

The following excerpt is taken from the book *Conversations with History: Inspiration, Reflections and Advice from History-Makers and Celebrities on the Other Side* by Susan Lander. It is published by Hay House (Available August 11, 2014) and available at all bookstores or online at: www.amazon.com and www.barnesandnoble.com.

INTRODUCTION: BEN FRANKLIN IN MY KITCHEN

What would you do if Ben Franklin was standing in your kitchen?

That's how this book got started. Well, actually it started with Ben Franklin's schedule.

It was the morning of September 12, 2011. I was writing another book and decided that I needed some help with discipline. Someone had sent me a copy of Franklin's schedule, his daily routine recorded in his autobiography, so I hung it up on my refrigerator, hoping that it would motivate me. It was simple and direct and right down to business—lots of time for work, “diversion” or conversation, and addressing “Powerful Goodness.” Then I saw a flash of shoulder-length gray hair, gold wire-rimmed spectacles, a furrowed brow, thin-lipped smile . . . it was *him*, decked out in full colonial garb.

I am what is called a medium—I can communicate with spirits. I can see them, hear them, and feel them. Granted, I don't usually see the spirits of famous dead people. Usually I see people's deceased loved ones or “spirit guides” (the spirits that help us walk our paths while we are here on Earth). But I was looking at Ben Franklin's schedule, so why wouldn't he come visit? I chalked it up to an interesting, but singular, occurrence and went on with my day.

The next day I was looking at the schedule and there he was again. Oops. Which brings me back to my original question: “What would you do if Ben Franklin was standing in your kitchen?” I decided to talk with him.

So we started talking. Although I was feeling more than a little silly, I started showing him things that an 18th-century visitor might find interesting in a modern Manhattan apartment: my computer, my sound dock with my iPhone, the microwave, the view from my 17th-floor apartment. He reacted to everything with curiosity and amazement, and I was just as curious and amazed to be talking to him.

Ben was fascinating to talk with and a very distinguished gentleman (although he says he prefers to be called a “statesman”). He was good-natured, focused, intense, and so smart, with an underlying sense of humor

and sense of purpose. Though the expression on his face was often a thin smile, I also got the impression that he was about to crack a joke at any second. He told me that he loves puns and will sometimes sit and make them up, saving them to drop at an appropriate time as if he'd spontaneously come up with them right then. He said it makes him look clever—"Little do they know!"

He told me that he enjoys creating and inventing and "being of service," but feels there is "a danger in taking oneself too seriously" or "being too pious—just know who you are and go on from there." When he said this, it occurred to me that I was being given some very interesting information, and I wanted to remember everything.

So I grabbed some paper and began asking him questions. (Twenty years in the legal field has taught me how to ask a good interview question.)

And that is how *Conversations with History* was born. As a matter of fact, Ben gave this book its name. Since then, the spirits haven't stopped coming, and they haven't stopped talking. The wisdom that their messages hold for all of us never ceases to amaze me.

At the beginning I kept asking myself "Why me?" and "How could this be real?" But I have come to realize that it doesn't matter. Whether or not you believe that it is real, I think that there is something fascinating and wonderful to be found in every interview. Each one is very different, although there do seem to be common threads or themes woven throughout them.

What I can say is that these participants know many things I don't, and the information that came through in my interviews has taught me a great deal. What I have learned has made my life better and happier every day, and I am looking forward to sharing it all with you. There are lessons in abundance and prosperity, love and relationships, personal responsibility for the world around us, and the legacy we leave for future generations.

The historical figures who "knocked" and came forward to participate are a very interesting and eclectic group. Most of the participants seemed to have chosen me. I had barely even heard of some of them. But I chose a few others whom I was personally interested in, asked if they would participate, and was happy I got to talk with them.

Most of these folks have vastly different areas of knowledge and expertise from me. I have some experience in social justice and politics from my 20 years in the legal field, but that's about it.

Included in these interviews are actors, abolitionists, businessmen, artists, spiritual leaders, a king, a warrior, a poet, musicians, a prophet, and a voodoo priestess. One of the participants passed away sometime in the 6th

century b.c., while the most recent passed in 2011. In his interview, Einstein talks about the nature of time; I think I got a C-minus in physics. The ancient Greek poet Sappho gave me new poems; I can't write a poem to save my life. So much in these interviews is outside the realm of my experience, and that is what made it so illuminating, challenging, and fun to work on.

By the way, I have always been a terrible history student. But after writing this book, I am proud to say that I'm not quite as bad as I used to be.

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