



BY WINNIE BONELLI

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Tucked in Tia Belle's back bag was a deck of dog tagged Tarot cards. When the other fifth graders stayed after school for extra help, the pint-sized brunette would go home instead with the teacher to read those cards. Her insight was uncanny, unfiltered, and extremely honest even then.

Never one to mince words, she laughingly refers to it as her "balls to the wall" approach, the same approach that captivated television viewers during an earlier appearance on "The Housewives of New Jersey."

It wasn't long afterwards that executives from FremantelMedia North America came courting at her enchanted shop, The Craft in Totowa. Fast forward ahead, the medium/psychic's A&E Network series, "Psychic Tia," is debuting with back-to-back episodes at 10 p.m. Saturday, Aug. 3rd.

Despite her dual ability to both talk to dead people and predict the future, Tia seems genuinely surprised and delighted by this newfound notoriety. Only five years have passed since Tia came "out of the closet." She explains, "I was three years old when people, who had passed, began showing up in my room. I wasn't afraid. It felt comforting and they had a warm energy about them."

"One day, I told my best friend that her father was going to die and he did two days later. After

that, I held this gift I'd been given dearly and closely, keeping it within my family. But down deep I always knew I was different."

Tia's life unfolded traditionally enough. She married, became a mother, divorced and remarried, joined the Passaic County Sheriff's Office, and worked as a crime scene investigator on a forensic level. One thing she didn't do was volunteer any intuitions or psychic impressions she received. "I didn't want to leave myself open to ridicule on the job. I was a girl in a boy's outfit trying to fit in," the 40-something woman confessed.

Eventually sidelined by a life threatening infection, Tia had plenty of time to think. "I vowed that when I got better I was going to go for it, and use my gift," she said. She emerged from that illness a new person, armed with unstoppable courage and determination. "I was raised by a Marine, who instilled the importance of giving your all to everything you do," she interjected.

Searching for the right location, Tia was lead to an historic stone building in Totowa. The two cherubs carved into rocks over the doorway validated the choice. A quaint shop soon emerged, filled with potions, candles and other supernatural paraphernalia that Tia refers to as "a land of misfit toys." These are symbolic items Tia often "prescribes" for her clients addressing every imaginable issue, from finding one's soul mate to rescuing a floundering business.

Armed with an innate flair for drama, Tia suits up for the day's appointments in a long black flowing gown. It perfectly complements her bigger-than-life personality. Reading for a client, Tia relays messages from the spiritual world with lavish amounts of maternal-like compassion and comfort. When it comes to predicting the future, advice is often tempered with a generous dose of humor.

When a woman asks about her prospective love life, Tia is quick to admonish, "Forget about dipping that cannoli into your espresso. You need to get some double A batteries and to concentrate on your business first."

Her overriding intention throughout is to use her vision to provide guidance to her clients and help them live better lives. As for Tia's own life, between running a business, having a family, and listening to spirits, it can get pretty noisy.