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In Memoriam - a personal tribute to a steadfast supporter of the SPSIG

The first time I met Alan in person was at a meeting of the Scientific and Medical Network held at Stowe School in the mid-1990s. Alan was giving a talk on Spirit Release with his characteristic energy and optimism. I warmed to him at once, not only because the number of psychiatrists in the UK working directly with the transpersonal could be counted on the fingers of one hand, but also because of Alan's evident sincerity and unflinching commitment in helping his patients, many of whom had almost given up hope of getting better.

First, a little about Alan's background – some of which I only learned after his passing. Alan was educated at Uppingham School and the University of London, qualifying in Medicine from St Thomas' hospital and undertaking his training in psychiatry at the Maudsley Hospital. The first part of Alan's professional life was spent researching facial structure and personality and in 1959, while making a trip to Africa, he went to see the Albert Schweitzer hospital in Lambarene, Gabon. There he met Gertrude Boschler, a Swiss-born nurse who was running Schweitzer's leper colony. Trudi (as she was known) and Alan were married a few months later and made their home in Bayswater, London, where their son and four daughters were raised, and where Alan and Trudi continued to live until Trudi's passing in 2016.

Following his years in research, Alan returned to clinical psychiatry in 1992, taking a consultant post in the NHS. Frustrated by the limitations of psychiatric treatments available to him, on meeting the hypnotherapist Lance Trendell, Alan learned about spirit release therapy (SRT). He had no hesitation in offering this approach to a number of his NHS patients. Although Alan was convinced the treatment was extremely effective in selected cases, in 1997 the hospital authorities prohibited him from using it because it was considered to lack the required evidence base and therefore could not be recognised. Consequently, Alan left the Health Service and began working in private practice. In 1999, he set up the Spirit Release Foundation (SRF) and I was delighted to give support as a founding member.

The SRF flourished under Alan's kindly direction, pioneering the use of SRT in the UK. We were a mix of psychiatrists, psychologists, healers and other health professionals who shared our knowledge and experience through networking and conferences. Although the self-funded SRF was obliged to close in 2012 due to financial pressures, the way had been prepared for the Spirit Release Forum, run by David Furlong, and which remains active to this day.

Due to lack of systematic research, the efficacy of SRT remains anecdotal and in the evidence-based world of mainstream healthcare, individual case reports are not taken into account – even when SRT is presented purely as a psychological treatment. Furthermore, the very idea of an after-death realm runs counter to the prevailing climate of physical realism. Yet Alan remained undaunted.

While continuing to see his patients, Alan set his sights on writing a book that would describe his work, and more widely, his philosophy of life. His aim, based on his extensive clinical experience, as well as his involvement in other forums including the Scientific and Medical Network and the Spirituality and Psychiatry Special Interest Group in the Royal College of Psychiatrists, was to demonstrate that we are eternal spiritual beings, and that death is but a transition to another realm. Alan was sure that no matter the scepticism of mainstream healthcare, this heartening truth could reach a wider audience and was something that he, as a psychiatrist, could help to make more generally known and understood.

Alan's book, *Psychiatry and the Spirit World*, was to be the means by which he would share his message. It took Alan several years to write and having been accepted for publication by Inner Traditions in 2022, it will be available in bookshops from February this year. It is written in Alan's friendly and companionable style and I trust that for its readers it will achieve his aim of lightening the burden of existential doubt and fear affecting many people in today's world.

I was in touch with Alan shortly before his passing and he mentioned how grateful he was for the support and friendship of numerous colleagues while writing his book. He had been looking forward to the book launch but he already knew the satisfaction of having completed what for him was his most important single task.

Like most of Alan's friends, I was not aware before his passing that in 1971 Alan had succeeded as the 2nd Baron Sanderson of Ayot, of Welwyn, but that he promptly disclaimed the Barony for life. My guess is that apart from his natural modesty, Alan would never have countenanced anything that might be taken to set him apart from the many patients from every walk of life that he made it his mission to serve.

Alan passed over after a short and pain-free illness. All of us who knew Alan will remember his personal warmth and enthusiasm, and his determination to help as best he could all those who came to him in distress and suffering. Over the many years I knew him, I never heard Alan say an unkind word about anyone – a truly kind soul.

Dr Andrew Powell