

gala**buzz**

the magazine for members of gala bingo

issue 2

Anna Ryder Richardson

TV's interior designer
on her dream home

★ Lucky Stars!

how the zodiac can
help you hedge
your bets

★ Denise Welch

why the bubbly soap star loves
roulette and playing bingo with
her Coronation Street pals

Gala
BINGO

Cross my palm with silver

Gala member Catherine Hislop Leaman penned this true-life tale – proving that sometimes, truth really is stranger than fiction...

Well, I don't claim any mystic powers but, over the years, there have been a number of coincidences that I can't quite explain.

May, the secretary in the community centre where I worked, was a God-fearing, church-going spinster. Careful – to say the least – with her money, she'd scrimp and scrape without need. She could have been very comfortable, but that would have required her spending money – not in her vocabulary.

My job was to occupy or gainfully employ a group of low achievers, aged 16-20, who were quite capable of outwitting Einstein and far more worldly wise than I would ever be.

I had various unorthodox methods of keeping their attention. Most mornings I would 'read' their fortune from a pack of cards – playing cards, not Tarot.

Now, bear in mind that these kids talked about each other, so I was well versed in all their various escapades and activities. Reading their fortune was a doddle. All I had to do was look serious enough to lend it authenticity and, although one or two cottoned on to my scam, all enjoyed it.

May, however, was the exception. Nothing would convince her that I wasn't a Spey-wife, and she begged me to read her fortune.

As no one knew anything about her, I figured

she'd be a tough nut to crack. But, eventually I relented and agreed to read her tea leaves – not easy to do with a tea bag! In my best Margaret Rutherford voice (remember *Blythe Spirit?*), I instructed her to burst the tea bag and turn the cup three times towards her heart (pure mumbo jumbo).

I looked into the cup and quite clearly saw a house with a picket fence. She informed me that she knew of no such house, but asked what colour the fence was. I said white – some folk want jam on it!

I returned the cup to May, telling her to turn it upside down and tap three times on the bottom – a nice mystic touch, as I'm nothing if not theatrical. This time I saw a pound sign among the leaves, topped by a Royal Crest. This was what she wanted to hear: money, money, money.

Two weeks passed and I had completely forgotten the reading. But, one Monday morning, May burst into my office, flushed and looking almost human.

She had been invited to church – free tea and biscuits! – and an acquaintance had invited her back for a meal. The house was just as I had described, right down to the picket fence – but, boy, had I goofed. She took great satisfaction in telling me the fence was green.

The best news of all was that she had received a tax rebate from the Inland Revenue (crown crest on the envelope). She never offered to share, so I never read her leaves again – what a punishment!

One night, at the local badminton club

tea, we were passing the empty cups down the table for collection, when I spotted a tea cup with the leaves forming a broken ring. Stupidly, I asked whose cup this was.

One of the girls claimed it and asked what I had seen. I told her and she blanched. "My husband and I are divorcing," she said, "but we're not ready to make it public. Please don't tell anyone what you saw."

Then there was the piano bar in Rhodes Town. The pianist was playing a selection of music from the shows and popular middle-of-the-road stuff – just our ticket.

The bar was quiet and I started to jot down some of my favourite songs. My husband asked what I was doing. To my surprise, I said: "I know what music the pianist will play next."

"You've had too much sun today, have another drink," he replied.

I jotted down Leroy Anderson's *Blue Tango*. Sure enough, he played it. Four songs later, I was only down by one track. Not bad going, all told.

We were having such a good time, so the pianist joined us to find out what was causing the laughter. I showed him my list and, to our

surprise, he told us my score should have been four out of four. He had intended to play my last entry, but the sheet music was missing.

My husband refers to me as the White Witch, but only when he needs my assistance, like when his team are on TV, there's a crucial penalty being taken and he begs me to "give the boys a hand". I have so little interest in football, though, that I'm not always sure I hex the right team.

"Nothing would convince her that I wasn't a Spey-wife and she begged me to read her fortune"

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Ghosts in my house

Spiritual medium and star of cable TV's paranormal detective show, *Most Haunted*, Derek Acorah, tells us why the spirit world has never been more alive. A Gala Buzz exclusive...



Derek Acorah is racing along the M1 up to Leeds, to another surprise destination for *Most Haunted* – the show where he and a team investigate infamous haunted locations around the UK.

Most Haunted is going from strength to strength, not only as must-see TV, but because Derek reckons activity in the spirit world has never been stronger.

"It's unbelievable," he says. "We're finding more active sites. Just the other evening, I was in an old London jail. The spirits there were so strong. I was pinned to the wall and elevated – my body literally lifted up off the floor."

Scary stuff, then, but it's stuff that Derek takes in his stride. As a spiritual medium for more than 26 years, paranormal activity has become second nature.

Derek's family has a history of psychic talent – his gran on his mum's side was also a medium. In fact, Derek had his first psychic experience at his gran's house when he was seven.

She called him down to tea one day and, when he got downstairs, his grandfather, Richard, came in through the door, ruffled his hair and called him a young scamp. Not very surprising – until you learn that Derek's grandfather had died from septicemia before Derek was born!

"When I told my gran what had happened, she just looked at my mum and dad. From that point on, it was accepted that I was the next medium in the family," says Derek.

Not that he always wanted to be a medium. As a boy, all he wanted to be was a footballer,

a dream that was realised at 15 when he joined Liverpool Football Club.

However, his psychic powers continued to grow and develop and, in the early 80s, he became a full-time, Liverpool-based medium. "I started off just doing one-to-one readings in people's houses," he says.

From there, he moved up and into his own business premises and held readings for a number of years, before gaining more and more recognition. Derek then went on to civic halls and theatres, then radio and television work, where he increased his profile on programmes such as *The James Whale Show*.

Derek likes to stress that there's nothing occult about his work. Spiritual mediums are all about helping people. "We want to link purely with loved ones for loved ones," he says.

These days, he's one of LivingTV's top psychic experts and has been fronting shows such as *The Three Mediums*, *The Antiques Ghost Show* and *Most Haunted*, with the likes of Phil Wyman and Yvette Fielding.

"Poor Yvette," says Derek. "She's been scared out of her wits so many times, but she always manages to contain herself."

And there have been plenty of hairy moments – Derek reckons the worst was in Leap Castle, Southern Ireland. He made contact there with a beautiful spirit woman from the 16th century, who turned into this horrible beast-like apparition. "Her eyes turned red and, when she talked to me, she told me lots of nasty things. I knew then that I had linked with the devil," says Derek.

Most of his experiences, though, are a tad more friendly and reassuring. And another reassuring thing – for Derek at least – is knowing when he is going to die. "I'm 53 now. I've been told that my work will be finished and I'll go over to the other side when I'm 84."

Luckily, that gives the rest of us plenty of time to watch him seek out spooks and put loved ones in touch with the dearly departed.

Guiding light



Sam is Derek's spirit guide. Derek says he was born and lived in Ethiopia over 2,000 years ago. As a young boy, he was killed stealing food for his friend and mentor, Masumai. As he lay there dying, Masumai told him that when Derek was ready to be born into another life, he would be there to look after him. "Sam was like me – a spiritual medium," says Derek. As Derek's spirit guide, Masumai chose the name Sam, as it's more in keeping with this era. When Derek dies, he knows he will meet Sam in the spirit realm. "Our roles will be reversed," he says, "and I will look after Sam and serve as his guide when he is reincarnated."

What a STAR!

She may have left *Coronation Street*, but Denise Welch is no stranger to our screens. Juggling a TV career and two children can't be easy, but the bubbly actress still manages to grab a game or two...

Denise Welch is a fellow bingo fan: "I love bingo, I have to say. We've got this big bingo hall near us in Cheshire, and all of us *Corrie* girls want to go. It's a bit tricky for us to go out when we're all on the telly like that, but we try to do it."

Denise, 43 – who was made famous for her role as *Coronation Street*'s Natalie Barnes – is sometimes asked to open bingo halls and do a spot of celebrity calling too.

"I'll do a couple of calls," she says, "but then I always want to play. I'm getting better at playing more than one line at a time. I've never won massively, just little bits, and I've tended to do that thing – shouting out at the wrong time – which people hate. They hit you if you do that, don't they?" she laughs.

A lively, chatty and bubbly person, with a tussle of wavy blonde hair, Denise laughs a lot. Not bad when you consider she's at her hotel, taking a break between filming and recovering from viral gastroenteritis. "It was really horrible – so bad that I was crying for my mum," she says.

Denise has just finished a half-hour drama, called *Facing Demons*, which is all about testicular cancer. Her reasons for doing it are threefold: one, it's from a director friend of hers; two, she's interested in the subject matter; and three, "I play a character called Alison who has a much younger boyfriend!" That bubbly laugh again.

Cancer is a subject close to her heart: "My mother had cancer. She's still with us, thank God; she had cancer ten years ago."

And Denise, married in real life to actor Tim Healy, is no stranger to health problems herself. A much talked-about postnatal depression followed the birth of her first son, 13-year-old Matthew. She describes its onset as a great shock: "I didn't think I was the type."

But it was her second son, one-year-old Louis, who needed the medical attention. He was born with Hirschsprung's Disease, a bowel defect that affects one in every 5,000 babies.

"He was so poorly when he was born," says Denise. "But he's doing brilliantly now. Matthew's doing well too. He just won the school *Pop Idol* competition, so he's a bit of a heartthrob at present."

Theatricality runs in the family. Matthew takes after Denise, who in turn gets her showmanship from her father.

When she was at school,

though, she had her heart set on being a teacher.

"My dad did a drag act for years, but he got me into acting," she explains. "He was a bit of an extrovert and my social 'outgoingness' is certainly from him. I'm glad now – I would have been an awful teacher!"

Denise's postnatal depression, her larger-than-life background and her scare over baby Louis have certainly made for an eventful life. There were also unfounded allegations in a tabloid recently concerning drugs and their influence on her job. The paper never apologised – "They never do, do they?" – but Denise has a pragmatic view of being targeted by journalists: "It was just my turn. I'd always had a good relationship with the papers before."

Denise's life reads like a character biography from a soap. And what a biography her character, Natalie Barnes, had! She arrived on *Coronation Street* in 1997, took over the garage, seduced the married Kevin Webster, got him to move in with her, lost him and took a job behind the bar at the Rovers Return. Then she fell in love with and married Des Barnes, her son Tony returned, Des got caught up in his shady drugs deal, was beaten up and later died. A

totally distraught Natalie then took over the Rovers pub, had a few more affairs, found her son had been murdered,

"I'm getting better at playing more than one line but I do shout at the wrong time!"



Denise on...

Lucky numbers

"My lucky number when I play roulette is 29. I adore roulette. When I was a rep actress I used to love casinos – I would get off the train and, before checking into digs, I'd go and join the 24-hour membership, so maybe I had a big win on 29 back then and it's stuck with me."

Horoscopes

I do read them but, like anybody, I believe them if they're good and not if they're bad. But I do visit a clairvoyant occasionally, usually if I have a decision to make and need that little extra bit of reassurance. I'd never ring one and ask, 'Shall I fly tomorrow?'"

Superstitions

"I'm not hugely superstitious – I'm like everybody else really. I wouldn't put an umbrella up in a house or anything like that, but I wouldn't live my life according to 'old wives' tales'."



Denise plays it plain in *Born And Bred*

had a breakdown, discovered she was pregnant and finally left for a calmer life in the Cotswolds.

Phew! Couldn't they have cheered up her storylines a bit?

"I used to ask that all the time," says Denise, "but they never did. I was always either emptying ashtrays in the pub, or hearing people had died!"

Unlike many soap actors and actresses, however, Denise has avoided being typecast. *Facing Demons* aside, she'll also be in *Holby City* – as "very flirtatious" risk manager Pam McGrath. She played a prostitute in a recent hour-and-a-half *The Vice* special, and is to guest star in an episode of BBC family drama

Born And Bred, playing a character called Edie McClure. "It's very unglamorous – there's no make-up or spot cover. We're talking dark wig, three months pregnant, six children and a heart murmur. But I loved it, loved the character. Also, it's filmed an hour away from home, and I love working near home, for obvious reasons," Denise says.

A self-confessed homebody, Denise has said she'd film in her back garden if she could get away with it. "I love my home. Tim and I try to juggle our careers so that we aren't both away very much."

Being at home, however, has not made her handy around the house, despite presenting *The Real DIY Show*. "I know absolutely nothing

about DIY, but I think my lack of knowledge added to the humour in it," she says. And there goes that laugh again.

Although Denise has plenty of varied work to keep her busy, she hasn't ruled out the possibility of a Rover's return. "Never say never," she smiles. After all, her character was one of the few not to be killed off. But the only things she thought she'd miss from the show are within easy reach.

"That's my friends, but we live within 10 miles of one another, so I see them all the time anyway," she says.

You might see them all soon too – when they're up for a laugh and out for a game of bingo!

For Anna Ryder Richardson, star of TV's *Changing Rooms* and *House Invaders*, work has become play, as she begins making over her new home...

Dream Designer

Like any truly glamorous celebrity, Anna Ryder Richardson has two homes: one in London and another one in Glasgow. Today, the one-time model is taking time out in her more relaxed Scottish setting, but work is never far away. Anna doesn't mind though - designing is, and always has been, her passion, even from a young and tender age.

"When I was tiny, about five or six, I was quite hyperactive and would get very lively at night time," she says. "My mother used to hear me crashing and bumping about - basically, I was moving my furniture around. The first thing I made was a family of gooseberries out of a green curtain, so that should have told everyone, shouldn't it?"

Nowadays, Anna is one of TV's more chic style gurus, so her houses have a lot to live up to. True to form, her London home has a very unique look.

"I really wanted a spaceship that was a bit Barbarella and a bit Alien," she says passionately. "Everything very white, apart from the big blob of pink that goes through it, and everything very fluffy. I'd like one of those Star Trek-style spaceship doors that make a 'shoop' noise."

Anna's new house in Glasgow is like a blank canvas for her - it seems that sometimes even busy interior designers spend their free time redecorating. "I'll

probably spend the next ten years doing exactly that at weekends," Anna says excitedly. "I'm really looking forward to it."

The Glasgow house doesn't have a garden, but Anna doesn't seem to mind. Although she loves some glorious greenery, she's "not very good with worms" or "the earthy bit". This doesn't mean that a little foliage is totally out though, as long as there aren't any creepy-crawlies involved.

"Up here in Glasgow, we've got a great roof terrace," she says. "That's my next project and I'm very, very excited about it. It's like an outdoor room."

But everyone needs a little relaxation time now and again, and during her free time, "I see friends, go out to dinner, and enjoy having sleeps and watching TV, which I don't get to do very often".

Just like that little girl who made a gooseberry family out of a curtain, Anna is still excited by what's "larger than life

and exaggerated". But even for this queen of interior imagination, her dreamy designs for the ultimate home could take quite some time to fully realise.

"I'd love to have a pad on the moon," she laughs, thinking again about her London homestead. "It would be gorgeous

DIY DILEMMA

Match the famous faces to their gardening and interior design programmes... (answers p20)

