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C H A P T E R T W O

I N F O R M A T I O N G A T H E R E D F R O M U N D E R C O N N S ' H O U S E

Dennis Banks, leader of the American Indian Movement, showed his notes and information on David Conn to Peoples Temple members. Members then checked out Conn's address and found it to be 2314 Damuth, Oakland, California. To discover the identity of this man David Conn, we gained entrance to his house through an open garage door and smaller trap door that led to the area beneath the house. We went under the house a total of five times. From there we could distinctly hear conversations of Donna Conn, her ex-husband David Conn, and Donna's daughter Susan. Sounds in the house were so audible to us that we could hear even a deep sigh. The hearing was augmented by the fact that the house's central heating system provided a natural sound duct from all parts of the house to a central opening under the house.

On the first occasion, we went under the house at approximately 10:30 PM sometime in early May, 1977. Entry under the house had followed upon a planned phone call to the Conns which was intended to provoke conversation related to Peoples Temple; it was our objective to flush out the alleged information Mr. Conn claimed to have and to determine in what capacity he was acting. The conversation going on as we came within earshot related to international politics,

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"monolithic communism," the Korean situation -- all from a radical right-wing point of view. The intended phone call came within two or three minutes, and Donna Conn received it. She became extremely agitated and began talking in a near hysterical voice. The caller claimed to be a free-lance reporter who had heard Conn's number quoted and wanted information regarding Peoples Temple. Donna Conn became alarmed when the caller would not leave a return address or telephone number. She was not convinced this was a reporter at all; She and David, who was visiting there at the time, speculated as to who it might really have been.

At this point, Donna asked David and his friend, someone by the name of Larry, to leave the house. She told David to park his car down the block and not in front of her house in the future. She said he was followed there. Evidently she felt that the phone call was a result of David's being there. She told him that several unrelated and unexplained incidents had occurred recently. Her water hose had been left running "for two hours," her "car was messed up," her gas had been turned off, and she said this was the third such anonymous phone call she had received. She associated David's presence in her home with these incidents, apparently because she knew of some "investigatory" work he was involved in. She asked him to take precautions next time he came and to call an agent for help. His response was, "What can he do about it?" David left shortly thereafter.

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When David and Larry left, they drove around the block twice and were followed by one of our members who was watching from the street. David came back into the house to tell Donna she was right, he had been followed there. Then he left again and drove off.

When David was gone, Donna called her daughter on the phone and told her to come home immediately. She told Susan to have her boyfriend walk her to the door when they arrived. She then began calling a series of friends, perhaps five calls in all. The first person she contacted was named Ann. She explained to Ann that certain strange things had been happening to her, the same things she had described to David earlier, and about the phone calls she had received. Part of her conversation was that she had a "high priority number" that she could call and, with no questions asked, she could get people there with guns in five minutes. Her exact words were, "They have guns and everything." In response to whatever comment Ann made at that point, Donna answered, "No, it's higher than that," referring to the high priority number.

After she talked to Ann, Donna called a person named Bruce, whom we later heard her refer to jokingly as "Bruce Alexander." She told him she was just letting him know there could be a problem and he should be ready to leave immediately, if she should call back.

Next she called another friend, no name ascertained, to

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whom she mentioned that "Bruce didn't know very much."
Details that were remembered in subsequent, random fashion from further phone calls were: "The number is known now, but I am afraid to change it because then they will know there is no man in the house. I have gone to great lengths to show there is a man in the house." She said she had been thinking for a long time her phone was tapped.

A half-hour later she called Ann back and told her to talk to Susan and convince her to stay the week-end at Ann's house, since she did not want to leave Susan alone in the house, especially since the last phone call.

Then we overheard an argument between Donna and Susan and heard Donna scream, "They will get you, trying to get to your dad!"

A half-hour later Bruce showed up. Donna tried to get Susan to go to into the other room so that Donna could talk to Bruce. Susan was watching a TV show and refused to go. All three watched the show together. It involved civil rights and black people, apparently, because Donna and Bruce made racist remarks throughout the movie. At one point Donna said, "I wish Larry were here, he would crack up." The story line, as best we could discern it, was about a black lawyer from the North who went to the South and experienced severe oppression there.

Bruce went in to take a bath when the movie ended. Donna went into the bathroom and began talking about Peoples Temple

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in general terms to Bruce. She had something she wanted to show him, and at first she could not find it. She was afraid she might have thrown it out, because she said, "I am afraid to have it on me." Then we heard the words, "Treasury Agent..." Laughter. "Treasury Agent..." Again laughter. Then, "I am official, too. I have the secret code. A secret number ..." Bruce replied, "How much does Sue know about this?" Donna replied: "Enough to be scared to death... But not that much... But enough to know not to go to the authorities. And that's just where we want it."

At this point, almost 3:00 AM, Bruce asks Donna to tell him more about all this. Donna refuses to discuss it further saying that it would take hours to explain it all. "I don't know all the pieces myself," she said. "David is more informed than I am and one of my sources has clammed up. The way I understand it works, if I am not involved, I shouldn't be bothered." Then she went further and said, "David didn't do anything wrong, but he was involved in the investigation." Then she suggested they talk about it Friday or Saturday. Donna continued to express anxiety about the phone calls, and Bruce made the statement, "Haven't you read enough books to know what is going on? Haven't you read...(inaudible)... blackmail?"

In the bedroom she made the statement, "A nice man from the Company... The Company is the CIA..." They went to bed and after an interval of small talk, Donna asked Bruce, "Have you ever heard of Jim Jones?" He replied with something in-

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audible, and she said, "Never mind." She went on to say, "Isn't there something we can do?...It is private property... Police.."(This part to the end is very inaudible.)

On a subsequent occasion, we went under the house at approximately 9:30 PM and heard Donna talking to her friend Ann, who was also in the house. They were discussing David's involvement in surreptitious activities about which Donna was confessing extreme curiosity. She told Ann that she was "Extremely curious about David's connections. For example, I am just dying to know who was on the other end of that phone call." Donna called David on the phone and pumped him for information, especially regarding Peoples Temple and what he knew about other radical organizations. She tape recorded that conversation and played it back for Ann to listen to, and both gloated over Donna's considerable skill at getting information out of David. We could understand quite a bit of the tape replay.

In the course of the tape, we heard David describe Temple history from the time Jim Jones was Human Rights Commissioner in Indianapolis, and his exodus to California. David quoted old articles that appeared several years ago in the press authored by Lester Kinsolving. He named the journalist and the newspaper, the Indianapolis Star. He brought Donna up-to-date in general terms of our settlement in Redwood Valley and the relocation and growth in San Francisco. During the course of the conversation, Donna asked questions about "Mert" and "Larry Tupper" and particularly about Mert's involvement in Temple activities. She was curious about his role as the

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church photographer and about Larry Tupper's court case for the custody of his children. Donna also asked David about Deanna Mertle's role in the Temple and "what they had on her?" David's response was inaudible, but Donna's reply was, "Oh, that's gross!"

Donna and Ann spent some time congratulating themselves for being able to "work David like a pump." Donna raised the question of Jim's self-proclaimed socialist posture: "Why can he get away with openly calling himself a communist in his public meetings?" Ann explained that "When you proclaim yourself a member of a minority organization such as the Panthers or the AIM, then you are suspect and can no longer walk the streets safely. But, if you proclaim yourself to be a communist, you can do just about anything you want..."

A third visit produced no information, probably because the daughter had friends in the house. The phone call provoked no comment from Donna. Even though her daughter asked questions about the call, Donna passed the call off lightly.

In a subsequent visit, David and Susan were home alone. There were no conversations pertinent to Peoples Temple except one thing. Immediately after the phone call, Susan said to David, "What are they bothering us for?" She made the remark, "I wish they would sink them to the bottom of the ocean." David went into the bathroom and called out from there to Susan: "What do you think we ought to do about it, Susan? Call the police or something?" She replied, "What good would

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that do?" His query to her was in a testing tone of voice, obviously staged and intending to sound her out on her guard against alerting the authorities.

At one point Susan asked David why Peoples Temple was harassing them like this. He replied to her that the Temple was running scared. They knew the articles on them were about to break, and now with John Barbagelata's initiative coming up... (at this point his voice dropped off). Susan, at some point in the conversation, remarked to David that the garbage was missing. He said, "Susan, are you sure the garbage is missing?" She said, "Yes, it was half full and I went out the next morning and it was all gone."

On one occasion we heard Donna ask how Peoples Temple had gotten the number of the house, and then she said something about how the number must have come off of a letter that she had written to Van Amberg. She surmised Van Amberg must have told Peoples Temple. She also talked about the tape of the last call that she said Peoples Temple had made to their house. She said the caller had threatened to burn the place down, and that she had taped the call. She said she had sent the tape to the lab, and wanted whoever it was she was talking to to hear it sometime.

Our entrances under the Conns' house ended with this last episode.