

Remembering Isabel Hickey The Spiritual Sparkplug by Brian Clark

Reflecting on Isabel Hickey has sent me tumbling back through time, arriving at 1972 when I was given *Astrology: A Cosmic Science* as a birthday present. I was 23 and searching ô reading Alan Watts, visiting the Spiritualist Church, and practicing Hatha Yoga. The book felt like a sacred text: a hardback edition with a blue-and-yellow dust jacket and a mandala of a twelve-pointed star on the cover. When I opened it to the Preface, I read: ôSo you have decided to study astrology. Welcome. You are starting a journey towards self-understanding í ö [1] A chord deep inside me was struck. I had come home. I thought she was speaking just to me, illuminating the path I had always been seeking.

Astrology: A Cosmic Science was self-published. My copy was the fifth printing and, if I recall, about 5,000 were published each edition. By the time the book was republished by CRCS Publications in 1992, more than 80,000 of the hardbacks had been sold. The front cover of the new edition was subtitled *The Classic Work on Spiritual Astrology*. Perhaps it was the ôspiritualö connection that spoke most clearly to me, but Issie, as she was affectionately known, also spoke about the soul, the importance of symbols, and the power to shape our own destiny from the blueprint of the horoscope. She was not just an astrologer and teacher, but a spiritual mentor as well.

I fondly remember meeting Isabel. It was June 23, 1978. Astrology was now a cornerstone of my life, but I was still exploring realms of consciousness. One track I was following was the Huna philosophy of Max Freedom Long. Imagine my surprise and delight when the next Huna Convention was announced for Ottawa, and one of the main presenters would be Isabel Hickey. At that time, I was living only two kilometres from the venue. The confluence was remarkable: Destiny had smiled upon me.

At the moment I met Issie, the transiting North Node was at $1^{\circ}06^{\wedge}$ Libra. My natal Sun is at $0^{\circ}42^{\wedge}$ Libra; Issie's natal Venus was at $0^{\circ}33^{\wedge}$ Libra. The picture this paints is a faithful portrait of our relationship. Issie died two years later; our time together was brief, yet it left its enduring influence. Her legacy is a reminder of the divinatory and spiritual foundation stones of astrology.

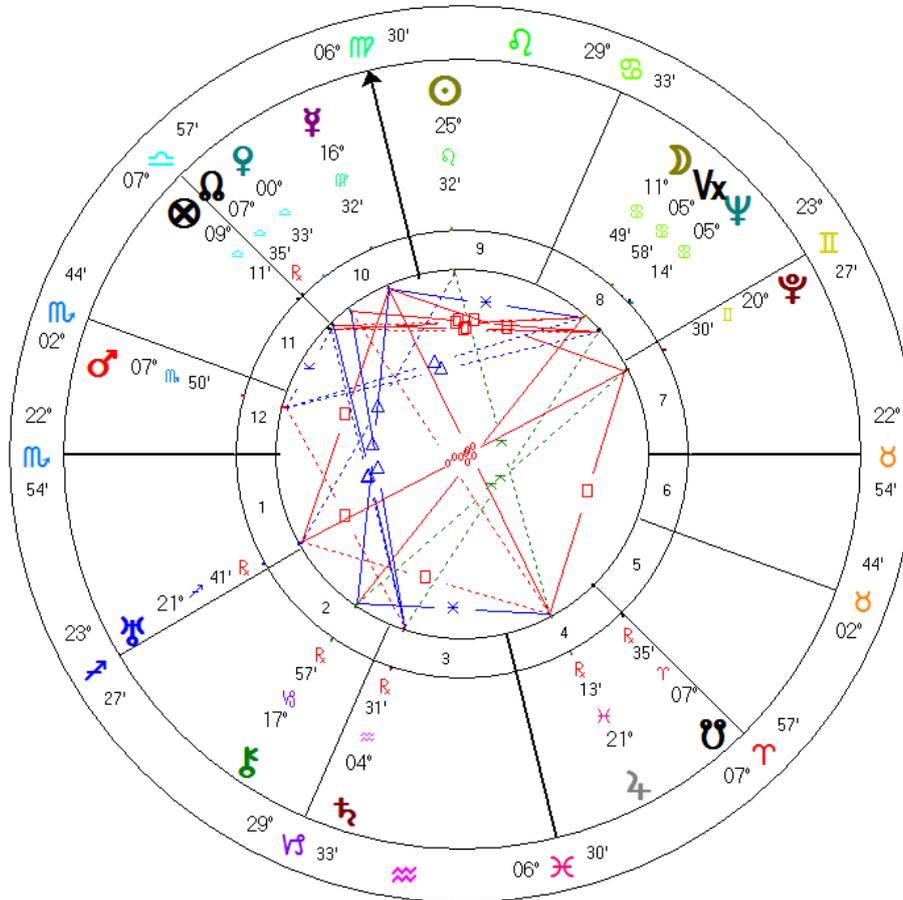
In Issie's natal chart, all seven classical planets are in the signs of their rulership ô something Issie liked to point out, as if it were a blessing from the gods. A mutable grand cross involving Mercury, ruler of her Midheaven, challenged her to strengthen her ideas and articulate her knowledge, and it contributed to her vocation as an influential, inspiring, and dynamic teacher of astrological wisdom.

It was the 1970s. The counterculture and the Human Potential Movement were morphing into the New Age, a populist blend of esotericism and spirituality. In the midst of these times, Issie became a sought-after speaker and spiritual leader. At the AFA Convention in 1972, Issie's teachings on Huna were considered inappropriate, so she, along with a huge following, continued the teachings at a hotel across the street.

She was known in Boston as the ôspiritual sparkplug,ö and her ôFriday Night Fixö became an established ritual for those in quest of spiritual sustenance. Issie's regular teachings and meditations on those Friday evenings were a boon to many who would come to hear about the ôreal selfö behind the personality, how we create our inner condition, and how, in order to change our life, we must change our attitude. These conscious-raising ideas appear simple now, many having been recycled into mindfulness exercises, but back then they mesmerized Issie's audience.

Self-awareness was the stimulus behind Issie's astrological teaching. Her approach proposed that astrology ôtrains the student in perceiving realities behind forms.ö She stressed the importance of a

symbolic approach, since ðin planes beyond the earth, everything must be understood through symbols, for language is of the material plane only.ð[2] Her New Age blend of esotericism, spirituality, psychology, and common sense was the cornerstone of her approach to astrology. It was her spiritual and symbolic underpinning of the astrological model that inspired me to forge my own melding of astrological images and symbols with the soul.



Isabel Hickey August 19, 1903 12.30 pm EST Brookline, MA, USA

I first experienced Issieðs presence when she closed the opening day of the Huna conference with a meditation. What I remember so clearly was her broad Bostonian accent and the invitation to deepen my inner world ð the world that astrology has enriched throughout my life. But it wasn't until the final day of the conference, when Issie spoke of her spiritual experiences, that we mutually met. I invited her to Ottawa for an astrological seminar later that year. It was the beginning of a wonderful association.

For the next two years, I would visit Issie at her beloved retreat house in New Hampshire, which was called Harmony Hill. She loved the peace and solitude, but she also invited guests and facilitated seminars there. I remember fondly one Saturday when the group had all decided to go swimming, and we asked Issie to join us. ðNo,ð she said abruptly. I thought that she might have felt awkward being with the young ones. Everyone went home later that afternoon, but I stayed to get an early start the next day for the long drive back home. The next morning, I was in the kitchen and was startled when I felt a pat on my shoulder. I was even more startled when I turned around and saw Issie. There she was ð 75 years old, in her bathing suit with a huge Mexican sunhat ð I burst out laughing. She grinned and said in her broad Boston accent, ðUranus in the 1st house!ð We continued laughing. She was one of a kind: unique and often very challenging. And she knew that.

Towards the end, Issie was in a lot of pain with angina, so she could often be short-tempered. I remember a sign near her phone that read "Watch Out," which reminded her when she answered the phone to not be as abrupt as she would often feel. Phone calls came in from all over the country, asking for Issie's encouragement, blessing, or insight. To which she would often respond, "It is all right" – the title of the book she published in 1976, in which she reiterated one of her core teachings: that we are connected to everything that happens to us. [3]

Issie had always wanted to go to Hawaii, the home of Huna. With an upcoming conference in Hilo, Hawaii, and with Jupiter transiting her 9th house in 1980, she thought this would be the perfect time to take the long journey. Her ticket was booked for June 18, but Issie was about to make a different transition. She died on June 17, as transiting Uranus was retrograding over her Ascendant, and Jupiter was approaching her Midheaven. She was going on a long journey – just to another destination.[4] At her Harmony Hill memorial service, a large gust of wind stirred and rushed through the pines, then disappeared. We all thought that it was Issie saying goodbye. I was ever so grateful that I had had the opportunity to say hello.



My thanks to Amy Shapiro for the use of the main profile photograph.

References

1. Isabel Hickey, *Astrology: A Cosmic Science*, Altieri Press, 1972, p. 5.
2. Both quotes are from the new edition of *Astrology: A Cosmic Science*, CRCS, 1992, p. ii. This book also includes Issie's monograph *Pluto or Minerva: The Choice Is Yours*.
3. Isabel Hickey, *It Is ALL Right*, self-published, 1976. Posthumously, her grandson Jay Hickey and astrologer Amy Shapiro published Issie's *Never Mind*, 2012.
4. In a private letter, Issie told me the date she booked to leave for Hawaii. She died on June 17, 1980 at 8:15 a.m., at her beloved Harmony Hill in Nottingham, NH, as reported by her daughter Helen.

Chart Data and Source for Isabel Hickey

August 19, 1903; 12:30 p.m. EST; Brookline, MA, USA (42°N20' 71°W07');
AA: birth certificate/record in hand.