

9/12/2019
For Fielding McGehee, Reporter
of Jim Jones Institute
at SDSU - from L.L.L.

THE DOWNFALL OF JIM JONES
By
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The telephone rang, perhaps twice. Very jarring.

Rudely awakened, I bounded out of bed and uncradled the phone before it could ring again. It was a friend's voice with a gruesome warning: "The Mills are dead. Murdered! Shot in the head. Their 16-year-old daughter was also critically wounded." He gave me more information. It seems unimportant now.

Shocked, I thanked him and hung up. I could not believe it. The Mills, dead. Brutally murdered in their Berkeley home. Could it have been the "hit squad"?

Al and Jeannie Mills of Peoples Temple fame. I knew them as Elmer and Deanna Mertle. That was before they adopted their aliases. They had been instrumental in the downfall of Jim Jones. Originally, they were members of the Jones gang, high muck-a-mucks in the infamous Peoples Temple. But, after spending "Six Years with God," as Jeannie's book is entitled, they finally saw the light and got enough guts to quit the Temple. After they left the church, they became outspoken critics of Jim Jones. This earned them top priority on the "hit list." One of Jones's last commands was to get the "traitors," especially the Mills.

It had been 15 months since the massacre in Guyana. We thought the hit squads had been disbanded or, at least, had lost interest now that their leader was dead. Poor Elmer, if only he had listened to Dave's warnings ten years ago he might be alive today.

My God, David Conn! Was he all right? Immediately, I decided to phone him at his East Bay hideout. My fears increased immeasurably when he did not answer. I could picture him (and perhaps his girlfriend) lying in a pool of blood. Actually, he had heard the news earlier that night and skedaddled for safer ground. But at that time, before I knew his whereabouts, I felt frustrated, helpless and enraged. Psychotic killers, automatons from Peoples Temple, on the loose, and the police seemed as helpless as I.

I sank back into bed and reflected on the last decade. That is how long I had been aware of the horror in Peoples Temple and its Hitlerian leader. I knew the story behind the story, that David Conn was the secret enemy of Jim Jones.

Unfortunately, so did Jones. The secret was no longer a secret where it counted most. Was my friend next on the hit list? I do not know and neither does he.

Upon further reflection I decided to chronicle the whole bizarre tale. After all, Jonestown was a major historical event, and the public has the right to know the full story. Hence, the following narrative.

For a man without title or position, fame or success, David Conn is a most remarkable person for, more than anyone else, he is responsible for the downfall of the infamous Jim Jones and his evil Peoples Temple. David was one person in the world who knew Jim Jones as a scoundrel and tried to expose him. How he did this is detailed here.

David Conn is a youthful fifty-two year-old from Richmond, California, on the eastern shore of the San Francisco Bay. I first made his acquaintance eighteen years ago, in 1962. His hair, then black, is now grey. I soon discovered that while short of stature he was tall on ideas.

In those days David attended Richmond's Barrett Avenue Christian Church (BACC). This congregation, like Peoples Temple, was part of the Disciples of Christ, a major American Protestant denomination. In fact, Jim Jones was an ordained Disciples minister.

Although Dave was a member in good standing of BACC, he was viewed by many of his fellow parishioners with distrust and disfavor since he wanted and worked for school integration and fair housing in Richmond. Virtually classed as a "communist" for his idealistic views of equality, he was eventually asked to leave the church by some of his short-sighted brethren, which he did in 1965.

Nevertheless, Dave's attendance at BACC had put him in contact with persons who would later emerge as key figures in the Jones cult. This membership in the church, plus the friends and acquaintances Dave made there, turned out to be the first important nexus leading to his investigation of Jim Jones.

As indicated, several of Jones's followers were former members of Barrett Avenue Christian Church. Among these were Elmer Mertle and Nita R. (names followed by an initial are fictional for real people), both friends of Dave who were destined to play greater or lesser roles in Peoples Temple. Elmer Mertle became Jones's official photographer and a member of the Temple's Planning Commission. Nita R. was a votary destined to die in Guyana.

Nita and Leigh R. were the proud parents of five children. This bond was not enough to hold them together however. By 1969 they were separated from each other and separated from the Barrett Avenue Christian Church. Then Nita, in search of security perhaps, joined the Peoples Temple, taking four of her children with her. Three never reached maturity, dying in the massacre in Guyana with their mother and 900 others. The fourth child, Timothy, had survived as Jim Jones's "adopted" son, Tim Jones.

Leigh R. was never convinced by Jones; somehow he sensed Jones to be a phony preacher from the start. Hence, he resented his estranged wife adding their children to the Temple flock. Resentment became abhorrence when he realized that Jones was brainwashing his kids, turning them against him. Abhorrence turned to terror when Leigh found out more about Jones's use of unorthodox methods to control his flock. These methods included child abuse, beatings, blackmail, and other ineffable horrors too numerous to relate in this brief recital.

Leigh R., in turn, began to confide in his friend David Conn. This was David's first warning that something was wrong in Peoples Temple. Later, in 1972, Leigh R. was to detail many of these horrible matters to another investigator on the trail of Jim Jones, the Reverend Lester Kinsolving, in a taped interview at Leigh's house. Lester Kinsolving was a religious reporter for the San Francisco Examiner. He was gathering evidence for a possible story about Peoples Temple. The interview had been arranged with the aid of David Conn. I was present at the meeting. A few days later Conn sent the following note to Kinsolving:

Dear Mr. Kinsolving:

I much appreciated the opportunity to meet and talk with you the other night at Mr. (Leigh R.'s) home.

There are one or two things that I would like to emphasize regarding the Jim Jones cult. First is the "fear" aspect, which is central to his continued power. It would be a tremendous ordeal, I believe, for any of his followers to break away from his hold. I'm sure that, should Jim be threatened by exposure, his followers will react in one of two ways. They will either block their minds from reason and truth in order to survive psychologically, or they will go into a most desperate and dangerous kind of rationalization, namely, that of believing this demagoguery and deception to be somehow a necessary but not too evil means of bringing together a "loving and saving community." (I have heard hints of the latter from close friends ... sympathetic to Jim—and it saddens me deeply.) In either case, however, Jim's followers will be blind to the long range psychological dangers of their sustained sycophancy.

Kinsolving's series of articles was cut short before the heavier details of that meeting could get into print. Jones had sent hundreds of his tribe to parade around the Examiner building. To avoid trouble, the Examiner stopped the stories.

Prior to Leigh R.'s warnings David Conn had heard only praise for Jim Jones from his old friend and co-worker at Standard Oil, Elmer Mertle. Elmer, like

Dave and Leigh, came from Barrett Avenue Christian Church. He had been a member of BACC since its inception in 1954.

Elmer Mertle was dedicated to the cause of racial equality. He even went on the Selma, Alabama march with Martin Luther King. Thus, it was not surprising when Elmer, like Dave, left the Barrett Avenue Christian Church in 1965. He was dissatisfied with the schism in BACC over interracial projects.

In 1969 Elmer and his second wife, Deanna, were encouraged by a Bay Area Disciples minister to attend the services of a remarkable preacher in Redwood Valley, 120 miles to the north, who was allegedly doing many good works. They attended Jones's service and liked what they heard. In 1970 Elmer and Deanna Mertle joined Peoples Temple. Elmer quit his job with Standard Oil and moved to Ukiah to be near Jones. Later they were to deed over several of their investment properties to the cult. The Mertles became respected and trusted members and were admitted to the Temple's governing board, the Planning commission. Deanna also held a staff position on the church newspaper, The Peoples Forum. In these high places they learned much about the schemes, techniques and machinations of Jim Jones. They themselves were caught up in the web of horrors and witnessed brutal beatings, bogus healings and other foul deeds. They even signed false statements "admitting" they were homosexuals who had molested their children.

Once in, it was extremely difficult to quit the Jones organization. The Mertles had given up their jobs, much of their wealth, and most of their contact with the outside world. How were they to leave? In 1974 Elmer's daughter received a brutal and humiliating beating at a church meeting overseen by Jones and witnessed by scores of people. She received 75 whacks, turning her buttocks to "hamburger," as a "catharsis" to purge her of her wrongs. Fearing further harassment, even death, if they quit, it took another year for the Mertles to work up the courage to leave Peoples Temple for good, which they did in August, 1975. They paid the price, though, in the form of threats, burglaries of their Berkeley home, and constant, gnawing fear of what would happen next. They even changed their names to Al and Jeannie Mills, to little avail.

Shortly after Elmer returned to Berkeley, he got in touch with David Conn. He had heard through his first wife that Dave was investigating Peoples Temple. Elmer poured his soul out to Dave. He told Dave of the fake healings, child abuse, beatings, fraud, sex exploitation, lies, brainwashing, theft, and other criminal and immoral acts, as well as his own predicament. David was someone who understood and listened, who knew that Elmer's horror stories were not the ravings of a madman. Elmer hoped that somehow, David could be of help, could assist in exposing Jones.

Exposing Jones was not an easy task. Both press and police were incredulous, needed hard evidence, and feared the litigious Jones. The tales of terror, unfortunately, sounded like nothing more than tales. For example, who could believe that an alleged child molester within the Temple had his penis placed on a table so that it could be beat with a stick in the presence of fellow parishioners as punishment? Who could believe that children were forced to eat their own vomit, or that a government official was sodomized by Jones? Who could believe that an old woman was compelled to defecate in a can on stage in front of a large gathering at San Francisco Peoples Temple? These tales seem incredible yet. In attempting to expose Jones, Elmer and Dave ran the risk of physical harassment and threats of lawsuit. Similar concerns, the threat of suits for defamation and invasion of privacy, deterred both press and police.

If problems of getting through to press and police were perplexing, the dilemma of dealing with the Disciples was even more disconcerting. The Disciples of Christ were responsible for Jim Jones. They had cloaked him in the church's robe of respectability. They had the responsibility for unmasking and unfrocking him. But, instead, they simply ignored Jones. Just a carbuncle, not a cancer! Hopefully, they thought it would go away.

David Conn would not let the Disciples be derelict in their duty. And he would not go away. David was persistent in his efforts to arouse the Disciples to action. On September 4, 1970, eight years before the massacre, David sent a letter to the President of the Disciples of Christ, Northern California-Nevada region, Elizabeth (Nellie) Kratz, outlining some of his apprehensions about Jim Jones. At a luncheon meeting with Mrs. Kratz a few days before, Dave had informed her of Jones's deceptive practices, fake healings, maltreatment of children, and other matters. In his letter David referred back to some of the "deceptive" practices they had discussed at the luncheon. He also expressed fears about "the ultimate well-being of children involved" in Peoples Temple. The letter urged the District President, "since Jim encourages the exhibiting of tumors from healed persons, to have some M.D., without Jim's knowledge, attend a healing and ask to have the tumor for laboratory examination." Dave suggested that the Disciples of Christ investigate Jim Jones and theorized that the Disciples' failure to "interfere" with Jones's operation might be "the result of fear."

On October 5, 1970, President Kratz responded in writing: "At the present time, I really don't feel that I have any evidence on which to act or even on which to talk to Jim. I would certainly need to have permission of persons who have shared what might be confidential information with you."

David Conn also warned two California Disciples ministers and two other officials within the Disciples hierarchy of the Temple crimes. He told them everything he knew, sparing little detail. He kept them informed about Jones

periodically, by telephone and in person, from 1970 right up to the holocaust in November, 1978. In 1976 Conn also arranged a meeting between a Disciples official and Temple defectors so that the official could hear corroborating evidence. Unfortunately, under church polity, the Disciples of Christ did not have any machinery to conduct investigations of, or hold hearings on, alleged activities of misbehaving ministers or errant congregations. "Excommunicate" is not in their lexicon.

In addition to gathering information about Jones from friends and others, David Conn personally attended a couple of Jim Jones services. The first was as early as 1969 when his curiosity had been piqued by conflicting reports. So, late in that year, Dave went up to Redwood Valley, California, to hear the controversial preacher.

Jones, always aware of strange faces in the crowd, saw David and asked him to stand. Jones asked a few questions—like where he was from and why he was here—and ostensibly tried to make Conn feel welcome. David responded honestly that he was "curious" about Peoples Temple. After services Jones confided to his aides, "I don't trust that man."

The distrust was mutual.

Conn left the Sunday services with the strong suspicion that Jones was a fraud. Suspicion grew to conviction. By 1973 David knew that Jones was a fraud and worse, worse even than Charles Manson and his cult. That is why, during a guest lecture on occultic literature at Diablo Valley College on May 16, 1973, Conn warned students of the Jim Jones cult. He lectured the class:

... psychic misanthropes or malcontents, or even psychic psychopaths can be deified or idolized, or even followed religiously Consequently, we have seen in recent days and recent years the range of groups from the Charles Manson cult to Jim Jones's Peoples Temple up near Ukiah. May I ask for a moment if anyone is aware of the Jim Jones group at Redwood Valley?

Only two out of fifty had heard of Jones.

Although Jones was virtually unknown, he had his organization and political connections. Conn had me and very few others. His cause—the exposure of power-broker Jones and his money-changing Temple—seemed hopeless.

Over the years David would discuss the Jones affair with me, his attorney friend, and ask for my advice. As an attorney for Alameda County, I could not represent Dave, but I could give him some friendly counsel.

I pointed out that much of what Dave knew was unbelievable (for so it seemed at the time) and that all he knew was hearsay. Percipient witnesses would

have to come forward and testify to what they knew of their own personal knowledge. Even then they might not be believed. And so far nobody was willing to testify.

Even with such testimony the police and FBI would be reluctant to investigate. The ancient American doctrine of separation of Church and State afforded Jones protection, like a moat around the castle. Convincing evidence was needed to bridge the moat, and David did not have it. Besides, police authorities could be easily intimidated with cries of repression and religious persecution. This was not a simple matter of unlawful bingo at a Catholic Church. The Jones church was active in civil rights and liberal causes. It enjoyed support from politicians and celebrities like Governor Jerry Brown and Mayor George Moscone. Even an Assistant District Attorney in San Francisco was a Jones aide. (He later defected and worked courageously against Jones.) Jones himself was foreman of the Mendocino County grand jury. And he had other connections we dreaded.

More importantly, I pointed out that not only would Dave's life be jeopardized, but that accusing Jones publicly could result in suits for slander, invasion of privacy, or other torts too costly to defend even if Dave prevailed.

These demurrers deterred my friend, but not for long. The magnitude of Jones's crimes was so great that David felt something must be done.

Finally, he hit upon a course of action. He would write to San Francisco KGO-TV news anchorman, Van Amburg. If the police could not handle it, perhaps the news media could. Van Amburg was picked because he was an acquaintance of Elmer Mertle and a friend of Elmer's brother. David thought that if he could tip off Van Amburg about the great religious scandal brewing in California without being unnecessarily specific, he could then arrange a private talk and specify the crimes, even name Jim Jones. David felt the Mertle brothers could vouch for his veracity. And, as a recognized attorney in the East Bay establishment, I could have attested to Dave's character and long investigation of Jim Jones. So, on January 13, 1977, Conn wrote the letter to Van Amburg stating that he wanted to meet and relate a "frightening story" that would leave the anchorman "stunned beyond your sense of reasoning." The letter warned: "We each will be horrified." Conn also named friends he and Van Amburg had in common who could serve as character witnesses. David promised that at the proposed meeting he would impart all details and names to Van Amburg. The letter urged the TV newsman to contact "Larry Lee Litke," a Deputy County Counsel with the Alameda County Counsel's office," by phone (stating my phone number) for verification of Conn's character and for confirmation of his story.

I never received that phone call. Just why a one-minute attempt to call was not made, only Van Amburg can say. He probably thought it was a crank letter. However, when contacted two years later by Conn, Van Amburg remembered the

strange letter and acknowledged, "If I'd only known, maybe there wouldn't have been a Jonestown."

I learned of the letter after it was mailed. I had previously contended that the Fourth ~~ESTABLISHMENT~~ ^{ESTABLISHMENT} was the most effective and trustworthy branch of government, and so I could not complain. Unfortunately, though, the news media faced problems like the police, with evidence needed and lawsuits feared. That is why, as Lester Kinsolving said, "the Examiner ceased to examine." Half of history is not written for fear of libel actions.

In March, 1977 an incredible thing happened—a meeting between David Conn and Indian leader Dennis Banks. It was the trigger that touched off the explosion that sunk Jones.

David saw a newspaper picture of Dennis Banks and Jim Jones together. Dave did not know the nature of their relationship, but felt that Banks' involvement was innocent and unsuspecting. Immediately David wanted to "save" the Indian movement from the taint which was sure to come from Banks' association with Jones. Besides, David had a friend in the American Indian Movement (AIM), and did not want that group sullied. He needed no invitation to be of help.

Dave's friend was George Coker, a full-blooded Seminole. Coker was acquainted with an AIM leader named Ward N. Ward in turn knew Dennis Banks. Banks had stayed at Ward's home in the East Bay after the celebrated Wounded Knee incident. Now it happens that Coker was one of the few friends, besides myself, whom Conn kept abreast of the Jim Jones story as it unfolded. Dave frankly told Coker, "Banks association with Jones is going to embarrass the American Indian Movement." In order to obviate this, Dave wanted Coker to ask Ward to set up a meeting with Banks.

No specific time or place was set. (Banks was fearful of extradition to South Dakota and had to be cagey.) Instead, shortly before midnight on March 22, 1977, came an unexpected telephone call. It was George Coker who had just gotten word. The meeting was set for that very night at Ward N.'s house.

Present at the midnight meeting were David Conn, Dennis Banks, George Coker, Ward N., and a companion of Banks. Conn explained his purpose to Banks—which was to save AIM from any discomfiture. He apprized Banks of the fake healings, the beatings, and other sordid matters. The Indian listened stoically.

Dave advised Banks to make a notarized statement saying he was aware of the allegations against Jones, then seal and keep it. Dave urged Banks to gradually disassociate himself from Jones. That way, when the exposé came, Banks would be able to demonstrate that he had not been duped.

Conn wanted Banks to believe, to know Jones for the charlatan he was. So Dave told Banks they could meet with a federal agent who could confirm that the Government was getting reports about Jones from Conn and others.

While Conn did not name him, the federal agent referred to was Jim Hubert, an investigator in the Treasury Department. Conn had contacted Treasury in January 1977, and periodically kept them posted. He put Jim Hubert in contact with potential witnesses, among them the wife of Jones's attorney Timothy Stoen.

When Conn told Banks they could meet with federal agents, Banks balked. He said he would consider it, but the Indian wanted his attorney present at any such meeting. David agreed and added that perhaps he would bring his own attorney. (Banks may have feared a trap to seize and transport him to South Dakota where he faced assault and riot charges.)

The meeting ended about 3:30 A.M. It had lasted almost three hours. Conn was not sure that Banks believed him, but he could do no more. He was sincere, but a stranger. He could only hope Banks was sufficiently alerted to protect himself and AIM from Jones. Conn and Coker left for their own homes. Repercussions would follow.

Unbeknownst to Conn and Coker, at about the time the meeting with Banks commenced, an anonymous person phoned Coker's wife seeking information about Dave, but she became suspicious and gave out no information.

A day and a half later, on March 24, 1977, the Mertles received a threatening letter, obviously from Jones's accomplices, concerning David Conn and the meeting with Banks. The note read in critical part:

I know that your relatives and Grace and others have been up to bad things with a man by the name of Conn. He's making fools out of all of you. He boasts about a treasury agent

(David had mentioned a Treasury agent, by Christian name only, during the meeting with Banks.) The note went on:

That Mr. Conn has quite a past. I think you ought to know that his former wife has provided a lot of helpful information about his character Tapes of his interviews were provided, as recently as this week. He thought two men believed his lies, but one excused himself to go out with the dog and handed the tapes over

.... Tell all of your cohorts, including Conn, that they could get in trouble with the law, for what they're saying that was, and is, a matter

of record. Eleven witnesses heard them also, so they had better stop trying to do others harm in such an un-Christian [sic] way

“Trouble with the law” was particularly alarming. Did it betoken costly defamation suits? And while it was possible Conn had been taped, the allusion to “Eleven witnesses” was unsettling. Conn and Coker did recall that at one point during the powwow the Seminole left the meeting room (kitchen) with Ward to see the dog and some Indian artifacts. Coker then observed other people in the house. Could they have been eavesdroppers? Could one have been a Temple spy? We did not know.

It should be observed, however, there is no evidence that Ward did anything but innocently furnish his house for the meeting. It must be stressed that neither Ward nor Banks were members of Peoples Temple. Like other celebrities, Banks was at most an unwitting cat’s paw.

The missive mentioned “Grace” several times. This would be Grace Stoen. She was a defector whom Conn had contacted. During the meeting Dave had mentioned her name. (Later her husband, attorney Timothy Stoen, would defect.)

On March 24, 1977, Grace Stoen also received an ominous note. It is quoted here in full:

Dear Cousin,

I think I should inform you that your latest course of action is the unwiseest of all. I know everything that D. Conn boasts of ahaving [sic]. Don’t you know what kind of fool he is making out of you? The public will never forgive people who are like unthinking robots when they are in fact devious liars. Imagine not giving you credit for holding any political beliefs. You should know that one hundred willbe [sic] staying back. This man can do nothing without your assistance and litigation will begin. I am not talking about just the potential of litigation. I am talkingabout [sic] a decision to litigate all the way for sure. So notify all your friends. You know the legal dangers of lying to the Treasury officials and the police don’t you?

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These notes were handed over to the Treasury Department and Hubert was informed of Conn’s disastrous rendezvous with Banks.

Now Elmer Mertle and Grace Stoen were unaware of David Conn’s encounter with Dennis Banks until they received the threatening letters. When Elmer got them, he called Dave, for they mentioned Conn by name. Dave

abashedly admitted his abortive meeting with Banks. The defectors were stunned at his lack of judgment. They felt let down by their staunchest supporter. Dave regretted his rashness, but it was too late. The word was out and they were all in jeopardy. Jim Jones now knew of David Conn and his collaboration with former Temple members and Treasury officials. Jones would stop at nothing to stop Dave.

Panic set in. Dave went into hiding. The defectors expected the worst. Fortunately, Jones never learned the identity of the author of this account. While only on the periphery of the problem, I too was sweating it out, for Dave had mentioned his "attorney" during the fateful meeting. We knew Jones had "hit men." We knew his mania was unreasoning. But we stuck together in spirit and will, interconnected by mutual fear and a common desire to destroy the Jones empire.

Naturally we began to wonder who told Jones about Conn and his meeting with Banks. We soon narrowed the leak down to Banks. A few months later Banks would confirm these suspicions.

But Banks' version of the meeting is at odds with Conn's account. We will digress a moment and skip ahead to a news conference on September 8, 1977, in San Francisco, where the principal attractions were Charles Garry, attorney for the Black Panthers, and Dennis Banks, Indian leader. The Examiner and Chronicle were there and Banks handed them a sworn statement, dated September 6, 1977. This Declaration stated that David Conn was threatening Banks with extradition to South Dakota if he did not publicly denounce Jim Jones. Following is Banks' full account of that midnight meeting in March, quoted verbatim from his Declaration:

DECLARATION OF DENNIS BANKS

I, Dennis Banks, also known as _____, declare that I am a citizen of the United States, and that I am 44 years old.

Several months ago, in Feb. or March, 1977, my friend Leighman Brightman was contacted on the phone by a man named George Coker. He wanted Lee to set up a meeting between myself and a man named David Conn, concerning the question of my extradition to South Dakota. Naturally I was concerned about this when I was notified of the call. In the next couple of days there were other calls. Lee called David Conn and asked him for some more information about my extradition. Conn told Lee that he wanted to talk to me about Peoples Temple and Jim Jones.

Lee asked Conn what Jim Jones had to do with my extradition. Conn wouldn't tell him. He said it was strictly confidential and that he would only talk about it with him and me personally.

So Lee set up a meeting between me and David Conn at Lee's house in El Cerrito for that night.

At the meeting, Conn showed up with a folder of papers. (He read notes from the papers.) I noticed the paper was stationery from the Standard Oil Company of California. Conn said that he was working with the U.S. Treasury Department, with an IRS agent, and with two men from the San Francisco Police Department. He told me the first name of the Treasury agent (Jim) he was working with. But Conn did not talk about my extradition problem. He read material that was disparaging to Jim Jones. He went on for some time. Finally I interrupted Conn. I asked him what all this stuff about Jim Jones had to do with my extradition. Conn asked me, "Well, you took money from the church, didn't you?" He said that my association with Peoples Temple could reflect very badly on my extradition. He then asked me to make a public denunciation of Jim Jones. He assured me that if I made such a denunciation, the rulings on my extradition would go in my favor. I asked him why a statement against Jim Jones could help my extradition.

Conn said that such a statement would be a determining factor with people like the Governor and other government agencies making decisions about my extradition. He said that if I came out with a statement against Jim Jones that a decision against my extradition could well be forthcoming.

Conn was obviously making a deal with me, and I was being blackmailed. Conn let me know that besides working with the Treasury agents and other government agents, that he was already working with ex-members of Peoples Temple, such as Grace Stoen, and that he had other people who would talk against Jim Jones. He said that the Treasury agents had already talked with Grace Stoen.

Conn pressed hard for me to meet with a U.S. Treasury Department agent alone that very night.

Conn also said—and he was very emphatic about this—THAT HE IN NO WAY WANTED THIS INFORMATION REVEALED FOR FEAR THAT IT WOULD “BLOW THEIR COVER” AND RUIN ANY POSSIBLE MEETING BETWEEN ME AND THE TREASURY AGENT.

I was further pressured to meet with the agent from the Treasury Department. The deal was to meet with the agent and to prepare a public statement against Jim Jones in return for some kind of immunity against my being extradited. I refused to talk with any Treasury agent without my attorney, Dennis Roberts. Conn insisted that I had to do it alone.

At this point, Leighman Brightman asked Conn to leave the house.

The next night I was called at D.Q. University by Conn. Conn told me that it was very urgent that I meet with the Treasury agent that very night, alone. I said to Conn that I had already told him I wouldn't meet with the Treasury agent without my attorney.

These agents all knew that I had a lot hanging over me. Besides the extradition (which to me is certainly a life and death matter), I also had a case in Federal Court in which the Treasury Department was involved. I have often made it clear that if I am extradited to South Dakota, that is like a sentence of death, because I am certain that I will be killed there.

So this was definitely a deal that I was being offered. Because it was not just a matter of Conn indicating that it would go well with me if I co-operated, but the implication was that if I didn't co-operate, it would go badly for me. This was to me a threat, and obviously blackmail.

I declare, under penalty of perjury, that all of the foregoing is true and correct, executed this 6 day of September, 1977 at Davis, California.

(Signed) Dennis J. Banks
Dennis Banks

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Out of genuine gratitude Banks could not denounce Jim Jones and Peoples Temple. They had bailed his wife out of a Kansas jail. They had provided food for poor Indians. How could anyone so good be as bad as Conn claimed? Once again, Jones's care, concern, and contributions served as an effective shield covering his crimes, excesses, and inhumanities. Jones's motivation for his good works was power. David understood this; very few others did.

Conn, incidentally, denied the blackmail charges. He admits he mentioned Treasury agents to Banks, but only in regard to their investigation of Jones. He emphatically denies any threats of extradition.

Given the excitement of the meeting and the lateness of the hour, it is easy to understand how confusion, misunderstanding, and distrust arose.

Conn's avowed purpose was to convince Banks that his association with Jones, however brief, might taint the American Indian Movement. Conn was unconvincing, however. This was apparent at the news conference when Banks admitted he told Jones about his meeting with Conn. Banks' failure to believe Conn was typical. When truth is stranger than fiction, it is perceived as fiction.

But to return to the chronology. All in all the meeting had been a mistake, a bungling, leading to a madcap mix-up with tragicomic operative effects. During the meeting, as indicated, Conn boasted of trumpeting this terrible tale to T-men, his attorney, and a journalist (circumspectly omitting their names, however). This vaunting fomented fear in Jones. Now he realized, or thought he did, that a federal agency, an attorney, and a major newspaper were on his trail. For the first time there seemed to be forces working against Jones over which he had no control. It was very disquieting.

What bothered Jones most, however, was the mysterious David Conn, a mere private citizen. What right did he have to investigate? Jones was baffled. Conn seemed to know more about him and his operations than anyone, including the Government and news media. Worse yet, Conn was uninhibited and would blab to anyone who would listen. Where was he coming from? Jones just could not fathom. The preacher could not conceive of any man who would simply do what was right—oppose evil and expose it. To be sure, there had been other meddlers, but Jones had been able to fend them off. Conn was different though. He did not fear the Temple of fear. Jones believed Dave was orchestrating an attack by police, press and pulpit. Paralyzed by paranoia, Jones could no more cope with Conn than he could joust or tilt with a charging knight.

Conn's chemistry worked wonders. Within 36 hours of the kismatic conversation with the Indians, Jones was so disturbed by the apocalyptic agitator, Conn, that he collapsed while chairing a meeting of the San Francisco Housing Authority on March 24, 1977. (Jones had been appointed by Mayor Moscone.) A Temple aide had told the Mertles that when Jones heard of the Banks meeting, he

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was certain his operations were about to be revealed. Jones was anxious and plotted his strategy all night. His anxiety, lack of sleep, and imperfect health contributed, we heard, to his collapse. Jones explained it away by saying he had been up all night “drug counseling.” “Drug dealing” would have been more plausible.

Jones had to silence Dave and the defectors. To do so he resorted to a campaign of terror. Hence, threatening letters, phone calls, and prowlers. Dave’s ex-wife and step-daughter were harassed. All to no avail. Jones’s fate was sealed at the parley with Banks.

Jim Jones needed more information about David Conn. It did not take him long to learn where David’s ex-wife, Donna, lived in Oakland. Jones immediately sent Temple members to spy on her. They observed that though Dave and Donna were divorced their friendship was not dissolved, for David still visited her occasionally.

Author Mark Lane in his book, The Strongest Poison, reports that on one of these occasions, unbeknownst to us, two Temple underlings crawled under Donna’s house to listen to the conversation. By prearrangement a third Temple member made a threatening phone call to Donna in order to incite discussion within the household about Peoples Temple. The ruse worked; for it touched off a round of talk about Peoples Temple and the Treasury agent with whom David was in touch. The two spies heard Donna demand that David not park his car in front of her house anymore. She was terrified that Temple thugs might be watching the house. They also overheard her say, as Lane relates, that she could get help in “five minutes flat” if necessary. Since this was all true, we are sure that Jones’s agents were under that house listening. There is no other likely explanation for their knowledge of the colloquy within the house. Besides, a high-ranking official of Peoples Temple admitted to Mark Lane that Jones had Donna’s house under surveillance and that Temple aides were under the house eavesdropping.

It is recorded in Lane’s book that as the two continued to eavesdrop they suddenly “froze” when they heard the voice of Jones’s close friend, Michael Prokes, emanating from above. Prokes, a former television reporter and current PR man for Peoples Temple, was a trusted aide and acquainted with many of Jones’s secrets. The two were sure they recognized his voice, but wondered why he was there.

At first the two Temple thugs thought Prokes was on special assignment to gather information for Jones. They were disabused of this notion, according to Lane’s sources, soon after they reported back.

Jones was dumbfounded at their report, for he had not sent Prokes on any mission to the Conn house. They assured him, however, that it was Michael Prokes.

Appearances can be deceiving, though, for the voice they heard was not Prokes, but mine. For I was with Dave visiting Donna on that occasion. We did, as Lane claims, discuss the Temple threats, but Prokes was not present. As in a Shakespearean comedy, there was a farcical mix-up and I was mistaken for Prokes.

At this juncture Jones and his cohorts suspected Prokes of playing the traitor and furnishing information to David Conn and the Treasury Department. The mix-up magnified Jones's paranoia. He decided not to tell Prokes of his suspicions. He was convinced that his trusted aide was part of the Conn conspiracy. It was a comedy of errors like this which led to the final tragedy. A mix-up like this makes me, a Christian, wonder if it wasn't the hand of God intervening and thwarting the plans and machinations of Jim Jones, an evil doer and false prophet.

Between Conn, Prokes, the Government, and news media (as Jones imagined it), the pressure mounted in Jones's mind and he was sure he would have to retreat to Guyana for a last stand. He felt the lid was about to blow, either through unwanted publicity, arrests, or both.

Mark Lane elaborates on the spy incident in The Strongest Poison at pages 234 to 237. In a chapter entitled "Was Prokes an Agent?" Lane implies that Prokes was a co-conspirator collaborating with Conn and the Treasury Department in their war on Peoples Temple. Lane's conclusion is based primarily upon the "evidence" that Prokes was in Donna's house. Had attorney Lane taken the trouble to ask David Conn or Donna, he would have learned that Prokes has never been in the Conn household. Neither Dave, Donna, nor I have ever met Michael Prokes.

Prokes, incidentally, committed suicide several weeks after the Guyana tragedy. He did so just after giving a press conference in Modesto, California. He praised Jim Jones to the bitter end and insisted that his leader was victim of a "conspiracy" to destroy Peoples Temple. Temple insiders told Lane that Prokes died without realizing Jones believed him to be a Judas. While the Jones gang called David Conn's efforts to expose the Christian gangster a conspiracy, we considered it an alliance to bring Jones to justice.

As I continue with the story, you should bear in mind that, when Jones heard from Banks about Conn's "journalist," Jones assumed it meant a big-time reporter. Actually Conn was referring to his future son-in-law, George Klineman, a part-time correspondent for a small-town newspaper, the Santa Rosa Press Democrat. Dave had been filling Klineman in on the Jones story for the last few months.

Now, just by coincidence, about the time of the Banks meeting, a reporter for the San Francisco Chronicle had taken an interest in the Reverend Jim Jones. Journalist Marshall Kilduff had observed Jones at a Housing Authority meeting and was fascinated by his train of attendants and hired clique. He decided to do a story, a political rundown, on the preacher and his pressure group. Jones, however, had his admirers within the liberal press, and the story was never run. Besides, it

was bad business to invite a lawsuit. Why antagonize a possibly litigious preacher? Disappointed, Kilduff turned to New West Magazine and teamed up with its ace reporter, Phil Tracy. They wrote the article which appeared in the August 1, 1977 issue. This story was the original expose of Jones and his criminal organization. Conn was behind it.

Jones's discovery in April, 1977, that Kilduff was snooping, confirmed his suspicions about a journalist. Jones did not realize, though, that Kilduff's initial information was relatively innocuous. At worst, the story would have been but a thorn to Jones. But Jones assumed Kilduff had explosive data with which to blast him. Thus, he leaped to the conclusion that Kilduff was the "journalist" working with Conn. No wonder Jones wanted to kill the Kilduff story.

New West began to be pressured and plagued. Temple members wrote letters, disguised as the spontaneous effusion of a grateful citizenry, advising New West of Jones's egalitarian liberalism and Christian works. Politicians from the liberal establishment tried to suppress the story. According to New West, it was "receiving as many as 50 phone calls and letters a day" from Temple members, supporters, and celebrities. They all spoke the party line: Jones was a saint spreading good like butter. Why harm the cause by printing lies and half-truths?

The harassment of New West was duly reported by the San Francisco Examiner in an article by Bill Barnes in June, 1977. David and I read it eagerly. This was the first we knew of Kilduff and New West, though Jones thought otherwise.

It took little encouragement from me for Dave to contact New West. His first contact, however, was anonymous, under the code name, "Grey Eagle," but he soon dropped his disguise.

Thus, in June, 1977, Jones telephoned the Disciples' State Office in Oakland and spoke to President Karl Irvin. According to Irvin, Jones told him that "David Conn and others" were "responsible for a soon-to-be published article in New West." Jones explained the article would be "quite negative" regarding Peoples Temple and would cause embarrassment to the Disciples of Christ. Jones assured Irvin the allegations were untrue. (Of course, Irvin had no way of knowing. He was not involved in Peoples Temple.) After confirming that Irvin knew Conn, Jones urged the President to contact New West with "positive information" about the Temple. Irvin contacted neither Conn nor New West.

In spite of all resistance, the New West article went to press. It paved the way for a series of devastating stories about Peoples Temple in the San Francisco Chronicle and Examiner by reporters like Tim Reiterman and Nancy Dooley. Once again, David Conn was on hand furnishing them with information and insight.

In reality, Jim Jones blew the whistle on himself. He did this by his false assumption that Conn was feeding information to the press and by his overreaction to the imminent, but theretofore innocuous, political profile planned by Marshall Kilduff.

Jones was convinced there was a governmental conspiracy to destroy him and that the mysterious David Conn was at its root, if not its head. The New West article and subsequent newspaper stories only served to confirm his convictions and increase his paranoia.

Jones screamed for help. He spared no cost, and hired attorney Charles Garry to defend him from the "libelous" magazine and newspaper allegations.

Garry called a press conference on September 8, 1977, and lashed out at Jones's critics. The pugnacious Frisco attorney averred that the attacks on Jones and Peoples Temple were part of a seven-year old conspiracy "to destroy and eliminate the Temple as a force in the community." Dennis Banks was present with his Declaration condemning David Conn. When reporters repined that the affidavit had little relevance to specific charges against Jones, Garry responded:

It goes to the very heart of why they are out to get the Peoples Temple. We've come to the conclusion there is a conspiracy on the part of certain individuals allegedly working with the Treasury Department, IRS, and other government agencies to destroy Temple work in this community.

Garry added that a Treasury informer had attempted to bribe witnesses to denounce Jones.

The press conference was duly reported in the San Francisco newspapers. Dave's reaction: "Even lawyers can be fooled."

Jim Jones himself publicly attacked David Conn in his own newspaper, the Peoples Forum. (Its masthead states: "Published by Peoples Temple (Disciples of Christ) a California Corp."). It was a monthly publication. Jones claimed a circulation of 300,000 in Northern California and Los Angeles. 50,000 would be more realistic. The October, 1977 issue contains a page 1 banner story about David Conn, the arch enemy of Peoples Temple. The article alleged that David was conspiring with the Government to destroy the Temple and Jones. It stated flatly that Conn used blackmail, bribery, false testimony and media-manipulation in his efforts to uproot the Church and its progressive movement. But, to quote from Jones's newspaper:

By far, the most startling evidence of massive conspiracy that has been publicly revealed is the attempt of an agency informer to get AIM leader Dennis Banks to denounce Rev. Jones and the Temple.

The article goes on:

The man, (David Conn) [sic] who tried to barter Dennis Banks' life and safety for false testimony, has been actively involved in a scheme to destroy the Temple for several years. It turns out that Conn is a long-time, close friend of two persons who have been the most prominent in leveling charges against the Temple, Elmer and Deanna Mertle (alias Al and Jeannie Mills). Conn and Mertle worked together at Standard Oil before Mertle joined the Temple in 1969 with his present wife, who had been associated with ultra-right wing causes before she happened to become interested in a church that was heavily committed to civil rights and peace activism. Interestingly, the Mertles joined the Temple about the same time that Conn's interest in the church began.

Thus, in the Temple newspaper, David Conn was singled out by Jim Jones as the longtime enemy of the church, an unscrupulous man who would stoop to any level to destroy the church. No one else is so "honored" in the long career of Jim Jones.

Peoples Forum has more to say about David Conn, however:

So the appearance of David Conn at a press conference held by New West reporter Phil Tracy shortly after their article came out that featured testimony by ex-members against the Temple, was no accident. Collaborating with the Mertles, along with others who have been identified by Temple investigations, but whose names have not yet been disclosed, Conn and company have contacted persons who were once members of Peoples Temple, in order to coerce them (as Conn did with Dennis Banks) [sic] to anti-Temple activity, and to try to create trouble for the church.

Thus, Jones clearly linked Conn to the original exposé in New West Magazine.

Jones also felt Conn was behind the subsequent stories appearing in the San Francisco newspapers, as the following quote from the Temple tabloid indicates:

The activities and connections of David Conn can help us to begin to understand what is lying behind all the excessive publicity and wild charges that have been shed in recent weeks. The smokescreen of publicity does lead to a smoking gun—in fact, several of them. They are held in the hands of a conspiracy to destroy Peoples Temple and Jim Jones, as the Banks incident clearly shows.

The same issue of Peoples Forum, in a separate article, quoted the Dennis Banks Declaration in full.

David Conn was also assailed in the January, 1978 issue of Peoples Forum. The article was largely a litany of old charges against Dave. With respect to Dave's alleged extradition offer to Dennis Banks, the column concludes:

Dennis refused the deal and immediately informed Jim Jones that Conn and the Treasury Department had contacted him.

Moreover, there is good reason to believe that Jones attacked Conn from the pulpit.

It is clear, then, that Jones feared Conn, perhaps more than he feared anyone in his life. How else explain the denigrating assaults on Conn for 4,000 Temple parishioners to read?

The fear was mutual. Although he could not prove it, Dave knew Jim Jones had killed before, and he certainly would not stop with David Conn. Dave alerted local police to his predicament. When he read the vitriolic articles in Peoples Forum, he knew he was on Jones's "hit list." While he knew little of weapons, he slept with a borrowed shotgun under his bed. At night he thought he heard strange noises. When he could sleep, he had nightmares. What would prevent his being waylaid at work? Dave could not afford guards. Any psychopath who read Peoples Forum had an excuse to kill him.

Dave felt, if he must die, he would go down fighting. So he kept the offensive and continued to warn others of the madman messiah who came, not to save, but to take.

In the meantime, around Independence Day, 1977, in anticipation of the New West Article, Jones decided to save himself. He fled to Guyana with a few followers. More would follow his fatal footsteps. His plantation became his stronghold against a hostile world. What Charles Garry described as paradise was, in reality, slave quarters for a thousand Temple serfs.

Going to Guyana only spread the problem. We heard reports that Jones, true to form, had corrupted a few Guyanese officials. David was especially concerned about the welfare and safety of persons stranded at the jungle outpost. He wrote

two letters. The first one, in January 1978, to Forbes Burnham, Prime Minister of Guyana, read as follows:

611 Kains Street
Albany, Calif. 94706

The Honorable Forbes Burnham
Prime Minister of Guyana

Dear Mr. Prime Minister:

I wish to express my grave concern for the well-being of the many innocent and helpless members of the "Reverend" Jim Jones' Peoples Temple who are existing in fear and confusion while Jones pathetically attempts to make it appear otherwise.

There is no doubt that he had intended to move up to some influential position in your country, in the same way he almost did in the state of California. I would hope, however, that you would look carefully into his background, and that you would see him in his true light, ambitious and ruthless, a truly destructive societal flaw—but clever, very clever.

He can only do your country harm.
Most sincerely,

(signed) David Conn
David Conn

In February, 1978, the second letter was sent to Cyrus Vance, U.S. Secretary of State:

The Honorable Cyrus Vance
Secretary of State

Dear Sir:

I wish to express my grave concerns regarding the reprehensible activities of the "Reverend" Jim Jones and his Peoples Temple, both in Guyana, South America, and in the State of California. Although there has been much publicity about his underhanded and ruthless procedures, few people yet know how insidious and how dangerous he

is. There is no doubt that he is the hub of one of the most invidious religious scandals in our nation's history.

There are many adults and children still under his sway, victims, innocent, brainwashed, malnourished, and helpless. I urge you to consider all reasonable actions toward rescuing these persons.

Very truly yours,
(signed) David Conn
David Conn

As before, his warnings were ignored.

In November, 1978, we heard from private sources that California Congressman Leo Ryan was going to Jonestown to ascertain if persons were being held against their will. I remember David saying, in the presence of two friends (Ben Zuppan and Sherman Butler) at Fenton's Creamery in Oakland: "Ryan will never make it. If he goes to Jonestown, he will never leave alive."

He meant it. Because near the 16th of November, he phoned the Examiner and reported Ryan's peril. Conn spoke to reporter Nancy Dooley for whom he had been a source. He told her, "I'm sure that Jones has some plan of action. I've studied his mind for eight years. Is there any way we can get through to Ryan?" Dooley assured Dave that reporter Tim Reiterman, who was going to South America with the Congressman's party, would tell Ryan everything. In spite of Dave's efforts, both were shot in Guyana, Ryan fatally.

November 18, 1978, was my mother's birthday, my sister's birthday, and my mother and father's wedding anniversary. It was a happy day, a red-letter day. But this year it became a black-letter day, a nightmare of Massacre, Mass Murder and Mass suicide at Jonestown.

Bill Brooks, a co-worker at Chevron, will never forget Dave's prophetic words spoken several days earlier: "Hundreds are going to die in Guyana when Ryan goes to Jonestown."

I was at Dave's hideout in the East Bay that ghastly day, waiting for him to return from work. I decided to write a letter to a mutual friend, Elizabeth Nelson. (Lizz was a Master's candidate at the University of Wisconsin. Her thesis is the rhetoric of Jim Jones.) Before I finished the letter, Dave returned. We talked some about Ryan's trip. We knew he was in Guyana and our interest was stirred. Dave was filled with foreboding. I, as was often the case with his premonitions, was skeptical. I returned to the letter.

The phone rang. Dave's daughter, Eileen, was frantic and said Congressman Leo Ryan and 18 others had been shot in Jonestown. We snapped on the radio. I

could not believe what I heard. Though shocked, I continued to write. Lizz saved that letter. I quote it here because it expresses emotions I could never recapture.

11-18-78 P.M

(address torn off)

Dear Lizz,

I was over at Dave's waiting for him to come home from work (I have a key to his place) when I spied your little essay on "Metaphor: Figure? Or Principle of Language?", so I read it. Let me say I thought it was A-1 and I enjoyed it very much, especially your reference to using words to advocate a cause as in a "case in a court of law" (if memory serves me correctly, as it always does (when I remember)). I felt you probably thought of me when you added that phrase to your paper (p. 12, lines 20 & 21, if once again, my unfailing memory has not failed me).

Incidentally, I agree with Aristotle. Richards strikes me as a smart-ass, pedantic American trying to capitalize on Aristotle's reputation.

Oh God, Liz, I'm with Dave right now & we got the word that Congressman Ryan, 2 Chronicle reporters & 18 others were killed in an ambush at Jonestown, Guyana. Eileen called & said so & then we got the news on the radio tho reports incomplete. I can't hardly write. Things are so hectic. Now Dave is calling you. Now the emergency call. It's Eileen again. Everything's O.K. I'm so scared I tore my address off this letter.

Liz, I'll write a less disconnected letter sometime when I'm better collected.

Honest, Dave is fine, but what a monstrous thing. This must be the strangest letter you ever received. I can't even joke anymore.

Your friend,

[signed] Larry

I was in for more shocks that evening. Though I had heard of mass suicide drills in Peoples Temple, I dismissed them as stuff and nonsense. That evening I did not dismiss them. Dave assured me they were for real. He was now positive a mass suicide would take place, saying, "Hundreds will die in Jonestown by their own hand." Although I thought he was crazy, such a thing was so unthinkable, I

became alarmed. After all, Dave had accurately predicted other things—including Ryan's death.

It was as if Conn was inside Jones's head, reading his every thought. This was why Jones feared him so—this man who had spent eight years studying Jones, tracking him. Jones knew that here was one man who understood him and did not fear him—one man who had the knowledge and courage to destroy him. This explained Jones's paranoid flight into the bush. I remembered Garry saying he advised Jones to remain in Guyana until his legal problems were unraveled. But what did Garry know? He had been fooled like so many others. And that poor old man was in the bush with Jones. He would be lucky to survive. And he did.

More news came over the radio. Now the authorities were trying to cope with it all. Rumors flew of what they planned to do. The poor, incompetent authorities, they never knew how to cope with a wild man like Jones. And here I was, that fateful historic evening, my mother's birthday, my sister's birthday, my mother and father's wedding anniversary, sitting with the No. 1 authority on Jim Jones.

But no one was listening to David Conn except me. Some defectors had not listened originally. The Disciples did not believe him. Many friends were unconvinced. Even Dave's son-in-law had been skeptical of his wild story at first. Lawyers said he needed evidence. And I had not listened—at least not closely enough.

Now Dave was telling me that if police or soldiers were sent into Jonestown to apprehend the killers of Ryan and his cortege, mass suicide would be the likely result. Now I believed, but it was too late. The mass suicide-murder was already taking place, although the world was not to know it until the next day, November 19, when the bodies were discovered and reports of the incomprehensible happening were first broadcast to the world.

But that evening, not knowing it was too late, I perceived something must be done to prevent the mass suicide. But what? I knew the authorities—FBI, State Department, Guyanese Government, or whatever—would not believe. Certainly they would not believe David Conn or me. They would dismiss us as drunk or crazy.

Knowing this, I conceived a plan. I wanted Dave to contact his newspaper confidante, Nancy Dooley, and warn her of the impending mass suicide. With her background of investigation and information about Jim Jones, there was a chance she could believe the incredible. The idea was for her to take the warning to her editor or publisher. Such men would be high enough up in the American bureaucratic and social order, that they could, somehow, possibly pass the warning on directly to the State Department. In that wise, the tocsin would be rung, and the

Government would act, hopefully, to prevent the mass suicide. Dave agreed. It seemed the only way.

And so it was that on the night of November 18, 1978, at 10:21 P.M., David Conn phoned Examiner reporter Nancy Dooley. He made a sincere effort to persuade the Examiner to notify the authorities of the danger of a mass suicide. Dave admonished that, unless the authorities took appropriate action, "hundreds will die in Jonestown by their own hand at Jones's command." Nancy Dooley responded that, from what she knew, there would be no military intervention in Jonestown. Only one Air Force plane with medics was going down there. She felt all was being done that could be done. Whether she took Dave's warning seriously and acted on it is immaterial, for it was already too late.

And so David Conn failed. He wanted to expose Jim Jones since 1970. He tried over the years to see Jones brought to justice. He sensed a profound evil had been launched upon the world and he wanted to stop it. This is not a success story, however. He tried and failed. Who, though, can blame him, unless himself?

Are there any other witnesses to this bizarre tale? At least one judge who shall remain anonymous. Also fellow County attorney, Benjamin H. Zuppan, who has been in on this story since 1975. He can confirm many of its particulars.

Zuppan vividly recalls my phoning him from David's hideout at 8:43 P.M. on November 18. Ben had already heard the news about the shooting of Ryan's party. When I warned, "there will be a mass suicide, hundreds will die," he was dubious. Ben was always a skeptic. Later, though, he admitted that all I had ever told him about Jones was all too true.

And so, on November 18, 1978, at Jonestown, Guyana, ended the greatest religious scandal in American history. Though Jones claimed to be God, he died a mortal death. His infamy was assured when the shepherd slaughtered his flock.

Jones, of course, did not worship God. He worshipped himself, and was worshipped by others. Out of this dual danger, dictators are born.

During one Sunday service, Jones threw the Bible on the floor and stomped on it. He screamed the Bible was worthless junk and other vile words. No one stomped out of the church service. Instead, many followed him to their death.

In one of his other sermons in the early 1970s Jones fulminated:

The God of the King James Bible doesn't exist Lying bastard, strike me dead if you exist See! He didn't I'll say it again. Lying bastard, strike me dead if you exist

As in an old fable, Jones did not say when or where. Who knows? Perhaps it was God who struck Jones dead that fatal 18th of November in the jungle.

And what has become of Dave? He has a book coming out on Peoples Temple, co-authored with Sherman Butler and George Klineman. They actually started the book eight months before the holocaust in Guyana. Dave was concerned that, in spite of the New West article and subsequent newspaper publicity in 1977, Jim Jones was still thriving in Guyana. The book was David's last weapon in his arsenal of ideas to slay the dragon. It is the definitive exposé of the "Marxist Messiah." The book was published by G.P. Putnam's Sons under the title The Cult That Died. I am hopeful the book will serve as a deterrent to religious quackery and prevent another horror like Jonestown. But, unless we look into ourselves, I doubt it.

Subsequent to this chronology (now 2018) David Conn co-authored The Cult That Died (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1980) and is the author of Lednorf's Dilemma (Authorhouse, 2008), The Specific Density of Scientists (Authorhouse, 2012), and The Pleasure of Fiends: An Orthodox Study of Evil And the Meaning in the Jonestown Cultic Horror (David Conn, 2013).

4/7/2019 → "E" or "E2"
each the same except for spacing
"D" was the first copy.
"E" (+ "E2") is the second copy.
"E" (+ "E2") is the same as "D"
except for one paragraph
added to "E" (and E2) at the
top of p. 4 of E2 in 2018.

2/2/2019 → Candelmas

"The Downfall of Jim Jones" may be googled
and is located at the San Diego State University
website. — Z.Z.L.

E2