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FRIDAY, May 11, 1984 96 pages

Clearwater, Florida

Former Scientologist recalls degradation

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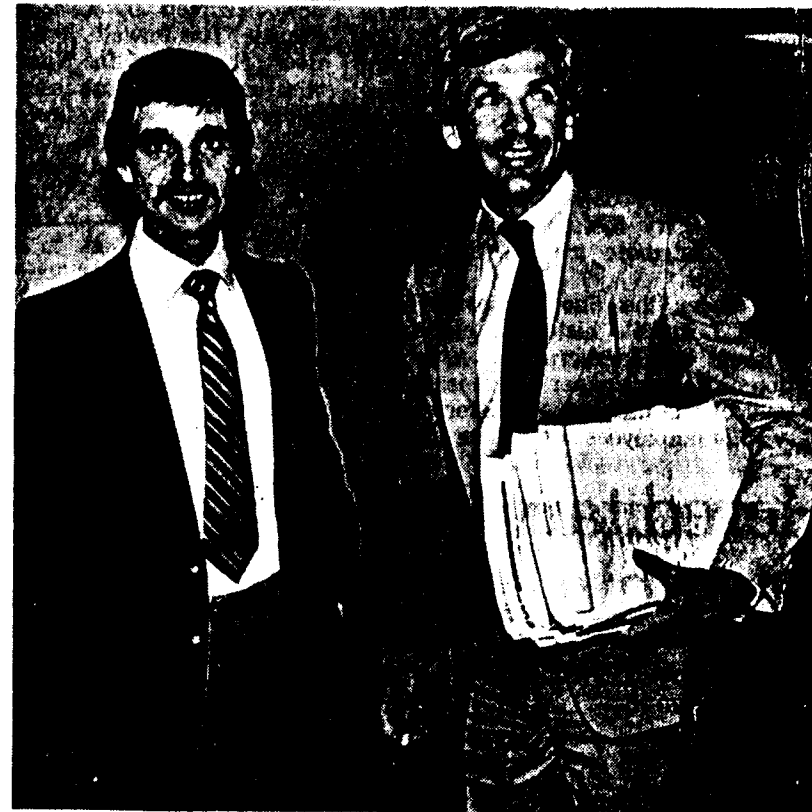
LOS ANGELES—The horror, the degradation, the humiliation and the pain all caught up with Gerald Armstrong Thursday when he broke down in tears while testifying in Superior Court here about his 11 years within the Church of Scientology.

The former sect archivist and subject of a suit charging him with taking personal papers of Scientology founder L. Ron Hubbard, Armstrong shook with sobs while recalling his 17-month term in the Rehabilitation Project Force (RPF), a form of Scientology punishment where he was paid \$4.30 a week for 100 hours of work while living in a storage room in Clearwater's Fort Harrison Hotel.

Armstrong's crime? Insubordination.

"I had sworn at (Hubbard's wife) Mary Sue's communicator and Hubbard deemed me a security risk," Armstrong told the packed courtroom.

"When we (Armstrong and his first wife) entered



Gerald Armstrong (left) leaves court with Michael Flynn.

AP photo

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RPF, we were the only ones in it and we stayed in the bathroom of a laundry room at the Fort Harrison," the 37-year-old recalled. "Then we were moved to a storage room on the tenth floor (and) worked on menial tasks ... assembling materials necessary to get out of RPF."

Armstrong described RPF as "a segregated group of people treated as prisoners (performing) forced labor under extreme conditions." He said RPF was an arm of the sect where Scientologists were banished "almost on a daily basis" when they did something Hubbard did not like. Sect officials said RPF still exists today.

Armstrong was the first defense witness called in the case by Boston attorney Michael Flynn. He was the Scientologists' archivist personally authorized, documents showed, by Hubbard to gather and compile records of the 72-year-old man's past so a free-lance writer could script a biography of the prolific science fiction author.

Armstrong collected the documents during 1981 and, when he became disillusioned by what he read, gave them to Flynn who, in turn, surrendered them to the court where they are presently under seal.

Although sealed by the court, Flynn said he will introduce as evidence a number of the documents. Under California law, those documents then become public domain.

But Mrs. Hubbard and the sect claim Armstrong had no right to take the 10,000 documents, letters and photographs and turn them over to anyone outside the church. They are suing Armstrong for the return of the documents and unspecified damages.

Ironically Armstrong, who rose to one of the highest levels of command within the organization, was trying to quash what he believed were inaccurate media claims about Hubbard's fictionalized past accomplishments when, he said, such stories were proven

true by the documents.

In early 1980, Armstrong wrote to Hubbard asking that he be appointed to "collect all of the records and files of Mr. Hubbard, to assemble them and do the research for his biography," Armstrong told Superior Court Judge Paul G. Breckenridge.

"He (Hubbard) had always told those inside the organization that these lies (reports about his misrepresented and exaggerated past) were made up by the media."

Armstrong said he believed that by gathering all the records of the man for the biography, he would have the proof to put to rest forever the controversy surrounding Hubbard's military record, education achievements and awards. But Armstrong claims those very documents proved the unfavorable stories, called "enthata" by Scientologists. It was then, Armstrong said, he left the sect, taking with him the contested papers.

Gerald Armstrong became a Scientologist in 1969 when the Canadian native was introduced to the burgeoning organization. Shortly thereafter, he said he signed a billion-year contract with the sect's "paramilitary" Sea Organization, "the elite of Scientologists."

He was assigned to Hubbard's flagship, the Apollo, and traveled about the world with him for the next four years. Testimony indicated Armstrong proved himself capable and loyal and moved up the ranks to several positions of importance and responsibility, including being at the forefront of the Scientologists' surreptitious move to Clearwater in 1975.

But one thoughtless moment resulted in his being banished to the RPF, working long hours for 17 months.

"In Scientology, no one has to be a victim," said Rev. Sandy Block of the Los Angeles organization. "Whatever happened was not necessary ... Gerry brought it upon himself. There were many avenues opened for him to handle

anything he thought was wrong."

Rev. Block said he felt that the fact that Armstrong was not able or willing to handle his problems within the church showed that his claims "are just so much hot air."

Still, Armstrong said, he was able to once again work himself into Hubbard's good graces and was given another executive position—in Gilman, Hot Springs, Calif.—where he moved into the "ultimate" inner circle of people who answered only to Hubbard, he testified.

It was at this time he helped coordinate a massive 200-person, two-week shredding operation of sect documents relating to Hubbard. The project was undertaken when it was learned of a possible federal raid on the Gilman retreat. The raid never materialized.

In time, Armstrong was again assigned to RPF, this time for "joking" about a film Hubbard was making. He underwent "hundreds of security checks on an E-meter" before again working himself out of the outcast organization. His penance paid, he again worked into a position of authority which by now paid \$20 a week for 100 hours of work.

In addition to Armstrong's contention that the documents presently under court seal will prove that Hubbard is not the man he claims to be, Armstrong detailed a 1980 Scientology project to get Hubbard awarded a Nobel Prize for his "discovery" of the Purification Process.

The Purification Process is a regimen of exercise, vitamins and sauna, which claims to rid the body of toxic waste and radiation. The Nobel project was unsuccessful.

Armstrong will continue testifying today and the trial is expected to last through next week.