiasts, many of which were regular jumpers mixed in with those doing their one-off tandem jumps. One of said regulars, Toby Landen (no pun intended, names are purely coincidental) contacted me indirectly through my sources, and his story fascinated me enough for me to drive up from London.

Toby's story in short: he'd often gone up with inconsistent numbers: a minimum of three, maximum of 6 for the people carrier they used. This one particular jump, he'd thought he would be going up with four persons, two solos (which included him) and one tandem jump. Getting into the plane, Toby thought nothing of the attendees, all appearing confident, all be it certain that the one going up on tandem, strapped to a pro, was anxious, this being her second jump.

Toby had been caught in his own thoughts, so really didn't care about numbers, especially when he noticed another person sitting in the plane with them. This was a girl, all kitted out for a solo. She appeared to be very quiet, adopting what Toby explained to be, a sense of serene confidence. He smiled her way, but she seemed dismissive. It never occurred to him that there wasn't a fifth passenger in the prep room. It never occurred to him to question it... so therefore, *it was what it was!*

They reached the jump position, and out they all went, solo's and then tandem together. Toby looked for the girl, but she seemed to have already jumped he thought. She wasn't in the plane, so again, without thought he sailed out into the bright blue sky, freefalling towards the earth with a parachute strapped to his back. The experience was always exhilarating he said. Being experienced as he was, he

learnt to freefall observing the others, taking note of what they were doing. The confident girl was below, but visible to him. She appeared to be adopting all the correct position, and enjoying it, or so Toby could see from his angle. He sped-up his descent, leveling with her until she could see him. She smiled, and together they signaled the need to pull the string ready for a steady slow decent. Toby waited for her to pull first. An instinct he had when freefalling with new people, be they experienced or not. He watched as she struggled, her face changed to one of fear. The chute appeared to be stuck. Toby had no way to get to her.

He waited, hoping she would suddenly open her shoot and rise up real fast, showing bright colors in a display of success. Toby watched in horror as she began to spin out of control. He noticed the ground coming fast below him. He had no choice but to deploy.

He launched his chute and once he had a chance, he looked below to see where the girl was. He couldn't see her at all. He looked around, searching for her chute. He could see the others, counting all four including his own.

Four, counting his own.

I sat across from Toby at the aerodrome café, near to the airfield where the event occurred. I asked what happened next, and he told me that he needed to take me out to the field. I nodded, and asked if it was okay if I took some equipment: camera, audio recorder, and a mini DV with night vision... just in case.

Walking out on the field, Toby explained what happened after he landed safely on the ground. He asked all the others who had also landed successfully, if they'd seen the girl, the fifth passenger come down. They didn't know what he was talking about, quite naturally. They even acted awkward with him for bringing up the possibility that somebody who they'd gone up with didn't deploy. To which end, there was no such evidence of anybody falling without a chute, and he was instructed to forget about it. Toby swore that there was another passenger.

Toby showed me exactly where he landed. I looked up, trying to get a sense of spirit activity in the area. There was hardly anything, distance feelings only, but they were much older feelings. I walked freely around the field, trying to get something, anything that was a scent of activity. I looked up feeling nothing, seeing nothing.

"I landed here. If she landed, she should have come around here." Toby indicated the area around him, shouting across to me as I walked further away towards the edge perimeter of the field. I had a feeling: fear, screaming, something instant, and something unavoidable. I walked further looked up. Suddenly as I looked up a second time, I saw, right up high, a face of a girl, a face of terror coming at me at immense speed, right on my position. I covered my head, just as a rush of warm energy passed through me, slamming to the ground. The scream that accompanied it was as horrific as it was loud. The sound stopped and the feeling faded. I felt her

fear though, that was for sure. It was like nothing I'd ever felt. It had no conscious pattern. She didn't die thinking of family, of life love or anything of the sort. Whoever she was, was all about her death, and through myself and the eyes of Toby, she was reliving her death over and over. She did however give me something else - I recorded sound on my audio recorder. It was a name... but the voice was not hers. The voice was of an old lady, another entity who had obviously been there when she fell... when she landed. A woman called out her name. The EVP I caught was unmistakable.

Amanda... no... Amanda.....

Toby felt complete shocked when I told him what was recorded. That set us both on a quest to find out who this Amanda was.

The airbase had records of all accidents, incidents and deaths over the last hundred or so years. There were 2 recorded deaths during WW2, and that was all. There was no mention of a Amanda however in any other records. My initial thought was that the archives were incomplete.

The owner of the Freefall private company, Grant Taylor, dismissed ever knowing a Amanda, and in the 45 years of his association with the freefall group, had never encountered anybody falling to their death. They decided for us that Toby was merely hallucinating. I however did not agree.

Something in me made me investigate beyond the airfield. I looked up the name Amanda, and the name of the different villages and towns in the surrounding area. I came up with the jackpot. There was a Amanda Jones, airplane enthusiast who went missing 40 years ago, never found. I felt it in my gut that there was a link with the missing person's case, and the experience that Toby had with the ghost of the girl they both believed had fallen to her death.

I had to get more from the older woman who was at the site of Amanda's death. The ghost who haunted the ground with Amanda had to have something more to say.

That night, I went out onto the field alone, without permission. I stayed on the spot where the girl had fallen, experiencing three times the same feeling of her falling straight through me. I did not plan to stay to experience a fourth. I closed my eyes and felt somebody grabbing a hold of my hand. A cold sensation was followed by a voice.

Amanda was buried... the woman said.

With the pull of her hand, I followed the dark shadow across the field, towards the trees, and a small barn. The spirit said nothing more, letting go of my hand and disappearing into the night.

The next morning, I took the owner of the freefall private company, Grant Taylor, along with Toby and a police official to the barn in the woods. There I helped move the earth, exposing the remains of the girl, complete with parachute gear. I then played the EVP to Mr. Taylor, and much to our surprise, he burst into tears. He was taken away for questioning, leaving the team of police forensics to uncover the body completely.

I said my farewell to Toby, rejecting his invitation to experience a tandem jump, free of charge.

“It was not my thing,” I said, “but thanks anyway.”

Grant Taylor was charged with concealment, posthumous kidnapping and disposal of the body of Amanda Jones but although it was a long and overdrawn court case, despite taking individual criminal responsibility in the hearing of his case, he was released on bail despite protests. The Protestors blamed me for most of that having paranormal evidence that couldn't be used in court was a big negative aspect in their eyes. There was even a notion brought that I had something to do with it.

Amanda received a proper burial in her family plot and was never seen to be falling from the skies again. The old spirit who guided me turned out to be the guilt ridden wife of Grant Taylor. She'd died after keeping the secret along with her husband for a great many years. Guilt was obviously still present, even on the other side. Tragedy always has a way of revealing its truth beyond death. But it did make me believe the expression: what goes around comes around.