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INSIDE SCIENTOLOGY BY JOE CHILDS and THOMAS C. TOBIN, Times Staff Writers

The Truth Rundown

High-ranking defectors tell of violence in Scientology's top ranks. This three-part series also reveals new information about the Lisa McPherson death case and details the degrading rituals that keep church staffers in line.

PART 1:

- Scientology: The Truth Rundown
High-ranking defectors provide an unprecedented inside look at Scientology, its leader and the Lisa McPherson case. (June 21, 2009)
- Scientology's response: "Total lies"
- David Miscavige's letter to the Times
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- Scientology: Death in slow motion
New details about the case of Lisa McPherson, who died in the care of Scientologists, from the executive who directed the Church of Scientology's handling of the case. He admits he ordered the destruction of incriminating evidence. (June 22, 2009)
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INSIDE SCIENTOLOGY A Times investigation beginning June 21, 2009

June 21, 2009
The Truth Rundown



High-ranking defectors tell of violence in Scientology's top ranks. This three-part series also reveals new information about the Lisa McPherson death case and details the degrading rituals that keep church staffers in line.

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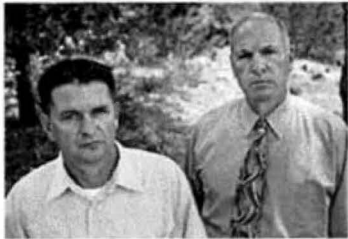
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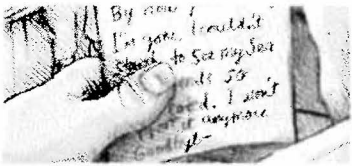
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BY JOE CHILDS and THOMAS C. TOBIN, Times Staff Writers

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- Map:** A closer look at Scientology's spiritual headquarters in Clearwater
- Map:** Scientology's International Headquarters in San Jacinto, Calif.

Mark C. "Marty" Rathbun left the Church of Scientology staff in late 2004, ending a 27-year career that saw him rise to be a top lieutenant under church leader David Miscavige. He spent the next four years living a low-profile existence in Texas. Some speculated he had died.

In February 2009, Rathbun surfaced on the Internet, announcing on a new web page that he was available to counsel other disaffected Scientologists.

"Having dug myself out of the dark pit where many who leave the church land," he wrote, "I began lending a hand to others similarly situated." Contacted that month by the Tampa Bay Times, Rathbun agreed to tell the story of his years in Scientology and what led to his leaving.

Thus began the long-running Tampa Bay Times series, "Inside Scientology," which sheds unprecedented light on the internal workings of a secretive church that counts Clearwater as its spiritual home. The organization also generates interest and controversy around the world.

The Times' conversations with Rathbun led to interviews with scores of other people in the Scientology world, including former staffers, former parishioners and current church members. Times journalists often traveled the country to meet their subjects face-to-face.

They also requested interviews with church officials, who initially spoke with the reporters but later responded to Times inquiries with only written answers. The newspaper has given prominence to the church's responses.

Scientologists and former Scientologists revealed aspects of the church previously unknown to the public, including how church upper level managers engaged in violent behavior, how the church controls its members and how it pressures and pesters them to donate far beyond their financial means.

The result of the Times' reporting is this multi-part special report, the latest in a long history of Scientology coverage by the newspaper. The Times won a Pulitzer Prize for a 1979 report on Scientology. And in the years since, with the church's Clearwater headquarters in the Times' prime coverage area, the in-depth reporting has continued.

Two veteran Times journalists have reported this series.

Joe Childs, Senior Editor/At Large, ran the Times Clearwater operation dating to 1993 and supervised the newspaper's Scientology coverage. He can be reached at childs@tampabay.com.

Thomas C. Tobin has covered the Church of Scientology on and off since 1996. He can be reached at tobin@tampabay.com.



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Tampa Bay Times

Scientology: The Truth Rundown, Part 1 of 3 in a special report on the Church of Scientology

By Joe Childs and Thomas C. Tobin, Times Staff Writers

Sunday, June 21, 2009 1:06am

Part ONE of THREE

The leader of the Church of Scientology strode into the room with a boom box and an announcement: Time for a game of musical chairs.

David Miscavige had kept more than 30 members of his church's executive staff cooped up for weeks in a small office building outside Los Angeles, not letting them leave except to grab a shower. They slept on the floor, their food carted in.

Their assignment was to develop strategic plans for the church. But the leader trashed their every idea and berated them as incompetents and enemies, of him and the church.

Prove your devotion, Miscavige told them, by winning at musical chairs. Everyone else — losers, all of you — will be banished to Scientology outposts around the world. If families are split up, too bad.

To the music of Queen's Bohemian Rhapsody they played through the night, parading around a conference room in their Navy-style uniforms, grown men and women wrestling over chairs.

The next evening, early in 2004, Miscavige gathered the group and out of nowhere slapped a manager named Tom De Vocht, threw him to the ground and delivered more blows. De Vocht took the beating and the humiliation in silence — the way other executives always took the leader's attacks.

This account comes from executives who for decades were key figures in Scientology's powerful inner circle. Marty Rathbun and Mike Rinder, the highest-ranking executives to leave the church, are speaking out for the first time.



Two other former executives who defected also agreed to interviews with the St. Petersburg Times: De Vocht, who for years oversaw the church's spiritual headquarters in Clearwater, and Amy Scobee, who helped create Scientology's celebrity network, which caters to the likes of John Travolta and Tom Cruise.

One by one, the four defectors walked away from the only life they knew. That Rathbun and Rinder are speaking out is a stunning reversal because they were among Miscavige's closest associates, Haldeman and Ehrlichman to his Nixon.

Now they provide an unprecedented look inside the upper reaches of the tightly controlled organization. They reveal:

- Physical violence permeated Scientology's international management team. Miscavige set the tone, routinely attacking his lieutenants. Rinder says the leader attacked him some 50 times.

Rathbun, Rinder and De Vocht admit that they, too, attacked their colleagues, to demonstrate loyalty to Miscavige and prove their mettle.

- Staffers are disciplined and controlled by a multilayered system of "ecclesiastical justice." It includes publicly confessing sins and crimes to a group of peers, being ordered to jump into a pool fully clothed, facing embarrassing "security checks" or, worse, being isolated as a "suppressive person."

At the pinnacle of the hierarchy, Miscavige commands such power that managers follow his orders, however bizarre, with lemming-like obedience.

- Church staffers covered up how they botched the care of Lisa McPherson, a Scientologist who died after they held her 17 days in isolation at Clearwater's Fort Harrison Hotel.

Rathbun, who Miscavige put in charge of dealing with the fallout from the case, admits that he ordered the destruction of incriminating evidence. He and others also reveal that Miscavige made an embarrassing miscalculation on McPherson's Scientology counseling.

- With Miscavige calling the shots and Rathbun among those at his side, the church muscled the IRS into granting Scientology tax-exempt status. Offering fresh perspective on one of the church's crowning moments, Rathbun details an extraordinary campaign of public pressure backed by thousands of lawsuits.

- To prop up revenues, Miscavige has turned to long-time parishioners, urging them to buy material that the church markets as must-have, improved sacred scripture.

Church officials deny the accusations. Miscavige never hit a single church staffer, not once, they said.

On May 13, the Times asked to interview Miscavige, in person or by phone, and renewed the request repeatedly the past five weeks. Church officials said Miscavige's schedule would not permit an interview before July.

At 5:50 p.m. Saturday, Miscavige e-mailed the Times to protest the newspaper's decision to publish instead of waiting until he was available. His letter said he would produce information "annihilating the credibility" of the defectors. Beloved by millions of Scientologists, church spokesmen say, Miscavige has guided the church through a quarter-century of growth.

The defectors are liars, they say, bitter apostates who have dug up tired allegations from the Internet and inflated the importance of the positions they held in Scientology's dedicated work force known as the Sea Org. They say it was the defectors who physically abused staff members, and when Miscavige found out, he put a stop to it and demoted them.

Now they say the defectors are trying to stage a coup, inventing allegations so they can topple Miscavige and seize control of the church.

The defectors deny it. They say they are speaking out because Miscavige must be exposed.

Rathbun says the leader's mistreatment of staff has driven away managers and paralyzed those who stay. "It's becoming chaos because ... there's no form of organization. Nobody's respected because he's constantly denigrating and beating on people."

"I don't want people to continue to be hurt and tricked and lied to," Rinder said. "I was unsuccessful in changing anything through my own lack of courage when I was inside the church.

"But I believe these abuses need to end ... This rot being instigated from inside Scientology actually is more destructive to the Scientology movement than anything external to it."

BEATINGS: Random, whimsical

At 49, Miscavige is fit and tanned, his chiseled good looks accented by intense blue eyes. His frame is on the short side at 5 feet 5, but solid, with a matching, vise-like handshake.

The voice, resonant and strong, can transfix a crowd of thousands. Many call him "COB," because he is chairman of the board of the entity responsible for safeguarding Scientology, founded by L. Ron Hubbard in 1954.

"He is one of the most capable, intelligent individuals I've ever met," Rathbun said. "But L. Ron Hubbard says the intelligence scale doesn't necessarily line up with the sanity scale. Adolf Hitler was brilliant. Stalin was brilliant. They were geniuses. But they were also on a certain level stark, staring mad."

Rathbun, Rinder, Scobee and De Vocht say they participated in and witnessed madness, from musical chairs to repeated physical abuse.

What triggered Miscavige's outbursts? The victims usually had no clue.

"If it wasn't the answer he wanted to hear, he'd lose it," De Vocht said. "If it was contrary to how he thought, he'd lose it. If he found it to be smart aleck, or it was a better answer than he had, he would lose it."

Rathbun and Rinder list the executives they saw Miscavige attack:

Marc Yager: At least 20 times.

Guillaume Lesevre: At least 10 times.

Ray Mithoff: Rathbun said Miscavige "would regularly hit this guy open-handed upside the head real hard and jar him. Or grab him by the neck and throw him on the floor."

Norman Starkey: "Right in the parking lot, (Miscavige) just beat the living f--- out of him, got him on the ground and then started kicking him when he was down," Rathbun said.

He said he saw Rinder "get beat up at least a dozen times just in those last four years ... some of them were pretty gruesome."

Said Rinder: "Yager was like a punching bag. So was I."

He added: "The issue wasn't the physical pain of it. The issue was the humiliation and the domination. ... It's the fact that the domination you're getting — hit in the face, kicked — and you can't do anything about it. If you did try, you'd be attacking the COB.

"It was random and whimsical. It could be the look on your face. Or not answering a question quickly. But it always was a punishment."

Scobee said Miscavige never laid a hand on her or any other woman, but she witnessed many attacks, including the time the leader choked Rinder until his face turned purple. Rinder confirmed that account.

De Vocht estimated that from 2003 to 2005, he saw Miscavige strike staffers as many as 100 times.

Rathbun, Rinder and De Vocht admit that they, in turn, hit others. In January 2004, Rathbun pummeled Rinder and had to be pried off by several church staffers.

"Yes, that incident happened," Rinder said. "It wasn't the only time that Marty or I was involved in some form of physical violence with people."

He recalled holding a church staffer against a wall by the collar and pressing into his throat.

Rathbun said he attacked many people, many times, including throwing Lesevre across a table, boxing Starkey's ears, and tackling Yager down a flight of stairs — all, he said, on Miscavige's orders. He said he threw another staffer against the hood of a cab at Los Angeles International Airport. As a crowd gathered to watch, he cocked his fist and told him to improve his attitude.

De Vocht said he "punched a couple of guys" during one of many sessions where managers confessed their wrongdoings to their peers, a gathering that got raucous and physical. Embarrassed about it now, he says he easily rationalized it then: "If I don't attack I'm going to be attacked. It's a survival instinct in a weird situation that no one should be in."

The four defectors each said the leader established a culture that encouraged physical violence.

"It had become the accepted way of doing things," Rinder said. "If COB did it, it was okay for everybody else to do it, too."

Rinder said Rathbun was Miscavige's enforcer. "If Dave didn't want to go do any dirty work himself, he sent Marty to do it for him."

Rathbun doesn't deny it. It's difficult to get the truth, he said, "unless you talk to somebody who's got some dirt on their hands. And I freely admit I got dirt on my hands, and I feel terrible about it. That's why I'm doing what I'm doing."

Rathbun wasn't exempt from Miscavige's attacks. "He once grabbed me by the neck and banged my head against the wall."

Nobody fought back.

"The thing is, he's got this huge entourage," Scobee said. "He's the 'savior' of everything because he has to bail everybody out because we're all incompetent a-----, which is what he repeatedly tells us."

"You don't have any money. You don't have job experience. You don't have anything. And he could put you on the streets and ruin you."

Church spokesman Tommy Davis said the defectors are lying. Responding to Rinder's contention that Miscavige attacked him some 50 times, Davis said: "He's absolutely lying."

Yager, Starkey, Mithoff, and Lesevre all emphatically told the Times that Miscavige never attacked them.

Davis produced court affidavits in which Rathbun and Rinder, while still in Scientology's top ranks, praised the leader as a stellar person and vigorously denied rumors he had abused staff.

Davis pointed to a 1998 Times story in which Miscavige denied the same rumors. Rathbun backed him, saying that in 20 years working with Miscavige, he never saw the leader raise a hand to anyone.

"That's not his temperament," Rathbun said then. "He's got enough personal horsepower that he doesn't need to resort to things like that."

Says Rathbun now: "That was the biggest lie I ever told you."

Davis played video of a confrontation between Rinder and a BBC reporter in London in 2007, just before Rinder left the church. The reporter repeatedly asked about the Miscavige rumors, which Rinder heatedly denied as "rubbish."

Now Rinder says that he lied to protect the church, and that his loyalty to Miscavige was misplaced. He said he did then what Miscavige's staff is doing today: "Just deny it. Nope. Not true. Never happened."

The Church of Scientology describes itself as working for "a civilization without insanity, without criminals and without war, where the able can prosper and honest beings can have rights, and where man is free to rise to greater heights."

Scobee says Miscavige does not practice what Scientology preaches. He liberally labels church members as enemies, which forbids any contact with family and friends still in Scientology.

"You cannot call yourself a religious leader as you beat people, as you confine people, as you rip apart families," she said. "If I was trying to destroy Scientology, I would leave David Miscavige right where he is because he's doing a fantastic job of it."

Character assassination

That's what the defectors are doing to Miscavige, according to a team of two church lawyers and two spokesmen.

Rathbun, Rinder, De Vocht and Scobee: All of them failed at their jobs, broke Sea Org rules and were ethically suspect, the team said. Stack these four failures against a man of Miscavige's stature and it's clear who is credible and who is not.

"It's not a question of they have a version and we have a version. It's that this never happened," said Monique Yingling, a non-Scientologist lawyer who has represented the church for more than 20 years. "There is a story here, and it's not what you've been told."

As the lawyers and spokesmen defended Miscavige and sought to discredit his detractors, they produced materials from the four defectors' "ethics files" — confessions, contritions, laments that the church keeps to document their failures.

The documents illuminate a world of church justice outsiders rarely see. This ethics system keeps Scientologists striving to stay productive. It relies on the notion that at any given time, every human activity can be reduced to a statistic and everything — a group, a person, someone's job or marriage — can be measured and placed in one of 12 "conditions."

The lower conditions include "Confusion," "Treason" and "Enemy." The highest condition is "Power," followed by "Power Change" and "Affluence."

Moving up the ethics ladder requires that the subject pen confessions or soul-searching memos called "formulas," which are said to better the individual as he or she examines what went wrong. These memos also can give the church a ready source of written material to use against members who would turn against Scientology.

More documents are generated when a person wants to leave, or "blow."

In 1959, Hubbard wrote a policy stating that a person leaves as a kind of noble gesture when he can't help himself from injuring the church. To justify leaving, Hubbard believed, the person thinks up bad things to say about the church.

Anyone who leaves has committed "overts" (harmful acts) against the church and is withholding them. The church is obligated to make such people come clean, Hubbard said, because withholding overts against Scientology can lead to suicide or death by disease. They must write down their transgressions to remain in good standing when they leave.

Yingling and Davis said the church doesn't relish using documents from ethics files. But after the four defectors spoke out against Miscavige, the lawyer and spokesman said they had no choice.

They produced documents showing Scobee violated Sea Org rules on "romantic involvement outside of marriage." Scobee said the church is exaggerating.

She acknowledged violating the rules by committing a sexual act in a supervisor's room, but noted the man involved was her future husband. Another document said she "started a relationship" with a man not her husband in 1988. Scobee said it was a non-Scientologist electrician who asked her to run away with him. She said she declined and reported it to a supervisor but was disciplined anyway.

A document from July 2003 cited poor performance and declared her unfit to work at the California base.

Scobee counters that the church kept her in positions of responsibility for more than 20 years. She was pictured in a 1996 church magazine as one of the "most proven" and "highly dedicated" senior executives in Scientology.

"The point is, it doesn't matter if I was God or if I was a sloppy janitor," Scobee said. "What I saw is what I saw."

De Vocht was in a condition of "Treason" when he authored a memo in 2004 saying he made a land deal in Clearwater that lost the church \$1 million. In a 2002 letter to Miscavige, he confessed to squandering \$10 million in church funds through waste and overspending on two projects.

Asked about those documents, De Vocht said the writings in the ethics formulas reflect the distorted culture created by Miscavige, not reality. "You say whatever you have to, to appear to be cooperative. It's not a voluntary action. It's a cover your a--, get with the program thing or you're going to get beat up."

Praising Miscavige was part of the formula, De Vocht said. "He's our pope, our leader, and he can't do wrong. ... If you say, 'I'll do everything I can to get it right,' then you can be okay. You don't have an option other than to bow down and say, You're right and I'm wrong."

The church says that Rinder, Scientology's top spokesman for decades, is an inveterate liar. In its ethics files, the church says, Rinder admits that he lied 43 times over the years.

"It was a real problem, Mike's propensity to lie Obviously he had an issue with the truth," said Davis, Rinder's successor as spokesman.

After denying Miscavige hit him or anyone else, Rinder is lying now, Yingling said. "He left because he was demoted ... He is bitter now and he has in his bitterness latched on to the one allegation he so vehemently denied for so many years."

Added Davis: "One of the things he was known for saying was, 'Well, if I'm so bad, why keep asking me to do things?' You know the answer to that question?... The ultimate answer to that question is 'Mike, you know what, you're right. Why keep asking.' And we stopped asking. And then he left and nobody came for him."

Like the other defectors, Rinder says he's sure he wrote whatever is in the ethics files, but he says the 181

admissions are meaningless, they were just whatever his superiors wanted to hear. "All of these things were written to try and get into good graces or curry favor."

Davis said Rinder has not been able to deal with his fall from spokesman for an international church to his current, workaday job.

"Mike left. I think we can all agree he is bitter," Davis said. "This is a guy who ran with the big dogs in the tall grass ... it's a very exciting life. And now he is selling cars, and it must be a hell of a shock."

The church released numerous pages of files it kept on Rathbun. Among them: a 1994 letter that said he had completed a Truth Rundown — one of many types of confessionals — and apologizing for leaving the church briefly the year before; three confessions for striking and verbally abusing staff dozens of times; and documents where he admits that he mishandled situations.

In a 2003 document, Rathbun writes a "public announcement" detailing two decades of flubs, including: making himself out to be more important than he was, making more work for Miscavige, mismanaging staff and messing up major assignments, including the church's long-running battle with the IRS.

Rathbun says he wrote what Miscavige wanted to hear.

The church made special note of an affidavit dated June 6, 2009 — after the Times asked the church about Rathbun — authored by a Sea Org member whose name the church blacked out. She criticized Rathbun for being violent and abusive and playing a role in her family's recent effort to wrest her out of Scientology.

Rathbun says yes, he tried to help the family, because the woman voiced strong doubts about returning to Scientology.

Like De Vocht's, many of Rathbun's confessions are marked by bountiful praise of Miscavige. He writes, for example, that the leader "single-handedly salvaged Scientology."

Scientology's international management cadre lives and works on the church's 500-acre compound in the arid hills opposite Mount San Jacinto from Palm Springs.

Rathbun orchestrated a "reign of terror" there in 2002 and 2003, church representatives say, masquerading as an ethics officer while Miscavige was in Clearwater handling legal and other matters. They say the leader returned in late 2003, summarily demoted Rathbun and began to clean up his mess.

Rathbun says he was away from the base for almost all of 2002 and 2003, handling lawsuits and other sensitive matters at Miscavige's behest. When he returned to the base in late 2003, he said, it was Miscavige who had established a "reign of terror."

The church said Rathbun has inflated his importance in Scientology; they say that after 1993, he never had a title.

But in a 1998 Scientology magazine, Rathbun is featured as the main speaker at a major event at Ruth Eckerd Hall attended by 3,000 Scientologists. The magazine said he was "inspector general" of the entity charged with safeguarding Scientology. Also, the church provided the Times a court document from March 2000 that listed Rathbun as a "director" of the same entity.

If Rathbun's responsibility was as limited as the church says, the Times asked, how did he get people to submit to a reign of terror? Davis, the church spokesman, erupted.

"He's the one who's saying that Dave Miscavige beat these people," Davis screamed. "And he's saying that Dave Miscavige beat the exact same people that he beat. And that's what pisses me off. Because this guy's a f----- lunatic and I don't have to explain how or why he became one or how it was allowable.

"The fact is he's saying David Miscavige did what he did ... And now I'm getting a little angry. Am I angry at you? Not necessarily. But I'm g-- d--- pissed at Marty Rathbun. Because he knows that he was the reign of terror."

Landing in Clearwater

Fall 1975. An outfit calling itself the United Churches of Florida announced it would rent the Fort Harrison Hotel from the Southern Land Development Corp., a company with plans to buy the historic building.

No one — not even lawyers for the seller — could find out anything about Southern Land. Not even a phone number.

When the sale closed on Dec. 1, Southern paid \$2.3 million in cash for the landmark property, where for 50 years locals held weddings, New Year's bashes and civic events.

The newcomers promptly closed the hotel to the public. Uniformed guards armed with mace and billy clubs patrolled the entrance.

On Jan. 28, 1976, a public relations team from Los Angeles came to Clearwater and announced that the real buyer was the Church of Scientology of California.

The deception put a scare into the sleepy town with gorgeous beaches. Clearwater Mayor Gabe Cazares was incensed by the group's evasive and then heavy-handed tactics.

"The Fort Harrison has been here for a half century and now, for the first time, it is actually a fort," he lamented. "It's frightening."

Locals grew anxious as they heard that Scientology was a cult with a belligerent streak. It had sued the State Department, the Justice Department, the IRS, the CIA, the LAPD — any agency that pried or denied its requests.

Why did Hubbard choose Clearwater? He had run the church for years from a ship, the Apollo, and wanted a "land base." He sent scouts on a mission: Find a big building, near a good airport, in a warm climate.

A property in Daytona Beach made the short list. So did the Fort Harrison.

It was to be Scientology's "flagship." Hubbard sent dispatches on how "Flag" should be run, everything from marketing plans to the staff's grooming and dress. It would be "huge, posh and self-supporting," Hubbard wrote, "a hotel of quality that puts the Waldorf Astoria to shame."

Hubbard trademarked a motto for the hotel: "The friendliest place in the whole world."

He would die a decade later, but already the next generation of church leaders was forming.

The Young Turks

Hubbard called it "fair game." Those who seek to damage the church, he said, "may be deprived of property or injured by any means by any Scientologist without any discipline of the Scientologist. May be tricked, sued or lied to or destroyed."

Mayor Cazares raised questions about the new group inhabiting the Fort Harrison, calling it a cult and trading lawsuits with the church. The Times and the Clearwater Sun investigated.

Scientologists followed Hubbard's playbook and went after enemies. They tried to frame Cazares in a fake hit-and-run accident. They intercepted Times' mail and falsely accused the paper's chairman, Nelson Poynter, of being a CIA agent.

By the spring of 1976, Hubbard — the "Commodore" — was realizing his vision for the Fort Harrison. Scientologists from around the world checked in for long stays. They spent thousands on counseling called "auditing," which seeks to rid the subconscious mind of negative experiences, leading to "higher states of spiritual awareness."

Mike Rinder, a 20-year-old Australian, ran the hotel telex, sending and receiving dispatches from Scientology outlets around the world.

David Miscavige, a 16-year-old from suburban Philadelphia, dropped out of 10th grade on his birthday that April and came to work at the Fort Harrison. He tended the grounds, served food and took pictures for promotional brochures.

In no time, the cocksure Miscavige was supervising adults. In 1977, after just 10 months in Clearwater, he was transferred to California, where he joined the Commodore's Messenger Organization, an esteemed group of about 20 who took on "missions" assigned by Hubbard.

Late in 1978, Miscavige was put in charge of the crew remodeling Hubbard's home on a Southern California ranch. Among the group was a 21-year-old former college basketball player who had joined the church a year earlier in Portland.

Thirty years later, Marty Rathbun says he can picture the first time he laid eyes on the teenage boss, strutting about, "barking out orders." No mistaking David Miscavige.

The early power plays

In the mid 1970s, the IRS hired a clerk-typist named Gerald Bennett Wolfe. What they didn't know was that he was a Scientology plant — code name "Silver."

He broke into an attorney's office at IRS headquarters in Washington and copied government documents for months, with help from the Guardian's Office, the church's secretive intelligence arm.

The IRS had revoked Scientology's tax exemption some 10 years earlier, saying it was a commercial enterprise. Scientology fought back, withholding tax payments, unleashing its lawyers and using Silver to infiltrate the agency.

But his undercover mission backfired. On July 8, 1977, the FBI raided Scientology headquarters in Washington and L.A., seizing burglary tools, surveillance equipment and 48,000 documents.

In October 1979, Hubbard's wife, Mary Sue, who directed the Guardian's Office, and 10 other Scientologists were convicted on charges of conspiring to steal government documents or obstruct justice. Her husband, named an unindicted co-conspirator, went into seclusion at his ranch near La Quinta, Calif.

By then, two of the young men from the remodeling detail were trusted aides to the self-exiled church founder. Rathbun delivered Hubbard's mail and messages; Miscavige was his "action chief."

In January 1981, Miscavige asked Rathbun to join him on a road trip to the Super Bowl. Driving eight-hour shifts from L.A. to New Orleans, they got to know each other along the way.

Later that year, Hubbard gave Miscavige a critical assignment: Resolve the crush of lawsuits and investigations that threatened the church. Miscavige chose Rathbun and three others to help handle the job.

Rathbun says he spent six months prioritizing cases and developing strategy.

"I put together units to handle cases, one in Clearwater, one in New York, one in Boston, one in Toronto," he said. "They would answer to me. I was sort of becoming in charge of the legal operation."

Miscavige, meanwhile, was disposing of internal rivals and building power. At age 21, he talked Hubbard's wife into resigning.

It didn't hurt to have Hubbard's approval. His son had filed a lawsuit claiming that the company overseeing Hubbard's assets, headed by Miscavige, was siphoning his fortune. Hubbard responded with a declaration stating that he had "unequivocal confidence in David Miscavige, who is a long-time devoted Scientologist, a trusted associate and a good friend to me."

Rinder, in turn, became a trusted associate to the emerging leader. Miscavige pulled his childhood acquaintance out of Clearwater to help dissolve the Guardian's Office, the arm of Scientology that had stolen the IRS files and committed other offenses.

He installed Rinder as head of the new international Office of Special Affairs. Part of Rinder's new job was to spread a revised narrative about Scientology: The church's new leaders were appalled to learn of the Guardian Office's dirty tricks. That was not, they said, what Scientology was all about.

Besting his rivals

On Jan. 27, 1986, thousands of Scientologists gathered at the Hollywood Palladium in Los Angeles, where a solemn Miscavige delivered the news: The founder had moved on to a new level of research that would be "done in an exterior state ... completely exterior of the body."

At 74, L. Ron Hubbard was dead.

Miscavige yielded the microphone to church attorney Earle Cooley, who did not mention Miscavige by name, but helped cement him as future leader. Cooley disclosed that Hubbard, who had died of a stroke, left the bulk of his estate to Scientology, giving final instructions that were "his ultimate expression of his confidence in the management of the church."

He left no explicit succession plan, leaving open the question of who would lead the church.

Months later, Miscavige, Rathbun and another executive took control of the Religious Technology Center, the RTC, which Hubbard created as the highest ecclesiastical body in the church. They dismissed the staff and pressured the head of the office to step down.

Miscavige became the RTC's chairman of the board, a title he still holds. Rathbun took the high-ranking post of inspector general for ethics.

The last rivals for control of Scientology were Pat and Annie Broeker, who had assisted Hubbard in his last years. The founder had elevated them to "loyal officer" status, a higher rank than Miscavige, a captain.

The Broekers also had custody of Hubbard's last writings, the cherished upper levels of Scientology auditing that he wrote by hand while in seclusion. For a church that depends in large part on auditing fees, the papers were a gold mine not only spiritually, but financially. Miscavige wanted them.

Rathbun reveals what they did:

The day Pat Broeker and Miscavige flew cross-country to meet church lawyers in Washington, Rathbun positioned a team of about 20 men outside the Broekers' ranch in Barstow, Calif.

During a layover in Chicago, Miscavige called with the signal for Rathbun to phone the ranch caretaker. Rathbun told her that Miscavige and Broeker had called with a message: The FBI planned to raid the ranch in two hours. If they didn't get Hubbard's papers out, they might be lost forever.

The woman let Rathbun and his guys in.

"It worked like a charm," he said.

Miscavige's rise was complete. At 26, he answered to no one in Scientology.

For Rathbun, the point of the story is that Miscavige maneuvered his way to the top, he was not the chosen one. But Scientologists believe he was anointed. "And when they believe that, they're willing to do almost anything."

It was a conversation days after getting their hands on Hubbard's last writings that Rathbun says showed him that Miscavige saw himself not as a political climber but as a chosen leader.

Miscavige seemed in awe of his new responsibilities, so Rathbun tried to buck him up. "I said my basketball coach in high school had these inspirational sayings. One, from Darrell Royal of the Texas Longhorns, stuck with me. He said, 'I don't worry about choosing a leader. He'll emerge.'"

"That's false data!" Miscavige shot back.

Said Rathbun: "He rejected that so fast. Boy, when I suggested he was anything other than anointed, he jumped down my throat."

Scientology vs. the IRS

By the late 1980s, the battle with the IRS had quieted from the wild days of break-ins and indictments. But Miscavige was no less intent on getting back the church's tax exemption, which he thought would legitimize Scientology.

The new strategy, according to Rathbun: Overwhelm the IRS. Force mistakes.

The church filed about 200 lawsuits against the IRS, seeking documents to prove IRS harassment and challenging the agency's refusal to grant tax exemptions to church entities.

Some 2,300 individual Scientologists also sued the agency, demanding tax deductions for their contributions.

"Before you knew it, these simple little cookie-cutter suits ... became full-blown legal cases," Rathbun said.

Washington-based attorney William C. Walsh, who is now helping the church rebut the defectors claims, shepherded many of those cases. "We wanted to get to the bottom of what we felt was discrimination," he said. "And we got a lot of documents, evidence that proved it."

"It's fair to say that when we started, there was a lot of distrust on both sides and suspicion," Walsh said. "We had to dispel that and prove who we were and what kind of people we were."

Yingling teamed with Walsh, Miscavige and Rathbun on the case. She said the IRS investigation of Miscavige resulted in a file thicker than the FBI's file on Dr. Martin Luther King. "I mean it was insane," she said.

The church ratcheted up the pressure with a relentless campaign against the IRS.

Armed with IRS records obtained under the Freedom of Information Act, Scientology's magazine, Freedom, featured stories on alleged IRS abuses: lavish retreats on the taxpayers' dime; setting quotas on audits of individual Scientologists; targeting small businesses for audits while politically connected corporations were overlooked.

Scientologists distributed the magazine on the front steps of the IRS building in Washington.

A group called the National Coalition of IRS Whistleblowers waged its own campaign. Unbeknownst to many, it was quietly created and financed by Scientology.

It was a grinding war, with Scientology willing to spend whatever it took to best the federal agency. "I didn't

even think about money," Rathbun said. "We did whatever we needed to do."

They also knew the other side was hurting. A memo obtained by the church said the Scientology lawsuits had tapped the IRS's litigation budget before the year was up.

The church used other documents it got from the IRS against the agency.

In one, the Department of Justice scolded the IRS for taking indefensible positions in court cases against Scientology. The department said it feared being "sucked down" with the IRS and tarnished.

Another memo documented a conference of 20 IRS officials in the 1970s. They were trying to figure out how to respond to a judge's ruling that Scientology met the agency's definition of a religion. The IRS' solution? They talked about changing the definition.

Rathbun calls it the "Final Solution" conference, a meeting that demonstrated the IRS bias against Scientology. "We used that (memo) I don't know how many times on them," he said.

By 1991, Miscavige had grown impatient with the legal tussle. He was confident he could personally persuade the IRS to bend. That October, he and Rathbun walked into IRS headquarters in Washington and asked to meet with IRS Commissioner Fred Goldberg. They had no appointment.

Goldberg, who did not respond to interview requests for this story, did not see them that day, but he met with them a week later.

Rathbun says that contrary to rumor, no bribes were paid, no extortion used. It was round-the-clock preparation and persistence — plus thousands of lawsuits, hard-hitting magazine articles and full-page ads in USA Today criticizing the IRS.

"That was enough," Rathbun said. "You didn't need blackmail."

He and Miscavige prepped incessantly for their meeting. "I'm sitting there with three banker's boxes of documents. He (Miscavige) has this 20-page speech to deliver to these guys. And for every sentence, I've got two folders" of backup.

Miscavige presented the argument that Scientology is a bona fide religion — then offered an olive branch.

Rathbun recalls the gist of the leader's words to the IRS:

Look, we can just turn this off. This isn't the purpose of the church. We're just trying to defend ourselves. And this is the way we defend. We aggressively defend. If we can sit down and actually deal with the merits, get to what we feel we are actually entitled to, this all could be gone.

The two sides took a break.

Rathbun remembered: "Out in the hallway, Goldberg comes up to me because he sees I'm the right-hand guy. He goes: 'Does he mean it? We can really turn it off?'"

"And I said," turning his hand for effect, " 'Like a faucet.' "

The two sides started talks. Yingling said she warned church leaders to steel themselves, counseling that they answer every question, no matter how offensive.

Agents asked some doozies: about LSD initiation rituals, whether members were shot when they got out of line and about training terrorists in Mexico. "We answered everything," Yingling said, crediting Miscavige for insisting the church be open, honest and cooperative.

The back and forth lasted two years and resulted in this agreement: The church paid \$12.5 million. The IRS dropped its criminal investigations. All pending cases were dropped.

On Oct. 8, 1993, some 10,000 church members gathered in the Los Angeles Sports Arena to celebrate the leader's announcement: The IRS had restored the church's tax exemption, legitimizing Scientology as a church, not a for-profit operation.

"The war is over," Miscavige told the crowd. "This means everything."

Recharged on the Freewinds

The euphoria was short-lived. With the tax cases ended, court records became public. Newspapers wanted to know why Miscavige and his wife together made around \$100,000 while at the time most church staffers made but \$50 a week. Miscavige was furious, and got angrier still when Rathbun argued it would be an insignificant story.

Shortly after, Miscavige's wife, Michelle, came to Rathbun's office and, without a word, removed the gold captain's bars from his Sea Org uniform. Miscavige called him an SP, a suppressive person, and Rathbun was forced to confess his sins before his own staff.

Rathbun was done. "I thought to myself: You know what? That's it. What am I doing here?"

From the safe in his office at the California base he took three 1-ounce pieces of gold, worth about \$500 each, slipped on a bomber jacket, ate breakfast in the mess hall and drove east toward Pensacola, to visit a friend. Miscavige tracked him down and arranged to meet in New Orleans.

"He begged me to come back," Rathbun recalled, adding that Miscavige offered the carrot of a two-year stint aboard the Freewinds, a Scientology cruise ship where parishioners get the highest levels of counseling while sailing the Caribbean.

Rathbun said Miscavige told him:

You've worked hard, you deserved a reward. Go spend time on the ship. Get yourself right, get in touch with what made you love the church in the first place. Hone your skills, come back as the best auditor on the planet.

It was just what Rathbun needed to hear: "I couldn't have been more thankful."

He came aboard the Freewinds late in 1993. He worked odd jobs, devoured Hubbard's writings and spent eight to 10 hours a day receiving counseling and training to be an auditor.

After two years at sea, he reported to Clearwater, to Flag, where the church bases its best auditors and offers upper levels of training. But the quality of auditing had slipped. Rathbun's assignment was to help bring it back up.

Late in the summer of 1995, a woman exited an auditing room at the Fort Harrison Hotel, raised her arms above her head and shouted with delight — a breach of the all-quiet protocol on the auditing floor.

"Who's that?" Rathbun asked a supervisor.

"That's Lisa McPherson."

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ABOUT THE STORY

Mark C. "Marty" Rathbun left the Church of Scientology staff in late 2004, ending a 27-year career that saw him rise to be among the organization's top leaders. For the past four years, he has lived a low-profile life in Texas. Some speculated he had died.

In February, Rathbun posted an Internet message announcing he was available to counsel other disaffected Scientologists.

"Having dug myself out of the dark pit where many who leave the church land," he wrote, "I began lending a hand to others similarly situated."

Contacted by the *St. Petersburg Times*, Rathbun agreed to tell the story of his years in Scientology and what led to his leaving. The *Times* interviewed him at his home in Texas, and he came to Clearwater to revisit some of the scenes he described.

Seeking to corroborate Rathbun's story, the newspaper contacted others who were in Scientology during the same period and have left the church: Mike Rinder, one of Rathbun's closest associates for two decades; Tom De Vocht, whom Rathbun named as key to his decision to leave; and later, Amy Scobee.

Rathbun and Rinder were well known to the reporters, who had interviewed them dozens of times, sometimes combatively, through years of controversy in Clearwater. They also hosted the reporters in Los Angeles in 1998, when Miscavige granted the only print media interview he has given.

Two reporters met Rinder in Denver, where he now lives, but he declined to be interviewed. About a month later, two Washington-based lawyers who work for the church showed up unannounced in Denver, informed

Rinder that they had heard about the newspaper's visit and asked what he had revealed.

They reminded him that as one of the church's top legal officers, attorney-client privilege did not end when he left the church. They told him he could hurt the church by going public.

Weeks later, after the church provided the newspaper with a 2007 video of Rinder heatedly denying that Miscavige hit him and others, Rinder decided to talk to the *Times*.

De Vocht was interviewed in Winter Haven. Scobee was interviewed in Pinellas County, when she and her husband came to visit relatives.

The reporters interviewed the four defectors multiple times, and met with church spokesmen and lawyers for 25 hours.

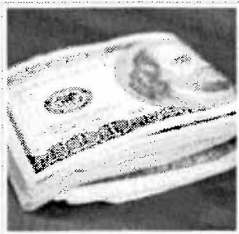
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Scientology: The Truth Rundown, Part 1 of 3 in a special report on the Church of Scientology 06/21/09

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Tampa Bay Times

Scientology: Ecclesiastical justice, Part 3 of 3 in a special report on the Church of Scientology

By Thomas C. Tobin and Joe Childs, Times Staff Writers

Monday, June 22, 2009 11:24pm

The four high-ranking executives who left Scientology say that church leader David Miscavige not only physically attacked members of his executive staff, he messed with their minds.

He frequently had groups of managers jump into a pool or a lake. He mustered them into group confessions that sometimes spun into free-for-alls, with people hitting one another.

Mike Rinder, who defended the church to the media for two decades, couldn't stomach what was happening on the inside.

The tactics to keep executives in line "are wrong from a Scientology viewpoint," said Rinder, who walked away two years ago. "They are not standard practice of Scientology. They are just not humanitarian. And they are just outright evil."

Church spokesmen confirm that managers are ordered into pools and assembled for group confessions. It's part of the "ecclesiastical justice" system the church imposes on poor performers.

Rinder and the other defectors couldn't cut it in the tough world of Scientology's Sea Org, a group whose members dedicate their lives to service of the church, the church says. Rather than accept their own failings, the defectors are putting a sinister twist on something that is normal.

The Sea Org is a "crew of tough sons of bitches," said church spokesman Tommy Davis, an 18-year veteran of the group.

"The Sea Org is not a democracy. The members of it agree with a man named L. Ron Hubbard. They abide by his policies . . . and we follow it to the T, to the letter, to the punctuation marks. And if you disagree with that and you don't like it, you don't belong. Then you leave."

A better thetan

The order came about 10 p.m. on a winter's night: Report to the swimming pool.

From around the church's postcard-pretty base in the mountains east of Los Angeles, some 70 staff members turned out in their Navy-style uniforms. David Miscavige was unhappy with the troops, again.

The punishment the leader had in mind was not new to members of the Sea Org. Hubbard, the church's late founder, "overboarded" Sea Org members in the 1970s when he ran Scientology from a ship named the *Apollo*.

Miscavige had the staffers line up at the diving board in their uniforms, and one by one, jump into the pool. Before each person went in, Norman Starkey, once the captain of the *Apollo*, called on them to be better spiritual beings. He recited a traditional Sea Org saying:

We commit your sins and errors to the deep and trust you will rise a better thetan.

Miscavige ordered the group to go to an office in their wet clothes and stay put until they figured out where they had failed.

Tom De Vocht says he can't recall what angered Miscavige that chilly night early in 2005. But he well remembers the doubts that crept into his head as he sat wet and shivering.

What am I doing here?

De Vocht had joined the church with his mother when he was just 10 and rose to a top executive post at Scientology's spiritual headquarters in Clearwater. But in the months after that mass dunking, he no longer recognized the organization.

Neither did Rinder, who went into the pool that night with De Vocht.

Two others already had acted on their doubts. Marty Rathbun, one of Miscavige's top lieutenants for years, left in 2004. Amy Scobee, who held several executive posts, left in 2005.

The four defectors, speaking publicly for the first time, each served more than 25 years in the Sea Org.

"Right, wrong or indifferent, I felt I was doing something for the good of man, and I'll never give that back," said De Vocht, who left in 2005. "But the longer I was in it, it got crazier and crazier as Dave took over."

Normal vs. abnormal

Confession is ingrained in Scientology culture. Admit all your bad thoughts and transgressions, leave nothing out, and you will feel free, unburdened, joyful.

The four defectors say Miscavige took the practice to a new level. They said he convened group confessions that came to be known as "seances."

The executives would confess sins they had committed against Miscavige, reveal their bad thoughts about Scientology and make personal disclosures, including sexual fantasies. If someone couldn't come up with a transgression, the others bullied him into admitting something. Anything.

"And Dave would sit there and listen to it and enjoy the hell out of it," said De Vocht, who recalled one seance when he said Miscavige struck executive Marc Yager and threw him to the floor, then singled out Faith Schermerhorn, a midlevel administrator who is black.

"He goes, 'By the way, (Yager) thinks black people are n-----, and he doesn't want Scientology to help blacks. Go kick him.' So (Yager) is down on the ground and she's kicking him," De Vocht said.

"Everybody in that damned room — people are wild and out of control," he said. "I punched somebody. Everybody was punched. And screaming and yelling. It just got like, *What the hell is going on here?*"

The church provided the *St. Petersburg Times* with sworn declarations from Yager and Schermerhorn denying that the incident happened. In Yager's declaration, he said he is not prejudiced and Schermerhorn is a friend.

Schermerhorn wrote that she has never heard Miscavige use the n-word: "As a matter of fact, I know that Mr. Miscavige has been the person in Scientology who has done the most for black people."

Rinder said a group confession early in 2004 stands out for him because Rathbun, his longtime friend, ended up attacking him.

"You stand up and there's 50 people in the room all screaming and shouting, 'What did you do? And you did this

and you did that.' And I'm standing there saying, 'No, I didn't do that,' " Rinder said.

The group ganged up on him. He had to have done something: *Come on. Own up. Come on.*

"And then when I said nothing, that's when Marty leaped on me," Rinder said. "And that's psychotic. There is a term for it in Scientology. It's called Contagion of Aberration. . . .

"When you get a group of people together, they will stimulate one another to do things that are crazy."

Davis, who succeeded Rinder as church spokesman, said the term "seance" is not used in Scientology and Miscavige never encouraged violence. But it's not surprising that Rathbun attacked Rinder, Davis said, because Rathbun physically attacked other managers all the time.

Rinder said the ugly moment was an example of the corrosive atmosphere at Scientology's base near Los Angeles. "There's an attempt to play people off, one against the other. And you know that and you see it," Rinder said.

Rathbun's attack "wasn't motivated by hatred toward me, it was motivated by some attempt at preservation for him."

Davis cited church founder Hubbard's policy that encourages members to confront and "come clean" when they have done something to bring down their group. It's one hallmark of a successful organization.

"It's not for the purposes of punishment," Davis said, "and it's certainly never for the purpose of trying to make the person feel guilty for it."

The church says Rathbun and De Vocht acted so inappropriately — roughing up staffers — that they were required to confess publicly. "They were definitely guilty, definitely in violation of the mores of the group," said spokeswoman Jessica Feshbach.

"And were they confronted by peers and asked, What's going on? Absolutely. Because that is the responsibility of the group."

Letting down the group also can result in overboarding, church spokesmen said. It's a Sea Org ritual akin to traditions in other religious orders.

Starkey, the 66-year-old former captain of the *Apollo*, said plenty of people have been overboarded in his 50 years in Scientology.

If a Sea Org member messes up, "you throw him over the g-- d--- side of the ship," Starkey said.

"He falls into the water, he swims around, climbs up the ladder, gets off at the dock, walks back in again. He never does that again. He knows that that is the way we operate. That is what the Sea Organization is like."

Church lawyer Monique Yingling said overboarding is part of ecclesiastical justice. "They're not backing away from it or ashamed of it," she said. It has been done hundreds of times, with precautions taken to make it safe.

In the example De Vocht and Rinder recounted, church spokesmen said, the pool was heated, towels were provided, a lifeguard was present. And Miscavige wasn't even there.

De Vocht and Rinder say he was. "He was standing right there, laughing," Rinder said. "It was very entertaining for him."

Rinder said he doesn't remember any towels at the ready, that night or any of the 10 or so other times he says large groups of staffers were escorted to the lake under guard and required to jump in fully dressed.

He disputed Yingling's contention the "overboarding" incident as described, with a large group of people, is accepted church practice. He said it's meant to address an issue with an individual.

Which is how church spokesman Davis said he punished a subordinate.

"It was a guy who was blowing it and kept blowing it and kept blowing it — making mistakes, underperforming," he said. "It was my responsibility to uphold the ethical standards of the Sea Org. Yeah, absolutely, I tossed the guy in."

If the defectors could not hack such punishments, Davis said, they could have left years ago. "The g-- d--- front door wasn't locked. And if they had a problem with it they could have walked out."

Intense and hands on

The defectors were not only soft, they couldn't maintain the accelerated work pace Miscavige established, the church says. Rathbun flubbed so many assignments, such as his handling of the Lisa McPherson wrongful death lawsuit, that Miscavige had to take over, distracting him from more important duties, spokesmen said.

With Rathbun gone, Miscavige focused on growth plans: "2004 was a paradigm shift, the point where everything changed," Davis said. "Where Mr. Miscavige was able to get on to what he always wanted to get on to."

Davis played DVDs of Scientology ads now on cable TV. He outlined a multimillion-dollar international expansion program to open an array of "ideal orgs," each with course rooms, displays that explain Scientology to the uninitiated, facilities for community outreach groups, and rooms for auditing, the core counseling of Scientology.

The church revamped its Web site, improved the books that are the foundation of Scientology and restored the grainy films of Hubbard's landmark lectures. All of this accomplished in the past four years, all led, planned, designed and created by Miscavige.

The spokesmen described him as a "hands-on" leader working in video editing bays, proofreading manuscripts, helping write scripts, staying up each night to listen to every one of Hubbard's 3,000 lectures and setting up a construction office to outfit the 66 new buildings the church has acquired since 2004.

Miscavige is intense, church spokesmen said, but he never behaves in degrading, crude or violent ways, and he never altered church policy. The church brought more than a dozen international managers to Clearwater to speak to the *Times*. All said they worked with Miscavige for years and spoke of his kindness and compassion.

All of them deny the defectors' allegations that Miscavige hit them.

"They're such lies," said Ray Mithoff, his voice shaking. "I've known the man for 27 years."

Said Mark Ingber, a Sea Org member since 1968: "I've never been beaten to a pulp in my life. Mr. Miscavige is my friend."

The best and worst

One night before Christmas 1997, Miscavige's wife, Michelle, telephoned Rathbun and Rinder. The leader wanted to see them. Right away.

From different parts of the California compound, they jogged to his quarters.

They say Miscavige bustled through the screen door in a terry cloth bathrobe and without a word grabbed Rinder around the neck, slapped him, slugged him and threw him against a tree.

Rinder ended up in ivy, mud on his uniform, his lip bleeding. Miscavige led them to the officers' lounge, poured Rinder a glass of Scotch and said it would make him feel better.

The leader of Scientology turned and walked toward his quarters.

People would flinch when Miscavige walked by, De Vocht said.

"That's how routine it was," he said. "His whole entire outlook was that everybody was out to get him. Anything and everything anybody else touched was going to be screwed up, and he had to do it himself. He didn't trust anybody."

Scobee described working in her office cubicle along the wall of a large conference room. Miscavige was seated alone on one side of the table facing several staffers, including Jeff Hawkins.

"So I'm not paying attention and all of a sudden I see David Miscavige jump up on top of the table — the conference room table," Scobee said.

He lunged at Hawkins, she said, and the two of them landed at her feet. Miscavige "stayed on top of him and was choking him and hitting him and grabbing his tie. Buttons were flying and change falling out of Jeff's pockets. And I'm sitting here going, 'Oh my God!'"

Hawkins has spoken and written publicly about the 2002 incident.

Church executive David Bloomberg tells a far different story. Bloomberg said that he was seated next to Hawkins that day and that Hawkins became belligerent with the leader. Hawkins fell out of his chair and ended up putting a scissor lock on Miscavige's legs.

"Mr. Miscavige did not touch Jeff Hawkins," Bloomberg said.

At his best, Miscavige inspires staffers, Rathbun said, recalling times the leader invoked a dispatch Hubbard wrote in the 1980s: The planet's fate rests on the shoulders of "the desperate few."

Miscavige used it to stir a sense of mission and make you feel special, Rathbun said.

"He'd make you feel like you were really important. And that's why you would do stuff for him."

But the defectors said Miscavige's tendency to change plans, micromanage and undermine the chain of command paralyzed the management team and stifled growth in the years before they left. To pump up revenue, Rathbun said, Miscavige repackaged old Scientology books and services and marketed them to parishioners as must-have, new products.

He cited the church's recent blitz urging members to buy new versions of "the basics," a collection of Hubbard books that are the foundation of Scientology. In 2007, Miscavige told Scientologists who had bought and studied the books for decades that the volumes were flawed, with whole passages missing, out-of-order or written by editors.

No wonder people complained about not being able to understand them, the leader said. The church put the volumes in their proper state and was selling them anew.

Said Rathbun: "He's telling (parishioners) literally to their faces, 'You didn't understand the first thing about Scientology because you couldn't possibly have because the books were screwed up.'"

The 18-volume set now sells for \$450, down from the 1986 price of \$738.

Davis, the church spokesman, describes the reworked collection as a sensational development, a historic recovery of Hubbard's work comparable to the discovery of the Dead Sea scrolls.

Said Yingling, the church attorney: "It was received with such joy by the Scientology public at large."

Rathbun, De Vocht and Scobee said they were privy to weekly internal data reports that showed a gradual decline in key statistics, including the value of church services delivered and the number of auditing hours and courses completed.

"These are the statistics that are supposed to matter," Rathbun said. "All that stuff's been going down."

De Vocht described Miscavige's decisionmaking as erratic. He said the leader often changes course, resulting in situations like Scientology's multimillion-dollar "Super Power" building in downtown Clearwater. The mammoth structure, finished on the outside, has sat vacant for six years.

After repeated design changes, work on the interior restarted this month.

Davis and Yingling trumpet Scientology's worldwide expansion. The past five years, the church has acquired 80 properties; three new churches — called orgs — opened this year, with five more on track to open by year's end.

Is this the real life?

They called it the Hole.

For months, the small building at the California base was like a prison for more than 30 of the highest-ranking officers in the Sea Org.

They could leave only once a day, for a shower, otherwise they stayed put. Food was brought in. They slept on the floor, men around the conference table, women in the cubicles and small offices ringing the room.

Miscavige called meetings at odd hours, 2 a.m., 4 a.m. Day after day, the exhausted executives puzzled through management structure and the pricing system for church services, trying to guess what their leader wanted.

He rejected their ideas, cursed them, branded them "suppressive persons" who put their church at risk. He demanded they go back at it; they could not leave until they got it right.

Sometimes Miscavige would let someone out of the Hole or throw in somebody else. Rinder says he was there from the start. In January 2004, Miscavige added De Vocht to the mix.

"Everyone gathered around the table. He's throwing things, yelling at people, beating people up," De Vocht remembered. "It was a weirdo scene, let me tell you."

Later that month, Miscavige threw a bigger name into the Hole: Marty Rathbun.

The leader told the others not to listen to a word Rathbun said, he was not to be trusted: *I know you all have come to respect this guy over the years, but he is the guy that's f---- me up.*

A few days earlier, Rathbun says, Miscavige had pushed his head against a wall and slapped him hard across his left ear for not being tougher on the staff. He figures that must be what landed him in the Hole.

The building consisted of small offices and a conference room tucked into two double-wide trailers. When Miscavige tramped down the corridor, the hollowness of the floor made a klunk, klunk, klunk sound.

Four days into Rathbun's stay, the klunking signaled Miscavige's arrival, flanked as always by his wife, who took notes, and an assistant with a recorder so that everything the leader said could be transcribed and distributed across the base.

Miscavige announced that they were going to play musical chairs to determine who among them was the most committed to the tasks at hand. All but the winner would be reassigned to Scientology's far-flung outposts.

Some staffers cried at the thought of being separated from family. Others made ready, positioning chairs around the 30-foot long, maple conference table.

Miscavige used a boom box to play *Bohemian Rhapsody*, by Queen.

Is this the real life?

Is this just fantasy?

Caught in a landslide

No escape from reality

When the music stopped, the uniformed Sea Org members jostled for chairs, knocking each other aside. Two men fought so hard a chair came apart in their hands.

Losers were told where they were being assigned, husbands and wives finding that they were to be thousands of miles apart. Rinder said Miscavige taunted one husband for showing a soft side by consoling his tearful wife.

"Oh yeah," Rinder said. "It was fun and games."

Again, church officials said, the defectors are making the normal seem abnormal. Miscavige was merely trying to make a point, they said, citing a Hubbard policy that says frequent personnel transfers are like "musical chairs" and can harm a group's progress. Miscavige wanted the group to see for themselves how destructive that can be.

Yingling said Miscavige had been away from the base and returned to find that in his absence, Rathbun had transferred hundreds of staffers. "That's why nothing was getting done," she said.

Rathbun and Rinder said it was the opposite: Nothing was getting done because Miscavige took top managers from their posts and ordered them to the Hole. Rathbun said Miscavige berated him for not transferring more people.

From evening into the wee hours of the next day the game of musical chairs dragged on, sometimes interrupted by the leader lecturing the group on their incompetence.

"It's like *Apocalypse Now*," Rathbun said. "It's bizarre."

The game ended with two women competing for the last chair.

"It was definitely a physical struggle and they were grappling and wrestling," Rathbun recalled. "Then (Miscavige) leaves and says, 'Okay, good. We'll see you f----- tomorrow.'"

Miscavige never carried out his threat of mass transfers.

One beating too many

The next night, Miscavige ordered his executives to jog from the Hole to a building where staffers made CDs of long-ago lectures by Hubbard.

With the group still huffing from their 400-yard run, Miscavige grilled De Vocht, who had overseen renovations to the building. He slapped De Vocht, threw him to the floor and began to choke him.

De Vocht can't recall why he was attacked. Maybe he hesitated with an answer. Maybe he gave a look the leader didn't like. Whatever the reason, he accepted his drubbing in silent, degrading submission.

Miscavige grew angrier if you expressed pain or resisted, the defectors said.

"You're literally sitting there thinking, I'm not going to hit this guy," De Vocht said. "It happens so suddenly, what do you do? And then if you want to go after him, how many other people are going to pummel you? You've got to realize this place is so cultish it's scary."

Scobee says the executives at the California base were trapped. They dared not speak to each other about Miscavige's behavior, afraid they would be found out in confessions known as "security checks."

A person who said something negative about Miscavige might withhold it in her own confession, Scobee said, but someone else would invariably report it in theirs.

"So you don't want to go against him," she said. "It wasn't even an option, as amazing as it seems. Now, after being out, I would so do everything different."

For Sea Org members, there's a personal struggle as well. "You put your life into the church and you do think that is your route to freedom," Scobee said. "There are a lot of great things about it ... and you don't want to throw that away. You don't want to risk it."

Why not just leave?

Easy to say, according to Rinder.

Scientology preaches self-reliance. You alone control your environment, your condition in life is no one else's doing but your own.

But just as strongly, Scientology holds that if you leave the church, something is wrong with you. Somewhere in your past is an "overt," a transgression.

"It becomes a big sort of dichotomy," Rinder said. Staying in an unhappy situation is no way to control your environment. "But if I leave, I'm doing something wrong, too. It's like a catch-22."

For Rinder, the Scientology experience he knew and loved had become something foreign, a work climate increasingly strange and abusive.

It also was at crosscurrents with the kinder, gentler public posture the church sought to build over the past 20 years, a message that Rinder, as chief spokesman, conveyed time and again: The church purged the lawbreakers and dirty tricksters of the 1970s and reinvented itself.

"We just stopped doing things that I and others considered to be foolish and harmful and off policy," Rinder said.

Except at home.

"Now, the irony is what's being done on the inside is foolish and harmful and abusive," he said.

Rathbun saw and delivered many beatings over the years. But he said Miscavige's attack on De Vocht the night after the musical chairs game clarified his thinking.

Four days earlier, when Miscavige put Rathbun in the Hole, he instructed everyone not to talk to him. But De Vocht quietly defied that order, asking Rathbun to help them figure out what to do to please Miscavige. Now De Vocht was being beaten.

"I'm watching this go down, and I just had this incredible connection ... this humanity connection with Tom," Rathbun said. "I subscribe to the Popeye philosophy: 'I can take so much but I can't take no more.'"

"I still have a thread of dignity and I see it being crushed in people around me. What am I going to do? Am I going to become one of them, too?"

As the rest of the group herded back into the Hole, Rathbun broke off and ducked into some bushes. He went for his motorcycle, a Yamaha 650, wheeled it to the back gate of the compound and hid in the brush for about 20 minutes. When the gate opened for a car, he sped away.

Rathbun said he felt rage and loss, mixed with an odd excitement.

"I'm kind of exhilarated that I've made the step, and I'm hauling a-- because I'm thinking someone's following me."

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ABOUT THE STORY

Mark C. "Marty" Rathbun left the Church of Scientology staff in late 2004, ending a 27-year career that saw him rise to be among the organization's top leaders. For the past four years, he has lived a low-profile life in Texas. Some speculated he had died.

In February, Rathbun posted an Internet message announcing he was available to counsel other disaffected Scientologists.

"Having dug myself out of the dark pit where many who leave the church land," he wrote, "I began lending a hand to others similarly situated."

Contacted by the *St. Petersburg Times*, Rathbun agreed to tell the story of his years in Scientology and what led to his leaving. The *Times* interviewed him at his home in Texas, and he came to Clearwater to revisit some of

the scenes he described.

Seeking to corroborate Rathbun's story, the newspaper contacted others who were in Scientology during the same period and have left the church: Mike Rinder, one of Rathbun's closest associates for two decades; Tom De Vocht, whom Rathbun named as key to his decision to leave; and later, Amy Scobee.

Rathbun and Rinder were well known to the reporters, who had interviewed them dozens of times, sometimes combatively, through years of controversy in Clearwater. They also hosted the reporters in Los Angeles in 1998, when Miscavige granted the only print media interview he has given.

Two reporters met Rinder in Denver, where he now lives, but he declined to be interviewed. About a month later, two Washington-based lawyers who work for the church showed up unannounced in Denver, informed Rinder that they had heard about the newspaper's visit and asked what he had revealed.

They reminded him that as one of the church's top legal officers, attorney-client privilege did not end when he left the church. They told him he could hurt the church by going public.

Weeks later, after the church provided the newspaper with a 2007 video of Rinder heatedly denying that Miscavige hit him and others, Rinder decided to talk to the *Times*.

De Vocht was interviewed in Winter Haven. Scobee was interviewed in Pinellas County, when she and her husband came to visit relatives.

The reporters interviewed the four defectors multiple times, and met with church spokesmen and lawyers for 25 hours.

On May 13, the *Times* asked to interview Miscavige, in person or by phone, and renewed the request repeatedly the past five weeks. Church officials said Miscavige's schedule would not permit an interview before July.

Joe Childs, Managing Editor/Tampa Bay, ran the *Times* Clearwater operation dating to 1993 and supervises the newspaper's Scientology coverage. He can be reached at childs@sptimes.com.

Thomas C. Tobin has covered the Church of Scientology off and on since 1996. He can be reached at tobin@sptimes.com.

Scientology: Ecclesiastical justice, Part 3 of 3 in a special report on the Church of Scientology 06/22/09

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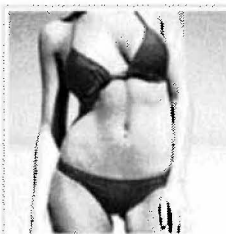
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Tampa Bay Times

Inside Scientology : A Times Special Report

No kids allowed

By Joe Childs and Thomas C. Tobin, Times Staff Writers

Saturday, June 12, 2010 8:41pm

Laura Dieckman was just 12 when her parents let her leave home to work full time for Scientology's religious order, the Sea Organization. At 16, she married a co-worker. At 17, she was pregnant.

She was excited to start a family, but she said Sea Org supervisors pressured her to have an abortion. She was back at work the following day.

Claire Headley joined at 16, married at 17 and was pregnant at 19. She said Sea Org supervisors threatened strenuous physical work and repeated interrogations if she didn't end her pregnancy. She, too, was back at work the next day.

Two years later she had a second abortion, this time while working for the church in Clearwater.

A *St. Petersburg Times* investigation found their experiences were not unique. More than a dozen women said the culture in the Sea Org pushed them or women they knew to have abortions, in many cases, abortions they did not want.

Some said colleagues and supervisors pressured them to abort their pregnancies and remain productive workers without the distraction of raising children. Terminating a pregnancy and staying on the job affirmed one's commitment to the all-important work of saving the planet.

"You just have a way of thinking," said Sunny Pereira, who was 15 when she entered the order. "It all has to do with the Sea Org and what we're trying to accomplish. Everything that is a distraction is scorned."

According to those speaking out, women who didn't schedule abortions were shunned by fellow Sea Org members, called "degraded beings" and taunted for being "out ethics," straying from the order's ethical code.

Some were isolated, assigned manual labor and interrogated until they agreed to abortions, said church defectors, including men whose wives got abortions.

The church denied all their accounts.

"There is no church policy to convince anyone to have an abortion, and the church has never engaged in such activity," said church spokesman Tommy Davis.

Sea Org members marry one another and take no vows of celibacy, as do members of other religious orders. And unlike many religions, Scientology takes no position for or against abortion.

"The decision to have a child or terminate a pregnancy is a personal decision made by a couple," Davis said. "That applies to all Scientologists."

"If any current or former Sea Org member ever 'pressured' someone to have an abortion, they did so independently and that action was not approved, endorsed or advocated by the church."

But in sworn depositions obtained by the *Times*, Headley and Dieckman recount, conversation by conversation, how Sea Org members influenced them to end their pregnancies.

The depositions were taken in a federal lawsuit Headley filed against the church. She claims her abortions were forced and the church's restrictive working conditions constituted human trafficking. She has a January trial date. She has submitted to church lawyers a list of 36 current and former staffers she said had abortions while working for the Sea Org.

Dieckman, 31, was deposed as a witness. She told the *Times* she's not the weepy type. But she couldn't hold her tears as she talked about how, at 17, she put the greater good of the group ahead of her maternal instinct.

"Now I look at it and I'm like, how or why could I possibly think that? It doesn't make sense. I don't understand how I relented, or why I gave in. But I did."

The church responds

Within the Sea Org, Scientology's highest calling, members were allowed to have children until 1996, when the policy changed to what it remains today: No children allowed.

"The policy evolved out of respect for families and deference to children," Davis said.

Babies were "viewed as interfering with the productivity of Sea Org members," Davis said. Also, "the long and demanding working hours required of Sea Org members and the need for Sea Org parents to be able to go to any remote area of the world on a moment's notice were obstacles to parents properly raising their children."

Davis denied pregnant Sea Org couples were shunned or called "degraded beings."

To the contrary, those wanting children are helped, Davis said. "They receive assistance from the church, including immediate prenatal care, medical care, financial assistance and even help in finding housing and employment upon departure from the Sea Org."

The *Times* asked to interview church officials, including church leader David Miscavige, about the accounts of former Sea Org members who described the pressures to have abortions.

Davis responded in writing. He also provided the sworn declarations of 10 former and one current Sea Org member who said the church and their colleagues comforted and supported them during their pregnancies, allowing naps, giving gifts and creating flexible work schedules.

"I received lots of care and support from the staff and at no time was I made to feel guilty for wanting to have a child," said Kathryn Reeves, who left the Sea Org in 2009 with her husband and has a baby daughter she said has a cheerful disposition.

"I am sure that part of her being so happy is that my pregnancy was very calm, very sane, and completely free of upset," Reeves said in her declaration.

Davis said the women speaking out to the *Times* made personal choices "they now clearly regret."

Kids were welcome

Scientology founder L. Ron Hubbard created the Sea Org in 1967 while running his church aboard ships, hence the maritime ranks and uniforms. Members sign billion-year contracts, symbolizing a commitment to serve in this life and coming ones.

Some 6,000 Sea Org members run Scientology operations worldwide. Miscavige, 50, and his wife, Shelly, 49, are members. They have no children.

About 150 others are executives, including spokesman Davis. Most of the rest work in the trenches, in jobs from doorman and bus driver to the church's top spiritual counselors, called "auditors."

They display military bearing, come to attention when a ranking officer enters and refer to superiors, including women, as "Sir."

The Sea Org staffs the church's two most important operations, its spiritual headquarters in Clearwater and its 500-acre international management base in the desert 80 miles east of Los Angeles.

For seven years before Gary Morehead left the Sea Org, he was security chief at the sprawling compound. He said pregnancies were considered "a slap in the face" to the organization.

"There was no plus side to it whatsoever. Never did anyone go, 'Congratulations.'

"You're taking a beautiful time in a person's life and you're making it into a complete, utter crime."

Hubbard, in his 1950 bestseller, *Dianetics*, extolled the virtues of motherhood: "A woman who is pregnant should be given every consideration by a society which has any feeling for its future generations."

Hubbard, who had six children, specified that Sea Org routine include "Family Time," at least an hour a day with one's children. There was an annual "Family Day" picnic. While parents worked, took classes and received spiritual counseling, their kids went to Cadet Orgs, nurseries and classrooms staffed by Sea Org colleagues.

After Hubbard died in 1986 and Miscavige emerged as church leader, a new Sea Org policy said pregnant couples would be suspended from the order and assigned to live on their own and work at a community church, called a Class 5 Org.

That was scary for those accustomed to the group providing food, housing, clothing and medical care, the defectors said. Working with non-Sea Org staff at a community church, they would support themselves and their newborn on a portion of whatever their local church took in.

Church management canceled Family Day in 1987 and Family Time two years later. A 1991 policy change said pregnant couples would be transferred not just to any community church but to one that was "nonexpanding, small, distant."

Today's ban on children in the Sea Org, issued in 1996, makes no mention of abortion. It says members wanting children must leave.

Davis said the church changed its policy as it tried to balance "the needs of families with the realities of life within a religious order."

The church pays for the medical and dental expenses for Sea Org members but did not pay for the abortions of the women speaking to the *Times*.

Davis responded: "For the church to mandate payment for abortions . . . would be tantamount to a tacit endorsement of abortion."

He said some Scientology churches, including the one in Clearwater, do pay for birth control for Sea Org members.

A full court press

Laura Dieckman was a fifth-grader when she told her parents she wasn't learning as much in Albuquerque public

schools as she had in Scientology schools. They let her stop going.

She hung out at the community church, or "org," where her parents were parishioners. Laura "body routed," waving a sign out front: Free Personality Tests.

A Sea Org recruiter came through early in 1991. Laura was 12 and gung ho about the idea of joining and living in L.A. Her mother, Toddy Dieckman, needed convincing.

The recruiter promised Laura would complete high school. Her Scientology courses and counseling, called "auditing," would be free. The recruiter said that being so young, Laura would be watched closely.

The question of children came up. Laura said she wanted to be a mother some day. No problem, the recruiter said, pregnant couples are transferred to community churches.

Mrs. Dieckman let her daughter go. "I kind of looked at it like, Okay, she's going to go to a school with a Scientology twist, really, and get a good education." Plus she couldn't picture her daughter sticking it out. "I didn't think she'd want to be away from home."

Laura's first job was in a 12-story church building a few blocks down Hollywood Boulevard from Grauman's Chinese Theater. She worked in the communications office, delivering messages and answering phones.

Her life ran on a restricted loop: take a church bus to the office each morning, work into the night, bus back to the dorm, bunk with eight to 10 women. There were no outings to zoos, roller rinks or concerts, nor did she get the schooling the recruiter promised.

Laura called home every night the first several weeks. On her dinner break, she would hustle a few doors down Hollywood Boulevard to the pay phone at Chicken Delight.

Her parents visited occasionally and took her to Disneyland once.

A few weeks after turning 16, Laura met new Sea Org member Jesse DeCrescenzo who, like Laura, was raised in a Scientology family. He was 17. They flirted at Saturday afternoon classes and did laundry together on Saturday nights.

At a New Year's Eve party in her office building, they counted down the final seconds of 1994. At the stroke of midnight, Jesse proposed. They married that August.

That Christmas season they visited Jesse's extended family in Oakland. Laura loved the warm family feeling. Wanting children of her own and without telling Jesse, she stopped taking the birth control pills she had gotten for free from a Planned Parenthood clinic.

Laura knew that if she got pregnant, neither her boss nor Jesse's would be pleased about them having to leave their posts. She had seen Sea Org members harass a pregnant couple prior to their transfers.

Still, she was confident she, Jesse and their baby could make it. Maybe they would even be sent to the Albuquerque org.

In February 1996 a pregnancy test confirmed what her body told her. Back at her desk, she called Jesse with the news.

He freaked, Laura said. He asked: What are we going to do?

"I told him I was planning on having it."

They discussed the rumor that the church was about to eliminate transfers to community churches and require that pregnant couples leave the Sea Org.

Laura told Jesse not to worry. His dad might hire him to work at his insurance office in L.A. Or maybe he could work for her dad, cleaning windows in Albuquerque.

She reported her pregnancy to her boss, Gabriella Saccomanno, who was in her 30s, nearly twice Laura's age. Laura considered her "the closest thing to a mom I had in the Sea Org."

Testifying in her deposition, Laura Dieckman described what happened over the next two days. "I told her that I was pregnant. She said, 'What do you want to do?'

"I said, 'There's no question in my mind, I'm going to have the baby.'"

She said Saccomanno told her to consider a Scientology tenet in dealing with problems: Evaluate what would be the "greatest good for the greatest number of dynamics."

Scientologists believe life consists of eight dynamics, or channels, and humans are driven to thrive in each of them. The first dynamic is to survive as one's self. The second, survive as a couple, through procreation. Having a child serves those two dynamics.

But if that means leaving the Sea Org, you put your own interests ahead of broader dynamics, such as the group, service to mankind and all life forms.

Sacomanno asked about Jesse. What did he want to do?

Laura said she answered: "We're going to have the baby. There is no question about it."

Sacomanno suggested the two of them get on the phone with Jesse and his supervisor, Christine Cole.

Through the speaker phone, Cole addressed Laura. "She was getting mad that I was saying that I was going to keep the baby, and she was telling me, Look at the effect that's going to have to the organization . . ."

She and Jesse had risen through the ranks to jobs as directors of Investigations and Evaluations, akin to police department internal affairs investigators. Cole reminded her of their responsibilities to the organization.

Laura hung up. "I was not interested in hearing such bulls---."

She said Saccomanno tried to calm her. "(She) just was like, 'Chill, Laura . . . the baby is just tissue at this point.' . . . She's basically saying that an abortion is the right thing to do and that it wouldn't be that big of a deal because it's not that far along yet."

That night she and Jesse talked about conquering their new challenge together. "We kind of came to the conclusion that we were going to keep the baby," she said.

But his tone had changed the next day when they talked by phone. "I could tell Chris had been talking to him more. . . . So then he's like, 'Maybe the right thing to do is have an abortion.'"

Jesse said he didn't want to leave the Sea Org. Laura faced raising a newborn at 17, with no real world experience, no formal education, no job, no money and now, no husband.

"It became like I didn't have a choice anymore."

Sacomanno told her again: You're not that far along. Think of the greater good.

She said Jesse told her, "We both have always wanted to be in the Sea Org."

Sacomanno talked to her again.

"I finally, after two days of this, said okay."

Jesse borrowed a car and \$350 from his parents and drove her to a clinic in Glendale on a Saturday. Laura was back at work Sunday.

The *Times* asked to interview Saccomanno, Cole and Jesse DeCrescenzo. Davis responded on their behalf, saying "at no time was Dieckman pressured to end her pregnancy."

Saccomanno never "encouraged or suggested that Ms. Dieckman have an abortion," Davis said, and did not describe the fetus as "just tissue." Nor did Cole apply pressure.

"Ms. Dieckman made her own choices," Davis said. She aborted her pregnancy "following discussion with her husband, who told her he was not ready to have children."

Dieckman said her disaffection with the church grew with the passing years. She was punished for staying away one day too long when she visited her dying grandfather in Portland, Ore. Months later she ran away to visit her grandmother there, but the L.A. staff found her and coaxed her back.

She was assigned to the Rehabilitation Project Force, a work detail the church says helps Sea Org members reform through physical labor, study and counseling. Critics say the RPF is a degrading form of detention intended to adjust one's thinking.

Dieckman gave it three years and decided she wanted out. She had seen a Sea Org staffer drink bleach and be discharged as a suicide risk. One morning in April 2004, while her 10-member RPF crew cleaned floors, she poured bleach into a Styrofoam coffee cup, left open the restroom door so people could see her and took a swig. She started vomiting.

The next day the Sea Org gave her \$500 severance and discharged her.

DeCrescenzo stayed. They divorced the following year.

The church said it offered Jesse and Laura the option of going to a community church, but Dieckman chose abortion.

"It is unfortunate that Ms. Dieckman now regrets her own decision," Davis said, "and seeks to place blame on her former faith rather than take responsibility."

Dieckman sued the church in California state court, alleging co-workers "regularly were ordered" to have abortions. Her suit said the church forced her to have an abortion by threatening the loss of her job, housing and husband. It also alleged Dieckman was "brainwashed" and "had no comprehension of her legal rights."

Davis said: "At no time has any church staff member been 'forced' to obtain an abortion."

A judge dismissed the suit in March, ruling it was not filed within the statute of limitations.

Dieckman is back in Albuquerque, living with the father of their two children.

"Everything didn't go like I envisioned it," she said. "Here I am thinking I'm going to have kids, and then I'm not allowed to. . . ."

"I was so under the control . . . from the age of 12, it had been ingrained in me how to think and how to operate. And I didn't know any other way."

Watching the perimeter

Fenced and guarded, Scientology's 500-acre desert compound near Hemet, Calif., had an added layer of security — a "Perimeter Council."

Up to 10 members met weekly in a conference room at Golden Era Productions, the church's audio-visual and marketing division headquartered at the base.

The council's job: share information about base personnel, especially those considered threats to the Sea Org's operations and image.

Heading the council was Gary Morehead, the base security chief from 1990 to 1997. He said the names of pregnant women came up, usually reported as having been successfully "handled," an abortion scheduled.

"We either went into the council knowing about it or somebody brought the information into the meeting," Morehead said. "The fact that somebody was pregnant."

Each pregnant woman's divisional representative reported on the status of the pregnancy, Morehead said. "They are getting an abortion or they are not or they haven't made their decision yet."

He has no records but estimated about one woman a month had an abortion, maybe 15 a year. He said about half of the 700 staff at the base were women.

Morehead said the few women at the base who wanted to continue their pregnancies were separated from husbands. Often they were assigned manual labor and subjected to security checks, a form of interrogation. Some slept in an old frame house; Morehead's security guards stood watch.

He said the physical labor wasn't meant to endanger the pregnancy, it was intended to erode the women's resolve. "I'd be asked, 'What are they doing?' I'd say, 'They're out sweeping sidewalks,' or, 'They're pulling weeds out of flower beds.' "

If the women held fast, he said he would get new orders: "No, put them on (cleaning) the Dumpster. . . .

"The more they resisted, the more effort was put into trying to break them."

The church said Morehead is lying. "No interrogation or heavy labor was ever assigned to a pregnant staff member," Davis said, not at the base where Morehead worked or at any other Sea Org facility. Nor were pregnant couples separated.

Davis said Morehead also is wrong about the Perimeter Council. Davis said he was "emphatically" told by those who served on the council at the same time as Morehead that abortion was never discussed.

Other church facilities, including in Clearwater and in Los Angeles, had their own Perimeter Councils.

Sunshine "Sunny" Pereira sat on one of the L.A. councils. Her devotion to the Sea Org was seeded at age 3, when her mother joined and the family drove from Texas to L.A. Sunny went into a Cadet Org and rarely saw her mother.

She signed her billion-year Sea Org contract at 15. "I was like, 'That's where my mom is, so I guess I'm going there, too.' "

She coordinated auditing, course work and other services at the church's Celebrity Centre in Hollywood, a religious retreat for notable parishioners. Part of the job included sitting on the Centre's Perimeter Council. Their discussions included disgruntled staff and pregnant women.

"We would list them all out and discuss who was going to handle who individually," Pereira said.

"Handle" meant change their thinking. If a woman said she wanted to keep her baby, a co-worker would pull her aside for a casual conversation: *What are your plans?*

The handling got more aggressive as needed, with supervisors and ethics officers participating. *What's causing*

this irrational thinking? Where's your commitment, your loyalty?

Couples sometimes were separated to loosen their resolve, Pereira said.

"It's about doubts about being in the Sea Org, doubts about saving people's lives or helping people. It's not about the baby."

Pereira remembers trying to intimidate a pregnant co-worker.

"I scorned her. I saw her walk by and I'd turn up: What is she doing? She's out ethics. She's stopping lives from being saved by going to do her own thing. She's selfish."

Repeated conversations played on a member's sense of duty and obligation to the organization. "I can't say straight out, 'Well, they force you to have an abortion,'" Pereira said.

"But they do everything they can to keep a person in the Sea Org. And if that requires termination of the pregnancy, they will support the person in that decision. And they will also help the person make that decision."

In March 1996, hundreds of Sea Org staff working in the former Hollywood Guaranty Building were told to gather in the sixth-floor dining hall for an important briefing.

Sea Org policy was changing. If you have a child, no more transfers. You would be "off loaded," expelled from the Sea Org. Two representatives from the international base made the trip to Hollywood to explain the change.

Before the briefing, the two met privately with ethics supervisor Astra Woodcraft. She said they told her that while they addressed the group, she was to circulate and write down the names of any staffers showing "bad indicators." She was to handle them.

Topping her list was a man who acted especially dismayed. Woodcraft said he told her that he and his wife were counting on having a family and working in a community church. Now that option was gone.

Woodcraft assigned the man and his wife one of Scientology's four lower ethical conditions, a state called "doubt." To return to good standing, each had to complete a "doubt formula," a multistep program of confession and atonement that would purge them of their plan to have children. They also would elevate the organization's needs ahead of their own.

"I had to get them to agree that if they did get pregnant, they would have an abortion," Woodcraft said.

The church denied Woodcraft's account. "Any implication that this was church policy is false," Davis said.

Woodcraft said that during the three years she supervised "ethics handlings," only a few of the scores of women working in the 12-story Guaranty building insisted on continuing pregnancies.

"Most women just did it," she said. "They found out they were pregnant, they went and had an abortion. That's just what they did. They didn't want to get in trouble."

Woodcraft joined the Sea Org at 14, married a co-worker at 15 in Las Vegas with her father's consent. Four years later, in early 1998, she'd had enough of long work days and the Sea Org's many demands. She hatched a plan: Get pregnant, hide it until it was too late to abort, insist on keeping the baby, get kicked out.

It worked. She was 4¹/₂ months pregnant when the Sea Org discharged her.

"When I was leaving, a senior guy came up to me and said, 'What are you doing?'

"I said, 'I'm routing out.'

"He said, 'Why?'

"I said, 'I'm pregnant.'

"And he said, 'Oh, it's too late for an abortion.' "

Her daughter was born four months later.

Davis said Woodcraft abandoned her husband and her job. He said the church never pressured her to have an abortion, and the encounter she described when leaving never occurred.

Will you marry me?

Claire Headley's immersion in Scientology also started young, age 4, when her mother joined the Sea Org.

Born in England, Claire was raised in a Cadet Org near London. Her formal schooling ended after her mother married an American and the family moved to L.A. Claire was 13. Sea Org recruiters started pursuing her.

"They would call, come to my house, want me to go there, hours-long meetings of them telling me the world is going to end. You need to do this for the sake of your well-being. Heavy duty stuff when you're a teenager."

In July 1991, with her parents' approval, she entered the Sea Org. She was 16. Assigned in September to the international base, she helped supervise staff job training sessions at Golden Era Productions.

There she met Marc Headley, another teenager who worked on Golden Era's production lines. They sat together in the staff dining hall a few times. Their first date was May 9, the annual Scientology holiday celebrating *Dianetics* first going on sale in 1950.

"He asked me that day if I would be his girlfriend," Claire said.

Outside her dorm that night, they talked about their feelings "and everything else."

Marc proposed.

Claire accepted.

They married three months later, in August 1992. He was 19, she was 17.

She wanted children but knew that getting pregnant was taboo. In her lawsuit, Claire Headley said she "had witnessed two other employees refuse to have abortions. They were demoted and ordered to perform heavy manual labor for months."

She said in a May 28 court filing that the church had "an internal policy of coercing and forcing" Sea Org women to have abortions "to maximize the workload from female employees and avoid child care issues."

She discovered she was pregnant in summer 1994. In her deposition last November, she testified that the Sea Org didn't pay her \$46 weekly allowance for several months that year, and she couldn't afford her birth control pills.

Not true, Davis said. "Per financial records," she was paid throughout the year. The church declined to provide those records, saying Headley has them. She said she doesn't.

Headley said she shared her pregnancy test results with two staffers in the medical office, Cynthia Rathbun and Jocelyn Webb. (Cynthia Rathbun is not related to Marty Rathbun, the outspoken former top lieutenant to church leader David Miscavige.)

Headley testified that they told her "that if I didn't go through with abortion, that I would be on heavy manual labor and sec checking, interrogation."

Davis said Rathbun and Webb "both stated emphatically that no such conversation took place."

Headley said she and Marc briefly discussed the consequences of resisting.

"I knew that if I said that I wanted to go through with the pregnancy, that I would have been put on heavy manual labor and know that's extremely dangerous in a pregnancy," Headley testified.

"We had absolutely no other option."

She said a higher-ranking staffer told her she herself had an abortion, it was "no big deal" and not terminating the pregnancy "would be much worse than going through with it."

Headley also worried the church might not allow Marc to join her if she left. "I basically would be out on the street alone, pregnant, with absolutely no contacts in the world, no finances, no husband ... boom — done."

Resisting and leaving the Sea Org likely would result in the church declaring her a "suppressive person." Scientologists, including her mother, father, two sisters and a brother, would be forbidden to contact her.

She said she felt trapped.

Church lawyer Marc Marmaro asked during Headley's deposition: "Did anybody order you to have an abortion?"

"Yes."

"Who ordered you to have an abortion?"

"The first time was Cynthia Rathbun."

"How far pregnant were you at the time?"

"Possibly six to eight weeks."

"And what did Cynthia Rathbun tell you?"

"Simply that I was pregnant and — because I had done a test — and that I believe she made a general statement that if I didn't go through with it, that I would be on heavy manual labor and sec checking."

She agreed to an abortion. The base medical office scheduled her appointment at a clinic in Riverside, Headley said, and Rathbun coached her:

"If they ask you if you want to talk to a psychologist about your decision, say no."

"If they ask you if you want to discuss it, say no."

She borrowed \$350 from a friend to pay for the procedure. A male Sea Org staffer drove her to the clinic, waited and drove her back.

Marmaro: "Did you consider just not leaving the facility ... refusing to go back with the individual who brought you there?"

Headley: "I thought about screaming for somebody to please help me. But I knew that if I did that, I would never see my husband again."

She reported to work the next morning.

Two years later she was in Clearwater with some two dozen Sea Org members training for jobs in the Religious Technology Center, the church's highest ecclesiastical body. The RTC makes sure Hubbard's religious

philosophies are properly administered.

Standing for hours at an afternoon class, Headley fainted. "I got the rush of blood to my ears. I was seeing stars. My knees started to buckle."

Pregnant again. But this time, she was across the country from her husband.

"I so wanted to talk to Marc, so badly, because I'd already promised myself the first time that I would never, ever go through with that again," she said in an interview.

She didn't have a cell phone. She couldn't call from the apartment she shared with 12 women. And without special permission, trainees couldn't use church business phones to call spouses.

Headley filled out the form for permission to make a call.

"Disapproved," wrote senior Sea Org member Anne Rathbun. (She is the ex-wife of Marty Rathbun).

Responding on Anne Rathbun's behalf, Davis said Headley is lying. He said it's "preposterous" to suggest a staffer would be denied the chance to call her husband.

Headley testified that Rathbun told her, "I need to go through with the abortion" and said she already had arranged for Sea Org staffer Aldona Medina to loan her money to pay for it.

The church did not make Anne Rathbun or Medina available for interviews, but Davis said Medina did not lend Headley money for an abortion. "Ms. Medina does not know anything about Claire Headley having an abortion or, for that matter, of her ever having been pregnant."

Headley said Medina accompanied her to the abortion clinic.

In an interview, Headley described how she reached her decision, alone. "I don't remember saying, 'I will' or 'I will not.' It was more like the apathetic path of least resistance. I know I never said, 'I want an abortion,' because I did not have the strength to say that. ... But, yes, I gave in to the inevitable that was in front of me."

She said Anne Rathbun read her mail, so she didn't dare write Marc about the abortion.

In September 1996, the church sent Marc to Clearwater for three days to help produce an audio-visual program. Headley arranged for them to share a room in the church's Hacienda Gardens apartment complex on N Saturn Avenue.

Six months had passed since her second abortion, and she still hadn't told Marc she had been pregnant.

"I definitely was torn and upset about the oncoming conversation, but I also knew that if I didn't get my guts up to tell him right then and there, it would be much harder down the road."

She told him and said she was sorry he was just finding out.

"I told him I tried to call," Headley said. "I didn't need to explain to him the situation I was in. He knew I had just been promoted (to the RTC) and now I was under a magnifying glass," in no position to make waves.

She returned to Hemet in January 1997, and she and Marc stayed in the Sea Org eight more years. They ran away three weeks apart in January 2005. Marc went first, speeding away on his motorcycle. Claire set up an optometry appointment at Walmart, eluded the church staffer assigned to guard her and jumped into a waiting cab.

Claire and Marc Headley, who have two sons now, each sued the church in federal court in January 2009. His suit also alleges human trafficking and wage and hour violations.

Fourteen years after her second abortion, Headley, 35, still is bothered she had to make such an important decision without talking to her husband.

"That was extremely upsetting. I mean, we're married. That decision (not allowing her to call) — even then, and even in that mind-set — I knew from a position of my own personal integrity that was wrong."

Pregnant and 'out ethics'

Samantha Domingo lives in England with her three daughters, 16 years removed from the abortion she did not want.

In 1993, working at the Celebrity Centre in Hollywood, she met fellow worker Michael Gomes. She was 26 when they married and pregnant a few months later. Church policy still allowed pregnant couples to go to community churches.

"I thought this was exciting. I have a child. I'm going to go off with my husband and pioneer in a Class 5 Org. It's a whole new adventure."

An ethics officer gave her a reality check:

What are you going to do about this?

You're pulling two staffers out of the organization.

You need to think of the greatest good for the greatest number of dynamics.

"Nobody would ever tell you, 'You have to do it,' " Domingo said. "You get backed into a corner. . . . You're sitting in front of an ethics officer, you're sitting in front of (church) executives that are basically telling you you're a piece of s--- if you don't do this. You're bad. You let the group down.

"You're out ethics, you did it deliberately. Look at what a bad thing you did to the planet."

Samantha said one of Michael's superiors convinced him that she got pregnant so he would have to leave the Sea Org with her.

She knew her marriage was over.

She had no savings and was about to have no husband. "I was entirely on my own."

She told her ethics officer she would have the abortion. "He was very happy and very pleased."

The church denied her account. "Ms. Domingo's former husband . . . has stated that Ms. Domingo was never forced into making a decision regarding her pregnancy," Davis said.

Domingo, now 43, said she felt out of step. "Basically, I felt like I was the only one that thought there was something wrong with the abortion. So I ended up thinking I was out ethics, that I was not being a good Sea Org member and letting the group down."

A couple of months after her abortion in 1994, a Celebrity Centre staffer quietly approached her.

It was Sunny Pereira, the Perimeter Council member who helped deal with pregnant staffers. Now she was the one pregnant, looking for an abortion clinic.

She was 21, newly married to one of her first boyfriends, Sea Org member Christophe Pereira.

Sunny had told him days earlier that she was pregnant. They talked about leaving the Sea Org to work in a community church. She wondered what it cost to have a baby. Do you just show up at an ER?

Following protocol, they reported the pregnancy to Sea Org ethics officers, who Sunny said gave them one option: If she stayed pregnant, she and Christophe would be transferred to the struggling Celebrity Centre in Nashville. With so few parishioners there, they knew they would be broke and couldn't afford to ever see Cristophe's family in France.

"We discussed it and decided going through with keeping a child was not going to work for either one of us or for the Sea Org and it was better for us if we just terminated it," she said.

"It was a mechanical decision. It was not a heartfelt decision. It wasn't an emotional decision. It was like, 'Okay, well, we're going to have to.' "

The church had no comment about Pereira, now 37, who had her first child, a daughter, June 1.

"Her decision was a personal matter," Davis said, "and would have been between her and her husband."

Pereira would have a second abortion in 2001.

For her abortion in 1994, she said she borrowed \$330 from her grandmother. She remembers that as the anesthesia was administered, the doctor studied her chart. She had written "Scientologist" in the box, marked Optional, for religious affiliation.

"He said there was another Scientologist in the next room."

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Coming tomorrow

Taking her daughter: Natalie Hagemo sees the irony: Now that the child the church wanted her to abort was 14 and a productive worker, the Sea Org wanted to keep her.

Prior *Times* coverage started in 1975, when the church first came to Clearwater, through last year's investigative reports, "The Truth Rundown," an examination of life inside Scientology, including former executives who said they were physically abused by church leader David Miscavige.



Laura Dieckman:

Age: 31

Sea Org: Joined at age 12, in 1991. Left in 2004

Married: at age 16

Abortion: in 1996

Today: Lives in Albuquerque with father of their 3-year-old daughter and 2-year-old son. She is a stay-at-home mom. "It became like I didn't have a choice anymore. I didn't know how extensive the pressure or coercion would be. I knew there were people who had gotten abortions. But I didn't know how much pressure there was. I hadn't seen it first hand, at that point."

Claire Headley:

Age: 35

Sea Org: Joined at age 16, in 1991; left in 2005.

Married: at age 17.

Abortions: in 1994 and 1996.

Today: Married to Marc Headley, sons 4 and 2. Lives in Burbank, Calif. Works as bookkeeper at the audio-visual design firm her husband co-owns.

"I was desperate to not have to go through with (an abortion) somehow, some way, but I did not have any means or options open to me financially or otherwise. If I did scream, they would take me back and I would be under full-time security watch."

Sunny Pereira:

Age: 37

Sea Org: Joined at age 15, in 1988; left in 2004.

Married: at age 21

Abortions: in 1994 and 2001

Today: Married with a newborn child. Lives in Dallas, works as a restaurant manager.

"There's a lot of blaming myself. ... I got really depressed after the first one and still went through with the second one. That's something that I just still don't understand." **Samantha Domingo:**

Age: 43

Sea Org: Joined at age 21, in 1989; left in 1996.

Married: at age 26; remarried at age 28

Abortion: in 1994

Today: Divorced, with three daughters, ages 8 to 14. Lives near London. Works as a writer.

"I felt like a bad person. I felt like I had killed my child. And even years later when I had my own children it would remind me. So it's not something that I would do. It's not something that sits easily on my conscience."

No kids allowed 06/12/10

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Tampa Bay Times

Ex-Clearwater Scientology officer Debbie Cook testifies she was put in 'The Hole,' abused for weeks

By Joe Childs and Thomas C. Tobin, Times Staff Writers

Thursday, February 9, 2012 12:01pm

SAN ANTONIO, Texas — Scientology executive Debbie Cook was on the phone with church leader David Miscavige when she heard someone pounding at her office door at a church compound in California.

Not wanting to hang up on her angry boss, who was complaining about her performance, she didn't answer the knocks. The pounding stopped, but someone was prying open her office window. Two male church employees crawled in.

"Are they there?" Miscavige asked.

Yes, Cook answered.

"Goodbye," the church leader said.

The men took Cook away to a place called the "The Hole," two doublewide trailers on the church's 500-acre California compound where, other high-ranking church defectors have told the *Tampa Bay Times*, Miscavige sent underperforming executives. The windows were covered with bars, and security guards controlled the only exit, Cook said.

Cook said she was held there seven weeks with more than 100 other Scientology executives. They spent their nights in sleeping bags on ant-infested floors, ate a soupy "slop" of reheated leftovers and screamed at each other in confessionals that often turned violent. For two weeks, she said, Miscavige had the electricity turned off as daytime temperatures in the desert east of Los Angeles topped 100 degrees.

Cook testified Thursday that the experience in the summer of 2007 gave her nightmares and was part of the reason she was so eager to leave the Scientology staff later that year and sign a severance agreement never to speak ill of the church.

"I would have signed that I stabbed babies over and over again and loved it. I would have done anything basically at that point," she said during several hours of sworn testimony in San Antonio district court.

The church is suing Cook and her husband for violating the terms of the agreement when she sent a New Year's Eve email urging fellow Scientologists to help reform the church's fundraising tactics and other practices.

Thursday night, church spokeswoman Karin Pouw said Cook's testimony is false. Cook voluntarily entered into the agreement, Pouw said, and "now clearly is bitter and is falsely vilifying the religion she was once a part of."

The church and Cook agreed to certain obligations, Pouw said. "Miss Cook and her husband have breached that agreement. The defendants and their lawyer are trying to divert the court with false claims and wild tales."

Church lawyer George H. Spencer Jr. said Cook's testimony was irrelevant and argued that regardless whether her statements were true, she ratified the contract by accepting \$50,000.

"This is a straightforward contract case," he argued before District Judge Martha Tanner. Testimony continues today.

Cook's attorney, Ray Jeffrey, argued the duress she suffered in the years and months before signing the agreement rendered the document unenforceable.

Cook's testimony took listeners through an extraordinary tale: from the church's "Hole" in the California desert, to the Clearwater campus that is home to Scientology's spiritual mecca, to her escape in 2007 that ended when a church team tracked her to a South Carolina restaurant and boxed in her car in the parking lot.

Once the respected head of the Clearwater operation and known to Scientologists worldwide, Cook said she was "basically imprisoned" in Clearwater during her final months with the church.

She said she was confined to the church's Hacienda Gardens residential compound on Saturn Avenue, prevented from leaving by guards, gates, high fences, motion detectors and security cameras. At work in Scientology's downtown buildings, she said, she was followed during her daily routine by a church official assigned to make sure she didn't escape; she was even followed into the restroom.

Through the years, Cook said, she witnessed physical attacks and mental abuse on church executives by Miscavige or by those acting on the leader's orders.

She described a 12-hour ordeal at the California base where she was made to stand in a trash can while fellow executives poured water over her, screamed at her and said she was a lesbian.

She said she saw Miscavige attack church executive Marc Yager, punching him in the face and wrestling him to the ground. She also recounted how church executive Mark Ginge Nelson was punished for objecting to violence he saw in "The Hole."

Cook said she saw Nelson taken to another room, where he was beaten by a Miscavige assistant and two other men for two hours. She said Nelson also was made to lick a bathroom floor for at least 30 minutes.

Cook said Miscavige once ordered his secretary to slap her, and she fell over into some chairs. She said he also ordered his communication officer to break her finger. The officer bent it back, she said, but did not break it.

Another time, she said, Miscavige marched around a large conference table looking as if he wanted to choke her but ended up grabbing her shoulders and yelling at her.

In May 2007, Cook got a reprieve from "The Hole" when she was summoned back to Clearwater to help Miscavige prepare for a major church event that would attract 2,000 Scientologists to Ruth Eckerd Hall. She worked there several more weeks, rejoining her husband, church staffer Wayne Baumgarten, but not telling him what happened in "The Hole." She said it would have been "very treasonous" to say anything.

Later that summer, Cook said she and her husband said they had had enough. One morning, a church staffer drove them to the church dining hall in downtown Clearwater and went inside to get them some breakfast. Cook jumped into the driver's seat, drove to a rental car company and left the church vehicle in the lot.

In a rental car, the couple drove to see Cook's father in North Carolina but were intercepted and persuaded to return to Clearwater to properly separate from the church staff. If they didn't go along, she said, a church official said her husband's Scientology relatives would sever all contact with him.

Cook said they were told the process would take a couple of days. But after three grueling weeks, Cook told her guards that she had called her mother and told her to call Clearwater police if she wasn't released in three days. She also conveyed in a letter that "if that didn't work I would take whatever steps necessary, like slitting my wrists."

The church's legal team sought to counter Cook's duress argument by showing a video of Cook initialing the contract, agreeing with a church attorney that the church had helped her and accepting a \$50,000 check that was later deposited in her account. She agreed she was under no pressure to sign. She also acknowledged she had criticized church leadership and disclosed information she knew about the church and its staff.

Ex-Clearwater Scientology officer Debbie Cook testifies she was put in 'The Hole,' abused for weeks
02/09/12

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"He came up as if he was going to choke me," ex-Scientology executive Debbie Cook says, describing church leader David Miscavige.

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