

Speak of the Devil

TALES AND TRENDS FROM DIABLO COUNTRY



Chuck and Shirl's Great Adventure

by Mark MacNamara

He's a psychic; she's a dream worker. Mr. and Mrs. For 17 years, Chuck and Shirl. The Coburns from Lafayette. In the little anteroom where he gives his readings, in among the unicorns, dolphins, and wizards, the crystal ball and a photograph of them taken by Shirley MacLaine in the high desert—the knick that stands out, in thick wooden blocks, is: Chuck ♥ Shirl.

They've just got back from Tibet and Bhutan. Before that, they were in Ethiopia. You've got to schedule months

in advance to get a reading from Chuck. He does one a day, four days a week. Meanwhile, Shirl has her own practice; you can get a reading from her more easily. She's not a therapist, she wants to be clear on that, but she is a member and chair of the International Association for the Study of Dreams.

She met Chuck at a bachelor friend's party in 1980. This was three years after Chuck found out he was psychic, but at the party he didn't sense Shirl's significance. This was also before Shirl became

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a dream worker, but she knew right away. In fact, late in the party, she had a vision. This was after he'd told her he was a former contractor from right here in Lafayette, divorced, and a Lutheran with two kids; and after she'd told him she was divorced with three of her own and

BESTBETS

Fusion Valentine. Explore interethnic and cross-cultural romance. *When?* Feb. 4. *Where?* Oakland Museum, 10th and Oak Streets, Oakland. (888) 625-6873.

Me and My Girl. Diablo Light Opera Company presents a bouncy, boisterous musical. *When?* Through March 4. *Where?*



Dean Leshner Regional Center for the Arts, 1601 Civic Dr., Walnut Creek. (925) 943-7469.

17th Annual Barrel Tasting. A taste of the future. *When?* Feb. 19, 20, & 21. *Where?* Fenestra Winery, 83 Vallecitos Rd., Livermore. (925) 862-2292.

Lucky Thirteen. Abstract and surreal art on display. *When?* Through March 25. *Where?* Danville Fine Arts Gallery, 233 Front St., Danville. (925) 838-1959.

Ah, Wilderness! Love proves victorious in this humorous play. *When?* Through Feb. 12. *Where?* The Village Theatre, 233 Front St., Danville. (925) 820-1278.

Wild Festival. The largest collection of native California wildlife in the museum's history. *When?* Feb. 12-13. *Where?* Lindsay Wildlife Museum, 1931 First Ave., Walnut Creek. (925) 935-1978.



A Russian Is Coming. Cellist Borislav Strulev performs with the California Symphony. *When?* February 13 & 15. *Where?* Dean Leshner Regional Center for the Arts, 1601 Civic Dr., Walnut Creek. (925) 943-7469.

Winemaker Dinner Series. Tour a winery and dine on a four-course meal at Mudd's. *When?* Sundays in February *Where?* Mudd's restaurant, 10 Boardwalk, San Ramon. Call Vino Ventures for details, (925) 456-9463.

For more events: www.diablog.com.

originally a Southern Baptist, but now anything but that; and after they'd discovered that, my God, it is a small world—they'd both gone to Acalanes High School where he was a sophomore when she was a senior—and he did remember her, but she didn't remember him, and that made sense to him because at 18 you don't remember the people who are younger as easily as you do the people who are older. After they discovered all that, Shirl looked at Chuck from across the room, and she didn't see him at all, just his soul.

Nineteen years later, here they are. There's a sage-colored Lexus in the garage; the house is ranch-style, and neat and clean as if forever awaiting the inspector general's white-glove inspection. And everywhere you look, artifacts and knacks. A poison blowgun from Ecuador, a shaman's stick from Ethiopia.

Next to the master bedroom is the office where Chuck is writing his third book. His second, *Reality Is Just Illusion*, was published last year (Llewellyn Publications, \$9.95). He used to have a cable television show in Alameda called *Personal Pathways*.

On the other side of the house, next to the reading room, is the bedroom for the seven grandkids, and down a short hall, past a glass showcase with witch dolls from around the world—she was born on Halloween—is the guest room. Chuck put in a door leading out to the pool, not only for access but also for the ghost, the odd presence, the chimera that occasionally visits the house.

"It's strange," says Chuck, "it seems to hang around if it can't pass all the way through the house. But mostly it just likes to see who's here."

After my 17-year-old stepsister was kidnapped in West Hollywood in December 1969, we went to a psychic. He was in his late 20s, a student at UCLA. "The message I'm getting is that she's okay," he said, "but that could mean she's dead or alive. The dead will often tell you they're okay."

My stepsister was dead.

Ten years ago, I went to a psychic in a poor section of West Palm Beach. We sat on two chairs in a room without another stick of furniture. He had the gift. On a matter of love his predictions went far

beyond what I could then understand.

Two years ago, on a whim, I went to see a woman named Doreen who lived across the street from the Sunvalley Mall. She reads tarot cards. Among other things, I asked her what happened to Margaret Leshner—I was writing a story about her death. "Murder," said Doreen, and described her vision in great detail. I believed her on that point, but of course there was no proof.

I asked Chuck if he would give me a reading. He said he would give a "social reading." Usually his readings last 90 minutes. He takes off his shoes, collects his thoughts, and then going from chakra to chakra, he tells you about your last life and introduces you to your spirit guides.

Wherever he goes, people ask him for a reading. Once a man at a party asked Chuck, "Tell me where and what I had for lunch." Chuck got unusual details about the restaurant and the people at the table, and he even got that the man had a salami sandwich. "Wheat or rye?" asked the man. At that point, Chuck couldn't go any further and guessed. He was wrong.

"Charlatan," said the man, and walked away.

When Chuck met Shirl at the party 19 years ago, he gave her a social reading. He told her that her watch was broken, that her son had recently injured his right leg, and that her previous boyfriend's name had an unusual spelling. It was all correct.

So he did my reading and it was accurate, but in the vague way readings often are. Not like the man in West Palm Beach, I thought. But then, this was a quick read.

The interview was finished. Chuck said he hoped the article would be positive. Just at that moment, I fell into a coughing fit; I was at the end of a cold. He took my fit as a sign. He said: "It's interesting that you should cough just when you're telling me this would be a positive story."

He seemed suddenly defensive. I asked why. He explained that journalists have not always been kind to him. "But," he said, "I'm sure it'll be positive. I wouldn't have agreed to talk to you otherwise." ▲