

place is swamped in trinkets — it's hard to walk without stepping on something. Most of the stuff is memorabilia from flea markets and garage sales.

Charles David wasted no time. His housemate/hostess Jimmi seated me and the *EW* photographer, and David made his entrance with the statement, "Lemme see your hands." Usually when white people demand this of me, they have badges and guns — it took me a moment to acclimate.

Apparently I displayed my palms in a fashion known as 'the hand of Jupiter,' with my fingers outstretched. "Most people hold their fingers together when they show me their palms. People who do that [hand of Jupiter] are just bold, man."

Meeting David was also deceptive. He looks and speaks like he belongs deep down south — in Mississippi or Alabama. "I'm a local redneck," he says "My grandfather was born in Florence."

"You have a really straight, deep simian line," he observed. "That means the depth of your devotion and feeling is incredibly intense." Examining my palm, he continued speaking. "This over here is your love line. Some people have a totally straight one, but yours is a bunch of deep little breaks." I wince. "I don't need to go into what that means, do I?" David asked. The *EW* photographer laughed at me, not with me.

"The strangest thing on your hand is the complete lack of a lifeline," he continued. "Your vitality I mean, it isn't very strong." Images of untimely death flashed in my mind: Ernest Hemmingway, Arthur Rimbaud, Heath fucking Ledger. The palmist remarks on my scarred knuckles and I confess to him I've done my share of boxing and barroom bouncing. David informs me that, as a boy, the first black boxing star, Jack Johnson, was told by a palmist that he would be the heavyweight champ of the world.

Palmistry began for David as a way to make money. He practiced in Eugene during the heyday of the counter culture years. "I was a hippie. We'd go down to the UO sorority houses and sit outside selling our leatherwork," David says, adding that the girls streamed out of their houses squealing, "I've never seen a real hippie before!"

But soon the girls got bored. David used palmistry to keep his customers interested. He acquired a small book on the subject and studied it a bit. "When I was young, I thought it [palmistry] was just a buncha b.s.," he says. "But over the years I realized palmistry had nothing to do with the book." David explains that real palmistry is far more than one can find in pages. He is in the process of writing his own book on Hellenism and its relation to palmistry.

Now, decades later, he no longer reads palms just for the money. "This isn't a business," he says. "It fulfills me." Although he charges a fee for his services, David only goes downstairs and turns the sign on when he feels so inclined. He doesn't have strict working hours. If you are

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— CONNIE BENDER

PHOTO BY TRASK BEDORTHA



CONNIE BENDER

lucky enough to be in the neighborhood when the neon is blazing, you can drop by, although many people stop by whether the sign is on or not. People bang on David's door at all hours, demanding readings. Sometimes it is other palmists, looking to test him. Other times it is night of the living dead-style tweekers, or a half-naked dude on roller skates stumbling by to ask him what the winning lottery numbers will be.

David had a lot to say about my palms. I grudgingly concede that most of it was relevant. I staggered away with deep respect for him, his vibrantly colored woodcarvings of Christ and the devil lining the dark hallway that I passed through on the way out.

I couldn't stop looking at my hands.

House of Cards

Connie Bender's cat meets us at the sidewalk and escorts us in to her home. A woman in the later years of life, Bender has been in Eugene forever. She seems like a character out of a Tom Franklin novella. The daughter of a water witcher, Bender's intuitive powers were first recognized by her grandfather, who owned a parcel of land in the Corvallis foothills. This man would take each of his adolescent grandchildren out on the property holding

underground water reserves, to see if they had "the juice."

Bender had the juice. She says, "the stick felt like a dog on the end of a leash, pulling me." Whatever it is Bender possesses, the trait runs in the family. Her grandmother read tealeaves.

Bender is a tarot card reader and a familiar face at the Eugene Saturday Market, where she's done readings for more than 22 years. Christian groups and devoutly religious people sometimes gather in front of her tent. Some protesters have even become physically aggressive with her, forcing Bender to call security. "You are so lost; if only you'd turn to Jesus," one woman implored her.

Bender once stopped reading cards for several years, both because she sought to hold down a steady, fulltime job and because the information the cards showed her was too overwhelming. "I'm not doing this for theatrics or kicks," she says. "This isn't a game. I'm not doing this because I get high from this. I tried to make that full-time [job] work, I really did, but this was calling me."

Bender knows the history of her calling. Tarot, she explains, was created for people who weren't very literate, hence the striking imagery adorning each card and card set. When I ask why many people consider Tarot to be so effective, she replies: "The cards don't lie. You can't erase such profound imagery from your mind."

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