

My Grandmother's Spirit Is Showing Me Her Pearls

by Debbie Eisenberg Merion

My first psychic was a woman I nicknamed the “reluctant psychic” (RP for short). She used to sell computer software for a large company, so she had the petite, tailored, well-groomed look of an older Carly Fiorina wearing something from Chico's or St. John's. She became a psychic because she was picking up spirit messages sent to her boss from people who had died. I can just imagine their office meetings.

I had sought out the RP in 1994, after I was stirred by an article on local psychics in the *Ann Arbor Observer*. I ended up talking with her many times, and each time she recorded the conversation on a cassette tape for me. Often I taped, too, as a backup. I sat at her kitchen table during my first reading as she said:

RP: Your grandmother [who died in 1982] is telling me you talk to her picture.

Deb: Yes, that's true.

RP: She's showing me pearls.

Deb: Oh, yes. She wore pearls every day. That was a part of her.

RP: Really? I wasn't going to say it, but it came in three times, and I have a rule that if something comes in three times, I just say it. My grandmother was a farmer and never wore pearls, so I couldn't imagine any grandmother doing that.

I recalled the soft, freckled skin of my beloved grandmother Bessie. My mother's mother was far from a farmer — she and my grandfather owned a Philadelphia tailor shop, and I never saw her wear anything but dresses. She was a Russian immigrant who people called “ladylike” and “old world.” During visits she'd serve me a little plate of fresh-baked vanilla cookies in front of her TV. I tasted her deep love in their sweetness. Grandmom wasn't stern but she was serious; I don't think she would have been amused by the RP's disarming quirks like I was. As I listened to the RP, I also became aware of another conversation—this one inside me:

Deb: *How does she know these things? No one ever heard me talking to Grandmom's picture. She couldn't have read my mind about the pearls because I had forgotten about them until she reminded me.*

Deb: *Don't be a fool; she could be a fake. Just answer her in monosyllables.*

Deb: *But what if she really is hearing Grandmom? It feels comforting, and it's proof that death isn't black and empty.*

Deb: *This is intense. I want more.*

The RP had her own struggles. Occasionally she'd mail out a letter: “Unfortunately, I can no longer provide the service of communicating with dead loved ones,” and then six months later I'd learn she was once again helping clients connect with, as she called it, “the other side.” She'd complain that some spirits of the departed had no sense of timing or decorum; she'd be dripping in the shower and they'd rudely drift in before their scheduled time. Worse still, she'd get sick often, which she attributed to her workday stress. For me, her self-doubts

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and problems were like a slip showing under a movie star's gown—they made her seem less practiced and more down-to-earth.

It was disconcerting how she sensed aching curiosity under my glossy veneer. She urged me to visit a study group that she held in rented office space in Plymouth, so I could connect with others who had had psychic readings. Deb-the-science-loving-technical writer immediately said “no thanks,” guarding Deb-the-spiritual-searcher from hanging out with more people like the RP.

However, on more than one occasion I found myself sitting in a semi-circle with the RP and others, mostly women, staring at a volunteer who was lit by a single light bulb. We were practicing doing a “reading.” The instruction was simple, a bit too simple I now understand: just say what comes to you. Some people saw spirits (“I see a man over your right shoulder,” they'd say) but I never did. Perhaps I belonged in a remedial reading class. But I was sincere; I tried. When I saw images in my head — a puppet, a man on a motorcycle — I'd mention them. Sometimes they'd even resonate with the person we were reading and the dots would connect.

In 2002, the RP quit and un-quit again. Feeling vulnerable and annoyed, I resolved not to call her any more. Then, on a visit to Crazy Wisdom's tea room, I saw Diane Evans's little signs



The author, Debbie Merion, at age 20 on her wedding day in 1976, with her grandmother, Bessie Rudnick.

for Saturday drop-in sessions with a psychic. I'd sit across the table from her, while she revealed new layers of my life in images and allegory, as though she was speaking a song Joni Mitchell had written about me. Although she was not a medium who communicates with dead people, she gave me something the RP never did: a role model for a woman who trusts and nurtures her own intuition. I studied with her, and three of my friends did too.

Like a gardener tending a little patch of vegetables who fantasizes about eliminating trips to the grocery store, I wondered if I could eventually learn a psychic's skills well enough to hear Grandmom myself. Cut out the middleman, cut out the doubt. But my education, revealing as it was into a psychic's methods, had merely baby-stepped my own psychic fluency from preschool to kindergarten mutterings.

In the fall, the action in my psychic life really picked up. My dear friend Carol Adams had just died from breast cancer (my story about Carol was published in the last issue of the *Crazy Wisdom Community Journal*). Though I had held her thin hand as she passed away, I still felt a childlike confusion: *Where was she now?* I shared my grief with my synagogue cantor, Annie Rose, during a walk over crunching maple leaves. Annie and the temple choir were important to Carol and me. Though Carol was Catholic and I'm Jewish, spirituality and music connected us like pearls on a string. Annie added one more pearl when she surprised me with the revelation that she shared my spiritual explorations: she'd seen a psychic medium named Rebecca Rosen. I asked Annie for Rebecca's phone number.

Rebecca is 27, with a BA, and lives with her husband and baby son in California, though she grew up in a Detroit suburb. She does readings over the phone. I waited three months for an appointment, which occurred over winter break while I was visiting Florida with my husband and kids. I shut myself in the bedroom while we talked. When I emerged, my 17 and 21 year old daughters both anxiously asked “Did she say anything about me?” My older daughter's boyfriend kidded, “Did she have a Jamaican accent?”

I felt numb and slow. Rebecca, though, had talked so quickly I'd call her a speed-reader.

I transcribed the following from the cassette tape she mailed me after the reading:

Rebecca: There's a woman standing next to you, so it has to be a female contemporary, she is showing me cancer.... There was some huge funeral, or huge memorial for her. And she's saying thank you for this, she had either a very funny personality or she was just really fun to be around, she wants you to know that none of that has changed. I am supposed to bring up Jo or Jonah or John, that's a person who would be living.

Deb: Right.

Rebecca: She's trying to send her love, and does she have a son who is living?

Deb: That's John.

Rebecca: OK, we're piecing this together. She's going to the son and she's saying “send my love,” so it's her way of saying it's OK, he's ready to hear this or he needs to hear this.

Rebecca: Now she wants me to tell you that she knows your grandmother. Now it may not be in this lifetime that she did, but she knows your grandmother, because she's standing right next to her right now. They're trying to say, all of these people, they know you think about them, that's why they're coming through. I need to bounce back for a minute. Do you have a pearl necklace or necklace that is significant of your grandmother's? She's showing me pearls...

WHOA! Once again, my inner conversation started:

Deb: *Grandmom's showing her pearls again through this new psychic! It must be Grandmom!*

Deb: *Easy, don't jump to conclusions...just pay attention...*

Rebecca: This grandmother is interesting. She loves to give validations [i.e., proof that it's really her]. There is a piece of jewelry that you need to get fixed. Let's say it was the necklace she gave you, or just a necklace in general. The clasp is broken. You'll notice this. You'll say, you know, I probably shouldn't wear it, if this is loose.

Deb: OK, I'll check that out.

Rebecca: You'll know, it'll happen and you'll know, it'll be so you won't lose it.

I had no idea which necklace she meant, but this sure sounded like words that would have come out of my worrying, protective grandmother's mouth.

A couple of months later, when Rebecca came to Michigan, Annie Rose and I drove to West Bloomfield to take her workshop. Rebecca had a sophisticated urban look with her make-up and long brunette hair, knee-length jacket over tight jeans, and trendy black-pointed boots. The smell of sage wafted through the air as she shook my hand when I walked in. She handed me a professional-looking binder of information and a shrink-wrapped CD she had made.

If your body is a river of energy, Rebecca stressed keeping your waters clear. In the binder, "Awakening Your Psychic and Mediumship Abilities," Rebecca wrote that fruit can positively affect your chakras (energy centers), and chocolate can have a negative effect on them. After lunch, a plate of mouth-watering chocolate cookies sprinkled with confectioner's sugar had no takers, but the pineapple chunks quickly disappeared.

Rebecca taught us how she protected herself from absorbing negative energy (which, by the way, the RP didn't do). Her techniques, she explained, had evolved as she discovered what worked best for her personally. Rebecca, who is Jewish like me and my religious grandmother, chose to precede readings with the *Sh'ma*, a Jewish prayer. She was confident, and I was comfortable with her.

After the workshop, I reminded Rebecca that during our phone appointment I learned of my grandmother's warning about a broken clasp on a necklace. I wanted Rebecca to know how the story ended. When I got home from Florida, I opened a drawer and picked up the only necklace of Grandmom's that I own: a 1920s crystal pendant on a silvery chain. I like it so much that I wore it in a formal family portrait that hangs in my hallway. My fingers met as I put the two ends together in the clasp. When I gave the clasp a gentle tug, my eyes widened as it made a weak attempt at doing its job, then failed. I ended up holding one end in each hand. My younger daughter asked, "Do you think she knew it was broken before she died?"

I had no idea, just like I have no idea how someone can die, but continue to communicate with me in a way that seems like she's still there talking. These conversations feel so comforting that I wish my skeptic would find a different issue to doubt. But ironically, my skeptical side keeps me paddling through these rough waters.

Carol, my dear departed friend, knew all about my skeptic/believer conundrum. Now, I like to think, she was being as devoted to helping me as I was to her. I can't deny that it was because of Carol that I learned about a Jewish psychic who fluently spoke the spiritual language my grandmother loved to use when she was alive.

Grandmom's pearls are still around. They live these days with my mom in Florida, who shows them off when she slips on a dress for a fancy occasion. She's changed them a bit, combining the two short strands into one long one. I'm pretty sure Grandmom is fine with that. Maybe I'll ask her the next time we're in touch.

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