

the girl. She told me as much and I was scared for a long time wondering if it was going to work out, which it is, but that first year was really rough."

One ambition Bridges shares with what often seems the entire acting establishment is a desire to direct. He is already involved in one project, the nature of which he declines to divulge.

But he is not nearly so reticent about his involvement in EST and its Hunger Project. In the spring of 1979 Bridges conceived, organized and lent his considerable prestige to a *Gathering for Hunger*. The event, billed as a benefit for world hunger, was held at the Los Angeles Convention

Center and featured, aside from Bridges and his brother Beau, fellow actors Harvey Korman and Bud Cort, singer Melissa Manchester and others. It was something less than a complete success. Aside from scant attendance the affair had the added misfortune of ill-timing. Just prior to the well-intentioned evening, *Mother Jones* magazine ran a piece describing in some detail the dubious ties between the Hunger Project and the EST organization. True, the Hunger Project, which aspired to end world hunger by the turn of the century, was the brainchild of EST founder Werner Erhard, who had recruited, aside from Bridges, a number of celebrity

types with EST affiliations, foremost among them John Denver. The problem, alleged *Mother Jones*, was an intricate web of cross-financing between EST and the ostensibly separate Hunger Project organization. A tax dodge was indelicately hinted at, as well as all manner of ulterior motives on Erhard's and EST's part. Whatever the facts turned out to be, not much has been heard of the Hunger Project since then, and world hunger seems no closer to ending tomorrow or twenty years from now.

Bridges, who acknowledges his own misgivings at reading the *Mother Jones* account, nevertheless asserts the pure motives of himself and the others involved in the *Gathering for Hunger*, and in the process reveals something of his own involvement in the EST lifestyle.

"The original idea of the Hunger Project, as Werner described it, was that hunger represented the main f--k-up. People try to rationalize it because they think they're helpless to change it. We had a lot of facts at our disposal and we wanted to put them out there and give the individual a chance to do something about the situation. We wanted to put the idea of ending world hunger by the year 2,000 in their heads, we just wanted to keep the idea going."

While Bridges denies any direct involvement between his *Gathering for Hunger* and the EST organization, certain contradictions arise in his account of events leading up to the clouded event.

"Werner wanted each of us to do our own hunger project," he explains, "so I chose not to make mine an EST event because EST has such bad P.R." The separation was never effected, not even, it seems, in Bridges own mind. "When the *Mother Jones* thing came out it was really a shock to

me because I had questioned that stuff when I was in EST. You know, you think, 'Is Werner a Nazi, is he trying to get my brain?' The *Mother Jones* article made me really confront my involvement with EST and I decided that I didn't give a shit about Werner and what he thought, but I agreed with what he said about stopping world hunger. Which is why I did the *Gathering for Hunger*. In fact, I'm thinking of doing another one."

Bridges' commitment to EST seems as off-handed as his career considerations. Admitting to being drawn to "all kinds of psychedelic bullshit, anything that has to do with exploring the mind," he describes the EST experience as "a roller coaster ride on a roller coaster you built yourself and that you can make as intense as you want. I used to go to EST meetings a lot and still occasionally drop by to get a hit of Werner's trip." But another area of spiritual exploration has drawn his attention of late. "I got involved with some born-again Christians on the set of *Heaven's Gate* and it's amazing how EST and Christianity dovetail. I got into this thing of praying in my acting. I'd pray to God in the morning and turn my body over to Him and ask for signals during the day to know what He wanted me to do. Usually He'd tell me 'don't do anything,' which I can really understand as a way of dealing with anxiety and paranoia.

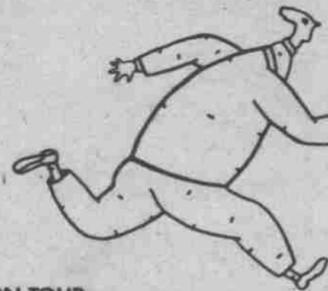
"On a basic level I know what to do, but I just don't do it. I know, for instance, that I shouldn't smoke so much pot, or that I shouldn't overeat, but I smoke a lot and overeat a lot. Work takes care of a lot of things for me. I shed pounds and don't smoke all day. I think I've really got what I've been looking for all my life, which is me. Now, all I've got to do is express that and have faith in it."



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