

UNEDITED INTRODUCTION

The click of my cassette tape recorder signals that the reading is over. I close my eyes and whisper a quick prayer, thanking my guides for helping me to hear from my client's spirit people. Then I take a few deep breaths to ground myself as I mentally step from the world of spirit back into the world of the physical.

My client, a young woman named Dorothy, has tears in her eyes. And a pixie-like smile on her face. Though I don't remember everything I've just said over the last forty-five minutes, I knew Dorothy's mother had come through, and had told her daughter she was proud of the great steps Dorothy had taken since she had quit drinking last month. Her father had come through, too, to apologize to his daughter for ... well, I'm not sure, but I know they were words Dorothy needed to hear. Her tears and her smile tell me this.

"May I?" Dorothy asks, reaching for a tissue.

"Of course," I say, and nudge the box toward her.

Luckily, Dorothy is my last reading of the day, so I can give her extra time to compose herself. I look away, to give Dorothy some privacy, and my eyes settle on the bookcase filled with Spiritualist books, many from the turn of the last century. These precious tomes with worn covers, cracked spines and titles blurred from use, were bequeathed to me by my mentor, Sadie, in the months before her death. *Take them*, she told me, every time I visited her in her small apartment and, later, at her nursing home. *I am not long for this world. I want them to go to someone who understands their worth.* And so she would gift me with another treasure. These books stand proudly in my reading room, reminding me of the grand dame who taught me everything about connecting with spirit, and gave me the confidence to step into the spirit world and bring

back compassionate messages for loved ones in the living. Sadie was a surrogate mother to me, especially after my real mother....

Dorothy brushes her chocolate-coloured bangs off her forehead and slowly gets to her feet. I thank her for seeing me, and allowing me to serve spirit. As I walk her to the door, I reflect on the thousands of readings I've given as a psychic medium over the last thirty years. All the stories I've heard, all of the lives that have touched me — how enriched I feel!

Most people who come to me are eager to hear from friends and loved ones who have passed on, and are relieved to hear messages that their loved ones are at peace. Yet, others could care less about the spirit world: They want to know winning lottery numbers, or if their spouses are cheating on them, or — can you believe it? — what day they are going to die. Yeesh! Why would anyone want to know that?

My goal is to give my clients information filled with hope and inspiration, but that's not always easy. I remember the woman whose daughter was dying of breast cancer, and pleaded with me to beg her own parents in spirit to let the young woman live long enough to graduate college. She would not let me convince her that I was only a messenger; I can't make bargains with those in the afterlife. And last year, the gay man who visited me — he so desperately wanted to connect with his deceased father and hear from him the words "I love you." He left my office frustrated and hurt, because his father refused to connect with me. And I couldn't in good conscience just tell him something I knew he needed to hear. Readings like that are tough — how do you try to give hope when there seems to be none?

Before I close my office for the day, I check emails and phone messages. My 10 a.m. tomorrow client wants to cancel his session: car trouble. Ah, but here's an email from a woman who needs to see me immediately — thank you, Universe, for filling the void. Uh oh, wait a minute — the woman is desperate because she wants me to remove a curse that a former roommate has put on her. I wish this woman had included her phone number; I would've called to tell her that she doesn't need a session with me because I don't do curse removal. In fact, I don't believe in curses. You can't be cursed by another person. You *can*, however, curse yourself with negative energy by believing that someone or something else has power over you. As former American first lady Eleanor Roosevelt said, "No one can make you feel inferior without your consent." (I also love her line: "A woman is like a tea bag — you can't tell how strong she is until you put her in hot water.")

Come to think of it, negative energy was what got me started as a medium. Thirty years ago, a woman predicted that my life would come to ruin because of alcoholism, infidelity and the kind of evil you could only spit at. Would you like to hear that story? Give me a moment to brew a cup of peppermint tea. After work, I like to relax with some fragrant herbal tea while I switch roles from medium to wife and mom. Time to move from the world of spirit to the land of scuffed kitchen floors, an unmade bed and a sink full of dishes. Housework: Now *there's* a curse.

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When I started my spiritual journey, I was young and seventeen, curious and full of wonder about how the world worked. I ironed my long, thick hair because I thought it looked cool. I was tall for my age, and gawky, which came in handy for my role on the defense for my high school basketball team.

That summer marked my first time away from my home in St. Catharines, Ontario, as I traveled with a French immersion class through Ontario as part of a university summer program. When we were in Penetanguishene, a fellow student gushed on and on about a psychic in the area she had visited. The session had been so accurate! The psychic had known so much about her! And this reader had such a great reputation in the community, everyone went to see her! (I kid you not — this girl spoke in exclamation points.)

Then the teacher of the French immersion course said he'd been to see her the week before. He wouldn't tell us what happened, but said her "psychic powers" was an eye-opening experience. Well, that convinced me. Like any seventeen-year-old, I wanted to know about who I would marry, what kind of career I would have, and would I have a closet full of wonderful clothes to wear?

The psychic — I'll call her Mrs. Ponty — was an elderly lady with a kind face beneath layers of makeup. My first thought was she might have been Mary Kay's biggest client. Perhaps there was a little too much rouge on her cheeks, but her blue eyes sparkled in the light and she showed perfectly lined lips when she smiled.

"You would like a reading, dear?" she asked and I thought, *Isn't reading something you do in the library?*

Mrs. Ponty led me to a brightly lit, cinnamon-scented kitchen in the back of her house, and sat me at a small table that was covered with a plain black cloth. In the middle of the table, an ordinary deck of playing cards. Mrs. Ponty sat across from me and began shuffling the cards. Her smile was full of grandmotherly trust. As she began talking, I found myself watching her hands, the way her nimble fingers danced through the deck.

She flipped those cards like a magician. And I was enchanted by the way her lips pursed in a contemplative frown or curled into a smile when she revealed a certain card. The words seemed to smoothly flow from her, as if someone standing behind her was whispering into her ear what she needed to tell me. Unfortunately, time has dimmed the memory of the messages she gave; instead, I remember leaving her that afternoon thinking, *How did she do that?, When could I come back to see her again?* and *That looked like fun. Can I do it as well?*

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Fast forward a couple of years....

I was an impressionable young woman of twenty, with my heart tied to a hockey-playing forester I was living with in Nova Scotia — a guy I was pretty sure I was going to marry. On a visit back to St. Catharines, my sister suggested that we see a psychic to find out if my hockey player was “the one”, and to learn what kind of career I’d have. (I already had a closet full of wonderful clothes.) We planned a fun outing: We’d both have readings, do some shopping, have lunch, and then go shopping (you can never have too many wonderful clothes).

Under bright blue skies, we drove out into the country. Grassy fields were like green carpets that stretched for miles. Spring is truly beautiful in Canada; the air felt fresh and electric. I felt uplifted and alive.

The reader’s modest bungalow was on a homey, tree-lined street in the Niagara peninsula. After a couple of tentative knocks on the front door, it opened slowly and a face peeked out. I quickly realized that this woman was nothing like Mrs. Ponty. This psychic — I’ll call her Zoe — looked about fifty years old, with wavy brown hair curled

down to her shoulders and dark, penetrating eyes. She wore tight beige slacks and a t-shirt. Zoe had a reputation for accuracy — after all, she supposedly worked with the local police. At least, that was the scuttlebutt given to me by my sister.

Zoe smiled and told me to wait upstairs in the living room while my sister would have her reading. Then she led my sister away, and I was alone in the airless house. The only sound was the ticking of a clock. But I was excited, because I felt great things were going to be revealed in my reading.

I sat in a wingback chair and stared out a large picture window at the street. Sunshine slanted through tree branches. Cars drove by; a mother pushed a stroller along the sidewalk. The scene was quaint, yet standing in Zoe's house, it seemed remote. I felt as if I had fallen into a Twilight Zone episode, and something was about to happen....

My sister came upstairs. She looked contemplative. I asked how her reading went and it took her a few moments to respond with a shrug. Then Zoe appeared over her shoulder and waved her hand, gesturing me to follow her downstairs.

I tingled with an uneasy excitement as I followed Zoe downstairs. I felt a little dizzy with anticipation, as if I was moving slowly up that first roller-coaster hill, and I'd better grip the handlebar because the downward plunge was coming into view.

And what a view it was. Chintzy, 1960's-like rec-room dark wood panelling, and was a ramshackle bookcase crammed with books, boxes and little statues against the back wall. There were more candles in the room than in a Catholic church. They flickered in tin wall sconces and on the end tables in the corners. They ran across the top of an old television beside the bookcase. They circled the dark leatherette chairs in the center of the

room, where we sat and faced each other. I almost expected Zoe to start the reading by cackling in a rasping voice, “Cross my palm with silver...”

She stared into my eyes like she was examining the folds of my brain. After a silence that lasted several minutes, she told me in a slow, methodical voice: I would not be able to trust my future husband. We would lose lots of money. Financial disappointments and alcoholism would plague us all our lives. He would die young. Each negative pronouncement made me feel more and more helpless and hopeless. And dirty. What a gloomy life awaited me! I felt like I was being cursed.

I felt like screaming.

Then, strange things began to happen.

The wire attached to the television’s rabbit ears moved, producing scratching sounds against the wall. Candle flames began jumping in unison, as if the flickering had been choreographed. A book fell off a shelf with a loud thud; a moment later, another thumped to the floor.

Zoe’s eye’s widened. She gazed into the semi-darkness over her shoulder and muttered, “This has never happened to me.” Suddenly, she connected the weird effects to me, and gave me a look that felt like the evil eye.

She looked at her watch and said, “That is all.”

The room fell silent. I think we were both glad the reading was over.

I walked upstairs on wobbly knees. My stomach churned; my head was swimming; I felt like I was going to be sick. My sister saw how upset I was and hurried me to the door. Zoe said something to us, but we were so focussed on getting out of there, we never said goodbye. Zoe quickly shut the wooden door behind us.

“Are you all right?” my sister and I asked simultaneously.

I shook my head. She did the same.

“C’mon,” she said, and hurried me back to the car. With great authority, she announced she had the perfect cure for our visit with Morticia Adams — shopping therapy!

Later, I was still feeling shaken as we walked through the aisles of the department store. *My fiancé was going to die young?* Everything I saw and touched seemed unreal, like I was watching the world through someone else’s eyes. *My future was alcoholism and infidelity?* With my eyes looking inward, I couldn’t see the people I was bumping into. *What’s the point of going on?* My future, Zoe said, was so bleak. And all those strange goings-on in the basement.... Was even God trying to tell me I was doomed?

I drifted into the bedding section and held up a package of purple twin sheets. But twins wouldn’t fit my bed; I needed a full-sized set. Involuntarily, I opened my mouth and said, “I’ve got to find a medium.”

A medium — what? I wondered. Then: *Who said that?* That low male voice coming from my lips certainly wasn’t mine!

My father’s face flashed in my mind. I ran to a phone and called him. He was surprised to hear me crying because after my parents divorced, my father and I rarely showed our emotions to each other. But here I was, sobbing as I told him my terrifying experience.

He said calmly, “I have just the person for you. Let me take you to her.”

“Just the person” turned out to be Sadie Nickerson, a psychic my dad knew about through his wife. It seems that a group of ladies my stepmother worked with occasionally

got together to meet Sadie for readings. She was always so impressed with the readings that she recommended Sadie to my father, who began making regular trips to see her.

Next Saturday, my father took me to Sadie's apartment in Welland, a small town located atop the Niagara escarpment. Sadie lived on the top floor of a three-story house that looked like it needed several doses of tender loving care. With trepidation, I walked with my father through a front yard of tall grass and unkempt flower beds. Anxiously, I looked at my him. Where was he taking me? *Oh, please, I prayed, not another Zoe!*

I rang the doorbell. After I stopped counting my thudding heartbeats, Sadie opened the door. Instantly, my apprehension vanished. Sadie looked like Cinderella's fairy godmother. She had an enchanting smile, and permed grey hair that seemed fussed over. She wore a simple loose-fitting blouse and plain blue slacks.

Sadie led us up a series of staircases to her modest one-bedroom attic apartment. She gently told my father to wait in the adjoining sitting room, then invited me into her kitchen and gestured for me to sit at a small, square table covered with a white cloth that was worn, yet clean. Sunshine poured through an open window and sparkled on the linoleum floor. Colourful china figurines lined the shelves. On the counter, ceramic salt and pepper shakers that looked like something from my great-grandmother's house sat beside an earthenware cookie jar. I was tempted to ask if there were any chocolate-chip cookies.

Sadie softly cleared her throat and looked into my eyes. She spoke slowly, soothingly, and asked me about the tears in my eyes. Without thinking, I raised a hand to my cheeks. *Why had I been crying?* I told Sadie about my frightening experience with

Zoe the candles flickering, the wire moving on the wall and the prediction that my life was doomed to failure.

After I finished, she gave me a gentle smile, then said, “Let’s start again.”

I burst into grateful tears. Sadie reached out to squeeze my hand and said that what I’d been told wasn’t a death sentence set in stone. Someone else’s forecast of bad luck didn’t have to come true. I could reject it — I had free will to create my own future. Or, if I chose to remain powerless, I could plug into someone else’s flawed version of what my destiny should be. I was free to make this choice: I could be powerful, or let someone have power over me.

Sadie — who had never met me — then proceeded to give me evidential bits of information about my life, including the job I was working at, the man I would marry, and a prediction that I’d have two children, a boy and a girl (that one took a decade to come true). There was passion in her voice, and she seemed to care about me. The more I listened to her, the more comfortable I felt.

Then, to make sure I was no longer spooked by the idea of psychic abilities, she said, “Now, you try it.”

“What?” I was astounded. “M-me?”

“Yes. Go ahead, tell me something. Something about me. The first thing that pops into your mind.”

I closed my eyes and thought a moment. I imagined a cartoon. “I see a red car with snow on it, Sadie.”

Her eyebrows jumped. “A new car?” she exclaimed, then chuckled. “I just got one and I have no intention of replacing it.”

Fast forward several months: Her “new” car (new for her, but really “used”) needed a new part, which made a repair too expensive, so her son drove her to local used car lot. It had started to snow that morning. After much dickering with the salesman, she chose a red Toyota in the corner of the lot — that was dotted with patches of snow! Sadie was so excited, she could hardly wait to call me. “You were right, Carolyn!” she said with delight. “I have a new red car with snow on it—just as you had predicted.” I was thrilled, both for Sadie and myself, because my very first reading had come true!

Today, I have to wonder if, on that very first day I had met her, Sadie had sensed my potential as a psychic medium. So I guess I should really be thankful I received a terrifying reading from Zoe; the experience brought me to Sadie, who would teach me the fine art of delivering uplifting, compassionate messages.

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Sadie and I worked together for more than twenty years, and in all that time, she never charged me a dime — except for that first reading I had with her. I did try to pay her for her time, for the years we sat at her kitchen table and talked about the importance of working with spirit, and for the weekly telephone calls I made when I was living in Nova Scotia with my then-future husband. But how can you pay someone for wisdom and guidance?

“No,” she replied whenever I broached the subject. “You cannot put a price on this.” Perhaps her payment was her joy in being able to speak freely about her beliefs, and share her insights with someone who understood her feelings about psychic development and mediumship, Spiritualism and religion, philosophy and science. After

all, she lived in a small conservative town in Canada; not many people shared her views, and that made her lonely.

“Oh, come on,” she’d say. “You are a spirit having a human experience. Keep that in mind and you will do your work well.”

And: “Remember — always serve. Serve spirit and serve people. That is why you do this work.”

And I was an avid learner of all her secrets. At times, I felt like I was the sorceress’s apprentice!

As we grew closer with each visit or phone call, I felt something special happening. How could I feel connected so deeply to someone? She told me that not many people understood her, and thought she was aloof. She was impatient with them, but not with me; in our relationship, she was kind and caring.

“What’s so special about me?” I asked her one day.

Sadie was silent a moment, and when she finally spoke, her voice was a soft purr. “I had a daughter named Carolyn who died when she was still in the womb,” she said. “She would have been my first born. I never thought she was lost to me. Whenever I think of her, I imagine a yellow rose.”

Her words sent chills down my spine. My wedding flower — and my favourite flowers — are yellow roses.

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Sadie’s only concern was that I was not exposed enough to others who had the same gift as she did. We all need a variety of teachers, she’d say.

“No, Sadie,” I’d chide her back, “you’re enough for me.”

“But I won’t be here forever. You’ll find someone to replace me.”

“Perish the thought,” said with a shudder. The idea of life without Sadie frightened me. Even though she was forty-four years older than me, she was my mentor, my friend and my confidante. For twenty years, she was the person I turned to with questions or to seek advice. She gave me the spiritual understanding I needed to move on my spiritual path, and became a mother figure, supportive of my work in the true sense my biological mother was not.

But all things must pass, and when Sadie went into spirit in 2001 at the age of 86, I was crushed. Even though I was — and still am — a Spiritualist who believed in life after life, and knew she had not left me, I felt lost. Looking back, I think what terrified me the most was the thought that I was now alone. I had no one to practice my lessons in psychic development with, no one to teach me how to be a better conduit into the spirit world. No one to tell me if I was doing a good job. I was now living the inverse of that famous quote: “When the student is ready, the teacher disappears.”

Maybe, I thought, I should give this stuff up.

Meanwhile, I had to prepare for Sadie’s funeral. Knowing how close she and I were, her son asked me if I would write her eulogy. I agreed, and asked Sadie for help. On the day of the funeral, a thought about her popped into my head at 3 a.m. and woke me up. I chided her and told her I needed more sleep; could she come back at six? She did. At the appointed time, I sat straight up in bed. Her voice in my ear said, “Come on, get up. We have work to do!”

Later that morning, I was racing down country roads, realizing I would be late for the funeral, when I suddenly heard loud laughter and Sadie’s booming voice in my head: “You’re going to be late for my funeral.” She thought it hilarious. I did not.

And when it came time to read the eulogy, I spoke without tears (it was hard to cry knowing Sadie was standing by and orchestrating her own funeral) the words she had given me. Her family was quite moved, and I greeted them all by name, which surprised them because most of them had never met me before — but I had Sadie nearby to whisper their names to me. Strangers later came up to me and asked how I could know someone like Sadie so well. I thought to myself: *If they only knew!*

As the group of mourners thinned out, I gazed into Sadie’s grave and promised her that I would visit her here every year. But two years later, standing at her headstone with tears in my eyes, I heard her chastising me: *You know better; I’m not here. I’m with you always. Life is for the living, so get on with it!*

(Interestingly, every year since, some type of special engagement has always popped up — sometimes at the last minute — that has kept me from visiting her grave.

And I have, indeed, gotten on with living.

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“What a long, strange trip it’s been,” says a line from a song by the aptly-named Grateful Dead, and that phrase sure describes the experiences I have had along my spiritual journey. You’ll read about them in the following stories of my life. They are tales about my students, many who have gone on to become good mediums themselves, stories about what I have learned from my clients (their names have been changed to protect their privacy), and anecdotes about those “Aha!” moments I’ve experienced in my

mediumship and public work, Lily Dale and England. These stories touch upon love beyond the grave and pain among the living, those who search for answers and others who lustily embrace the mystery of what makes us human.

Spiritual development, like psychic development, is a life-long journey, and what we take to the grave is our mind, our personality, our memory, and our soul. So don't believe anyone who says, "You can't take it with you." Because you do. And love never dies. So, remember — you will always be able to tell someone after you're gone "I love you." In fact, go tell that person now. Maybe you have several persons you need to tell, Go ahead, it's important. Be that compassionate messenger. I'll wait.

Thank you, Sadie and my spirit friends, for believing in me! Our job has just begun.