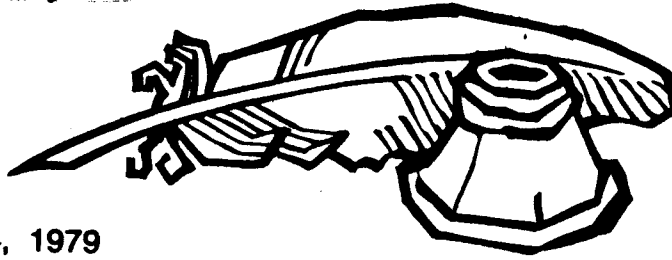


Opinion



CLEARWATER SUN

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SECTION F

Documents remove last faint doubts about Scientology

JOURNALISTS PRIDE themselves on being fair and objective. Like any other profession, our barrel has its bad apples. But as a rule, we bend over backward to be fair.

Seldom have I questioned my own ability to make the professional judgments required of me as a reporter, city editor, managing editor and editor.

Seldom has it been charged that I did not attempt to be fair, though hindsight sometimes has shown that those attempts were somewhat less than successful. But one group has screamed "unfair" at me so many times during the last four years that small doubts sometimes crept into my mind.

Doubts planted by the cult that calls itself the Church of Scientology did not cause me to lose sleep or function poorly at my job. But every once in a while, I would let the harangings of a Sorrel Allen, an Arthur Maren, a Laura Wolfe, a Fred Ulan, a Fred Rock or a Nancy Reitze—all Scientology officials—slip into my introspective thoughts.

Did the Clearwater Sun overreact when it was discovered the Scientologists guard their privacy so much that they lied to city officials when they first came to Clearwater? Or was this the signal that this group really had something to hide?

WAS THE BROW-BEATING administered to two Sun reporters enough to create prejudices on their part and mine? Or was it

**RON
STUART**
Sun Editor



really a blatant attempt to frighten them out of pursuing the biggest story of their lives?

Did I deserve the shouted declarations that my lack of a solid commitment to a religion made me insensitive to the religion of others? Or, as so many believed, was it a sham to call Scientology a religion?

Were the ravings of persons such as former Clearwater mayor Gabe Cazares and current Clearwater City Commissioner Richard Tenney just the rhetoric of politicians wanting to score re-election points? Or were they the genuine concern of elected officials for the city they serve?

Was I bordering on wild accusations when in my own mind I blamed the cult for the break-in at the Tallahassee hotel room of a Sun reporter? Or, as the Washington Post later reported, were these followers of a former science fiction writer, L. Ron Hubbard, really guilty of an elaborate scheme to frame our reporter?

WAS I RIGHTFULLY indignant when the

FB¹ informed me that the occupants of the former Fort Harrison hotel had managed to get one of their own placed in a clerical position in the Sun newsroom? Or was this harmless nose-tweaking in adversary journalism?

Was it OK for the staff to good-naturedly present me with a Scientology dart board after the cult had circulated a poster with a caricature of me throwing darts at such a board? Or did it reflect a biased opinion by reporters who should remain objective at all costs?

Was the enrollment of a reporter under his given name into a basic Scientology course an invasion of privacy and an assault on citizens' rights to freedom of religion? Or was it a legitimate attempt to find out what Scientology is all about?

Was it paranoia when the management of the Sun decided to have our phones checked for bugging devices? Or was this "religion" really guilty of such illegal exercises?

Was it an overactive imagination the night a van belonging to the cult (blue-and-white with a Volusia tag) followed me on a trip from a Tampa residential neighborhood into downtown Clearwater? Or was it proper caution that I decided to drive into the police department parking lot, allowing the van to pass.

After I became editor, did I let previous events play too important a role in the Sun's editorial policy on the cult's activities? Or

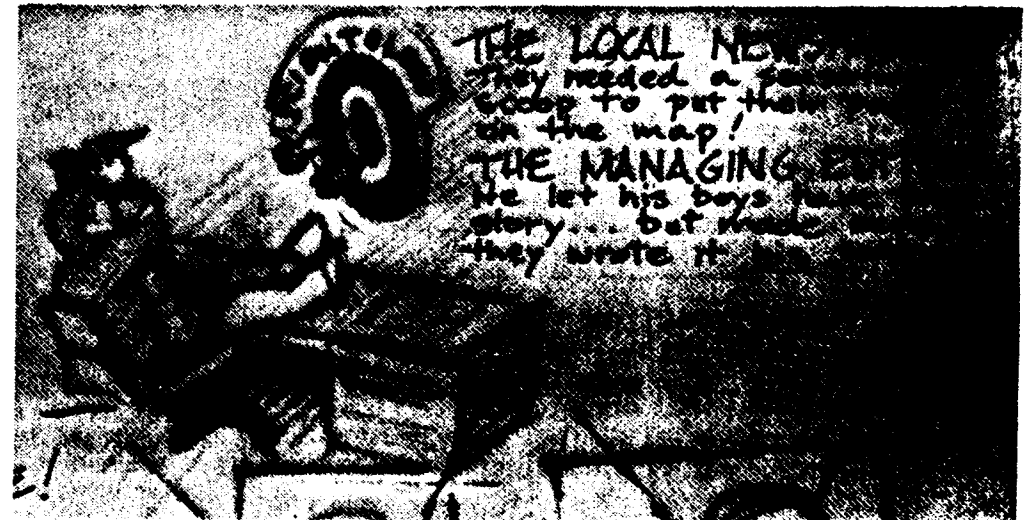
was it our duty to keep reminding readers that this is a vindictive organization with questionable means of achieving even more questionable goals?

AND THROUGH it all, were the cult spokesmen correct when they said we were playing on the hysterical emotions of area residents just to sell papers? Or were we carrying out our professional responsibility to inform the people?

Those doubts were never big, but I would be lying if I said they never existed. But Hubbard's followers have planted the last unsure thought in my mind.

The documents showing the cult's intent to "take control" of the city you and I call home have eradicated the last faint doubts.

My conscience is just as clear as if it had just received the best audit possible from an E-meter.



This caricature of Sun managing editor was circulated by cult.