

THE ONLIEST ONE ALIVE:
Surviving Jonestown, Guyana

Book by Catherine (Hyacinth) Thrash as told to Marian K. Towne © 1995
Readers Theatre adaptation by Marsha L. Grant © 2003

CAST

(2 women, 1-2 men)

PAPA EDWARDS/JOHN THRASH
HYACINTH EDWARDS THRASH
ZIPPORAH EDWARDS

All roles are played by African-Americans. Their ages are non-specific, but should be mature. Running time 45-50 minutes. Performed over a dozen times during the winter of 2003-04 for church and civic groups in Indianapolis IN, the play continues to be enthusiastically received by multiracial audiences. Performances often are followed by a discussion on the lure and dangers of cults. Although religion is a central theme, the story is ultimately about Hyacinth's independent spirit and survival. A single actor plays the roles of Papa Edwards and John Thrash, although they could be cast separately. Costume modifications are noted in the script. Papa wears suspenders and a straw farmer's hat. Hyacinth and Zipporah wear unadorned housedresses common to the 30's and 40's. Actors need to be aware that at times they are narrating the story, at other times interacting with each other.

HYACINTH: I was born Hyacinth Edwards on March 27, 1905, on a small farm in Wilsonville, Alabama, near the Coosa River...

ZIP: What we called the Coosie.

HYACINTH: The town was only two stores, a bank, and a depot, about fifty miles southeast of Birmingham.

PAPA: Mrs. Weaver named Hyacinth. She was a real nice white lady their Mama worked for... always giving us a sack of meal or flour, or a ham, so we'd have something to eat.

ZIP: Mama had two families fifteen years apart: first four were: Rosie, Lena, Ada and Alvin... then three more--LaMar, Hyacinth, and me, Zipporah, seven all told. I was the baby...

HYACINTH: and spoiled rotten. Everybody give in to her, even Mama. Papa spoiled her so bad, she'd get away with murder. Lots of times when we had work to do, like sweeping the yard or something like that, she'd say...

ZIP: Oh, I have the worst headache. I gotta go lay down.

HYACINTH: And she'd go lay down.

PAPA: Hyacinth was a good child, always feared God. The serious one. Never give Mama no trouble. Now, Zip, she was the mischievous one.

ZIP: *(to Papa)* But you never whipped any of us, Papa. You'd just roll your voice, and that would set us crying. It was worse than any whipping.

PAPA: We had it better 'n most folks. Owned our own farm and sometimes I worked as a cook on the train crew. They'd just pull the cook-car off on the siding and I'd do the cooking there.

HYACINTH: On top of working for Mrs. Weaver, Mama kept a big garden. We had black-eye peas...

ZIP: ... greens, cabbage and beans. We grew peaches, plums, and apples and then dried them on a big scaffold Papa built. And blueberries by the buckets!

PAPA: Only we called them huckleberries.

ZIP: And wild blackberries! They were big as thumbs!

HYACINTH: When we had a cold, Mama gave us what she called catnip tea.

ZIP: She'd make a big pot of boiled greens and give us each a tin cup of pot liquor. We was never ones for making dandelion wine or anything strong.

PAPA: Never drank whiskey or beer.

ZIP: Read in the Bible about "wine bibbers." Strongest we ever drank was coffee.

HYACINTH: Mama was a good manager. She made all our clothes...

PAPA: ... saved up flour sacks or bought material remnants and sewed anything we needed.

ZIP: All she had to do was look at something and she could cut a pattern for it out of newspaper and sew it up. The Lord give her the gift!

HYACINTH: Zip was four years younger 'n me, but Mama dressed us up like twins. She made us the cutest little dresses with aprons edged with lace. She took our head size and went to the store to buy us little hats.

PAPA White store keepers wouldn't let colored folks try on hats in the store.

ZIP: And we had little patent leather shoes with white stockings. Oh, yes, Mama dressed us up real cute!

HYACINTH: As early as seven or eight years old, I knew I had a healing hand. If I had a headache, I would put my hand to my forehead and in fifteen minutes the headache would be gone. Same with a stomach ache. I heard voices, too...

PAPA: *(to Hyacinth)* Hush, girl. Don't want to hear you talking about it.

HYACINTH: *(conspiratorially to audience)* If I lost anything, like a needle or pair of scissors, I'd go into the back yard and sit on a chair. Pretty soon I'd hear a voice saying, "Go look... here or there."

ZIP: *(to Hyacinth)* And sure enough, you'd find it. The Lord give you the gift.

HYACINTH: Now, Zip 'n me, we was baptized in the Star of Bethlehem Baptist church in Wilsonville.

ZIP: *(laughing)* Once we had a baptism for the chickens. We filled the tin tub with water, caught the chickens, held them under and then hung them on the fence to dry. We never killed any, but they sure was struggling... a lot got away.

HYACINTH: At Christmas the women were in charge of putting together a program in church. We said verses, had plays and sang.

ZIP: Mama was always singing.

PAPA: Zip would sing a solo. She had a beautiful voice—real high. Poor Hyacinth...

HYACINTH: Couldn't cool soup with my voice.

ZIP: We only had four months of school down South. Whites had nine. Our school had two rooms and two teachers: Mr. Levi, from Georgia, for the older kids; and Miz Annie Wallace for the primary room.

HYACINTH: Teachers didn't know much in those days, just a little more than the pupils. We had nothing like a high school. We were out in the sticks.

PAPA: Books were cast-offs from the white school. Stories were all about white children. History was all white. It was equal nothing. "Stay in your place" was all.

ZIP: There'd be school meetings where the blacks would ask for more school. The whites said they didn't have money either and if we wanted more school, we'd just have to pay for it.

PAPA: I paid county tax on our farm, but couldn't vote. Only those with lots of land--acres and acres of it--got to vote. And white folks told them who to vote for.

HYACINTH: Papa told us how awful it was in the south when he was coming up. They wouldn't even let 'em go to church sometimes.

PAPA: So, we took pots and pans into the swamp to beat on and sing. And we prayed a lot. I remember my Mama was always whispering. I said, "What you whispering about, Mama?" "It's just praying, chile," she said.

HYACINTH: His pa died young. Folks didn't live long in those days. You could get a good master and then you'd get a mean one who'd beat you for no reason.

PAPA: I remember a man called Jake. His master beat him in the eyes for nothing. Lost both of them.

ZIP: Things wasn't so bad when *we* was coming up, but they was bad enough. I remember one ugly incident. A white man hired my oldest sisters, Rosie and Lena, to chop cotton. He didn't pay them and when they went back for their pay...

HYACINTH: He said he'd given the money to Mama and she'd spent it.

PAPA: *(to Hyacinth)* He was telling lies. Your mama would never do a thing like that.

ZIP: And people believed mama 'cause she had a good reputation. But she was scared, and told Mrs. Weaver what happened.

PAPA: Mr. Weaver talked to the man, but he never did pay the girls. He was a drunkard and probably drunk up all the money.

HYACINTH: Mama's father was killed by whites, we think. We don't know the circumstances. Maybe he wandered someplace he wasn't supposed to be. They had these signs up in towns telling blacks to stay out, but blacks couldn't read them.

PAPA: Mama couldn't read or write. I took lessons through the mail and taught myself.

ZIP: In Sand Mountain, Alabama, they had this sign:

WE DON'T ALLOW NO NIGGERS IN THIS TOWN.
YOU BETTER GET OUT BEFORE THE SUN GOES DOWN.
IF YOU CAN'T READ, BETTER GET OUT ANYHOW.

HYACINTH: My teacher's son, Easton, was found dead near Sand Mountain, about a hundred miles from home.

PAPA: Once there was a black man, just walking on the Big Road...

ZIP: What we called the highway.

PAPA: He was passing a white woman's house when he stopped to tie his shoelace. She called out to a crowd of white men 'cause he "insulted"

her. That poor man was harassed so bad, he had to pack up his belongings and leave town. There was that much hatred!

ZIP: Lewis, the son of papa's best friend, got kicked in the rear by a white man, and when he stood up for himself, the Klan lynched him. Oh, Papa! Isn't there a better place we can move to?

PAPA: I don't want to move. We got our farm, and it's warm in Alabama.

HYACINTH: Old folks was grounded in the place. You couldn't pull them up.

PAPA: After the Civil War, we was freed but we wasn't free, if you know what I mean. We was called Niggers and Knot Heads. But God don't intend for you to do evil for evil. So folks started thinking about leaving Alabama. All kinds of black folks was moving north for better jobs and better schools.

ZIP: Alvin left in 1907 and died of too much alcohol. Lena and Rosie went north to Indianapolis with their husbands.

PAPA: Finally I did go see them and got a job working for the city--cleaning.

ZIP: After Alvin was buried Papa came back to Wilsonville. But in '18 or '19 we packed up our clothes and bedclothes and caught the train for Indianapolis.

HYACINTH: Zip and me were tickled to death cause we never rode on a train 'til then.

PAPA: We were all Baptists in Alabama and Baptists when we came to Indiana. Went to the Mount Carmel Baptist Church on the southwest corner of 25th and Oxford.

ZIP: They had a lovely choir. Lena and Rosie went Pentecostal. Hyacinth tarried at Christ Temple Apostolic before she got married, but stayed a Baptist 'til she met Jim Jones.

PAPA: Then Mama died of tuberculosis. She'd been very sick with the flu during that big epidemic.

HYACINTH She also worked too hard and was a "worry wart." She was always worrying about paying the bills.

ZIP: *(to papa)* You give her a hard time, Papa. She'd work hard and save her money, and then you'd blow it on something. You was a hard head and wouldn't listen to her... just let the money come and go. Mama started a bank account and then you let the insurance go. She was the manager in the family. Oh, Papa, you caused Mama's death.

PAPA: *(to Zip)* Oh, no! I didn't do that. I loved your mama.

ZIP: *(to Papa)* You fussed a lot... told her she looked like a possum done sucked her face.

PAPA: That made her laugh...

HYACINTH: And the fuss was soon over.

ZIP: She was buried in Crown Hill Cemetery, dressed all in white.

HYACINTH: I was awful hurt over losing my mother. You always think you're going to have your mother with you for a long time.

PAPA: I never did remarry.

ZIP: We told him not to bring a step lady into the house or we'd leave.

PAPA: Did all the cooking...

HYACINTH: ... and I helped do what I could. Zip didn't work much.

ZIP: *(to Hyacinth)* Mama always cared more for you than me...

HYACINTH: *(to Zip)* That's not so! You were the baby so Papa let you do what you wanted.

PAPA: Now, girls! *(to audience)* It was better in Indiana than in Alabama. We weren't called Nigger every time you turned around. And if you sat down some place, white folks wouldn't get up and run all over everywhere acting like they were scared of you. We felt like we were human beings in Indiana.

[Change of character if a single actor plays Papa & John. He dons a sporty fedora and suit coat, and appears younger, a bon-vivant of the 20's. Hyacinth puts on a dressy hat, fur stole, and gloves, and picks up a small bouquet of flowers.]

ZIP: On January 22, 1926, Hyacinth married John Thrash in the judge's chambers on Delaware Street, near the Court House in downtown Indianapolis. They were so young and acting silly. The judge asked them, "Do you all know what you're doing? This is serious business. Looky here, you all go on home. You aren't ready for marriage." But he married them anyhow. When they were coming out of the judge's chambers, John asked...

JOHN: *(to Hyacinth)* How we gonna act now?

HYACINTH: *(to John)* Don't know about you, but I'll act just like I acted before we got married.

JOHN: *(to audience)* We got along real well...

HYACINTH: At first. *(to John)* You didn't fuss, never no loud mouth, nice looking and quiet, cause you was raised inside the gate. I liked that.

JOHN: My niece, Eliza, and Hyacinth's niece, Ruth, were married the same month. We went around together, going to shows and baseball games, down to Douglass Park to watch swimming and skating... just one big happy family.

HYACINTH: *(to John)* You worked for the city, cleaning and digging holes.

JOHN: And come home muddy all the time. *(to Hyacinth)* You sure put up a fuss about that.

HYACINTH: *(to John)* Didn't want you muckin' up my clean floors.
(to audience) You see, I quit work after we married and stayed home.

JOHN: *(to Hyacinth)* You wasn't much of a cook.

HYACINTH: *(to audience)* Really! I couldn't even boil water. Mama wanted to teach me before she died, but I wanted to clean the house or the yard.

ZIP: *(to Hyacinth)* You'd do anything but be in the kitchen.

HYACINTH: Once I made an apple pie with baking soda and it went to the top of the oven.

ZIP: We laughed till we cried.

JOHN: *(to Hyacinth)* Will you get mad if I ask you a question?

HYACINTH: *(to John)* No.

JOHN: *(to Hyacinth)* Will you let my sisters teach you how to cook?

HYACINTH: *(to John)* Well, Zip's a good cook. She can teach me.

ZIP: And so I did. Hyacinth learned to set a nice table...

HYACINTH: ... and had the food sitting in the warmer at the top of the stove when John got home from work.

ZIP: John was funny. His mother made good light bread. So when Hyacinth talked about making biscuits, he'd say...

JOHN: *(to Hyacinth)* I didn't eat no biscuits much when I was comin' up. I don't think I want any.

HYACINTH: *(to John)* All right, I'm just gonna make ME some, then.

ZIP: So she did. And he liked them just fine.

HYACINTH: We didn't have the money to get things. I washed on a scrub board and hung the clothes out in the sunshine. In winter I washed on the outside, and hung up the clothes in the kitchen before we went to bed. My niece and I made our own dresses. When I went back to work I'd try to put a dollar or two away in a bank account. I was a good manager, just like Mama. John used to complain...

JOHN: *(to Hyacinth)* Hyacinth, you can hold a dollar 'til the eagle squawks.

ZIP: Jim Jones used to say he never saw such good managers as Hyacinth and me. I'm so glad Mama raised us like that, to be clean and intelligent.

HYACINTH: All our friends were having children, and every month I was looking to get pregnant.

JOHN: *(to Hyacinth)* I wanted a girl, and you wanted a boy.

HYACINTH: I wanted five children all together.

ZIP: Our oldest sister, Ada, had fourteen children; Rosie had nine; and Lena, seven.

JOHN: But Hyacinth and me, we didn't have any!

ZIP: After they'd been married 'bout nine or ten years, John and Hyacinth separated.

JOHN: I started running around with a gang and other women.

ZIP: Hyacinth wouldn't take that.

HYACINTH: I think I would've stayed married if we'd had children and if Mama hadn't died. She would've counseled me. You could always bring your troubles home to Mama. But I was young and hot-headed at the time. My pride was hurt.

JOHN: Ah, but the devil got a-hold of me. Started drinking, fornicating... strayed from the path of Jesus. Got married again, too, but that marriage didn't work out either. Learned too little, too late. *(exits)*

ZIP: Then he died of lung cancer. Smoked something awful! In 1947 Papa died suddenly at the age of eight-nine. One day he said that Pheenie had been there. That's what he called Mama--her name was Josephine. We knew then that she had come to get him.

HYACINTH: *(to Zip)* It was a good thing he was living with you 'n me, Zip, 'cause nobody else would've buried him. Papa was not a good manager like Mama. I told him once, "If it wasn't for your children, you'd be in the poor house."

ZIP: *(to Hyacinth)* You was the manager, Hyacinth. Saved your money, bought us a house.

HYACINTH: *(to Zip)* Now don't go putting yourself down, Zip. Remember, you stayed home with Papa for five years when he was blind and needed care.

ZIP: *(to Hyacinth)* But I was happy-go-lucky, while you was always volunteering to help others, caring for the sick and elderly. You even got turned off going to church 'cause they kept asking for more money...

HYACINTH: ... and pastors doing things they told others not to do.

ZIP: So mostly we watched TV church. That's where I first saw Jim Jones. *(beat)* Hyacinth! Come look! I've found my church! There's an

integrated choir and Jim Jones is standing so handsome. He says God's no respecter of persons, all minorities are welcome. I want to go.

HYACINTH: So, we joined Jim's church. He called it "Wings of Deliverance."

ZIP: We were real impressed with Jim. He was so good, doing for folks.

HYACINTH: We bought canned goods and fixed up baskets, helping the under-privileged, like Mexicans and blacks, as Jim called us.

ZIP: I guess that's when we started using the word "blacks." We always used to say colored folks.

HYACINTH: Jim integrated Methodist Hospital too.

ZIP: He was going to a black doctor, so the hospital assumed he was black and put him in a black ward. It caused such a ruckus they had to change their policy.

HYACINTH: I was baptized first in Alabama, but I was baptized again in Jesus' name in the Holiness church at 10th and Delaware, the church Jim bought.

ZIP: It used to be the Jewish temple. Jim talked them into giving him an interest-free loan and paid it off within a year! He was really something!

HYACINTH: Jim got ordained by the Disciples of Christ at the Broadway Christian Center, but he was really Pentecostal Holiness 'cause he healed and spoke in tongues. Some folks think it's foolishness, but I spoke in tongues when I come up out of the water on my second baptism. It's evidence of the Holy Ghost. I have premonitions too... hear voices and believe in spirits

ZIP: *(to Hyacinth)* You got an inner ear or feeling about such things, Hyacinth. Jim had psychic powers. He could've been a prophet!

HYACINTH: He had a real good church program going in Indianapolis. *(to Zip)* And you was a real good church worker, Zip, real faithful. I helped with feeding and healing...

ZIP: *(to Hyacinth)* You always had a healing touch. God laid his hand on you. Jim healed people, too. Remember?

HYACINTH: When I had my annual check-up the doctor found a knot in my breast and said, "Hyacinth, you have cancer." I felt it. It was hard,

like a tabletop. I thought I was gonna die! That Sunday, at service, Jim said, "Hyacinth, you've had bad news. Don't worry. I've been fasting all day. We'll pray." He laid his hands on me, another person laid her hands on me, and another. Monday I felt the tumor. Tuesday I felt the tumor. On Wednesday my breast was loose. The doctors took x-rays and the tumor was gone. They couldn't believe it. Divine healing, I told them. And I haven't had a knot since.

ZIP: Jim was so good. He was called of God.

HYACINTH: *(to Zip)* So, what went wrong, Zip?

ZIP: There was a lot of unrest in Indianapolis during the '60s. Jim said Indiana was racist and trying to kill him.

HYACINTH: White folks did him real bad when he tried to integrate the churches. In one north side white church the preacher started singing "Old Black Joe."

ZIP: In another church a man said, "Why didn't you tell us you were coming? We'd have roped off an area for you." Roped off! Like cattle!

HYACINTH: In a south side church a man got up and said the church was gonna be bombed. I was afraid. We couldn't do anything about integrating the churches. God would have to take care of it.

ZIP: Jim left for California in 1962, and most of us followed in '65. He picked Redwood Valley 'cause it wasn't racist and we'd be safe from nuclear attack.

HYACINTH: Jim said, California was the promised land, and I believed him. We bought the house I'd always dreamed about-- a lovely four-bedroom ranch on one and a half acres. It had kitchen cabinets all around and lights just where you wanted them. Bought it for \$15,000 in 1970. When it sold later for \$37,000, all the money went to Jim.

ZIP: We loved it in the valley. Had our own garden and grape arbor. And there was a pear orchard across the street that the owner let us pick for free. We put up pear preserves, made chili sauce from our own tomatoes, froze green beans and corn, and made pickles from zucchini.

HYACINTH: We had wonderful neighbors. Jim built his church right down the road from us and everybody pitched in to help.

ZIP: When Governor Reagan started closing down big hospitals and putting out mental patients in the community, we took care of four nice

ladies from Mendocino. The state give us \$270 for each patient, and Hyacinth was such a good manager, the inspector said, "I don't need to come back here no more."

HYACINTH: Our nephew, Herman, was living with us for a spell. He was a real good worker, but Jim started breaking down family ties. He said I paid too much attention to Herman and wanted to send him to Guyana on the early team to get the place ready.

ZIP: But Herman hid so he wouldn't have to go. Jim said that if Herman quit the church he couldn't live on our property. So Herman got an apartment in town.

HYACINTH: Now, I realize Jim told us stuff to get us to go along with him. He thought all blacks were gullible. We'd just do what the white man said. Of course, we always did believe whatever the white man told us, from slavery on up. His inner circle was all white.

ZIP: *(to Hyacinth)* Hyacinth, Jim said you'd never make a revolutionary.

HYACINTH: *(to Zip)* What's he mean by that?

ZIP: *(to Hyacinth)* You're too independent, won't go along...

HYACINTH: *(to Zip)* I don't like people telling me what to do. I like having the freedom to do what I want.

ZIP: Well, Jim was talking about moving the People's Temple to Guyana. He's leased some land there, enough for everybody. He said it was our mission—to go help the Guyanese get on their feet. They couldn't get loans or anything from the British after they got their independence. It was only for a year, and then we could come home.

HYACINTH: *(takes her cane & speaks to Zip)* I got a bad knee. How am I gonna drag myself around with a cane in the jungles, being crippled and all?

ZIP: *(to Hyacinth)* There'll be doctors and nurses to take care of us, Hyacinth. Jim's planning to build a place just for his seniors.

HYACINTH: *(to Zip)* We only have \$8,000 left to pay on our house. I'll stay here and tithe the mission.

ZIP: *(to Hyacinth)* You're my sister, Hyacinth. I don't want to go without you. Besides, who's gonna take care of *you* if I go?

HYACINTH: *(to Zip)* We got lots of nieces and nephews. They'll take care of me.

ZIP: *(to Hyacinth)* They got their own families to take care of, and you always said you didn't want to be a burden to anyone. Jim says Guyana is a holy mission. We can't refuse.

HYACINTH: *(to audience)* But I knew it was more 'n that. Jim had changed. He was obsessed with power and riches. Before it was all over, Zip 'n me gave him everything we had: our house, our bank account, insurance, pensions, Social Security checks-- over \$150,000.

ZIP: I tried to talk with Hyacinth, but she wouldn't listen. Jim gave me praises, and maybe she was jealous.

HYACINTH: *(to Zip)* No, Zip. You refuse to see what's happening. Jim's set the young people against their families. Told us the Government was against us and made us go on survival marches. Threatened to put his wife in an insane asylum because she wants to take their kids back to Indiana.

ZIP: *(to Hyacinth)* Jim loves his children and doesn't want to lose them. He's our spiritual father, Hyacinth. I trust him.

HYACINTH: *(to Zip)* Then, you go. I'm staying here.

ZIP: *(to Hyacinth)* After the church leaves, there'll only be a couple of black families left in the Valley.

HYACINTH: *(to Zip)* I'll manage.

ZIP: *(to audience)* Well, I was excited about the work we'd do in Guyana. Went to Washington to talk to the Senators... Atlanta, Philadelphia, and Pittsburgh...

HYACINTH: And in the end I went along with my sister. We were family, and I didn't want to be left alone. But when I got on the plane this feeling of doom come over me. It was a slow boat to Jonestown, and then by dump truck to the compound. Jim picked the place, I reckon, where he thought nobody could get out.

ZIP: While our cottage was being built, we stayed in a house made of thatch and set on blocks. It leaked something terrible. We had pans sitting all around to catch the water.

HYACINTH: Zip 'n me were sick and disgusted...

ZIP: ... but we never complained, so Jim gave us praises.

HYACINTH: One lady put out that the inside of her dorm looked like a slave ship. It had triple-decker beds. She fell out of the top bunk and reported it to one of the Concerned Relatives inspecting the place. Jim cursed her out for that! Ooh, ooh! She was trembling. All his henchmen were shoving fists in her face. So I knew better than to complain. I knew when they got done with me, there'd be nothing left.

ZIP: Our new cottage slept four--Esther Mueller, who'd been Jim's cook and housekeeper; Ruth, who had a stroke in California but could still type; Hyacinth and me. It had a porch with a chair and bench, and I crocheted nice throw rugs to put on the floor.

HYACINTH: We didn't have any screens or glass in the windows.

ZIP: (to Hyacinth) And you spent most of the day swatting flies.

HYACINTH: *Jim's* place had screens and glass. Air-conditioning, too. I felt so sorry for Ruth. About six weeks before the end, she got an awful crying spell. She wondered why she couldn't get healed. She said, "I thought Jim was a different man. He brought us here like slaves. I left my family in the U.S. and haven't got my healing." Did she have a premonition of the end?

ZIP: In the beginning it wasn't so bad. Lots of things you could get two crops of--peanuts, potatoes. Bananas they brought out of the jungle and planted. Before we left California, Jim said, "You'll have so many bananas, you'll get sick of them."

HYACINTH: But we never did, because he sold them up and down the river.

ZIP: Everyday we had this exercise class...

HYACINTH: (*demo*) Bending and stretching, bending and stretching.

ZIP: Seniors made the nicest crafts— dolls of different races...

HYACINTH: ... that Jim sold up and down the river. Called them Jonestown dolls.

ZIP: I worked in the radio room, then at the commissary, handing out clothes. Jim trusted me not to butt into his business. People were coming and going at all hours.

HYACINTH: Jewelry they sold up and down the river too. *(to Zip)* You gave Jim your watch to sell, but I got my watch now, right here!
(to audience) We waited for our stuff to be shipped from California, but it never came. Turned out he sold our clothes in San Francisco.

ZIP: And I pitched a fit. I really told Jim off about that. When I saw my sheets drying on someone else's line, I ran over and snatched them off! Oh, was I mad!

HYACINTH: Besides hogs we raised chickens, big ones! When they butchered, we figured we'd get a little liver or heart or gizzards that you can't sell so easy, but we never did. I think Jim was trying to starve his seniors. One evening his adopted daughter came to our cottage and asked, hush-hush like, "Do y'all want some food?" There was Jello and coffee, salad and meat! First Jello I saw since California, and here it was leftovers from the staff's food.

ZIP: One thing you can say for Jim--he didn't deny people medical care. The doctor and nurses was always good to us.

HYACINTH: They had their hands full, treating folks for bites and foot diseases and accidents on the job.

ZIP: One time a bunch of old women stood up for themselves. There were about twenty-five of them who went to the fields and then came back, saying, "We didn't come out here to work in the hot sun!" They were too old for that anyhow. I told Jim off about that, too.

HYACINTH: The heat was something fierce! It was so hot my forehead peeled. And mosquitoes so big they'd walk away with you. I felt sorry for the women. They went from nice homes in the States to working in the hot sun in jeans! Oh, my, but we were brainwashed! Programmed, like with dope! Promises, promises!

ZIP: The place had so much potential.

HYACINTH: If Jim had done right. But he started ranting and raving about the FBI and the CIA coming to get us. At the end the medicine ran out, vitamins ran out, and food ran out. When people complained, he laid *them* out.

ZIP: Once Jim got on the P. A. system and said, "You all ought to be like Hyacinth and Zip. They never complain." That made some folks mad, but we just kept our mouths closed and went along with the program.

HYACINTH: You see, it didn't do any good to complain. Complainers came up missing. Jim wasn't talking about God any more. Back in California he started saying he was the Father, like God. Well, I knew he wasn't God, 'cause God is a Spirit, but you couldn't tell him that. He said he was the Comforter too. The Gospel of John says, "I am leaving now, but I shall send a Comforter." Well, Jim said he was it, and a lot of people believed him.

ZIP: Jim was our spiritual father, and I trusted him. But folks were getting awful restless and dissatisfied. We were afraid we'd all be killed by mercenaries hiding out in the jungle. Jim was gonna have to do something drastic pretty soon.

HYACINTH: *(to Zip)* Zip, you know what Wanda told me?

ZIP: *(to Hyacinth)* No, what?

HYACINTH: *(to Zip)* She said she saw a big barrel full of cyanide being unloaded at the pavilion.

ZIP: *(to Hyacinth)* Oh, we've heard Jim talk about suicide, but he'll never go through with it. We drank Kool-Aid in the drill, remember? It was a pretend thing, and we laughed about it.

HYACINTH: *(to Zip)* I been praying to God to get me out of here. Last night Jim looked at me real hard. Do you think he can read my mind?

ZIP: *(to Hyacinth)* Folks are saying Jim's changed, but I know he's a good man, called of God.

HYACINTH: *(back to audience)* And God struck him down. He started having fainting spells. He'd collapse and everybody'd break their necks to get something for him. They'd say, "Father's dying, Father's dying!" But you never saw such happy folks when Jim announced one day he was going to go away and take a rest. Folks thought they could get out and go back to the States. But the next day he changed his mind.

ZIP: When we heard that Representative Leo Ryan of California was coming for a visit, folks got real agitated. We kept hearing things, but only Jim's inner circle knew what was going on. Everybody was afraid to talk.

HYACINTH: That last day Zip was working in the commissary distributing clothes. Congressman Ryan had been there all day,

interviewing folks to see if any wanted to leave. I never saw Ryan myself, cause I didn't go to the pavilion, but Zip, Esther and Ruth did.

ZIP: *(to Hyacinth)* You were smart not to come, Hyacinth. Edith Bogue stirred up a hornet's nest. She said she wanted to leave with her whole family, the whole blood unit. And then all hell broke loose.

HYACINTH: *(to Zip)* What happened?

ZIP: *(to Hyacinth)* Ryan said anybody who wanted to leave could leave. He'd take them out. And if there wasn't enough room for all, he'd come back again and again to get all of us who wanted out.

HYACINTH: *(to Zip)* That so?

ZIP: *(to Hyacinth)* Jim's going to be awful mad at you if you don't come down to the pavilion.

HYACINTH: *(to Zip)* Well, he'll just have to come and drag me down, cause I ain't going on my own.

ZIP: Hyacinth... *(Looks at Hyacinth as if she wants to tell her something, then changes her mind & speaks lightly.)* Jim has some important news for everybody. I believe I'll wear my red sweater.

HYACINTH: *(to Zip)* Why you doing that, Zip? You never cared what you was wearing before.

ZIP: *(to Hyacinth)* Something's happened over at the airstrip. I'll tell you when I get back.

HYACINTH: *(pleading)* Don't go, Zip. I'm afraid. Something awful is going to happen. I just know it.

ZIP: *(to Hyacinth)* You got one of your premonitions?

HYACINTH: *(to Zip)* I got a feeling. . . Please, Zip. Don't go!

ZIP: *(to Hyacinth)* Jim's expecting me. *(exits)*

HYACINTH: *(to audience)* I didn't say anything after that, and she left. It was the last time I saw her alive.

When I heard the first shooting, I hid under the bed. I got to thinking: maybe the mercenaries have come! But I was so tired, after a while I got

into the bed and covered up with the spread. Next thing I knew, it was morning. I woke up about half past six and looked around. "That's funny," I thought. "Jim must still be carrying on, 'cause the girls haven't come back yet." So I turned over and went back to sleep. About eight o'clock I had to get up to go to the toilet. I was hungry too, 'cause I didn't have supper the night before, and it was late for breakfast. So I got dressed to go out.

It was like a ghost town. I didn't see or hear anybody. I went over to where my friend Birdy lived. I saw her sitting in the chair, draped in a sheet. I says, "Birdy, Birdy, what's wrong?" But she didn't move. Then I saw Sister Lavina. She was covered up too. I pulled the sheet back to look at her. They was both dead.

I looked down the row of beds and all the people were either sitting up or laying in bed covered with sheets. I said, "Oh, my God, they came and killed them all, and I's the onliest one alive!

I thought of Zip, and Esther, and Ruth. They must be dead too. I started shaking all over, crying, and wringing my hands, then I heard a voice, just as plain, like a radio playing behind you in the distance: "Fear not; I am with you." I looked around, dropped my hands, and the fear left me.

I went back to my cottage, climbed up the steps, and sat down in my chair. Jungle birds were singing so pretty. I thought how I might escape through the jungle. But there was a real steep cliff and vines hanging low. I was scared I might fall with my cane, pass out, and nobody would find me. Then, I must have dozed off.

That's when the soldiers from Georgetown came and found me. They couldn't believe I was still alive. It was like a battlefield--bodies strewn all over. Dead people and dead dogs. A woman lying where she'd fallen out of her wheelchair; a girl lying in a ditch, her hair floating out around her.

There were needles all over the pavilion around the empty tank. They wanted me to help identify bodies, but I couldn't do it. I did identify my sister, though, from a distance. She was laying straight on her back, just outside the pavilion in the dirt. Her left arm was over her waist, her right arm by her side. I don't believe Zip wanted to die. I believe she would've run. It looked to me like she was dragged to where she was.

They took me to a hotel next to the American Embassy where I saw friends who had escaped--Dale and Edith Parks, and Odell Rhodes. We talked about how people looked after they died, how the babies died in

Odell's arms. He'd have to hold them, he said. There were twenty eight babies, and they were having convulsions. Odell said he cried 'til he had no more tears.

Jim was hurrying the people up, telling them to be brave. Some were running around, saying they didn't want to die. Bodyguards were saying, "Every Goddamn one of you is going to die." Some tried to run away, but got shot down or clubbed with sticks. One girl tried again and again to give the poison to her baby. Finally she did it, then gave it to herself and went to the riverbank to die. One eleven or twelve-year-old girl cried, "I'm too young to die." Odell offered to go for a stethoscope, then lit out for the jungle.

[Hyacinth drapes a shawl around her shoulders and sits on a stool, appearing older and saddened.]

I buried my sister in Los Angles. Paid for the funeral and hearse with my own money—my un-cashed social security checks they found in Jim's safe in Jonestown.

While I was recovering in the hospital, people kept asking me about Jonestown, but I couldn't talk about it—all those poor babies and sweet toddlers, the seniors in hospital beds, people I knew and loved. My grandniece, Catherine Wallace, flew out to California and brought me back to Indianapolis.

I still get depressed sometimes, but then I start singing and praying, and God takes the burden from me. When people ask me how I survived, I tell them the angels were camped around me that night.

After a while it got too hard for my family to take care of me in their homes, so I went to Mount Zion Geriatric Center on Boulevard. I have lots of friends and lots of company. We get together in my room for good times, singing and praying. The Mount Zion Baptist Church pastor visits me often. Ladies from the church bring me gifts. I'm lucky. I've got good people to take care of me. There are always caring people, and I haven't given up hope. I still think I'm gonna get my healing. I'll be 90 years old in March. Hallelujah! The Lord's been good to me.

Background/ Notes

The tactics and techniques of Jim Jones outlined above found fertile ground and were greatly facilitated because of the background and motivation of those who joined People's Temple. Generalities, of course, are always difficult if not dangerous. However, on this basis of the information which has come to us in the course of this investigation one can draw the following general profile of many who became People's Temple members and followers of Jim Jones:

- Some of the young adults were college graduates out of upper middle-class backgrounds which provided privilege and even luxury. Their parents were often college-educated professionals or executives. Frequently, their families were active in demonstrations against the Vietnam war, campaigns for racial equality, and other social causes. In some cases, the young People's Temple member had been alienated by the "emptiness" of his family's wealth.
- A larger number, especially young blacks, had their roots in the other end of the American social and economic spectrum. The products of poor ghetto neighborhoods and limited education, some had been drug addicts, prostitutes, and street hustlers.
- An even greater percentage were elderly, again predominantly black, who had come out of the San Francisco ghetto. They found in Jim Jones an abiding and protective concern. Despite the harshness of life in Jonestown, they regarded it as preferable to the poor housing they had left behind. They also found a warm sense of family and acceptance within the People's Temple community that they did not have before joining.
- A goodly number of middle-class blacks and whites came out of strong fundamentalist religious family backgrounds and were attracted by what they saw as the evangelical nature of People's Temple.
- By contrast, many of the younger people had little if any religious motivation in joining People's Temple. Rather, they tended to be compelled by humanitarian interests. Altruistic and idealistic, they were impressed by Jones' involvement in social causes and what they saw as the "political sophistication" of People's Temple. To the extent that a religious motivation was involved, it was seen chiefly in terms of Jones' seeming concrete application of Judeo-Christian principles. Over time, the dimension of their motivation was not only nonsectarian but eventually became embodied in the Socialist-Marxist-agnostic philosophy which Jones espoused.