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A memoir and warning about cults

Gerette Buglion, "An Everyday Cult,"
Rootstock Publishing, 2021

When she was the new mother of her 6-month-old daughter, author Gerette Buglion visited "Doug," a therapist who had been recommended to her by two friends. She was looking for spiritual fulfillment, but she also wanted to talk to a professional about her sense that she had been sexually abused as a child. Knowing he did dream therapy, she told him about a dream she had had about abuse. Immediately, he introduced her to new terms: feelings, which open you up, and emotions, which shut you down. He also introduced her to the Jungian concept of animus, which he redefined as the true self and Christ figure, and its opposite, pathology, a scientific term he misused to define a trickster that made a person unable to get to the

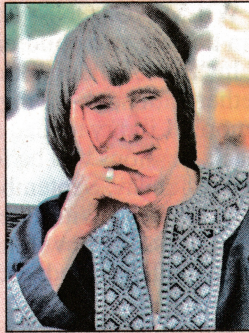
animus. By the end of her first session (at which she had carefully taken notes), he had convinced her that her interpretation of her dream was incorrect. After telling her its "right" interpretation, he said she shouldn't worry about her possible abuse. She should just ignore it. Relieved and instructed in a new way of thinking, she went back to him again and again, joining his group of adherents, which she renames the "Center for Transformational Learning," or CTL. She stayed with the group for 18 years before realizing the power Doug had over her mind, her family, and even her business. Then she saw that she had been a member of an "everyday cult"—unlike Charles Manson's cult in scope, as she and her husband lived in their own home, ran businesses, raised a family—but still, a group held together by an autocrat's "unethical use of power."

The book is a memoir, but also a warning to people who, looking for enlightenment or fulfillment, fall into the clutches of an autocrat. And falling is the right word. As she puts it, "Just as no one intentionally falls in love with an abuser, I didn't just join a cult—I fell for it." She divides the

book into five sections, of which "Falling" is the first. It's followed by eight years of "Drifting," a period in which she continued being a teacher and a mom, but slowly lost her sense of self. For five years after that, she was "Asleep," believing that the only thing she could put faith in was what

Doug and the others called "the work." The fourth part, "Snapping," describes her sudden jerking awake and leaving the cult. And finally, she briefly describes "Waking Up Again and Again," and becoming a cult awareness consultant who sees all too clearly the power that cults can exert over people if they permit it.

It is difficult to describe the kind of charisma that enables men like Doug to take over people's lives and wallets, and Buglion doesn't try. Certain traits come out clearly: for example, Buglion struggled through Doug's front door in



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the unshoveled snow for many sessions before she learned from somebody else that the back door was fully cleared. The metaphor "Don't tell people helpful things unless they ask" couldn't be clearer. Subsequently, time and again Doug told Buglion that she talked too much, clearly a sign that her pathology was ruling her. The most shocking example of this irritation at feminine opinion was Doug's determination to help Buglion "fight her pathology" by stationing a 6-foot-4-inch man behind her, who, when she said certain things, put his hands around her neck, strangling her words (though not quite her). Onlookers in the group watched without interfering or commenting, and they went on believing. So did she: She missed the funeral of her beloved brother because it coincided with a CTL retreat.

Buglion's warning about the ease of slipping into a cult that seems to offer enlightenment, support, and love is well taken, which she points out by referring to QAnon. It is all too easy to allow a charismatic personality to exert power over people who want truth without questions or serious, independent thought.