

The Love Family, Part 1: Love & Logic

SAM: Hello, Ghost Family. Welcome back to *Family Ghosts*.

[music: FG Theme]

Today we begin the second season of *Family Ghosts*, and as our team thought about the questions we wanted to explore in our stories this season, I kept coming back to the watchword of our show - *every house is haunted*. And I got to thinking, that phrase begs a question, which is: can you even have a family without ghosts? And what would happen if you tried to create one?

BRIAN: the first spark that led to the Love Family being what it is was an LSD experience...

[music in]

In 1967, Brian Allen dropped out of the University of California, and moved to San Francisco. When he got there, he was crashing on a friend's floor, with another guy who was also new in town. That guy's name was Paul Erdmann - and Brian wasn't sure what to make of him at first.

BRIAN: He was always kind of the .. A little bit of a hustler salesman even then, and always really.

Paul suggested that he and Brian should get their own apartment, and be roommates. He also suggested that Brian should put up all the money for the rent and the security deposit - which Brian did, reluctantly. But they found a place, and shortly after they moved in, they took some LSD together.

BRIAN: What we ended up doing is turning face to face, knee to knee, sitting in lotus position, facing each other, and looking into each other's eyes.

Before long, Brian started to feel like he and Paul were melting into each other - like he couldn't tell where one of them ended and the other one began. And then Brian started to have visions of faces - faces of his family members, and then faces of devils. And then the faces started changing - moving faster and faster before his eyes.

BRIAN: Ultimately, I started to see that all of these faces were really the same. They had the same quality. They were all parts of the same thing, even the ugly ones. They were just part of the human spirit. And then, I started to see that all of us collectively, that's what Jesus Christ is, Jesus is all of us. We're all Jesus. So we're saying this to each other, and he's having the same experience. We're saying to each other while we're looking into each other's eyes, "We are one. We are God. We are one with God. We are one with each other."²²

[music ends]

And there was something else they said to each other.

BRIAN (ct'd): We said, "Okay, let's try to just keep our focus in the present. Let's not talk about the past. Let's not talk about the future."

They didn't realize it at the time, but those words, and this vision that Brian and Paul had together, would completely changed their lives - and eventually, several hundred other people.

NEWSREEL: Anti-war demonstrators protest US involvement in the Vietnam War! In mass marches, rallies and demonstrations.

Meanwhile, outside the apartment, at the corner of Haight and Ashbury streets in San Francisco, the Summer of Love was in full swing. The Grateful Dead were playing some of their earliest shows in an old Victorian house. Scores of hippies filled the streets, smoking pot, dropping acid, reciting poetry, and protesting the war in Vietnam.

By some estimates, 100,000 people flocked to Haight Ashbury that summer. To the news crews that descended on the mayhem, the hippies proclaimed that they were remaking culture - finding a new way for humanity to exist.

In interviews, they declared that all of civilization was up for grabs.

NEWSREEL: Students, housewives, beatnik poets, doctors, businessmen, teachers, priests and nuns. Makeup and costumes were bizarre!

But over the course of their time as roommates, Brian had the sense that Paul Erdmann was in it for something else.

BRIAN: He wasn't like all of the other people that had been attracted to San Francisco. He didn't have long hair. He didn't grow a beard yet. He was still pretty much a, a used car salesman kind of a guy. What he liked about it was the lot of easy access to sex, drugs, and rock and roll. He was he was exploiting it and he talked about it. He just said, "This is so easy to exploit these people here."

A year or so after that fateful LSD trip, Paul left San Francisco, and went back to Seattle, where he was from. He moved into a house in what was then a fairly run-down part of Seattle, called Queen Anne Hill. Paul and a handful of housemates lived simply - they didn't have much in the way of possessions, and they spent most of their time having sex with each other, taking LSD, and talking about the visions they had.

And somewhere in there, the group became consumed with this quest to figure out what was real, and what was imaginary. As Paul sorted through his visions, he kept returning to the concept of love - and in particular, this phrase, "Love is real."

And then, Paul had another vision: the word Love, carved in gold on a pyramid, floating atop a cloud that seemed to represent the dischord plaguing American society. He suddenly had an epiphany: that the concept of Love was the only thing that could reunite God's wayward tribes of Israel - and that Paul himself was the one to unify them under the banner of Love.

And so, Paul Erdman, the man who'd been proclaiming that "Love is real" issued a new proclamation: from now on, he would go by the name Love Israel. One by one, he began re-christening his housemates. One became Strength Israel, another, Zeal Israel. As Love explained it...

LOVE: ...everybody represented a virtue -and so those were the names that we got - what we represented. Even though we have all the virtues in us, that's what we represented...everybody has a part to play. Everybody has a face of God to use...everybody.

Gradually, Love began inviting others to come live with them in the house, and bestowing virtue names on them. And Love gave the group a new name as well - the Love Family.

Little by little, word started to spread. One day, Love's old roommate, Brian, got a call from an old friend from the San Francisco days. The friend told Brian he ought to check out what Paul was up to in Seattle - that Paul had changed his name to Love Israel, and was getting people together. So in 1971, Brian made the trip north to see what his old roommate was up to.

BRIAN: Much to my surprise, when I got there, they acted like I was somebody they were all familiar with, and it was about time I came home, like I was the prodigal son or something.

Brian was welcomed with open arms - it was like they'd been expecting him.

BRIAN: It turns out that Love had told them all the stories of he and I living together and taking LSD together and seeing God in each other and kind of recognizing now is the time, love is the answer, and we're all one, and we need to do something about it, It's the logic of "We are one".

And when Brian arrived at the Family's house, there was a new name waiting for him.

BRIAN: I showed up, they already called me Logic, and I sort of had a place of leadership and reverence in the community and I, that was rather surprising to me.

As Logic, the prodigal son, began his new life with the Family, he noticed something else.

BRIAN: We had this zealous refusal to discuss our past.

Love had taken that idea from their acid trip in 1967 - that notion of trying to be completely in the present - and distilled it into a watchword of his own - an axiom the family recited regularly to each other: We are all one. Love is the answer. Now is the time.

And it's that last bit - now is the time - that Love believed had the power to ward off ghosts.

[music in - FG Theme]

So, last summer, our team spent a few months researching the Love Family, and then we went out to Washington State and interviewed a bunch of people who were part of it. And today, we begin a three-part series about the Love Family, beginning with the story of Love Israel - the man who tried to build a perfect Family - but ended up becoming his own Family's ghost.

[music in - the Love Family sings "We Are One"]

From Spoke Media, and WALT, you're listening to *Family Ghosts*. I'm Sam Dingman, and this is episode eight - "The Love Family, Part 1: Love and Logic."

LOVE: Remember that we are really all one - we're definitely a family. And how it all shakes out we don't know, but one thing's for sure: we're a family.

Our story begins after the break.

[AD BREAK 1]

So, how do you build the perfect family? The first thing you need is members - and Love knew where to find them. He'd seen the throngs of hippies looking to reinvent society in the streets of San Francisco, and knew that he was building this Family at a time when lots of people were doing what they called "the circuit" - roaming between a wide range of communes and spiritual communities that sprung up all across the country in the late sixties, offering escape and sanctuary to those who were fed up with the Vietnam War, who didn't see a place for themselves in the profit-driven mainstream society, or who felt like their biological families didn't understand them anymore.

One of them was the man who would eventually become Serious Israel - a self-described "spiritual dropout." In 1970, he and his girlfriend had decided they were fed up with life in the US, and they were planning to move to Canada. But on their way north, they stopped in Seattle, and someone suggested they should swing by Queen Anne Hill and check out this group called the Love Family

So before they left town, Serious paid a visit to the house where Love, Strength, Zeal, Imagination, and a few others were living.

SERIOUS: I walked into the place and I felt like I was walking into a holy space. It was very zen, very, very little furniture, people mostly sat on the floor on carpets. There was a sign on the front entry that said, "All those who want to believe in Jesus Christ are welcome here." I didn't particularly believe in Jesus Christ or even thought I wanted to believe in Jesus Christ.

But there was something about the way Love spoke.

LOVE: We have more in common with each other than anybody that I know of. I don't know of anybody I have more in common with than you. And I think that's the same for all of us.

SERIOUS: ...he had a way of making you feel like you were the most important person who had ever walked into his life. And I think that was, that was genuine. He really was

seeing everyone that came his way as a potential lifemate for him, for himself. That we were going to create this family. And that, that was a very compelling thing. Plus he spoke with a kind of authority that I had never encountered, and I was looking for spiritual authorities in my life.

But Love didn't invite Serious to live with him and the others. He wasn't sure yet how serious Serious was about dedicating his life to Love.

SERIOUS: He sent me out many times because we weren't ready. He'd tell us we weren't ready.

There were a handful of others hanging around Queen Anne Hill in the same predicament - no one was sure what exactly Love was expecting from them.

So one night, Serious and his fellow purgatorians gathered in a small room a few blocks away from Love's house, and took some LSD.

SERIOUS: I had an amazing revelation that, uh, that settled all my doubts. I experienced oneness with Love Israel even though he wasn't there in the room. And um I woke up the next morning from that experience and word came to us through the grapevine that Love said it was time to all come home.

In addition to the name "Serious," Love bestowed another title on him: Elder. Logic was also anointed as an "elder," which struck him as a little bit odd.

LOGIC: I had this somewhat unearned position of significance in the Love family - and keep in mind, everybody's 20 something, but the people who were 28 or 29 were called the elders.

As the months went by, more and more people started arriving on Queen Anne Hill, many of them reporting that they'd had that same experience Serious and Logic had - that sense that Love was calling his children home.

VISION ISRAEL: You felt like you HAD to go. And you didn't know why. It was almost like being a bison migrating, I mean you just had to go. I must find my people.

That's Vision Israel, who was living in Cincinnati when Zeal Israel passed through town one day, talking up this theory he'd been developing.

VISION: He had all kinds of things written down in calligraphy and seven hills in Seattle, and seven hills in Cincinnati, and there's parallels in Minnesota's like that too, and just fascinating stuff. And he told me about Love and this whole thing going on.

It was enough to convince Vision that she should check out the source of these numerological ruminations. She hitchhiked across the country and made her way to the Family's house on Queen Anne Hill.

VISION ISRAEL: As I walked in the house, it was kind of like return to Oz...So I was basically, I don't know what y'all are doing, but I'm staying. (laughs) I'm in.

As Love's children came home, they began to notice this shared experience none of them could quite explain. People in the Love Family seemed to somehow recognize each other, even though most of them hadn't met before. They had visions remarkably similar to Logic's early experience in San Francisco, of gazing into Love's eyes and seeing a convergence of identities...

SERIOUS: We'd be looking in each other's eyes, and all of a sudden, instead of the familiar face that we were used to seeing the faces would start changing.

LOGIC: ... and I saw faces of my family. I saw family members and then, it all started moving faster and faster, and faster.

VISION: For example, I'd look at you, and faces would come through you that were every woman that's ever been. Kind of life-altering stuff.

SERIOUS: ... and all of a sudden they all just start merging together and they're all happening there at once and they're all overlaid and all of a sudden it's just Jesus Christ looking at you. Which is part our understanding of what the meaning of Jesus Christ was. Jesus Christ was the best of all of us.

Love interpreted these visions to mean that Jesus's virtues were reflected in the essence of each of his Family members, as represented in the names Love gave them.

And this sense that history and divinity were converging on Queen Anne Hill gave Love the next thing he needed to build his ideal Family - a collective belief that this family was special unlike any that had ever existed. A Family, Serious explained, united by a simple creed:

SERIOUS: We're all one. Love is the answer. Now is the time.

Love encouraged his Family members to forget about their old lives.

RACHEL: Love was like, "Well, we don't talk about the past. We only stay in the present all the time."

RICHNESS: you'd go okay, what do we need to, how do we need to process this person...at least to get him to quit talking about the past

NANCI: We never really talked about our past either. We had to be present.

Love had several ways of keeping his Family focused on the present - or, as Serious put it...

SERIOUS: We were people who were wanting to know the truth... and we wanted to know it for real. So we wanted a higher reality.

One of Love's pathways to the present was the morning meeting which took place most mornings, often before sunrise. Family members awakened and dressed themselves in the Family's chosen spiritual garments - long, flowing hand-made white robes. They would file into the living room of one of the Family's houses on Queen Anne Hill, where all the furniture had been cleared out, save for a carpet and some pillows, and a small table with a candle and a bible.

[music in]

They would drink coffee with honey and fresh cream, and Love, or one of his Elders, would pass around what they called “the tah” - a ceremonial marijuana pipe. There would be readings from the bible, singing and chanting, and a group meditation, after which Family members were encouraged to share any visions they’d had. The visions were documented and filed away.

LOGIC: I have to tell you in retrospect, I think some of it was Love Israel's rather conscious manipulation of people. It was part of how he built loyalties. What you say out loud in front of witnesses and what you memorialize by writing down is a very powerful thing.

Logic compared Love’s celebration of visions to a Baptist revival meeting, where a preacher might challenge the congregants to come forward and let Jesus into their hearts.

LOGIC: And Love worked that like a miracle. He wanted people to vocalize that they had seen God, seen Jesus, seen that he was a representative of Jesus and God, and that the Love Family is where we need to be...and he worked it. He really tried to get everybody to have one....and if you didn't have a vision, then you almost weren't bonafide.

For Family members who were craving those bonafides, but weren’t having visions and weren’t willing to make something up, as some members later admitted they did, Love might offer something to help them access that higher reality.

SERIOUS: ...LSD or, or psilocybin, or sometimes peyote.

VISION: It facilitates the possibility for taking the elevator instead of the stairs, as I call it.

Speaking of visions, that’s Vision Israel again, the one who hitch-hiked across the country from Cincinnati. She has clear memories of the wonders she experienced when she would, as Love called it, “take the sacrament.”

VISION: And you felt as within, so without. You could feel the energy and everything that was alive around you. Everything, a tree. Everything was absolutely lit to the nines...this pure love energy, whatever you want to call it. In every direction.

Vision told us that, at least in her case, the drugs allowed her to witness miracles.

VISION: We had a guy that couldn't walk. I saw these two huge beings come in the room, get on either side of him, and the guy was walking around in the room that was crippled. I swear to god I actually saw it. I really did. And uh, and then he fell. And I remember going "oh, he must have doubted". And uh, you saw things like that.

Every once in a while, actual reality pierced the veil. In 1972, two Family members named Reverence and Solidity died from huffing toluene, a solvent used in paint thinner, and another of Love's so-called "sacraments."

[music in]

But Love told his Family that if the two fallen brothers were true believers, they would be resurrected within three days - which, naturally, didn't happen. But by framing the tragedy as a test of Reverence and Solidity's faith in *him*, Love found a way to deepen the Family's belief in the mystical reality he was trying to create.

[music out]

Another way of keeping the Family in the present was to interpret "now is the time" to mean that now is the only time that has ever existed. There was no more past. Literally. When you joined the Love Family, your entire previous identity was erased. You renounced your old life, and you were reborn as an eternal being without an age or a birthdate. Which, as a former member named Allan explained, created some problems with the police.

ALLAN: When we ever got stopped by a policemen, we didn't have identification. We didn't have driver's licenses - and so the policemen would say, "What's your name?" You tell them your name. Then they say, "How old are you? What's your birthdate?" You say well, "I'm eternal." They would look at you like, "Look, I have to fill out this form. If you don't tell me the answer, I have to take you in."

This actually happened to Allan - he got arrested as a result of it, and hauled down to the police station.

ALLAN:... and I joked around with them. I said, "Well, I'm eternal. I'm kind of hungry. You got anything to eat? I'm going to be here for a while."

But eventually, the Love and the Elders convinced law enforcement to print special ID cards for Family members, complete with their virtue names, and in place of a birthdate, to simply write the word "legal."

And "now is the time" didn't just pertain to ages. Love forbade traditional time-keeping - no clocks, no calendars. Logic, the prodigal son, told us that he knows he came to Seattle in 1971, but he's not sure exactly what year anything that happened in the Family after that took place.

LOGIC: We gave years names, the Year of Meaning, the Year of Faith, the Year of Hope, the Year of Cleansing, but we didn't associate those with a calendar date.

In the late seventies, a sociologist named Robert Balch was studying the Love Family, and he visited one of their properties. He realized he wasn't wearing a watch, and he couldn't find a clock anywhere.

ROBERT: and so, if you asked somebody what time it was, they would simply say, "Now is the time."

ALLAN: We had no radio, no television, no newspapers. We had music.

[music in - Allan sings "The End Result"]

Allan, that guy who got arrested for being eternal, told us music was a fundamental part of creating that miraculous atmosphere.

ALLAN: Every night it was music, every morning it was music. During the middle of the day there would be music.

Many of the members that joined were musicians, and the Family had its own songbooks full of original spirituals and folk music. Allan even sang one of them for us.

[beat of Allan singing]

SERIOUS: Growing good food, and creating good entertainment. And making beautiful clothes, and looking beautiful, and making beautiful environments - and then inviting people in and turning them on.

[“The End Result” fades after Allan sings “It’s Loooooove - and nothin’ else!”]

SERIOUS: There was an amazing thing going on, and miracles were happening all the time.

But no matter how much seemingly miraculous energy was floating around the Love Family, a higher reality where everyone supposedly exists in the divine, eternal present isn’t easy to maintain. Logic told us that in the early days, the Love Family was barely surviving.

LOGIC: Everybody that joined the group put everything they had into the community pot, and that money was used to pay rent and buy groceries and supplies and that sort of thing. But really, it was pretty meek and pretty poor times because nobody had much. Most of us were either hitchhiking or living out of our vans. I was living out of my van, a Volkswagen van. So, it was just a bunch of hippies getting together without much money at all.

In 1970, the Family created a formal charter, written by hand in gothic calligraphy, and bound in blue paperback. First, the Family declared itself “The Church of Jesus Christ At Armageddon” - a reference to an obscure passage in the New Testament which they interpreted to mean that in addition to the catastrophic end times, “Armageddon” can also mean “hill of special fruit.” On Page 11, the Charter says: “Members of the Church of Armageddon will give all they possess to the Church upon joining.” Which was another convenient way for Love to disconnect Family members from the past.

[music in]

At first, people would sell their wedding rings, and give the proceeds to the Family. They'd donate their monthly welfare check, empty out a meager savings account, or offer whatever allowance they were getting from their parents. Every once in a while, someone who had a BMW joined, which the Family could then turn around and sell. It wasn't much, but it was just enough. Seattle was in the midst of a major economic recession. There was widespread unemployment, and lots of houses sat empty, particularly on Queen Anne Hill, where Love had managed to get that first house. And this meant that landlords weren't as put off by a bunch of spiritual seekers in robes and long beards as they might have been otherwise.

So the Family had a handful of houses, and about a hundred people crowded into them, sleeping on mats on the floor, spending their days gardening and meditating.

And there was one more ingredient Love needed to make the Family feel like they were really living in the promised land. He discovered it when this guy showed up.

RICHNESS: I had, you know, plenty of money and sports cars and all that. I didn't need any of that stuff. It was just more about uh, you know, real relationships with people.

Daniel Gruener joined the Family in the early seventies. He'd just gotten out of jail for running away from the police in one of those sports cars he had plenty of, which was filled with marijuana. After about a year in prison, Daniel was released on the condition that he spend time reflecting on his crime, and he went to a monastery, where an old friend tracked him down.

DANIEL: He rolled into the monastery there, and dressed Old English, you know? Kind of, and he had long hair and a beard, you know? And he's just that kind of a guy, you know? Just a big, you know penetrating eyes...

[music in]

The friend told Daniel he ought to come to Seattle and meet the Love Family.

So after his time in the monastery was up, Daniel did exactly that - and there was a lot about the Family that was appealing to Daniel.

DANIEL: ...you're just seeing, oh this is what human beings do, you know, we're here on the planet just supposed to love each other. It's not supposed to be confusing. We shouldn't have to explain everything to each other all the time. you just get simple and look around, you know? Kind of what it was about, like, simplifying the outlook.

[music out]

But as Logic told us, Love also saw something very appealing in Daniel. It turns out that Daniel had bought all that marijuana and all those sports cars with money he'd inherited from a relative who worked for DuPont, where the relative had invented polymer. He had traded the patent for polymer to DuPont for DuPont's stock, which made him rich. So rich, that by the time Logic met Daniel...

LOGIC: I think he was the third generation that had not held a job.

It's hard to overstate how transformative Daniel's wealth was for the Family. Logic had told us most of the people who joined the Family and donated their possessions gave things like wedding rings or maybe a car. Many of them showed up on Queen Anne Hill carrying everything they had to give.

In Daniel's case, there was so much money to collect that he and Logic had to embark on a multi-state road trip to find it all.

[music in]

LOGIC: So we're out there gathering up all of his stuff, and he's kinda treating it like Mardi Gras; it's his last big fling.

I should mention here that Logic was no stranger to money. His father was Steve Allen, who was, among other things, the first host of *The Tonight Show*. But Logic

says Daniel Gruener's wealth was beyond anything he'd ever experienced. During the road trip, they stopped in Coeur D'Alene, Idaho, at what Logic called the fanciest restaurant he'd ever seen.

LOGIC: The first thing that shocked me was they knew him. It was like, "Hello Mr. Gruener." They took him to like his table, and it had this beautiful view over Lake Coeur d'Alene, and when the menus arrived, I noticed right away that there were no prices on anything.

Still, even if Daniel's reputation had preceded him, Logic says their long, flowing Love Family robes made the waiter a bit skeptical. Daniel thought the waiter was being snooty, so he told the waiter to bring them the most expensive bottle of wine they had in the restaurant. The waiter scoffed, and said there was no way he could possibly afford that. "Oh really?" said Daniel. "Then bring us two of them."

[music out]

But, Logic says, Daniel wasn't just spending money to show off. Like a lot of Love Family members, Daniel was against the war in Vietnam. But unlike most of them, because of his biological family's stake in DuPont, Daniel was also directly profiting from the war in Vietnam.

LOGIC: ...one of the stories that Daniel told me while we were out driving around the Western United States was as the war in Vietnam escalated and they started dropping more and more agent orange and napalm, both of those increased his dividend checks. And so here's this guy, fourth generation wealth, who would get larger dividend checks every time the war escalated. And he had enormous guilt about it, and he was kinda in a phase where he was almost trying to give his money away. It was blood money and he felt bad about it, and he had given it to people all over the Western United States, and that's what we were on our way around to go try to find and collect. And ultimately he gave pretty much everything to the Love Family.

[music in]

Perhaps most acutely of anyone we read about, Daniel had good reasons for wanting to escape his biological family's past. Exactly how much money he gave the Love Family isn't totally clear - but the conservative estimate is in the low millions. Which, for a hippie commune in the early 70's - or for anyone at any time, really - means things are about to change pretty radically. Which is exactly what happened.

SERIOUS: I gotta say that it's really Danny's introduction of all that wealth in The Family, that's when I first saw the shift in Love...

LOGIC: ...it really brought out another character in Love Israel that most of us hadn't seen much yet.

Our story continues after the break.

[music out]

[AD BREAK 2]

Shortly after Daniel Gruener joined the Family, Love gave him his new virtue name: Richness. And shortly after that, Love started spending Richness's money.

[music in]

LOGIC: The first thing Love wanted to do was buy an airplane.

Over time, Logic told us, Love ended up buying not one, but three airplanes. He explained to the Elders that he needed planes so that he could visit the Family's new 300-acre ranch in Arlington, Washington - also purchased with Richness's money.

SERIOUS: There was a classic old fire engine with a bell and everything that we drove around the ranch. That was a lot of fun.

Suddenly, the Family went from barely covering the rent on its meager holdings to having things like a novelty fire truck. They bought the houses they'd been renting on Queen Anne Hill, giving them a robust compound in Seattle plus that 300 acre ranch about 45 miles north, which had a sprawling lake, lush gardens and fruit trees, and newly-erected households full of family members, more of whom were showing up all the time. The Family also got a boat - a 137-foot wooden World War 2 minesweeper - which Love decided they needed to reach their other new property, a second ranch in Alaska - which had also been Daniel's.

More than ever before, Love was able to offer his Family what seemed increasingly like a higher reality. Why would anyone want to live anywhere but with the Love Family, right now, in this glorious time of miracles and wonder?

LOVE: I mean, if we believed in the world as it is, we'd be there. But we don't believe in it. At all. You know, we think it's not real.

[music out]

By the late seventies, the Love Family's membership had swelled to almost four hundred.

But some of the newcomers weren't entirely convinced Love was the answer.

JAEL: I think I was in the family four weeks or more before I ever met him. And I was kind of taken aback because of his um, needs to be recognized.

Jael was one of the Family's midwives. And she had her suspicions about Love Israel from the moment they met.

JAEL: I can remember opening the door and this man standing there with this big smile on his face, thinking that I'd know who he was or, you know, something. And I'm going, who are you? [Laughs] Because I also remember in my mind kind of a feeling like, oh, he reminds me of my ex-husband. Which was not good.

[music in]

Jael: But you know, there I was in the middle of all these people that I was really loving the people. I loved the music, the music was oh so important to me. So.

So Jael stayed. And it's a good thing she did because Jael had been a registered nurse in her life before the Family, and the Family was starting to have babies. A lot of them.

Jael: I stopped counting births at like 186 or something in my birth career, and you know it just was a lot.

Births were an important part of the Family's spiritual practice. As many as twenty people would gather to celebrate the arrival of Love Family babies. Like all Family gatherings, there was music, praying, and chanting.

The births were a joyous occasion. But if it hadn't been for Jael, they might've been a much more dangerous one. So far, we've talked a lot about the belief system Love created for the Family. Equally important, however, were the things he didn't believe in. Like modern medicine, which was another one of the things you had to leave behind when you entered Love's eternal garden. He told his Family that their physical ailments could be healed through the power of faith. Visits to the doctor were strictly forbidden, as were eyeglasses. As Love explained to a news crew in 1979...

Love: Even I think - even the doctors of the world see that if people really exercise their eyes, then they can cure them.

Completion Israel recalls her mother being ridiculed for being clumsy.

Completion: She was always bumping into things and her depth perception wasn't good, and other members noticed her as being more clumsy, and then once she snuck off and got fitted for some contact lenses, and started wearing them, and I believe it was Love who said, "You've changed quite a bit." He noticed that she wasn't so clumsy anymore, and she just, "Oh, thank you" you know.

And for Family members in crisis, Jael was one of the few sources for reliable medical advice.

JAEL: Well, I just remember a person coming up to me and going, "Jael, what's wrong with me?" And I looked at her pupils and she had uneven pupils and I said, "You need to get to the doctor right away, I think you have a brain tumor or some kind of a head injury or something." And it had been going on these headaches and stuff, and when it got to blurred vision she came to me. And she had a tumor the size of a lemon that was removed from her brain.

Another thing the Love Family didn't believe in was marriage - or at least not marriage as it was understood outside the Family.

SERIOUS: In a very real sense we felt like we were, we were married. We were a marriage. We were a group marriage.

Page 21 of the Family charter declares, "Worldly marriage is null and void; all worldly relationships dissolve upon joining the Church." Love interpreted this passage to mean that men should be free to have multiple partners if they so desired - and that Love should be the one to decide who slept with who.

SERIOUS: We called it sanctioning. So, if two people felt attracted to one another and they wanted to be sanctioned to be a couple and to start a family, have children, they would have to get permission from Love, ultimately.

Serious made it sound like these partnerships were created out of mutual desire, but Vision Israel told us that in her case, she didn't have much of a choice.

VISION: When I was flown to Alaska, Love had said to me, "So do you like Confidence?" And I said "Yeah?" So I was kind of like a mail-order bride.

[music in]

We don't have to wonder whether Love was a misogynist - he wrote it directly into the Family charter, which reads, on page 23: "Within the Family, the men as husbands will have authority over the women as wives." And predictably, the principal beneficiary of the sanctioning policy was Love himself. He reasoned that since he was the head of the Family, all the women were his wives.

Love also used his position in the Family to make it seem as though being chosen as a sexual partner had spiritual significance. Beyond his primary partners, Love would periodically choose a woman in the Family he was attracted to, and anoint her with a new title: priestess of the day, or according to the sociologist, Robert Balch.

BALCH: There was the joke among some of the people, that "Oh yeah, the lay of the day."

[music out]

Completion Israel - whose mother had to sneak away from the Family to get covert contact lenses - told us that one winter, Completion's grandmother made the mistake of sending Completion's mom a nice coat in the mail.

COMPLETION: In the winter time, families like ours sometimes would only have one meal a day and no socks, and so my grandmother saw that my mom was cold, and so she went and bought her a really nice down winter jacket. Very expensive.

But then Love saw the jacket on Completion's mom, and decided that he wanted one of his preferred women to have it.

COMPLETION: So he commanded that the jacket be given over to this other lady, and so my mom gave the jacket.

Sometime later, Completion's grandma came to visit the ranch, and saw that her daughter was again freezing without a jacket, so she bought her another one. And again, when Love saw it, he took it for one of his priestesses.

COMPLETION: And then the story repeated, but my grandmother kind of got smart and so she bought my mom a really ugly second hand store, just really ugly winter jacket, and um, and my mom got to keep that one.

Knowing how much money Richness Israel brought to the Love Family, it's fair to wonder why any of its members wouldn't have warm clothes to wear in the winter.

[music in]

But as both Serious and Logic told us, something changed in Love Israel when Richness' money came to the Love Family. Having built a supposed sanctuary for his Family - and stripped them of their possessions and identity in the process - Love had made them dependent on his vision for the higher reality he wanted to inhabit. And as time went on, mothers couldn't get Love to give them money for milk or shoes for their children. One article about the Family estimated most of its members were surviving on the equivalent of sixty-five cents a day.

And meanwhile, sociologist Robert Balch told us, Love Israel was having the time of his life.

BALCH: Love is going to concerts, he's buying expensive suits, he's smoking Cuban cigars, he's going on vacations to Hawaii and Mexico, and...so he's becoming more and more removed, spending more and more money on himself.

Love's access to food and comfort while so many in the Family were literally starving casts the priestess phenomenon in an even more sinister light. Being Love's partner meant you also got a better chance at surviving the harsh conditions of the Family's supposed paradise. You got to sleep in his bed instead of on a rolled up mat on a cold basement floor. You got to eat lavish, specially-prepared feasts instead of making do with boiled carrots for weeks on end. It meant you literally got the coat off someone else's back.

And on top of all this, Love found yet another luxury to spend the Family's money on.

SERIOUS: He has a weakness for cocaine.

[music out]

The coke wasn't the same as the sacramental marijuana and psychedelics. Love used those to bring people together. Logic told us the cocaine was a different story.

LOGIC: As Love deteriorated more and more into his cocaine and free-basing habits, he became more and more withdrawn from the community. He was very isolated. He was physically gone. He'd take trips, and he would stay up in his room for days on end and not connect with anybody.

Robert Balch says Logic wasn't the only Elder concerned about this development.

BALCH: As one of the elders told me, he says, "Love occasionally would ask you know, do you think I'm too far into it?" meaning am I doing too much of this. I said, "No, Love, I think you can handle it." Even though I didn't really believe that.

Around this time, a news crew visited the ranch, and asked Love if he thought it was dangerous for him to wield so much power over his Family.

REPORTER: If...to be very pointed, you were to become suddenly ill, mentally, you could lead these people down the road to something disastrous.

LOVE: Well, I feel that my brothers keep me balanced.

[music in]

But unbeknownst to Love, one of those brothers was about to betray him.

BRIAN (ct'd): I have to admit that the whole time I lived there,-I always battled having this other vision of him. I believed that he'd had a real transformation - that he'd realized that he was a bad guy, and needed to be a good guy, and that that was genuine... Over time he got drunk on the power, and power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. I think that's what I observed.

We'll be right back.

[music out]

[AD BREAK 3]

Back before there even was a Love Family, or Elders, or a ranch in the country - back when Love Israel was still Paul Erdmann, living in a small apartment with Logic, who was still Brian Allen - Brian had his doubts about Paul. He knew that Paul hadn't come to Haight Ashbury because he was moved by the politics and the betterment of humanity. He knew this because Paul told him.

BRIAN: He was exploiting it and he talked about it. He just said, "This is like, so easy to exploit these people here."

Before he became Love Israel, and forbade his Family from talking about their pasts, Pual loved to tell Brian all about his own.

BRIAN: He told stories about things he'd done in his life that he would kind of be proud of and cackle about, about people he had cheated and stolen from, and beaten up. You know, he was proud to be kind of a badass guy.

But as Understanding Israel explained, once Paul became Love, he had a way of making people believe he was someone far more virtuous - God's chosen messenger for the revelation that now is the time.

UNDERSTANDING: If you look at from a point of view of brainwashing, we woke people up in the middle of the night, we sat them in meetings and told them the same things over and over again... and then we broke down who you are. The past is gone.

Love was building a Family separated from its own history. So many of the members of the Love Family joined precisely because they wanted to get away from the past. They were fearful about where the country and their lives were

headed, and Love encouraged them to forget about all of that - to be reborn into a world governed by miracles, where the past no longer existed.

Instead, Love Israel offered something else - an eternal present, where the answer to big questions was simple and complete - him. Love is the answer. We are all one. Now is the time. And when there were aspects of that eternal present that were troubling, or scary, or dangerous, it was dismissed - the reality of the situation flatly denied.

Sociologist Robert Balch told us Love had a name for doubt - he called it “darkness.”

[music in]

BALCH: If you had a contrary opinion, if you were complaining, if you had disagreements with other people, you know Love might walk into the room, a morning meeting say, and say, “So, Integrity, why are you so dark today?”

And even if the darkness became overwhelming - if you looked around and saw Love retreating into a haze of cocaine, and people starving, and women being sexually manipulated, and children without shoes to wear, what were you supposed to do - leave? With what? You’d signed over all your worldly possessions to the Family when you joined, and given up your name. At that point, Love *had* to be the answer.

But the past always always catches up with families - whether they believe in it or not.

LOGIC: Love was off in his kind of crazy, extravagant phase, and he had his third airplane, and it was new to him. And he was getting pretty druggy...

And eventually, the past caught up with Love Israel.

LOGIC: One day he sent a message out that he was going to fly over the ranch, and he wanted everybody to quit what they were doing, and form a big circle in the big meadow so that he could see it from the air. And it was kind of the height of his detached hypocrisy.

Next time on *Family Ghosts*, Logic confronts Love.

LOGIC: So, my first decision was to see who would support a coup.

That's coming up in part 2 of our story.

[music out]

[FG Theme]

Family Ghosts is hosted and produced by me, Sam Dingman, with Odelia Rubin, Jennifer Lai, Jacob Smith, Lindsey Kratochwill, Jenna Hannum, and Janielle Kastner. Our story editor is Micaela Blei. This episode was mixed by Evan Arnett, and featured original music by Jesse Brenneman. Our theme music is by Luis Guerra. Fact checking by Greta Rainbow. Executive producers for season two are myself, along with Keith Reynolds and Alia Tavakolian at Spoke Media. Special thanks to Posey Gruener - and also to Daniel Gruener, who passed away between the time of our interview with him and the publication of this episode. Thanks also to Hannah Palin at the University of Washington Special Collections Film Archives, Penny Gruener, Sarah Viars, Oza Faye Viars, and Debbie Becker. Our story about the Love Family is by no means a definitive account, and if you're interested, we've got links to lots of resources for learning more about the group on our website, including the documentary *It Takes A Cult*. We thank Eric Johanssen - aka On Israel - for allowing us to use clips from his film in our story, and encourage you to watch the whole thing. To find out where you can do that, or to see pictures of the Love Family charter, and much, much more, please visit familyghostspodcast.com where you can also sign up for our email list, the Ghost Post. If you'd like to follow our show on Twitter and Instagram, you can find us at [famghoshow](https://twitter.com/famghoshow) - that's f-a-m-g-h-o-show. Thank you for listening to *Family Ghosts* - where every house is haunted.

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