

16Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi departs Iran on "vacation" as his government begins to crumble, and exiled religious leader Ayatollah Khomeini predicts his own Iranian Revolutionary Council's rise to power. As violence between demonstrators and the army continues, Khomeini will return to Iran on Feb. 1. Ten days later, Khomeini supporters will overthrow the remnants of the Shah's government, and by May 9, 200 political executions will help secure Khomeini's power.

19Former attorney general John Mitchell is released from prison, the last of the Watergate conspirators to go free.

21The Pittsburgh Steelers defeat the Dallas Cowboys, 35-31, to become the first football team to win three Super Bowls.

26Former vice president and New York governor Nelson A. Rockefeller dies in *flagrante delicto* (while in the arms of his secretary Megan Marshack).

29San Diego teenager Brenda Spencer walks into an elementary school and begins shooting, killing two. Her explanation, "I don't like Mondays," inspires Irish rockers the Boomtown Rats to record a song by that name.

1979 FEBRUARY

2Still on trial for the alleged murder of girlfriend Nancy Spungen, Sid Vicious dies from overdosing on heroin in New York City.

3Top of the charts: Chic's "Le Freak" (pop single); the Blues Brothers' *Briefcase Full of Blues* (pop album).

7Stephen Stills becomes the first rock musician to record on digital equipment, though his recordings are never released. Ry Cooder, however, will soon release the first major-label digital album, *Bop Till You Drop*.

Researchers identify a coin found near Bar Harbor, ME, in 1961, as a Norse penny minted between 1065 and 1080.

DEA agents arrest eight Chicago Bond Options Exchange traders for cocaine distribution.

15Billy Joel wins his first Grammys (two for "Just the Way You Are"), along with Earth, Wind & Fire (two for *All 'n All* and one for the instrumental "Runnin' "), Anne

paranoia, panic & poison by tim cahill

FROM THE HELICOPTER it looked as if there were a lot of brightly colored specks around the main building. At three hundred feet the smell hit. The chopper landed on a rise, out of sight of the bodies. Other reporters tied handkerchiefs over their faces. Tim Chapman, a husky twenty-eight-year-old photographer for the *Miami Herald*, didn't have one, so he used a chamois rag. It turned out to be a good idea.

In Georgetown, the capital of Guyana, he had talked his way onto a flight to Jonestown, where the bodies still lay, three days after the massacre that culminated in the death of more than nine hundred members of the Reverend Jim Jones's Peoples Temple.

"The first body I saw," Chapman said, "was off to the side, alone. Five more steps and I saw another and another and another and another—hundreds of bodies. The *Newsweek* reporter was walking around saying, 'I don't believe it, I don't believe it.' Another guy said, 'It's unreal.' Then nobody even attempted to speak anymore. There were colors everywhere—raincoats and shirts and pants in reds and greens and blues; bright, happy colors." Chapman saw two parrots on a fence, a red-and-yellow macaw and a blue-and-yellow macaw. He moved around to get that angle: the contrast of life and death.

The bodies, Chapman said, were in grotesque disfigurement. One woman's false teeth had been pushed out. He saw a child, maybe five years old, between a man and woman who were swollen in death. He remembered that the child wore brown pants and a blue shirt. He wasn't as swollen as the man and woman. The children didn't seem to swell as much. Just for a moment Chapman stood there, hating the parents. They had a choice and the children didn't.

"I moved to my left. There was a vat, and then I saw Jones. As I moved toward him, I got a real bad whiff. I stepped away, almost tripped on a body and stumbled to get my balance, and as soon as I bent down, I was suddenly too close to one. There was a tremendous adrenaline shot, a fear."

Chapman chose not to shoot any photos of Jones. It had been done, and besides, he felt that somehow any more photos would glorify the man.

"His head was all blown out of proportion. There was a wound under his right ear and it was oozing. One arm was up over his head, stiff in rigor mortis. The skin was stretched tight over the hand, and it looked desperate, like a claw."

There was something else, something about the arrangement of the bodies that struck Chapman. Jones was on his back. Most of the others were face down, their heads pointing to Jones. "I could tell," Chapman said, "that it wasn't their final statement. It was Jones's."

Somehow that single thought was the most terrifying thing Chapman said that morning.

It was a massive job, loading up all the corpses at Jonestown, and it took eight full days. On the ninth day, the government allowed about fifty news ghouls into the jungle enclave. We flew up to Matthews Ridge and were ferried the twenty or so miles to the ghost town in a helicopter that accommodated twelve. We landed on the rise Chapman had mentioned and made our way to the pavilion, where bodies had lain.

To get to the pavilion proper, we had to step across muddy rills, and the thought of that ocher-colored mud clinging to our shoes was unpleasant. The pavilion had a corrugated metal roof set on wooden columns and a hard-packed mud floor. In front of the stage, along with a collection of musical instruments, were several bits of gore: blackened flesh, shriveled bits of scalp, all crawling with flies. On the walls were signs that said LOVE ONE ANOTHER, and the like.

The path outside led down a shallow slope to Jones's house, a brown, wood affair, slightly larger than the rest, surrounded by tangerine and almond trees. The place was locked up, but scattered on the porch were Jim Jones's mail, a collection of books



Murray (for "You Needed Me") and Barry Manilow (for "Copacabana"). *Saturday Night Fever* is the big winner with three, including Album of the Year and Best Pop Vocal Performance by a Group.

The Temple City Kazoo Orchestra appears on *The Mike Douglas Show* with guest soloists David Brenner, Cheryl Tiegs, Lee Grant and Lou "The Hulk" Ferrigno.

16 During an acoustic performance at the Palomino, a North Hollywood club, Elvis Costello first reveals his country roots, playing songs by George Jones and his own "Stranger in the House," which Jones will later record.

17 The Clash kicks off its first U.S. tour at New York City's Palladium, with Bo Diddley supporting; "I'm So Bored With the U.S.A." is their opening song.

As an outgrowth of Vietnam's continued involvement in the Cambodian civil war, Communist China attacks Vietnamese troops along the length of Vietnam's border. Three weeks later, Chinese forces will begin to withdraw, but hostilities will persist.

22 ROLLING STONE reports that in an music industry first, Journey has developed an advertising relationship with Anheuser-Busch, leading to Budweiser posters in the group's programs and Journey-produced beer jingles. Similar deals appear imminent between Pabst beer and the Marshall Tucker Band, Panasonic and Hall & Oates, and JVC and Sea Level.

1979 MARCH

1 According to a *Washington Post* poll, 99% of Americans own TVs, although 41% like the programming less than they did in 1974.

2 Havana Jam, the first cosponsored U.S.-Cuban music event in 20 years, offers Cubans three days of rock music, boasting a lineup of Stephen Stills, Billy Joel, Kris Kristofferson, Rita Coolidge and Tom Scott & the L.A. Express.

15 At a Columbus, OH, Holiday Inn, Elvis Costello, Bonnie Bramlett and members of Stephen Stills's entourage get into a fracas following disparaging remarks made by Costello about American R&B legends Ray Charles and James Brown. By way of explanation, Costello admits

and magazines and his medicine cabinet: three things that reveal much about a man.

The books and magazines were about conspiracies, spies, political imprisonment, people who manipulate the news and Marxism. A large red book contained dozens of Russian posters; one showed Lenin speaking before a crowd of workers.

Near a footlocker full of health foods and vitamins, I found hundreds of Valium tablets, some barbiturate-type pills and several disposable syringes, along with ampoules of synthetic morphine. Near the drugs, by a pile of blank Guyanese power-of-attorney forms, was a great stack of letters addressed "to Dad." Most were labeled "self-analysis" and began with "I feel guilty because . . ." The self-analysis letters were confessions. No one admitted to being happy and well-adjusted.

I read one from a young male: "I am sexually attracted to a lot of brothers and would rather fuck one in the ass than get fucked." After the original confession, the letters churned with hate. "I have feelings about going to the States for revenge against people." From an eighty-nine-year-old woman: "Dear Dad, I would rather die than go back to the States as there is plenty of hell there. I would give my body to be burned for the cause than be over there . . . If I had to go back, I would like to have a gun and use it [she names several temple defectors who worked with the anti-temple Human Freedom Movement] and have them all in a room together and take a gun and spray the row of them. I am glad to have a Dad and Father like you . . ."

The letters were chilling, suggesting lives filled with guilt and hate, and fear. More frightening was the tone of absolute submission to "Dad," a man who, by all evidence, seemed to be a hypochondriac, a drug addict and paranoid.

In the past, Jim Jones had real enemies. They were, for the most part, louts, bigots and segregationists: the kind of people who referred to him as a "nigger lover" and who spat on his wife when she appeared on the street with one of their adopted black children. Sickened by racist attacks, Jones moved his ministry from the Midwest to Brazil, then to Northern California, where the hostilities began anew. Vandals shot out the windows of the Redwood Valley temple, and dead animals were tossed on the lawn. In August 1973, a mysterious blaze devastated the San Francisco temple. Legitimately harassed, Jones began making connections between events, part real, part delusion.

Finally, a blistering exposé of the temple was published in the August 1, 1977, issue of *New West* magazine. Various defectors told stories of false healings, humiliations, beatings and financial improprieties. Jones used all the political clout at his disposal in a vain effort to kill the story. He fled to Guyana shortly before it was published.

In the isolation of the jungle, in the intimacy of the pavilion, Jim Jones raged against the defectors. They were organized now, and the traitors called themselves the Concerned Relatives. They were plotting against him, smearing him in the media and were in league with the shadow forces arrayed against him.

He was Father to all of them. He had taken the junkies and prostitutes off the street. He took in lonely old folks and fed the hungry. The young idealists had been floundering, unsure of how to make a better world. And he showed them. Without him there was nothing. Without him they would be back on the street or lying on a slab in the morgue. The community was totally dependent on him. Without him they were nothing and he told them so. It frightened them to realize he was ill.

His hate and fear were contagious. Elderly women united to kill the defectors. He held his hands up for the people to see, and they were running with blood. "I'm bleeding for the people," he said. ("Ground glass," a surviving Jonestown nurse told me later.)

Sometimes during Peoples Forum, when members spoke of being homesick or wanting to leave, Jones would have a "heart attack." The community could see what it was doing to Father, and they'd turn on the speaker in a fury. It wasn't just people leaving. That might be acceptable. But no one ever left and remained neutral. They sold out. They told lies. They joined the traitors. Perhaps those who spoke of leaving were infiltrators. Everyone could see what their words did to Father. He had to protect himself. "No one leaves Jonestown unless they're dead," Jones said.

The conspiracy came to a head on Saturday, November 18, 1978, during California congressman Leo J. Ryan's visit. Some temple members had deserted in the morning, when security was concentrating on the Ryan party. Now others were saying they wanted to leave with Ryan. Whole families — the Parks, the Bogues — had turned

traitor. They were more concerned with blood relations than with the cause and Father. Jones looked beaten, defeated. A man named Don Sly flew into a rage and menaced Ryan with a knife, but he was subdued. Newsmen were present. There'd be more smears. Ryan would report to Congress, and the full weight of the United States government would fall on Jonestown.

When Ryan and his collection of traitors left for the airstrip in Port Kaituma, gunmen followed. The shadow forces had won.

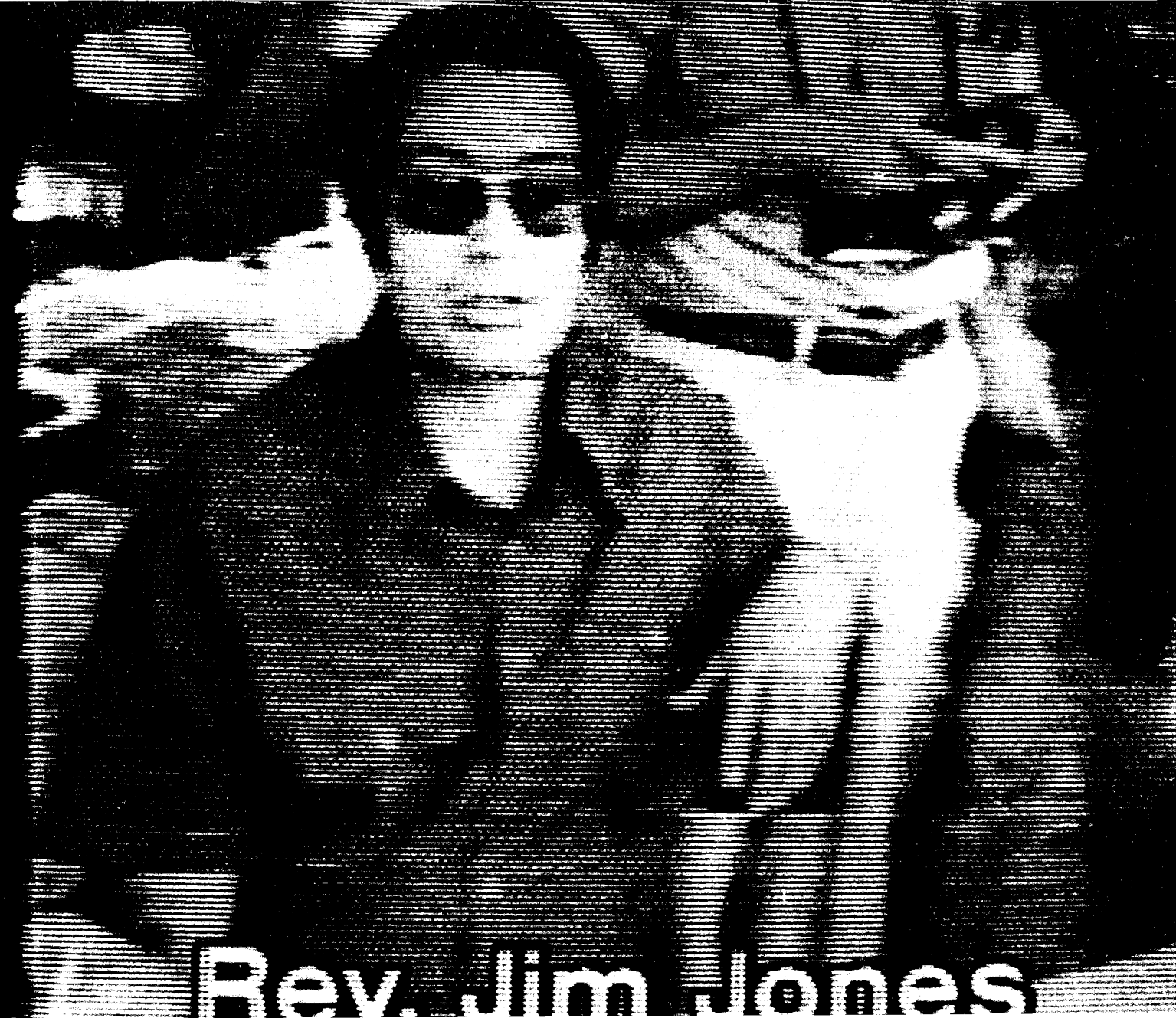
An alert was called and the community rushed to the pavilion. Jones told them the congressman's plane would "fall from the sky." He could do things like that. At Port Kaituma, Ryan's party was going to take two planes but a Jones loyalist named Larry Layton, who had left with Ryan, pulled a gun. Although Layton later denied it — saying it was his idea to go after the congressman's plane — Jones may have instructed him to shoot the pilot when the plane was airborne. But the party was too large and they were going to take two planes. Layton wounded two. He leveled the gun at Dale

Parks's chest and fired. Dale fell back, thinking he had been shot, but the gun had jammed. He jumped Layton and, with the help of another man, wrestled the gun away.

Meanwhile, gunmen arrived from Jonestown and began firing at the other plane. Ryan, Patty Parks and newsmen Bob Brown, Don Harris and Greg Robinson were killed. Others were wounded. The gunmen retreated to Jonestown.

"Those people won't reach the States," Jones told the community. Then he said it was time for all of them to die. He asked if there was any dissent. An older woman rose and said she didn't think it was the only alternative. Couldn't the temple members escape to Russia or Cuba? She had the right to choose how she wanted to live, she said, and how she wanted to die. The community shouted her down. She was a traitor. But she held her ground, an elderly woman, all alone.

"Too late," Jones said. He instructed Larry Schacht, the town doctor, to prepare the poison. Medical personnel brought the equipment into a tent that had been used as a



that it was "just a way to bring a silly argument to a quick end by saying the most outrageous thing possible. And it worked, too."

18Declassified Pol Pot government records reveal that Nixon's stated reason for sending troops into Cambodia in 1970 – that the entire Communist effort against South Vietnam was based in that country – was indeed true.

26Egyptian president Anwar Sadat and prime minister Menachem Begin of Israel, bolstered by President Carter's intense involvement and support, sign a peace treaty at the White House. The agreement, founded on the success of 1978's Camp David Accords, calls for a full Israeli withdrawal from the Sinai, but still leaves uncertain the future of Jerusalem and the West Bank of the Jordan River. Again, Egypt is the only Arab state participating in the peace process.

Michigan State wins the NCAA basketball championship against Indiana State 75-64, kicking off a long-term rivalry between Michigan's Earvin "Magic" Johnson, who will go on to play for the L.A. Lakers, and Indiana's Larry Bird, who will join the Boston Celtics.

27Led by master guitarist (and ex-school teacher) Mark Knopfler, British newcomers Dire Straits assert themselves at #4 on the pop singles chart with "Sultans of Swing." The band's self-titled debut album will eventually go platinum.

28The first major nuclear-power accident in American history occurs at the Three Mile Island power plant near Harrisburg, PA, raising radiation levels over a four-county area and casting a pall over the future of nuclear energy. A combination of human, mechanical and design errors is blamed for the near meltdown that occurred after the reactor's core was mistakenly exposed to air. *The China Syndrome*, a film about safety problems at a nuclear reactor, is a box-office leader at this time, two weeks after its premiere.

1979 APRIL

1Patty Hearst and her former guard Bernard Shaw are wed two months after her release from prison.

5ROLLING STONE reports that Kmart – the nation's second-largest retailer – has pulled

school and a library. There were large syringes, without the needles, and small plastic containers full of a milky white liquid.

Jones told the community that the Guyanese Defense Force would be there in forty-five minutes. They'd shoot first and ask questions later. Those captured alive, he said, would be castrated. It was time to die with dignity. The children would be first.

A woman in her late twenties stepped out of the crowd. She was carrying her baby. The doctor estimated the child's weight and measured an amount of the milky liquid into a syringe. A nurse pumped the solution into the baby's mouth. Then the mother drank her potion. Death came in less than five minutes. The baby went into convulsions, and Jones – very calm, very deliberate – kept repeating, "We must take care of the babies first." Some mothers brought their own children up to the killing trough. Others took children from reluctant mothers. Some of the parents and grandparents became hysterical, and they screamed and sobbed as their children died.

"We must die with dignity," Jones said. "Hurry, hurry, hurry." One thirteen-year-old girl refused her poison. She spit it out time after time and they finally held her and forced her to take it. Many people in the pavilion, especially the older ones, just watched, waiting. Others walked around, hugging old friends. Others screamed and sobbed.

Jones stepped off his throne and walked into the audience. "We must hurry," he said. He grabbed people by the arm and pulled them to the poison. Some struggled, weakly.

After an individual took the poison, two others would escort him, one on each arm, to a clearing and lay him on the ground, face down. It wouldn't do to have the bodies piled up around the poison, slowing things down.

The survivors, some of them children, stared at the reporters with vacant, ancient eyes. There were literally hundreds of journalists, from at least five continents, in Georgetown. It was madness. Virulent lunacy. And when you tried to assemble bits and pieces of the story, none of it fit together. There was no perspective, no center.

There were three distinct groups of survivors. First came the voices of dissent: those who had gone with Congressman Ryan and survived the shoot-out at Port Kaituma. This group included the Bogue family, the Parks family and Harold Cordell. They hated Jones and Jonestown. The press counted them as the most reliable sources.

The second group consisted of those who had escaped the carnage at Jonestown. Odell Rhodes and Stanley Clayton made up half of the total number. Both were articulate, both had witnessed the final moments.

Of the third group, Tim Carter, thirty, and Mike Prokes, thirty-one, had held leadership positions in Jones's organization, and they looked terribly frightened.

They sat at one of the tables and the press pounced. Lights, cameras, microphones, tape recorders, half a dozen people shouting out questions. Tim Carter, in particular, fascinated me. It was his eyes. He looked like a beaten fighter in the fifteenth round, one who just caught a stiff right cross he never saw coming. Tim Carter was a beaten man, and his eyes had the watery, glazed and unfocused look of a boxer who can no longer defend himself and who is simply going to absorb punches until he falls.

"I heard a lot of screaming," Carter said, his voice breaking, "and I went up to the pavilion and the first thing I saw was that my wife and child were dead. I had a choice of staying there," he continued, close to tears, "and I left."

"You saw your wife and child take poison?" someone asked Tim Carter. His eyes swam. "I didn't see them take poison. My baby was dead. My wife was dying. I'm trying to forget about it. Everything you thought you believed in, everything you were working for was a lie, it was, it was . . . a lie."

We had heard a remarkably similar story from the dissenting survivors. Jim Jones had promised that anyone who left Jonestown would be tracked down and killed. And yet, leaders of the organization had left in the midst of the suicides. They had with them a suitcase containing five-hundred thousand dollars in American currency.

"The money was given to us by one of the secretaries," Prokes said. He identified Maria Katsaris, a top aide and mistress to Jones. "She said, 'Things are out of control. Take this.' We left. The money was in a suitcase."

We all crowded at their table to suckle more information. The letter to the embassy, for instance. The one in the suitcase with the money. It was addressed to the Soviet

embassy. Mike Carter explained, "Jones told us the Soviet Union supported liberation movements."

The bits and pieces wouldn't fit. It was like trying to hold too many ball bearings in one hand. Every time you got something, everything else threatened to clatter to the floor and roll out of reach.

Odell Rhodes was a soft-spoken, articulate thirty-six-year-old, an eyewitness to the first twenty minutes of the massacre at Jonestown. The first time we met, we sipped bourbon, strong and sweet and straight. Odell had been a junkie for ten years. He'd been through two drug-treatment programs, and both times he had gone back to drugs and some sleazy hustle on the street. "They tell you an addict shoots junk because he likes it," Odell said. "I never liked it. I had to shoot it."

When the Peoples Temple buses came through Detroit, an alcoholic friend decided to join. The next time they came through, the friend looked up Odell. The friend was dry, sharp, well dressed. "He looked like a successful businessman," Odell said. And Odell, who had failed twice trying to kick his habit, decided to check out the temple.

Jim Jones, he said, gave him a new self-image. He was intelligent. He was useful. Odell was given a job in the San Francisco temple. "The area it was in," he said, "was like where I had come from in Detroit. But I could walk down the street with money in my pocket and pass it all up."

When Odell first arrived in Guyana, things seemed fine. His job was teaching crafts to children, and he was good at it. He'd spend hours poring over books, looking for projects children could complete in a couple of hours. The kids teased him – "Hey, that'll never work, man" – and he'd bet them cookies that it would. They laughed a lot. "I really loved those kids."

But then things started going sour in Jonestown. The food deteriorated. The workdays increased. It seemed, to Odell's experienced eye, that Jim Jones was developing a serious drug problem. Crazy things began to happen, and he made plans to escape.

But then the news of Congressman Ryan's visit hit Jonestown. Security was increased. Then came the incident at Port Kaituma, followed by the terrible night of screams in which more than nine hundred died.

"I watched them die," he said. "And I haven't cried yet. It's like I'm dead inside. Water comes to my eyes, but I can't cry." Odell sipped at the bourbon and blinked several times.

Jonestown was the last cult-oriented story I ever wrote. What else was there to say?

When I began writing about cults in the early Seventies, I was attracted, immediately, by the inherent comedic possibilities. Some groups flatly predicted the end of the world and they set actual dates for the firestorm. I always liked to be on hand to watch the sun rise and set without substantial incident. Then I got to ask the question: "Uh, wasn't something a bit more dramatic supposed to happen here today?" The intellectual flailing about in the wake of a failed Apocalypse was always both hilarious and pitiful.

Not that I thought cults should be banned or outlawed. Quite the contrary. If personal freedom meant anything at all,

it had to encompass the process of belief, and that meant belief in the sublime as well as the ridiculous. For this reason, I was on record as opposing forcible "deprogramming," in which parents hired thugs to snatch adult children out of cult situations in order to turn them against their leaders. My exact words – a peculiarly Seventies formulation – were: "Kidnapping in the name of freedom is like fucking for chastity."

So the new religious organizations began contacting me, a writer they saw as an obvious sympathizer. Some were harmless, and a few actually did good work: I recall one group that formed a lifesaving volunteer ambulance service in the Bronx. Few groups, to my disappointment, advocated sexual license – there was enough secular sex to go around in the Seventies, I suppose – but one cult, the Children of God, did make a pretty good pile of cash out of old-fashioned prostitution. Jesus said, "Be a fisher of men." They were "flirty fishers."

The Seventies' spiritual smorgasbord also included Moonies, Hare Krishnas, Christian fundamentalists like the Tony and Susan Alamo Christian Foundation as well as a thirteen-year-old Perfect Master, lots of older ones, along with gurus, maharishis and American avatars. There were leaders who talked to God, and others who were God. I spoke to them all, sometimes writing stories, sometimes just collecting research.

Looking back over a span of twenty years, I suspect I had hoped that, in doing this work, I'd find the Truth: the belief system that would fill my soul with Utter Certainty. But, as the decade progressed, the stories that presented themselves to my attention became darker and more frightening. In various new religious sects, there were rumors of beatings, of unexplained deaths. Guns, in some cases, were being stockpiled, and members disappeared without a trace.

The one sentence I heard most often from cult members was: "If the press just told the truth about us, they'd have the greatest story ever told." But the press seldom wrote about the structure of the religion or its belief system. They wrote about cult leaders taking sexual or financial advantage of followers; about secret paramilitary drills; about actual physical torture. This, some cult leaders felt, was evidence of a vast conspiracy directed against them.

Hatred and fear of the outside world was the cement that held the most appalling groups together. Comedy had given way to a vague, unfocused fear that sometimes blossomed into outright terror. I was not surprised when I heard the first reports of the danse macabre of suicide and murder orchestrated by mad Jim Jones. It was almost to be expected.

The article I wrote about those deaths failed to change the world, and certainly hasn't stopped people from joining destructive or deadly cults. I suspect it is human nature to seek the solace of Utter Certainty. In San Diego, members of Heaven's Gate knew the Truth, as did the followers of David Koresh in Waco. Call it the Jonestown Syndrome: If the damn Apocalypse is going to keep dragging its feet, why not simply engineer one of your own? That way you never have to answer any of the hard questions. And if they laugh at you, or find you pitiful, you won't ever even have to know about it.

Because death is the only Utter Certainty.