



Do You See What I See?

It's not late at night. There is no thunder clapping in the menacing heavens. And there is no baleful wind howling through anyone's door. It's midday—clean in the emerging and violently thrilled to be summer. But despite all of this, the daylight, the welcoming, what Jennifer Rogers sees before her—what she finds herself living, vicariously, virtually—is terrifying.

It's like she is at the party, as drunk and stumbling as the young college freshman she is channeling. It's like she is falling down the garbage chute, narrow as a coffin, clanging and cold just after 1:00 am. And now it is she who is in the dumpster, stunned, still drunk, and surrounded by a wetness that is undefined and dark, a stench that is blinding and inescapable, a taste of that same stink...and blood? And in trying to escape, to push through the soft plastic lid of her humid tomb, she slips and falls forward, half laughing with the remaining twirl of cheap beer sloshing in her stomach and brain. Surrounded by the angular refuse, unable to stand, sleep comes with the tab from a slippery Chinese food carton stuck to her flushed cheek, the distant, muted thumping of a frat party just out of reach...

For Medford psychic Jen Rogers, her abilities have rendered her more than just a fortune teller. Rogers, while working alongside the police on unsolved crime cases, becomes a misfortune teller; one that some families are fortunate enough to know.

BY NICK DIULIO

Photography by Kerry Pittenger

Hours pass. Now something is approaching...the sound of a diesel engine...the arm of a truck...and she is lifted, unaware, and dropped...and the machine sound begins humming, churning, like the stomach of an angry god...

Flash! Rogers is suddenly back in Medford. She's

back in midday, sweating in her office on the corner of Main and Union Streets. She allows the aftertaste to pass, not so much like one does after waking from a nightmare as one does when the credits roll on an exceedingly horrific and macabre film. She needs the quiet of her afterthoughts.

She then picks up the phone and dials the number of the man who had called her just a few days prior, on the morning of March 27, 2006. He had said his son was missing. He had said he needed Rogers' help. Well, now she had helped. And when this man picks up the phone, Jennifer Rogers, an alleged psychic medium, says, "They need to check the garbage can."

Just a few weeks after this episode, investigators found the remains of John Fiocco, Jr., a 19-year-old College of New Jersey freshman, in a Pennsylvania landfill, concealed beneath piles of trash. The road to that landfill had begun almost a month prior, when the young man had been missing for two days and authorities received word (albeit indirectly) from Rogers that they should look in the dumpster outside his dormitory. When they did, investigators found blood in and around the trash bin. After laboratory tests confirmed the blood was Fiocco's, a search was underway at the 1-acre, 20-foot deep area of the PA landfill they believed the trash from Fiocco's dorm was regularly taken. And it was there they eventually found what they needed to find.

"The detectives on that one were jerks. They didn't want to hear anything from me. But when it turned out that I was right, they took a different turn," says Rogers, 33. "Then they started calling to find out more info. What section of the landfill? What area?"

For Rogers, who has made a career over the last ten years as a psychic medium—communicating with and channeling the deceased, both for private clients as well as local law enforcement officials looking for help on difficult cases—these episodes have become common occurrences. The deaths and abductions, Rogers says, she relives as though she has just stepped into a movie. And when it's over, sometimes the police want to listen. Sometimes they don't.

"You go right back to the time it happened. Any time there is a mark in the universe, a negative energy, you can tell exactly what happened. In the beginning, the family wanted to know if there was urgency. Is he alive? No. Then the tone changes. There's desperation and they get very angry. But once the anger goes away, they want to know if you can help them," says Rogers, recounting the way the Fiocco case (like so

many others) unfolded. “I watched what happened to him that night.”

When asked how she copes with witnessing such violence, such desperation over and over again, she says, “You have to separate emotions and work. Otherwise I would be off a bridge somewhere.”

Jennifer Rogers has supposedly been watching the dead since she was a girl growing up in Sussex County, “kind of in the woods.” Allegedly, the capability came from her father’s side of the family, of which several members claimed to be touched, gifted, with a keen ability to communicate with energy that has shaken its mortal coil. And while she says her father has never possessed this gift himself, Rogers claims her aunt was very much in touch with the afterlife, going so far as to warn young Jennifer of the moment when the dead would begin making themselves known.

“I remember my aunt saying, ‘Don’t be scared when your powers kick in.’ And I used to ask my mom all the time, ‘What does that mean?’ And she would say, ‘Oh, she’s crazy. Don’t even worry about her,’” says Roger during an interview in the back room of her Medford office, where she does the bulk of her readings. Rogers has been here since August and the place is surprisingly contemporary—sharp, Ikea lines dominate—yet hushed and classic in a way that would make most neo Gen-Xers quite cozy. Smooth stones and mystical, water-trickling desert music clue one into the ethereal purposes of this room, but it could just as easily double for a psychologist’s den or attorney’s thinking space. Well, an exceedingly spiritual attorney, anyway.

Rogers sits on the opposite side of a long, black table, rocking occasionally in her leather office chair. The room is dimly lit. The walls, green. There are no crystal balls or beaded curtains, no neon palms buzzing in the window or animal hides hanging from the ceiling. Even Rogers herself is only a distant approximation of the image typically conjured up by the words “psychic” or “medium.” Wearing jeans, a long-sleeved black shirt, and puffy down vest, Rogers looks more prepared to go watch her kids’ soccer game than peer into someone’s future or communicate with a long-deceased loved one. But isn’t this the point? Rogers, ever since her childhood, has been trying to break down the stereotypes. Even now, with over 100 clients and a storefront operation in Medford, Rogers struggles to fight the world’s prejudices. They expect someone old, she says... and a little crazy.

And while she may be passionate about sidestepping the clichéd conventions, Rogers is

not overly concerned with the skepticism (sometimes measured, sometimes vehement) folks inevitably bring to the table. She is remarkably matter-of-fact about her profession and unphased by questions pertaining to potential fraud or hypocrisy, as though she doesn't care if one believes her or not. Belief is not the point.

"This is me. I've always had to make it okay in my mind, so it's normal to me. And if people don't like it or understand it, I say that's too bad. I don't fight it or argue it. I just say it's too bad their mind doesn't open that far," she says. "If you are told what to do, you don't let your mind escape. You don't allow it to be open and free. Actually free. That's why I have such a hard time with authority."

To ask Rogers when she first recalls knowing she could see and communicate with the dead and gaze into the future is akin to asking anyone when he or she first recalls breathing or blinking. For Rogers, a keen psychic ability has always played a significant part in her life. With the exception of a few early years, Rogers claims to recall seeing the dead from a very young age. There were no Haley Joel Osmont moments of disfigured corpses in tents or scenes like the opening from "Ghostbusters." So when Rogers visits

grocery stores and sees the dead wandering the pale aisles, or looks through the window of the car next to hers and can immediately know the internal lives of those inside, it fazes her no more than it fazes most of us to watch a bird take flight.

Just don't call them ghosts. Ghosts, says Rogers, are a Hollywood concept that have nothing to do with "reality." Instead, she prefers the word "energy."

"It's an energy field you feel in your chest when someone comes around. It's very cold. I'm always cold when someone enters my area," she says. "And I hate the word 'ghosts.' I think that's stupid. I like to call it energy because that's what it is. That's the big secret. It's just energy."

The idea to do this as a full-time career was not as ever-present as the abilities themselves. After high school, Rogers says she went through a "Grateful Dead phase," following the band on tours and surrendering to the blithe, unconditional haze of indecision. Nevertheless, she knew she wanted to travel; so Rogers enrolled in travel school and worked as a booking agent for a few years before giving it up. Regardless of her vacillations, Rogers says her confidence in her abilities

never wavered, and even while she was working a more conventional nine-to-five, she would often perform readings at local bars and restaurants.

At 24 she married her husband, Ted, and got pregnant on the honeymoon with their son T.J. No, Ted is not a psychic. And no, Ted does not claim to share in any of his wife's abilities. Nonetheless, says Rogers, he supports her, even though his understanding is limited. "I wouldn't call myself a skeptic. I didn't really have an opinion on it to be honest," says Ted of when he first met his wife. "I'm pretty open-minded. And my wife and I are the same like that. We will accept people for who they are. We don't worry too much about what other people think."

This was an important trait for the couple to share when, in 1997, they moved to South Jersey, both so Ted could open a pool business with his brother-in-law and Jennifer could focus her attentions on making a living from seeing the future and talking to the dead. And for eight years, Jennifer mediated the future and the dead from her home in Atco. Customers came and went, seeking not only her prescience, but her counsel as well. She also made it known to local authorities that her services were available should they

need to call (and some of them did). But as her clientele increased and reputation grew, so did Jennifer's stress. So did the side effects.

"Ted doesn't like the side effects I go through when I do it. 'That's hard to watch,' he says. Because when I'm dealing with a case, I bring home their personality and take on their energy and it's frightening sometimes," she says. "And I become depressed when I collect too many negatives. It pulls you down."

That's part of the reason Jennifer opened her Medford location eight months ago. It had become increasingly difficult for her to separate her professional and family life when she was working in Atco. Besides, neither Jennifer nor Ted was all that comfortable with so many people coming and going from their home, especially when dealing with crime-related clients, whom she sees more often than not.

Jennifer, who is currently working with six different police departments, has aided in investigations ranging from the exceedingly morbid and perverse (see the Fiocco case) to the relatively benign (including infidelities and inter-family thefts). And in almost every instance, it is the victim or the victim's family that reaches out, not the authorities. Currently, Jennifer is in the middle of a handful of investigations, which she speaks about in a somewhat broad, imprecise manner, careful not to mention specific police departments, townships, or victims' names. But, lest one confuse reticence with dodgy abstraction, one need only see the large wall in her office plastered with maps of the region, photos of victims, and Sharpie marker lines making connections between seemingly unrelated times and places. Where does she get her leads? Well, from the dead of course. Remember: it's all about the energy.

"You sit there and your energy is drawn to different places, and different names come out and street numbers come out," she says, touching on the various missing-persons cases in which she is currently immersed, letting me into a secret I'm not sure I even want to know. "Are they all dead? Yeah."

So, what exactly does Jennifer Rogers think of death?

"I think death is a beautiful thing. I think it's like birth, just a different part of life you experience. The hardest part is the energy you leave to the people who are still living," she says. "I can smell it. I can smell death."

It's remarkable how one can utter the above statement without giving off a disturbing vibe to match the unsettling quality of the

statement itself. This may be where Rogers is most successful. Yes, she talks about walking through forests in her mind, searching for the burial plot of a rape victim. Sure, she has a “negativity rock” in her backyard where she stores the harmful energies that collect throughout her day. (“My cats won’t go near it.”) And yeah, her eyes and attentions will sometimes wander and she will say, “Sorry. Sometimes when I talk about [the dead] they try to contact me.” But her fervor carries little pretension, and that counts for a lot.

It is noticeable, however, that Rogers does not have a definitive grasp (should there be one to have) on the bigger picture. One does not come away, for example, with a more complete understanding of the universe’s purpose, or the spiritual realm’s ethereal architecture, or the reasons for life itself. But Rogers doesn’t parse the existential. She is not a guru or philosopher, and, because of this, a degree of relativism pervades her convictions—an irresoluteness that will be frustrating only if one is confused about the aim of her mission.

“Heaven and hell? No. Heaven is not in the clouds. I’ve never seen a freakin’ spirit in the clouds, I’ll tell you that. They’re around us. Their energy is here, it’s just in another form,” she says. “Do I believe in God? Well, I’d like to think there is. Someone gave me this gift. I don’t know where else this comes from.”

Despite loathing the institution while growing up, Rogers still attends a Roman Catholic Church, mostly, she says, because of familial pressure. It’s not necessarily for her two children, whom she claims share in her ability as medium and psychic (“They’re gifted. You can look in their eyes and know it.”), but more for the cultural experience.

“Wherever you get your Zen or peace, go for it. If someone tells someone else to sniff the bottom of a garbage can and that it will bring him peace, then let him sniff it. I leave people alone. I go [to church] and it’s okay; but I am much more at peace here,” she says.

And proud. Near the end of our conversation, I ask Rogers if she believes all of us have the ability to perceive what she perceives, to know the worlds she knows. Well, she says, not really.

“They say everyone can do it. I don’t think so. Not everyone can be a carpenter. You may be able to cut wood, but you can’t make beautiful things. I think you may be intuitive once in a while, but not in such a strong, powerful way where you can lead someone’s life for them, guide them through different things,” she says. “You have to be a very powerful person to be able to do that.” ■