

# 'The Way': A Defector's Tale

Continued From Page One

will not give her address or her telephone number. A reporter has to write to her at an address she leaves and then wait for her call.

Her involvement in The Way in Potsdam came during 1978-79, her senior year at college. That year, Strauh was the "branch leader," a position in the hierarchy of the movement.

That hierarchy is organized around the simple model of a tree. Individual followers of The Way are called "leaves" and small study groups are known as "twigs." Cities and states are organized as "branches" and "limbs." The "trunk" is The Way headquarters in New Knoxville, Ohio.

There, in a rural community, the organization was spawned by Victor Paul Wierwille, a former pastor in the United Church of Christ. Now 64 years old, he rarely grants interviews. But Miss Brandt, who met him once soon after she became involved in The Way, described him as "very grandfatherly. We all thought he was wonderful."

## Spoke to God

Wierwille traces the group's beginning to an apocryphal encounter with God in 1942. He was 26, just graduated from Princeton Theological Seminary, and growing uncomfortable with traditional Christian doctrine — particularly the notion of the Trinity. He prayed and, one autumn day he claims, God spoke to him audibly, telling Wierwille that he would teach him the word of God as it had not been known since the First Century if Wierwille taught it to others. The next day, looking for a sign, he said, "Let me see it snow." When he opened his eyes, he saw snow falling from the clear autumn sky, he has related.

By the early 1950's he had gone public with his beliefs on a radio program from Lima, Ohio. By 1955, he changed the name of the show to "The Way," and moved it to the family farm at New Knoxville.

But there was a falling out with the United Church of Christ and he was asked to resign the post by a church committee. It apparently created a greater resentment for what he called "churchianity."

## Tapped The Jesus Movement

At that time, the Jesus movement of the late '60's was catching fire and Wierwille tapped into it. Spreading his gospel from a red motorcycle, he eventually wound up in San Francisco's Haight-Asbury district and there gained more than 30 followers.

He returned to Ohio and, soon afterwards was convinced to put his message on film. The \$30,000 investment to film his "Power for Abundant Living" talk brought in converts by the thousands.

Soon, the organizational needs began to demand greater and greater financial commitment from The Way's followers. Members are required to tithe at least 10 percent of their gross incomes to The Way, and many contribute much more. By 1980, the organization had among its assets: \$2.1 million in gold and silver, \$1.2 million in certificates of deposit, a \$750,000 turbo jet plane and real estate in seven states valued at about \$8 million.

And, increasingly, the doctrine of the "Doctor," as Wierwille is called, began to overshadow the teachings of the word of God.

**Tale Of Involvement**  
Enter Carol Brandt. In 1977, she was a junior in college and studying in Spain during a "Junior Year Abroad"

program. There, she grew close to another girl in the program, Kathy.

"Within a matter of three or four months, before I was totally convinced of this what I wanted to do, she talked me into taking their introductory session, 'Power for Abundant Living,'" Miss Brandt said in one of the telephone interviews.

She took the course in March of 1978 in Spain, when it consisted of 15 sessions. Now, the class is 12 sessions. It meant attending three-hour classes for three or four days a week for three weeks, she recalled.

To assure a "commitment," those taking the class were required to pay \$50. That fee has been hiked to \$100 and then to \$200.

Her friend, Kathy, taught the class. There were two Americans and eight Spaniards listening to the taped course. "They ran the tapes in Spanish, too," she said.

"They told us this was the true and correct interpretation of the Bible, not an opinion, and that bothered me," she went on. "After all, he (Wierwille) was a man."

## No Questions

But she was not allowed to raise the question — nor any others prompted by inconsistencies in the doctrine — during the sessions. Instead, inductees must reserve all questions until the end of the training. But by then, "The question had just sort of melted away."

Looking back now, Miss Brandt reflected, "It's one of the techniques that all cults use. There are incredible amounts of information bombarding you. You end up believing it all without having a chance to analyze it."

The class was very strictly run. Besides not being allowed to take notes or ask questions, the students were not given a break until two hours had passed.

What was taught? "At first, a lot of general things," Miss Brandt recalled. "A lot of Dale Carnegie-type things, positive things." They were told that questions and doubts came from Satan.

By the end of the class, however, the students were practiced in such intricacies as speaking in tongues. "As soon as you're born again, you're supposed to talk in tongues," she said. "Everybody does it. We thought it was marvelous."

The Way won't call its people members. But Miss Brandt said that, by then, "I had basically joined The Way."

## A Respite, Then Deeper Involvement

After that school year ended, however, Miss Brandt had a bit of a respite from the organization. Because she had already been enrolled in an excursion with the National Outdoor Leadership School for the summer, she had to miss out on the week-long "Rock of Ages" celebration held every summer in Ohio for Way followers.

It wasn't until her return to Canton for her senior year that her involvement began to deepen. She became involved in the activities of Way followers on the SLU campus and also in the Canton-Potsdam communities. On campus, the group met about six nights a week and she was attending another six per week in the community.

The schedule cut into her other activities only slightly. Her grades dropped a bit; before entering The Way, her grades had been mostly A's and "a few B's." In her senior year, she was getting B's fairly consistently.

She had been in the "Big Sister Program" in the Community Development Corps, helping Northern New



CAROL BRANDT — In her 1979 SLU yearbook picture

Yorkers. She dropped out of it.

## Parental Concern

Until the fall semester, there had been really no confrontation with her parents over her new-found beliefs. But that fall, the Jonestown tragedy in Guyana focused a lot of attention on cults and her parents began to get worried.

Mrs. Brandt, speaking from her Minnesota home, said "We didn't see as many changes those first years." Carol wrote home, saying she was taking a Bible study course, Mrs. Brandt recalled. "We hadn't heard of The Way, then. We didn't know much about cults at all."

Carol had been raised in the Lutheran church, and Mrs. Brandt confesses to being "a big churchgoer." Carol, too, was active in the church group and taught Sunday school. There wasn't a lot of cause for worry. "I guess I thought only strange kids got into it."

It was only later, Mrs. Brandt went on, that she and her husband noticed: "Her personality was changing drastically."

## Word Over The World

For then, Carol had graduated from SLU. Instead of going on to graduate school, as she had considered, she went into The Way's "Word Over The World" program (WOW). She attended the Rock of Ages in the summer of 1979 with 2,000 other WOW "ambassadors" and was assigned to a

small town in Ohio.

That year, she recalled, was an "intense situation." The WOW ambassadors were expected to work five to six hours a day to support themselves and earn money for the Way. They were also expected to run classes for the group for about eight hours a day. The regimen was exhausting.

In Celina, Ohio and in Bellefontaine, the honor student with a biology degree found mental jobs: working at a Burger Chef, waitressing, housecleaning, and one stint as a counselor at a YMCA camp.

## Rigors, Doubts

"The rigors of her life caused doubts. I started getting discouraged. I was really starting to feel the control," she said. Once an excellent tennis player, she missed the sport. "There were things I couldn't do, and I didn't understand that," she said.

But when the doubts appeared, she would think that Satan was putting them in her mind, and it caused guilt. "I'd feel guilty because I was being selfish. I wasn't able to give more to God."

Not only that, but her relationship with her parents by then had deteriorated. "I couldn't even come home without a lot of fighting and screaming." As far as she was concerned, her parents didn't approve because they were influenced by the devil.

Those who doubt or oppose The Way are seen to be possessed. "Once you're part of this elite group, the world outside is just a dark void," she said.

## The Deprogramming

She also began to fear that her parents planned to have her kidnapped and deprogrammed. Although the Brandts had considered it, they decided against it because to them it represented a heavy moral and constitutional question. Ironically, it was Carol's fear that led the Brandts to finally seek the aid of experienced deprogrammers.

Things came to a head during Carol's WOW year, when her parents were nearby to attend a cousin's wedding. They called and said they wanted to take her out to dinner. She feared that they were going to try to kidnap her. The state leader assigned a young man as her "bodyguard." He was told not to let Carol out of his sight.

Her parents were shocked. They had no intention of having her kidnapped, Mrs. Brandt recalled. "We just thought we'd go over and see her, just get a relationship going," she said. But, when the young man refused to let the family be alone, the Brandts realized the seriousness of the situation and they determined then that they would seek out a deprogrammer.

When Carol's WOW year ended, she attended the Rock of Ages once more and then planned to return to the North Country, to the Canton area to spread the word of The Way.

By now, the trust in her parents had built up a bit, and Carol decided to return home for a few days before embarking on the next phase of her service with the movement. But this time, her parents were ready.

"The morning after I got home, I was approached by some people my parents had hired. The minute I saw them, I knew what was happening," she said. The Way had taught her to resist mentally, to speak in tongues, to avoid the deprogramming.

## Speaking In Tongues

She and her father were driven to a house in the country about two hours away. Her mother followed behind in another car. "I kept thinking — God's going to help me," she said. "They said they'd not hurt me, they'd just talk to me. I thought at first they'd try to slip some drug into me," she recounted.

But there were no drugs and there was no force. Only good meals, plenty of rest, and a lot of talking. By talking, Miss Brandt said, she began to see the inconsistencies in The Way's doctrine. Whereas The Way had given her answers for "just about everything," the deprogrammers "asked questions you're not programmed to answer," she said. "After awhile, my answers became illogical to me. It was very confusing."

Eventually, some of the doubts she had developed while in The Way began to come through again, but the process was slow and painful, she said. "It's your whole life system. They're questioning you on everything you've thought or done for the past three years. I thought I'd have to give up my whole life, but it was just a cult life, an artificial answer system."

After about eight days, Miss Brandt said, she knew she did not want to go back to The Way, but there were still many fears. "I felt like I was between a rock and falling off a cliff," she said.

"It takes a lot off of your ego to realize what you've been doing is so wrong and so evil," she added. In all, the process took 12 days.

"Once I decided I didn't want anything to do with The Way, I thanked them, we cried, and I apologized," she remembered.

However, because of a fear that ex-cultists call "floating" (returning to the cult state of mind), she went to live for a time at a "sort of a halfway house" with other ex-cult members. There she met people who had been involved in other cults: Moonies, Krishnas, Devine Light Mission.

Gradually, she said, she began to heal. "It's quite a killing to your ego," she said, referring to the deprogramming. "You have to get your self-esteem built back up."

Since then, she has left the halfway house and has done some deprogramming herself. But she will not disclose her job or her whereabouts. "I don't tell people where I am and what I am doing," she said.

Her parents had to change their telephone number to avoid the annoying and threatening calls generally made by other Way members after such an event. Her father did get one angry call at his office, and Carol has occasionally received letters imploring her to return to The Way.

## Mr. Smoothie

Carol left the Canton-Potsdam group before Tully arrived to become the present leader. But, from descriptions from those who know him, he would be a good recruiter for The Way. Some describe him as "a real talker," others as "Mr. Smoothie."

"He could talk his way into, or out of, any situation," said one. When contacted for an interview, Tully demanded of a reporter: "How did you know I was in the ministry?" He begged off one interview, saying that he was leaving town for the weekend. But when contacted later, he said he had decided not to grant the interview. Instead, he gave an Ohio number — the public relations arm of The Way.

Tully's background has prepared him for ministry in The Way. Born in Flushing, N.Y. in 1950, he graduated from the University of Dayton in 1972 and later from The Way College at Emporia, Kansas. From 1975-76 he was employed with the public relations firm W.J. Sloan in Washington, D.C.

He has worked as a substitute in the Norwood-Norfolk Central School system.

Presently, he works with handicapped children from many different school districts at the Potsdam High School. He has also helped with audiovisual tasks at the school, say sources. School officials have indicated that there have been no complaints that Tully's religious beliefs have spilled over into his job. Although reluctant to talk about Tully as a specific employee, School Superintendent Kenneth Daniels said that he has not had any complaints of that nature about any teacher.

## A Footnote

Aside from the "mind control" complaints, there have been few concrete allegations about any wrongdoings linked with The Way. Fears arose some time ago because of weapons training that was linked with the group. Students at the Way college campus in Emporia were required to take a "hunter safety course" offered by the Kansas National Guard that included marksmanship. The Way discontinued the course in the wake of unfavorable news reports. But some critics say that private weapons training continues.

The Citizens Freedom Foundation, a national anti-cult group, has compiled a list of more than 20 Way members who have died, or committed suicide under strange circumstances, however.

The Way does collect substantial amounts of money from followers. The required amount of tithing is 10 percent. Carol Brandt estimates that in three years, she gave \$3,000 to \$4,000 to the movement.

# Election Results In Potsdam And Other Townships

**Editor's note:** Election night is always a scramble for those trying to keep track of the results — the candidates, elections, officials, voters and the press. First results are termed unofficial until absentee and military ballots are counted and, in some cases, voting machines rechecked. In the following account, the totals for the Town of Potsdam and Hopkinton are official, but all others are the unofficial and could change.

**Potsdam Town Supervisor Leslie W. Cook,** a Republican, won re-election by a 214-vote margin, beating back a challenge from one of his colleagues on the town board, Alan Reasoner, a Democrat. Cook got 1,481 votes and Reasoner received 1,267.

The Republicans picked up another seat on the board with the election of William Pelotte. An incumbent Democrat, James Hourihan, lost his

bid for re-election. Aside from the Hourihan defeat, the incumbents had their way in all Potsdam races.

Voting results were: council (two seats): Wallace Purves (R) 1,491, William Pelotte (R) 1,345, James Hourihan (D) 1,315, Virgil Trombly (D) 1,277; superintendent of highways: Donald Jones (D) 1,633, Lloyd Moore (R) (I) 1,161.

Those running unopposed included town justice Shirley Harris (D) and Mary Frpost (R), town clerk.

## Colton

In Colton, the Republicans won the contested races.

Town supervisor: Harold Buck (Republican) 425; Sandra Dunning (Democrat) 124; superintendent of highways: George Fisher (R) 366, Lawrence Regan (D) 203; assessor, four years: Hamilton J. Ferry (R) 213, Richard R. Owens (Independent)

210, Frank Thomas (D) 131; assessor, two years: George E. Wright (R) 332, Ronald Rondeau (D) 190; council (two seats): Dennis E. Eickhoff (D) 214, Walter Kissam (D) 237, Thomas E. Frank (R) 313, Edward Woolston (R) 293.

Elizabeth Ford ran unopposed for town clerk, and John Litten ran unopposed for town justice.

## Madrid

The results in contested races were: town justice: Kenneth Graves (D) 234, Sherry Campbell (R) 274; town justice, unexpired term: Carol LaValley (D) 152, Thomas Nelson (R) 321; council (two seats): Ronald Burke (D) 296, Albert Gilbert (D) 263, William Carkner (R) 327.

Uncontested candidates were Democrats Virginia Molnar, town clerk and John McCall, superintendent of highways; and Republican Supervisor Murray Fisher.

## Parishville

The results were: supervisor: Eugene Groebler (D) 270, Dean Wilson (R), 262; town clerk: Patricia Phippen (R) 281, Lucetta Wicox (D) 255; superintendent of highways: Raymond Waite (D) 318, Floyd Remington (R) 235; assessor (four years): Richard Bicknell (R) 292, Royal Moses (D) 224; assessor (two years): James Bradish (D) 252, Joseph Witherrall (R) 235; justice: Merle Wickwire, unopposed; councilman (top two vote getters): Joseph Snell (R) 318, Reginald Barrett (D) 285, Fay Kingsley (D) 216, Gloria Tyo (R) 199.

## Hopkinton

Sandra Hunsinger, running as both a Democrat and an Independent, garnered a total of 185 votes to edge out the incumbent town supervisor, Republican Richard Tozier, who received 173 votes.

It appeared in the election's aftermath that a possible tie existed between council candidates: Rose Baldwin and Curtis Benham, based on unofficial totals. But, by Monday afternoon, Baldwin was declared the official winner by just one vote, 188-187.

The results included: town clerk:

Vickie French (D) and (I) 190, Margaret Zahler (R) 189; superintendent of highways: Hubert Boulds (R) 217, Charles Converse (I) 152; town justice: Thomas Beaulieu (D) and (I) 114, Ira C. Miller (R) 243; town council (two seats): Rose Baldwin (D) and (I) 188, James McGraw (D) and (I) 156; Richard Eakins (R) 212, and Curtis Benham (R) 187.

## Lawrence

The results Tuesday included: supervisor: Jack Cummings (D) 384, Lyle Wilber (R) 310; town clerk: Irene Roach (R) and (D) 710; highway superintendent: James Darnody (D) 326, Reginald Francis, Sr. (R) 331; assessor four years: Warren Dyke (R) 384; assessor two years: Glenn Wilson (D) 418; town justice: Robin McLaughlin (D) 205, Homer Stranger (R) 543; council (two seats): Ernest Bedard (D) 415, Roger Peck (D) 375, Guy Rhodes (R) 394.

## Norfolk

The town that had numerous contested races saw its superintendent of highways race go to the independent candidate, Allen Baxter.

Supervisor: George Molnar (D) 657, Robert Bailey (R) 907; town clerk: Sandra Morrill (D) 507, Arlene Francis (R) 1,061; superintendent of highways: James Belgrade (D) 613, Lowell Todd (R) 228, Allen Baxter (I) 751; four year assessor: Dorothy Gately (D) 811, Louise Bixby (R) 731; two year assessor: Patricia Almsy-Marion (D) 931, Daphne Veneroni (R) 527; four year assessor, unexpired term: George LeRoux (D) 943; town justice: Joseph Myers (D) 827, Leon Burnap (R) 713; town justice, unexpired term: John Tanski (R) 827, Paul Paige, Sr. (D) 725.

In the Norfolk council races, the Republicans made a clean sweep of things: Richard Merchant and Roger Pernice each garnered 860 and 887 votes respectively, while Democrats June Furnace and Antonio Germano, Jr., received 711 and 593 votes respectively.

## Stockholm

In Stockholm, incumbent supervisor Lincoln Chapman was unopposed and re-elected with 825 votes. Other

seats were hotly contested, however. Town clerk: Freda Frary (R) 732, Louise Crump (D) 271; highway superintendent: David Gebro (D) 561, Wendell Page (R) 448; assessor four years: Floyd Deleel (R) 633, Eugene LaBrosse (D) 351; assessor two years: Kermit Blanchard (R) 545, Robert McCutin (D) 436; council (two seats): Joseph Robinson (R) 519, Arthur Sweeney (D) 492, Leo Lynch (D) 489, Daniel Chambers (R) 483.

Republicans unopposed and re-elected were also Elizabeth Ramsdell, tax collector, and Wayne Williams, town justice.

## Brasher

Incumbent Democratic Brasher supervisor James Dawson turned back a challenge from Republican Caroline Drake.

The unofficial results were: town supervisor: James Dawson (D) 688, Caroline Drake (R) 359; town clerk: Rosalind Randall (D) 809, Connie Deisse (R) 228; superintendent of highways: Frederick Groebler (D) 536, Paul Dumas (R) 519; assessor (four years): James Ploof (D) 649,

Robert Murphy (R) 355; assessor (two years): Robert Crump (R) 536, Bruce Wells (D) 510; tax collector: Phyllis Collins (D) 812, Joan Snyder (R) 228; justice: Jeremiah Mahoney (D) 756, John A. Karlberg (R) 277; councilman (top two vote getters): William Demo (R) 682, Gerald Leary (D) 585, Bruce E. Derouchie (R) 492.

## Pierrepont

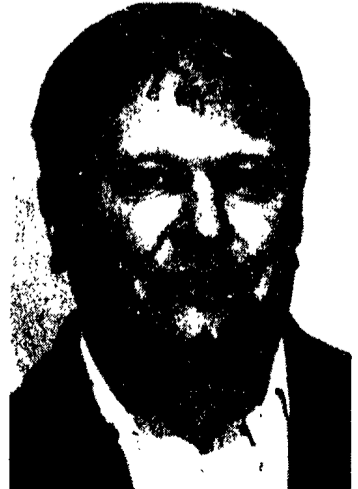
Incumbent Republican Supervisor Lawrence Scanlon was returned to office in Tuesday's voting.

The results were: supervisor: Lawrence Scanlon (R) 430, Janet Martin (D) 173; town clerk: Kathryn Paul, unopposed; superintendent of highways: Lawrence Tupper (R) 437, Thomas Latimer (I) 142; assessor (four years): Courtland Ostrander, unopposed; assessor (two years): Keith Collins, unopposed; tax collector: Gerdyne Ostrander, unopposed; justice: Michael Jackson (I) 324, Jane McEwen (R) 307; councilman (top two vote getters): Orin Thomas (R) 394, Gary Jones (R) 414, Norene Randall (D) 113, and Dahl McCormick (I) 111.

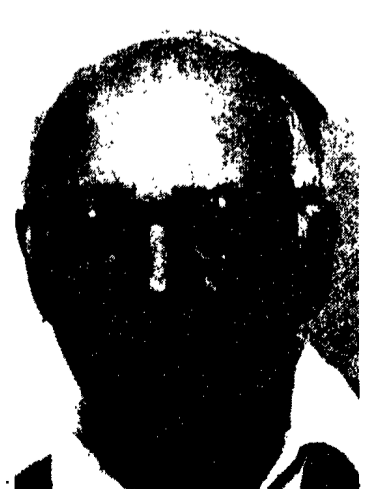
## More Election Results, Page 13



**MONEY DONATED** — The Douglas E. Pete Memorial chapter of REACT presented a check for \$200 to Gary House on behalf of the Physical Therapy Unit of the Canton-Potsdam Hospital on Thursday evening. The money was raised through the REACT-sponsored Old Time Medicine Show held at the Parishville-Hopkinton High School in October. From left to right in the photo are Martha Bouchard, treasurer; House; Robert Taylor, vice-president; Kenneth Reasoner, secretary; and Roland Gilbo, president. (Bill Short photo).



WALLACE PURVES



WILLIAM PELOTTE