



What's new, pussycat?

Beata Pillach will dialogue with your dog, chat with your cat or go hoarse with your horse

BY ANTONY ANDERSON

Once had to babysit a potential mother-in-law's three cats. I must have really wanted to impress my girlfriend. When I arrived at her mom's place, I found three sheets of paper waiting for me — each an excruciatingly detailed psychological overview of the cat's habits, traits, preferences and vomit patterns. I never recovered from that. The relationship fizzled. Until very recently, I thought people who were too devoted to their pets to be of dubious and suspect character.

Then I heard about Beata Pillach.

When she wants to talk to your horse or cat, Pillach apparently doesn't even need to be in the same city. The self-trained animal communicator just settles down in a quiet place, focuses on a photograph of your pet and then sends out a telepathic signal. Once contact has been made, Pillach and the animal can have a transnational chat made up of words, images, feelings, sounds or taste. "Most animals," she says, "are happy to share their feelings."

Don't believe it? In 1491, all the smarty-pants knew the world was flat. In 1500, the same smarty-pants knew the sun revolved around the Earth. And in 1966, music critics thought the Beatles would never surpass *Revolver*.

When I first heard what Pillach did for a living, I thought "harmless delusion." But I couldn't resist meeting her. Over the phone I liked the fact that there was nothing pompous or otherworldly about her. She made her work sound as magical as riding a bike: "A lot of children know instinctively how to talk with animals. They take it for granted. It's not a gift. I believe it's something we've forgotten."

We meet for coffee. I do discreet mental exercises. "Remain open-minded. Do not shut down. Remain open. The Beatles did the *White Album* after *Revolver*."

Born in Leicestershire, England, Pillach moved to Canada at the age of seven in 1972. She was raised in a conservative Catholic family in and around Waterloo, Ont. While very young, she felt a deep connection with animals but didn't explore it. Her queasiness about blood prevented her from becoming a vet. Drifting through a succession of jobs in fashion, retail, fundraising and public relations, she decided to volunteer in an environmental group dedicated to saving dolphins. In 1991, she had the opportunity to swim alongside a dolphin in Ambleside Harbour near the English town of Newcastle-on-Tyne. When she showed me photographs of herself in the water with the dolphin, I felt a little churlish at having wondered whether she was making this up. Eight years after the swim, her delight and wonder are still obvious. "There was so much wisdom in those eyes and unconditional acceptance." The whole encounter was "an incredibly life-altering experience."

Essentially self-taught, Pillach's reputation has spread by word of mouth. Her first client was a sick cow who told Pillach that she had swallowed a piece of metal while chewing on a fence. "Farmers are very practical. They wanted to cure their cow." Three years later, Pillach has stopped temping. Clients are now referred to her by Karen Bentley, a veterinarian in Guelph, Ont. Says Bentley: "From my perspective, it adds to the overall clinical picture. It helps to hear it from the horse's mouth, so to speak."

In one instance, Bentley told me, she was unable to treat a cocker spaniel's aggression. She contacted Pillach, who chatted with the dog. The dog told her there was something "wrong" with his brain. When the dog was re-examined, Bentley found a fatal tumour: "Beata described conditions the owners and I weren't aware of. Her physical and emotional descriptions were very good." Bentley is pragmatic about the question of animal communication: "If everything in this world could be explained, that would be nice. But life isn't like that."

I began thumbing through the Yellow Pages. Dr. Martin DeForest practises in Toronto: "I'm not discounting anything, but you have to take it with a barrel of



Beata Pillach, of Waterloo, Ont., claims she can communicate with animals. Here she talks on the phone with a client, trying to determine what the client's pet is complaining about. Looking on is Toshi.

salt. I've had clients who've consulted psychics when their animals were sick. In my experience, it was of no help diagnostically." Regarding the spaniel's tumour, DeForest is unimpressed: "It's not unusual for an older dog with a brain tumour to develop behaviour changes, and that can include aggression."

Another Toronto veterinarian, Robin Lane, suggests that animal communication may have more to do with observing body language and verbal cues than telepathic connection. "Does the animal shy away from us when we stroke a certain area? Is one of its legs raised [in pain]?"

Pillach's clients counter that she often does her work over the phone. So I got



on the phone and had my own cross-Canada chats (though using only words and sounds).

I began with Linda Park, a retired banker living in Whistler, B.C. Her son's dog, Ranger, would not stop barking at people walking by. She contacted Pillach, who asked for a photo and information about Ranger's age and breed. Pillach telepathically contacted Ranger, who explained to her: "It's my job to warn them [about the people walking by]. I have to do my job."

Pillach suggested that Park thank Ranger as soon he started his barking warning routine. When Park did that, Ranger the relentless barker stopped barking. That merely impressed Park. The next part of their conversation

amazed her. Pillach mentioned two events — Ranger's tussle with a porcupine and his being left behind when Park's children had gone snowmobiling. Ranger wanted Park to know that he would never play with porcupines again and that he could have kept up with the snowmobile.

Park had not mentioned either story to Pillach. "I swear to God that Beata met and knew him. She kept describing him to a T." Although Park is delighted with Pillach's work, she acknowledges that the whole thing sounds bizarre. "My friends snort: 'Have you got nothing better to spend your money on?'"

I continued on the Pillach trail and contacted Tamara Taylor, a Toronto actress living and working in Los Angeles. She has a chihuahua named Big Poppa. The one incident that stuck out for her was Pillach mentioning Big Poppa eating "some kind of a sweet nut." The night before, Taylor had dropped a honey-roasted cashew on the floor and her pooch had

'Animals know more about us than we do about ourselves. They don't get enough credit'

scooped it up immediately. Pillach said he wants to eat a lot more of them.

Then I talked with Estelle Gee, a professional organizer in Toronto, whose cat was sick and wouldn't eat. Pillach tuned in to something that the cat had eaten before and really liked, "chicken and spices." Gee was stunned. She occasionally feeds her cat bits of chicken souvlaki.

As I talk to people who have dealt with Pillach, I cannot help but think that if none of this were true, then she has gone to a great deal of trouble. I have one more client to contact. A hypnotherapist in Stoney Point, Ont., named Judy Colangelo, who was concerned about her beagle Cujo's nervous and aggressive behaviour. An animal behaviourist was able to modify the aggression somewhat

but the problem persisted. Colangelo arranged a chat with Pillach, who passed on Cujo's message: "I am the way I am because of them." Her owner "was so sad over so many things. I started to feel her anger, too. She doesn't show it. And it just hangs in the air. I want to be a happier dog, but I need permission to release this pain, too. It has become my pain." Colangelo said it was a difficult message to hear but it led her to deal with her own unresolved emotional turmoil. During that period, she noticed that "Cujo became a more peaceful, gentler dog. It's almost as if she was a different dog."

Pillach often finds herself in the position of delivering a message that some clients may not want to hear. "I have to honour what the animals tell me," she says. "They know more about us than we do about ourselves. We don't give them enough credit. We're going into outer space in search of intelligent life. We should be looking at our own planet."

I hate to admit there might have been merit in those three pages of cat profiles from my former potential mother-in-law. And indeed, next spring, Pillach is scheduled to give a workshop on animal communication to the Ontario Association of Veterinary Technicians.

I return to my notes from Lane: "We can understand how an animal feels. You can tell that it's hungry, that it's happy to see you when you come home from work." But assuming more than this, he says, is probably our innate tendency to project our human qualities onto our much loved pets. "Anthropomorphism is common. The human race is very good at it."

But, he adds: "I'm not that old, but I've been around long enough to know that if you say 'never' about something, someone will eventually come around to prove you wrong."

The *White Album*, don't forget the *White Album*. □

ASIDES

Julie Stewart

Age 35

Occupation Actor

Current project For the third season, Stewart is playing the role of Sergeant Ali McCormick in the police drama series *Cold Squad*.

Claim to fame What's really nice is when people tell me how much they enjoyed my character Rosemary on the TV series, *North of 60*. I was only on for one season. That role was another step toward feeling comfortable in front of the camera.

What is your most treasured possession? It sounds really corny, but my wedding band. My husband is the best thing that's ever happened to me. That's what the band represents.

What's your favourite room in your home? Oh my God, the bedroom, and I can't quite say any more.

What's your greatest indulgence? I have so many. I love just hanging out drinking, smoking and talking to all kinds of interesting people.

What's the worst advice you have been given? Someone once told me to take a questionable role. When I think back, I guess I learned from the experience.

And the best? The best advice came from my husband. He said, 'You can do whatever you want.'

How do you relax? Running. Also, I love to spend time listening to all types of music.

Did you have an awkward teenage stage? Oh my, yes. I was a bit of a freak, an outsider. I had an effervescent nature that drove everyone crazy. Until I started doing plays, I didn't feel like I fit in anywhere.

What do you love most about Canada? I adore the landscape across the country. Also, Canadians are likeable people. I've been able to see the country by working in various cities. I hope to see more.

What do your friends consider your worst personality trait? They get really frustrated when I'm being hard on myself.

What's your biggest regret? I really don't like it when I'm nasty to people.

What quality do you dislike most in others? Insensitivity and selfishness.

If you were not an actor, what would you be doing? Probably working a cash register, which is something I aspired to do as a child because I wanted to push the buttons.

What was your first job? I worked in a fabric store rolling bolts of fabric for 10 cents an hour. Also, I had to rearrange the stockroom.

If you could invite three people, living or deceased, to a dinner party, who would be on your guest list? Susannah Moodie, Rick Hansen and Mozart.

Define your style. It is a combination of really expensive and really cheap.

— Marcy Cornblum

