

Montreal psychic seeks to link East, West in 'the light'

Marilyn Rossner, the Montreal medium, has been spending more time lately behind what used to be the Iron Curtain than she has in Montreal.

But Rossner, in and out of Montreal for the last several weeks, will be on hand for next weekend's 15th annual conference of the Spiritual Science Fellowship, of which she is the founding president, and its affiliated International Institute of Integral Human Sciences.

A list of more than 20 guest speakers at the conference, May 18 to 20 at the Holiday Inn Crowne Plaza, is headed by Dr. Raymond Moody, a U.S. physician and author of *Life After Life* and *The Light Beyond*, books on the mystical experiences of people close to death.

The overall theme of the conference is Future Self — 1990.

"The whole idea is who we are and who we are becoming as we get closer and closer to the 21st century," Rossner said.

Her own views on what the future holds, based largely on her recent experiences, mundane and mystical, in Eastern Europe, are decidedly optimistic. She is in the middle of a two-year series of visits for speaking and consultation, generally in response to invitations, in the Soviet Union, Poland and Czechoslovakia.

"I have had many visions," she said.

Some of them, she said, indicate that a leader of the world will come out of the East by 1993; Rossner has no doubt that he's Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev.

She said "inner visions" have convinced her Gorbachev "will be protected" from perils that threaten him and will go on to lead the world to "oneness, rather than separation."

The Soviet president and Pope John Paul II, she said, "are the two most powerful people in the world" right now. Rossner was pleased to report that, while passing through



HARVEY SHEPHERD
RELIGION

Rome within the last few weeks she and a travelling companion, Sister Leona Hartman, received a blessing from the Holy Father.

Rossner is convinced the Pope is "being used by the Heavenly World to show humanity how it can understand all and accept all" and that "the truth is one" — even in ways that John Paul II may not consciously agree with.

"I am very optimistic."

Rossner, who has training in behavior therapy and has been a teacher and therapist specializing in children with learning disabilities, said her eastern European meetings have almost all been with people and organizations close to the main stream of therapy in their countries rather than identified as spiritual. She has, for example, visited centres for handicapped children and for drug abusers.

She said many of her audiences have been packed.

There is less division between the spiritual and the social sciences in eastern Europe than in North America, she said, and Soviet psychiatrists are more likely than their Western counterparts to accept the need for treatments that emphasize a combination of intuition, relaxation, creativity and special education.

Spiritual phenomena are more respected by the mainstream social scientists in eastern Europe than in the West, although the social sci-

tists do not use use religious-sounding terminology, Rossner said.

"Over there, I am called a sensitive or an intuitive rather than a psychic or a medium. The Moscow Narcology Clinic is using what we would call spiritual healing, but they call it bioenergetic manipulation."

Speakers at next weekend's conference, which runs from Friday evening to Sunday evening, include John Robbins, who writes on diet, astronaut Brian O'Leary, Swami Satchidananda, who is a yoga master, several woman "sensitives," clergy of several religious groups and others.

There is an elaborate schedule of fees, generally ranging from \$15 or \$25 for individual sessions to \$130 for the whole conference, not counting fees or donations for a range of special consultations and sessions of various types or a week of seminars following the conference.



An interfaith approach with a less specifically mystical emphasis is reflected by the recent establishment of a new Inter-Faith Council of Montreal.

The new council has been set up at the initiative of the Roman Catholic-supported Canadian Centre for



Marilyn Rossner Spent weeks in eastern Europe

Ecumenism, based in Montreal, and its associate director, Sister Katherine MacDonald. The aim of the new council is "fostering awareness, understanding and respect for the peoples of the different faiths of the city."

The council says it has representation from the Baha'i faith, the Christian churches, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Sikhism, Zoroastrianism and the North American native tradition.

"The council wishes to seek ways which will enable people to be committed to their own religions and yet achieve knowledge, understanding and appreciation of other faiths," MacDonald said.

Specific goals of the new council include speaking out when a particular faith community faces some threat, organizing an annual religious and cultural event that will encourage dialogue, and other activities to promote tolerance, including a speaker's bureau to respond to invitations, especially from schools.

The council will make its public debut at 7:30 p.m. tomorrow in the form of an interfaith musical event at the Congregation of Notre Dame building at 2330 Sherbrooke St. W. The public is invited and admission is free.



Flushed with the success of last year's first direct appeal to the faithful for funds, officials of the Roman Catholic archdiocese of Montreal say parishes too will benefit directly if this year's appeal, which ends tomorrow, does as well.

In the campaign now under way, the diocese hopes to raise \$1.8 million, about the same as was raised in last year's first appeal but well above last year's \$1.2-million objective.

Much of what was raised last year over the objective went to set up contingency funds for three areas to

which the diocese gives high priority: \$250,000 for work with families, \$200,000 for help to poor parishes and \$50,000 for youth work.

Msgr. Neil Willard, the diocese's chancellor or top administrative officer, said in an interview that if this year's campaign meets its objective, about \$1 million will go to the diocese and the other \$800,000 will go back to parishes. The exact formula for doing this has not been worked out but one objective would be to make it unnecessary for some parishes to make special appeals to their parishioners for such things as major building repairs.

As for the money the diocese is seeking for its own activities, Willard said, four areas of activity are getting special priority: "pastoral animation" in elementary schools and work with families, youth and members of Montreal's growing immigrant communities.

By "pastoral animation" in elementary schools, the diocese means the growing role of lay people, mainly women, in taking over the task — which used to be done by parish priests and sometimes still is — of visiting schools and helping children prepare for their first communion.

Financial pressures in this area are building up, he said, as the availability of priests dwindles, and it becomes clear that lay people doing the work deserve decent salaries. Schools are also becoming more secular, and hoped-for government funds to help with the task have not materialized. The diocese devoted \$204,700 to elementary-school pastoral work in its \$4.64-million budget for fiscal 1988-89.

Willard said the diocese does not want to take advantage of its fundraising successes to build up large reserves and has policies in place to avoid growth in the 200-person — lay and clerical — diocesan staff. Any new staff activities started up are supposed to be offset by pruning existing activities.

COMING EVENTS

SUNDAY, MAY 13

Lag B'omer Picnic: The Open Havurah of Montreal, a group that seeks to "express (its) Jewish identity in an informal setting," plans a picnic on St. Helen's Island to mark the Lag B'omer festival, beginning at noon. Members of the public are invited; bring a lunch, preferably kosher, vegetarian, games, a musical instrument, a blanket and what not. Participants will visit the David M. Stewart Museum for the "Planets, Poisons and Parchments" exhibition that deals with the early history of science and includes portions of the Dead Sea Scrolls. In case of bad weather the YMWHA switchboard at 737-6551 will have information Sunday.

An interfaith musical event is planned to introduce the new Inter-Faith Council of Montreal. The event will begin at 7:30 p.m. at the Congregation of Notre Dame building at 2330 Sherbrooke St. W. The public is invited and admission is free.

MONDAY, MAY 14

Justice, peace and the integrity of creation will be the topic of Rev. Faye Wakeling, director of the United Church's St. Columba House, who recently attended a meeting on this subject in Seoul, South Korea, sponsored by the World Council of Churches. Her talk, sponsored by the English-language justice and peace office of the Roman Catholic archdiocese of Montreal, will begin at 7:30 p.m. at the archdiocesan offices, 2000 Sherbrooke St. W.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 16

Retreat: Rev. Malcolm Smith of the Roman Catholic archdiocese of Montreal will lead a retreat on small Christian communities in the Catholic church. Sessions will take place between 9:30 a.m. and 3 p.m. at Holy Name parish, 899 Chomedey Blvd. in Laval.

FRIDAY, MAY 18

A healing mass is planned by the Roman Catholic archdiocese of Montreal at 7:30 p.m. at St. John Fisher Church, 120 Summerhill Ave. in Pointe Claire.

"Future Self — 1990" is the theme of this year's annual conference of the Spiritual Sciences Foundation and an affiliated organization Friday through Sunday at the Holiday Inn Crowne Plaza Hotel.

Among more than 20 speakers are John Robbins, author of books on diet, at 7:30 p.m. Friday, Swami Satchidananda, a yoga master, at 9 p.m. Friday, astronaut Brian O'Leary at 7:30 p.m. Saturday and Dr. Raymond Moody, author of books on near-death experiences, at 9 p.m. Saturday. The fee schedule ranges between \$15 for an individual speaker and \$130 for the full conference.

SATURDAY, MAY 19

Bible conference: Rev. Bernard G. Dupont, a Dominican priest based in Lewiston, Me., part of whose career was in Kenya, will discuss growth in faith in the light of the Gospel of St. Mark. The conference will run from 9:30 a.m. to 4 p.m., with another session planned for June 16, at Holy Family Roman Catholic parish, 7355 Lajeunesse St. Bring lunch and a Bible and call 747-2544 or 272-8488 in advance.

Montreal medium sees Spiritualism coming into its own

Marilyn Zwaig Rossner is a happy medium.

The short, vivacious Spiritualist with the long, red hair has a number of reasons for being cheerful:

- In eight days the Spiritual Science Fellowship, of which she is founder and president, will celebrate its 10th anniversary.

- She says Canadian membership of the fellowship has just passed 5,000 (including about 1,500 in greater Montreal). She says it is the largest Spiritualist organization in North America.

- Last month "Rev. Marilyn," as she is often known, celebrated the 15th anniversary of her ordination as a Spiritualist minister after training at a Spiritualist college near Indianapolis.

- She thinks a galactic event predicted for around Aug. 16 and known as the "Harmonic Convergence" did occur. She reports an overflow turnout at the Sunday service of the fellowship that evening, one of many events across North America and abroad where the convergence was marked. She says a number of people "felt something beginning at that time."

- Rossner, known to many Montrealers through her broadcasting and journalism over the years, is convinced Spiritualism is coming more and more into its own.

She is invited to speak, alone or with her husband and associate, Rev. John Rossner, an Anglican priest, in places as orthodox as Roman Catholic convents.

RELIGION

Harvey Shepherd



On the other hand, on a recent tour of the Soviet Union and other socialist countries, she found growing interest in spiritual phenomena, even if scientists there prefer to talk of "energy" or the "intuitive faculty."

She says polls show many North Americans have had what they consider psychic experiences — premonitions that turn out to be true, for example, or sensations of travelling outside one's body.

Local inquiries

Locally, she reports, at least five inquiries a week come into the three-storey greystone rowhouse headquarters of the fellowship at 1974 de Maisonneuve Blvd. W.

Rossner says growth in the \$15-a-year membership of the 24 chapters and study groups of the Spiritual Science Fellowship across Canada has been especially strong in the past four years.

There are also nine affiliated local groups in the United States, "several" in India and one getting organized in Greece, Rossner reports.

The fellowship is one of a number of organizations within a Spiritualist movement that has existed from time immemorial, in a way, but in its modern form — mediums, clairvoyance, séances and so forth — for about a century and a half.

At least four other groups in Montreal practise what they no doubt regard as a purer kind of Spiritualism than Rossner's. Relations, she says, are friendly.

But she thinks her eclecticism is a return to the Spiritualist sources.

"What many people are doing nowadays under such names as Spiritual Science, New Age consciousness, higher consciousness, metaphysical truth, self-awareness and so on is similar to what was being done under the name of Spiritualism when it was originally defined."

The fellowship has in common with other Spiritualist groups the absence of any dogma or creed, but differs in its keen interest in yoga and the world's great religions.

"Christian priests, ministers, Jewish rabbis, Hindu swamis, Sikhs, Tibetan Buddhist lamas, Jain monks, native medicine men, Spiritualist ministers, psychics, mediums and representatives of other faiths, old and new, have shared the platform at various meetings of the Spiritual Science Fellowship with scholars, scientists and ordinary people alike," Rossner says.

"The message of all the great religions is the same."



Gazette, Tedd Church

Marilyn Rossner: Fellowship membership is growing.

Some members of the Spiritual Science Fellowship participate regularly in Sunday evening services. Prayer, meditation, hymns and a talk generally precede "sharing of the gifts of the Spirit" by several mediums, often including Rossner, who circulate among the congregation bringing individual messages from departed loved ones and other spirits.

Some fellowship members pay little attention to the worship service and are mainly interested in weekday courses in psychic and spiritual development, working up from relaxation techniques to such things as trance phenomena. There are also a number of yoga courses.

Rossner and others also offer private consultations and healing

prayers.

Rossner believes anyone can develop his or her psychic abilities, but not necessarily become a medium. Mediums are born, not made.

Vision of Christ

She traces her awareness of her gift to a vision of Christ — not Jesus, she insists, but Christ — at age 4. Her Orthodox Jewish parents, steeped in Jewish mysticism, responded with understanding, as they have to her career.

Outside Spiritualism, Marilyn Rossner is a teacher, writer and therapist specializing in teaching children with learning disabilities. Trained in behavior therapy, an ap-

proach some would regard as the antithesis of the spiritual, she teaches at Vanier College.

Still, she says she studied behaviorism in order to get another kind of understanding of her spiritual life. And some of her child-therapy work is on topics such as yoga for children.

The 10th-anniversary celebration will take place at the usual time and place for Sunday evening services: 7:30 p.m. at the Ramada Inn, Guy St. at Dorchester Blvd.

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