



There's More to Life Than This: Healing Messages, Remarkable Stories, and Insight About the Other Side from the Long Island Medium

By Theresa Caputo

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For fans of TLC's *Long Island Medium* and anyone interested in the big questions of life, death, and finding out what's important in between, *New York Times* bestselling author and medium Theresa Caputo shares how she discovered her gift and her many encounters with Spirit.

Beloved medium Theresa Caputo, star of the hit television show *Long Island Medium*, opens the door to her world and invites you to experience her exceptional gift of communicating with those who've crossed over to the Other Side. The always funny, frank, and down-to-earth medium—whether she's talking to her family, the local butcher, or the souls of those who've passed on—began communicating with Spirit at the age of four, but didn't fully accept her gift until she was thirty-three years old. She had a good life as a busy wife and working mom, but also suffered from chronic anxiety that, as it turned out, came from ignoring her abilities. Once Theresa began channeling, she realized that she felt much better after delivering a message from Spirit and releasing that energy. Since then she's used her extraordinary gift to help people heal from the loss of their loved ones.

Theresa feels that it's her purpose to make us all aware that there is more to life than what we see here in the physical world. She wants you to know that your deceased loved ones are safe and at peace, and that they're now with you in a different way—watching over you, loving you, and assisting you from the Other Side. She also wants you to realize that the unexplainable things you sense and feel from these souls are real, and that it's healthy and essential to acknowledge them.

There's More to Life Than This lends insight on how Theresa's mediumship works, what happens to your soul when you die, what Spirit says Heaven is like, what the deceased want you to know, the importance of living a positive life, and

the many roles that your family, friends, angels, guides, souls of faith, and God play here and in the afterlife. It also explores how to safely connect with Spirit, so that you can recognize when your loved ones are reaching out.

Through Theresa's personal story, compelling anecdotes, and fascinating client readings, she teaches us about how she communicates with Spirit and helps us to understand and appreciate the important lessons and touching messages that we're meant to embrace every day.

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Theresa Caputo was born and raised on Long Island and lives there with her husband and two children. She is the star of *Long Island Medium*, which airs on TLC. After suffering anxiety for most of her life, Theresa met with a spiritual adviser who helped her realize her ability to communicate with Spirit. Theresa has been a practicing medium for more than ten years and is a certified medium with the Forever Family Foundation. Her first two books, *There's More to Life Than This* and *You Can't Make This Stuff Up*, became instant *New York Times* bestsellers. She has appeared on *Good Morning America*, *The View*, *The Dr. Oz Show*, and *Ellen* and has helped countless people heal and find the closure to embrace life without their loved ones. For more, please visit TheresaCaputo.com.

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There's More to Life Than This

1

Me and Spirit: A Match Made in Heaven

I wasn't born in the back of some gypsy wagon, and I didn't grow up reading fortunes on the Bayou. Listen, the only crystals on me are the Swarovski ones covering my Louboutins. I may not be your idea of a "typical" medium, but dead people don't care. They've been bugging me to deliver their messages since I was a child, and that's what I feel compelled and blessed to do.

I grew up on Long Island in a town called Hicksville, with my mom, dad, and younger brother, Michael. Mom was a bookkeeper and my dad was the public works supervisor for Nassau County. We were extremely close and still are. I was actually raised for most of my life in the house next door to the one I live in now. We have a gate in the back that connects our two yards, and Dad likes to use it so he can futz around in both our tomato gardens. When people come for readings, they sit at my dining room table, which looks out onto the back. I always say, "If you see someone out there, it's not a dead person walking around. It's just my dad!"

Growing up, I had the most loving, happy, and seemingly normal childhood. I was on a traveling soccer team and local bowling league. I loved playing with my dolls' hair—I always thought I'd be a hairdresser, go figure. I had nice friends, got good grades, and spent a lot of free time with my family. I was always with my cousins, grandparents, aunts, and uncles. On Thursdays, we'd have spaghetti and meatballs at Nanny and Pop's house; on Saturdays, I'd paint ceramics with Auntie G; and on Sundays, our whole extended family would go to Gram and Gramp's house after church to spend the afternoon eating, laughing, and telling stories.

It was like the Long Island Italian version of *Leave It to Beaver*, but with a twist that literally kept us all up at night. I used to have the most frightening dreams, which made no sense given that my days were so carefree. These were actually my first memories of seeing, feeling, and hearing Spirit, though I didn't know that's what was happening. My first vivid experience happened when I was just four years old. At the time, we lived in my dad's childhood home, which is right near the Hicksville Gregory Museum, a former 1915 courthouse that also had jail cells for prisoners in it. Some people think old buildings like prisons, with their

history of pain and suffering, can hold on to Spirit. What a place for me of all people to grow up around! Anyway, I'd have a recurring dream where, from a window on the second floor of our house, I'd watch a man pace on the sidewalk out front. He'd chant my name, Theresa Brigandi, Theresa Brigandi, Theresa Brigandi . . . over, and over, and over again. Can you imagine how scary that was to a freaking four-year-old? I never saw the man's face, but he was always hunched over and carrying a stick with a bandanna sack on the end. He wore ragged clothes and looked like a hobo.

Spirit later told me that this dream was actually a visitation, and I now believe this "man" to be one of my spirit guides for that time in my life. This doesn't mean the spirit guide is literally a bum. It's more like those Bible stories where people invite in the poor, and then later find out the person's an angel. I now believe a hobo is the unassuming image that my guide took so that I'd understand the Sunday school reference and feel okay when he called my name. I was raised Roman Catholic and still practice this today, so I think my guide presented himself through my frame of reference, a little like how Spirit shows me signs and symbols during a reading now. They do it in a way that makes sense to me, so that it's easy for me to interpret the message.

When I was four, a hobo equaled a gentle, godly man—at least when I was awake. At night, seeing, hearing, and sensing one made me cry out like I was being violently attacked. Again, I don't think I was experiencing negative Spirit, and I wasn't dreaming that Spirit pushed me around or anything; the dreams themselves weren't "bad." I was terrified because I'd feel Spirit's energy, while seeing and hearing them talk to me, in this alarmingly real and personal way.

My inconsolable screams rattled my family more than what caused them, and my social life became limited. I couldn't go to slumber parties or sleep at my grandmother's house without wondering what I'd feel next. I didn't feel safe anywhere but at home, and even that wasn't a given. Besides the hobo, I also saw my great-grandmother on my mom's side of the family. She'd died four years before I was born, and I didn't realize who it was until much later when I saw a picture of her. But I'll never forget her standing at the foot of my bed—she was short with dark hair and wearing a housedress. I'd scream like a crazy person when I saw her too. Poor lady was no three-headed monster, though I sure reacted like she was!

In the morning, I'd forget most of these night terrors or how long they went on. I'm told they'd pass when my mom or dad would turn on the light and rush into the room. So did this make Spirit leave? I don't know. But after a while, Mom made up a prayer to help me keep Spirit at arm's length. It went, "Dear God, please keep me safe through the night. Bless . . ."—and then I'd name all the people in our lives, and those in Heaven. And wouldn't you know, every time I said that prayer before bed, I'd sleep soundly, and so would my parents. I continued this when we eventually moved into our new home, the one my parents live in now, though I always kept the hall light on.

Even when I traveled with my family, I never got a break from Spirit. We took a lot of vacations together, including an annual camping trip with my grandparents for the entire summer. Most people at the site were lucky to have a tent with a Bunsen burner; we had this awesome trailer with a shower, kitchen, a screened-in porch so the bugs wouldn't get at our food, everything. My grandmother made scrambled eggs and French toast in the mornings, and in the afternoons, we'd have bicycle races and go tire swinging into the lake. At night, we'd play pinball at the rec hall, roast marshmallows, and sing campfire songs. I was a regular Girl Scout! But no matter how much fun we had during the day, or how relaxed I felt, my night terrors would strike like they did at home. Only this time the whole area heard me! My grandparents even warned our fellow campers in advance—if you hear someone screaming bloody murder, it doesn't mean there's a bear or maniac on the loose! It's just Theresa having a night terror. One time my parents wanted me to sleep with them in a tent, and I was deathly afraid of it. I felt safer in the camper, especially since I was seeing shadows

against the canvas. I was so adamant about staying out that I kicked and screamed, and gave my father a fat lip. He was so mad. I was this close to knocking over the lantern and setting the whole tent on fire.

Though I handled Spirit's appearances much better during the day, they were still a surprise. For instance, I clearly remember seeing three-dimensional people walk in front of the TV. I'd be sitting on our green tweed sofa, watching Romper Room, when a person would pass by and then fade out. One time this happened when I had a babysitter over, and I asked her if she'd just seen what I did. She said no and gave me a funny look, so I played it off. I kind of wondered if I was seeing things or had an overly active imagination, but I didn't dwell on it. It's like when you see a shadow out of the corner of your eye, or stare at a light too long and then watch a yellow shape float across the room—you assume that you're just seeing things and don't think much of it. I also remember getting a kitchen set for Easter one year as a kid, arranging my pots a certain way when I was done playing house, and when I came back to them in the morning, they were in a completely different spot. That must've been Spirit too. Listen, I know my brother, Michael, didn't touch them!

Who's to Say What's Normal?

As I got older, I began to feel anxious and strange in my body. I couldn't put my finger on what could be causing it. I'd say to Mom, I don't feel right. I don't feel like I belong. I feel different. I felt as if there was something going on that needed to be explained. One of the few places I actually felt safe and secure was in church. I even played guitar in a church folk group. God's house was the only other home, other than my own, where I felt peaceful and comfortable in my skin. I often say that if I weren't a medium, I could've been a schizophrenic or a nun. Seriously, sometimes those felt like my two most realistic options. Imagine? My parents spoiled me with so much love, but that didn't take away from the fact that I sensed something about me was off.

Sometimes I'd ask God, Why is this happening? Why do I feel so afraid all the time? But I'd never get mad or angry at Him, or lose my beliefs. That wasn't how I was raised. I don't like to use the word "religious," but I did come from a strong faith family. I was taught to say prayers at night and before every meal. My parents also had an open mind about all spirituality. It's funny, because not all Catholics do. But to us, faith, spirituality . . . it all comes from God.

When I wasn't at church, my anxiety could get so bad that I didn't want to leave the house. I didn't know when I'd sense or feel something, at any given moment of the day. I realized that every place I went came with a different sensation, and I sometimes felt like I was being watched. When I'd tell this to Mom, she'd sit me down and say, "Your safe place is you." I could go anywhere, because I was my grounding force. For a long time, that mind-set worked.

Even still, I was clearly seeing and sensing things that other people weren't. When I was out with my friends at the mall or the bowling alley, I'd ask if they saw a man walk by or heard someone call their name, because I secretly had, and they'd go, "Uh, no. What are you talking about?" Or sometimes I'd receive a message, which I'd assume was just my own random thought and not realize that it had any meaning, or that I'd even thought of anything, until it was validated later. For example, if I was on my way to the fair, I might hear a voice tell me, "Don't eat the cotton candy." I'd ignore it, and then a friend would tell me the cotton candy made her sick. But even then, I just assumed that I got better hunches about people and situations than maybe some friends or strangers did.

Again, I believed that I was my safe place. So seeing, hearing, and sensing something around me all the time became my normal. Doctors have always said that our bodies are built to adapt; if a feeling or experience goes on for long enough, the brain learns to disregard it, work around it, or just treat it as normal. I know

now that seeing and sensing Spirit isn't most people's typical experience, but it was routine for me, and I didn't have too many people disputing it. As a child, my family and friends just laughed when I'd occasionally say strange things, but never pursued the subject much further. (Mom recently joked that my abilities give a whole new meaning to when I used to say there was a monster, imaginary friend, or ghost in my room!) And for as many times as friends didn't agree with what I'd heard or seen, I did have family who had similar experiences because they're also sensitive. In fact, my cousin Johnny Boy used to jokingly call me and my cousin Lisa "freaks," and nicknamed us "Para" and "Noid," when we told him we'd see or feel things. We also used to go shopping separately and come home with the same outfits! But at the time, all Lisa and I knew was that we had unusual, shared experiences that made encounters with what we now know is Spirit just part of our lives. As for my smart-aleck cousin Johnny, he was living in my grandmother's house ten years later and saw her standing in the hall when he was coming out of the shower. Who's laughing now?

When my peers became mouthy teenagers, things began to change. Between the ages of about twelve and fourteen, I began to feel less comfortable with what was happening around me, mostly because of how people reacted to my observations. My family was still blasé about stuff I said, but when I'd casually ask if a friend saw or felt something, they'd be like, "No, that's weird, there's nobody there. Nobody hears or sees things the way you do!" What once seemed normal now wasn't, so I decided to block my experiences out altogether. I didn't say a special prayer to make Spirit stop or anything; I just didn't acknowledge Spirit's attempts to communicate with me. Keep in mind, this was before every TV channel had a ghost-hunting show and John Edward was a household name. People didn't talk about this stuff. Nobody, including me, could've guessed what was really going on. It was never part of a comfortable, mainstream conversation.

By the time I was sixteen years old, I was lucky that I hadn't lost a lot of loved ones, but this also means that I didn't have recognizable Spirit visiting me. When Nanny, my father's mom, died, I was devastated. We were very close, and everyone missed her a lot. After she passed, my dad's older sister, whom we call Auntie, had a psychic come to Nanny's house. I didn't know why at the time, but I now think it was to get in touch with her. I didn't want to go, and I felt a little afraid—mostly because I didn't know what a psychic really was or did. But I knew I'd feel safe at Nanny's house, so I went anyway. And for the first time in a long time I didn't block Spirit.

I felt Nanny's energy and soul near the window, and my family kept asking me why I was by the drapes when everyone else was at the kitchen table. They also asked me whom I was talking to, though I don't remember what I was saying. (It's similar to how I can't recall most of what Spirit says after I channel for others.) After a minute of this, my family had to interrupt me in their usual, teasing way. They kept it lighthearted and didn't freak out.

"Theresa, who are you talking to?"

"I'm talking to Nanny."

"Sure you are. Nanny's dead."

"I know she's dead, but I'm talking to her."

Auntie and my cousins might have been confused but didn't make it a big deal. I was known to blurt out crazy things, but was this any stranger than having a psychic over for coffee? They were clearly open to spiritual conversations that I hadn't considered yet.

When I think about this memory now, I can physically smell Nanny's house and see everything in it—the plastic-covered furniture, marble end tables, her sparkly dining room chandelier, a painting of The Last Supper, and those gold drapes. It was very gaudy Italian. And as I tell this story, I get a vision, like a quick filmstrip, of Nanny standing at the stove, smoking her cigarette all the way down to a really long ash that's dangling over a bubbling spaghetti pot. She'd let that cigarette burn until only the filter was left, and yet the ashes never fell into her gravy. She loved her jewelry, and in my memory, she's wearing all these diamonds. Like me, you know?

After my little encounter with Nanny, I went back to completely ignoring Spirit. My uncle Julie died during my senior year of high school, and around that time, my anxieties began to get much worse than they'd been. I developed random phobias, many of which had to do with feeling claustrophobic. The night terrors had long past, but I still had restless sleep habits. Instead of waking up screaming, I'd jump out of bed, feeling like I couldn't breathe to save my life.

Then Along Came Larry

My eighteenth year wasn't a total disaster, though. That's when I met my husband, Larry! When Auntie had the psychic over that first time I saw Nanny's soul, he told me I was going to meet someone much older than me with a beard and mustache. Back then, I thought the psychic was being a wacko, since I was dating someone at the time and didn't even like facial hair. But two years later, I met Larry, and you better believe he had a beard, mustache, and was eleven years older.

It was love at first sight. Larry had this awesome hair that was tight on the sides, fluffy on top, and long in the back. He was also a sharp dresser and had a nice body. He looked like a clean-cut biker! He says I was a cute little sparkplug who made jokes and lit up a room. Larry worked for his family's business, an oil company, and I worked part-time in the customer service department. I never went to college because I was too afraid to leave my family and comfort zone. I dreamed of becoming a hairdresser or legal secretary, but that meant commuting into Manhattan for the good jobs, which was way too overwhelming for me—trains, elevators, skyscrapers, traffic jams . . . that was not my world.

Larry tells me he used to look forward to coming to work to see what I was wearing, because I was in my Madonna stage. I used to wear skintight pants, big belts, a fishnet top that draped off my shoulder, and fingerless gloves. Like in that movie *Desperately Seeking Susan*! But just because I was distracted by love doesn't mean my anxiety went away. I tried hard to suppress it, but that only made things worse. I didn't want Larry to think I was crazy, and I was still occasionally wondering if I was. Sometimes I saw figures or heard things, but at this point I was in such denial that I was fully convinced my mind was playing tricks on me.

I decided to see a therapist, who, session after session, basically said there was nothing wrong with me. I'd tell him, "Ben, there is something wrong with me. I don't feel right." He'd ask me all about my childhood, and I'd explain that it was idyllic. My friends and family now? Great. Dating? Fun and exciting. Work? Fine! The best cause we could find for my chronic unease was that I came from an anxious family, so maybe this kind of thing was genetic. But the guy couldn't give me one good medical or psychological reason why I felt as severely bad as I did.

I couldn't keep my anxiety attacks and laundry list of phobias from Larry for too long, especially when we were in the car or other enclosed spaces. I seemed to feel my worst when my mind was at rest. If we were on the Long Island Expressway during a traffic jam, I'd get a frown-y look on my face knowing that I was about to freak out. Then I'd scream bloody murder, and even if the car was moving, I'd beg and plead with Larry

to pull over so I could get out right away. I even did this on double dates with other couples in the car! My anxiety was not shy. The panic attacks would eventually pass, and it helped that Larry always kept his cool. He didn't know what was causing me so much stress, the same way I didn't, but I'm just glad he didn't get spooked and leave.

Larry and I got married when I was twenty-two. Right away, I'd startle him in the middle of the night. I'd wake up yelling, jump out of bed, and run around the room yelling his name and crying for help. Then the moment would pass, and I'd come back to bed and forget it by morning. I talked in my sleep too. I never let Larry pull the covers over our heads, not even as a joke. Once he threw a blanket over us when we were watching TV, and I began screaming. He never did that again. But hey, Larry knew anxiety came with the package, and he loved me just the way I was.

In Sickness and in Health

My husband says that although I made us take the hospital stairs instead of the elevator when I was in labor with our son, Larry Jr., I was unusually calm and in control during childbirth. I was twenty-three when our first child was born. My anxiety went up and down after, but I generally felt better, now that I had the new responsibility of taking care of a child. I could even travel okay.

Ever since I was a junior in high school, I was always ashing a cigarette with my manicured fingertips. I never drank or did any type of narcotic, but smoking was my vice. I stopped when I found out I was pregnant with our son, but two or three years later, I went back to smoking when those familiar stress levels snuck back. I thought smoking cigarettes would relax me, even though it seemed to make my chest feel heavier, which only increased my anxiety.

I stopped smoking again when I got pregnant with Victoria, had her at twenty-seven, and went back. My anxieties became horrific. The worst they'd ever been. I can remember a horrifying incident at Disneyworld when I hadn't traveled in a while. We got to our hotel room with the kids, and I immediately started freaking out. My mom and aunt had to take the train from New York to meet us and calm me down. As if having a severe panic attack weren't bad enough, I also took it out on my husband. He says I needed a scapegoat. The kids had never seen me that bad and looked terrified to watch their mom unravel in front of their eyes.

In December 1999, I became deathly ill for no reason. Now, I am not a sick person, I don't do sick. Even when the kids were young and brought home nasty germs from school, I rarely caught their colds or flu. But this was the weirdest thing. I was getting ready for a wedding one morning and I was fine; then suddenly out of nowhere, I had a 104-degree temperature. My dad literally carried me to the doctor's office. I was on my back for two weeks, which was hard since my son, Larry, was nine and Victoria was five. My husband was a big help as usual, but it's not like I had the luxury of staying in bed. I don't even remember the first delirious week of all this. And during the second, I just lay there. I couldn't walk, eat, or go to the bathroom. I also couldn't smoke.

In hindsight, I believe God was detoxing my body during this time. Drugs, smoking, narcotics—all that stuff funks up your aura and mucks up your energy. And smoking, specifically, turns your aura gray. I stayed away from cigarettes when I got better. This doesn't mean I was a joy to live with. I remember Mom saying to me, "You're such a bitch without nicotine. Go back to smoking!" You know what I said back? "God's making me stop!"

That rationale came flying out of my mouth. I checked myself. Where did that come from? Why would I even say that? That's when I knew quitting was an act of God, because those words didn't come from my

brain. And with that, I haven't touched a cigarette in thirteen years.

When I channel Spirit, I do it from a place of the highest good, and that requires my body, mind, and soul to be healthy and pure. Looking back, I wouldn't have been able to develop my abilities if I continued to fuel my body with anything negative, like cigarettes. But at the time, all I knew was that God wanted me to stop smoking. Certain foods began to make me ill too. Doritos and Wendy's made me feel dizzy and light-headed, like I couldn't focus. I hallucinated when I ate MSG. When I was pregnant with our son, Larry and I were walking out of a Chinese restaurant and had one of those surreal conversations that reminded me of when I was a kid.

"Hey, did you see that dog in the car?"

"What dog?"

"Don't you hear him barking?"

"Hon, there's no dog."

"It's a husky. He just winked at me!"

I later learned that Siberian huskies are considered to be very spiritual dogs, since they're so closely related to the wolf, which Native American tradition says is the highest spiritual teacher in the animal kingdom. I suspect the MSG helped trigger my vision because it's a chemical, and when people alter their chemistry, it can do some crazy stuff to their soul.

A Serendipitous Encounter

At twenty-eight, I was a hot mess. I'd just stopped smoking and my anxieties were nonstop. I didn't want to leave the house and was in a constant panic that something bad would happen if I did. My therapist called this "anticipatory anxiety," which is when you anticipate future events in a way that causes you to feel anxious, and that interferes with your ability to function in everyday life. The thought of going to work, the butcher, or a birthday party made my mind reel.

One night, Mom had a candle party—like a Tupperware thing, but with scented candles—and I decided to go at the last minute. She lived next door, so this I could do. Mom's friend Pat Longo is a spiritual healer and works with people who have physical or emotional ailments, including chronic anxiety; she also teaches classes about living a balanced, positive, and fulfilled life that includes meditation and healing. Like me, Pat also decided at the eleventh hour to go to Mom's event. All these last-minute decisions don't say much for her parties, do they!

I told Pat about my anxieties and how sick I'd been, and though I'd known her for years—her son and my brother grew up together—she had no clue about the anxiety I suffered as a child, and certainly nothing about how I sensed Spirit. She put her hands over my head and began to channel healing energy from God. For three weeks after, I felt so calm that I wanted to do it again. But when I called to make an appointment, Pat told me I didn't need another healing, that there was nothing for her to mend within me. She asked if I wanted to take her spiritual awareness class instead to give me some perspective and balance in my life. She suspected Spirit communication was causing my distress, but didn't tell me that right away.

Whatever Pat did to me made me feel better, so I decided to go for a class—why not? I also trusted her with

my well-being because my family had known hers for years. If Pat were some random spiritual healer, I wouldn't have been able to believe in her or her evaluation of me. I put on a good face for friends and family, but I was still fragile on the inside and wouldn't have felt safe with just anyone. I also knew I'd feel secure in Pat's classes because my mom had taken her course a few years before. She was actually one of Pat's first students, though she only went to learn more about feeling positive and healthy from the inside out. My dad and us kids used to rib her, like, "Oooh. You're going to your voodoo class tonight." Pat says Mom was starting to touch the surface of her own abilities by the end, but she put her spiritual energy into working with the church instead of developing them any further on her own.

After that first night in Pat's class, I got sidetracked and didn't go back for, um, a year. When I finally did, the classes were held on Wednesdays, and every week there would be a downpour. One of my phobias was driving in the rain, so I cut class for that whole first month. But in my heart, I wanted to make this work, so I practiced driving in thunderstorms, up and down the block. I was ready to go back to Pat's the next month, though it continued to rain every Wednesday.

I think Spirit made it rain to help me break through my fear, on my way to honing my gift. This shouldn't surprise me; it always rains during milestone events! There was a monsoon during my son's baby shower and my daughter's Communion, and Hurricane Hugo hit on my wedding day. It wiped out St. Thomas Island, and my honeymoon was canceled. Even when I taped The Tonight Show a few years ago, which was intimidating and such a big deal for me, it poured cats and dogs. Leno's producers assured me that it never rains that much in LA in October, and wouldn't you know, the minute I was done shooting at five p.m., the sun came out.

I'm a What?!?

"You're a medium," Pat told me during class one night. A lot of people were discovering their own gifts, and this was mine. "You have the ability to speak to dead people. If you can learn to control the energy around you, you can learn to control and understand your anxiety better."

This was the first time I'd ever considered that my anxiety and all that stuff I saw when I was a kid, and forced myself to ignore, could be related. Who knew there were real, physical consequences to blocking what I'd been seeing, hearing, and sensing?

Pat explained that one reason ignoring Spirit gave me anxiety is that I channel Spirit through my chakras. Ideally, it enters through the crown, or head, chakra, flows through my entire body, and then releases through my words. But when Spirit was trying to deliver a message, it would channel through my crown, and I'd block it in my chest, which would cause my heart to race or give me those crazy palpitations. My chest would also feel heavy and compressed, as if an elephant were napping on it. I don't even know much about all the chakras, just that I need to keep the crown chakra, third eye, throat chakra, heart chakra, solar plexus chakra, spleen chakra, and root chakra aligned and balanced so I don't freak out.

Pat also said the type of channeling I do was causing me to have panic attacks. There are lots of ways that mediums experience Spirit. A "clairvoyant," for instance, mostly sees visions, and a "clairaudient" primarily uses her hearing sense. Pat explained that I'm "empathic," which means I feel Spirit most, and use my other senses to fill in the blanks. For instance, a message might begin with me feeling very restricted in the throat area, which means there is a soul that would like to tell me that they passed via a death connected to the throat, that they were unable to communicate prior to their passing, or they did not get to say good-bye (one symbol for me can mean a lot of things—more on that later). But if I felt my throat close without knowing that this was Spirit's way of delivering a message, all I'd know is that I felt like I was choking, which

triggered a panic attack.

So I'd be having a normal conversation with someone at the grocery store, say, and all of a sudden I'd feel like I couldn't breathe or that I was being strangled. I now know that's Spirit trying to communicate with me, but fifteen years ago, I was just like, I have to get out of here! As I said earlier, this could happen even when I was asleep. As soon as I removed myself from the situation or woke up, I was good, but it was a quick fix. I also thought some places felt better than others because I had random anxieties, but it was really the energy changing in each spot, often based on Spirit's presence. As for the phobias, I think they're usually about associations, quiet moments, or past lives. I may have either felt Spirit in that exact place, or a similar one, which is why anticipating it made me nervous. My Catskills camping memory contributed to my tent phobia, and riding in cars or being silent in an elevator forces me to sit still without distractions, which is when I'm most open to Spirit. During a past-life regression, I also learned I was a prisoner on a ship during a torrential storm, which explains why I'm afraid of rain. I could go on, but I'll spare you all my phobias and explanations! Suffice it to say, all these situations made me feel out of control, and so all of these things caused me to panic.

As for my anxious family members? I suspect they're also sensitive, since I believe my gift is genetic. They're also very faith-based people, which increases your awareness of Spirit.

I continued to attend Pat's courses every Wednesday, as Larry watched the kids. I felt calm at her house, since I knew that if anything scary happened, Pat could make me feel better. In class, I began to give people messages from loved ones, and right away, channeling made me feel normal. But I was afraid to try it anywhere else. I still needed Pat as my safety net.

Physically and emotionally, I began to slowly heal. My anxieties became less dramatic. Larry saw a difference in me, and I told him channeling Spirit seemed to be a big part of the answer. He was like, "That's cool, hon. If you think talking to dead people makes you feel better, keep doing it." Larry was also raised Catholic, so I'm not sure he believed in Spirit, and was more likely appeasing me, but he was supportive, which is what ultimately mattered.

Six days a week when I wasn't in class, I had to cope on my own. Since I hadn't fully accepted my gift yet, I was still prone to the occasional meltdown. I remember when my first cousin Lance got married, we planned to go but at the last minute, I could not get in the car. The kids were dressed, and Larry had mapped out the fastest route. But I didn't want to drive that far, and my whole family was so upset. I paced for hours. Finally Larry said that if at any point I didn't want to continue, we could turn around and come home. I reluctantly agreed to go.

Cell phones were still new at the time, and I insisted on taking one in the car in case I needed to call Pat to talk me off a ledge. I remember hearing Faith Hill's new song "Breathe" and thinking, That's exactly what I need to do, just breathe. I made Larry play it over and over. I now think it was Spirit telling me to relax already.

When we pulled into the hotel parking lot, my whole family was waiting out front. I remember seeing Gram, who was alive at the time, standing at the window waving at me. I can still see the smile on her face, as if it were yesterday. She died a few years ago, but whenever I get over anxiety-related hurdles—like taking a tour bus across the country or sitting in a tent in my backyard—Spirit makes me remember Gram standing at that window, beaming with pride.

Give Spirit an Inch . . .

To help control the energy around me, Pat taught me that I had to set some boundaries with Spirit that I still use today. I can't dictate which guides, angels, or dead people talk to me, or what they want to say, but I can control whether I acknowledge them and how I do that. So in the beginning, I said to Spirit, I'm going to set aside a time every day at four o'clock for you to communicate with me. I'm going to light my white candle to protect everything in God's light. I ask only for the highest good of all concerned. And I only want to channel souls that walk in God's white light. And you know what? For the most part, Spirit respected that, so I became more comfortable channeling too. We were developing a real give-and-take relationship.

Whatever I sensed while I was meditating, I wrote down on a pad of paper. Pat taught me how to do automatic writings, which is when you basically take dictation from Spirit. Channeling through the pen is an easy way to speak with Spirit, especially when you aren't fully comfortable with "hearing" messages in your mind and can't always tell the difference between your thoughts and Spirit's. You'll see me do automatic writing during readings on TV with my little notepad, since it helps me focus; when I channel, I'll scribble down words that Spirit wants me to use to make a point.

Another major thing I asked Spirit to do was stop presenting itself to me as three-dimensional people—an image like you or me. When I first started reading others, I'd be brushing my teeth, look up, and suddenly see a man standing behind me in the mirror. That was so startling! So I told my guides that if I was supposed to embrace this gift, they'd have to find other ways to show me things. From then on, I saw Spirit as figures in shadow instead. I don't mean negative "shadow people," or the scary dark masses that whisked away the bad guys' souls in Ghost. The images I see are like silhouettes, or like a chalk outline at a crime scene but filled in with a cloudy shadow you can see through. Its energy feels very positive. In fact, because I only want to serve the highest good, I don't see negative Spirit and try to avoid them at all costs. I don't like Halloween parties or historic haunted houses, and you couldn't pay me enough to touch a Ouija board. In the same vein, I'm always asking that things be protected in God's white light, so I never even get negative information during readings. Only good things, that's all I want.

I began to develop a "vocabulary" with Spirit to understand the signs and sensations they were sending me. I took on more of Pat's clients and began sharing the unbelievable, moving, and often hilarious stories with Larry. He asked lots of questions, and I could tell he was becoming more invested in what I was doing. Frankly, we were both amazed I could speak to these souls in the first place! In a lot of ways, I was on a clear spiritual path, but we were growing in it together.

Holy Sheet! I Really Am a Medium!

Though I only liked giving readings in class, one day I let it happen in real life. I was in Bed Bath & Beyond, and I remember feeling like I couldn't take a breath. I'd established with Spirit that this is a sign that someone's passed from the chest—heart, lungs, breasts, a filling up of fluid, or a drowning even. At one time, I would've gone into a tailspin—abandoned my cart in the middle of the aisle, hightailed it out of the store, sped through stop signs crying, and beat myself up for the whole drama once I got home. But that day in BB&B, I told myself I'd be okay. I thought about what my mom used to say: Your safe place is you. And then I heard a man's voice.

"Tell my wife I like the ones on the left," he said.

Nobody was there.

Just then, an older woman came up to me with two sets of sheets. She told me she'd just lost her husband after forty years of marriage and was redoing the bedroom. She couldn't decide which sheets he'd have liked

better. I suggested the ones on the left, and it made her so happy.

I didn't tell the woman that her husband told me what to say. I like my baby steps, if you can't tell! But at that moment, I knew Spirit would continue to place people in my path who needed to hear messages from their loved ones, like this woman. I also believe my own Spirit guides were giving me my first real test, and I passed! The best bonus of all? My chest felt normal after delivering the message. I channeled, released the energy, and went on with my day.

After taking Pat's classes for five years, and reading her students, it was time to share my ability with others. I felt confident that what I was doing came from a higher power. There were also signs that made me feel I was being guided by the divine. I was thirty-three years old when I accepted my gift, and Jesus was thirty-three when he died. I live off Jerusalem Avenue. Pat suggested I make business cards and get a separate phone line for my venture. The last four digits of this number were 6444, which I thought was perfect because I was born in the month of June (6), and I believe 444 is a sign of the angels. But the day my phone was set to be turned on, the guy told me he had to change it. I was so bummed, until I realized that the last four digits were the sign of the cross. It's worth mentioning that one reason it took me so long to accept my gift was that I struggled with why I was chosen to have it in the first place. I kept thinking, Who am I? I'm no one special. Why was I chosen to do this? Why is this my journey? And being raised Catholic, you don't contact the dead. So I think Spirit was also sending me "religious" signs to assure me that what I was doing was okay and, in many ways, guided.

From the moment I began seeing clients in my home, my family was laid back about it. If people asked my kids what their parents did for a living, they'd say, "Dad owns a business importing Italian foods, and Mom speaks to dead people." So natural, like I was a teacher or something. Larry also overheard some readings at the house and began coming with me to my small venues. After that, he said it was hard not to believe in what I did. He'd get especially impressed when Spirit had me talk about health or human anatomy, because I didn't go to college. I also don't read books, since reading relaxes my brain and clears my mind in a way that lets Spirit communicate with me, and then I can't focus on my book! So where would I learn this stuff, if it didn't come from Spirit?

Being a medium also helped validate a lot of "unusual" experiences for my husband. Larry saw his grandmother's soul when he was ten years old, but was never sure it was real. He shared a room with his brother, and she was standing at the foot of his bed. Larry thought it was his imagination, and actually forgot about it until I accepted my gift. He's also learned a lot about *déjà vu*. When Larry was young, he'd be in places he hadn't been before, though he had clear memories of them and couldn't explain why. Now, if he feels anything "strange"—like *déjà vu*, gut instinct, chills, good timing, coincidences, or even a hand on his leg or tug on his shirt, he knows it's Spirit. In 2001, Larry was diagnosed with a brain tumor and not only did he survive, he overcame most of the nerve damage that it caused. He credits more than his doctors for his recovery.

My favorite change in Larry, though, is that my tough, tattooed, motorcycle man has become more emotionally sensitive to everything for some reason. The Color Purple makes him cry and don't get him started on how much he loves our family. The guy's a sap.

The Start of Something Good

Though I've finally embraced my gift, I'm far from perfect. I have fewer panic attacks, and I'm much more independent. But I still don't like elevators or enclosed spaces, and I'm deathly afraid of the dark (no pun intended). I sleep with a nightlight and TV on, and I keep all the doors open except the closet. I also don't go

into a deep sleep at night. I toss, I turn, I hear things, I feel things. And if I dream, I don't remember it. Larry says when my alarm goes off at six a.m., I get right up—no stretching, no snoozing. It's as if I'm happy that I don't have to be in that bed a minute longer. I try to be the best Theresa Caputo I can be, but there are plenty of days I come up short. I'm a medium, not a saint!

As someone who doesn't exactly hide her big personality, I've found it fun and interesting to channel souls that have distinct characters and stories. I love meeting new people, and being a medium can make me feel like the hostess at a really important gathering. Children's souls, especially, have told me, "My parents have been to mediums, but I like channeling through you because you let my parents see me." People can feel their loved ones and how they acted or spoke when they were at their best. I'm not saying this is because I'm better than other mediums—no no no no no. I feel that all mediums channel and connect with Spirit differently; one isn't more skilled or better than another.

I realize that I have a lot to be grateful for. I'm glad that I can share this gift with other people, though my family likes to joke that I don't give them much of a choice when I stop them in the gym, dentist, or at the mall! I'm glad that Spirit continues to keep me on my toes, and with every single reading, they teach me something new. I also feel thankful that I have such an easygoing personality, or else it might be harder for me to accept my unusual abilities. As a rule, I don't question or overanalyze anything—I let life be simple. If you handed me a bottle of hair spray and asked how it worked, I'd say, "Listen, I don't care how. Does it work? Yes? Great." I don't need to know how, when, why. It is what it is, and that's it. I treat Spirit communication the same way.

But, enough about me. Let's get down to Spirit!

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