

# Ellen Browning Scripps 'speaks': Did we just interview La Jolla's most legendary historical figure?

By **Corey Levitan**

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**A**lmost everything **La Jolla** is today was partly the doing of one giant little lady. Regarding how important Ellen Browning Scripps remains to our community, there can be no skepticism.

Scripps, a former journalist for the Scripps papers, had enough wealth and compassion to found, bankroll or donate La Jolla's most cherished institutions — including Scripps Park, Scripps Memorial Hospital, Scripps Clinic, Scripps Research Institute and Scripps Institution of Oceanography.

Scripps, who shunned the limelight, was also the guiding force behind La Jolla institutions that don't bear the family name, which she once complained was "one little vowel and six harsh consonants." They include the Torrey Pines State Preserve, Bishop's School, the public library and Athenaeum, and the La Jolla's Woman's Club, Recreation Center and Children's Pool.

At least once a week, someone in some community meeting here conjures up the memory of La Jolla's grand benefactress and asks whether she would have approved of this project or handled that problem.

So it occurred to us ... Why not try to ask Ellen herself?

Kelly Fisher earns her living as a medium. The former marketing professional, who operates SoCal Medium out of an office in Mission Valley, reports sensing dead people since she was a child in Colorado.

"She's very excited that we're doing this, and I'm getting a big thank you, to everybody in La Jolla, for still caring what she thinks," Fisher says after tightly closing her eyes and claiming to make initial contact with the late philanthropist. Fisher describes the voice she hears as confident with a slight English accent, the mind as a voracious reader and studier, and the attitude as both playful and stubborn.



Looking inside the under-renovation Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego, psychic mediums say they detect undeniable signs of the building's former occupant. (COREY LEVITAN)

Our setting is — where better? — the front door of the under-renovation Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego at 700 Prospect St. Until Scripps died inside of it 86 years ago Aug. 3, this was the building she once called home — her beloved South Moulton Villa II.

“Ooh, I love this,” Fisher says Scripps keeps telling her. “This is my space. I loved sitting out back, watching the ocean. But where are all the flowers? There were much more flowers here in my garden before.”

Fisher has brought along a friend with whom she regularly teams, a former **WWE** wrestler-turned-Reiki healer and medium named Joy Giovanni. Fisher says they make a stronger connection when “double-linking” — like a “bigger antenna” to the other side. (Both were trained and certified by celebrity medium James Van Praagh.)



Self-described spiritual mediums Kelly Fisher, left, and Joy Giovanni claim to make contact with the spirit of Ellen Browning Scripps outside her former home. (COREY LEVITAN)



In answering the questions, Fisher and Giovanni switch off so frequently, we offer their contributions as combined answers. We're not claiming that they come from Ellen Browning Scripps herself. There are some elements that sound uncannily like it to us, but not all. Anyway, we'll let you be the judge.

Both mediums knew beforehand that this would be an attempt to contact Scripps, and claimed not to have researched her life beforehand. (As a sneaky test, we asked for the name of Scripps' driver, but Fisher named "Willis" instead of the correct answer, Higgins. Willis was the "W." in "E.W. Scripps," Ellen's younger half-brother, whom Fisher later claimed might have been dropping in to help with the answer.)

The Light decided to let La Jolla's current community leaders submit the first few questions. We were surprised how many jumped at the idea — including City Councilmember Barbara Bry and even Scripps' own great grandnephew, La Jolla Beach & Tennis Club president William Kellogg, who replied, "Why not?"

**Kellogg asks: What do you think about the condition of Downtown La Jolla? Is this the vision you had in mind?**

EBS: "Oh dear, it's terribly congested and there are so many buildings. I fell in love with the open spaces and natural beauty. My vision was a place of community and art and literature, where people know each other and it feels like a small town, but I'm concerned about larger corporations putting in that city feeling. Be mindful to maintain balance."

**Bry asks: What actions would you take and investments would you make to insure that La Jolla is an inclusive community?**

EBS: "It's important that people from every economic level enjoy La Jolla. It shouldn't be so exclusive that people wouldn't want to visit because they don't know if they're wearing the right clothes. Look at who the voting members of the community are and evaluate their motives. Are they financial or are they about the community?"

**Town Council president Ann Kerr Bache asks: What would your vision be for the future of La Jolla?**

EBS: “I see all different ethnicities, religions and backgrounds being able to enjoy the beauty that is La Jolla, the preservation of that intrinsic culture and art, the blending of the old and the new, being able to say hello to each other. Preserve the historic buildings and homes to the best of everybody’s ability, and keep the art and culture here. I want to see kids from all walks of life coming here to experience, touch and learn here.”

**Warwick’s bookstore owner Nancy Warwick asks: What new cultural initiative would you be most interested in advancing?**

EBS: “Oh, I love that store! There should be a strong music initiative. Keep the outdoor concerts. I love the outdoor concerts.”

**Parks & Beaches advisory board member Phyllis Minick asks: What do you think about the seals inheriting the pool you intended for children to enjoy?**

EBS: “I didn’t know that building the pool would attract the seals. But now that they’re here, this is a natural habitat and it should be as such, where people can enjoy and watch the wildlife. Don’t push the wildlife out so that people can have one more beach. There are already enough beaches for people. It’s magical to be able to watch the seals have their calves. As human inhabitants, we shouldn’t encroach on the place they choose.”

**Independent La Jolla vice president Melinda Merryweather asks: What do you think about La Jolla separating from the City of San Diego?**

EBS: “You’re barking up the wrong tree. What is the intention behind the separation? It seems like a battle that will never be won, so find a different way to take care of La Jolla.”



Scripps' Moulton Villa II was built after fire ravaged her first home at 700 Prospect St. William Peck, a 43-year-old Australian, confessed to, and was imprisoned for, the arson. He explained that he was angry about being fired as a gardener. (WIKIMEDIA COMMONS)

### **Parks & Beaches advisory board member Bill Robbins asks: Why did the gardener burn down your house?**

EBS: "It's not that cut-and-dried. There's more to that story than you know."

### **Rec Center Director Nicole Otjens asks: Is that your brother playing the piano on stage at night at the Rec Center? Because it freaks the staff members out.**

(Neither medium can answer on behalf of Scripps, but Fisher explains that she sees a female and feels it's more likely to be Ellen's sister, Virginia.)

### **What makes you happiest about the way things in La Jolla turned out?**

EBS: "I love that there are different houses of worship. I love that people come here from all over the world to study and advance humanity. I spend time down by the water, and I love to see people walking outside. These are memories I know people take with them. The Jewel still works its way into the hearts of the people."

### **Which institution that you created are you proudest of?**

EBS: “Oh, am I required to choose just one? I’m very pleased with the research that has been done. In the last year, there was just a major breakthrough in cancer at one of my facilities. That will be shared and will ring out around the world.”

### **What was your political affiliation?**

EBS: “I was fully independent and not politically aligned one way or another. Lincoln was a fine fellow. I really respected him.”

### **Why did you never marry?**

EBS: “There was far too much work to be done.”

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