

Scientology founder's son: Father a liar

What they said:



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"If Hubbard decides to leave this planet, he will take these people with him," said former Scientologist Edvard Walters, drawing a comparison to the late Rev. Jim Jones.



"My father only knew how to do one thing and that was to destroy people," said the former L. Ron Hubbard Jr., now known as Ron DeWolf.

By JOHN HARWOOD
 St. Petersburg Times Staff Writer

CLEARWATER — The way the Church of Scientology tells it, L. Ron Hubbard discovered Scientology while healing his own blindness, by blending his knowledge of Eastern philosophy, nuclear physics and experience in extensive travels through Asia.

It's not true, Hubbard's son told Clearwater City Commissioners Wednesday.

"He was never . . . blinded," testified the former L. Ron Hubbard Jr., 47, now known by the last name of his great-grandmother, DeWolf.

There were no extensive Asian travels, DeWolf said. No long years of research. No training in nuclear physics.

"I WOULD SAY that 99 percent of what my father has written about his own life is false," DeWolf asserted.

Bespectacled, pink-complected, red-haired like his father, DeWolf delivered a sweeping condemnation of Scientology's founder during the first day of public hearings into church activities.

His attack on Hubbard's credentials is significant, according to city consultant Michael J. Flynn, because those credentials are what draw many Scientologists to join the church and pay money to it.

DeWolf was the second of an estimated 20 witnesses that Flynn, a Boston lawyer, will present this week in an attempt to persuade city commissioners to pass ordinances regulating the church's "fraudulent practices."

The first witness, 44-year-old ex-Scientologist Edward Walters of Las Vegas, warned that the methods of Hubbard and the late Rev. Jim Jones, founder of the People's Temple, are "amazingly similar."

Jones led more than 900 of his followers in mass murder-suicide at a Guyanese jungle retreat in 1978. The thin, balding Walters raised the specter of another Jones-town should Hubbard end his own life:

"IF HUBBARD DECIDES to leave this planet, he will take these people with him," he said.

Though Walters' testimony consumed most of the six-and-a-half hour session, it was DeWolf whose appearance attracted the most attention.

He broke from his father many years ago, and Wednesday was not the first time he has attacked the veracity of the Scientology founder's claimed credentials.

But since Hubbard leads such a reclusive, mysterious life, the presence of his son clearly impressed commissioners. He sat at a long table facing the commission dais, flanked by Flynn and another lawyer, and sipped orange juice for his diabetes as he testified.

He portrayed his father as loose with the truth; a man who "takes one small fact and . . . balloons it way up."

Far from being a brilliant, accomplished academic, Hubbard was "a terrible student," DeWolf said. Though Hubbard did take a physics course in college, he flunked it.

The book that started Scientology — *Dianetics: The*

See SCIENTOLOGY, 18-B

Scientology from 1-B

Modern Science of Mental Health — "generally came from his imagination," DeWolf testified.

"THE WHOLE BOOK was written right off the top of my father's head . . . in less than a month," said DeWolf, who lives in Carson City, Nev.

In his testimony — which lawyers for the church have not yet been permitted to rebut — DeWolf also charged that his father:

- ✓ Transformed his original movement, Dianetics, from a mental health treatment to a religion largely to solve difficulties he was having with courts and the Internal Revenue Service.

- ✓ Kept shoeboxes full of cash in his closet during the early days of Scientology so he could flee from authorities at a moment's notice.

- ✓ Employed merciless smear campaigns on his critics. "My father only knew how to do one thing and that was to destroy people," DeWolf said.

- ✓ Was a bigamist. DeWolf said the senior Hubbard married his second wife Sara Northrup Hubbard in 1946, a year before he divorced DeWolf's mother, Margaret Grubb Hubbard.

- ✓ Twice tried to perform abortions on the first Mrs. Hubbard — including once in the presence of DeWolf, who was then 6 or 7.

"You have to view the past of L. Ron Hubbard as almost a great big ball, a tangled web, of barbed wire," DeWolf told commissioners.

DeWolf testified for slightly more than an hour before the hearing adjourned about 5:40 p.m. When the hearings resume at 9 a.m. today, DeWolf will give additional testimony and answer questions from commissioners.

The hearings, which are scheduled to continue through May 15, opened on a volatile note Wednesday morning. After Flynn, the city's \$80,000 consultant for the hearings, delivered an opening statement, a lawyer for the church rose to speak as well.

THE LAWYER, Paul B. Johnson of Tampa, said City Attorney Thomas Bustin had assured him of the chance to make an opening statement. But Mayor Charles LeCher and the rest of the commission, to Johnson's obvious displeasure, said no.

The mayor said Johnson could make a statement next Monday when the church will be given a chance to rebut Flynn's witnesses. He then told Johnson to sit down.

"Does that mean that Mr. Bustin's permission is withdrawn?" Johnson pressed.

"That means, sir, sit down!" LeCher shouted.

At that point Johnson walked out of the hearing, and said it was evident that LeCher has "prejudged the entire matter."

Johnson said the church still hasn't decided whether to participate in the hearing, but he described the proceedings as "devoid of any concept of . . . fairness."

He added, "It seems to me it would be an exercise in futility for me to return."

After the hearings, Johnson and other church officials chose not to respond to specific points of testimony from either DeWolf or Walters. Walters outlined what he said were church policies designed to silence critics through such means as burglary, electronic bugging, and even kidnapping.

JOHNSON DID SAY that "I don't see the slightest similarity" between Scientology and the People's Temple of Jim Jones.

"That just sounds like clear sensationalism and irresponsibility," Johnson complained. "I'm just appalled."

Though commissioners have said they intend to focus on the church's activities in Clearwater, neither DeWolf nor Walters offered any testimony concerning Clearwater.

DeWolf quit the church in 1959, 16 years before Scientology moved here. Walters said he had never been in Clearwater until two years after leaving Scientology.

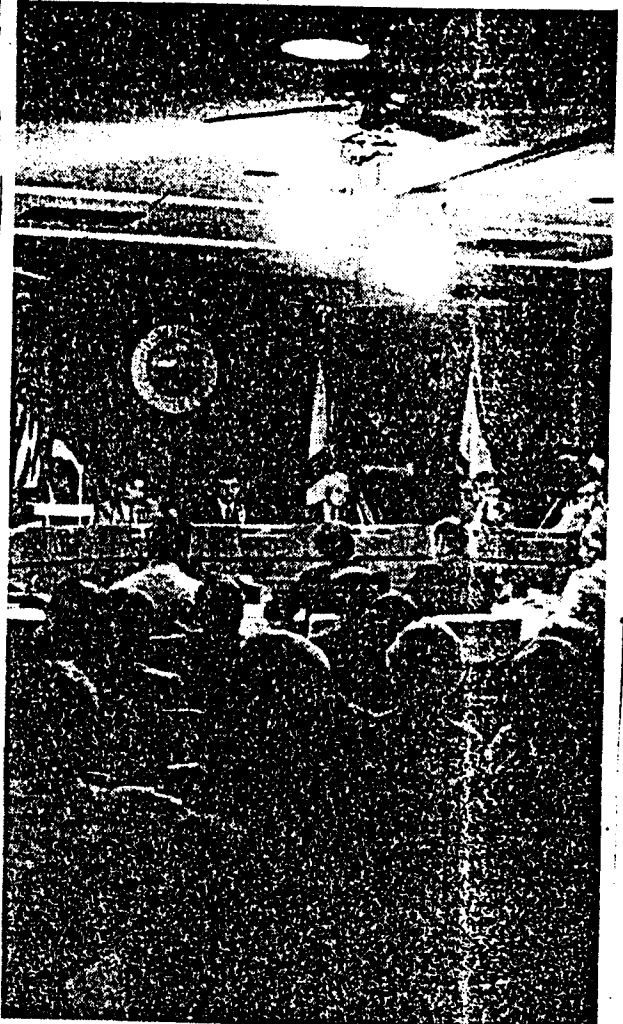
Nonetheless, Flynn promised that Wednesday's testimony "is just laying the foundation" for revelations concerning Clearwater. Those will begin today with testimony from three more ex-Scientologists, Flynn said.

At one point in Walters' remarks, Commissioner James Berfield, a lawyer, asked if Walters had been granted immunity from prosecution or read his rights concerning testimony about his own involvement in various alleged crimes.

FLYNN REPLIED, "That issue has been resolved" with local officials.

Reached later by the *St. Petersburg Times*, both Pinellas-Pasco State Attorney James T. Russell and Assistant U.S. Attorney Terry Bostic said their offices had not granted immunity to any witnesses at the hearings.

Investigators from both Russell's office and the Florida Department of Law Enforcement were among the more than 100 spectators at the hearings, according to Clearwater Police Chief Sidney Klein.



St. Petersburg Times — STEVE HASEL

The first day's hearing was well attended in Clearwater.