

Regional Affairs

Gundella 2 Years Later: She's A Full Time Witch

By TIM RICHARD
Fame, a new career and a much bigger income have come to the jolly Garden City matron known as Gundella the Witch.

She has given up teaching (her career) to be a full time lecturer and entertainer; she is recognized when she goes shopping and is asked to autograph grocery bags; she has been in the mass media all over southern Michigan and even out-of-state; her daughter is doing occasional appearances as a witch; and she has made witchcraft socially and academically acceptable.

Giving autographs in the grocery store "doesn't bother me. I like to talk to people. It'd be kind of hard for me to hide," says Gundella, who is built like a big rubber ball and is just as bouncy.

WHEN INTERVIEWED by Observer Newspapers two years ago, she was teaching

special reading courses in Inkster, doing her witch work at night and was booked six weeks ahead. She has been a "public" witch all her 42 years, but at that time she was making the circuit in earnest because her husband had suffered a serious heart attack a few months before and there was a family to feed.

In that story, the Observer made the mistake of using her home address. Gundella was bothered by idly curious people just knocking at the door and asking to look at the witch. Today her address, for publication, is Box 434, Garden City.

Shortly after the Observer interview was published, J.P. McCarthy had her on his radio program. Six months later, the Free Press interviewed her, and the Detroit News followed some months later. Today she is booked through mid-July.

Despite her new fame and relative fortune, Gundella still

lives in the same brick home, she still has the delicious sense of humor, still likes to gab over a cup of one of 1-e 30 or 40 different teas.

"I'M MAKING more money lecturing now than I was teaching — more than three times as much. Sometimes I earn more in a day than what I earned as a teacher in a week. That's too bad," said the veteran of 22 years in the classroom who still dearly loves teaching.

Her earnings are around \$500 to \$1,000 a week. In addition, she has cut an LP record for Mutt Productions in Inkster; royalties go to a trust fund for her youngest daughter.

The switch from teaching to lecturing and entertaining has been good for her family life.

Her husband is disabled, and so Gundella is the supporter of them and their four children. She puts in only a few hours daily away from the

house, does much work at home and has more time with her family. Weekends are reserved for the family.

"My oldest son, who will be 21 in July, now welcomes me at school, but there was a time when he didn't want me around," she laughs. The young man wants to be a symphony conductor and is an apt student at a community college, where he is president of the student government.

THE BIGGEST impact has been on her oldest daughter, a 19-year-old Wayne State University student. With so much correspondence to handle, Gundella hired the girl, Madilynne, as her secretary.

The girl was always interested in witchcraft but never wanted to go "public" until one day Gundella suggested Madilynne fill in for her as speaker to a nurses' association. Madilynne agreed, adopted the witch

name of Lydamie (scrambling her own name and dropping the n's) and now does occasional appearances.

Lydamie even lectured on witchcraft during a trip to Europe last summer.

"The younger children (aged seven and eight) like having a witch for their mother. It's like having Bozo the Clown around all the time," says Gundella.

SHE HAS GIVEN 17 courses throughout the metropolitan area in the last year and a half. The six-session courses cover witchcraft; testing and using clairvoyance; spirit writing; recognition with tea leaves, candle wax and cards; herbs, spices and incense; spells, rituals and incantations.

Graduates get certificates proclaiming them "witches apprentices."

Her next course will have the most prestigious sponsor of all — the community services program of Oakland Community College. It begins April 19 in Birmingham's Seaborn High School.

Books? She's too busy to get her share of the work done on a joint project with University of Michigan sociologist Marcello Truzzi. Besides:

"Books are over-done. I have 75 books in my room right now with the word 'witch' or 'witchcraft' in the title. Why clutter the field?"

SHE HAS TALKED to audiences at the U-M, Western Michigan University, Bowling Green (O.) University, Macomb Community College, many high schools and civic clubs; Unitarian, Presbyterian, United Church of Christ and Catholic groups; radio and television programs — usually groups with better than average educations. She and Truzzi were the sources for a Mike Whorff "Kaleidoscope" broadcast.

She turned down an offer to teach at Central Michigan University, where she studied years ago before earning two degrees in education at other state universities.

A prominent visitor to her home was Anton LeVey, shaven-headed founder of the First Church of Satan in California. "Every radio station he visited, he found I was there first," Gundella recalls, "so he asked to meet me, and I invited him out for lunch."

She pointed to the large organ in the middle of the living room (the sheet music of a Christmas song was on it) and said: "He played the organ for a long time. He's a tremendous organist, you know. He used to play for radio programs, and he played all the old radio program theme songs."

"He was in my house three hours, and we never discussed religion."

She paused: "I don't think he really believes in it (Satanism). But unfortunately I think a lot of his followers do."

Gundella wants nothing to do with Satanism herself.

LeVey's visit had repercussions. Gundella's young son returned to school and told his teacher, "The devil was at our house." (LeVey wears black and has a pointed beard.) The teacher didn't believe the lad.

ALTHOUGH GUNDELLA is as lovely and inoffensive a person as there is, she has been in a controversy three times.

A high school in Hazel Park invited her to speak, then canceled because some parents objected.

Earlier this month a minister and an evangelist got equal time in a Pontiac area high school — after Gundella spoke. Gundella seems to have won that encounter because the clergymen got far more probing and hostile questions from the students than she did. One coed even told off the clergymen:

"I don't think she did any harm. It seemed like you were there to harm her."



GUNDELLA'S mostly a lecturer now.

The biggest ruckus of all occurred when Wonderland Center booked her for Halloween last year. Although Gundella's talks are perfectly clean morally, an eager public relations man wrote a suggestive release that conjured up images of an X-rated movie.

Some Livonia Presbyterian clergymen objected, and the Wonderland merchants group canceled her but paid her anyway. The results:

- Television and daily newspapers swarmed all over the story. "I should thank them," said Gundella. "I got better publicity than if I had gone."

- Ironically, the cancellation came the same day that she spoke elsewhere to a Presbyterian audience. "I was well received."

The PR man no longer works for Wonderland.

PROBABLY WHAT makes Gundella not only popular but acceptable in academic, scientific and religious circles is her intellectual grasp of what witchcraft is all about.

It's not consorting with the devil or fortune-telling or black magic. Rather, it's Pealeian "positive thinking, simple psychology and sensitivity to the unspoken messages that other people generate."

This is how she explained it in a letter to a doubtful man who contended she was "just pulling our legs."

"I do not believe in anything supernatural," Gundella began. "However, I do believe that most things people call supernatural are very natural indeed."

"In your grandmother's day, a transistor radio would have been considered magical. Today we understand how they work so they are not thought of as magic. I don't find it any harder to believe that thought waves can travel from place to place than to believe that radio waves do."

"Someday science will come up with an instrument sophisticated enough to measure these vibrations, and they will no longer be thought of as supernatural..."

Her charms, lodestones, candles, potions, rituals — none of them has supernatural power. They are simply props. "The power comes from within you," says Gundella, closing with the blessing of witchcraft:

"Blessed be."



PLANNING A PARTY — The verdict is in, and Judges Benjamin Burdick and Thomas Foley of the Wayne County Circuit Court have ruled that an Easter party for crippled children will be held at the Latin Quarter, Detroit, on Saturday, March 25. The two judges, who are co-chairmen of the event, met recently in their chambers with Jay House of the Detroit Police clowns, who will provide the entertainment, and Kenneth Chrzan of Detroit and Renele Johnson, 10, of Inkster. Kenny and Renele are poster children for the Wayne County Easter Seal Society. The campaign concludes Easter Sunday, April 2.

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