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## BREAKING THE SILENCE: SECRETS OF THE REICHIAN CULT

In the 1930s and 40s, Austrian psychiatrist Wilhelm Reich claimed to have discovered an invisible, omnipresent, biophysical energy called orgone, named after the sexual orgasm. Blockage of the flow of this energy, he believed, caused physical and emotional illnesses. He developed a therapeutic method of treating illness which included applying physical pressure to patients' bodies to release blocked orgone and to get rid of "body armor." It was to be used on infants and children as well as adults.

He was expelled from the International Psychoanalytic Association. Reich escaped from Nazi Germany to Scandinavia, but because his work was regarded as "utter scientific nonsense" in Denmark, Sweden, and Norway, he was denied visa renewal. He emigrated to the United States.

In New York, he was greeted with interest by the lay public, especially by avant-garde intellectuals, who established a cult following. He built and sold boxes he called "orgone accumulators," leading to an FDA investigation and an injunction against him which he refused

to answer or abide by. He was convicted of criminal contempt and sent to prison in 1957, where he died some months later.

Now, in the twenty-first century, some of the patients—then children, now in their 60s and 70s-- who were treated by Reich's followers want to tell their stories.

### Reichian Therapy

New York City 1947. Susanna Steig's mother takes the three-year-old girl up the stairs of a large concrete warehouse and into the office of her pediatric orgone therapist, Felicia Saxe, follower of Wilhelm Reich. Saxe treats Susanna weekly because the girl is jealous of her new baby sister. Susanna's parents believe Saxe's treatments will "dissolve her armoring," allowing her orgone energy to flow freely and replacing the sibling rivalry with more positive, "natural" emotions.

Felicia Saxe is a gypsy-like woman with dark skin and hair, dressed in shiny silks, breasts bulging out of her blouse. She is a professional dancer; it is unclear who has authorized her to have a therapeutic practice. Susanna has to remove her clothes. The therapy consists of Saxe digging her fingers and nails into Susanna's body, causing great pain, pain so intense that the child becomes, as she later says, "a screaming, crying machine that would never be turned off." Then Saxe takes Susanna on her lap and masturbates her. The little girl leaves with her mother: "I am cold, I am alone, and I have no feeling,." Susanna later recalls. This excruciating "therapy" continues for months.

1951. Susanna is seven. Her father drives her for an appointment in Red Bank, New Jersey, to another Reichian therapist, psychiatrist Elsworth Baker. Her parents are concerned that she is "too much of a lady." Dr. Baker, a short, slender, dark-haired man, leads her into a room

with a big bed, and tells her to take off all her clothes except her white cotton underwear. This is allegedly so he can observe how the chronic muscular tensions called “armoring” responds to his treatment.

With his fingers, Baker applies painful pressure all over Susanna’s body, sometimes pressing so hard she cannot breathe. This time she refuses to scream and cry, the only resistance she can make. Instead, she dissociates: *“I am not really here, and it is not body he is tormenting.”* As before, this shattering “therapy” continues for months.

Susanna is not alone in this kind of suffering. According to Reich biographer Myron Sharaf, in 1948 Dr. Baker was reprimanded by the New Jersey Commissioner of Mental Health for allegedly masturbating patients at Marlboro State Hospital and, through the use of Reichian therapy, making them scream with pain. Baker resigned from the hospital staff.

One day Susanna is taken to the house of Reichian followers in Maine, where Reich’s son Peter, also 7 years old, is staying. The adults put Susanna and Peter to bed together and tell them to make love while the adults watch. Some weeks later, during a “treatment” with Baker, he grabs her and asks, “Is this where you feel it when you think about Peter?”

1959. Frederika, nine years old, sits in her therapist’s waiting room trembling with fear; her mother forces her to go every week. She looks up to see Dr. Albert I. Duvall, a psychiatrist and follower of Wilhelm Reich, reeking of cigarettes, his mouth and fingers yellow from continuous smoking. She’s summoned into the therapy room, where the walls and doors are covered with cork to absorb sound. There he impatiently demands that she remove her clothes. Once she is naked, he pinches, pulls and pushes her muscles and inserts his hands into her orifices in a way that causes pain so severe she screams. He intermittently passes something

called an “orgone hose” over her body as he pinches her. It is a hollow, flexible steel cable terminated in a container of water.

She screams and thrashes about. He sexually molests her, forcing her to perform oral sex on him, and again uses the orgone hose. He licks her genitals, then pinches them until she involuntarily urinates. Again the orgone hose. He thrusts his penis into her mouth, ripping the corners of her mouth, making her gag. He makes her masturbate him. He ejaculates in her face and hair. She screams from the coercion and fear and pain, and begs him to stop. He tells her to stop fighting, stop being a nuisance, a brat, a spoiled kid, a trouble-maker. She submits more and more, and becomes more and more numb. Finally, she begins to dissociate, leaving her body for his use.

Afterward, she is bruised, hair in knots on the back of her head, sobbing, her crotch stinging, burning, swollen, her body black and blue, face red and burning, broken capillaries in her face and neck. She begs her mother not to force her to go, to no avail. She cries all the way home. Her mother is irritated and tells her to stop. Finally, after nine months, when she begins running away, the appointments stop.

These experiences are not mentioned again until Frederika is 16. She tries to talk about it, and her mother tells her she is lying. She does not die from the overdose of Phenobarbital she then takes.

1963. In preparation for a custody hearing, singer Judy Garland’s children Lorna, age 11, and Joe, 8, are sent to Dr. Duvall. He has relocated to the Los Angeles area where he serves as a court-appointed psychiatrist. In Lorna’s first session, he asks her what she’s most afraid of, and she says “Needles.” She has been phobic about hypodermic needles since an earlier surgery. In

the next session, he has her lie naked, and then takes out a hypodermic needle, threatens her with it, and asks “How frightened are you of your dad?”

Week after week he moves the needle across her body,; she calls it “psychological torture,” “frightening beyond description.” She learns what he wants her to say, that she doesn’t love her father, and she will say anything he wants. Joe is enduring even worse torture, but they are both too afraid to tell their parents what’s happening to them. Thirty years later, Lorna said if she had known what Duvall was doing to her brother, she would have “told anyone who would listen.”)

Duvall continued his reign of pedophilic terror well into the 1970’s when eight-year-old Roger M. Wilcox and his brother were his patients, taken by their Reichian parents. In the course of several years of “therapy” sessions, Dr. Duvall requires Roger to be naked, and applies excruciatingly painful thumb and finger pressure to various parts of his body. Roger screams with pain. If Roger is not immediately compliant, Duvall sneers, “You’re stubborn, aren’tcha? You’re stubborn all the way to *here!*” and jabs hard in the small of his back, as Roger screams. Duvall threatens Roger’s penis with surgical scissors. Once Roger accidentally kicks Duvall, and is subjected to harsh, nightmarish punishment. Duvall also uses the orgone machine, with its hose and hollow metal tubes that causes the sensation of a light breeze over Roger’s body. He threatens the frightened boy with a hypodermic needle, saying “Where do you want it?” but never actually injecting him.

Roger learns to say and do whatever it takes to lessen the pain and attempts at degradation.

Now, 30 to 60 years later, they describe their experiences with orgone therapy, Susanna Steig and Roger Wilcox on a website, Lorna Luft in her autobiography *Me and My Shadows*, Frederika and Susanna in unpublished essays.

Susanna says “I have spent a lifetime dealing with the aftermath.” She knows other children who were subjected to similar or worse abuse by Reichian therapists, including stories of repeated rapes and other sexual molestation. Many children from a Reichian community in Freehold, New Jersey, were sent to Reichian therapists, with similar abuses, and as adults came back to accuse their parents. Susanna says, “I am tired of secrets, of people not wanting to know, of a story so outlandish and horrible that I do not really want to inflict it on people unless they really want to know.”

#### Acts of Torture

Trauma is the stress resulting from extraordinary experiences of intense fear, helplessness, and loss of control that destroy a survivor’s sense of safety and trust in the world. As psychiatrist and trauma expert Judith Herman notes, to study perpetrators of traumatic injury toward others is “to come face to face ...with the capacity for evil in human nature.”

Psychiatrist Lenore Terr, who works with survivors of childhood abuse, distinguishes two types of trauma. Type I involves a single traumatic experience, such as a rape or other attack. Type II refers to repeated, prolonged traumatic events, such as repeated sexual, physical, and emotional abuse, and includes the behavior of the Reichian therapists toward these children.

Psychologist Ibrahim Kira has described a third type of trauma.. Type III is torture, consisting of “any systematic act by which severe pain or suffering...is intentionally inflicted on a person for any reason, by or at the instigation of or with the consent or acquiescence of a public

official or other person acting in an official capacity.” In the cases of Susanna, Frederika, Roger, and Lorna and their siblings, the “therapists” were perceived as officials, as authority figures, by both children and parents. And certainly the painful and abusive acts performed on the children would qualify as torture.

What was going on? Why would parents deliberately and knowingly subject their children to sadistic physical and sexual abuse that amounted to torture--such extreme experiences that they resulted in life-long trauma? Why would the parents still deny the atrocities years later? These children pleaded with their parents not to make them go. Parents knew something unusual was happening; they heard the screams and saw the aftermath of the sessions.

While not directly participating in the abuse, the parents certainly were responsible. Criminal charges could have been brought against them, as well as against the so-called therapists. Roger says if he'd known he could notify Child Protective Services himself, he would have. Susanna reports that many of the other children who were also sent to Reichian therapists, with similar abuse, came back as adults to accuse their parents.

What allowed these crimes against children to continue?

These therapists and the parents of these children (except Lorna and Joe) were part of a group that began with *avant-garde* New York and New Jersey intellectuals in the 1940s and 50s who came under the spell of a charismatic leader, psychiatrist Dr. Wilhelm Reich. The group might best be called a cult.

#### Formation of a Cult

A cult is a group led by an “inspired” or “wise” charismatic leader, whose members are required to agree completely with rigid doctrine. The leader is usually seeking power, or money,

or both, and may be seen as a messiah. Cult leaders hold out promise of superiority, a utopia, some form of ideal society. The leader requires strict adherence to doctrine, discourages independent thought, and teaches that outsiders (unbelievers) are dangerous or not worthy of consideration. Members are forbidden from contact with family. According to psychologist and cult researcher Margaret Thaler Singer, in many, if not most, cults, children are abused.

Concerned psychologists, sociologists, and religious leaders identify several destructive elements in a cult. The three most easily identified here are (1) acceptance of blind obedience to a self-proclaimed authority figure who claims to have special knowledge; (2) the conviction that the belief system is absolute truth; and (3) child abuse.

### The Leader

Wilhelm Reich was born in 1897 to a well-to-do Jewish family in Austria. He was educated by tutors until he was 13. At that point, according to two of his biographers, he informed his father about his mother's affair with one of his tutors. As a result of his revelation, his mother killed herself. When his father died four years later, young Reich was left to manage the family farm and attend high school.

After serving as a lieutenant in the Austrian army during World War I, Reich entered premedical and medical training at the University of Vienna. He received his MD in 1922 and later completed postgraduate education in neuro-psychiatry.

He developed a profound, almost exclusive, interest in sexuality, which led him to become active in Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic circles. He began a private practice, but his extreme and exclusionary emphasis on orgasm and sexuality, and his belief that sexual dysfunction caused all neuroses, led to a break with Freud. He was denounced by psychoanalysts



and in 1934 was expelled from the International Psychoanalytic Association. Active in liberal politics, he had also been expelled from the Communist Party in 1933.

Escaping from Nazi Germany, Reich spent a few years in Scandinavia, continuing to develop a therapeutic technique to release sexual energy and get rid of “body armor”. He also pursued research into a substance he claimed to have discovered, “orgone”—a “life energy” omnipresent in physical form, involved with all emotional and physical problems, responsible for weather patterns and influencing alien space ships. His ideas were attacked as unscientific and unproven.

In 1939 Reich went to the United States to teach at the New School for Social Research in New York. Although not licensed as a physician in the United States, he taught his therapeutic techniques designed to combat character armor, which he defined as personal traits used as defense against emotions, lodged in muscles and organs. Continuing his research on orgone, he invented boxes called “orgone energy accumulators” which he sold or rented to his patients. In the early 1940s he bought land in Rangeley, Maine, and set up a research laboratory there.

Back in New York, Reich had a private practice in which he treated patients, some of whom had cancer, by placing them in the orgone accumulator boxes.

It was in the 1940s and 50s that Reich gathered around him an enclave of politically and artistically *avant-garde* New Yorkers—mostly Jewish Eastern European Bohemian Marxist Bauhaus artists, musicians, and writers. Notable among them was Susanna’s uncle, writer and illustrator William Steig.

Reich had two marriages—to Annie Pink, with whom he had two daughters, and Ilse Ollendorff, with whom he had a son—as well as one other long-term relationship, and numerous

sexual relationships, including at least one with the wife of a colleague. However, according to his wives, while he claimed sexual freedom for himself, he had delusions of jealousy in which he angrily accused them of infidelity. His first wife left him because of his violent jealous accusations and temper outbursts. Ilse, his second wife, writes in *Wilhelm Reich: A Personal Biography*, “He would accuse his wife of infidelity with any man who came to his mind as a possible rival.”

Ilse describes him as “a black-and-white thinker.” She adds, “The power of his personality was enormous and...difficult to withstand....He was violent of temperament, taxing people around him to the utmost, but he was at the same time terribly exciting to be with.”

He suffered from delusional disorder in at least three forms. In addition to delusions of jealousy, he exhibited delusions of grandeur—he saw himself as like Galileo and Christ, and later in his life often stated that the Air Force and the President of the United States were secretly protecting him. Delusions of persecution led him to believe in a communist-inspired conspiracy against his work.

### The Belief System

Cults offer apparent utopias. As do most cult leaders, Reich focused on affluent, educated people to recruit into his system. The children, now adults, of the followers of Reich recall being taught that the world was divided into Reichians, who were the “enlightened and healthy” people, and everyone else, who were diseased with “the emotional plague.” An emotionally plagued person is chronically armored and tries to suppress and control “life energy,” which is expressed in spontaneity, emotionality, and sexuality.

Cults are likely to enforce either celibacy or extreme sexual activity. Susanna, whose “therapeutic” experiences beginning at age three were described earlier, says, “The cult is about the perfectibility of mankind through having an ‘unarmored’ body and the proper orgasmic sex life, which was the key to everything. Although Reich held out the promise of great sex in a repressive time, the Reichians were actually extremely fascistic about sex, being very homophobic, thinking only some positions were correct, etc.” However, they did believe that children from infancy to adolescence should engage in sexual activity with other children.

What were the specific beliefs that permeated the cult? Followers were asked to accept unquestioningly the following premises, because Reich presented “scientific” evidence unconfirmed by others, that they were true:

1. All emotional illness and perhaps physical illness is due to repressed sexuality.
  2. The body develops rigidities in muscles and organs, called body armor. The personality develops character traits to protect repressions, called character armor.
  3. Therapy is designed to break through and reduce body armor and character armor.
  4. People, including children, must be allowed to act on their sexual impulses.
  5. Orgone, discovered by Reich, is an invisible energy.
  6. Orgone can be concentrated in boxes and used to treat diseases..
  7. Orgone can control the weather. Reich designed a contraption with pipes and cables called a “cloudbuster” which was to make rain. He claimed it influenced local weather immediately and regional weather for days after its use.
  8. Alien spaceships which frequently come from other planets can be disabled by orgone.
- (Social scientists Margaret Thaler Singer and Janja Lalich, in their book *Crazy Therapies*, which

reviews cults created by psychotherapists, note that these therapists can “become entranced with the idea that UFOs and alien life exist.”)

What attracted otherwise intelligent and sophisticated people to this man and his beliefs? Susanna says, “The need for certainty and perfectibility.” For whatever reasons, his theories are still being taught and utilized by some psychiatrists and other mental health practitioners.

### Child Abuse

Many cults have presented doctrines that support violence and other destructive behavior. Given the nature of the leader and the rigidity of the belief system, it follows that brutal and dehumanizing activities can be carried out in the name of “Truth.” The young, innocent, and powerless are prime targets for ruthless exploitation. And that’s what happened in the Reichian cult. Unfortunately, Reich had the status and credentials of a medical doctor to enhance his messages.

The terror, torture, and sexual abuse described by Susanna, Roger and Frederika, and experienced by many others, was ostensibly done to rid them of character and body armor. But it is also true that a belief system that allows such treatment will attract unprincipled people—psychopaths and sadists—who will use it for their own purposes. Pedophiles would be drawn to a school of thought that encourages sexuality with children. The behavior of the therapists Felicia Saxe and Albert I. Duvall appears to be pedophilia associated with sexual sadism.

The late psychologist and cult expert Margaret Thaler Singer, in her book *Cults in our Midst*, emphasized the prevalence of child abuse in cults. She writes,

“Cult children are powerless. They are total victims—even the parents on whom they should be able to depend are controlled by the cult leader, ... In cults, parents do not function as they do in the regular world.... the cult leader dictates how children are to be reared, and the parents simply implement these orders.... Often cult parents are led to regard children as

creatures similar to wild ponies, who must be broken....Moreover, in many cultic groups... parents' dedication is measured by their willingness to abuse their children at the leader's request" [and parents are taught] "to stand by while their children...are severely abused....child sexual abuse is promoted in certain cults....Child-to-child sex, adult-to-child sex, and incest are encouraged in some cults."

The Reichian children—Susanna, Frederika, and Roger--now adults, have described their sexual torment. Furthermore, Singer notes, children who witness or are subjected to “brutality and harshness” can “become terrorized and docile to avoid such a fate befalling them.” Roger, in particular, on his website tells about exactly that reaction.

### And in the End...

#### What Happened to the Reichians?

In the late 1940s articles about Reich appeared in *The New Republic* and *Harpers*. Written by Mildred Edie Brady, co-founder of Consumer's Union, they were critical of orgone accumulators and medical claims. (The child abuse was still secret.) The articles caught the attention of the Food and Drug Administration, which began to investigate.

In 1954 the FDA filed an injunction, denying the existence of orgone energy and requesting the court to prohibit the shipment of orgone accumulators in interstate commerce. Reich refused to appear in court, so an injunction was issued; all orgone accumulators and related materials were to be destroyed, and Reich's books on the subject were banned. When Reich disobeyed the injunction, he and a colleague, Michael Silvert, were sentenced to federal prison for criminal contempt of court. For Reich the prison term was to be two years. The machines were destroyed and his books were burned.

During this period, Reich became even more rampantly psychotic. A psychiatric examiner at the prison described Reich as “paranoid manifested by delusions of grandiosity and persecution and ideas of reference.”

Reich, who had had one heart attack and frequent cardiac problems, died of heart failure in 1957 after eight months in federal prison. When released from prison, Michael Silvert killed himself. The cult broke up into warring factions

Felicia Saxe, Elsworth Baker, and Albert Duvall have died. (When Roger heard about Duvall’s death, he says, “My brother was overjoyed. I’m sure he would’ve danced a jig on Dr. Duvall’s grave, and I’m sure I would have joined him.”)

And yet...Reichian therapists have followers and have established various institutes. In 1968, Elsworth Baker founded The American College of Orgonomy near Princeton, New Jersey. The College continues to provide training about orgone and “biopsychiatric therapy,” as does The Institute for Orgonomic Science in Philadelphia, The Orgonomic Institute of Northern California, and The Reichian Institute in Sacramento. There are thousands of Reichian therapists all over the world.

### What Happened to the Children?

As they have tried to tell us, these children and others like them are not who they might have been.

The lifelong effects of child abuse are well documented. Such trauma has far-reaching effects in all aspects of life—thoughts, feelings, identity, behavior, and relationships. Physical, sexual, and psychological abuse disrupts a child’s biological and psychological development.

Researchers point to biological changes in the brain as a result of early trauma, and particularly Type III trauma. Various physiological systems, including the immune system, are affected by early high levels of the stress hormone cortisol. In their book *Transforming the Legacy: Couple Therapy with Survivors of Childhood Trauma*, Kathryn K. Basham and Dennis Miehls review the alterations in neurotransmitters, brain hormones, and brain structures.

The International Cultic Studies Association, founded in 1979 and based in Bonita Springs Florida, is a global network of people with extensive experience with the effects of manipulation and abuse in cults. Members include legal and mental health professionals, former cult members and their families. Their research points particularly to the prevalence of chronic post-traumatic stress disorder in survivors of long-time cult abuse.

These two sources describe post-torture difficulties in the following areas of life:

- problems with stress management
- intense, extreme emotions, including rage storms
- problems in developing emotion-regulation systems
- re-victimization; choosing abusive partners
- startle responses; increased sensitivity to stimulation, such as sound or light
- flashbacks; reactivation of traumatic events, such as day and night terrors
- shifting patterns of response ranging from hyperarousal to numbness
- development of self-protective mechanisms, including use of drugs and alcohol
- parasuicidal acts; cutting, burning, and other modes of self-injury
- eating disorders
- feelings of shame

- problems with sexual functioning in adulthood
- avoidance of reminders of the abuse situations
- hyper-vigilance
- numbing and withdrawal
- dissociation and depersonalization
- problems with trust, connection , and attachment in relationships
- clinical depression
- anxiety
- suicide.

Abuse survivors experience some of these conditions every day of their lives. Some problems come from their efforts at self-protection: at the time they were being tortured, the survivors tell us, they used various psychological mechanisms to survive, some of which became habitual. Frederika and Susanna describe dissociation and self-anesthesia, leaving the body, losing awareness. Roger talks about passive compliance—“I’ll do anything, just don’t hurt me”—that became generalized to other areas of his life. Susanna trained herself not to cry under the worst pain and terror.

This, then, is Reich’s legacy. Frederika says the trauma and betrayal are as fresh as yesterday. She has never had a pelvic examination without crying. Susanna says, “I changed from a happy, boisterous child to a frightened, quiet one. . . . My heart was broken, and would never totally mend.”



The children encountered what philosopher Hannah Arendt called *radical evil*, domination through reducing human beings to non-human objects. They saw a delusional, megalomaniacal leader whose followers, regarding human beings as less than human, conducted brutal manipulation of innocent minds and bodies under the guise of medical treatment. They saw their families collude, sacrificing their children for a belief in their own superiority and permission for unbridled sexuality.

And so the dancer and the doctors—Saxe, Baker, and Duvall—found a home, a group in which to legitimately inflict and enjoy children’s pain and terror, to dominate by reducing human beings to sub-human, with parents and others as silent, complicit bystanders. They did not manage to destroy these particular children, but other child victims may not have been so lucky. With resilience almost unimaginable, they survived to tell their stories with outrage, recapturing their dignity and humanity.

These children, now adults, have found ways to create fulfilling lives, sometimes in service to others; however, thirty to sixty years later, they struggle daily with the aftereffects of their pain, fear, and the attempts to degrade them. Other victims are still silent, but these few have found the dignity and strength and courage to tell their stories, in spite of the pain of doing so, hoping the accurate history of the Reichians will not disappear, hoping someone will listen.

Material available to be used in a sidebar:

### Similar Psychotherapy Cults

Two other groups are eerily similar to the Reichians—The Center for Feeling Therapy and the Sullivan Institute for Research in Psychoanalysis. They were founded by mental health professionals, resorted to abuse of members, and usurped parental authority over children.

#### The Center for Feeling Therapy.

In her book *Insane Therapy: Portrait of a Psychotherapy Cult*, sociologist Marybeth F. Ayella describes The Center for Feeling Therapy, established in Los Angeles in 1971 as a offshoot of psychologist Arthur Janov's Primal Scream Therapy. Janov and his followers claimed to be influenced by the writings of Wilhelm Reich, preaching a doctrine of "freeing physical blocks."

The members were mostly college-educated people in their 20s and 30s. They were forced to have abortions, to strip naked, to have sex, and they were beaten. Children were taken from their parents and sent away.

By the time the group dissolved in 1980, 300 members were living together and 600 more were outpatients. The founding therapists claimed to have absolute truth and guaranteed a life of "identity, meaning, intimacy, and community." The charismatic leaders, notably Joseph Hart and Richard Corriere, demanded blind obedience, utilized harsh punishments, rigid unrealistic norms, while claiming that following these dictates made members far superior to outsiders.

These therapists were finally convicted of committing fraud, gross negligence, unprofessional conduct, misrepresentation of professional qualifications, and patient abuse. Their licenses were revoked, but they went on to have careers in related fields, such as counseling in corporate and academic organizations

### The Sullivanians

Sociologist Amy B. Siskind, in *The Sullivan Institute/Fourth Wall Community: The Relationship of Radical Individualism and Authoritarianism*, describes the leadership and practices of the cult in which she was raised, founded in New York in 1957 and known as the Sullivanians. The founders were Jane Pearce, M.D., student of respected psychiatrist Harry Stack Sullivan, and her partner, Saul Newton, an office worker with no clinical training. Newton, charismatic and dominating, soon took over.

Their members were Upper West Side New Yorkers—liberal, educated, intellectual, some famous in their professions. The stated goal of the community was to make its members psychologically superior through the Institute’s own brand of psychotherapy, through “regression, corrective experience, and personality restructuring” based upon perverted theories of psychoanalysis and communism.

Throughout the next few decades, hundreds of Sullivanians lived together in apartments and saw their therapists often, for therapy, classes, parties, and sexual relations. Promiscuous sex was mandated. Children were removed from their parents and either sent to boarding school or given to other group members to be raised.

The group was ruled by Saul Newton and his various wives (he had six, of whom Jane Pearce was one) as a dictatorship, wherein Newton exerted absolute domination over the lives of

members. Those who did not submit were punished or expelled. The group became increasingly paranoid and abusive, and in the 1980s, it split into warring factions. Newton died in 1991. In the *New York Times* obituary, he is described as charismatic and tyrannical; a former member labels the Sullivanians as “a manipulative cult that preyed on people, made patients feel troubled and vulnerable, cut them off from their families and the outside world.”

Former patients and students charged the remaining leaders with professional misconduct. The leaders gave up their professional licenses (if they had them) rather than contest the suit, but continued to work as therapists.