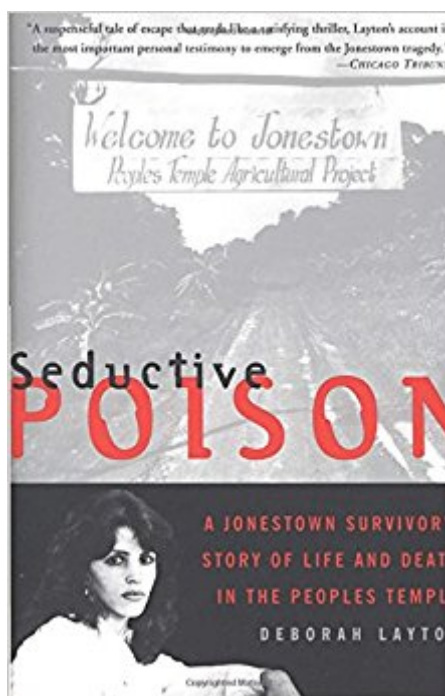


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# Seductive Poison: A Jonestown Survivor's Story Of Life And Death In The People's Temple



## Synopsis

In this haunting and riveting firsthand account, a survivor of Jim Jones's Peoples Temple opens up the shadowy world of cults and shows how anyone can fall under their spell. A high-level member of Jim Jones's Peoples Temple for seven years, Deborah Layton escaped his infamous commune in the Guyanese jungle, leaving behind her mother, her older brother, and many friends. She returned to the United States with warnings of impending disaster, but her pleas for help fell on skeptical ears, and shortly thereafter, in November 1978, the Jonestown massacre shocked the world. *Seductive Poison* is both an unflinching historical document and a suspenseful story of intrigue, power, and murder.

## Book Information

Paperback: 368 pages

Publisher: Anchor (November 9, 1999)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0385489846

ISBN-13: 978-0385489843

Product Dimensions: 5.2 x 0.8 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.2 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.6 out of 5 stars 354 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #55,888 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #24 in Books > Religion & Spirituality > Other Religions, Practices & Sacred Texts > Cults #24 in Books > Self-Help > Death & Grief > Suicide #308 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Leaders & Notable People > Religious

## Customer Reviews

Deborah Layton was, by her own account, a typical rebellious youth, with nothing in her dossier to indicate that she would eventually find herself in Jim Jones's People's Temple in Guyana, looking for a way out of the green hell that had become the People's Temple Agricultural Project. She barely escaped in June 1978. Within months, more than 900 people drank Jones's cyanide punch and committed "revolutionary suicide" in the face of mounting stateside pressure on the cult, some of it prompted by Layton's own testimonials upon her safe return home. Her brother, Larry, also survived, and as one of the few left alive in Guyana became a scapegoat for Jones's crimes; he is now serving a life sentence in federal prison. There is a simple naiveté at the root of *Seductive Poison*. Layton's own youthful innocence, foremost, but also the desire to trust another person, the

need for belonging and meaning, which led so many perfectly normal Americans to place their faith in a suicidal madman. Far from confirming the simplistically monstrous Jones of the public imagination, Layton paints the man as a dark, twisted shaman, by turns soothing, then suddenly malevolent and petty, with a hugely sadistic streak that belied his perfectly coifed hair, expensive suits, and impressive political connections. The scenes in which she describes her escape and flight to safety are wrenching, her last-minute conversation with Jones and his seductive appeal for her to return home to Jonestown are chilling, and her fear and indecision are still palpable on the printed page. For Layton to recount tales this personal and horrifying must have been tremendously difficult. For her to lift those recollections above the bargain-basement freak-show reputation the People's Temple has achieved in the popular imagination and depict them with the power of great tragedy is nothing but extraordinary. --TJames Madison --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Published on the 20th anniversary of the suicide-murder of more than 900 followers of Reverend Jim Jones in the Guyanese jungle, Layton's book is the first by a former high-level member of the People's Temple. A troubled teen from an affluent family in Berkeley, Calif., Layton and her mother were introduced to Jones by her brother, Larry. For seven years, she was Jones's close confidante in California, and in 1977, she left with her mother for the "Promised Land" of Jonestown. In the months that followed, she became aware of trouble in "Paradise," realizing she had arrived in a work camp patrolled by armed guards and ruled by a deceitful "Father" (Jones), who practiced manipulative mind-control tactics, dictated grueling physical labor, staged suicide drills and devised bizarre punishments such as wrapping a boa constrictor around the neck of a "sinner" or hanging children upside-down in a well. By May 1978, Layton had engineered a complex escape plan and returned to the U.S. Concerned for her mother, brother and friends still in Jonestown, she went to both the press and the State Department to warn of a possible mass suicide-murder but found few who believed her. Her fears were, of course, founded and not only did her mother die of cancer in Jonestown shortly before the mass suicide, but Larry was convicted for the conspiracy to kill Congressman Leo Ryan and is still in prison. Layton's lengthy account provides valuable insights into the inner workings of cults, and the details of her escape in the closing chapters generate strong suspense, hinting at film possibilities. "Never before published" photos unseen by PW. (Nov.) FYI: Layton's other brother, Thomas, wrote an earlier family history, *In My Father's House* (1981), with journalist Min S. Yee. Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

I had always wondered how and why people were suckered into joining Jim Jones's cult, what life was like in Jonestown, and how in the world Deborah Layton escaped. This book gave me an insider's view, exactly what I was looking for. Early in the book, I found the story unconvincing, perhaps fodder for a skit on Saturday Night Live. The idea that in one People's Temple meeting, she became a convert, I thought was possible. However, the moment of her conversion was unbelievable. Jim Jones tries to persuade her to join, so cheesy I wanted to gag. But then again, this is her story, and this is what convinced her to join. I must accept it as she explains it, the idea that anyone could become a victim becoming less of a reality. Some people are susceptible to such ruses -- the naïve, the mentally challenged, the desperate -- and we all know people who fit those categories. Deborah easily falls for Jim Jones's lies, that all men are homosexual except for Jim Jones, that she may become an amoeba in her next life if she doesn't follow the teachings of her church. I wondered if she had a life before the Temple, why there didn't seem to be any hesitation to accept the teachings that are contradictory to everything she knows. Again, as I read, I begin to believe she is a bit more challenged than the average person. I've always wanted to understand how the people at the top, those who organized the ruses could also be a blind follower of Jim Jones. How is it they can still believe in his powers when they have to collect poison ivy type leaves to cause letters to defectors to be irritating, making the defectors itch and suffer (as if caused by God)? Did they not wonder why God couldn't do it himself? That remains unanswered. Once fully indoctrinated, it is easy to see why it was so difficult to escape. Once in Guyana, I can see how it became impossible. Even for those who wanted to escape, there was no way out. The book was riveting at the end, and I could not put it down. Though I knew the outcome, how it happened was amazing.

This book showed from an eyewitness point of view how this happened and could still happen. It enlightened me as to how easily you could be persuaded. For those of us who say It couldn't happen to me, it shows how easily it could. It's a scary reality

I loved this book! I couldn't put it down until I finished it. My heart really went out to Deborah and it was understandable how all of Jim Jones victims became so dedicated to him and his cause. He preyed on the vulnerable. I truly became anxious and my heart was racing when reading about her escape. I would highly recommend this book. Deborah really gives an honest account of Jonestown.

Such a sad event in history, but with this book and so many others i hope that man kind will not repeat the past. I highly recommend this book to everyone, it's very insightful and educational. From beginning to end I was drawn in and intrigued on how people would follow so blindly. Now I understand it's not the people's fault but the deceptive, charismatic rev.jones

Still amazes me after all these years what was going on

This is my second book I have read on Jonestown and is definitely a must read. The author does an amazing job of including enough detail you can imagine actually being in the story. Deborah Layton also does an extraordinary job of seeing the victims as actual people, instead of just a number. I felt a connection to the family and friends throughout the story, and even more so in the end of the story. Once again if you are interested in Jonestown, you must read this book!!

I own this in Kindle format, and all the 5 star ratings are accurate assessments. This book will be a companion piece for a gift with the Jim Jones book "Raven". They are both incredible histories of how cults become manipulative before the victim is even aware. Psychologically fascinating to explore this very dark event in our culture.

Are you even faintly interested in learning about cults? Serial killers? Crazy people? Then this is the book for you. Jim Jones, leader of the People's Temple and founder of Jonestown, was truly insane and amazing manipulator. He was probably a psychopath and was definitely guilty of several crimes. Deborah Layton - who escaped Jonestown - offers a powerful and captivating recount of her time working closely with Jones and other members of the cult that offers a shocking view into how much control Jones had over his followers. I HIGHLY recommend this to anyone. It's such a shocking story but it's also fairly recent history in the US.

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