

RUSTIC RETREAT
A Native Son Shares His Truth in the Hills of West Virginia
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by Charlene Nevada

A few years ago, a highway patrol trooper pulled up to the Richard Rose farm outside Wheeling, W. Va., and demanded to know what was going on. Why all the out-of-state cars parked on the grass? What were those little signs posted on trees leading to the farm that said "TAT"? What did it all mean?

Rose replied that it would take too long to explain.

"Arrest me if you think I'm breaking the law," he said.

The cop backed off—a bit.

"What are you, Klansmen?" he asked.

"I wish to Christ we were," Rose replied. "Then you wouldn't bother me."

"If you're a radical, they leave you alone," Rose sniffed in recalling the story.

It's easy to understand, though, why the passing cop would wonder at the happenings at the Richard Rose farm. Here—in the most unlikely of places—people gather from all over the country to contemplate age-old questions like: What is man? What is his relationship to the universe? What is his ultimate destiny?

Not only is the farm just outside Wheeling—a city more often associated with country and western music jamborees than with intellectual activity—but it is also smack in the middle of a major Hare Krishna settlement.

"The Krishnas are our only neighbors for miles," says Rose, who is partly responsible for the West Virginia Krishna settlement. He leased the Krishnas the first piece of land in 1968—a decision he now regrets. They subsequently bought up several other properties around him and he found himself almost surrounded.

To get to Rose's 160-acre farm, one must follow miles of winding road and cross five bridges, including some one-lane, wood-slat spans. In some places the road has been washed out by the creek along which it runs. Instead of repairing it, signs have been posted: "One lane road." In other words, visitors proceed at their own risk. In the hills of West Virginia, there are no flagmen to assist drivers.

At the end of the paved road, there is another mile and a half of hilly, unpaved, winding road. When it rains—as it did much of June—the ruts in the road are several inches deep. But the road and the drive don't deter people from journeying to Rose's farm.

On a weekend late in June, they came: There was the aerospace engineer from Los Angeles, the stockbroker from Columbus, the chemist from Denver, the physician from Portage County, the art teacher from Pittsburgh, the college financial aid officer from Charlotte, N.C., the financial planner from Maryland, as well as several people from the Akron area.

About 50 in all, they gathered in the rustic setting, ate ham sandwiches and peach pie, drank coffee, listened to hours of lectures, traded thoughts. They came to talk about healing at a distance, thought transference, prophecy, clairvoyance, after-death visions, déjà vu. The participants didn't share any one belief. They shared the desire to share ideas, to reach for another dimension.

"It's both a spiritual and an intellectual experience," said Akronite Janet Chamberlain, a nursing instructor at the University of Akron, as she sat in the farm's front yard and ate lunch between lectures.

Two retreats are usually held each summer. Another is scheduled for next weekend, August 7 and 8. The cost for the weekend is \$30—plus wear and tear on one's car getting there. Camping is free. Food is inexpensive. (Fifty cents for a big wedge of homemade peach pie.)

Officially, the name of the sponsoring group for these retreats is the TAT Foundation. The initials—posted on trees when there is a retreat going on—stand for Truth and Transmission. Rose, one of the founders of TAT, has devoted his life to searching for truth and transmitting, or conveying, it to others. At 65, he is a paunchy man who looks perhaps a bit like Confucius. He's a seminary dropout, a retired contractor, an individual who has devoted his life to searching for the meaning of life. And death. He's traveled hundreds of miles seeking out what he calls "legitimate mediums" so he can attend séances and grill the "returnees" on where they've been.

Rose is soft-spoken but out-spoken, a teacher who wants to share his wisdom, but not with a cop who has only a few minutes to spare.

Rose was born in Benwood, outside Wheeling, in 1917. His parents moved to the farm when he was very young. At age 12, he left to join a seminary. He was seeking the Truth—with a capital T. At 17, he left the seminary, disillusioned. He went to college for a couple of years and studied Chemistry. After that, he moved around a lot and held a number of jobs. He worked briefly for Goodyear, checking the work of subcontractors before it was shipped to Akron. He worked for Babcock & Wilcox, doing research for the atomic energy powered submarine.

But he never stopped searching for the meaning of life. He embraced different religions along the way—including Yoga and Zen. After a while, he concluded that most of them were rackets. "It's a tremendous business," he says. When Rose was 32 and living in Seattle, he had an experience that profoundly changed his life. He's cautious when he

talks about it. It's difficult for most people to understand. By his own definition, he was separated from his body and brought to a sort of mountaintop. "I left my body and I knew it," he says. "I thought I was dead." From this perspective, Rose found what he describes as "a oneness with God or the Absolute. I use the word Absolute because I think God is a misused term." The feeling, he said, was like "being one with this force." From the different perspective, Rose saw the universe—as most of us know it—as an illusion. Humans seemed to be like robots—sort of wandering around playing roles, as in a picture show.

Rose was not drinking, not taking any drugs. The experience just happened. And for a few hours, he feels he was fortunate enough to have transcended into another dimension.

"Under certain psychic conditions, you can enter a different dimension," he says. "This is the whole thing behind mysticism. It's seeking a higher state of consciousness."

Experiencing that higher state of consciousness left Rose stunned. After several months, he sat down and attempted to put his experience on paper. Rose calls the description of the experience, written in free-style poetry, *Three Books of the Absolute*.

Rose didn't talk much about the experience, though. Rather, he concentrated on living. He married, had three children. He bought a farm near his homestead. Then, after his mother died in 1960, he moved back into the family farm. He worked as a contractor in the Wheeling area.

"I kept my mouth shut a good bit," he says. When you're running a business and raising a family, it isn't wise to talk of things that would make people think you're weird, he added.

But Rose did find a few friends with whom he could share his experience. Finally, after a period of years, he decided he would try to share his grand experience, to try to communicate it to the people he views as robots.

"Occasionally and accidentally, a robot puts to his own computer a question and comes up with an answer about himself, which tells him that he's a robot," he says. "And thus, he becomes less of a robot. And so now, I'm trying to contact other robots."

In 1973, Rose finished writing a book about his philosophy, titling it *The Albigen Papers*. The Albigenses were members of a French sect suppressed as heretics in the 13th century. The book, which contains the description of his otherdimensional experience, also traces many religions.

Publishers didn't exactly line up to print *The Albigen Papers*. So Rose had it typed and mimeographed copies for distribution. Eventually, as the demand for the copies increased, he had a printer set it and published it himself. The 240-page book sells for \$5.

Soon after that, he was asked to speak at the University of Pittsburgh. The word spread, and he got invitations from more and more universities. From Kent State. From Ohio State. From Case-Western Reserve. From Akron U.

When Rose left a campus, he left an impression. He found a following. Dan Niebauer first heard Rose speak nine years ago at the University of Pittsburgh student union. Niebauer saw a sign and went to a meeting—not knowing quite what to expect.

"Walking into that room was a bolt of lightning. It was electric. I listened to him and said, 'He's got something,'" Niebauer said of Rose. Niebauer, now an aerospace engineer in Los Angeles, traveled back for the June retreat—as he's done many times before—"because I get a good feeling about these people. I have yet to meet a group of people I feel more at home with."

Another TAT member is Bill Weimer of Akron. Weimer was studying philosophy at Muskingum college in the early 1970's when a professor recommended *The Albigen Papers*. Weimer picked up the book and was fascinated. "I'd always been into Emerson and Thoreau and this seemed like the next step," he says. He contacted Rose and became active in the organization. Weimer, a salesman with the Eureka Co., helped organize lecture sessions in the Akron area. For Weimer, the association with TAT provides a vehicle to explore the questions of "who I am, why am I here? Where am I going to be when I die? Where am I going to be when the body is no longer useful?" He and others volunteered their time to build a 500-seat shelter on Rose's farm for the sessions. The summer sessions were started six years ago.

Rose will share his Truth with those who want to listen, but he doesn't preach. At the June session, in fact, he kept a very low profile, choosing instead to bring in knowledgeable speakers on a variety of subjects.

"We're open to ideas," Rose says. "But we don't do anything that smacks of chicanery."

In June, Mark Jaqua, a Kent State graduate now in contracting in Bellaire, lectured on some recent discoveries in biochemistry and human anatomy. Dr. Lewis Frederick Bissell, a Kent internist who is involved in psychosomatic medicine and holistic health, lectured on "A Course in Miracles," an intensive study in celebrating the joy of life. Although Bissell came as a speaker, he stayed to participate in the sessions. He says, "All of us search for the meaning of life."

A reviewer of Rose's book wrote, "If ten percent of the world were required to read Richard Rose's papers, we would have a spiritual evolution/revolution brought about by the one percent that did think on and understand his writings."