

Question:  
What  
are these  
people  
doing?



Answer:  
Waiting their turn with the "reader"  
at a new kind of household event, a psychic

# Making It in the Twilight Zone

By HOLLY D. REMY

Whether  
"consulting" for  
business,  
presiding at  
"classes" or  
running  
Tupperware-style  
parties, today's  
psychics are  
adopting the  
trappings of the  
all-American  
entrepreneur.



"BJ", an associate of psychic entrepreneur Barbara Rose, give a reading for Pat Gilmore at Town of Tonawanda psychic party.



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nexpected and unusual events happen all the time. Blame them on fate. Blame them on the stars. Blame them on plain old bad luck. They all make plausible and uncomplaining scapegoats. But if a person is tuned in to his own personal vibrations, he'll have nobody to blame but himself for not knowing when trouble will trouble him. Or so say today's psychics.

Wait a minute. Psychics are supposed to put the blame on the stars, not on the clients.

That's the way it used to be. Now, long after all the singing about the dawning of the Age of Aquarius has died down, a new breed of psychic has arisen. There are still those around who claim to see the future during consultations in their kitchens, but there are others who have studied their techniques for years and who want to be recognized as legitimate and "professional." So, cultivating that image, the workaday psychic has become diversified and business-minded — and he or she foresees a profitable future.

Who goes to see a psychic? According to Bernice Golden of Angelica, whose business cards say "psychic consultant," those among us who are most willing to be read are those whom we might least suspect of it. "Higher-class people are more open to psychic readings," she says, "while lower-class and middle-class people are more skeptical." Golden says the number of clients calling for appointments goes up slightly about the time of the full moon and notes that more women than men come to her in summer and more businessmen than women in winter.

Age doesn't seem to make a difference in whether a person seeks a psychic's counsel, says Dr. Irving Biederman, a State University of Buffalo psychology professor and a student of psychic claims from the scientific point of view. (As a member of a committee of scientific debunkers, he approaches the subject as a skeptic.)

The young people who go to psychics want to hear about romance, Biederman says; the middle-aged, about finances; and the elderly, about health.



In any case, it's unclear who gets the fortune at a psychic reading, the client or the psychic. Psychic talent has yet to be proved, although people are willing to be parted from as much as \$30 to hear about their personal future.

The dozens, perhaps hundreds, of psychics in Western New York (most don't advertise and many work on their own rather than through organizations) are eager to shake the image of being fortune-tellers whose predictions are strictly for fun. Yet, under the law, that's how they are classified.

State law allows anyone to be a fortune-teller, provided he doesn't try to make money by using his occult powers. And the word is just that: fortune-teller. A person could be charged with a misdemeanor "... when, for a fee or compensation, he claims or pretends to tell fortunes or holds himself out as being able, by claimed or pretended use of occult powers, to answer questions or give advice on personal matters." So, to spare the psychic an unwelcome fate, psychics' busi-

ness cards and signs at psychic fairs say that consultations are meant to be entertainment.

The "professional" psychics say they are vehemently opposed to anything smacking of fakery. "I don't want to be classified as one of those little tea-leaf readers who sits in a back room somewhere," says Bernice Golden. "You have to be very careful not to get taken in. You see, for example, anyone can tell you anything about your past lives. How you gonna check it out?"

"I always recommend that someone interested in parapsychology take a good class first," says Barbara Rose, a director of the Mind-Body Institute in Buffalo and an organizer of Tupperware-style "psychic parties" in people's living rooms.

Pam Neuman, an astrologer and numerologist from West Seneca, sees the higher purpose of parapsychology not in predicting the future, but in promoting self-understanding. "Getting to know other people is the most important

**Bernice Golden:**  
"I don't want to be classified as one of those little tea-leaf readers."

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# Psychics

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thing," she says. "And first you have to get to know yourself."

Perhaps psychics have gained respectability. Police departments have brought them in to track down criminals, and psychics say they have been hired by major corporations to do economic and investment forecasts.

Nowadays, psychics seem to work with a spirit of practicality like that set forth by comedian Woody Allen in his book "Without Feathers": "There is no question that there is an unseen world. The problem is, how far is it from midtown, and how late is it open?"

**B**ERNICE GOLDEN IS a psychic with flair. She's on television shows, she's a radio talk-show guest, she's the subject of newspaper interviews from Florida to Ontario. She helps prospectors find minerals, and she helps police departments find crooks. She paints pictures of places she has never seen that she says turn out to be surprisingly accurate. She has a full appointment book for private consultations in Buffalo, Rochester and Washington, D.C.

In short, she knows she's got a good thing going, and she's using it to the hilt.

"I'm a strong businesswoman," she says, and smiles. "But, of course, I've got the advantage."

Her work leaves little time for her home and family, but when she does retreat to her hilltop house in Angelica, she works on developing the psychic talents of her two youngest children, ages 5 and 13. The other two children are, well, a bit more like her clients.

Golden, 37, seems concerned with the quality of her readings. She asks her clients to keep track of her accuracy, and according to her surveys, she is 75 percent to 93 percent on target. Her tools are tarot cards, and her skill is psychometry, the picking up of vibrations from an object given to her by the client. She considers herself fortunate to be able to work as a psychic.

"Everyone has psychic power to some degree," she says. "Whether it's strong depends on how much they've been held back throughout life. I know in most cases what will happen to me and my family in the future. It's a hard way to live, be-

cause when I see something bad is going to happen, I still have human feelings, even though I'm a psychic."

Golden believes in spreading the word that people like her don't wear black robes and don't ride brooms. She isn't shy about the press. In fact, sometimes she goes to reporters rather than waiting for them to come to her.

On Dec. 29, 1981, she handed a letter to a United Press International reporter in Rochester. It was labeled "Predictions for 1982." In it she wrote, "Major difficulties may arise concerning an important power plant that could cause more static than ever before."

On Jan. 25, 1982, a tube ruptured at the Ginna nuclear power plant in Ontario, New York, causing radioactive steam to be released into the atmosphere. Officials declared a site emergency, the second-most-serious kind of emer-

gency defined by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

But that wasn't the beginning. On Sept. 10, 1980, Golden had told the same reporter she had a vision of a serious explosion occurring at Eastman Kodak Co. in Rochester in two to three months. On Dec. 2, 1980, a chemical explosion at Kodak injured several workers.

In her readings, Golden adheres to a code of ethics of her own. "I'll tell you if you're going to have a great affair, but I won't tell you if your spouse is cheating on you," she says. "I won't tell you when you will die, and I won't give you a physical diagnosis, because I'm not a doctor."

She says 60 percent of her work involves security or law enforcement. "Most people think the police can just say, 'Bernice, what's the name and address of the murderer?' It isn't that easy. Sometimes I have to go to the site and relive the

crime; sometimes I have to go undercover.

"I've never charged yet for police department work because I feel you can't put a price on life or death."

Despite her success, Golden has ambitions to move into another career. And she is considering a field that she feels fits her talents.

"I'd like to get into politics — small-town politics at first, then maybe something bigger. I could see what's really going on behind the scene."

**A** LITTLE BIT of warm conversation in the living room, an aromatic pot of coffee brewing in the kitchen, a good psychic in the recreation room: These are the ingredients of a successful psychic party. It's like a Tupperware party. The host or hostess invites at least twelve guests and then calls Barba-



Pam Neuman reads for client Pamela Sprenger: Secrets in tea leaves and tarot cards, but never in ashtrays.

Photo by Robert L. Smith





Rev. Olivia Miller with her colored stones: "Pink universal love" and hostility in the beef stew.

ra Rose, director of Parapsychological Society International. Rose sends two readers of the host's or hostess's choice, depending on what he or she orders — a psychometrist, a tarot card reader, an astrologer, palmist, spiritualist, crystal-ball gazer or whatever.

The partygoers pay \$8 each for fifteen-minute consultations with either reader. And the host or hostess, for having the party, is entitled to a free reading. It's almost like getting a free set of plastic canisters.

Rose, 36, the party arranger, doesn't do readings herself, but she has studied the paranormal for eleven years. Her interest grew out of her childhood visits to her grandparents' home at Lily Dale, a spiritualist community in Chautauqua County, where she watched her grandmother do tea-leaf readings.

"I had more of a curiosity than anything else," Rose says. "I began

taking classes as a search inward." Her studies eventually put her in touch with the people who founded the Mind-Body Institute, which operates classes from the Aquarian Book Center on Niagara Falls Boulevard. The institute combines parapsychology and self-growth concepts, offering classes in meditation along with classes in astrology.

That was after she jumped on the psychic fair bandwagon, organizing fairs for charitable causes. "You could get a lot of information at one of the fairs," she says. "But nothing like that would go anymore, because people's interests have changed. Now people seem to go into physical fitness and relationships and relating to other people."

Rose has set up a code of ethics for the psychics registered to work at her parties. Most important is that they not discuss death, serious illness or tragedy with clients.

"People are at a party to have

fun, and they don't want to hear those kinds of things," she says. "No psychic is God, and no one can know for sure that these things will happen, so there has to be discretion."

"Say, for example, the reader tells a woman of 22 that she sees a divorce in her future. That will prey on the woman's mind. On the other hand, if the woman is 40 and hates her husband, it could be good news."

Among psychics, those born under the astrological sign Pisces are said to be the most sensitive to vibrations of the unseen world. But Rose says one of the most psychic people she has known was a man born when the sun was in Cancer.

"He wasn't mechanical-minded, but he could put his hands on a refrigerator or a car and tell you just what was wrong with it," she says. "He did the predictions for a column I did for a monthly newspaper, Buffalo Downtown." One of his predictions was that Buffalo's light-rail rapid transit system won't open until 1986 due to unforeseen financial difficulties. We'll see.

Rose's friend no longer lives in Western New York. The last she heard from him, he was planning a trip to Atlantic City to place his hands on some slot machines.

**P**AM NEUMAN OF West Seneca doesn't mind reading tea leaves, but that's where she draws the line. "I went to a psychic fair in Syracuse not long ago, and they had people there reading eggs and even ashtrays," she says. "I couldn't believe it."

Neuman gives her readings on Wednesday afternoons at Marie's Tea Corner in Orchard Park. The \$6 fee includes the tea, brewed from loose leaves and served in a cup three inches high. The client drinks the tea. When there is a quarter-inch of tea left in the cup, the client swishes around what's left and turns the cup upside-down on the saucer.

"The way the handle is placed makes a difference," Neuman says. "If it faces away from the person, he's more concerned with things outside himself. If it faces toward him, he's concerned with his own life."

Then the reader turns the cup

three times and tips it up on the saucer the proper way. The reading begins. "A lot depends on your imagination," Neuman says, "but mainly the reading is done on the basis of psychometry."

(Psychometry is the reading of vibrations transferred by a person into an object).

Neuman also gives readings in astrology, tarot cards and numerology. She learned astrology first, and then one thing led to another.

She sees her calling as primarily to instruct, develop and train people in the psychic "sciences." Four nights a week, she holds classes in her basement study room. She also has private clients, participates in psychic fairs and spends at least twenty hours a week studying.

Neuman and about 40 other people have set up a group called the Inner Journey Movement Institute to hold classes and, more important, to pursue state certification of psychics. "We'd like to set up a structure so we don't get fly-by-nights out there giving the rest of us a bad name," she says.

Neuman says it takes time and determination to learn the right way to use psychic power. "It takes concentration. You lose your name and become a channel, putting yourself out of the picture to tune in to a higher vibration."

For Neuman, psychic interests are her own field in her household. Her family isn't interested. Her two teen-age children say "it's no fun having a mother who's a psychic, 'cuz you can't do nothin' without her knowing," Neuman says. And her husband "looks at it as 'You're doing your thing — I'm doing mine.' I don't think he'll ever change. He's got Saturn in his Ninth House, so what more can I expect?"

**T**HE HOUSE looks like many others in the North Ogden-Lovejoy area of Sloan: neat flowerbeds, clean white siding, tidy sidewalks. But it's not exactly like every other house. One difference is the small metal plate on a pillar of the front porch, done in rustic lettering: "Rev. Olivia Miller/Church of the Holy Spirit/Use Side Door."

Inside the side door is an expan-

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P: After five years, you'll be on your own. You'll work from your home, you'll have an office in your home.

B: Most people think most reporters really are frustrated writers, even though that's not necessarily true and some people like the social interaction of an office. But it's a good guess.

Biederman gave his overall assessment of the tape with a smile.

"In a sense, it was cheap therapy," he said. "You got the feeling of having a session with a friend, so on that score maybe thirty dollars wasn't much to spend."

But it is the taking of money, after all, that bothers him. "You're kind of buying into a false view of the world when you believe a psychic," he says. "The psychic adopts a posture of warmth and intimacy, and then exploits your trust."

Biederman says psychics may not consciously try to prey on people. "We could have people who honestly believe they have psychic powers, and we could also have people who practice deception."

"What is clear is that none of them have any special abilities."

Even police officers can fall prey, Biederman says, to psychics' skills as what he calls "snake-oil sellers." Psychics have indeed been called in on crimes in Buffalo. The example in recent memory was during the search for the .22-caliber killer. When police seemed to have run out of clues, a visit by a psychic and an astrologer from Chicago was arranged by WKBW-TV. Although the two talked with police for five hours, investigators said they didn't provide much help.

"Not once has a psychic solved a crime," says Biederman. "They didn't do a thing in Atlanta (during the child killings). These people are opportunists. They have to be good salesmen."

He says a good psychic reader employs many of the same techniques used by con artists. They're outlined in an article by University of Oregon psychology professor Ray Hyman called "'Cold Reading': How to Convince Strangers That You Know All About Them." The article appeared in the spring/summer 1977 issue of *The Zetetic*, the journal of the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal. Since then, the journal's name has been changed to *The Skeptical Inquirer*.

Hyman writes that the "cold reader" — one who has never met his subject before — relies on his observation and his memory to pick up clues about a person. Clues are found in the client's clothing, physi-

cal features, way of speaking, and even in eye contact. The reader generally uses a stock spiel about the client. These are statements that could fit anybody, such as: "You have a great deal of unused capacity which you have not turned to your advantage. You have a tendency to be critical of yourself. You have a strong need for other people to like you."

Hyman also has come up with certain "rules" to follow if a person wants to become a reader of other people's characters:

1. Look and act as if you believe in what you are doing. If you do, even a bad reading will be accepted as truth.

2. Make use of the latest information about society — what the general public believes, worries over and does.

3. Be modest; make no excessive claims of skill.

4. Tell the client that the success of the reading depends as much on his cooperation as on your efforts. This gives you an "out" for any inaccuracies.

5. Use a gimmick such as a crystal ball, tarot cards or palm reading to lend an air of novelty to the reading and to allow you to stall to formulate your next statement.

6. Have ready a list of stock phrases. These will add body to the reading and fill time while you formulate your predictions.

7. Keep alert to sizing up your client, and watch his reactions as you unload your statements.

8. Use the technique of "fishing."

9. Let the client talk at will. He'll tell you about himself.

10. Always give the impression you know more than you're saying.

11. Don't be afraid to flatter the client whenever you can.

12. The golden rule is: Tell the client what he wants to hear.

Biederman says the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal, which finished a two-day conference in Buffalo yesterday, each year presents the Bent Spoon Award to a deserving psychic. It is an actual bent spoon — a little fancier than the work Uri Geller made famous with telekinesis — mounted on a transparent base.

That award is given to a psychic who hasn't been able to convince the committee he has real powers. But the first person who proves that he does, in fact, possess the ability to make contact with the unseen world has a \$10,000 check from the committee waiting for him — in real money.

— HOLLY D. REMY

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sive kitchen, but just to the rear is the church. The sanctuary contains nine small pews, each big enough for two people. At each seat is a hymnal. The walls are covered with crucifixes, paintings of biblical scenes and bells decorated with angels. In the middle of them are the Rev. Olivia Miller's framed credentials — her certificate of ordination from Covenant Spiritual Church in Buffalo, dated 1978, and a certificate authorizing Reverend Olivia's Counseling Service to do business in the village of Sloan.

"I consider myself to be a counselor because of the ministry, because people come to me for guidance," she says. Although her church is Christian-based, Miller says, it also teaches recognition and use of metaphysics. Her faithful (she says they number from twelve to 70 at the weekly service held on Wednesday night) deal particularly with aura reading and psychometry.

Aura reading is based on the idea that each human being is surrounded by a halo that varies in color with his or her mood and that this halo can be seen by people who are psychically tuned in to it. "I tell people that if someone has been unfair or mean to them, surround that person with pink universal love," Miller says.

"One night a woman called me, very upset," Miller says. "She was upset at her husband, and she said it seemed like every time the family sat down to supper, a squabble would break out and they'd all end up yelling at each other."

"At the time, she had a pot of stew cooking. I told her that every time she stirred that stew, she was transferring her bad energy into the stew, and that was what was disrupting her family. She stopped feeling upset, and her family stopped quarreling."

Miller, who lives in the same neighborhood in which she grew up and who has three adult children now, says that as a child, she "used to pick up things on people."

"I had to find out why I felt things about people. Finally, in 1970, I said, 'Hold it. I must find out who I am.' I went out to search for a medium, and I found a wonderful teacher. A lot of people want to learn why things happen in a scientific way. I wanted to find the spiritual way. It more or less came to me one night. I woke up saying

'Alchemy is self, alchemy is self.' I paced a long time and thought about what that could mean. And then I realized that I had done a complete about-face in my life, and I didn't feel like screaming at people any more."

Miller uses "color healing" to help spiritually troubled members of her church. She has a special room set up for it and special tools. The room is furnished with a small table, a few chairs and two kneelers. It also has a bookshelf on which are boxes of colored glass "stones" as well as books. Miller says the seven colors of stones each indicate a different spiritual state of being and she can tell how a person is feeling by which color he or she chooses from a plate of stones.

She also does readings, using a crystal ball which she keeps safe in a bag that in other circumstances would be used to carry a bowling ball. "I don't really read the crystal ball," she says. "But I do believe it has energies in it, and I let people feel them."

Miller is a firm believer in the good works of her church. She says it's important for her to be at the end of the phone in case someone in need should call and to have the church to offer her counseling. "If someone said, 'You can't have this church,' I wouldn't know what to do. I believe I'm in the right spot in my time."

**A**LTHOUGH THE general public no longer seems as interested as it once was in sun signs and palm reading, psychics have found ways to adapt. Some combine parapsychology with the new interest in self-awareness, others with practical considerations such as business investments and crime solving, and still others with matters of faith.

Pam Neuman says things can only get better for people in her line of work. "Pluto will be going into Scorpio in January, and this will bring about political changes and better times for everyone," she says. "We psychics will see more of a awakening among politicians and others as to what we're doing."

If that aids the psychics' aim to gain respectability, they can thank their lucky stars.

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