

Marilyn Rossner

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SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE

A friend once told me of having dinner at professor John Rossner's house, and how throughout the evening Rossner's wife, Marilyn, kept getting up in the middle of a conversation and heading for the phone. Just then it would ring. The same was happening with the doorbell.

A stoic and pragmatic man, my friend was, nevertheless, flabbergasted by the experience.

No such phenomena took place when I visited Marilyn Zwaig Rossner, a medium and educator who lives with her husband of 22 years, an Anglican priest who has just retired from his teaching post in Concordia University's department of religion. In his introduction to his wife's new book, Professor Rossner describes her as "diminutive in size, childlike, simple, of a sweet disposition, characteristically joyful and energetic. She is the rare combination of both a highly organized and accomplished behavioral scientist, as well as - since birth - one of the world's most gifted 'intuitives' or 'sensitives.'"

The Rossners live in a colorful three-storey house across from the Museum

of Architecture. Marilyn Rossner, who has a PhD in special education, opened the door dressed in her typically little-girl style - a flowery dress with a wide frill at the hem, a "granny" hat on her long hair and the ubiquitous dark glasses in red frames. (When asked her age, she

"I'm as young as a blade of grass and as old as eternity."

smiled and answered: "I'm as young as a blade of grass and as old as eternity.")

She greeted me warmly, dwarfed by the enormous head of a Chinese paper dragon hanging at the entrance to the hallway, a Cheshire-cat smile on its colorful face.

"Watch this," Rossner said, throwing a switch. Suddenly the eyes of the dragon lit up and we both giggled at the effect this must have on evening visitors. By the wall, just beneath the dragon

head, sits a beautiful sculpture of an Indian sacred cow, facing the door "for good luck," she said.

There are colorful Indian paintings on the walls, all hand-painted with vegetable and fruit dyes.

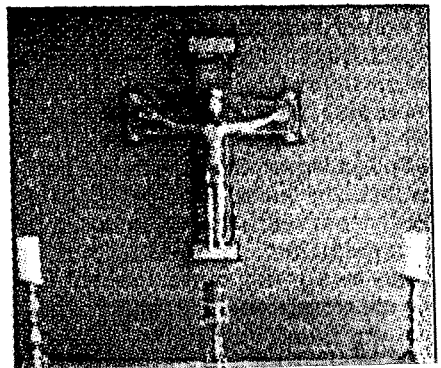
Rossner is a lively, eloquent woman, eager to share the story of her initiation into the world of parapsychology.

"I come from an Orthodox Jewish family. My parents, Sarah and Abraham Zwaig, came from Poland, and most of my family was murdered in the Holocaust. The earliest memory I have is of my father with his skull cap, praying.

"I went to a public school," Rossner continued, "and one day, when I was 4½, our teacher had us make an outline of a Christmas tree in paper and, as we were doing that, I became dizzy and everything started to move around.

"All of a sudden a face came toward me - I knew nothing of out-of-body experiences at the time - and the face was so beautiful, with piercing eyes and long hair, and in my right ear I heard the words, 'Christ is God, Christ is Lord indeed,' and then I saw children

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And they were holding hands and they were singing 'We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord.'

She rushed home to tell her mother of her experience, crying and upset. She says she continued to have this kind of experience, even seeing dead relatives that her parents recognized from her descriptions. Finally, they took her to a leading Hasidic rabbi in New York, who said she had special gifts and a special vocation.

She went to a regular school, taking Hebrew lessons after hours. "I loved school," she said. "I loved learning."

But she kept seeing auras around people and predicting events, which made some of the children afraid of her. "On Saturday night, I would sit on the stairs of the restaurant where Jewish people would go, and I would say, 'Let me guess how much you paid for your bill tonight'." She said she was always right.

She credits her parents for never making her feel different or trying to dissuade her from her chosen path.

"I grew up in a family that was very supportive, where there was meditation, where there was prayer, where there was a simple lifestyle. I was never taught that I wasn't supposed to do this. I was taught that this was a gift and that I had to take care of it and do something with it.

"I always believed that I had a responsibility to let people know what I know. Not to change, but to share."

This belief led her to the establish-



SHERYL NADLER, GAZETTE

A figure of Rossner's greatest guru, Swami Sivananda.

ment, in 1977, of the Spiritual Science Fellowship. "I decided to put together a spiritual community, where we have Christians and Muslims, and Jews and atheists, and people from the Native traditions, and we all come together and worship."

Two years earlier she, her husband (they married in 1974) and an international group of scientists, scholars, doctors and religious leaders founded the International Institute of Integral Human Sciences "for promotion of interfaith studies leading to the convergence of science and spirituality, and the emergence of universal human values in the global village."

Rossner feels very much at home in

that global village, having spent years travelling around the world, primarily to educate children with special needs, but also to share and exchange her teachings and experiences in the field of parapsychology.

Many of these travels were in the company of her greatest guru, Swami Sivananda, whose ministry was focused on children. She studied yoga under his tutelage and is proud that she opened the first yoga camp for children in North America, in 1972 in Val Morin.

"Yoga and the teachings of spirit communication have really been the basis of my life, with a very strong Jewish Orthodox tradition," she said.

The traditions of the world are represented everywhere in Rossner's house. From the colorful kitchen, filled with plants and with an enormous Indian baldachin - a canopy used to shade important people in India - suspended from the ceiling, we made our way upstairs, where Rossner has her own chapel. All in pale blue, it's a spacious, bright room with a magnificent antique wooden cross on one wall and a painting of a Jewish religious scene on the opposite side.

There's a comfortable couch facing the windows, while across from it is a tiny wooden chair with a red cushioned seat on which Rossner likes to meditate.

The crucifix is from southern Spain, a gift, as are most of the objects in this house. There are straw dolls made by Rossner's many children (pupils, that is - the Rossners don't have any of their own), a figurine of a swami and little slippers signifying "walking in the footsteps of the great masters," as Rossner put it.

The second floor also houses Professor Rossner's office, filled with books and very sombre compared with the carnival of color filling the rest of the house.

In another room I met Rossner's companion on many trips, Sister Leona Hartman, a nun with the ecumenical Order of the Transfiguration, who's become fascinated with Rossner's teachings and has been living in her house for seven years.

"I love it," she said of her newfound beliefs and surroundings. "I had to

grow into it, but I sensed there was more to it, and that's where my search began."

Sister Leona, a gifted musician, has written a book about her experiences called *A Nun's Search for God*. During a photo session a few days later, she surprised the photographer and me by bursting into song in praise of the Lord.

We continued touring the house, which also has a tiny basement office with a dead television set - "I never watch TV," Rossner said adamantly. "I don't even know how to turn it on" - and more fascinating artwork, including an exquisite dowry chest from India.

India is not the only place that has left its mark on Rossner. Her numerous trips to Eastern Europe, particularly the former Soviet Union, are her most memorable. There she met with scientists and educators and visited the numerous institutes of parapsychology that exist in almost every Russian city. She is still invited to speak at conferences and symposia and travels extensively. She has just retired from teaching special education at Vanier College and will have more time to devote to her centre.

When not travelling, she is happy to be home. "I love Montreal," she said. "Even though I've travelled around the world, Montreal is my favorite place. It's a special place, a sacred place. It will always be a safe place and nothing negative will ever happen here.

"And I believe it's one of the power places of the world."