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Writer says sect harasses her

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It has been 11 years since freelance writer Paulette Cooper published what she calls "the book that launched a thousand suits." And it has been about a week since she was served with the eighteenth lawsuit filed against her by the Church of Scientology.

"I handled the eighteenth better," the thin, blond woman said Thursday. "But how can things not bother you? I work day and night to pay lawyers."

Ms. Cooper, in Clearwater this week for the city's Scientology hearings, has been embroiled with the sect since she published a book in 1971, "The Scandal of Scientology."

The New York writer said the latest suit charges her with conspiracy against the church, as do most of the recent suits. Ms. Cooper, meanwhile, said she has two suits pending against the sect and one counter-suit charging Scientology with harassment.

In sect documents released by federal court order in 1976, Ms. Cooper emerged as perhaps Scientology's most hated enemy be-

cause of her damaging writings about the sect and its activities.

According to the documents, she was the target of "Operation Freakout," a plan to get her "incarcerated in a mental institution or jail, or at least hit her so hard that she drops her attacks."

The subsequent lawsuits have cost her \$19,000 and led her to a nervous breakdown, she said.

The church has said it no longer engages in such attacks, but Ms. Cooper, who will speak at today's hearings, said otherwise.

"They say they've changed," she said, chain-smoking Kent cigarettes. "I want you to know that Scientology has not changed. I don't ever want anybody to go through what I went through."

Ms. Cooper, 40, said that this past week someone canceled the airline reservations for her Clearwater flight to the hearings. "That's the third time this year," she said.

The sect's Tampa attorney, Paul B. Johnson, declined to reply to the comments until after Ms. Cooper testifies. Scientology spokesman Hugh Wilhere repeated the sect's policy of referring all inquiries on hearing mat-

ters to Johnson.

Ms. Cooper called the city's hearings a "wonderful forum," even if they serve no other purpose than "to educate the people."

She said she thought the sect has been growing weaker in recent years and, when asked how long she thought it would survive, said "I plan to outlive them."

But she predicted the sect would always have a "hard core" following of at least 1,000, "and this, Clearwater, is where they're going to be."

Ms. Cooper's book was prompted by a friend who she said joined Scientology in the 1960s and wound up in a mental institution. She said she does not know the sect drove her friend to the institution, but the incident raised her "curiosity."

She began research in 1968 and said she ran into trouble with the sect soon after.

"They made it clear to me about what would happen," she said. "That they'd make me an example so no one would ever do it again. I was scared, but being scared is a very stupid reason to be quiet."