

SCIENTOLOGY: CHURCH, CULT OR CON?

BOTH!

'PEOPLE NEED TO KNOW THERE'S A WAY OUT'

Glen entered the trap willingly and, for a while, he didn't even realise that he'd been caught

Glen McClelland has the look of hate in his eyes as he remembers what he's just been through. Now 28, Glen spent four years as a convert to the Church of Scientology. For him, this wasn't so much a religion as a way of life. And it nearly cost him his family and girlfriend, his sanity – and bank balance, too.

The story starts in a crowded Sydney city street when Glen was first approached for a "free personality test", but it soon took the McClelland family from Sydney to Los Angeles and London in a desperate bid to save their son.

"I'd met a few friends in town to see a movie. We had time to kill, and I ran into some guy who offered me a free personality test," Glen says. For Glen, it started off as just a bit of fun. At first, no mention was made of the Church of Scientology. Just the promises ... promises that it would find the sources of all his unhappiness, and "clear" them from his life. Through Scientology, Glen would be able to find his eternal salvation. But it was not to be an easy road to that salvation. Glen at first was sceptical, but soon the church had his interest. He started to be "audited" (see right). "It was just like I had this existence before ... it was very traumatic ... quite disturbing."

That glimpse into the secret world of Scientology enticed Glen further and further down the road. He became convinced that only through Scientology would he understand himself and the world around him. This was to be done through a series of complicated study courses, called The Bridge. Only by completing each "step" of The Bridge could Glen learn the secrets. But it would cost ... and cost dearly! Soon Glen was borrowing money from wherever he could get it ... and it all went to the one place – the Church of Scientology.

Glen, finishing his electrical engineering degree at university, was spending more and more time within the close circle of his new "friends". His parents, Tony and Joan McClelland,

What is it?

Scientology is registered as a religion. It was started 40 years ago by American science fiction writer, L. Ron Hubbard. A recluse for many years, he died in 1986. The central aim of the Church of Scientology, it claims, is to remove unhappiness from people... to "clear" them. But this isn't easy. It requires hours of study, centred on "auditing", a process which involves a senior church member hooking the person being "audited" to a crude lie detector-like device, an "e-meter". Probing personal questions are asked, to get to the seat of all personal unhappiness. The sessions can go on for hours. As well as such sessions, Scientologists must undertake complex studies of the "Thoughts and Writings of L. Ron Hubbard". These studies take years, and can cost huge amounts of money. It is not uncommon to pay \$300 an hour.

are still visibly upset at what Scientology has done to their boy.

"I noticed Glen's attitude towards people change," recalls Joan. "He refers to people as 'dogs', if they were not Scientologists." She is slightly embarrassed to think back to how Glen spoke about his parents outside the church. "They were known as 'meat'," Joan says.

"Glen believed the organisation was a cult," Tony McClelland adds with an air of desperation. This father of five has now moved from panic and despair to anger, remembering how his son changed so dramatically in the hands of the church. For several years, there was incredible tension in the comfortable family home on Sydney's upper north shore. Glen was changing, and changing dramatically ... it appeared that, somehow, someone was in control. Glen's friends dropped away to be replaced by those who believed in the teachings of founder L. Ron Hubbard. If you were not a Scientologist, then you just didn't count.

One person, though, who still did count was Glen's English girlfriend, Lyna Saslow, who was in Sydney at this time.

"He was going to the meetings every night and talked about it all the time," says Lyna. As she found out more of what Scientology was all about, her worries increased. She wanted to leave Sydney to fly home to England, and had planned for Glen to join her overseas. But L. Ron Hubbard came between them.

"I told Glen that if he was going to come to England, he would have to leave Scientology forever. It was a terrible time," she recalls. It was no better for Glen. "I was between a rock and a hard place: I didn't know where to go." But he made a decision. Lyna came second. Though devastated, she refused to give up and determined to find out all about Scientology. She was losing Glen, and Tony and Joan McClelland were losing their son, to a cult they were not permitted to question.

Meanwhile, Glen was pressuring his parents to guarantee

huge loans he was taking out to pay for his courses. In the end, Glen handed close to \$25,000 to the Church of Scientology. He got everything he could beg, borrow and scrape together.

Joan McClelland was near her wits' end. "Physically, she looked gaunt," she recalls. "Glen had dark circles under his eyes and he was a lot thinner and

What do they believe?

L. Ron Hubbard tells his followers that 75 million years ago, the galaxy was ruled by a tyrant named Xenu. One day, Xenu rounded up various wrongdoers and imprisoned them in volcanoes on earth ... which was then called Teegeeach. Hydrogen bombs were dropped on them. Then their spirits ... called thetans ... were

trapped in humans. And that's the cause of all our sufferings. Only through Scientology can our thetans be cleared. Reincarnation is a part of belief and Hubbard makes the ultimate promise - immortality. A Scientologist is not permitted to know that story of "creation" until he or she has reached a senior level of the church. If they happen upon it before time, they're told they'll die of pneumonia.



Gary and Lyna – together again after the fight for Glen's personal life.

What is their history?

The Church of Scientology is an organisation that thrives on getting money from its members. L. Ron Hubbard had several commandments; one of the most important was this order to the hierarchy: "Make money." When they had done that, the second commandment came into effect: "Make more money."

Back in the '60s, in Victoria, a Judicial Board of Inquiry labelled the organisation "evil". For a time the Church of Scientology was actually outlawed. In the early '80s, 11 top Scientologists, including Hubbard's wife, went to jail in the US for a series of crimes, including burglary. British and American courts also haven't been kind to Scientology. Criticism has ranged from schizophrenic and paranoid, to "corrupt, sinister and dangerous". In 1984, in a Los Angeles court, L. Ron Hubbard, the judge decided, was "virtually a pathological liar".

was his charisma and the extraordinary past he claimed. If you listen to those who still believe, L. Ron Hubbard was a war hero (the first man wounded in World War II), a nuclear physicist, and many other things besides.

But Hana Whitfield has a different story. "He was none of those things – I've read his diaries," Hana says. She looks back, thinking again of the stories Hubbard would tell.

"About the civilisations that are living in the Big Bear constellation right now, the type of people they are, the type of clothes they wear."

This is all accepted as part of the great thoughts of the man whom Scientologists the world over regard as god-like.

The Whitfields are walking encyclopaedias on the Church of Scientology. So it

drawn-looking." This physical change and all the money problems finally jolted the McClelland family into action.

"Joan phoned probably 30 different organisations in the US," Tony says, as he recalls the thousands of dollars they spent on phone bills. Through the US Cult Awareness Network, they were put in touch with Jerry Whitfield.

Jerry Whitfield had been a top member of the Church of Scientology in the US for 10 years. Once a true believer, now his full-time job is getting people out of the organisation to which he had devoted his life. Like many ex-Scientologists, he is still angry at what the church did to him.

"I was ripped off by Scientology, I was conned, I was manipulated," Jerry says. "I did things for them I would never have done for anybody else."

He sits in his house in Los Angeles, beside his wife, Hana. Like Jerry, Hana was a soldier for Hubbard – a key officer, working by his side for 20 years, seeing his fetishes.

"Perfume, fancy soaps, aftershave, they were all forbidden," Hana says. "He demanded his clothes be washed 13 times!"

Part of Hubbard's appeal, both Jerry and Hana now agree,

was no wonder Joan and Tony McClelland ended up inviting Jerry to Sydney. He would be paid thousands of dollars to get Glen McClelland free of the church, but to the McClellands it was a small price to pay. For them, the job just had to be done.

And the way it was done is like an episode out of a spy thriller. Glen was lured to the family home one sunny Sydney morning. He thought he was meeting with his grandmother. But instead, waiting in the lounge room was Jerry Whitfield. Glen pulled up in his car, but parked it on the street ... something he never did. His parents were struck with panic. Does he suspect? Does he know that Jerry is here? Will he come in? they wondered. Glen walked calmly through the front door.

Cautiously, his father introduces Glen to Jerry, mentioning that Jerry is a class 5 auditor and an OT 3 (an operating thetan, a Hubbard rank). This signifies to Glen that Jerry is no foot soldier. He's impressed. Tony McClelland tries to convince his son that there is a huge problem between him and the rest of the family, and that Scientology is the reason. Joan sees tears in her son's eyes ... it is going to be hard for everyone.

For the next five days and nights, Glen and Jerry are locked

ANDREW SHAW



Only Jerry Whitfield, a former Church member, understood enough to "reach" Glen.

ANDREW SHAW

Who belongs?

Scientologists claim a worldwide membership of six million (Critics say it's probably closer to 60,000, but because the church is so secretive, it's almost impossible to confirm one way or another.) In Australia, the power bases are in Sydney and Melbourne. A popular ploy of the church is to recruit celebrities, and display them as they testify to how wonderful Scientology is. Kate Ceberano is probably the best-known member in Australia but she's small fry compared to Hollywood catches like John Travolta, Tom Cruise and his wife, Nicole Kidman, Kirstie Alley from the TV show "Cheers", and Cher's ex-partner, Sonny Bon

Suddenly, Jerry puts on a video tape. It's a television documentary highly critical of the church. It shows the similarities between hypnosis and the techniques Scientology uses. But then, it all happens. The program is about to explain OT 3: the secrets of what happened 75 million years ago, when Glen becomes so agitated that he demands it be shut off. He's told he'll die of pneumonia if he hears the story before the church says he can.

But Jerry is persistent. Glen hears the story, and surprise, surprise, survives.

It was the turning point. Quietly, with purpose, Jerry led him further, further, to the point where Glen himself started to question.

More talk, more books, more analysis until Glen himself acknowledged he'd turned the corner. Looking back now he sits in his London flat with Lyna. Glen is not shy about his present feelings about Scientology. "The organisation just stinks - it's rotten and the guy who set it up, Ron Hubbard, was basically a con man but a bloody good one."

Jerry puts Glen's case in the top 10 percent of those he has handled all over the world. He thinks he "got through" to Glen simply because, as a Scientologist, he knew the language, the traps, the corners.

It took a certain bravery for the people in this story to go public. The Church of Scientology does not like to hear stories like this - they want the sanitised Hollywood version, complete with followers John Travolta or Tom Cruise. But Glen McClelland and the Whitfields want to warn Australians how easy it is to "lose" a son or a daughter.

And Hana Whitfield recalls how easy it is to fall prey. "Was she a fool? Yes. I was a fool. But an unsuspecting one. I didn't know one is being led into the trap, until you're in and the exit is closed. Even then, you don't know it's a trap."

Glen McClelland doesn't mind that people may think he's simple, or worse, stupid, for joining in the first place. What's important to Glen now is that someone else can benefit from his mistake. "I want people to understand that it's not just freaks who get involved in this sort of thing. I mean, it takes maybe a moment of weakness, maybe not even that, for some people. And you can get hooked. And it will do you good, you know. I think people need to know about that. But there's a light at the end of the tunnel and there is a way out. And that's what people need to know." - ANTHONY McCLELLAND

◀ in a battle of wills. The air is thick with discussion and argument ... from the intricate philosophies of Hubbard, to why it is that Hubbard told so many lies. Jerry Whitfield uses books and tapes and videos to try and open up Glen's mind to the possibility that he may have been duped. It's a very slow process. Argument ... counter argument. Jerry is at pains never to attack Glen; he focuses on the ridiculous claims made by Hubbard and the church.

"Hubbard says you can heal yourself," Jerry points out to Glen. "If that's the case, why couldn't he fix himself, with all his own medical problems?" Glen doesn't have an answer.

He goes home every night, his mind in total confusion. Who is he to believe? His "minders" at the Church of Scientology, or this American who speaks the same language as L. Ron Hubbard, but warns of what will happen to Glen if he stays a devotee? The practising Scientologist and the ex-Scientologist mind wrestle over Hubbard's quaint policy of "fair game".

This is the ultimate in payback. Any critic of the church, any enemy, is declared a "suppressive person". Once you've got that tag, you may be "tricked, sued, lied to or destroyed". A loyal Scientologist has a duty to carry out this policy.

The days pass. At several stages Tony McClelland gets depressed as he thinks he sees the battle is lost ... the intellectual see-saw keeps tipping one way, then the other. Two steps forward, one step back.

Official comment

The head of the Church of Scientology in Australia is Mark Hanna. We approached him to speak about the church, its members and practices but he told us he would only do so if we excluded the story of what occurred with Glen McClelland and Jerry and Hana Whitfield.