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Ma Jaya and the Cult of Kashi Ashram

Kashi Ashram: Claims of Rape, Child Abuse, and Kidnapping

By **Terrence McCoy** *Thursday, May 16 2013*



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By **Terrence McCoy**

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Courtesy of the DiFiore Family



Ma Jaya celebrates her birthday in the late '80s. Her clothing reflected her interfaith teaching.

Courtesy of the DiFiore Family



The night the dark-haired guru declared herself greater than God, the chanting started at dusk.

Scores of sweaty followers squeezed around a platform and closed their eyes. Their features slackened, and they rocked to a rhythmic mantra echoing inside the cramped hall. Before them, sinking into an ocean of pillows, was Ma Jaya Sati Bhagavati: the guru. In the candlelight, her gold-wrapped wrists and white teeth glowed like fire. She was the one who could swallow their pain and make it vanish.

A hush settled over the room. "When the Christ first came to me," she called out in a Brooklyn accent as thick as her long, equine hair, "when I anxiously waited for him to appear, afraid that he would and more afraid he wouldn't, I turned on every light in my house. When he appeared then, my house looked dark — to his brightness, the house looked dark."

The guru paused, and a chubby blond girl wearing white-rimmed glasses began plucking a one-stringed instrument. The guru smiled, and her grins infected the audience like a contagion. Her black eyes were big. Her smile widened. The moment was near.

"But," the guru began, quelling the mantra with one word, "the guru is greater than God. Flesh man knows. The guru you can see and touch and feel. God, unless you're perfect, you cannot."

She closed her eyes. "The guru," she intoned as the supplicants melted into a trance, "is greater than God."

The phrase would reverberate across the decades. From this 1977 retreat in California until her death last year, Ma Jaya's infallibility was nearly unquestioned by her followers. At an isolated Florida ranch near Sebastian, 20 miles north of Vero Beach, she cocooned herself with hundreds who'd abandoned home and family to worship her like a deity. Together, they formed what would become the Kashi Ashram. "I am the breath," she told them. "I am inside you."

For many, to exist near Ma Jaya — a beguiling New Yorker with a tenth-grade education — was rapture. To them, her dogma was beyond the mortal ken. There was incredible benevolence and service to the sick and dying, which eventually afforded her

Ma Jaya and her daughter walk in procession toward a night prayer at Kashi Ashram.

PRNewsFoto/Kashi Ashram/Newscom



Ma Jaya spoke with a heavy Brooklyn accent and often reminisced about her New York childhood.

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audiences with Pope John Paul II and the Dalai Lama and lured high-profile fans like actress Julia Roberts and folksinger Arlo Guthrie.

But there were also stories of profound cruelty and despotism. Eight former followers interviewed by *New Times* say Kashi members were beaten for disobedience or spiritual cleansing. A man said he dunked his head into a vat of red paint because Ma Jaya had asked him to. Masked teenagers reportedly battered a 13-year-old boy with rocks inside socks because he'd angered their leader.

In the church's 35 years of existence, adherents claim abuses including beatings, pedophilia, forgery of official documents, and extortion occurred by order of Ma Jaya, according to a *New Times* analysis of never-before-disclosed court filings, psychological studies, police records, and dozens of interviews with former members. "Kashi Ashram fits every criteria of a destructive cult," says Rick Ross, a nationally recognized authority based in New Jersey. "And the most defining element of a cult is a charismatic leader."

Now, months after Ma Jaya's death, her adult daughter has sued the Kashi Church Foundation in Miami court. She claims much more happened on the ranch than anyone knew and has pushed the church, which still has hundreds of members in New York, Atlanta, and Los Angeles, into quite possibly its most contested episode to date. In 1981, when she was 14 years

old, Ma Jaya's daughter says she was raped repeatedly by a 25-year-old church member.

And her mother had ordered it.

Once — before the name changes and the jewelry and the acolytes — the guru didn't exist. Five decades ago, there was only an impoverished and garrulous Jewish teenager named Joyce Green tending a quiver of umbrellas along the boardwalk on Coney Island. Every night, as the sun set, the 16-year-old returned to her family's basement apartment of peeling paint and mold in Brooklyn.

One day at the beach, a confident olive-skinned kid named Sal DiFiore sauntered up to the girl. To him, Joyce Green was beautiful, her black hair tangled and teeth gleaming. She loved to gab and was drop-dead funny, recalls DiFiore, today age 75 and still in Brooklyn. "None of her family was like that," he says. "They were very poor. You could tell by the clothes she wore. Her father was a loser."

After they married a year later, the young couple fashioned a traditional Brooklyn life of three children, lasagna dinners at 6 p.m. sharp, and Sundays with relatives. But even then, the young wife showed sweeping vanity and a combustible temperament, says DiFiore, who later divorced her. She gained weight easily, spurring several bouts of depression, says the ex-husband, who drove a Coca-Cola route. One day, while Green was devouring a meal, he looked upon her with disgust and said sarcastically, "You should eat a little."

The future guru never forgot that comment. She swore to drop the pounds and subscribed to a new counterculture lifestyle. Jostling yoga mats, incense, and books on meditation, she ditched the neighborhood gals and locked herself inside the downstairs bathroom. Then, in the middle of the night, strange smoke and sounds began escaping the doorway cracks. Within weeks, Joyce Green DiFiore vanished. And Sal DiFiore had lost his wife to — of all things — yoga.

Hippies deluged their Brooklyn home, babbling about meditation and spirituality. "I couldn't believe it," DiFiore says. They fawned over his wife, wept in her presence, and did anything she asked. DiFiore discerned something dark in his spouse. "She controlled those people," he says. "They were all superrich kids who were dysfunctional, and they would go to her for guidance. Her norm was high upbeat, like: bom bom bom bom. Then she'd be mellow."

Even today, after decades of analyzing these chaotic months in 1973, he can't comprehend his wife's sudden transformation. Or what happened next.

One night, DiFiore heard a loud crash. He rushed downstairs and saw the future guru frantically careening about the house. She'd had a vision of Christ, she whispered. Wounds, she said, had appeared on her hands. "What are you talking about?" DiFiore remembers exclaiming.

She showed him her pajamas. Red splotches blotted the fabric. "So I took the pajamas to a friend who owned a dry cleaner, and he said it was theatrical blood."

Word nonetheless rippled across the boroughs: There'd been a stigmata. Joyce Green DiFiore soon materialized in basements and parks across the city, delivering nightlong sermons. "I thought, 'Get skinny with Christ or fat without him,'" she later told the *Palm Beach Post*. "I lost 65 pounds on the Christ diet."

But Christ wouldn't be the only apparition. In the same year, she claimed she had visions of a deceased and bald Indian guru named Neem Ka'roli Baba, who endowed her with the name Ma Jaya Sati Bhagavati. Her following ballooned to include hundreds of inquisitive college-aged kids mostly convinced Christ had plucked this Jewish housewife from poverty to teach "all ways to God."

In 1975, Ma Jaya left her two oldest children, Jimmy and Denise, and her husband, who filed for divorce a year afterward. Jimmy was especially wrought up over the abandonment, his family said. Those feelings would be with him the rest of his life.

The guru, however, held onto her youngest, Molly. (At the daughter's request, *New Times* has changed her name.) In 1976, Ma Jaya and her flock fled New York for a sprawling plot of grass and creek in Indian River County, in Central Florida. In one of the most Christian areas in the state — where steeples dominate most horizons — the nascent community built Buddhist and Hindu temples and followed an ascetic existence of celibacy and vegetarianism.

Hidden behind thick foliage, they locked out the world. "This was about finding a way to God," remembers one longtime resident who'd traveled from California. Hundreds of others arrived, bedraggled from the road, and there was Ma — grinning and bejeweled. She hugged them. She called them child. Together, they promised to serve humanity. And in the name of spirituality, Ma Jaya bestowed them with Hindi names and forbade recreational sex, according to interviews with eight former residents.

Without warning, she ordered marriages between devotees who barely knew each other. "Ma married Chandra and Madhava on the spur of the moment last Sunday," one follower named Lyn Deadmore scribbled in her journal on June 5, 1981. "They seem really happy about it." Weeks afterward, on June 22, Deadmore wrote in her diary: "She doesn't care how happy she makes us or how miserable she makes us." In an interview, Deadmore said members abetted her whims because they considered Ma Jaya to be divine.

(Anjani Cirillo, spokesperson for Kashi Ashram, denies that Ma Jaya arranged marriages or that Kashi members worshiped her. "I never heard anything like that," she said. "People married when people wanted. No forced marriages ever happened.")

Whether she was deified or not, every person interviewed for this article agreed that Ma Jaya's charisma was almost preternatural. "When you were around her, it felt like being stoned," Deadmore recalled. "The energy that surrounded her made you feel that way." This, however, is where consensus regarding the guru stops.

Indeed, an examination of court records and in-depth interviews reveals just one theme: obsession. Along the serpentine Sebastian River, Ma Jaya spurred powerful emotion at both extremes. Followers either loved her with such abandon that they couldn't discern a fault. Or they came to hate her so much that it consumed them.

Those who condemn Ma Jaya emerged in a vicious 2001 divorce between former Kashi resident Richard Rosenkranz and his wife, Gina, who remains in the ashram. In court filings, several ex-church members remembered scenarios they say constitute mind control. One afternoon in the early 1980s, Richard Rosenkranz dipped his entire head into a vat of red paint. "When asked what had happened, he answered that he'd gotten the message from Ma," onetime resident Helene Rousseau recalled in a sworn statement.

Or they recalled Ma Jaya's sudden fixation on children after she had several miscarriages with her new husband, Soo Se Cho. Rosanne Henry is a former Ashram resident who's now a psychologist in Littleton, Colorado. "My husband and I wanted to have a child in 1981," she remembered in a deposition logged in the Rosenkranz divorce case. "But we had to ask permission."

Before she entered labor on October 21, 1981, Henry says she dyed her blond hair raven to impersonate Ma Jaya. She even signed the guru's name on her daughter's birth certificate. Then, after she was wheeled out of Jackson Memorial Hospital in Miami carrying her newborn, she spotted a van full of Kashi followers. Without hesitation, she handed over her daughter, who was secreted back to the ranch. (Henry testified to all this in court, adding she did this because she believed Ma Jaya to be the "Divine Mother.")

In all, four mothers from 1978 to 1982 signed Ma Jaya or her new husband as biological parents on birth certificates, the *Palm Beach Post* reported in 1992. Ma Jaya told the newspaper she took the children to save them from abortion, though Henry denies that.

Another disputed tale emerged weeks after Henry's child was born, on the night of December 10. Ma Jaya's followers were called into the main house at Kashi Ashram in Sebastian for their nightly prayer session. The guru, in Palmetto Bay at the time, was on speakerphone, recalls Deadmore, who left the church in 1990. Dozens packed into a room cluttered with urns and statues. Over the phone, the guru launched into a perfunctory monologue. But then, according to three witnesses, she dropped a bomb. Like it was nothing. "I've married my [14-year-old] daughter [Molly]," she said, "to Datta Das."

Puzzled looks crisscrossed the room, the witnesses say. Datta Das was a 25-year-old man.

"I remember thinking, 'She can't possibly be old enough to be married,'" says Deadmore. "I thought she was 12. But I knew Ma wouldn't hurt her own child. There was no child abuse in Kashi at that time."

The masked men came for 13-year-old Wang Chun Rosenkranz on a spring day in 1996, says New York jeweler Sal Conti. At a small garden temple beside Ma Jaya's two-story house, near a pond where residents sprinkled the ashes of their dead, the wiry, dark-haired boy waited. Ma Jaya had requested to see him, but, according to Conti's 2001 deposition and a police complaint, she didn't arrive. Instead, the two masked men grabbed the boy. They plastered duct tape over his mouth and restrained him. Then they whipped him over and over again with rock-laden socks.

Ma Jaya and Conti, who was then her confidant and treasurer, were allegedly outside her house at the time. "She was just ecstatic," Conti claimed. Wang Chun, he recalled, "came out completely bloodied."

Weeks later, the men donned their "ninja outfits" and again savaged the child, Conti testified. But this time, it was in clear sight of Ma Jaya's house. The guru watched the violence with Conti and several others. Wang Chun allegedly crumpled into a fetal position and wept. His face was awash in blood. Ma Jaya, Conti said, had a strange look on her face. "Hit him harder," she allegedly said. "Hit him harder."

The beatings were Wang Chun's punishment, Conti stated. The boy had declined to have sex with a young girl at the ranch. And Ma Jaya "didn't want to hear that," Conti explained. "She started calling him a pervert and cursing at him. The kid was whimpering and shaking, and she enjoyed that. You could see it in her face that she was enjoying it."

Wang Chun didn't respond to four messages left by *New Times*. Spokespeople with Kashi Ashram, then and now, deny this story, and no criminal charges were ever filed. "The story's made up," said ranch spokesperson Cirillo.

Wang Chun initially told his father, Richard Rosenkranz, he'd been bloodied at the ranch but later withdrew the claim. While his parents' divorce case raged through 2002 and under the supervision of two Kashi members, the then-19-year-old told *Florida Today*: "I stupidly said I was beaten by people here, which was a lie." Ma Jaya denied any involvement, calling Conti "very sad and very lonely."

But Conti wasn't the only one to bring significant allegations against Ma Jaya and the church, and soon it wasn't clear anymore whether this encampment, which had begun as a quest to find God through service and tolerance, hadn't fallen under the yoke of a megalomaniac and morphed into something much darker. During the 1990s and early 2000s, two dozen former Kashi residents alleged profound abuses ranging from psychological control to extortion to physical violence against both adults and children. Interviews, court filings, and a Rosenkranz-commissioned study of 21 former residents by now-deceased cult psychologist Paul Martin reveal the following claims:

- Ma Jaya either personally struck residents or ordered them beaten, according to nine respondents in Martin's study and eight former members interviewed by *New Times*.
- Police were twice called to extract children living with Ma Jaya.
- Ma Jaya demanded money from followers, 13 former residents alleged. "Ma conspired to defraud me of my inheritance," Richard Rosenkranz said in a March 2002 affidavit.
- Ma Jaya severely burned a man with a votive candle in 1981 to punish him for sexually molesting a child, said three witnesses interviewed by *New Times* and two additional respondents in Martin's study.
- The molested boy was "beaten at length by Ma" and "made to walk naked around the central pond with about 50 people watching," recalled one respondent in Martin's study. "His penis [was] painted black with a magic marker."
- Ma Jaya personally beat at least two children, Sal Conti claimed. "Ma slapped [a boy] across the face," he said in his deposition. "I had never seen someone hit that hard." A respondent in Martin's survey said she saw Ma "slug" a 2-year-old in the arm.

Kashi spokesperson Cirillo denies accusations of abuse and calls these former members "a few disgruntled people. Those allegations were very troubling for us," she said. "And all I can say is it's really difficult when you're in a spiritual teaching. And when it's not a place for you anymore, people have blamed us when they wanted to move on."

"When I hear people saying we're a cult, I say, 'What is this crap?'" Cirillo added. "I don't get it. The allegations are a bunch of baloney."

They wouldn't disappear, however. In the early 1990s, reporters deluged the Kashi ranch like locusts. The *Palm Beach Post* published an article headlined "Guru Ma: Sainly or Sinister?" and *People* magazine described how Rosanne Henry had retrieved her 7-year-old daughter with an Indian River County court order and a five-member SWAT team in 1989.

After the child was returned to Henry's home, the girl believed Ma Jaya was God and prayed to her at the dinner table, according to a state health and rehabilitative services' psychological evaluation. (Retired detective Mary Shelly, who'd ordered the raid to remove the girl, declined to comment about Kashi beyond saying "These are some very vindictive individuals" when *New Times* visited her Vero Beach home.)

After Henry took back her daughter, Ma Jaya descended into apoplexy, Conti said. "She was completely outraged that the kid was taken from her," Conti testified in 2001. "She was trying to scheme all ways to try and steal her back."

In the following months, Henry said Kashi delivered stuffed animals and bicycles to her front stoop in Littleton, Colorado. Agents of Kashi Ashram stalked her child. "At one point," Rosanne Henry said in her 2001 deposition, "I had to decide if I was going to hire a bodyguard for my child."

But Cirillo instead claims that Rosanne Henry had planned on an abortion and that the guru had saved the child's life. "Henry didn't want to take responsibility; she gave up her child. When she wanted her back, all she had to do was make a phone call. But instead, what did she do? It couldn't have been so simple. How do they justify their lying?"

The constant discrepancies between stories illustrate a broader issue that's bedeviled reporters, police, and psychologists who have investigated the Sebastian ranch. Ma Jaya has never been accused or convicted of a crime, except for battery in 1982 for attacking an Albertson's clerk in Stuart. (She was put on probation for one year.) And as Cirillo points out, only disaffected followers have entered any complaints.

Indeed, Ma Jaya was also a person of indefatigable service. At the height of the AIDS scare, she championed gay rights. She pushed graphic pictures of AIDS victims at Pope John Paul II in 1993. Three years later, she delivered an impassioned plea for equality at the Washington Memorial. She cared for the sick and dying at local hospitals, and hundreds looked to her for support. "Ma really walked the walk," said Los Angeles documentarian Janice Engel, whom Ma Jaya taught for decades. "No matter if you were gay, straight, it didn't matter. She would love you no matter who you were."

But her own children wouldn't agree.

On May 31, 2004, Jimmy DiFiore decided to die. Ma Jaya's 43-year-old son stepped into the bathroom at his Staten Island apartment, put on an Elvis record, and unfurled a blanket. He analyzed his handsome and tanned face in the mirror, swallowed a powerful painkiller cocktail, and lay down. Unsheathing a blade, he cut into his left forearm from elbow to wrist and bled to death on the floor.

When the landlord discovered the body, black-and-white photographs of Jimmy and his mother were strewn throughout the house, even in the bathroom next to Jimmy. According to the state coroner's report, five drugs were found in his blood.

Of all the stories swirling around Ma Jaya and her Kashi ranch, perhaps the most tragic are those of her children. Jimmy was 14 when his mother left for Florida. He grew up street-tough, charismatic, and dirt-bike-obsessed, but there was a deep sadness behind his toothy smile. "He had so much going for him, but he was stuck," says his younger sister, Molly. "He couldn't get out of that time. He couldn't stop being 12."

When he was a teenager, his father, Sal, plunged Jimmy into boxing, where he took out his insecurities on lesser foes. Reared in a blue-collar home, he landed on a Coca-Cola delivery route after high school with his father, whose voice thickens when he remembers his son. The two were inseparable, and in August 1993, they even opened a father-son company called Alpine Vending.

But Jimmy kept Sal and his sister, Molly, who left the Kashi Ashram when she was 20, at a distance. Days would pass when he wouldn't leave his father's house, and depression swallowed him. He turned to painkillers, say those close to him. "Jimmy was always troubled," said his ex-wife, Rhonda. "He always had problems."

The most painful involved his relationship with his mother. Occasionally, Jimmy would be in the throes of conversation with family members when he'd fall quiet and look away. He'd glance up, brown eyes shiny, voice guttural. "Why did she leave us?" he'd say. "How could she just abandon us like that?"

"He talked about her all the time," his ex-wife said. "Every day."

His pain escalated as he disappeared into middle age, bounced among failed romances, and discerned disappointments both petty and profound. Sometimes he'd call his mom.

"Jimmy," Ma Jaya told him when they spoke, Molly remembers, "you're my eyes. You're my life and soul."

But the whispers inside his head only grew louder.

"I can't imagine being a family member of Ma," says 20-year-old Ganga Devi Braun, who was born into the church and raised by Ma Jaya, whom she loved fiercely. "It would be such a terrible thing. You want your mom to be there. Ma had so much love and energy, but it wasn't focused on her children... It was hard for her family to understand the love she was giving to other people."

The week before Jimmy slit his wrists, he was checked into a hospital in Staten Island, wracked with drug addiction and melancholy. Every night that week, he called Molly, who says she phoned their mother. "Jimmy needs help," Molly told her.

"You selfish bitch," she recalls Ma Jaya saying. "I have people dying of AIDS and a student dying of cancer on Kashi and have much more important things to worry about."

That weekend, Jimmy left the hospital and called Molly. "He only talked about our mom and how could she ignore us," his sister said.

After the suicide, Ma Jaya was shattered by grief. The morning of June 9, the guru wrote an email to her followers. "So many of you know how close Jimmy was to us, especially His Mommy. He proudly sat by His Mom watching Her take care of so many. All he had to say over and over is, 'I AM PROUD OF YOU MOMMY.' His last words to his Mom were THAT 'I LOVE YOU MORE THAN ANYONE MY MOMMY. I just want to sleep, Mom. I just want to sleep.'"

Jimmy's 13-year-old daughter, Alexa, discovered the note and was sickened with anger. The evening of June 12, she responded with an email. Her father, she wrote to the congregation, never said those last words. "I just want to show people what a terrible 'thing' Joyce is," Alexa typed. "What a bitch. This may be hard to hear or believe, but as long as you have lived on the ranch, you have been LIED to. My grandmother didn't care about my dad when he was alive, and she definitely doesn't now... My dad had a lot of mental problems, and Joyce just added to them. She helped to kill him."

Then the girl signed the note: "I have heard of many people Joyce brainwashed. One day, she will get caught, and I can't wait."

Weeks ago, the night of Ma Jaya's commemoration, the chanting spread like hayseed in wind. A mass of white-clad Kashi followers encircled a fire and a portrait of Ma Jaya beside an open-air Hindu temple. Chimes and drums pulsed. The blaze burned higher and higher. The droning built to crescendo. Individual consciousness evaporated.

From across the nation, more than 100 followers came to this recent anniversary of Ma Jaya's death. A billboard bearing the guru's countenance clung to the side of the ranch's main house. Her black eyes, crinkled with mischief, looked upon her monks below. They lay before her and, one by one, kissed the ground.

Then there came a Brooklyn twang. "And this dance between night and day goes on," Ma Jaya's recorded voice echoed across the pond and grass. "And this night I dedicate to all of humanity. Let the calmness come over you. The sweetness. Let joy of life embrace you. For this is Kashi."

Attendants wept with the memory: On a Friday night in April 2012, Ma Jaya died in her bed at age 71 of pancreatic cancer. She'd wanted to "leave her body" on the ranch and had forbidden any attempt at resuscitation.

After she died, scores of people streamed down the streets of tiny Sebastian. Folksinger Arlo Guthrie, who followed Ma Jaya's teachings for decades, mourned her without reservation. "I've met a lot of people that were very important," he told reporters. "But I can honestly say no one I ever met in my entire life was as funny and as sincere and as courageous and as unapologetic as she was."

Actress Julia Roberts was next. She had discovered Ma Jaya while preparing for her role in the 2010 movie *Eat, Pray, Love*. "There are few people in one's life that create only the warmest and most powerfully positive impact imaginable," she emailed the memorial service. "She was one of those people to me and my family."

Meanwhile, hundreds of miles north, in a bedroom nestled inside a brick house in Bradford, Pennsylvania, Molly's iPhone chirped with a fresh message. "Yes, Molly, it's true," the message said. "At 9:49 p.m. last night."

Molly, then 44, with hair dyed blond, put down the phone and felt relief flecked with sadness. "I pushed the emotion way down inside," Molly says now. "And then my husband came home, and I lost it. I cried. A weight was lifted off of me... It was the happiest day of my life."

Later, she wept in bed beside her husband, a professor at the University of Pittsburgh-Bradford. "I had memories of a man groping me," she recalled. "I said to my husband, 'I think something happened to me as a kid.' It was a picture show."

Molly claims in that moment — only after her mother had died and couldn't defend herself — did she recall what had happened 30 years before. When she was age 14 in 1981, she says, her mother married her to a 25-year-old church member named Kevin Brannon so he could impregnate her.

Earlier this year in state court in Miami, Molly sued Kashi, Brannon, and Carolyn Hutner, who represents Ma Jaya's estate. "Beginning in 1979, she was 'groomed' by Ma Jaya into believing she must engage in sexual intercourse with an adult member to give another child to Ma Jaya," the lawsuit says. "Such 'grooming' included... drugs and alcohol in an effort to normalize [Molly to the idea] that girls her age were supposed to have sex with adults of the Kashi cult, get pregnant, and give their babies to Ma Jaya."

This preparation, the civil suit charges, also involved Brannon repeatedly raping her with Ma Jaya's encouragement. "I remember zoning out [during sex] and going somewhere else," Molly said in an interview. "It was what was expected of me."

On December 10, 1981, Molly says she squeezed into a white wedding dress at a 5,000-square-foot house on Old Cutler Road in Palmetto Bay. That afternoon, she claims her mother married her to Brannon — then called Datta Das — at a small ceremony inside the house. "I remember my mother's hair," Molly said. "Her hair was always long and normally jet-black, but then it was gray. I remember it was in the living room, and there were mirrors behind us, from floor to ceiling. To the right, there was a bar. I remember sitting around the bar afterward and eating cake."

The lawsuit is more specific: "During the 'marriage' ceremony, [Brannon] was instructed by Ma Jaya and did grope, fondle, and sexually stimulate [Molly.]" Two people who say they stayed at the Palmetto Bay house and spoke to *New Times* on the condition of anonymity, said they witnessed Ma Jaya announce Molly's marriage to Brannon later that night. (In a motion to dismiss filed in March, Brannon denies he married or had sex with Molly, calling the allegations "reckless" and "inherently false." Both he and his attorney, Elizabeth Boan, declined further comment.)

A week later, the lawsuit alleges, Ma Jaya ordered a church member to administer a pregnancy test to Molly. It was negative.

Kashi Ashram also denies the story, labeling it another manifestation of familial drama. "Ma and [Molly] were estranged for many years," spokeswoman Cirillo says.

Then, after Ma Jaya died, Molly was excluded from the inheritance, Cirillo says. "This is a bunch of baloney. She's not in the will; then, all of a sudden, she remembers this? Baloney." (Molly's lawyer, John Leighton, says his client discovered she wasn't in her mother's will only after she'd filed litigation. Says Molly: "I don't care about money; I just want people to know the truth.")

Carol Lourie, who was associated with the ranch for years and once criticized it, says she's dubious of Molly and her story. "I find her motives very suspicious. She could have brought the lawsuit when her mother was alive."

Despite the looming legal battle, Ma Jaya's recent commemoration glowed with mirth and smiles. Children ran and played among parents drinking tea. In the shadows of new houses rising in the woods, attendants traded favorite Ma Jaya stories — that time she named a student "God" because he was so handsome. Or how she always gave a lollipop to every child. The next day, as rain pounded the ashram, some of her followers disrobed and swam in the opaque pond where Ma's ashes had been scattered — and were again one with the guru.

