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A Hand Up, Not A Hand Out

Sept 19 - Oct 10 2007
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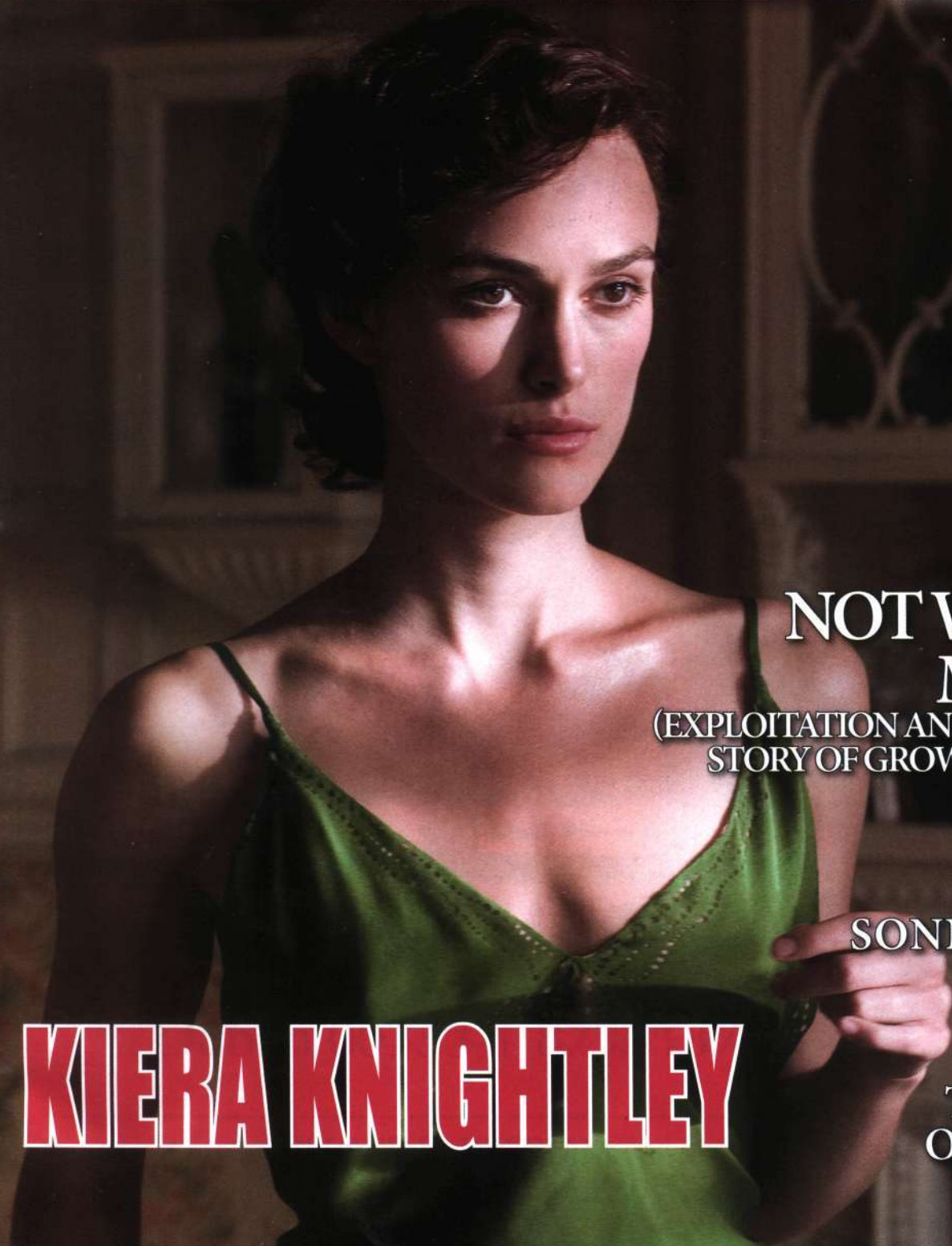


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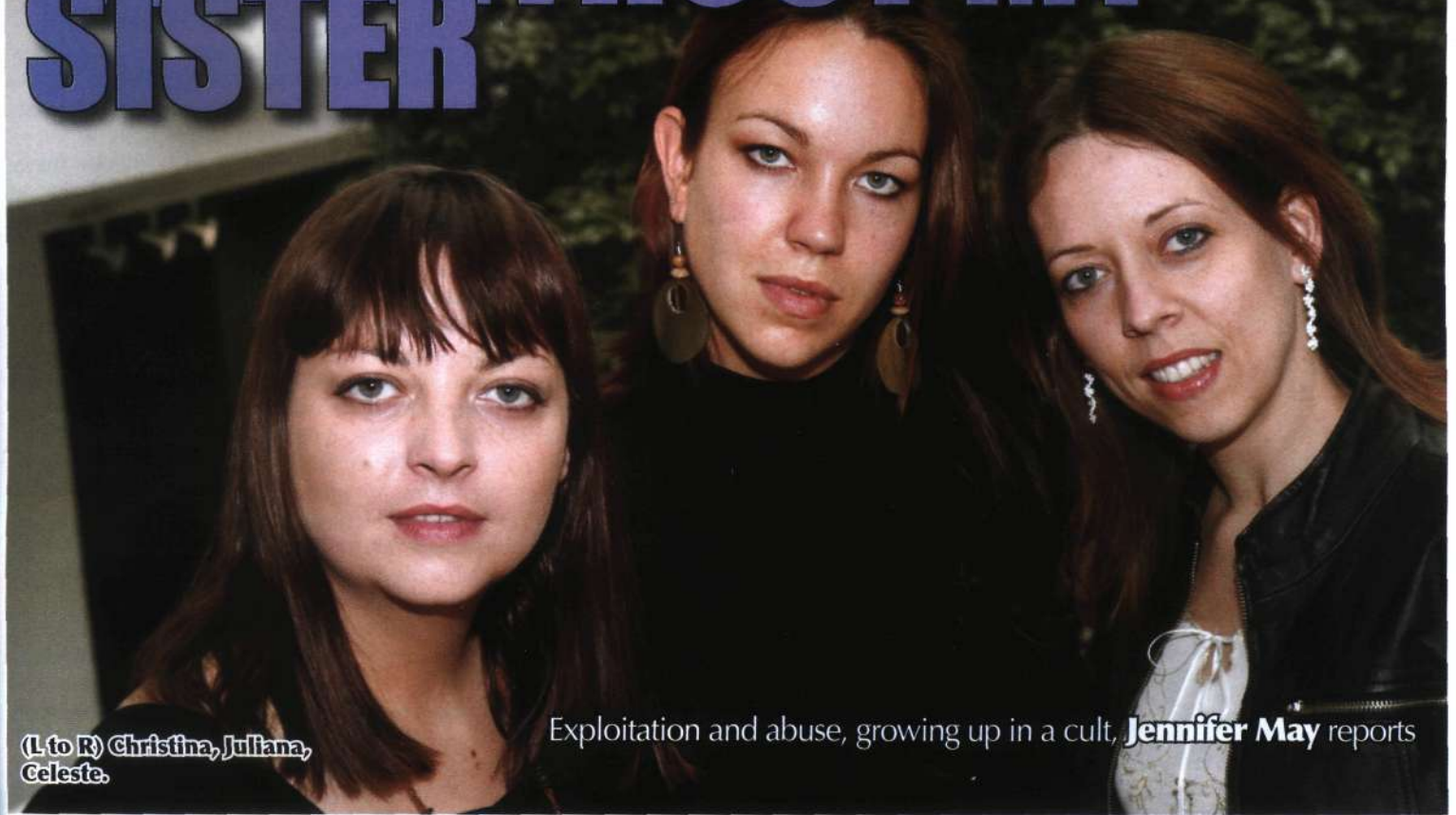
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NOT WITHOUT MY SISTER



(L to R) Christina, Juliana, Celeste.

Exploitation and abuse, growing up in a cult, **Jennifer May** reports

'I always wished to fly. I used to stare up at the sky from the confines of the cult commune walls and imagine growing wings and flying away. Perhaps for this reason I would always climb to the highest point I could find, be it a tree, balcony, water tank or roof, so I could see the world beyond four walls and imagine myself there'. **Juliana Buhring.**

Juliana Buhring is a remarkable woman. After years of enforced silence she found the strength to speak out about the horrific physical, sexual and psychological abuses she and her siblings suffered within the confines of the Children Of God, a cult she was brought up in from birth. Juliana is now a voice for all the other voiceless children caught, like her, in the hellish nightmare of cult living.

The Children of God (now known as the Family International or TFI), was founded in Huntington Beach, California in the 1960's, as an off-shoot of the Jesus Movement. Founder David (Moses) Berg preached a bizarre mixture of religion based on salvation, apocalypticism and a spiritual revolution against the outside world; where all were considered evil. He also believed that one way of showing your love of God was through sex and the 'sharing' of ones bodies with other members indiscriminately – tragically the children unlucky enough to be part of this 'religion' were also expected to partake in these rituals.

Juliana's father, Chris Jones, joined the movement, which has communes in many different

countries (including Ireland), as a young man and married his first wife Rebecca, also a cult member, when she was seventeen. Rebecca had three children, but after the birth of her son David, became depressed and left the movement bringing two of her children with her. Her eldest daughter Celeste – Juliana's half sister – was left behind.

The camps were huge – often with more than 200 children, and there was widespread sexual abuse of the children from a young age.

Chris then fell in love with Serena, a young German woman and in 1981 Juliana was born into cult life in the Philippines.

'My sisters and I were never members of the Children of God,' Juliana is quick to clarify. 'We never had a choice – it was just forced upon us.'

One of her earliest memories is of being separated from her mother, which would be a devastating blow for any child, but in such an unnatural environment, catastrophic.

'My mother became ill,' explains Juliana. 'She had a hereditary illness, but it was seen by lead-

ers as a 'spiritual sickness'. She was forced to leave the Philippines and sent back to Germany, as she was considered a bad influence; it was terrible for her to leave her husband and child, but she had no choice.'

Juliana was then moved to a series of children's 'training camps', where harsh army-like discipline was practised, and the children were regularly beaten into conformity.

'We children were brainwashed to believe that we were the 'pure generation', the ones who would run the world when Jesus would return in 1993,' explains Juliana. 'We grew up believing that we would never grow into adulthood, that we were martyrs – Berg was training us to be the 'perfect models'.'

The camps were huge – often with more than 200 children, and there was widespread sexual abuse of the children from a young age.

'Berg preached the Law of Love and even children were considered sexual beings,' remembers Juliana. 'He contorted scripture to suit his own paedophilic tendencies. We were taught how to have sex, how to perform with each other. There were 'sharing schedules' – I grew up equating affection or hugging with sex.'

Although she had never known any other life, Juliana instinctively questioned her existence, saying that she felt frustrated, disillusioned and very alone. She became deeply depressed. Her relationship with her father didn't help matters. Knowing she was unhappy and that she wanted to leave the group, he put pressure on her, with-

