

Beyond the crystal ball

Her goal is to help people find and listen to their inner voice

By Marya Smith
SPECIAL TO THE TRIBUNE

When Sonia Choquette was 16, she was asked to help solve a murder case near her home in Denver.

Choquette, 36, is a psychic who has been giving public readings since she was 12. By the time she was a teenager, she had attracted a local reputation and the attention of a group of adult psychics who persuaded police to allow the young woman to use her psychic abilities to investigate the murders of an elderly couple.

"The other psychics told me my big chance had come, and I got caught up in the drama of it even though my mother was very unhappy with my decision," Choquette recounted in a recent interview in her home on the North Side of Chicago.

"As we drove through the mountains, I was full of myself and the idea that I was going to be famous. Then I got out of the car, and there stood the family [of the murder victims], so shattered by their loss and waiting for me with such hope. My first feeling was shame for my sense of self-importance. I hadn't thought until then that people were counting on me.

"I walked into the house, and it was horrifying to be in the psychic vibration of where two people had been gunned down. Then one of the women with me shoved a box of crystals at me, screaming and wailing that only they would keep the evil spirits from overtaking my body. It was bizarre, but it scared me to death, and I ran out and down the mountain road.

"At home, still sobbing and clutching the box, I told my mom, who is also psychic, that I needed the crystals to keep the horrible spirits away from me. She burst out laughing and said, 'The power that keeps you safe is the power of the spirit of God within you.'"

Choquette never returned to attempt to solve the murders.

"I was too immature," she said. "I was the victim of my own arrogance and naivete. But the incident was a great turning point in my life. It woke me up and forced me to take a deeper look at what psychic work is all about.

"Up until then it was like a game. I enjoyed the attention it brought me from my family and friends. But I learned it's not about ego; I learned that my abilities come with grave responsibilities. Since then, my mission in life has been to restore to people their courage to embrace and honor their truth, to find their own center of spiritual power."

The experience also prompted Choquette to commit herself to two decades of religious and metaphysical studies with spiritual masters. She also studied at the University of Denver and the University of Paris-Sorbonne.

Today Choquette, like many women in 1994, juggles the demands of young children and a career. Without flowing robes, or even a lap-top crystal ball, she teaches a popular spiritual workshop series with her husband, Patrick Tully, and has a five-month waiting list for private psychic readings. Her book, "The Psychic Pathway," is scheduled for publication by Random House by early next year and is available in manuscript form (\$19.95) at several Chicago-area bookstores.

"There are two types of people on the planet: those who are sleeping and those who are awake," said the soft-spoken Choquette. "The first comes to me and says, 'Tell me what's going to happen,' as if they're sitting on the bank of a river watching their life go by. The second says, 'Tell me how I'm doing creating my own reality,' and those are the ones in the river rowing the boat. We need to have more people wake up.

"I can predict. I can see how energy is being directed, how people set themselves up for learning experiences, but I don't think predictions are the



Tribune photo by Bill Hogan

Sonia Choquette: "There's no big event in finding the right path, as people fear, but a series of small, magical events. It's step by step, holding true to what's right for you."

most significant aspect of what I do.

"My job is to help people find their soul path in the world. My ability is to look at you and know what your whole energy is about, but my service is to have you know what your whole energy is about.

"I don't care about skepticism. I used to care, when I was younger and my ego was more involved in my work, but I am at a point in my life where I don't seek to convince.

"We're spiritual beings. If somebody doesn't get it, they're just not awake, and there's no point in my trying to wake them up. Life will wake them up. I don't keep the company of people like that, but I'm certainly used to it."

One long-time client, author Julia Cameron, of Taos, N.M., recounted: "When my book was an unsold manuscript, Sonia told me very clearly the impact it was going to have. She said, 'You'll be asked to teach everywhere.' It seemed unlikely at the time."

The manuscript became "The Artist's Way" (Tarcher/Putnam, \$12.95), a creativity workbook that has sold more than 200,000 copies and has put Cameron on the teaching circuit across the country.

"Sonia foreshadowed what was going to happen, so when it did I took it in my stride," Cameron said.

Carolyn Schuham, a Chicago psychotherapist who knows Choquette indirectly, through the experiences of colleagues and some of her own clients, said: "When a therapist friend of mine went for a reading, Sonia got extremely troubled that something was wrong in her stomach even though my friend had no physical complaints. Sonia told her, 'You've got to go to a doctor.' My friend went and learned she had an undiagnosed stomach infection from some prior minor surgery. She could have died from it, but she began treatment and was all right."

"People usually come to me with surface issues," said Choquette, whose girl-next-door looks and light-hearted demeanor burst the cultural stereotype of a psychic. "Maybe they're in a job crisis or have been betrayed. I can and do answer all issues, but the most important issue a person deals with in their life is, 'Where's my soul path?' or 'How can I be in this world and feel I'm using my time correctly and feel gratified by it?'"

"She's been right on target with my clients," Schuham said. "Sonia told one woman she needed to go inside herself and develop her own philosophy of life instead of depending on others. She told another client, an outwardly perfect overachiever, that she was deeply exhausted and needed to take time for her own healing. These were core issues for those individuals."

"I call myself a psychic because the word means 'of the soul,' but as in any unregulated domain there lies a lot of room for confusion," Choquette explained. "Storefront psychics say 'Pay me lots of money and I'll pray for you and save you.' Saying I will do your soul-work for you is a wholly incorrect stance.

"I completely discourage attachment and will not read for anyone more than once in a year because I don't want anybody ever to believe that the point of power is outside themselves. I offer spiritual classes to help direct people to trust their own instincts.

"I see changes in my clients, and it feels very satisfying to know I might have been a slight influence in helping someone remember their pathway.

"My work can be very tiring. It takes incredible concentration and focus, and I play a lot for balance. I'm fun-loving. I believe that where there's laughter, there's God."

Choquette said that after she meets with a client, "I totally let it go. It's for my own sanity. I'm a working mom, but my 5- and 6-year-old daughters are my No. 1 priority.

"One of society's problems is that women are exhausted by work and don't know how to stop. I've been in that boat, and I've had to learn to balance work and play, family and self.

"Honoring what you need is part of honoring your inner voice or intuition. It's not spiritually superior to repress it. There's no 'good job for suffering,' but 'Why did you so dishonor yourself?' It's

a woman problem."

The lace-covered table in Choquette's intimate office holds rune stones, medicine and tarot cards, I Ching coins and other "psychic tools," which she compares to the instruments any artist might choose, such as pastels or crayons.

"If someone comes to me a nervous wreck, I might use the cards or stones to relax them," she said. "Sometimes I don't use anything. But psychic tools are fun. The pathway to the spirit is the pathway of play. The ego is on a different road."

According to Choquette, each person is the author of his or her own destiny.

"I can look at a person and say, 'This is your problem, here's why and here's how to get out of it,'" she said. "But that's all I can do. The rest comes from the person's own volition."

Barbara Mahaffey, a psychotherapist in Phoenix who knows of Choquette's work through mutual clients, said:

"Many times a patient wants to know how to change, not just talk about it. Sonia helps them see the lessons they need to learn and to access a higher part of their being so they can change more easily. She gives a lot of people a sense of hope, that we have the power to change anything we want and that we're not alone."

"My job is to help people get on their path, and their job is to decide to commit to it, to be accountable," Choquette said. "There's no big event in finding the right path, as people fear, but a series of small, magical events. It's step by step, holding true to what's right for you. You do little things, get your life in order, and notice how you feel. A path doesn't have to be grandiose. That only gratifies the ego, not the soul. The soul path gives the spirit relief."

Choquette views life as a series of challenges to be solved, not problems to bear.

"Nothing stops me. My fearless spirit is partly a gift and partly from my training. I had to face down gross hostility and ignorance recently on a national talk show, and I liked that I could do that. I like to test myself.

"I understand what it feels like to be discriminated against. I've been mocked, shunned, called names, cursed. I don't care because I'm sure-footed on my path.

"I teach my clients that when they have difficulties, to think, 'Oh, well,' not 'Oh, no,'" she said. "I teach them to look for the essence of an experience. Crises are ways to get you back on your path, never part of your path. When you're on your path, the drama goes. Drama is a substitute for true

creativity."

"Sonia's spiritual perspective makes a difference to people," Schuham said. "For example, if someone is caught up in the sadness of a broken relationship and feeling like a failure, she says, 'It's only one pebble on your path. You stumbled. It's time to put that pebble aside and move on.' A therapist always works in a way to help the client see it for themselves, but Sonia can say it right out."

Choquette believes in miracles.

"Events are not random," she said.

"There are sources of help for anyone receptive. If you honor your psychic impulse, you get lots of feedback, and your life will change immediately. Help, divine support, is available if you're on your path.

"What makes me feel different from most people is that I feel completely and absolutely safe. It doesn't mean I have any less challenges or any less work, but I have a complete sense of being guided, protected and given what I will need to meet any circumstance along my path. I'm totally receptive to that, and my experience bears it out.

"There are no secrets. It's not scary. No evil spirits are going to possess your brain. You don't have to be part of a cult. That's all silliness. There is simply a need to remember we are spiritual beings, not just five-sensory beings. It's time for normal, everyday people to integrate their sixth sense into their lives intelligently.

"I'm normal. I have two kids and all the problems of a two-flat and living in the city. There's nothing distinguishing about me except that I'm a happy person. I've always been very clear about my path, which relieved me of the angst most people have. I've had some very difficult periods in my life, but I've never had self-doubt. I've always known what I had to do.

"We are trained to deny our senses, to dishonor what we know, but your intuition is your inner teacher. It's the highest voice of your awareness, the still voice within you that guides you at all times."

For more information about Choquette's book or readings, call 312-989-1151.