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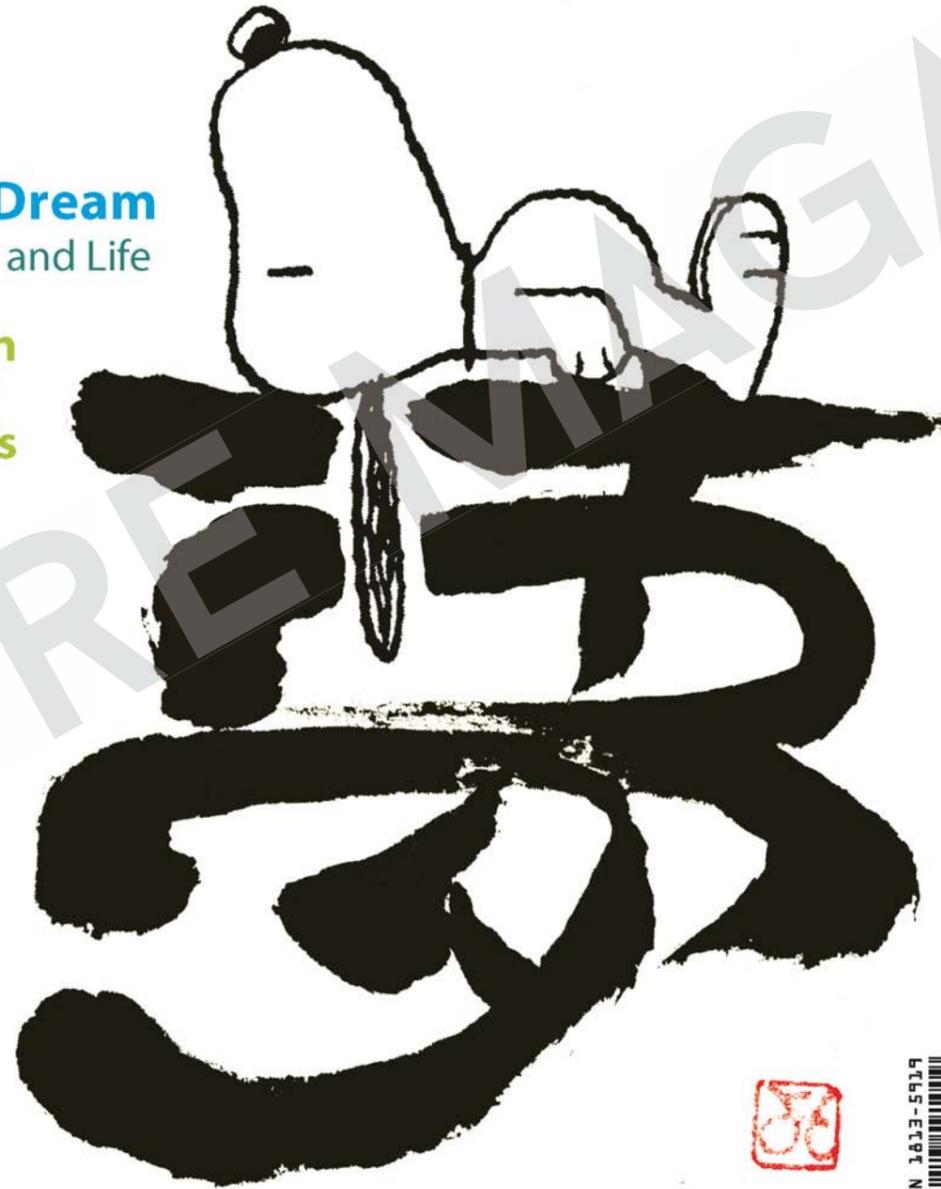
Issue 115

Dare to Dream
Snoopy Art and Life

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Words of Wisdom

A chance meeting with an old gentleman on a hot steamy night gave this writer an auspicious foretelling of good fortunes to come

Text Tara Lee / Photos Dave Chung

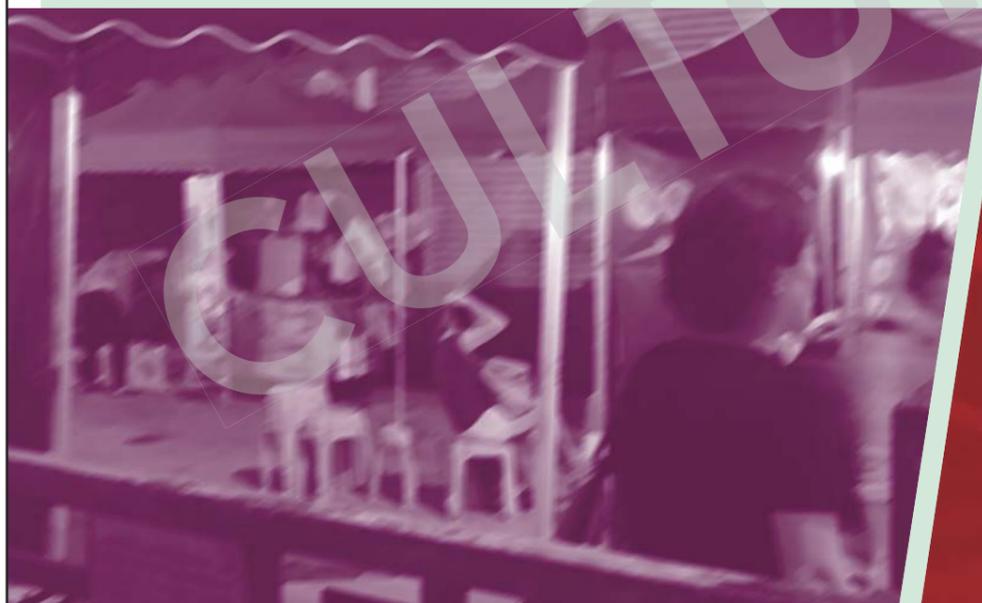
My recent encounter with Chinese fortune reading began with an innocent hunt for a pair of shoes on “Sneakers Street” in Mong Kok with a friend. Something about the shabby wooden desk and his stack of Feng Shui books attracted me to the old gentleman on the street.

Perhaps it was the excruciating humidity and the heat of the night that propelled me to make an impulsive decision to sit down for a fortune reading session. My friend, Yan, born and bred in Hong Kong, was easy enough

to hire as the translator for the evening, in exchange for a cold can of Tsing Tao beer.

Yan and I settled on the red plastic stools in the fortune reader’s outdoor office, and I told him the date, time and place of my birth. The old gentleman had already put on his reading glasses and scribbled the numbers in his notebook. After flipping through a few pages of a ratty book, he said I am a “warm kind”, which was explained to mean “wearing more blue clothing can be auspicious – to complement the heat with water.”

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Words of Wisdom

35

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After the unexpected wardrobe advice came the palm reading. He took one glance and commented that I have the hands of someone born into wealth, since my fingers were slender and smooth. After my protest against the spoiled child verdict, he relented and undertook further examination.

"I see that you will live to see over eighty years of age, because the crease that leads up to your wrist from the palm is long. The shape of the outer parts forms a mound, which is good. It makes your hands look like a bowl. To hold money." Just when I thought two hundred Hong Kong dollars wasn't a steep price for such blessings, he finished off with a disclaimer. "But I can't promise anything after eighty-four." Nevertheless, it was still comforting to know I had not yet reached one-third of my life expectancy.

Although I am not necessarily superstitious, I was eager to hear what he had to say about my face. A small part of this curiosity must

have been vanity, but it's only human to wonder about the first impression people might have of me. An old Korean saying goes, "After forty, one is responsible for his disposition." The logic is that a person's inner character, good or bad, emanates through their outer appearance.

This is not an endorsement of the "Disney rule", where the physically attractive person is good and another of less appealing appearance is the villain, but rather a passably scientific approach to ageing; depending on the activities you do, your body reflects your lifestyle. For example, if you're a happy person, you must smile a lot and your facial muscles will shape in a certain way. If you have a clean diet, your complexion will show fewer imperfections.

Since I have less than a few decades on me, the fortune-teller focused more on my birthmarks. The mole dotted next to my left eye, he said, is called a "tear dot", since it looks



like a tear drop that trickled down from the eye. "People with tear dots cry a lot. They live a tragic life," he said.

On a lighter note, the freckle next to my mouth represents a house. "The forehead represents your younger age, the middle section of your face represents your thirties to forties, and below that down to the chin shows your old age. Your freckle is in the bottom third. Therefore, from forty-five and later, you'll live in a big house," he assured me.

In the latter part of the session, he gave a generally positive outlook on career and family relations. As Yan and I parted, we both agreed he probably was not a psychic.

Chinese fortune telling dates back to the Shang dynasty, where diviners would "solve doubts" by asking heaven questions and observing the cracks of tortoise shells they punctured for answers. Other divination techniques, such as Feng Shui and Guan Lu, developed around astrologic observations

and burial practices.

As in other ancient civilizations, these divination techniques lack scientific or logical foundations and are considered more of an earlier form of spirituality by anthropologists.

While waiting for Yan, who was haggling for a better price at a street shop, I recalled some of the cautions from the fortune-teller: "You think too much when there is no need to worry. You speak before you think; take a moment to reconsider your words. People come and go and that's all right. Things can be tough when you are younger, but your time will come."

These are generic wisdoms not difficult to find, a list I can imagine reading in any newspaper's astrology column. What struck me was the beauty in having someone tell you such things in person on a hot summer night, in the middle of a busy street in Hong Kong, where you don't typically expect words of encouragement from a stranger. But then again, I did pay him to tell me all of it. ■