

'Death Seemed Sweeter'

By Joel Kotkin

Special to The Washington Post

SAN FRANCISCO, Nov. 22—Deborah Layton Blakey was only 18, a pretty California girl fresh out of a British boarding school, when she joined the late Rev. Jim Jones' Peoples Temple. She stayed for more than six years, watching with increasing horror as the cult grew more paranoid and violence-prone, until she began to feel that "death seemed so much sweeter than life."

It was at that point, however, last May, that Debbi Blakey chose life. She deserted Jonestown, barely avoiding a mass suicide she grew to believe was an inevitable product of Jones' "sick" control of the temple.

Relating her experience to a largely incredulous world, Blakey finally was able to persuade a few journalists and a congressman, Rep. Leo J. Ryan (D-Calif.), to believe her fantastic story about the goings on at Jonestown in Guyana, setting the stage for Ryan's dramatic visit there and its savage finale in the jungle last weekend.

Today Blakey, 25, sits in a San Francisco cafe, surrounded by FBI plainclothesmen, haunted by feelings of guilt over the horrors her revelations set in motion. Most of all she is plagued by the murder of Ryan, a crime for

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which her brother, Larry, 32, has been arrested.

"When I last saw Ryan," she said, her eyes glazed, he hugged me and told me, "Debbi, you don't need to worry about anything. It's all going to turn out all right."

In the aftermath of what has happened, Blakey feels more "numbed" than angry, shocked most of all by her brother's alleged role in assassinating the man she had finally turned to for help. "I felt sick when I heard about Larry," she said. "I tried to tell people to doubt [the temple] so I think Jones assigned my brother to do it. He tried to do that to hurt me and my family."

The events of the last week have all but destroyed Debbi Blakey's efforts to put together a new life after leaving the Peoples Temple. Convinced that "assassination squads" have her targeted as a "Class-A class enemy," Blakey lives in fear, refusing to give out her address or her telephone number.

Blakey says she knows of at least seven members of Jones' "assassination squads" whose names have yet to appear on the death list coming out

of Guyana. "You grow tired of having a gun to your head all of the time," she said. "This was the first time I was going to have Thanksgiving with my family since I was 16. But now I know for the next year all I'll be doing is going in and out of court."

While the world remains stunned by the events of the last week, Debbi Blakey feels they were only logical outgrowths of the increasing paranoia which afflicted the cult and its leader, Jones, over the last several years. First attracted to the church because of its "humanitarian acts" and the admiration her husband-to-be, Philip Blakey, had for Jones, Debbi says that by 1972 fear had replaced love as the prime adhesive of the group.

"Once you got into the church, you thought this is really comfortable," she recalled. "Then Jones started saying you better not leave because the CIA would get you. Then they started threatening to beat you, then to kill you. I dreamed of leaving, but I was living in fear."

Reinforcing the terror was a sense of isolation from a world Jones told them was full of racial hatred and growing fascism. Jones also discouraged all close human contact, even

among members of the church. Blakey's own marriage became, in her world, Blakey says Jones was able to man relationships within the cult and all communication with the outside world. Blakey says Jones was able to gain total control over the minds of its members.

"Once you were in the church, he told you to distrust your parents," Blakey said. "He'd tell you all these terrible things about your family and you'd soon find yourself completely into their paranoid-schizophrenic world."

Jones' ability to keep this netherworld together in San Francisco began to flag last year when reports concerning the cult's strange practices—including beatings and humiliations of its members—first started gaining currency in the local news media. Panic-stricken, according to Blakey, Jones moved to transfer his flock to Guyana, which seemed like a haven from the storms then swirling around the temple.

Last December, Jones ordered Blakey, then the organization's "financial secretary," to Guyana. She remembers being told of an idyllic settlement where children played in a lake and

It, a Legacy of Guilt and Fear

life was simple and good. But conditions there were much less benign.

"When I got over there I asked someone where that lake was where all the kids were supposed to be swimming," she recalled with a trace of bitterness. "Of course, I found out there wasn't one."

Blakey stayed until May, when working for Jones in the capital city of Georgetown, she sneaked off to the American embassy and arranged to leave the country. By then, she recalled,

suicide drills had become part of life at Jonestown.

After she went from Georgetown to Washington, Blakey started telling both State Department officials and Rep. Ryan about what was going on at Jonestown. In a signed affidavit, she described the mass suicide drills, which ultimately became dress rehearsals for one of the most gruesome scenes in recent memory.

Today, Deborah Blakey is struggling

to come to grips with what has taken place. She believes some remaining members of the cult are still at large, ready to carry out Jones' last mad request, the executions of alleged "traitors." Right now, her only hope, she says, is that Steve Jones, the reverend's son, will "cool things down," and persuade the last zealots to lay down their guns.

Special correspondent Paul Grabowitz contributed to this report.

Fatal Potion Included Drugs and Poisons

GEORGETOWN, Guyana, Nov. 22 (UPI)—Autopsies performed by Guyanese medical examiners today revealed the mixture the Peoples Temple cultists willingly drank at the Rev. Jim Jones' order was laced with a variety of depressants, tranquilizers and deadly poison.

The autopsy showed the ingre-

dients, blended in a huge cauldron filled with grape-flavored Kool-Aid, included thiorazine, a sedative; demerol, a painkiller; phenergen, an anti-histamine that promotes absorption of substances into the blood system; thalium, a tranquilizer; haloperidol, an antipsychotic sedative used to calm violent people; largatil, another sedative; and

two poisons — potassium cyanide, which affects the respiratory system, and potassium chloride. The brew contained depressants to minimize the pain associated with cyanide poisoning and may have been used to trick the faithful into believing they were only rehearsing their own deaths.