

Reader, we predict riches in 2003

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'Okay, now I've spoken to you before, right?' says F., my telephone psychic, and I can feel his third eye squinting at me. It's a bad omen, because no, I haven't spoken to him before and, really, of all people, shouldn't he be able to tell? I am paying \$2.99 a minute for this?

Maybe F. should be forgiven for going a little Miss Cleo -- it is the time of year when those who are in the business of seeing the future are overwhelmed with requests. From the oracle of Delphi to Alan Greenspan, making predictions about the future is a human obsession. Adolf Hitler had his astrologer, Mackenzie King his spiritualist. And in even in the 21st century, you'd be surprised at just who calls a psychic for advice.

Both Nikki, the psychic to the stars, and Deborah Levin, another high-profile Toronto psychic, count everyone from Bay Street suits to Toronto arts people and other prominent folks around town as regular customers. Interestingly, the most common questions aren't about love or relationships, but about career direction.

Nikki and Levin say they first noticed their special talents when they were toddlers. In Nikki's case, a number of her family members also have the gift. Nikki worked (and still does occasionally) as an actress before she took up being a professional paid psychic 15 years ago. Levin started doing free readings in her Queen Street bookstore in 1993.

"I don't call it a gift, I call it a different way of thinking -- we all have it, but some of us can tap into more of it," Levin explains. "It's not exactly that I get a visual image, but I do see something in my mind's eye."

When the mall that held Levin's store was torched by arsonists, she took up psychic readings full-time. "People asked me, 'Why didn't you see that coming?' " she says, adopting a sarcastic tone. "In retrospect, I had a dream about a burning tower, but I never thought it applied to me."

Both Levin and Nikki are surprisingly normal-sounding and looking. Neither sports Mrs. Roper-muumuus or overwrought East European accents. There are no sacrificial chickens in sight, although Levin does have a real crystal ball. She says she doesn't actually need it, but it helps her focus.

Nikki assures me that real psychics don't need props. Readings aren't meant to be theatre. If anything, it's more therapy, giving people the chance to unload their hopes and fears for the future.

"It's definitely a bit of counselling, and that's one of the rewarding things about it," says Levin. She makes a living off predicting the future -- just -- charging \$80 for a half-hour reading or \$3.20 a minute on the phone, but she can only attend to a couple of people a day before she is exhausted. Nikki demurs when I ask her how much she makes.

Growing up, they both kept their visions to themselves, loath to tell anyone except close friends. The

jokes -- "But then you knew I was going to call you, didn't you?" -- get tired fast.

Neither of them hangs out with psychics -- there's no annual psychic picnic or night at the bowling alley. Nikki says psychics can't predict their own future -- she herself seeks another psychic to give her a reading -- which explains why they don't keep buying lottery tickets or betting on sports games. Both of them respect their talent, but it does have a dark side. For help in solving crimes, police often contact Nikki -- she worked on the Paul Bernardo case. Most famously, Nikki is the one who, on a radio show in April, 2001, predicted that a plane would fly into the World Trade Center later that year.

"People thought I was ridiculous," she says quietly. This year, her predictions (posted on <http://www.canadianparents.com>) include a number of terrorist attacks around the world, a devastating earthquake in California and Muhammad Ali receiving the Nobel Peace Prize. (My favourite, however, is her warning, "Siegfreid and Roy have to be careful of a crazed tiger." She does not warn us about a crazed Siegfried and Roy.)

Levin says she learned how to turn the talent on and off so she can make it to the grocery store without being interrupted, *Dead Zone*-style, with visions of every person she passes.

"You can't be that sensitive to people in the outside world all the time," she says. "You'll get too drained."

As for F., he doesn't tell me anything ominous -- he's a little too complimentary in fact. But he does predict some sort of career change, as, in fact, did Levin. With only seconds to go in the timed psychic session, he promises me that with Mars going into Pisces, it's going to be a brilliant year ahead. I predict telephone psychics will always be with us so long as they keep telling us what we want to hear.

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