

Video: Our sit-down with the psychic

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Last week I went for a “reading” with a psychic.

It was, to say the least, an interesting encounter - who doesn't like someone focusing entirely on you and your life? - with, I admit, one or two moments when the hairs on the back of my neck tingled.

I'm not a skeptic when it comes to ghosts, the presence of spirits around us or communicating with dead people. A

skeptic leaves open the possibility of being proven wrong. I am, without reservation, a firm non-believer.

Like everyone else, I've listened to sane, responsible people relate stories which seem to have no explanation other than ... something OTHER controlling events. For example, I was in a near fatal car crash when I was 18 and the cop who responded reported his arrival to the twisted wreck on a country road at precisely 5:18 a.m. More than 100 miles away, my sister Peggy woke suddenly with an unshakable premonition that I was in mortal danger. She looked at the clock on her bed table which winked, 5:18 a.m.

A startling coincidence? Peggy never thought so.

The closest I've come to a relation with the spirit world was one winter afternoon a few years ago. I was sitting in the living room of my empty apartment reading, of all things, “Ghost Story” by Peter Straub. Totally absorbed in Straub's story of the spirit world, I'd neglected to turn on a light as the apartment slowly filled with shadows. Finally realizing I was practically reading in the dark, I was about to turn on a light when I heard a somber male voice speaking softly. It was coming from the kitchen.

The shock I felt became even more paralyzing when I realized I would have to get up and go into the kitchen to confront whatever was in there. The voice droned on as I strained to understand what it was saying. Finally I walked the 20 feet to face it. I was so shook I might as well have been walking to the gallows.

I flipped on the kitchen light and there was nothing. Except for Bob, the cat, on the counter pawing playfully at the controls of the clock radio. Bob had tuned into some financial analyst giving grim economic news.

So no, I don't believe. But I don't put down those who do because I don't doubt people's faith, which is all it takes to believe the dead are talking to certain people. Faith, I was taught, is the evidence of things unseen. I don't mock believers in mediums or the paranormal when mainstream religions depend on a belief in virgin birth and God having a son, or are convinced that an obscure desert tribe was chosen by the Deity who contracted only with them, or that the way to your reward is to lay off caffeine or booze or other dietary restrictions.

Which leads me to my "reading" by [Dawn Joly](#), a Smithtown professional psychic/medium. I met Dawn in her office in the course of putting together [a feature on the business of psychics](#).

Dawn was a cordial hostess, pleasant, upbeat and good company to me and Mike Samuels, LIBN's law/government reporter who came along, doubling that day as a videographer. After talking to her about the nuts and bolts of the psychic/medium biz, I asked Dawn what she thought of me.

"I think you're a doll," Dawn said. Ah, she'd hooked me on the first drop. *Story continues below video*

Her eyes did a slight roll backwards - something which would happen repeatedly - she stared at me and asked what my Italian connection was. I said none except close friends, but Dawn responded by saying, "The Italian is there."

I've been asked this more than a few times, I think because Ambrose, a common enough Italian name, is unusual when linked to an Irish surname.

She then stated there was journalism and writing in my family. I said no, I was the only one who had joined such a low profession. But that night, telling my wife about the reading, she shook her head. "Jack? Your brother? Author of two books?"

True, he didn't make a living with his word processor, but he was a legitimate author, his two books published by a university press.

Sorry, Jack.

Dawn's eyes rolled. "Where does Mary come in?"

A slight shiver ran over me. "Mary's my wife."

"And that's who you're supposed to be with."

No argument, Dawn.

She ran through some other names which rang no bells.

She asked about “the Florida connection.” Mike responded that would be him, born and raised in the Sunshine State. Dawn said something about “a boomerang affect” that voices she was hearing were getting mixed up.

But honestly, what Long Islander doesn’t have a Florida connection?

Dawn noted there was “cardio and diabetes” in my family. Right. Again, with a big family, was this premonition or just playing the odds?

“Where does John come in?”

“John’s my brother.”

“There are two Johns.”

Bingo. My beloved nephew, John.

She said I wrote for other publications and I answered that I freelanced. She said it was something bigger than LIBN. Score one more, Dawn. I freelance for [The Washington Post](#) on occasion.

But again, a lucky guess, or since I had an appointment, a quick Google search?

But then came hair-tingling time: Eye roll. A direct look. “Who has the blue eyes in the family?”

“My mother.”

After asking if I had been with her when she passed away, Dawn asked, “Where does Margaret come in?”

My mother’s name. Hearing her name, remembering her eyes in the brightly lit office ...

Dawn told me not to stress over deadlines - Stress? Me? Any journalist? - that I shouldn’t worry about everything so much and that I came from good stock. She said my father could be a bit grouchy but had a hearty laugh.

Later Mike, the cold-blooded cynic, said, “Wow, a father who is a little grouchy toward his son and an Irishman who has a hearty laugh.”

There was one last moment of someone walking over my grave. Immediately after Dawn spoke of my father, she asked, “Where do the Williams come in?”

Still concentrating on my father, I told her that would be my father and grandfather.

She stared at me. “And where does the third one come in?”

A small shock. “My brother.”

Sorry, Bill.

“Don’t forget him,” Dawn said with a laugh.

I wasn’t converted, but I had a wonderful time.

Researching the story I spoke with [James Randi](#), a magician and self-styled psychic debunker who has a standing \$1 million reward from any psychic who can scientifically prove they hear the dead speak. After years no one has claimed the reward, Randi said. But again, this seems a matter of faith and not science.

I asked Randi where was the harm? As long as the psychic is not looting people’s bank accounts, wasn’t this a case of “so what” if people go to psychics for entertainment or comfort and in the end nobody gets hurt?

Randi would have none of it. “Heroin will cure all of your problems. You’ll have no worries. Your family is perfect. Who cares about debt? Heroin is no help at all. It’s temporary surcease.”

But I disagree. No matter the methods used to “read” you, whether it’s a technique using acute observations of your physical presence, the way you dress, the way you speak and your ethnicity, or your grandfather speaking beyond the grave, a trip to a psychic will open your eyes to a waking dream of you and your family.

