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The Race the New Right Must Win

By Alexander Cockburn
& James Ridgeway

The idiom of national politics over at least the next two years may well be determined by the outcome of a hitherto little-noticed senatorial campaign in New Jersey where, with time rapidly running out, a young, conservative Republican, Jeffrey Bell, feels sure that he can still wrest victory from the favorite: former basketball star and liberal Democrat, Bill Bradley.

Across the country, new conservatives and old Republicans are hoping that Bell will be a portent: that a surprise triumph over Bradley will show that the tax revolt has staying power and can be made to work for them. If Bell wins, the lobby behind New York Representative Jack Kemp's call for huge permanent tax reduction will gain powerful national presence and could—along with a then-certain Kemp drive for the nomination—be politically dominant in Republican presidential politics in 1980. Furthermore, a Bell victory would be a signal to President Carter of the tempestuous national mood with which he must grapple in the months to come, amid the high emotions of a single-issue electorate, inflamed (Continued on page 11)

JAMES POETT



SETH SPOKE

*A Visit with Jane Roberts,
a Medium with a Message*

By James Poett

"Who are Jane Roberts and Seth? Most people are familiar with their names; others are not. For those who are not, a brief introduction is necessary. Seth is a non-physical being and Jane Roberts is a writer that . . ." This began an ad placed in a New York daily and two upstate papers. The group that placed it had once worshiped Seth as a token of a new age. Now they were bitter. "He claims," they wrote, "to be a morally infallible spiritual teacher sent to reveal the truth to mankind. But," they asked, "has he ever used his foreknowledge of human affairs to warn mankind of floods, plagues, aircraft disasters? Never. Has he ever commented on the moral integrity of the world's political leaders? Has he revealed cures for cancer?" How they had been taken in by (Continued on page 27)

The Great White Hype

By Jack Newfield

Cat Davis is a kinky media phenomenon, a product of the Great American Hype Machine, just like Tiny Tim or Jerry Rubin. She has been profiled by *People* magazine. She has been interviewed on the *Today Show*. She participated in *The Superstars*, a trash sports show on ABC-TV. Cat is a lady boxer who is white, blonde, and pretty.

Cat is also not what she appears to be. And her manager-boyfriend, Sal Algieri, stands accused of trying to fix her fights, of controlling a fake "commission" that regulates women's (Continued on page 15)

**Jackie O.
vs. the
Nudists**
By
Anna Mayo
(P. 8)



Cathy "Cat" Davis, on her way to losing the women's Lightweight Championship, takes a hard right from Ernestine Jones (alias Connie Smith) during their fight last June.

Her trance was almost complete. Rob asked the Ouija board for a further explanation. Jane couldn't hear the words forming in her mind, and she sensed a presence behind them.



GEORGE DELNERICO

SETH SPOKE

Part One: The Universe Breaks Open

By James Poett

(Continued from page 1) him. Hours they had waited in semidarkness, listening for some spirit of their own to talk to them.

Finally, they were rewarded. Back from those unfathomable spaces came words, half-drawn forms, mumbings, and alien presences. But as months passed they began to suspect that their spirits could lie. One had told them that Jane Roberts was on her deathbed and they must go to her and take her last will and testament. Their car was packed when someone thought they should phone first. It was a tremendous blow to their faith when Jane, healthy and alive, answered their call. It must be that their spirits were demonic; suddenly they saw a universe swarming with these disembodied leeches out to rule and possess mankind. The world had to be warned. Jane Roberts had to be warned of what was happening to her. When she refused to speak to them, they took out their ads in the newspapers.

"All sorts of things like that," Jane said. Jane Roberts is a small woman, 49 years old, who, in the tradition of mystics, spiritualists, and the like has suffered physically the blossoming of the spirit—though she denies any connection. She is arthritic, and seems more to carry her hands through gestures than to move them. She has a taste for green and purple nail polish, bright print shirts, and strings of beads. Her hair is short and dark, and her face—well, there are her eyes. Bulgy

"Two Jesuses have written me." She hesitated for a moment. "If I'd thought of it, I should have connected them up with some of the apostles I know of."

Communication is a kind of commitment for Jane, a linkage that connects and breaks with a conversation. Broken, there are times when she seems to fold in on herself, to cling physically to the air around her and to admit neither an exit or entrance. Connected, she is quick, impish, and sane. She does not readily shake hands. Behind her as she sits with her husband, Rob, at a table in their living room, are five or six of her paintings. They are all small, hectic pictures of bouquets of flowers and vivid colors just one step this side of abstraction. The rest of the living room is dominated by larger pictures Rob has done, particularly a portrait of Seth as a man in his sixties. The paintings, on masonite, are cool and a little formal. Robert Butts himself is slightly more rumpled. A man of 59 with frizzy gray hair that comes down to the collar of his work shirt. He is protective of Jane and cautious where she is intuitive.

Together, with Seth dictating, they have completed three books; *Seth Speaks* has sold about 600,000 copies. Jane has written five other books more or less directly related to the material she has received from Seth.

Rob pushed a letter over to me across the table. "It's an example" he said, "of another kind of letter we get." It thanked them for what they were doing and described an almost identical experience the writer had had

ing the Seth material. "I know what occult people are like," the woman told me when I talked to her a week later. "They're nuts. I've been around. They're on a separate beam. . . . If Western society is working for you, if it's paying your bills and if you're happy, you don't look around for anything else, but if society isn't doing what it should for you, then you go searching."

"I believe Seth's precepts about your body following your own beliefs. When reading Seth over I said, Ahhh, that's why so and so happened, or that's why I lost my health: I believed—I wanted to be sick. I wanted to die. I did. It wasn't until I woke up every morning praying to die that I lost my health. I dwelt for a long time in the past—for a really long time—and anyone who has undergone a kind of—like the people in this building, for instance, a good many are Auschwitz survivors. They are still living in Auschwitz. You meet them, and half of them are reliving it all the time. It's like, anything that has that much force in somebody's history replays and replays. But, of course, we bring it on ourselves. That's why, for me, Seth is very interesting. It gave me a different viewpoint so I just wasn't stuck in my own pain."

"The Jewish people, unlike us goddamn Wasps, have a mysticism that's inbred. The people themselves believe in dybbuks. They have the Cabala. They've been into all this stuff for centuries. Those of us who come out of the Puritan-American ethic, Jesus, they cut all this off for us. They just left us stand-

ing on that goddamn Plymouth rock, out there in the wind, with nothing."

Snow drifted down out of the Elmira night. The few cars out on the streets made long black lines under the street lamps. The wide Chemung River cutting through the center of town seemed darker as the snow nestled down next to it. Jane had walked home this night from her job at the Arnet art gallery on Lake Street. It was a Sunday evening, and winter, until now, had been more anticipation than cold fact. The country was still in shock over Kennedy's assassination two weeks before. Coincidence would begin to cast grotesque shadows over the psyche of a country numb in disbelief; *The American Way of Death* perched like a gargoyle at the top of the non-fiction best sellers; and Walt Disney this evening was presenting the second installment of *Pollyanna*.

On Water Street Jane and Rob had taken their shock, shelved it, and once again sat down in the living room with a Ouija board between them to reestablish contact with the dead. Jane noticed the snow powdering the sill of the window outside their second-floor apartment as she and Rob waited with their hands on the pointer for their communicant to speak.

"Are you there?" Rob asked, expecting the local resident they had contacted three times the previous week. "Yes," answered the Ouija board. "Do you have a message for us?" Hardly a pause and then the pointer was

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fly.

"Consciousness is like a flower with many petals," the board answered. Not quite the kind of answer they had received before.

Rob was incredulous. "Is this Jane's subconsciousness talking?" Rob asked.

"Subconsciousness is a corridor. What difference does it make which door you travel through? Nevertheless, I can speak through her if I choose. Once she spoke through me. You cannot see the joke, of course. Ha."

Never before had they received more than a single-sentence answer. The chill in the room was gone.

"When did you speak through Jane?"

There was no hesitation now. "A century ago. Seance. She was a medium reaching me for you. I came through, too."

"We need some kind of name to use in talking to you," Rob said.

"You may call me whatever you choose," the board answered. "I call myself Seth. It fits the me of me, the personality most clearly approximating the whole self I am or am trying to be. Joseph is your whole self more or less, the image of the sum of your various personalities in the past and future. You are Joseph, the Joseph you see in your mind—the blueprint."

As they had agreed, Rob wrote down exactly what they got. They had to stop a few times so he could get it all.

"What name would you call Jane, as you call me Joseph?"

"Ruburt," Seth said, and Jane made a face.

"It seems strange to us. I don't believe Jane likes it."

"Strange to the strange," Seth quipped. The Seth material had begun. Ruburt was Jane's name once long ago, and the names represented high points for their entities—images in their mental genes, blueprints for the spirit to follow. Joseph and Ruburt represented the full scope of the earthly personalities toward which they must grow. "But, in another sense," he added, "you are already Joseph and Ruburt since the blueprint exists. Everyone has such a blueprint. Through each life the individual tries to follow his. The pattern is not imposed but is the entity's own outline." By this time more and more material was piling up in Jane's head.

"Does this interfere with free will?" Rob asked.

First she'd been getting letters before they appeared on the board, then words, and now whole sentences were jamming up in her mind like snarled traffic, waiting to be spelled out. She could see Rob on the other side of the board, asking if they weren't more or less at the mercy of the subconscious.

"Yes," Jane heard in her mind as the pointer moved, "but that is like saying that the whole is at the mercy of the parts. . . ." She began to feel that she could speak these words, but she was scared. It was a little like an experience she had had a few months before. It was what had first gotten them interested in Ouiji boards. Each night after supper Jane would write poetry while Rob went into his studio to paint. She would sit down at her table and straighten everything out, "Cigarettes, coffee. And the next thing I remember, all of a sudden, with no transition at all, I left my body. It was like mentally you were just going away from yourself. As far as I was concerned, my consciousness just flew right out over Water Street. There was a nail in the window and, shit, I can't explain it, but as I went out I sort of merged with the nail and flowed through the leaves of the pear tree and flowed through the bark and all kinds of stuff like that, and I knew that everything had life—that the nail was alive; that the atoms and the molecules in it had a consciousness; that the world was amazingly alive, no matter how dead anything looked."

"The next thing, I was back in my body and my note pad, which had been there for writing poetry, was full of writing that I must have done while I'd been out-of-body. It was called, *The Physical Universe As Idea Construction*, and I got back in my body—it was like skhoo, I just flew in and here was this goddamn thing."

"Well, I just yelled the word. I didn't know what the hell had happened. I hadn't even

read about out-of-bodies and I was really excited: The physical universe as idea construction—that instead of the senses perceiving reality, they actually create it. Everything has life. But to me at that time those ideas were really far out. Completely."

"I'd say you were out for quite a while," Rob said. He was used to the noises that came from the front room when his wife was working. The silence that night was distracting. When Jane called him in she'd tried to explain what had happened. Rob tried to follow her and looked at the pages of the manuscript she had written while she told him she was really not sure how they got there. He loved her. She had always been a little crazier than he was; it would take him a while to work this out.

They started buying occult paperbacks and studying them. Jane had already published three science-fiction novels, so she called her editor at Ace and told him about her automatic manuscript and an outline she and Rob had worked out for a non-fiction book, the idea being: "Jesus," Jane said. "Now that I think of it—shit: seances, fact or fiction; 'life after death'; 'Ouiji boards'; 'automatic writing'; anything we saw in one of those paperbacks, we made up as a chapter heading." Though Ace was not unduly impressed, Rob and Jane went ahead anyway. They planned to try everything, and if it worked, fine. If not, the felt she would have a good little book saying: "Look, people, I tried all this stuff and it just didn't work. . . . They started out with the Ouiji board, Rob taking notes."

At first, Rob had felt a little dumb about the whole thing, "two grownup individuals, you know, with their hands on the pointer, expecting something to happen." They got gibberish, and then something who said he was Jane's grandfather. Then a dead Elmiran. Each time, Jane's involvement intensified until, a few weeks after Seth identified himself, Jane seemed only dimly aware of the room as she sat in front of the board. Her eyes half closed; she watched with curious detachment as she spelled out, word by word, the thoughts that came to her complete . . . "a past personality regaining momentary independence on a visual plane. Sometimes a lapse occurs of this type." Her hands paused. They had been talking about an experience a friend of theirs, Bill Macdonell, had had. Her trance was almost complete. Rob asked for a further explanation. Inside, Jane could hear the words forming in her mind, and now she began to sense a presence behind them. "In some submerged manner," she was spelling out, "all fragments of a personality exist within an entity, with their own individual consciousness. . . ." The force behind the pointer paused . . . or was it her will? Something else was pushing her. She felt a shiver of aloneness in the face of it. Words pushed up inside her against the tedious translation through the Ouiji board. They piled up against her fear, and finally even her ability to fight them. She lifted her hands off the pointer.

"When Bill saw the image," she said, "and recognized its presence . . ." Her voice was deeper, a little shaky, and carried an odd accent—a voice they would get used to over the next 15 years. "The fragment itself seemed to have a dream. The entity operates its fragments in what you would call a subconscious manner—that is, without conscious direction. The entity gives the fragment independent life; then the entity more or less forgets the fragment. When a momentary lapse of control occurs, they both come face to face. It's as impossible for the entity to control fragment personalities as for the conscious mind to control the body's heartbeat."

She stopped, only half-aware that she had been talking about more than Bill Macdonell. Rob was scared. He asked her very softly, very kindly, "Could you hear yourself?"

"Dimly," his wife nodded, "as if a radio program was going on in my head from some other station."

For the most part, static is all we get. Whatever words whistle out of what subterranean caverns the human psyche might once

"You may call me whatever you choose," the board told Rob. "I call myself Seth. You are Joseph." "What name would you call Jane?" Rob asked. "Rubert," Seth said.



ROBERT BUTTS

have listened to go by much too fast for most of us to hear. The obsessiveness of rational thought was born of the glamour of the written word, and though clawless it has hung around like fog. Like perspective in art, which defined the ego with the concept of the vanishing point, primitive culture, obscure mythologies—in a word, magic—fused the individual and society to the physical world which contains them. After a while this unity becomes not curiosity but a downright nostalgia. A waiting around for the lake of fire upon which this world of ours floats to once again make itself known. Magic presupposed the link between the mind or an action (the two being the same thing) and the socio-physical nature that displays it. They are not separate. Psychology and physics are two sides of the same coin.

Mysticism is the degeneration of magic. It already presupposes the degeneration of social bonds that are fundamental to magic. It comes from a time when men began to find it difficult to believe that the forces that were could really be intimately involved with the soil, or birth, the rain, sickness, or the act of love. Mysticism was the closing of one's eyes and seeing. Or, as Emerson said of ecstasy, a getting out of the body to think. True, the mystic often came back from the mystical experience to the everyday world with a gem-like wisdom expressing the true unity of existence, but more often than not he has preferred to stay, sipping the sweet milk and honey of inarticulate transcendence.

Seth, as far as I could make out when I began to work on this story, was a magician who loved to hear himself talk and had trouble containing an overactive imagination. The material he has given, however, according to mystic sources in California and Scotland, is generally considered to be of "high quality." Nor was I really adverse to his ideas; the fact is I had arrived in Elmira fully expecting to contact Jane Roberts and Seth through supranormal channels. If Seth's contention that we, as human beings, "create our own reality," a phrase he continually returns to, were true, it seemed logical that I might just show up and, through certain processes I assumed would come to me, separate out the psychic wheat from the chaff, as it were, and by following up on certain signs or inclinations, contact Seth in such a way as would prove to me his existence was what he says it is.

Elmira is a nice enough town of about 50,000, surrounded by hills, big enough and old enough to be involved in its own urban-renewal project. A Revolutionary battle had been fought in the forested hills outside the town. During the Civil War a prison camp claimed the lives of about 2500 Confederate soldiers and the townspeople buried the rebels feet to feet, head to head. Later, Mark Twain spent his summers here and finished up *Tom Sawyer* in a hexagonal glassed-in

shed overlooking the valley near his home. Subsequently the shed was bought and moved to the campus of Elmira College, just above a grass-banked duck pond. His papers and pens are laid out, a little like utensils in a morgue.

Anyway, through all this, the Chemung River flows, flooding the center of town every once in a while, but mainly being a good neighbor with good fishing up by the spillway toward sundown. Middle of the day, you can't get much. I'd driven about a mile upstream from Main Street. Shaded suburban streets stretched down to the levee. A lawn mower or two cut through the warm Saturday morning. Kids shouted to each other from bicycles. Things were not going quite as well as I could have hoped. While driving up the day before, I had sent out a dinner invitation into the atmosphere, for the hell of it. But nobody showed up. I had, however, found a Gideon Bible open to a curious passage from Nehemiah on a table in my motel room. "And I arose in the night," it said. "I and some few men with me; neither told I any man what my God had put in my heart to do at Jerusalem, neither was there any beast with me save that I rode upon."

I parked my car where the street ended at the levee and, taking Seth's 'Unknown' Reality with me, walked to the river. There were a few hundred yards of woods between the dead end of the street and the river bank. A trail cut through lush green underbrush and tall trees. "And I went out by night by the gate of the valley even before the dragon well and to the dung port and viewed the walls of Jerusalem which were broken down and consumed with fire." Nothing was burning here. Two kids wizzed by on bicycles along a trail through the woods just before I came to the river. There was about a six-foot drop and then a shoreline 10 feet wide. There was an overturned tree, bleached bone white. Downstream what looked like the columns of an old bridge stood in the sunlight. On the far side of the river a steep wooded slope struck out and reached up to about 10 o'clock in the sky. It was a little after noon now.

Quiet. Opening up the 'Unknown' Reality at random you might run across a quote like: "In your reality, experience is dependent on time. But all experience is not so structured. There are . . . parallel events. Your consciousness picks and chooses to accept as real . . . only certain overall purposes." It's a little like looking at a tile floor—only certain patterns can appear at one time. Other patterns are there but not really noticed until you actually look at another diagonal or focus on a different square as the intersection of two different lines.

The idea of changing one's way of looking in order to see something differently is nothing new. Nor is the idea of talking to a spirit. Throughout recorded history the race has heard voices and talked to spirits. Moses, So-

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crates, Jesus, Joan of Arc, Swedenborg. In each case, a kind of mythology has grown up around the event to both explain and separate it from the rest of human experience. The fact that Joan of Arc was burned at the stake might well have dampened the spirits of some other Joan born later.

However, the force of any repressive structure defines the strength of the opposing force needed to overcome it. The history of American spiritualism has continually reflected the country's democratic ideals as they have developed. The pilgrims were democratic but bound to God in such a continual arm wrestle for physical and spiritual survival that their democratic spirit would not have thought of venturing outside the shadow of their religious beliefs. The children of the enlightenment, coming into the country in the following century, did that for them by honing down democracy into the more comfortable secular ideal.

It rebounded, however, after the Revolutionary War and, while keeping the tradition of Protestant theology, totally broke open the form within which worship contained itself. Partly out of necessity. In the early 1800s, roving evangelists scoured the frontier, holding camp meetings and backwoods revivals—meetings that often went nonstop for three

nose the diseases of strangers brought before him. Edgar Cayce, a century later, came out of this body of thought. Experiments were also done to try to contact future events. By the late 1830s New York was often having as many as two public exhibitions of mesmerism a day.

One of the best of the trance subjects was a young man from Blooming Grove, New York. He had grown up poor and as a child first heard voices out of the ether telling him to have plenty of bread and molasses. By the time he was 18, Andrew Jackson Davis was working as a clairvoyant for two animal magnetists. Eventually, his diagnostic abilities brought him consideration as physician for the U.S. Senate. But fate was turning him in another direction. He had discovered that while in a trance state he could speak for extended periods of time on subjects beyond the reach of his conscious mind. Soon he began to go into self-induced trances and would dictate to secretaries book after book until he opened his own publishing house. Reviewers found in his works affinities with Kant, Hegel, and Goethe.

From his couch he would dictate such things as "In the beginning the Univercatum was one boundless undefinable and unimaginative ocean of liquid fire. It had no

spirit then described a book of gold left by the former inhabitants of this continent and stones, the possession of which instructed Seers in former times. The spirit said it would direct Smith to a hill outside of town where the book could be found. It was to constitute a new bible called the book of Mormon.

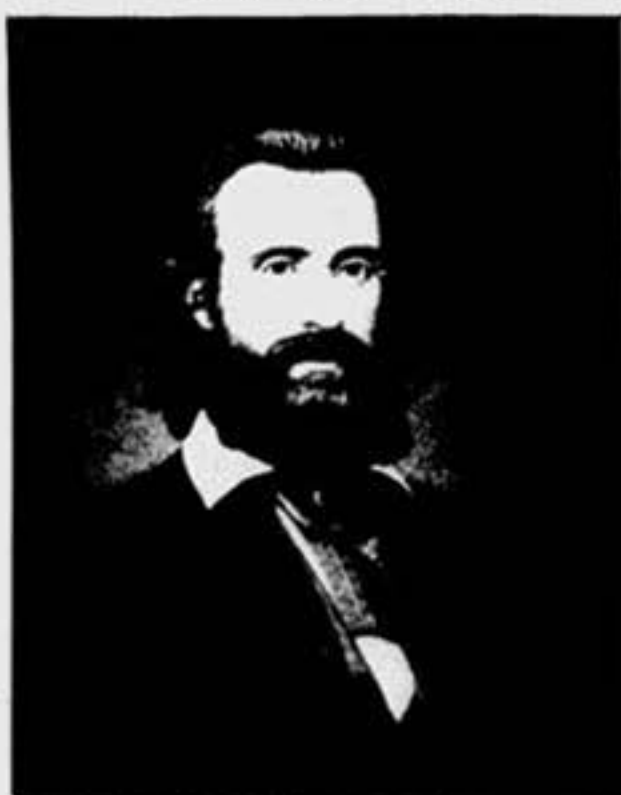
The old Bible has always seemed something of a problem for the American sensibility. Davis had written his own and dedicated a chapter to Emerson called the Gospel according to St. Ralph.

Emerson had his own problems. He and Thoreau would go walking in the woods, wondering what to do with the kind of mind that still went giddy at the thought of European culture. Emerson came up with the idea that all history was contained within a single life and idea, which—at least for him—eliminated some of the chagrin of living in a country whose inception was well within living memory. History became a course in self-examination and the final nails were driven into the heart of the old God with the theories of each individual right to interpret Him. Nothing was sacred but the integrity of the mind. Thoreau, meanwhile, was beginning to think he was getting too caught up in Emerson's stuffiness, so he went off into the

Swami Abhedaranda to New York. That Americans were suddenly confronted with the idea that they had been fiddling around in a psychic forest with bear traps and Winchesters, only now to be confronted with whole temples of inuendo, did little to dent their enthusiasm. No sooner did the Eastern stuff catch on than Americans were changing their names to such things as Yogi Ramacharaha and writing books like *Thought Force in Business*. The more traditionally minded—a soul like John Alexander Dowie—simply put East and West together, announced he was the reincarnation of Elijah, and started a newspaper.

The more subtle effect of the Ouiji board, however, was in suburbia. In the year before the country got involved in the Great War, a Mrs. Curran and two neighbors were toying with the spirits. The board spelled out Pat E. . . . Pat E. Worth. Over the next four years Patience Worth, through the mediumship of Mrs. Curran, described her life as an Irish girl from the 17th century with a decidedly literary bent. Mrs. Curran worked through the board for four years until 1919, when she settled back in her drawing room with a secretary and allowed Patience to speak for herself. Patience spoke rather well. Much better, it was thought, than Mrs. Cur-

American spiritualism has continually reflected the country's democratic ideals.



ANDREW JACKSON DAVIS, CLAIRVOYANT



THE SISTERS FOX, SPIRIT RAPPERS



MRS. CURRAN, THE EARTHLY VOICE OF PATIENCE WORTH

days, lit at night by torches and bonfires, fed by people speaking in tongues and corn whiskey—ripping apart the inbred stoicism of the frontiersman in a ritual that would make the hair of any self-respecting Indian stand on end.

But the spirit strove deeper than dissolution. Without the opposing force of a religious hierarchy, inspiration shattered the tightly held barriers between man and God. Since equally reliable sources began to come up with widely varying answers, it came to be suspected that there was more than a single Source. The popularization of this idea in the form of spiritualism has been America's gift to the world.

Basic to spiritualism is the idea of the trance. It became popular first in Europe and then in the U.S. as an offshoot of a quasi-scientific theory called Animal Magnetism developed by an Austrian named Frederick Anton Mesmer. Out of crude beginnings, where participants were bound together around vats of iron filings and bottles of magnetized water, each holding iron rods through which whatever ills they had could flow away, it was discovered that in the excitement a few of the participants would fall into a trance or, as it was commonly referred to, they became mesmerized. From this trance state certain subjects could remain in verbal contact with their surroundings while at the same time being immersed in the magnetic currents that flowed beneath the surface of our normal perception. From this state it was possible for the trance subject to diag-

motion but was an eternity of motion." In the universe Davis began to uncover he found no free will and no sin. A follower of Davis, himself a medium, described the process by which the knowledge had been received. "The archetypal ideas were internally inwrought by spiritual agency into the inmost mind of the Medium, he at that time having passed into a spiritual or interior condition. . . . These archetypal ideas internally unfolded until, at length, they . . . uttered themselves in speech and were transcribed as spoken by the Medium, he by spiritual agency being temporarily elevated to the spiritual degree of mind." "Uttered themselves" is the crucial phrase here, and the concept that separates the medium from the mystic.

The medium was a kind of antenna and receiver that picked up what there was to pick up and translated it into speech. It was Davis who popularized the idea of a prophet with no real responsibility for the prophecies spoken through him. And, not without connection, raised the question—since he was not of a religious tradition but of the quasi-scientific theories of Animal Magnetism—of exactly where these voices came from.

Other prophets had sprouted up. About 100 miles north of Elmira and a few years before Davis came of age, Joseph Smith sat alone one night early in the fall when a light suddenly began to brighten up his room. It solidified into a human form of "glory beyond description." Smith called out to the spirit and it revealed it was from God. The

woods to live by himself, leaving Emerson to deal with space cadets like Alcott and friends, from Fruitlands and Brookfarm, who mingled with the tourists and fanatics in Concord Square.

Spiritualism needed only two girls from the little village of Hydesville (again) New York, and it was off. "Mr. Splitfoot, do as I do," Katie Fox would say as she stood before her mother with her sister. She clapped her hands three times and, from out of nowhere, three raps answered. Their mother asked if this were a spirit. The spirit rapped yes, and the girls became the rage of Rochester. Theories of reincarnation were already taking hold on the popular imagination, and the sisters provided living proof that you could talk to spirits. When, 40 years later, Maggie Fox would claim that the rappings had been nothing but a peculiar action of the first joint of her large toe, it did nothing to stop the tide. By then the gates of the spirit world had been unhinged and trampled so many times that Maggie's cry of fraud was lost to the wind.

Around 1890 William Fuld invented the Ouiji board. The means, or at least the symbol, of tangible communication with the world of spirits was now available to everyone. The age when communication with forces outside our own was the prerogative of only the hero, the saint, and the madman was gone. Now, spiritual authority was available to anyone with two bucks, and with this democratization came another wave of prophets and disciple-mongers.

The turn into the 20th century brought

ran could have and with a knowledge of facts and intricacy of dialect that, scholars conceded, would have been completely unknown to Mrs. Curran, with her limited education. "Let him not be another," Patience would say, "who could be his own." and, when asked of reincarnation: "How could it be that flesh created may become flesh again in like exact?" Jane Roberts was seven the year Mrs. Curran died.

*Tippy's gone to cat heaven
I buried him yesterday
Beneath the old oak tree
Where we used to play.
I covered him over with posies
So no one would ever know
Tippy's gone to cat heaven
Where all good pussycats go.*

Jane laughed.

"I didn't even have a cat," she said. "I wrote that when I was about seven, I guess. But I always wrote. That's all I ever wanted to do. I didn't want to have children. I didn't want a whole bunch of things. I always wanted to write poetry."

She was born in 1929. She grew up in Saratoga Springs, New York. Her parents were divorced. She was poor. Her mother was an invalid. They were on relief. She was in a home for a year: St. Vincent's Female Orphan Asylum in Troy, New York.

"I was really sort of a little shit when I was there. Most of the kids didn't have any parents at all and I had one and my grandfather sent me 25 cents a week, and nobody else had

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any money. For breakfast we used to have corn-meal mush with the cold chocolate left over from the night before on top of it, and—if you were in grade school, which I was—bread. I got to know one of the high school kids, and they had toast, so I took my 25 cents and gave it to this girl, and I got a 100 pieces of toast a week.

"When you took showers you couldn't look at your body and you got in, put a shower robe on over your clothes, and took your clothes off underneath. Then you soaped your shower robe and if anybody caught you looking underneath to see what the hell you had or what your body looked like, you had to kneel for an hour and pray for forgiveness or something like that. I used to get punished for looking in the mirror. If you looked in the mirror, it was pride. And when you wet the bed they took your wet pajamas and wrapped them around your neck and you had to go to class the whole goddamn next morning with wet pajamas around your neck. I spent many mornings that way. Jesus."

"It was brainwashing," Rob said. "It was brainwashing. I'm telling you, the church is great."

After a year she went back home to take care of her mother. Priests were sent down from St. Clement's Church to be her spiritual father. "I'd write poetry and then recite it to the nuns and the priests. I guess I was about nine or 10. There was a delightful old Irish priest, Father Trainer, who came down and he would read Chesterton's *Lepanto* and *Elegy in a Country Churchyard* by Gray every goddamn Sunday, and I would have to sit absolutely still and listen. Then, when he finished, I could read my poetry. I started reading stuff like, 'I have lived forever,' and he'd say, 'No. You mean God has lived forever,' and I'd say, 'No. I mean I've lived forever.' The nuns wouldn't listen to me anymore. When I was in high school a younger priest was coming down and my Latin teacher had given me *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, and he burned the whole goddamn set out in the ashcan. And he burned a book of poetry.

"Anyway, that was just about it, as far as I was concerned. Finally, I just left. I was really upset, because when I was a Catholic and I was a little kid, I believed everything right down the line and I used to pray to Sacred Heart."

"Now, to some extent you believe that you chose all this?" I asked.

"I don't know how to put it in words exactly. From what I'm beginning to understand, if somebody was going to do the kind of thing I'm doing, you'd need a background where you could see what beliefs do to people. What religious beliefs were, what social beliefs were, how they operated, and use that as a framework to try to make better ones. You keep trying one system and then another system until there's not enough to content you and it sort of forces you to find something else."

"See," Rob said, "if you knew Jane's background in detail you could see how it all fits together beautifully, like bricks on a wall. And that the poverty, the town she lived in is extremely vital."

"I tried to murder the welfare lady once. I was 12 and this woman called Mrs. Calkins was the welfare lady. When that poor lady came to our house she was really put through the ringer. I would go to the door—'Good afternoon, Mrs. Calkins. I'll see if my mother is in.' She knew my mother couldn't get out of bed. And I'm supposed to fix demitasse and coffee and, you know, everything just right. In the meantime, my mother every now and then read cards, which I thought was the worst superstitious nonsense in the world. I had the feeling my mother used to say some pretty nasty things were going to happen to Mrs. Calkins. Mother hated her because she came to the house and looked everything over."

"And on this particular day my mother was bitching and saying she was going to come again and make sure you do everything right. We kept money in this goddamn crucifix on the wall. It was a hollow crucifix. And so Mrs. Calkins came and the way she sat, the goddamn crucifix was where she

could see it. And I used to have the worst time looking at her, anyplace but that goddamn crucifix. Anyway, she came this day and I was real upset because my mother was real upset. I was supposed to fix my regular thing—hot chocolate in mother's demitasse cups. And I took Brillo and Comet and mixed it in with the hot chocolate and set it down. My mother must have known from my face that something was up. This woman had a beautiful white suit on—winter white—and my mother said, 'Mrs. Calkins, I wouldn't drink that if I were you. You better let me taste it.' And Mrs. Calkins said, 'Well, what do you mean?' And my mother said, 'I don't like the look on my daughter's face,' and she said, 'Oh, she's the loveliest little girl, Marie.' And so my mother said, 'Well, go ahead.' So she took a sip and went aguhhhh all over her dress, all over everything. So, after she left, my mother gave me a quarter and I thought this was really cute. So, this Father Trainer came the next day, and Mother told him what had happened, and then I piped in, 'And Mommy gave me a quarter.' And, boy, I got such hell I never forgot it for months after."

"You really have to watch it in a small town. I remember one time I bought five ice cream cones and walked up and down the street, licking them all at once because the neighbor right next door had yelled at me that I had too much money for ice cream and they were going to report us to welfare."

"I got kicked out of Skidmore my third year. I was a scholarship student and I did really great in what I was interested in—poetry and English. But I was working at the college and I was working at the newspaper. I did all the college news for Saratoga, and I was also working in the circulation department and I worked in the administration office and I took care of my mother. I got so I could like you a lot and find out you had two bucks to your name and I wouldn't talk to you. If you ever saw a poor girl who was proud—and even if you had money, I had talent. I ran that to the hilt."

"My mother was a real bitch, but she was an energetic bitch. I had never been out all night long and on my 21st birthday I decided I was going out all night, and two of the kids from college and myself went to this professor's house and we all had a bang-up party. But the girls were signed out to stay at my house and they weren't at my house and I had somebody to take care of my mother. But when I didn't come home by about two in the morning my mother called up that woman professor and they came and got us and they swore we took dope, which we never even thought of in those days."

"When my mother attempted suicide for about the fifth time she took a whole mess of sleeping pills and she was in the hospital, of course, and I went to welfare and said, 'Look, I'm leaving. I can't take it.' I said, 'I don't care if you have to take care of her in the hospital for a month, but I can't take it anymore. I've just got to leave.' Well, I'd been going with this Walt and he wanted to go some place, so we got on the motorcycle and went out to the West Coast to see my father."

"I stayed out there for a short time. And I knew we didn't dare go home without getting married, so we got married one Sunday afternoon. I got a job at the Saratoga and I ended up as society editor for a span. They asked me to go back to Skidmore and I said if I had my pick of colleges I just wouldn't go to Skidmore. Anyway, three years we lived together. Then I found out while I was working in a radio factory, putting lover-boy Walt through school, everybody else in town knew he isn't going through school. Ah. And about this time I was beginning to feel my oats sexually. I think by that time I'd met Rob. I wrote him a poem the second time I met him."

"I'd been working in New York City," Rob said, "for a number of years, doing commercial drawing—mostly syndicated comic strips. I worked for DC and they put out Superman and a whole bunch of other stuff. I never got to work on Superman. That was all taken. . . . After a while, they all began to look alike. This fellow I'd known for a



"I tried to murder the welfare lady once. I was 12 and when that poor lady came to our house she really put us through the ringer."

number of years called me from a little town upstate, about 10 minutes from Saratoga Springs, and he was doing a comic strip and he needed help and I'd had a lot of experience in that, so I said what the heck. I was out of a job 'cause they'd had the big newspaper strike. So I said, sure, I'll come up. He met me in Saratoga and he said there's this great girl you've got to meet. He didn't know her well himself; he'd met her at a few parties, and he said, you ought to see her when she gets liquored up. She likes to dance around. . . .

"Jesus," Jane said, "I used to dance around and put on seven veils, and I was gone. It was completely innocent, compared to what can happen today."

" . . . and we were driving out of Saratoga to his place and he said, 'Hey, pull over to the curb. There she is right on the street, right now.' So he called Jane over and introduced us. Well, it was her. Only I couldn't see her. It was dark, like now, and her head was up above the roof of the car so we sat there, talking, for about 15 minutes and Jane agreed to come out to a party the following Friday. That's when I got my first look at her. It was only a few weeks later we were engaged."

"I always wanted to write," Jane said. "I didn't want to have kids. I didn't want to be a little housewife type. It was really wild. I think, anyway, 'cause it happens in a million different ways with a million different people—the kind of thing you want and what you say, you end up getting. You end up working toward it. . . . I wrote him a poem the second time I met him. The third time I met him. No, the fourth time. It was a party—we'd never kissed, we'd never had a date. I just looked at him and said, look, I'm leaving Walt and I'm going to leave by myself or I'm going to leave with you, so just let me know. He said okay. Then he took me down to his parents' and he was 30? . . . How old were you, 34, 35?"

"Thirty-three."

"You know, unmarried son, and here was this woman who'd just left her husband. Oh, jeez, it was funny. I kept my maiden name 'cause I'd started writing by then and I figured, no sir, I'm not. . . . I'm going to keep my own name."

"I've been meaning to speak to you about that."

"I don't know what would have happened without Rob. I don't think myself. . . . I might have had sessions, but I don't think I would have taken all the notes."

"You think Seth might have emerged eventually?" I asked.

"In one way or another."

"I think," Rob said, "something would have happened"

"Yeah."

"It could have taken the form of fiction or something like that, but I don't think it would have existed recorded in quite the form that it exists now—as an advancement of ideas that say: 'Look, people, listen. We

believe this is true and that there is something to it."

"Yeah," Jane said, "and alone I'd have picked the cloak of fiction I think. . . . I mean I would have done it. . . ."

"Essays."

"Kept private journals."

"Poetry and things like that," Rob said.

"See, it was natural for me to start recording. That's the way I am and the way I think, and I'd spent years writing on my own, so, when I wrote down the first word it was just as easy for me to do. I didn't have to make a decision to start writing it down; I didn't have to force it. . . . Jane accepted that because she liked to write, but she had no patience that way at all."

"Yeah, and I like a spontaneous thing and I don't care how long I do it so long as somebody else writes it down. But if I had to record it? I just like to do it or be it."

"I used to wonder if I was making her see things my way. But, after a while, we came to see that we were essentially doing the same thing in individual ways and that we were complementing each other. The whole thing worked so easily it was quite deceptive. Now we just take it for granted."

"We always had questions though," Jane said.

"See, at that time," Rob continued, "like other people, we'd get sick every so often—like the virus—nothing serious. Once I got a virus and I got laid up for two weeks and the doctor couldn't find a damn thing wrong with me, and after that happened a few times and I got a little older I began to wonder why would a person get sick like that? And our friends would talk about being ill or their jobs—trouble at their jobs. You could see that they were unhappy for this reason or that. And, bit by bit, even without knowing it, we started to ask a lot of questions about that sort of thing."

"I had a lot of back trouble. I couldn't sit down. I was in agony and I had muscle spasms. I knew I had them and at the same time I knew there was nothing wrong physically. I went to a chiropractor and he'd helped, but they'd come back. It was really terribly painful. I couldn't even drive a car and I had to take time off from work and this and that. I just knew there was something wrong with the whole goddamn system, the way you looked at life, and so on. The doctor wanted me to go to the hospital and stay in traction for seven weeks to straighten out the muscles in my back by force with weights on my feet—well, for Chrissake, I didn't want to do that and it intuitively followed that it was the wrong thing to do."

"The back was a perfect symbol of our way of life—the tensions involved were from working for a living and the belief structures we had about society in general—the world, inflation, crime."

"I think," Jane said, "that our questions reached such a point of desperation that it opened a creative channel. Kennedy died around that time. . . . You see, I think somewhere in the back of my mind, that you can really make the universe listen; or if you do certain things—but you don't know what they are—somehow or other you've got a chance, even though you don't know how to use it, to force the universe, to answer . . . or something."

"I got so terrified when he got sick. I know this sounds dumb, but also my cat—we had a couple of cats—they died; the goldfish died. His parents were getting old. I was going to be the great American writer by the time I was 30 and I was 36. I had a science-fiction novel out and it had a cruddy cover. My husband was sick. The two of us were going to be world beaters, or whatever. I think all that just formed a real strong intent that you could make the universe break open if you felt that way. And, for me, it did."

Part Two of "Seth Spoke," in which the author returns to the bank of the Chemung River in search of the Power and finds himself in over his head, in which Seth explains the parable of the television set, in which Jane and Rob explain Seth's presence, and in which Seth reveals his skepticism of the author's existence, will appear in next week's Voice.

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