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Up close and personal with the peddler



Medium Mavis Pittilla talks to Sue Farrow about a uniquely hands-on experience.

Mavis Pittilla isn't your average medium. Not only is she exceptionally gifted, she's not afraid to defy stereotypes and be one hundred per cent herself.

Off duty and relaxing, Mavis can frequently be seen with her trademark cigarette in one hand and a wineglass in the other. But that chilled-out image is certainly not the whole story.

Mavis was a protégée of the legendary medium Gordon Higginson, who died in 1993. She's respected around the world for her ability and takes the responsibility of her mediumship and other spiritual work extremely seriously.

It's fitting, then, that she should have been afforded some unique privileges at the historic World Congress of Spiritualists, held in Lily Dale, New York in July.



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I asked if this was her first visit to the iconic Spiritualist venue.

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“I had visited once before, many years ago, but I had never seen it in operation and never worked there. Although we have many Spiritualist churches in the UK, a full-scale residential community like this was something to behold!

“I was delighted to be one of the demonstrators at the first Divine Service in the historic large auditorium, where clairvoyantly I saw many of the early pioneers gathering.

“They were sitting amongst the delegates from the Congress and were excited by the prospect of different organisations coming together in unity. They felt that a new energy was needed to enthuse the world again with the miracle of communication between the two worlds.”

Later, Mavis gave a joint demonstration of mediumship with her colleague Colin



The reconstructed Fox Cottage

Bates. “It was joy of sharing a three-hour demonstration with our own Colin Bates,” she told me. “And a further thrill was delivering a lecture in the very impressive Assembly Rooms building, which is filled with paintings of Spiritualist pioneers.”

An even bigger historical buzz was to come.

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my mediumship at the legendary ‘Stump’ in the forest, where the early mediums communicated with lost loved ones. It

really is an outdoor cathedral, and the power and energy there was tremendous.”

Regular readers will know that Modern Spiritualism had its beginnings in 1848 in the small American town of Hydesville. In the cottage home of the Fox family, the spirit of a murdered peddler communicated intelligently with two daughters of the family by means of raps and taps, establishing his identity. Those events led to a huge interest in the realities of life after death and spirit communication, spreading the message rapidly across America and subsequently to Europe and around the world.

A number of objects from the original Fox Cottage are housed in the museum at Lily Dale, and it was there that Mavis was to have the privilege of a unique hands-on experience with Spiritualist history.

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Mavis takes up the story:

“I was given the opportunity to psychometrise the peddler’s box from the original Fox Cottage. It’s held securely in the museum and had not been touched for over 25 years. After some gentle persuasion by SNU Minister Steven Upton, the curator opened up the display cabinet so that I could touch it and tune in. It was a unique opportunity.

“I immediately got the story and discovered that an argument had started the day before by a campfire and that there had definitely been drink involved. The peddler’s death itself was accidental and had not been deliberate.

“My hands seem to melt inside the box where I knew there were trinkets, twine and other artefacts. There was not much of any monetary value, but it was probably very precious to the man himself.

“Just to be part of the history that has been the foundation of my belief and religion for over forty years was mind-blowing. When I finished tuning in, the museum curator, Ron Nagy, told me that I had said exactly what the last person who had tuned in had felt 25 years earlier. It was splendid confirmation.”

And what were Mavis’s impressions of today’s Spiritualist life in America?

“It would be wrong of me to comment on American Spiritualism, as we didn’t really witness much whilst we were there. What



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I do know from my work in many parts of America and with my online mentorship group in the USA is that they are thirsty for knowledge and spirituality, and value the British approach.

“I discovered that Lily Dale had been the home of free-thinkers at the turn of the century and it allowed them to come together to share ideas. Women particularly found their voice there and the suffrage movement was very strong. It was definitely a powerhouse in its time.”

This first ever World Congress was a

landmark event for Spiritualists, with delegates travelling to Lily Dale from all around the globe. Was it a one-off event or will there be another such gathering in the future?

“The SNU has agreed to host the next event in four years’ time and that will be a wonderful opportunity to showcase the best of UK practice,” says Mavis.

“I really believe that in this world of discord Spiritualists at least should be able to come together and achieve unity.”

