

PRESENTATION OF LIFE-STORIES

This section will present a summary of the life-stories of the 16 mediums interviewed in the study. I have chosen the term life-story rather than life-history in order to emphasize that these stories are based on accounts of the mediums' lives as delivered orally by themselves (Bertaux, 1981). In addition, the concept of life-story is one that indicates the collaborative dimension of this process. My goal is not to present a "complete" life-story but to emphasize those aspects which the participant believes are directly related to the process of becoming a medium. Thus, these kind of accounts can be classified as thematic life-stories.

These life-stories are the product of a collaborative act between myself and the participants. My role in the construction of these accounts is reflected in several ways. First, I was involved in the elicitation of these life-stories through asking questions and making comments on the participants' accounts. Second, I translated these accounts from Spanish to English, and in doing this I transformed the original accounts. Third, I organized the life-stories by choosing common themes in order to allow for

comparison between spiritist healers. In spite of these "distortions", I made an effort to write these life-stories from the participants' point of view, without making psychological interpretations. My goal was to respect the healers' accounts of their experiences as they chose to present them.

I did not try to check out the accuracy of these life-stories. I was more interested in the "truth" of autobiography than in the reality of personal history (Crapanzano, 1980). This distinction was made by Jung in the prologue of his autobiography:

I can only make direct statements, only "tell stories". Whether or not the stories are "true" is not the problem. The only question is whether what I tell is my fable, my truth (1965, p. 3).

Bruner (1986) in addressing this issue made the point that in a life history one has to distinguish between life as lived (reality), life as experienced (experience), and life as told (expression). The healers' life-stories are representations of lives, not necessarily lives as actually lived. These life-stories represent ways in which individuals frame and articulate realities and the experience of these realities.

Individuals construct versions of themselves to present to others. Some of the following life-stories may appear to be over-coherent and linear, giving emphasis to the

development of the healing power. In order to understand this issue one has to consider that in the narration of events individuals tend "to make coherent any elements of the narrative that seem discontinuous, supporting the expectation of a single motivated life grounded in a flow of related circumstances..." (Frank, 1979, p. 84).

I have organized these life-stories according to the spiritist movement which the medium seems to follow in her/his practice. Mediums have been classified into three major groups. The first group is composed of those mediums who are followers of Indigenous **Espiritismo**. The second group is composed of those mediums who are followers of Kardecian **Espiritismo**. The third group includes mediums who cannot be considered Kardecian or Indigenous in terms of their healing practices. I decided to call this group, the mediums in transition.

The criteria utilized in making this clasification will be discussed in the next chapter. In order to protect the privacy of several participants some names have been changed and the details that may identify them have been modified. However, some participants gave me permission to include their real names in their stories. As a way of appreciating their cooperation I am including their accounts without using pseudonyms.

In the telling of these stories, these mediums are sharing very important and intimate knowledge. The mediums were aware that their stories may be misunderstood but despite of this, they took the risk of sharing their experiences. There is a great need for the reader to read with respect and to honor the medium's honesty without abusing or misusing their willingness to share.

I will begin by presenting the life-stories of the Indigenous mediums: Gela, Ernesto, Diana, Generosa, Áurea, Mayo and Aida.

Doña Gela

Initial contact with the medium

Doña Gela is known in the community as the medium who gives "spiritual injections". People from different towns come to see Doña Gela asking for spiritual injections in order to be cured of their illnesses.

Doña Gela is a fifty three year old married medium who has six daughters and two sons. Her academic education is limited to the fourth grade. Taking into consideration her financial situation and living conditions, Doña Gela seems to belong to the lower class category.

Doña Gela offers **consultas** (spiritual consultations) every Monday and Thursday. However she sees "emergency" cases any day of the week. It was difficult to make an appointment with Doña Gela due to her busy schedule. We had to cancel some of the interviews because she had to see one of her clients.

Usually Doña Gela works in collaboration with other mediums in the **consultas**. I participated in several of these **consultas** which gave me the chance to learn about how Doña Gela works as a medium and how she educates other mediums.

First experiences in her development as a medium

Doña Gela began her story by saying that she has been a medium since she was eight years old. She described that at this age she began to have experiences with the spirits:

At nights I was afraid because I saw different "things". These "things" began to come near me and would suddenly become men and women. These men and women continued getting near me until they were transformed into smoke. This smoke penetrated into me and at this moment I became unconscious. My last words were: "Father, I am dying". When I would wake up, my house would be full of people trying to help me. But I felt fine.

This happened to her several times. When she explained to her father what had happened, he didn't believe her, punishing her for telling lies. Doña Gela's parents were

very Catholic and they did not believe in **Espiritismo**.

At that time Doña Gela had a vision of Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary. She also began to develop the power to predict things, especially the death of relatives:

When I was nine years old, I saw a vision in which my two year old sister was in a coffin. I heard a voice that told me she would die at 10:00 P.M. I told this to my mother but she did not believe me. At 10:00 P.M. my sister died in my arms. Six months later I told my mother that my grandmother had died of cancer. My mother told me: "We have a crazy child in this house". She went to look for a belt to hit me. In 15 minutes my aunt came telling her that my grandmother had died.

Becoming a medium

Near Doña Gela's home there was a **centro** in which **reuniones** were held. Without the consent of her parents she decided to attend a **reunión**. There she was told that she had been destined to become a medium since very early in life. At the age of ten Doña Gela began to attend a **centro** frequently but she told her parents that she was at the Catholic Church:

In this **centro** I developed my **facultades** very quickly. I was involved in the spiritual doctrine that was offered in the **centro**. I passed the spiritual **causas** that were affecting me. I knew that those things that made me unconscious were spiritual beings who were "passing" through me and I did know how to control them.

At the age of 15, Doña Gela worked as a medium providing **sanación** (healing) and lifting **causas** that were giving people physical illnesses. She continued visiting the **centros** despite the opposition of her father. She remembers that every time that she came back from a **centro**, her father punished her. As an adolescent she had to read the spiritist prayer book Oremos secretly, to hide it from her parents.

After being married, Doña Gela did not have to worry about her parents' attitude toward **Espiritismo**. But then she confronted another problem: her husband did not want her to work as a medium. However, Doña Gela would not let anyone limit her development as a medium:

I told my husband that if he prohibited me from attending spiritist **centros** I would divorce him in order to continue practicing as a medium. I also told him that when I fell in love with him I did not ask him if he loved me but if he believed in **Espiritismo**.

Doña Gela's commitment to her work as a medium is very strong. She said that if she had to leave her family in order to continue working as a medium, she would do that. No one would stop her from continuing to help others.

After some time, Doña Gela's husband began to suffer from a stomach condition. He was cured of this condition in a **centro**. After this experience, he began to believe in **Espiritismo** to the point that sometimes he collaborates with

Doña Gela in the **consultas**. In addition, Doña Gela's daughter and son have developed **facultades**.

Doña Gela worked in a **centro** for almost 14 years but she stopped attending it because, according to her, the mediums were doing immoral things. She gave me the example of a medium who, in a **reunión**, began to kiss and touch another woman while he was passing a spirit. Other mediums liked to swear when they were passing ignorant spirits. Doña Gela was also disappointed because there was too much gossip among the mediums.

She decided that it would be better not to go to any **centro**. After some time, she had a dream in which the Apostle Saint Pablo appeared telling her that he had the right place for her. One day, Doña Gela was sick and an old man invited her to a **centro**. Doña Gela felt that she should go to this **centro**. From the first time that she visited it, she knew that this was the place that Saint Pablo mentioned to her in the dream. The members of this **centro** called themselves disciples of Saint Pablo. This saint is the most important guide of the **centro**. Doña Gela became a member of this **centro** and she has been working as a medium there for more than 10 years.

The **centro** that Doña Gela is attending has many differences from the Indigenous **centro**. It belongs to what I

have called in this paper "the spiritist church" movement. These spiritist churches have a structure and organization which is very similar to a traditional church.

Healing approach and evolution of practices

Doña Gela dedicates two days of the week, Saturdays and Sundays, to working at this **centro**. She spends the rest of the week providing **consultas** to the people who come to her home. She offers the **consultas** in a small room located in the basement of her house. In the room there is a bed, a table and two large benches. The walls are covered with pictures of saints. On the table there is a big goblet of water, a bottle of **agua de florida**, and other kinds of liquid substances used for giving **despojos**. In the center of the table one can see a great figure of Jesus Christ.

Doña Gela is famous in the community for the spiritual injections that she is capable of introducing on different parts of a client's body. I talked with several of Doña Gela's clients and they felt as if they had been injected with a needle when she had touched a part of their bodies with her finger. I decided to observe Doña Gela very carefully when she was working with clients in order to see if she was carrying something on her hands. She "injected"

several people in front of me and I could not see anything in her hands or fingers.

One day I was doing participant observation in one of Doña Gela's **consultas**. After having worked with two clients, she looked at me and said: "You are very tired. You are working too much." She asked me to stand up in front of her. Then she began to massage my back and stomach. She was giving me a **sobo**. Suddenly I felt as if I had been injected in my stomach with a small needle. After a few seconds I felt the same sensation but stronger. Then, Doña Gela took one of my arms and she pressed gently with one of her fingers on the middle of it. At this moment I had to move away a little from Doña Gela because the sensation that I felt was as if I had been injected with a bigger needle. It was kind of painful. I told Doña Gela: "These injections are too strong". Everybody in the room began to laugh and Doña Gela smiled at me, continuing her massage. When she finished giving me the **sobo**, I looked at my stomach and arm, and I saw three small red points at the places in the body where I was "injected".

Doña Gela's style of working is characterized by strong physical contact between herself and the clients. She established physical contact with all the clients I saw her working with (about twelve). When a person is suffering from

a stomach problem, Doña Gela will give him or her a **santiguo**. In order to take away the bad **fluídos**, she uses a **despojo**. Doña Gela considers that massages are very important; she even had an electric massage machine in the room which she uses on some occasions. It seems that she is open to "modernizing" her practice.

Doña Gela put a strong emphasis on the working of **causas** in her practice as a medium. Usually her treatment for a person includes the education of an ignorant spirit which is affecting him or her. This spirit "passes through her brain" in order to express his or her feelings to the person.

Doña Gela believes that most of the illnesses are caused by "mental suggestions". She gave me an example to explain what she meant by "mental suggestion":

One day I was in the hospital visiting a friend of mine. A doctor who I have known for several years talked to me about a patient who was not physically sick but he told everybody that he was dying. I told the doctor to inject the patient with water because his illness was mental. The doctor followed my instructions and the patient got well very soon.

According to Doña Gela she sees many clients who are not really sick, they are **maniáticos**:

They think that there is something wrong with them but it is just their imagination. In their imagination, they believe that they have cancer, a heart problem or that they are mentally ill. I give them advice and **sanidad** to heal their mental nerves. For example, many of

the men come to me saying that they have cancer of the prostate or that they are impotent. Most of the time I tell them not to worry about it because nothing is wrong with them. Next time they come to see me, they claim to be feeling better.

In our last interview, Doña Gela confessed to me that there are things that she does not like in the **centro** that she is presently attending. She has had several disagreements with the leader of this **centro** because he does not think that to work the **causas** is important in the treatment of a client. The meeting in this **centro** lasts about six hours but he only gives 15 minutes to the working of **causas**.

Doña Gela has also challenged the authority of the leader by being able to cure the people he was unable to help. According to Doña Gela the leader does not want other mediums to progress very much, he just wants to keep control of them. She was also critical of the meetings in the **centro** because they are too similar to a Pentecostal or Evangelist meeting. Doña Gela explained that this happens because the leader was Pentecostal before he began to be involved in **Espiritismo**. Many members of the **centro** have told Doña Gela that if she establishes a **centro** they will follow her.

Doña Gela considers that being a medium has not negatively affected her relationships with the community.

She helps clients who are members of the Pentecostal church, and moreover a Pentecostal minister refers people to her. Her neighbors are also Pentecostal and she has a very good relationship with them.

Ernesto

First contact with the medium

I met Ernesto when he was a college student at a University in which I was teaching. At that time I was interested in doing a study about the influence of spiritist beliefs on the lives of college students. One day a student of mine told me that he had a friend who is a medium. Through this student I made an appointment with Ernesto at my office.

At this first meeting, Ernesto explained to me that he had worked as a medium at his parent's **centro** for several years. He invited me to attend one of the meetings at the **centro**. However it was not until I began this study that I really had the opportunity to learn about Ernesto's development as a medium and to visit his parent's **centro**.

The story of Ernesto clearly exemplified how different religious orientations and world-views can affect and

influence the development of a medium in Puerto Rico. It also showed that in the process of becoming a medium one may feel conflicting feelings and anxiety when trying to make sense of one's experiences.

Initial experiences in his development as a medium

Ernesto was born in a family in which the father and the mother are mediums. They have a spiritist center which follows the tradition of Indigenous **Espiritismo**. Ernesto's father works as a medium giving **consultas** every afternoon. Consequently, for Ernesto **Espiritismo** has been part of his life since he was born.

Ernesto remembers that as a child he felt lonely because he did not have brothers or sisters. He used to play and talk with the people who went to have **consultas** with his father. At the age of eight, Ernesto began to work as a medium:

A woman came complaining of several physical pains. I looked directly at her eyes and I told her that she did not have any physical illness. I gave a **despojo** to the woman with a red handkerchief. I told her to turn over and over three times. Then I gave her a massage with **alcoholado**. The woman told everybody that she was cured. She said that when I rubbed her forehead, she felt that "something" was taken out of herself. Everybody was very surprised about what I had done.

From very early on in his life, Ernesto began to hear the voice of the spirits. He also had dreams in which he received premonitions about the future. However it was not until the age of fourteen that he was able to **pasar** his spirit guides:

My mother took me to a medium who helped me to **pasar** all of my spirit guides. She told me that first I had to **pasar** my principal spirit guide and then the others. What I remember is that I went out of the world for some time. When I woke up, my mother told me that I was able to **pasar** all my spirit guides. My principal guide established the order in which all my other guides have to **pasar** when I am ready to work.

Becoming a medium

After this experience, Ernesto began to work **causas**, to give **consultas**, to divine what would happen in the client's future and to perform "spiritual surgeries". He worked in collaboration with his parents in the spiritist meetings at their center.

However at the same time Ernesto was being attracted by the rituals and belief system of the Catholic religion. He was attending Mass every week and was also an altar boy. He enjoyed praying the rosary. His parents did not object to Ernesto's interest in the Catholic church primarily because they considered themselves Catholics.

When Ernesto was in high school he developed a loving relationship with a student. However, after some time she told Ernesto that she did not love him. After this experience Ernesto felt that no other woman would love him again. He believed that women would always reject him. Consequently he decided that the best thing to do was to become a Catholic priest because in this way he would not have to confront the issue of not being able to have a love relationship with a woman.

Ernesto's decision caused great problems between him and his parents. His parents knew that if Ernesto became a priest, he would have to abandon the **obra** (spiritist work). He described the situation at home when this happened as follows:

There was a war between my parents and me. I wanted to leave home. My life became a hell. We were fighting all the time. At that time I began to hate and despise everything related to **Espiritismo**. This was the major crisis that I have had in my life. It was a very strong spiritual and material confrontation. This decision threatened the good relationship that I had with my parents.

Around the same time, Ernesto's father got very sick because, according to Ernesto, "his **protecciones** were cut off" by people who disliked him. Ernesto's negative feelings toward **Espiritismo** increased because he could not understand "how this could happen to my father when he has helped so

many people". He thought that to be involved with **Espiritismo** was very dangerous.

Ernesto was not sure how to proceed. His parents continued pressuring him to leave the seminary. He had doubts about his decision to become a priest. Ernesto decided to visit a medium in order to get a **consulta**. According to Ernesto this **consulta** helped him to understand the nature of his conflicts:

The medium told me that I had a **protección** who is a priest and he wanted me to also become a priest. She helped me to understand that my decision to become a priest was motivated by the problem that I had with my girlfriend. The medium also said to me that I was looking for an escape from this problem. She finished by saying that I came to serve God not as a priest.

Ernesto then went to talk with a priest about his problem. He spent several days in meditation and reflection, which led him to realize that he should not become a priest. He found himself disappointed with the Catholic Church and **Espiritismo**. Ernesto did not want to continue working as a medium.

By that time, he had finished high school with very good grades. He made the decision to go to college and study psychology "because it seemed like the most interesting field". While in college, he learned about the **Rosacruces** and he began to read everything that was available about this

philosophy. According to Ernesto, reading the books of the **Rosacruces** helped him to practice **Espiritismo** again because their system was similar to **Espiritismo**.

Healing approach and evolution of practices

At present, Ernesto participates in the spiritist meetings that are held at his parents' **centro**. He also gets involved in the treatment of clients who come for help. In his practice as a medium, he deals with marital problems, physical illnesses, women who have problems getting pregnant and adolescents with sexual identity problems, among others.

There are many factors that make Ernesto's development as a medium a very unique one. First, he came from a very poor family. His father worked as a baker all his life. His parents never went to high school. Their financial situation has always been a very precarious one. Yet, Ernesto has finished college and he is thinking about continuing on to graduate studies. He has overcome financial and social obstacles in order to finish his degree. As I was talking with Ernesto, I began to wonder how his education has influenced his practice as a medium and how his practice has differed from his parents' world-view.

Ernesto expressed to me that through the study of

psychology he has been able to relate spiritist concepts with psychological ones. He considers that a medium uses suggestion and hypnotism in order to perform spiritual surgery. He also told me that he, as a medium, uses the counseling skills he learned in psychology courses.

The practice of **Santería** has also influenced Ernesto's practice as a medium. At the age of eighteen he received the power from the saints or the **aché**:

I had to fast and meditate for three days. I could not talk to anybody. After that the **santero** baptized me using the water of three coconuts. Then I received a **despojo** with a white pigeon. Following this **despojo** we went to a river and I was baptized there again. Next I received the necklaces of various **santos** (saints). In the last part of this ceremony I had to **pasar** all my **protecciones** besides the **santos** who will be in charge of taking care of me. The **santos** that I received were Saint Francis of Assisi and **La Virgen de las Mercedes**.

Ernesto was also told in this ceremony that he should wear white clothes when he is involved in spiritual work. After being initiated in **Santería**, Ernesto read different books about it. He participated in several **santero** ceremonies in which animals were sacrificed in order to honor the **santos**. In his work as a medium he gives prescriptions that are based on **Santería**. For example, he prescribes the number of plants that a person needs to use according to the number of his or her saint. However, he does not use his

santero necklaces at the **centro** because "they are too heavy and look as if they were for women". He only uses the necklaces at a Christmas celebration at the **centro** which he described as being a "**Santería** party". This celebration involves a Mass, a rosary and the singing of **aguinaldos** (native songs) for the spirits. After this, people have the opportunity to dance and to drink alcohol.

When I interviewed Ernesto's father I discovered that he knew little about **Santería**. He told me that **Santería** is very similar to **Espiritismo** but the major difference is that in **Santería** people practice **brujería** (witchcraft). However he said that **Santería** can also be used to do good and that it depends on how the person wants to practice it. Ernesto's father expressed that sometimes he had used **brujería** in order to strike back against an individual who was harming him. He has some **protecciones** who have this power.

Another important element in Ernesto's development as a medium is his strong attraction to Catholicism and especially the priesthood. This influence is manifested in his life and practice as a medium. Ernesto's dream is to have a center which resembles the spiritist churches I described before. He visited one of these spiritist churches and found that this is the kind of model he wants to follow in the practice of **Espiritismo**.

The influence of Catholicism in Ernesto's life is so profound that he celebrates a Mass by himself every Sunday morning in his room. There he has all the ritual objects that a Catholic priest uses when he is offering a Mass. He showed me the communion cup, the bell and the Bible. Ernesto also has some special clothing which resembles a priest's robe. (Some of Ernesto's **protecciones** were priests in another life.)

Ernesto disagrees with some of the ways in which **Espiritismo** is practiced at his parents' **centro**. He thinks that there are too many pictures and statues of saints. Ernesto likes to preach and to give spiritual instructions while his parents do not consider this an important element of the **reunión**. His father told me: "There is not much time for spiritual instructions because there are too many **causas** that have to be lifted." What Ernesto's father considers important is the working of **causas**.

Ernesto also told me that sometimes "there is too much ignorance about **Espiritismo** in his parents' **centro**". However he thinks that there isn't any sense in trying to educate the people who attend the **centro** because most of them are old people and they don't want to change. They want to keep their old practices. On the other hand he believes that young people are open to learning new practices.

In the interviews with Ernesto's father he emphasized the value of suffering as a way of "purifying" the spirit and getting God's salvation. Contrarily, Ernesto was very clear that he does not believe that one has to suffer in order to be saved by God.

Observing Ernesto in a **reunión** helped me to understand that although there are differences at the theoretical level between Ernesto and his parents in their view of **Espiritismo**, these differences are minimized at the practical level. Ernesto's style of practicing **Espiritismo** is very similar to his parents' style in several dimensions.

For instance, Ernesto, like his parents, considers himself to be an unconscious medium. They all believe that to be unconscious is better because one is not affecting the spirit's communication. Ernesto emphasized to me that he does not remember anything that happens when he gets into a trance. After the **reunión** his mother tells him about the cases in which he has been involved.

Ernesto's way of helping clients in the **reunión** is based mostly on the working of **causas**. In my participant observation at this center, I observed him "passing" very strong **espíritus de causa**. These spirits came very angrily and aggressively, saying bad words such as **carajo** and **coño**. One of these **espíritus de causa** who were communicating

through Ernesto asked for **luz** (light) and he was given a lighted candle. Ernesto put it in his mouth until the spirit was lifted.

When I asked Ernesto what the major obstacle in his development as a medium has been, he responded that his mother has overprotected him too much. According to Ernesto, his mother does not want him to have a girlfriend. Also, she does not want him to have any kind of independence. Ernesto said that his mother has always tried to control his social life. He considers that his mother's overprotection has made it very difficult for him to have an intimate relationship with a woman. He is kind of anxious to have a girlfriend and get married.

On the other hand, Ernesto realized that it will not be easy to find a woman who can share his spiritist ideas. He believes that some women moved away from him when they found out that he was a medium. In addition, Ernesto has discovered that there are some **protecciones** who do not want him to get married. He has been trying to educate them.

Ernesto also recognized that the stereotypes about **Espiritistas** have affected his relationships with others:

People think that you are a **brujo** (sorcerer) and that you do harm to others. They look at me as if I had leprosy and they consider me weird. **Espiritismo** is considered to be for mediocres and ignorants. **Espiritistas** are rejected by a

great number of individuals. People told me that I would never go to college because my parents were **Espiritistas**. They think that you are a primitive man who worships many gods.

Diana

Initial contact with the medium

I met Diana when I was visiting a Kardecian spiritist center. She had attended this center for several years. In this center there was a strong emphasis on the intellectual preparation of the medium. There were classes every week about mediumship development. My impression was that the members of this center were mostly middle class people. The director of this center was a very well educated man who seemed to have deep knowledge about the philosophy of Kardecian **Espiritismo**, although he was not a medium himself.

When I explained to Diana the purpose of my study, she was interested in being interviewed and she promised to help me in any way she could. She was the first medium I interviewed for this study.

Diana is a fifty-year old woman who lives with her husband in an urban middle class community. Her husband is a retired man who worked as a teacher in the public school and the university. Diana has never worked outside her home.

She finished high school and decided not to continue studying. She has two daughters and one son.

Early experiences in her development as a medium

Diana described her childhood as a "normal" one. However, at the age of twelve she began to feel that a "man" was sleeping beside her. In the darkness of the night she perceived several shadows of people (**celajes**) which made her very nervous. In order to stay calm, she prayed the Lord's Prayer. She believed that all of these experiences were caused by the spirits. Diana added that when she was a child the spirits helped her with her school tests.

Diana's parents were believers in **Espiritismo**. Her grandfather was a medium who specialized in performing cures. Diana's mother helped him when he was working with clients. Diana remembers that the **Espiritistas** from all over the Island met in her mother's house annually. However, Diana considered herself to be a Catholic.

When Diana became an adolescent, she began to attend a spiritist center that was directed by a medium who was the mother of Diana's present husband. This medium helped Diana's father to overcome his alcohol problem and was also an important figure in Diana's development as a healer.

Diana described the spiritist center of her mother-in-law as very different from the center she was attending when I met her. The first center was very much in the tradition of what I have been calling Indigenous **Espiritismo**. Diana said that in this center people used incense baths, handkerchiefs and candles, among other things. It was in this center that she began to develop her **facultades**. Diana had an altar at her home in which there were statues of Catholic saints, flowers and water.

As Diana continued attending this Indigenous center, she began to experience having another "mind" or "voice" which told her what would happen in the future, and how to resolve certain problems. She could easily distinguish these particular feelings and thoughts from her own. Although she is not sure about it, she thinks that this "other voice" is her principal spirit guide.

Becoming a medium

After marrying, Diana began to have problems with her husband because he did not believe in **Espiritismo**. He did not want her to become a medium nor to attend spiritist meetings. Diana reported that each time she went to a spiritist meeting, her husband prevented her from working as

a medium with his negative thoughts. Consequently, Diana described that she had "to develop her **facultades** secretly".

Several years later, her daughters mentioned that there was a spiritist center directed by a well-prepared person and Diana decided to go to this center. In the meeting she received several **videncias** (spiritual revelations), being able to tell participants about their past and future. Diana began to participate regularly in the activities of this center, becoming an active member of it.

Very early in the interview I found that there were several disagreements between Diana's perspective on mediumship development and the philosophy of this spiritist center. This theme permeated all the interviews I had with Diana because she was experiencing a great degree of stress produced by what the director was telling her to do, and what she feels was the right way to develop her **facultades**.

Diana gave me several examples to show how the director prohibited and criticized the way she was practicing **Espiritismo** and helping some clients. First, she was doing **consultas** at her home but had to stop because the director told her that the clients would get "dependent" on her. People came to her asking for a **consulta** but she could not help them because "the director would scold her". Diana believes that she is a medium who needs to give **consultas**.

According to her, she has lost her confidence as a medium by stopping the **consultas**. In trying not to create "dependency", she realize she cannot help a client as she would like.

Diana was also using the cards to work with clients but the director told her that this kind of practice attracts ignorant spirits and not evolved spirits, and that the cards are a crutch that mediums use. The director told Diana that she does not need cards in order to practice as a medium. Nevertheless Diana feels that through using the cards she can contact the spirits easier and faster. She thinks that she is more effective as a medium when she is using the cards.

Diana has also been taught that a good medium should not use candles, handkerchiefs, herbs or other kinds of ritual objects. As Diana told me: "The director has taken everything from me because he says that I don't need them".

The director has made fun of Diana due to her orientation towards indigenous healing practices:

One time the director had a very bad cold. I prepared a medicine from different kinds of herbs for him. Then he made fun of me, telling everybody that I was a **curandera**. On another occasion he was also feeling sick and I told him to put a cup of water in front of his bed to pick up the bad **fluídos** (negative energy). Then he told the group that he drank the water every night (One is not supposed to drink this water because one can get sick). This made me feel very badly. I also prescribed some herb

baths for him and he criticized them because they smelled terribly.

Diana commented to me that she thinks the director should not criticize the Catholic Church and Christianity. The director likes to say things such as: "Jesus had several brothers; I am not a Christian; Jesus was a human being like any of us; I do not believe in the Holy Spirit; the mother of Jesus was not a virgin". Diana recognized that she had a strong Catholic background and there are things about Catholicism that one should respect.

Several times I observed Diana's trance states (**trance mediúmnico**) while I was doing participant observation in the spiritist center. Most of the time her trance states were out of her control. Usually she had to be held by others because if not, she would have fallen off the chair. She "incorporated" the strongest **espíritus de causa** of the meetings. Usually these spirits were crying, yelling or very aggressive.

Diana describes herself as a totally unconscious medium. She does not remember anything that happened during the trance. The director is continuously teaching that good mediums are those who are in control of the trance state and are conscious of what happens during this process. The director also thinks that although she is an unconscious

medium, Diana can be in control of the trance if she wants to do it because one is never totally unconscious.

One month after the first interviews I went to visit Diana again at her home. This time she was more frustrated than before about her participation in the center. She had not attended the center for weeks. She described an incident which precipitated her decision:

In this meeting we were helping a person who had a **causa**. I began to feel a desire to fight but I felt that this desire was not mine. The director asked how I was doing. I told him that I was very angry and that I wanted to... I began to feel that I was not myself, but I was a man. The director asked another medium to take my hands. He tried to transfer the vibration of the spirit that I was incorporating to the other medium. However, the other medium took just half of the vibration. I became aware that the spirit still was with me. The meeting finished but the spirit was not "given light". I still had the vibration of the spirit with me. They had to let me incorporate this spirit so that I could get rid of this negative vibration.

When Diana finished telling me this account I thought that at a deeper level she was reacting to the director's decision not to let her work as a medium and his asking another medium to incorporate the spirit. The director uses this technique of transferring the spirit from one medium to another medium when a medium is incorporating his or her own **espíritu de causa**. He does not think that a medium should work her or his own **espíritu de causa**.

Diana expressed her dissatisfaction with the way in which mediums are educated at the center and how the spiritist meetings are organized. She argued that the director did not want to learn from the experiences of mediums:

When I disagreed with him, he always said that he would convince me. He teaches us, but he does not want to learn from us. It is true that he has read many books but I have the practice and the spirits who teach me. He is always telling me that the spirits can lie to me and that "the other voice" can be my own voice.

Diana thinks that the education that she has received at this spiritist center has made her doubt her capacities as a medium. She read a book that was in the library of the center noting that according to the book she was not a medium. She said that the result of this education is that she has lost her freedom and spontaneity:

I am very afraid of giving **videncias** because I am not sure if they come from the spirits or if I am inventing them. Before I did not have any doubts and I worked very well. When I was using the cards, I had a lot of confidence in myself. Now I cannot help anybody. My daughter came from Florida but I could not help her. I have to start again getting confidence in my **facultades**. I do not trust my "other voice" any more and I am doing the opposite of what the voice tells me. I am very confused.

As I was listening to Diana I understood that this was a turning point in her development as a medium. I knew that

she was struggling very hard in order to find the best way to develop her **facultades**. It seems to me that she understood on her own that to follow the director's ideas about mediumship development was alienating her from her own perspective of how a medium should be. She was practicing ideas that were not congruent with her "natural" development as a medium.

Feeling very discouraged by all of this Diana asked me: "What is your opinion about all of this? What do you advise me?" At this moment of the interview I felt vulnerable, not knowing how to respond her. I felt hesitant to make an "intervention". I knew that the interview had provided her with an opportunity to express and explore feelings about her mediumship development. In this process, both of us were trying to understand this conflictive issue in her development. I thought that to leave Diana's question unanswered was not the right way to proceed at that moment. I told her that I do not consider mediums who use ritual objects ignorant, rather that they are developing their **facultades** in a different way. I said to her that she should do whatever she thinks and feels is best for her development. I encouraged her to follow her own conscience.

Diana asked my opinion about the issue of dependency between a client and a medium in a **consulta**. I responded

that this is a very difficult issue because the concept of dependency is very relative and that it is important to consider degrees of dependency between a client and a healer. I also told Diana that I believe that a certain degree of dependency between a client and a healer is therapeutic and necessary. In any relationship it is impossible not to create a certain degree of dependency. I knew that in saying this to Diana, I was not taking a "neutral" position. Moreover, I was in some way in opposition to her director's teachings about the **consultas**. I felt the need to say something although perhaps I was getting too involved with the whole situation. I began to perceive that while the director was "prohibiting" Diana from giving **consultas** because they create dependency between medium and client, he was making Diana dependent on him.

It seems to me that my declaration about the potential value of "dependency" encouraged Diana to discuss other doubts and conflicts that she was experiencing. She also knew that I valued and respected her indigenous healing practices.

I am not sure if this was the right way to proceed in my interviews with Diana. However at the particular moment of the interview I felt that I should intervene in this way in order to support Diana.

Diana told me that a person she knows looked for help in the spiritist center. However the director and the mediums could not help him. Then he went to a medium who uses candles, water and camphor. This medium cured him. According to Diana, the Kardecian **Espiritismo** could not do anything for him but the other medium was very effective:

I understand that there are a group of spirits who need to use these rituals in order to cure people. Maybe in another life I can use just my mind in order to cure others. If in using **alcoholado** I cure myself and others, I will continue using it. The most important thing is the love that I have when I am helping someone.

On my second trip to Puerto Rico I visited Diana at her home. She was very happy to see me again. Unlike other times, Diana was very relaxed and calm.

The first thing that she mentioned to me was having experienced a personal transformation in which she has found herself. Diana said that she is "learning to be herself as a person as well as a medium". She decided not to continue attending any of the meetings at the spiritist center because they were not helping her. Now Diana is thinking about continuing to help people like she was doing in the past, using ritual objects and offering **consultas**.

Doña GenerosaInitial contact with the medium

The first time that I saw Generosa was in a **reunión** at her spiritist center. A cousin of mine mentioned to me that Generosa was the **Presidenta** of a center and that she may be interested in participating in my study. I arrived at the **reunión** half an hour late so it was impossible to meet Generosa before hand. I thought that I should not have any problem identifying her because my experiences had been that **presidentes** have a central role in the development of the **reunión**. However in this case I struggled through the whole **reunión** trying to identify Generosa. A male medium was the one who was in charge of the meeting. During the **reunión** I thought that maybe Generosa was sick and she could not attend the meeting.

At the end of the **reunión**, I asked one of the participants where Generosa was. He pointed to one of the mediums who did not have any active involvement in the spiritist meeting. I became very interested in knowing why Generosa was not "acting" like a **Presidenta** of her **centro**. Soon I discovered that Generosa had lost some of her **facultades** and she was in the process of recovering them.

Early experiences in her development as a medium

Generosa is a fifty-year old medium who lives with her husband in a rural area. In general she follows and practices the system of Indigenous **Espiritismo**. In addition she has been influenced by the tradition of spiritist churches. She attended one of these churches for several years.

As I began to interview Generosa, I found that the concept of **pruebas** was central in the description of her development as a medium. According to **Espiritismo**, **pruebas** are problems, sufferings or illnesses which have been chosen by a person before birth in order to pay a spiritual debt of a past life. If a person suffers his or her **prueba** with resignation, he or she will "purify" the spirit of moral imperfections.

According to Generosa, she has had different kinds of **pruebas** in her life. At the age of eleven, she had her first **prueba**:

I got very sick with a very high fever. My parents took me to the hospital and the doctor prescribed some medication. However, I continued having a high fever. My parents decided to take me to a **centro** in which I was told that I was developing **facultades**. In addition they told me that I should become a medium. I was cured of my fever in this **centro**.

Although Generosa's parents were believers in

Espiritismo, she criticized and made fun of it. She said that she did not have faith in **Espiritismo**. Generosa was not interested in becoming a medium.

At the age of eighteen, Generosa experienced a stronger **prueba**: she "lost her mind" for three years. When I asked what happened when she "lost her mind" she responded that she "cried, yelled and ran away from home". Sometimes she had to be locked up due to her behavior. However, she did not remember this period very well. It was through attending a **centro** and receiving help from mediums that she overcame this **prueba**.

After having overcome this **prueba**, Generosa decided to get married. However, her marriage did not last very long because her husband began to physically abuse her. She was divorced after four months of being married but she was already pregnant. After some years, she married the man who is her present husband. Generosa had only one son, because there were no children from the second marriage.

Becoming a medium

In her story, Generosa emphasized that she visited different **centros** in the community. Through this process she began to learn how to **pasar** spirits, to work **causas** and to

receive **videncias**. She received the help of fully-developed mediums to learn all of these things. According to Generosa, she is unconscious when a spirit is communicating through her:

In the beginning I wanted to be conscious but I was very afraid and I had too many doubts. When I was conscious I believed that what I was saying came from my mind not from the spirit. In order to eliminate these fears and doubts I have to work unconsciously.

When her husband had a heart attack, Generosa could not continue attending **centros** anymore. She began to meet with a small group of **Espiritistas** at her home. Generosa expressed to me that in one of these meetings her husband received a **sanidad** (healing) and because of that the surgery that was scheduled for him was cancelled. As a way of thanking God, he decided to build a **centro** so that others could "also" benefit. At the same time, Generosa was giving **consultas** at her home. She said she was extremely busy seeing people in **consultas** and being in charge of the **centro** three days a week. It appears that she was feeling overwhelmed by her work as a medium.

In 1982 she got very sick and a doctor diagnosed her as having tuberculosis. She came back from the doctor before the end of the **reunión** that was being celebrated at her **centro**. She asked the people who were there to help her

because she was very sick. However she was very surprised by the way people responded to her:

Most of the people left with the exception of two mediums. They excused themselves saying that it was too late. However it was just 3:30 P.M. This hurt me a lot because I had helped so many persons and when I needed help nobody was there to help me. At that moment I decided not to work as a medium anymore. When people came to my home I told them that I was sick or that I was not giving **consultas** anymore. As a consequence of this behavior I lost several of my **facultades** such as the ones for working **causas** and giving **evidencias**.

At present, Generosa considers that she made a great mistake in not continuing to help people because she "could not blame the whole community for what happened with a small group of persons".

After losing my **facultades** I learned that I have to be humble because before I was too proud. One has to serve others and it does not matter if they appreciate what you have done for them or not. I understood that I was not serving them, but God. A medium should never turn his or her back on a needed person. One always has to say "I'm here" when a person knocks at your door.

Although Generosa thinks that she can recover her lost **facultades**, she also understands that the process is a very difficult one. Although she did not lose her principal **protección** and her **cuadro de sanidad** (group of spirits who are specialized in healing), it is impossible for her to give **consultas** because as she said:

I ask and ask and I feel empty. If I do not receive anything from the spirits, I cannot give anything to the person. I cannot invent things. This is something too delicate and I am very honest. If I do not receive any **evidencia**, I cannot say anything.

Generosa believes that before losing these **facultades**, she received a lot from the spirit world. She also admitted that her participation in the **centro** has been affected a great deal by this experience. The fact that Generosa lost some of her **facultades** was helpful in explaining why she is not assuming the role of a "traditional" **presidente**.

In my participant observations at Generosa's **centro**, I noticed that the person who was assuming the role of the **presidente** was a male medium named Mayo. In my conversations with Generosa I found that there were some conflicts and disagreements between herself and Mayo:

Mayo is always telling people how much he knows. But this is not true because in **Espiritismo** no one knows anything. Everything is received from God.

Don Mayo also has commented in front of the public that he has more **facultades** than Generosa. Generosa feels that he has tried to humiliate her in front of the public, but she has remained quiet, not responding to his comments.