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# CHRIST!! AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY

*Rog Phillips*

There was a man in Canada who claimed seriously to dislike Roger P. Graham, and to be in almost constant telepathic contact with Rog Phillips; a woman in Los Angeles who proved by letter and verse from the Matrix stories that Rog Phillips was perhaps the greatest "adept" of modern times; a man in Virginia who published an announcement that Rog Phillips is the incarnation of an Archangel; and a man in St. Paul, who was genuinely surprised that any of the stories by R. P. Graham were anything but straight science fiction and fantasy.

There was a young man in a southern state who thought he was taking his life in his hands in writing me, and took careful precautions to prevent my killing him. He had penetrated the secret message hidden in "So Shall Ye Reap", and was demanding to be included among those who went into the radio-active-proof artificial caves being constructed to house mankind. He had written all this down and given it to an unnamed friend to hold, to be turned over to the police if he met with some mysterious death instead of getting a ticket to the caves. There was a young lady in Michigan who wrote after the announcement of a Russian atom bomb being exploded in Siberia that she and a few others now knew that "So Shall Ye Reap" was true, and when I answered her telling her that I, who wrote the story, didn't believe it was true, she answered thanking me for trying to reassure her, but she still knew it was true--facts were facts.

Those are a few, a very few, of the letters I have received and I have read, that my stories and articles have given rise to. They have nothing to do with the Shaver Mystery. From the very start of my writing, I have consistently steered clear of sounding like Shaver -- not for any personal reason, but simply because a second fiddle, no matter how sweet, is always a second fiddle.

By far, the majority of my mail, mail from people who have never written me before, has been sensible and ordinary. I've made many friends through the mail. A good many of you reading this article have written me at some time or another, and some of you have letters from me in person. Or maybe more than a few. Probably at least 50 of you. So I'm quite sure I won't be starting a feud or creating a misunderstanding in this article, in which I am going to tell about some of the more unusual contacts and experiences I have had on account of my writing.

The most unusual by far was a young lady who lives near San Francisco. A letter from her came to Ziff-Davis some years ago. At that time I wasn't so snowed under with correspondence, and was answering most of my

mail, I wrote her a thank-you letter for her kind words about my stories, since the letter had been sent to me personally. I received another letter from her immediately. I would have scratched it off as "crackpot", but that night I had a very vivid dream in which I saw her face. The next morning when I woke up I had the conviction that it had been her.

I wrote and frankly told her of the dream, and said that I was interested in such phenomena that might have evidence of supernatural things such as esp, and would she send me her picture so I could compare it with the face in the dream. She refused, but countered by asking for my picture. I happened to have two snapshots of me in my office, one sitting at my typer, the other of me lying on my davenport. I took them out of the drawer and studied each, trying to decide which one to send her. I looked at the one of me sitting at the typer. My eyes went to the legs, and a thought entered my mind that they were the legs of a cripple. I frowned at the thought, stretched out on the davenport, and the thought returned. "Those are the legs of a cripple." It wasn't so, and the thought was irrational. But I've had a good many experiences with esp, and this thought had the "feel."

The trouble with genuine esp is that more often than not it comes disguised by one's own thoughts, and it's a problem for Freud to get underneath the symbolism of one's own mind and get to the real impressions. I reasoned, "Since I am definitely not crippled, could this mean that she is?" I took the gamble and wrote her, saying that I thought she was an invalid in some way, perhaps unable to walk. She answered that I was correct up to a certain point. By this time, she had apparently fallen for me and was comparing the two of us to Browning and his invalid girlfriend. It was about this time that I was preparing to spend a winter in Los Angeles. I decided I would drop up and see her -- not for the romantic element, it says here, but in an investigation of this pay dirt in esp that I had stumbled onto. I had another dream in which I saw her. I also saw a strange face that looked like it might belong to a Filipino.

To make a long story shorter, I did go up and visit her, staying for several days. Her features, so vividly etched to my mind through those two dreams, were exactly as I had seen them in every detail. The first time I saw her in the flesh she was looking out a window as my taxi drove up, and I recognized her. It was genuine esp, over a distance of 2400 miles.

And here is where the subtle changes in esp come in. Instead of her legs being cut off or paralyzed or anything like that, she had heart trouble in an advanced stage that prevented her from staying out of bed more than a few minutes at a time. She was not given more than a few months to live.

But at the moment I arrived I "felt" that something wasn't quite kosher. I couldn't lay my finger on it. I had already discovered that she believed that all dreams were genuine psychic experiences with an objective existence on spiritual planes. She was all mixed up, and there was

not much that could be done on that score.

I went to town alone one day, just to get away and think things out. In town I had my second surprise, and one that I can't explain. I got into a poker game, lost a few bucks, and then wandered down the street. I met and passed the Filipino I had seen in that dream in Chicago, as authentic in every facial detail as this girl's features had been.

I went back to her house still undecided about things. Then she really let her hair down and I discovered what had been bothering me. She had a certain ability at esp, but the combination of that and unrestricted dreaming with the belief that they were all the same and objectively real, had led her to a pretty absurd goal.

She believed I was the incarnation of Christ, and that I had chosen her as the instrument to prove my identity to the world. She was going to die and be pronounced dead by the doctors. In three days after she died I was going to raise her from the dead, and she was going to be my disciple, and all the world was going to accept me as Christ.

Under my breath I said, "Christ!" and made a graceful exit. A fortunately timed letter was my excuse for hurrying back to LA. She was a die-hard, and for a year after, I got letters from her in which she imagined I was still talking to her via the astral planes. It was a close call. One thing I must not do is to let the world know I'm Christ. That business is too competitive. There are fewer good writers in the world today than Christs, and more demand for them.

The second most remarkable experience brought to me through my correspondence was a letter from Dick Shaver when he lived at Barto, Pennsylvania and I lived on the west coast. The letter's contents weren't unusual. I was home alone except for my dog, a wire-haired terrier, since deceased. I don't know how to explain what happened, and I can't make head nor tails of it, so I'll tell it just the way it happened. I brought my mail into the kitchen and laid it down on the drainboard. Pepper was standing there wagging his tail, looking at me. I opened Dick's letter. Something seemed to jump out of it. Pepper backed up, then ran into the front room like the devil was after him.

I "sensed" that something came to a pause in front of me about two feet off the floor. I focused my eyes carefully where I "knew" the something to be. My eyes could see absolutely nothing at any time, yet I followed this something from the kitchen into the front room, studying my "impressions" of it. It either had no size, or was no larger than an insect, and invisible. I "sensed" a shrill whining like a high speed machine. When I went into the living room, Pepper tried to hid behind a chair, whining in intense fear. He ran about the room like he was having a fear fit. I followed this something around, bending over and trying to make out at least some visible evidence of it, always "knowing" its exact location, as did Pepper.

It was there for half an hour, and then, suddenly was gone, and never returned. The instant I "felt" it leave, Pepper quieted down and wasn't afraid any more, though apprehensive for an hour or two afterward. His reactions preclude the possibility of this being my imagination; but of course this is a personal experience of no value evidently to myself. I have often wondered what it could have been. Some phenomenon connected with Shaver and his caves? Probably. Whatever it was, it arrived inside an ordinary letter that contained nothing unusual and was purely friendly chitchat from Shaver.

Once several years ago, Ray Palmer and I almost got into some trouble over a guy who had spent his life concocting a theory about the origin of planets and solar systems. We listened to his theory. It had many good things in it and many not so sound. We couldn't do anything with it, though, and several months later a story that appeared in Amazing had some stuff in it vaguely similar to his. He threatened to sue Ray, and although he didn't, it taught me a lesson - never to read supposedly original stuff from strangers.

My third most unusual letter came to me without being mailed. It was back in the days when the deCourcies were in Seattle cultivating my friendship so they could sell Ray Palmer stories. They were dangling their "bait" in front of my eyes -- a mysterious spirit that talked through Jack deCourcy and made all sorts of claims. Later Jack and Dot asserted in an open letter to fandom that this spirit Joe was a hoax they had used to sell stories, but - well, listen to this:

I had dropped over to their place in the housing center at White Center, in West Seattle. Dot said to Jack, "Maybe we should - " and Jack said, "No, we should wait. Joe doesn't want us to." Dot said, "But if we wait until it happens, Rog could never be sure we hadn't written it then, instead of now." Jack said, "We didn't write it. Joe did. But you have something there. Maybe we should give it to him sealed, to open when we tell him." Dot said, "But if we let him read it now, he can have that encouragement." To which, Jack said, "You're right."

He went into the bedroom and brought out a sheet of paper. It was signed "Joe", and said my wife would be released from the hospital on a certain definite date, that was about three months away at the time. ((I was married then, but am not now.))

On my next visit to the hospital, I asked the doctors if they had any idea when she could be released. They hadn't. I mentioned this date. The doctor said, "Most emphatically no. Her improvement would have to be miraculous."

On the exact date predicted by this hoax "Joe", she was released from the hospital. To make it even better, her recovery had been so good that the doctors had planned on releasing her a week earlier than that date, but at the last minute decided to keep her another week to make sure there would be no relapse.

Some of my most interesting mail has come from the female of the species. There have been outright proposals of marriage, but more often just nice letters with a (Miss) before their names. Usually, of the ones I've answered, they turn out to be young ladies who have no thought of marrying Rog Phillips. The female mind is adroitly "transparent" in that respect, and can find more ways of saying something without saying it than an null-A I've ever heard of.

In spite of the fact that my mother and father married after having only corresponded, the idea doesn't particularly appeal to me. (My dad was in the Spanish American War, and one of his buddies had a sister. Since my dad didn't get any mail, this buddy talked him and his sister into writing each other, and when the war was over my dad went up to Christman, Illinois, respondent in his army uniform and handlebar moustache, so naturally Mom was a pushover.) A girl that falls in love with me from reading my stories is falling for a different man than she'll ever meet in the flesh. He is a part of my mind that hides, for the most part, when others are around. Even noise or troubles cause it to pull in its head. It manifests itself only through my fingers on the typewriter. So any girl that falls for that part of me is in for a sad awakening, when and if she meets me. Knowing this, I feel it's like carrying on a romance by proxy for a guy who will run and leaves me holding the bag - get it? I just got it myself; that's why I asked.

For the most part, letters are extremely pleasant to get. I have received two letters that made me extremely uncomfortable. They were over the "Club House". The first was from a postal employee in Canada who took me to task over a statement I made in my column about Canadian discrimination against US magazines. He accused me of deliberately and criminally trying to upset diplomatic relations between Canada and the US, which had been amicable up to then.

The other upsetting letter was from a Britisher, who from his wording was writing for his Great American Public, although the letter was addressed to me. Its essence was that when I said in the "Club House" that "the Statue of Liberty was the only thing we ever got from any European country", I was alienating the affections and loyalty we could buy when Russia started in. He demanded that I publish his letter in the "Club House". Naturally, I didn't. All Europe, including England (which I have never considered in the same breath with Europe in my own mind) will just have to keep on having its feelings hurt, and embrace the slavery of communism when the time comes, just to spite me, rather than fighting to maintain what freedom they have.

Every once in a while, I get a letter from some fan who seems to have the belief that I am the leader of stfandom and exert a tremendous influence, being able to use the "Club House" to exert pressure on fans. Two of these letters have been from fans "being run out of fandom by some", asking for my help to save them. Another was from a "fan" who had decided

fandom was too tame lately and wanted to get another feud of some kind started, asking my help. He would write a hot open letter to fandom if I should write a hot reply. Obviously, I have neither the ability nor the desire to exert any kind of pressure or disciplinary movement against any part of fandom. The only exception to that is when I have exposed the reading public to possible mulchting in what seems to be a fraud. If -- and when -- that happens, I will publish in the "Club House" just enough of a statement to warn the public against sending any money to the thing-- to correct my previous boosts, if any.

Fan mail is the answer to my being able to so consistently sell my work. I've had rejections from publishers, but I have never written a story I haven't sold. I hear that other authors have their sacred pile of rejected stories that have made the rounds and been given up, their current half-dozen hopefuls that might be sold yet in the expanding market. I don't have a single reject hanging around, nor do I have any stories out "making the rounds". When I write a story, it is sold. Fan mail has done that. There are two ways in which it has done it, besides the fan mail that comes in on a Rog Phillips story.

The first and most important way that fan mail has helped me is this: a great deal of my stuff is published under pen-names invented by the editors. The stories are apparently the work of brand new and unknown writers. Fan mail comes in giving the stories high rating, and often top rating, and asking for more of that new author's stuff. That's the type of thing that boosts my stock with editors. There have even been times when fan letters have placed the "new author" way above Rog Phillips -- and by fans I know, who would be very surprised to learn I was this other author too!

The second way in which fan mail has helped me follows the same pattern, but with a different angle. As often as not, Ziff-Davis and Clark bought my stories without reading them. They knew they can do so safely-- because if a story were to prove too poor for publication, I would make it good with another story of the same wordage without protest. And when I say too poor for publication, I mean in the editor's opinion. There was one story bought without reading it, and when the magazine was being put together, it was behind schedule. They took a chance and sent the manuscript to the typesetters without reading it until they got the page proofs to correct. Then they read it and were horrified. It violated every rule of writing. It was definitely no good. They got me on a phone. I rushed right down and read it myself. I had to agree with them. It was absolutely no good. But there was nothing that could be done. It was set in type; there wasn't time to replace it, let alone stand for a bawling out from the front office for wasted typesetting. I was set to work on the problem of "saving" the story in some way by minor cutting out the equally minor corrections that could be rushed through the typesetters. I couldn't find anything that could be cut out and improve the story. One of the editors and I cooked up a couple of paragraphs, one in the middle of the story and one at the end. Also the name of the author was changed. Fan mail rated the story excellent, and objected only to the

two paragraphs we had inserted:

Speaking of that, I got a big kick out of the fan mail published in Thrilling Wonder Stories on my story "Quite Logical". That story had originally been 11,000 words. Sam set it back saying he wanted it if I could cut it down to 9000.<sup>4</sup> I didn't see how it could be done, but did it and sent it back to him. I got it back with a note saying they would buy it if I cut it to 6500. I had already done all the cutting in the first half. I still refused to change a word in the last half, the descent on Washington and the White House. I cut the damn thing to 6500. Sam bought it. One of the fan letters published said it was cut too much in the first half!

There are two more letters I think will amuse you. One came to Ziff-Davis from a large radio and TV production agency in New York. It said that this agency was desirous of entering into the stf field, and in surveying the market, had settled on two authors they wanted to contact first, and requested their addresses. The authors' names were Rog Philips and Craig Browning.

Howard Browne called me on the phone and read the letter, suggesting that I answer. My answer was very short: "Dear Sir: Inasmuch as I am both of these authors, your task is much simplified. Yours truly, R. P. Graham."

I've spoken in this article of a couple of mysteries in connection, with letters I've received. The biggest mystery to me is why my writings are popular. I think that is the big mystery to all writers who sell. At the start, I recognized a definite cycle to successful writers: (a) the period of learning to write and finally selling, (b) the period of success during which stories create favorable reading response but the writer does not know why, and (c) the decline, during which the writer is doing better work than ever but it's unpopular or creates no response. I've realized I was vulnerable so long as I didn't know what why my stuff was popular, and have tried to isolate that factor which made a story popular. Not having ever found it, I'm still vulnerable. I may often sound like an egomaniac, but with each story I write, I pause to frown and consciously realize my vulnerability, and to admit to myself that with this story my decline may be starting, with me helpless to prevent it.

Consequently, when I receive a letter like the one I'm going to quote verbatim, I feel very good about it. It came with a check from Z-D, and said:

Dear author:

Christ, if I could only write as good as you!

Your sincere admirer,  
J. Wellington Flutch  
Editor