

## SCIENTOLOGY

Before detailing an intervention concerning a Scientologist, having a basic understanding of about the organization and its history is important. Some of the most notable and historically significant events in the history of groups called “cults” are tied to Scientology. Scientology can be seen as perhaps the most notorious cult in the United States. It certainly seems to be the most reported about and the enduring focus of public fascination. This is largely due to the many celebrities who are Scientologists, such as Tom Cruise, John Travolta, and Kirstie Alley.

Scientology has a relatively long history, beginning in the 1950s. There are certain key events during its more than five decades of history that provide some perspective and context so we can better understand Scientology, its development, and its current position.

### 1977—FBI Raids on Scientology

In 1977 FBI raids on Scientology churches led to the indictment of eleven people, including the third wife, Mary Sue Hubbard, of L. Ron Hubbard, the founder of Scientology. The defendants received sentences of one to five years in prison. But L. Ron Hubbard remained an “unindicted co-conspirator”<sup>857</sup>

Scientology’s covert criminal operation called “Snow White” during the 1970s remains astounding in its scope and success in penetrating the US government. Scientologists reportedly undertook this operation “to spy on and burglarize multiple federal offices, including the IRS and Justice Department, with the aim of stealing and destroying government documents about Scientology.”<sup>858</sup> The operation also included spreading stories about Scientology’s perceived enemies.

Historically L. Ron Hubbard is a controversial figure. In the introduction to his book about Hubbard and Scientology titled *Bare-Faced Messiah*, author Russell Miller writes, “Scientology has vigorously promoted an image of its founder, L. Ron Hubbard, as a romantic adventurer and philosopher whose early life fortuitously prepared him, in the manner of Jesus Christ, for his declared mission to save the world. The glorification of ‘Ron,’ superman and savior, required a cavalier disregard for facts: Thus it is that every biography of Hubbard published by the church is interwoven with lies, half-truths and ludicrous embellishments.”<sup>859</sup> L. Ron Hubbard claimed to be a nuclear physicist and said he had traveled into outer space without his body. California superior court judge Paul Brekenridge described Hubbard as “a pathological liar.”<sup>860</sup>

Lafayette Ronald Hubbard was born in Tilden, Nebraska, on March 13, 1911. After “flunking out” of George Washington University in 1932, he became a “pulp fiction writer.”<sup>861</sup> In 1950 Hubbard published *Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health*, proclaiming it was “a milestone for man comparable to his discovery of fire and superior to his inventions of the wheel and arch.”<sup>862</sup> The book became a best seller and spawned “Dianetics groups” across the United States.<sup>863</sup> Eventually, what had started out as a self-improvement program became a religion. Hubbard’s son said his father “told [him] and a lot of other people that the way to make a million was to start a religion.”<sup>864</sup> In 1954 Hubbard launched the Church of Scientology.

L. Ron Hubbard taught that the human spirit is immortal and lives on through many lifetimes. He wrote that Scientology is “the means to attain true spiritual freedom and immortality.”<sup>865</sup> Purportedly this goal is accomplished through Scientology courses, training, and what is called “auditing” or “spiritual counseling.”<sup>866</sup> One of Hubbard’s pivotal points to explain the need for such auditing is the continuing influence of ancient spirits.

Hubbard wrote that Xenu (pronounced Zee-new), “the head of the galactic federation” seventy-five million years ago, to resolve an overpopulation problem, killed millions of people by blowing them up volcanically on earth. Xenu then packaged their disembodied spirits in “clusters” so that many spirits could live on in one body. Hubbard labeled these spirits “body thetans” or BTs.<sup>867</sup> The story about Xenu and details concerning BTs are disclosed to Scientologists when they reach a certain level of training known as OT-3 (Operating Thetan Level 3).<sup>868</sup> At that point Scientologists learn how Hubbard’s teachings can free them from the influence of these ancient, shackled spirits.

Along this prescribed path, or what is called the “Bridge to Total Freedom,” a Scientologist eventually reaches what is called the state of “clear” and then begins to move on through the various Operating Thetan (OT) levels, which are graded from OT-1 through OT-8. The story of Xenu is strictly withheld until a Scientologist reaches OT-3; only then can it be shared, despite its substantial importance within Scientology’s belief system.

David Touretzky, avid researcher of Scientology and a professor at Carnegie Mellon University, told the *New Yorker* that to pay for the course work and auditing necessary to reach the “upper levels,” it could potentially cost hundreds of thousands of dollars.<sup>869</sup> When asked about Scientology, Cynthia Kissler, the executive director of an organization devoted to exposing cults, told *Time* magazine, “No cult extracts more money from its members.”<sup>870</sup>

When L. Ron Hubbard died at the age of seventy-four in 1986, he reportedly “left behind a \$640 million dollar fortune.”<sup>871</sup> According to the coroner’s report, Hubbard apparently took an anti-anxiety drug hydroxyzine (Vistaril); his assistants reportedly said that this was “only one of many psychiatric and pain medications Hubbard ingested over the years.”<sup>872</sup> This is an interesting detail considering that Scientology, as ordained by its founder, is generally an outspoken critic of psychiatry, psychiatrists, psychiatric medications, and mental health professionals.

### 1995—The Death of Lisa McPherson

On December 5, 1995, Lisa McPherson, a longtime member of Scientology, died under strange circumstances. McPherson had been staying at Scientology’s Fort Harrison Hotel in Clearwater, Florida, for seventeen days immediately preceding her death. When Scientologists brought McPherson to a hospital ER in Port Richey, she had already stopped breathing and had no heartbeat. The young woman was also described as gaunt, and her body was bruised.<sup>873</sup> According to Scientology, McPherson had checked into the hotel for “rest and relaxation” and “suddenly fell ill.”<sup>874</sup> The coroner initially concluded that there was no way McPherson “suddenly fell ill.”<sup>875</sup>

Lisa McPherson had been a devoted Scientologist since the age of eighteen. She’d moved from Texas to Florida in 1994 to be closer to Scientology’s headquarters in Clearwater. She worked for a Scientology-linked company and was committed to the church’s training. In 1995 McPherson reached the state of “clear,” but only a month later, after a minor traffic accident, it appears that she had a mental breakdown. After getting out of her car, McPherson took off her clothes in the street. She told a paramedic, “I need help. I need to talk to someone.” The young woman was then taken to a nearby hospital and received a psychiatric evaluation, which is the equivalent of a sacrilege to Scientologists. McPherson subsequently signed out of the hospital against the doctor’s advice.<sup>876</sup>

It is from this point that the situation seemed to devolve under the control of Scientology. McPherson was brought to the Fort Harrison Hotel and put under the constant watch of Scientologists there. This included feeding her, doling out “valerian root capsules,” administering “herbal sleeping preparations,” and giving McPherson various dietary supplements consistent with Scientology’s beliefs.

Copious notes concerning McPherson’s condition and treatment were taken each day.<sup>877</sup> According to those log entries, she was “blabbering” and “shaking.” And at times she spoke “incoherently for hour after hour.” McPherson “refused to eat” and was at times “violent,” “combative,” and/or “confused.” And she experienced “difficulties even to swallow a bit of water.”<sup>878</sup> A Scientologist “cut her nails” to “reduce the risk of scratches,” but the Scientologists involved with her care didn’t take McPherson back to the hospital for more than two weeks. The two crucial last days of log entries were destroyed. But days before McPherson died, it was noted that she was “not strong enough” to stand.<sup>879</sup>

Almost three years after Lisa McPherson’s death, after a police investigation and lengthy review by a state prosecutor, Scientology was charged with two felonies: “practicing medicine without a license and abuse of a disabled adult.”<sup>880</sup> In its defense Scientology commissioned studies concerning the cause of McPherson’s death, challenging the coroner’s conclusions. Dr. Joan Wood, the coroner, received thousands of pages of documents and numerous subpoenas. “It became very difficult,” said Jacqueline Martino, a former chief investigator who worked with Wood for sixteen years. “I think she almost tried to stand alone against this behemoth, Scientology.”<sup>881</sup> Ultimately under considerable pressure, Wood amended the death certificate from cause of death “undetermined” to “accident.” The coroner had first said the death was due to a blood clot brought on by “severe dehydration.”<sup>882</sup> Because of the change Wood made concerning the cause of death, criminal charges against Scientology were dropped.<sup>883</sup>

Lisa McPherson’s family filed a wrongful death lawsuit in February 1997 against Scientology, and it was settled out of court in May 2004. The terms of that settlement remain confidential.<sup>884</sup>

In September 2003 certain Scientology release forms were made public through the Internet. These releases and/or agreements contain the statement that the signer opposes psychiatric treatment and that if the signer should become mentally ill, Scientology is authorized to “extricate” him or her from treatment or care by mental health professionals. Rather than receiving such care or treatment, he or she agrees to submit to the so-called Introspection Rundown, a Scientology practice L. Ron Hubbard had devised.

It appears that Lisa McPherson was subjected to this Scientology procedure.

The release form reads, “I understand that the Introspection Rundown... includes being isolated from all sources of potential spiritual upset, including, but not limited to family members, friends or others with whom I might normally interact. As part of the Introspection Rundown, I specifically consent to Church members being with me 24 hours a day at the direction of my Case Supervisor.” Moreover, “the Case Supervisor will determine the time period in which I will remain isolated” and that “such duration will be completely at the discretion of the Case Supervisor.” The release form or legal contract concludes, “I further understand that by signing below, I am forever giving up my right to sue the Church... for any injury or damage suffered in any way connected with Scientology religious services or spiritual assistance.”<sup>885</sup>

Dr. Joan Wood, who served as a medical examiner for eighteen years and performed more than fifty-six hundred autopsies, never recovered from the one she did on Lisa McPherson. That event in Wood’s life reportedly so “scarred” the coroner that she went into a “reclusive retirement.”<sup>886</sup> “Sadly, the Scientology episode took its toll on Joan Wood, [and] that was her demise,” lawyer Denis de Vlaming said. When Wood died in 2011 at the age of sixty-seven, no one she knew professionally through her long career found out until it appeared in a newspaper.

## 2012—Alleged Abuses of David Miscavige

2012 would prove to be a very bad year for Scientology, both in court and generally through negative media exposure. Seemingly endless bad press would engulf the purported cult, first through former members claiming the church had abused them and also through the breakdown of its most famous member’s marriage, that of movie star Tom Cruise.

In January 2012 Debbie Cook, formerly one of the most high-ranking staff members of Scientology, sent out an e-mail raising questions about the organization’s fund-raising tactics. It seems that Cook hoped to reform the church from within and urged thousands of Scientologists who received her e-mail to take on what she called the “responsibility that every Scientologist has” regarding the legacy of L. Ron Hubbard.<sup>887</sup> Cook claimed that despite seemingly endless appeals for needed money, Scientology actually held more than \$1 billion in cash reserves.

Fifty-year-old Cook had served Scientology faithfully since she was a teenager. She’d risen in its ranks and assumed command of the church’s important hub in Clearwater, Florida, reportedly “the most revered Scientology spiritual center anywhere.” Cook ran Clearwater for seventeen years before leaving in 2007.<sup>888</sup> In a prepared statement she said after her January e-mail, “I am not trying to pick a fight with the Church, nor am I bitter, or blasting or any of the other things concocted by other media outlets. I am simply asking my friends to do their part, the part that Mr. Hubbard asked of all Scientologists, which is to make sure that they only follow the workable technology laid out in policy and bulletins written by Hubbard exactly as he wrote them. This is the responsibility every Scientologist has—to keep it unadulterated.”<sup>889</sup>

Cook and other former Scientology staff seem to feel that David Miscavige, Hubbard’s successor and the current head of Scientology, has somehow adulterated Hubbard’s teachings. Like Cook, David Miscavige started with Scientology when he was very young. His father, Ron Miscavige Sr., brought him into the organization as a small and sickly boy, suffering from asthma and severe allergies. But by the time he was twelve, David Miscavige was reportedly already providing Scientology’s version of religious counseling, called “auditing.”<sup>890</sup> Dropping out of high school at sixteen, Miscavige embraced Scientology full time. “I wanted to dedicate my life to this... The thought of hanging around two more years in that existence so that I could match up with the status quo meant nothing to me because I knew that in two years I would go and work with the church anyway,” he explained in an interview.<sup>891</sup>

Miscavige became a staff member of Scientology in what is known as the Sea Organization (Sea Org), working within the “Commodore’s Messenger Organization.” “Commodore” was the title Hubbard gave himself when he created a personal navy within Scientology. Miscavige’s job as a messenger was to help in the implementation and management of Hubbard’s policies. He was housed, like many other Sea Org members, within Scientology facilities at Clearwater and encapsulated within its subculture. At the age of nineteen in 1979, he rose to the rank of “action chief.” And in the wake of the “Snow White” program, Miscavige played an increasingly important and pivotal political role within the organization. He is credited with obtaining the resignation of Mary Sue Hubbard in 1981. “I knew if it was going to be a physical takeover we’re going to lose because they had a couple thousand staff and we [the ‘messengers’] had about 50.” Nevertheless his takeover succeeded. He later commented, “Nobody gives you power. I’ll tell you what power is. Power in my estimation is if people will listen to you. That’s it.”<sup>892</sup>

Two years after Mary Sue Hubbard was deposed, it seems David Miscavige had largely consolidated and sealed his position of power in Scientology. When questions were raised about L. Ron Hubbard's status and competency by his son, a sworn statement emerged in 1983, signed by the reclusive Scientology founder. Hubbard's statement included fingerprints for the purpose of identification and reportedly used a "special ink" to date his signature. In this document, which a judge later ruled authentic, Hubbard called Miscavige his "trusted associate" and "good friend" who reportedly kept his "affairs in good order." When L. Ron Hubbard died in 1986, it appears that Miscavige was firmly in control and had effectively become the new "Commodore."<sup>893</sup>

In 1991 *Time* magazine featured Scientology on its cover as the "Cult of Greed,"<sup>894</sup> But two years later David Miscavige won a great victory. After seemingly endless litigation and conflict with the US Internal Revenue Service (IRS), Scientology was finally awarded the tax-exempt status it had sought for forty years.

Jazz musician Chick Corea, a longtime Scientologist, later told the *St. Petersburg Times* , "The one incredible thing that we all needed was what David did. ...[He] came and took all the dropped balls and caught them all and kind of saved the organization from splintering apart, and put it back together again for all our sakes."<sup>895</sup> But Vaughn Young, a former Scientology insider who'd spent twenty years in the organization, saw things somewhat differently. In a 1989 interview Young said many Scientologists looked on Miscavige with "a combination of admiration and fear." Young warned, "He's got a serious vicious streak in him that you don't want to trigger."<sup>896</sup>

It was this alleged "vicious streak" that became the focus of press attention in 2012. After Debbie Cook sent her e-mail expressing concerns about fund-raising and Miscavige, she was sued. Scientology claimed Cook had been paid \$50,000 severance and had signed a strict confidentiality agreement, which prohibited her from discussing anything about Scientology. After receiving the money, Cook moved to San Antonio, Texas, with her husband. When she appeared in a Texas court, her testimony was shocking.

Under oath Cook testified in March 2012 that in 2007 she had been held under guard in "the hole," a pair of double-wide trailers within Scientology's "Gold Base" compound located in the desert near Los Angeles. Cook said dozens of former Scientology executives were held there. She testified that in the hole they were fed "slop" and reportedly "forced to sleep on an ant-infested floor."<sup>897</sup> Cook testified that she spent seven weeks in the hole, where she was screamed at in a volatile and often violent environment. At times the electricity was turned off, even though temperatures exceeded one hundred degrees. Cook testified that she had been made to stand in a trash can while fellow executives poured water over her and screamed that she was a lesbian. Cook stated that at one point she witnessed David Miscavige punching one executive in the face. Another executive was told to lick the bathroom floor, which he did for thirty minutes. Cook said David Miscavige ordered an employee to break one of her fingers. The Scientology employee then bent back one of her fingers but didn't fracture it.<sup>898</sup>

Cook explained under oath that at the end of her ordeal, she signed the confidentiality agreement. "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.<sup>899</sup> Debbie Cook stated that she was "basically imprisoned" during the last months she spent in Clearwater. Her attorney concluded that the agreement his client signed was "unenforceable" because she had been put under duress.<sup>900</sup>

Scientology denied everything.

But Cook said her testimony represented only "the tip of the iceberg."<sup>901</sup>

Weeks after Debbie Cook's testimony in San Antonio, Scientology decided to settle the lawsuit. Neither Cook nor Scientology's spokesperson would offer further comment. The document disclosed stated that neither party would pay the other anything. Cook's website and Facebook page were then shut down.<sup>902</sup> Debbie Cook and her husband, Wayne Baumgarten, sold their car, furniture, and household possessions. Then they moved to Guadeloupe, an island in the Caribbean. Jon Donley, who had once worked at the couple's marketing company in Texas, asked them if their move was a condition of the settlement. "They looked me right in the eyes and said, 'We can't talk about that,'" Donley said.<sup>903</sup>

Other former Scientology staffers have spoken out about alleged abuse by David Miscavige. According to former insiders, Miscavige had smashed Scientology executive Mike Rinder's head into a wall. Rinder claimed that Miscavige had attacked him repeatedly. "That happened more than once," he told the press. In 2009 four former Scientology staffers claimed David Miscavige had assaulted them.<sup>904</sup>

Scientology has described the allegations of such former members as "total lies."<sup>905</sup>

When Oscar-winning screenwriter Paul Haggis resigned from Scientology after thirty-five years, the event drew considerable press attention. In 2011 an article published in the *New Yorker* magazine explicitly outlined the reasons for Haggis's action. The screenwriter discussed in some detail Scientology's policy of "disconnection," which encourages members to cut off family, friends, and associates who have been declared suppressive persons or SPs. An SP is often someone who in some way has expressed criticism of the organization.

In a CNN interview an official spokesperson for Scientology, Tommy Davis, was asked about the disconnection policy. He answered, "There's no such thing as disconnection as you're characterizing it." However, Haggis publicly took issue with Davis. "We all know this policy exists. I didn't have to search for verification—I didn't have to look any further than my own home." Haggis was referring to his wife who was told to disconnect from her parents when they left the church. He then concluded, "To see [Tommy Davis] lie so easily, I am afraid I had to ask myself: what else [is Tommy Davis] lying about?" Haggis later lamented, "What kind of organization are we involved in where people just disappear?"<sup>906</sup> Lawrence Wright, the reporter who wrote the article in the *New Yorker* about Haggis, later expanded the story into a sensational book about Scientology.<sup>907</sup>

Jenna Miscavige Hill, the niece of David Miscavige, wrote a book about her own odyssey in Scientology.<sup>908</sup> She told the press, "My experience in growing up in Scientology is that it is both mentally and at times physically abusive." Ms. Hill claimed, "We got a lousy education from unqualified teachers, forced labor, long hours, forced confessions, being held in rooms not to mention the mental anguish of trying to figure out all of the conflicting information they force upon you as a young child."<sup>909</sup> Like other defectors, Hill says she has been branded an SP.<sup>910</sup>

## 2012—Katie Holmes and Tom Cruise Divorce

In 2012 when actress Katie Holmes filed for divorce against movie star Tom Cruise, all the historically troubling issues surrounding Scientology seemed to congeal and become fodder for the press. And the issue of disconnection in particular—and its potential for parental alienation—was discussed in some depth. It appears the famous couple was preparing for a contentious court battle over the custody of their six-year-old daughter, Suri Cruise. Holmes reportedly was unhappy about Scientology and didn't want her child to be indoctrinated. The divorce became a magnet drawing increasingly bad press for Scientology. Former Scientologists were interviewed, and details about their allegations of abuse in the organization were reported about and broadcast globally. Media magnate Rupert Murdoch even weighed in, calling Scientology "a very weird cult" and Scientologists "creepy, maybe even evil."

Josh Forman, a matrimonial attorney and partner at Chemtob Moss Forman & Talbert in New York, opined, "I don't think it would be very good for Tom's career if he is seen as having a huge, dragged-out custody battle with Katie. I think they should really settle, and I see this as settling."<sup>911</sup> Less than two weeks after the divorce filing, that is exactly what happened. Cruise quickly settled the divorce.<sup>912</sup> In that settlement Katie Holmes was reportedly granted "sole custody of Suri," while Cruise received "meaningful" visitation rights.<sup>913</sup> Further details reportedly revealed that the settlement contained a prohibition concerning attendance at any "residential school" of any kind, which seems to preclude the possibility of potential Scientology indoctrination. Tom Cruise is also required to pay for his daughter's education, health care, and dental costs, though apparently Katie Holmes will be the parent who specifically decides what type of care and education Suri Cruise will receive in the future.<sup>914</sup>

## Narconon

Narconon is a drug rehabilitation program closely associated with Scientology. Narconon CEO Gary Smith said, "It's not accurate to say it is Scientology-based, because Scientology is a religion. We're not a religion." However, Smith admitted that Narconon is based on the teachings of Scientology's founder, L. Ron Hubbard, and that it receives funding from Scientology.<sup>915</sup>

Board-certified forensic psychiatrist Dr. Ryan Estevez said, "Anybody can see if you look into [Narconon], the philosophy that is brought into the rehabilitation program is the same philosophy that is brought into their religion of Scientology."<sup>916</sup>

The rehabilitation program Narconon provides includes what is called the "purification rundown," which is a Scientology ritual L. Ron Hubbard prescribed. This is about a month-long regimen of vitamins that includes taking large doses of niacin, ingesting cooking oil, running on a treadmill, and sweating in a sauna at temperatures reportedly set from 140 to 180 degrees Fahrenheit.<sup>917</sup> Dr. Estevez warned, "From a physician perspective, they are also doing something that could be very dangerous."<sup>918</sup>

A similar Scientology-linked detoxification program run in New York City called Downtown Medical sought to involve city rescue worker who responded to the World Trade Center attack and were exposed to toxic materials. Participants were reportedly asked to cease taking prescribed

medications as part of the program. Dr. David Prezant, deputy chief medical officer of the New York Fire Department (FDNY), said, “It’s risky for anybody to stop any type of medication without guidance and a plan from their own treating physician.” The FDNY refused to endorse the program.<sup>919</sup>

Narconon also ran an antidrug educational program, which was banned from San Francisco public schools in 2004.<sup>920</sup> In 2005 the California Medical Association unanimously supported dropping Narconon as a source for drug education for students due to its “factually inaccurate approaches.” Medical experts specifically called attention to erroneous teachings such as “Drugs accumulate indefinitely in body fat, where they cause recurring drug cravings and flashbacks for years, even after the user quits” and that “the vitamin niacin pulls drugs from fat, and saunas sweat them from the body.”<sup>921</sup>

Narconon Arrowhead in Oklahoma became the focus of a multiagency investigation by the Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation, the Pittsburg County sheriff’s office, and the Department of Mental Health. The investigation began with the death of Stacy Dawn Murphy, twenty, at Arrowhead in 2012 but would eventually include the additional Narconon Arrowhead-related deaths of Hillary Holten, twenty-one; Gabriel Graves, thirty-two; and the 2009 death of Kaysie Dianne Werninck, twenty-eight. During 2013 a number of lawsuits were filed across the United States against Narconon. Five lawsuits filed against the Arrowhead facility in Oklahoma alleged fraud, deceit, breach of contract, and civil conspiracy.<sup>922</sup>

Lucas Catton, once the president of the Arrowhead facility in Oklahoma, left in 2004. In an interview Catton said, “It’s all based on deception. Everything from the success rate to their counseling certifications, to their general requirements of what it takes to be a staff member to their connection to the Church of Scientology—every single one of those things is deceptively portrayed to the general public versus what really goes on behind the closed doors.”<sup>923</sup>

Search warrants were executed at a Narconon-related rehabilitation clinic during April 2013. Narconon in Georgia is under investigation for insurance fraud. One patient’s insurer was reportedly billed \$166, 275 for doctor’s visits that never took place. At the time the warrants were executed, Danny Porter, the Gwinnett County district attorney, said, “We are actively and vigorously pursuing an investigation.”<sup>924</sup> Concerned families claimed that Narconon financially exploited them. “No one ever said, ‘We’re going to open up two credit cards in your name,’” said Scott Maxey, a Chicago man who received new credit cards in the mail that were already charged to their limits to pay Narconon.<sup>925</sup>

## **Scientology Shrinking**

Despite its prodigious efforts in recent years, which includes buying and renovating impressive buildings Scientology calls its “Ideal Orgs,” or operational urban hubs, census figures seem to demonstrate that Scientology is in decline with a shrinking membership. For example, according to a 2011 census there are only 2,163 Australians who call themselves Scientologists. This reflects a 13.7 percent drop in Australian membership alone over the past five years.<sup>926</sup> The US Census Bureau and American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS) estimates appear to reflect the same. ARIS estimated that there were fifty-five thousand Scientologists in the United States in 2001, but by 2008 that number reportedly dwindled to about twenty-five thousand.<sup>927</sup>

## SCIENTOLOGY INTERVENTION

A middle-aged Scientologist confronted his wife and served her with divorce papers. He was determined to leave his family in an effort to become a full-time member of the Sea Organization, commonly called Sea Org. First established by L. Ron Hubbard, Scientology's founder, Sea Org is now composed of the full-time staff serving at Scientology centers or what are called "Orgs" around the world.

Most people who join Scientology begin as "publics," people who pay for Scientology courses and services but are not on staff.<sup>928</sup> Celebrity Scientologists like actors Tom Cruise and John Travolta are essentially publics, but they are catered to and receive special treatment, such as special handling at Scientology's so-called celebrity centers.<sup>929</sup> Scientology courses and services can be quite expensive and therefore potentially represent a substantial financial burden to the average income earner and at times even for the wealthy.<sup>930</sup> Some publics have joined Sea Org in the hope that further training and services would be available, essentially in exchange for work. Sea Org members have signed "billion year contracts" tying themselves to Scientology seemingly forever, based on a belief in past and future lives.<sup>931</sup>

After nearly thirty years as a public Scientologist, the husband wanted to do more to "clear the planet." "Clearing the planet" is Scientology jargon that essentially means recruiting people into Scientology so they can supposedly become cleared of negativity through Scientology courses and training. The husband felt that at this point in his life he could best accomplish this task by serving Scientology as a staff person. Now that his two children were adults and not living at home, only his marriage remained as an obstacle. He must leave his wife, who had never fully embraced Scientology, and move on.

After more than twenty years of marriage, the husband had never been able to convince his wife to do more than take a few Scientology courses. The couple owned a home and had raised their two children together, but now the husband was restless. He must fulfill his destiny through Scientology. And since his wife wouldn't support this full-time mission, he must leave her and go it alone.

After receiving divorce papers, the wife called her children, and a kind of family intervention took place. The wife and children cried and pleaded. They begged the husband and father not to separate from the family by going into relative seclusion in the Sea Organization. They knew that Sea Org members may cut off their families and have little, if any, meaningful communication. And if family members questioned such behavior or offered any criticism of Scientology, they might be labeled "suppressive persons," or SPs, and then summarily be dismissed through what Scientologists call the "disconnection" process.

After the emotional catharsis of the family intervention, the husband agreed to pause and reconsider the situation. His family's pleas affected him deeply, but he was confused and torn between his dual loyalties of Scientology and family.

At this juncture the wife called her sister-in-law. The husband's family had long been concerned about his involvement in Scientology, but much like his wife, they had kept their criticism private for fear of losing him. Now with the evidence mounting that he might submerge completely in Scientology, they decided to take immediate action and retained me to facilitate an intervention.

Before beginning the intervention, we held a preparation meeting, which included the husband's sister, his wife, and his children at my hotel room. We spoke at length for hours about the complexities of the intervention process and about how each person must fulfill his or her role. This talk included the usual warnings about boundaries and undue criticism at inappropriate moments. The intervention would require their full support, cooperation, and assistance for me to fulfill my role and facilitate this effort.

We decided during the preparation process that the best approach for the intervention would be a friendly visit from the sister at the family home. This was planned in advance, and the children would be there. We would begin on a weekend. The sister and I would come to the house, and she would introduce me.

We arrived in the morning. The wife greeted us at the door and let us in. It wasn't long before the husband and I were engaged in a friendly conversation about his home improvement projects, art collection, and hobbies. We chatted about his interest in art history and architecture for some time before he finally asked, "Why are you here?" My answer was candid and to the point, explaining that his family had serious concerns about his plans for the future. It seems that he had decided to postpone those plans, though there was still some palpable fear among his family members. We agreed to have a deeper conversation about their fears. Were all these apprehensions misplaced, or were there legitimate reasons for concern?

Our conversation soon moved to the subject of Scientology. The husband explained that he had been a member of the organization for almost three decades. He added that his wife and children had neither opposed nor fully embraced Scientology and that historically there had been no real arguments or serious disagreements about his commitment to the controversial organization. Instead, at times his wife and children had agreed to take Scientology courses and had been passive or generally agreeable to his ongoing involvement.

At this point his wife entered the conversation, explaining that her relative passivity in the past regarding Scientology didn't mean she had no concerns about it. The husband's sister explained that after learning about the proposed divorce and his plans to abruptly change his living arrangements, she became seriously concerned. Both of the adult children likewise expressed fears about Scientology's influence in the current situation. They wanted to know why their father had decided to leave their mother and move in to Scientology group housing.

His explanation was that after years of taking courses and moving through Scientology training as a public member, he wanted to make Scientology his total focus and mission in life. The husband felt that the only way he could do this effectively was to become a full-time staff member of Scientology. Since his children were both adults now, they no longer needed a full-time father. And his wife had enough property and assets to ensure her security. When I asked whether Scientology or Scientologists had played any role in his decision-making process, the husband's response was stony silence.

During the first day we discussed the nucleus for a definition of a destructive cult, as described by Robert Jay Lifton.<sup>932</sup> Might Scientology potentially fit within that basic framework? Did the founder of Scientology, L. Ron Hubbard, parallel the first characteristic Lifton had described, fulfilling the role of a defining charismatic and authoritarian leader? Wasn't it Hubbard's legacy of writings that formed the foundation of Scientology and completely defined the group? In this sense couldn't Scientology be seen as a personality-driven organization? These thought-provoking questions stimulated our discussion and moved the conversation forward. The husband acknowledged the singular and pivotal importance of Hubbard and his writings. He said that without L. Ron Hubbard, Scientology had no basis for existence or meaningful substance.

After Hubbard's death in 1986, Sea Org member David Miscavige ultimately became chairman of the board of the Religious Technology Center tasked with the responsibility to "preserve, maintain and protect the Scientology religion."<sup>933</sup> Today he "holds the ultimate ecclesiastical authority regarding the standard and pure application of L. Ron Hubbard's religious technologies."<sup>934</sup>

In our discussion about Hubbard, we touched on the mythology that seemed to surround the man. This included Hubbard's personal biography, as promoted by Scientology, which reportedly is often misleading, generally inflated, and grossly exaggerated.<sup>935</sup> Who was L. Ron Hubbard? We examined some of the relevant research about Hubbard's education, military career, and time as a science fiction writer. But it was his role as the creator of Scientology that ultimately became Hubbard's most lasting and important historical legacy.

What was Scientology without L. Ron Hubbard? After a day of discussion, we agreed that the personalities of Hubbard and Scientology were so intertwined, synonymous, and inseparable that neither had any historical significance without the other. Scientology would simply be unable to function without Hubbard's legacy. Therefore the most salient single feature of a destructive cult was evident in Scientology—that is, a charismatic leader comes to define the group and is its driving force. Our first day was consumed with establishing this fact. We examined the life of Hubbard through whatever objective historical documentation or existing news reports could be verified rather than through the mythology Scientology had developed about the man.

At the end of the first day, there was no difficulty in obtaining the husband's agreement that he would continue the dialogue the following day and not contact anyone associated with Scientology. He stayed with his wife and two children at the family home, and his sister and I returned to our respective hotel rooms, not far away, for the night. Per our previous preparation, the family understood that during the intervening evening they wouldn't discuss Scientology or any related topics we had touched on through our conversation that day. Instead, they would use that time to unwind, relax, and engage in casual conversation not connected to the intervention.

On day two we discussed the second characteristic Lifton identified in his core definition of a destructive cult—that is, evidence that the group or leader uses a thought-reform program. Lifton lists eight criteria that, taken together, constitute proof that a thought-reform program is in place and

ongoing.<sup>936</sup> Lifton explains that such a program can be run effectively using a minimum of six of these criteria. We discussed which of the criteria might be applicable to Scientology.

The first and foremost of Lifton's eight criteria of thought reform is control of the environment or what he calls "Milieu Control."<sup>937</sup> This aspect of thought reform provides the foundation or platform for the following seven operating characteristics. I asked the husband to explain what extent his social network of friends extended to beyond Scientology. He explained that virtually all his present friends were Scientologists. Other than members of his immediate family and extended family, he really didn't have any deep or meaningful relationships with anyone outside of Scientology. After decades of involvement in Scientology, whatever old friends he'd once had outside the organization had long since fallen away.

To better understand how this aspect of relationships might relate to cultic control, we went over a chart psychologist Margaret Singer composed that correlated the research of MIT professor Edgar Schein regarding coercive persuasion with the findings of Lifton and her own interpretation of how this information applied to cults.<sup>938</sup> Singer noted how "control [of] the person's time and, if possible, physical environment" correlated with Milieu Control.<sup>939</sup> We talked about how such social isolation is also one of the "key factors" sociologist Richard Ofshe cited in his explanation of coercive persuasion.<sup>940</sup> In other words, that's "the use of an organized peer group" to "promote conformity."<sup>941</sup> Singer also noted the work of Arizona State University professor Robert Cialdini,<sup>942</sup> who included "liking" as a principle of influence used to gain compliance. Singer correlated this dimension to cults: "We obey people we like."<sup>943</sup> I asked the husband whether his relatively tight-knit group of Scientology friends had effectively served as an element of control in his decision-making process. Did he obey Scientology largely because he liked them? Cialdini also points out the influence of what he calls "social proof"; one way to "determine what is correct is to find out what others believe is correct."<sup>944</sup>

We also discussed the husband's many years of taking courses, going through auditing, and doing other Scientology-related activities. Certainly during that time Scientology or Scientologists had exercised ongoing control over the environment. Specifically we focused on how the organization can potentially encapsulate an individual. I then pointed out that Sea Organization members represented the most extreme example of Scientology's control of an environment. Sea Org members lived in Scientology housing, were full-time staffers who were barely socializing in any meaningful way with the outside world, and became effectively cocooned in Scientology. We discussed how control of the environment and the flow of information laid the groundwork for control of the mind. As Cialdini observed, "People often view a behavior as more correct in a given situation—to the degree that we see others performing it."<sup>945</sup> To the extent that an organization or leader can control environment, everything a person sees, experiences, and does in social interaction, that group or leader can substantially control the mind. Ofshe summarized this control as "the manipulation of the totality of the person's social environment to stabilize behavior once modified."<sup>946</sup>

On the second day we also touched on other aspects of Lifton's thought-reform criteria such as "Mystical Manipulation" and the "Cult of Confession."<sup>947</sup> How might those characteristics be expressed in Scientology? Scientologists are put through a process called "auditing," which is a form of counseling based on questioning conducted by an auditor while the subject is physically connected to what is essentially a galvanic response-measuring device. Scientologists call this apparatus an "e-meter."<sup>948</sup> A Scientologist is told that the e-meter measures the "negative reactive mind," but in fact it is little more than a means of measuring nervous tension during what can be seen as an interrogation process. The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) categorized the e-meter as a "religious artifact" without any meaningful medical application.<sup>949</sup>

Perhaps auditing might be seen as somewhat like a Roman Catholic confessional process with a priest but without confidentiality and the added element of technology. The so-called e-meter is one aspect of what is often called a "lie detector" machine or polygraph. How potent and penetrating does that make Scientology's form of confession? An auditor or confessor is aided by a form of technology, which helps him or her identify and delve deeper into the subject's secrets and vulnerabilities. We talked about the fact that auditors take copious notes for each auditing session, which then become part of a file compiled about that individual. We discussed how the auditing process could be used to manipulate the subject, who is in a highly suggestible state.

According to Lifton, Mystical Manipulation "uses every possible device at the milieu's command, no matter how bizarre or painful. Initiated from above, it seeks to provoke specific patterns of behavior and emotion in such a way that these will appear to have arisen spontaneously, directed as it is by an ostensibly omniscient group, and must assume, for the manipulated, a near-mystical quality."<sup>950</sup> This comment also parallels Ofshe's observation concerning the primary aspects of coercive persuasion, which includes the "intense interpersonal and psychological attack to destabilize an individual's sense of self to promote compliance."<sup>951</sup> We also reviewed Singer's research, which identified the net result of such personal manipulation as "powerlessness, covert fear and dependency."<sup>952</sup>

As we continued to move forward through the second day, the husband remained engaged and seemed very interested. But he did repeatedly offer counterpoints defending both Scientology and its practices. He said, "Other religions are the same." But as the husband offered a new apology, it was also an opportunity to raise additional questions about the integrity and transparency of Scientology.

For example, other religious groups are typically much more open about their beliefs, faith claims, and doctrines. Why does Scientology deliberately withhold information about important components of its belief system? Do Christians withhold certain information they know about Jesus? Do Jews conceal the story of Abraham?

These questions emphasize the point that Scientology deliberately withholds important information about its basic beliefs. No one who enters Scientology is initially told about Xenu (pronounced Zee-new), “the head of the galactic federation” who ruled seventy-five million years ago and killed millions of people by blowing them up volcanically on earth. Only when a Scientologist reaches OT III (Operating Thetan Level 3)<sup>953</sup> does he or she learn about how Xenu packaged disembodied spirits in “clusters” or body thetans (BTs), which would live on as one body. Only when a Scientologist reaches OT III does he or she learn the relevance of this history, which is linked to the process of cleansing oneself of negativity. This process includes addressing the negative influence of BTs, which can effectively be accomplished only through Scientology.

I asked the husband whether he thought Scientology might be seen as deceptive or at least less than forthcoming by not openly sharing the story of Xenu and BTs with people from the beginning. Would Christians neglect to explain the importance of the virgin birth or resurrection as an important part of Christianity? Would Jews fail to disclose the epoch of Exodus and its relevance to the Ten Commandments?

Despite the importance of Xenu to Scientology, his existence is not disclosed until a Scientologist reaches a predetermined point, which may take years to accomplish. Only then is this information shared. We talked about Singer’s delineation of the differences between indoctrination and thought reform—for example, that religious indoctrination is typically not deceptive but that thought reform “is deceptive.”<sup>954</sup>

There are eight OT levels in Scientology. As we discussed this aspect, everyone agreed that progressing through these various levels could be quite costly.<sup>955</sup>

But how could someone make an informed decision about such an investment of time and money if he or she doesn’t have the necessary information to fully understand Scientology? If Scientology expects someone to pay for courses and training, why isn’t there more meaningful disclosure about the beliefs that form the basis for much of that course work?

The husband struggled with these questions and could neither easily address them nor offer solid answers. His family members reiterated their concerns—that if he was going to dedicate the rest of his life to Scientology as a full-time staffer, such issues must be addressed. Again we agreed to meet the following day, ending our second day with serious questions we would follow through on the next morning.

On the third day the husband seemed almost anxious to begin. He wanted answers to the perplexing questions surrounding Scientology. We discussed yet another aspect of Lifton’s criteria concerning thought reform. Is Scientology what Lifton calls a “Sacred Science”? Lifton writes that in a group using thought reform, there is “an aura of sacredness around its basic dogma, holding it out as an ultimate moral vision for the ordering of human existence.” He adds, “This sacredness is evident in the prohibition (whether or not explicit) against the questioning of basic assumptions, and in the reverence which is demanded for the originators of the Word, the present bearers of the Word, and the Word itself, while thus transcending ordinary concerns of logic.”<sup>956</sup> Singer describes this as a “closed system of logic” that will “allow no real input or criticism” as opposed to education, where a “two-way pupil-teacher exchange is encouraged.”<sup>957</sup> Singer also says a legitimate educational effort “is not deceptive.”<sup>958</sup>

Could Scientology be considered such a “Sacred Science” and “closed system of logic”? Scientologists have said they hope to “clear the planet” through their technology. Cannot such a plan be seen as tantamount to proposing “an ultimate moral vision for the ordering of human existence”? Is there a meaningful two-way exchange during Scientology training? Certainly there is reverence of L Ron Hubbard as the “originator of the Word” as well as considerable deference demonstrated to both the current leader, Miscavige, and the organization as “the current bearers of the Word.” And there is absolute acceptance of the word itself. We also discussed how Cialdini’s principles of influence might be applied in this context. That is, the use of authority, according to Singer, uses “a deep-seated sense of duty to authority figures” to solicit obedience and compliance.<sup>959</sup>

We watched A&E cable network’s investigative report about Scientology.<sup>960</sup> This two-hour presentation, broadcast during December 1998, was the last media interview of David Miscavige. A&E apparently had the full cooperation of Scientology. The producers seemed to make sure that ample time was afforded for Scientologists to rebut any criticism and present the organization’s views and official positions. Miscavige noted, “All of our source materials, original teachings will be taught and practiced the same way fifty years from now, hundred years from now, thousand years from now.”<sup>961</sup> Miscavige ultimately concluded, “Scientology, we believe, is a point where science and religion have truly met.”<sup>962</sup>

Entertainer Isaac Hayes, who was also interviewed for the A&E program, emphasized the absolute nature of Scientology teachings as written by

Hubbard. Hayes said, “We will not allow it to become aberrated [subject to an aberration], [and] we will not change it.”<sup>963</sup> This sentiment Hayes expressed seems to reflect Lifton’s description concerning “the prohibition against the questioning of basic assumptions” of the group.

But then how could Scientology be the point where “science and religion have truly met” if it is such a closed system that is not subject to change? We discussed this issue during the intervention; that is, science is certainly subject to change based on new discoveries and research. Scientologists like Hayes, however, appeared to see any change as an unwanted aberration. For example, Hubbard posited the theory that toxins are indefinitely held in the fatty tissues of the body. I pointed out that science has proved Hubbard wrong.<sup>964</sup> Yet Scientologists who support the Scientology-linked drug rehabilitation and education program, known as Narconon, refuse to accept this scientific fact. They will not accept that L Ron Hubbard was wrong.

We discussed this issue during the third day. After all, Hubbard wasn’t a doctor or a scientist but rather a science fiction writer without a college degree. Isn’t it possible that such a man, writing decades ago, got some things wrong? For example, there is now new research regarding the brain and its chemistry. In the 1950s Hubbard wasn’t aware of this—that is, scientific research hadn’t yet been done. How could Scientology be scientific if it isn’t subject to new discoveries and research? How could it “meet science” without critical questioning or change?

As we watched the A&E investigative report, other issues came up. A Scientologist tried to explain the cost of courses and training. He said, “Donations are requested.” I asked the husband whether this statement was disingenuous; that is, Scientology has specific pricing for its courses and services, and they are not simply paid by “donations.” He agreed and was aware of the prices set for services; he saw that the word *donation* was misleading.

At another point during the A&E program, the practice of “disconnection” was discussed. Disconnection is the process in Scientology that provides for the official shunning of declared or designated people outside the organization. Scientologists are expected to cease association and communication with people who have been declared “suppressive persons” (SPs). During the A&E program Mike Rinder, then an official spokesperson for Scientology, claimed that those people declared for disconnection were “antagonistic.” Ironically Rinder himself would years later leave Scientology, be declared an SP, and be subject to disconnection.

I asked the husband whether in his experience everyone who went through disconnection had demonstrated that he or she was somehow antagonistic. He responded that not everyone declared that he knew had been antagonistic regarding Scientology or Scientologists. Many had simply opted to leave or discontinue their involvement with Scientology, and subsequently they had been declared SPs. We concurred on this point, then reviewed news reports about former Scientologists and affected families, who claimed Scientology had cut them off.<sup>965</sup> Many complained about the lack of meaningful communication from loved ones in the Sea Organization.

We continued to watch the A&E report, which served to frame other issues. At one point Isaac Hayes said, “The more you know, the less likely you are to be victimized.” Hayes meant that people should learn more about Scientology. But couldn’t this concept be applicable to almost anything? I asked the husband whether this principle might be applied to our current discussion about Scientology. He agreed. Another day was ending. After we finished watching the A&E report, our third day was done.

At the beginning of the fourth day, we continued our dialogue about Lifton. At this point we delved into what Lifton called “loaded language.” He wrote, “The language of the totalist environment is characterized by the thought-terminating cliché. The most far-reaching and complex of human problems are compressed into brief, highly reductive, definitive-sounding phrases, easily memorized and easily expressed. These become the start and finish of any ideological analysis.”<sup>966</sup> We talked about how the label SP might fit the category of a thought-terminating cliché. We discussed how labeling people as SPs not only makes them social pariahs but also effectively ends any consideration of their ideas or personal accounts of abuse in the organization. In this sense the loaded language linked to disconnection could not only terminate thinking but also dispense with the very existence of those so declared.

“The Dispensing of Existence” is yet another of Lifton’s criteria used to identify the existence of a thought-reform program or what some might call “brainwashing.” This characteristic is an expression of how “the totalist environment draws a sharp line between those whose right to existence can be recognized, and those who possess no such right.”<sup>967</sup> At this point we discussed how this quotation might be linked to Scientology’s disconnection policy. How people passed in and out of existence depending on their status or designation, according to Scientology. A person’s existence could be dispensed with if he or she left the organization, because there was no legitimate reason to leave. Therefore, whenever someone left, he or she was wrong and was potentially an SP; he or she could be declared an SP and then be subject to disconnection. Wasn’t Scientology’s disconnection policy an expression of what Singer described as a “closed system” that was intolerant of criticism and resisted logic?

Was it simply coincidental that so many aspects of Scientology paralleled Robert Jay Lifton's nucleus for a definition of a destructive cult? Was it happenstance that so many of Lifton's criteria concerning thought reform and coercive persuasion techniques, as researchers such as Schein, Singer, and Ofshe explained, seemed to be evident in Scientology?

The husband didn't experience an epiphany or sudden moment of clarity. Instead, through the days as we worked together, his realization of Scientology gradually unfolded. Bit by bit and piece by piece, the program instilled in his mind over a period of decades gradually unraveled and fell apart. He increasingly asked critical questions, and on the fifth day he said he would no longer be involved in Scientology. Needless to say, his family was greatly relieved. But most importantly, he came to this conclusion through his own thought processes, analysis, and critical thinking—which the intervention had only facilitated and encouraged.

On the fifth day he began to disclose previously unknown information to his family about Scientology and its inner workings. He admitted that Scientologists had encouraged him to divorce his wife and leave his family. It seems those who had advised him saw the husband as more useful in Sea Org as a full-time staffer than just continuing to take courses and receive auditing and training.

In the months that followed, I received several phone calls from the husband, his sister, and his wife. Sometimes there were concerns regarding the difficulties he was experiencing in his social transition away from Scientology. He was sometimes lonely and missed his Scientology friends. It appears that he wasn't officially declared, but his Scientology friends began to drop him, and he needed to move on with his life. This meant finding new friends and interests.

The husband received some professional counseling, but largely found solace from the input, support and advice of family.