

The Truth About Fortunetellers

By MARYA SAUNDERS

When this reporter went seer-hunting with a hidden tape recorder, her findings included some amusing phonies—plus a few soothsayers whose insights were eerily accurate

I'M FASCINATED by fortunetellers—in fact, most women are.

As a result, fortunetelling is a \$100,000,000-a-year business in the United States. In my city alone, there are such diverse practitioners as a psychometrist who locates lost objects, a medium who locates dead relatives, and a woman who reads feet.

"But do people really believe in fortunetellers?" I have asked friends. "Can occult powers actually shape our lives or tell us who we are?" At some time or other, we have all been told about seers with unaccountable knowledge of one's past and amazing predictions about one's future which have come true. These stories of "marvelous" fortunetellers have been repeated so often and so convincingly that FAMILY WEEKLY assigned me the job of trying to find out the truth.

I arranged to visit a series of well-known fortunetellers as a typical customer. The only difference would be a small tape recorder hidden in my purse which would preserve an irrefutable transcript of each encounter.

A celebrated palmist was first on my list. "Shake hands with me, my dear. I can tell a lot from your handshake," she said after we met and sat down at a small table in an exclusive restaurant. "Are you in your twenties?" I nodded yes. My mouth was dry with nervousness; I was afraid she would discover the recorder.

"Now relax, my dear, and put your big purse on this chair. Your fate is in your hand, you know, and you have nothing to worry about," she said soothingly. She turned my palms up and examined the lines under the green glow of her flashlight. "I see you are a mature, realistic young lady and sensible and kind to people. Are you married, dear?" I shook my head no.

"Well, you will be. And you'll make a good wife and mother." She explained that the lines on my

left hand showed my possibilities at birth, while my right hand showed what I had done with my life. Apparently, my right hand was filled with good things. "You are quiet and efficient," she told me. "You'd make a fine nurse. Do you have a job, dear?" I answered no.

Swiftly, she considered this reply and switched to a new line of predictions. "You know, you're quite an artistic young lady—creative and versatile. You would do well in some branch of the applied arts." I tried to kick the chair holding my purse closer to her. She was saying so many things, and I wasn't sure the tape recorder would pick it all up.

"May I take notes?" I asked.

"No. You can remember the high points."

Here was the key to her success, I decided later when I played back the tape of our conversation. Most customers would remember the adjectives that appealed to them and forget the inconsistencies in the prognostication. I was fun-loving but reserved, an idealist but practical, I got discouraged but not too discouraged. Her encouraging words added up to a lovable character for every client. It was a "marvelous" formula. I left the restaurant glowing happily.

A Graphologist Sounds Off

Still glowing the next morning, I opened my mail and read, "Dear Miss Saunders: You are rebellious, emotionally undisciplined, and unrealistic about yourself and life." The stinging words were part of the answer to a letter I'd written to a world-famous graphologist. Graphology is the study of handwriting and claims to see your character in the way you dot an "i" or cross a "t."

"You are basically not suited for wifehood or motherhood," continued her analysis. "You are irritable and resentful, and you don't like people." When I finished the letter, I felt stunned. The graphologist was a widely acclaimed teacher.

Could this really be me? Had the palmist been so wrong?

For the rest of the day, I brooded over my faults. Only late in the evening did a friend finally convince me that I wasn't really such a terrible person. "Look," he said, "the graphologist may have been in a bad mood the day she wrote this. She probably only saw the dark side of your handwriting. Why don't you write her again, sign a different name, and compare the results?"

"Well, perhaps it's rationalizing," I said, "but maybe you're right. Perhaps she was tired and needed a vacation. I'll write a second letter."

My next stop on the soothsaying circuit was a visit with a reputedly "brilliant" numerologist. A small, sprightly lady with frizzy red hair, she asked my birth date, counted the letters in my name, and began to scribble down numbers. It took her several minutes of adding and subtracting to find my life pattern. Finally, she looked up, pleased.

"Your ego number is six, a feminine number," she announced. "Your emotional genie is number five, and your lower mind or sixth sense has great uniting power able to reduce discord to harmony."

For three hours, she talked while I stared in mystification. Some of the more comprehensible things she told me were that I would have six children and that I gave people six chances. At one point she said gently, "I usually don't give the bad news until the end. But you must be careful. Your present name attracts fly-by-night people. It would be better if you added a middle name or at least an initial. 'S' might do."

She then gave me a chart containing my life pattern and a handful of mimeographed daily lessons which, when followed scrupulously, would assure me a happy life. I could feel her genuine concern for me. She was worried, for example, about my groping blindly in the universe. I was so young and had so little time in the past to