

# Brother Sam Prepares His Flock For The 'End Days'

By ADON TAFT

Knight Newspapers Writer

Brother Sam Fife, a tattooed, one-time paving contractor and country and western singer, is preparing followers throughout the hemisphere from a Miami bungalow for the "end days" — when his sect plans to assume leadership of Christianity on the eve of Armageddon.

Many of an estimated 4,000 members of the sect — variously christened the Body of Christ, the Movement of God and the Company of the Manifested Sons — endure primitive conditions on hard-scrabble farms: Sam Fife has prophesied famine.

Mr. Fife believes the 4,000 are "the headship company" to which all other Christians will turn for leadership in the "end days" before the Second Coming of Christ. He has predicted that will occur this year.

Disaffected members claim they endure more than the self-imposed hardships of backwoods life as they await the Second Coming. They cite broken families, sexual entanglements and harsh treatment of children.

They also claim that the controversial cult, which elicits fervent loyalty from its adherents, harbors runaways — such as Wilbur Anderson (Randy) Wright Jr. of Charleston, S.C.

Mr. Fife denies that. So does Randy Wright.

"We don't go out and drag anybody into our fellowship," says Mr. Fife.

Randy Wright, 20, had walked out of the Adams and Ortmann Jewelry Store in downtown Charleston, where he worked as a diamond salesman and apprentice appraiser, on Wednesday, June 12, 1974. He told his boss, "I'll see you tomorrow."

He did not. His new yellow Gremlin, on which he was paying \$96 a month, was found three days later at the local

airport. His mother received her first indication of his whereabouts in September when a monthly bank statement contained a canceled \$54 check: her son had given his last dime to Mr. Fife and his Miami Revival Center.

Knight Newspapers interviewed Wright by phone at the Bethesda Bible Center, "the Body's" farm near Malcomb, N.Y. "None of these people influenced me in any way," he said. "They don't encourage you to leave your family."

Knight Newspapers asked Mr. Fife for an interview after three private detectives approached a reporter within one month for information about the movement. Fife discussed the Body of Christ beliefs.

Many of the sect's beliefs are common to Pentecostal churches: spiritual healing and prophecy, for example.

But the sect differs from other movements in the primitive life of its more than two dozen "wilderness" farms scattered in 12 states, Canada and South America and in the harsh treatment of children, who are not spared the rod. Detractors also complain about occasional sexual entanglements among movement members.

Mr. Fife, 49, acknowledges his own entanglement, a "deception of Satan" that occurred at the ill-fated state of his "Body" ministry in Metairie, La., a New Orleans suburb, after his 1957 graduation from the Baptist Theological Seminary there.

In a tape-recorded explanation of the material he provides to all initiates, he recalls how a young woman brought her deaf son for faith healing. Through a series of visions, he said, he believed he would bring forth a great prophet by her.

He discussed the situation with his second wife, Lee, who is 10 years his senior. She agreed to step aside for a year so he could produce the prophet. He returned to his wife and two daugh-



PREACHER SAM FIFE CLAIMS 4,000 FOLLOWERS

— Knight News Wire Photo

ters after the year. No children had resulted from the union.

Apostle C.E. (Buddy) Cobb of Hollywood, Fla., also acknowledged "a few incidents" of homosexuality and extramarital relations among members separated from their spouses at the remote farms. Those persons "either are no longer with us or have straightened out," he said.

One former member said there was a high incidence of divorce and remarriage among new believers.

Mr. Fife said divorce among his followers is less than among members of establishment churches. He defends even a situation in the Canton, Ohio, Body two years ago, where 15 divorces were pending at one time.

One teaching emphasized among the virtually autonomous congregations is that sparing the rod spoils the child.

A former follower said her son was struck black-and-blue for not "praising the Lord" by raising his hands above his head during three-to-five-hour-long "praise services."

"Anybody could do the hitting because everybody belonged to the 'family,'" said Mrs. Douglas (Pat) Bazzel of Miami. "I've seen a woman slap a five-month-old baby for crying while lying on the floor during a service at 10 at night with people around it shouting and singing."

A child, Fife says, has "the same kind of nature the demons have. The demons can't make him be any worse than he is" because he was "rebellious against God from the day he was born," he says in a tape-recorded sermon.

It is by strict discipline, by preparing for hardship — even famine — that The Body will be ready to lead the Christian world at the Second Coming, the Mr. Fife teaches.

A young student nurse who lived on

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the Mississippi farm for eight months said that strict routine and privation drove her to the brink of a breakdown. Members have no newspapers, radio or television. They constantly work or study the Bible, she said.

The regimen, she said, leaves them "exhausted zombies."

The head of a private Florida school, whose daughter still lives on the Mississippi farm, said youths there are "afraid they will die or something will happen to their families if they leave Sam's divine protection."

Despite his detractors, the minister continues to expand The Body.

There are now about 25 loosely affiliated farms where members are withdrawing from the world in preparation for what they believe is its impending end. Mr. Fife prophesied in 1970 that the end would come in five years.

## A Quotebag Full

Knight News Wire

**STEVE ALLEN:** "As a comic, my forte is ad lib comedy. In fact, I'm one of a very small group of people who can do it at all. To be sure, every comedian can ad lib a little bit, and for that matter every human being can — that's all we do all day long. When you get out of bed in the morning the world doesn't hand you a script, yet you never have any trouble thinking what your next line is. The only time people have that difficulty is when they go on stage; suddenly, their lifelong ability to ad lib seems to desert them. Well, I can think extemporaneously just as all human beings can, but I can also do it in front of an audience and in a funny way. Apparently, that's some kind of ability, and a fairly uncommon one at that."

**RED SKELTON:** "I think TV is ruining comedy. CBS wanted Jackie Gleason and me to team up and tell risqué jokes, just to get people used to the idea so they could show their risqué movies that they had purchased. When Jackie and I told them what they could do, I was told I was no longer relevant on TV. I would like to do TV again, but I would want to have artistic control. Not the way it is now, with them pandering to the worst elements."

**JOANNE WOODWARD** on husband Paul Newman's image: "My husband has been trapped in his image of Sam Superstar. For myself, I don't project any particular image as a human being. That's the reason why people rarely recognize me. I'm able to get into any role."



SKELTON WOODWARD ALLEN

**HELEN GURLEY BROWN,** Cosmopolitan editor on censorship: "I'm for anything that turns people on. How dare the government attempt to influence our visceral reactions. Of course, violent sado-masochist sex does offend me. I wouldn't mind seeing some comic books scooped up."

**LORD C. P. SNOW,** British scientist and author: "Although the human species is the only one which tries to kill large numbers of its members when it gets a reasonable chance, still we have a kind of species loyalty. There are few persons who would remain unmoved at the sight of a starving child. This humanism in ourselves makes us a little better than ourselves. It gives us a finite chance to get through this enormous, hideous crisis in which we are now living. We certainly have to try."

**DIANE VON FURSTENBERG,** socialite-fashion designer: "American women hide themselves behind clothes. I do not believe in this. I guess it is sometimes easier than showing what you are. She would show her legs. Walk like a woman. Feel like a woman."

**ALISTAIR COOKE** author-historian, on the American malaise: "I think I recognize here several of the symptoms of the decline of Rome: A mounting love of show of luxury. A widening gap between the very rich and the very poor. An obsession with sex. Freakishness in the arts. In the past decade America has demonstrated the Roman folly of exercising military might in places remote from the centers of power. There is, too, a general desire to live off the state. Yet the original (institutions of this country still have great vitality: the Republic can be kept, but only if we care to keep it."

**GORE VIDAL:** "When I started to write, the novelist was the center of the culture and my immediate generation, which is Mailer, Capote and myself — the only survivors you still hear of — considered ourselves as continuing the tradition of those glorious 19th Century stars like Thackeray, Dickens, Melville. In 30 years we have seen novel shift to the periphery of the culture and the moviemaker in the center. We are now where the poets were when we began. About to vanish altogether. There are good writers today who are much less ambitious and vain and take their obscurity far more gently than we take ours."

**SAUL BELLOW:** "Literature is not a power in life. Power is in government, politics, the mass media. The writer has been shut out. He is not at the center of things. Yet one part of mankind is in prison, another is starving to death, and another seems not to be fully awake. What will it take to rouse us?"

**BISHOP FULTON J. SHEEN:** "I never resort to a prepared script. Anyone who does not have it in his head to speak extemporaneously for 30 minutes is not entitled to be heard."

**ORSON BEAN,** Author-actor-humorist: "I'm torn between two things when I die. I've always felt I'd like to be cremated, put in a Mason jar and let the city get rid of me with the garbage. Or, I could leave all the good parts — eyes, kidney, etc. — to medical research and the rest of it to some needy nephrologist."

**PAUL HARVEY,** news commentator: This cries out for your remembering. When impatient people demand the government provide prosperity at any cost — when they thus crowd their government to provide prosperity no matter what — government's historic response is to avert internal combustion with an external war. SURFLY A "thinning-out" is preferable to that."

**PHYLLIS DILLER:** "To some woman, a hairy man is the epitome of sex. Hair all over. They should find an ape on his day off."

THURS. FRI. SAT

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