

3 Families Freed Their Children; This Story Is of One That Failed

Editor's Note: Most of the parents have decided their children will have to leave the group on their own, and that there is nothing a parent can do to bring a son or daughter back home. But a recurring thought nags at them — what if she really is brain-washed? Maybe if I forced her away from the group for a few days she would come to her senses. Edna Buckley is one parent who tried that. She failed.

Edna Buckley is a devoutly religious grandmother who speaks with a soft Boston accent. She hardly looks the type to plan a "stakeout," get in a fistfight or race away in a getaway car.

But Mrs. Buckley, who is firmly convinced that Donald DeGraaf is the leader of an insidious cult, has done all that in an effort to "bring my Ginny back home."

The Buckylys, who live just outside Boston, are one of the families who — after the letters, phone calls, visits and just plain waiting for their child to leave on his or her own — decided to take matters into their own hands and "rescue" their son or daughter.

Three families have forcibly removed their children from The Group. Two families, one from Oregon and one from Alabama, have apparently succeeded in deprogramming their sons and persuading them to remain outside of the group.

Those families would not agree to be interviewed or allow The Press to contact their children because they feared reliving old memories would disturb their sons.

The third family was the Buckylys. They tried three times to remove Ginny from The Group and convince her that she should return home. And three times Ginny re-



AP Photo

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The third family was the Buckleys. They tried three times to remove Ginny from The Group and convince her that she should return home. And three times Ginny returned to the group more convinced that she was doing God's work.

Ginny was 22 when she met up with DeGraaf's followers in Orlando, Fla. She and a girlfriend had moved there from Boston to try to find jobs as stewardesses.

Members of The Group befriended Ginny soon after one of the first major disappointments of her life — she was rejected by an airline.

At first her parents were happy Ginny had found "a wonderful group of friends." When her visits home became less frequent, she told her family that her new Amway business didn't give her any time for vacations.

Gradually, Mrs. Buckley decided that her daughter "was involved in something very scary" and she became determined to rescue her.

That decision has cost the Buckleys close to \$20,000 in airplane tickets, long distance phone calls, deprogrammers' fees and legal expenses, Mrs. Buckley estimates.

Mrs. Buckley's first attempt to remove her daughter from the group came in 1977 after she visited Ginny at the movement's goat ranch near Red Oak, Texas. Ginny's "waxen smile" and robot-like behavior disturbed her mother so much that Mrs. Buckley didn't return to Boston. Instead, she attempted to "snatch" her daughter.

Mrs. Buckley and a sister and brother of Ginny's tried to force her to leave the ranch. Ginny cried, wailing, "Please don't make me leave. It's the first time in my life I've been happy." The Buckleys were so upset they were unable to push Ginny into their car.

Five weeks later, Mrs. Buckley returned to the ranch with her husband Francis and two deprogrammers, more determined than ever to spring her daughter from the group.

Mrs. Buckley recalls that Ginny

AP Photo

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met them at the door and said, "Hi Dad, have you come to get me again?"

"I don't even like to remember what happened next," says Mrs. Buckley. "I guess the only way to say it is we really had a fistfight. Fortunately the one I was fighting with was a gentle boy. He wasn't brought up to hit old ladies."

They succeeded in getting Ginny into their car and brought her to a motel where the deprogrammers went to work, talking to her and trying to bring back what her parents call "the old Ginny."

But the first time Ginny was alone, she managed to open a locked door and escaped. Two days later her parents learned she was back at the goat ranch.

In October of 1978, the Buckleys tried to use the courts to get Ginny out of The Group. A Texas judge granted them a "legal conservatorship" of Ginny, which meant they had custody of her for 30 days.

The judge was friendly to their case, Mrs. Buckley recalls, because a month earlier he had granted the parents of another DeGraaf disciple a similar conservatorship.

The youth involved, Michael Holderer of Huntsville, Ala., was deprogrammed and had called the judge to thank him for aiding in his "escape" from the group, Mrs. Buckley says.

Once the conservatorship was granted, police picked up Ginny and brought her to her parents. Several deprogrammers spent five days with her but were unsuccessful in convincing her that she had been brainwashed.

Mrs. Buckley had to pay them nonetheless. The main deprogrammer received \$2,000 plus expenses and his assistants received approximately \$700 plus expenses.

The Buckleys then brought their daughter to a small live-in counsel-



Ginny Buckley joined the group after a major disappointment — she didn't get a stewardess' job.

former cult members. But Ginny somehow escaped from there in less than a week, despite the fact that all the doors and windows were locked.

With three unsuccessful attempts behind her, Mrs. Buckley says she has given up on trying to force Ginny to leave the group. She now feels all she can do is pray that her daughter returns some day.

"I tried to do what was right and Ginny apparently was convinced she was right," Mrs. Buckley says.

Despite her attempts to force Ginny from The Group, Mrs. Buckley still gets an occasional letter from her daughter.

Ginny has told her that when she made her first escape from the locked motel room in 1977, she "had a visitation of angels" who told her she could walk through the wall to escape. "The angels kept saying you're safe, you're safe," Ginny told her mother.

"I wish I could have talked to her then," Mrs. Buckley says, trying to keep her voice steady. "I would have told her that if she did have a visitation of angels they were trying to tell her, 'Yes, you're safe, you are

Parents

from 2A

The Group when it started in Grand Rapids, have left the movement.

But Mrs. Aldridge says she still bears the scars of several years of

bitterly. "He's got all the money in the world, all the girls in the world and they're all sticking with him. He could charm a snake, I guess."