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'Family' Of 30 Struggles To Find A New Way

For One, 'It Saved My Life'

By JOHN BARBOUR

BENSON (AP) — It is dawn. From the dark northwest the cold front musters blue-gray clouds before it, and the wind cuts through denim and wool.

Jane Barkley is in the kitchen kneading the dough for bread. She is 21, an escapee from North Carolina, New York's Greenwich Village, San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury. "I came here a year ago and they let me stay," she says, her long, brown hair falling over her slight shoulders. "It saved my life."

Mana Pardeahtan, an Apache, sees a hawk on a Yucca spike outside his room. He runs out the front door to alert Bill Haines, who has a gun. The hawk preys on the pigeons that Bill brought from the East. In another day Mana would have blasted the hawk himself from the bathroom window as soon as he spotted it. But now he abjures violence.

"I don't kill any more," he says quietly. "I've killed too many things in my life." His long hair, fastened by an Indian headband, sometimes is a knot behind when he goes into town, falls loose over his bare shoulders as he ignores the cold. The hawk is gone by the time Haines fetches the gun.

Thirty diverse people live here, in their commune, backed up against the Rincon Mountains. They came together to be alone, hidden by hills and high chaparral. They pose the question for themselves: Can they, for all their various motives, within the limitations of this experiment, daring the word hippie, daring the memory of strong drugs, create something better than the other world out there?

Steve Marquess puts a fresh log on the fire, and the draft from the great stone fireplace borrows from last night's embers and sucks it to orange life. He is an architecture school graduate from Arkansas, the newest member of the commune, a conscientious objector. He is 24, his beard dark and his hair modestly long. He takes three incense sticks from a box on the mantle and places them in the mouth of a Tibetan statuette of a Lhasa dog, bronze and lion-like. He lights them and sits on the long window seat at the end of the room. The remaining members of the commune answer the call of the Oriental gong. The back door slams open and one by one they filter in for the morning reading.

Steve begins where he left off the night before. "All knowledge . . . aims at reaching the Unknown from the known, by dispelling Maya or illusion. Knowledge must proceed from a starting point of self, which is the postulate and axiom of existence . . ."

It is Yoga, their belief. But in ordinary words, says Bill Haines, it is much simpler: truth, love and nonviolence. Only that? Perhaps more than that?

Haines is their guru. Not a simple man. He is 43 with a mind beset by practicalities he would prefer to ignore. He grew up in Manhattan, traveled in Europe and India, taught theater and writing, resents inquiry into his past. "Why do you need to know that?" he gruffs. "Just say I was a criminal." He visited a doctor recently, and the nurse introduced him as nurses will: "Mr. Haines." Priest. Religion? ...A.

"Is that some sort of mystical cult?" she asked.

"You mean like Christianity?" he asked back.

He is also a sort of overseer without portfolio. The light in the back bedroom doesn't work. "How long has the light been out?" Haines shouts, charging down the hall. A confusion of abused and abusive voices echoes back. Haines's voice rises above them.

After an evening reading, Haines blisters the group. "You promised to plant 10 trees around the places where you live," he says. "You've been here two years and I still don't see the trees. Where are the trees?"

"Look," chuckles someone. "Johnny Appleseed is mad."

"We can't go out and steal trees," objects someone else.

"You're not stealing them," Haines shoots back. "You're only moving them." Ten days later a trio drives out into the desert to look for trees.

He is Orson Welles in voice, face and figure. He roars opinions as if into the face of the wind. Or he nearly mumbles, contemplatively, gently, and the room is still to listen. One of the commune women says, "Bill is really quite good. He doesn't try to control what you do. But whoever needs him, he's there."

Anna Druck, brown-haired, dark-eyed, attractive, is walking the commune children one chill morning, the two babies bundled in a stroller, 3-year-old Thorin at her side. Thorin complains that his hands are cold and she warms them with her own. "God usually does that for me," says Thorin. "Who's God?" Anna asks, surprised. "You know," says Thorin with the certainty of his small world. "Bill Haines."

Haines led them to this new home in the desert. They began far away in the green hills of New York. They were four years younger then and chance brought them together one by one at another Yoga community in Monroe, N.Y. Some were on drugs, at least one of them addicted to heroin. It was an established ashram, or commune, and a comfortable one.

But the people there were "weekend Yogis, more interested in what room they were getting and what was for dinner," Haines recalls. "They were frightened by the younger people they didn't understand. They wanted me to get rid of them. I couldn't do it. They brought in police with shotguns. We left. We were 28 people without a home. We had nowhere to go."

Rescue came from Timothy Leary, already discharged from Harvard in a campus scandal over experimentation with hallucinatory drugs. He invited the commune to move into the second floor of his baroque three-story house in Millbrook, N.Y. He even paid for their meals. Out of the cold, but into the fire. They finally left the turmoil of Leary's beleaguered colony.

Their little caravan moved out on the back roads to avoid incidents, bound for Arizona. Three trucks, four cars, six-teen people, fifteen dogs, nine cats and a goat.

When they moved into the ranchhouse they had no furniture to speak of and few eating utensils. They lived on mattresses and rugs on the floor.

The commune is not yet self-sufficient. But now there are walls around and a roof over Mana's formerly outdoor pottery shop. Sales are up. One of the customers for hippie handiwork is Goldwater's in Phoenix. Now they have a color television set, a party-line telephone, propane gas for heat, 360 acres of their own and 800 more leased from the federal government. They are respected at the local bank, make their mortgage payments, pay bills in cash. But more gratifying to them is the relative peace with their neighbors. One nearby rancher, a 75-year-old who drops by occasionally, was invited to a come-as-young-as-you-feel party by friends in Tucson. He picked up some clothes at the ashram and he and his wife went as hippies.

For all the brightening financial picture, it took about $27,000 from friends to keep the commune alive last year, most of it from Steven Lazar, a Los Angeles stock broker.

Still, mostly they earn what they have. Before most of the commune is awake, the five youngest men take a quick breakfast and step out into the cold darkness. They coax slim life into one of the fleet of disabled jalopies and drive 70 miles westward to regular jobs in Tucson. The money — last year $9,600 — goes into the commune kitty. It isn't enough to pay the $11,700-a-year grocery bill.

The car jerks out of the commune driveway, the seats crowded with unwary riders. Boyd Dennison, 25, an Ohioan who drifted here from California, apprentice bricklayer. He hopes to buy a brick-making machine for the commune, where he is building a home for Bobby and Becky Gessler and their 7-month-old baby, Joshua. Gerry Gessler, 28, Harrisburg, Pa., apprentice surveyor, learning another trade for the commune. Scott Clark, 26, Denver, works as a woodworker in Tucson's construction trade, hopes to be the commune's furniture maker. His current assignment is to make new dining room tables, but he is short on time. Haines presses him, "Do you realize that if you'd made the table for the Last Supper, He'd be alive today."

But the jobs in Tucson are exigencies only. Jane echoes the unanimous wish: "we've got to bring the boys home."

Roger Irwin is 31, a former minister in the United Christian Church. He and his wife Martha came here via Kansas, where they had been part of another commune dedicated to teaching retarded children. He has degrees in sociology and philosophy. He acts as the commune's ethical guide, and does some carpentry on the side. For him and for others, the ashram offers a time to grow. "In the Christianity I was raised on, we were all thrilled about changing the world — to go out and start a new church, to preach. I'm all for doing good in the world. But not until I know what it is. The thing I missed was discovering the evil in myself before I inflicted myself on the world."

Martha, after housekeeping chores she shares with other wives, practices singing two hours every afternoon. Her voice echoes through the house from the guest room at the end of the hall. Haines chides from afar. "The next time we get a girl in here who has to practice, she'd better be a belly dancer." Martha has also written a volume of poems on the people and creatures who live in the commune, and hopes to have it published when the commune starts operating its printing press, now stored in a shed.

If the members of this commune are "hippie," they are graduate hippie. If they contrast with the people who live here in Arizona, they also contrast with the garden-variety type of hippies who pass through.

Bonnie and Rap. They drift in from the highway and ask to be put up for a couple of days. Bonnie says she is 18, Rap 22. She of long blonde hair and an incessant cough, tall, slender. He of long brown hair, sturdy, swaggering, his moustache encroaching on full, selfish lips. They are running away from a bad scene in Atlanta, "like now," Bonnie says, repeating it again and again. But through it comes the story of rock festivals that don't come off, the O.D. (Overdose Center), the poor lame kids hung on drugs, the 12-year-old covered with welts, beaten by his brother. Bad dreams.

Rap, who has been traveling with her for the last four days, has to ask her what her name is to introduce here.

Haines has only one question, poking the remnants of the fire. "Do you have any drugs?" If you do, take them out and bury them in the desert. You can't have any around here."

Bonnie and Rap say they are clean, and so are welcomed to stay. Rap can't get the wonder off his face. He has stayed at other communes, none like this. One by one, members of the ashram shop by and talk with the newcomers. The conversations are short. Rap and Bonnie leave the next day.

One of the hopes for the future is that the commune might set up a clinic to treat youngsters on drugs. The ashram members admit to an extensive experience with drugs in the past.

A former addict, sitting in the dining hall, explains that some youngsters can't be helped, the ones who take drugs just for the kicks, the cop-outs from the responsibilities of life. But some become involved because they are seeking a greater meaning. "They have the experience with drugs and mistake that as the meaning of their lives. It turns out to be illusory. They can't apply the drug experiences to their daily lives. We can help them. We have the experience and talent to do it."

Why are they here? Thirty people and four-times-thirty answers. Yoga, nonviolence, truth, love.

"There are so many mixed motives for people to live in a situation like this," says Ted Druck, former principal of a Hebrew school. "I think that all of us feel there was some parental love missing in our lives." Many of the commune members came from broken homes, but that alone is too simple an answer.

The incense burns and the sweet smell, misdirectors, the blue smoke. The candles are low, and the family has finished dinner. Fresh logs wait their turn by the fireplace. It has been a long day, and most sit with closed eyes, but there is no sleep.

They listen to the evening reading, the meaning of Gandhi's life, his devotion to "ahimsa" (nonviolence), the estrangement of the Indian by the oppression of government schools and Western values, a world of frustration, self-contradiction, resentment and violence, an incapacity to understand themselves and a limitless fear and suspicion of everyone else, neither liberty nor civilization. And without saying it, it seems to speak for the alienated of all times and all places, this place included.

Steve Marquess had spent his day digging away at the small knoll where he would build his house of native stone from Happy Valley. Now he asks permission to complete his week's assignment as reader by reciting his reply to the Selective Service Board back home.

He begins softly, "I believe that each life is special and unique. Therefore it is to be lived in its own way. Each man has a unique combination of soul, conscience, and consciousness that tells him which way he is to go. I have listened within myself for the decision on this very important matter. There have been no loudspeakers proclaiming which path to choose, what words to use, but there is a quiet murmur that keeps me confident that I am doing what is right.

"War among other human activities is wrong. No individual should have to choose whether to enter the war or not, but that is the situation today. I have no specific group doctrine to tell me what to do. I have no elaborate personal code set down, only a long-standing believe in trying to live by the 'Golden Rule.'"

There is silence when he is finished.

Sunday dawns bright and warm. For a day they are freed from their duties: from the stoneware pottery shop, from installing insulation, from making new pottery molds, from building the new jewelry shop.

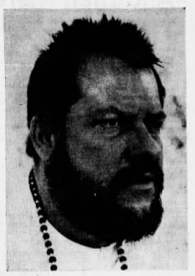
This day the family expects 25 important visitors from Tucson, a high school class from a Presbyterian church, the first time any group in the community has expressed an interest in the commune. Still they deride the prospect of the afternoon half as a hedge against disappointment. The class is late, and solitary members of the ashram worry the windows. Finally the caravan of cars comes down the dirt drive. The family has dressed for the occasion in their best clothes, Haines and others of the men in the robes of monks and priests. Most have set aside the daily denim and wool.

The confrontation is friendly. Haines in rare good humor explaining the precepts of Yoga, the principals of Gandhi, truth, love, nonviolence, the meaning of Christ and Buddha and God. He asks them why they decided to come out to the commune, to see how hippies live, or what? One youngster explains it is part of a project, to talk to an astrologer, an expert in extrasensory perception, and you. Everyone laughs.

Haines explains the future, but not as he once told the police. "Get used to us. We're going to be around for the next 40 years or so." He talks of the building plans, the hope for brick homes for everyone, maybe even a separate colony of houses on a hill for parents of commune members who want to retire here.

The day settles on toward night, the Russell Kelmer sits down on one of the window seats. The lowering sun cuts slices in the incense-laden air, and he pulls his knees up and looks at the people sprawled around the room. "This is my family," he says. "It's the only family I've had."

Commune's Guru



Bill Haines is the group's acknowledged leader: spiritual comforter and practical gadfly.

Dreams Of Future

Teepees and shacks are all that stand on the desert hills now. But there are plans for brick homes for everyone, and perhaps even a separate colony of houses on a hill for parents of members who want to retire there.

A Voice Within

Steve Marquess, faced with the draft, is confident that an inner murmur is leading him on the right path.

Striving For Self-Sufficiency

Mana Pardeahtan works in his pottery shop, assisted by one of the younger members of the desert commune.

Together In Peace

"This is my family," says a member of an ashram near Benson. "It's the only family I've ever had." (AP Photo)

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