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Jonestown: The Life and Death of Peoples Temple

By Marcia Smith

Nobody joins a cult.
Nobody joins something
they think is going to hurt them.
You join a religious organization,
you join a political movement,
and you join with people
that you really like.
I think in everything
that I tell you about Jim Jones,
there is going to be a paradox.
Having this vision
to change the world,
but having this
whole undercurrent of dysfunction
that was underneath that vision.
Some people see
a great deal of God in my body.
They see Christ in me, a hope of glory.
He said, If you see me as your friend,
Ill be your friend.
As you see me as your father,
Ill be your father.
He said, If you see me as your God,
Ill be your God.
Jim Jones talked about
going to the Promised Land
and then, pretty soon, we were seeing
film footage of Jonestown.
Rice, black-eyed peas, Kool-Aid.
We all wanted to go.
I wanted to go.
Peoples Temple truly had the potential
to be something big
and powerful and great,
and yet for whatever reason,
Jim took the other road.
On the night of the 17th,
it was still a vibrant community.
I would never have imagined that
24 hours later, they would all be dead.
Die with a degree of dignity!
Dont lay down with tears and agony!
Its nothing to death.
Its just stepping over into another plane.

Dont, dont be this way.
I vividly remember the first time
that I met Jim Jones.
My sister Carolyn
had invited my parents
and my younger sister and I
to visit her in Potter Valley.
We came and there was
this strange man in her house,
and her husband wasnt there.
Annie and I were sent out
to go on a walk.
When we came back,
something had happened.
Something terrible had happened,
because everyone had red eyes
except for Jim Jones.
We didnt really get the story
until we were in the car going home.
He was carrying on an adulterous
relationship with my sister.
And because his wife
couldnt relate to him as a wife...
that Carolyn
had taken over that role.
Everything was plausible,
except in retrospect,
the whole thing seems
absolutely bizarre.
The first time
I visited Peoples Temple,
I drove at the urging of a friend,
a co-worker, to Redwood Valley.
We all got suited down,
neck-tied and everything.
You know, and we were sharp.
As soon as I walked into
the San Francisco temple, I was home.
I was one of those kind of guys...
that I used drugs.
I was an alcoholic.
I drunk alcohol and stuff like that.
And... and all these people
that were like my age,

they were clean.
Before I came here,
I was taking LSD, marijuana,
every type of dope
you can imagine.
Without our pastor, Jim Jones,
to teach me the right way,
I would not be in college right now.
And for me, that was like,
Wow, man. I liked that.
Thank you very much, thank you.
There was an interracial group.
The choir was interracial
and they used to sing this song:
Never heard a man
speak like this man before.
Never heard a man
speak like this man before.
All the days of my life,
ever since I been born,
I never heard a man
speak like this man before.
After they sang one or two songs,
the whole place was lit up.
The Peoples Temple services,
they had life, they had soul,
they had power.
We were alive in those services.
I would be up jumping in the balcony
and clapping my hands.
If you came in as a stranger
and didnt know anything about the politics,
you were thinking you were entering
an old-time religion service.
By the time Jones did come out
to do his speaking,
the table had already been set.
I represent divine principle,
total equality,
a society where people own
all things in common.
Where there is no rich or poor.
Where there are no races.
Wherever there is people struggling

for justice and righteousness,
there I am.
And there I am involved.
What he spoke about were
things that were in our hearts.
The government was not
taking care of the people.
There were too many poor people
out there. There were poor children.
The world is like a human family.
The little child may not be able to go
and draw a paycheck,
but the father
guarantees the childcare.
The grandmother
may not be able to work anymore,
but the father and mother
guarantees her the right to live.
Every single person felt
that they had a purpose there
and that they were
exceptionally special.
And that is how he brought
so many young college kids in,
so many older black women in,
so many people from diverse backgrounds
who realized that there was
something bigger than themselves
that they needed to be involved in...
and that Jim Jones offered that.
I went home, told mom, You know what,
this is the right church for me.
It was the next week that I became
a member of Peoples Temple.
Theres a little town in Indiana.
The moment I think of it
a great deal of pain comes.
As a child I was undoubtedly
one of the poor in the community,
never accepted.
Born as it were
on the wrong side of the tracks.
I grew up with Jimmy Jones.
We started first grade together.

My brothers used to
go over to Jimmys house
and hung around his barn,
which was where he played.
From the time I was five years old,
I thought Jimmy was a really weird kid,
there was something not quite right.
He was obsessed with religion;
he was obsessed with death.
My brothers came back
with stories of him
conducting funerals
for small animals that had died.
A friend of mine told me that
he saw Jimmy kill a cat with a knife.
Well having a funeral for it
was a little strange,
killing the animal was very strange.
Jimmys father did not work,
did not have a job, and was a drunk.
Jims mother had to work
in order to support the family.
And he was kind of
left to his own devices.
Kind of the kid who ran wild
in the street, you know what I mean?
Listen, he was in a
dysfunctional family.
We got a nice name for it now.
But when you live
in a dysfunctional family,
you think its normal.
Feeling as an outcast,
Id early developed a sensitivity
for the problems of blacks.
I brought the only black
young man in the town home
and my dad said that
he could not come in
and I said, Then I shant,
and I did not see my dad for many years.
In Lynn, Jim Jones looked for community
and couldnt find community,
in Lynn as a town... which had a

population of what, a thousand people?
But he did find community
in the Pentecostal Church.
He saw that they were
a surrogate home.
He saw that the preachers were like
father figures to their congregations.
And that role represented power
over the lives of your congregation.
Jim Jones started out
on the revival preaching circuit,
learning the ropes of
being a preacher.
And once he started doing that,
it became clear that
he could get a following.
The first time I met Jim Jones
was Easter 1953.
My mother-in-law, Edith Cordell,
had a monkey and it hung itself
and she wanted to
replace the monkey.
So she looked in the Indianapolis Star,
and in that Indianapolis Star
was Jim Jones's ad
that he had some monkeys to sell.
So it was through that
that she met Jim Jones,
and came back saying that
he had invited her to church
this next Sunday.
It didn't make no difference
what color you were.
It was everybody welcome there
in that church
and he made it very plain
from the platform.
We had some people
that disagreed with Jimmy.
They got up in the audience
and they said they disagreed with him.
They did not like this
integration part of the services.
We did ask people to leave the church

one night because of that.
I was the first Negro child
adopted by a Caucasian family
in the state of Indiana.
Jim and Marceline actually
went to adopt a Caucasian child.
The story goes that
I was crying real loud
and it drew attention
for Marceline to come over,
and once she picked me up,
I stopped crying.
My family was a template
of a rainbow family.
We had an African American,
we had two American Asian
and we had his
natural son, homemade.
Jim was breaking new ground
in race relations
at a time when the ground was
still pretty hard against that.
Jim Jones was hated
and despised by some people,
particularly
in the white community.
There had been pressures on him
to leave Indianapolis.
He thought that Indianapolis was
too racist of a place for him to be,
and he wanted to
take his people out.
California is perceived to be
a very progressive state.
This would be the place to
implement the dream of racial equality.
Not Indianapolis,
which seems hopeless,
but California, which
seems to be the Promised Land.
He chose Ukiah
in northern California,
about 90 miles north
of San Francisco,

because there was an article
in Esquire Magazine that said that
Ukiah was one of the nine places
in the world that
in the event of
thermonuclear attack,
people would survive.
I told Edith, If you follow Jimmy
to California, you're crazy.
So what did Jimmy do,
but took her to a psychiatrist
and sent me a certified letter
that she is of sound mind,
and she is not crazy.
I was there the afternoon
that Edith drove away.
I didn't know
I'd never see her again.
The move to California
was really fun.
There were about twelve to fifteen cars
driving across United States
and making that journey
to a place that none of us knew,
you know, none of us
could even imagine.
We were going to California,
our new world.
When I saw Redwood Valley,
I couldn't believe my eyes
because it was like a paradise.
It was rural. It was green.
There were grape vines everywhere,
and I fell in love.
I said "This is got to be
a perfect way to live."
We started with about
a hundred and forty-one people
and from that, we've grown
to a very thriving congregation.
We have about every level of society,
all socio-economic income strata,
professional down to the ordinary
field worker, field laborer.

Really, its beautiful to see that
all these divisions have been broken down...
not only race, but any differences
of economic position.
The focus of Jims message
was taken from the Bible,
where Jesus in his earliest days
told people to sell all things
and have all things in common.
Jesus Christ had the most revolutionary
teachings to be said, in the sense that
he said to feed the hungry,
clothe the naked,
take in the stranger,
administer to those who are
widows and afflicted in their suffering.
And we feel that no one really
tried Christianity too effectively
in the Judeo-Christian tradition.
The membership
increased substantially
as he procured
more and more Greyhound buses
and fixed them up,
and every summer
he began this cross-country tour.
The purpose of the bus trips
was to spread Jims beliefs
about socialism and the world,
and how we can live a better life
and about an integrated lifestyle.
But behind that, I think it was to
gather more members for the Temple.
I decided not to go to Vietnam,
and I was just at the point of
what am I going to do with myself?
I heard Jim Jones was
going to be coming to Philadelphia,
and coming to
Benjamin Franklin High School.
And I went Wednesday night
and I listened to him,
and I was impressed by
how it was such an interracial group

and people were really happy.
You got nothing to lose.
Who else is going to stand
and look you in the face and say,
Come and Ill give you a job.
Come and Ill give you a home.
Come and Ill give you a bed?
But Ive got nothing but a pension.
Go and leave your pension behind,
who else will tell you that?
Wholl tell you,
Ill put you on that bus tomorrow?
I heard Jim Jones talking
about equality among races,
what its like living in California,
in the Redwood Valley,
the good works that theyre doing.
Things that, like,
I wanted to get involved with,
but didnt even know
where to make an entre.
And all of a sudden,
the answer was there.
Somebody is gonna get on the
freedom train in Philadelphia!
He was there for three evenings,
and the third evening
I went off on the bus
and came to California.
When I joined Peoples Temple
in the spring of 1966,
there were exactly
eighty-one members.
Five years later,
an extended family of eighty people
had become
an organization of thousands.
Peoples Temple
really was a black church.
It was led by a white minister,
but in terms of the worship service,
commitment to the social gospel,
its membership,
it functioned completely

like a black church.
He talked black.
He really understood it.
He understood how it was
to be treated differently.
And thats from his roots
coming out of Lynn.
When people heard Jim,
they didnt look upon him
as being a white preacher, you know.
People didnt look at Jim
as being white. He was not white.
He was just their preacher.
You going to go to Texas with me
when I have that campaign?
I was just wondering whether
I could go or not. I would like to go.
Why of course youd go,
you went to Mexico with me.
As older people joined,
it took a year or so
and hed convince the people that
he was doing so much in the community
and so why not rather than
just tithe your twenty percent,
why not sell your home,
give the money to the church?
And that is what people began to do.
Now in this church,
what have we done in a short time?
We have four senior citizens homes
that are the most innovating,
the most beautiful you want to see.
They had their own rooms,
they had every need taken care of,
they had their food provided.
They were well looked after.
Now my home is stone block and
theres not a piece of new furniture in it.
But our senior citizen homes,
theyre elegant. And thats beautiful.
They were giving their lifes money
and savings to the church,
but in exchange,

the church was agreeing
to take care of them in the community,
not just in a nursing home.
Well it got to the point where
there were so many duties in the Temple
that some people
had to become full time.
So when you were full-time Temple,
you worked about
twenty hours a day.
My week kind of ran like this,
I'd work my regular job on Mondays,
you know, eight to five.
Then, I'd work on files.
There were people
who ran rest homes.
There were animals to be taken care of.
There were the publications.
Everybody had a job.
Wednesday night we'd have
a meeting in Redwood Valley
and I'd go to the meeting for,
until probably 10 or 10:30.
We turned our paychecks over
every time we got paid.
And then we got an allowance,
five dollars a week.
And Friday, I'd go to work
and I'd get off of work,
and I'd hop on the bus
or drive the bus to San Francisco.
If I had to go to the doctor,
it was taken care of.
If I had to go to the dentist,
it was taken care of.
If I needed clothes,
that was taken care of.
And often on Saturday night,
we'd have planning commission meetings
until 2 or 3 in the morning.
We would always try to let
each other know the next day,
Well, how long did you sleep?
Oh, I slept two hours.

You only slept two?
Well, I slept an hour-and-a-half.
And then Sunday,
wed have a Sunday morning service
and then around one oclock
hop on the buses, drive up,
drop people off in San Francisco,
and drive up to Redwood Valley.
The longest I ever stayed awake
was six days,
and thats with no coffee,
no nothing.
It changed over the years,
but it was always busy.
Being in an environment where youre
constantly up, youre constantly busy,
and youre made to feel guilty if you
take too many luxuries like sleeping...
you tend to
not really think for yourself.
And I did allow Jones
to think for me
because I figured that
he had the better plan.
I gave my rights up to him.
As many others did.
Edie.
Fingers, are your fingers numb
in your right hand?
Reach the fingers out
that are bothering you.
Now, is the pain gone?
There was a senior citizen
and we nicknamed her Power.
He would have her to come up
in the midst of one of his meetings,
and she used to say,
The man got power.
The man got power, yall.
And the whole place
would just go wild.
Take your glasses off.
Lets just dare in our faith.
Now look at my face.

I love you,
the people love you,
most importantly
Christ loves you.
What do you see?
- One finger.
- One finger!
One of the most
incredible healings, to me,
was this little old lady
and she was in a wheelchair.
Jim said, Darlin,
you know, today is your day.
Were going to,
you're going to get healed today.
He said, Were going to,
were going to heal those legs of yours.
You're going to walk again.
And the whole auditorium
went totally crazy.
Come forth, my dear.
Stand up. Take that step.
Bless your heart. Take that step.
And she takes this
real slow, shaky step.
She said, I can feel it.
He said, Yes, I know you can feel it.
Now take your other leg and do it.
And so another real slow, shaky step
and he says, Now
I want you to walk toward me.
Move forward. Move forward.
Move forward, darlin. You can do it.
And she starts taking forward steps.
And pretty soon she is walking.
And she starts walking up
one of the aisles.
And pretty soon she's running.
Well, by this time the whole congregations
running down these aisles with us,
were all just running around the aisles,
just hoopin and hollerin up a storm.
Later, I found out
that this person

that I had seen healed
and cried with
was really one of the secretaries,
made up to look crippled and blind.
Never shall forget
what Hes done for me.
Oh, what Hes done for me.
Oh, what Hes done for me.
Oh, what Hes done for me.
I never shall forget
what Hes done for me.
For those people that hadnt
grown up in the apostolic world,
Jim would say, you know,
I know this is different for you.
But for people to come from
extremely religious backgrounds,
so that I can bring them forward
to the message
thats so important
for all of us today
and that is activism,
then I need to speak
on each persons level.
He said, A lot of you people,
you Christian people coming in,
youre so hung-up on this Bible.
He said, This black book
has held down black people
for the last two-hundred years.
He said, But Im going to
show you this has no power.
So he leaned way back
like a football player and he flung it.
And when he flung it and let it go,
the place got dead quiet like.
And he waited
until it hit the floor, POW!
When it hit the floor, he stood
and he looked back and forth.
He said, Now, did you see any lightning
come from the sky and strike me dead?
Youre gonna help yourself,
or youll get no help!

Theres only one hope of glory
Thats within you!
Nobodys gonna come out of the sky!
Theres no heaven up there
Well have to make heaven
down here!
And he said, What you need to
believe in is what you can see.
He said, If you see me as your friend,
Ill be your friend.
As you see me as your father,
Ill be your father,
for those of you
that dont have a father.
He said, If you see me as your savior,
Ill be your savior.
He said, even so, If you see me
as your God, Ill be your God.
People lifted Jim
to a level of adoration
because many believed that
he had healed them of cancer.
Many believed
that he had saved their son
or daughter from an automobile accident.
There were many reasons
for many people
to admire, love,
excuse, overlook
much of what Jim did.
I had been in the Temple
for just a few months.
I was sent backstage
in Los Angeles to...
to get something for somebody,
I dont remember what.
And Jones happened to be
coming out of his room and he said,
Hi Tim, how are you doing? How is it going?
How do you like everything so far?
And, Oh, I like it a lot.
And, you know, its really cool.
I dont remember exactly.
And he reached up and kind of patted

the back of my neck, and he said,
Ill fuck you in the ass
if you want.
And I just kind of stammered,
No. You know, No.
And he said, Well, you know,
if you ever want that, thats okay,
just let me know
and well do that.
Jim said that
all of us were homosexuals,
everyone except... He was the only
heterosexual on the planet.
And that the women were all lesbians
and the guys were all gay.
And so anyone that showed
any interest in sex was just compensating.
What he explained to each of us,
and in sermons, was that
sexual relationships
were very selfish
and they took away
from the focus of the church,
and that was to help others.
Jim was not celibate.
Nobody knew that until perhaps
it was their time to find out.
What he spoke from the pulpit
wasnt what he did behind the scenes.
I remember one night,
one of the brothers had stood up and said,
You know, I think everybody
that wants Father to screw them in the butt,
you need to take an enema first.
Im telling you the truth man,
Im telling you the truth.
And then the question went on,
Well, how many of you in here
have had him to do that?
And whether they were lying
or just following suit,
hands of the men
just went up around the room.
And Im sitting there petrified

because Im like,
Is this what its leading to,
that Im supposed to get to?
And Im thinking, hmmm.
But I played it off like,
Okay, Im being cool.
Okay, if thats where they at,
thats not where Im at.
Because Im thinking, My wife...
Im happy with my wife.
With this sleep Im not getting,
Im not getting enough anyway.
One of the powerful things that
Jim used, to keep us to not think,
was that we were never really allowed
to speak with one another.
Id look around and Id say,
Am I the only one that feels this way?
I learned, eventually,
not to say anything to anyone.
We had a lady
who visited us a week ago here
and was speaking to one at the door,
and she was a member of a prominent church,
a pastors wife,
and she said, I think that the poor
should be made to control
how many children they bring
into the earth. You remember?
Some leading scientists say,
We have to have euthanasia.
Oh, no. Oh, no.
Whos going to decide who
and when a persons going to die?
We must never allow that because
this is the kind of thing that ushers in
the terror of a Hitlers Germany.
We must not allow these kind of things
to enter our consciousness.
My father used to tell me
that peoples lives,
sixty percent of peoples lives,
were made on emotional decisions.
Make your decisions,

sixty percent of your decisions,
based on logic, fact and reason,
and allow emotion
to be the secondary motivator.
And... we were Star Trek fans.
He and I were Star Trek fans,
and he used to always say,
Just vulcanize yourself.
Just vulcanize yourself.
We were celebrating New Years Eve.
There were about
a hundred and twenty people.
Jim started talking
about our cause and he said,
This punch is going to be
passed out to everybody here.
We all drank our punch
and then he said,
You just drank poison.
And we will all die, right here
in the church, together as one.
The women were just screaming,
Oh no, my baby, my baby,
and others just sat there.
And all of a sudden, Jim says,
That wasnt poison you drank.
Jim said that
this was a test of loyalty.
He just wanted to see if we were
truly committed to our cause,
and that was
how we would show it.
Well it wasnt about our loyalty,
because we were
demonstrating loyalty all the time.
Coming there, being there
in the meetings, sitting, listening,
you know, supporting, working.
And I thought it had
a lot more to do with Jims sense of
rehearsal.
Did he feel like he was potent
and... and omnipotent enough
to really get people

to kill themselves when he said so?
And that frightened
the hell out of me.
Jim Jones, I think,
realized that
ultimately Ukiah
was not the sort of climate
where Peoples Temple would thrive.
He wasn't going to be gaining
large numbers of members.
He couldn't declare himself to be
a socialist god openly,
certainly in a city like Ukiah.
In San Francisco, Jones walked in
on a sort of a wild kind of party,
where there was a lot of new faces
and new sources of power.
And there was a sort of feeling
that smaller groups,
neighborhood groups, activist groups
had a bigger chance.
I think the early sixties
had been a time of great optimism;
there was a belief that
we could change the world
through social movements.
With various assassinations, Malcolm X,
Medgar Evers, Martin Luther King,
Robert Kennedy, there was definitely
a feeling of hopelessness.
The message of Peoples Temple was,
No, the dream is alive.
If you had a demonstration
in San Francisco
and you wanted
people to show up,
Jim Jones, the Peoples Temple,
could be there in twenty minutes,
with hundreds of people.
And we would be enthusiastic.
There was an attitude of,
"We can change the world."
And that's what we wanted to do.
These people would be on time,

theyd be polite and nice.
They were a span of ages,
a span of races.
They were tailor-made
for a political rally.
To a politician, it was like
a birthday cake times twelve.
You have managed to make
the many persons associated
with Peoples Temple part of a family.
If you are in need of healthcare,
you get healthcare.
If youre in need of legal assistance
of some sort, you get that.
If youre in need of
transportation, you get that.
And thats the kind of religious thing
that I am excited about,
and have some respect for.
When vice presidential candidate,
Walter Mondale, came to San Francisco,
Jim Jones was part of the entourage
that boarded his private jet.
When Rosalyn Carter
came to San Francisco,
she gave Jim Jones
a private audience.
Jim Jones had political power
that few people,
let alone preachers,
could have imagined.
Jim Jones represented
the Peoples Temple
as a progressive movement
that was threatened.
That there were outside forces who
didnt want us to do what we were doing.
And it was the government.
The government was infiltrating
and wiretapping
and trying to kill people
or assassinate people.
Thats what was happening.
He was always paranoid that

someone was going to get in
and try to kill him,
that they had two people
that had dedicated their lives,
that they were going to jump
in front of Jones and take the bullet,
kind of like the secret service
so to speak.

Jim started changing a lot
in the seventies.

He was taking drugs.

I think he said
it was his kidneys at the time.

And he was getting
more and more paranoid.

Incredibly paranoid.

There was always threats.

Always, always, always,
always threats. They were there.

They were just about
to try to destroy us
if we werent always viligant
about our movement.

There was a fire
in the San Francisco Temple.

The Temple was burned down
and had to be rebuilt.

The fire proved
they are out to get us.

They so dont want us to do
what were doing;

theyve burned down the Temple.

Theyll do anything to keep us
from doing what were doing.

So we have to be even stronger.

What about the fact that

the Ku Klux Klan

has increased one hundred times
in its membership?

Where? Not Mississippi,

Im talking about New York State.

Its the churchs duty to have

a place of protection for its people.

December of 75, ninety of us

went by plane, into Guyana,
and saw where we were
building the community there.
See, theyve made
progress on the road
and leveled it,
clear in to five miles.
And youre seeing in the distance,
housing complexes, that are being built.
What I saw that creation
as being was building a city
where we could move and raise
our children, outside of the oppression
and the racism of
the United States of America.
When I first went into Jonestown,
it was just a footpath in the rainforest.
We had Indians
in front of us with machetes,
and we had Indians
behind us with machetes.
Three-hundred miles into the jungle,
we literally built a city
in the middle of the jungle,
in the middle of nowhere.
Hello family. Its been a... its
such a joy and great pleasure being here,
because of Fathers love.
We are trying to make,
and we are making
a place of refuge for all of you here.
There is no,
nothing at all that I would...
that I have any holdings here.
I do not want to go back in any way,
shape or form to the States.
I love it here and this is the place
where all of you are going to be.
Pretty soon we were
seeing film footage
of the first crew
that went down there.
We all wanted to go.
I wanted to go.

It looked like...
like freedom.
Now, will each of you
give a very fond embrace,
a salutary kiss of greeting
to your neighbor,
and lets fill this atmosphere
with warmth and love.
We thought of ourselves as one big
family that did handle our own discipline.
I was in a lot of the meetings where
people were spanked or beaten, and I...
I was slapped once,
also in a public meeting.
People were brought
up front and asked...
had to tell who
they had slept with
and who they had
sneaked off to a restaurant with.
There wasnt a week that went by
that I wasnt called up on the floor
because of my behavior,
because of my attitude.
Stanley Clayton, up, front, center.
He would ask people,
What do you think
we ought to do with them?
Do you think they ought to
get a good boxing?
And then hed get
a resounding roar, Yes!
You might fight
five people in one night.
Well, you know,
youre very tired!
Ive seen situations where
they actually knocked the person out
and actually took water
and threw water back on him,
woke him up,
and whooped him some more.
I had welts really bad,
and when I went to work the next day,

one of my employees
noticed the welts when I sat down.
And I just broke down
and told her.
She didnt even know
I was Peoples Temple.
And she called the manager
of the station up
and they talked to me
about leaving.
I couldnt say goodbye
to my son or my husband
because at that point,
it was like the Gestapo,
the families were
turning in each other.
If I had said goodbye,
one of them would have reported me.
Its kind of like when you
get married and you have this ideal.
And youre, you know,
youre in love and then,
you know, the honeymoon
wears off and reality sets in.
And most people,
once the going gets rough,
dont jump out immediately.
In one planning commission meeting,
Jim was getting notes, kind of love notes,
from one of the members
on the planning commission.
Jones is sitting there calmly
and so another lady said,
Well, I dont know
why you keep doing that.
What makes you think youve got
something that he wants anyway?
And so another woman says,
Well, you know what?
You ought to just take off your clothes
and show him what you got.
You aint got nothing.
And so, by this time,
they looked back to Jones

and so he looks over his glasses,
and he nods with approval.
Yeah, thats a good idea.
She was to be totally naked and
she was down to nothing but her skin,
not even any shoes on, you know,
no bra, no panties, no nothing.
Then they begin to say
what her breasts looked like,
her stomach, butt,
vagina, you name it.
Everything they could think of,
they were saying.
By this time, her face is red,
her bodys almost red from
embarrassment, and I noticed something.
Jones was sitting,
looking over his sunglasses,
but he had a smile on his face
like hes really enjoying
this woman being torn down.
I have a conscious memory of
sitting there, thinking to myself,
This is wrong.
And I didnt do a damned thing
to stand up and say, This is wrong.
Its like a child
in a dysfunctional family.
On a certain level,
its normal, you know?
I just kind of took
everything in stride.
But then we felt like we had gotten
involved and gotten in so deep that
it was actually no way out.
I had traveled on Bus Seven,
which was Jims bus.
And he sat down next to me.
And I was sitting there
and I thought,
Thats weird, it smells
like alcohol next to me.
And he leaned over and he said,
Do you know what you do to me?

He had informed me that
I was to come in... On Bus Seven,
there was a room
in the back for just him.
He had books.
He had a desk. He had a bed.
When everyone got off the bus
at the rest stop,
I went into his little room
and I sat there and waited for him.
And finally he opened the door,
and without any talk or anything,
he just pulled down his pants and...
and had sex with me.
And as I lay there frightened,
not sure what to do,
and as I shivered, he'd say to me,
This is for you.
I'm doing this for you, Debbie.
Well, in 1975 it was
a mayoral election in San Francisco.
A conservative candidate and
a liberal candidate, George Moscone.
Jones had several hundred people
who would go door-to-door Election Day.
Instead of a group that might give you
twenty or thirty of these people,
or a hundred, you had
three or four hundred.
The Moscone election was very close.
The margin of victory was
probably no more than 4,000.
So you had to credit a big chunk of
decisive votes to Peoples Temple.
The reward for the election
of George Moscone
was the appointment of Jim Jones
as Chairman of the City Housing Authority.
What was once a really
boring meeting, all of a sudden,
became like really interesting
when Jim Jones became the head of it
because we all
came down on the buses.

And we were instructed that
when Jim came in, we stood,
and when he left or spoke,
wed stand and clap.
The sheer staginess,
the controlled atmosphere
that sort of enclosed this guy,
made him so unusual,
so different than the norm,
that it made me very curious.
My biggest problem was
getting somebody
to sort of talk to me about the Church
in kind of conversational terms.
I had become friends with
some of the various defectors,
and one of the defectors told me that
she was going to speak
publicly about Jones.
And I said to her, Well,
if youre going to speak publicly,
Im going to speak with you.
Im not going to let you do this alone.
I finally heard from
some ex-members who heard
I was interested in writing a story
about the Temple for New West magazine,
and they took a chance.
They called me and some of them said,
you know, You dont know
nothing about the Church.
Wait until I tell you
what I went through.
Before the article was going to break,
Jim convinced the publisher
that she needed to read it to him.
He was on one phone and
I was on taping the other end of it,
while somebody else
listened on another one.
Jim didnt understand that
there was no way he could talk her down
from whatever this article
was going to say.

And as she continues
to read this article,
hes looking around the room
at about five of us
and you could tell that hes becoming
more and more anxious and as...
and you know, his mouth
becomes dryer and dryer.
And he realizes that this article
is going to be hugely damning,
and it was midway through it
he mouths to all of us in the room,
Were leaving tonight.
They flew out to Guyana,
six hours before
that article was going to hit.
When Jim Jones decided that
there was too much pressure,
too much trouble
to stay in San Francisco,
he ordered the move to Jonestown
and it happened almost overnight.
People were being taken to airports.
There were people who were packing
their belongings and leaving their homes,
with virtually no explanation
to their family members
as to where they were going
or why they were going.
Fred Lewis came home and found that
his wife had taken their seven children
and gone to Guyana,
along with all their possessions.
My wife had gone over
three months prior.
And I was waiting
on pins and needles,
and I was talking to her probably
twice a week on the hand radio
and Leona Collier came up,
Ok, Eugene its your time,
youre going over.
Coming into Jonestown,
you see a guard at the front gate

and youre all excited,
youre going down this road.
The trailer comes to a stop
and then you can see the wooden
pathway that leads to the pavilion.
And youre just...
you want to run, but you know,
you just try, Alright Im gonna be cool.
And just as you reach
the edge of the pavilion,
people started rushing you
that you knew, you know.
My wife was there. Havent seen
my mother in over a year or so.
And Im just hugging people
and its just... its like, I have arrived
and everything is
going to be okay now.
I have never been so totally
happy or fulfilled in my life.
I cant begin to describe it.
You could sit here
and talk all day long and no words
could describe the peace, the beauty,
the sense of accomplishment and
responsibility and camaraderie thats here.
Its overwhelming, it really is.
You cant describe it.
You know, its just such an exciting time.
Everything was new and unique and...
and just fun. You know,
we just had fun with it as it grew.
I just loved that
we created what we ate,
that we did all these jobs.
What you think about your friends
back down in the States?
You think they should be here?
Do you want to share with them
this morning? Speak up!
- I wished I could, share with them,
- Can you do it?
- but they wont listen to me.
- Would you do it? Wont listen to you, huh?

When you dont have anything,
you own Jonestown
you are part of Jonestown.
You were a shareholder of Jonestown
if you were African American.
It gave them the opportunity to...
to really be a part of creating a utopia.
I think that Jim Jones
took his group down there
because he was afraid
to face the publicity
and answer the questions
here in this country.
I dont think that he feels confident
having people talk to their relatives.
I think the only way he can survive
and sustain what he started
is to isolate all his followers
from this country and from their families.
The Concerned Relatives
were the ex-members
who wanted other family members,
still in the church,
to know they could leave.
They wanted them to feel
that there was an outside world,
that Jones was wrong about telling people
they could never leave the church,
and that they would be
treated badly in the real world.
The Concerned Relatives prompted
FCC investigation of Peoples Temple.
They organized letter-writing campaigns
to public officials, to members of Congress.
They were incredibly effective
in mobilizing government
and media interest
in Peoples Temple.
He was talking integration.
He was talking helping people.
He was talking
better this and better that.
What about now?
Whats your impression now?

My impression now,
that those are fronts for him.
I think hes gone crazy.
When Jim Jones wasnt there,
things tended to be a little bit lighter.
You know, people would be
dancing or singing.
There would be music
in different cottages.
But when Jones was present,
it was very, very dark.
It was almost like a dark cloud.
In Jonestown,
there was a speaker system
and only Jim spoke on it.
And it went twenty-four hours a day
and he would tape himself.
So, in the middle of the night,
all through the night,
his voice was talking to you.
The United States is calling for
the removal of all Blacks and Indians.
So is England.
They want to have their immigrant Black,
Indian population removed in six months.
We had no other radio or T.V.
or communication with parents
or any kind of, you know, update
that could show us, really,
that theres a whole other thing going on
besides what Jim was interpreting for us.
I make my stand clear.
Give us our liberty
or give us our death.
No matter where you were,
you could hear.
You could hear it in your...
in your bunk at night.
You could hear it
when youre in the outhouse.
You could hear it when
you were working in the field.
You...
you could hear it all the time.

At least on those terms,
we choose our death
and no one chooses it for us.
Dont try to take any of our children.
There was this pervasive sense
of being under attack in Jonestown.
He told them that things were
just getting worse in the United States,
they couldnt go back home.
And not only that, but these
forces were traveling to Guyana
to destroy them there.
You cant know how much
of a conspiracy there is
in the U.S. these days.
Maybe its economics?
Who knows what it is?
Im not able to say.
But I do know its real.
Its obvious that Martin Luther King
was murdered by conspiracy,
Malcolm X, Senator Kennedy
Over the summer of 1978,
all of us noticed that
Jim was seemed to be getting sicker.
His harangues over the loudspeaker
were getting more and more frantic,
and really just sounding
more and more insane.
He had gotten to the place that
even his voice was becoming slurred,
and he said it was because
the nurse was giving him
the wrong medications.
But yet still, everyday
it was getting worse and worse.
Every night, at some point,
his voice would come over
the loudspeaker and hed say,
Im sending somebody out tonight,
somebody you know,
somebody you trust
and theyre going to act like
they want to leave.

But this is a loyalty test
and you need to turn them in.
A father would turn in a son.
A husband would turn in a wife.
A small child would turn in a parent.
There was no freedom to express
to one another what was going on,
because everything was suspect.
The most forbidden thing
to express was to leave.
He had a real issue with separation.
People could not leave him.
He took it as a betrayal
to the cause, and to him personally.
He said, I really want to get away
from him. By Christmas, I will be gone.
By Christmas, do you want to be gone?
By Christmas, do you want to be gone?!
By Christmas, do you want to be gone?!
I would ask you, could I go home
and make a trip to see my people?
I have the power
to send you home by Christmas,
but its not on Transworld Airlines.
Its blasphemy! Its blasphemy
to talk about going back
when you have not been
given any approval!
Do you want to go home?
- No.
- Well, then be seated and shut your mouth
and dont be in my face anymore.
Congressman Ryan was unique
in the political sphere.
He had this hands-on
approach to legislating.
He just didnt take no for an answer.
So when he was in the state assembly,
he went to Folsom State Prison
and spent a week as an inmate
to understand the prison issues
and prison reform.
He became concerned
because a number of residents

in San Mateo County had become members of the Peoples Temple and family members started contacting him, concerned about their whereabouts and concerned about whether or not they were being held against their will. The word we were getting was that there was an armed encampment. It was enough for the Congressman to say, You know what? I want to go find out for myself. There was a lot of preparation for Congressman Ryans visit. There was all these different scenarios that were presented. He wasnt going to let him in. He was going to let him in. We were going to wait for them to come in and we were going to kill 'em all when they came in. I was very fearful about making the trip. I had a copy of the Congressmans will and placed it in a particular drawer in my desk, just in case. We flew in sometime in the afternoon, about 6pm. We saw this beautiful sign, Welcome to Jonestown. As we approached Jonestown, it was spartan, but very impressive. How could you not be impressed that out of the jungles of Guyana, they had carved out a community? They had crops growing. They had cabins. They had a little medical clinic, a little daycare area.

Flour, rice, black-eyed peas,
more peas.
We have different containers
surrounding the place
we couldnt go through all of the tremendous
inventory they built up. Kool-aid...
When Ryan came,
he came on a Friday night
and we put on a reception for him.
The songs that we sang
that night, it was people saying,
This is who we are
and this is what we are about.
It was a vibrant community.
I would never have imagined
that twenty-four hours later,
those people would be dead.
Everything up to that point
was, was... was good.
Everybody was thrilled
that Ryan was thrilled.
He just kind of praised us.
I think that all of you know that
I am here to find out more about...
Questions have been raised
about your operation here.
And I can tell you right now,
that from the few conversations
Ive had with some of the folks here
already this evening,
that whatever these comments are,
there are some people here who believe
that this is the best thing
theyve ever had in their whole lives.
That response to him
was spontaneous. It was loud.
It was emotional.
What I was feeling was,
this is an opportunity that I can vocalize
how much I believe
in what we are doing here.
The reporter next to me said,
Ive never felt anything
like this before, and I said,

Because you havent felt
anything like this before.
I actually felt pretty good overall.
This went probably as well
as it possibly could go, so far.
When Congressman Ryan came,
I wanted to pass him a note
that said, Help us
get out of Jonestown.
When one of the reporters was walking
around toward the edge of the pavilion,
I stuck the note in the fold of his arm
and it fell to the ground.
And so I picked up the note and I...
and I gave it back to him.
I said, You dropped something,
and this little boy, about nine years old,
started saying,
He passed a note! He passed a note!
Don Harris, who was theNBCreporter,
came up to me and Congressman Ryan
and handed us these two notes
from people that wanted to leave.
So at that point,
we knew that
something was very, very wrong.
I was like the first to rise up
the following morning.
It was a bright sunny day,
but it was a dark day.
It just didnt feel right.
We were there, supposed to interview
some of the family members
to ask them why they cannot leave.
Are you happy here?
Oh, I should say I am.
Ive never been any happier in my life.
Do you want to stay?
Definitely.
I certainly do.
Some people have said
they couldnt leave if they wanted to.
Do you think you could?
Yeah. If I really wanted to

Im... Im free to go,
if I really wanted to.
I would be free to go.
Well, I believe it. Ive been here
a few days and I have...
I have absolutely
no complaints at all.
It is really nice here.
It is really nice.
And Ill be leaving in a couple weeks
and they could come with me,
but they said they didnt want to come.
Literally, out of nowhere,
this storm came blowing in.
The sky turned black.
The wind came up and it just,
torrential rain.
But what I personally felt was
that evil itself blew into Jonestown.

It was about 11:

Edith Parks walked up to
Jackie Speier and said,
Im being held prisoner here,
I want to go home.
Now do I both
understand you to say that
you both want to leave
Jonestown on this date,
November 18th, 1978?
Immediately,
the whole vibe changed.
I mean this reporter said,
We got our story.
You know, The storys here.
Its happening right now.
Jim Jones came to talk to me
and the first thing he said was,
Dont say anything to the reporters.
Theyre all liars.
The last words I heard
from Jim Jones was,
I just want you to know that
you can come back to Jonestown

and visit your son
any time you want.
Last night, someone came
and passed me this note.
Hes the one that
Im just talking about.
This is the man that
wants to leave his son here.
Doesnt it concern you, though,
that this man, for whatever reason,
one of the people in your group
People play games, friend.
They lie. They lie.
What can I do about liars?
Are you people going to leave us.
I just beg you, please leave us.
Bill, we will bother nobody.
Anybody wants to
get out of here, can get out of here.
They have no problem
about getting out of here.
They come and go all the time.
I dont know what kind of games people like.
Who... people like publicity.
Some people do. I dont.
But some people like publicity.
But if its so damned bad,
why is he leaving his son here?
Can you give me
a good reason for that?
When word got out
that people were leaving,
all hell broke out.
You bring those kids back here!
You bring them back!
Dont you touch my kids!
More people wanted to leave.
And then Jim Jones started
to make pleas to people, saying,
You cant leave.
Youre my people.
Why do you want to leave?
It was an emotional roller coaster
for everyone there.

Dont you touch my kids!
Mother!
Youre not taking my kids!
No!
Jones was in the pavilion.
At one point, he said,
Well, of course
you can go if you want.
But clearly,
that was not the message.
The message was,
You are betraying me.
I went and I spoke to
the Congressman in the pavilion.
I told him, You are in extreme danger.
You need to leave.
And he said, You dont have
anything to worry about.
He says, You have the Congressional
shield of protection around you.
And I just looked at him
like he was totally insane.
Congressman Ryan was
directly across from me,
and I saw this Temple member
walk up behind him
and he was actually
crying and shaking
and all of a sudden,
he pulled out this knife and said,
All right, motherfucker,
youre gonna die.
We all jumped on him,
and there were just screams of horror
everywhere.
We heard this great uproar
in the pavilion and the truck stopped.
Then, shortly thereafter,
Congressman Ryan starts walking out
in this bloodstained shirt.
Those of us in the news media
viewed Congressman Ryan
as a form of protection,
a shield of the United States.

What happened there
in those few moments
made it clear that nobody was safe.
I went back to my cottage.
All I wanted to do was
see my wife and my son.
Gloria and I were laid down
on the cot and we just held each other
and I said, You know,
I think we may all die.
And she said, she kind of looked at me
and then she looked down at our son,
who was playing on the floor
with the toys,
and she said,
Youre scaring him.
I had literally opened my mouth
to say we need to leave,
when there was an
announcement on the loud speaker,
Will everybody report to
the pavilion for a meeting.
We drove back
to the airstrip, Port Kaituma.
All of a sudden, we saw a dump truck
from far away arriving to this airstrip.
We realized these people
catch up from people from Jim Jones,
theyre very close lieutenant
to Jim Jones.
These three guys,
they get off the truck
and walk around this area
as though they were
looking for somebody.
They looked in peoples faces.
They stared at us for a little bit,
but they didnt say one word.
They didnt ask anything.
Right away,
they walked back to the truck.
They drove this truck
all the way across the airstrip
and stop on this side of the plane,

so literally
they cut us off from the jungle.
We never know theres people
hidden inside the dump truck.
The moment it stopped,
they start shooting right away.
Everybody ran toward the plane,
on this side of plane.
They try to hide
underneath the wheels.
Then the Congressman ran under
the plane, and I sort of followed suit
and got behind one of the tires.
All you can hear is the gun
"pop, pop, pop" goes off constantly.
We lie flat on the tarmac
at that moment.
But shortly afterwards,
I heard my partner, the cameraman.
He yelled, Oh shit. He said he got...
he got shot. He was sitting up.
There were people
tumbling and yelling
and letting out cries
as they were hit.
I was hit in my arm and wrist.
I felt a tremendous explosion,
right next to my head.
I got a tremendous pain
ran through my arm and on my shoulder.
I was really shaking,
but I didnt move.
I took the pain and hold still.
I was lying on my side,
pretending that I was dead,
with my head down.
And...
they came and shot me
at point blank,
point blank range.
I remember someone coming to me
and telling me that
Congressman Ryan was dead.
But I was at a point where

I didnt know
how much more time
I was going to be alive.
The guns dead and all we can hear
this one engine was still running.
So all you could hear
the engine noise. And thats it.
We walked up to the pavilion
together, with everybody else.
It was very quiet.
It was very somber. It was very sad,
but it wasnt a death march.
The congressman is dead!
You think theyre going to
allow us to get by with this?
You must be insane. Theyll torture
some of our children here.
Theyll torture our people.
Theyll torture our seniors.
We can not have this!
He said, Well, we got to go.
We got to get out of here.
We got to... we got to go to sleep.
Get the solution together.
If we cant live in peace,
then lets die in peace.
Maria Katsaris walked up to him
and whispered in his ear,
and he looked at her and said, Is there
anyway to make it taste less bitter?
And she said,
No, no apparently not.
And he said, Is it quick?
And she said,
Yeah, its supposed to be quick.
Anyone that has any
dissenting opinion, please speak.
When we destroy ourselves,
were defeated.
We let them,
the enemies, defeat us.
On the last day of Jonestown,
Christine Miller stood up and said,
I dont want to die here.

Why are we going to throw
all this away? Weve worked too hard.
I look at all the babies,
and I think they deserve to live.
I agree, but also they deserve
Whats more, they deserve peace.
We all came here for peace.
Is it too late for Russia?
Shes calling Jim Jones
on some of the things that
he has promised them
that they were going to do.
Jim had promised, as an
alternative to them dying in Jonestown,
that they could go
to the Soviet Union.
Im listening to you.
You asked me about Russia.
Im right now
making a call to Russia.
What more do you suggest?
Eventually, the rhetoric
ratchets up enough
that she is shouted down.
Christine, your life
has been extended to today.
That youre standing there
is because of him.
Thats when I noticed
that there were armed guards
that had kind of taken positions
up around the pavilion.
Im thinking,
Where did all of these
fucking guns come from?
Jones came down off the podium
and he said,
Hey, we got to do this.
We got to... we got to go,
that if we dont go this way,
we going to go like this.
They were coming,
taking like newborn babies
out of their mothers arms.

Mother, mother, mother,
mother, mother please.
Mother, please,
please, please dont
Dont do this!
Dont do this!
Lay down your life with your child.
But dont do this.
There was a young kid,
his name was Sunny
and when he came inside,
he bumped into me.
At that same time,
hes falling to the ground
and hes going into convulsion.
Hurry, hurry, my children, hurry!
All right, let us not fall
into the hands of the enemy.
Hurry my children!
Hurry!
I grabbed the kid
from the shoulders up,
and in that process of
taking him out of the pavilion,
this kid died in my arms.
I mean, I just felt
the life go out of him.
To me... at that point,
I knew that this shit was real.
Die with respect,
die with a degree of dignity.
Its nothing to death, its just
stepping over into another plane.
Dont, dont be this way!
I aint never used
the term suicide,
and Im not gonna never
use the term suicide.
That man killed... was killing us.
As I walked up
to the back of the pavilion,
I saw a woman named Rosie
on the ground crying,
holding her dead baby.

There were maybe eight
or nine other people who were dying,
or in the process of dying.
Inside, I just wanted things to stop.
Please, just let me catch my breath,
let me figure out
whats happening here.
I looked to my right
and I saw my wife,
with our son in her arms
and poison
being injected into his mouth.
My son was dead and
he was frothing at the mouth.
You know, cyanide
makes people froth at the mouth.
My wife died in my arms
and my dead baby son
was in her arms.
And I held her and said, I love you,
I love you, because its all I could say.
She died in my arms, man.
Quickly! Quickly!
Quickly! Quickly! Quickly!
Where is the vat?
The vat, the vat
Bring it here,
so the adults can begin.
My wife came up to me,
she didnt have no tears in her eyes.
She just was...
was just in a daze.
My mother, my grandmother,
my sister, my brother, they gone."
You know she said,
Just take me. Just take me
and just lay me down
next to my grandmamma.
And she went up to that Kool-Aid,
to that death barrel
and she just, didnt hesitate,
just took it and drunk it
and then told me to hold her,
to take her, and I did.

And she died in my arms.
And once I laid her down
and she told me how she wanted to
lay with her grandmother,
I... at that point, knew that
I didnt have no reason
to be here no more.
We laid it down, we got tired.
We didnt commit suicide.
We committed an
act of revolutionary suicide
protesting the conditions
of an inhumane world.
We were just fucking slaughtered.
Fucking slaughtered.
There was nothing dignified about it.
Had nothing to do
with revolutionary suicide,
nothing to do about
making a fucking statement,
it was just senseless waste,
senseless waste and death.
To whomever finds this note.
Collect all the tapes,
all the writing, all the history.
The story of this movement,
this action, must be
examined over and over.
We did not want this kind of ending.
We wanted to live, to shine,
to bring light to a world
that is dying for a little bit of love.
I never believed in
Heaven in my whole life.
You know, thats not the way
I operated
but when I was in Guyana,
and when Id watch the sun rise,
I actually thought
there was a heaven on Earth.
And now, I cant
believe in heaven anymore.
Theres quiet
as we leave this world.

The sky is gray.
People file by us slowly
and take the somewhat bitter drink.
Many more must drink.
Im saddened
because it didnt work out.
Because it just seemed so beautiful.
And Ill say this
about November 18th,
I felt Id lost a family
and I knew Id lost my children.
A teeny kitten
sits next to me watching.
A dog barks.
The birds gather
on the telephone wires.
Let all the story of this
Peoples Temple be told.
We were people that...
We wanted to make a change.
Its a shame it didnt happen.
It might not never happen.
But one thing I can say,
at least we tried
and we didnt sit back and wait
on the laurels for somebody else to try it.
Yes, we tried it.
Yes, it was a failure.
Yes, it was very tragic.
But at least we tried.
If nobody understands,
it matters not.
I am ready to die now.
Darkness settles over Jonestown
on its last day on Earth.
I never had any dreams of Jonestown
until this one dream came.
I could see myself
in Jonestown walking,
and when I looked to my left,
there was my son.
He was standing
in the middle of a duffel bag.
And just right when I got ready

to reach to touch his head,
he pulled the bag up like this.
And the bag fell and he was gone.