

West Virginia mountains

# Snake handlers last refuge

United Press International  
**LONG BOTTOM, W.Va.** — Religious snake handling is as much a part of rural southern West Virginia as coal, poverty and the crooked roads which wind through the mountain valleys.

refuge for the fundamentalist Christians practicing the dangerous religious act.

In a little more than a year, two men have died of snake bites received during Sunday church services. The deaths were the first recorded since 1976, the same year the U.S. Supreme Court upheld Tennessee's ban on snake handling.

The latest victim was Mack Wolford, 43, of Phelps, Ky., whose Cadillac had a green cobra decal on the passenger door.

Wolford died Aug. 28, eight hours after being bitten on the left forearm by a yellow rattler during a service at the Lord Jesus Temple in Long Bottom, a tiny town of only a few dozen people.

Wolford, who previously had been bitten three times, refused medical treatment, said Brady Dawson, minister of the church and the dead man's brother-in-law.

As he lay dying on a mattress before the altar, members of the congregation and others from a nearby church prayed over him and sang, accompanied by electric guitars and drums.

Dawson, a soft-spoken man with green eyes and thin black hair, built the brick church two

years ago after leaving Grundy, Va., because of that state's ban on snake handling. He said he has survived seven snake bites.

"People label us as a cult, but we're not. We're scriptural," Dawson said as he sat in the church shortly after returning from Wolford's burial in Phelps. Followers base religious snake handling and strychnine drinking, which sometimes accompanies it, on Mark 16:18 in the Bible. It reads, in part, "They (believers) shall take up serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them."

"It is essential to believe the fullness of the Bible," said Dawson, who said the ritual dates back to the fourth century and is designed to show obedience to God. "People say we murder ourselves, but we martyr ourselves."

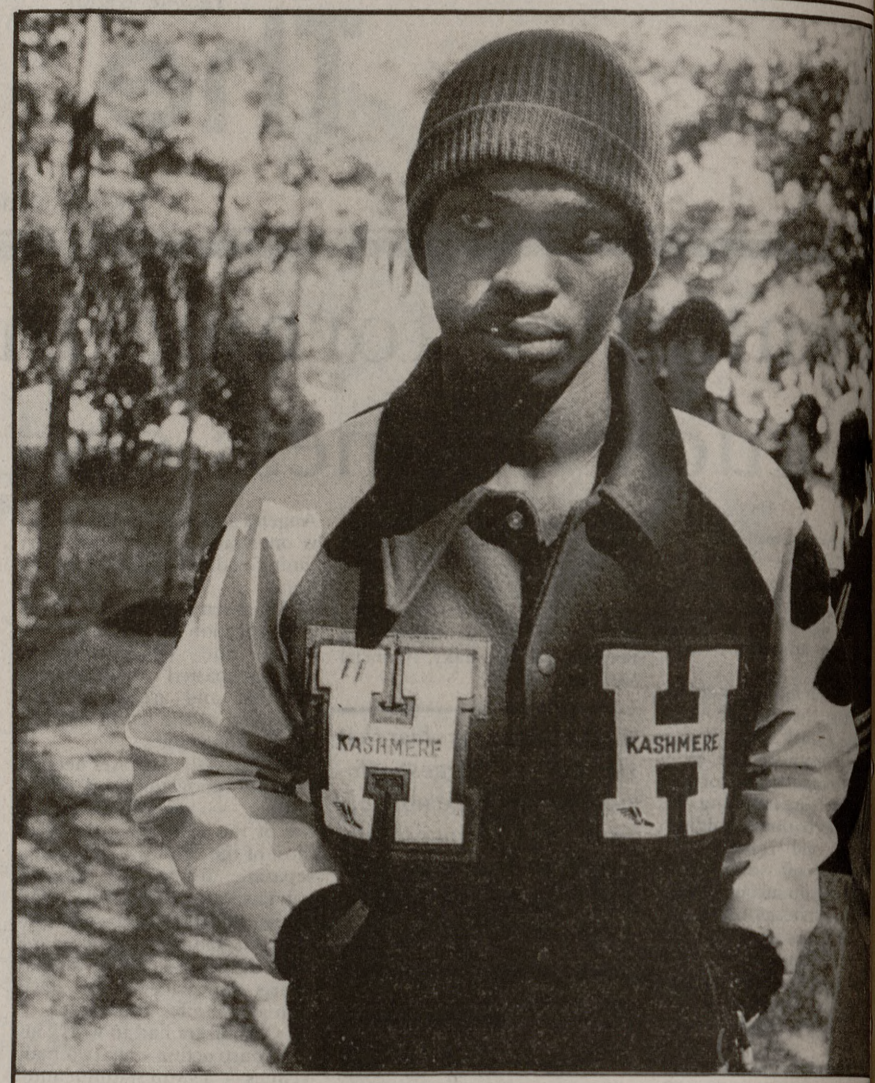


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 8:30P.M. at the Grove  
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COLD weather clothes

The cold snap which hit the area Tuesday did not catch Kendric Wesley, freshman computer science major from Houston, unprepared. The cold streak came before fall, which officially began today.

BRAZOS VALLEY GOLF DRIVING RANGE

Mon.-Fri. 2-9 p.m.  
 Sat. 12-9 p.m.  
 Sun. 1 p.m.-8 p.m.  
 696-1220  
 East Bypass and Hwy. 30,  
 Service Road Going South - 1/4 miles.

### Traceable property less likely stolen

United Press International  
**NEW YORK** — The college student needs burglar protection as much as the homeowner when personal belongings include a TV set, typewriter, stereo and maybe a personal computer.

The Insurance Information Institute suggests students protect their valuables by having them engraved — preferably with a personal ID number that the local police department can provide.

If property is stolen, police can enter the information in the National Crime Information Computer, which traces covered property to its owner.

If local police do not participate in the NCIC, engrave property with your Social Security number or similar personal number.

Burglars are interested in selling what they steal and less likely to take items that are marked, the institute says.

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### ATTENTION INDEPENDENT MEN:

Delta Upsilon Fraternity is establishing a new Chapter at Texas A&M. If you are interested in becoming a founding member of this non-secret, non-hazing fraternity — contact DU Leadership Consultant Dave Legman at 693-9891, ext. 110

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9/24/82

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