

## **ABC News: “Jonestown Massacre”: Interview with Mike and Tim Carter, 12/1/78 (21:12) PART 2**

**Note:** This is the second part of an ABC News interview with survivors Mike and Tim Carter in the weeks following the events of November 18. The first part of the interview is currently unreleased and is not listed within the online ABC News VideoSource archive.

The second and final parts of the complete interview may be viewed directly through the ABC VideoSource Archive here:

[ABCNEWS VideoSource](#) (Search 20P679B for Part 2. 20P679C for Part 3.)

Alternatively, it may be viewed on YouTube here:  
(1:37:11 - 1:59:22)

 **1978-1982 SPECIAL REPORT: "JONESTOWN AFTERMATH"**

**Brothers Mike and Tim Carter, along with Mike Prokes, managed to escape the Jonestown mass suicides after being assigned the task of delivering suitcases filled with money to the Soviet Embassy in Georgetown. The interview takes place at the Park Hotel in Georgetown, Guyana, and starts with a close-up of Jonestown survivor, Mike Carter. The interview begins with his response to a question from the first part of the interview in regards to what he witnessed after returning to Jonestown to assist with body identification.**

**Mike Carter:** I know— when I went back to identify bodies, all the babies I had seen— you know— were next to their mothers, some next to their fathers. All of them had poison so I would imagine that the parents had taken them. By force or willingly, I’m not sure.

**Reporter:** You believe that your wife poisoned your daughter?

**Mike:** Well, I believe she was holding her. I don’t know if she willingly or willingly (??) did it. That's what I’m saying. I— I know that— I mean it’s obvious to me she had her arms around her. I mean when I went back to find her.

**Reporter:** Knowing Jonestown as you did, knowing your family— why would your wife had done that?

**Mike:** (Clicks tongue) I don't think she had a choice. I don’t think anybody there had a choice on whether they lived or died. They had to do what was the will of the— of Jim Jones.

**Reporter:** Why didn’t they have a choice?

**Mike:** (Clicks tongue) Well— he um— I’m speaking of Jones now— had the voice— I mean he made the decisions on what to do and obviously he thought that this was the end of Peoples Temple for some reason or another. Even though obviously before all— even with the people who were leaving, Congressman Ryan still thought it was a success, and thought that Jonestown was uh— you know— it actually was— I mean it had a lot of problems—

**Reporter:** What I'm coming to is— if Jim Jones stood up and said: let's everyone commit suicide and let's kill all the children, would your wife have poisoned your child because Jim Jones said so?

**Mike:** It's a hard question. I think um— she might of.

**Reporter:** Why?

**Mike:** Because there was nothing else in life she had. Uh especially when we're like us who had grown up in the Temple from you know, being a teenager. You don't have anything else in life but what you're been taught in Peoples Temple which had been given. You're dependent on it. And uh— you believed whatever you know, he would tell you was the truth cause you heard nothing else. And uh I believe a lot of people thought the same way. There was nothing else in life if you didn't have Jim Jones and Peoples Temple and if that was to fall apart, you might as well die.

**Reporter:** You believed that?

**Mike:** I would say maybe up to Friday or Saturday I did, but I was you know— (Smiles and shakes head) foolish because it was ridiculous. No, no, not now. Not at all.

**Reporter:** You were in Jonestown. You escaped the suicides because you were in a corner of the village too far away to know that everybody else was committing suicide.

**Mike:** Well I didn't know that— they— know I had started, although we were allowed out to take a package somewhere. We didn't know that the suicides were starting until after we left (Glances to Tim) and my brother had told me.

**Tim Carter:** It's totally by chance. I mean it's totally by chance.

**Mike:** And still to this day (Smiling) I don't know why we were picked.

**Reporter:** If you had been closer to the central area when Jim Jones said: now it's time for all of us to die, would you have poisoned yourself?

**Mike:** (Shakes head) I don't think so. I think they would have to fight me. (Nods)

**Reporter:** And yet your wife did, and as far as you know, poisoned your child?

**Mike:** (Nods) Yes. I think from the (Unintelligible) things. I think at first, from what I've heard— there was some people who didn't want to— and this one woman I heard<sup>1</sup> stood up and they all shouted her down. And um— so a lot of people at the first part thought you know, well it's going to be an easy death which he said it would be— you know before. I mean an easy death, no pain, we'd all meet somewhere—

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<sup>1</sup> Mike is most likely referring to Jonestown resident Christine Miller, who can be heard on tape Q042 arguing against Jim Jones and his decision to commit mass suicide.

you know god knows where. And uh— here now, I heard that— I think at first a lot of people would of done it willingly, you know, no problem at all. But I think that as things would go on, a lot more people would not want to, and a lot of people, you know, would hold back when doing it. You see what I'm saying is as things gone on and people saw the horror of it— people would less want to listen to Jones and think more for their own mind.

**Reporter:** You are how old?

**Mike:** I'm twenty.

**Reporter:** And you've been a part of Peoples Temple for how long?

**Mike:** Uh a little— just over five years.

**Reporter:** And you've lived here in Guyana, at Jonestown, and in Georgetown for how—

**Mike:** Yes.

**Reporter:** —long?

**Mike:** Uh— fourteen months in Guyana, nine of which were in Jonestown, five in Georgetown.

**Reporter:** Let me ask you the question I asked Tim a minute ago. What was— was there a need in your life that Peoples Temple met?

**Mike:** A lot of them. I mean— I had no mother essentially during most of my childhood, and um— just my dad who was— he's in his older years and— you know, I was young— and his alcoholism of course. So I essentially need um some parenthood or a father and a mother figure. I needed— a lot more companionship cause I didn't have a lot of friends, especially after moving to a new city— didn't really have a lot of friends although I had some.

**Reporter:** So—

**Mike:** And that was fulfilled when I— almost very quickly when I came down.

**Reporter:** What— what was fulfilled quickly? Tell me that again?

**Mike:** Friendship. Uh a lot of people who— immediately were warm to me which I had never felt before and (Unintelligible)— and that's one thing that really attracted me, you know. That so many people were so warm to me so quickly.

**Reporter:** Why do you think they were so warm so quickly?

**Mike:** Well I mean at that point I think um— people are in Jones'— you know, Peoples Temple where at that point you know, a lot closer to each other and were happy to see people join Peoples Temple. Um— it was uh— you were taught at that time to be friends with everyone but love everyone type-of-a-thing and people believed it and I believed it.

**Reporter:** Alright so I want to ask um— once I get this running if we ever do. Did you believe— um Don, would you pour the guy some coffee? Tim wanted some and you got it over there— alright— say when?

**(Off-screen assistant pours coffee)**

**Mike:** Thanks, I'm good.

**Reporter:** Mike— um, did you believe that Jim Jones was God?

**Mike:** (Smiles) Well, I uh— had believed he had some sort of power.

**Reporter:** The truck went by and blocked out your answer.

**Mike:** Yeah.

**Reporter:** Did you believe that Jim Jones was God?

**Mike:** I believed he had some sort of power. Uh— you know it seemed to appall me to fake all the stuff he was doing you know— and the Temple up there. But uh God? Not really. (Shakes head)

**Reporter:** You think he was somehow divine?

**Mike:** Yeah— I believed he had some sort of um— uh— you know what I mean, just the way he had spoke you know— in a way uh he presented himself. It seemed that way, yeah. (Nods)

**Reporter:** That he was somehow in touch with God?

**Mike:** I don't know in touch— I mean (Laughs) uh as far as the religious aspect he was not (Shakes head) religious. I mean he spoke— you know, some verses from the bible and so forth but anybody knows anything about Jim Jones he's not uh— a religious person.

**Reporter:** What was he?

**Mike:** He was an atheist. Uh— although he— he believed there was Jesus and everything. But he believed in more of uh equalitarian type of living.

**Reporter:** He was more interested in socialism? Marxism?

**Mike:** More so, as we got down here it was more into the Marxist-Leninist, especially down here in Guyana. He used to call it equalitarianism and socialism in the states.

**Reporter:** He— told you that he uh— didn't believe in God?

**Mike:** In a divine God that— you know, he said: how can there be a god with three or four (Unintelligible).

**Tim:** (Unintelligible) God—

**Mike:** You know, a god who— loved all, loved everything, yet there's starving babies throughout the world and suffering throughout the world. How can there be a loving god?

**Reporter:** Jim Jones— told you— he did not believe in God?

**Mike:** Yeah, in a loving god. That's all (??).

**Reporter:** You said he didn't believe in God. There was a loving god?

**Mike:** (Nod) (Unintelligible)

**Reporter:** He didn't believe there was a god figure, a thinking conscious entity?

**Mike:** Mhm. Yeah, that's correct.

**Reporter:** Did that strike you strange for Reverend Jim Jones to say?

**Mike:** Well— uh as you got to know People Temple, not really. (Smiles) As you know, Peoples Temple was just not an ordinary group. (Smiles again) Um— and it's obviously more so now. Yeah, I mean— it pretty quickly got to know, you know, that. I mean in a way it made sense. The way he would portray it as uh— it always made sense to me at the time of course.

**Reporter:** How did Jim Jones say this? Was— was he speaking in front of a platform?

**Mike:** Yeah.

**Reporter:**—Or was he talking to you?

**Mike:** No— he's speaking from a platform. He said it publicly.

**Reporter:** Jim—

**Mike:** Anybody who's been in any service of Peoples Temple heard that.

**Reporter:** And—

**Tim:** It's not a deep dark secret.

**Mike:** No. (Shakes head) Anybody— anybody— at the time practically who's been in any meeting with Peoples Temple would know that.

**Reporter:** Well, then why did you— if Jim Jones himself said that he didn't believe in god as most people understand god— a thinking entity. What was it that made you think he had divine contact since he himself disputed— any sort of divine entity?

**Mike:** You mean contact with god? I never claimed he had— I don't know maybe he did claim I don't know but— he um (Clears throat) just uh the— he seemed to know a lot about what— you know he would say things would happen a lot times they would happen. I don't know if that was all rigged or what. There was just somethings that um— about him that obviously he— he— I'm sorry it's very hard. (Smiling) It's been a long time.

**Reporter:** Alright— let me ask you Tim, your wife— **(Camera pans to Tim)** did your wife murder your child?

**Tim:** I don't know. I know the first thought that came into my mind was um— when I saw my baby dead in her arms was— they've murdered my son. Not that she'd murder my son. I think my thought was Jim Jones had murdered my son. Uh—

**Reporter:** A mother's first instinct (Unintelligible)

**Tim:** Is to protect the child.

**Reporter:** And yet from what evidence we have— there's reason to believe that (Tim smokes a cigarette) your wife poisoned your child?

**Tim:** True.

**Reporter:** Why would she have done that?

**Tim:** I don't think she had any choice. Um— that's a good question. That's a question I'll probably ask myself for the rest of my life— along with why I didn't get my wife and my son out of there sooner. That's guilt I'll have to live with for the rest of my life. From um— I don't know (Shakes head)— I just don't know.

**Reporter:** Would your wife have poisoned your child because Jim Jones said so?

**Tim:** I can't believe that— cause I know— I know how she felt about her son and I cannot— I can't believe that I know that um— when I saw her kneeling on the ground, there was tears going down her

cheeks, and um— she was obviously in pain and grieving. Uh— I leaned over and I started crying. I said: I love you so much— I love you— I love you and she uh— started going into convulsions. I wasn't um— all I was thinking about at that point was— I mean I had nothing else to live for. I mean my son was dead, my wife was dying and I had a way out of Jonestown and I took it. And why I was picked, I don't know.

**Reporter:** Can you explain “picked”?

**Tim:** Well, like I said Maria— I was walking down the path by the pavilion and Maria Katsaris saw me and— it was like she just said: come I want to talk to you. It wasn't like she was looking for me. I think— I think was just absolutely totally— just um— just I don't know if you call it luck or—

**Reporter:** This was before the suicide ritual began?

**Tim:** (Nods)

**Reporter:** And she said what to you?

**Tim:** She called my brother and I into a room next to the radio room and said: Prokes has a heavy suitcase to carry, would we help him carry it? And um— I said yes. I— I never conceived— the entire time I was in Peoples Temple that Jim Jones would be mad enough to do anything like this— cause he asked me several months ago when I was in Jonestown for one of— a short period of time— he asked me a rhetorical question. He said: you know why don't we just all die tomorrow— and there was no crisis going on or anything like that. Like I said it was a rhetorical question and I said no. He said: 'cause I do not have the moral right to take these babies' lives, these seniors' lives, these people's lives. We came several thousand miles to live, not to die and I believed him. I took him at his word.

**Reporter:** Why Guyana?

**Tim:** I think it was a number of— reasons. One, he'd been in Guyana apparently several— seventeen years ago. He liked the people. It was a third-world country— um black country and the congregation's predominantly black. It was uh a government who's trying to start a socialist society. We had a socialist cooperative and um— I'm not sure why it (Unintelligible) but—

**Reporter:** Going back to the money, Maria Katsaris, I think you said— asked you to come in and get the suitcase and she said what?

**Tim:** Like I said when she asked us this question she just asked us if we would help Prokes deliver a heavy suitcase. She didn't say where or anything else and um— I said yeah primarily because I wanted— I think to get out of Jonestown at that time. If I had been thinking my wife and my son are going to die in the next five minutes I would of been thinking something entirely different. I would be thinking on how to get them out and—

**Reporter:** You wanted out of Jonestown. Why?

**Tim:** Just the whole atmosphere that day was um— I can't describe it. It was like the place was disintegrating. Literally disintegrating. It was a very eerie— scary— sort of feeling, all day long. It was just very between the— I mean the um— with the people leaving and families being broken up— cause some of the families, part of the families stayed back, some go, there was a lot of crying, a lot of heavy emotion. One man was ready to leave and take his three kids<sup>2</sup>— not even tell his wife. His wife didn't even know that he was leaving and uh— a very strange—

**Reporter:** So you want uh— you wanted to get out for, I mean to go up to Georgetown for an hour or week or whatever?

**Tim:** Just— just— whatever— she said: do you want to go and I said yeah, I want to go but like I said—

**Reporter:** You didn't mean get away forever. You just meant—

**Tim:** (Shakes head) No— no—

**Reporter:**—leave for the time being because there was a bad scene that day?

**Tim:** No. If I wanted to get away forever I'd—

**Reporter:** So— so— there was this suitcase and then what happened?

**Tim:** Well, you got to take things in sequence. She asked me to get my suitcase. She asked me if I had a suitcase. I said yeah and she said you better change your clothes so I had— some heavy shoes and a t-shirt. Went back to the cottage area and I changed my clothes and got my suitcase then I went to West House and— I gave the suitcase to a woman named Carolyn Layton. I didn't go into the house and her sister Annie Moore, who was one of Jones' nurse had just— was coming up on the porch stair in front of the house and asked me to go find Maria and ask whether or not— two of the children that were there should come to the pavilion or whether they should stay down there. So on the way I met Maria actually about halfway towards the pavilion and I heard the word suicide. I didn't hear the context but I became— at that point I got a feeling of— I don't know. I can't describe but it was just terror, dread, like oh my god, this couldn't be happening— or what I'm afraid might be happening can't be happening. And I went back— started back down towards West House and I met Annie and over Maria said: keep the children down there for now and I knew we'd need some water but I think— I don't know. I think I was being drawn towards the pavilion to see what was happening. When I got in the kitchen area I heard a lot of screaming and crying and uh— a lot going on at that point when I thought about my wife and my son. I wanted to see what's happening. (Sighs)

**Reporter:** So you went out and saw your child dead, your wife dying, you spoke to her and then—

**Tim:** She didn't answer me.

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<sup>2</sup> Tim is likely referring to the argument between Bonnie and Al Simon. Al wished to leave Jonestown with their three children and upon discovering her husband's decision to leave, an argument ensued between the couple. Ultimately, the entire family would remain in Jonestown during its final day.



**Reporter:** How were you able to flee at that point with the suitcase?

**Tim:** Well, like I said we'd been asked to do something so apparently— like I said we had a way out. So I did not see any armed guards but apparently there were armed guards. I guess I know they had been told to let us go. It was just entirely— entirely uh something by chance.

**Reporter:** So you left with this suitcase and with who else?

**Tim:** My brother (Glances over to Mike) and Mike Prokes.

**Reporter:** You didn't know what was in the suitcase?

**Tim:** Well, when I got back— see while I was witnessing this nightmare because I didn't just see my wife and my son. I mean I saw other mothers— kneeling, holding their babies and crying. I saw some bodies on the ground and I uh— it was just a nightmare. I can't describe it. It was a nightmare. When I got back the suitcases had been filled with money and uh— I don't know. I guess you told, Maria told Prokes to take it to the embassy but he says he doesn't remember if she said Soviet Embassy or not— just take it to the embassy.

**Reporter:** Why would Jones have wanted to take this money to the Soviet Embassy?

**Tim:** It's a good question. I honestly do not know.

**Reporter:** And the Soviet Embassy supplied the money?

**Tim:** I don't know.

**Reporter:** (Unintelligible)

**(Tape cuts)**