

SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT
TO THE
GULF ISLANDS
DRIFTWOOD
JANUARY 17, 2007

Death and Dying

Love transcends death, says island spiritualist

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Outside it's dark and windy and pouring rain, but inside the Lower Masonic Hall on Lower Ganges Road, those gathered for the Continuous Light Sanctuary's Message Night create an energy and excitement that starves out the weather.



Carol Spencer

About 20 people sit on chairs in a semi circle. Rev. Carol Spencer stands in the middle. Spencer, an older woman dressed in a long navy skirt and matching blazer, sips a water bottle and rocks slightly back and forth.

She has a kind, round face and a good repertoire with those gathered.

The room is quiet. The only sound is that of the ticking clock in the corner. The crowd, although quiet, appear happy and optimistic. They are gathered to observe Spencer communicate with spirits of the dead.

Spencer, who founded the Sanctuary in 2003, is a "Spiritualist." According to her handout, Spiritualism is a religion, but rather than tying its adherents to a creed or dogma, it is founded on seven principles. These principles were developed in 1871 through communications between Emma Hardinge Britten and the spirit of Robert Owen, who had played a role in the modern spiritualist movement before his death.

But this communication is not a morbid act, nor does it come across as phony. Quite the opposite, it gives those gathered a sense of fulfillment, closure and hope.

"When we pass into the world of the spirit, our personality has a chance to evolve . . . Live your days like you mean it, because when you pass onto the other side, you have to keep working," said Spencer to the group.

Throughout the evening, Spencer speaks with seven spirits.

She converses with the father of one woman: "Your dad was a get-up-and-go person," she said, explaining that the spirit first appeared to her while she was playing music and prepping the room.

"There's just so much movement, as he gets closer, I'm losing my breath," said Spencer. She says the spirit feels anxious that he won't have time to complete everything.

He also wants to let you know that you should stop worrying about your health and "get on with [your life]," she said.

To this, the woman exhales with relief.



Grave marker at a south Salt Spring church.

Photo by Derrick Lundy

Much of the pain she may have been feeling might be caused by her father's spirit drawing too near and accidentally inflicting his illness upon her, said Spencer.

"[Next time], if you do have a shortness of breath, would you just say 'Dad, would you back away?'" suggested Spencer.

Leap of Faith

During an interview in her home a few days later, Spencer explains how Spiritualism can help those touched by death.

"It really is about reducing fear. Reducing fear of death and reducing fear of aloneness and separateness . . . [The] spirit world is the

catalyst to realize that they're not alone."

She differentiates between spiritualists and psychics: whereas spiritualists converse with people "on the other side," psychics, using "earth energy," inherently see and know things.

And she is understanding of non-believers.

"I think it's wonderful to be skeptical, especially on Salt Spring Island. There are a lot of things that can't be explained out there. If it doesn't resonate with yourself or you can't accept it, don't accept it. Don't accept things on blind faith."

Spencer has been formally studying Spiritualism for 10 years, and has completed courses at Stansted Hall at the Arthur Findlay College in England.

She worked in extended care at Lady Minto for 25 years.

"People who die have choices as well. If they choose not to come back, they choose not to come back," she said to those who believe the dead should be left alone.

New Opportunities

The January 5 Message Night is Barb Kinnear's first, but the islander says she will come again.

"It was awesome. [Spencer] was so good with Granny, she said everything my grandmother was," said Kinnear after the demonstration.

Earlier in the evening, Spencer had told Kinnear: "A lot of people have the ability of mediumship, and especially a lot of people here [on Salt Spring] . . . You should try it out sometime."

Kinnear, an extended care worker, has worked with many sick and elderly people, and says you can "see and feel stuff" before someone dies.

"You can feel energy when they're about to pass," she said.

Kinnear has also brought her daughter Louisa to Message Night in hopes that it might give her daughter a chance to know her grandmother. The two share the same name.

Spencer knows people are drawn to the Continuous Light Sanctuary for a variety of reasons.

"One of the things we're doing is finding that love transcends death," she said.

The Continuous Light Sanctuary meets the first Sunday of each month in the Lower Masonic Hall at 506 Lower Ganges Road. For more information, contact Rev. Carol Spencer at 537-2154.