

SAN JOSE MERCURY NEWS / JUNE 28, 1987 / WEST
Newspaper Cover Story: Crime and the Krishnas - **Part Two**
By John Hubner

The Temple of Doom
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THE TEMPLE OF DOOM



Followers of Krishna built an elaborate palace in West Virginia to honor their founder and his ideals. But the ideals disappeared as the movement turned to greed and violence. ISKCON has ended up as a series of cults that are far more materialistic than the culture ISKCON's founder sought to transcend.

Last week in *West*, in the first of a two-part series on the Krishna movement, staff writer John Hubner told how Swami Prabhupada started the movement in the United States and how its members became increasingly involved in illegal activities after his death. The public, however, continued to think of the Krishnas as a benign if strange relic of the '60s. Then a former devotee named Steve Bryant began a crusade to unmask the movement's leadership.

STEVE BRYANT was careening around the country, driving through state after state, screaming at his wife, Jane, even though she was hundreds of miles away in West Virginia. At 3 a.m. one very hot night in Dallas in July 1985, Bryant parked his van, telephoned Jane, and begged her not to divorce him. She refused. Bryant hung up and immediately called Kirtanananda, the most powerful guru in the International Society for Krishna Consciousness—ISKCON. Kirtanananda was leader of New Vrindaban, a 3,000-acre; 700-member Krishna commune in the hills of West Virginia.

In the phone call, Bryant accused Kirtanananda of breaking up his marriage. As he always did, Bryant taped the phone conversation.

"You'll have to surrender to me," Kirtanananda said, implying that was the only way Bryant would get his wife back.

Bryant argued that the guru had no right to come between them. "You tried to persuade her that you had the only relationship with her," he said.

"I have the only eternal relationship with her," the guru replied.

"I just talked to my wife, and she doesn't want to come back to me—ever. And I can't allow my sons to stay there [in New Vrindaban]."

"All right, we'll fight for it," the guru said, "You want to just go through with a fight, huh?" Bryant asked.

"Yeah!" the guru replied.

Steve Bryant wouldn't seem to be the sort of person to take on a religious figure who has hundreds of followers and millions of dollars at his disposal. Kirtanananda built "America's Taj Mahal," the Palace of Gold in New Vrindaban, Bryant was an itinerant jeweller who took trips to India to buy gems and settings cheaply, In America, he sold pendants with pictures of Indian deities to devotees; to *karmies* (the Krishnas' name for meat-eating, sense-driven Westerners) he sold earrings and necklaces, the kind of trinkets aging hippies sell on Berkeley's Telegraph Avenue. At times, the Bryant's and their three children (Jane had a son from a previous relationship; together, they had two boys) were broke and living on welfare.

Bryant had been away on a trip to India when Kirtanananda initiated Jane without his consent, a serious violation of ISKCON law. In ISKCON, women are considered subservient to men, Men follow a guru and pass his instructions on to their wives. If a husband and wife have different gurus (Bryant was initiated by Prabhupada, the ISKCON founder), they are following two masters, and inconsistency and disharmony are bound to result. Jane didn't care because she wanted a divorce.

"I didn't really have any affection for Sulocana [Bryant's Krishna name, pronounced Su-low-chan]," Jane says. "I asked Kirtanananda if I could stay, and he said yes. Sulocana was furious,"

Kirtanananda routinely broke up marriages and ordered women to marry men they hardly knew. It was one of the ways he used to control people. Other ISKCON gurus do the same thing; as a result, devotees estimate the movement's divorce rate at between 80 and 90 percent.

Bryant didn't question the practice until he and Jane separated. Then he became convinced if he studied Prabhupada's writings, he would find references to marriage that would prove Kirtanananda had no right to come between a man and his wife. He intended to copy the references and send them to Jane, hoping she would see Kirtanananda was in error and change her mind about divorcing him. So after the 3 a.m. phone call from Dallas, Bryant rolled his homemade van onto the Interstate and headed west to Los Angeles,

Prabhupada's letters (the ISKCON founder preferred to communicate by letter and wrote thousands of them) are stored in the Bhaktivedanta Book Trust in L.A. The word on Bryant was out before he reached L.A. ISKCON officials denied him access to the founder's letters. However, an alienated devotee slipped him a microfilm containing 7,000 of the letters.

Bryant didn't read far before he forgot about marriage. The letters were absolute dynamite. They would blow ISKCON sky-high!

Steve Bryant thought he had a holy crusade: to unmask the leadership of the Krishna movement in America. But no one believed his stories of child abuse, drug-running and fund-raising scams until Bryant was murdered. At first, Los Angeles police thought Bryant's murder was just one more killing in a rundown area of tire city. But Bryant's friends convinced homicide detectives this was a religious killing that involved a nationwide conspiracy.

Ever since the death of Iskcon's founder Swami Prabhupada, in 1977, the movement has been crippled by "the guru question." The 11 men who took over the movement claim to be Prabhupada's spiritual successors. Devotees must worship them to reach Prabhupada, who will take them back to Krishna and godhead, or nirvana. Devotees who dispute this claim by the gurus believe individual was qualified to succeed Prabhupada. Instead, they believe, the way to godhead is to read the master's books and follow his teachings. The gurus won the argument and took over the movement, which then deteriorated. According to *Hinduism Today*, an independent newspaper, of the more than 4,000 devotees personally initiated by Prabhupada, only 500 remain in the movement. Many remain as honest and devout as they were on the day they joined. They have managed to ignore the critical activity that has occurred in many temples. Others have abandoned the religion. Still others, like the members of the San Jose temple follow an Indian guru who is a contemporary of Prabhupada's.

Reading the microfilmed letters, Bryant discovered that ISKCON's founder himself did not trust the gurus who would soon succeed him. In particular, Prabhupada did not trust Kirtanananda, who has always claimed to be Prabhupada's successor and built the Palace of Gold to prove it. The founder called Kirtanananda "crazy" and "a fool," and wrote, "there is nothing to be lamented if thousands of Kirtanananda's ... come and go."

Suddenly, Bryant believed he understood everything: Krishna had allowed Kirtanananda to break up Bryant's marriage so he would read Prabhupada's letters and discover the truth about the gurus. Krishna had picked him to overthrow the gurus!

In a frenzy, Bryant drove to Berkeley, where he bought a \$495 Commodore computer and printer. He began sending printouts of Prabhupada's letters to ISKCON officials all over the world. He sent them to New Vrindaban and repeatedly phoned the commune to challenge Kirtanananda to a debate, Kirtanananda and the other ISKCON officials ignored him, but alienated devotees who read the letters began telling Bryant stories of terrible crimes—child abuse, drug smuggling, even murder—that were done with the approval of some gurus.

Bryant began to formulate a book he thought would be the ISKCON equivalent of Marlin Luther's 95 theses. He would print Prabhupada's letters to puncture the gurus' claim they were Prabhupada's spiritual successors. Then he would present evidence of crimes to show how evil they had become. He would circulate the book throughout ISKCON. If it didn't force the gurus to resign, Bryant would take evidence of the crimes to the police and the press.

Night after night, Bryant sat in his van, banging out a sprawling, often chaotic expose called *The Guru Business*. His efforts earned him only death threats. He took to wearing disguises and parking the van on a different Berkeley street every night. Desperate to have an impact, he drove back to West Virginia, where he asked Donald Bordenkircher, the sheriff of Marshall County, in which New Vrindaban is located, to place him in protective custody.

"He said there was international trafficking in dangerous drugs, counterfeiting, child abuse, and on and on," the sheriff recalls. "But it was all third or fourth hand. I kept saying, 'Give us the names.' He'd say, 'I can't do that because they're in fear of their lives.'" The sheriff dismissed Bryant as an angry devotee who had a grudge against Kirtanananda. He filed Bryant's stories in the back of his mind with hundreds of other stories he had heard about the Krishna's over the years: "Sheriff, they're stockpiling automatic weapons up there." "Sheriff, they've got a hepatitis epidemic up there." But though the sheriff ignored Bryant, people in New Vrindaban didn't—not after what happened next to Kirtanananda.

A FEW WEEKS AFTER BRYANT LEFT THE Marshall County Jail, in October 1985. Kirtanananda was overseeing the construction of a brick road in New Vrindaban. A transient

devotee named Michael Shockman picked up a three-foot steel pipe, sneaked up behind the guru, and brought the pipe crashing down on the guru's skull. Kirtanananda was rushed to a hospital in Pittsburgh, where brain surgery was performed immediately. The guru has never fully recovered. He walks with two canes and suffers severe headaches.

Shockman was sentenced to a 15-month term in the Marshall County Jail. In a letter to Sheriff Bordenkircher, which was subsequently leaked, Bryant suggested that Shockman be released and given a medal.

"That letter convinced a lot of people in New Vrindaban that Bryant and Shockman were working together," says an L.A. devotee who knew Bryant. "They think Bryant's writings inspired Shockman to do it. A lot of us out here on the West Coast think so, too."

Back in Berkeley, fear worked on Bryant's mind as steadily as cancer does on the body. He flew into sudden rages that alienated the few devotees who were willing to help him. To escape the pressure and his fears, Bryant began smoking marijuana and using LSD.

In February 1986, Bryant returned to West Virginia and began calling his ex-wife. He told her he had arrived with an army that was going to storm the commune and kill Kirtanananda, Commune leaders called the police.

"I couldn't believe he was back," says Sheriff Bordenkircher, who arrested Bryant in a cheap apartment outside Moundsville. Bryant had no army, only a loaded .45; he also had a small quantity of LSD. "This isn't the guy who was screaming for protective custody and in fear of his life. This is a new guy. He's full of bravado, he's got a loaded gun, and he says he's got people here helping him. I've yet to figure out why he came back."

"He was crazy, unpredictable," says a close friend of Bryant's. "He said he went back there to get contacts. It was a great mistake. It cost him his life."

Bryant posted bond and was released from jail. He drove to Detroit to visit his parents. He was followed by a New Vrindaban enforcer named Thomas Drescher, who watched the Bryants' house and, just for the kick that comes from taking a risk, sneaked up to the driveway and put a Snoopy "Are we having fun yet?" bumper sticker on Bryant's van.

The sticker was Bryant's death warrant. With Drescher stalking him, he had as much chance of surviving as a rabbit does when a peregrine falcon goes into a power dive. A Vietnam veteran who drove children around New Vrindaban in a bus, Thomas Drescher is a convicted killer.

Drescher eventually followed Bryant to California and tracked him down in Los Angeles. According to police, he shot Bryant twice in the head in the early morning hours of May 26, 1986. Bryant's van was parked on a dark street. When the police found the body, Bryant was sitting in the driver's seat. His hands were folded, as if he had been chanting.

The irony of it is, Bryant had already ended his crusade. When he left his parents' house, Bryant drove back to Berkeley. His friends had abandoned him, and he had made no new converts to his cause. From Berkeley, he moved to Three Rivers, a small town just below Sequoia National Park where a few dozen Krishna refugees from temples around the country reside.

Most of the devotees in Three Rivers are trapped in a netherworld, neither in the Hare Krishna movement nor out of it. Some are afraid to re-enter the larger world; others do not know how to. They gambled their lives on a promise to enter heaven. When you bet on stakes that high and lose, there seems no sense in gambling again.

But Bryant found the community comforting, For the first time in years, he began to relax, He formed a relationship with a divorced woman who has three children. Her children did not replace his two sons, but they did help lessen the pain of being separated from them. Bryant asked her to marry.

The couple planned to move to Mount Shasta, where Bryant was going to start a business custom-building campers. The seed money would come from Bryant's jewellery business, which he had agreed to sell to three devotees in Los Angeles for \$10,000, All he had to do was load his jewellery-making equipment in the van and go down to L.A. On the day the deal was to be completed, he was killed.

At first, Los Angeles police thought Bryant's murder was just one more killing in a rundown area of the city where domestic arguments turn violent and drug-related shootings occur regularly. But Bryant's friends convinced homicide detectives this was a religious killing that involved a nationwide conspiracy.

"When the police asked who I thought did this, I said Tirtha [Thomas Drescher]," says Yuvati Matusow, a close friend of Bryant's who drove down to L.A, with him. "If they [the leaders of New Vrindaban] were going to send somebody out here to kill, that's who they would send."

Back in West Virginia, people who knew Drescher were thinking the same thing. He had told a number of acquaintances that he was going to California to kill Steve Bryant, One of them, a retired steelworker named Randall Gorby, called the West Virginia State Police. The police put a tap on Gorby's phone,

Five days after the Bryant killing, Drescher called Gorby to say he was leaving the country. Police arrested Drescher a few hours later outside a bank in Kent, Ohio. His wife and family and most of their belongings were piled into an Isuzu Trooper, Drescher was carrying \$4,000 cash. He had a diary that contained detailed surveillance notes on Bryant's movements in Los Angeles.

The day after Drescher's arrest, Randall Gorby woke up in his upstairs bedroom and did the first thing he did every morning: light a cigarette. The house exploded, blowing Gorby through the roof. He survived, but second and third degree flash burns kept him in a Wheeling hospital for months.

A natural-gas leak caused the explosion. Police think the blast may have been linked to Drescher's arrest. Drescher thinks it was caused by Gorby. "He was cheating the gas company," Drescher claims. "He bypassed the meter and must have messed up,"

During the Bryant investigation, police discovered four witnesses—including Randall Gorby—who heard Drescher say he had killed a fringe member of the New Vrindaban commune named Charles St. Denis, a drug dealer who ran a plant nursery to hide his real vocation, Drescher ambushed St. Denis with a .22, Although St. Denis was hit 10 to 12 times, he stayed on his feet and tried to run. Drescher tackled him, He stabbed him so hard, the blade of the knife broke, Drescher then stabbed St. Denis with a screwdriver. The whole time, he was screaming at St. Denis, "Chant! Chant!" Krishnas believe that, if they die chanting, they will get a better body in their next incarnation.

"St. Denis had received an inheritance of more than \$200,000," says Norman Hewlett, former president of the ISKCON Cleveland temple, a satellite of New Vrindaban. "Anyone who got an inheritance was supposed to turn it over to Kirtanananda. This guy didn't."

Last December, Drescher was convicted of first-degree murder and sentenced to life in the West Virginia penitentiary. A week later, his accomplice, Daniel Reid, pleaded guilty and led police to the body. Three other bodies have since been discovered buried in shallow graves in the New Vrindaban commune. Police are now attempting to identify the corpses.

Drescher is now awaiting extradition to California, where he faces murder-for-hire charges in the Steve Bryant case; the charges could carry the death penalty,

Kirtanananda denies any connection with either the St. Denis or Steve Bryant murders. He believes law enforcement authorities are beginning an attack on Hindus and that New Vrindaban is the first target because it is the most prominent Hindu community in America. In March, the gum's charges of religious persecution got him a meeting in Washington with a White House official named Rudy Beserra, who is an assistant director of the Office of Public Liaison. Kirtanananda has gone on a "First Amendment Freedom Tour" and has appeared on television and radio talk shows in the East and Midwest.

"We abhor violence," Kirtanananda says, "If people want to talk about conspiracies, why don't they try to figure out the conspiracy to kill me? I am being persecuted. If they can't physically destroy me, they'll destroy me by character assassination,"

In March, the Governing Body Commission of ISKCON, meeting in Vrindaban, India, excommunicated Kirtanananda. An ISKCON press release said the reasons for the excommunication were Kirtanananda's "attempts to establish himself as the sole spiritual heir" of the founder and "his apparent approval of illegal activity." Kirtanananda has said he will not step down and is threatening to file a lawsuit against ISKCON for kicking him out. He is the sixth gum to be expelled from the movement, Investigators from half a dozen local, state and federal agencies are now crisscrossing the country, investigating crimes that were first reported by Steve Bryant in *The Guru Business*, Bryant's charges of murder, child abuse and molestation, drug rings and fund-raising scams, which seemed so unbelievable when Bryant described them in his wild, rambling prose, are turning out to be true. ISKCON began as an alternative to materialistic Western culture. It has ended up as a series of cults that are far more heartless and much more materialistic than the culture the ISKCON founder sought to transcend.

"Devotees became expendable," says Peter Chatterton, an ISKCON regional secretary and president of the Vancouver temple from 1972 until he left the movement this spring. "The kind of human beings they were did not matter. Everybody was judged by the same material standard. As long as devotees produced money for the movement, they were held in esteem. When they did not produce money, they were nothing. It was always, 'He must be pure; look how much money he's bringing in.' It didn't matter that the people who brought in the most money were criminals.

"They say a little knowledge is a dangerous thing," Chatterton concludes. "We got a little knowledge, and we got very dangerous. We combined the worst aspects of both cultures."

Among the "worst aspects" of the corrupted Krishna movement are the following:

[1] *Child Abuse and Molestation:* Last December, almost six months to the day after his father was killed, Steve Bryant's 3-year-old son drowned in a lake in New Vrindaban. He is not the first child to die at New Vrindaban. During the summer of 1984, Charles St. Denis' and Daniel Reid's 5- and 6-year-old sons were found suffocated inside an old refrigerator. A dead rabbit was found between them.

Police say there is no evidence the children were murdered, They say the deaths are evidence of appalling neglect.

"The way children are treated up there [in New Vrindaban] is criminal," says one investigator. "They leave kids alone all day. Or they'll put a 10-year-old girl or pregnant girl in charge of two dozen kids."

"They're funnelling all this money into the temple, and the kids' nursery is above a barn," adds Steve Hebel. "There have been lots of cases of hepatitis. I've got a son who has a problem with parasites in his stomach. For years, he looked like an Ethiopian with a bloated stomach."

The neglect and abuse of children is not limited to New Vrindaban. A devotee in the Dallas temple sent her pre-teen boys to a Krishna school in Oklahoma, Both were beaten often. One boy had his arm broken, The former devotee now lives in Pleasanton; her children are in therapy.

Two years ago, a Los Angeles devotee was sentenced to 50 years in prison for molesting more than 10 children. This spring, Susan Hebel and her ex-husband, Steve, filed charges against two members of the New Vrindaban commune, school headmaster Larry Gardner and his assistant Fredrick Di Francisco, for sexually abusing their son, now 13, on numerous occasions over a four-year period. Another former devotee, Christine Mills, has filed a lawsuit charging Gardner with "the repeated and systemic oral and anal homosexual rape of schoolchildren." Police say more child-molestation charges will be filed soon.

Gardner has fled and is believed to be in India. Di Francisco is under arrest.

"When I found out what happened, I went to Kirtanananda and said, 'I'm having such a hard time dealing with this,' Susan Hebel recalls, "I gave my children to the school trusting they would be taken care of and become devotees. I can't believe anyone would sexually molest them, Kirtanananda screamed at me, 'You stuid woman! Sex is sex! How much sex have you had?' He was equating sex between a man and wife and sex with a child. I couldn't believe it. Then he said, 'Shri-Galim [Larry Gardner] has rectified himself. He's gotten married.' Later, I found out that he put Shrigalim back in charge of the school."

The underlying reason for the high incidence of child abuse and molestation among the Krishnas is that parents are routinely separated from their children. At the age of 5, Krishna children leave home to live year-round in separate boys' and girls' boarding schools called *gurukulas* or ashrams, The children spend only four weeks a year and an occasional weekend with their parents. Even when they are home on weekend visits, children in communes like New Vrindaban rarely see their mothers because most women are constantly on the road, collecting money.

"A lot of things the anti-cult people say about communes are true," says Peter Chatterton. "Communes destroy family integrity. Parents have no economic independence. They depend on the guru for their livelihoods. They allow the guru to make decisions only the parents should make.

"The only way ISKCON will survive is if it comes back as a traditional church—a community of families that live apart and worship together," Chatterton concludes.

• ***The Abuse of Women:*** Cynthia Hebel, Steve's second wife, lived in New Vrindaban in 1980 while Steve was serving a sentence in a federal prison in West Virginia. During the Christmas season, she was forced to go on the road, away from her children, to collect money. "All the women had to go out; they wouldn't let you stay in the community if you didn't," Cynthia says. She went to collect on the streets of New Orleans.

"I was attacked by three men," Cynthia recalls. "I had about \$2,000 on me, which they stole. Then they shot me up with heroin, I was repeatedly raped. The next morning I woke up partially clothed in a churchyard. I called Dharmatma [Dennis Gorrick, the head of the woman's collecting party at New Vrindaban] and told him what happened. I said I was in bad shape and asked if I could check into a motel for a couple of days and recover. He said, 'Absolutely not. You put on some heavy makeup and get right back out there,' " Stories like Cynthia Hebel's are not uncommon in ISKCON. Women in the Berkeley temple who collected for Jiva das, an ex-con named James Patrick Underwood, tell similar stories.

So do former New Vrindaban devotees, whose women were beaten repeatedly.

"Women are considered to be less intelligent than men! They were compared to cows; they were around to make babies and clean house," says Don McAdams, a former New Vrindaban devotee who made stained glass in the Palace of Gold. "I've seen a few women beaten up. Our next-door neighbour was told to marry a guy, and he used to beat her quite often. She used to hide at our house. She would lie to Kirtanananda about how she didn't want to be with this man, and he'd tell her she had to stay with him. He wanted the guy to be satisfied.

"There is a lot of wife-beating at New Vrindaban," Susan Hebel agrees, "I got married a second time because Kirtanananda wanted me to. My husband beat me, and when I told Kirtanananda, he said, 'You just submit.' "

Kirtanananda denies that children have been molested or that Dennis Gorrick, the head of the women's collecting party, or anyone else ever beat or mistreated women. He claims that Hebel is seeking revenge because he kicked her out of New Vrindaban for "immorality. She is more or less a prostitute."

"A prostitute! I was celibate for over seven years!" Susan Hebel replies.

"Women have been treated terribly in ISKCON. I'm guilty of that myself," says Peter Chatterton. "It's the result of a Western misunderstanding of Hindu culture. ISKCON men used Vedic scriptures as an excuse to exploit women, to justify the worst kinds of Western machismo."

• **Drug Dealing:** Some temples considered drug dealing acceptable if it was done for Krishna. Even though Steve Hebel had fallen away from the movement in the late 70s, when he began dealing drugs he made a \$5,000 donation to New Vrindaban out of the proceeds from a successful deal. "My ex-wife and kids were there and I still thought Kirtanananda was great in those days," Hebel says. "They knew what I'd done and where the money came from. They were glad to take it. They had their own drug organization. It was bringing in thousands and thousands of dollars."

Law-enforcement authorities believe the Krishna drug ring was headed by a man named Emil Sofsky, or Adwaita. Authorities believe Sofsky and his men smuggled hashish oil from Pakistan in hollowed-out suitcases, and cocaine from Colombia in shipments of scarves. Sofsky is now being sought by the federal Drug Enforcement Agency.

"The guys working for Sofsky were mules in the true sense of the word," says Steve Hebel. "They were smuggling hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of stuff, and staying in \$3-a-day hotels in India. The money went to Kirtanananda."

"They take people who used to sell drugs and get them back into it, only now they tell them it's religious, it's spiritual," adds Norman Hewlett, former president of the ISKCON Cleveland temple. "I used to do it. Before a concert in Akron, I'd get all the drugs together, and we'd bag them

all up, me and the secret men, maybe 10 of us. We'd go out there and sell heroin, coke, marijuana. There was so much money being made."

• **Fund-Raising Scams:** In January, the FBI, the IRS and local police raided the New Vrindaban commune. The authorities hauled away three tractor-trailers full of counterfeit Snoopy bumper stickers and counterfeit NFL and NCAA football emblems. Devotees were selling the phony souvenirs at ball games and passing out bumper stickers, asking for "donations" to charities that do not exist. They are now doing the same thing in the Bay Area.

"At any major sporting event, you are going to find Krishnas," says Berkeley police officer Joe Sanchez. "They're not going to say I'm from a Krishna temple. They're going to say, 'Hey, you look like you need a smile. Here's three Mickey Mouse bumper stickers. Could you spare a couple a bucks for charity? We're collecting for kids in Africa,' The copyright infringements, the charity scams continue to go on and on."

"How else are my wife and I going to support our kids?" says a former New Vrindaban devotee, one of many to flee the commune and relocate in the Bay Area. "What else do we know how to do? And some of it does go to Krishna. I'd say we keep 75 percent of what we take in and give 25 percent to the Berkeley temple,"

"I hate all this illegal fund-raising," says Hansadutta, the deposed Berkeley guru. "I hated it even when I was allowing it to go on. We've got to get back to Prabhupada's teachings. That's the only thing that will save this movement."

Hansadutta is relaxing on a couch in a Palo Alto house that smells of curry and incense. He is quiet these days. He describes the past in a monotone, as if it is a movie and he is rather bored with the main character, himself. His wife circles the conversation, occasionally bringing the former gum one of his books so he can show his visitor.

The around-the-world trips are no more. Outside, a school bus that has been painted gray is parked in the yard. Large sheets of plywood rest beside it. The bus is Hansadutta's big project. He is remodelling it, turning it into a travelling temple.

"Forget communes, forget the temples. What did we ever need all that money for, anyway?" the former gum asks. "After four or five years of floundering, I've finally got a clear understanding of what we need to do. I'm going to take the bus and go out preaching Krishna Consciousness. I'm going to go door to door like the Jehovah's Witnesses. We'll start from the grass roots and rebuild."

Steve and Susan Hebel are sitting at the kitchen table in Susan's small house in Three Rivers. Susan is on welfare. Steve is unemployed and looking for a job.

"I don't regret joining the movement for a second," Steve says. "I still think Hare Krishna is the most important thing in the world. I'd like to think the phoenix will rise out of the ashes, but it won't. It's really a shame, how badly we've messed up Prabhupada's movement. It's like a house that is so full of cockroaches; it's got to be bulldozed."

JOHN HUBNER is a staff writer for West.