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 **HEADLINE Couple's Scientology lesson costly
 After forking over thousands of dollars,
 a few things become clear
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**The tale of Jon and Stacy Roberts and the Church of Scientology is the story of a typical couple, in many ways, who were looking for answers.

When the financial advice they sought turned into spiritual guidance, the couple began to regret the direction their search had taken.

In the process, they gave more than \$100,000 to the Church of Scientology and an organization connected with it. Now they want to warn others not to do the same.

Jon Roberts filed suit in June against the Church of Scientology and Sterling Management Corp., a company he says pressured him into joining the church. The lawsuit charged that "the defendants acted with high pressure sales techniques, psychological pressure and other tactics" to acquire from Roberts "a significant portion of his net worth."

In July, the suit was settled for an undisclosed sum, but attorneys for the Roberts say the case isn't over yet. They say they plan to file a new suit against the church, this time in Stacy Roberts' name.

Jon Roberts says his feelings about the church have not changed.

"I honestly want people to know it's very easy to get involved in something like this," he said. "They play on your emotions, and we don't want that to happen to other people."

** The president of Scientology International, Heber Jentzsch, said the church did nothing wrong.

"He went to a business seminar. He was introduced to religion, and now he wants to sue," Jentzsch said. "That has never been illegal in Indiana."

A business seminar was indeed what propelled the Robertses toward their encounter with Scientology.

Although the lawsuit revealed little about their experience, Jon Roberts agreed to talk about it in several interviews with The Indianapolis Star.

Jon Roberts is a 1981 graduate of the Indiana University School of Dentistry with a private practice in Columbus, Ind. Stacy Roberts is a stay-at-home mother of two.

A couple of years ago, Jon Roberts decided his practice wasn't earning what it should.

** "He had poor business practices as a dentist, even though he had a huge practice," said his Indianapolis attorney, Gregory

Zoeller.

So Roberts began attending seminars to improve his management skills.

He already had attended two seminars, the first costing \$5,000 and the second about \$13,000, when he began receiving letters from patients recommending one sponsored by Sterling Management Corp.

"The other ones had helped show me how to be more efficient, and I thought the more the better," Roberts said.

"I thought, 'By golly, this will be my last one. I'll increase my knowledge that much more, and \$13,500 isn't going to kill me.' "

He and his wife made arrangements to attend a Sterling Management seminar in Pasadena, Calif., in October 1990.

Before leaving home, the Robertses received personality questionnaires to fill out along with other forms seeking information about their business.

"They asked about the office's production and collection and my personal financial situation, so I could set goals for the future," Jon Roberts said. "I didn't think anything of it."

The Robertses say Sterling Management used the information from their questionnaires to take advantage of their personal problems and insecurities and get them involved in the Church of

**Scientology.

According to a company spokesman, Sterling's teachings are based on the "management technology" of L. Ron Hubbard, the founder

**of Scientology. Hubbard believed he had cured his own mental problems, and he went on to write Dianetics, a best-selling book about human mental processes.

The Robertses say that just three days into the seminar, Sterling officials were pressuring participants to learn more about

**the Church of Scientology.

"They set a time for you to meet with a representative of the church. I'm not sure if they said he was from the church," Roberts said.

"They said they would be going over your personality questionnaire."

It was during this discussion about their personality questionnaires that the Robertses first became interested in

**signing up for marriage counseling with the Church of Scientology.

"They would say, 'Look at all these highs and lows,' and they start to play one spouse against the other," Roberts said. "They play heavily on your emotions. They say your kids won't turn out well . . . so by the time that they're done, you're saying, 'Where do I sign?'"

Pressure to give money

** After their initial introduction to the Church of Scientology at the Sterling seminar, the Robertses each made five trips back to California, some separately, for training.

During each trip, they said, they were pressured to give larger

**and larger sums of money to Scientology. Initially, they were asked to give a \$5,000 "fixed donation" for marriage counseling. Then, they paid \$80,000 for a counseling package that "would take care of any emotional or physical problems you had," Jon Roberts said.

Stacy Roberts said officials prepared scripts for her to use to ask her husband for money when she called him from California.

While they talked, she said, she was instructed to write down his objections so church members sitting nearby could supply her with answers.

It was an arrangement she felt was worthwhile at the time.

"I know it sounds strange, but it felt like they were helping you," she said.

This is standard operating procedure for the church, according to Gordon Milton, director of the Institute of the Study of American Religions at the University of California at Santa Barbara.

"A person can only go so far without the consent of his spouse," he said. "They believe it blocks progress."

After just eight months in the church, the Robertses were both "cleared." This means they had been certified to be clear from damaging engrams, or early mental traumas. Scientologists go through rigorous study and training to reach this phase.

Normally, people spend four or five years studying before they are cleared, Milton said.

"He must have been heavy into it," he said of Jon Roberts. "He must have been spending all of his leisure time studying when he wasn't drilling teeth."

Thought life would change

The Robertses did spend a lot of time studying church teaching because they were told it would change their lives. They said they were told that once they were cleared, all their personal problems would disappear.

"They make it sound like when you become clear on the first dynamic, which is yourself, all those problems you have won't bother you, like you'll go on like it's nirvana or something," Jon Roberts said.

** The couple say they were told Scientology would fix problems like a lack of confidence, feelings of low self-esteem and depression, and cure an unsatisfying marriage.

This is not unusual, Milton said. Scientology typically makes lofty promises about what it can do to change people's lives, he said.

**charging that Scientologists can certainly be overly enthusiastic in "Scientologists can certainly be overly enthusiastic in person's life," Milton said. "Of late, they are not making those kinds of claims."

Scientologists are now sticking to more general claims, he said, rather than promising benefits that seem almost too good to be true.

It was those promises that kept the Robertses coming back for **more Scientology training in pursuit of becoming cleared.

Although they say they didn't feel they were getting much out **of Scientology at the time, during each trip back to California they were convinced they soon would feel different.

"You're out there in a hotel, away from your friends and family," Roberts said. "All day long you're around people who are up and happy and you feel good, too. You're away from your problems."

When they returned home, they said, their problems returned.

Decided they'd had enough

Two weeks after their final trip to California when they had both become clear, the Robertses decided it was all "bogus."

"We both looked at each other one day and said, 'What is this c-----?'" Jon Roberts said. "We didn't get anything out of it."

Soon after, they said, they had a giant book-burning party, **burning every tape and textbook from the Church of Scientology.

"We had a great time. We burned everything - everything," he said. "It was a good feeling."

Scientologists maintain that since their church was founded in

1953, the programs have benefitted millions of people and only a few have been dissatisfied.

** Scientology International President Jentzsch said he is not sure what the Robertses were expecting, but he knows what happened to him when he was cleared.

"I became much clearer in my thinking. My IQ changed," he said. "My college professor always said your IQ was fixed, that you couldn't change it, but mine went up."

Jentzsch also said becoming clear changed his view of mankind and gave him a greater respect for others.

"These are spiritual qualities that must be experienced. Obviously, it's up to each individual and his dedication. You can't make anybody be better."

Larry Jerrim, an Anderson Scientologist, counsels people using church doctrine. He says that it has been his experience that when people are not successful with counseling, it is usually because they began the program "under false pretenses."

While he says that may not be the case with the Robertses, he believes they may not have been applying the technology correctly.

Church rejects claims

Church officials said very few people ever have complained about the personality questionnaire the Robertses completed.

"Several million people have taken that test," Jentzsch said. "Ten, 15, maybe 20 people have complained about it. It's just a personality test. It tells you your areas of interest and the areas where you might want to make changes in your life."

Jerrim said the questionnaire sometimes indicates that people procrastinate and therefore may need extra pressure to attend to some of their more serious personal problems.

He said he never has heard of church officials sitting in on the phone calls of its members and offered a different version of the scenario Stacy Roberts described.

If one person in a relationship wants counseling and the other doesn't, for example, he said the church might ask the first person to describe the other's objections.

"We'll tell them to call the person and then let us know what their responses are so we can better answer their questions," he said.

Jentzsch said he thought the lawsuit was part of an effort by the Cult Awareness Network, an organization that has been highly **critical of Scientology in the past.

"It's just a little hate group that has got this fellow excited," Jentzsch said. "They've told him to go attack the Church **of Scientology. It's obviously related to that."

Jon Roberts said he has never heard of the Cult Awareness Network. His attorney said there was "absolutely no link" between the network and the suit.

Jentzsch also charges that the Indianapolis-based pharmaceutical firm Eli Lilly and Co. may have some role.

A year ago, Scientologists were waging a highly visible war against the anti-depressant drug Prozac, manufactured by Lilly.

The church also has a history of launching personal attacks **against those who have been critical of Scientology.

Jentzsch said Stacy Roberts had taken Prozac, something the Robertses confirmed.

"I don't think that's something, even if it is true, that they should disclose," Jon Roberts said. "That's not something that should be done."

** After their relationship with the Church of Scientology, the Robertses have tried to move on with their lives. They are seeing a marriage counselor to deal with some of the problems they hoped Scientology would solve and say they finally are making progress.

** Their time in Scientology helped them air out some of their problems but wasn't worth the expense, Jon Roberts said.

"We spent a lot of money, and it caused us a lot of heartache."

@ART CREDIT:STAR STAFF PHOTO/ ROB GOEBEL

@ART CAPTION:Stacy and Jon Roberts first got involved with the church through a business seminar.

@ART CREDIT:STAR STAFF PHOTO/ SUSAN PLAGEMAN

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president of Scientology International