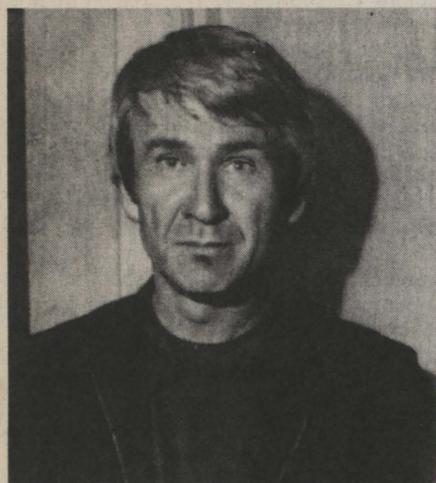


## Flying Saucery in the Wilderness

*New revelations from the sheep of Bo and Peep*



Marshall Herff Applewhite ("Bo")



Bonnie Lu Nettles ("Peep")

The wiry fellow hauling clubs on this summer's pro tour looked to be your average caddy: suede shoes, mottled spectacles, blue sun cap. But Paul Groll, 32, quietly claims to be an emissary from an ultrasecretive religious cult that is—quite literally—outlandish.

The cult sounds like a cross between the *Book of Revelation* and Arthur C. Clarke's *Childhood's End*. It was born in 1975 when a distinguished-looking couple held a series of West Coast meetings to announce that a spaceship would soon arrive to swoop up properly trained apostles into the "next level" of existence. The pair called themselves only "Bo and Peep" or—because of their claim to be the "two witnesses" of the End Times in *Revelation 11*—"The Two." With end-of-the-millennium enthusiasm, as many as 200 people forsook jobs and possessions, even spouses and children, and suddenly followed Bo and Peep into the wilderness.

Groll was among them. He had done an Army hitch, spent four years as an antique refinisher, been married and divorced before becoming a caddy. Why did the onetime Presbyterian believe in The Two? "I just felt drawn to them. You could feel the goodness."

After the flock vanished, the press identified Bo as Marshall Herff Applewhite, a former music teacher at the University of St. Thomas, a Roman Catholic school in Houston, and choirmaster of an Episcopal church. Peep was formerly a Houston nurse named Bonnie Lu Nettles. In 1976 two University of Montana sociologists, Robert Balch and David Taylor, located the nomads' wilderness camp and found it noncoercive but sometimes troubled by doubts.

The group is still camping out. Groll's account of life there cannot be corrob-

orated because he "promised" Bo and Peep not to reveal the location. He says only that there are about four dozen people, and that they are normally encamped in the Wyoming Rockies, moving to a ranch in northern Texas when the snows come. Unarmed sentries guard the perimeter of the compound to fend off outsiders. As Groll tells it, the relaxed life-style that the sociologists found seems to have changed drastically. Even with today's can-you-top-this cult scene, his account of training for life in outer space is remarkable. Each minute, 24 hours a day, a musical beep sounds across the camp from a command tent ("Central"). During the day, at twelve-beep intervals, the disciples check Central for their next task. Among their duties: camp chores, perimeter guarding and stints as "rotating eyes" (monitoring campers' conduct and reporting violations).

Bo and Peep have "thousands of rules," reports Groll, but "they never force anyone to do anything." During one three-month phase, members constantly wore hoods over their heads and peered out through mirrored eye slits. The usual uniform is a brightly colored windbreaker over a jumpsuit. Gloves are worn at all times. Members can say yes, no or "I don't know" but otherwise communicate only by written messages. They

study the Bible, forswear sex, drugs and alcohol. They are, however, permitted to watch TV newscasts and read newspapers to emphasize the differences between the values of the camp and the outside world. The newspaper obituaries, stock market reports and sports pages are clipped out because they are considered distracting.

At the two daily meals (called "lab experiments") a blackboard in the dining tent lists "formulas" that specify the menu (PA for potatoes, CA for cake). The food must be consumed with meticulous care to reduce noise. Bo and Peep usually shop for food and supplies personally. They always pay cash, once explaining to cult members, Groll recalls, that we "didn't have any need to wonder" about money.

Much time is spent on an eye exercise in which Bo-and-Peepers concentrate on a single object for up to an hour. They are "out of orbit" (*i.e.*, exempt from the twelve-minute work cycles) for this, and for lectures by Bo and Peep. The Two proclaim that Bo has been Jesus, Elijah and Moses in his former lives. The spacecraft is imminently expected. It will carry believers to an enigmatic "garden" where they will get "energy" from their coequal, the King of Kings, alias Chief of Chiefs, the god who created planet earth. Believers will live eternally in hairless, toothless bodies that are free of disease and decay. Groll scoffs about possible parallels between the camp discipline and the tragic end of Jonestown: "Anyone can walk away. We just have to turn from a caterpillar into a butterfly and then we'll be ready to leave."

Groll got an honorable discharge from the U.S. Army. He has not sought money for his strange revelations. He was always a rootless man, according to Toledo Lawyer Sheldon Slaybod, a friend who knew him before the conversion. The years in the wilds have not changed him much, says Slaybod, "although he's a lot more at peace with himself."

Groll claims that Bo and Peep decided to have him come out of hiding for a while and tell his story. Consequently he regards his workaday life as temporary. "If I felt they were calling," he says flatly, "I would go back. They're still putting out vibrations and sending me a lot of positive energy." If the call does not come earlier, he expects to meet up with his companions when that rescue spaceship arrives and flies them away to the eternal garden. ■



Paul Groll caddying

*Waiting for the Chief of Chiefs.*