

I VISIT A SEER

... In which three psychics tell our reporter about the future, sort of.

By JOANNE BALL

The strange man in a long, flowing cape sits in a heavily draped chamber spouting foreign phrases. When he does speak in English, it is heavily accented. A crystal ball sits on an ornate, antique table in the center of a candlelit, incense-filled salon where strains of sitar music are barely audible.

That was what I imagined a psychic reading would be like. But I found out that I was wrong. None of the places I visited were like that. And neither were any of the psychics.

How is what happened when I visited them? I went to know my profession. To all of them I brought a blank cassette tape to record the session. I also brought considerable skepticism.

The psychic community in the state is larger than I expected, but somewhat far-flung. There are, however, regular meetings of soothsayers in Hartford and outlying areas.

If the right person is contacted, scores of readings can be set up. My travels for three readings took me to Bristol to see Frank Mola, to Colchester to visit Mari Gross Bentley and to Chesterfield to hear the predictions of Carl Hewitt. Mola and Hewitt worked in business offices; Bentley saw me in her home.

Finding a fortune-teller can be a tricky job for the average person. You can't just turn to "clairvoyant" in the Yellow Pages. And there are no ads for the occult.

Seers are understandably protective of their whereabouts, and I found my three psychics through a job contact ("someone who knew of someone"). Most recommendations come from word of mouth.

My first visit was to Mola. His office was hardly the mystic palace of a necromancer — in fact, its exterior was quite mundane. He shares his "Alpha-Logics" center for the study of psychic phenomena, mysticism, healing and extra-terrestrial travel with Metallics, Inc., his screw factory.

When I made my appointment, he told me to come to the back entrance. That opens onto an office, with a small library off to the left. There were displays of everything from Edgar Casey material to copies of "Jonathan Livingston Seagull."

The bearded, bespectacled, beefy Mola is self-conscious about his weight



ILLUSTRATION BY NOVES

and called attention to it more than once during the course of my visit. From a necklace hung a medallion which, he claimed, connected him to his "past life" as an American Indian. We toured the building — the whole thing, including the screw-making operation — with Mola pointing out his plans to convert space from the factory into an expanded Alpha-Logics center. Before the reading began, Mola poured himself a glass of white wine, saying that it relaxed him. I drank water.

When we finally got to the room for the reading, Mola told me of his introduction to the supernatural. He said that at his first psychic reading several years ago, a woman told him things that she couldn't possibly have known unless she had had some special gift. While listening to Mola recount his experiences with spiritualists, it did occur to me that perhaps I should have been going to that woman for my reading.

After we sat down, he placed the cassettes into two separate recorders, dimmed the lights, and gave me a

preamble about psychic readings, their importance and validity. "Any of the material that flows is at best to be looked at and examined," he began. "Information makes itself known to me. A visualization, in other words. As I begin to look at you, I begin to sense your vibrations ... the energy that flows from you."

"We (all human beings) are in communication with each other all the time ... Now you have given me permission to enter into your vibrations. You've said, 'Let's do something psychic,' and it's very important to do that. I'm beginning to go into an alpha state — a relaxed state. I'll be able to see the past, the present and the future only as it may seek to benefit you. I don't want to talk about death. I don't want to talk about people who are divorced. I don't want to talk about illness ... I do want to clarify things that are around you."

After all of that, to be sure, I was eager to get on with it. But it turned out that not much of what he said seemed, on the surface, to be accurate. I pointed this out to Mola

on another occasion, and he said I had been "tough to crack." He attributed his reading of me to my being "tight."

Mola, for example, discussed a rivalry between me and a female relative — a rivalry that, to my knowledge, doesn't exist. And he predicted I would write a highly-acclaimed story with the words "Genesis II" somewhere in the title; so far, at least, no such story has materialized.

He said I would attend a function at the Bushnell Memorial with a man in his early 30s and would have a marvelous time; I would wear a white blouse, a long black skirt and crystal-like dangling earrings. But I no longer own a fancy white blouse, wouldn't wear a long black skirt on an evening out — even if I had one — and hate dangling earrings, particularly those crystal things. But, as it happened, after that reading I did go to the Bushnell, to see the Dance Theatre of Harlem; it was with a woman, not a man, in her 20s, not 30s. To Mola's credit, I did have a great time. But you don't need any psychic abilities to predict that.

One of his forecasts concerned a

man named "Andrew Nevins." Mola said this person would have a significant impact on my life on Nov. 6 and 7. I was to call Mola on Nov. 8 to report what happened. What happened was ... nothing. No Nevins appeared before or on the dates specified.

Throughout the reading, I got the impression that he was on a fishing expedition. And nothing bit.

My next visit was to Mari Gross Bentley, who conducts readings in her modern Colchester home. In the living room some strange-sounding Indian music was playing on a reel-to-reel tape recorder. She greeted me wearing blue jeans and lots of eye makeup. She explained the jeans by saying that after she finished with me, she and her husband were going to a regional fair.

We walked down the hall to her den, where she chose the comfy-looking leather high-back chair around which the recording equipment was set up. She set a timer, perhaps to limit her contact with the cosmic so that she wouldn't be late for the fair.

She intoned the following prayer, her eyes tightly shut:

"I ask that we be surrounded by the pure white light of Christ and his love and protection, and ask that only the Most High come in. If there's anything here that is not sent from the Most High, I demand that it leave immediately. I name the source as the Christ consciousness, the universal consciousness, and ask that while this reading is going on that Joanne be granted a healing on all levels through the Most High, physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually."

She then asked, "Please state your name, your age and where you're living."

Bentley did not know my profession; she guessed that I was a biologist. In her preface, she said I have a logical mind that "interacts with intuitive and scientific methods." She encouraged me to take up accounting or data processing (!) as the economic times are rough and my chances of excelling in these areas are, she said, great. But she added that I couldn't ignore my

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Psychics Vary in Clarity of Vision

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creative tendencies which, she said would be well served by pursuing music and art. In that way, she said, "the logical faculties" could achieve the balance they seek with the creative ones.

"And now," she said, "we will take the questions."

"Will I travel?" I asked.

"We see that should there be a trip to Europe, in particular, that would be excellent. Know that if this is accomplished, and it can be with a little more planning, that there will be the memories. Go to the country of Germany, to the city of Brussels, and parts of France, outside of Paris . . . the villages. There would then be the remembrances, the feeling of 'familiar with.'"

She continued in elliptical fashion, often using the editorial "we."

"Also have had a life in Rome, in very ancient times. Much has changed since those times, but there would be some memory there as well. Have spent a great deal of past life in these countries, therefore, if you would plan to go, and we see going with a travel plan, would be better than just going alone, for it would be a little less expensive and also the tour guide would take you to places that would stimulate the memory. We see that this can be done but it does not appear to be so immediate, but more a few months from now."

"What are my career prospects?" I asked.

"Can you state where you work now and what you do there?"

I told her.

"Now we see this job as a good one for you in that you are able to find out about people, thus finding out about parts of yourself. Know that the particular areas where you have done reporting and investigation are by no means coincidence, that you have chosen this one or that one, that your own soul, your own 'higher self,' has directed you to work with certain people, not only to find out about them, but you may relate to pieces of yourself, through them . . . (I) see you staying there for awhile, but find it is a job you will soon become restless with.

"May even go into television or types of broadcasting or even working with radio. These are possibilities because you are attracted to this type of area . . . but may find also, too, if you pursue them, have abilities in accounting, data processing and the logical types as well as the investigative types. Not as exciting, but would provide a steady income and in the days to come this will be most important as the country will be undergoing great stress and strain.

"Even The Hartford Courant will be going under great managerial changes soon and there will also be the talk of dividing the paper into parts, even rearranging the present structure of that paper. There will be need for different types of reporting in the future . . . more specialty areas will be important in the future."

She said she saw my independence as the greatest obstacle in the way of marriage. Bentley said I must become more tolerant of others before I could make nuptial plans.

About my finding happiness, she said: "This, then, depends on whether one would want to find happiness and one is willing to set that up as a goal, as a thought form, and willing to work toward it. Now we will give you an analogy of happiness. A person who is unhappy and is given all those conditions that he would say that would make him happy would sooner find a reason not to be happy, if he chose not to be happy. And yet a person who chose to be happy and was put in unpleasant situations, would find a reason to be happy after a while.

"So if one wishes to be happy, do those things within self that would sat-

isfy self as well then as giving and sharing with others. Could be sharing of knowledge, of time, and becoming close to others and expressing, helping others. Happiness then, should be a major assignment of your life. God wishes that you be happy."

It seemed to me that this advice, though certainly sound, was hardly the result of great psychic flashes. Any two-dollar supermarket-paperback self-help guide could have told me as much.

By the time I got to Hewitt's office for the third of my three psychic readings I'd become accustomed to the process, and to the mild disappointment I felt at the close of each session. Was I never going to talk to someone who made significant psychic pronouncements?

Hewitt resembled a pudgy Jimmy Carter, and, it turns out, he too is a Southerner, from one of the Carolinas. He has an open face and an easy manner. What surprised me was that many of his "impressions," as they're called, were on the money.

A secretary was seated in his outer office, which resembled a dentist's waiting room. Books and calendars, some for sale, others on loan, lined the walls. Soft Muzak played in the background. Hewitt directed me to his inner office — the reading room — where a portrait of him standing in the foreground of a flat landscape hung on the far wall. Again, books were abundant. The lighting was electric, though dim.

To acquaint himself with my "vibrations," Hewitt asked for a ring or a watch. I gave him the gold ring I have worn constantly since I was 10 (and thought if ever there were a vibration-laden object, this was it). When Hewitt returned it about 40 minutes later, the band was hot to the touch.

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His opening line disarmed me. Initially he said he received the image of a woman, from the South, who would have been related to me on my father's side — someone I wouldn't have known because supposedly she had died before I was born. This woman, he said, was looking out for me, and hers was a vision he had to get rid of in order to continue. All of that reminded me of my first venture about two years ago into the world of mystics and seers. Some companions and I had gone, on a whim, to have our tea leaves read. The woman there told me, using the symbolic mode of speech of tea-leaf readers, that "an umbrella was being held over my head" — meaning that someone who had died was watching out for me. I remember feeling a slight quiver when both references were made.

Hewitt did manage to shake the image of this Southern woman from his consciousness and went on to say that my life at present seemed "caught in the middle here; in the crossroads with no direction." I may have been "trying to get my foot in the door" for another job, according to him. "You're in the process of making a lot of changes in your life and you don't want to make the wrong step. There's a lot of people around you and they try to mind your business. If I were you I wouldn't let them get to me because they're not doing so well themselves."

Hewitt, who to my knowledge did not know my profession, said he heard phones ringing around me and saw me

writing on a small computer screen — as accurate a description of a newsroom as you can find (check it out on "Lou Grant").

He had a few quaint expressions and occasionally spoke in the first person, as if he were me talking to myself in the process of decision making: "You're trying to move or you just moved. You will move in a while, I do say eventually. You'll move, but hold in there because I don't want to go over my head." When I finally do move, perhaps a marriage will have preceded it, he said.

I'm to have a reunion with a family member — a male, related on my mother's side. That person, he said, "is on the same wavelength" as I, and we'll have much to discuss and much happiness doing it.

On the matter of money, Hewitt warned me not to loan any great amounts to anyone because I wouldn't ever get it back. He asked, "Did someone borrow money from you?"

"Sure, all the time."

"Did you get it back?"

"Yeah."

"Be very careful with this. There's a person you loaned money to and they paid you back. But then I see you getting tapped again and I don't see you getting it back. Don't loan the money. Be kind about it. Now I'm talking about a sizable sum here. It's almost like they set you up by paying back the first amount. But this time they'll stick you. So be careful here because you've got too many things going for you. You're going to be very interested in buying furniture and planning for a home."

Then he moved to an image of a woman at work, with blondish hair and "a little on the heavy side. She's going to be talking to you — using you as a sounding board. I'd give advice when asked, but it could be sticky. I think you can help the person out," he said. She appears to be a mother figure.

My mother, he said, has a weak right ankle. He saw her twisting it after she stepped into a pothole in a parking lot. I was to warn her about that premonition, Hewitt told me. I did mention the subject to my mother, and sure enough, she said she did seem to have more trouble with her right ankle than with her left. But more than that, she declared that a couple of weeks earlier she had twisted her ankle in a parking lot. The injury was by no means serious, but she said, "I was limping all day long."

Later in the reading, Hewitt claimed that "something that very seldom happens in the course of a reading" had occurred. He asked me if I gambled.

"Rarely, if ever," I replied.

He said he saw me playing a slot machine while I was on a trip. "Do like I do," he counseled, "get yourself two or three dollars in small change, and I see you hitting the jackpot. Just out of curiosity, try it. I feel you'll be very impressed with a certain machine. You'll be running two machines and I see one breaking . . . It's very rare I ever see this with people."

He could have no way of knowing that I had already booked a flight to the Bahamas where gambling is legal and slot machines are popular. I've since postponed the trip, but when I go we'll see if I break the bank.

While no state statutes govern the specific activities of psychics, seers can get into trouble with the Department of Health if they get involved with such things as healing and counseling. The department's regulations prohibit unlicensed persons or organizations from healing or counseling other persons. Also, according to the state Consumer Protection Agency, if psychics charge fees for their readings but aren't reporting those earnings, they could be prosecuted under federal tax laws.