

crazy ladies i have known

By MIKE LEE
Of the Emerald

I remember interviewing my first Crazy Lady.

Her name was Eloisa Whipple, a 55-year-old overweight grandmother who believed she once was Queen Nephertite of Egypt.

That was three years ago. I was reminded of Eloisa the other day when my mother questioned my recent story on Robert Artison, a practicing witch.

"This can't be true," she told me. When my mother, a faceless bureaucrat at the University, questions her own son's credibility, I know I'm in trouble.

Yes, Mom, these people exist. They come to campus in search of people to follow them to a new way of living.

Eloisa, being my first, was my best. I had never heard of auras, or the astral, or regressive hypnosis, and it was all I could do to keep from laughing in her face.

Especially when she described her tangled family tree. Because of the ram-

pant reincarnation of her relatives, her 28-year-old son was her father in two previous lives.

"He still tries to father me a lot in a loving sort of way," she said.

And though her husband of 32 years had died in 1973, Eloisa felt better since he had just been reborn as her grandson, she told me.

"What a crazy lady," I thought as I drove back to the Emerald. I still call her that, now capitalized, but it's a term of endearment rather than disdain.

Crazy Ladies, male or female, have found unique ways to handle our crazy society, that's all. What they offer to themselves, and to their followers, is tranquility: they sincerely believe they have found the answer to life, and that sincerity is a bulwark against our questioning world.

But enough of the streetcorner philosophizing. Back to the fun stuff.

Almost a year passed before I met my next Crazy Lady. And while she wasn't

Queen Nephertite, Liz Bedford said that in a previous life she had performed the rites of a South American temple virgin.

Temple virgins aren't as glamorous as the movies portray them. "It was a rip-off," Liz recalled. "They tore my heart out."

The next March — we're in 1980 now — I met Saniel Bonder, an emissary from Da Free John, formerly Bubba Free John, born Franklin Jones. John ran the Free Primitive Church of Divine Communion, which taught the Way of Divine Ignorance: a way to "realign our bodies and minds to the All-Pervading Conscious Life of the universe that radiates from every heart," according to a church pamphlet.

While I sat down to digest all of that, Saniel told the story of how he met John. Finding the "God-realized being" in the just-opened Vision Mound Sanctuary in Northern California, Saniel knelt before him. John held out his hand, and Bonder offered him a bouquet of flowers.

John took the flowers, set them to the side and held out his hand again. Saniel gave him some fruit. John set the fruit by the flowers and held out his hand *again*.

"I had nothing left to give him but myself," Saniel remembered, "so I jumped in his lap."

And now Robert Artison, who says he was once "official witch" to the Los Angeles Dodgers.

Bob is the funniest of the people I've met. During our interview, he gave me an apple and told me to share it with someone I know to test his claims. I didn't realize until now the witty symbolism of his offering the fruit.

Thanks, Bob. One of these days I'm going to call you, and Saniel, and Liz, and dear Eloisa, and we're all going to get together for a beer somewhere.

Why? Because I'm graduating soon, and I'll have to go out into the Real World and interview scores of politicians — after that, I'll need a drink with the only sane people I know.



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