

Saturday 11 May 1991

THE ~~AGE~~ AGE

S A T U R D A Y

EXTRA

CULT

BUSTERS

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# THE AGE



**Two American cult-busters recently flew to Australia to try to reclaim a young man from Scientology.**

**JACQUI MACDONALD watched as they tried to unlock his mind, hour by hour, inch by inch. The names of the family and the cult-busters have been changed.**

**F**OR TWO days Peter Nolan has rehearsed how to greet his son. Peter and his wife Mary have planned how they will open the flywire front door and smile at the son they have not seen for several months.

They have agonised over the deceptive plot hatched for Andrew and wonder whether they will be able to maintain the lie. Andrew is being lured home on this sunny morning; the invitation to spend the day with his grandmother is an elaborate set-up.

As the Nolans count down the hours their doubts mount: How will they explain the presence of two strangers in their home on a supposedly family occasion? What will Andrew make of the giant television screen in the living room?

Nine o'clock comes and goes. No Andrew. Mary Nolan nervously offers yet another cup of coffee. It is 10 am. Still no sign of him. Has their plan been discovered and their son tipped off that the home-coming is an ambush?

Finally, about midday, Andrew arrives. He shakes his father's hand and is introduced to the strangers: "Son, this is Joe and Sean." Then Peter Nolan plunges into his carefully pre-

pared script.

If Andrew had known what the script's ending would be, he would have stayed away.

**J**OE and Sean are "deprogrammers", members of a controversial group of men and women dedicated to busting people out of cults. They were flown to Australia by the Nolans, who were desperate to reclaim their son from Scientology.

The Nolans say they had watched as Andrew, a bright but troubled young man in his mid-20s, slipped deeper into Scientology. They estimate he spent between \$20,000 and \$30,000 of the money he had earned as a well-qualified professional on his search for answers to life's questions.

There was no doubt that the Nolans wanted their son out of Scientology but they said they accepted that the final decision was his. They simply wanted to provide him with the facts on which he could make an informed choice. "I want him to know that if there was a royal commission into Scientology that he would have all the facts so he would not be shocked by what he learnt," Peter Nolan says. "That he

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knows when he walks into the organisation he goes in on the basis of having made an informed decision."

The Nolans were also aware of the dangers of deprogramming and the radical methods, including kidnapping, sometimes employed by so-called cult-busters. Kidnappings have generally involved sect members who live inside tightly controlled cult communities.

As they tried to find someone to deprogram their son, they were forced to look overseas. One ex-Scientologist after another was quizzed. Finally, they talked to Joe and Sean and decided to chance the pair. They paid more than \$8000 to bring the Americans to Australia because they believed it was the last chance to save their son.

**A**S SUN streams through the windows of the 1950s-style lounge room, the battle for the mind of Andrew Nolan begins on a small, blue, two-seater couch.

"Joe's an OT3 and a class 5 auditor," Peter Nolan announces, hoping that his

son will be impressed by these terms that describe high positions within the church of Scientology. He fails to mention that Joe has since defected but continues quickly. "We invited him to help us understand Scientology better and what your involvement is."

"Good," is Andrew's only response.

Peter Nolan tells his son he is concerned at the gap developing between them, and that he believes Scientology is responsible. Mary Nolan offers another round of coffee and soft drinks.

Tears well in Andrew's eyes as he realises that his parents believe the communication gap is wider than he does. He tells them how difficult it is for him to maintain a relationship with people who cannot comprehend his involvement in the church. He alludes to his girlfriend, who has rejected Scientology, and says he feels there is no hope for the relationship.

"If I told them what my goals were, and how I intend to achieve them, they'd find would think I was crazy," Andrew says. "To them it's like snaring invisible butterflies. You must think I'm crazy, but I can see them."

Deprogramming involves trying to open a person's mind to other truths. In Andrew's case, it was to try to make him see that the butterflies were not really there.

The two deprogrammers, who describe themselves as "exit consultants", are both former cult members. They say they work by trying to gradually build a relationship of trust with their subject, showing them that they, too, have believed that the cult can provide all the answers.

Then they say they try to test the strength of the subject's beliefs. They provide the subject with details of the psychological techniques used by various cults to keep their followers.

Then comes the assault on the cult. All its beliefs are put up and then shot down. Finally, the "deprogrammers"

**They paid more than \$8000 to bring the Americans to Australia because they believed it was the last chance to save their son**

say, it is up to the subject to choose for him or herself. They hope Andrew will make the "right" choice.

## The deprogramming begins

**J**OE BEGINS work immediately on building a bridge with Andrew. His knowledge of the church gives him an initial bond with Andrew that nobody else in the room can share. The two bandy the jargon of Scientology (course names, theories, policies devised by the church's founder, the late L. Ron Hubbard) back and forth.

Every word has a purpose but as yet Andrew does not see what it is. Joe asks what Andrew has got out of Scientology. Andrew says he has not yet gained any of what the religion promises. "But I know what I am after," he says confidently.

They talk about the Org (short for church organisation) for hours. Joe is trying to get Andrew to give details of how deeply he is involved.

At first Andrew is reluctant to give too much away. But as the hours go by, he provides more information, almost drip by drip. He says he is not really into the church's organisation but be-

lieves that the technology it offers can help him.

His faith is in what the church calls an E-meter, a primitive lie detector used in Scientology counselling sessions known as auditing. He is convinced that if he continues with auditing he will be delivered from all the problems that he says have plagued him.

What he is seeking is the state of "clear". He has been told that when he reaches this he will be able to create his own reality — spiritual and physical.

Already he has spent 100 hours clutching the tin cans of the E-meter while his auditor measures the importance of his inner thoughts and feelings by tuning to "galvanic skin responses".

Slowly more of his story trickles out. He says on one occasion he recorded a "rock-slam". This is where the E-meter fluctuates rapidly and his auditor indicated that there was something drastic Andrew needed to disclose. He talks about one "peak moment". This gave him a taste of being "clear". This was the state of consciousness he yearned for.

Gradually, the relationship with Joe becomes easier. They talk more freely, chatting about everything from politics to work. There are no challenges or criticisms of Andrew. Andrew passionately defends the church and what it

stands for. He questions Joe on the depth of his religious conviction.

Joe has been an auditor and has gone past the stage of OT3. In Scientology, those who achieve this state are admired. OT stands for operating thetan, a term used by L. Ron Hubbard for the spiritual being. On the bridge to happiness, scientologists go through several grades until they are "clear".

It is only when they are "clear" that they begin studying the OT courses. The most significant of these is OT3. Newcomers are told that if they hear the lessons of OT3 before they are ready something terrible will happen to them. This is usually death by pneumonia.

More questions are thrown at the cult-busters. Andrew asks Joe, who has reached OT7, is he is going to continue across the bridge to happiness?

Joe says he does not think he will. Andrew asks why. But Joe turns the question back on the questioner. "Are you interested in parachuting?"

Andrew says he isn't, that he has different goals and priorities. He sticks by his beliefs. Joe says the same applied to him but does not elaborate.

The conversation turns to the Scientology policy of "fair game", in which Scientologists are told that their enemies ("suppressive persons") can be "tricked, sued, lied to or destroyed".

Andrew says he does not believe that L. Ron Hubbard could be responsible for such a policy. "But even if he did, that is not what I am interested in," he says. "I'm there for my individual purposes."

"Lots of dickheads get into organisations and want to play cops and robbers. I hope to hell that it is not criminals furnishing me with the technology, but if it is — so be it. I'm interested in the auditing technology. I want to be an auditor. It's an individual service."

It has been a long day but Andrew hugs his father as he leaves to go home for the night, thanking him for caring enough to further his understanding of Scientology. He says he understands why his parents lied about his grandmother's visit, promising to return to talk some more.

The real purpose of all the discussion has not dawned on him. Peter Nolan looks uncomfortable. "I felt like a complete bastard," he says.

## Challenging beliefs

**T**HE GIANT television screen hired by the Nolans has remained off until this morning. Andrew has been so obsessed with his beliefs that he has not questioned why

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Americans Joe and Sean, who were flown to Australia to reclaim a young man from the Scientologists.

## Cult-busters

■ FROM EXTRA 1

It sits alone in the middle of the lounge room.

Joe gets ready to turn the set on. He tells Andrew that one of the concerns of many parents is that their children are being brainwashed. He says it is important for Andrew to understand what brainwashing means and how it comes about.

The video begins. It shows the effectiveness of hypnosis: people hold their arms in buckets of ice for long periods because they have been told they will feel no pain while in a hypnotic trance. Another man snaps in and out of consciousness, like turning a light on and off.

A voice says that similar techniques are used to induce trances in members of some cults. There is no mention of Scientology. Andrew appears to be astounded that people succumb so easily to the suggestion of others.

The movie continues with an American documentary on cults. Suddenly, that word is mentioned. Scientology is included among those cults that are said to be involved in mind control. Andrew's face screws up into a grimace of disillusionment.

The picture goes black. Andrew turns quickly to Joe. "Well, I suppose you're going to tell me now what you really think of the church?"

He doesn't shout, doesn't even raise his voice. He lies back on the couch, keeping his chin erect.

The assault begins. Gentle but unre-

lenting.

Joe says that L. Ron Hubbard is a liar. He says that the Scientology policy of targeting enemies as "fair game" has not been discontinued by the church but continues. He says there is no difference between auditing and hypnosis.

Andrew is bombarded with more and more challenges to his beliefs. Joe says the money trail has been elaborately set up for the benefit of a few at the top of the church. He quotes from US court judgments that have found that Scientology uses dangerous psychological techniques.

But Andrew does not crumble. "I can't believe that LRH would lie."

Joe continues, not letting up for an instant. He says he can prove that L. Ron Hubbard has fabricated his academic and defence-force credentials. He shows Andrew how similar the techniques of hypnosis and auditing really are.

For the first time, there is a flicker of doubt. Andrew says that it may be that some thoughts have been subtly implanted in his mind.

Joe says that the late L. Ron Hubbard had not been able to cure his own illnesses through auditing. This seems to strike hard at the core of Andrew's beliefs.

His face becomes more and more tormented. He is trying to reconcile what he has believed over the past four years with what he has been told over the past

few days. He is clearly terrified of letting go of his belief in the power of auditing to give him fulfilment.

But the wall is beginning to crumble. Joe walks to the television set to turn it on for the last time.

Andrew, his family and the deprogrammers sit quietly as a BBC documentary begins on the operations of the church of Scientology. It begins by looking at instructions that church staff try to get money, and then "more money", and then "more money" again.

**'Well, I suppose  
you're going to  
tell me now what  
you really think  
of the church?'**

Suddenly, the documentary mentions OT3. Andrew is agitated, asking for the video to be put on fast-forward. He says he will die of pneumonia if he hears

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about OT3 before the church deems him ready.

For non-Scientologists, OT3 is best described as a science fiction story that teaches followers that a cruel leader named Xenu, of the Galactic Federation billions of years ago, planted an H-bomb on the principal volcanoes on Earth, then known as Teegeeeack. The bomb destroyed the universe as it was then known. The thetans, or souls, of the destroyed beings have now cast themselves upon the people of Earth and are known as body thetans. For the spiritual being to function properly the body thetans have to be audited away.

Andrew does not want to hear any of this. Instead, Joe tells him that OT3 is so

absurd that the church deliberately surrounds it with fear because followers would desert the church if they knew its true meaning.

The bombshell has hit its target. Andrew can no longer contain his anguish. He sits quietly, telling Joe, Sean why he believed Scientology had offered him a way out.

He says he has suffered continual bouts of crying and cannot seem to escape the feelings of sorrow. Lying back on the couch, he struggles successfully to keep his head in the air.

"Do you still believe man is a spiritual being," he asks haltingly. Joe replies calmly: "If you mean a thetan — no. A spiritual being... I don't know."

## The next life

**A**NDREW'S NEXT question is the one everyone has been hoping for. It is asked in sorrow, and in a sense, in desperation. "Well, what do I do now?"

Joe responds with more information about Scientology. He tries to reinforce that many others have left the church and started new lives. He provides the telephone numbers of ex-Scientologists and psychologists who Andrew can talk to. Andrew appears to gain strength that others have succeeded in moving on.

But Andrew has more questions still. "You've got the OT materials? And you will let me see them?" Joe replies that he can see them any time. Andrew leaves it at that for the time being.

At times he still clings to auditing. He wants to try it one more time, but finally decides that if he is to have one last auditing session it should be with someone Joe recommends.

Andrew says he is angry at the amount of money he has spent on Scientology and wonders aloud whether he can get it back. He does not say he is leaving the church, but intends to resign his job and visit his girlfriend overseas.

Peter Nolan is watching the transition in his son's face. "It is remarkable," he says. "The glaze in his eyes is clearing."

## Manual is a plot, say ex-cult members

**I**N the early 1970s, a manual titled 'Deprogramming — The Constructive Destruction of Belief' was distributed in Australia and Britain to groups including politicians and journalists.

It circulated under the guise of legitimate practices used to retrieve believers from the clutches of various cults. But two American ex-cult members, recently in Australia, have claimed that the document is a Scientology plot in the United States to discredit deprogrammers. The Scientology church denies that it put out the manual.

The Americans, Joe and Sean, prefer to be known as "exit-consultants", because the term "deprogrammer" has become associated with kidnapping and other dubious activities that are outlined in the manual.

The techniques that the manual suggests are used by deprogrammers include "food termination", sleep withdrawal, shame inducement through nudity, physical correction and verbal stress.

It says food termination means withdrawing food and that the only fluid allowed is water. It argues that because deprogramming only lasts a couple of days there should be no medical danger. However, it concedes that if the sessions lasts for weeks, small quantities of food would be allowable.

It goes on to say that no sleep should be allowed during the deprogramming.

"When the subject falls asleep, he should be immediately awakened. Some of the methods used to keep the subject awake included rubbing iceblocks on the subject's body or making the subject stand so that if he falls asleep he wakes as he hits the ground."

On the use of nudity, the manual says: "Most subjects are very body conscious and having to stand naked in front of their opponents causes a person to become a temporary introvert." It says the slightest flaw in the person's physical make-up should be pointed out and the person should never be allowed to go to the toilet by himself.

Physical correction is described as punishment and should be done "with as little bruising as possible and the avoidance of fractures or internal injuries". The manual says the deprogrammer should always deny its use.

It says verbal stress is created by speaking constantly to the person in a loud voice. The manual recommends that deprogrammers use amplifying equipment.

Joe and Sean argue that legitimate deprogrammers do not use any of these techniques. "You have the right to believe in whatever you choose, but you also have the right to know exactly what it is," Joe said.

"Usually when people realise what they've got themselves involved in they will make an informed choice."

JACQUI MACDONALD

## Deprogramming 'not on', say Scientologists

**T**HE church of Scientology defines deprogramming as "forcibly deconverting a person from their chosen faith".

Scientology's Melbourne spokesman, Mr Chris Campbell, said the practice involved forcibly making a person change their beliefs. "It resembles a psychiatric depersonalisation mind-control kind of mechanism, similar to what you would have seen used by the Koreans and Vietcong on American soldiers to deconvert them from their beliefs," he said.

"It's a similar type of practice where you continually batter a person on a mental level day in day out until they renounce their beliefs. That's what deprogramming is, and that's not on."

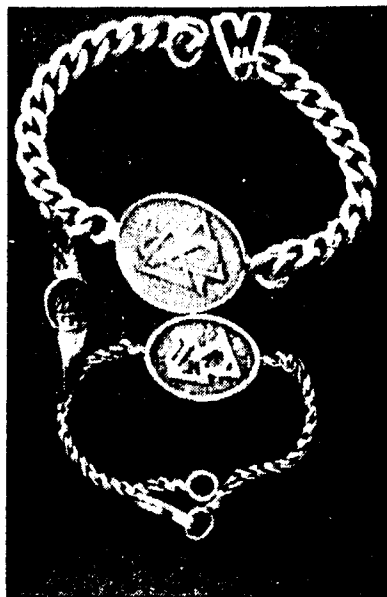
He said the word deprogramming was the terminology used by its advocates and was not used by the church. He said there were cases overseas where people involved in the practice had been jailed for abduction and false imprisonment.

The two Americans who deprogrammed the Australian man in the accompanying article, Joe and Sean, said they preferred to be known as "exit-consultants".

They claimed there is a stigma associated with the term deprogramming and argued that it is not necessary to abduct Scientologists. "Once we start talking to them, they will usually sit back and listen," they said. "It would be very rare for someone to try and leave and if they wanted to we would let them."

Mr Campbell said he was not familiar with the term "exit-consultants".

"Anybody can talk to anybody else," he said. "If you've got a disagreement with somebody's views, well all right you can talk, you can state those views. To actually use force or coercion, es-



Some of the jewellery worn by Scientology members.

pecially where abduction comes in or false imprisonment comes in, is simply breaking the laws of the land and that's all there is to it."

Mr Campbell said he had material that indicated that at least one Melbourne man had forcibly detained people and could face abduction charges. The person concerned has denied any involvement in abductions to 'The Age'.

Mr Campbell also referred to kits and manuals distributed by deprogrammers on how to remove people from a cult. He said he was concerned the manuals referred to practices such as withdrawing food and sleep from the subject.

JACQUI MAGDONALD