Nicki Michaels was tutored by Dane Rudhyar, one of the most influential astrologers of all time. She was thrust into the limelight in the late 80s when she discovered she'd been computing astrological calculations for President Reagan's astrologer, Joan Quigley.

BY MARION WILLIAMSON

Nicki Michaels' life reads like an astrological Who's Who. Sitting in her tranquil San Francisco office with its framed photographs of groundbreaking astrologers, past and present, I knew there would be stories to tell. She's a conceisseur for The Mountain Astrologer; she worked for the first telephone astrology lines; she sold the world's first astrological computer; she 'crunched' data for Presidential astrologer, Joan Quigley, and she was invited for an interview, Michaels

1974 Convention. It turns out the event was fatedly linked to the mysterious advert, "I remember the conference because it cost $18 dollars just to go to the talks - that was so much money for me at the time. There were 3,000 people attending and it was the first time I'd been around astrologers. One of them wanted to see my chart. She took a look and said, 'My South node is conjunct your Saturn. My astrology teacher says this means I owe you something from a past life.' I asked her who her teacher was and she told me it was Mark Robertson and that I should buy his book Transit of Saturn. Fast-forward to the interview..."

Michaels arrived at the interview already suspicious of the mysterious organisation based in the centre of San Francisco. "There was this really messy desk and a guy in a suit...he looked like CIA. But he told me I'd been chosen to go into this training class and that it was part of a new business. I scanned his desk trying to figure out what it was all about and I saw a piece of paper with Mark Robertson's details on it. Someone knocked the door just then and stuck their head in, apologised for having interrupted, and left - it was Mark Robertson. I asked the suit what he had to do with the course and he said, 'That's who I'm training you with.'

TELEPHONING THE STARS

Two hundred and fifty people answered the advert to join Astro Phone, the world's first astrological phone consultancy. To determine who had what it would take to make good counsellors, the applicants were divided into two piles: one for those with counselling experience and the other for applicants with astrological knowledge. "They wanted to train half and half and eventually picked 20 from each pile whose astrology charts suggested they would be good at the job. They didn't know if the people without the astrology could learn it in three weeks, and needless to say they couldn't. So when Mark taught the classes, instead of using the symbols for the planets he used 'Sa' for Saturn 'Su' for Sun etc."

Astro Phone needed people that would be good at giving concise information in a short time period. The phone lines were expensive - $4.95 for the first ten minutes then a dollar a minute after that, $60 an hour in 1974 - that equates to about $250 an hour today. Remembering, Michaels said, "They needed people that could be quick, logical, and get to the heart of the chart in ten minutes. Clients would call Astro Phone, toll free, with their birth details and would be given an appointment sometimes in the following 24 hours. It took so long because back then we had no computers to calculate the charts - these were all compiled and sent over by an outside agency."

Michaels trained for four hours a night, five nights a week, for three weeks, followed by written and verbal tests. Michaels expressed a doubt that many current astrology phone services would be so thorough. Michaels worked at Astro Phone for a year and a half and had over 625 clients. "That's how I got started," she said brightly.

MEETING RUDHYAR

Michaels had been at Astro Phone little over a year when she was looking through a local San Francisco magazine and saw an advert for a university where you could develop your degree in a specific field of interest. "I got into an undergraduate degree in astro-psychotherapy that I developed myself. If you didn't have classes in your major - clearly they wouldn't have in mine - they gave you a third of your tuition to develop your subject area. So I signed up for every astrology class going. I also taught a 12-week undergraduate course based on Rudhyar's textbook, The Astrological Study of Psychological Complexes for a number of years."

In 1975 Michaels visited a bookshop where Rudhyar was giving a talk. "I became very close friends with Rudhyar - and his wife, too. He became my mentor and my friend until his death in 1985. He was an extremely bright and hardworking man - he wrote every day - everything in longhand and worked until he could no longer continue. Rudhyar's main identity was that of a philosopher and composer. Music he wrote in the early 1900s is still played at new music concerts. He felt that
Who was Dane Rudhyar?

Dane Rudhyar (1895-1985) is considered by many to be the greatest astrologer of our time. He was an accomplished composer and came to astrology through an interest in Oriental music and philosophy. He brought a spiritual approach to astrology and, as with so many great thinkers, was way ahead of his time. His legacy is a vast storehouse of astrological wisdom for generations to come. For further information on Rudhyar and free online copies of all his works visit: www.khaldea.com

In 1988, Donald Regan, former Whitehouse Chief of Staff, revealed his disagreements with Nancy Reagan in his book For the Record: From Wall Street to Washington and included claims that Nancy's personal astrologer, Joan Quigley, helped steer the President's decisions. Michaels remembered the excitement the story caused. "Oh my gosh, when the story broke that Reagan had an astrologer, I was getting calls from People Magazine and Newsweek. I could not believe what was going on. It was on the cover of Time magazine. I was on CNN!"

LIFE COACHING

Michaels learned early in her career that clients appreciate a no-nonsense approach to their astrological consultations. "What I learned from my time at Astro Phone was to speak in plain English. I could talk to you about your chart with no jargon. Mark Robertson taught me that the client should get some really useful information so that when they walk away from the consultation they can apply it to their life. I really enjoy helping people in that way - giving them really practical, useful stuff."

One of Michael's clients suggested that she become a life coach. She took on a training program and found that she absolutely loved it. "As an astrologer, people usually come to see you when there's a turning point or a challenge in their lives - you advise them and a lot of the time you don't get to see how things turned out until the next big change when they're back for more guidance. There's not a whole lot of interaction with the client. But the thing I love about coaching is that I can help someone identify what he or she needs to change and discuss how they're going to go about it. As an astrologer I have to come up with the answers but as a coach the client comes up with the solutions. It's very nice for me to see results!"

Further Information

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