

## Ex-Member Cites Abuse By Church

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CLEARWATER — Lori Taverna was a young, impressionable mother of two children when a friend took her to a free lecture given by the Church of Scientology in June 1965.

"It sounded very good," she testified Thursday. "It sounded like it was something I was looking for."

"I thought it was great," she said. "I was joining a group that would handle drugs, crime and war. And, my children would be growing up in this."

Part of Taverna's education by the church took place in Clearwater.

And Thursday — 17 years after her first contact with the church and just two months after she walked away, fearing for her safety — Lori Taverna returned to Clearwater to testify before the City Commission about the church.

Taverna testified as part of the city of Clearwater's public hearings to investigate the church. The hearings continue today at 9 a.m.

Other witnesses testified Thursday that the Church of Scientology in Clearwater was a major money-making operation that forced believers to make money or face punishments that included eating beans and rice for a week and physical abuse. For the second straight day, church founder L. Ron Hubbard's son also testified that his father lied about his past and many church matters.

The church has contended that it is not guilty of misconduct and objected to the hearings, but it lost a bid in U.S. District Court last week to block them.

Taverna testified Scientology cost her a marriage and \$90,000.

And, she said, she saw people working 14 hours a day for little pay, she saw abuse and constant pressure to come up with money. A dozen people occupy the miniature hotel rooms at the Fort Harrison, the church headquarters, and there is much sickness that is left untreated, she said.

Children with 105-degree temperatures were left untreated until Taverna's sister objected and threatened to call authorities, she testified. She also remembers courses in Los Angeles that forced church followers to look at each other without speaking and without blinking their eyes.

Prevent your eyes from blinking and remain silent for two hours and you passed the course, Taverna told the commission.

For three months, from 8 a.m. to 11 p.m., the students tried to do it — and failed.

"A lot of students went psychotic," she said. "Some had the white disappear from their eyes. I tried to talk to the officers and tell them this was wrong."

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Taverna said she became so ingrained with Scientologist teachings, however, that she could not leave immediately. She said she kept hoping that Hubbard would find out about conditions and change things.

In time, with overwork and anxiety that caused health problems and with physical abuse when she made mistakes, Taverna said she started to lose touch with reality.

"You had a set schedule," she said. "You wake up and there was a schedule ... you go to sleep."

"You lose touch with reality. I didn't know what day or month it was and I didn't care."

Living and health conditions in Clearwater made her feel "other than human," she said.

"I would classify it as very uncomfortable," she said. "With 10 people in a small room and no air conditioning. One bathroom. And there were these bugs crawling around."

"There were ants on the bed .... And, there was this thing that looked like a roach and had wings."

Although she escaped from Clearwater once and went back to New York, she said she returned to the city and the church a day later because it was such a "high crime" to leave the organization.

She said that she left the church a second time, promising to sell her house and return with the money. She has not been back.

Another witness, Casey Kelly, 23, who left the church in October 1980 after spending three years in Clearwater, said the Clearwater denomination once made \$2.3 million during one week while he was there.

The church set a high priority and used high-pressure tactics to sell religious books and its courses and that's where most of the money came from, he said.

The church makes \$400,000 to \$500,000 during an average week, he said.

"I don't know where all that money goes," Kelly said.

"And, the people that do don't tell."