42 Miles to Enlightenment

By Daniel Glick

Is theirs a path to spiritual fitness — or runaway madness?

Early Sunday mornings in Boulder, Colorado, ten to 20 runners make their way in a colorful cluster along Baseline Road, heading for the hills to the west. By late morning they stride along the rocky footpaths that meander for miles above the city. More than six hours later, the group is still running, haggard and sun-swept, straggling alone and in twos, emaciated men and women with hollow, spent eyes, straining as they finish the grueling 42-mile training run.

In Boulder, home to a high concentration of both spiritual seekers and the sports-obsessed, it's not uncommon to see athletes pushing their mental and physical limits. But for this group, personal will might not be the sole motivation for finishing the day's workout. Some of these runners have said that they're driven in part by the fact that if they fall short of the grueling regime set before them, they risk scrutiny, food deprivation, and even chastisement from their leader.

"I hated running," says Donna Roberts, a former member of the club. "I used to fantasize that I'd break my ankle and couldn't run." Never much of an athlete before joining up with the group, Roberts asks plaintively, "Why did I end up with a teacher who was into running?"

Some would argue that Roberts "ended up" with him because she was a brainwashed member of a cult. The "teacher" she refers to is 51-year-old Marc Tizer, aka Yousamian. "Yo," as he's more often called, is the coach, spiritual leader, and driving force behind the Divine Madness Ultra Club, just one of the more eyebrow-raising aspects of a larger group that calls itself "the Community."

Gone too far? Spiritual guru and coach Yo, above at left, assists a runner in Leadville.

LEFT: PAT MINNEAR RIGHT: KIRK SPEER

Donna Roberts says she became one of several so-called Yo Ladies, core women who catered to their guru's fanatically precise rituals including twice-daily sex, usually with different partners.

In the relatively unheralded world of competitive ultrarunning, Tizer's group had quietly operated on the fringe for years. Tizer himself was a familiar sight on Boulder's city streets and mountain trails, with his distinctive full beard, frizzy dark-brown hair pulled back into a bun, and peculiar, short-legged gait that made him look like a jogging leprechaun. But few knew about his running club.

Then, in 1996, the Divine Madness Ultra Club became known to the outside world when two club members won prestigious races: Steve Peterson triumphed in the Leadville Trail 100—the first win in an unprecedented three-year streak, and Janet Runyan was victorious in the women's 100-kilometer national championship. Around the time of Peterson's first victory, Tizer started giving public workshops on running. Members of the Community contacted journalists looking for coverage of the club's successes, which included two members besides Peterson finishing in the top ten in the 1996 Leadville race.

Shortly after that race, however, claims against the Community began to surface when three former members filed a lawsuit against Tizer, accusing him of sexual impropriety, outrageous conduct, and what amounted to mind control. They said that Tizer exerted an inappropriate level of authority over the lives of Community members, including telling them how much to eat, sleep, and run, and who their sexual partners should be. Tizer's lawyers denied all illegal behavior and said that members of the Community entered knowingly and could leave freely. Although the suit was settled out of court for an undisclosed sum, and both parties agreed not to discuss the settlement, Tizer and his group began to be scrutinized by the outside world. Other former members began wondering if they, too, had been duped.

BY THE TIME SHE WAS 25, DONNA ROBERTS FIGURED SHE had a pretty good grip on the American dream. She lived with her wealthy husband in a spacious suburban home and tooled around in a Porsche 911E. The couple took Caribbean cruise vacations and spent weekends in Aspen, perks of what she calls "the perfect *Better Homes & Gardens* existence." But when they tried to have a child to round out the picture, she didn't get pregnant right away. She took it as a sign that everything wasn't as it seemed in her domestic paradise. Then, her infertility led Roberts in a circuitous way to a holistic healer in Boulder. The visit was a personal awakening. "She asked questions about what was going on inside of me," Roberts recalls.

The healer she visited was the student of a teacher known as T.H., as Tizer was then called, a charismatic imp of a man who preached a mélange of nutrition and various Chinese-based healing systems he called Harmonizing. Roberts attended a seminar given by T.H. and then asked her husband to take one, too. Her husband tried, but expressed so much skepticism he was kicked out. Roberts felt her life was changing tremendously, on a different course from her husband's. Soon the two divorced.

In 1979, Roberts moved to Boulder and joined what was becoming a loose community of people who followed T.H.'s teachings. Her health problems became acute when a routine pap smear returned a frightening prognosis: Her doctor told her she was likely to get cervical or ovarian cancer, like her grandmother and aunt. T.H. offered to personally heal Roberts. He treated her with homeopathy, and worked with her about her attitudes toward sex and sexuality. Roberts says he told her she had to have sex more with other members of the community, and she did. Soon her pap smear results were perfectly normal. Then, she says, "it was put to me that sleeping with him would help me," though she was admonished to keep their sex a secret, especially from T.H.'s wife. The secrecy bothered her some, but since Roberts had been given a death sentence from her doctor, her faith in T.H. was strong. "I'd rather have sex with anyone than die of cancer," she says.

Over the next 17 years, Roberts watched as the community of T.H.'s followers became larger and more structured. T.H. changed his name to Yousef Amin, then Yousamian, and then became known as Yo. With one noted exception, when she moved to Los Angeles for two years at Yo's direction because

Spent: Now living in Montana, former member Celia Bertolia gave tens of thousands of dollars to the Community during her 13-year stint.

CHUCK HANEY

KIRK SPEER, GARY CRABBE/ENLIGHTENED IMAGES

The great legitimizer? Divine Madness poster child Steve Peterson, far right, en route to a sixth-place finish at the 1999 Western States 100 in northern California. Veteran Community member Douglas Wysoff on the go in Leadville.

he said she was in an emotional rut, Roberts made Yo and the Community her life. Roberts saw Yo's teachings become more elaborate as he moved from his roots in alternative medicine into a more structured and disciplined lifestyle that sought to break down societal conventions: She says he advocated a healthy but strict diet limited to precise amounts of food twice a day; a sleep quota of less than 35 hours per week to test physical limits and endurance; multiple sex partners, even for people in relationships, to help students understand that attachments can be confining; exercise in the form of ultramarathoning, which entailed training for more than 70 miles a week; meditation; and all-night "raps" about the road to personal transformation, self-awareness and a deeper spirituality that sought to connect people to what Tizer called the unseen and untapped energy in the universe.

Roberts also watched Tizer become increasingly captivated with his teachings and convinced of his own omniscience as he exercised control of virtually every aspect of his students' lives. Contact with the world beyond the Community became more strained and less frequent. People were discouraged from seeing their families, going to movies, even reading newspapers. "Slowly, he replaced the outside culture with his culture," Roberts says.

Roberts says she eventually became one of several so-called Yo Ladies, core women who catered to Tizer's fanatically precise rituals, including twice-daily sex, usually with different partners. Over time, she says, Tizer's personal habits became more problematic, and he took to daily alcohol binges and increasingly bizarre demands, such as insisting that Yo Ladies scrape his walnuts smooth with their fingernails before he could eat them. Yo became so convinced of his spiritual powers, Roberts says, that he told her he had the ability to kill his own sperm—and because she thought he'd cured her cancer, she believed him.

Unfortunately, the psychic birth control failed. Roberts says she became pregnant and wanted to keep the child, since she had had difficulty getting pregnant before. She told Yo about it, and at first, he held out some hope that she could have the baby, throwing the I Ching and telling her it was a close call. Then he decided against it and called her in. "Yo spent two hours telling me what a terrible life I'd have," Roberts recalls. "He told me I wouldn't be a decent mother, I'd be kicked out of the community and on welfare. For two hours he systematically destroyed me." She agreed to have an abortion. "I was afraid that if I left he'd do something to me or my baby." The day following Yo's harangue, Roberts was a wreck, depressed and upset. She says Yo came up to her and said, "You know, it's much more your nature to be joyous." Years later, Roberts is still visibly upset at the recollection. "I wish I had spit in his face," she says.

That was the beginning of the end for Roberts. She left the Community but kept her silence for several years, living with recurring nightmares and regrets about not standing up to Tizer, or speaking out to other community members, to the outside world. Finally, this year she decided to speak publicly, on the record, hoping to help others who were still under his spell. "I realized I had to say something," she says about her decision to talk about the Community for the first time.

LIKE ROBERTS, MANY FORMER MEMBERS SAY THEY ARE worried about Tizer's persuasive techniques and want others to enter into the Community with their eyes open—if they enter at all. Interviews with more than a dozen former members reveal a leader who started out with interesting and valuable teachings but whose message grew tarnished because of increasingly bizarre personal demands and the nearly-complete control he exercised over his students' lives.

During preparation of this article, Tizer moved to Reserve, New Mexico, where he plans to spend the majority of the year on land he owns and calls The Retreat. Neither he nor any current member of the Community would agree to be interviewed by *Women Outside,* nor would Tizer or any of his followers address any of the allegations that people offer in this story. However, insiders estimate that between 30 and 40 people still live in homes belonging to the Community today, down from more than 100 in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Repeated attempts to interview current community members and Tizer led to an elaborate runaround, no small thing when you're dealing with an ultramarathoning guru. Tizer, through intermediaries, mulled over multiple interview requests without giving a definitive answer for more than a month. At one point, he asked for and received written questions. After repeated offers to visit him, Tizer sent an e-mail stating that he did not think he had enough time to help a reporter understand his teachings sufficiently. He also said he felt it unlikely that he would get fair treatment, given past negative publicity. Community members, he said, had complained that they had been unfairly treated by the press, and others added that their private lives, family relationships, and businesses had been adversely affected by unflattering press attention. For that reason, he said, no current member would agree to an interview, either. He did offer to send videos of his "raps," as his teachings are known. He also sent the following statement: "After all the lies and distortions of fact and context reported about me and us by the media, based on what actually has occurred and goes on here and in the light of the truth I am the only one who should be crying foul, not my 'former students.'"

Even gurus get thirsty: Yo would swill European mineral water by day, then would allegedly move on to stronger domestic spirits—Jack Daniels and Sierra Nevada Pale Ale—come evening. The Community's newest enclave, the 160-acre Retreat in Reserve, New Mexico.

KIRK SPEER, DANIEL GLICK

Tizer is clearly a complicated man, and he elicits complicated descriptions from his former followers. All agree that many of his teachings are insightful and that at times the Community has functioned as a dynamic, supportive environment for personal growth. In the ultramarathoning world, Tizer has had undisputed success as a coach, both with community members and with outsiders. "I appreciate what they've contributed to the sport of ultrarunning," says Stephanie Ehret, a nationally ranked ultrarunner who has run with members of the Community. "I've heard all the rumors, but everything I've observed firsthand has been entirely positive. They've all chosen this particular lifestyle, and from what I can tell, they're happy with that choice."

For others, the Community is a classic cult. Psychotherapist Judy Wahlberg, who has worked with several former Community members and spoke with their permission, identifies several cult characteristics of the group: Wahlberg says there's a charismatic leader who has authority over people's lives, including what they read, whether they can see their families, whether they can have families themselves. He determines exactly what their path to "enlightenment" will entail. There's a clear hierarchy, and nobody but the guru himself ever attains true spirituality. What's always hard to explain, says Wahlberg, is how smart, functioning people choose to get involved with someone like Tizer, and why they stay for so long. "When you enter, there's a lot of euphoria," she says. "Somebody's finally got the answers." Over time, she says, "you come under the spell of the mind-control. People suffer a lot of humiliation in the guise of finding the path to enlightenment." For people who don't have what Wahlberg calls "a cohesive sense of self," the siren song of somebody like Tizer is irresistible. He artfully creates a sense of belonging and higher purpose, and at first that's easy to believe. Then, when problems or questions emerge, Wahlberg says, it's like a dysfunctional family. "Everybody lies to protect [the family member in question]. It's too painful to see your [loved one] hurt or broken."

Not all of Tizer's former students are critical, however. Glen Turner, 39, who recently left the Community after a year and a half because, among other reasons, he chose to be in a monogamous relationship, says that Tizer has much to offer those who are willing to submit to his rigorous teachings. Turner acknowledges that many of the practices appear strange from the outside but notes that by breaking down certain barriers, like mainstream sexual mores, "you can open yourself up to possibilities that seem impossible." The Community, he says, is "a safe place to explore relationships and limits you were curious about—things you wouldn't necessarily do outside the Community." Many disgruntled former members, he says, "want to blame Yo instead of taking personal responsibility. I say, 'Grow up!'"

Another former member, who does not want his name used, says that Tizer evolved from being a holistic healer into a spiritual teacher. In that role, Tizer exacts incredible discipline from his disciples, with a conscious goal to "change the rules of the physical world to see if it allows a window to let the spiritual world in." Tizer's teachings are transformative, he says, and it requires a deep commitment to understand them. "If you want to change yourself, you don't just do it on the weekends," he says. Like Turner, he scoffs at the idea that Tizer led people into unwitting spiritual servitude. "Everybody was there voluntarily," he says. "When I wanted to leave, I left."

People are attracted to Tizer for reasons that are as complicated as the man himself. Of the former members interviewed, it's noteworthy that only men spoke in Tizer's favor. Tizer's ability to lure followers involves the excitement of living an alternative lifestyle amid a homogenous American landscape of tract homes and strip malls, the very real sense of community they gain from living in a group, the effects of sleep and food deprivation added to physical exhaustion, and the intense, charismatic nature of a man who has come a long way from his roots as a Jewish boy growing up in Philadelphia with a father in the floor-covering business.

Tizer's boyhood years near Philadelphia are a mystery to many who know him. As a young adult he rode the rails around the country, spent some time as a door-to-door encyclopedia salesman, and ended up in California. There he took long wilderness treks in the Sierra Nevada and hung out in radicalized Berkeley in the 1960s. In the seventies, Tizer moved to Colorado, had two children with his common-law wife, and began teaching seminars and workshops on Harmonizing, just as Boulder was earning a reputation as a tolerant haven for offbeat philosophies of all sorts.

Tizer's philosophical roots seem to lie in Touch for Health, a practice based on Chinese organ-energy concepts and relying on applied kinesthesiology, acupressure, and various techniques for enhancing connections between mind and body. Over the years, he drew on a number of different spiritual and health schools, notably the Fourth Way of Russian-born George Ivanovitch Gurdjieff. Gurdjieff, who spent much of his career in Paris, believed that mankind was not born perfect, and that people need to strive to perfect themselves through various practices. Tizer also used the ancient I Ching for many consultations, as he did when determining whether Roberts should have an abortion. He turned the applied kinesthesiology practice of "arm pulling"—testing muscle resistance in response to various questions—into a divination method that ultimately was used to determine everything from how far one

Members of the Community were encouraged to "call" each other on any transgression, whether it's sneaking a snack or complaining during a run, says one former Yo Lady. "We'd earn brownie points by ratting on each other."

student should run to whether another had eaten too much dairy that day.

His lessons came in long, rambling raps that often started after midnight and lasted until 3 A.M. or later. In one videotaped rap, he spoke at length about "leading conscious lives" by integrating mind, body, and spirit and working to "train and strengthen and nurture the muscle that is the mind." Wearing sweatpants and a tank top and sitting on the floor, gap-toothed and expressively waving his dark bushy eyebrows, Tizer talked and gesticulated for hours, occasionally taking questions. His teachings feature a Buddhist orientation to lack of attachment and a Taoist bent toward being "aware in each moment."

Tizer had been a sprinter in junior high school and ran for many years, and somewhere along the way he decided that ultramarathoning would be a good spiritual practice for his students. One former Community member who left without bitterness says the choice of ultrarunning as a spiritual practice was almost haphazard. "It could have been golf or horseback riding," he says. "But Yo chose running."

RUNNING ULTRAMARATHONS COULDN'T HAVE BEEN further from Doug McLean's mind when he hooked up with the Community in 1988. McLean was living in Seattle, a little adrift and "emotionally dissatisfied," when he met one of Tizer's disciples who had set up a satellite community in the Pacific Northwest. In short order, McLean moved in and became part of a close-knit group of about 25. "It was amazing," he says. "People were nourishing, present, and involved in each other's lives." The group ate together, exercised, and helped one another. "They weren't cult-y people," he says. "They were just waking up to their lives."

McLean, now 45, recalls the dynamism of the group that he says helped him grow. He and others were given "assignments" as varied as "having fun today" and "telling somebody your truth five times a week." Shy with women, he was also encouraged to have sex with different partners, and to his delight they agreed. When Tizer's disciple returned to Boulder in 1990, McLean and many others in the Seattle group moved as well.

Life for members of the Community in Boulder revolved around strict regimens of running, work, eating, and listening to Tizer's raps. Members were expected to make a monetary "commitment" of $140 to $200 a month in addition to room and board, which was by Boulder standards very reasonable. Tizer assigned Community members strict food rations, and food was eaten "consciously" from ceramic bowls. There were limited amounts of meat and fish, but a favorite dish was a vegetarian stew, known as Angry Red Planet, consisting of beets, carrots, onions, peanuts, and cheese.

Tizer, who lived in the community with his wife and their two children, also reportedly told each person how much they could sleep—one student claimed she had the record low of four hours and 22 minutes per night. The community experimented with different ways of choosing sexual partners, including "envelope dating," which involved randomly assigning partners in a game-like atmosphere. Tizer discouraged monogamy and at one point instituted a "50 percent rule," stating that couples could have sex with their "primary partners" only half the time. All-night parties with drinking and dancing were the norm once a week. Former Community members describe a life so proscribed and exacting that at times they functioned in an almost zombie-like state. Most had outside jobs to earn money, and many were self-employed as massage therapists, construction workers, and housecleaners. But often their real-world jobs suffered. "I was such a bad teacher then," says one former Yo Lady who asked that her name not be used. She worked in a private school that was run by the Community but took outside students. "I couldn't even think because I was so tired and hungry. I just didn't have the energy to fight him."

Yo Ladies were said to be on call in shifts. Tizer kept a buzzer in his sparsely furnished room, ringing it whenever he needed anything. When he wanted tea, the water had to be brought almost to a boil and then two Darjeeling tea bags had to be dunked 20 times over three minutes, honey added, and more honey put on the tray. The exactitude of his demands

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On the road to enlightenment: Yo, far right, paces Steve Peterson to victory in the 1997 Leadville Trail 100.

made people nervous. "I worried, If I don't do this right, am I going to blow his energy?" says Barbara Edmonds, 38, who was a member for 11 years. Everything—from the wrinkle-free sheets on his bed to the exact position of his water glasses—was scrutinized by Tizer. He spent his days watching television, often tapes of his own raps or sports events, like past Olympics, and reruns of old sitcoms. In the evening, according to several former Yo Ladies, they would pour five or six shots of Jack Daniels into a bottle for Tizer, and keep cold Sierra Nevada Pale Ales nearby. Every night, they said, Tizer would finish virtually all the whiskey, and usually a pair of beers as well.

Eventually, some Community members confronted Tizer about his drinking. Celia Bertoia, 44, a 13-year veteran of the Community, recalls Tizer explaining why he drank. "I get too revved up," she says he told her. "I operate at much higher levels than you, and I need to de-cycle with alcohol. You're not to bring it up again." Bertoia asked him why he demanded that Community members perform ritual end-of-the-day self-evaluations before bed, while he could get drunk. "I did that years ago," Bertoia said Tizer responded. "I've gotten way beyond that stage."

As each evening wore down, various women were asked if they wanted to be "in the stew," meaning to be in contention for Tizer's amorous attentions for the evening. Barbara Edmonds says that Tizer's position as guru made it difficult to refuse being in the stew. "If the man who was your teacher wanted to make love to you, he must deem you somewhat evolved," she says. "I was in the stew a couple times and felt it was an honor but didn't enjoy it at all."

Another woman says that she was once awakened at 2:30 A.M. by a Yo Lady who told her Yo wanted to have sex. The woman didn't want to, since she had to wake up early to do a 42-mile training run. She says she went in to find a tipsy Tizer who insisted she drink one shot of bourbon and one beer. She did, then says she passively waited while he tried to have sex with her before he passed out on the bed. She recalls completing her training run with no sleep, still half drunk.

Frequent group meetings became encounter sessions, where members' shortcomings were discussed by the group. Edmonds recalls that once she didn't finish a prescribed run, "which was not OK." At the next community meeting, the forum where peer pressure came to bear, "it was all focused on Barbara," she recalls. "I was seen as a wimp, and I was really uncomfortable."

It's through this kind of insidious group pressure, former members say, that Yo controls his students. Through a community hierarchy that consists of Yo, then a series of female lieutenants, a strict regime of peer pressure is exerted nearly constantly. One former Yo Lady says that members are encouraged to "call" each other on any transgression—whether it's sneaking a snack between meals, sleeping an extra time with a boyfriend, or complaining during a run. "We'd earn brownie points by ratting on each other," says the former lieutenant, who requested anonymity. Therapist Wahlberg says this groupthink all amounts to "mind control," a classic sign of a cult. That same kind of mind control, she says, means there is an extreme form of peer pressure that makes it difficult to question the leader and eventually extremely scary to leave. Tizer, however, told one reporter a few years back that the idea that he's running a cult is "ridiculous." "There's such an illusion that I control people," he said. "A cult is where everyone shaves their head and you have to give all your money over."

By that definition, Tizer's group must be a demi-cult. Tonsorial choices are left to individuals, but members donate hundreds of thousands of dollars to nonprofit entities set up by Tizer and his inner circle. Although Tizer's lifestyle is far from lavish, he preaches that holding on to money is selfish, and members sometimes part with large sums. One member paid cash for the 160 acres in New Mexico where Tizer now lives. Bertoia, who is writing a book about her experiences with the group, says that Tizer actively solicited money on several occasions, suggesting to members that they put their money in a meaningful place: the Community. After one rap, Tizer asked, "Well, does anybody want to donate money?" Bertoia recalls that "it became sort of like a rally." One person offered $1,000, another $10,000. Then Bertoia stopped everybody short when she said she'd give $100,000. "I was into it," she says. "It was my life."

Even that wasn't enough, Bertoia says. When Bertoia later balked at turning over another $40,000, she recalls, Tizer passed word that "if I was really serious about transformation, I had to give away all my money." She gave him the money. Even as she was about to leave the Community, she signed over a six-bedroom Boulder house worth $305,000. (She eventually retained a lawyer and recovered it.) "I don't feel good about that at all," she says. "I was pretty whacked-out emotionally, and they preyed on me. He finds people's weak spots and takes advantage of them."

Former followers claim the blind devotion that Tizer demanded occasionally had disastrous results. Bertoia says that Tizer made her train even though she was complaining of intense shin pain after a 20-mile run. Tizer told her to take three days off and then run again. So she ran. "I figured, Yo knows what he's doing. He's my coach." Bertoia was a quarter-mile into her run when "I heard this noise like my tights were ripping." It was her tibia, which had snapped. Later, when Tizer was told about the break, she remembers him saying, "Well, who told her to run?" Bertoia says that Tizer couldn't remember telling her to run because he had been drunk at the time. When she went to the hospital a day later, Bertoia recalls, "the doctor was kind of amazed. He said 'My God, what did you do to this leg?'" Unabashed, Tizer blamed the fractures on brittle bones, Bertoia says, telling her they were a metaphor for her problems.

Doug McLean says his blind following of Tizer's running regimen drove him to hyperthyroidism, a condition that was diagnosed only after he left the Community and stopped running. According to McLean, his doctor now says that he was in a hypermetabolic state during the running, where his body was essentially burning itself up from long-term extreme stress. Like Bertoia, McLean says he heard from Tizer that his physical problems were his own fault. McLean says Tizer told him he was either imagining them or causing them to occur. "He has to preserve this belief system that he's infallible in the face of evidence to the contrary," says McLean.

Despite—or possibly because of—the group's Tizer-driven discipline, it has produced some top-flight ultramarathoners. Runners from outside the Community say they're envious of the camaraderie and support that the Divine Madness runners receive. Nonmembers like Kirk Apt, a top-ranked ultramarathoner who finished second to the Community's Steve Peterson in the 1998 Leadville Trail 100 after winning in 1995, say that Tizer's knowledge as a coach is helpful, especially

about accessing ways to use core abdominal muscles called the psoas, to create a fluid, rolling movement through the pelvis that maintains momentum. Apt also thinks, however, that many Community members put in too many miles in their training and are unable to reach their peak performance. As far as anybody knows, Tizer is almost entirely self-taught as a coach, and even his detractors say he has an amazingly curious mind and very keen powers of observation.

Regardless of the support and the wins, some in the ultrarunning world are uncomfortable with the Divine Madness package. "I think Yo has an agenda," says Adam Feerst, 39, an ultramarathoner who used to run with Community members but who no longer feels comfortable with them. "Having Steve [Peterson] win was extremely important to him. It legitimizes him to the outside world."

IN MAY, TIZER AND A FEW KEY COMMUNITY MEMBERS moved to their compound 12 miles outside Reserve, New Mexico, a small town with a population of approximately 600, depending on the season. Yo couldn't have picked a place in the West that would be a starker contrast to Boulder. Reserve is the county seat of Catron County, home of a kind of secessionist movement that aims to remove public lands from federal control and privatize it. Locals want to call it The Republic of Catron. Boulder, by contrast, buys private land and turns it into permanent public open space and is seen as so politically progressive that it is known as The People's Republic of Boulder, a Democratic enclave in a sea of Western Republicanism.

The Retreat has always served as both a reward and a place of exile for people within the Community. Surrounded on four sides by National Forest land, a 160-acre inholding along the San Francisco River in classic piñon-juniper country, the Retreat is an isolated place where visiting members are financially supported by the Boulder group, since they can't hold down outside jobs there as they do in Boulder. Tizer had a number of members work for years—in return for room and board—building a beautifully crafted staff house, renovating the original lodge and sprucing up the outbuildings. For members who want peace, quiet, and intensive training from Tizer, the cottonwood-studded property is a perfect retreat. But for members with relationships in Boulder or who want a more urban-oriented life, being sent to the Retreat for extended periods is difficult.

Getting to the Retreat requires seven river crossings on a dirt road, past the only other piece of private property for miles: a ranch called, appropriately, El Medio de Nada—the Middle of Nowhere. There, community members spend days waking up early for long runs along the trails and roads around the Retreat and town; working on the gardens, fields, and structures on the land; and doing their meditation practices.

Their relationship with the people of Reserve appears to be quite cordial. When they first came to town, rumors flew that "the old Jack Edwards place" was being turned into a retreat for wealthy Jewish businessmen. Nowadays, Community members come to town occasionally to sell organic vegetables, and locals have been invited to garden parties to enjoy hibiscus tea with floating rose petals. "I don't think most of the local

folks know about Yo or what any of them believe," says Elena Gellert, owner of Reserve's Black Gold, perhaps the only convenience store in the rural West that sells tofu and incense. "That's probably been to their benefit." She says that most locals don't know that Tizer has moved in and see the group members as nice, polite, loving people who maybe are "a little on the skinny side."

Tizer said in an e-mail message to me that he is spending time at the Retreat to focus on writing a book, tentatively titled *Who and What I Am and We Are: What It Is We Actually Do and Why It Is We Do It.* Others say that the Retreat is also something else: Y2K-proof, with a hydroelectric plant, root cellars, a generator, and enough gas and propane to last a year. Former members say it is typical of Tizer not to leave anything to chance. In June 1996, according to county documents, Tizer took sole possession of the Retreat after his divorce in 1995. The quit claim deed doesn't list the value of the property, but Robert Fisher, a broker at Elkhorn Realty in Reserve, says that "if that property were put on the market right now, I could find a buyer for between $600,000 and $700,000."

By relocating to Reserve and bringing a small number of Community members with him from Boulder, Tizer seems to have orchestrated yet another classic characteristic of a cult: further isolation of its members. In the past year, though, perhaps in response to allegations that he was being coercive, Tizer has instituted a more nuanced level of commitment from members. He reportedly now lets students, with his approval, choose between several "levels" of community membership. "Level one" students are those willing to submit to Tizer completely; "level two" students are not as hard-core but live in the Community and adhere to many of Tizer's teachings; "level three" members live in the community but receive little guidance from Tizer. Former members fear that whatever mellowing Tizer has undergone is inadequate to stop a spiral out of control. Donna Roberts, the former Yo Lady, says that her advice, especially to women seekers, is to watch the fine line that she feels Tizer crossed. "You work with someone because you want to change things in your life," she says. "That doesn't mean you have to give up every boundary. There is no true spiritual teaching that condones such violation of personal boundaries. Nobody needs to tear you down so much to teach you something." At some point, she says, "you have to stop questioning yourself and start questioning your teacher."

Another former Yo Lady questions what Tizer is all about besides personal aggrandizement, for himself or even for his students. "He's not giving anything to the world," she says. "A few good runners. Big deal." While many former members remain angry with Tizer for his excesses and have little to do with the group, they balance their anger with a conviction that the Community did teach them valuable lessons. "Personally, I don't really blame Yo," says Aiy'm Fellman, Donna Roberts's significant other and another former Community member. "I blame myself for letting that happen." Glen Turner, who has left the Community but is still supportive of Tizer, acknowledges that Tizer is "an easy target because it's a weird life and he's a strange man." Despite his failings, Turner says, Tizer is hardly malevolent and will surely keep padding down his spiritual path with anyone who still wants to go with him.

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