

ROBERT T. SMITH: I don't want to pretend that this is an in-depth study of the occult by any means. It's just a chance for the person who has some interest in it to get a survey idea of what is going on today.

CONNIE GOLDMAN: That was *Minneapolis Tribune* columnist Robert T. Smith, explaining what his new book, *Cult and Occult*, is and what it isn't. Actually, it's a book in the style of his newspaper columns, each chapter introducing the reader to another person who has had an unusual spiritual experience or who has some unusual spiritual belief. Are you one of the cult? I asked Mr Smith.

ROBERT T. SMITH: No, I started as a terrible skeptic and scoffer. I didn't believe anything that I couldn't touch, or eat, or push around. And I got that way, I suppose, from all the years, 25 years or so I've been a journalist. So I started out saying this is a bunch of nonsense. But as long as you're paying me, I'll do the book. But I ended up, I guess, not what you'd call a believer in any or all of it, but a sort of believer that anything is possible, a believer that there are things that just cannot be explained in natural terms.

People still think that witches are devil worshippers. And they're not at all. The satanists take care of that aspect, which is abject very much to being called devil worshippers or satanists. They deny, for instance, that there is such a thing as a black witch. They are basically nature worshippers. They believe in the power of nature, that you can gain power from the moon and from growing things. They also are believers in reincarnation, in almost any form.

I expected to find weirdly dressed people, with huge black shadowed eyes, who flew about in dark bat caves, and told a lot of strange stories. But actually, I ran into housewives, and department store executives, and businessmen, and journalists, and almost any walk of life that you can imagine who are involved in the occult, who are seriously involved, who are, as I said, normal people, whatever that means today, who are going about their business, as successful in terms of the establishment, and yet who once a week will go to a coven meeting of witches to practice witchcraft, but who believe sincerely in it, and who are sane.

There are a lot of people privately involved in the occult. The occult still is a sort of secret organization. You don't run out in the street and say, hey, I just communicated with my dead husband. Because there are some people that might put you away. And much of it has to be done privately because of the scoffers, of which I used to be one, and the skeptics. It's just hard for people in general to accept the more blatant types of occult practices. They're interested. I'm not saying that there's a great mass out there that wants to get into the occult. They're just fascinated by it and interested in the things that are going on.

CONNIE GOLDMAN: In the introduction to his book, Mr. Smith says the following. "In doing this book, I was exposed to many things that cannot be easily explained. But I found that it helps in people's lives. And in a sense, what does it matter if the belief is scientifically true? Perhaps as I did, you will abandon some prejudices and misconceptions, get to know the witch next door to you. And then, who knows. I'm Connie Goldman.