

Healing approach and evolution of practices

Generosa expressed that what she most likes to do as a medium is to use her **don de sanidad** (gift of healing). Using this **facultad** she has been able to cure some of her clients. She likes to sing religious hymns because she receives the healing power from the spirits when she is singing:

I feel that I go out of this world. I feel the vibration in my hands. I get rid of my own self. At that moment I experience being in front of a sea and I am using its water to heal people. I received all of this healing power in my hands and I need to touch a person so that he or she can receive the **sanidad**. When I am doing this I feel that flames of fire are coming out of my hands.

Generosa believes that water can be spiritually prepared and it can become the medicine that a person needs in order to be cured. The water becomes medicine because the good spirits transmit their "vibrations", "**fluidos**", or "magnetism" into it. Generosa calls this water "**agua fluidizada**" (fluidic water). She told me stories of several clients who drank of this water and have been cured of their illnesses. However Generosa believes that if the person does not have faith it is more difficult to cure him or her. To have faith is the first requirement for being healed.

Another procedure that Generosa uses in helping clients is "spiritual injections". After having enough

concentration, she "can inject a client with her finger" in the part of body that is affected.

Generosa's **centro** is one of the most active in the community where she lives. It is open three days a week. In general, the participants of this **centro** are poor people. The only individuals who attend the **centro** regularly are the mediums. There are about seven or eight mediums. The total number of persons in each **reunión** is about 20 persons.

The central activity of the **reunión** at Generosa's **centro** is the working of **causas**, which occurs after about half an hour of prayers. Several ignorant spirits who are causing harm to clients speak through mediums in each **reunión**. One day a week there is a period in the **reunión** for "instructions" but as Generosa said: "Very few people come on this day because they don't like the instructions, what they want is for someone to work their **causas**." She thinks that people have a great resistance to the study of **Espiritismo**. She admitted that she does not know very much about the philosophy of **Espiritismo** because she does not like to read.

As I said in the beginning, Generosa uses the concept of **prueba** in order to make sense of her development as a medium. According to her, in order for a person to become a good medium, he or she should suffer strong **pruebas**. But, what is

the purpose of suffering **pruebas**?

The **pruebas** help the medium to change his or her character. The suffering that I had when I lost my **facultades** helped me to become humble. Through having this **prueba** I began to value the **facultades** that I had. One has to suffer in order to understand and sympathize with the suffering of others.

Doña Generosa thinks that through these **pruebas**, God is testing how much faith one has in Him. If a medium passes this **prueba** successfully, he or she is more prepared to help other people to pass their own **prueba**. As Generosa said: "If you have not walked barefoot in the rocks, it is impossible for you to know and to understand this experience".

Doña Aurea

First contact with the medium

Of all the mediums who participated in this study, Doña Aurea is the only one who has lived in the United States. I met her in 1983 when she was living in Boston with her family and working in a **botánica** (herbal shop) giving **consultas**. At that time I was visiting several **botánicas** because of my interest in establishing a connection with the spiritist mediums in Boston.

One day I was listening to the radio when I heard the message that a new **botánica** had opened in Cambridge. On a Tuesday morning, I took the train and went to Central Square looking for the **botánica** called **San Miguel**. It was very easy to find it. From the outside I could hear a record of **santero** songs. I went into the **botánica** and began to check some of the records that were on sale. Two women were talking to each other, one of them was about thirty years old and the other was in her fifties.

After a few minutes, I introduced myself to the two women. The younger woman was the owner of the **botánica**, and the other one was Doña Áurea who was working giving **consultas** at this place. I talked with Áurea about the absence of spiritist centers in Boston. She was very concerned about this situation too, telling me that she would like to go back to Puerto Rico because there she could work in many spiritist centers. After having talked for a while, I told Áurea that I was a student who was interested in writing about the life of spiritist mediums. I asked her if she would be interested in being interviewed about her development as a medium. She did not hesitate for a moment, giving me her address so that I could visit her at home. At the end of the meeting she gave me a crucifix and a small picture of Jesus as a gift.

Since this first meeting, I kept in contact with Aurea, making several visits to her home. From the beginning I felt that she trusted me very much which helped me to develop a good relationship with her. In the middle of 1986, after having lived for five years in Boston, she decided to go back to Puerto Rico, establishing herself in a small town at the center of the Island. During the period that I was doing the field study in Puerto Rico, I visited Doña Aurea two times, which gave me the opportunity to interview her more in depth.

Doña Aurea is fifty-one years old but she recognizes that she looks older than her age because she "has suffered very much". Her education is limited to the fifth grade.

The first interviews with Aurea were done before the official beginning of this study. But my interview approach was consistent with that adopted in the thesis: I let her talk about what she considered important and essential in her life as a medium. I did not want to impose themes which may not be meaningful to her. From these conversations I discovered that her life is full of revelations, visions, meaningful dreams and healing experiences which began to manifest themselves very early in her life.

At times it was difficult for me to distinguish when Doña Aurea was talking about a dream or revelation and when

she was talking about "real" events. I found myself constantly asking her if this was a dream or not. After some time I began to realize that for Aúrea some "dreams" were as "real" as our conversations. She was not making a distinction between a "real" event and a revelation because for her the revelations were part of the reality she was experiencing. My need to distinguish between the "real" and the "imaginary" became an obstacle in understanding Aúrea's reality.

Early experiences in her development as a medium

Doña Aúrea began her story describing an experience she had at age five:

Ever since I was a child I have liked to look at the moon. As a child I spent many hours looking at the moon. One night I was observing the moon through one of the windows of my house. Suddenly I saw a beautiful child in the sky who was coming down in a cloud. He was getting near me and I could see that he had three stars on his face. The child was carrying the world globe in his hands, sitting on a cloud that shined like the sun. The child got down by my window asking me to come with him. He also told me that he was **el Niño De Praga** (The Prague Child) and to not be afraid of him. I was so astonished that I could not say a word. I called my mother so that she could see the beautiful child. However she did not see him. I explained to my mother what had happened but she did not believe me. After this experience, I went every night to a river that was near my home trying to have another experience with the child.

At the age of seven, Aurea had a vision in which she had a "direct confrontation with the Enemy":

It was very late and I was still at the river. My mother was calling me but I wanted to stay more time looking at the moon. I was not afraid to be alone at the river. On my way back home I had a terrible experience. Between two banana trees there was a very ugly animal. Fire was coming out of its mouth. The animal tried to hold me with its claws. I began to pray "Our Heavenly Father", then I told the animal: "You are not stronger than me". I had the courage to cross in front of it. As I was leaving, I felt an energy that pushed me toward the animal. When I could get home, I began to cry. I described my experience to my mother and she said that the animal was the manifestation of the Devil.

According to Doña Aurea, God wanted to test her spiritual strength, making her have a fight with the Devil.

Doña Aurea's grandmother was a medium. When Aurea was eight years old, her grandmother died. A few days before her death, the grandmother told Aurea that she wanted her to follow the spiritual work, giving Aurea her **cuadro espiritual** (group of spirits who are assigned to a person from his/her birth). In this process, the grandmother's spirit guides and ignorant spirits became part of Aurea's **cuadro espiritual**. Besides, her grandmother told Aurea that she would become a medium who would heal many persons. At that time Aurea did not understand the meaning of her grandmother's message very well.

Áurea considered that her mother was an obstacle for her **desarrollo de facultades**. Her mother was Catholic and did not believe in **Espiritismo**. Every time Áurea talked to her about an spiritual experience, the mother told her that she was becoming crazy. Áurea was punished several times when she shared the visions with her mother.

Áurea's mother took her to the Catholic Church several times. Doña Áurea remembers that she could not stay at the Church very long because she would begin to laugh without any apparent reason. There were times in which she saw "things" behind the priest.

When Doña Áurea began to see the spirits, she was not aware that they were spirits. The spirits appeared to her as if they were human beings and she would talk with them without knowing that they were spirits. Sometimes she went out to the mountains for several days without telling anyone because she wanted to be alone, in contact with nature. Her first experiences with the spirits were so "real" that one day a spirit hit her face.

Becoming a medium

At the age of sixteen, Áurea got married. Her husband did not let her go to the spiritist centers. She read The

Gospels According to **Espiritismo** without her husband knowing it. After being married for eight years, Doña Áurea got divorced, and had to take care of three children by herself. There were times in which she did not have any food to give to her children. But being alone gave her the opportunity to continue visiting **centros**.

After a few years, Doña Áurea remarried a divorced man who was a member of the Evangelist Church. He also prohibited Doña Áurea from participating in spiritist meetings. As she expressed: "I had to hide The Gospel According to **Espiritismo** again". At that time, she became **loca** (mentally ill), not wanting to eat anything and hearing voices that told her to commit suicide.

Seeing that the doctors could not cure Áurea, her husband decided to take her to a spiritist **centro**. There, the mediums told him that Doña Áurea was suffering from an **obsesión** (spiritual illness) because she was not working as a medium. After two or three visits to this **centro**, Doña Áurea was cured of the **obsesión**.

After this experience, her husband let her to participate in spiritist meetings. She developed the **facultad** to cure people using water. She liked to help people beside a river that was near her home because she could use the river's water in the healing ritual. In

addition, Doña Áurea developed the **facultad** of prescribing herbs to cure physical illnesses. She also learned how to interpret the revelations she was receiving in dreams.

Healing approach and evolution of practices

Although Doña Áurea uses several ritual objects in her work as a medium, she thinks that the function of those objects is to please the spirits or the mediums. According to her the ritual objects are not necessary for healing to occur. However she likes to use a bottle of perfume in a spiritist meeting "for creating a good environment". She learned that the ritual objects are not necessary because there were times in which she was unable to use a ritual object while helping a person and the person was cured.

In her development as a medium, it was important for Doña Áurea to identify the spirits who are part of her **cuadro espiritual**. First she identified several spirit guides who were helping her. She has a group of spirit guides who are Black Africans and another group who are Mexican Indians. There is also a Queen of Spain in her **cuadro espiritual**.

According to Áurea, in one's **cuadro espiritual** there are also ignorant spirits (**espirítus de prueba**) who need to

be educated. They are trying to make her deviate from the right path. Doña Áurea gave me the example of a female spirit who in another life worked in a bar and she was killed there. This female spirit wanted Áurea to work in a bar and to drink a lot of alcohol. Áurea talked with this spirit several times trying to educate her. After some time this spirit became one of her own spirit guides.

In 1981, Doña Áurea came to Boston with her husband in order to see her newborn grandson. Áurea's oldest son asked her if she could stay for some time and take care of the child. Áurea's daughter and youngest son were also living in Boston. She thought that it would be nice to stay there for a while so that she could be near her daughter and sons.

It was very difficult for Doña Áurea to adapt to the new environment. She complained about the absence of good spiritist **centros**. Doña Áurea felt that she could not be as effective in Boston as she was in Puerto Rico. She needed the contact with nature and to go to the mountains for a **despojo**. The water in the rivers and the beaches was so cold that she could not use it in the healing ritual. She also could not go out at nights to look at the moon because she was afraid that someone would attack her. As she expressed to me in one of the interviews held in Boston: "I feel that instead of going forwards I am going backwards in my

development as a medium".

Áurea has an extensive network of friends in Puerto Rico, including a woman who is also a medium. This woman has been very important in Áurea's own development as a medium. When Áurea was feeling down or upset, she called her friend to get advice. And when Áurea had a revelation, she consulted her friend in order to get help in the interpretation of it. This friend was also constantly telling Áurea that Puerto Rico is the place for her to work as a medium.

At the time that I met her, Áurea was dealing with several problems in her family. First, her husband had been an alcoholic for several years and had been unable to keep a job. Second, her two sons were getting divorced at the same time. Her youngest son was also having an alcohol problem and losing his job for the same reason. At the same time, Doña Áurea's daughter had separated from the man she was living with.

Very soon I noticed that Doña Áurea was an "advisor" for all the members of the family. Her sons and daughter consulted her every time they had to make major decisions. Doña Áurea was continually giving them emotional support. She was the one who kept the family together.

At the end of 1984, Doña Áurea made contact with a

group of **Espiritistas-Santeros** that was holding its meetings every Sunday. The meetings were led by a Cuban man who has been influenced by **Santería** and **Espiritismo** in his practice as a medium. I had the opportunity to do an ethnographic study of this group (Núñez-Molina, 1984).

Doña Áurea attended these meetings with her family. At the beginning, Doña Áurea was very excited about the meetings but then she got discouraged because the leader "had a different style of doing the spiritual work". She complained that one time she received a revelation and she asked permission to give it, but the leader told her that she had to wait. Doña Áurea believes that the leader did not want other mediums to give revelations. She also was afraid of working as a medium because she did not know if this would be considered appropriate by the **santero** leader. I noticed that her participation in these meetings was minimal. Similarly, the participation of other mediums was also very minimal. The leader was in charge of almost everything. Doña Áurea expressed her feelings about the meetings in the following way: "There, what the mediums do is to shake themselves from bad **fluídos**, so I do the same thing".

In the beginning of 1986, Doña Áurea decided to divorce her husband and to go back to Puerto Rico. She described the reasons for getting divorced as follows:

My husband has been one of my worst enemies within **Espiritismo**. He has been a big obstacle in my spiritual development. I thought that I could help him to overcome his alcoholism but I have found that I was wasting my time with him. The time that I have left I will dedicate to my spirits.

When I saw Doña Áurea in Puerto Rico, she was feeling very happy. She was helping several persons in collaboration with her friend. Describing her relation with the spirits Doña Áurea said:

I cannot live without the spirits. They are like a family for me. I belong totally to them. They give me a lot of courage. I have a guide who is, for me, like my mother. I always carry her statue everywhere I go.

Don Mayo

Initial contact with the medium

Don Mayo is a fifty-five year old man who has been practicing as a medium for about 30 years. He lives with his wife and mother-in-law. Don Mayo worked as a janitor in different factories but is now receiving a pension due to "mental disability".

I met Don Mayo while I was doing participant observation at an Indigenous **centro**. He was one of the most active mediums in the meetings, working several **causas** and giving

many revelations in every meeting. When I visited him at his home I discovered that Don Mayo was involved in giving **consultas**. He has a small room beside his home designated for this use. Our conversations were held in this room which made it possible to have a more private conversation.

Don Mayo was very cooperative, always trying to respond to my questions with a lot of details and examples. His wife was also very attentive, and invited me for dinner several times.

Don Mayo has a high school diploma. He also has a very good vocabulary for expressing his ideas. His economic condition is very difficult. At one time Mayo told me that he was unable to attend a spiritist meeting because he did not have the money to pay for the transportation.

Early experiences in his development as a medium

Don Mayo's involvement with **Espiritismo** began when he was in his twenties. Before, he did not believe in **Espiritismo**, and made fun of the people who practice it. However his wife was suffering from "attacks" and they decided to visit a medium to see if she could do something for her. Besides treating his wife, the medium told Don Mayo some very significant things:

The medium told me that I needed more help than my wife because I was having great **pruebas** due to my development of **facultades**. She also said that I liked to drink and to fight with others very much because there was a spirit who wanted me to become a murderer. She ordered me to throw away a knife that I had in my pocket.

Don Mayo recognized that at that time he liked to get involved in fights and was not behaving as he should. After some time, he visited another medium. At this time, Don Mayo received a great **comprobación** (verification) because the medium told him significant things about his dead mother without knowing her. The spirit of Mayo's mother communicated through the medium saying things to him that proved "that she was really my mother". Don Mayo commented that after this experience he began to have faith in **Espiritismo**.

Don Mayo emphasized through all of our conversations that he developed **facultades** because he underwent many strong **pruebas**. One time he had a medical exam in which it was revealed that he had an ulcer. The doctor told him that he had to be operated on as soon as possible. Don Mayo decided to go to another hospital. There he had another medical exam and this time it did not reveal any evidence of an ulcer. Don Mayo explained this saying that sometimes ignorant spirits can influence the results of a medical exam in order to make one have unnecessary operations.

Mayo's **prueba** continued and he was unable to work for four years due to an illness. There were times in which there was nothing to eat at his home. He had to send his children to a friend's house so that they could have something to eat. His economic condition was very critical. However he was resigned to it because he knew that God was testing him. As he expressed: "The person who will become a medium is tested in different ways to see how he or she will react to the suffering".

Becoming a medium

Don Mayo visited different spiritist centers trying to find the reasons why he was having so many **pruebas**. In all of them, the mediums told him that he was developing **facultades** and that he would become a medium. Don Mayo remembers that at the beginning he was experiencing many doubts which were obstacles to his development as a medium. He was afraid of telling people the things that he received from the spirit world because he was not sure if the messages came from the spirits or from himself. Through practice Don Mayo gained confidence in his capacity to heal others working as a medium.

When I asked Don Mayo about his **facultades**, he responded

that he could do spiritual analysis, give prescriptions, do **sanación** (spiritual healing), and work **causas**. He can do all of these things because he has **asistencias** (spirit guides) who are specialized in these functions.

Don Mayo expressed that his **asistencias** and God are the ones who are helping people, not him. He does not like people to thank him because he is not responsible if they get healed.

Don Mayo has lost his **asistencias** three times. He explained that other mediums have been jealous of him and they have tried to take away his **asistencias**. Don Mayo also recognized that in the past he received revelations about a person's life and he was not sure what could be told and what had to remain a secret. Sometimes he made mistakes telling other mediums and clients something very personal and they reacted very negatively wanting to take away his power. Now Don Mayo is more careful about what things he tells to the people in a spiritist meeting or a **consulta**.

When I asked him about his **asistencias**, he responded that a medium should not say the names of his **asistencias** to other persons. According to Don Mayo if anyone knows the identity of one's **asistencias**, he may be able to cause harm to them.

In 1965, Don Mayo began "to suffer from the nerves"

(**nervios**). He was experiencing **ataques** (attacks) which made him unconscious for a while. At other times, he could not control his emotions becoming aggressive with others. Don Mayo said that he "could not have control over the thoughts that came to his mind which ordered him to do bad things". He had to go to a mental health center in order to be treated for his condition.

At present, Don Mayo is still on medication. According to him, he has not been cured of his **nervios**(nerves), but now he has more control over the bad thoughts. As he explained:

I have more faith in God. I reject the bad thoughts through praying. I have more control over my behavior. When I have a bad thought, I examine it to see if it is from the spirit world or due to my **nervios**. When I have problems with my **nervios**, I ask God to give me control. Through praying, the bad thought goes out of my mind. Being a medium has helped me to confront this problem because my mind is busy with those things.

I was not clear if Don Mayo understands whether his **problema de los nervios** is caused by spiritual influence or if it is "material". He made it clear to me that his problem is totally "material", there is not any spiritual **causa**.

Healing approach and evolution of practices

During one of my interviews with Don Mayo, a person visited him asking for help. I realized that this was a good

opportunity to observe Don Mayo working with a client so I asked permission from him and the visitor to stay in the room. Both of them agreed to it.

The **consulta** lasted for about one hour. The visitor was a fifty-five year old man who was having problems with his legs. Don Mayo began the **consulta** by offering several prayers. Afterwards he asked the man several questions related to possible symptoms that he was experiencing. Some of the questions that Don Mayo asked were: "Are you having pain in your back? Do you sometimes feel chills and fever? Are you very tired most of the time? Are there nights in which you can't sleep? Do you feel itchy on your head? Do your legs become numb? Do you sometimes get dizzy? All of these questions were responded to positively by the visitor.

Then Don Mayo told the visitor that he saw a spirit who was trying to make him paralytic. This spirit was the one responsible for the leg pains that he was having.

Don Mayo also commented to the visitor that his wife was in need of help. According to Don Mayo the visitor's wife was suffering from headaches because she had a "weak brain". Don Mayo also pointed out that one of the visitor's daughters was causing problems at home.

After all of these comments, Don Mayo informed the visitor about the manifestations of ignorant spirits. He

told the visitor what he should say to an ignorant spirit in order to "give light" to it. Then Don Mayo closed his eyes, and began to move his hands around his head, showing that he was getting "possessed" by a spirit. Two ignorant spirits gave a manifestation expressing their desires to harm the visitor by making him paralytic. Both of the spirits were taken by Don Mayo's guide to a spiritual school where they would "get light".

Then, Don Mayo made several recommendations to the visitor. First, he prepared water and gave it to the visitor, telling him that it would cure him of the itch he was having on the head. Second, he told the visitor to put a hot towel on his waist everyday. Third, Don Mayo prescribed that the visitor take three herbal baths with different kinds of plants such as **altamisa**, **berbena** and **santamaría**.

Before leaving, the visitor asked Don Mayo if he had to pay him something. Don Mayo answered that he does not charge for his services.

I asked Don Mayo if there wasn't any material cause in the visitor's problem. He responded to me that there possibly was a material cause but he does not give importance to a material cause when it is not dangerous to a person's health.

Don Mayo's wife is a medium in development. She knows

how to **pasar** her **asistencias**. Sometimes they work cases together. However, Don Mayo's daughter is a Jehova's Witness and she has been trying to convince Don Mayo that he is doing something wrong. As Don Mayo expressed: "My daughter has given me many headaches". Their relationship has been affected negatively because the daughter is continually criticizing **Espiritismo**.

In our last interview Don Mayo expressed the following: "Maybe the people who read my story will laugh at it, but this is my story and it is my truth. So I do not mind if they make fun of it".

Aida

Initial contact with the medium

The story of Aida is one that touches me in a special and profound way. I have known her for many years. I observed her many times helping clients at her **centro**. I always admired her spiritual strength. She was always eager to help others.

Aida was the **Presidenta** of a **centro** which has been located behind her house for more than 20 years. Due to several health problems she is now unable to practice as a

medium. She has chronic diabetes condition. Three years ago one of her legs had to be cut off in order to protect the rest of the body from being infected. In addition she has lost her vision due to glaucoma. But the most painful event of her life was the loss of her twenty-two year old daughter who died in a car accident about six years ago. Aida is continually trying to make sense of all of these **pruebas** but sometimes she cannot understand why she has to suffer so much when what she has done in this life is to help others. The question of the meaning of suffering remains an unsolved puzzle for her.

Aida is now fifty three years old, but she looks much older. Much of the time she has to lie in bed. As she was telling her story to me, there were moments in which she cried, feeling very sad and hopeless. At other times there were moments of joy and happiness as she remembered special events of her past.

Early experiences in her development as a medium

Aida's **pruebas** began very early in her life. At the age of twelve she began to hear voices that commanded her to hurt herself. She ran away from her home several times. She cried and yelled without any reason. Aida's mother believed

in **Espiritismo** and took her to different spiritist centers. At these centers, mediums told Aida that she was suffering from spiritual **causas** and **pruebas** of past lifes.

Aida's problems continued after she got married at the age of twenty. One day she tried to jump through a window from the sixth floor of an apartment building because the spirits told her that she was a bird. Another time she got poisoned with Clorox. When she had these crises, she was very aggressive with her husband and other people.

Aida had 10 natural abortions before having her first child. She believed that ignorant spirits wanted her not to have any children. Her husband said that Aida told him the day that she would get pregnant and the day that she would abort. Aida further explained:

A spirit told me all of these things. He also told me that I got pregnant by him. The spirit also tried to kiss me. I told him that I was a married woman and he should not kiss me. I saw this spirit as if he were alive. I ran away from him around the house. After some time of running after me the spirit left me, saying that he was happy because I would lose my child. This was a nightmare.

Becoming a medium

At that time one of Aida's aunts invited her to a spiritist center. There Aida began to have more control over

the voices that were troubling her. Several of the **espíritus de causa** that were affecting her were "lifted up". Aida was also told that she should become a medium so that she would not get ill again.

Aida began to have dreams about future events that would happen. At the spiritist meetings she learned how to **pasar** the spirits. One night, a spirit gave a message through a medium, telling Aida that he was her spirit guide. The spirit also said that she would find his bust in a shop. A few days later, Aida was in a **botánica** and she saw the bust of a black man. She suddenly understood that this was the bust that the spirit guide was talking about. She bought it for two dollars and ninety five cents and she still preserves it. However she made it clear to me that this bust is just a representation and a symbol of her spirit guide.

In later communications, the spirit guide revealed more about his identity. He told Aida that his name was Carabalu. He lived in India as a Black slave all his life. He was a very strong man who was obligated to have sex with other slave women in order to make healthy children.

Aida developed different kinds of **facultades**. She could **pasar** ignorant and good spirits unconsciously. Aida could also receive revelations from the spirit world. She also "magnetized" water so that it could become medicine for sick people.

Healing approach and evolution of practices

After living for some years in New York, Aida and her husband decided to go back to Puerto Rico. She got pregnant and had her first child. Aida described this experience as the most significant one in her life. At that time she decided to build a **centro** behind her house as a way of giving thanks to God for all the help she had received. She also began to see people at her home in order to help them with their problems.

Aida's **centro** can be classified as an indigenous one. There is a large table covered with a white cloth. On the table there are objects characteristic of indigenous **centros**: **agua de florida**, candles, a goblet of water and other things. The walls are covered with figures of saints.

The **centro** became a place in which Aida's family and other members of the community met together in order to get help from the spirit world. There were times in which Aida felt overwhelmed by the people who were constantly looking for her in order to get help. Sometimes it was hard to find free time for herself and the family. Aida complained that people from the community came to her when they were robbed or when they had lost objects as if she had the capacity to "view" where they could find their belongings. These

unannounced visits and requests also took much of the time she could have otherwise dedicated to her family.

When I asked her about the function of ritual objects in spiritist healing, Aida responded that although she used the ritual objects, none of them are necessary for healing to occur. What she considers important is the **fluido de sanación** (healing energy) of a good spirit. When this **fluido** is deposited in water, then a sick person who drinks from this water can be cured.

Aida's husband, Ramón, has worked as a carpenter all his life. He has also been a medium since he was very young. Ramón believes that if he had not been an **Espiritista**, it would be impossible for him to be with Aida and to have a stable marriage. They worked together as mediums in the spiritist meetings that were held at their **centro**.

At the present, very few individuals are attending Aida's **centro**. A small group of people meet at the **centro** to pray. There is no working of **causas** or spirit manifestations. However, Aida expressed that the **centro** should not be closed because she has a commitment with God to keep it open.

Aida mentioned that most of the people who attended the **centro** in the past had faith in her but not in God. She believes that they left when she got sick and could not work

as a medium at the **centro**. She considers this a problem because "people have to understand that everything that a medium receives is from God, so one does not know anything".

The death of Aida's daughter was an incident that affected her very deeply. This daughter was the one who was supposed to be her successor at the **centro**. Of her three daughters, this one was the only one who was a believer in **Espiritismo**. She was also her preferred daughter. As she expressed to me: "Since the death of my daughter, there has not been any day in which I have not cried. Sometimes I hear her laughing. When I eat something that she liked, I remember her and I cry. I cannot understand why they took her away. I hope that all of this will help me to purify my soul." There were moments that she asked God: "Where were you when this happened to my daughter?" The only answer that she received was that this accident had to happen as a **prueba** for her and not as a punishment for her daughter. She thinks that maybe in another life she was not a good mother and now she is paying for her mistakes. As she expressed: "I ask God for all of these **pruebas** to have the purpose of liberating my spirit. I ask God that I can say one day: I am happy, I do not suffer anymore. It is with this hope that I continue living."

The second group of mediums represent the practice of Kardecian **Espiritismo**: Peruchín, Félix, Emiliano, Marcos and Rosa. What follows is a summary of their life-stories.

Peruchín

Initial contact with the medium

Peruchín was referred to me by an informant of mine who is a leader of Kardecian **Espiritismo** in Puerto Rico. He has known Peruchín for several years. On a Sunday morning, we visited Peruchín at his home located in a community of limited economic resources. After having introduced me to Peruchín, my informant left the house explaining that he had to work on his car and would come back in two hours.

Peruchín is a sixty-nine year old medium who looks much younger. He is tall and thin, with dark skin that makes him look like a **mulato**. Peruchín lives with his wife in a small wooden house. They do not have any children. He has worked as a janitor in a public school for many years.

Peruchín never finished the first grade. He hated school and never learned to read and write. Despite these limitations Peruchín expresses his ideas very well. I was impressed by how much he used metaphors and other figures of

speech in our conversations. He explained to me that he is able to talk in this way because he has the **facultad** of inspiration. The spirits inspire him to talk using poetic language. According to Peruchín, he was being helped by the spirits as he was answering my questions. He did not need to experience a deep trance in order to communicate with the spirits.

Early experiences in his development as a medium

Peruchín began his story by telling me that when his mother was pregnant with him she was told that the child she would have would become a medium. His mother was black and was never accepted by his father's family. They were constantly telling Peruchín that he was not his father's son.

As a child, one of Peruchín's dreams was to become the best professional baseball player in Puerto Rico. At the age of nineteen, he began to play professional baseball for the team of Ponce. At that time he had experiences which led him to stop playing baseball.

At nights I began to see "things". I felt that someone was holding my hands. Then I felt that my spirit was getting out of my body. Instead of dreaming about baseball, I dreamed that I was giving a spiritual message to a big crowd of people. When I was batting in a game, I saw the figure of a woman and this made me strike out.

Peruchín understands that this was the beginning of a "conscious **obsesión**". This process made him wander in different towns, sleeping on benches without any money. For a period of six months, he lost his appetite, feeling nauseous in the presence of food. Also his sexual appetite increased, and he felt a tremendous need to have sex with other women. He made it clear that the **obsesión** was conscious because he felt the need to run, to throw things at people and to fight with them but he was able to control these impulses.

Becoming a medium

At that time an old woman invited him to a spiritist center. There his **obsesión** was cured by helping the ignorant spirits who were troubling him. He was told that he came to this world to develop **facultades**. Peruchín felt a great love for the spiritual work, and decided to prepare himself as a medium.

Very soon he developed the **facultades** of inspiration, was able to give **videncias** and **pasar** spirits. He began to see spirits who told him: "I want to be your friend". He established a small center in which he saw people in need of help.

By the age of twenty-eight Peruchín had been divorced two times. A spirit told him that he would find the right woman very soon. That night, in a dream, he saw a young woman who was sitting under a tree.

That week a woman came to his center asking for help. Peruchín was very surprised to see her because the woman was very similar to the one in the dream. The woman was experiencing an **obsesión** because she was developing **facultades**. Peruchín helped her to overcome the **obsesión** and in the process they also fell in love. They have been married for more than thirty years.

I noticed very soon that the relationship of Peruchín with his wife is a very special one. As Peruchín told me: "When I married her, my life changed completely". He relates to his wife as if they were newly-weds. Peruchín is constantly praising her for how good a wife she is. He expressed that his wife is always concerned about how well he is dressed and how much he has eaten. A spirit told him that his wife was his mother in another life.

Healing approach and evolution of practices

Peruchín follows the movement of Kardecian **Espiritismo** in his practice as a medium. He is a friend of several

leaders of this movement. In many ways he is different from an Indigenous medium. Peruchín has a spiritist center beside his house but he calls this place a spiritist school, not a **centro** or a "temple". The name of his spiritist school is **La Voz de la Vida** (The Voice of Life). Meetings are held in his school every Monday night. An average of 15 to 20 persons attend these meetings.

Although Peruchín recognized that he used prayers in the past, now he thinks that they are not necessary. In the meetings he gives talks about topics inspired by the spirits. He considers that what is important is to prepare a good environment so that good spirits will be attracted. To support his point Peruchín told that "a baker does not have to call people because they will come attracted by the good smell of the bread. The spirits do not have to be called if there is a sense of harmony in the meeting". Besides, Peruchín does not believe that ignorant spirits can be educated through prayers. When I asked him what the reaction of people was when he stopped doing the prayers, Peruchín responded that some of them left the school.

Peruchín also has a different conception about the working of **causas**:

The concept of **causas** is what has been an obstacle in the progress of **Espiritismo**. No one can take away the **causa** from another person. I

am the only one who can lift my **causas**. The important thing is to orient and to educate the individual. What would life be then, if someone has the power to lift our own **causas**?

Moreover, Peruchín does not think that a medium should tell a person that there is an ignorant spirit who is trying to harm him or her. As he explained:

To say this to people is like giving them a poison. It may become a negative suggestion which may cause more harm than good. For example, to say to an individual that an ignorant spirit wants him to have a car accident may affect the individual negatively because now he is very afraid of driving. What a medium should do is to support the individual, motivating him to study and to become a better person.

"How then the ignorant spirits will be educated?", I asked Peruchín. Peruchín answered me that in the process of giving advice to the individual, these spirits will also be listening and benefiting from these conversations. According to Peruchín it is not necessary to talk directly with the spirits to help them. If the person is being helped, the spirits who are troubling him or her are also being helped.

In relation to the use of ritual objects in the medium's practice, Peruchín declared that "the cigar does not think, the candle does not think, the **agua de florida** does not think..." He made it clear that he does not use any of these things in his practice because they are not necessary

in helping a person. However, he recognized that these ritual objects may help mediums to do their work with more confidence. Peruchín added that sometimes the spirits suggest that a medium use a ritual object but the medium should not follow their suggestion, just educate them.

In one of my interviews with Peruchín, a friend came to see him because she was not feeling well. The friend was a woman of about thirty-five years of age. Peruchín asked his wife for the book The Gospel According to Espiritismo. Then Peruchín asked the woman to sit down in a chair that he brought from the dining room. Afterwards, he told the woman to close her eyes and to breathe very deeply five times thinking that she is alright. Following this, Peruchín asked her to think about a place she would like to be.

He began to touch her forehead with his fingers, using gentle pressure. Then he repeated the same procedure in different parts of her back. He gave these massages for about 15 to 20 minutes. When he finished, his friend said: "You have taken about 50 pounds from me. I feel much better".

I was surprised to see that Peruchín was using techniques of relaxation and visualization in order to help this person. Besides, instead of giving a **despojo**, he gave a "massage" to her.

At the spiritist school Peruchín also uses classical music as a way of creating a "more spiritualized environment". When I asked him where he learned these techniques, Peruchín responded that it was in the "school of life".

Throughout all the interviews Peruchín emphasized that a medium should "study" in order to develop his or her **facultades**. What he means by study is that one has to "listen and observe the events of life very carefully". Peruchín pointed out that we have confused the words "study" with "reading and writing" but they are not the same.

As I was about to leave Peruchín's house, I asked him if he considered himself a fully-developed medium. Peruchín answered as follows:

A medium never finishes developing the **facultades**. A medium is always in the task of learning and developing. The medium never becomes a fully-developed medium. I am always learning new things.

Don FélixInitial contact with the medium

Don Félix is a seventy-eight year old medium who is well known throughout the whole Island due to his healing skills. People from different towns come to see him for a **consulta**, sometimes traveling two or three hours. He is considered to be one of the most powerful spiritist healers of Puerto Rico. Newspapers have written articles about him and the cures he has performed. Famous artists, politicians and public figures have visited Don Félix asking for his help.

I was very curious and interested in meeting him. I went to see him on Saturday morning in which he was giving **consultas** at his **centro**. Don Félix's **centro** is located in the heart of a poor community at the metropolitan area. The **centro** is a cement structure painted white and blue. It has a separate small room which is used by Don Félix for giving **consultas**. The **centro** also has a small cafeteria in which visitors can buy different kinds of native foods. The main room of the **centro**, in which spiritist meetings are held, has the capacity to accommodate more than 150 persons. In the front of this room there are four rectangular tables in which

the **centro**'s mediums are accommodated.

From the moment I asked Don Félix to participate in my study he was very interested in helping me. He told me that he did not have time for an interview on Saturday or Sunday because he was working at the **centro** those two days. However he invited me to a country house he has in the mountains where we could talk about whatever I wanted. I discovered that Don Félix's country house was located in my hometown where I was staying while I was doing this field study.

Through the interviews and participant observation at his **centro**, I began to know about the mediumship development of Don Félix and his unique style of helping others. Although Don Félix is the oldest medium among those I interviewed, he is one of the most active. On Saturdays, he gives **consultas** to about 30 individuals. On Sundays, he is in charge of a group of more than 100 persons. In addition, on the weekdays he visits those clients who cannot go to his center due to different problems. I was very impressed with his physical strength. On Saturdays and Sundays he does not seem to get any rest from 8:00 A.M. to 5:00 P.M., seeing several clients, and taking charge of the meetings' development. He seems to renew himself in the **reunión** and the **consultas**, always being ready to meet the different needs of the people.

I made an appointment with Don Félix for an interview in his country house. On a Tuesday morning I went to see him. I met Don Félix's wife who is also a medium. She told me that Don Félix was working on the farm, planting some orange trees. She told me that they like the house a lot because it is a spiritual retreat for them. They can also have some privacy because in their home in San Juan many people visit them asking for help. After a few minutes Don Félix came, looking very sweaty. He said that he had been working on the farm since very early in the morning. Working on the farm is a hobby which he enjoys very much.

Don Félix showed me his house and afterwards we went to the basement because he said that there we could talk without interruptions. There he began to tell me about his life.

Early experiences in his development as a medium

Don Félix described his family of origin as one of the richest in his hometown. At the age of ten, due to several problems with his family, he left them and went to San Juan. He began to live by himself, shining shoes and working in agriculture for the rich people of San Juan. Consequently he never had the opportunity to go to school.

At the age of eighteen, Don Félix had his first direct

contact with the spirit world. He was awake on his bed at one in the morning when two men and a woman suddenly appeared before him. At that time he did not recognize that they were spirits. He thought they were burglars:

These people told me that they will educate me about everything. They also said that they would dictate a book to me. I asked them how I could write a book if I do not know how to write or read. They responded that I do not have to worry about it because they will teach me.

After this experience, Don Félix often began to feel the need to travel to many remote places in the Island, compelled by the spirit forces. In these different places he went into trance and he received messages from **espíritus de luz** (spirits of light) which he wrote in whatever he found that can be used to write. He wrote these messages on plantain leaves, wrapping paper, fabrics, cardboards, among others. After his trance experience, Don Félix did not know what had happened nor did he know how to read the spiritual messages because he was illiterate. The only thing he knew was that he had to preserve these different messages.

Several years passed until some friends of Don Félix became interested in the messages that he had received from the spirits. According to Don Félix, they had a hard time trying to figure out what was written on the different kinds of materials he used. His friends told him that the messages

should be printed in a book in order for other people to benefit from these teachings. After overcoming several obstacles, the book was published in 1974 by Kier, a famous publishing house in Argentina specialized in spiritualistic books (Rodríguez, 1973).

In the first interview Don Félix gave me a copy of his book, Luz de la Verdad Espiritual (Light of the Spiritual Truth) which I had the opportunity to read; it was very well written. This book is , according to Don Félix, a mediumistic work, which means that he wrote it by automatic writing. In this sense Don Félix does not consider himself to be the author of the book because he was only a "channel" that different spirits used to dictate their messages. The book is a collection of 13 short essays dictated by different "spirits of light" such as Amalia Domingo Soler (a famous spiritist woman from Spain), León Denis (an European spiritist philosopher), Agüeybaná (a well known Puerto Rican Indian) and the Apostle John.

At the age of twenty-three Don Félix got married to a woman who was also a believer in **Espiritismo**. A few years later he began to suffer from an **obsesión** which lasted about three months. Don Félix had to be hospitalized in a psychiatric facility. His wife decided to take him to a spiritist **centro**. After visiting this **centro** for a month,

Don Félix was able to recover his mental health. The diagnosis that was given to him at the **centro** was that he was developing **facultades**.

Becoming a medium

After this experience, Don Félix visited different **centros** until he got prepared to offer **consultas** at his home. (I could not get more information about this period because he had difficulties trying to remember what happened to him). In a few years, Don Félix became a very well known medium in the community, having developed several **facultades**.

When I asked about his **facultades** he mentioned several including clairvoyance, telepathy, hypnotism, magnetism, automatic writing, visual and auditive mediumship (capacity to see and hear the spirits). Listening to all of these concepts, I recognized that Don Félix's vocabulary for describing his **facultades** was very different from the vocabulary used by indigenous spiritist mediums. Where did he learn all of these concepts? Although he seems to be an intelligent person, Don Félix's everyday language shows that, if he had some academic education, it was very little. According to Don Félix, the spirits have taught him how to read and write because he has never been in the school.