

“As men’s prayers are a disease of the will,
so are their creeds a disease of the intellect.”
–Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Self-Reliance*

Chapter 4

Straight from the Witch’s Mouth: Personal Interviews with Witches

“What you are looking for is looking for you.”
–David Hurles, *Old Reliable*

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For 21st-century inquisitors, witch-hunting is a .32-second chase by a search engine.

In 1969 and 1970, I had to work harder than that. Witchcraft was secret territory.

In the ages before the internet, witches had to hide in plain sight by advertising in code. During the 20th century, seekers asked the owners of *avant-garde* or *retro-garde* bookstores questions about the “old books” or the “self-help” section. If the owners were not themselves witches, they often knew who was. Even with times changed, the old ways are still valid for searching out sorcery.

Check out incense-boutiques with gemstones and crystal balls as well as the slightly off-campus shops with window signs for “Occult Records.” Become literate about the magic symbolism of jewelry, clothes, tattoos, and piercings. Interpret mystic insignia at coffee shops, concerts, and health fairs. To the diversified eye, young witches are as visible as crones, and gender is negotiable. Read the classifieds of local college or ethnic newspapers, as well as free local guides to arts, massage, hypnosis, and healing. Because sex is more “out” than witchcraft, a male or female witch can often be found hiding within the sex ads of the straight and gay underground press. As in classic “massage” listings which did not offer actual massage because they were coded “rub-and-tug” parlors, conventional wisdom knows that what people advertise is often a cover for what they are selling.

The Yellow Pages were once pop culture’s best index. Listings included *astrologers*, *astrology schools*, *palmists*, *botanicas*, *metaphysical bookstores*, and *old curiosity shops*. There was no category for *witches* who had to present themselves as “palmists” or “hypno-therapists.” Because it’s a principle of perception in popular culture that “stereotype always trumps archetype,” witches have always had to be self-protecting, because the stereotype is what gets burned at the stake.

Nothing can ruin the night more than looking out the windows of one’s castle and seeing the villagers approaching with torches and pitchforks.

Geography also figures into how witches label themselves. California is always ten years

ahead of the rest of American pop culture. On the west coast, the Yellow Pages listed “hypno-therapy” which in the Midwest was coded under “relaxation techniques” or “stress reduction.” As categories like *palmist*, *astrologer*, *numerologist*, and *midwife* emerge, would it hurt to have a listing for *witch*?

I think it should be a *rede* of witchcraft that “What you are looking for is looking for you.” In any group, ask, “Has anyone here any Native-American blood?” Always there will be someone. Ask also, “Does anyone here know a witch?”

Take advantage of the social possibilities of Silva Mind Institute groups, drumming circles, modern-primitive lectures, and psychic encounter groups like the Psychic Club of Dayton, Ohio. For ten dollars this club, which advertises itself as the place “where witches and warlocks abound,” will match you to an astro-twin pen pal, a Free Location Service for correspondence with others with the same interests, and a one-year subscription to the *Psychic Club Bulletin*. The more outrageous can join the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence who are men in comic nun-drag dedicated to charitable acts, as well as to running in high heels to dodge attacks from the Catholic Church which—itself having stolen so much from paganism—objects to the Sisters’ dragging up the image of Catholic nuns.

In the last analysis, witches, like beauty and porno, are in the eye of the beholder. What people say about themselves, though “crafty,” reveals way more than a Hallmark Halloween card. In the following interviews, popular practitioners in wicca and witchcraft, speak for themselves. In some of the shorter interviews, the question-and-answer format has been condensed to a statement.

Interviewed in 1969 and 1970, these practitioners provide a time capsule of the emerging American age of witchcraft liberation. Their points of view and predictions for witchcraft in the last quarter of the 20th-century have increased in historical value.

The questions originally asked in 1970 of practitioners interviewed by mail were these.

Please respond to any of the following areas you feel pertinent to your realm. If these questions do not please you, write instead what you feel.

1. Please make a statement on witchcraft as you find it to be today.
2. Please make a statement on witchcraft as you think it ought to be today.
3. Why, do you believe, is the occult enjoying so much popularity?
4. What is your opinion of the laws for and against witchcraft? As a witch, have you experienced any discrimination?
5. Please make a statement concerning white witchery.
6. Please make a statement concerning the black arts.
7. Please make a statement on the role of the contemporary witch, male or female.
8. What do you think of the commercialization of witchcraft? For instance, *Rosemary's Baby*, TV's *Bewitched*. (Any comment on the Polanski-Tate-Manson affair?)
9. Please make a statement concerning the place of sexuality in the occult, black and/or white.
10. Please make a statement concerning the direction you think witchcraft will go in the coming twenty-five-year *fin de siecle*. To greater or lesser acceptance? Any aspect of it that will become immensely popular?