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‘Like Prince Harry, I asked a medium about my mum, but be careful what you wish for’

Sheena McGinley’s mother died when she was 19, leaving her with many questions. But the answers she found have haunted her for two decades. Here, she writes, be careful what you wish for...

Premium 

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"Although Mum never described the person in the caravan as anything other than a faith healer, I would later realise she had been seeing a medium. Her reasons for these visits were — and continue to be — a mystery." Sheena McGinley and her mother, Noreen, on Killiney Beach in 1992



Sheena McGinley

March 05 2023 02:30 AM



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Sheena McGinley

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“Don’t tell anyone where you were, they wouldn’t understand.” My mother was right — especially as she’d taken me out of school for the day to have this jolly to Palmerstown. Not that I ever left the back of the car.

Mum had made many of these clandestine trips; lengthy car jaunts to a park where she’d clamber up the wooden steps into an ornate vardo. When she emerged, some 45 minutes later, we’d drive home. If my big sister happened to be with us, Mum would divulge some details, but largely in hushed tones, because of “the little one in the back”.

While I never left the confines of the car, the lure of this ritual was compelling. Why so far away? What was she doing in the caravan? As I got older, the snatched snippets I got to hear always seemed like something and nothing — arbitrary but nonetheless enlightening. Although Mum never described the person in the caravan as anything other than a faith healer, I would later realise she had been seeing a medium. Her reasons for these visits were — and continue to be — a mystery; to this day I have no idea what the compulsion was or what possible succour or solace she may have got from these repeated encounters.

Mum died around a decade later. I’d just turned 19. The night prior to finding out that she had terminal lung cancer, I had cried myself to sleep because I just knew something was terribly wrong, even though she only had a cough. As ‘the little one’, I’d been spared the full extent of her diagnosis so we could all sing *Happy Birthday* to her. Afterwards, we went to The Royal Marine Hotel, where the full gravity unfolded. She spent her final birthday, her 59th, in a small hospital room. She died four months later.

Since then, making an appointment with a reputable medium was never far from our minds. If we were going to do this, it had to be done right, even if meant spending years searching for the right person. It’s not something we even questioned; it was tradition at this point. But how to find a medium in which we had faith was the issue. Then the universe answered.

About 18 months after Mum’s death, my sister found a dewy yellow rose in the middle of her driveway. She stuck it in a vase, and didn’t pay it much heed.

Then, when a close friend swung by the following day, she stopped short when she clocked the bloom perched on my sister’s kitchen counter.

“Where did you get that?” she asked. “I found it on the drive,” my sister replied, adding, “Why do you ask?” It transpired that her friend had visited a medium who had brought up our mum, saying that Mum would “send a yellow rose” to show she was around.

Not wanting to freak several shades out of a grieving family, this friend had kept this nugget of information on the down-low. Until the rose appeared.

Personally speaking, I didn’t buy it. Freak coincidences happen, I thought. In hindsight, I resisted investing in it for fear it turned out to be bullshit. That’s why, when we managed to get an appointment with this very medium some months later, I made a pact with myself not to show any emotion, not to give anything away.

The booking was made over the phone. We made the trek to suburbia, only to be told on arrival that our slot had been double booked. All was not lost, however. We were offered a complimentary tea-leaf reading by one of the medium’s colleagues instead. This resonated; Mum used to try to read our tea leaves, so we eagerly took it as a sign not to have a wasted journey. When the day of our rescheduled medium slot arrived, we drove there in silence. I was first to go in for a reading. She had asked for ‘the little one’. That was jarring — especially as I was far from little at the time. Perhaps this was a stock phrase mediums say, hoping it would apply to some clients? I walked in, po-faced.

The room was large and dark, despite it being midday. Candles flickered, a blanket cradled the arm of the chair opposite. No stoicism was necessary. This medium read with her eyes closed.

"She's so happy you came. She keeps saying, 'my girls, my girls!'" That was something Mum always said — "my girls". Isn't that something most mums of girls might say? I sat silently in this cosy back room of a mid-terrace, while this serene lady recounted, in meticulous detail, events my mother and I had gone through together. Wildly specific details. From correlating timelines to the clothes on our backs. "She was wearing her pink silk scarf." With the reading coming to a close, our medium gently opened her eyes and asked if I had any questions. I didn't. I was stunned, unable to speak. That's when she locked eyes with me, before saying, "She really wants you to know that she's sorry."

A child never wants to admit, never mind state, that their upbringing has been chaotic, but children feel it. My "mother" referring to it gave me reassurance that it was OK to feel it, that I wasn't being disloyal. After my sisters' readings, we went to the nearby pub to compare notes. When it came to how puzzling the end of our conversation was, one of my sisters said, "Yes, she brought that up with me too about you."

What subsequently unfolded was a compounding personal revelation that has impacted me to this very day, over two decades later. Was I prepared for that kind of information? Probably not. Has it changed the rest of my life? Probably. On reflection, the information relayed to me from my mum via the medium had been something I'd suspected privately about my childhood — but was afraid to say, lest I spoke ill of those about whom I cared.

When people talk about mediums, their worst fear is that the person whom they engage will be a charlatan when, in fact, their biggest fear should be what happens when the person is *not* a charlatan — and, like me, they find themselves receiving information from 'the other side' that is shocking and, to all intents and purposes, true. In the intervening years, I thought of this experience every single day. I kept the medium's card, but never rang — I was stuck in a purgatory of sorts, desperate to know more but afraid of learning anything new. Around two years later, aged 23, I caved.

This time, our appointment was in a housing estate. Again, the medium spoke in a whisper with her eyes closed. When I mentioned why I was there, she seemed to brush it aside. "You don't need to dwell on that," she said. "What's done is done." Instead, she talked about a "young man" I already knew, who was "going to take an interest" in my career. She stipulated that I was going to be "surrounded by piles of paper. Lots and lots of single sheets of paper, strewn on a desk." She'd "never seen so many papers".

Finally, I felt like I could talk about something that has been part of my life for so long. But it's something so easily dismissed and ridiculed, I mostly keep it to myself. Now, here was someone speaking frankly about their experience with mediumship.

Although I have a more detailed history with psychics than most, I still have questions and reservations. Like, is it OK to channel the recently bereaved? How do mediums actually speak to the dead? What's the difference between a medium and a clairvoyant or a psychic? How do you book someone who is reputable and not a con-artist looking to exploit a vulnerable individual?

I know people who haven't had great experiences. One friend went to a hen party and a fortune teller told her she wouldn't be having any more babies.

"Then, I pushed my chair back from the table and stood up. I was heavily pregnant. He was shocked, and said he must have been reading someone else," she recalled.

"I found it strangely upsetting. I think it's probably not something I would do again. You have to be ready to hear things from left-field."

That's the thing with seeing a medium — how do you actually know what you're looking for? Most of us are pretty clueless when it comes to definitions.

"There is no directory I know of. *Holisto.com* [a holistic directory] closed down a few years ago, unless a new one has sprung up very recently," says Brian McCullen. A spiritual healer and teacher for almost three decades, McCullen has been providing guided meditations and archangel healings via his practice in Enfield, Co Meath, and his YouTube channel. While he communes with spirits and guides, he isn't a medium.



Princess Diana with Prince Harry in London in 1995

He explains: "As a spiritual healer, I channel healing energy through my body, through my hands, to the healing recipient's energy field, I rebalance any blocked or congested energy within the energy field of the person receiving the healing."

Although there is no guild or formal accreditation, there is the Global Psychics and Healers Association. Founder Rosemary McArthur says: "As a medium and a healer from Scotland, I am very conscious of how I work with my clients. I travel all over the globe, teaching other mediums and healers on how to do this kind of work appropriately.

"With thousands of students worldwide, I have been doing this work since the early 1980s and I love it. I do not consider it work, really. I have been working full-time since 1994, teaching others how to create and balance their lives."

Her goal was to "bring together credible and ethical people globally".

She says: "I don't allow charlatans in as I feel this brings down the whole vibration of the organisation. People must understand that there are certain criteria and standards that I hold my members to.

"This is not a hotline. It's an organisation of credible, ethical psychics and healers, who are the best in the industry."

Though global in reach, there are no members for 'Southern Ireland'.

Also, the website is based on (very) early Noughties' coding architecture, making it quite difficult to search and not terribly user-friendly. It does, however, list members by category, but you have to know what the categories mean.

"A medium is a person who is naturally attuned to the spirit world," explains Juliette Celeste, UK-based psychic-medium and founder of *communicationfromthebeyond.com*.

"They convert what spirits, deceased people, convey into a clear format — like a radio can convert frequencies [into sounds and speech]. Mediums either see, hear, and/or feel information coming from spirit; their role is to share information and messages received from spirit with the sitter. A medium doesn't need tools, such as cards, to do their work. Instead, they use their heightened senses to allow communication."

There are four 'clairs' of intuition — clairvoyants see images; clairaudients receive messages aurally; clairsentients read feelings, while claircognisants intuitively 'know' things.



"A spiritual healer and teacher for almost three decades, McCullen has been providing guided meditations and archangel healings via his practice in Enfield, Co Meath, and his YouTube channel"

Psychics read information in the client's aura — the invisible energy field which supposedly surrounds each of us. "They can guide, advising on challenges and opportunities that present themselves in the sitter's present, or future. A psychic can't communicate with spirit. This is the main difference."

As a psychic-medium, Celeste maintains she has the ability to connect with deceased loved ones, and can advise on questions a person has regarding their life.

"My joy resides in providing guidance and clarity. However, please also remember this — there is no such thing as 'fortune telling'; nothing is immutable. Each of us has the responsibility to shape our own future. Psychics can only guide and advise in accordance to what they see, but you keep your free will."

Similarly, UK-based Andrew Matthews is a psychic-medium, whose readings "involve part of life that as yet to unfold". He is, reluctant to refer to that part of life as the future, saying: "I don't call it 'the future'; it's just what's placed in front — be it words, places, or scenery from those in spirit. My readings cover those who have passed over; relationships; plus direction in life, both on a personal level and in business."

Not every psychic-medium is keen to impart business advice, however. When speaking with an American member of McArthur's association — Dr Elizabeth Raver (AKA Dr Liz, PhD) — about her criteria for reading someone, she said, "Anyone can request a reading, but I will not work with everyone. For example, I once had a request for a reading pertaining to questions about a business venture. I declined to do so since I'm primarily interested in helping people connect with loved ones who have passed, and/or spirit guides. I want to show people that there is indeed life after death, that consciousness continues after the body ceases."



"My joy resides in providing guidance and clarity. However, please also remember this — there is no such thing as 'fortune telling'; nothing is immutable. Each of us has the responsibility to shape our own future. Psychics can only guide and advise in accordance to what they see, but you keep your free will." Juliette Celeste, UK-based psychic-medium and founder of communicationfromthebeyond.com.

Crucially, Dr Liz has a code of practice when working with "people who are mentally ill. I feel strongly that they need a good therapist, not a medium. In addition, I will not work with someone who is high on drugs or alcohol".

This sentiment is echoed on this side of the Atlantic.

McCullen also says he won't treat people that are actively taking hard drugs or are mentally unwell, and states categorically: "In these cases, the person should obviously be seeing a professional counsellor or psychiatrist."

Clearly, strong ethical guidelines and the well-being of clients is to the forefront of these practitioners' minds. However, there are obviously charlatans working in the industry and it is incumbent on the potential customer to be rigorous in their research and also to maintain a healthy scepticism. Buyer beware, as it were.

Recounting when she first felt grounded in her intuition, Dr Liz - who has a doctorate in psychology and previously taught both psychology and mathematics — said she was in her 20s before becoming aware of her abilities.



"My readings cover those who have passed over; relationships; plus direction in life, both on a personal level and in business." UK-based Andrew Matthews is a psychic-medium

"Things I'd been dismissing as my imagination were actually psychic abilities. I was clueless that my childhood 'imaginary playmates' were spirit guides."

"Slowly, over time, I stopped fighting these abilities and began to understand and work with them. But not until my 40s did I begin taking formal lessons practising mediumship. Fortunately, somehow I knew when I was young told me not to tell anyone about my experiences! Being born in the late 1950s, I didn't grow up in a culture particularly receptive to people who could communicate with the so-called dead."

Does she ever get scared?

"When I was younger, there were times that, for a range of reasons, a spirit could frighten. Now, that I'm older and more experienced, this no longer happens. I look at spirits the same way I look at people on Earth — except that the former do not have a physical body."

What does she do if a negative energy comes in, or, worse, if a spirit is horrible, or perhaps, evil?

"I tell it to get lost and show no fear. Then I call on my spirit guides for extra protection to help get rid of the 'nuisance'. I then try raising my own vibrations by praying to very high-level spirits. These include a range of figures, be it Jesus, Buddha, Shiva, the Great Spirit, Mother Mary. The vibrations from such prayers are usually enough to repel the problem."

Given that mediums immerse themselves in this space during readings — raising their vibration and asking spirit to lower theirs, so the two can effectively meet in the middle — there is, for them, a checklist of activities that are best avoided.

Dr Liz refers to them as low-level activities — “over-drinking, hurting people, low emotions like hate and anger, being greedy or ungrateful, eating too much junk food.”

She continues with a warning: “Also, especially for the inexperienced or those who are mentally/emotionally unbalanced, avoid the ouija board and other types of communication tools. They run the risk of inviting mischievous spirits. ☒Mediums,” she says, “should always be working on self-development, alongside their “mental hygiene”, so that they are “balanced when having one foot in this world and the other in the next”.



“Anyone can request a reading, but I will not work with everyone.” Dr Elizabeth Raver, who has a doctorate in psychology and also previously taught both psychology and mathematics

While some mediums and spiritual guides employ cleansing practices to clear themselves and their space of negative energies — be it sage sticks, crystals, or mantra chanting — Dr Liz prefers “meditation, singing, listening to inspirational music, yoga, working in my garden, an Epsom salts bath, watching nature, even baking cookies or a cake. Anything to lift the spirit. I attract as I am”.

Speaking of whether her grounding in psychology affects her readings, she adds that it helps her work as a medium in several ways. “First, I have an understanding of cognitive processes which helps to quiet my physical mind so that my own thought distractions don’t interfere with spirit’s messages.

“Second, psychology has helped me to be more aware of my own biases — preconceived notions, assumptions, and judgments — and [helps me to] put these aside so that messages are delivered objectively.”

That said, it can hamper proceedings. “Sometimes, I struggle with getting my rational, scientifically trained mind out of the way. That’s when I take a deep breath and just pass on what spirit is downloading.”

For those who might be considering seeing a medium, Celeste has some sage advice.

“Follow your gut, but be careful not to give any information to the medium. The main purpose of mediumship is to give you evidence to prove, beyond reasonable doubt, who the spirit is. In order to make themselves recognisable, spirits give detailed information such as names, dates, and shared memories that the medium cannot know.”

If a spiritual healing resonates, McCullen adds that it helps for the person to be open-minded. “It’s OK to be sceptical. In fact, I find most people who are initially sceptical become the greatest fans of receiving spiritual healing.”

As it happens, this still sceptical cynic is receiving a complimentary reading with Dr Liz this coming Thursday. It’s her “way of saying thank you to spirit” for helping to cast light on this phenomenon, which humans have been practising for millennia.

Will Mum be there? Will she have more details? Either way, this time, I’m better equipped for what may come. In fact, I’m looking forward to it.