

Don Félix's principal guide is called Agüeybaná. Agüeybaná was a famous Taino Indian who at the time of the Spanish colonization decided to fight against the oppressive Spanish regime. The first contact that Don Félix made with Agüeybaná was after having been meditating in a mountain for three days. There, Agüeybaná told Don Félix everything about the history of the Puerto Rican Indians.

Don Félix is a conscious medium but there are times in which he works unconsciously. He considered that conscious mediums are the best ones because they can help people without them being aware that there is a spirit helping the medium. Another advantage is that conscious mediums can work with their eyes open.

Healing approach and evolution of practices

In 1953, Don Félix established a **centro** on the first floor of his home. He has been offering services to the public since then. To see Don Félix "in action" at his **centro** is a unique experience because the **reunión** in this **centro** is not a ritual separated from everyday life. Don Félix likes to make jokes in the **reunión** trying to release the tension of the group. He told me that when he makes a joke and the audience laughs they are not thinking about

their problems anymore. They feel more relaxed and consequently it is easier to help them. However this is not a "technique" that Don Félix uses, it is an intrinsic part of his personality. He made me laugh several times during the interviews suggesting that I not take this research too seriously. I really enjoyed being with him. He was always emphasizing the funny elements of life.

At the **reunión**, Don Félix is a very spontaneous person. In the middle of a very serious conversation, he may swear a **carajo** or a **coño** in order to emphasize a point. He may compliment a young woman saying to her: "Do you want to be my girl friend?" He may scold a client or a medium very seriously and then he may start laughing. Sometimes he calls people by nicknames based on their physical characteristics such as **flaco** (the skinny one), **gordo** (the fat one) or **cabezón** (the big-headed). However Don Félix told me that the spirits tell him when he can tease a client and when it is not appropriate to do so.

Don Félix has great confidence in his abilities, demonstrating no doubts about the way he wants to proceed in the treatment of a client. He walks slowly with a sense of pride and respect. The mediums and the clients seem to admire him a great deal. I noticed that I admired his capacity for relating to people, for interacting with them in

an intimate but not intrusive way. He seems to be in control of the **reunión** at all times.

The **reunión** at Don Félix's **centro** is divided into four major sections: the conference, the prayers, the healing session, and the working of **causas**. The **reunión** begins with a conference by Don Félix from 8:00 to 9:00 A.M. In this conference he presents different topics such as his personal experiences as a medium, description of cases in which he was successful, how a person should be according to **Espiritismo**, and a talk about reincarnation. Sometimes he tells people to ask questions related to the conference. At other times he will ask questions to the public. He may also read a passage from a book about **Espiritismo** and then explain it.

After the conference, the participants listen to a record of prayers for about half an hour. Then, there is a healing session in which each participant comes to the front and receives **pases** from Don Félix and other mediums.

At about 12:30 P.M. there is a one hour lunch recess. The final period is the "working of **causas**". The "working of **causas**" is primarily for clients who have been to a **consulta** before. Each client is assigned to a medium who is supposed to help him or her. In this process a medium may find an ignorant spirit that is affecting the client and this spirit may speak through the medium. Don Félix does not work with

any specific person so that he can be ready to assist a medium who needs his help in order to work a **causa**. He moves around the other mediums, checking how they are helping clients. Mediums tend to give advice about how a client should behave in order to resolve a problem. It seems that Don Félix is "supervising" their work.

In the **reunión**, it is very difficult to recognize when Don Félix is under the influence of a spirit and when he is not. He does not believe that a spirit goes through the "brain" of a medium in order to make a manifestation. In other words, he does not believe that the spirit "possesses" a medium. According to Don Félix, when a spirit wants to say something to him, it comes near him and stays at some distance. Then the spirit "projects" ideas and feelings to his subconscious mind or **submente**. From the **submente** these ideas and feelings cross to his conscious mind. At that moment he feels an irresistible impulse to talk to the client. According to Don Félix the **submente** is the part of the human mind which is more influenced by the spirits because it is free of prejudices and negative ideas.

Don Félix has developed a vocabulary which seems to be particular to his own development as a medium. In one of the interviews he mentioned to me the concept of **espíritus anoides** for describing ignorant or bad spirits. Don Félix

told me that he likes to read books about **Espiritismo**, parapsychology, hypnotism, magnetism and occult sciences. I saw a good book collection on these areas at Don Félix's **centro**. It seems that he has been influenced in his practice as a medium by the reading of these books.

Don Félix works primarily with a population characterized by poverty and low academic achievement. In this sense he is a medium who serves the poor. On the other hand he uses a vocabulary and understands the healing process in a way that is very much different from indigenous spiritist healers. For example in his **centro** there are no candles, goblets of water, incense, nor statues or figures of saints. Moreover he does not believe that using these ritual objects may be helpful in the healing process. I observed that in his center there are pictures of Jesus Christ, John F. Kennedy, Juan Ponce de León (Spanish colonizer of Puerto Rico), Amalia Domingo Soler (a famous Spanish spiritist woman), Luis Muñoz Marín (a past governor of Puerto Rico), and a picture of Don Félix when he was young. According to Don Félix he has these pictures in the center because these persons are examples of how a human being should be and behave. Don Félix also has the statue of an Indian which represents his principal guide, Agüeybaná.

The only ritual object used by Don Félix in his **centro**

is a wooden knife. With this wooden knife, Don Félix finds the areas of the client's body which are affected by an illness. However, according to him, the knife is just a symbol and does not participate directly in the healing process. Don Félix uses a knife because it "increases the suggestibility and the faith of the client", and therefore it is easier to help a person. According to Don Félix, in the healing process, his spirit guide uses his "physical magnetism" in order to cure the client of his/her affliction. The client's faith is important because it opens him or her to this magnetism or energy.

Don Félix admitted that in the beginning of his development he used ritual objects because he "had weak **facultades**". When he made contact with more powerful forces, the ritual objects were not necessary anymore. It was after suffering a thrombosis that Don Félix developed the "forces of magnetism and hypnotism".

Don Félix's understanding of the causes of illness is described in this way by him:

Illness is a psychic microbe. Illness resides in the "subconscious mind" and because of that the "physical mind" is disturbed and gets sick. What I do is to cure the subconscious mind and therefore the physical mind is also cured. In this sense I am a natural psychologist.

Don Félix did not emphasize the education of ignorant

spirits as a major goal in his treatment. He uses techniques that are based on a psychological explanation of illness. For example, he employs techniques of suggestion and hypnosis in his work with clients. He told me that a medium should know how to use suggestion with their clients because most of the problems can be resolved using this technique. He gave me an example of how to use suggestion with a client:

Lets suppose that you are mentally sick. I would tell you: "I can cure you. They are treating you for being crazy but you are not crazy". (Although you can be really crazy). "What happens is that you are suffering very much. I will put my hands on your forehead and when I ask you to yell, you will do it. After that you will be cured".

Don Félix mentioned that sometimes it is not necessary to tell people that there is an **espíritu de causa** that is troubling them. Through the process of hypnotism and suggestion the spirit may get help without the need to make people afraid of it.

In addition Don Félix uses hypnosis with clients when they are prejudiced against **Espiritismo**. Such clients do not want to cooperate in the treatment or they are very afraid. In order to "hypnotize" a client Don Félix puts his hands on the client's forehead, putting pressure on his or her eyebrows. Afterwards, he tells the client to count from one to 100. Through this process the client gets into a trance

and Don Félix gives him or her a verbal suggestion to "condition" his or her mind. Don Félix believes that the major goal in using these techniques is to make the client more open to the influence of the spirit guides. He expressed that he is not the one who gives the suggestion but his spirit guides through him.

Another procedure that Don Félix uses to help clients is to give **pases**. What he does when he is giving **pases** is to put his hand on the part of the body which is affected without moving it. Don Félix does not think that one has to move the hands while giving **pases** or **despojos**. However he considers that for some people to move their hands rapidly is helpful because it increases their faith in the healing process. Don Félix understands that to give **pases** is effective because the medium is giving of his own "physical magnetism" with the help of his or her spirit guide.

Presentation of a case worked by the medium

Don Félix described a case to me in which he was able to cure a client who could not speak due to some damage in his vocal cords. The physicians had told the client that only with a very delicate operation would he have some possibility of recovering his voice. In order to be operated

on, the client had to be anesthetized but it was dangerous to do that because he was suffering from diabetes and high blood pressure.

The client decided to attend Don Félix's **centro** on Sunday morning. Without the client describing his problem, Don Félix told him that he had to be operated on immediately by him if he wanted to recover his voice. Then, Don Félix said to the client that first he had to be "anesthetized". Hearing Don Félix's statement, the client became very afraid because he did not want to be "anesthetized". However Don Félix explained to him that this anesthesia was produced by hypnosis and it would not be dangerous to his health. Seeing that the client understood the procedure, Don Félix proceeded to hypnotize him. In a state of trance, the client was "operated on" by Don Félix using his wooden knife.

When the client was getting out of trance, Don Félix heard a voice ordering him to slap the client's face. After being slapped by Don Félix, the client became furious about the lack of respect but at this moment a word came out of his mouth. Everybody in the **centro** heard the client swearing a **carajo**, a word which is used when one is angry. But the client was aware that in order to say this word he had to be able to speak. He began to cry, giving thanks to Don Félix for helping him recover his voice.

I interviewed other members of the **centro** who were there when Don Félix cured this person. All of them confirmed Don Félix's story.

Emiliano

Emiliano has been the director of a spiritist society that belongs to the movement of Kardecian **Espiritismo** for about 25 years. No one can believe that he is already seventy-three years old because his physical condition is very good. Emiliano is a very active man who works on his farm very hard, teaches gymnastic classes and enjoys reading very much. Although Emiliano went to school until eighth grade, he is a self-educated person. He is knowledgeable about psychology, philosophy, medicine, health foods and other areas. He worked all his life as a tailor but now he is retired and living with his wife who is also a medium.

Emiliano's development as a medium varies significantly from the other stories that I have presented. Emiliano's development is not characterized by **pruebas**, **obsesión** or spiritual experiences in childhood. Besides, Emiliano does not have the **facultad** of "incorporating" or **pasar** spirits. He does not see or hear the spirits, nor does he have visions or revelations. Emiliano is a medium of magnetic **pases**,

meaning that he has the capacity to give "magnetism" to a sick person in order to cure him or her.

Early experiences in his development as a medium

Emiliano began his involvement with **Espiritismo** in his twenties. His parents were Catholic but he did not like any kind of religion. He considered himself an "agnostic". At that time he was in love with the woman who is now his wife. She was a very active **Espiritista**. Emiliano became interested in **Espiritismo** through her because she lent him several books on this matter. They also had numerous conversations about **Espiritismo**. Emiliano found that the spiritist philosophy was congruent with his ideas about life.

One day a friend invited him to a spiritist meeting. There Emiliano received a message: "Work hard and you will succeed".

Emiliano began to work as a tailor in the Metropolitan Area, having to be away from his girlfriend. One day he was sick with a stomach condition. The next day Emiliano received a letter from his girlfriend telling him that she had gone to a medium. The medium told her that Emiliano was sick with a stomach condition and prescribed several things for him. Emiliano was very surprised that this medium could

know about his illness if he had not said anything to his girlfriend.

Becoming a medium

The next time he went back home he decided to see the medium with his girlfriend. This time the medium told him something that he considered absurd: "You have to prepare yourself because you will become the **presidente** of the spiritist society that your girlfriend is attending". Emiliano responded to the medium that he was not very interested in those things and that he was just a beginner. The medium repeated to him: "You have to prepare yourself".

Emiliano followed the medium's advice by continuing reading different spiritist authors. After being married, he continued attending the spiritist society with his wife. Very soon he was part of the society's directive. In addition he received lessons from a spirit through a medium about how to magnetize. This spirit is a Hindu who helped Emiliano when he was giving magnetism to a person.

Healing approach and evolution of practices

At present Emiliano does not work as a medium of magnetic **pases**. According to him, being seventy years old,

he does not have enough magnetism to share with others. It can be dangerous to his health to do that at his age. Emiliano considers that, in this process, besides being an instrument of the magnetism of the spirit world, one is giving magnetism from one's own body.

Emiliano explained that one gets sick due to a magnetic disequilibrium. The role of the mediums is to restore the magnetic equilibrium by providing the person with a quantity of magnetic energy. When a person is healthy he or she does not need magnetism. However if the sick person does not have faith, Emiliano thinks that it is a waste of time to magnetize because he or she will not be open to receiving it.

The spiritist meetings in Emiliano's center are held Mondays and Fridays. I made three visits to the center and there were about 10 to 12 people at each meeting. The structure and organization of the center is characteristic of the centers that practice Kardecian **Espiritismo**. There is a total absence of ritual objects. In Emiliano's center the traditional "white table" has been replaced by a desk which is used by him. At one side of the center there is a bookshelf which contains several books on **Espiritismo**.

The spiritist meeting lasts about two hours. Almost one hour of it is dedicated to the reading and discussion of a book on **Espiritismo**. This discussion is led by Emiliano. He

asks questions about the reading trying to motivate people to participate and to contribute with their ideas. In the meetings that I participated in, people had the opportunity to criticize the health services that they are getting. Emiliano supported the discussion of social issues. In one of the meetings he said: "We are governed by mediocrities".

After the discussion, the lights are turned off. Emiliano announces that it is time for the meditation. Then the people begin to listen to a tape of classical music. Emiliano asks them to relax and to breathe very deeply several times. Then Emiliano helps people to concentrate with a kind of guided meditation using phrases such as: "God is within me, as I am within Him".

This period lasts about 20 to 25 minutes. When the meditation ends, Emiliano asks the mediums to pass their guides. After each medium has done this (there are about three to four mediums), Emiliano asks the group if anyone has had an experience in the meditation that needs to be shared. This is the opportunity for the mediums to talk about any revelation or vision they have received about a person. For example in one of the meetings I was told that a spirit who came with me did not like to listen to the word "strength" when Emiliano was saying it. Another medium expressed that she saw a female spirit with me but she was one with good

intentions. In addition, a woman was given magnetic **pases** because she said she was feeling depressed and nervous. In none of the three meetings did I observe the manifestation of an ignorant spirit.

When Emiliano began to preside over the center, he used to offer prayers and to have a goblet of water in the meetings. He ceased praying because he "was cooperating with the religions" and not practicing **Espiritismo**. For this reason, he also prohibited mediums from "wetting people with water". There were people who stopped coming to the center but he didn't mind because "those were the religious ones". Emiliano made clear that he did not consider himself a Christian. For him, **Espiritismo** should never be mixed with religion. Spiritist centers are not churches but "schools for moral and intellectual development", he said.

Through all of our conversations, Emiliano emphasized how important it is for a medium to have a balanced diet and to do physical exercise. He became a vegetarian several years ago when he began to read literature about natural foods. He has found that this kind of diet helps him feel better and have more energy than before. In addition he keeps himself in physical shape by teaching calisthenics to a group of children in a gymnasium. This has also provided him the opportunity to know other people who visit the gym.

Emiliano showed me the importance of reading literature from different sources by describing an experience he had with a minister who was visiting the gym. He was suffering from intestinal polyps. Emiliano had read in books of Yoga how to cure intestinal polyps. He told the minister to change his diet and to stop eating meats. Emiliano recommended that he do certain exercises. After a short time, a medical exam revealed that the minister did not have polyps. Emiliano made it clear to me that the most important thing was not just the elimination of the polyps but that the minister is now living a healthier life.

Elaborating on this idea, Emiliano explained to me that the major purpose of **Espiritismo** is not to cure people or to communicate with the spirits but to teach people how to develop their own spiritual powers in order to become better human beings. This is the goal that he is trying to achieve every Monday and Friday at his **centro**.

Marcos

Initial contact with the medium

I met Marcos five years ago when I attended a spiritist meeting at his home. Since then we have had several

conversations about his practice and development as a medium. Consequently the interviews for this thesis were seen by him as a continuation of our conversations but with the difference that at this time they were being recorded.

Early experiences in his development as a medium

The mediumship development of Marcos highlights how a medium who was educated within the tradition of Indigenous **Espiritismo** has moved to practice Kardecian **Espiritismo**, while still appreciating and respecting the indigenous tradition. He believes that "scientific" **Espiritismo** does not satisfy the needs of the poor, religious and non-educated Puerto Rican.

Although Marcos has a college education and he is living up to the standards of the Puerto Rican middle class, his family of origin was poor and had very little academic education. He never knew who his father was, so he considered himself a **hijo natural** (natural child). His grandmother took care of him until he was five years old. Then his mother married a cousin and Marcos began to live with them.

Marcos remembers that as a child he woke up at night and began to walk around the house. His mother told him that he

seemed to be talking with others while he was in this kind of sonambulistic state. His stepfather did not like this behavior and punished Marcos several times. From what Marcos described, it seems that his stepfather was physically abusive towards him and his mother.

Marcos had a religious inclination since he was a very young child. He liked to go to the Catholic Church and to read the Catechism. He did not miss any of the rosaries given at the Church. Sometimes when the priest was holding Mass, Marcos got the impression that it was he who was giving it. When somebody asked him what he wanted to be as an adult, he responded that he wanted to be a priest. His stepfather made fun of him, telling Marcos that men who become priests are homosexuals.

Becoming a medium

When Marcos was in fourth grade, his stepfather began to suffer from "attacks" but the doctors could not find anything wrong with him. A medium told the stepfather that his problem was not "material" but spiritual. The medium also told the stepfather that he had to bring Marcos to spiritist meetings because he was developing **facultades**. The stepfather decided to follow the medium's advice and began to

attend a center with Marcos regularly.

However, the stepfather continued abusing Marcos and his mother to a point where Marcos asked his mother to divorce her husband. Marcos was feeling great resentment towards his stepfather. He started to carry a knife in order to defend himself and his mother from the stepfather. In addition, Marcos began to feel the presence of a spirit that wanted him to kill his stepfather.

Marcos's mother recognized that she could not continue accepting this situation for much longer. After an incident in which her husband beat her up very badly, she became determined to get divorced from him.

Marcos was then fifteen years old. He was attending a **centro** with his grandmother but at the same time he was a member of the Presbyterian Church. At the **centro**, he was the center of attraction because many people came to see the "boy who was able to **pasar** spirits".

The **Presidenta** of this **centro**, named Pura, became a very important role model for Marcos. This woman did not have any academic education but according to Marcos she was one of the best mediums he has known. She emphasized that in order to be a good medium one has to be humble. When clients did not have money to buy something that she had prescribed, Pura did not hesitate to buy it for them.

In this **centro** there was also a medium named Ramón, who was in charge of giving spiritual instruction. It was he who introduced Marcos to the works of Allan Kardec, teaching him the importance of studying the philosophy of **Espiritismo**.

After finishing high school, Marcos wanted to go to college but he had not taken the required entrance tests. With the help of his school counselor, he was admitted to a private college after having passed a very difficult test. Marcos believes that he received help from the spirit world to pass this test. In addition, he obtained a fellowship and work-study scholarship which enabled him to pay the tuition and board.

By that time Marcos had the experience of meeting his spirit guide for the first time:

That night I had a dream in which I talked with my spirit guide. She was a girl of about seventeen years of age, thin with long hair. She told me that she was my sister in another life. She also said that she was in charge of taking care of me.

In addition he had his first experience in trying to educate an ignorant spirit:

This spirit wanted to help me but she was not very evolved. She wanted me to smoke cigars when I was working as a medium. In the **centros** I was feeling a strong desire to smoke. I told the spirit that if she wanted to help me she would have to change her style or I would not accept her. After some time, the spirit said to me that she would adapt to my style of helping.

In addition I discovered that she was my mother in a past life.

Healing approach and evolution of practice

After completing college, Marcos got married. He continued attending **centros** regularly. After some time he also decided to hold **reuniones** at his home. At present, these meetings are being held every week in a section of his garage specially prepared for this purpose. Marcos's **centro** does not follow the model of Indigenous **Espiritismo** in its physical organization. The incense, the **agua de florida**, the "white table", the candles or other objects characteristic of indigenous **centros** are absent in Marcos's **centro**. However, there is a goblet of water which indicates Marcos's roots of indigenous practices.

Through interviewing Marcos and doing participant observation at his **centro**, I was able to see how Marcos's practice and world-view as a medium has changed as he got exposed to Kardecian **Espiritismo**. These changes in his philosophy and mediumistic practice are revealed in different ways. First, Marcos is opposed to the belief that one can be an **Espiritista** and Catholic at the same time. In his **reuniones** he asks people to decide between the practice of **Espiritismo** and Catholicism. But he recognized that this is

one of the reasons that people stopped attending his **centro**. Marcos also realized that it was not easy for him to begin practicing a more rational and secular **Espiritismo** because his background was very Christian and especially Catholic.

According to Marcos there are a number of beliefs within **Espiritismo** which are opposed to the teachings of the Catholic Church. One is that **Espiritistas** believe in reincarnation while Catholics believe in resurrection. Another difference is that **Espiritistas** do not believe that Jesus was God incarnated nor that Mary was a virgin. Marcos believes that these ideas may seem as too radical for an **Espiritista** who still attends the Catholic Church.

Marcos said that he "does not want his **centro** to become another church because that is opposed to his principles". He criticized those **centros** that use the Bible as their primary reference, celebrate baptisms and the Catholic communion.

Although Marcos began using ritual objects in his practice as a medium, he thinks now that "the only thing that one needs to contact the spirit world is a good thought". He indicated that as he was educating himself, it was necessary to discard some "superstitions" he had about **Espiritismo**. Marcos thinks that some mediums need to use ritual objects in order to concentrate.

Another dimension in which Marcos has experienced changes is in how to educate an ignorant spirit. In the beginning he thought that the most important thing to do to educate the spirits was to offer prayers to them. Now he teaches people that one cannot educate spirits through prayers but one has to give "counseling" to the spirit. According to Marcos one has to "dialogue" with the ignorant spirits if one wants to help them.

On the other hand, Marcos's practice as a medium suggests the presence of indigenous spiritist elements. For instance, each meeting at Marcos's center begins with several prayers from the Colección de Oraciones Escogidas of Allan Kardec. He believes that prayers are very important and essential in the meeting because they help people to concentrate. Prayers are also necessary for the development of a positive environment. Moreover, Marcos considers that the "magnetized water" can be helpful in the treatment of the client's condition. He has a goblet of water in his **centro** prepared with healing plants.

Marcos criticized the Kardecian **Espiritistas** for trying to eliminate the religious dimension of **Espiritismo**. He thinks that **Espiritismo** cannot be totally "scientific" because it will mean the practice of "materialistic **Espiritismo**". According to Marcos the practice of a "pure

scientific **Espiritismo**" leaves him totally empty because it only emphasizes the intellectual dimension.

He also criticized Kardecian **Espiritistas** for using a very sophisticated and high-sounding vocabulary in their meetings because it discourages people who don't have a good education. Marcos argues that as a leader of a spiritist group he also has to provide for the people who are not very educated. It is important for him to offer instructions using a very simple vocabulary since there are individuals in his **centro** who have not gone to school.

Marcos described several dissatisfactions and frustrations with his role as a leader of a spiritist group. The number of individuals who attend Marcos's **centro** varies from 15 to 20. He complained that he only has two good mediums in his **centro**. Marcos argued that most of the time individuals who can become mediums do not have enough faith and perseverance, and consequently it is very difficult to develop a group of good mediums. Sometimes he feels that he is working alone in the **reunión** without receiving help from anybody.

Another of Marcos's dissatisfactions is that according to him, some mediums produce "animistic manifestations". (Animistic manifestations are those possession experiences which are totally produced by the mind of the medium without

the intervention of a spirit). He described one of the developing mediums who attends his **centro** as having a "sick ego" which leads her to generate a trance manifestation which is purely psychological in its nature.

Although Marcos has been working as a medium since he was very young, he confessed to me that doubts about the reality of the spirit world have never left him. He has had several moments of crisis in which he has lost his faith but he always finds "someone" who answers his questions. There have been times when he would like to see the materialization of a spirit in order to be sure of the reality of the spirit world. In addition, due to the fact that he is a conscious medium, Marcos is constantly examining and questioning the nature of his trance manifestations. Consequently, the issue of who is the one talking through him when he is in trance is always present in his mind.

Because he is a spiritist medium, Marcos has felt some rejection from co-workers and community members. Some people move away from him when they find out that he is an **Espiritista**. Some of them think that he has a liaison with the Devil. At the school where he works, his co-workers know that he is a medium. One time they were talking about **Espiritismo**, and realizing that Marcos was an **Espiritista**, they said: "Lets not talk about this anymore because with

Marcos we have to be careful." On some occasions community members were surprised to find that Marcos was a medium because they could not imagine how a good and educated person as he could be involved in **Espiritismo**.

Rosa

Rosa is a medium who attends a spiritist center that belongs to the **Confederación de Espiritistas de Puerto Rico** (Spiritist Confederation of Puerto Rico). The center's philosophy is based on the practice of Kardecian **Espiritismo** without using any kind of religious rituals. The people who attend this center are primarily middle class.

Rosa is a forty-two year old black woman who divorced several years ago. She lives with her two adolescent daughters. Rosa works for the Department of Public Instruction as a teacher in an elementary school.

Early experiences in her development as a medium

Although Rosa has attended spiritist centers since she was a child, she considers herself to be a "medium in development". When she was a little girl, her father took her to a spiritist center several times. Rosa very much

enjoyed being at these meetings, considering them a "marvelous spectacle".

Rosa's mother did not believe in **Espiritismo**. She was constantly arguing with Rosa's father about taking Rosa to the spiritist center. Rosa's mother also considered that she was too young to attend spiritist centers.

Rosa's father died when she was seven years old. However Rosa continued visiting a spiritist center located near her home. She described her visits to the spiritist center as being the most important recreation in her childhood. Rosa remembered that she got punished by her mother due to these visits.

She explained to me that as a child she had "visions" of beautiful places. Now Rosa understands that these visions were part of her development as a medium. In addition, any time she was feeling sick, Rosa dreamed that she went to a place on a white horse. After she woke up from the dream Rosa felt that the illness had disappeared.

As Rosa grew up, "strange things" started to happen in her life. One time she was walking on a road well-known to her and suddenly she had the feeling that she had never been there before. Rosa also began to see shadows near people and to "see things that were not there". She was worried and decided to consult with a neighbor who was a medium. This

medium told her that she was having these experiences because she would become a medium.

Becoming a medium

A few years later, Rosa began to feel a great pain in her eyes. After some minutes, she could not see anything. Rosa decided to visit the medium she had seen before. The medium took a glass of water and put a white flower in it. Then she rubbed Rosa's eyes with the water. At that moment Rosa got her vision back.

Another unusual experience happened to Rosa one day when she came back from work:

I could not talk. I felt that my tongue had been stabbed with a paper clip. I went to see the medium. She "prepared" some water and gave it to me to drink. A few minutes later I began to talk without any problem. The medium told me that I was developing **facultades** and that I should be careful about the kind of spiritist centers that I attend.

Rosa continued attending spiritist centers of the kind that I have described as indigenous until five years ago when she learned about a center that was led by a university professor. Since that time she has been attending this center two or three times a week. At the center she takes classes on mediumship development. Rosa is one of the most active mediums at the center.

At the beginning she had revelations about people but she was afraid of talking about them. However one night the director was giving **pases** to her. At that moment, she got in a trance and one of her spirit guides communicated through her. After this experience, Rosa gained more confidence to participate in the meeting as a medium.

When I asked her about the **facultades** that she has developed Rosa responded that she is a medium who receives the spirit communications mentally or intuitively. She expressed that "the spirits do not talk directly to me but it is like I am imagining it". She does not see the spirits with "the material eyes" but with the mind. Besides, Rosa has the **facultad** of **incorporación**, meaning that the spirits can manifest through her, using her senses. She also can feel the illnesses of other people in her body in order to identify the problem. Rosa commented that to feel the symptoms of other people's illnesses may be dangerous if you don't know how to get rid of them before the meeting ends. It is also very painful because one becomes the receptor of the negative vibrations that are affecting the person.

I observed Rosa at the spiritist meetings several times. Ignorant spirits who were affecting visitors communicated through her in order to be educated not to do harm. She described what she feels at the moment of **incorporación** as

follows:

Each time one feels different things. I may feel tremors, pain in my body and strong heart palpitations. At other times I feel very hot or cold. Sometimes when I am working a **causa** I feel like I'm dead because I do not feel that I am breathing. I don't feel my body. Many times I have felt the need to laugh.

Rosa described herself as a semi-unconscious medium because when she is in trance she can remember certain things but not others. Sometimes people express their gratitude to her at the meeting but she does not remember what she has done to help them.

Rosa expressed that most of her spirit guides do not have academic preparation or knowledge about **Espiritismo**. Consequently she began to work as a medium using candles, **agua de florida**, incense, handkerchiefs, cigars and other things. From the classes at the center, she has learned that one does not need to use this paraphernalia in order to help others. She is educating her spirit protectors in this matter so that they can learn to work without using these objects.

The director of the center is continuously attacking the mediums who use ritual objects in their practice. However Rosa believes that if a medium needs to use these ritual objects, she does not see anything wrong in doing it. As she explained:

I do not use these things at the center because I have not needed it due to the kind of people who attend the center and the kind of spirits who give manifestations there. I believe that these kind of practices are useful. If you are a carpenter, you need a hammer to work with. If you are an engineer you use more sophisticated tools. The same happens in the spirit world. The spirits have different kinds of preparations, some of them are more evolved than others. If a spirit needs to use something "material" to help a person it is acceptable to use it. I do not mind what the director thinks about it. In my experience I feel that I am more effective doing a **despojo** when I am using my handkerchief than when I am not using it. I feel that the magnetic force is bigger when I am using my handkerchief. When I visit other center, I use my handkerchief.

Rosa thinks that the director of the center is too rigid and strict about the development of mediums. He doesn't want the mediums to move their hands and bodies when they are "incorporating" a spirit. Some mediums have left the center because the director has criticized their performance. She remembers that one night her spirit guide, a Black African, gave a communication in which she sang a song. A few weeks later the director criticized those mediums who have guides that sing and dance.

Rosa emphasized that working as a medium may be dangerous because the medium is confronting negative forces while trying to help a person. She believes that there are **causas** that are too strong, that can disturb the mental equilibrium of the medium. Three years ago she had an

experience in which she "lost her mind" for three days:

A person asked me to meditate with her at twelve midnight in order to help a friend who was having a lot of problems. One night I was meditating about the problem of her friend and I lost my mind. I began to talk incoherently, without wanting to eat or sleep. I was out of my mind for three days. I was very aggressive against others. I had a "machete" on my bed. I was conscious of what I was doing but I did not have any control over it. It was the most terrible experience that I have had.

Rosa was cured after a spiritist meeting was held in order to educate the spirit who was bothering her. She believes that the spirit who was affecting the person she was trying to help, tried to make her crazy. In other words, she lost her mind due to an **obsesión** by an ignorant spirit. One of Rosa's concerns about her practice as a medium is the possibility that the work with ignorant spirits may be detrimental to her mental health.

Rosa is taking meditation classes and reading books about it. She is interested in learning to meditate because this will improve her contact with the spirit world. According to her, through meditation she can become a better receptor of the spirits.

In the beginning Rosa had problems with her daughters because they did not accept her work as a medium. However in the last years their attitude has changed significantly and now they are more open to these ideas.

Rosa expressed to me that the classes she is taking at the center have helped her to be a better mother. She was having problems with one of her daughters:

I treated my daughter very badly, punishing her very often. At the center I learned that if I want to change the world, I have to begin changing myself. I have developed more patience and tolerance in the relationship with my daughter. Before, I usually exploded very easily when she contradicted me.

Rosa finished our conversations by saying that although she feels that attending spiritist meetings is important, she would not miss a dance or a party for a meeting. As she said: "One cannot spend all one's time in communication with the spirits; it is also important to enjoy life".

The last group of mediums represents the category of mediums in transition: Luisa, Juanita, Miriam and Luz. These mediums cannot be classified within any specific spiritist movement. Although they have moved away from Indigenous **Espiritismo**, they still are influenced very much by this movement in their practices.

Doña LuisaInitial contact with the medium

Doña Luisa is a sixty year old black woman who appears to be much younger than her age. A friend of mine, who knew her, talked to me about the "great **facultades**" of Doña Luisa. My friend was very impressed with Doña Luisa's capacity for "reading the mind" and knowing the past of a client. I decided to call and ask her if she would be interested in participating in my study. She agreed to do so and we made an appointment for a weekday because she dedicates the weekend to her husband.

After a long trip of about two and a half hours, I finally arrived in the town where Doña Luisa lives. As I was trying to find her house, a black woman in her car stopped and said to me: Are you the one who is looking for me? She was Doña Luisa. Doña Luisa told me to wait in her house which was located at the end of the street because she had to take her husband to his job.

I waited for her about 10 minutes. She came driving an old car. I was very impressed by how tall she was. We sat in two rocking chairs on her porch and began to talk about my study.

At first Doña Luisa did not let me tape the conversation. She told me that she wanted to know more about my interests in doing this study. I understood that I was too anxious to tape everything. I told Doña Luisa that I was not interested in proving anything about mediumship development. My main interest was to describe the development of spiritist mediums. In addition I told her that some members of my family were mediums and this was one of the reasons which led me to choose this topic of investigation. I felt that Doña Luisa was much more apprehensive about being interviewed than the other healers I had interviewed.

One of the reasons that led me to interview Doña Luisa was that she had participated in a project in which mediums and mental health professionals met together to exchange lectures and to discuss cases each had treated. I was interested in knowing how this project had influenced Doña Luisa's development as a medium.

Doña Luisa confessed to me that after being involved in this project she had decided not to participate in these "kind of things". She agreed to be interviewed by me because she wanted to help others. She felt that in the prior project, mental health professionals attacked her and wanted to compete with her. According to her, mediums were

considered ignorant by many mental health professionals. At other times, mental health professionals did not take into account the educational background of the people they were dealing with. Doña Luisa said that sometimes these professionals presented material using a very sophisticated vocabulary. She also felt that they were continuously trying to test her **facultades** in order to prove whether she was a good medium. It seemed that she was also in competition with the mental health professionals rather than in collaboration with them in this project.

I felt that this prior experience influenced the degree of trust that Doña Luisa had toward me. I think she perceived me as yet another mental health professional who wanted to test her **facultades** as a medium. Several times she responded to my questions in a "defensive" way. However, I am not sure if this was also produced by the nature of my questions.

Early experiences in her development as a medium

Doña Luisa described her first spiritual experiences as very sad. Her family was very Catholic and they were opposed to **Espiritismo**. Luisa's parents died when she was a child and she was reared by family members. At the age of twelve,

she woke up one morning with several scratches on her body. However these scratches disappeared very soon. Each morning she began to wake up with these scratches in her body. According to Doña Luisa these scratches were caused by spirits who wanted to harm her. She began to attend spiritist centers with her sister and after a short period of time her problem disappeared.

In her adolescence, she had visions of the Virgin Mary. She also heard voices which addressed her. On several occasions she saw flowers falling from the sky but when she tried to pick them up, they disappeared. In addition, Doña Luisa had premonitions that terrible things would happen in the future such as wars and deaths of family members. Her family members thought that she would become "crazy". Her concern about these experiences made her consult a Catholic priest. The priest told Doña Luisa not to tell anybody about her experiences and not to worry about experiencing all of these things.

One day, when Doña Luisa was fourteen, she was in the yard when suddenly she saw a human head on a piece of zinc. She was very afraid and remembered this experience for a long time. At that time she had thoughts of wanting to run away but she had control over them.

After some time of attending different **centros**, Doña

Luisa, with the help of another medium, was able to see spirits who were "materialized" in front of her. This medium also gave her advice about the importance of morality in the development of **facultades**. She decided not to attend any more **centros** and to continue developing her **facultades** by herself.

Becoming a medium

When I asked Doña Luisa about her **facultades** she responded that she has the capacity to see and hear the spirits, to read people's thoughts, to **pasar** spirits, to receive the messages of spirits through the mind and to predict future events. However, she considers that sometimes having these **facultades** is disturbing and anxiety-provoking. She explained to me that days before the disaster in Mexico in 1985, she received a revelation that it would happen. She also thinks that having the capacity to read people's minds is terrible because in a way it is a kind of manipulation and control over others. For example, sometimes she is capable of knowing what her husband is thinking about her which makes her more vulnerable to being hurt.

Doña Luisa stressed that in the process of developing her **facultades** it has been very important to educate her

protecciones:

In the beginning I had a **protección** who liked to smoke. He wanted me to do the same thing to the point that I started to look for tobacco in order to smoke. However I understood that I should not do this because I was giving a hope of life to this spirit when he was already dead. My **protección** did not need to smoke because he is a spirit. What I did was to help him understand that spirits do not need to smoke.

On another occasion, Doña Luisa's **protecciones** wanted her to charge for her services as a medium. It was a great conflict for her because to charge for services was against her values and principles. However she thought that maybe she could use the money to do charity work. For a week she charged for her services to clients but afterwards Doña Luisa reconsidered her decision:

How can it be possible to charge for my service when I don't pay anything to the spirits for helping me? I should not let the spirits convince me that I have to charge for my services. I didn't pay for receiving my **facultades** so I should not charge for helping people.

After this experience, Doña Luisa continued helping people for free. However she does not criticize those mediums who charge because sometimes they do not have any other source of income. She believes that in general the mediums who charge are the ones who are very poor.

Although Doña Luisa seems to have extensive academic

instruction, she only has a high school diploma. As a child she left school in the fifth grade due to an illness. However, when she was an adult, Doña Luisa continued her studies at night until she got her high school diploma.

Doña Luisa does not like to read very much about **Espiritismo** because she prefers "to learn from personal experiences":

I believe that Kardec's books were about his own experiences. I love and trust my own experiences. In order to defend myself, I have to talk about my own experiences. Not to say in these books I read this but to consider what I have experienced through all of these years practicing as a medium.

Some of the books that Doña Luisa has read are the ones written by Amalia Domingo Soler, a famous spiritist woman from Spain who is very well known in Puerto Rico. According to Doña Luisa, the spirit of Domingo Soler has helped her a great deal. This spirit has dictated messages and poems to her. She asked Doña Luisa to write a book of poems dictated by her. Doña Luisa did not agree to write the book because she "did not deserve to receive this honor". She feels that she does not have enough preparation to write this book.

One of the poems dictated by the spirit of Domingo Soler to Luisa reads as follows:

Vente conmigo amigo mío,
vamos al campo y tú verás,
verás lo que en tu tierra pasará.

¿Dónde está el coquí?,
dónde está si ya no existe,
ya no da el mismo ritmo de canción.
Corre, coge por este atajo,
mira a ver si alcanzas
a ver un cucubano.

At present, Doña Luisa is living with her husband. They have one son who is thirty years old. She told me that in the beginning her husband did not believe in **Espiritismo** but little by little the spirits gave him evidence of their existence. Consequently her husband "was convinced that the spirits have a great influence over our lives". She gave me the following example:

My husband likes to play baseball. One day I told him not to go to a baseball game because something very bad would happen to him. However he did not listen to me and went to play baseball. In this game he was hit by a ball, having to be hospitalized for three months. All of these things gave him faith in **Espiritismo** and therefore he began to respect it.

Doña Luisa had to visit a psychologist because she wanted to receive help with a family problem she was confronting. After having told the psychologist about her problem, he responded in the following way: "You know, Luisa, you have an incurable disease. This disease is called Juan Pérez" (this is the name of Luisa's husband). According to Doña Luisa, after hearing this she understood that she had to deal with her husband in a different way. The relationship