

Interview with Gary Christen

by Nina Gryphon

Nina Gryphon, NCGR Membership Director, is conducting a series of interviews with Advisory Board Members. This one is with astrologer Gary Christen.

Nina: How did you first get into astrology?

Gary: I always have had an interest in astronomy and joined the Junior Astronautical Society at age 10, where I helped grind the mirror of an 8" telescope and watched a lot of NASA movies of rocket launches. I also found astrology through Sidney Omarr in the newspaper, and at the same time with the 5 cent sun sign rolls produced by the weighing machine at the Woolworth Five and Dime store.

However, it was while attending School of Visual Arts in New York City that one of my teachers exposed me to real astrology, and I found myself in the winter of 1968-1969 at the New York Astrology Center buying way too many books. By summer of 1969, I was volunteering and doing work study to pay for classes. I never intended to become a full time astrologer, and I began to read charts as people became aware of my interest. I went back to school at the Livingston division of Rutgers University and met Dr. Kenneth Negus, a German literature professor who was the advisor to the Rutgers Astrological Society. With Dr. Negus, I designed a student initiated major in Foundations of Astrology and linked to the NASO School of Astrology (out of the New York Astrology Center) for class work and experience. I was awarded the first BA in Astrology from an accredited university in modern times. (I believe the last given undergraduate degree was in Germany in 1826, but don't quote me.) After that, I went to work for the New York Astrology Center, full time.

Nina: How did you start a practice?

Gary: This question makes some serious assumptions about what the profession of astrology is!

I have been employed in astrology with a paycheck my entire career. I have worked as a corporate astrologer for a steel company, in the publishing end of the field from books, journals, and magazines to helping to create the entire field of astrological computer program publishing. I have always been paid for work on the production side of the field, which brings me to an important observation, since when does having a practice become the definition of working as an astrologer?

Being on the production side of the field allows me a view of astrology not seen by most practitioners. First of all, the size of astrology in all its permutations in the modern world is staggering. The practitioner side of the field is dwarfed by the reach of the production side. Who has the expertise to edit major magazines or decide what features to put into an astrological computer program, along with all the artists whose work adorns so much of our modern culture? When an editor or a programmer works on a project, they have to know everything about the subject as well as the innovator or historical record can provide. They become, in effect, the guardians of the correct way to do or say something in this field. That requires an immense amount of knowledge and expertise.

Like in medicine where you have doctors who are highly trained and skilled at what they do, astrology has its practitioners. Similar to medicine, someone designs the instruments, other tools, drugs, etc., that are employed by the doctors. If a company designs and makes tools for use by brain surgeons, they better know all the ways that tool can be used, which means they have to understand the procedure as well as the doctor who advanced it in the first place. The same is true for astrology. Our best and brightest should edit the books, create the software, and work at presenting astrology in the best possible light.

All that being said, I have always maintained a practice in addition to working full time in astrology. My practice grew from word of mouth with no marketing.

Nina: Do you have any advice or guidance to astrologers who are starting a practice now?

Gary: Besides the idea that there are real, very rewarding careers in astrology that do not require the client astrologer model, a practice operates similarly to any profession that relies on attracting clients to your talents.

A lot of it has to do with one's social circles, particularly when starting out. If you are a socially outgoing person with a talent for presenting yourself, it is easier to attract interest and move through new groups of people introducing yourself and what you do. By using good counseling skills and applying your astrological knowledge well, your first clients will help you gain publicity. If you move in social circles that have limited means or antithetical differences to your ideas, it will be more difficult to begin to establish yourself and demonstrate your talents.

I rarely find advertising to pay off for beginners. Advertising seems to work best for the established counselors who want to expand their existing practice and can play off the fact that they may be recognized due to their earlier work. Establishing web pages, listing with the local Board of Trade, taking advantage of simple marketing is important and pays off for the established practice. For the beginner, however, just spreading the word that you do this novel thing and have great credentials is important, simply because astrological counseling is so personal that your prospective clients need to develop the initial trust by getting to know you. As you gain happy clients, they will help you because they already have a connection with you and have judged your talents.

Physical space creates overhead, but looks good for the established counselor and would be a possibly foolish gamble for the beginner--keep your investment and expenses low. Clients are there for the information and help, as long as the place where you read is dignified and clean. Besides your house, many times you can use a public place like a coffee shop to work, as long as there is the sense of intimate privacy and no one paying attention. The space where you work will say a lot about who you are as well as your abilities, so plan this part of things well and look for advantages in places that may be overlooked by others.

Most of all, value your time. Charge for what you do, and if people cannot afford your fee, move on. Find the places that attract traffic, the social groups intrigued by what you do that have some sort of means and network with other businesses that are symbiotic to what you do.

An example of establishing a symbiotic relationship could be with restaurants that are more casual. When I was in-between jobs or just wanted to occupy my time (in the days when it was in abundant supply), I used restaurants to do simple client interactions. I made relationships with the owners of

several restaurants. When I had an evening open I would call one of the establishments and let them know I was available. I would go and set myself up at a table with a tip jar, and the owner would let all the patrons know that the astrologer was available for readings. I would give folks 15 to 20 minutes and identify important features and timing, and they would generously tip me. Most of the time the owners would present me with meals and desserts, and at the end of the evening I would help them close up. Often the little chit chat about the chart would lead to a full reading later, and I would move into another new social circle with word-of-mouth bringing in new clients.

Be creative. If you go into counseling as your astrological career, remember, you have a craft that has very little oversight, and that gives you a great moral responsibility to do things more correctly than heavily regulated fields, where one can test the bounds of propriety. You also have one of the most creative and rewarding crafts available. The ratio of professional practicing astrologers in the general public makes us rarer than a calico lobster. Exploit that disparity and know your skills are highly desired.

Nina: You are an authority on Uranian astrology; what insights are you able to glean from this discipline that you didn't find in more basic forms of astrology?

Gary: I see Uranian as a component of Symmetrical Astrology, which is much wider in scope.

The Uranian System was created by a group of astrologers in Hamburg, Germany, based on the ideas of Alfred Witte (1878-1941) to be a synthesis of Western Astrology from the Greeks forward through the Renaissance, and bring astrology more in line with (the then) modern thinking and conceptualization of the early part of the twentieth century. It is a highly successful body of work, having survived for close to a century with thousands of adherents around the globe. The thinking behind the development of Uranian dictates that a thorough understanding of the past is essential to build astrology's future, but if astrology only has a past, it has no future.

The insights to this form come through the way information is organized. There is a hierarchical view of what to look for and where that allows the graphic and non-intellectual pattern recognition functions of the brain to operate without interference. This hierarchical view separates the inner experience of the native or event and the outer world of connections and matter. It is these ways of viewing the chart that attracted me to this way of thinking. The use of the Cardinal Axis is quite expanded in the system, giving its mundane abilities great reach.

As mentioned above I have come to see the Uranian System as a leg of Symmetrical Astrology. While the scope and completeness of Witte's observations are astounding to this day, he didn't get to sample the fruits of modern research into more ancient astrological cultures like the Mayans or Babylonians. Western astrology is quite rightfully focused on the Ecliptic as the center for planetary action, but it does this by reducing the sky to a plane and that limits the information that the entire sky holds for us. The Babylonians, for example, were focused on the local horizon, which allowed them to include the entire sky without distortions caused by projections to a plane. In the modern world we are not bound by place in the way the ancients were, and the horizon is a very movable thing. I have been integrating A.H. Blackwell's (1942-1992) use of off-ecliptic insights, and it allows the real use of fixed stars, three-dimensional midpoints, and great circle interactions. Blackwell's work in the 1970s had a great influence on me, and it is now that I am able to create the tools that make me giddy.

The other part of the question infers; what is missing in other forms of astrology that kept me looking, and the answer to that is nothing. Astrology in all its schools and forms is absolutely perfect. It is like

music--some folks play three chords on the guitar and become the darlings of the world and really are enjoyable. Some folks are technically perfect and have great musical knowledge and have their admirers. Some folks just can't carry a tune no matter what instrument they play and are awful. Like music, astrology has to speak to you so that you not only hear it, but understand it.

Nina: What do you see as the epoch-making astrological shift of our times, and why? Many point to the Uranus-Pluto square, while others focus on the precessional shift of the Spring Equinox into Aquarius.

Gary: Is it epochs you are asking about or eras? We are definitely in the era of the great cardinal cross, but we are in the epoch of the great Neptune Pluto conjunction of 1892.

It took an entire century for this combination to complete in 1992 with the conjunction of Uranus and Neptune. Prior to 1892 the outer planets were reversed in the zodiacal order (Pluto was furthest along in the signs and was followed by Neptune and then Uranus), and after 1992 they were in a more natural arrangement (Jupiter and Saturn in the lead followed by Uranus, then Neptune, and finally Pluto). Through the entire twentieth century, Uranus caught up to Pluto, passed it, and then caught up to Neptune and passed it as well.

Before 1892, horses dirtied the streets and there were no vacuum cleaners or refrigerators. After 1892, we saw the widespread introduction of technological advancement. Prior to this combination the world was ruled by kings and potentates, followed by the rise of the democratic rule by the masses after a lot of bloodshed. So much so that the actual generation born around 1892 mostly found death in WWI or the Spanish flu and were called "The lost generation." The "modern" world really begins to take form after 1992 with the rise of the Internet and the offshoring of the need for memories. Prior to the twentieth century, most knowledge was measured by what you could memorize and recite, and that has changed to how well you can manipulate information and conceptualize.

These things take time. We won't really begin to see it till after 2025 when Neptune finishes crossing the Cardinal Axis.

As far as the Aquarian age, nice song for the sixties. The idea of constellational boundaries varies with the different eras and epochs. Hand's work in his book, *Essays on Astrology* (Whitford Press, 1982), gives a good method of determining the boundaries of these things by using the moving precession of the Cardinal Axis to connect various fixed stars. The Cardinal Axis doesn't get to the first stars in the loosely defined Aquarius for a good long time, passing the last star in Pisces in 2813.

So are we in epoch making times? We are at the end of a great transformation and a new world is upon all of civilization. The implications will not be fully understood for some time and great upheaval is still reverberating. Of course the times in which we live are the times we get to witness, and for us these are the most important times. How we see our time is similar to this short parable by Nasrudin.

The Master was approached by his student who asked, "Tell me about the end of the World?" "Which one?" was the Master's reply and the student, somewhat taken aback asked, "There is more than one end of the World?" And the Master replied, "Yes, there are two ends of the World, the Greater End and the Lesser End. If my wife dies that is the Lesser End of the World, but if I should die, then that is the Greater End of the World."

Currently, Gary is President and CEO of Astrolabe, Inc., a world-renowned astrological think-tank and

*software publisher based in Cape Cod, Massachusetts. Astrolabe is the publisher of Solar Fire, Astrolabe Report System, and many other outstanding works in the field of astrology. Gary has spent most of his career working towards moving the entire field of astrology into a commanding position in the new technological age. He is currently working on **Nova Chartwheels** (along with Ray White as programmer) based on his methods and technique as well as writing **An Approach to Astrology**.*

Gary: I try to keep on the cutting edge of things.

Basically, I specialize in the Symmetrical Astrology, which is composed of various schools of thought comprising the Uranian System, Cosmobiology, Cosmobiosophical, and others based on the ideas compiled by Alfred Witte, and incorporates many of the mundane ideas introduced by A. H. Blackwell. This modern approach also utilizes other new-wave forms of astrology, as I long ago passed through the more orthodox and traditional forms. I try to teach people new ways of looking at and thinking about astrology.