

St. Petersburg Times

Florida's Best Newspaper

Sunday, November 10, 1991

14A TIMES ■ SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 10, 1991

SCIENTOLOGY'S CHILDREN

Church responds to Erlichs' claims

The Church of Scientology says that Dennis Erlich cannot be considered a reliable source of information about the church.

Erlich, wrote church of Scientology spokesman Richard Haworth, is nothing more than a disgruntled former member who blames the church "for his troubled life."

"Ten years ago he was asked to leave the church following complaints from his wife that he was physically abusing her. . . . Erlich was also violent and abusive to other staff."

Haworth labeled Erlich a "hate vendor" and a member of the Cult Awareness Network, which he said harbors "deprogrammers" and encourages "individuals to pay thousands of dollars to kidnap family members . . . and mentally and physically harass them until they . . . denounce their religious beliefs."

Erlich admitted he once slapped his wife and went to a Scientology

counseling session to discuss it but denied other allegations of violence. He denied he is a deprogrammer or a member of the Cult Awareness Network. He said he does support the group and warns people about what he considers to be the dangers of Scientology.



HAWORTH

A spokeswoman for the Cult Awareness Network says the organization provides information and emotional support to cult victims and their families but does not advocate involuntary deprogramming.

On some specific points raised in the Erlich story, Haworth said:

■ On Beth's long work hours — "Children of this age are not allowed by the church to work late."

■ On forcing Beth to change rooms often at the former Quality Inn where she lived — "This is certainly not the case in present time nor have I found it to be true."

■ On how an 11-year-old could understand the concept of a billion-year contract — Many children "spontaneously originate a desire" to sign the contract. Children work only if their parents agree.

■ On the quality of food served to the Sea Org staff and family members — "There were periods in the past when conditions were not optimum regarding crew welfare. However, church executives conducted an investigation and the reasons why were located. An upgrade of both the quantity and quality of the food is the result."

■ On the church as a factor in the separation of the Erlich family — "It is not church policy to separate children from families."

■ On the general criticism that some Scientologists spend little time with their children — Church staff families spend three or four hours a day with their children and "this is time actually spent with the children not just time when they could be together."



Photo by JEFFERY MAY

Kristi, left, and Beth Erlich didn't get together often after Beth moved to Clearwater in 1978.