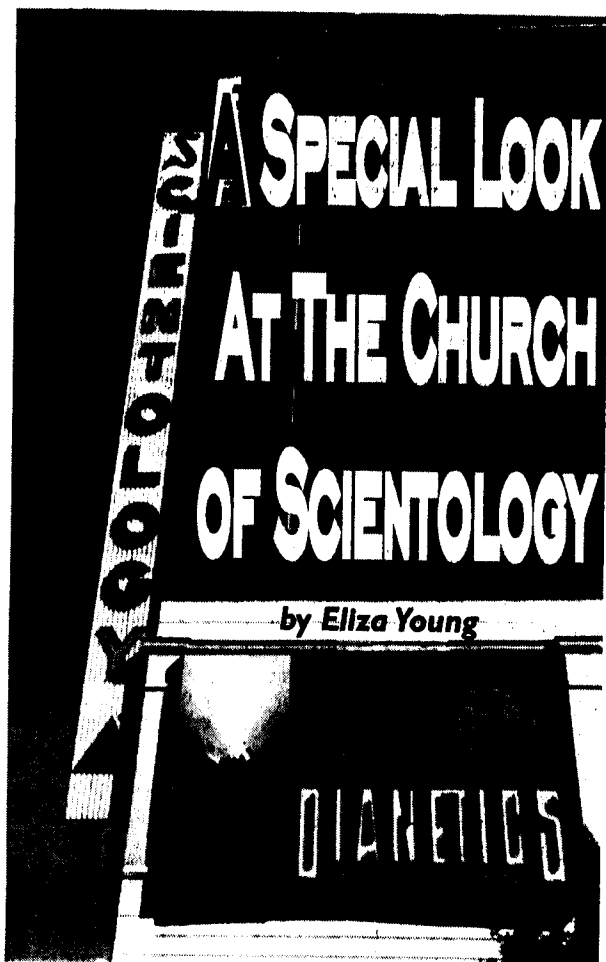


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Elaine Clarke* (name has been changed due to present involvement in the church) seemed happier than she had been in a long time. Her friends said that she was finally getting over her shyness and at 22 was forging a solid path into adulthood. She had recently purchased a new car, finished school, and was planning to get an apartment that summer. That was a year ago. Now Elaine is 16,000 dollars in debt to the Church of Scientology.

It all began with a phone call. An advertisement for a receptionist was placed in a local newspaper that Elaine read. An interview at the Church of Scientology panned out and she got the job. Her friends and family, however, feel certain that she would never have been hired had she not been "recruitable". The church, they say, has enough members under contract to provide them with receptionists well into the next millennium. After two months of working for the church Elaine signed a six year work contract, unbreakable, during which she must work 40 hours a week for the church at minimum wage, and in return all of her church services are free. Living in the second most expensive city in the country, she soon discovered that she could not make ends meet. One month later her car was repossessed. Then she disappeared.

Perhaps she had a moment of realization in which she saw all of her recent progress vanish, perhaps she had glimpsed the magnitude of the church's hold on her; no one knows her motivation, but three weeks later she contacted her sister and all she would say was that she was alive and trying to get out of the church. She instructed her family not to tell anyone where she was. But the work contract was legally binding and soon after she was not only back with the church, but had announced her engagement to a fellow Scientologist. In order to make ends meet, she was forced to take a second job. She now works seventy hours a week and shares an apartment with other church members, which they rent at a discounted rate from a more affluent Scientologist. In one year Elaine has gone from hope and prosperity to bankruptcy and isolation.

Elaine's story, while tragic, is not unique. Many ex-church members have been jailed, sued and bankrupted before being able to break free. Scientology is big business and retains some of the best criminal lawyers and public relations firms in the nation. The Church of Scientology was founded in 1950 by L. Ron Hubbard, a science fiction author once known to have said that the best way to become a millionaire was to start a church. He wasn't kidding - to go from "raw meat", a derogatory term for the ordinary public or non-Scientologist, to the upper echelon of the church costs about one-third of a million dollars, according to the latest Flag price list. This includes the process of auditing, which uses an E-Meter (essentially a crude lie-detector made from a voltmeter) to help recruits work through their psychological problems, as well as expensive seminars and "purification rundowns" to remove all toxins from the body. Jeff Quiros, Director of Special Affairs for the Church of Scientology in San Francisco, likens this extensive training process to attending a school of divinity or seminary. However, to graduate from the most expensive seminary in the nation will still cost much less than one-third of a million dollars. And you get a degree.

Scientology currently boasts eight million members worldwide, among them prominent figures such as Tom Cruise, Kirstie Alley, Anne Archer, John Travolta, Kelly Preston and Isaac Hayes who enjoy memberships at the mansion-like Celebrity Center in Hollywood. Scientology has aggressively recruited many high-profile people to bolster its image and to attract more "raw meat." The public opinion of the church directly affects their revenue and church officials have worked hard to present Scientology as normal and even popular. Although L. Ron Hubbard's books have been on the bestseller lists years at a time, making Dianetics a household name, it has been rumored that the church buys back its own books to ensure its best seller list status. A B. Dalton Booksellers store manager said they once received a shipment of Dianetics with the B. Dalton price stickers still on them. The church's recruiting methods have been attacked by the Cult Awareness Network as less than ethical and often downright illegal. The Cult Awareness Network, a nationwide organization dedicated to monitoring mind control cults, is now virtually defunct and has declared bankruptcy as a result of Scientology's endless barrage of law suits. "In recent history there have been cases where the Church of Scientology has used the name Cult Awareness Network and set up their own affiliate offices for purposes of recruitment," says a counselor at the Cult Clinic of Manhattan, who has endured numerous subpoenas and bogus claims against her license. As a marriage, family, and child counselor, her license was under review after a church member claimed she had been locking patients in her office. This, after investigation, proved to be untrue. She also spoke of a case in which two teenage boys applied for summer jobs at the church after seeing a help wanted sign in the window. While inside, they watched films about the life of L. Ron Hubbard and were then asked to sign a contract and told that they could not be paid unless they did. The boys had no idea they were signing a Scientology work contract. After a law suit was filed by the boys' parents the contract was dissolved because the boys were minors.

A representative of the Cult Awareness Network in Los Angeles described the church's gung-ho recruiting methods. "Scientology is extremely efficient at recruiting. They're the best at getting money out of people." Sterling Management Systems, one of the church's recruiting fronts, mailed over 300,000 newsletters to health care professionals, including dentists and veterinarians, advertising seminars that promised to increase their business. These conventions were held in first rate hotels where high pressure sales tactics were applied. According to ex-members, the church put on quite a show.

The explanations that ex-Scientologists give for people becoming involved with the church vary widely. Many claim that they were looking for spiritual guidance, acceptance, or something special in their lives. However, they all found that they were angrier and more depressed after leaving the church than they were before they ever got involved. A Cult Clinic counselor explains that "In Scientology these people not only felt special and powerful, actually omnipotent, when they left they felt very, very weak... and the big positions that they held didn't translate in the real world. 'What have you been doing for the last ten years' and they say 'Oh I was an auditor for the Church of Scientology,' and their friends say 'What the hell is that?' All the things that they worked very hard for in the church were meaningless. And they started thinking this whole thing has been a sham."

Paul Grosswald got involved with the Church of Scientology in Long Island when he was 18 and five months later signed a billion year work contract. This sect of the church is known as the Sea Org, a military like branch consisting of people who have pledged not only their lives to the church but their afterlives as well. "My parents always encouraged me to try new things and to have an open mind. I was going through a rough period; I had recently broken up with a girlfriend and was confused about what I wanted to major in at college. They played off my emotions." Paul says that it has taken a lot of time and energy to undo the damage what was done to him and that he now speaks out against the church at schools and cult conferences in hopes that other young people will learn from his experiences.

LOTUS

MAGAZINE

1997

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Courts have ruled that the Church of Scientology is a church, although they are not in fact a house of worship. The church enjoys tax exempt status saving them vast amounts of money, which they have fought hard for. Non profit organizations are capable of generating substantial revenue, the Church of Scientology being no exception. Church members are the financial backbone of Scientology and its important for them to not only recruit new members, but to hold on to the members they have. The church retaliates against any form of bad press with the "fair game" law, which states that critics of the church may be cheated, lied to, harassed and sued, and is spoken of frequently by ex-members although the church denies its existence. In 1990 the LA Times published a series on the Church of Scientology by Joel Sappell and Robert Welkos. After the publication, a package was delivered to the front doorstep of Robert Welkos from a local mortuary detailing the benefits of arranging a funeral before death. Welkos telephoned the mortuary and asked why they had sent the material. The mortuary said that they didn't know they had, and that they never sent brochures unsolicited because it can be upsetting. Then it happened again. Furthermore, a bogus assault complaint was filed with the LAPD against Sappell by a man whose address and telephone number turned out to be phony. Car dealerships they had never contacted were making inquiries on their credit reports. This is not unusual. Hubbard wrote "remember, intelligence we get with a whisper. Investigation we do with a yell. Tell them by letter to retract at once in the next issue...Then hire a private detective to investigate the writer, not the magazine, and get any criminal or Communist background the man has."

In Ron Hubbard's writings he advised church lawyers to use the legal system to their advantage. "The purpose of the law suit is to harass and discourage rather than win." A Los Angeles attorney representing a Cult Awareness Network director who wishes to remain anonymous says, "their legal doctrine is to use the law suit to harass, to use the legal process in a way that it was not designed for. Not as a regress of grievances but to beat the hell out of you...they will file one law suit after another and drive you into submission. The legal process will take these law suits seriously and force you to spend millions to defend yourself against them." Scientology has enough enemies to warrant much more negative press than it is currently getting. This, according to the anonymous directors lawyer, can be attributed to the expensive lawsuits that the church files against its critics. In one case, Time magazine published a scathing report on Scientology in 1991, eventually costing Time-Warner seven million dollars in legal fees.

Infrequent raids on the church by police have been conducted to retrieve documents on illegal operations, prompting the church to declare religious persecution. "It costs law enforcement agencies exorbitant amounts of money to investigate the church, because of excessive law suits filed against them," explains the Los Angeles attorney, "therefore not nearly as many are launched and the church gets away with activities that are considered outrageous to most citizens. Journalists that I've talked to and I think this holds true for law enforcement too, they would rather cover the Mafia than the Church of Scientology. Because it's safer."

Perpetuating the church's unusual image is L. Ron Hubbard's theory of the creation of mankind. This is an excerpt taken from OT III, the third of eight levels one must go through to "get clear" and into

the top ranks of the church. Scientologists admit that the OT levels exist but refuse to speak of them as they are considered sacred documents. "The head of the Galactic Federation (76 planets around larger stars visible from here) solved overpopulation by mass implanting. He caused people to be brought to Teegeeack (Earth) and put a H-Bomb on the principal volcanoes... His name was Xenu." Hubbard also postulates that the universe was created 4 quadrillion years ago instead of the 8 to 20 billion years that astrophysicists widely agree on. From Xenu and the Galactic Federation, known as OTIII, comes the practice of auditing body thetans, spirits who are not strong enough to claim a body of their own. These spirits attach themselves to parts of already inhabited bodies and cause physical and emotional harm. According to Hubbard there can be thousands of them on one person and all require expensive "auditing" to be removed.

The First Amendment to the Constitution states that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof..." Regardless of how unconventional Hubbard's doctrine may seem to non-believers, Scientologists are nevertheless guaranteed by law the right to practice their religion. Abiding by the Constitution means that, as citizens, we must often tolerate beliefs other than our own. It is important not to attack the church for their beliefs, but instead for their unethical actions. Jeff Quiros, Director of Special Affairs of the San Francisco church expressed exasperation with the church's critics. "I've been through 25 years of little pip-squeaks squeaking about these 'serious allegations' that they never can prove." He also likened the Cult Awareness

Network to Hitler Jüngen. "Asking why the church is fighting the Cult Awareness Network is like calling up the NAACP and asking why they don't like the Ku Klux Klan. The Nazi Skinheads are a nicer bunch of people than the Cult Awareness Network." Fortunately, for the church, the mud slinging has subsided, if momentarily. The Cult Awareness Network which was started as an information and referral service, is closing it's offices because they have had to respond to

so many consecutive law suits filed against them by the church. The representative that I spoke with in Los Angeles personally had 22 suits filed against her, one of which on the unlikely charge that she picked up and threw a man who was a foot taller than she.

It may seem incredible that Scientology is allowed to continuously abuse the legal system, but the same Constitution that gives the church the right to practice also gives the public its right to investigate, speak out against, and seek retribution for the wrongs done to them by the church. No organization should be allowed to intimidate, harass, or cause financial harm to others in an attempt to preserve its secrecy. Scientology has a shaky reputation at best and as ex-members recommend it should be carefully scrutinized before joined. Bob Grosswald, Paul Grosswald's father who helped his son to get out of the church, advises to "investigate the organization... and when you find that the time you are spending there is substantial, ask questions. If the questions go unanswered or the answers are vague, get out." Spirituality is different for every person and is ultimately an individual choice. For Scientologists it is also an expensive choice, and herein lies the problem: Should Enlightenment come with such a hefty price tag?