

## Cult's last days: sky-searching, lemon purges

By MICHELLE LOCKE  
Associated Press

SAN DIEGO (AP) — For months, the 39 members of Heaven's Gate climbed a sci-fi stairway to Paradise, step by faithful step.

Up before dawn, they prayed and then trained a telescope on the sky to look for the UFO they believed would whisk them away from Earth's tribulations.

In March, as the Hale-Bopp comet swooped to within 122 million miles of Earth, they got the signal: Time to go.

Suddenly, their daily regimen switched from holistic hokum to recipe for destruction as they leaped into the void fueled by a cocktail of pudding, sedatives and vodka, confident to the end that cosmic salvation beckoned.

"We know whatever happens to us after we leave our bodies is a step forward" — videotaped message by Marshall Applewhite, leader of Heaven's Gate.

Last October, the group known as Heaven's Gate moved into the sprawling mansion that would eventually become their high-priced mausoleum.

There, according to people who knew them through their business incarnation of Web site designers Higher Source Contract Enterprises, group members followed a schedule of almost military precision. They got up at 3 a.m. for prayers, searched the sky at 4 a.m., ate a communal meal at 5 a.m.

The rest of the day it was work and more work, interspersed by breaks for fruit and a lemon-cayenne pepper drink reminiscent of the faddish '70s purge known as the "Master

Cleanser."

They wore black and kept their hair trimmed to Marine-recruit length. They didn't drink alcohol. They didn't do drugs. They didn't have sex. Some of the men had taken celibacy to the extreme: castration.

"I have the same kind of penetrating questions that you have: Who or what would make 39 people take their life in this manner?" — Sheriff Bill Kolender at a news conference describing the deaths.

In mid-November, a rumor began to circulate that there was a spaceship lurking behind Hale-Bopp.

On their Web site, cult members made references to the ghost ship. But they said it was irrelevant, because the comet signaled it was time for "the arrival of the spacecraft from the Level Above Human to take us home to 'Their World.'"

In March, the group started winding down their business, telling some clients not to call them until after Easter. One company tried to hang on to their services, recalled an employee who knew three cult members by the names of Jeff Moore, Nora and Golden.

"They became indecisive. It was like part of them didn't want to leave," the employee, who spoke on condition of anonymity, told The San Diego Union-Tribune.

On Friday, March 21, the group went out to lunch at a Marie Callender's restaurant in suburban Carlsbad.

Typical of their contact with outsiders, they were friendly, polite — and a little bit strange.

They asked for so many lemons that the restaurant went through three deep-dish casserole

pans of quartered lemons.

"They kept asking for lemons for their ice tea; we couldn't keep up," waiter Jeff Mercier told The North County Times. "They were just sucking them down."

On Sunday, house owner Sam Koutchesfahani paid a visit. His lawyer would later say the group seemed fine and gave him a computer for his son to use in school.

That night, the ball of frozen gas and dust known as Hale-Bopp made its closest pass to Earth.

The Heaven's Gate Web site was updated one last time at 10:26 Pacific time.

In its final version, the page carried a flashing logo borrowed from Star Trek.

"Red Alert, Hale-Bopp Brings Closure to Heaven's Gate."

"Take the little package of pudding or applesauce and eat a couple of teaspoons. Pour the medicine in and stir it up. Eat it fairly quickly and then drink the vodka beverage. Then lay back and rest quietly." — suicide instructions as read by the medical examiner.

Notes, a trash can full of plastic bags and medical evidence indicate the final hours of Heaven's Gate was a calmly choreographed dance of death.

Members put on a uniform of long black pants, oversized black shirts and brand-new black Nike sneakers emblazoned with the shoe maker's comet-like white "swoosh" trademark.

All but one of the group had left a final message on videotape.

"I am doing this of my own free will," said one man. "It is not something someone brain-washed me into or convinced me of or did a con job on."

Most tucked identification into their shirt pockets along with a \$5 bill and some quarters. They packed suitcases or canvas grips and stowed the luggage neatly at the foot of their beds.

Then they settled themselves on the white and yellow comforters with a plastic container of pudding or applesauce, a dose of phenobarbital and a vodka drink.

The first group, probably 15, spooned up the drug and drank, and then plastic bags went over their heads, suffocating them. Eight assistants arranged the corpses, cleaning up the trash and draping a 3-foot-square piece of purple cloth over head and torso.

A second group followed.

Finally, they were down to two. Two last doses, two final plastic bags.

Heaven's Gate closed.

"The window to Heaven will not open again until another civilization is planted and has reached sufficient maturity (according to the judgment of the next level)" — posting on [www.heavensgate.com](http://www.heavensgate.com).

On Tuesday, March 25, a former cult member known as Rio DiAngelo got a letter and two videos at his new job in Beverly Hills.

On Wednesday, he showed his boss, Nick Matzorkis, the package with its ominous message that the cult had "shed our containers."

Within minutes, the two were making the drive south to Rancho Santa Fe.

At the house, Matzorkis waited in the driveway while Rio went inside.

Ten minutes later Rio came out, his face white as a sheet.

"They did it," he said.

## Tender Mercies

An exceptional boy meets an untimely end

By NANCY SHULINS  
Associated Press

Installment one of three

All his life, Vincent Graham has preached in God's Army, a fundamentalist foot soldier armed with the Word. He's a youth minister, a Bible scholar, a missionary. He knows a miracle when he sees one.

In 44 years he's seen many, none greater than the birth of his oldest son, Samuel. Vincent called him a Miracle Boy.

One night last August in Fort Lauderdale, Fla. while his family slept, the Miracle Boy climbed out of bed, dragged a step stool into the back yard and hanged himself from a fruit tree. He was 12.

On his last day on Earth, Sammy Graham went to church. He had a pillow fight with his brothers and ate ice cream for dessert. And if his suicide remains a mystery to his parents, at least it's a private one now. The news vans that tore up their front lawn are gone, as are all the reporters who used their bathroom and promised to keep in touch. No one has.

At the immaculate little ranch house where Samuel lived and died, reminders of his short life are everywhere: his Little League trophies, the piano he was learning to play, the empty vase he always filled with the wildflowers he picked for his mother.

### 'The fat kid'

Jacqueline Graham still can't bring herself to show her son's room to a stranger, but you don't need to look past the photos in the living room to see who he was: He was the fat kid who didn't have any friends. The easy target. The mark. It's all there in his eyes: The sweetness. The shyness. The hurt.

At 5 feet 4 inches, 174 pounds, he wasn't the heaviest kid at his school. But he was sensitive, and when the others teased him about his weight, when they chased him down the street or smacked the back of his head when the teacher wasn't looking, he sometimes cried. In the social hierarchy of fifth grade at Westwood Heights Elementary School, that put him squarely at the bottom.

### Starting sixth grade

Would things have been any different at Parkway Middle School? Sammy was to have started sixth grade there that Monday, the morning his father cut him down from the tree.

His family is coping; "not healed," Jackie says, "but able to go on." The same God that let Sammy go home to Jesus has allowed his two younger brothers to bounce back, and the parents are grateful. Such is the magnitude of their faith.

Sammy had it, too — "a deep, unusual love for Jesus at that tender age," Jackie says. "He loved God. He loved church. He always sat in the second pew. He would come home and tell you, verbatim, what was said."

In church, it's the soul, not the body, that matters; on the road to salvation, no one gets chased. And if God sees the sparrow, he must have seen Sammy, in his navy blue blazer, sitting up front.

He wasn't just saved, after all. He was a Miracle Boy.

### A prophecy comes true

By all rights, he shouldn't have been here at all. But years ago, a dying man gave Vincent his bless-

ing. It was that blessing, Vincent believes, that led to the miracle of Sammy's birth.

He was a teen-ager in Jamaica when it happened. The man "began speaking in tongues, which was strange, because he wasn't thought of as saved. Then he said, 'I must convey upon you the fatherhood blessing.'" At the time, Vincent was disappointed. "I was hoping for rich and famous."

Years later, when doctors diagnosed his low sperm count, he remembered the blessing and experienced a revelation. Rather than seek medical treatment, he would let nature take its course.

Though she longed for a family, Jackie concurred. "I have faith in your faith," she told Vincent. "If you believe that much, I believe in your belief."

God tested their faith for seven long years. "On the seventh day of the seventh year of our marriage, Jackie was seven days pregnant. Seven! The number of God's perfection." He took that as a sign and gave his son the Greek name Simeon Ozee Ouk Ozee: "He liveth whom they say could not live."

The name proved prophetic. At eight months, Sammy suffered a seizure. He stopped breathing, and the ambulance took forever. "I took him on my shoulder," Vincent says, "and he was stiff. The doctors said even if he lived he'd be brain-damaged."

But instantly came a new revelation: "I called his name, in the name of Jesus! I said, 'How can he die when his name is Simeon Ozee Ouk Ozee?' And he lived."

Editor's Note: Please see the second installment of "Tender Mercies" in tomorrow's Daily Nebraskan.

## Palestinians protest; Israelis station tanks

NABLUS, West Bank (AP) — Thousands of demonstrators shouting "Vengeance!" filled streets throughout the West Bank and Gaza Strip on Sunday, protesting Israeli construction in east Jerusalem and venting their anger over the killing of a demonstrator.

Israel, fearing the spread of violence on Land Day — an annual day of protests against Israeli land confiscations — stationed a half-dozen tanks outside Nablus and beefed up its troop presence at checkpoints and military bases around other Palestinian towns.

But Palestinian police largely succeeded in creating a buffer between their own people and Israeli troops — at times firing into the air, beating protesters with clubs and chasing them.

The only death in 11 days of riots had been that of Abdullah Salah, a Palestinian engineering student killed Saturday. The unrest began when Israel broke ground on a new Jewish housing project in east Jerusalem, which the Palestinians claim as a future capital.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Sunday accused Palestinians of unleashing "terrorism as a weapon of the negotiations" and lamented "a virtual collapse of the peace process."



■ Throughout the West Bank and Gaza Strip Palestinians protest to mark Land Day and anger over the Israeli killing of a demonstrator.  
■ Israel stationed tanks outside Nablus, and warned Palestinian police they would be brought in if Joseph's Tomb were attacked.

AP/Carl Fox

**Daily Nebraskan**

Questions? Comments? Ask for the appropriate section editor at 472-2588 or e-mail [dn@unlinfo.unl.edu](mailto:dn@unlinfo.unl.edu).

Editor: Doug Kouma	A&E Editor: Jeff Randall
Managing Editor: Paula Lavigne	Photo Director: Scott Bruhn
Assoc. News Editors: Joshua Gillin	Art Director: Aaron Steckelberg
Chad Lorenz	Web Editor: Michelle Collins
Night Editor: Anne Hjerzman	Night News Editors: Bryce Glenn
Opinion Editor: Anthony Nguyen	Leanne Sorensen
AP Wire Editor: John Fulwider	Rebecca Stone
Copy Desk Chief: Julie Sobczyk	Amy Taylor
Sports Editor: Trevor Parks	

FAX NUMBER: 472-1761

The Daily Nebraskan (USPS 144-080) is published by the UNL Publications Board, Nebraska Union 34, 1400 R St., Lincoln, NE 68588-0448, Monday through Friday during the academic year; weekly during summer sessions.

Readers are encouraged to submit story ideas and comments to the Daily Nebraskan by calling 472-2588. The public has access to the Publications Board.

Subscription price is \$55 for one year.

Postmaster: Send address changes to the Daily Nebraskan, Nebraska Union 34, 1400 R St., Lincoln, NE 68588-0448. Second-class postage paid at Lincoln, Neb.

ALL MATERIAL COPYRIGHT 1997 DAILY NEBRASKAN