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Dream Wizards

Hotline passes couples' surprise test

By Howard McEwen

In the last stanza of the 1963 ballad "In Dreams," Roy Orbison sings:

It's too bad that all these things,

Can only happen in my dreams

Only in dreams

In beautiful dreams.

Orbison's boxing up dreams as something that isn't "real" is a common mistake, according to Laurel Clark, president of the School of Metaphysics. The school, a nationwide network, sponsored the National Dream Hotline last weekend, offering 36 hours of free over-the-telephone dream interpretation.

Biologists explain dreams as what the brain picks up and projects from a mish-mash of chemicals. Clark sees them differently.

"Dreams are a communication from the inner self, subconscious mind, to the outer self, conscious mind," she says. "They tell us about our attitudes and state of awareness."

Clark describes a dream interpreter as a guide "who tells you what is working or not working in yourself and your life, what you need to pay attention to, how you can change, what the cause is for success or difficulty in your life and how you can be more self-aware."

At the Cincinnati school, a staff of about five people at any one time staffed the phones, all students of the School of Metaphysics. They're able to interpret dreams, Clark says, because they're educated in the Universal Language of Mind, which she describes as a system of universal symbols and images.

"Dreams, scripture, metaphors, mental telepathy -- all are communicated in images," she says. "Dreams are symbolic. For example, a car in a dream symbolizes the dreamer's physical body. If one dreams that they are driving and run out of gas, it means that they are experiencing some health problems, running out of energy, becoming tired or fatigued. The symbols are universal; however, only the dreamer can say how it applies to his or her life."

Using Orbison's "In Dreams" for inspiration, I decided to put the National Dream Hotline to the test -- if not for meaning, then at least consistency. The song opens with the line, "A candy-colored clown they call the sandman." The song has the heartbroken narrator dreaming about being back with his love.

In dreams I walk with you. In dreams I talk to you.

In dreams you're mine. All of the time we're together

In dreams, in dreams.

But he awakens to loneliness.

But just before the dawn, I awake and find you gone.

I can't help it, I can't help it, if I cry.

I remember that you said goodbye.

I called National Dream Hotlines in Louisville, Cincinnati and Urbana, Ill., and told them my dream -- essentially a dream-within-a dream in which, like the narrators of Orbison's song, I dream I'm heartbroken, dream of being back together with my love only to awaken to heartache. And there was a clown.

I called two cities; and my wife, Alicia McEwen, called a third to see if sex changed the interpretation at all.

In Louisville, I spoke with Bethany.

"It's all about you," she said. "Nothing to be alarmed about. It's actually just a part of you."

She went on to explain that the things we dream about aren't about those things. They're about ourselves. She also said that dreaming about falling asleep in a dream signals a person mentally "checking out" during that activity in their daily life.

So this dream would not be warning about a breakup in a relationship but a breakup in something in the subconscious of the dreamer.

Bethany asked me to describe my wife.

"She's understanding and happy," I said.

"The way that I see it is that you're changing your relationship in those qualities with yourself," Bethany said. "You're checking out mentally."

"And the clown?" I asked.

Clowns signify whimsy, she said. This would mean that I'm not too worried about making this change in my life.

Alicia spoke with Matt in Cincinnati. He gave the same interpretation.

"A spouse represents commitment to self," he added. "A breakup may mean that you've lost touch with a commitment to yourself -- goals or dreams."

The School of Metaphysics in Urbana yielded a similar interpretation.

"The subconscious mind has to deal with goals in life -- spiritual inclinations, what's ultimately important," said Joan, the dream interpreter. "So this is suggesting that you're leading that aside and it seems OK. The clown says there's nothing wrong with it."

So the interpretations were consistent. But as H.L. Mencken said, "For every problem, there is a solution which is simple, clean and wrong." The real test of dream interpretations is how they affect people's lives. Do they do any good?

For the school's president, they bring comfort. She is a widow. Before going to sleep, she prayed to meet her deceased husband in a dream. Her prayer was answered. In the dream, he walked by her and smiled.

"Later in the dream, I picked up my Bible, and in it was a note with a heart and in his handwriting the words 'I love you,'" Clark said. "I woke up with the clear recognition that that was actually his spirit coming to me in

the dream."

For Amy Pawlus, a student at the school for five years and a field director for its Indianapolis office, interpreting her dreams has brought understanding.

"Understanding dreams and their meanings has in fact changed my life over and over," she says. "There are the simple things like understanding my daughter's dreams and how that has given me valuable insight into how she sees the world. This allows me to be a better parent and to provide what she needs in ways that I do not always see." ©

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