Chapter 12:
"Precious Acts of Treason"
April – October 1978

Small Mercies and Solace

Newcomers to Jonestown quickly learned it was safest to keep their doubts and dreams to themselves—Deborah Layton writes in her book *Seductive Poison* that those who voiced fears or criticism were often reported, even by friends and family:

Once you were in, it didn't take long to learn the ropes: keep your head down and don't talk unless it's absolutely necessary. For each person showing weakness by speaking of his or her fears, another would become more trusted for reporting it.[1]

Jim Jones worked to foster suspicion and fear among the ranks, dividing couples and setting family members and friends against one another. But he could not entirely squelch protest or keep teenagers from being teenagers; neither could he smother camaraderie. Even in this environment, many took risks for friendship or love, or found ways to commit other "precious acts of treason"—as Deborah put it—both small and large.

Deborah describes the first of several such acts she would experience in Jonestown that took place on her very first day. When she and her mother, Lisa Layton, first arrived, their luggage was searched—standard protocol for newcomers by then. Personal items such as letters and medications were always confiscated during such searches—for someone suffering from cancer as her mother was, having medication taken away could be dangerous. But "an elderly black committee member who knew Mama" hid one of Lisa's bottles of liquid medication, a painkiller called Paregoric that she needed, quietly stuffing it back down into her bag.

Much later, Deborah was to see some of her mother's other confiscated medications on a shelf in Jim Jones's cottage.[2]

Stephan found a retreat from the deterioration of conditions in Jonestown in the form of the wilderness, just as he had in Redwood Valley. It was a source

of solace he was also able to share with both his mother and, before she died in late 1977, his grandmother, Lynetta Jones.

Wright, in "Orphans of Jonestown," relates the story of Stephan's gift to Lynetta of a trip into the wild. Seventy-eight and suffering from emphysema, she had nearly died from the trip on the roiling Atlantic from Georgetown and then upriver to Jonestown.

Stephan had often visited his grandmother in her cabin, where, too weak to get up, she gazed out at the jungle, "begging Stephan for stories of his adventures in the woods." He made up his mind he had to take her there, "even if it killed her." One day in December he "carried her in his arms" to his haven in the jungle, where Lynetta wept—the only time Stephan ever saw his grandmother in tears. "She died three days later," Stephan told Wright.[3]

One day, Stephan was finally able to show his mother his jungle retreat. Reiterman and Jacobs tell how Stephan took Marceline first to a knoll that had a view of Jonestown. She took it in for some time, in silence. Then she turned to Stephan and told him she had been afraid that moving to Jonestown might stifle his creativity forever, that Jones might crush his spirit. But looking down on what was now thoughtfully arranged clusters of buildings, from animal shelters, gathering places, cottages—and her beloved nursery—to farm plots and orchards, all joined by paths and boardwalks, when it had been almost impenetrable jungle, she realized he *had* found an outlet for his creativity. He had helped design and build something important for the people he loved, and she saw that Stephan took pride in what he and others had done.

Then he took his mother to his jungle refuge. When Marceline saw the green and peaceful spot, water splashing into a small pond, she knew that Stephan had found a place in the wilderness he loved to escape for a time from his father's madness.

The journey into the bush they shared that day would become a memory both of them would cherish.[4]

Another kind of escape from Jonestown they found on that walk came in an unlikely format. Marceline had to stop from time to time, her back still a painful problem for her. Stephan tells that story.

Mom sat to rest another time on our walk and when she stood, her rear end was covered with fire ants. I mean COVERED, just solid red roiling. It was a comical but efficient scramble for me to bat them all off her without either of us getting bitten.
It helped that Mom was laughing and quite calm, probably because I was, and she had no idea what a hundred bites from the suckers felt like—and that the ants were such a mass that they came off in clumps.

Laughter too, is a solace and an escape, and in Jonestown, no doubt, more and more a rarity—except in secret places with trusted people or at evening events that included songs with humorous lyrics. Levity might be seen as a refusal to take Jones's dire predictions and crazy newscasts as true. Laughter was yet another "precious act of treason." In the wilderness Stephan and his mother could laugh, even at what might have become a small disaster.[5]

Kids Will Be Kids
As accusations and punishments were meted out by Jones and life in Jonestown became more punishing both physically and mentally, young men and women continued to do what the young do: have fun, flirt, fall in love, and get into trouble.
Some "acts of treason" were small and the perpetrators never caught: There were reports that someone figured out how to unplug the P.A. system so as to escape Jones's monotonous, hours-long harangues. Jones would go on and on into the microphone in his cabin, not knowing he was speaking only to himself and his mistresses. And on one occasion, when Jones required everyone to watch Barbara Walters's interview of Fidel Castro (it was not the first time), Edith Roller wrote that Jones "had been obviously disturbed by the lack of seriousness he had seen" during the screening—almost certainly it had been teenagers unable to contain their laughter.[6]

Finding the comfort of another in the dark in spite of the increasingly grim days was a kind of escape. More than a dozen babies were born to Jonestown parents, according to Stephan.[7] In the midst of a miserable situation—one in which it was nearly impossible to trust anyone—young people nonetheless seemed to find a way to seek out loving human contact. Deborah writes that some cabins "were inhabited by the bold young

teenagers who wanted to live with a girlfriend or boyfriend," but Stephan later told Bebelaar that, given the long workdays, the best teenage couples could do to be together was to section off a small space for themselves in a crowded cabin.[8]

In Roller's cottage, where she lived with fourteen others (including Opportunity student Sonje Regina and Tim Jones's older sister Ruth), young people often played music and talked outside the cottage late into the night.[9] They may have considered it a safe spot for private assignations; Roller wasn't one to report wrongdoing, though she wrote once that she threatened to report some students misbehaving in her class. But teenagers know a soft-hearted person when they meet one.

Even the most benign behaviors of young people were criticized or condemned by Jones. Part of the flirting ritual among teenagers at that time involved girls "fixing" boys' hair—combing, braiding, or styling it—which could be seen in cafeterias, courtyards, and the back of high school classrooms. It was no different in Jonestown. At one rally in March, Roller asked Marceline if she approved of young women "curling young men's hair." Jones cut in and said he disapproved.[10] But it's unlikely that the practice was stopped altogether.

At times youthful passions ran high in Jonestown, and one evening in 1978, eighteen-year-old Opportunity student Ricky Johnson discovered his girlfriend, Christine, was sleeping with his friend Thurmond. Heartbroken, Ricky ran off into the jungle and the next night attempted suicide by swallowing gasoline. Overwrought with guilt, Christine tried also, by slitting her wrists; neither succeeded.[11] Jones denounced the two at the rally on October 14, in a rambling, incoherent harangue, complaining he'd "had no peace *two* nights in a row" (another boy, fifteen, had tried to run away three times in one night):

I want to hear no shit coming back from you people. No bullshit music. I don't want to be caught up in no goddamned games, sex games or foolishness. . . . You can be in a relationship, but I don't want no goddamned mess like we've seen here in the last few hours of people trying to kill themselves or go running off because somebody's with somebody else.

Jones goes on:

You're upset, you're disturbed. And I understand that. You're disturbed as a whole because you're not getting enough sex and you turn that disturbance towards me so that's why you see yourself threatening me. Hell no, that's as normal as rising of the sun. But you got to get yourself together, and right now you're not together.[12]

Ricky, known as "Richard" to Jones, responded in stammers. "I guess I'm not. I know I'm not. Uh I . . . I try . . . I've tried to get— pull myself together and get this hostile out of myself and and through—"

Jones cut in, asking if Ricky had ever "had emotional treatment in a mental institution," claiming such treatment would be no more difficult than if Ricky were to get a tonsillectomy or have his appendix out. "I have a strong feeling . . . that people act like this should never even get out," Jones said, suggesting the Extended Care Unit (or ECU), which he calls "the hospital unit," be enlarged so the "two basket cases" could be sent there. He speculated that for Ricky and the other boy it might take "sixteen months" to restore their sanity.[13]

At a rally two days later, Jones warned that any potential runaways would be shot in the legs, or that Guyanese soldiers would kill them outright, adding to the list of deadly dangers to runaways such things as "infiltrators," "mercenaries," and snakes. He was still railing on about Ricky, claiming that Ricky drank "three cups" of gasoline which would have killed the boy, who "shit fire" and vomited flames. Jones bragged that he had miraculously saved Ricky's life, and pronounced that he had acted "loving[ly]" toward Christine, and that she responded by selfishly trying to kill herself. So she too deserved to be drugged in the ECU.[14]

Ricky was apparently ordered to write an apology to Jones.

To Dad

Ever since the incident with Christine and Thurmond I have not really been myself, it has put a deep effect on my feelings. I am fighting it each day but sometimes it gets real hard, because I keep getting flashbacks in my head of what I seen and what she told me about what she and Thurmond did when they suppose to be watching the animals all night and how her best friend knew what was going on and kept on letting it go by. Sure I admit that I have

hurt peoples feelings but there is also a time when hurting peoples feelings come to a stop. I guess in one way I had it coming to me things just don't happen[—]they happen just. When I was in New York I use to always wonder why did the man always beat up on the lady. I use to see it almost every day. At least I could say I have never beat up on a girl. I try to beat them up with words. I think about certain films I saw, like The Learning Tree [and] how a young black man['s] girlfriend got fucked by a white guy . . . but the most important thing that comes to my mind is dad when you was sitting in a classroom and how someone drop your girlfriends panties on your desk just because you didn't want to have sex with the girl because you wanted to show respect for her.

Dad, don't worry I'm not going to do anything stupid because eventually my feelings will change. I sure did learn that in a relationship there is a awful big chance of getting hurt and when you do, it hits like a ton of [bricks].

I know its not the end of the world for me it's the beginning believe me when this does fade away I will be [—] damn sure will be stronger. Dad people should understand that life is nothing if [you] don't have a cause to die for. Dad the way I feel now seem like it will never be the same again for as long as I live. I will never forget this incident because it was a part [of] me growing up.

from your Son

Ricky Johnson

A hasty postscript, perhaps dictated, reads, "Without you Dad this would be a cold cruel world."[15]

Tommy Bogue got into trouble repeatedly: He was whipped for building a still, punished for taking a dish of curry offered to him by an Amerindian boy who knew Tommy was hungry—even though Tommy tried to explain that it would have been rude to refuse. Punishment never deterred him. When he was caught building his own cottage in the bush, a place to get away to—at least temporarily—he was forced to dismantle the cottage and return the lumber, guarded by Stephan. When Tommy dropped a board, Stephan "slugged him behind the ear hard enough to make him stagger," according to Julia Scheeres in her book, *A Thousand Lives*. The following

day, his punishment continued when he was ordered to dig pits for outhouses in the broiling sun for weeks. Sometimes his punishment included going without food until a certain amount of work had been accomplished.[16]

When Tommy's friend Brian Davis was sent to Jonestown, the two were at first uncertain about whether it was safe to trust one another in this new environment, but their old friendship quickly won out. Now both fifteen, they decided to run away together. Having been in Jonestown for ten months already, Tommy knew a good deal about finding his way in the bush. He was fascinated by a full-grown bush cat the size of a kitten, howler monkeys, macaws, and toucans—though he'd been disappointed the toucan didn't look like the one on the cereal box at home. He knew which plants were edible, and he'd learned how to snare small animals from an Amerindian boy he'd befriended.

Tommy and Brian planned to make it all the way to Venezuela. En route, they'd sell condoms stolen from the Jonestown warehouse in villages along the way, and use the money they earned to buy food. Once they reached Venezuela they'd call home. With the condoms stolen and their plan in place, they needed only to await the perfect opportunity. The two found their moment one night when Tommy's latest punishment—for falling asleep while Jones was speaking at a meeting—was to collect still-hot coal from land cleared by burning. When Jones called for someone to supervise Tommy at his chore to make sure he worked hard enough, Brian volunteered. Apparently Jones was too far gone from his intoxicant abuse to remember the boys were longtime buddies and partners in crime.[17]

Tommy and Brian changed their plans and decided to head to Matthews Ridge four or five miles away to try to get help in reaching the American embassy in Georgetown. Their plan was foiled when they were found and captured in Matthews Ridge, and once brought back to Jonestown, the would-be escapees' heads were shaved and their legs manacled. Fortunately, before too much time passed Stephan discussed the issue with his mother, and Marceline convinced Jones the boys had been punished enough.[18]

In one of the shipments from San Francisco, a basketball arrived. Stephan, some of the boys from the Opportunity baseball team, and several others began to practice drills, seeking out fields in the settlement where they could

play.[19] Stephan describes how basketball began in Jonestown in his essay on the Jonestown Institute website, "Baby Toes."

We threw together a bootleg basketball court in Jonestown, because I loved hoop, because Mike could weld, and because we'd both had just about enough of Dad's controlling shit. It was a juicy piece of rebellion that ultimately saved many young lives.
We managed to get the floor for a storage and tool room up on stilts before Dad said we had no money for the walls and roof. Without walls and a roof, the floor took up about the same area as two greyhound buses side by side (now there was a measurement the people of Peoples Temple could understand). But for its precipitous—we made them adventurous—edges, it was practically ready made for a basketball court.
I can't remember if Dad had said outright that we couldn't have a court. Everyone in town knew he didn't approve of competitive sport. . . . it seemed like we were always trying to see how far we could get before our drug-whacked leader noticed. . . . it was a lot harder for him to take something away than to snuff it while it was just between our ears.
Once we got the idea, we didn't hesitate. It felt like we were erecting a monument to defiance.
Our ball playing almost immediately became a force to be reckoned with in Jonestown. We needed the release of basketball, of competitive sport, legal aggression with an undercurrent of communion. And the communion was of our own creation, our own volition, from the bottom up and not the top down. Genuine instead of demanded. The court was birthed in rebellion, and even Dad knew that a larger rebellion lay in trying to stop what Mike and I had started. We were on that court just about every free minute we were given, and some that we took. Much steam was let off there—literally and figuratively.[20]

Lawrence Wright describes how practice was held in the evening, and after the team set up lights for the court, they would play "until all hours," He told how, one night, "Tim walked over to the radio hut and started imitating his father's voice over the P.A. system—slurred speech and all." Amazingly, Tim wasn't punished. "There was a sense of liberation—and also of

uncertainty. People began to allow themselves to wonder what life in Jonestown would be like without Jones."[21]

Tim saw a chance when a Guyanese "sports official" came to Jonestown, and convinced the man that the Jonestown team should play in a tournament with the Guyanese national team. As with the Cobras baseball team, Jones somehow went along with the plan. Uniforms were sewn up and practices became serious. "Everyone cheered when the boys ran along the road and through the middle of the settlement on their training drills," Wright reports.[22]

When the team played on the make-shift court, they always had an audience—mostly young and female, some with kids—despite the late hour.[23] At least for a time, the intense physical energy lifted the young men and their loyal fans out of the continuing madness.

The team would also come to play an important part in the Jonestown story.

The Diversion of Music

Music provided another form of escape from drudgery and exhaustion, at least for a while. For many of the other people Stephan's age, music and dancing were the preferred respite from the madness, and, as Roller's journal reveals, there was still at least *some* fun at the evening rallies. Jones was learning how difficult it is to suppress youthful pluck and spunk.

There was no shortage of performers: Jonestown had the Temple band, several singers, and other musical and dance groups. Roller detailed the program for one particular evening—on the billing were the "stomping" Soul Steppers, a rhythm, marching, and dance group that performed regularly. A woman named Shawanda Jackson danced to the "St. Louis Blues." Diane Wilkinson sang "Summertime" and "Isn't She Lovely," and someone named Patsy Johnson even performed a "snake dance with an emerald green boa constrictor."[24]

Opportunity students Johnny Cobb, Jimmy, and Calvin Douglas plus Bruce Oliver and others formed the lineup for a musical group they called Black Velvet, with a young man named Pancho leading the vocals. Wearing matching suits, they danced in sync and snapped their fingers to the music of Motown groups like the Spinners, the Temptations, and the Dramatics. Despite their having almost no time to practice or to work with the Temple

band, Stephan said they "actually sounded pretty good," though a couple of them "were told just to move their lips" and dance.[25]

Other musicians performed Creedence Clearwater Revival's "Proud Mary" (with its refrain, *Rollin' on the river*), and Les McCann's "Compared to What."

Jonestowners wrote original lyrics, sometimes adapting them to favorite songs, often poking fun at their own discomfort: "Diarrhea," "Deworm Me, Please," and "Sittin' on the Toilet Stool," (which *must* have been sung to Otis Redding's "Sittin' on the Dock of the Bay"). Even though the music and performances were often for the benefit of visitors, to demonstrate the "virtues" of the settlement, it was also a form of expression for which one couldn't be punished.

Some of the songs were political, like "I'm Just Another Worker with a Cutlass in My Hand." The Soul Steppers drummed and march-danced to "Guyana Is So Beautiful." And even though Jones dropped most references to religion in favor of teaching socialism, Jonestowners even sang "I'm Going Up to Jonestown Over Jordan."[26]

If Opportunity students weren't participating in the performances, they were surely clapping their hands and dancing in their seats or singing along. Teenagers are for the most part, and under almost any circumstances, irrepressible. Stephan tells the story of one memorable night of youthful musical rebellion, held on the new basketball court

On at least one of Dad's worst drugged-out days, he told Johnny and Tim from his cottage that there would be no meeting but everyone had to occupy themselves in the library or socialism study or some other stupid, contrived control mechanism dressed up like human development . . . and the town had a party instead. I mean it. They somehow got the music going and had a dance on the basketball court. I didn't go and can't say how Tim and Johnny conjured that one up, but it was a street party in the only way Jonestown could've had one.[27]

Often, though, at the rallies, the music and dancing would precede punishments and humiliation. Eugene Smith describes the rally taking place as he arrived at the settlement in March 1978, in a trailer full of other incoming Temple members:

JUMP!! We start jumping off the back and side of this trailer into this mud. Excellent. I have arrived. The pavilion was packed. DAMNNN, this is crazy. I see Ollie, then I see my mom, old friends, folks I thought were gone were here. Ollie was big—8 and a half months pregnant—and she was beautiful. In the group I arrived with, we were 100 strong. We increased the population of Jonestown by 10% overnight. So to say things were not comfortable is an understatement. So we are singing and clapping, looking, listening, making mental notes. This goes on for a while.
It's a hyped environment, frenzied. I can see Jones on stage. As the music died down, Jones was calling names. Damn.[28]

"Calling names" (also "called up" or "called on the floor") meant Jones was ordering people to the stage for criticism and punishment.

While music was often a big part of the rallies, Jones discouraged dancing on at least one occasion, according to Roller, who wrote that "some people," likely young people, "had been disappointed that he wouldn't allow them to dance on the dirt floor which kicks up dirt which is bad for their lungs."[29]
Still, there were some "public relations" activities in Georgetown involving music and dancing that were sanctioned, including free performances featuring some of Jonestown's most musically talented youngsters. These performances were seen as a good way to quell rumors in Georgetown that those who left for Jonestown were never seen again.
On one such trip to the capital, Deborah—who used the trip to conceal her first moves to prepare for her defection—was tasked with accompanying a group of these young people to a week-long, well-publicized series of performances at the Guyanese Cultural Center. The group of Temple kids, "ten adorable girls and five handsome boys, mostly black," would don African costumes, dance, sing "songs of freedom," and recite socialist poems.
The trip was a great escape for the kids: private showers, comfortable beds, good food, no work, no Learning Crew—just practice, which was fun, and a talent show. In her book, Deborah describes the kids pouring excitedly into the Temple's Georgetown house at Lamaha Gardens when they first arrived

at the capital. “Dibs on the upstairs shower!” one yelled (Deborah indicates it was someone named Joyce—possibly Joyce Polk Brown).[30]

Even if they were also expected to collect money for the Temple on the Georgetown streets, that would still be easy compared to hard labor all day and rallies half the night back in the camp.

Labor as Escape

Another form of escape for some of the young men came in the unlikely form of extra work: Unloading supplies from the *Cudjoe* just in from Georgetown was a job that was really a labor of love for those who formed the team, including Stephan, Mike and Albert Touchette, Phillip Blakey, Ronnie Dennis, Carl Barnett, Mark Cordell, and Emmett Griffith. The young men knew they were feeding the people of Jonestown rather than just following Jones’s often-capricious orders. They wouldn’t be working alone, but together with a common purpose. So, though it meant going back to work after a long, sweaty day, the young men looked forward to the bone-banging ride to the dock. It was also an escape from Jonestown; a time to be rowdy, release youthful pent-up energy and laugh; a chance to be themselves, to speak without considering who might be listening. It was an athletic event requiring speed, skill and muscle; a game, a dance they had learned to do together.

The crew ate quickly and set off at about five in the afternoon to unload the new shipment of supplies just in from Georgetown. Jouncing and banging over the rough road, they headed for Port Kaituma on the tractor trailer.

Two men in tandem might be tossing—in the near dark—two-hundred-fifty-pound bags of sugar to the next two in line as the goods made their way from the boat to the tractor trailer. Or they could each be carrying hundred-pound bags of flour from the hold, or forming a bucket brigade to pass along heavy boxes of canned goods or nails. “It was all for one and one for all,” Stephan said. “And it was so much fun.”

At two or three in the morning, or sometimes as the sun was beginning to rise, they’d secure the load and head back, dead tired but still laughing. With a heavy trailer, the trip would take perhaps two hours. They’d take showers, sleep for a couple of hours, and then head off at six to their regular day jobs.[31] The hard work and lack of sleep were a small price to pay for the freedom, fun and sense of purpose the job afforded them.

Even Edith

Open dissent was infrequent—not surprising given the punishments handed down—and sometimes came from surprising ranks. Even Edith Roller, whose journal-keeping Jones encouraged, broke Jones's dictums from time to time, risking a mild complaint about conditions in the settlement, or even expressing doubt or disagreement with Jones. On at least one occasion she retreated to her beloved books and poets when she should have gone to a required film. After monitoring an after-dinner "political enlightenment" test and helping those who couldn't complete theirs, Roller reported: "A required movie on the Nazis was being shown in the pavilion but when I finished the test I didn't stay for it. I went home and read *Identity of Yeats*."[32]

Roller's journals end abruptly with her August 1978 entries. On September 9, she returned to her cottage to find a significant portion of her journal entries—some originals, some typed copies—gone. She typed a letter to Jones describing the disappearance, but it is not known what happened to the journals, and the possibility that Jones confiscated them cannot be ruled out.[33]

One of the most notable incidents of Jonestowners who challenged Jones was enacted by Christine Miller, a sixty-year-old woman who'd arrived in January, just before Joyce and Ollie and Eugene Smith. From her earliest days with the Church, which she had joined in Los Angeles, Christine had repeatedly stood up to Jones; she spoke her mind when she wanted to, and was not prone to intimidation.

Jones sometimes brought a gun to the rallies in Jonestown, which he'd fire into the air when he wanted silence and attention, or to wake dozing attendees. At one meeting, according to an essay by the late Michael Bellefountaine posted on *The Jonestown Institute* website, when Christine voiced her opposition to something Jones said, he "pointed the gun at her and said he could shoot her, and no one would ever find out." Christine stood her ground, saying, "You can shoot me, but you are going to have to respect me first." Jones threatened her again, but Christine just coolly repeated, "You can do that, but you are going to have to respect me first." Jones then rushed forward and put the gun to her head, "shouting his rage at her

defiance." She did not back down. "You can shoot me, but you will respect me." It was then Jones who retreated.[34]

Ruth's Teeth

Ruth Tupper was Tim Jones's older sister, and Stephan was fond of her. Stephan's essay, "Ruth's Teeth," posted on *The Jonestown Institute* website, paints a picture of youthful camaraderie, of resilience.

Ruth Tupper was missing two front teeth. She used a bridge—two removable porcelain teeth—to fill the gap. She was twenty-two years old. Ronnie Dennis, Vincent Lopez, and I were returning from another day in the bush dropping trees for timber or road access, when someone shouted my name. I turned to see Ruth and a couple of her friends coming toward me. She held her hand in front of her mouth while she scurried over to us, and as she got closer I could see that her neck and face were blushed a bright pink. Her adorably unique seal-bark laugh kept escaping around the hand at her mouth. She walked half-bent and sideways up to me and put her free hand on my shoulder and started rocking to and fro. She continued to guffaw as she turned away from me, then turned back, then turned away, while continuing to hold her other hand to her mouth. I was chuckling with her by then, but just as persistently asking what was going on. She might have danced her embarrassment for some time if one of her companions hadn't threatened to tell me herself. At first, all Ruth could muster through her upheld hand was that she needed my help, I answered "Okay," which is how I often respond to a request for help, usually before I know what's required, especially from someone who is as helpful, kind, and unassuming as Ruth was. Mom—and Dad in his way—taught me to be willing to help. Whether or not I actually can help comes out later.

Ruth was finally able to convey that she had been feeling sick—a common occurrence in Jonestown, even among young and healthy people—and had barely made it to the outhouse to throw up. Too late, she realized she had expelled the two porcelain teeth into the smelly sewage.

Jonestown had no dentist, and even in Georgetown dentures would have been difficult to get. The two teeth lying in the depths of the heavily used

outhouse "were the only thing keeping young and vibrant Ruth from a six-month-old—or eighty-year-old—grin," Stephan writes.

I told her not to worry, that we would get her teeth back, and I didn't hesitate in telling her I thought the cost was too great for us to fail. I envisioned the teeth perched serenely nine or ten feet down whatever hole Ruth had chosen. I found something very different when Ruth took us to the spot. . . .
I was already thinking about what we could rig up to a string and lower through the hole to scoop up the teeth [with] when Ruth shined the flashlight through the hole. Not straight down, though. At an angle, toward the back. In my imaginings I hadn't taken into consideration the violence of Ruth's purging. The flashlight beam bored in on the red and ivory of the bridge more than six feet to the rear of the toilet hole, and nine feet down. Suddenly things felt more like an expedition than a favor.

After considering several alternatives, Stephan decided that Ronnie and his five-foot-six frame (compared to Stephan's at six-four) was the only solution to the problem:

Ronnie gave an exaggerated look over his shoulder as if to see if I might be looking at someone or something behind him, then angled a glance out of the corner of his eye at me, and with a fought-off smile said, "What?" But he knew what. One of us was going to have to go in and get those teeth. He saw the feasibility of my plan when I explained it, and after a drawn out "Aw, Steve" accompanied by the appropriate body language, agreed that my assignment of roles was the best.

Stephan sent Vincent to get ropes and a respirator as Ronnie and Stephan collected other tools and went to work removing the boards that served as the "shared throne" over the hole in which Ruth's teeth rested. The work clothes Ronnie was already wearing, designed to thwart bugs and other jungle creatures, would be his protective uniform, providing "a barrier to unspeakable bodily fluids." A set of goggles to guard against the burning methane (at Mike Touchette's strong suggestion) topped off Ronnie's suit of armor.

They secured the rope around a crossbeam and tied it to Ronnie, who put on the respirator and goggles.

When we were done, Ronnie looked a bit like a cross between a fly and a pig dressed like a pirate on safari. From that point till we lowered him into the pit, he didn't say a word. . . . I asked Ronnie, whose head was now five feet beneath toilet seat level, if he was okay. He mumbled, "Just beautiful." It took everything I had not to laugh.

Working together, the group maneuvered and rotated Ronnie until he was head-down, "less than a foot from the six-foot-deep shitmire," then struggled to position him so he was facing Ruth's teeth. After a series of careful, controlled swings to get Ronnie within reach of the teeth, timing would soon be everything.

It was a now-or-never moment of breathtaking proportions. Just before the penultimate swing I shouted, "Now, Ronnie!" and on his next swoop for the teeth he bellowed, "Only for yoouuu, Steeeve!," swung out his arm, and plucked them from the muck at the end of his reach. I immediately hit the rope low to prevent a head planting on the swing back, quickly stopped the human pendulum, jumped onto the bench, and heaved upward on the rope. The other two dragged it over the rafter till Ronnie's head cleared seat level and the girls could swing him clear enough for us to lower him to the ground with a blood-rushed head, sweaty body, and a tiny bit of green and brown on the ends of the fingers that were death-gripping Ruth's teeth.
This is what I know still: Ronnie was a black kid from East L.A. who, prior to the Temple, had known no one of Ruth's pale complexion and suburban background, and if she, in the very next instant, had somehow dropped those teeth back in, he would not have hesitated to go right back after them.[35]

Tim's Turning Point
Stephan already had his doubts about his father much earlier on, but Jimmy and Tim had continued to feel loyal to Jones. That began to change as 1978 progressed.
Tim's turning point came when his former girlfriend, Shanda, now married to Bruce Oliver, became Jones's new "object of fascination, easily

discarded," as Deborah described Jones's sexual conquests. His purpose, according to Deborah, was to choose young and innocent women and break their spirits. Shanda was a sweet, bright girl, and she and Deborah had become close friends back in San Francisco.[36]

Everyone loved beautiful, vivacious Shanda, with her large dark eyes, sparkling smile, and fluffy Afro. Jones began inviting Shanda, who was just nineteen, to his cottage. Lawrence Wright, in his "Orphans of Jonestown" article in *The New Yorker*, writes that Jones claimed these visits were arranged so he could "counsel her for 'suicidal tendencies,'" a not uncommon judgment for Jones to make about his followers.[37] Shanda was afraid of Jones, according to Deborah, and didn't want to be with him. Soon, those who happened by Jones's residence, set off from the more humble cottages, when Shanda was there could hear Jones sexually abusing her. Jones would often blame the young women, and men, he chose to have sex with, and shame them in front of the community—especially those who had spirit and charisma. It was part of his cruel strategy to divide his people.[38]

In Georgetown, Deborah had overheard a radio conversation between Jones and Shanda, and could tell that she had been chosen as his latest victim. It made Deborah sick. She knew many would blame Shanda rather than Jones. Although there had been rumors of Jones choosing two black women for liaisons back in San Francisco, Shanda was the first black woman Jones slept with that everyone knew about.[39]

Stephan understood why those who still tried to maintain a belief in Jones refused to see the truth: "My father was capable of doing no wrong, so if something was inconsistent . . . you focused your anger on somebody else."[40]

Still, Shanda was more interested in Al Smart, a black nineteen-year-old who'd arrived in Jonestown in July 1978. After Jones called Al on the floor for something trumped up—he'd seen them together—Shanda courageously sent Jones a note, telling him she wanted to date Al instead. Jones immediately ordered her sent to the ECU, claiming she'd threatened to commit suicide.

Tim Jones read Shanda's note before he handed it to Jones. Tim was now beginning to see his adoptive father clearly. "That's what set me off," he told Wright. "He drugged her and he fucked her whenever he wanted to." Before,

Tim had worshipped Jones. Now he understood Marceline's difficult position in Jonestown, and grew close to her. Now, for the first time, he "finally realized what an idiot her husband was." Tim told Wright, "It was hard for her to respect me, because I was always around him, protecting him. I ran his errands. To her, it was as if I were blind to him." Tim also began reestablishing a relationship with his birth mother, and his younger brother and sisters. And now, Stephan and Tim had the same complicated but clear-eyed feelings about their father.[41]

Soon everyone on the basketball team—with the exception of Jimmy, who thus far still believed in his father—was angry with Jones for his retaliation against Shanda, especially when she was seen stumbling out of the ECU in a stupor, unable to walk without assistance. While no one had been surprised that Jones had taken yet another mistress, Shanda was young and innocent. Jones's bragged-about sexual prowess had become obvious sexual predation.

The boys on the team, and others, no doubt—even some of his staunchest supporters—had begun to see Jones's lies, his cruelty, the depths to which he had sunk.

But though his other mistresses apparently still sided with him, Jones had now lost another of his sons, along with the basketball team. Stephan describes his father at his worst: "screwing a teenager in an outhouse and calling others up in front of everyone to say that he couldn't take them on too, publicly proclaiming his desirability and martyrdom, while stumbling about the place and slurring his words half the time and talking insanity and gibberish even more."[42]

Jimmy's Plans

Even as Tim and the rest of the team began to lose faith in Jones, however, Jimmy still remained dedicated to his father. Still, he soon began to make other plans for his life—plans that didn't involve a life in Jonestown. In September Jones sent Jimmy to Georgetown as a sort of Jonestown ambassador, to foster relations with Guyana's important black citizens. Weeks later, in a Georgetown church on October 2, the day after his eighteenth birthday, Jimmy married Yvette Louise Muldrow—his "childhood sweetheart, the first person [he] ever really loved." The couple had already started planning how they'd live their lives. They hoped to attend college in Cuba and then go on to medical school—plus, Yvette was pregnant. Jimmy

was “flabbergasted[ly]” happy. For the time being, though, he sent her back to Jonestown on her own, as he was still needed in Georgetown. Though Jimmy felt committed to his duties to the Temple, one foot was nonetheless out the door—the couple had already submitted their visa applications.[43]

“The Center Cannot Hold”

One of Roller’s favorite poets was William Butler Yeats, whose poem “The Second Coming” seems fitting for the mood in Jonestown at the time:

Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned.

Jones’s “center” had always been his family and his closest friends and allies. It was a new experience for him to learn he no longer held a tight grip on his own family.

Tim, now swayed, happened upon Stephan sitting alone in the dark pavilion one night in late October. Reiterman describes this meeting: “Tim Jones still seethed with the anger of betrayal. He felt revulsion for the corruption and cruelty of his adopted father. ‘We gotta kill him,’ he exploded. ‘We gotta kill him. We gotta have a revolution. We gotta throw this son of a bitch out.’”

Stephan answered, “You want a revolution. Let me tell you something. You know what would happen if you killed Jim Jones now? . . . Some of these seniors think he’s God and he’s their only hope. And you’re gonna go up there and kill Jim Jones? That won’t work. The only way you can take care of Jim Jones is to hope he dies naturally or gradually phase him out. That’s the only way you’re gonna do it. I’m sorry.”[44]

The next day Stephan came across Jones as he struggled back to his cottage, and complied when Jones asked for an arm. Stephan accused his father of drugging Shanda. When Jones denied it, Stephan called him “a fucking liar.” Jones threw back the insult and they parted company, furious.

Since this exchange of insults occurred within earshot of Tim and Johnny in the pavilion, Jones commanded that they put Stephan “under armed surveillance.” But not much surveilling took place—the boys went right to Stephan, smiling broadly, and said “We’re supposed to be watching you.”

Soon thereafter Stephan suffered unusual pain and lethargy, according to Reiterman, and came to believe his father was behind this condition—that he was being drugged too. But Stephan would not give his father the pleasure of his suffering, and went to work as usual. After Jones, apparently shocked to see his son up and working, Stephan accused his father of drugging him. Of course, Jones denied the charge, with bluster.

Jones now dealt out accusations and punishments more widely. After accusing Tim of ridiculous offenses at a rally, Tim replied: "'I ain't got nothin' else to say,' refusing to play the penitent son. 'I don't wish to talk about it. Whatever you want to do with me, go ahead on. . . . Three-fourths of it is bullshit.'"[45]

For Stephan, his father's permanent residence in Jonestown had cut especially deep from the beginning. He had long been keenly aware of his father's cruelties and manipulations, but, though like other members he may have longed to escape, leaving Peoples Temple had never been an option for Stephan. He loved his mother dearly, and Marceline, in spite of everything, still seemed to believe in the Church and its mission—and to support her husband. Stephan was just as much a captive in Jonestown as the other residents.

Erik Erikson, developmental psychologist, wrote an essay, "Youth: Fidelity and Diversity," about what he saw as a central task of adolescence. During that time, youth struggle with an existential dilemma. They seek the means to remain true to what they value in their families and communities while simultaneously struggling to break away—to become themselves, to be true to their own developing principles. Erikson points to Hamlet as embodying the difficulty of this problem: a young man who finds little in his world he can trust.[46]

Stephan and his brothers shared this dilemma. They loved their parents. But, over time, and as Jones descended into drug-enhanced madness and narcissistic mania, they also saw how wretchedly Jones treated the people—his believers—who had followed him to Guyana. And for Stephan, who had viewed his father with clear eyes for years, watching Jones's slow, dreadful descent was likely excruciating.

The outright rebellion of his sons brought on a significant policy change, as Reiterman describes: Jones demanded that all the firearms in Jonestown be

handed over. They were then stashed in a locked building, and only Jones and Joe Wilson had access. But Stephan had managed to hide his rifle beforehand.

Not long afterward, Carolyn Layton went to Marceline requesting that she "sign twenty blank sheets of paper." Marceline would not comply, and an argument ensued. Later, Stephan advised his mother to give in to the "lesser" cases, saving whatever sway she had with Jones for the important things. Marceline replied that "she was tired of signing so many blank pieces of paper over the years."

Carolyn was doing Jones's bidding in requesting the signed papers, but even Jones's most trusted mistress could see his rapid deterioration. She wrote to Stephan expressing her full support should "anything ever [happen] to your father."[47] Surely as Jones became more obviously ill and weak—this feeble man who had once been so strong and was now dependent on others, on his drugs—many in Jonestown must have felt he couldn't continue indefinitely. Jones seemed a paper tiger about to catch on fire.