



SPIRITED WAY

SHE **OUTSPOOKED** HER FELLOW CONTESTANTS ON THE HIT TV SERIES, **THE ONE**, NOW **PSYCHIC CHARMAINE WILSON**, WHO IS HEADING TO PERTH NEXT MONTH, TELLS **MELÉNIE AMBROSE** ABOUT HER **TRAGIC** PAST AND **DRUG ADDICTIONS**.

CHARMAINE WILSON HAS A picture-perfect image of the last time she saw her daughter Crystal. With her hair in pigtails and Cabbage Patch doll under her arm, the four-year-old waved happily as she was driven away from her Brisbane home by her grandparents to visit their Kempsey property in NSW.

Tragically, days later, on June 28, 1986, she would be dead – the victim of a car accident. Her dad, Tony Wilson, Charmaine's estranged husband, had been at the wheel. Drunk, he lost control on a straight stretch of road. He survived but Crystal was killed instantly.

"I felt like I had been shot into space with nothing to hang on to. Nothing felt safe," says Charmaine who then went on a drink-

ing binge for the next 16 years. "When you are confronted with your child in a coffin, it does something to your mind. There is no way you can get relief from that."

Charmaine Wilson's spiral into an abyss that ended with an odd psychic epiphany is detailed in her debut book, *Spirit Whispers: Autobiography of a Psychic Medium*. She was "packing death" in penning a personal exposé that is as raw in parts as it is disturbing.

Drunk at 14, a teen mum at 16, married at 17, she gives a no-holds-barred glimpse into the life of an A-grade student turned rebel-rouser who makes friends with life's non-conformists – musos, bikies and drug users alike.

This is, after all, a woman who at the tender age of 11 tossed aside Enid Blyton for Alice Cooper and Led Zeppelin while puffing

away on her first cigarette. "I thought people are going to either like it and respect me, or they're going to hate me for it," says the 44-year-old. "But I am a very honest person and I don't see any reason to hide anything. What has happened in my life has made me the person I am."

Wilson's series of tragic events began in 1982 with the death of her 20-year-old brother, Martin, in a motorbike accident. At the time, she was just four months into her new life as a teen mum with daughter Crystal.

"My step-dad John walked in and said Martin had been killed instantly in a bike accident. I couldn't believe it. It was the most horrific thing to face at 17 years of age," says Wilson. Oddly enough, she says the catastrophic



event helped "soften the blow" of what was to follow four years on – the death of her only child Crystal. "It was like 'OK, I know what this is. It's horrible. My life will never be the same again'," she says.

Confronting ex-husband Tony in hospital after the crash was another turning point. He had lost his spleen and suffered a broken leg in the accident.

"I couldn't send him any more hate," recalls Wilson. "He shouldn't have been driving. He was unlicensed and very drunk but even as a young woman of 22, I knew that he would never have intentionally killed his daughter, who he loved and adored. So I forgave him immediately. I didn't speak to him for another 10 years, but I did forgive him that day."

While Tony was jailed for six months for culpable driving, Wilson mourned the passing of her beloved grandpa, Mervyn, a chronic asthmatic, from lung failure at 65.

Her new partner, Mick, an attractive, Aussie bloke, had demons of his own to contend with. He had lost a child in a previous relationship – the baby boy dying at just 14 months of age.

The arrival of sons Alan, in 1989, and Jack, in 1994, brought a much-needed glimmer of hope, but the lure of the bottle and its pain-numbing abilities persisted. In 1999, the same year her father Mike Contarino died, Wilson found herself fighting a serious alcohol and drug addiction, one that would lead to her losing her two boys to Mick in a bitter custody battle.

"I was addicted to amphetamines on and off for three years. What people don't realise about 'speed' is that it takes you up fast, but it takes you down faster. In only a relatively short time, my whole life was destroyed.

"I congratulate Mick for taking the boys off me. It was what I needed to sort myself out again," says Wilson who describes the period as the "most shameful" in her life. "Losing your sons when you are a woman, it does something to you. It sends you nuts. You go to hell," she says.

Then came the voices. Materialising as if they were right beside her, up to seven different voices including that of her daughter Crystal would talk away to her for hours. Their message was clear – change your lifestyle or your life is over.

Along with this audio commentary, Wilson would spend hours fascinated by the strange faces, wispy figures and blue balls of light that would float through the air.

Certain it was some kind of psychosis associated with her drug taking and alcoholism, in September 2001 she finally kicked her bad habits for good. Yet the voices and visions continued. A year later when she turned on the TV, the penny dropped. On screen was another person who seemed to have the same problem. His name – John Edward, America's uber-psychic.

"I cried and cried because I couldn't understand the whole concept of spirit communication. It wasn't something I wanted," she says.

But the more she resisted, the more the entities persisted. A crash course in clairvoyance followed with Wilson devouring all the literature she could find on psychic phenomena.

"Once I understood I was a spiritual medium, it was so easy for me. I can't tell you how easy it was," she says with a sigh.

Private readings quickly became group podium-medium sessions in which Wilson "read" several members of the audience. If she was looking for validation of her unconventional powers, she got it in 2005 with the Australian Psychic

Association voting her Australian Psychic of the Year.

So what does this "spirit-medium" see? What does the "other side" look like?

"Heaven is only another dimension, unseen by human eyes, that coexists in our world. I see it as a memory; a mind's-eye view. I don't actually see full-bodied spirits standing in front of me. That would give me a heart attack!" she says.

"If I get a sick feeling it can mean a suicide or murder, generally a life taken by someone's hand. A pain in the chest usually means a heart attack and pain in the head, a brain tumour. If someone dies in a car accident, my whole body vibrates. You can feel it and hear it."

So do spirits have a sense of humour?

"Absolutely! They can be hilarious. I call myself a com-medium sometimes," Wilson says. "Once on stage, I had a beer belly competition going on between two male spirits. Another time, a spirit gave me his name as being both Colin AND Karen. A little old lady in the wheelchair looked up from the crowd and said 'Well, that's correct actually. My son was a 'she' if you know what I mean.'"

In 2008, it was time for Australian television audiences to see Charmaine Wilson in full psychic flight. Appearing on Channel 7's series *The One* – the search for Australia's most gifted psychic – the Brisbane mum's talents were pitted against six others from around the country.

Challenges included finding a boy lost in the bush picking up "energy" off his teddy bear, locating contraband in an ocean of sea containers and performing impromptu readings for celebrities and sports identities. With a contagious smile and an impressive hit-rate, Wilson was soon favourite to win the show.

The former wild child came into her own when asked to identify a pair of silky, snakehipped pants worn by one of Australia's foremost bad boys of rock. While she didn't get the owner's name (Bon Scott from AC/DC), she did deduce the pants belonged to a man (not bad considering they were small and silky), that his name began with an "R" (Scott was born Ronald Belford "Bon" Scott), that there was a connection to a car (Scott was found dead in a car in London from acute alcohol poisoning) and that his career peaked in 1978-'79 (the band's 1979 album *Highway to Hell* was a runaway success).

Guest judges rock aficionados Molly Meldrum and Glenn A. Baker were impressed.

Not so surprisingly, since taking home the crown (and yes, she did predict she would win the series), Wilson has been in big demand.

Last year, she performed 50 shows around the country and did more than 200 private readings at \$150 a pop.

She claims even police have been in touch to ask if she can shed any light on the disappearance of Brisbane schoolboy Daniel Morcombe.

The 13-year-old vanished from a bus stop in 2003. The spirit-medium reveals she's had "a lot of feelings about a certain landscaping business" in regards to the case, but admits she steers away from psychic detective work feeling it just "re-opens old wounds for people".

Helping grieving parents, however, is a high priority, particularly in light of Wilson's own loss of Crystal 23 years ago. Today she runs Spiritual Counselling for Bereaved Parents – a free service to give a spiritual helping hand to parents who have lost children.

There are also retreats three times a year in the Gold Coast hinterland where grieving parents

pay \$750 for an all-expenses stay to discover the meaning of life, death and the after-life, according to Wilson.

But could this reality show winner be accused of preying on one of the most vulnerable of all victims, grief-stricken parents who, in their desperation, cling to any hope they can to keep their child's memory alive?

"That is absolutely not the case. I am simply using my own experience to help others," she says. "Having lost a child myself, I can empathise with them. It's their choice if they come to the retreat and I don't charge for my counselling. How can I be targeting someone if I don't ask them to pay?"

"It brings them a lot of peace, actually, and a sense of empowerment. They come to realise that when a child dies, it is only a temporary separation. It is not forever. You will meet them again," says Wilson pointing out that raising money for charities is another of her passions.

In 2006, she says she raised \$26,000 from her public seminars to charities including Bravehearts, a support group for victims of child sexual abuse, and Compassionate Friends, a self-help group for parents who have lost children.

Among those won over by Wilson's spooky powers are Sharon and Bruce Andrews, from Gatton in Queensland. In March 2004 they lost their eight-year-old son Tim in a car accident while Bruce was driving. A 25-year-old woman had run into the side of their vehicle. Desperate to make contact with their little boy, they got in touch with Charmaine who came up with several chilling accuracies.

They included the digits 613 – the number of Tim's favourite dozer driven by Bruce at his earth-moving business, and news that Sharon would give birth to another boy on February 2, 2005 (Billy Tim was born on February 3, 2005).

"To know that Tim is OK makes it a little easier to try and deal with it," says Sharon. "We have still not mended our hearts, we probably never will, but at least we are luckier than some. We can have a contact of sorts with Tim through Charmaine. Without her I don't know if we'd have got through this."

For Wilson, life these days is hectic rather than hellish. She has a "fantastic, open and loving" relationship with her sons Alan, now 19, and Jack, 15, and shares joint custody of the boys with Mick, who lives just 10 minutes away.

Her new partner is Patrick Painter, 51, an enthusiastic musician from Virginia in the US who manages Wilson's Spirit Whispers business. The couple met on the internet dating site RSVP in 2007. It's an impressive turnaround for a once depressive mother whose daily highlight was getting a dole cheque to feed her drug habit.

"It has certainly been a journey – one that has shaped me and one that I embrace daily," she says.

"Somehow everything turned out all right. I just hope the book shows people what can happen in your life, how far down you can go, but that there is faith. If you have a little bit of faith in your life and you believe in yourself, you can turn your life around."

✻ *Spirit Whispers*, Fontaine Press, \$23.95.

For more information go to www.fontaineexpress.com/spiritwhispers

✻ Charmaine Wilson will be touring WA in March at the Octagon Theatre, UWA, on March 18; Mandurah Performing Arts Centre, March 23; and Bunbury Entertainment Centre, March 24. Visit www.spiritwhispers.org for more.



Spirit Whispers
Charmaine Wilson



CHARMAINE'S WILSON'S
LATE BROTHER MARTIN



HER DAUGHTER CRYSTAL



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