

Guyana horror

Peoples' Temple story told

By SHIRLEE IDEN

Marshall Kilduff's never had any job but that of reporter.

Like other media people, he thought of writing a book, but the urban affairs and school beats on the San Francisco Chronicle kept him pretty busy.

In a bizarre turn of events, Kilduff, with reporter Ron Javers, also of the Chronicle, has written the first book about the more than 900 murders and mass suicides in Jonestown, Guyana.

"The Suicide Cult" was published in paperback, 12 days after the murder of California Congressman Leo Ryan and the ultimate deaths of hundreds.

Last week Javers lay in a Philadelphia hotel room, close to relatives, but also closely watched by a bodyguard. He is recovering from a bullet wound in the fleshy part of his shoulder and a subsequent infection.

Kilduff, in a Southfield interview, told the story of how they came to author the book published by Bantam as an "extra."

"Ron wasn't just a paperback writer waiting on the sidelines to pounce and write this. He was almost killed," Kilduff said. "He's lost 25 pounds and he's hurting."

"And this is a good solid story, not a scatter-brained rip-off."

KILDUFF said the trip to Guyana was Javers' initial involvement with the People's Temple and cult leader Jim Jones. For Kilduff himself, it was the culmination of more than two years of investigating and digging.

"I've been on the story all along," Kilduff said. "The reason the paper didn't send me to Guyana with Congressman Ryan was because I was well known to Jones and I would have been a provocation."

"It was a sensitive situation just getting Ryan and the press into Jonestown," he said. "But as for the book, if anyone was going to do a book, it had to be us."

Work on the project began at 2 a.m. Sunday, Nov. 19 shortly after the Guyana story began to break. Bantam editors agreed that Kilduff and other

Chronicle reporters should be involved, and they were contacted.

"I wasn't really sure we could do it so quickly," Kilduff said. "We had to change things as we went along. The death toll kept mounting and we had to re-write the Saturday night scene at the airport too."

While Kilduff used research materials gathered in the past two years, Javers could only dictate his part of the manuscript which wound up being 284 pages long, with a 32 page insert of photographs.

An August 1977 issue of "New West Magazine" contained a long article by Kilduff on the cult. His investigative reporting was probably what led Congressman Leo Ryan to look into the People's Temple and ultimately make the ill-fated trip to Guyana.

KILDUFF is convinced that little is left of the cult and that no danger of further "hits" of people on a hate list will occur.

Asked if he thought Jones had planned the massacre, he said: "I think it was a spur of the moment, desperate move, possibly incited by drug use," he said. "He was an emperor in the jungle who saw his people leaving him."

Kilduff's relationship with Jones began when he covered the San Francisco Housing Authority, when Jones was an appointed member.

"He'd arrive with his huge entourage and take over the meetings," Kilduff recalled. "I'm a reporter, and he was just too screwy. All the bells went off and I believe they would have for any trained reporter. He was a hypocrite himself, and the way he buttered you up and then would never answer questions."

The reporter added when he wanted to visit the People's Temple, Jones put every obstacle in his way. Finally, when he did get it, the cult leader was always surrounded by aides and was inaccessible.

"He was paranoid, always thinking people were out to get him," Kilduff said. "He was that way while he was growing up, I found."

One of Kilduff's sources, a woman

who was an ex-finance officer for the cult, told the reporter that the cultists were rehearsing killing themselves, that Jones subjected them to searchlights and loudspeakers night after night.

"When Ryan and the media group went down, I thought Jones would behave and the group would be treated well—a staged thing," he said. "Instead it turned out to be just what that girl said, a nightmare."

Kilduff said joining the People's Temple meant going through a slow process of becoming "this programmed automation."

"Slowly you were convinced to give up your family, sign over your second car or 10 per cent of your property," he said. "People would begin by going to one meeting and then gradually go more and more. Jones was always up there onstage, in an overstuffed chair."

"In the end, it was difficult to leave. You had no identity. Jones became the source of everything in your life, your food, your shelter, everything."

He contends what Jones used was some pattern of brainwashing.

Jones claimed about 20,000 followers in a 1976 statement, but Kilduff said the count was probably more like 3,000 or 4,000.

"The real problem with Jones and people like him is that he was never really held accountable," Kilduff said. And sadly, there are always creatures who will follow people like him.

"As for orientation, he was no more communist than he was stamp collector. He was just a Jonesist, not a Marxist or a Christian."

For Kilduff, the story of Jones, the cult and their tragic end is without a question the most exciting story he has ever done.

"BUT IT'S NO THRILL," he said. "It's an ugly story and I don't sleep too well. But then I won't go through life looking over my shoulder either."

Despite the horror of the Guyana murders and suicides, Kilduff said the press and authorities have to be very careful about freedom of religion. "We must err on the side of the freedoms that are vital," he said.



Sprucing up

Jimmy Patten, of the Farmington Area Advisory Commission, helps spruce up the Farmington Area Jaycees' tree lot in the parking area in front of the old Federal's store on Grand River. The sale, which

is open daily and during the evenings on weekdays and weekends, will help Farmington get in shape for the holidays and will help the FAJC's drug counseling program. (Staff photo by Harry Mauthe)

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