

Captivated by the Occult

Don't be fooled as I was. Recognize occultic influences for what they are.

I didn't want to face my furies. I wanted someone else to do it for me. As a compulsive person, I was particularly vulnerable to the quick fix of mind-bending fads and cults.

Compulsive people are dependency-prone. And from childhood I'd been attracted by the invisible world.

Superstition was part and parcel of New England life. There were rabbit's foot keychains and horseshoes nailed over doorways.

Then came the Ouija board craze. Great mysteries were revealed by this means, a neighbor assured me. She had special clairvoyant insights, and in my early teens I made frequent visits to her house seeking answers to all kinds of problems.

Once as a seventh-grader, my friend Betty Lou and I attended a magic show at the Barre (Vermont) Municipal Auditorium. When the magician needed volunteers, we streaked to the stage.

Perched on wooden folding chairs, we stared obediently into his intense blue eyes. Later friends told us that after being given hypnotic suggestions, we had scratched frantically as if covered by fleas and shivered violently from icy cold blasts.

Afterward, my mind wouldn't focus. I felt confused, disjointed. The next morning I made the mile walk back to the auditorium. At my knock the door was flung open, and there he stood.

"I'm one of the people you hypnotized last night," I told him. "I've felt strange ever since you woke us up. My mind seems fuzzy. Everything is all mixed up."

"You must be one of the very sensitive ones," he replied. "Really, what I did last night was routine. Perhaps you went into a higher plane of consciousness than the others."

He pulled a chair beside mine and explained that he would call upon a higher power to help me. I didn't understand the words he used after that.

Ten minutes or more passed. His voice trailed off into a chant.

"You should have no further problems now, Miss," he said.

I thanked him weakly and backed out of the room. But a part of me that had felt safe and secure before, now felt violated.

Dabbling With Deception

Psychic phenomena continued to fascinate and lure me. Shortly after representing my state as Miss Vermont in the Miss America pageant, I visited a woman who told fortunes with a deck of cards.

I was alarmed by my tendency toward compulsive behavior, and I started looking for control outside myself. If my horoscope said to beware of short trips, I'd hesitate to cross the street for a cup of coffee.

When my marriage failed to supply the needed external control, I sought out a psychic. She called herself Madame X, and I began to depend on her for most of my decisions.

At one visit she announced that we had been joined by her "spirit guide," who also happened to be her dead mother. Together they went into the previous lifetimes they said I'd had. I was eager to believe these revelations, my imagination captivated by the intrigue of my supposed past.

One of my friends, Lois Ann, tried to warn me about the psychic's ploys. She even brought a Bible to my house one day and read to me: "Let no one be found among practices

divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist who consults the dead. Anyone who does these things is detestable to the Lord" (Deut. 18:10-12, NIV).

Influenced, I thought, by her Roman Catholic faith, Lois Ann called such practices "occult." They were, she informed me, "an abomination to God." It struck me as a little far out, but I didn't say anything.

Compulsively driven as I was, I often turned my parenting responsibilities for my children, Brad, Brent and Lisa, over to my cleaning lady, Hilda, so that I could focus on my civic projects and social engagements. Werner, my workaholic doctor husband, also was seldom available to them.

A breakup was the last thing I wanted for myself and our children. Nevertheless, Werner and I got a legal separation in 1970 and divorced the following year.

In time my son Brad chose to live with his father. Several years later Brent joined him.

Meanwhile, I married again. My new husband, Randall, was a sharp trial lawyer. The children and I were happier, and I resumed my hectic social schedule.

In my obsessive busyness, I didn't realize that no amount of outside activity—only a transformation inside—could satisfy. I continued to cry out for answers from anyone and everyone.

An Unhealthy Attraction

One evening, I attended a lecture by a group I'll refer to as the International Serenity Society (not its real name). The speaker was a stocky, handsome woman named Velda, who had a mixed bag of technical data and psychic techniques. I was captivated by her presentation and made a date for a special counseling session.

The following morning Velda explained how she would help me contact my “spiritual guides,” a process that involved much concentration.

Sensing my uneasiness, Velda assured me, “You have nothing to be afraid of. These guides are spirits who have been with you ever since you were born—and even before that. They are committed to helping you as long as you are on this side.”

“You are a very old soul,” she told me, “a master who has returned from many lifetimes. You didn’t have to come back this time, but you chose to.”

“What are you trying to tell me?” I asked.

“That you are a prophet,” she answered, “with strong visionary capabilities—gifted in intuition, but confused in the feeling part of your psyche.” Before dismissing me, she urged me to attend the summer camp of the International Serenity Society (ISS), which would be held at a place called Spirit Lake.

I attended the camp. But I was a cauldron of conflicting thoughts and emotions when I returned.

What I didn’t realize was that the compulsive woman inside me was finding a “high” in these experiences. Psychic phenomena—offering experiences such as altered states of consciousness, trances, even the exaltation of becoming divine—attract people seeking a mood change, and they can deliver just as effectively (and addictively) as alcohol or drugs.

I was drawn by the intrigue and spiritual euphoria promised by the ISS. Once I agreed to be the Montana representative, our home became the destination of a steady stream of visiting ISS “counselors.”

Desperate for help with my out-of-control drinking and the eating binges with which it alternated, I began calling them

for advice. To each I described my inability to concentrate; the mocking, sinister voices in my head; the hideous faces that zoomed in and out of my mind whenever I closed my eyes.

Months passed, and the voices and faces became more insistent. Nothing could shut them out—not alcohol, not the cakes and other sweets I'd gorge on in the middle of the night.

One day in desperation I found my daughter's silver crucifix in her bureau drawer and clutched it for comfort. But that didn't help, either.

Nor could any person help. My husband was bewildered by the change in my appearance and my enslavement to the group's practices.

One day when I was out, Brent and Lisa threw out what they could find of my ISS literature. They explained when I discovered the loss that it made me "act funny."

I ached to be a real mother to them, but I was totally consumed with self-hatred and self-pity. I spent endless hours in bed with the covers pulled up over my head and the drapes closed to shut out any prying rays of the sun.

I later learned that when the compulsive woman seeks help through involvement with a cult, her behavior will often get more and more out of control. Such was the case with me. I had everything to live for, yet something inside me was pushing me straight into a dark pit.

Hitting Bottom

It was at the bottom of this pit that change for me began. In August 1978, totally defeated by addiction to alcohol and prescription drugs, I attempted suicide.

At the insistence of my psychiatrist and my husband, I entered Montana's hospital for mental disorders at Warm Springs. It was one of very few facilities in the state then available to

treat people with addictions.

The turning point for me occurred in this hospital, but it didn't come through medication. It came through a group of women 150 miles away in Billings, Montana, who were praying for me.

The Billings intercessors prayed that God would send someone to me. I believe today that another patient at the hospital, Karen, was that person.

On one occasion, she had approached my bed, and I could hear her crying. "Oh, Sandy, does Jesus love me? Does Jesus really love me?"

Some instinct in me longed to comfort her. "Yes, Karen, Jesus loves you."

Holding her in my arms, saying the words she needed to hear stirred something deep within me. In an instant I had changed from a totally self-centered individual to one with the tiny beginnings of a caring heart for others.

There had been a supernatural change in my spirit. My life turned around dramatically, and a few weeks later I was released from the hospital.

This experience marked the beginning of my recovery. Soon after, I gave my heart to the Lord.

I underwent more than one deliverance session with my pastor and a prayer team, in which I renounced all involvement with the occult. I repented of my idolatry before the Lord and confessed each and every practice I'd dabbled in (a long list).

With these acts of obedience, I received God's forgiveness, and an enormous load was lifted from me. The heaviness I'd carried for so long, which I thought was normal, was gone.

Expressing my gratitude to God and worshiping Him brought tremendous relief. Clarity returned to my mind, and the world took on a beautiful patina that had never been there before.

Today, I am overwhelmed at how far I've traveled on the recovery road. Along with millions of others, I am still on a journey.

Years later I attempted to contact Karen and the Billings women. I had no difficulty reaching the prayer group, but the institution had no record of the patient I knew as Karen, who I believed was God's emissary, sent as an answer to the women's prayers.

I have learned to build up my spiritual resources and take nothing for granted. I've learned how to deal with temptations when they assault me and always to keep my eyes on the One whose name Karen had called out from the pit of despair. I give God thanks and praise for setting me free.

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OCCULT PRACTICES TO AVOID

The following is a partial list of mind-manipulating rituals, beliefs and religions in which believers in Christ should not participate:

- Acupuncture
- Anthroposophy
- Astral projection
- Astrology
- Automatic Writing
- Bahai

- Biofeedback
- Black/White magic
- Blood pacts
- Black Mass
- Buddhism
- Cabala
- Channeling
- Christian Science
- Clairvoyance
- Confucianism<br. />
- Divination
- Divine Light Mission
- Dragons
- Dream catchers
- Druid worship
- Edgar Cayce
- ESP
- Fantasy games
- Fortunetelling
- Freemasonry
- Guided imagery
- Gurus
- Halloween
- Hare Krishna
- Harry Potter
- Humanism
- Hypnosis/self-hypnosis
- Inner Peace Movement
- Jehovah's Witnesses
- Karma
- Levitation
- Mantra chanting
- Martial arts (those that invoke supernatural, spiritual power)
- Meditation
- Mediums
- Metaphysical healing

- Mind control
- Mind expansion
- Mind science
- Nature worship
- Nostradamus' predictions
- Numerology
- Omens
- Ouija boards
- Palm reading
- Parapsychology
- Phrenology
- Psychic healing
- Psychic hotlines
- Psychic readings
- Pyramid power
- Rainbow Girls
- Reflexology
- Reincarnation
- Religious Science
- Rosicrucianism
- Satanic rock /heavy metal music
- Satanism
- Scientology
- Seances
- Seers
- Shintoism
- Silva Mind Control
- Sorcerers
- Spiritism
- Spiritual guides
- Tarot cards
- Tea leaf reading
- Telekinesis
- Telepathy
- Theosophy
- The Way
- Trance inducement

- Transcendental Meditation
- Unification Church (Moonies)
- Unitarian Universalist
- Unity
- Voodoo
- Water-witching
- Wicca
- Witchcraft
- Witch doctors
- Wizards
- Zen Buddhism