

Can Joan Morin tell which boxes have the bucks?

BOB DRIVER

THE DRIVER'S SEAT



On Saturday I will have my first psychic experience. Or at least I will witness one. Maybe.

I plan to be on hand at 10 a.m. in the Spiritual Center Church, 560 Clearwater-Largo Road, when representatives of the Tampa Bay Skeptics ask psychic Joan Morin to try to guess which of 23 boxes contain one-dollar bills.

I should state up front that I am a dues-paying member of Tampa Bay Skeptics, a local group whose purpose is roughly the same as its

national organization, the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal.

The purpose, stated simply, is to apply objective testing to the claims of persons who say — among other things — they can heal without using conventional medical techniques, predict the future, speak with departed souls, make inanimate objects move, or — as in the case of Joan Morin — divine the contents of closed containers.

Ms. Morin, who lives in Pinellas Park, has said she is able to do just that. Unlike other psychics in the Tampa Bay area, she has the courage to step forth and allow Tampa Bay Skeptics to put her to the test.

On Saturday she will sit or stand before 23 boxes, in some of which a one-dollar bill has been placed. If she correctly identifies those boxes, she will win \$2,000.

The odds are strong she won't make it. But if

she does, it will cause a small — or maybe a large — sensation, and Ms. Morin will have demonstrated that she is indeed possessed of psychic powers.

Although I'm a member of Tampa Bay Skeptics, I'll be hoping Ms. Morin succeeds. I love excitement and the remarkable. For years I have been rooting for an Unidentified Flying Object to be captured and displayed in full view of the world.

Same way with those little green men from Mars, or wherever, and Bigfoot, the ape-man who is reported to haunt the mountains of the American Northwest.

However, until such long-rumored phenomena are proved to be real, I will remain a doubter.

Conducting Saturday's experiment with Ms. Morin will be Dr. Gary Posner, the St. Petersburg physician who founded the Skeptics about a year ago. In addition to the \$1,000 put

up by the club, Posner has pledged \$1,000 of his own money if Ms. Morin succeeds at the task set before her.

I spoke with Ms. Morin briefly by phone Thursday. She sounds like a friendly, open person. She said she is not worried about what may or may not happen Saturday. She regards her gift as a matter of faith, and something out of her control.

On Sunday, during 9 a.m. and 11 a.m. services at the Spiritual Center Church, Ms. Morin will discuss her previous day's activities with the Skeptics.

I have never experienced anything psychic beyond a vague hunch that turned out right. I used to wish I could develop psychic powers, but now I'm not so sure. I will soon celebrate my 28th birthday, and as I move into middle age I tend to keep my life simple. So if I should one day discover I can predict the future or read someone's mind, I'm going to keep it a secret. Life is already complicated enough.

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Psychic puts her powers to a test

By MARIE TESSIER
Times Staff Writer

LARGO — Joan Morin sat relaxed in the small chapel. Outside, believers and skeptics sat on the lawn, some with heads bowed in prayer, awaiting the results of a test of Morin's psychic powers.

"That church is full of people," Largo believer Arthur McMartin said, looking at a TV screen that showed a nearly empty chapel at the Spiritual Center. "There are spirits all over, you just can't see 'em."

In the end, after days of praying and meditation in preparation, Morin flunked the test, at least in the eyes of her skeptics.

"It was hard to get the spirit down here," Morin said. "You have divine nature and you have human nature. Just because the test didn't come out doesn't prove there's not communication. I could have been wrong."

The Pinellas Park woman's task on Saturday was to correctly predict whether each of 23 small white jewelry boxes contained a dollar bill. The odds of that are about 8-million-to-1, said Gary Posner, a founder of the Tampa

Bay Skeptics, a non-profit group that disputes the authenticity of psychics, crystal power, extra-sensory perception and astrology.

Morin, who said she is guided by a saint who intercedes with God, correctly predicted 10 of the boxes.

"The results of this test are just about as you'd expect," Posner said from the pulpit of the Spiritual Center after the results were tallied in view of a video camera. "It was really just guessing."

It means Morin can't collect \$2,000 in prize money, and it means the Skeptics won't have to certify an apparent psychic feat.

Posner said the results indicated that psychic power should not be believed.

But it did little to shake the faith of Morin or her fellow church members at the Spiritual Center, a metaphysical church that holds Jesus Christ as a role model.

"If it's God's will to be done, it will be done," said Morin, who wore a pendant with a hologram image of Christ on the crucifix around her neck. "Nobody can play God."