

{ ON THE COVER }

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GALLO IMAGES/THINKSTOCK PHOTOS



WE NEED TO TALK

Tammy de Oliveira communicates telepathically with animals, alive and dead. She is a surprisingly busy woman. Why are so many of us trying to speak to our pets, and what are they trying to tell us?
Oliver Roberts reports

MY great-grandfather, so I'm told, was a kind man with a tender spirit. He spent most of his life working on the drizzly railways of north Yorkshire. He also spent a few years in the trenches of World War 1, fighting at diabolical places like the Somme, winning medals for bravery. I met him once, when I was seven. The only memory I have from that day is seeing the tears shimmering in his grey eyes as he looked down at my sister and me sitting at his blanketed feet. He died in the old-age home a short while after.

As I grew up and heard more stories about great-grandfather Harry, I began to sense an odd union with him. He was tall and thin, like me. My mother tells me we have the same colour eyes. I can't say why but I feel connected to the man. I look at photos of him and he is looking back at me. I have met him in several dreams and we have spoken there like old friends. There have been times when I've been sure of his presence in a room.

Is it possible that my cat, in the instant of his death on January 17 last year, met Grandpa Harry in the afterlife?

This sounds utterly absurd, I know. And a month ago I would have said anyone who wrote a sentence

like that was crackers. But a month ago I had not met Tammy de Oliveira. A month ago I hadn't seriously considered the idea that an animal may have a soul.

De Oliveira is an animal communicator. She speaks to animals, both living and deceased, using telepathic means. She also tracks lost pets. She does not — and this is important — wear hemp, follow a strict whole-grain diet and/or listen to pan-pipe music.

She is not some loon who you feel the need to entertain for a few minutes and then plan your escape from. She is a perfectly rational and smart woman with a naughty sense of humour and an ankle that was badly sprained a few months ago from rambunctious dancing at a party.

The reason all this is important is because, delivered in a certain way by a certain type of person, it might be easy to come to the conclusion that telepathic animal communication is a load of hooey.

But when you're hearing about it from someone who is doing their masters in metaphysics, you tend to listen.

Even De Oliveira had her doubts. She says she has always felt a kinship with animals, always knew when, say, one of her dogs was not feeling well. Then an encounter with a pair

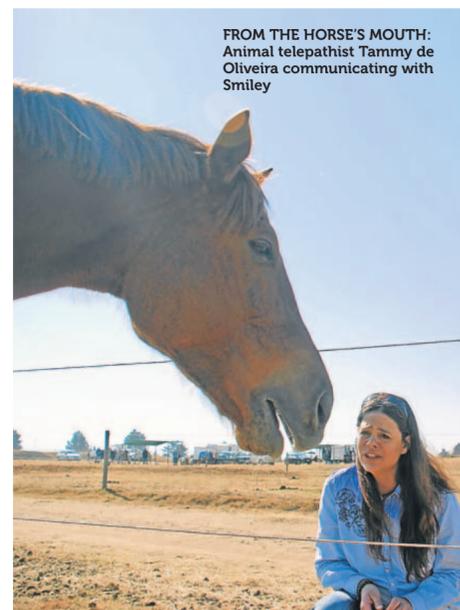
of dolphins in Mozambique convinced her.

"There was a mother and a baby, and they started doing a spiral around me," she says. "There was this sudden flood of emotion and images and pink light. It sounds mad, I know, it sounds crazy. But as soon as I got off the boat I contacted Anna Breytenbach [one of South Africa's leading animal communicators]. I did my first course through her and then wanted to know more and more."

De Oliveira has been at it for nearly six years. She's doing about 10 trackings and between 20 and 30 readings a month.

How it works is someone will e-mail a picture of their lost/troubled/dead animal (preferably with the animal looking directly into the camera), and De Oliveira, by gazing into the creature's eyes, receives messages and emotions from it. She won't do live communications in the client's home because it's too distracting.

"Everyone has their own technique, their own way of connecting," says De Oliveira. "I work from a wendy house at the bottom of my garden. I go into a very quiet, calm, meditative space and then basically start connecting with the soul of the animal. Then I do automatic writing,



FROM THE HORSE'S MOUTH: Animal telepathist Tammy de Oliveira communicating with Smiley



KINDRED SPIRITS: Oliver Roberts's late cat Oscar and great-grandfather Harry Slater

It comes through like words, like a conversation in my head."

To make sure the communications are not influenced by outside suggestion, De Oliveira always requests that her clients give her as little information about the animal

as possible. Results have been remarkable.

There was the woman in Botswana whose cat ran away. De Oliveira was told (by the cat) that it was tired of being harassed by the dogs every time it entered or left

the house. This was true, but De Oliveira did not know that the woman owned dogs. She advised the woman to create a calm space for the cat and provide a window for her to get into and leave from in an area closed off to the dogs. A few days later the cat returned.

There was the couple who were moving overseas and had a very old and incapacitated dog which they weren't sure whether to take with or put down. De Oliveira says she spoke with the dog and it told her it wanted to "pass on" and have its ashes scattered in a field of tulips. When De Oliveira got back to the clients with this information they were astonished. For what they hadn't told De Oliveira was that they were moving to the Netherlands, and the house they were moving into was across the road from ... a large field of tulips.

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But is it? Why, when we care so much for our pets, feed them and love them and grieve for them when they die, do we assume they are beings whose emotions never surpass mere instinct?

Smiley is a horse. She didn't like being in her horse box. Her owner, Jade Duncan, contacted De Oliveira who sorted out the problem with a bit of reassurance.

Next, Smiley began showing intense agitation in her stable at night. She once got so anxious that she kicked a hole in the wall. De Oliveira communicated with Smiley again. She received images of bats. She relayed this to Duncan, who checked the stables and found a group of bats nesting in the rafters.

De Oliveira seldom meets the animals she's communicated with but here we are at an equestrian park on a windy Sunday morning in Midrand. Smiley and De Oliveira have communicated with each other eight times over the past three months. De Oliveira has brought along a chunk of rose quartz, apparently a request from Smiley.

"I've had the horse for six years," Duncan says. "I got her from a racing yard. I don't want to speak too loud [she whispers because Smiley is within earshot], but she didn't do so well on the track."

De Oliveira is in the background, stroking Smiley, saying, "You're very brave and you're very special."

Duncan wants to ride Smiley in show-jumping events. But the lovely beast sometimes rears and gets

panic attacks. This is what De Oliveira is working to solve at the moment.

"I think the communications have helped Smiley a lot," says Duncan. "She seems to have a lot to say. I think she's been trying to tell me a lot and I don't listen, obviously, so when she gets a bit naughty, or what I see as naughty, it's actually just her saying, 'Give me some time, you're going too fast.'"

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Jenny Shone, who trained De Oliveira and is a world-renowned animal communicator, is at the equestrian park with us. Again, she is not some fruit bat with dream-catcher earrings. She is serene and articulate. While we're chatting to Smiley, Shone drifts away from us. When I look for her, minutes later, she's in the dusty distance, standing face-to-face with a calm black stallion.

"Everybody can tap into this," Shone tells us later. "But some learn more easily than others."

Shone has her own stories. The time she took her computer to be fixed at some man's house and his African grey parrot casually described to her the appearance of a woman who turned out to be the computer nerd's ex-wife. Or the orang-utan that was raised in a house in South Africa and has now

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Native Americans have been onto this animal telepathic communication thing for centuries. They see animals, especially wild ones, as

messengers and totems. Both De Oliveira and Shone have worked with wild animals. Shone says that's a whole other experience.

"If you get a wild animal to connect with you it's quite a privilege because they're not integrated with humans. There's a very raw energy there. They tend to give you very spiritual information. Stuff about the state of the planet and the purpose of animals."

What is their purpose?

"Depends who you're asking," Shone says.

De Oliveira says there's been a recent surge in the number of cats going missing from households. She says they are picking up on people's stress and their absence is a way of telling their humans to fix what's wrong. Of the trackings she does for lost pets, very few are successful. According to De Oliveira, a lot of pets who "go missing" have actually left the house of their own will. Shone concurs.

"I'm seeing a lot more dogs getting run over and cats leaving and not coming back," she says. "They're choosing to do that. Their souls are crossing over because the earth energy is too hectic."

So, is all of this very unlikely? Remember, De Oliveira is practically inundated with requests from pet owners. Is it possible that somewhere among all the tweeting and texting and instant messaging, we are craving some new form of contact? Are we perhaps yearning for a connection that goes beyond the utterances of humans and the bleep of some handheld device?

That's probably why I sent De Oliveira a picture of Oscar, the Siamese cat I adored for 16 years. I wondered what might come of it. And when De Oliveira replies with the message that, on his passing, Oscar was met by "an older gentleman with grandfather energy, tall, and with a very kind and gentle soul", I think I believe it might be true.

Because why not? Missiles are fired at schools, planes are shot from the sky and the Kardashians are releasing autobiographies. So why the hell not? **LS**

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"There's no doubt that all of it is true. It's definitely Smiley talking and it's definitely Tammy speaking to Smiley because she's so, so accurate."

Jenny Shone, who trained De Oliveira and is a world-renowned animal communicator, is at the equestrian park with us. Again, she is not some fruit bat with dream-catcher earrings. She is serene and articulate. While we're chatting to Smiley, Shone drifts away from us. When I look for her, minutes later, she's in the dusty distance, standing face-to-face with a calm black stallion.

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