

Dumb and Dumber at the ABC

Is Auntie turning tabloid?

What is happening to the ABC? Australia's most respected media network, famous for its science programs and excellent research, is now publishing and endorsing what is clearly bunkum. First we had the decidedly crackpot endorsements of quackery on the ABC TV program *Second Opinion*, and now we have the Radio National program *The Spirit Of Things* clearly saying:

Allison Dubois is a forensic psychic whose information has helped police locate bodies and murder suspects. And:

Allison DuBois has helped to solve murders for the FBI."

Note that it says "has helped" not "claims to have helped". Now all of this we find just a little difficult to believe. Isn't just a little bit of checking required before publication? Isn't *the Skeptic* magazine required reading for all ABC personnel? Hasn't anyone read *the Skeptic's* eminent articles demolishing psychics' claims of helping Police and Search And Rescue organisations find missing people?

But before we get all puffed up and indignant about this, does it really matter? Does it really matter that the ABC has clearly stated that some self-promoter has helped the Police and the FBI locate missing bodies and solve murders? Can we let this one pass through to the keeper and put it down to just another day in the life of a skeptic;

continually assaulted by all manner of improbabilities and lazy thinking.

Well, yes it really does matter. Consider this:

- *The families of the missing are deeply traumatised by unsolved murders and missing bodies. As Bret Christian said in an earlier article, "Skeptics sometimes find amusing the bizarre claims of clairvoyants, but there are many instances when their antics add to the trauma and heartache of bereaved people."*
- *No "psychic" has ever solved a murder, located missing bodies, aircraft or boats.*
- *The urgings of such traumatized people and "psychics" only inhibits the work of Police and Search And Rescue organizations.*
- *The ABC is a greatly respected organization, and this endorsement will only lift the credibility of "psychics" and cause more grief for the bereaved and difficulties for Police and rescue authorities.*

So at first keeping an open mind, (my friends call it a "vacant mind") I contacted the ABC *Spirit of Things* presenter Rachael Kohn and asked:

1. *What steps did you take to verify her claims that "Allison Dubois is a forensic psychic whose information has helped police locate bodies and murder suspects."*



Ken McLeod is a retired Air Traffic Controller and Search And Rescue Co-ordinator. He is now a boutique farmer on the NSW South Coast and recently lost his whole flock of livestock when both his sheep died.

2. Can you name the cases, dates, police services, and contacts within those police services who can verify those claims?

3. Were you aware that the Texas Rangers and the Glendale Arizona Police have denied Alison Dubois' claims that she had helped them solve crimes?

4. If you were aware of that, why was this not mentioned in the program as a way of introducing balance?

While waiting for her reply, I did some digging for myself, Strangely, I found that on one web site that the ABC linked to from *The Spirit of Things*, there were published the rebuttals from the Texas Rangers and the Glendale Arizona Police of Alison Dubois' claims that she had helped them solve crimes. So the ABC had the rebuttal right in front of them when they went to air and did not notice it. This seems to create an entire new definition of the phrase "incompetent research." One would think that this would have raised some concern in even the most gullible minds, but not apparently, in the ABC. Is there some form of super-gullibility, like super-conducting metals? I can see a lucrative research program being developed by some budding PhD.

Rachael Kohn's response to my questions came commendably quickly, but it did leave me a little perplexed, so I show it here in full.

The Spirit of Things is about matters of faith, which Allison Dubois clearly said her work requires. In answer to my question, she said very plainly that you do have to make that leap of faith or its just not going to work or be meaningful. Similarly, the matter of faith is central to the second interview on the program with Patricia Stannus. The "material" evidence for both mediums is typical of the field, and one is free to believe it or not. Rev'd Stannus may be able to see the images on the photographs or not, but I'm not sure that telling her they aren't there is

going to make much difference to her faith. The Arizona Daily Star, featured a positive assessment of her uncommon powers by Prof Gary E Schwartz, which was impressive. But as the article also notes, a fellow academic who holds him in high regard, is critical of his work on mediums. In that article it was a draw. I'm unaware of the specific denials by the Texas Rangers and the Glendale Arizona police, which you did not cite. But as Allison says, the police are not willing to admit they use information from psychics. Either way, I'm in no position to get to the bottom of it. But I do not have to. The Spirit of Things is not in the business of debunking faith. If it was, I can assure you, it would not stop at mediums. The whole box and dice of the religious world would be up for grabs. But that would be to misread the whole purpose of faith, which Allison, along with everyone else in the religious world would admit can move mountains metaphorically speaking and heal people.

While I am aware of the exploitive nature of some religious/spiritual movements, and occasionally do programs which focus on the it, I am not aware of any stories about Allison Dubois being exploitive or abusive of the people who have faith in her. Though I am sure there are some disgruntled ones out there. I wonder why sceptics do not turn their rational powers of debunking to Aboriginal beliefs in spirits, Christian beliefs in the resurrection and associated miracles, and Protestant beliefs in the powers of the Holy Spirit to save people. For that matter there is a central Muslim belief that no matter how destitute or needy one is as a result of having children, Allah will provide. I wonder if they all need to be investigated as well, after all, the claims are made on a daily basis around the country.

Regards, Rachael

Readers will no doubt be as perplexed as I am. To the simple and straightforward questions regarding what steps were taken to verify

Allison Dubois' claims that she had helped police locate bodies and murder suspects and to name those cases, dates, police services, and contacts within those police services who can verify those claims, there was no response, except to say that it is all about faith.

Now, some people might call me difficult, but this is not about faith at all. Statements of fact were clearly made; "*Allison DuBois has helped to solve murders for the FBI.*" By dressing this up as a statement of faith we are asked to overlook the lack of supporting evidence and go blindly into the netherworld of gullibility. No doubt, we shall be hearing from more people who have nothing but faith to support their irrational beliefs on the ABC. I haven't heard from the Flat Earth Society for a long time and really miss them, and they would fit right into *The Spirit of Things*. Better yet, the Flat earth Society will not traumatise the bereaved.

So it seems that there's two avenues for advancement within the ABC. One can aim for such programs as *4Corners*, where you work your fingers to the bone, researching every detail, checking every allegation, unearthing every document. Or you just sit back, like in *The Spirit of Things* and *Second Opinion* and accept everything that every whacko and charlatan who comes along tells you, as long as it's a matter of faith, of course.

It's very sad that the ABC has come to this. This is the organisation that the Australian public rely on for information because of its reputation for accuracy and professionalism. What a shame that the uncritical acceptance of the mutterings of every ratbag is trashing that reputation.

Of course, a cynic would say that that's just the way the Government wants it.

