

# Séance provokes thought

BY MEG BURIK  
Columnist

"They were people once," Rachel (name changed for anonymity) said, in a very non-ironic tone. She was referring to ghosts, spirits, presences, whatever attribution you wish to apply. I'm sure they really don't care what you call them. They're dead anyway.

Rachel's interpretation of the afterlife is rather communicative. "Just because you're in heaven or hell doesn't mean you can't talk with us," she said.

Rachel is a hobbyist in the art of communicating with the dead.

"I'm not a professional, I don't do this because it's something that I necessarily know what I'm doing, I've just had luck with it in the past, and I've just had friends ask me to do it," she said, brushing off the pressure of claiming any self-righteous skill. "It's not always successful, but the few times it's been successful, it's very successful. We make great contact."

Communicating with the dead — I acknowledge that this calls up any variety of images in your head. Anything from "The Haunting in Connecticut" to John Edwards and his audience of willing participants in necromancy. The paranormal is inexplicable, as inexplicable and perhaps unbelievable as any other non-concrete concept. Sure, the real skeptics could probably chalk all the ghost stuff up to suggestibility, saying if you want to encounter the paranormal, you will, simply because your imagination is so keen on the intention.

But if you are a skeptic, entertain the possibility of "making contact," at least while you continue reading this.

I work in Baldwin Auditorium, arguably one of the creepiest places on campus. I've heard all the ghost stories about the place, so turning off lights and locking up at night after an event always gives me the heebie-jeebies when I'm alone. The ghosts usually are playful and just prank the Auditorium workers. They've inconvenienced me a time or two by switching on the lights I had turned off just minutes before. So I maintain an intrigued, but not overly committed, belief in the supernatural.

Rachel, however, seems to be more inclined to both perceiving and believing in the paranormal, as she had her first encounter with a ghost form when she was in kindergarten.

"I was down in the basement in my cardboard fort playing with Barbies and toys and I crawled out of it, and there was this man with no definite features and a top hat just chillin' with his feet propped up on a table," she said casually. "I didn't know what to do, so I just crawled back into my cardboard box."

This chance meeting sparked an interest in Rachel, but the interest stayed latent in the back of her mind until middle school. Then one of her friends asked if she'd like to sit in on a séance.

"It was a really scary experience because she was leading it, and she found who she thinks was the Devil," Rachel said. "[This] was the time when my garage door shook and she just started crying a lot because the experience was so bad for her."

The experience rehashed Rachel's childhood interest in communicating with the dead. Since then, she has had encounters with both good and evil spirits. My friends and I, hoping to

encounter gracious and talkative spirits, decided to capitalize on her enthusiasm and ask her to lead us in a séance.

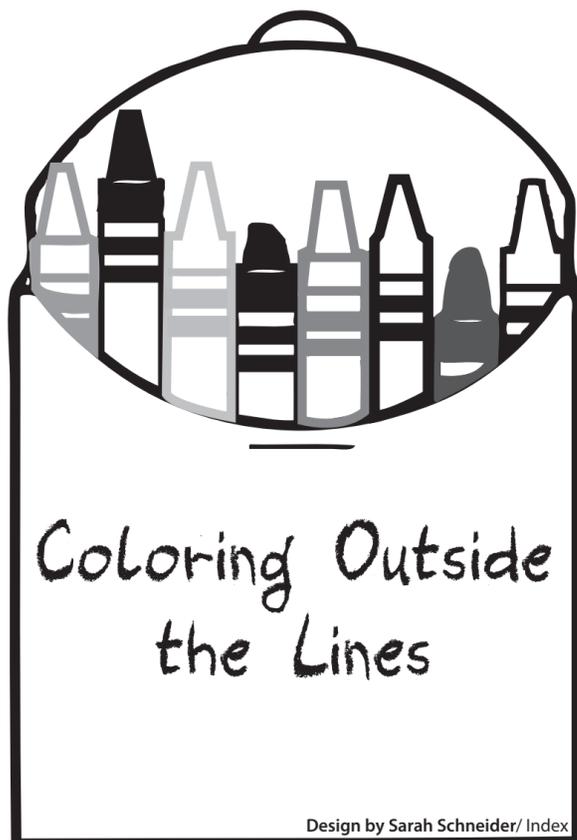
Candles created ghostly shadows across our complacent faces as we sat in a circle of anticipation. Each of us was straining to bridge the gap between our world and the paranormal, from my friend's living room to the spirits', well, dead room? The stage was set for a séance, to invite the dead to dwell among the living. We hoped they would answer a few questions.

There were doubters in the chain of held hands, to be sure, but they were hopeful doubters, yearning for the experience of the unknown, yet unsure if it exists. I like to think that the other world doesn't care about your opinion, and they will go on doing their own thing whether you, I or anyone else thinks they exist. I don't know though — maybe they thrive off our curiosity, like Tinkerbell in, "Peter Pan." (I do believe in fairies, I do! I do!) As soon as you stop believing in them they all go away.

Rachel discussed the various ways she performs séances and let us choose the manner we wished to use to attempt communication. We chose a somewhat meditative method, which Rachel described as calling the dead on a phone and hoping someone answers, preferably someone nice.

"Imagine a forest," Rachel said. "You see a clearing. At one side of the clearing are stairs and you follow the stairs up to the top. There's a door. You open the door, and there's a man. The man lets you into a room. We are searching, searching."

She led the group mentally into the world of the dead. We waited for a spirit to make contact with us.



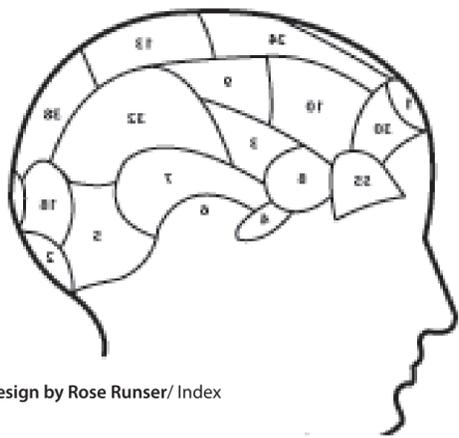
"Searching, searching, searching," Rachel repeated, helping us keep our focus.

We never got into contact with someone. Rachel said the spirits might have been deterred by the skeptical members in our circle. Apparently, you can be anti-social in the afterlife too.

Now I really don't know what to believe. I was very disappointed we didn't make contact, but at the same time I'm glad the dead remained silent. I'm horribly

suggestible. Despite fronting some semblance of bravery to the séance group, had we made contact, I might have peed myself. The night after the séance, my dreams were fluffy and not nightmarish.

I'd like to try a séance again sometime. With the rate of their pranks, the ghosts in Baldwin Auditorium probably would be overly willing to communicate. Then again, if we succeeded in conversing with them, I'd probably want to quit my job.



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BY ELIZABETH NECKA  
Columnist

I've had countless disputes with my father about what I'm going to do with "the rest of my life." He always talks about the future as though it's so big and grand.

Although I'm not about to slack off — I would like to be successful, thank you very much — my main objective in life is to be happy. I know that's what he wants for me, too. We just have different ideas about the root of happiness — his is centered on a job where I'm making at least six figures a year.

We all find ourselves in the search for happiness. More than 2,000 years ago, Aristotle wrote that happiness was "the mean and purpose of life, the whole aim of human existence." "The pursuit of happiness" is paramount to man's "inalienable rights" according to Thomas Jefferson.

But when you Google "how to be happy," you get more than 158 million results. With a supply of resources like that, there has to be a big demand from people wanting to know what will make them happy. But is happiness really that hard to achieve?

Research on positive psychology has taken off in the past decade, and a few obvious roads to happiness have emerged. People who surround themselves with other people and activities they love but don't worry or judge themselves by anyone else's standards are the most happy. Truly happy people have that sense of self-confidence and self-loving

## The Truman Experiment:

# Road to happiness filled with bumps

that a lot of us are developing.

But one peculiar route to happiness was this: don't look for routes to happiness. Stop planning what will make you happy and just be. It stuck out to me because I plan all the time. On a Friday night, I'm mass-texting by 4 p.m. to find out what's happening because if I have something to do, I'll be happy. I'm the one who hammered out her four-year plan freshman year, trying to decide which electives would make the happiest Truman experience. I'm not quite obsessive compulsive, but I often wake up with my day planned out hour-by-hour so I can fit in all of my extracurricular activities, which also make me happy. You get the point.

This ability to plan, reason and make decisions sets humans apart from other animals. You can argue that we've got opposable thumbs, however it's the frontal lobe part of our brains which sets us apart more than anything else. From this, we derive our ability to imagine and think about the future. The frontal lobe was the last part of our brain to evolve and is the slowest to mature according to Harvard psychologist Daniel Gilbert. It's important, and without it, we wouldn't have a civilized society. Imagine living in a perpetual state of the present — we probably wouldn't have jobs or make money because we wouldn't find a reason for money. Money requires planning — what you need it for and what you're going to do with it — an ability we wouldn't have. We simply couldn't function.

And yet, we're awful at predicting what will make us happy! Gilbert says we create grossly inaccurate predictions of the future. That's because we have a hard time seeing life through anyone's point of view but our own and, because we have only our past experiences and memories to guide us, we expect the future to be a lot like the present. But that's why so many people

have mid-life crises, thinking they did themselves a favor by getting their medical doctorate and then realizing medicine isn't what they really wanted at all. So many couples, thinking one person will make them happy for the rest of their lives, but their future selves have other interests and they divorce. Gilbert tells us to live in the moment.

I can personally testify that it does the trick. Studying abroad last summer was probably one of the happiest times of my life. This is largely because of the nature of the program — my days were so filled with excitement and adventure that it seemed like there was no tomorrow. Although I had to keep a loose watch on money and grades, there was a sense of "live every moment like it's your last." And because I knew my days in England were numbered, every moment there was approaching my last. I can honestly say that, without having to worry about what internship I would have next summer or paying rent, I experienced one of the most extreme highs of my life.

But where do we draw the line? It's a bit gluttonous to live off the thrills of the moment and what feels good now without thinking about the future. That's why people cheat, eat chocolate or end up broke after studying abroad. Thinking about the future keeps us civilized, and I'd rather not revert to ape societies. But clearly man is most satisfied when he's not too busy trying to ensure his upcoming happiness and instead simply enjoys today.

I wish I had an answer, but psychologists haven't come up with concrete solutions, and I'm no better. As a human, all I can do is make a plan that I think will make me happy in the future. I'll stick to it loosely but never get so carried away that I forget to enjoy today.

"I'm the one who hammered out her four-year plan freshman year, trying to decide which electives would make the happiest Truman experience."

# Love introduces new languages

BY ANNE REBAR  
Columnist

Apparently I am bilingual, at least when it comes to love languages.

My roommate raised my awareness of love languages during one of her daily rants about why things with her current love interest can't possibly work out. According to her, they speak different "love languages" and thus do not effectively communicate their feelings to each other.

If you are thinking this sounds like a bunch of bologna, I probably would agree with you. After a Google search of the term I came to find out there are, in fact, five "love languages" created by a marriage counselor with an über cheesy, self-help looking Web site that claims to help you "express your heartfelt commitment to your mate."

I threw up in my mouth a little. After I was done mocking the Web site. I took the online quiz — all in the name of research — to find out what love language I "spoke." After answering a series of questions about what I like in a relationship, such as, "I feel loved when you hold me in your arms" and "I feel loved when I receive a gift from you" — seriously, I could not make this

stuff up —, I found that I fit pretty evenly into two of the five categories, which, the Web site informed me, means I am bilingual. Who knew?

The five love languages are: words of affirmation, quality time, receiving gifts, acts of service and physical touch. According to the Web site I "speak" the quality time and physical touch "languages," meaning whomever I am with can most effectively communicate their love to me by spending time with me and through physical gestures. I am beginning to gag again.

Negativity and cynicism aside, this exercise did get me thinking. Two people who express their feelings in completely different ways will have a much harder time in their relationship. My roommate knows what she likes from a guy in her relationships, and her current boy does none of them so therefore she is annoyed by something he did — or didn't do — on a daily basis. Without completely buying in to the love language philosophy, I think she is on to something.

All people want different things in their relationships. Some are not overly affectionate while others crave attention and compliments. My roommate is very verbal. When she likes someone she tells them. She compliments them



on their achievements and tells them how much they mean to her. She does this because this is what she likes in return.

Therein lies the problem. The boy she is dating is quiet. He doesn't make a big production of his feelings and is never very affectionate. Although he probably doesn't mean for it to, this comes across to my roommate as apathy. She feels ignored, and it seems to her he couldn't care less if she graces him with her presence or not.

She realizes they are different in this way but she can't help but be annoyed by his lack of attention. So is there any hope of their current flirtation turning into a

healthy and functioning relationship? If she is still attracted to him despite feeling annoyed by his lack of displayed emotion should she try and make it work?

Honestly, I don't think there is anything that can stand in the way of a relationship if both parties are determined to make it work. If they can talk to each other and actively try to improve their communication, then I can't see any reason to write off the relationship and chalk it up to the "language difference." People learn to speak new languages all the time. Maybe they both just need to become bilingual.