Reflections on the Human Freedom Center

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The Human Freedom Center in Berkeley, California and its founders, Al and Jeannie Mills, have become a footnote to the Jonestown story for most people. In the months leading up to the tragedy, they were little known to anyone other than to the defectors from Peoples Temple who took refuge with them and to the followers of Jim Jones whom they rankled. In the days following the suicides — and then again over a year later, when the Center itself died — it provided interesting copy for reporters looking for insights into the Jonestown legacy. Inside its walls, though, the Center provided counseling for the bewildered and grief-stricken, and affirmation for those who offered those services, including myself.

My own belief is that the organizational and personal dynamics of the Human Freedom Center revealed something about the psychology of Peoples Temple defectors. Much of the negative publicity which drove Jim Jones and his followers from California to the jungles of Guyana came from Jeannie Mills and her followers. Eventually pressure from these same defectors, as well as from some of the relatives of those in Guyana led to the involvement of Rep. Leo Ryan (D-Calif.) and his ill-fated fact-finding mission.

I think it is important to realize that self-interest, vengeance, hysteria, and the desire for personal vindication fueled the activities of some of the Concerned Relatives just as powerfully as sincere concern propelled the efforts of others. I also think it is significant that the Peoples Temple-style of interpersonal relationships did not perish with the Temple.

I have never known anyone like Al and Jeannie Mills. Although

I decided to break with them after an association of a few months, I found them more fascinating than annoying. They were caring, parental, generous, warm and amusing. They were also manipulative, controlling, insecure and, occasionally, infantile. Indeed, they combined the best and the worst of Peoples Temple. Even after their own defections, they lived as they had during their six years inside: adopting the familiar model as their own, completely unrepentant about their former role in the Temple leadership, still in search of a true utopia. They talked about "deprogramming" others, and never bothered to deprogram themselves.

Beginnings

My association with Peoples Temple began a few months before the suicides, in July 1978. At the time, I was executive director of the Mental Health Association of San Mateo County, California, about 20 miles south of San Francisco. My book, *The Cults Are Coming!*, which had been published a few months earlier, was prompted by my longtime fascination with contemporary religious movements, by a personal experience with the Unification Church, and through the persistence of my wife who kept predicting the future importance of cults. The book spawned a number of phone calls from anguished parents whose offspring had found their way into some of the groups mentioned in its pages — the Moonies, the Children of God, and the Hare Krishnas — as well as some nastier sects then not familiar to me. Since I was more of a sympathetic observer of the cult phenomenon and of parental reactions than an active interventionist, I did little but listen, provide general advice, and recommend other books to read.

Claire Bouquet, a local school teacher, made one of those phone calls. She told me that her son Brian was in a place called Jonestown in Guyana, South America. Jonestown, she said, was the enclave of Peoples Temple, a Northern California sect led by a healer-evangelist named Jim Jones. I remembered both Jones' name and his questionable reputation. As I worked on my book manuscript, Peoples Temple defectors had spread tales of beatings, threats, theft of property, sexual improprieties, and worse. The regularly scheduled broadcasts of Jones' sermons and healing services had been mysteriously suspended, although display ads still ran in both San Francisco daily newspapers. I had planned to include a section on Peoples Temple in *The Cults Are*

Coming!, but my editor had asked me to delete it, because his publication committee believed that the Temple and Jones were purely California phenomena of little interest to anyone outside the state. Besides, my telephone calls to the Temple were never returned.

Still, my many years of participative observation of extremist sects and the scare headlines that Jones had engendered prepared me little for Claire Bouquet. She was animated, articulate, and overpowering. She wove together a tapestry of doom and gloom from defectors' accusations, a mother's intuition, inferential surmises, the speculations of yellow journalism, and awful, terrifying forebodings. She detailed her frustrating conversations with government officials, a radio-telephone conversation with Brian through which she "knew" he was trying to alert her to the true conditions of the utopian experiment in the jungle, her appeals to the media — including the tabloids — and even her efforts to recruit a Rhodesian mercenary to undertake an armed rescue of her son. It was that last detail which put me off. I was convinced that Claire was a crackpot much like the Kennedy assassination theorists I had once interviewed or the woman who believed the American Medical Association and the American Cancer Society were persecuting her husband, because his cure for cancer threatened the livelihoods of rich doctors everywhere. And so poor Claire Bouquet and the whole Jonestown mess was filed away in the recesses of my mind for possible — but not probable — review on some dull day in the future.

And then Joan Culpepper called. To me, Joan was even more bizarre than Claire. A fast-talking, name-dropping resident of Los Angeles — a city everyone in Northern California knows to distrust — Joan told me of her background in advertising and show business, as well as her following of "Bo and Peep" in an obscure UFO cult. Her latest association was with a fledgling anti-cult organization called the Human Freedom Center, with its Southern California branch in Encino and a larger office in Berkeley. The group had two purposes: to create public awareness of, and remedies for, "mental kidnapping" and other cult nastiness; and to provide shelter for refugees from Jonestown. She added that the Human Freedom Center expected Jonestown to collapse at almost any time as the result of the machinations of the Concerned Relatives, an HFC affiliate.

I found much of Joan's rhetoric distasteful, and I told her so. I wanted then — and I want today — no laws against "mental kidnapping" or "mentacide" or any other socially unacceptable state of mind.

Despite my objections to the models by which she expressed herself, there was something innately warm and human about Joan that enabled us to interact and continue our telephone conversation.

Joan said she was coming to Berkeley that weekend for a meeting of the Human Freedom Center Board of Directors. She invited me to attend, and to consider becoming an adviser or consultant. She flattered me a bit, claiming that both my knowledge of cults and my experience as the director of a nonprofit charitable organization could be valuable to the Human Freedom Center. Perhaps, she added, I could share my organizational, fundraising and public relations expertise with the amateurs who were running the Human Freedom Center.

I accepted her invitation, and a few days later, my wife and I drove from our Foster City home across the Bay Bridge to the large old house on Regent Street next to Alta Bates Hospital.

My initial impressions were mixed and confused. The building was a sparsely furnished, dilapidated nursing home with ratty, abused sofas and arm chairs, fading and peeling paint, and little evidence of upkeep. Strangely, though, the house was furnished with a sizeable and impressive assortment of antiques and collectibles: a large oak dining room table with a carved sideboard, marble-topped dressers and chests, and ornate stands for umbrellas and boots.

My wife and I were equally amazed and disoriented by the people we met inside the house: Joan was a gaunt woman, almost completely disabled by lung disease, who continued to smoke the cigarettes that had caused her ailments; a single mother and her child, both on welfare, lived there, but her dental student brother who had left Peoples Temple shortly before the mass exodus to Guyana, did not; and the facility "director," who served more as a house-mother for the place, was a blonde, blue-eyed college dropout who had decided to make the cause of the brother and sister her own.

Joan called the meeting to order around the oak table in the dining room. Our hosts — and the centers of attention — were Al and Jeannie Mills, former Temple leaders who were now directing the forces against Jones. Jeannie, an attractive brunette in her late thirties, seemed a warm, motherly person, although I found her enthusiasm a little over-projected. Her husband, about 15 years her senior, was a gentle, likeable man who constantly referred to Jones as "the master manipulator." He related vicious outrageous and sickening humiliations which Jones had visited upon his followers, particularly upon the Mills' compatriots on the 30-member Planning Commission, also known as the

PC. Almost as horrifying as his story of a male PC member who had been ordered to have oral sex with a black female PC member during her menstruation, was the glee in Al's voice as he told it.

While we discussed the bestiality of the defectors' former God and of the need for educating the public about the dangers of "destructive cultism," two severely disturbed mental patients — whose presence no one offered to explain — wandered aimlessly around the building, talking quietly to themselves. I wondered if they were among the "cult victims" the Millses had mentioned. I learned much later that they were board and care patients left over from the days when the Millses had operated the facility as a licensed nursing home. One, a woman who appeared to be in her late fifties, held her bathrobe tightly around her and interrupted Jeannie from time to time with a request that Jeannie would brush aside with a syrupy phrase and a wave of her hand. The other patient, a grinning young male schizophrenic like those in the social rehabilitation programs I directed for six years, sat at the table with us and interspersed giggles with imaginative rhymes from words he lifted from the serious conversation around him.

Despite a meeting without agenda, focus or purpose, often disturbed by the mental patients and tinged with an undercurrent of hostility, I learned much about Peoples Temple, about the kind of people it attracted and, above all, about a fact-finding mission to Jonestown scheduled to depart in two days. The delegation to Guyana would include members of Concerned Relatives and would be led by Rep. Leo Ryan, whom I knew both as my Congressman and as a slight acquaintance.

The air of unreality of our afternoon at the Human Freedom Center clashed with my feeling that something needed to be done, and quickly. For although my wife and I had doubts about the credibility of this collection of agitators among the ruins, the stories of "White Nights" and mass suicide rehearsals unnerved us.

Leo Ryan's San Mateo district office was a few hundred yards away from mine, and the following Monday morning, I went there to ask permission to accompany the Congressman and the Concerned Relatives to Guyana. My purpose was to offer my services as a trained observer who could help Ryan discover whether any of the sensational allegations — including the threat of mass suicide — were true. I also thought I could help the delegation see through any dog-and-pony public relations stunt Jones might try to pull. But I knew I would be sitting in judgment of the Congressman as well, a man I had found to be sometimes theatrical, superficial, and not altogether trustworthy.

As if I were applying for an academic position, I took along copies of my professional resume and some of my publications. My fear was that I would be mislabeled, as I had once mislabeled Claire Bouquet, as a paranoid nut.

I didn't speak with anyone in authority, but I left my materials and explained my offer to two clerical employees. Shortly afterwards, the Ryan party left New York on a jetliner to Georgetown, Guyana. I returned to my work, unaware that my message had, in fact, reached Ryan and that I had been cleared to accompany the group. The confirmation never reached me.

The Massacre and Its Aftermath

November 18, 1978. Fanaticism's Pearl Harbor. A date which will just as surely live in infamy. An event which will never be fathomed. A community of more than 900 men, women and children took a forever exit, leaving behind a few disheveled survivors to offer inconsistent — and sometimes incoherent — stories of the last hours.

That afternoon, I busied myself around the house while an unattended television blared away. And then I became aware of news bulletins about a shooting at an airstrip not far from Jonestown. There were no additional details.

I called the Center in Berkeley, wondering if people there had heard the same reports and whether they had additional information. The director said the Center's knowledge was as sketchy as anyone else's, and asked me to hang up so that people with families in Jonestown could get through. I complied with her request. Soon enough, I knew, we would all learn the whole grisly story.

Within a month, my life as director of a mental health association had come to a close, and I became a counselor of individuals and families affected by cults.

The Human Freedom Center turned into a maelstrom of confusion, as surviving Temple members, earlier defectors, relatives of the dead, and members of the media from every part of the world converged upon the Regent Street house. The fear of reprisals against the Concerned Relatives and against the few people who had escaped the Jonestown holocaust were not irrational, and a heavily-armed SWAT team surrounded the facility. Indeed, those fears infected everyone.

Jim Cobb, a member of the Concerned Relatives who had accompanied Ryan to Jonestown, had been taken seriously ill, apparently with

some tropical ailment contracted when he fled into the swampy area around the Port Kaituma airstrip during the ambush. Several doctors in Berkeley refused to treat him, though, believing that the phantom "hit squad" would find them out.

The discussions that started at the Human Freedom Center with the first news bulletins lasted for months. It was never-ending group therapy, with the survivors, the defectors, and the bereaved relatives coming and going, being interviewed, photographed, tape recorded, and filmed again and again. Questions ranged from the insightful and compassionate to the cruel and insensitive. Novelists and non-fiction writers tripped over one another as they jockeyed for special arrangements for the "inside story," especially the ones that could be told by Jones' son, Stephan, and his adopted brothers and friends who formed the Jonestown basketball team. Mental health professionals, seldom hearing what the survivors and defectors actually had to say, offered their own theories of "brainwashing," "mind control," "thought reform," and "systematic manipulation of social influences," thereby enabling Jones' followers to blame everything on "Dad" and nothing on themselves.

It all made me wonder if anyone I met during those months was truly innocent.

I counseled about one-third of the survivors during the first months after Jonestown, and I continued with some of them over the intervening years. Between November 1978 and July 1979, I heard stories of Peoples Temple horror recounted on a daily basis as I attempted to console escapees, defectors, and relatives of the dead. I heard tales about Jim Jones from more sources than I can remember, some from associates who had spent 20 years with him. I listened to recordings of his sermons, firsthand recollections of Temple leaders and followers alike, bootlegged tapes of Jones' phone conversations, and unpublished — and perhaps never to be published — details of his activities provided by journalists, government officials, and others. Much of my time, none of it begrudged, was spent with the young adults who had spent almost their entire lives under Jones' influence.

I still carry many of the memories of what people told me about their years in the Temple and about the first few months following the deaths, but perhaps the strongest recollection I have from that period is what I learned to identify as "the Jonestown dream."

The dream came to defectors and survivors alike in the year after November 18. In the dream, the person would awake to find himself or

herself back in Jonestown, lying on a cot, feeling exhausted, bewildered, disoriented. The dreamer would then hear the voice of Jim Jones booming over the loudspeakers positioned throughout the community. Suddenly Jones himself would appear beside the cot, and say — or usually scream — to the dreamer, "You will never get away from me! Never!" The dreamer would then realize that the massacre hadn't happened, that Jonestown was still the reality, that everything he or she had experienced since the suicides was itself a dream, and that there was no escape.

The nightmare would finally end with the dreamer awakening, oftentimes trembling and sweating. Any sense of relief was ethereal, because, as several of my clients told me, the dream returned again and again.

For some, the dreams finally ended when their friends and relatives were buried at the Evergreen Cemetery in Oakland. Others just stopped talking about it. From time to time, I suspect, some of them still have "the Jonestown dream."

Despite the power that both the dream and real-life memories held over my clients, I managed for the most part to keep an emotional distance between myself and the tragedy. I listened, analyzed, categorized, and did what I could to help. I was impressed by Jones, the brilliant manipulator who had so skillfully woven together so many diverse strands of religious and sociopolitical thought. His claims to be God and his use of the title "Father" were purloined from Father Divine's Peace Church. His concept of divinity as a potential present in each person and powerfully manifest in some, such as himself, borrowed heavily from New Thought and "positive thinking." His notion that God incarnates himself in each era in a community which recreates the miracles of Jesus and the Apostles, combined Anglo-Catholic sacramentalism and Pentacostalism. His use of the Bible to provide prooftexts as pretexts was learned from revivalistic tent evangelists and independent Bible churches. The use of healings and speaking in tongues came from the charismatic/deliverance movement. His magic tricks, such as his gift of discernment or mind-reading, was passed on to him by former associates of midwestern spiritualists. He studied group persuasive techniques in National Training Laboratory experiments in which he took part during the 1950s. His "apostolic socialism" derived from the "communism" of the Jerusalem church of the Book of Acts and his lifelong fascination with Marxist-Leninism. His style of leadership, including the creation of four warring factions in middle management, all of which reported directly

to him, suggests Hitler's Third Reich as its inspiration.

His use of civil rights, nuclear terror, racism, sexism, and ageism as background for his creation of a hopeful vision of the future demonstrated his ability to discern the needs of the times, and to manipulate them for his purposes. But his brilliant mind was undone by his sadism, his drug addiction, and his complete inability to tolerate resistance or dissent. He had the need to control others, to be the sole focus of his followers' deeds and thoughts, to hold their lives — and their deaths — in his hands. He was a monster of depravity who delighted in debauching the innocent and making his closest associates as corrupt as he was. His hypochondria led him to an uncontrolled use of antibiotics which destroyed his body's immunological system. His nerves jangled with their dependence to powerful chemical substances. Had he survived the jungle apocalypse, some have said, he still would have died within a few days or weeks. What will never be determined is when he crossed the line between his calculated use of the threat of mass suicide with which he blackmailed the government of Guyana and tested the loyalty of his followers, and his decision to destroy 1000 souls who had committed themselves to his despotic rule.

Although the details of Jones' reign in his jungle utopia were revolting and unprecedented for the press, the government, and social service professionals, there was something about Jones which was disconcertingly familiar to me. Two decades of study of "fringe religious phenomena" had led me to many Peoples Temples and numerous Jim Joneses: storefront missions with their archbishops, independent churches with their apostles, sects and cults with their gods, gurus and messiahs. And I had met many abject subjects, ready and willing to do the will of their self-proclaimed prophets and prophetesses. Fortunately, the unique combination of factors which permitted a Jonestown have not repeated themselves on such a scale. But they could.

And then, on one rainy evening in March 1979, my composure, my ability to objectify and categorize, fell apart. I was driving home on the San Mateo Bridge, a ten-mile long span. My thoughts went back to the previous night, when survivors and defectors had met with an NBC crew to review videotapes shot during the Ryan mission to Jonestown. Many of the Jonestown victims, especially the children, were still unidentified at the time, so as the tapes labored along at freeze-frame speed, the survivors and defectors called out the names of the people they recognized.

As I thought about the Jonestown dead, I reasoned, somewhat

heartlessly, that they all would have died anyway, sooner or later, and that, had it not been for their slavish devotion, their lives would have probably meant nothing. The dream of Jonestown had both given them life and then taken it away from them.

That was when my mind shifted to the dead children, the 300 incipient human stories which had been snuffed out. I had never shed a tear for the fathers and the mothers, the grandparents, the husbands and the wives, the crafty and the outfoxed, the adults of Jonestown. Jones twisted their arms and mangled their minds while drawing his strength from their weaknesses. I worked each day with their legacy of grief, but never shared it. But when I thought of the deaths of the little ones, "Dad's nursery," the Temple's tomorrow that would never be, I began to ache as though someone had just announced my own death.

As I drove on, my hands tightened on the steering wheel, and I began to scream, "Sometime, somewhere, someone must accept responsibility! If the God I worship and love and serve, if this God deceives and defrauds, then I must own up and say that it is my own fault, that I gave him the power to destroy, and I must accept the blame."

"It is all so simple," I thought. "Accept responsibility for your own life, and let God be God." And for ten years, this is what I have told my clients.

Al and Jeannie

Along the way, I spent scores of hours with Al and Jeannie Mills. They were the part of the post-Jonestown Peoples Temple I knew best, so I have more memories of them than of any other aspect of my experience at the Human Freedom Center.

When I resigned as director of the Mental Health Association, they offered to pay me for my services as a fundraising consultant for the Center. Within a day, I was asked to be the executive director and, soon afterwards, the president of the board. A psychic had told Jeannie that she was going to become rich, famous, and an expert in Egyptian antiquities. She and Al had left Jones and fallen into a kind of New Age "what you believe is what you receive" theology, and they believed they could make their own reality. When we went out for lunch, Jeannie would "materialize" parking spaces.

The Human Freedom Center was housed in one of the two board and care facilities they ran, but those ventures didn't represent the principal source of their income. Instead, as I understood it, they

acquired the properties of their elderly clients who could no longer afford even the taxes on their homes. After sending out a work crew made up of relatives and other Peoples Temple defectors and survivors to renovate the houses, the Millses sold the properties for a profit. The practice was one of the many they shared with the now-reviled Temple leadership.

I noted another pattern as well. Jeannie would offer free room and board and the promise of future financial reward to the workers in the rehabilitation ventures and in the board and care facilities. The arrangement seemed modeled after the structure which, according to Jeannie, Jones had use to exploit Al and her. After my first month at the Human Freedom Center, I remained virtually as a volunteer. Donations and fees were never adequate to cover expenses and salaries. Yet I, like the others, remained hopeful about the future.

In the midst of the Center's carnival-like atmosphere, Al and Jeannie were constantly trying to cut deals with the various journalists and agents who found their way to Berkeley. Al would try to peddle photographs, and Jeannie had a complete set of transcripts of radio traffic between Jonestown and San Francisco which she offered for sale. The latter scheme ended when the federal government informed them that they had no claim to ownership of intercepted radio communications, a ruling which, according to Jeannie, cost them $250,000 in anticipated revenues. They were able to get an advance from a New York publisher for Jeannie's book, *Six Years With God*, but they spent most of that money on a Mercedes Benz. They explained that this act of faith in their financial future would cause the universe to support them in the manner to which they wanted to accustom themselves. Nevertheless, the sight of that new car deeply offended some of the defectors, who felt Al and Jeannie were using them and the Center for their own personal profit. Some of them also confided to me that they still harbored deep resentments towards Jeannie for the savage way in which she had treated them while part of the Temple leadership.

The Jeannie Mills of *Six Years With God* was an innocent idealist who had been deceived, misled, duped, and generally victimized by Jim Jones. The Jeannie Mills with whom I worked every day was a different person. She was proud of how powerful she and the other women of the Temple had been, and of the vast responsibilities she had had as director of publications. The poverty and the self-sacrifice had been for a cause, for friends and loved ones.

She also told me of a plot that she and another of the Concerned

Relatives had been involved in while still inside the Temple. They had tried to manipulate Jones — "the master manipulator" himself — into retreating into godlike solitude and turning over control of the Temple to them. Jones had seen through their strategem, and curtailed their authority. That rebuke, together with Jones' decision to renege on a promise to provide adequate support for her enormous family of natural, step-, and foster children living in her house, were the reasons she constantly cited for her break with the Temple.

Once Jeannie left — or had been ousted, depending upon the observer's viewpoint — she determined to bring Jones down, even if it cost her her life. The first draft of what eventually became *Six Years With God* was a long first-person account of Jones' excesses; she filed the manuscript with the archives of the State of California in Sacramento, so her voice would not be stilled even if she were murdered.

She and Al also went through the legal procedures to change their names from Deanna and Elmer Mertle. That decision, she said, was made to avoid culpability for the legal documents they had signed while members of the Temple. How the name change would have helped them was never explained to me.

Part of the cost of defection, as Jeannie and Al repeatedly attested, was their loss of more than 30 homes they had owned, mainly low-cost rural rentals. They were more circumspect about the fact that they quickly regained the deeds to the units.

I have often wondered what would have happened if Al, Jeannie, the other defectors, the media and the congressman had left Jim Jones and his followers in Guyana alone. I recall one chilling videotape segment from Jonestown in which an NBC correspondent thrust a signed statement from a handful of dissidents in Jones' face and demanded an explanation. I could see Jones fighting to keep his composure, his tongue seemingly glued into silence. The newsman was making his news, not reporting the facts. And when the bodies had been counted and stacked like cords of wood, many of the Concerned Relatives seemed more interested in their own vindication — "See! See! Jones was a monster, and I was his helpless victim! I told you so!" — than in the tragedy which had consumed their friends and loved ones. Were they too numb, too overcome by the enormity and banality of it all?

Leaving the Human Freedom Center

It was not the public fascination with the macabre demise of Peoples Temple, but other events of a more personal nature that led me to accept the position as director of the Human Freedom Center in the first place. I had just completed seven years as a political campaign consultant and as a mental health administrator, and I wanted to return to my true area of interest: religious experience.

I was also concerned about the virtual war declared the day after Jonestown on all non-traditional, authoritarian, innovative and/or communal religions. Suddenly, anything strange became suspect. Every cult, sect, and occult group became a potential Jonestown. Panic overwhelmed reason. Deprogrammings multiplied. And the response by the cults was natural: they resisted with increasing vigor, which, in turn, led the deprogrammers and other anti-cultists to become more violent.

Atrocity stories by defectors from other groups became commonplace. Nevertheless, as had happened in the months prior to the Temple's exodus from San Francisco to Guyana, there always seemed to be a reporter ready to swallow the stories whole, without examining the facts or questioning the motives of their bearers.

Jonestown became the most powerful negative metaphor in 20th century religious history. Its power could not be lost on cult members, and many of them re-evaluated their own commitment to movements headed by charismatic and fiercely demanding saviors. The truth is, defections were more common than even the anti-cult network has realized.

But the Human Freedom Center would prove to be a poor vehicle for my vision. It was too caught up in the continuing dynamics of Peoples Temple. It was too much an instrument of the Millses' need for "volunteers" for their various enterprises. It was too much an expression of the corrupting "if it feels good, do it" milieu.

The time soon came for me to leave the Human Freedom Center and to found my own agency, the Freedom Counseling Center. I had had enough of Peoples Temple and its ceaseless parade of broken survivors, the self-serving stories told by its defectors, the strident posturing of some of the Concerned Relatives, the simmering hostilities and jealousies of the post-massacre factions. But more than anything, I wanted to get away from the Millses and the little cult of Jeannie-worshippers which had evolved at the Human Freedom Center.

Jeannie was a loving and caring woman. But there was a price

for that love. She expected boundless appreciation, total dedication, and the furthering of the idiosyncratic vision of the future promised to her by her psychic adviser.

Her life started to unravel about the time she turned 40, six months after Jonestown. A male employee of the Center told me he had rebuffed her attempts to seduce him. Knowing nothing of the accusation, Jeannie recommended that I fire the man because he had allowed a young woman client to become emotionally involved with him. She didn't detail any misconduct, and her expression, tone of voice and choice of words implied there was another, unspoken reason for her request.

For Jeannie and her coterie to try to blacken the reputation of a fellow staff member seemed hypocritical. The sexual laxity of some of her followers was notorious. On more than one occasion, Jeannie and one of her disciples boasted of their sexual adventures with black men, although Jeannie never made clear whether her own escapades occurred during her Temple years or following her defection.

In addition, Jeannie insisted on playing off her three male employees against each other. She, or one of the two women working for her, would tell me that my male associates were incompetent, immoral and conspiratorial. The other two men heard the same characteristics attributed to me. Things were getting slimy.

When I eventually confronted her about this manipulation taken from the Peoples Temple manual of human relations, she started to cry and asked me to understand the hard times she and her family were going through. Her teenage daughter had developed a heavy dependence on drugs, she said, and then run away. Al had found her on the streets, prostituting herself for money to support her habit. Jeannie also said that her family was being watched by unknown parties and, as she had both after their defection from the Temple and following the suicides, she feared for her life. There were financial problems as well: the book was not selling as many copies as she had expected, their real estate dealings were not profitable, and, of course, the Center was not even making enough money to pay its rent on a regular basis. It was the fallout over the last concern that eventually led to the Center's end.

At first, Jeannie asked me to remove the Center from the Regent Street house so she could rent the rooms to university students. When I declined, she launched formal eviction proceedings. Then, when I moved to new office space, she went to the Berkeley police and claimed I had burglarized the Center and stolen its meager belongings, which consisted mainly of client records. When I showed the police the eviction

papers and the Center's by-laws — which gave me, as President of the Board, full power over the Center's assets and location — they shook their heads and left.

The day after the move, Jeannie and one other board member held a rump board meeting at the Regent Street house and approved a resolution declaring that I owed Jeannie $15,000 for money she had allegedly invested in the Center. The resolution further stated that Jeannie was to hold the Center's research files — primarily consisting of newspaper clippings — as collateral. Finally, Jeannie and the other member resigned, leaving me as the sole active member. I was supposed to assume all the liabilities, while she kept all the assets!

A few months later, Al, Jeannie, and Jeannie's daughter Daphene were murdered in the tiny, shabby cottage behind their board and care home. According to the press and police, there had been a terrific struggle. Jeannie had fled to the bathroom, but the murderer — or murderers — smashed the door to bits to get to her. Several shots were fired. Eddie, Jeannie's teenage son, was considered a suspect at first, but was later released. The police then accused him of calmly watching TV in the midst of the commotion, his lethargy attributed to marijuana, but Eddie denied that as well, claiming he had neither seen or heard anything.

Anti-cult organizations were quick to seize upon the murders as evidence that the discredited Temple hit squad actually existed, and that Jeannie had been the target of the assassination because of her work. Although no one has ever been arrested for the deaths, and although the slayings could have had as much to do with Daphene's involvement in drugs as with her mother's work, Jeannie has achieved martyr status over the years.

My wife and I were in Capetown, South Africa, when we heard of their deaths. We were stunned and sickened. Whatever the Millses had been, they hardly deserved this. With all their quirks and failings, Al and Jeannie had been important to me. They had helped me to make a break with work that no longer satisfied me and to commit myself to new forms of service. Their encouragement and support had been indispensable at the outset, and I was grateful to them. But I did not want to be part of the miniature Peoples Temple they were creating, replete with head games, sexual pranks, personal and financial manipulation, and dependence upon their whims.

By nature, training and experience, I disdain fanaticism, whether that fanaticism is the unreasoning bombast of self-appointed

messiahs or the demand for suspension of civil liberties by the enemies of "destructive cultism." I am also deeply touched by the pain and bewilderment which characterizes the loss of faith. And, as I believed that my presence both as a sympathetic listener and as a reminder of forgotten options was valuable to Jonestown survivors, so I hoped I could act as a guide for other ex-cultists as they sought to re-program themselves for self-fulfilling lives. I wanted to help families sundered by religious differences, to provide them with insights rather than scare stories, to help them develop appropriate strategies for reconciliation. I wanted to counsel cult members, to stimulate them to think outside the narrow confines of ideological cliches, easy answers, and prooftexts learned by rote. I wanted to do this without resorting to violence, compulsion or deception, and without making anyone dependent upon me in the process. Finally, I wanted to help former believers, no matter how they had lost faith, to see that there is life after cult, that it is possible to separate the wheat of basic living truth from the chaff of self-delusion and to go on with one's own life. In the fall of 1979, as I left the Human Freedom Center to begin my work with the Freedom Counseling Center, this was only a wish list supported by a number of unexamined presuppositions. They were the articles of a faith I had not yet tested.