

discovery



exploring the Occult

Getting inside the minds
of those who get into ours

by Linda Browne



When people

hear the word “occult” they often imagine mustachioed men in tall hats and long capes snickering wickedly as they hatch diabolical schemes. Or they think of Halloween and all things associated with the unknown and the mysterious.

Some folks have a negative view of the occult because they don’t understand it. But if you had a chance to speak with those who live on the fringes of this world – like psychic Edna Aker, hypnotist Gary Summers and illusionist David Copperfield – perhaps you would see it isn’t such a scary place after all.

I Can See Clearly Now...

As I pick up the phone to call psychic Edna Aker in Kentville, Nova Scotia, I’m nervous. Perhaps I’m worried that Edna will pick up on my feelings of doubt. I am, after all, a journalist. Skepticism is one of the job requirements.

But once I hear Edna’s voice, I immediately feel at ease. We begin with a reading, and to do it she only asks for my first and middle names. She explains she will use energy or tarot cards and water to look into my past, present and future. According to her website she is the only person documented in the world, to her knowledge, who does this type of reading since Nostradamus.



Edna Aker

It's not long before I start thinking that Edna may know more about me than I do. She tells me things about my personality and life that are eerily accurate.

Speaking with Edna is akin to having a conversation with a wise, older aunt. She's blunt without being brash, confident without being cocky. Perhaps this is partly why Edna has such a loyal customer base. Even one of Newfoundland's most famous exports, comedienne Cathy Jones, has come to her for guidance.

Edna "channels" during readings, likening the process to deep prayer.

"You know when you are playing with an elastic band in your hand and you know the stretch that you feel? Well, that is just the matter of the other person. So I go into what I call the matter of the other person's energy...and I do use my crystal ball and I have to spray it with water because without water, it's almost like I can't see, I can't feel," she explains.

Edna believes everyone has psychic abilities, whether we know it depends on how we tap into them. She recalls

when her abilities first came to light.

"It was when I got pregnant with my oldest daughter in 1965 that it really freaked me out and scared me because every time I was around water I would actually pick up visions and know all the stuff that was taking place," she says.

Edna's predictions took a chilling turn when she foretold her own death. In 1972, she was in an accident that left her clinically dead for 20 minutes.

"I've been very accurate about when people are going to die – too accurate," she says.

During the reading, Edna wishes me a happy 101st birthday because she bets "dollars to doughnuts" I'll live to be at least that old. If she's willing to put baked goods on the line, she must feel pretty confident...I hope!

Edna says she will give information about when people are going to die, depending on the circumstances.

"I believe that if you're just meant to die, then God will let me know that. I believe if you have cancer and you should get into the hospital and get checked and things can be changed, I feel that God will let me know that you need to do this," she says.

But she adds, "Just because a medical doctor says you're going to die, or a psychic tells you you're going to die, maybe it means that you need to give up marijuana or alcohol or tobacco...and start to find life."

At first, Edna saw her abilities as a curse, but now she embraces them.

"One of my best sayings is just 'Blessed be.' It means I don't have to understand it," she chuckles, "but bless it anyway!"

"Focus" Pocus

When Gary Summers opens the door of his St. John's home, I am surprised by his appearance. He doesn't

look like the stereotypical hypnotist from old movies. He lacks the cape, pointy goatee and pocket watch that he's supposed to swing slowly in front of my eyes as I fall into a deep sleep.

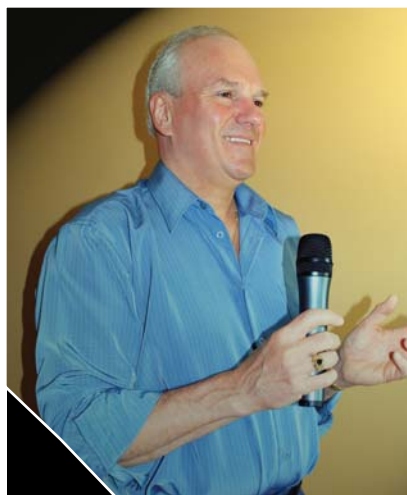
A certified hypnotherapist with the American Institute of Hypnotherapy, Gary is also a professional speaker and member of the International Brotherhood of Magicians. However, there is no magic involved with hypnosis. Much of his website is devoted to dispelling myths about hypnosis. He says it really all boils down to psychology.

"You have two minds. You have a conscious mind and a subconscious mind. Your conscious mind is what you use day-to-day. It's your mind that judges things, it's the mind that is good at counting...but it only accounts for five per cent of your brain power. So your conscious mind sets goals...has desires," he explains.

"Your subconscious mind is more powerful. It contains all your feelings, your emotions, all your experiences. Everything that you've gone through in your life is locked up here in a little computer called your subconscious mind," he says, tapping his temple.

"It's about 95 per cent of your brain power. Now people say you only use five per cent of your brain. That's not true. You use all of your brain. But your subconscious mind is your habitual mind. It either talks you into something or it talks you out of something. Hypnosis taps into the person's subconscious mind."

In addition to entertainment, people have also come to Gary looking for help for everything from overcoming a fear of turtles to losing weight to quitting smoking. "You want to be able to relax the person's conscious mind, so that there's no judgment taking place. Your subconscious mind doesn't judge. It accepts everything



Gary Summers

that's presented to it, as long as it's beneficial for you," he says.

During a second, separate session, Gary feeds back to the client information on how their life is going to improve by quitting smoking or eliminating any other negative behaviour.

"If a person can't see any improvement as to how their life is going to be better, why would they even want to stop smoking?"

Contrary to what some may think, hypnotists cannot turn people into their own personal puppets by merely staring intensely into their eyes. Gary says this is perhaps the most common misconception about hypnosis.

"Even though you're in hypnosis, you have a heightened awareness of everything that's going on around you," he says.

"A lot of people will say 'Don't look at him because he'll have you up on the roof barking like a dog.' But it doesn't work that way. If you believe in the process and expect it to work, it'll work. The person has to be willing, they have to believe in the process, and they have to want to change."

Now You See Me, Now You Don't...

He has escaped from Alcatraz, levitated across the Grand Canyon and walked through the Great Wall of China. He has been hailed “the greatest illusionist of our time,” and next month David Copperfield will be in St. John’s, Newfoundland for four performances at Mile One Centre. “An Intimate Evening of Grand Illusion” promises to be an electrifying tour de force that will make some of your wildest dreams (and perhaps nightmares) come true.

“As a magician you have to learn to control your fears, otherwise you can never effectively perform the illusion,” Copperfield says during a recent interview with *Downhome*.

His work has required him to “conquer many fears over the years, from being in a tank of water and learning to control my breathing to hanging over a bed of flame-covered spikes high up in the air.”

The show certainly is an “intimate evening,” since much of it depends on audience participation. One of the highlights includes the oft-requested illusion “Thirteen,” in which Copperfield makes 13 random audience members vanish. He says he’s had fans make requests about who they’d like to vanish. “The number one request: ‘Can you make my boss vanish?’ The number two request: ‘Can you make my spouse vanish?’” he jokes.

Like hypnosis, Copperfield says people have misconceptions about magic.

“People may perceive that magic is something that Uncle Charlie does at a family holiday dinner. In fact, the art of magic is the oldest of the performing arts, practised in an unbroken succession from the pharaohs of Egypt through King Arthur’s Court to

David Copperfield



the modern-day stage,” he says.

Copperfield also uses magic to reach out to others. His rehabilitation program “Project Magic” exists in more than 1,000 hospitals in more than 30 countries.

“Magic seems to give patients – from stroke victims to those with physical and learning imparities – a great amount of self-esteem, and it improves manual dexterity. It is a program I am most proud of,” he says.

Magic also comes in handy in getting out of scary situations, as Copperfield himself found out.

“A few years ago following a show, in a personal robbery attempt just outside a Florida theatre, I was able to produce ‘empty pockets’ much to the dismay of the culprits! Within a few hours the police caught the guys, from our description and the images on the loading dock cameras,” he remembers.

For those who wish to follow (or float) in his footsteps, Copperfield has some advice. “It’s about perseverance – never take ‘no’ for an answer – loving what you do and by all means practice, practice and then more practice!” he says.

“I love to entertain to see the audience’s reaction. At 500 shows a year, I had better really love what I do!” 🎩