

## **How I Became Involved in Astrology**

*By Virginia Bell*

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I have to give Father Chase, my parish priest at St. Aloysius, credit for pushing me towards astrology, although he would be horrified if he knew. At fifteen I was devouring the monthly Dell Astrology magazine; not the in-depth articles; just the daily forecasts. I was miserable and wanted desperately to know if anything good would happen to me. I lived in a wealthy Jewish community on Long Island; my parents were poor and Christian. My father, a short order cook in an all night diner, was extremely abusive and we fought constantly. My mother, fragile and childlike, was slowly disappearing like a bar of soap; years later she would be diagnosed with Schizophrenia. The magazine became my lifeline; every month I pored through the pages searching for something positive to hold on to.

One day after Sunday school I casually asked Father Chase his opinion of astrology. “*The devil’s work*” he replied harshly. I was shocked by his rigid attitude and closed mind. I knew literally nothing about astrology (apart from the fact that I was a Taurus) but I decided then and there to put my faith in the stars and not the saints. For years I didn’t go near a church. My fate was sealed.

My next encounter with astrology was in the mid Sixties when I was living in Italy. At seventeen my Progressed Sun entered Gemini and I began going into New York City to pursue a modeling career and study dance. At nineteen my Progressed Sun hit my 9<sup>th</sup> house cusp and I was off to Europe with a one way ticket and a few hundred dollars. I needed to work so I headed to Rome where the film business had exploded. I managed to find plenty of work and although I met fabulous people and had lots of amazing adventures, by career never really took off. By the time I was twenty-six I was confused about what to do and where to live. Tullio Pinelli (Federico Fellini’s screenwriter on films such as *La Dolce Vita*, *8 ½*, and *Juliet of the Spirits*) suggested I seek advice from a group of seers who lived in Turin. One of them was an astrologer. I took the train to Turin and had a meeting with Doctore Arno. He told me I had very good luck (“molto fortuna”) in Europe but I decided to return to the States anyway. It was my Lunar Return and I was feeling the need for a change.

Back in New York City I worked as a story editor for a film company but that job like everything else I had done up to then was connected to a powerful man (Venus in Gemini on the Mid-heaven). I had always worked on other people’s dreams and never created anything on my own and was aching to do so. But what? I loved to exercise and I was obsessed with food so I considered opening an exercise studio or a health food restaurant but I had no formal training in either area. The food finally won out (Sun, Moon, and Ceres conjunct in Taurus) and in 1974 I opened a natural foods restaurant in Greenwich Village called *Whole Wheat N Wild Berrys*. The concept of health food was gaining momentum but the food itself was boring and heavy (dense carrot or soy bean loafs and bread that could sink a ship). I had a vision of food that could be healthy also but lush and delicious. The concept took off and the restaurant was a success.

Friends wondered how I could trade foreign travel and film festivals for long hours of cooking, cleaning, and bussing tables but I thrived. Not only was I having my Saturn Return, my Progressed New Moon was conjunct my natal 9<sup>th</sup> house Saturn in Gemini. The restaurant was an education; it taught me how to show up, work hard, and be accountable. It wasn’t easy (Saturn never is) but I welcomed the responsibility and challenge and loved watching the business grow. Most important, I finally had an identity and a place in the world; I even healed the eating disorder which had plagued me for years. In a way I had been drifting in a sea of glamour and illusion (Neptune on

my Virgo ascendant); the restaurant was like a little tug boat that steered me to safety.

During the Seventies my 9<sup>th</sup> house Gemini planets (Mercury, Uranus, Saturn, and Venus) were humming. I explored therapy, yoga, The Course in Miracles, EST, bodywork - you name it. I never thought of studying astrology; for one thing I didn't think I was smart enough to do the math. On the other hand my knowledge was limited; I only thought of astrology in terms of prediction. I actually had an astrologer on staff; the crew and I received readings in exchange for meals. "*When will things get better?*" was my usual question. I never realized how much more there was to astrology. That is until the late eighties.

At that point I had been in business for fourteen years and was doing well. So well I decided to open a second one. My sister suggested we go into business together. She lived in the Berkshires (in Western Massachusetts); Canyon Ranch and Kripalu (the yoga institute) had recently opened and the area was booming. It seemed perfect. We found an old coffee shop in Great Barrington that was going out of business, renovated it and opened in May, 1988. That summer we were jammed. Tanglewood (the popular music festival) was nearby and we would typically serve 350 customers for weekend brunch alone. Unfortunately in the winter everything died. There was skiing in the area but that first winter we had hardly any snow. The seasonal business wasn't my only problem. Unbeknownst to me, Pluto (in Scorpio) was transiting my 2<sup>nd</sup> house and was exactly opposite my 8<sup>th</sup> house Sun and would eventually hit my Moon. We're talking *years* of Pluto! My best friend of 27 years died that year. That should have been a clue.

I've heard that Pluto brings a guide during his transit. I became friends with a woman who owned a weekend home in the Berkshires. She and her husband lived in New York City and I would often drive back with them on Sunday evening. One night on the way home she read aloud from an astrology book. I was riveted; I never heard astrology describe with such richness and poetry. It was Steven Forrest's *The Inner Sky*. She told me it was currently out of print but would lend me her copy when she was finished.

When I finally read it I was deeply moved. Steven's language and images brought the planets, signs and houses alive for me. In the back of the book my friend had written Steven's phone number. In retrospect I find that odd since she never called him for a reading; it must have been for me. I called and ordered a natal reading; then a transit and progression reading. I never knew astrology could be so deep and complex. I felt a whole new world opening up for me. At the time I was under enormous stress; I worked in my NYC restaurant from Monday to Thursday then get on a train to Hudson, New York where someone would pick me up and drive me to Great Barrington. I worked in GB from Thursday to Sunday night, returned to the city and started all over again. I was exhausted, going broke, and I had absolutely no life outside the restaurant. Those couple hours on the train to Hudson each week were like gold. I would listen to Steven's tapes or read astrology. By now I had discovered Liz Green and Howard Sasportas; I was hooked. Astrology was the one area that was not contaminated by all my problems and financial stress; a luminous world filled with gods and goddesses, myth, and magic.

I closed the restaurant in Great Barrington in 1991, and then turned my attention back to the one in New York City. By this time Pluto was making an opposition to my Taurus Moon. My mother become seriously ill, I was on the verge of a breakdown, plus my original restaurant needed work but I had gone through all my money. I struggled to keep it going while looking for a buyer. At least I was back in NYC full time; I learned about NCGR, began going to astrology conferences, and started studying with Eileen

McCabe. I sold my restaurant in the city in 1995. Pluto was at 0 degrees Sagittarius plus my Solar Arc Pluto had just made a conjunction to my ascendant. The surgery was complete; an old life was over and a new one was about to begin.

In the late nineties I wrote a book called *The Manhattan Health Pages* and I assumed I could carve out a new career writing and speaking about health and wellness. I did that for a while but the corporate lectures on “green living” led to talks on astrology and the articles on “urban wellness” led to writing Sun sign columns for magazines. Now I am a full time astrologer and writer. Along the way I studied with Wendy Ashley and I have been in Steven Forrest’s Apprenticeship Program since 2000.

I came to astrology fairly late in life; Father Chase’s comment may have nudged me in that direction but it took me a long time (and a whole lot of Pluto) to get here. I used to wish I had started earlier but perhaps the single most important thing astrology has taught me is that we all have our own individual timing; a rose is no less than a daffodil because it blooms later in the season. What’s essential is to honor that timing and trust the process no matter how long it takes. In many ways I’ve come full circle. As T.S. Eliot said in *Little Gidding*, “*We shall not cease from exploration and in the end of all our exploring we shall come to where we started and know the place for the first time.*”

*Virginia Bell is a full time writer and astrologer based in New York City. She has written Sun Sign columns for many magazines including US Weekly, TV Guide, The Fashion Mini, The Daily Front Row, and Tennis Week. She has also lectured on astrology at corporations such as Viacom, MTV, Bovis Construction, and The New York Times and is currently working on a book. Visit her online at [www.virginiabellaastrology.com](http://www.virginiabellaastrology.com)*