

## **John Lofland *The Doomsday Cult***

### **Alfred**

Alfred (age 17) grew up on a farm near Northwest Town, a neighbor of Elmer's parents. He was reared in the standard, active way of life of rural America, but in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade became very fat, prone to bruises, and hyperactive. He developed a round moon face and reddish complexion, which made him appear mentally retarded. Specialists diagnosed his affliction as overactive adrenal glands and failure of the body to discharge liquids, which were building up in body tissue and causing obesity. These conditions were corrected, but thereafter he was required to live in a relatively sedentary life.

Prior to his illness, Alfred had been an outdoor type and had aspired to prominence on high school athletic teams. Although mediocre in this area, he had trained for various sports by putting himself through a daily regimen of five to seven miles of roadwork. Medical directives closed off this career.

He now shunned the "frivolity" of high school youth culture, spent a good deal of time alone, and read widely, developing a fascination for the apocalyptic books of the Bible and far-right-wing political writings. He grew increasingly preoccupied with strict moral codes and what he saw as a widespread and deplorable evasion of them. He felt that his church was filled with hypocrites, viewed local businessmen as crooks, and thought that most people were "lazy, spendthrift, materialistic slob." As editor of the school paper, he continually attacked the administration for not running a "tight ship" (e.g., failing to apprehend boys who smoked in the lavatories).

Even though he was a top student (salutatorian, 98<sup>th</sup> percentile on a national senior achievement examination) and his teachers fondly regarded

him as one of the few intellectually alive students they had known, Alfred felt that his teacher disliked him for his attacks on the school. Knowing Elmer, and learning that he was in Bay City with a "religious group," Alfred decided to visit him the summer after graduation and to work in Bay City before entering Northwest University.

### **Freda**

Thirty-year-old Freda, a divorcee with a history of mental hospitalization and profuse hallucinations met Minnie in a chance encounter on a local bus. A college graduate, she was living in a women's residence hall in State U. City and working as a secretary, all the while longing to get married again. She was unsuccessfully participating in local, organized matchmaking groups or lonely hearts clubs and taking numerous university extension courses. She said that she had no close friends and was, in fact, observed to be a very unhappy young woman, noticeably "at loose ends."

Minnie and she began to associate extensively. Holding back the more bizarre DP assertions, Minnie gradually worked Freda into the DP view of history and the modern world. Freda became very fond of Minnie.

...She had recently been unemployed and was still at a turning point....After nine years of psychotherapy, she was a veritable fount of psychiatric self-conception.