



The Medium Has a Message

Whether talking to believers or skeptics,
a psychic gets no respect. By Rochelle Jewel Shapiro

I'm at a party talking with people about art, politics, books. One person is an architect, the other a microbiologist, the next an English professor. I usually don't tell people what I do for a living, but this group seems open-minded, so I am lulled into saying, "I'm a psychic." The conversation stops. They roll their eyes, smirk. Suddenly, my I.Q. has dropped 50 points.

"Oh, you're one of those!" the architect finally says. I know he is thinking about scam artists or lunatics. The others chatter on about how they don't believe in psychics as if I were not there.

In a way, the treatment I receive from believers is even worse. For instance, a couple hire me to entertain at a party, but they don't want me to mingle with the guests. A psychic knows everybody's secrets, and what she doesn't pick up during the reading, the client usually ends up confessing. Perhaps these two fear I will blab that the host has warts and the hostess pilfers from dollar stores?

Because people dread "psychic leakage," I am a social pariah, as welcome as a peeping Tom. Recently, when I phoned my close friend, her husband answered the phone.

"Beep, beep, beep," he chirped.

"What are you doing?" I asked.

"I'm jamming you from psyching me out," he replied in all seriousness.

I'm not ashamed of what I do for a living. But I don't want people to point to me in a supermarket and say, "There she is, the woman who thinks she's a psychic." To avoid that, I usually do readings by phone, using a "nom de psychic," and accept payment by credit card so that I don't have to reveal my address.

I am not the only one hiding; my clients hide, too. When they call, they cup their hands over the mouthpiece and whisper. They laugh, nervously, as if answering a personal ad. "I've never done this before in my life," they say, even though it later comes out that they have. And then they proceed to grill me. "What is your rate of accuracy?" they demand, as if I were a sharpshooter at an artillery range. They don't understand. A psychic reading is not like a math problem. I have to be open to whatever comes into my mind and let the most illogical phrases, the most improbable riffs fly

out of my mouth. I was doing a reading over the phone for a woman I had never seen. Unaccountably, I began singing, "I'm Popeye the Sailor Man." "That's mean," she said. "My eyes pop because of a thyroid condition."

Then I had a reading with a man in his late 60's who had recently immigrated here. "What keeps going through my mind is condoms," I said, feeling foolish as soon as it was out of my mouth. It turned out his name was pronounced the same way as a popular brand of prophylactics. "My name is a proud one," he said. "Why does every American have to make fun of it?" He demanded that I cancel his charge.

His reaction was mild compared to what people say when I tell them I can speak to the dead. They think I'm insane or a fraud. And why not? Imagine this exposé on television: A medium claims that a filmy substance rises up from him as he contacts the spirit world. The medium warns the disbeliever that the substance can't be distinguished by look or by touch from ordinary cheesecloth. (It is cheesecloth.) Even clients who have never read Hamlet expect the spirit to deliver a lengthy soliloquy, but what I pick up is like a scratched 45 r.p.m. of Alvin and the Chipmunks. Sometimes a spirit acts out to identify himself, lifting a bottle to his lips to show he was a drunkard in life — a morbid game of charades.

Once, I gave an exceptionally accurate and detailed reading for a client — including a description of his deceased mother's kitchen wall clock, which was shaped like a cat with a pendulum tail. Just before the reading was over, my client demanded to know his mother's nickname as proof that I was really contacting her. I didn't know it.

"I knew this was a bunch of nonsense," he told me and slammed down the receiver. I was upset by his rudeness, but I ask myself how much respect can a woman command when she advertises her phone number in newspapers? Men sometimes get my number mixed up with phone sex. They call to offer to be my slave. I decided to get a Web page ad. That very day on the front page of the paper there was an article about how prostitutes are leaving the streets in favor of the Internet.

Reading about malpractice suits, I wondered if I needed an insurance policy to protect me. I phoned my lawyer. "Irwin," I said, "if someone doesn't like what I've told him, can he sue me?"

Irwin said: "Let him try. I'll go before the judge and say: 'Your Honor, the plaintiff was foolish enough to seek the advice of a psychic. I rest my case.'" ■

Rochelle Jewel Shapiro is a psychic who lives in New York and is working on a novel about a psychic.

Out of the Candlelight And Into the Spotlight

Once people find out about my psychic ability, they no longer want friendship, they want the future

BY ROCHELLE JEWEL SHAPIRO

I DREAMED I WAS IN BARNES & NOBLE, giving a reading of my very first novel, about a suburban psychic. The audience smiled expectantly, and as soon as I stopped reading, people rose from their seats. Whipping out my pen, I sat down at the table, ready to sign copies. But the crowd that rushed toward me held no books for me to sign. Instead, their hands were outstretched, grabbing for me. "We came to be read by you!" they shouted. I woke up in a cold sweat.

In a few months I'm supposed to go out and promote my novel. While I'm happy to talk to readers about plot and character, I dread being asked where I got my subject matter, how I did my research and whether I really believe in psychics.

The fact is, I do. My Russian grandmother, who called herself a healer, was psychic. One look into a woman's eyes and she could tell if she was pregnant—and whether she was happy about it.

Bubbie suspected, even before I could talk, that I had her talent. When I was 4, I told everyone that my mother's cousin Bertie was coming on a ship from London. The next day my mother got a call from the docks. "It's Bertie! Come pick me up!" No invitation, no warning. When Bubbie heard, she told me, "You have my gift."

But as I got older, being psychic began to seem too Old World to me. I wanted to do something modern, so after college I wrote for a magazine and then taught middle school. But wherever I worked, my psychic abilities came with me. I knew too much about other people, and that caused pain and embarrassment to me and them. I was gossiping with a co-worker one day when I suddenly blurted out, "Congratulations! When is the baby due?" And then I saw a funny look on

her face and knew she hadn't told anyone.

"How did you know?" she demanded.

"I don't remember," I lied.

A couple of days later, over lunch, I was moved to tell another co-worker, "I'm sure your father is going to be OK."



MARGARET SALMON AND DEAN WAND

MIND READER: I knew too much about other people, and that caused pain and embarrassment to me and them

"What are you talking about?" he said. "My father is perfectly fine." An hour later he got a call that his father had been in a car accident and was in intensive care.

As it happened more and more, I had to admit to my colleagues that I was clairvoyant. Once I did, people no longer wanted friendship—they wanted the future. Finally I stopped resisting my calling and became a professional psychic, though one who was in hiding. For more than 25 years, I've given readings over the phone and told all but my closest friends that I make my living as a writer.

Keeping my occupation under wraps

hasn't been easy. I was once coaxed into attending the wedding of a client who believed my reading had led her to her husband-to-be. "Only if I can be incognito," I told her.

"Of course," she said.

At the ceremony, I joyfully wept at having had a hand in the young couple's destiny. But during the toasts, the bride stood up, lifted her glass and said, "It was my psychic, Rochelle Shapiro, who brought Steve and me together." The photographer shone his lights on me. Guests rushed over as if I were the Viennese dessert table.

"Will my son-in-law pass the bar exam this time?" one demanded. "Is my dead father around me?" another asked. "Can I take you to the track with me?" another said.

I was so unnerved that I would have left right away, but I had to stop at the ladies' room. "She's in here," I heard a woman say, seconds after I went in. "I recognize her shoes!"

"Where can I find a husband?" a woman called over the stall. "I'm next for the psychic," another woman argued. There was a crowd out there! "We should take numbers," I heard a man say. A man in the ladies' room! I had gone from being a phone psychic to a bathroom psychic.

I'm no longer surprised by how quickly people get carried away. Once, a woman I'll call Linda begged me to let her come to my house for a reading instead of doing it on the phone. "I need to be close to you when you contact my mother's spirit," she pleaded.

She sounded so distraught that I finally gave in, and after the reading, she looked so much happier that I considered working in person more often. She wanted to come back in two days, but I didn't have an appointment available for two weeks. "I'll just have to hold out," she sighed.

The next day, when I stepped out of my front door, Linda was standing there. "Mama!" she cried, and threw her arms around me as tight as a vise. After that, I couldn't help looking over my shoulder every time I left the house.

I don't want to use my ability to promote my writing career. I work by candlelight, not spotlight, and my gift might leave me if I abuse it. I want to use it to help people, not to sell books. I'll continue to give psychic readings, but I want to use my other gift, too, the one I practice in quiet when I'm alone—writing.

SHAPIRO lives in Great Neck, N.Y.

My best friend is a psychic

Rochelle reads the future for a living. So why won't she answer all my questions? **BY CAROLINE LEAVITT**

All friends tune in to each other. My friend Jane sees me chewing my lip and knows I'm upset. Lindy can read my mood just by the colors I'm wearing. But one of my closest friends doesn't even have to see or hear me to tell the state I'm in—or the state I will be in years from now. She's a bona fide professional psychic—and the ultimate irony is that, despite my entreaties for her to give me a reading, she won't.

Rochelle Jewell Shapiro and I met through a mutual friend ten years ago and instantly hit it off. She was smart, funny, warm, and engaging. We were both writers, both wisecrackers, both addicted to books and movies. She lived a few hours away, but we talked nearly every day and met for lunch every month. I thought I knew everything about Rochelle, but it wasn't until three months into our friendship that she told me the most important thing of all: She has a thriving practice as a psychic. She tells people's futures and talks to the dead, and she has been able to do it since she was 3 years old.

MIXED SIGNALS

I was stupefied—and thrilled. I had gone to psychics for cosmic solace, for fun, and now I actually had one as a friend. I had a million burning questions. Would I have a baby? Would I have success? And I wanted to talk to everyone in my family who had died.

"So when can you read me?" I asked.

"Never," Rochelle said cheerfully. "And there are good reasons why."

A psychic likes to start with a blank slate, so that she can objectively interpret the images she receives. "With you, I

already know too much. I'm too close," she said. "I might see a broken watch face, and because I'm your friend the image will take on meaning it might not have at all. I'll worry all day, when really, that image could mean nothing more than that your watch is running slow. It'll end up upsetting us both." Love, she tells me, clouds the images, or stops them entirely. That's why she doesn't read for her husband or children, and why she won't do it for me.

She will, however, read my friends, who clamor for referrals.

"She's astonishing!" they tell me when they call up afterward to gush their gratitude.

"Did she say anything about me?" I always ask. And no, she never does.

INTIMATE LIMITS

I suppose Rochelle is right not to read me. After all, a friendship should have boundaries, and my willingly telling her some of my secrets is a whole lot different than her finding them out on her own. In truth, there are some things I don't want her to know, private things about my husband or family. Too much knowledge upsets the balance of friendship. "I understand," I tell Rochelle. But I still want a reading.



Does she know things about me that she's afraid to reveal?

Despite her resolve, Rochelle does sometimes reveal things to me—when she feels she has no choice. A few years ago, I became friends with a writer who lived far away. "I have to tell you, be careful," Rochelle warned me. "Your friend's suffering from severe mental problems."

I was angry with her for casting such a shadow. "I'm sure your intuition is clouded," I snapped, and she never mentioned it again—until two months later, when my friend killed himself in a hotel room, despondent over his failing marriage and a shocking array of legal problems I had no inkling he faced.

"You see why it's so difficult to know things about people you care for?" Rochelle asked. "Sometimes (*continued*)"

Brief Summary of Prescribing Information as of April 1998

ALLEGRA® (fexofenadine hydrochloride) Capsules 60 mg

INDICATIONS AND USAGE

ALLEGRA is indicated for the relief of symptoms associated with seasonal allergic rhinitis in adults and children 12 years of age and older. Symptoms treated effectively include sneezing, rhinorrhea, itchy nose/palate/throat, itchy/watery/red eyes.

CONTRAINDICATIONS

ALLEGRA is contraindicated in patients with known hypersensitivity to any of its ingredients.

PRECAUTIONS

Drug Interactions

In two separate studies, fexofenadine hydrochloride 120 mg twice daily (twice the recommended dose) was co-administered with erythromycin 500 mg every 8 hours or ketoconazole 400 mg once daily under steady-state conditions to normal, healthy volunteers (n=24, each study). No differences in adverse events or QTc interval were observed when subjects were administered fexofenadine hydrochloride alone or in combination with erythromycin or ketoconazole. The findings of these studies are summarized in the following table:

Effects on Steady-State Fexofenadine Pharmacokinetics After 7 Days of Co-Administration with Fexofenadine Hydrochloride 120 mg Every 12 Hours (twice recommended dose) in Normal Volunteers (n=24)

Concomitant Drug	C _{max} (Peak plasma concentration)	AUC _{0-12h} (Extent of systemic exposure)
Erythromycin (500 mg every 8 hrs)	+82%	+109%
Ketoconazole (400 mg once daily)	+135%	+164%

The mechanisms of these interactions are unknown, and the potential for interaction with other azole antifungal or macrolide agents has not been studied. These changes in plasma levels were within the range of plasma levels achieved in adequate and well-controlled clinical trials. Fexofenadine had no effect on the pharmacokinetics of erythromycin or ketoconazole.

Carcinogenesis, Mutagenesis, Impairment of Fertility

The carcinogenic potential and reproductive toxicity of fexofenadine hydrochloride were assessed using terfenadine studies with adequate fexofenadine exposure (based on plasma area-under-the-curve [AUC] values). No evidence of carcinogenicity was observed when mice and rats were given daily oral doses of 50 and 150 mg/kg of terfenadine for 18 and 24 months, respectively; these doses resulted in plasma AUC values of fexofenadine that were up to four times the human therapeutic value (based on a 60-mg twice-daily fexofenadine hydrochloride dose).

In in-vitro (Bacterial Reverse Mutation, CHO/HGPRT Forward Mutation, and Rat Lymphocyte Chromosomal Aberration assays) and in-vivo (Mouse Bone Marrow Micronucleus assay) tests, fexofenadine hydrochloride revealed no evidence of mutagenicity.

In rat fertility studies, dose-related reductions in implants and increases in postimplantation losses were observed at oral doses equal to or greater than 150 mg/kg of terfenadine; these doses produced plasma AUC values of fexofenadine that were equal to or greater than three times the human therapeutic value (based on a 60-mg twice-daily fexofenadine hydrochloride dose).

Pregnancy

Teratogenic Effects: Category C. There was no evidence of teratogenicity in rats or rabbits at oral terfenadine doses up to 300 mg/kg; these doses produced fexofenadine plasma AUC values that were up to 4 and 37 times the human therapeutic value (based on a 60-mg twice-daily fexofenadine hydrochloride dose), respectively.

There are no adequate and well-controlled studies in pregnant women. Fexofenadine hydrochloride should be used during pregnancy only if the potential benefit justifies the potential risk to the fetus.

Nonteratogenic Effects. Dose-related decreases in pup weight gain and survival were observed in rats exposed to oral doses equal to and greater than 150 mg/kg of terfenadine; at these doses the plasma AUC values of fexofenadine were equal to or greater than three times the human therapeutic values (based on a 60-mg twice-daily fexofenadine hydrochloride dose).

Nursing Mothers

There are no adequate and well-controlled studies in women during lactation. Because many drugs are excreted in human milk, caution should be exercised when fexofenadine hydrochloride is administered to a nursing woman.

Pediatric Use

Safety and effectiveness of ALLEGRA in pediatric patients under the age of 12 years have not been established. Across well-controlled clinical trials in patients with seasonal allergic rhinitis, a total of 205 patients between the ages of 12 to 16 years received doses ranging from 20 mg to 240 mg twice daily for up to two weeks. Adverse events were similar in this group compared to patients above the age of 16 years.

Geriatric Use

In placebo-controlled trials, 42 patients, age 60 to 68 years, received doses of 20 mg to 240 mg of fexofenadine twice daily for up to two weeks. Adverse events were similar in this group to patients under age 60 years.

ADVERSE REACTIONS

In placebo-controlled clinical trials, which included 2464 patients receiving fexofenadine hydrochloride at doses of 20 mg to 240 mg twice daily, adverse events were similar in fexofenadine hydrochloride and placebo-treated patients. The incidence of adverse events, including drowsiness, was not dose related and was similar across subgroups defined by age, gender, and race. The percent of patients who withdrew prematurely because of adverse events was 2.2% with fexofenadine hydrochloride vs 3.3% with placebo. All adverse events that were reported by greater than 1% of patients who received the recommended daily dose of fexofenadine hydrochloride (60 mg twice-daily), and that were more common with fexofenadine than placebo, are listed in the following table.

Adverse Experiences Reported in Placebo-Controlled Seasonal Allergic Rhinitis Clinical Trials at Rates of Greater Than 1%

Adverse Experience	Fexofenadine 60 mg Twice Daily (n=679)	Placebo Twice Daily (n=671)
Viral Infection (cold, flu)	2.5%	1.5%
Nausea	1.6%	1.5%
Dysmenorrhea	1.5%	0.3%
Drowsiness	1.3%	0.9%
Dyspepsia	1.3%	0.6%
Fatigue	1.3%	0.9%

Adverse events occurring in greater than 1% of fexofenadine hydrochloride-treated patients (60 mg twice daily), but that were more common in the placebo-treated group, include headache and throat irritation.

The frequency and magnitude of laboratory abnormalities were similar in fexofenadine hydrochloride and placebo-treated patients.

Prescribing Information as of April 1998

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US Patents: 4,254,129; 5,375,693; 5,578,610.

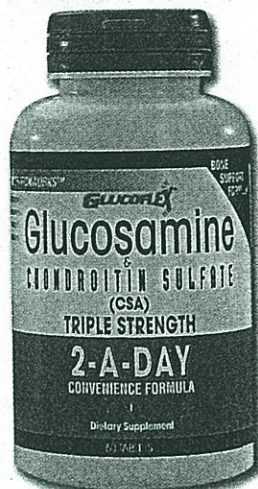
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my psychic friend (continued)

telling people things doesn't help because they're not ready to hear them."

A VISION OF HOPE

Rochelle also peeked into my future to make sure I had one. Three years ago, after I finally had the baby I'd yearned for, I became critically ill with postpartum hemophilia. Rochelle told my husband that she knew I'd get well because she kept hearing a future conversation with me after I had won an award for a children's book. "But she doesn't write kids' books," my husband said.

"She will," Rochelle insisted.

I did get better, and we all laughed at the kids' book prediction, right up until an adult novel I had written won an award as the best book for teens.

For the most part, Rochelle and I have an agreement: I don't ask, and she doesn't tell. But having a talented oracle so close makes it hard for me not to try and bend the rules. "I have a pain in my stomach. What should I do?" I ask.

"See a doctor," she tells me.

"Will we get the house we've bid on?"

"Talk to your real estate agent," she says calmly.

I try e-mailing her the eternal questions I want answered: Have my relatives who have died ever come to Rochelle with messages for me? And where exactly are they? Can't she tell me just those two little things?

When I finally get a reply from Rochelle, it's a chatty letter about her kids. I don't need to be a psychic to get the message.

Sometimes Rochelle's being psychic creates an odd sort of friction for me. No matter what she says or writes to me, I can't help wondering: Is she giving me a hidden message? What does "hope all is well" mean? Is she being psychic, or is she simply being a friend? I don't ask. She doesn't tell.

Still, the next time we're on the phone, I can't resist blurting, "Will Jeff and I get a baby to adopt?" Rochelle sighs so theatrically, we both laugh. "You never change," she says affectionately. But I have changed. I've made peace with knowing I can't have first dibs on her second sight. That the only super, natural thing about my relationship with Rochelle is, and always will be, our friendship. □

Caroline Leavitt is the author of six novels, including *Living Other Lives*.

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A Psychic Channels Real Life Into a Novel

By MARCELLE S. FISCHLER

EVERY morning Miriam Kaminsky climbed the back staircase to the north wing of her old Tudor in Great Neck. Wrapping her corkscrew curls around her finger, she sucked in her breath, and on the exhale, chanted a long "Om." When the phone rang, an image flickered. Though she had never met the person on the other end of the line, it was, she said, as if "our noses were touching." The pain of her client's broken heart was palpable.

Miriam is the main character in Rochelle Shapiro's plucky semiautobiographical first novel, "Miriam the Medium," which was published last year by Simon & Schuster. It is a heartfelt and amusing tale of a distraught housewife from Great Neck who, like Ms. Shapiro, just happens to be a telephone psychic from Great Neck.

Writing is similar to psychic work, Ms. Shapiro said: "You sit down, you write, and the characters start talking to you, and you start seeing things in your mind, and you start getting memories of characters that aren't your memories."

Ms. Shapiro, 57, said she had spent most of her life walking around like a satellite dish, indiscriminately picking up the secrets and dreams of strangers. To reduce the psychic static, she schedules readings only by appointment, at \$150 for 30 to 40 minutes.

Sitting in the dining room of her apartment just off Midde Neck Road, ignoring the ringing telephone and insisting she knew who was calling without checking the caller I.D., Ms. Shapiro explained that psychic abilities are innate. "It is a brain function," she said. "It's like walking in the night and suddenly walking into a spider web, and you can't really see it, but you can feel the strings." Before she learned to compartmentalize her psychic abilities, Ms. Shapiro said she would brake for accidents that didn't happen until the next day. She said that as an 8-year-old in Far Rockaway, Queens, she got into trouble when she visited a friend's house and blurted out that the friend's parents were going to get divorced. Six months later, they did.

Having a mind that works like a stylus on a Ouija board, Ms. Shapiro said, is like walking a tightrope.

"Some people's lives are predicated on a dream and an illusion," she said. "What psychics are gifted at is picking up people's unconscious wishes and feeding it back to them. Do you know what a disaster that can be?"

Until she published her novel, Ms. Shapiro was a closet psychic and advertised under the name Bubbe Meiseh, a Yiddish expression meaning "old wives' tale." She didn't want to be a social pariah.

"If you tell people that you even think you're psychic, they'll worry that you'll know they bought their little Dior number in Filene's," she wrote.

Ms. Shapiro told all but her closest friends only that she was a writer. Once others found out that she was a psychic, she didn't get a chance to talk about anything else.



Phil Marino for The New York Times

Psychic ability is innate, Rochelle Shapiro said. "It's like walking in the night and suddenly walking into a spider web, and you can't really see it, but you can feel the strings," she said.

Ms. Shapiro said she inherited her clairvoyant abilities from her paternal grandmother, Sarah Shapiro, an immigrant from Russia who suspected that her granddaughter shared her gift. Rochelle Shapiro said that when she was 4 she announced that her mother's cousin Bertie from London was coming on a ship and that the cousin showed up, without any other warning, at the dock.

Ms. Shapiro tried to pursue other careers. She has a master's degree in fine arts from Brooklyn College. She worked in public relations and taught math in middle school.

"Every time I did something else, it ended up with psychic readings anyway, just like the characters in the book," she said. Ms. Shapiro said she wasn't even writing when, 25 years ago, Vincent Ragone, a well-known clairvoyant, predicted that she would write a novel that would be published by Simon & Schuster. "It seemed too preposterous at the time," she said with a hearty cackle.

Twenty years ago, she enrolled in a poetry class through the Great Neck Adult Education program. Later she started keeping journals of her readings. It took her seven years to complete the novel, which is ultimately about self-acceptance.

In it, Miriam is desperately trying to save her husband's business, the

Mirror Pharmacy, but his patience with her psychic attempts is running short. Her daughter, Cara, is an over-achieving teenager embarrassed by her mother's powers.

"Life was lonely with a husband consumed by work, a daughter full of shame, and clients as disembodied spirits on the phone," Ms. Shapiro wrote. "Great Neck was lonely with its castles and manicured lawns and dogs named Baron."

Ms. Shapiro moved to Great Neck 27 years ago but said she never felt she fit in anywhere. She has two children. Her husband, Bernard Natt, is a pharmacist.

Clients sometimes expect her to be a sharpshooter, but it's hard to tell, Ms. Shapiro said, just how accurate she is.

"I'm like a controller at an airport," she said. "I'm sitting there, and I am just watching things arrive, arrive, having to interpret them. For me to know anything is a miracle."

But her descriptions of life in an affluent Long Island suburb hit a bull's-eye. "When I reached the next corner, another blond woman dashed out of Paradise Salon, her hands up as if she had just been robbed," she wrote. "'Help!' she called out to me. I rushed to her. Then she held a quarter out to me in her outstretched palm. For a moment I was insulted.

"Would you put this in my meter?" she asked frantically. 'I just got my nails done.'"

Smile When You Say That

Certain people always seem to be successful at getting what they want: a great job, lots of friends, lasting relationships.

Laurie Puhn, a former cheerleader voted the most outstanding student in Great Neck North High School's class of 1995, is one of those A-list people. At 16, she won a Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. award from the Nassau County Commission on Human Rights after she founded the young adult division of the American Ethnic Coalition in the Town of North Hempstead.

At 27, she is now a Harvard-trained lawyer turned motivational speaker and author. The key to success and getting what you want, she said, is not brains or luck or money. It's the power of persuasion.

"It's not just for lawyers," Ms. Puhn said. "It's not just for salespeople. It happens at the dinner table with your family. It happens at work. It happens with your friends."

While mediating disputes between plaintiffs and defendants, Ms. Puhn noticed how often things could be going along smoothly toward a settlement when one party stuck his foot in his mouth.

"It was in that moment the whole thing spiraled out of control," she said.

Ms. Puhn began to concentrate on saying the right thing at the right time. Difficult relationships became easier.

To help others concentrate, avoid communication blunders and say the right thing, Ms. Puhn left her job at Orrick, Herrington & Sutcliffe, a Manhattan law firm, and wrote a self-help book, "Instant Persuasion: How to Change Your Words to Change Your Life" (Jeremy P. Tarcher/Penguin, 2005).

"We spend a lot of time walking around the supermarket aisle reading labels on bread and on cookies, figuring out the carbs and the fat," Ms. Puhn said. "We spend so much time figuring out what we are putting into our mouths and spend so little time figuring out what comes out of our mouths and the effect our words have on others."

Ms. Puhn suggests 35 quick and easy rules to catch bees with honey, not vinegar. Among them: "It is a blunder to complain about something without offering a solution" and "It is a blunder to be stingy with your words of appreciation."

Instead she offers "communication wonders" to win people over. "It is common sense," she said.

The "All I Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten" type book starts with a spoonful of sugar theory. Ms. Puhn calls it "punch with a smile."

"A wife could tell her husband in the morning, 'That tie looks awful and you need to change it,'" Ms. Puhn said. "That woman has instantly persuaded him to ignore her right then and there. On the other hand she could make a small change in her words and say, 'Honey, you look great today. I like your outfit, but I think a different tie would go better with it.' In that case she is trying to be helpful, not hurtful."



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A New Path for Rochelle Shapiro: From Psychic to Writer

By Frankie Espadas

Rochelle Jewel Shapiro is about to release her first book, *Miriam the Medium*, published by Simon and Schuster, which is set right here in Great Neck. She has been living in Great Neck for 27 years and she even learned how to write at the Great Neck Adult Education Program where she studied poetry with Kent Ozarow and prose with Cynthia Shor. "Both teachers not only have a great ear for language, but they also know how to find what's good about your writing," she said.

Ms. Shapiro could not say enough about the wealth of intellectual resources available to the public in this community. She has attended the Great Neck Arts Center Film Subscription Series since its inception and refers to it as her "Ninety-second Street Y." And she regularly attends book discussions and readings by Shirley Blanc Romaine and others.

Responding to our positive comments about the book, she shared the good news that she has nearly finished the sequel to the book. She said that she is still so involved in the characters that she cannot let them go. "It's like color field painting," she says, "where an artist places a red square on a blue field and next to it, a red square on a yellow field and you get a whole new effect." Every time she places Miriam, her protagonist, in a new setting with new characters, it results in something totally different.

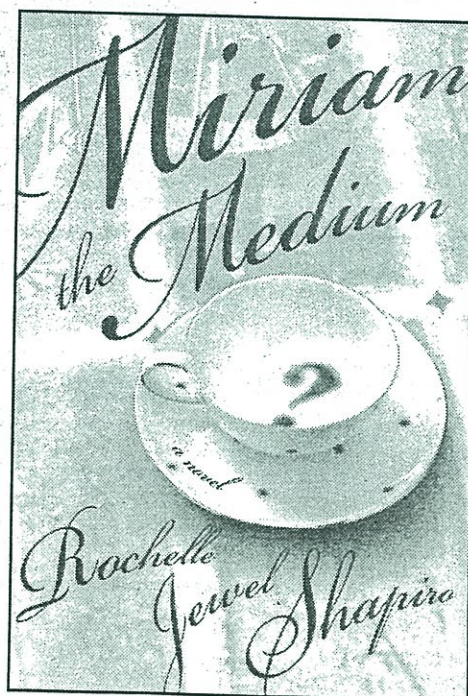
Like the heroine of *Miriam the Medium*, Miriam Kaminsky, Rochelle Shapiro is also a phone psychic who has clients all over the world and has done many radio shows. But she needed a break from staying in her home-office, talking on the phone all day and so she began to write.

It took her seven years to complete *Miriam the Medium*, which, although it has deep themes of children of survivors, family struggles, and the need to accept oneself, is richly comedic. After September 11, she thought that neither she nor anyone else would ever laugh again.

But then she ran into two Great Neck residents, Miles and Mimi Coons, who encouraged her to finish her book. Miles said, "The answer to destruction is creativity." She wrote that quote on an index card and whenever she lost the will to keep going with the book, she looked at the card and that gave her the strength to keep going. It was the generous spirit of



ROCHELLE JEWEL SHAPIRO



MIRIAM THE MEDIUM

were all kinds of errors which she could not fix. The screen would show the text as she wanted it, but on the printouts there were big blank spaces. No matter what the experts told her nothing worked. The pressure mounted; her rewrite was due at the publishers. Dorrit Title, from her poetry workshop, came over and read from her monitor so she could fill in the blank spaces.

Hannah Ritter, who designed Ms. Shapiro's web site, helped her proofread the book, which was a monumental task. For example, the grandmother character, Bubbie, was making "healing slaves" instead of "healing salves." And the people were driving around in "Porches" instead of "Porsches." Cynthia Shor helped the author keep tabs on the timing of the events in the novel so that characters were not in two different places at the same time. She also helped with the narrative flow by listening to Ms. Shapiro read the book to her over and over, while

making suggestions.

Suddenly this interview went from one that was very interesting, to one that was deeply personal. Ms. Shapiro began speaking about my father who had passed away when I was 9, telling me about how he died and the messages that he had for me which were very specific and meaningful and private. I was shocked. It blew my mind. People had always told me that my father was around, but I assumed they were just trying to make me feel better. Now I know it's true.

her Great Neck friends and neighbors who continued to encourage her.

Since she had spent seven years writing the book, it had been through a few different computers and programs, and there

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THE JERUSALEM POST UPFRONT

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Cosmic conversations

• By AMANDA BORSCHER-DAN

I'm what you might call a cautious psychic," says Rochelle Jewel Shapiro, in an early morning telephone call from her Great Neck, New York home.

Shapiro is used to divulging over the phone. As a telephone psychic with clients all over the world, Shapiro regularly reaches out and touches someone, even on the other side.

Dealing with cosmic stock tips is not her only profession, however: Shapiro recently published her first novel, *Miriam the Medium*, about — you guessed it — the life of a telephone psychic.

"The process of writing is very much like the process of being a psychic. I get images, sensations, and then the characters start speaking and take over. You don't ever know what's going to happen."



Miriam the Medium
By Rochelle Jewel Shapiro
Simon & Schuster
309 pp., \$23

Although the transition to writing came in stages, about 30 years ago Shapiro went for her first and only visit to a psychic, and the clairvoyant Vincent Ragone predicted that she would eventually write a novel that would be published by Simon & Schuster.

Her girlish bubbly voice belies her newly attained grandmother status and Shapiro gushes that when she walked into the meeting at Simon & Schuster, it was like falling in love.

The novel is set in a Long Island suburb where, much like in the *Bewitched* television series, Miriam plays the secret super-powered housewife while her husband, Rory, makes an average living at his small drugstore. Daughter Cara is a turbulent high-achieving teen, dealing with her mother's powers and her own normalcy in a typically teenaged fashion

—rebelliously.

Rory's business is failing and Miriam doesn't need to be a medium to see that the future isn't terribly bright. To boost the family's financial situation, Miriam gives psychic readings over the telephone, aided by her trusty Bubbie's spirit.

FACT AND fiction blend in the enjoyable, quick-reading novel. Like in the book, Shapiro's own grandmother was also a gifted psychic and healer, and is still a daily presence in her life.

"As a child, I thought that seeing things and hearing things was the norm. I was able to let the gift flower and enjoy it."

Shapiro says that her grandmother used to say that when a person dies, the spirit rises up and splits into three. One part goes immediately to the ethers, another portion hovers around for the week of shiva ("It's wonderful, that week of shiva."), and the third part is what Shapiro calls the *ruah*. "That part is around at all times and can be contacted."

Interpreting the spirit world, says Shapiro, is like listening to very fast Alvin and the Chipmunks records.

"But the dead don't always come through," she clarifies, remembering the capriciousness of the dead with a well-worn anecdote. Once she saw a spirit who wouldn't speak. She described his physical characteristics to her client, who said, "That's my father. He didn't believe in psychics; the last thing he'd want to do is talk to you."

Although the book is called *Miriam the Medium*, Shapiro says that she, like Miriam, is just a "regular psychic" who gathers information through all senses, in addition to working as a medium, who only speaks with the spirit world.

In order to minimize the overwhelming psychic flashes she used to feel in all walks of life, Shapiro has switched to pre-arranged appointments on the phone. Removing the spontaneity has reduced the ever-present psychic noise, and Shapiro further hones her receptors through prayer and meditation.

"I feel like I'm fighting for the right to be a writer," she sighs. "Everyone is so much more interested in the psychic aspect. Shop talk can be overwhelming all the time."

Shapiro often tells friends and neighbors that she is a writer or consultant, to minimize the on-the-spot demand for readings.

"Doing a reading is a very deep knowing of another being. To see what a person is struggling with. I feel that my work is very deeply connected to love."

She pauses, and again sighs.

"The mind needs a rest," says Shapiro. "I feel a great responsibility towards my clients and I pray to give them light. They should walk away comforted, more secure, having direction for themselves."

The writer is the Cultural Editor at The



Rochelle Jewel Shapiro. A phone psychic turned novelist, Shapiro admits 'shop talk can be overwhelming all the time.' (Janine Flugmacher)