

# Palm reader becomes skeptical professor

By Eric Apalategui  
Of the Emerald

Ray Hyman is a skeptic, but he wasn't born that way.

He says he once subscribed to beliefs at which many scientists turn up their noses. Hyman, now a University psychology professor, has many stories to tell about his days as a student at Boston University, where he performed palm readings to pay his bills.

Hyman believed his palm readings were valid, and he says his subjects all agreed.

The way Hyman tells it, when he was a freshman journalism major at Boston, the head of the psychology department once called him into his office and bawled him out for reading palms. The psychology professor thought palm reading was akin to witchcraft. At the end of the grilling, the professor attempted to prove his point by having his palm read by Hyman.

The professor was shocked — the reading seemed incredibly accurate. Later, the rattled professor called Hyman into his office again, and this time with a new set of questions, he asked Hyman to read his palm once more. The professor was shocked again.

About a year later, Hyman says a friend asked him to give a palm-reading demonstration at a lecture the friend was giving. After Hyman had read some palms with his usual success, he says his friend suggested that Hyman lie about the story on the next subject's palm. For example, if the life line indicated a long, prosperous life, Hyman would say the opposite. Hyman says he went along with the joke, but to his surprise, the subject still raved about the ac-



Ray Hyman

curacy of Hyman's reading.

"It was really stunning to me. I thought I was doing some concrete things. It dawned on me that something else was going on here," Hyman says now.

Hyman wanted to learn more about that "something else," and he subsequently switched his major to psychology, he says.

And now he says palm reading "is a matter of people putting into it what they want out of it. The reader is like a mirror."

Hyman developed his interest in pseudo-psychology through magic, he says. His father gave him magic tricks for his seventh birthday, and before long, the young Hyman was hanging out at a magic shop in Boston, picking up magic tricks from the experts who frequented the store, he says.

That experience led to a life-long interest in the paranormal and a stint as a performer for the Armed Forces during World War II, Hyman says.

Hyman has taught psychology courses at the University since 1961, after five years of teaching at Harvard.

Because he is an expert on pseudo-psychological subjects, and because he is a skeptic, Hyman is occasionally called to investigate psychic claims.

He was called when the U.S. Defense Department wanted to know if self-proclaimed psychic Uri Geller could really bend metal with his mind.

Hyman says he couldn't. He was called to Flint, Mich., when the federal government wanted to know if the head of a fundamentalist religious group could actually read with her fingertips.

Hyman says she couldn't. While filming a program titled, "The Nature of Things," the Canadian Broadcasting Co. flew Hyman to Vermont so that he could provide a counterargument to the validity of water witching during a convention of the American Society of Dowisers.

Water witching (finding water with a divining rod) holds special interest to Hyman, who co-authored a book on the subject, "Water Witching USA." Hyman has not been able to prove whether water witching, or dowsing, works, but he leans toward skepticism.

Hyman also has an interest in human intellect. Surprisingly, he says, it is not the unintelligent or ignorant who are most susceptible to trickery.

"Being taken in has nothing to do with intelligence," he says.

Hyman is writing a book about this phenomenon, tentatively titled, "How Smart Men Go Wrong." The book is based on a series of Hyman's lectures.

And Hyman is on the executive board of The Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal, which publishes its findings in The Skeptical Enquirer.

Hyman teaches a course in pseudo-psychologies each winter term at the University.

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## Crime

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said.

Repeat offenders commit a large number of the crimes, and many are on parole, Bobrowitz said.

Too few officers to adequately handle crime is also evident to Bobrowitz. "County levies are failing, and city budgets have been cut. It's been reduced across the board," he said.

Locally, the crime increase has not shown up with Eugene Police Department statistics, or in the number of crimes reported by University police officers. Last year's reports indicate a two percent decrease in Part I crimes, said Eugene Police Sgt. Tim McCarthy. The Part I category contains the most serious crimes, including homicide, robbery and rape, he said.

"It's an anomaly that we have not shown an increase in Part I crimes. Those that we did are minor," McCarthy said.

The city's Part I crime rate in 1985 was 7,851 per 100,000 population compared with

8,009 per 100,000 in 1984, McCarthy said. Those numbers, however, can be misleading in their severity, he said.

"In the index credit system, a rape gets the same as a stolen bicycle," he said.

City police statistics showed decreases in homicide, rape, robbery and theft, a 6.8 percent hike in burglary and a 3.5 percent increase in aggravated assault. Motor vehicle theft also increased by 14 percent locally.

"This also includes mopeds, and 10 years ago you wouldn't have had that problem. It's the same statistic, but not the same value," McCarthy said.

Oakley Glenn, director of the University Office of Public Safety, says his statistical crime comparisons between 1984 and 1985 show small increases in criminal mischief, shoplifting, minor theft (under \$20), and off-campus, sorority and trespassing crimes.

Assault is down campuswide from 16 in 1984 to 7 in 1985, and home burglaries have

decreased from 25 in 1984 to 8 in 1985. Burglary 11 (uninhabited dwellings or businesses) also has decreased from 35 to 29.

However, Glenn is not satisfied with the decreases.

"It is my personal opinion that crime is on the increase. I think it may have started showing up at the end of last year, and we're just moving into it," he said.

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