



Just Close Your Eyes

Feature story by Ashleigh Patterson

Just close your eyes. Imagine you are walking along a line leading to a past life. As you walk down that long line, I want you to imagine the very first time the fear of spiders came into your mind. Tell me where you are. What are you doing? What do you see? Past life regression and hypnotherapy are the work of Dr. Georgina Cannon, director of the Ontario Hypnosis Centre in Toronto. As she sits in her office relaying the story of a former student, you can't help but feel a sense of calm. The walls are a muted green and strewn with framed landscapes. The lighting is low and the furniture designed for maximum comfort. "Now this guy is a sales guy, so he's very cynical," she says with a slight hint of her British roots. She guides him to a past life when he was a soldier at war, "He said he was on a battlefield, and there was a gaping wound on his face. As he looked down, there was a huge spider crawling next to the wound," she says. "We did the whole process of healing and coming forward back into this life. And I asked him if there was anywhere else he needed to go, cause sometimes it can happen in a few lives or it can happen again in this life." The student's arachnophobia dissipated and so did his skepticism.

His reaction, and many other's, is one of amazement. Harnessing the power of the mind to achieve goals, break habits or gain wisdom is the focus of hypnotherapy. While hypnosis and past life regression continue to operate under a shroud of mysticism, Cannon strives to bring hypnotherapy to the forefront of alternative healing. Through various projects, she has become the leading expert and advocate for hypnotherapy in Canada.

As a journalist in England, Cannon's interest in spirituality grew. "Ever since I can remember, ever since I was a kid I guess, I was always involved in the metaphysical world," she says. After immigrating to Canada, she carved out a lucrative position in the field of public relations. But her posh lifestyle couldn't fill the need to explore her spiritual side, "I was flying high. I had a big bank account and nice cars, but I didn't enjoy it anymore. I wanted something new, and I really felt like I needed to do something that would please the heart."

After being certified by the National Guild of Hypnotists, she started practicing one day a week. Eight years later, the Ontario Hypnosis Centre is open seven days a week for counseling and habit change. The clinic houses a variety of therapists who treat everything from grief and low self-esteem to nail biting and sleeplessness. "We work very differently in this clinic than in others we work mind, body and soul. So for instance, we work with you to quit smoking. We would check that not only your mind agrees with it, but it's okay with your body and it's ok with your soul," says Cannon. If you want to quite smoking, hypnotherapy will curb your physical and mental cravings and give you a boost in self-esteem for accomplishing your goal. The OHC also offers workshops and certification to anyone interested in hypnotherapy.

Teacher, mentor, therapist, author, spokesperson, mother, and entrepreneur are all suitable titles for Cannon, but she is most recognized by colleagues, and the media, as the country's leading expert on hypnosis. "She's the number one in her field. There's nobody I know out there who gives interviews, who's on TV, who makes sure that public awareness is being increased," says Peter Fink, a former student and colleague at the OHC. Cannon's schedule is hectic but her motivation to expand public knowledge of hypnosis keeps her going. Hypnosis is a simple method that anyone can apply and very few know about. "She does a lot of media stuff. I can't keep up with her, I don't know half the stuff she does. It benefits all of us because more people get the idea," says Shawn Gallagher, a colleague specializing in hypnosis for childbirth, fertility and prenatal issues. "With her background, it's familiar territory for her."

Cannon's work is far reaching and not exclusive to one medium. The OHC website offers press kits, media relations manuals for clinics, story ideas and a glance at some of Cannon's awards including the Hypnotism Media Award from the National Guild of Hypnotists. Her book, *Past Life Regression and You* has peaked interest in Canada and internationally. She currently hosts a monthly past life regression chat on the Shirley MacLaine website and will embark on a teaching tour and book signing south of the border this month.

Most notable is her work for the CBC -TV series *Past Life Investigation*. Shot at the OHC, the series takes a skeptical look at the remembered lives of some 30 volunteers. Three participants embark on a journey to their past. They reveal lives as Chicago bootleggers, Buddhist nuns in Nepal, druids, African mothers, and American cowgirls. The volunteers research their lives and travel to remembered locations to verify their own existence. The series is nominated for three Gemini Awards and the Viewer's Choice Award.

Sitting in the lobby of the OHC, you can't help but be reminded of Cannon's drive to bring hypnotherapy to a wider audience. A taped interview plays in the lobby, her self-hypnosis CDs are on display next to pamphlets and binders detailing the benefits of hypnosis. The biggest testament to the power of focusing the subconscious mind isn't in the paraphernalia she produces but is Cannon herself.