

Minding My Own Business

written by Guest Contributor | October 15, 2018



I was standing on line at Austin Drugs in Great Neck, Long Island when I noticed a heavyset man three people ahead of me whose aura was as weak as the flame of a sputtering? candle. I could see his aura because I have my Russian grandmother, my bubbie's, gift. In her kitchen, she told people's fortunes sprinkled with good advice, and made them healing potions. I wanted to "mind my own business" as my husband, Bernie, always tells me, as my mother had before him. What if this man is psychotic? Besides, I'm thirty-five. He could think I'm flirting with him. But I felt as if I were being pushed toward this stranger by an invisible hand. I got off the line and approached to him.

"Are you all right?" I whispered.

He shook his head. "I'm diabetic," he said. "I didn't take my insulin today, and I was about to buy all of these and eat them at once."

He showed me the six boxes of chocolate chip cookies in his cart.

"Leave them here," I said. "Let's go next door for a coffee and talk." All the while I told myself, *Bernie's right. I shouldn't be doing things like this. The guy is a stranger.* But next thing I knew, I was sitting across from him at a table in Bruce's Bakery.

Before we even ordered, he blurted out that his wife had been hit by a bus. She was in a coma at North Shore Hospital with a terrible prognosis—the doctors had given him no hope.

"I'm a psychic," I admitted. "Don't listen to the doctors. Go back to your wife. Hold her hand. Talk to her. Don't leave her side. I see her walking with you. She has a limp, but she's fine otherwise. Go to her now."

I didn't know if I was right, but at the least it seemed kind. My bubbie always told me, "People should never go from you crying."

I didn't know then that this was going to be the catalyst that would make me decide to earn money for my services, as my bubbie had. I had been making money like a college graduate should. As I stayed home with my two children,

I earned money writing essays, book reviews, short stories, and poems in the days when people got paid for these things. When there was time and money, I planned to get a master's in English Literature.

The moment that opened me to a new life came two years later. I was walking on Middleneck Road with my husband when a Honda jerked to the curb. A man dashed over to me. "You remember me?" he asked.

I didn't.

"Wait," he said. "I want my wife to meet you." He opened the passenger door of his car. A woman got out with his help and limped toward me, smiling, and the whole incident came back to me. This was the guy who was going to do death by cookies, the guy whose wife had been in a coma. He had gotten so much thinner that I hadn't recognized him.

He began pumping my husband's hand and telling him how I had helped him and his wife. The guy asked me for my card so he could call me for another reading.

"I don't have a card," I said, but I knew, not psychically, but in hard fact, that I would be ordering them soon. A door had opened for me and I was determined, no matter what anyone else said, to walk through it. I was going to do the readings by phone, I decided, so that I didn't have to rent an office. Things had changed since my bubbie was in practice, when everyone knew each other. I wasn't about to let strangers into our home.

I couldn't blame my husband for not wanting me to give reign to my gift. It often made it hard for him to be around me, even hard for me to be around me. At a Christmas party, I met a nurse, Jan, whom we admired so much for her great laugh and her dedication to handicapped adults at the home where she worked.

"Bernie, I have this horrible feeling that Jan is going to die before next Christmas," I told him in the car. "She's going to get sick."

"I'm going to get sick if you don't stop," he said.

Eight months later, Jan died from a blood clot that traveled from her leg to her heart. *Maybe I should have called her, I thought. Warned her.* But I hadn't known what was wrong with her, and neither, we learned, had her doctor when she went for a physical only weeks before her death. What could I have done besides scare her?

Even when I wasn't giving psychic information, friends thought I was. Once Bernie and I were hanging out with another couple, Dan and Rene, who knew I was psychic. Although we had an agreement that they never ask me psychic questions, Dan said, "We found a great house in Commack that we're thinking of putting a deposit on even though we haven't sold our co-op yet." A statement, not a question. But I felt them scrutinizing me, waiting for me to raise an eyebrow or nod approvingly. I made sure to keep still. When they were stuck with two mortgages, I got a call from Dan complaining that Rene swore she saw me lift my thumb like an okay.

When I became a phone psychic thirty-three years ago and had my own business to mind, I no longer got as many random flashes. I wasn't gasping at car crashes that didn't happen yet or worrying that a neighbor's wife would find out he was having an affair. These days, focusing on my clients, I am mostly able to keep the weight of other people's fates off my knobby shoulders.

Doing readings by phone, I never have to worry that a client is going to recognize me and approach me on the street to ask whether her son-in-law is going to pass the bar exam or holler questions to me while I'm peeing in a toilet stall. And, knowing clients' secrets the way I do, they might not want to run into me either. Who wants to come face-to-face with the person who knows that you've pilfered from a Dollar Store or returned a cocktail dress to Bloomingdale's that you've worn twice?

Do I know everything that is going to happen? No. Doing a reading is like seeing the reflection of a full moon in a rippling lake. I get glimmers, wavelets. I only know if I'm right when I see what comes to pass. One of my joys is that I've worked with many clients long enough to find out if my predictions worked out. For one client, I kept seeing a small russet-colored dog with white markings.

"I never had a dog and never will," she insisted. "I don't want to be one of those people who have to pick up after a dog and carry its poop in a plastic bag until I find the garbage."

After a battery of belittling boyfriends, a marriage that wrung out her *kishkes*, she now lives in bliss with a King Charles Spaniel that not only matches her temperament, but her coloring too.

I told a twenty-six-year-old woman who was despairing of finding a man she would want to spend her life with, "You'll connect with him on your alumni website." Of course, I didn't add that it would be a decade before they found each other or she would have *plotzed*. But they are getting married in the spring. She just tagged me on Facebook to share pictures of them surfing. I have readings with the grandchildren I foresaw of clients I had when I first started out. I feel part of them, a leaf on their family trees.

My bubbie always said, "Man plans while God laughs." There are people who know, Day One, what they are going to do with their lives, and others who worry over it all the time. Either way, you can never be sure of your destiny. You may have a plan and then one day, standing on line in a drugstore, you see a stranger ahead of you, and you are pushed toward your future by an invisible hand.



Rochelle Jewel Shapiro's is a phone psychic as well as a writer who inherited her psychic gift from her Russian grandmother, her bubbe. Her novel, *Miriam the Medium* (Simon & Schuster, 2004), was nominated for the Harol U. Ribelow Award. *Kaylee's Ghost* (2012) was an indie finalist. She's published in the *New York Times (Lives)*, *Newsweek*, and many more magazines and anthologies. Her poetry, short stories, and essays have appeared or are forthcoming in *Moment*, *Mudfish*, *Iowa Review*, *Stone Path*, *Peregrine*, *The Louisville Review*, *Stand*, *Inkwell*, *The MacGuffin*, *Negative Capability*, *Peregrine*, *Passager*, *Permafrost*, *Bayou Magazine*, *Empty Mirror*, *The Dallas Review*, *Sedge*, *Rio Grande Review*, *Cumberland Review*, *Amoskaag*, *Gulf Coast*, *Empty Mirror*. *Spry Magazine* has nominated one of her poems for Best of the Net 2019. Currently, she teaches at UCLA Extension. For more information about her and her work, please visit <https://-rochellejshapiro.com/>