

STELLA LONG

AN INTERVIEW WITH A WATER WITCH

The following interview took place on January 2, 1975 in Epping, North Dakota at the home of Mr. and Mrs. George Long. I had arranged to visit with Mrs. Long about her claim of being able to locate sources of underground water with the use of a divining rod. Present at the interview were Mr. and Mrs. Long, (also referred to in the interview as George and Stella), My son, Stefan Peterson, and myself, Barbara Peterson. I taped the interview, with the permission of the Longs, and later transcribed it word for word, hoping to preserve the flavor of Mrs. Long's personality, and the feeling I had of participating in the unusual experience she created for us.

Barbara: Mrs. Long, may I begin by asking you what expression you use to describe your talent for finding underground water?

Mrs. Long: All that I can say is it's a God's gift.

Barbara: Do you describe it as witching or dowsing?

Mrs. Long: Witching is the way I describe it.

Barbara: Witching! Oh, that's interesting. I like that expression.

Mrs. Long: That's what I say. It's witching.

Barbara: it's witching.

Mrs. Long: Uh huh.

Barbara: Good. How old were you when you first began witching:

Mrs. Long: In the 30's our well went to pieces, and I can't tell you exactly what my age was, but my father did it, you see, and the gift is given from male to female, and I didn't have any sons, so I couldn't give the gift to them. Our well went to pieces, and I tried it out there for the first time. That was in the 30's, and, well, I was born in '99, so you could kind of figure out what my age is, and that's when I first started. And from then on, I have been from one end of the state to the other, and I've also been in Hinsdale, Montana.

Barbara: How interesting. Well then, in other words, your ability is inherited?

Mrs. Long: Inherited from my father, yes.

Barbara: Can you trace this back further than your father?

Mrs. Long: No, I can't. I can't do that.

Barbara: Do you know anything about your grandmother or prior generations?

Mrs. Long: No, I can't. I didn't know my grandparents that well, because we moved out here when I was seven years old.

Barbara: Well, now, did your father actually teach you?

Mrs. Long: No.

Barbara: Or did he just tell you?

Mrs. Long: He just did it, and then I never really thought of trying to do it, until our well went to pieces.

Barbara: But you had in the back of your mind all the time that you should have this ability?

Mrs. Long: No, I really didn't. I really didn't have it there. What really made me start doing it, was George's brother-in-law could do it, and he came up, and he witched out our well. And then he said "well, now, the rest of you try it". And that's when I tried it for the first time. And I found out I could do it, and I estimated the depth of our well at 116 feet, and that's where they struck the water, at 116 feet.

Barbara: That's amazing. Have you always lived here in Epping?

Mrs. Long: I was born in Wisconsin. Then we moved to Niagara, N.D. in '07, to Ray in '16. I don't remember what year we moved out here to Epping, but I've lived my married life here.

Barbara: Did you go to grade school and high school?

Mrs. Long: No, I just finished my eighth grade in Niagara, N.D.

Barbara: Do you know any other lady witches?

Mrs. Long: I have a niece that says she can do it too, so she would have to have inherited it from my father, too, you see. I had four brothers, and none of them could do it. I was the only girl in the family, and the four brothers, none of them could do it.

Barbara: But you would account for your niece's ability as an inherited ability also. How old is your niece now?

Mrs. Long: Oh, I'd have to stop to think...

Barbara: Well, she's a grown woman now?

Mrs. Long: Yes, she's married.

Barbara: Does she live here?

Mrs. Long: No, she don't do it.

Barbara: She doesn't do it?

Mrs. Long: She has witched one well that I know of, but why she knew she could witch is because I witched the well where she is married to this man, I witched his well, and then she tried it after I did, and then she found out she could do it.

Barbara: Would you describe witching as more or less a full time occupation for you?

Mrs. Long: Oh, no.

Barbara: Has it ever been a full time occupation?

Mrs. Long: No.

Barbara: You've been busy being a farm wife?

Mrs. Long: I have never advertised it, and they have to come to me, and ask me to go. I never go out or anything, unless they personally come to me.

Barbara: In other words, people's knowledge of your ability is spread just by word of mouth?

Mrs. Long: Yes, from other people to other people. And I witched many a well where other witchers had been. But, you see, I use a water willow, I don't use a rod. I use a willow.

Barbara: A branch from a willow tree?

Mrs. Long: In a fork. And where I have gone and witched after these other people, they've used rods. You know, welding rods, or anything like that. But from what I understand, mineral will draw mineral, and I could go over the same spot they went, and I could find nothing. Now, Our minister, Rev. Lindberg, he was very interested because he took so much science, and he and I went out to Trenton. He wanted to go along, so we took him out there, and I witched them a well. They had witched with this rod, so they knew where there was water, they was sure they did. So I took my willow, and I found nothing. Well, he took the rod, and he walked over, and sure, it turned for him. There it did, the same place as it turned for them. Only he said, "I want to try that willow", and he tried the willow. It wouldn't do a thing. But then, he took hold of the willow with me, and we went over it, and we found the water.

Barbara: This power, whatever it is, you can transfer to another person?

Mrs. Long: As long as they are holding the willow with me. They have to hold the willow with me.

Barbara: When someone contacts you and wants you to witch for them, you charge a fee for locating these wells, do you not?

Mrs. Long: Yes, I do.

Barbara: How much do you charge them?

Mrs. Long: Well, within the county, I charge \$20.00, and if I go out of the county, I charge \$30.00 or \$40.00. It depends on. And now of course, with the price of gasoline, you know what that is.

Barbara: That's right.

Mrs. Long: He and I went to New Town, and I charged them #35.00. He figured up the mileage, and the gas it took, and when we got home he said "well, mother, you made \$2.00".

Barbara: When you go to witch a well, your fee does not depend on whether or not water is actually found?

Mrs. Long: No, I don't guarantee anything. There was a man called me, well, I wasn't home so actually he talked to George, and that's the first thing he asked, did I guarantee water, and George said "no, she does not".

Barbara: Can you estimate what percentage of your wells have been successful?

Mrs. Long: No, I can't. You can't estimate the strength of the vein.

Barbara: But I mean, of the wells that you have witched, how many times have you selected a location that has brought in a good well?

Mrs. Long: As far as I know, I haven't flubbed. At all.

Barbara: That's remarkable.

Mrs. Long: Nobody has ever told me that I have flubbed. They have called me, yes, and said "I didn't get water". I went back to this one fellow, He called me on the telephone, and he said "I didn't hit no water where you witched, so I want you to come back". Well, I said "I'm not coming back for nothing. At my age I'm not going it". I said, "you'll have to pay me". Well, he said, "I won't pay you". So I said, "O.K., I won't come back". In fact, he said he was going to blacken my name so nobody would ever have me again. Well, it wasn't a week after that, that another guy called me, right up in the same location. I witched his well, and he said "Mrs. Long, I want you to go over there forthat man's place, and witch that!" and I said, "I won't go over there for nothing, I have to be payed because he was so sassy to me over the phone that I was just sick about it". But I went over there, the minute I went over there, I saw he had not drilled where I witched. I knew the location, George was with me, It's one thing that I insist on, is that they mark it, so the mark is stationery, but they just marked it with a bunch of little stones, and he had somebody come out there and clean the stones off, and of course, they took the marker.

Mr. Long: They cleaned up the rock, because there were rocks all over, and they were selling house lots.

Mrs. Long: And I noticed right away, and I turned to this other guy that was with me, and I said, "listen, Mr. Jacobson, he did not drill where I witched". And I showed him where I witched. That's the only one that's ever called me back.

Barbara: That has ever questioned you? Well, I think that's a remarkable record, one hundred percent.

Mrs. Long: Well, as far as I know. Nobody has ever told me otherwise.

Barbara: If they didn't get water they would be likely to call and complain.

Mrs. Long: That's what I thought.

Barbara: You would assume that they were successful wells, if you heard no more about them.

Mrs. Long: They're not always successful wells. There is places you hit water, but there is so much sand and stuff that they can't bring in a good well. But it isn't because the water isn't there. Most of the time there's too much water, but there is river sand, so fine that you can't screen it out.

Barbara: Not even using a point?

Mr. Long: They have these big screens, some of them are up to twelve feet long. I suppose now they'd cost six or seven hundred dollars each. Some places they have been known to put in as high as two of them, in order to get water. It isn't because there isn't water there, it's because there's too much sand to stop it.

Barbara: Mrs. Long, how do you estimate the depth of a well at your chosen location?

Mrs. Long: I walk along, and the willow goes down, points, down, and then I back up, back off of the stream. Well he can tell you, I don't know.

Mr. Long: Well, she just backs up straight away from the stream. You got to back straight away from it.

Barbara: From the direction in which you have some originally?

Mr. Long: You find out which direction the vein runs. If it runs northeast to southwest, you back straight away from it, you see. If you back along it, then you can't get a true..., but if you back straight away from it, then the willow will come up, and it's double that to the depth.

Mrs. Long: The willow comes back up by itself, and hits me here on the chest. And then he steps it off, and it's double that to the water.

Barbara: Do you have any way of estimating the rate of flow?

Mrs. Long: No, I havn't. The only thing I insist on, is when I go to a man to witch a well, I insist on that he holds the willow with me.

Barbara: Oh, you do. How interesting.

Mrs. Long: After I have hit the vein, I insist that he does, because I have been accused of turning the willow. And that is one thing that I insist on, that he hold the willow with me. And he holds it as tight as he can hold it, but the willow will still turn. I insist on that.

Barbara: You have him hold it with one hand?

Mrs. Long: Both hands. Bring me the willow.

Barbara: You let someone else take your willow and hold it, after you have discovered the location for a well?

Mrs. Long: Yes, I let them take the willow and go it themselves, and it won't do nothing for them. But I have a hold of the willow, and then they have a hold of the willow with me, and it works.

Barbara: Do you rely upon any local geological information in first scanning an area to see where water might exist, such as looking at the contour of the land, or the texture of the soil?

Mrs. Long: No, I just walk. And this works for me in a car, too. It will work for me right here in the house.

Barbara: Oh, it does?

Mrs. Long: At my age, there are so many pasture wells here. You know, when the government was giving money for these pasture wells, I absolutely refused to walk. And when a man comes to me and wants me to witch, I say "is it a pasture well or is it a farm lot well", because I refuse to walk in a pasture. When I hit the vein, then I get out and check it.

Barbara: Someone can drive you along in a car?

Mrs. Long: And it will work.

Barbara: Well, that's very unusual, Mrs. Long. From what I have read, most water witches have the feeling that they must be in direct contact with the earth, and that even rubber overshoes will disturb their...

Mrs. Long: No, I don't have to do that at all. Well, right here, in our house now, I can show you. The vein runs right under our house.

Barbara: Oh, it does?

Mrs. Long: I'll show you. Now this is the way I hold the willow. See my hands?

Barbara: Mrs. Long is now holding her willow wand.

Mrs. Long: And then I go across here...

Barbara: We're walking through the kitchen...

Mrs. Long: And now, here you see my willow going?

Barbara: Oh, oh, for goodness' sake!

Mrs. Long: That is our vein of water. Now you take a hold of it with me.

Barbara: Let's see, just one hand?

Mrs. Long: No, put this hand across the top of mine.

Barbara: Oh, O.K....I now have my two hands on the rod, along with Mrs. Long.

Mrs. Long: Now you go over there. Do you feel it going? Hold it!

Barbara: Yes, I couldn't possibly keep it from going down. Why, Mrs. Long, there is no doubt in my mind that that rod is impossible to stop. Stefan, you try it with her too, so that you get the feeling.

Mrs. Long: Would you like to do it?

Stefan: Yes, I'd like to.

Mrs. Long: Now, we'll just walk right across there. Now you hold that willow! Can you hold it?

Stefan: Isn't that something!

Barbara: The fork of the willow is pointing right down toward the floor, and there's no way, I think, that you could keep it from doing that.

Mrs. Long: No, there isn't. I have had a well driller, he didn't believe in it, and they called me to this place where he was drilling, and he says "I can hold that willow", and he just held it until he peeled the bark off.

Barbara: I can feel that my hands are a little bruised from hanging on to it.

Mrs. Long: Well, that's why I said I wouldn't witch more than three wells a day. Because, when I first started, I witched more, and my hands would look like a piece of beef steak when I come home.

Barbara: Now, is this particular willow branch...

Mrs. Long: It's a water willow.

Barbara: It's a water willow that you are particularly fond of using? Do you take good care of this one, or do you pick new ones from time to time?

Mrs. Long: No, In the summerime he goes and gets me a fresh willow every time I go ut, on account of, they're hard to hold, and then they get dry and they break here in the fork. That's the way that is.

Barbara: That's the most interesting demonstration that I've ever seen. Is this a stream of water running under the house?

Mrs. Long: It's just a vein, because I can pick it up anywhere along here. Very seldom you will find a vein that goes straight with the world. They either go this way or this way. They'll not go straight with the world.

~~Barbara: // North-east // by // south-west // on // north-west // by // south-east // // That's
a water willow that you are particularly fond of using // Do you take good care of this one // or do you pick new ones from time to time // Mrs. // Long.~~

Barbara: Northeast by southwest, or northwest by southeast? That's interesting, too. I am very impressed with your ability, Mrs. Long, after that exciting demonstration. I was going to ask you a question about your technique, but obviously, we've seen your technique, so I really don't have to go on and ask you anymore about that. Why do you think that willow fork reacts for you like this?

Mrs. Long: All I can say is it was a God's gift from my dad. And people ask me, "why". I don't know. I cannot explain it. A man from the book store in Williston gave me a book called Ben's Well Witching, or something like that, and he explained in there that it went from male to female, and then from female to male. If I'd have had a son.... Now, whether or not it will follow in my grandchildren, I don't know. I know nothing about that.

Barbara: Well, that will be interesting to see.

Mrs. Long: Yes, well I've got some boys now that's old enough, well they're all old enough to try it.

Barbara: Hve they shown any interest in it?

Mrs. Long: No, none of them have, so far. But we'll try it after awhile.

Barbara: Are you able to witch other things besides water?

Mrs. Long: I've never tried.

Barbara: You've never tried?

Mrs. Long: They have asked me to. Some said I should put oil on the end of my rod and I could witchfor oil, and I said "no, no". I wouldn't think of it. This is enough running, on this, without trying anything else.

Barbara: Do you find it exhausting? I take it from some of the things you have said that this is very hard physical work.

Mrs. Long: Well, It's awfully hard on my hands. And now, at my age, it's getting hard to walk. So that's why I have them use a car or pickup, at the age I am. And I tell them that when they coem to get me.

Stefan: Do you feel there is an actual drain of physical energy when you are witching:

Mrs. Long: Do you ^{mean} ~~men~~, does something go out of my body?

Stefan: Do you feel tired, or do you feel relaxed?

Mrs. Long: No, I had one man tell me, I was in the pickup with him, and he turned to me, he was one of our neighbors, and he said to me "now, Stella, I suppose we have to concentrate". And I said, "Donny, if I have to concentrate on this, I'm through. Right now. I won't

concentrate at all. I just go along as if I was every-day walking, only I'm holding the willow. I don't concentrate, or nothing.

Barbara: Are you able to witch water with your eyes closed.

Mrs. Long: I've never tried it. I don't dare that. With this backing up and measuring depth, I'm awfully afraid of falling.

Barbara: You've never had an occasion where you were witching at night after dark?

Mrs. Long: No, no, I won't witch at night.

Barbara: Do you feel as if this ability to witch has been a burden to you?

Mrs. Long: Oh, no. I think in my younger day, when I first started, I had a neighbor living right over here, where this fire hall is. She's two years older than I am. At that time I drove all over. We went clear up pretty near to the Canadian line. We'd go together, and we really would have a good time a doing it.

Barbara: In other words, you've been able to enjoy witching?

Mrs. Long: Yes. And her husband and her, and George and I started out one Sunday, and we drove over two hundred miles witching wells.

Barbara: What an interesting way to spend a Sunday afternoon.

Mrs. Long: Well, it wasn't so much fun because I got into one place that was terrible because it was right along the Missouri River, and we hit stones, and everything else.

Mr. Long: Along the Missouri it's hard to hit a good well.

Barbara: Why? Because of the fine sandy subsoil?

Mr. Long: I don't know, but they have to go so deep.

Barbara: Oh, they do? Is the water table so very low there?

Mr. Long: I don't know, but you take the rim just up off the river bottom, there's wells up there that's six hundred feet deep.

Mrs. Long: And of course, with the willow, it's hard to estimate depth after it goes over one hundred feet.

Barbara: Anything under one hundred feet you are able to estimate fairly accurately?

Mrs. Long: I'm not too sure of it, but some of them have said I struck it right, and of course, our well, I struck that right at one hundred sixteen feet. This well here, I struck right at sixty-three feet. I have witched a number of wells. I witched for the school.

Barbara: For the Epping school?

Mrs. Long: Yes. And I witched for the Williston Pack.

Barbara: What is that?

Mr. Long: The slaughterhouse.

Mrs. Long: It's kind of a joke there. I shouldn't tell it, I don't suppose, being this is taped.

Barbara: Oh, well, certainly you can tell it.

Mrs. Long: Well, my brother-in-law, Alan, he took some cattle to the Williston Pack after I had witched there. When he came in they found out who he was and they said "boy, your mother sure hit us a good well. It come pretty near to being a flowing well". And he's only four or five years younger than George is! And whether it was a compliment to Alan that he looked so young or a compliment to me that I only looked that old, I don't know.

Barbara: What other places can you recall where you have witched?

Mrs. Long: Well, I went to Hinsdale, Montana, and witched a well for Lawrence Hughes. I witched a well at granville, and I witched wells in Grand Forks county, out of Larimore. And we've been all through the Watford City and Keene area. I witched for the Mormon church in Williston. I witched the R.E.A. well out here.

Stefan: Do you have any idea how many wells you have witched over the years?

Mrs. Long: Oh, no! I wouldn't have.

Stefan: Have you witched any wells recently?

Mrs. Long: Where did we go last time? Where was it we went? I forget.

Mr. Long: Wasn't it just out of Williston?

Mrs. Long: Oh, yes. If you go to Williston, you see a red barn. Probably you know that red barn.

Barbara: I'm not sure that I do.

Stefan: On the hill as you come in? Yes, I know it.

Mr. Long: You can see two or three trailer houses there.

Mrs. Long: I've witched those wells that are in there.

Barbara: I think it's interesting that you are still being asked to witch.

Mrs. Long: I won't go unless the party himself contacts me.

Barbara: Have you ever run into the situation where someone has called, or come to see you about witching a well, as a last resort? Have people ever come to you and said, "now, I've had a well driller, and he can't find water".

Mrs. Long: Lots of them! Lots of them!

Barbara: ~~As the last resort they come here!~~
They come to you as a last resort?

Mrs. Long: As the last resort they come here.

Mr. Long: They'll spend maybe two or three thousand dollars trying to find water, and then they'll come and get her to witch them a well.

Mrs. Long: Well, I can tell you of an experience I had. It was right here at Epping. It was for A.... C....., and he didn't believe in it. He didn't believe in it. He had four wells drilled over there. When he built his house, he just built a place out where he was going to put his well, because he knew he could hit water anywhere. He drilled four wells, and finally he came over and asked me to go over there, and I went over there. I spotted him on a vein, and at fifty-six feet he got all kinds of water. And he took me home, and when he took me home, and when he left, he said "Stella, I could have ~~paid for~~ paid you five hundred dollars and been ahead". But he didn't believe in it.

Barbara: And now he does.

Mrs. Long: No, he still don't believe in it!

Barbara: Oh, he still doesn't believe in it?

Mrs. Long: No, he still don't believe in it. He is that kind of a person.

Barbara: But he does have his well?

Mrs. Long: He has his well.

Mr. Long: Let's put it this way: He believes in it, but he's too bull-headed to admit it.

Mrs. Long: I have witched wells for both of his brothers living on farms out here. I witched his folks' well right over here, too, and I've witched for the Epping Lutheran Church.

Barbara: Mrs. Long, after visiting with you here today, I think that if I were to need a well, I would not hesitate for a minute to come to you to have it witched.

Mrs. Long: Well, thank you. I have witched a lot of wells. I witched a well for Ted and Ruby (Crites) down there in their back yard.

Barbara: After watching your demonstration today, and hearing about your experiences as a water witch, I'm sure that if there is water in my back yard, you could find it with your willow.