

Sexual abuse prostitution child sex rife i

SYDNEY: Children aged less than 12 had frequent sexual contact with adults in a Sydney apartment's opening address to Col...

The children were released back that in his unique children had...

CULT FILTHY SAYS MP

A RELIGIOUS cult operating in Sydney was running prostitution racket, a Federal MP alleged.

The Member for Peterson, Mr Frank O'Connor

ADULTS HAD SEX WITH CHILDREN, COURT TOLD

FROM LEFT Kristina Jones, Juliana Buhning and Celeste Jones escaped the religious cult after years of sexual abuse.

FIGHT FOR SECT CHILDREN

Child human rights inquiry

By GARY HUGHES

THE federal Human Rights Commission has provided the highest possible priority to a inquiry into the Children of God cult.

Sect child 'cried over sex queries



Children often put on shows in schools, orphanages and homes for the elderly.



Ricky Rodriguez, pictured with his stepfather, founder David Berg, would commit murder-suicide age 29.



Kristina and Celeste's parents, Rebecca and Christopher Jones (also father of Juliana), pictured here in 1976, were both members of Children of God.

“we were FORCED to OBEY”

LIFE INSIDE THE CHILDREN OF GOD CULT

ESCAPING PAEDOPHILIA AND PROSTITUTION ... WHAT BECOMES OF THE CHILDREN WHO GREW UP INSIDE THE WORLD'S MOST NOTORIOUS SECT? BY KERRIE DAVIES

Ricky Rodriguez had a plan. Sitting in his Arizona home on January 7, 2005, wearing a sleeveless top, his hair shaved close to the scalp, and with a Sum 41 album playing in the background, he pressed record on his video camera. Over the next 56 minutes his voice would see-saw from an eerie calm to angry confusion. He had “a need for revenge”, he said, “a need for justice, because I can't go on like this”. Before him lay his tools of retribution – including a handgun, a knife and duct tape.

It was time for Rodriguez to take his final stand against the sexual abuse he suffered at the hands of his own mother, Karen Zerby, during his childhood in one of the world's most notorious cults, Children of God [COG]. Zerby, it's said, had sex with Rodriguez when he was just 12. “Man, they sure fucked up our brains,” he ranted. “Used us as slaves. And that's what we were – every last fucking one of us ... just there for those sick fuckers' pleasure.”

The next day, 29-year-old Rodriguez put his plan in motion, inviting former cult member Angela Smith to dinner

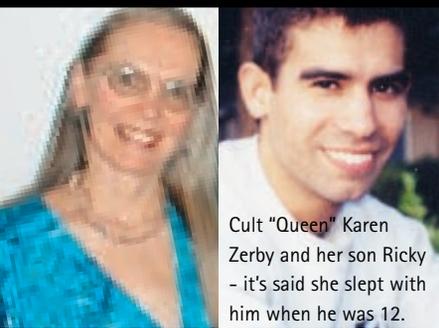
and bringing her to his home. Smith, who had spent years as Zerby's secretary and also looked after Rodriguez for a time in his younger years, would never leave that apartment. Rodriguez stabbed her to death and, early the next morning, ended his own life with a bullet to his head. Among his final words on his video murder-suicide note was this haunting question: “How can you do that to kids and sleep at night?”

Kristina and Celeste Jones and their half-sister Juliana Buhning have long wondered the same thing. In their book *Not Without My Sister*, released this month, they add their voices to the others who claim to have suffered horrific sexual abuse while growing up in the Children of God. “From birth we were conditioned to obey and follow the way of the cult,” they write. “We had no choice and knew no other way.” The sisters bravely chronicle their experiences, which took place in the UK and Asia, and included developing a sexual knowledge that far surpassed their years, being forced to hide questioning minds beneath obedience, relying on other children instead of adults, and expressing their frustration, depression and →

Sect child was 'shared' for sex, court told

REPORT

BY MALCOLM BROWN



Cult "Queen" Karen Zerby and her son Ricky - it's said she slept with him when he was 12.

exhaustion through disorders such as anorexia (which Juliana suffered at age 16), and ultimately, rebellion and escape.

Bedtime reading, as for all in the cult, was the disturbing *Story of Davidito*. A 762-page how-to guide for raising children, the book chronicled the upbringing of Ricky "Davidito" Rodriguez.

As the stepson of cult founder David Berg, (Berg took Zerby, now known as the Queen or Mama Maria, as his second wife), he was considered the Messiah. In a 2005 *Rolling Stone* article, *Davidito* was referred to as "unabashed child pornography", and called "perhaps the most disturbing book ever published in the name of religion". In it, according to Kristina, there was a photograph of Rodriguez's nanny sucking the two-year-old boy's penis, while Zerby's secretary was shown lying naked "with [Ricky] on top". Of course, it was not prophesised in the book that this young boy would later commit murder-suicide.

arising from our liberal stance towards sexuality should have been anticipated and stringent rules established earlier on."

Berg died in 1994, but Zerby is now believed to direct the Family International from a secret location and the organisation no longer practices the abusive and socially unacceptable elements of Berg's doctrine. Activities relating to sexual contact with children were formally renounced, prior to Berg's death, in 1986 and, though police investigations have linked no COG members conclusively to sexual abuse, Borowik did also state early in the year of Rodriguez's death, that "during a transitional stage of our movement, from 1978 to about 1985, there were cases when minors were subject to sexually inappropriate advances."

Kristina writes of posing naked for photos at age four and of enduring shocking acts of sexual abuse at the hands of various COG members. Between them, the three sisters danced naked for Berg, had scheduled "dates" with other children and older members of the sect, and Kristina even brushed her mother's hair before she went "Flirty Fishing" - female followers would offer sex to recruit new male members and benefactors. (It was called this because Jesus's followers were fishers of men.)

Children conceived this way were called Jesus Babies, and Ricky Rodriguez was one of them. "One of the issues with

COG [is that] a lot of people don't know who their fathers are," says Raphael Aron, who wrote *Cults: Too Good To Be True*, leads interventions and counsels those who have left cults.

Kristina, Celeste and Juliana's father, Christopher Jones, joined COG like many others, as an idealistic Christian youth. He had three children - Celeste, Kristina and David - with fellow cult member Rebecca, who joined in her teens and they were faithful to each other until Berg decreed in 1976 his Law of Love as a way to justify taking Zerby as his second wife. "Berg told his followers that the Ten Commandments were now obsolete. Everything done in love (including sex) was okay in the eyes of God. Adultery, incest, extramarital and adult-child sex were no longer sins," write the sisters.

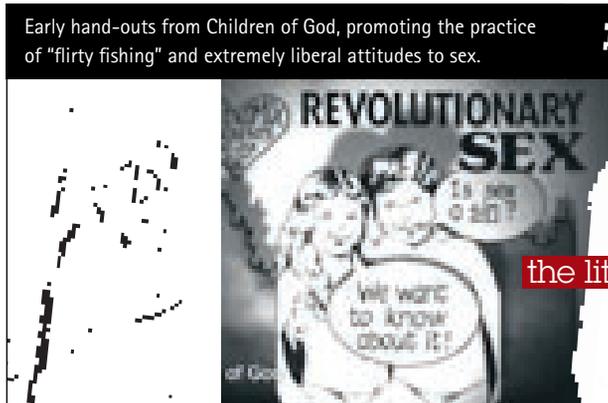
But not everyone agreed with Berg's interpretation of love. Two thirds of the cult left, including Berg's first wife, disillusioned and disgusted, but those who stayed obediently embraced it. "Essentially, the defining characteristic of a cult is the notion of surrender, that is the →

THE THREE SISTERS DANCED NAKED FOR BERG AND HAD SCHEDULED "DATES" WITH OTHER CHILDREN AND OLDER MEMBERS OF THE SECT

When Kristina heard about Rodriguez's fate, she had been out of the cult for years and was deeply distressed, as was Celeste. "I didn't know him but Celeste did, and lived with him. He was the poster boy. Everyone in the group knew him in a way ... It was shocking and extremely heartbreaking to see the difficulties he had to deal with and the pain he had stored up ... It shows how much his childhood affected him."

In the 24 hours before Rodriguez died, he had called Celeste saying he could not go on. She told *The New York Times* that she had assured him in that phone call "things would be taken seriously." Still, she added to the newspaper, the abuse "happened everywhere - in the Philippines, Japan, Greece. So where do you go for legal redress?"

Since the '60s when California-based Berg created the cult, a kind of religious twist on the hippy mindset, it has undergone reformation. Their spokesperson today, Claire Borowik, describes it as a Christian fellowship with 4,000 children and 4,000 adult members who live across 100 countries (including Australia) in 718 communal houses. The group sends aid workers and missionaries to disaster areas and its more musical members have even sung at the White House. The organisation's name has changed from Children of God to the Family International, and Berg's controversial views on sex have been addressed. Though he once wrote, "There's nothing in the world at all wrong with sex as long as it is practiced in love whatever it is, or whoever it's with, no matter who, or what age or what relative or what manner", in 2005, Borowik said, "In hindsight, it became clear that potential problems



the literature

giving up of one's individuality; surrender in an emotional, physical and spiritual sense under the powerful influence of a higher authority," explains Aron.

Kristina and Celeste's father, Christopher, took COG lovers, including Serena Buhring, who gave birth to their half-sister Juliana. Their mother began a relationship with an Australian-born, violent former drug addict, Bill*, and they later moved to the UK, taking Kristina and David, while Celeste stayed with her father at the commune in India where they had been living. Confusingly, Kristina, Celeste and Juliana are just three of 15 half-siblings from their father's relationships within the cult.

"As children, we were taught that we were the hope of the future, untainted by TV and the 'system'. We felt we were on this ride where we lived in fear – of [the cult members], of the police ... We were beaten down, mentally and physically ..." says Kristina, now 30 and living in the UK.

"Despite being indoctrinated into radical sexual beliefs, I was disgusted," she writes in the book. "I did not want my baby sister to suffer what [Bill] had done to me [physical and sexual abuse] ... All this contributed to making me anxious if I did not know where my brothers and sister were at all times ... I was a nine-year-old girl heading for a nervous breakdown."

Meanwhile, Celeste and Juliana were abused as they travelled with their father, Christopher, to communes around Asia. When Rebecca later confronted him about Celeste's abuse, he dismissed the claims as "ridiculous", adding that she was a virgin. To Celeste he said he hadn't known about abuse within the cult. "Really? I'm sorry ... I ... I didn't know", he said.

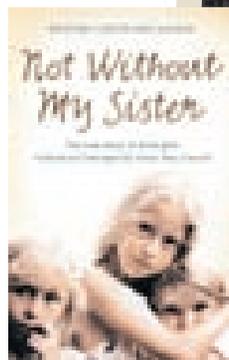
The sisters now worry about the five young half-siblings still with their father in the cult. "It must be hard for him to believe something so strongly for so long and admit he was wrong. He doesn't see [the abuse] in the same perspective, which doesn't give him any understanding. He doesn't care. He *can't* care because it's against what he has been taught ... He doesn't realise the [damage] abuse can do to a child ... It's infuriating," Kristina explains.

By the time child welfare was concerned, so was Kristina's mother Rebecca. She fled the cult – and Bill – with her children in 1987, after being told to send Kristina to a commune in the Philippines for "training for the last days". Instead, Kristina's mother found strength and began fighting to find her other daughter, Celeste, still living with her father. Celeste was secreted in a number of communes throughout the world until publicity forced the cult to allow a supervised, tense meeting between Celeste, her mother and Kristina. Later, Celeste left the cult of her own accord, as did Juliana, who was by then living with her mother in Germany.

Away from the grip of the Family, Rebecca was ready to face the truth when she read a memoir by Berg's eldest daughter, Deborah, which spoke of how her father abused her. "Worried, Mum asked me if anything sexual had ever happened to me. I relayed to her how I had been sexually and physically abused and she cried, feeling terrible," Kristina writes. "[She said,] 'That vile, hateful man [Bill]! How could I have not seen. How could I have brought him into your life?'"

But Kristina has found the strength to forgive her mother. "I'm proud of her. I know how hard it was for her to leave. She didn't have any of the life lessons other people have had. She still managed to find herself somewhere in there

In Sri Lanka, Christopher and Serena (holding Juliana) and Celeste (next to her father). The sisters' book of their experience growing up inside the cult is available July 1 (\$29.99, HarperCollins).



and get the courage to go against it. I love her very much."

The transition to normal society for ex-cult members is rarely easy, explains Aron, and this is especially so for those who have grown up in a cult. "COG kids [who leave] have had the rug pulled out from under their own sanctity. They have lost their purity and innocence and they didn't choose this. They are angry and they don't know where to vent ... [During rehabilitation] you reawaken their pre-cult mentality. But when you have someone who has always been in a cult, it's one big blank."

Kristina knows how hard it is to adjust to the outside world. "There are a lot of suicides within the second generation because basically, when you decide to leave, there is little help and it's hard to accept help even if it is offered. There is the stigma of being in a cult and a lot of people don't admit to it and don't know who to trust because of that disconnection. One girl left the group at 16 and sat in a pub for weeks listening to people's conversation and [watching] how they acted. It's a culture shock," she recalls.

Many turn to the website movingon.org, which has helped the two thirds of children of COG members who have left the cult. The organisation, which was created by and for young people with parents who were members of COG, currently has 4,250 registered users and even sells a baseball cap emblazoned with "I think therefore I left". Moving On also directs members to New York based group, Safe Passage, which helps children connected to cults or high-demand organisations.

Berg would be turning in his grave to know that members of his "untainted generation" are now success stories of the system he despised, despite most being denied a proper education. Kristina works with Safe Passage; Celeste is a clinical psychologist; Juliana, a writer and David is an Oxford University math scholar.

After escaping COG, Kristina holds out hope for the future. "I took a stance. I'm the victim here, but I am not going to feel ashamed," she says. "... There are horror stories and tragedies, but there is hope ... I see good in the world." **m**