

# The New York Times

By PETER APPLEBOME  
Nyack, N.Y.

IT'S not clear what's less likely – that Shira Plotzker's career as a pet psychic is going great guns despite the small problem that she's allergic to animals or that a group of graduate students at Pace University, studying unlikely business challenges, decided to do a marketing study on her entrepreneurial prospects.

But then, maybe there's no stopping an idea whose time has come, which, at least in part, explains the adventurous career path Ms. Plotzker has followed as she's expanded her product line in the psychic business from mere humans – on this side or having crossed over – to dogs, horses, fish and at least one bearded dragon lizard.

We're not going to get into the murky mysteries of how Ms. Plotzker (who is known professionally only by her first name) does what she does and whether dogs really begin gabbing with her about their medical histories and sartorial preferences or whether carriage horses in New York confide in her about which of their teeth hurt.

But even in their report, “A Market for Animal Communicators: How Pet Psychics Can Create Value for Their Customers,” the Pace business students seem to think that Ms. Plotzker has found an appealing target audience. After all, as the baby boomers age and pets (or animal companions, the preferred term) become the new children, why shouldn't we have as much access to their inner lives as we do to our own?

To back up, Shira is a 47-year-old divorced woman who lives in Rockland County and who conducts readings in various places, including Nyack, which is to psychics

what Greenwich is to hedge-fund managers. She began dabbling in psychic activities in her 20's and has made this work full time over the last few years, doing medium sessions with the dead, numerology, and tarot card and other readings.

She got into the pet-reading business about three years ago while watching Sonya Fitzpatrick, a pet psychic who has a television show on Animal Planet.

As she watched Ms. Fitzpatrick channel the pets, she realized – holy cow! – that she could tap into the same frequency. That began a sideline business in which people pay for readings over the phone, attend her lectures or invite her to barns or kennel clubs, where she listens to what the animals have to say.

Yes, this is made more difficult by the fact that she's become allergic to most animals, but it turns out that pictures work as well as the real thing. If you're good at this, you need not actually be in the same room with Rover or Spot anyway.

Shira doesn't actually hear animal voices, she says, like a gruff bark telling her where a lost pet can be found. Instead, she receives telepathic messages in something like a very animated child's voice.

Dogs, not surprisingly, are better communicators than cats. Horses communicate in deeper impressions than dogs. Snakes are more interesting than you may think. But mostly, they all just want to gab a little, allowing her to translate for them in something of a singsong voice along the lines of: "And Walter says he wants to know when he'll go in the car again, because he likes the leisurely rides." Or, "And Walter says: 'I can use a bath, you know. I'm smell elegant.' "

NOW, fuddy-duddies and skeptics may scoff, but we'll give Shira two things.

The first is the Pace study, which came about when the graduate students were asked to research why customers might purchase a product that the students could never imagine anyone purchasing. They found that spending on pets had almost doubled in the past decade and that the "humanization" of pets is a continuing trend, so the potential market is there. They also found that most of Shira's clients came away

satisfied and felt closer to their pets, er, animal companions.

The second is that not only did she intuit the intellectual depths of Walter, our slightly bipolar, two-dogs-long, half-a-dog-high corgi/something mix (“If he was a person, he’d be a philosopher”), but she also sensed correctly that a friend’s dog was ailing.

Still, being a pet communicator can have its challenges.

“If I had to talk to cats all the time, that would not be as much fun,” she said. “They’re mostly into themselves, how they look or how nice their fur is and how they compare with other cats. Dogs can talk about pretty much anything. Cats are more particular about what they want to talk about, and it’s mostly about themselves.”