

CHURCH OF
SCIENTOLOGY

A MACLEAN'S  BIG READ

SCIENTOLOGY'S PLAN FOR CANADA

BY NICHOLAS KÖHLER

It's under fire in Hollywood,
but that hasn't stopped the
church from a massive
expansion north of the border



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Inside the famously secretive world of Scientology

EVERY FEW MONTHS or so, Adam Holland, an intense but baby-faced 24-year-old, dials his father's number and leaves a message. His father, Paul Holland, who lives in the Toronto suburb of Richmond Hill and works as an electrical engineer, never picks up or returns his calls, Holland says. "But as a son I think it's my responsibility to let him know that I'm there for him, and that I'm willing to look past everything." By Holland's account he last saw his father more than two years ago, when the Church of Scientology declared him a "suppressive person," prompting his father, a longtime Scientologist, to "disconnect" from and shun him. "I definitely know he still loves me," Holland says. "We aren't parting because of a serious disagreement. We've been separated by a large corporation that's used its authority to disrupt a family."

Scientology's willingness to use its influence over adherents to break up families has led Holland to view the organization in which he was born and brought up as toxic. Once an ardent believer and a member of the Sea Organization, an elite group of the church's most faithful, Holland rebelled, left the fold, and is now an anti-Church of Scientology activist bent on exposing what he sees as the group's nefarious sway over followers—and in particular young members recruited by the church's all-consuming Sea Org. Holland is one of the few Canadians with intimate knowledge of the church willing to speak out. "What can they take now?" he says. "They've taken my dad, my home, my identity, my religious beliefs—everything."

Due to its history of aggressive litigation, news reports on the church, especially in Canada, have been sporadic. Yet the advent of the Internet and so-called "hacktivist" groups like Anonymous, which over the past five years has directed pranks and protests at Scientology, have eroded its influence over media outlets. So has a wave of departures by high-profile members.

Last year, in a lengthy article by journalist Lawrence Wright in *The New Yorker*, Academy Award-winning Canadian film director and screenwriter Paul Haggis, a Scientologist for decades before leaving in 2009 over the church's stance on homosexuality (two of Haggis's daughters are gay), detailed his split with the organization, a crushing blow. Wright, a Pulitzer winner for his history of al-Qaeda, is said to be completing a book-length exposé on the church. Meanwhile *The Master*, starring Philip Seymour Hoffman and Joaquin Phoenix, and widely understood to be a thinly veiled portrait of L. Ron Hubbard, Scientology's controversial founder, opened in theatres last weekend.



Dear leader: L. Ron Hubbard designed an 'e-meter' to locate emotional trauma in individuals

But it was in June, following Katie Holmes's divorce filing against leading Scientologist and screen icon Tom Cruise, that the world's gossip-sheet flood-gates opened: websites, celebrity mags and daily papers, many of which had breathlessly reported rumours that Holmes was instructed by her Scientology handlers not to utter a sound during her daughter Suri's birth in 2006, began filling with strange reports that Suri had been poised to undergo "sec check" interrogations while holding an e-meter, a device not unlike a lie detector that Scientologists use to locate emotional trauma in this as well as past lives. In July, less than two weeks after the split went public, the couple's

lawyers hammered out a divorce settlement with an alacrity observers said reflected the church's desire to end the PR blitz. It was much too late: the divorce had already unleashed some of the most damning criticism of Scientology ever published. And the reports keep coming—such as *Vanity Fair's* allegations in this month's issue that the church auditioned romantic partners for Cruise.

Critics call Scientology a cult. If that is so, it is a cult in crisis. Apostates and long-time observers speak of dwindling membership numbers and, at local churches, choked cash flow. Much of the trouble appears to stem from the allegedly brutal leadership of David Miscavige, who at age 26 took over the church after Hubbard's death in 1986. Since then Scientology has endured a number of scandals and setbacks. German authorities have sought to ban the group. A French court convicted it of fraud in 2009 and fined it nearly a million dollars. One witness noted the “heavy debts, broken family ties” and “sect-like methods” the church uses to “indoctrinate” the vulnerable. That conviction was upheld this year.

Some of the group's most recent hits have come in Canada. In April, Quebec became what is believed to be the first jurisdiction in the world to shut down a branch of Narconon, a Scientology affiliate with dozens of drug- and alcohol-rehab facilities worldwide. Local health officials said Narconon Trois-Rivières offered clients little medical supervision and relied on Scientology-inspired treatments with no scientific basis, which included potentially dangerous doses of vitamins, days of sweating in hot saunas, and odd study drills that directed clients to shout offensive criticisms at fellow addicts. (More recently, a death in July at the Narconon Arrowhead facility in Canadian, Okla., the third death there since last October, triggered investigations by local and state authorities.)

Liberal Sen. Céline Hervieux-Payette, who agitated for the closure of Narconon Trois-Rivières, notes that Scientology enjoys tax benefits in Quebec as well as in other provinces due to its designation as a religious organization. “Why should we give tax benefits to people who are abusing our population?” says Hervieux-Payette. She believes officials in Quebec failed to move more quickly to close Narconon Trois-Rivières because the church has “friends within the government. I am sure, because when I intervened at the federal level I had some MPs from Toronto intervene” and defend Scientology.

These have been trying days for the church. Yet in many ways it has been under siege ever since Hubbard, the charismatic, volatile one-time sci-fi pulp

writer, opened his first church almost 60 years ago. It has been laying siege to its enemies just as long: once described as “schizophrenic and paranoid” by a California judge, the church has spied on government agencies in the U.S. and Canada, and has seen its offices raided by the FBI and the OPP in return. It relentlessly pursues its foes, whether with undercover agents and hidden cameras or through endless litigation. Members communicate using bizarre jargon and blame an intergalactic antichrist for all humanity’s woes. The slightest whiff of apostasy—even by proxy from a relative—can get a member exiled to farflung church outposts in Australia or Canada.

The slightest whiff of heresy can get a member exiled to far-flung Scientology outposts, like Canada

Hubbard, at turns charming and terrifying, dreamed up improbable ways of tormenting his followers, many of whom accepted, even welcomed, his psychological assault for years, seeing in it a path to spiritual redemption. One of those adherents was a former logger from Chilliwack, B.C.—a man who four decades ago gained entry into the church’s inner sanctum as one of Hubbard’s most eager devotees, but who later became one of his chief enemies—and, upon his departure, the object of Scientology’s unceasing compulsion to crush all opponents. That onslaught chased him back into the B.C. frontier, where he wages his 30-year war against the church, destitute but unyielding.

FOR WHATEVER REASON, the small town of Mono, Ont., at just 7,500 people and north of the staid south-central Ontario bedroom communities of Orangeville and Caledon, has long contained a multitude of quasi-monastic elements—a Ukrainian Catholic cloister, the Fung Loy Kok Institute of Taoism, a Boy Scout camp. But the arrival of the Scientologists back in 2009 was something else entirely.

Here the Church of Scientology Advanced Organization Canada, as the new Canadian national headquarters is called in a Scientology promotional video, rambles across more than 80 hectares of the Niagara Escarpment. Once a golf resort—the former Hockley Highlands Inn and Conference Centre—the site is slated to become a centre for high-level Scientology work, as well as the new base for the Canadian branch of the Sea Org, a unit of believers so dedi-

cated to the faith that they sign billion-year contracts and agree to labour in exchange for room and board but almost no pay. While the Sea Org awaits these new facilities, the group is being housed in a former school for troubled boys in nearby Caledon, Ont.; there, members can be seen striding purposefully across the grounds in uniform surrounded by jungle gyms and soccer fields. Meanwhile, the Mono complex, which in keeping with Scientology's mania for abbreviation is referred to as an "advanced org," will get what the church calls the "full ideal design treatment," priming it for members seeking the "ultimate frontier at the top of the bridge to total freedom"—in other words, the most abstruse reaches of L. Ron Hubbard's spiritual universe.

Scientology's dogma is mysterious and esoteric, with core beliefs revealed to adherents only years into their journeys within the church. To newcomers, the faith promises clarity, success, perfect memories and rocketing IQs; those who achieve this nirvana, referred to as "clear," even increase their immunity to the common cold. Most fundamentally, Scientology holds that we are all possessed of eternal souls, called "thetans," and that we have lived multiple lives, replete with traumas that continue to harm us. The group claims its "technology"—mainly counselling sessions called "auditing," conducted while an e-meter sends a flow of electrical energy through the subject—can free us of the "reactive mind," the storehouse of irrationality and fear that drags non-adherents down.

For his most dedicated followers, Hubbard devised a space-opera creation myth, the true explanation for humanity's most stubborn neuroses. The story centres around Xenu, an alien dictator who 75 million years ago dealt with a problem of interplanetary overcrowding by dumping trillions of creatures into Earth's volcanoes and blasting them with hydrogen bombs. The explosions transformed these beings into free-floating souls that, over the intervening millennia, attached themselves to humans. Only through advanced Scientology auditing sessions offered at facilities such as the one planned for Mono can we free ourselves of these parasites, an exorcism that ultimately costs thousands of dollars.

Against the backdrop of Ontario's "untrammelled" wilderness, Mono's advanced organization will reflect Hubbard's spiritual path down to the floor plan, says the promotional video, with an "advanced classroom," "advanced Hubbard guidance centre," and "auditing rooms." But the Hockley Highlands purchase also represents another ambition of the church—and critics say, its new business model: real estate.

Scientology still claims it is the world's fastest-growing religion, with followers numbering in the millions worldwide. In fact, membership, once an ever-expanding source of funds, isn't what it was. Census data from several countries where Scientology once enjoyed growth suggest numbers are in decline. According to the American Religious Identification Survey, which for two decades has tracked religious affiliations in the U.S., there were about 45,000 Scientologists in that country in 1990, but only 25,000 in 2008. Statistics Canada data from 2001, the most recent available, found there were only 1,525 Scientologists here—nearly double the number of Satanists but well behind pagans, Jains and Zoroastrians.



Makeshift HQ: The building in Caledon, Ont., where the Canadian Sea Org is now housed

Dwindling membership and donor fatigue among parishioners fed up with what longtime Scientologists call “crush regging”—church slang for “solicitation”—have led church leaders to a new focus on property, likely valued in the billions worldwide. “Since the early 2000s,” notes Janet Reitman in her recent book *Inside Scientology: The Story of America’s Most Secretive Religion*, “Scientology has been running what former church executives say is a very profitable building and renovation scheme . . . Indeed, according to numerous reports from within and outside of the church, real estate may

now be Scientology's principal cash cow."

Both in the U.S. and in several jurisdictions in Canada, the church has good incentive to invest in real estate. In 1993, the U.S. Internal Revenue Service reinstated Scientology's tax-exempt status as a religious organization after stripping it of that designation in 1967. In Canada the church is exempt from property taxes in Quebec, Alberta, Ontario and parts of B.C.

The Scientology website lists dozens of ribbon-cutting ceremonies in recent years at new or refurbished facilities worldwide—including a new church in Quebec City in January 2010. Similar churches are planned for Toronto, Winnipeg, Vancouver and Kitchener, Ont. These facilities are often ambitiously high tech: the Dissemination and Distribution Center, which opened last year in L.A., "houses a custom mill for the manufacture of signage, furniture and other items unique to Scientology Churches," church spokeswoman Karin Pouw told *Maclean's*. At times the pressure to build or repurpose outstrips local resources—as in Montreal, where Scientology made a recent bid to open a new church despite the city's small congregation. Reitman writes that local members "were convinced to donate \$4 million to purchase the building and then another \$4 million to renovate it," requiring "crush regging" that left the parish in debt and the building empty.

Scientologists can on occasion respond to this corporate strategy with sardonic humour. In a comment posted to former Scientology executive-turned-apostate Mark "Marty" Rathbun's blog last year, someone writing as a current member of the church skewers the new Canadian advanced org in Mono: "Being a local, this purchase was a real shocker to me and I am sure many other Toronto and Canadian Scientologists," the post reads. "I liked going to the Flag AO because it was in Florida (hot with beaches). I liked going to AOLA because it was in southern California (and warm) . . . The new Canadian AO is in Canada for God's sake (think mounds of snow and viscious [sic] black fly bites). But by God the strategy worked! . . . Since the announcement of the new Canadian AO, the IAS [International Association of Scientologists] has come into Toronto and regged millions of dollars. And then the IAS went to Montreal, Quebec and Vancouver and regged millions more. Friggin' brilliant!"

ADAM HOLLAND, the former Sea Org member, finds another reason to worry about Mono's "pioneer" backwoodsiness. ("It will feel like it's a thousand miles away," the announcer in the promotional video intones.) "They're

trapped,” says Holland, who knows Scientology as it operates in Canada like few others. His parents, now divorced, joined 25 years ago, and met as staffers at the Toronto org. Like many raised in the church, Holland is part of an extended family of adherents: his aunt and uncle rank high in the Vancouver org, and his cousins are deeply committed Scientologists. Holland says the Sea Org recruited him in 2007, when he was 18. He signed up, he says, because he believed the Sea Org would give him the opportunity to help people by connecting them to Scientology’s “technology.”

**‘They take away everything you are
and replace it with their own version of what they
think you should be’**

The church flew Holland from Toronto to L.A., an important Scientology hub, to train in book sales and bookstore account management. Later that summer, lost in work aimed at rushing out a set of new Hubbard book editions, he found himself working long, arduous hours. “I realized I hadn’t talked with either my mom or dad, and I’d left the country,” he says. “I was blown away. I’d been in such a state of mind that I never even bothered to tell my parents, ‘Hey, I’m in L.A., I arrived safe, I’ve been here for 2½ months.’” By Holland’s account, his stay in L.A. and his life at the Toronto base, where the long hours and separation from family continued, formed part of a church strategy of isolating adherents. “They take away everything you are as a person,” he says, “and replace it slowly with their own version of what they think you should be.”

During Holland’s tenure there, between the spring of 2007 and spring of 2009, Canada’s 65 or so Sea Org members worked at a base in downtown Toronto located on the four upper floors of 696 Yonge St., the Church of Scientology of Toronto headquarters, where the group’s designation as a religious organization allows it to save more than \$3 million a year in property taxes, according to Ontario’s Municipal Property Assessment Corp. There a run-down storefront presence caters to curious passersby, a strange addition to a strip otherwise dominated by bars and fast-food restaurants.

But above the Yonge Street hubbub a military environment prevailed, with uniforms, marching and saluting. Sea Org members, especially newcomers, lived and worked as a unit, rarely getting time alone, Holland said. They

dined as a group, the cook struggling to feed them on budget. Breakfast arrived at 8:30 a.m. and they knocked off work at midnight—later still for team members working the phones as glorified telemarketers selling Hubbard books to B.C. adherents. After work they walked to a tiny home nearby, a location they'd been ordered to keep secret even from family members, and slept in barracks jammed with as many as 12 to each room.

Although the church says it does not permit children under the age of 16 in the Sea Org, and that minors must have a high school diploma and the consent of parents or guardians, Holland and another former Canadian Sea Org member who remains a Scientologist and has asked not to be named here say they worked with children as young as 12 and 13 years old. (Holland says his own cousin, who is from Vancouver and is roughly Holland's age, was a Sea Org member by the time he was 13, and left his parents behind to work at Scientology's spiritual headquarters in Clearwater, Fla.) These children did not go to school, and Holland says he witnessed them assigned to unsupervised study sessions, a token effort at education. These young Sea Org members, he adds, were discouraged from reading books other than those written by Hubbard.

Holland's description is in keeping with reports from elsewhere in the world, including an account by church leader David Miscavige's own niece: "I was allowed to see my parents only once a week at best—sometimes not for years," Jenna Miscavige Hill, a critic of Scientology, wrote on a website she founded as a forum for ex-members. "We got a lousy education from unqualified teachers, forced labour, long hours, forced confessions, being held in rooms, not to mention the mental anguish of trying to figure out all of the conflicting information they force upon you as a young child."

The Sea Org disappointed Holland. Rather than helping the public, as he'd been promised, he toiled as a courier and receptionist; the job required him to read personal correspondence sent to his Sea Org colleagues and filter out any that he considered "entheta"—church jargon for spiritually harmful—and divert them to higher-ups. For this Holland earned between \$12.50 and \$25 a week. His fellow members washed dishes, ironed superiors' clothing and swept floors. Above all, they sold Hubbard's books. By his own admission, sales was not an area in which Holland excelled. "I wanted to help people, see people benefit from the counselling that was supposed to be so miraculous," he says. "If I'd wanted to be a salesman I could have worked elsewhere—not given up everything to live there, eat there, sleep there."

His low sales numbers became an issue when, prior to the Christmas 2008, he applied for leave to see his family. Holland says he had seen his father only rarely in the years since he'd joined the Sea Org, when Paul Holland appeared at the org for courses. Yet Holland's superiors declined his request, he says. "They said, 'You haven't made very much money for us, you've not sold any packages'"—collections of Scientology books and CDs that can cost thousands of dollars.



Disconnected: Adam Holland was raised in a Scientology family; his father no longer sees him

Holland informed the Sea Org he intended to go anyway. The night before his departure, according to Holland, two senior female Sea Org members frogmarched him into a boardroom inside 696 Yonge St. and closed the door; a male guard stood outside. "They began yelling at me," he says. "One woman threw down this heavy Scientology dictionary, slammed it on the table. It was an attempt to scare me and what they threatened me with was that I would be declared a suppressive person right then and there. Then I *never* would get to see my dad. Because a suppressive person is a very serious thing, a person they liken to mass murderers like Hitler, Stalin, 'Pretty Boy' Floyd."

He ignored the threat and left, returning to the Sea Org a week later. But he was no longer a believer. Upon his return he played along just enough not to be declared a suppressive, but quibbled with and ignored orders enough

that the Sea Org eventually let him go. He spent the next year living with his father, surreptitiously corresponding with dissenters online and reading books written by apostates. Meanwhile, he prepared for his coming exile into the Scientology wilderness—securing jobs delivering newspapers, manning a sandwich board outside a pizza joint and dishwashing at a Middle Eastern restaurant.

Holland then escalated his campaign by walking into 696 Yonge St. and handing an envelope to one of his former colleagues, Corinne Smith, originally from California. The envelope contained a telephone card and a message from Smith's twin sister, Maureen Bolstad, who had left the church and been declared a suppressive person in 2006. The twins had not spoken since. Holland had come across Bolstad online and offered to help her get in touch with Smith. "I gave Corinne the envelope and she kind of nervously smiled," Holland recalls. The note inside was brief: Bolstad missed Smith, hoped she was well, and offered help if she wanted it. Instead, says Holland, Smith reported him to the church for relaying the message, a serious offence. ("As far as I know, my sister still works at the Scientology complex in Canada," Bolstad wrote *Maclean's* in an email. "Whether it's her choice or out of fear, I can't say.")

Smith isn't the only American Scientologist dispatched to Ontario because close relatives back home have been declared suppressive. In fact, Canada appears to be a holding pen for Scientologists tainted by association with renegades or guilty of other infractions: Holland knows of three other U.S. church members whose checkered associations or bad behaviour landed them in Toronto.

Marc Headley, a former Sea Org member and Tom Cruise's one-time auditing subject, says his sister Stephanie, formerly stationed at Scientology's international base in California—a prestigious assignment within the church—was transferred to Toronto after he left and had become a vocal opponent of the church. "When you're at international headquarters, that's where Miscavige lives and works," says Headley, now based just outside Denver. "If the person who left starts causing trouble and making noise in the press or wants authorities to check on a relative, that is what they call a security risk. They want to get that person as far away from Miscavige as possible." Reitman, in *Inside Scientology*, notes that "no one with friends or family who'd left Scientology on bad terms could be assigned" to the international base. Headley says Scientologists who pose the highest security risks are

sent to Australia, an echo of that country's penal-colony past. Headley has not seen his sister Stephanie since he fled the international base on his motorcycle in 2005—according to his book *Blown for Good: Behind the Iron Curtain of Scientology*—with Scientology security guards close on his tail.

Holland's fall from favour was similarly precipitous. Soon after the letter incident, Scientology staff in L.A. tasked with monitoring negative web chatter about the church found he had been writing posts critical of Scientology. This prompted Yvette Shank, president of the Church of Scientology of Toronto, to ask him to a meeting. "Is it true, the things I am reading about you?" she asked. Holland soon understood she intended to send a submission to church officials in L.A. seeking to have him declared suppressive.



Step right up, folks: Scientology's Yonge Street storefront in Toronto. Inside, a military environment prevailed, complete with uniforms and saluting.

That happened on March 13, 2010—Hubbard's birthday, when Scientologists are asked to work extra hard for their founder. At 696 Yonge St., where Holland says his father was attending courses that weekend, church officials showed Paul Holland a copy of the declare—a legal-sized, goldenrod-coloured form. "He was heartbroken," says Holland. "He came home that night and in his eyes what this paper meant is he already wouldn't be able to talk with his son. He just looked at me and he was almost in tears and he said, 'You're

going to have to leave.' I don't think I've seen him that upset in my entire life. It was as if there had been a death in the family."

"YOU YELL AT the ashtray, you yell, 'ASHTRAY, STAND UP!' Then you pick up the ashtray and hold it up and you say, 'THANK YOU, SIT DOWN IN THAT CHAIR!' And then you put it back down in the chair and you say, 'THANK YOU!' " David Love never dreamed he'd one day scream orders at inanimate objects. A logger-turned-realtor-turned-industrial oyster shucker from Vancouver Island, he suffered three workplace accidents over the years that led to chronic pain and, by the time he was in his late 50s, a raging opiate addiction: to Dilaudid, morphine, Tylenol No. 3 and, from time to time, heroin. In 2008 Love's drug habit landed him in hospital with an overdose. Soon he was seeking treatment at Narconon Trois-Rivières, a rehab program recommended by his daughter, Amber Wold, who worked at the facility, one of 62 Narconon treatment centres in 47 countries, according to Narconon International. Due to that family connection, he says, Narconon Trois-Rivières offered him a space at half its regular \$23,000 fee. "Just sign over your employment insurance every two weeks," he recalls Wold instructing him. "I was there the next day."

Love did not then know that all Narconon facilities, including the one in Trois-Rivières, function as Scientology affiliates, operations that critics say have funnelled substantial revenues to a network of corporations controlled by the church. Lucas Catton, former president of Oklahoma's troubled Narconon Arrowhead facility, says all Narconon centres pay licensing fees that ultimately go to ABLE International, a corporation closely related to the church, fees that over the years have amounted to millions. Adam Holland recalls a senior Scientology executive in Toronto in 2008 telling staff that Narconon had been a chief source of income for ABLE Canada that year. Love and other clients—"students," in Narconon parlance—interviewed by *Macleans*' describe strange counselling techniques and an atmosphere in which verbal abuse and sex between patients were rampant. David Love later became an employee at the facility. The experience, according to Love's psychiatrist, led Love to be diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder.

Upon his arrival in Montreal, Love, still under the influence of alcohol and anti-anxiety medication prescribed to him by a doctor in Vancouver, was driven to an apartment in Trois-Rivières, 125 km away; it was a Friday night,

and the facility did not accept new clients on weekends. Nevertheless, says Love, “the staff came over from Narconon and started the training routines and auditing sessions right there in the apartment.”

Once at the facility, Love spent the better part of two weeks in its withdrawal unit, and says he did not see a doctor for 10 days. “This is the dangerous part about it,” he says. “I saw patients whisked away in ambulances.” Two other former clients, Joshua Dann and Iola Rawnsley, say they too did not see a doctor until more than a week after being admitted. Nor did Narconon staff inspire confidence. “They’d ask what kinds of medications you’d been taking, and they wouldn’t know how to spell them or what they were for,” says 33-year-old Rawnsley, a British Columbian who sought treatment there in late 2009 for heroin and methadone addictions.

Love says his job involved tracking all the places where patients were having sex with each other

At the same time, Love says, Narconon staffers routinely confiscated medications from new clients: “Anything to do with psychiatry, mental problems, pain killers, they take it away.” Rawnsley was a victim of this policy; she says Narconon confiscated her prescribed anti-anxiety medication. According to Love, one Narconon Trois-Rivières client who did not get his insulin was rushed to hospital and fell into a three-day coma. “They were against the use of all medication,” says Marc Lacour, the chief of the local public health agency. “There were cases where all medication was stopped to certain patients. They did make some corrections—like for insulin. But it remained their approach to avoid all medication.”

In a written response to questions posed to the organization for this story, Narconon International president Clark Carr stated that according to Narconon policy “an enrolling student must be given an examination by a qualified medical doctor and receive medical approval to do the Narconon withdrawal program.” Carr said he has “no records of reports to the contrary at Narconon Trois-Rivières.” Narconon only withholds medically unnecessary medications, he added, and prospective clients who are “medically required” to continue taking psychotropic drugs are ineligible for the program. He said Narconon International has “no record of anyone at Narconon Trois Rivières or anywhere else ever having their insulin withheld.”

It did not become clear to Love that Narconon operated on principles derived from Scientology, and that most Narconon executives were Scientologists, until two fellow clients began discussing the issue. “One of the staff overheard and walked over and said, ‘Stop that, you’re not allowed to talk about Scientology here, it’s forbidden—you know that,’ ” Love says. Yet as the coursework ground on, the link became clear: clients at the rehab centre were soon required to memorize passages from books written by Hubbard.



Disillusioned: David Love attended and worked for Narconon, a Scientology-affiliated rehab facility

As early as the withdrawal stage of the program, Love and his fellow clients were instructed to engage in a series of odd drills, many of them associated with lower-level Scientology coursework. “They had me sit and stare at another person with my eyes closed for 20 minutes without moving whatsoever, and then do the same thing over the same time period with my eyes open,” Love says. Joshua Dann, a man in his mid-30s from rural Ontario who was struggling with a cocaine addiction, recalls sessions in which staffers asked, “ ‘Do birds fly? Do fish swim? Do fish swim? Do birds fly?’ Back and forth constantly. I said, ‘I can’t do this anymore, you gotta get me out of this course room—this repetitive stuff is making me crazy!’ ”

Another psychologically challenging drill, called “bull baiting,” involved clients paired off to hurl abuse at each other. Dann recalls “sitting there saying,

‘Your mother is ugly and the reason why you’re here is because your family hates you’—sitting there saying that to a person across from you without them flinching, and then him jumping off the chair almost strangling you because you pushed his wrong button.” “I’ve seen fistfights—just horrible,” says Love. Iola Rawnsley, a mother of two, recalls more personal attacks: “You’re a f-king shitty mom, you left your kids for drugs,” someone screamed at her. “People were in tears.” She could not at first remain composed. “But you have to if you want to move on with your program and get the heck out of there.” (Carr calls such accounts “offensive and false,” and says the drill “is actually rather fun and is very popular with our students. It involves one person helping another learn to confront any variety of issues of what may come up in life later to challenge his ability to live drug-free. It is specifically to be done consulting the individual circumstances of that person.”)

Then came the saunas. Love endured a month of four- to five-hour sauna baths, a procedure referred to as the “purification rundown” that incorporates Hubbard’s enthusiasm for vitamin B3, also called niacin. They would take doses as high as 5,000 mg, well above the maximum daily dose of 500 mg recommended by Health Canada. Rawnsley stayed at the sauna stage of the program for more than a month, and recalls having “red blotches, a burning sensation—you’re in there itching and scratching and sweating.”

For its part, Narconon International describes its program as a “social model” rather than a “medical model” of drug rehabilitation. “With proper and intensive life skills education, [addicts] can in fact stably recover,” writes Carr, who contrasts this approach with “the failed concept that addiction is an incurable disease.” The regimen is predicated on the notion that remnant traces of drugs and alcohol remain stored in tissues high in fat content and must be burned away to stop cravings. Narconon International says niacin, as well as other vitamins, minerals, oils and electrolytes administered to clients, help correct the nutritional deficits seen in many addicts. Its sauna method has been and continues to be “extensively studied,” says Carr, who points to the dozens of research-paper abstracts posted to a Narconon-affiliated website detailing Narconon treatments in other cases of toxic exposure.

The Narconon program, Carr maintains, has clearly defined standards and procedures, laid out in manuals. Some 33,400 clients have completed the regimen since the early 1990s, says the group, which boasts a 75 per cent success rate. CARF International, a private, non-profit accreditor of health and human services, has given Narconon Arrowhead a three-year accredita-

tion—though in the wake of recent deaths at that facility, CARF in August added undisclosed stipulations to that accreditation, a sort of probation.

Critics charge that the regimen has no medical basis. “This is simply not scientifically validated—you do not sweat drugs out of your system in a sauna,” says Steve Wiseman, a clinical psychiatry professor at the University of British Columbia who heads the pain clinic at Vancouver’s St. Paul’s Hospital and has studied the Narconon regimen. Lacour, head of the Mauricie health agency, would agree. “The Narconon approach was not recognized by science in Quebec,” he says.

One Scientology case officer ran agents planted inside the OPP and the Ontario attorney general’s office

Meanwhile, Narconon required clients to write “overts and withholds”—confessional reports detailing, in Rawnsley’s words, “anything bad you’ve ever done.” Critics say these reports, which are also part of the Scientology program, give the church, and in this case Narconon, undue influence over practitioners. In her case, Rawnsley was horrified when she learned her report had been read by a Narconon staffer.

Love says he complained at every stage of the regimen; nevertheless, as his treatment progressed, higher-ups at the facility began approaching him about taking a job there. “They start grooming you, throwing out phrases like, ‘Why don’t you stay here and work? Saving lives is a very honourable thing—there’s nothing better.’” The pitch worked. Love had grown attached to people at the facility, and many of the younger clients looked up to him. “They called me ‘Papa Dave,’” he says. “I would just sit there and listen.” At the same time Love had spent all his employment insurance on the program; he was out of money.

The Scientology indoctrination grew more intense once he became an employee. He received dozens of Hubbard’s books—“brand new, still in cellophane, \$700 worth,” he says—and was required to listen to recordings of Hubbard’s lectures. His duties sometimes took him outside the classroom. One assignment, he says, had Love and another employee poking around the apartment building of a former Narconon client suspected of being a “suppressive person,” gathering intelligence. Another ongoing duty, Love says, involved “keeping track of all the places patients were having sex with each other.” Rawnsley, who fell into a relationship while there, confirms such

trysts took place. (Carr says incoming clients sign an agreement stating sexual relations within the program are forbidden; those who break this rule are disciplined or asked to leave. And he says Narconon keeps clients' personal information in strict confidence: "We never received any report of the above staff behaviour.")

Six months after he graduated and began work at Narconon, Love fled the facility: "All I left with was documents and a few clothes. I left my computer, all my belongings, everything—I just wanted to get out." Almost immediately Love began lobbying authorities to shut the facility down. That took time.

In July 2011 Dr. Pierre Labonté, the "medical manager" of the centre, agreed to cut his ties with Narconon Trois-Rivières after the Collège des médecins du Québec found he "had been in breach of several of his ethical obligations by associating himself with a drug detoxification centre administering treatment not scientifically recognized in the current medical literature, by conducting an incomplete medical assessment, and by keeping records of mediocre quality," according to a letter the college sent to Love in response to his formal complaint. The college would not discuss details of its arrangement with Labonté, and Labonté's staff said he would not discuss the subject with Maclean's.

Love says he and other former clients have filed complaints with the Quebec Human Rights Commission accusing Narconon Trois-Rivières of exploiting their drug addiction, a disability. A commission spokeswoman confirmed it is investigating five complaints, including one for sexual harassment and another linked to reprisals for filing a complaint with the commission. Love's complaints name Narconon International and the Church of Scientology International, prompting Love to tell the *Village Voice* in April, "I think I have Scientology by the balls."

Love also filed a complaint with the Quebec labour-relations tribunal about his low earnings at Narconon—just \$2.50 an hour. It was during a meeting Love had with Marc Bernard, the head of Narconon Trois-Rivières, arising from this matter that Narconon revisited the possibility of negotiating a "comfortable settlement" with Love "to make everything else go away," as Bernard is heard to say in a recording of the discussion provided to *Maclean's* by Love. In response, Love quips: "Just add a couple of zeroes to this and we're done."

That remark may be the basis for the allegation of blackmail made in two

nearly identical letters sent to *Maclean's* by both Narconon International and Gary Soter, a lawyer for the Church of Scientology International. They allege that Love has “written [an] extortionate demand to Narconon for \$255,000. Narconon did not pay the demand. You are seeing the result.” The letters go on to quote from a testimonial written by Amber Wold, Love’s daughter and a former Narconon Trois-Rivières employee, and provided to *Maclean's* by Soter: “When my father graduated from the Narconon Program in April 2009 he gave an amazing speech singing praise of Narconon and how the Program helped him,” it reads. Both letters include a URL link to a video of Love’s speech (“This place, these books, really saved my life,” he says in the clip). Narconon and Scientology also allege that Love has been arrested for, among other criminal charges, breaking and entering and possession of stolen property in excess of \$5,000, and has convictions on his record. Love denies the allegation of extortion and says he has no record.

Meanwhile, he continues his campaign. His most immediate goal has already been realized. In April, public health officials for the Mauricie region informed Narconon Trois-Rivières they would not certify the centre, explaining that under new provincial regulations its approach to drug rehabilitation was not recognized and that its methods could put clients’ health in danger. Of the 55 criteria used to evaluate it for certification, Narconon failed 46, according to Lacour, head of the health agency. At least four Narconon clients had been taken to hospital in the months prior to its closure, adds Lacour, who ordered that the 32 residents at Narconon be relocated. (Carr writes that Narconon International has no record of these hospitalizations.) “Most of their practices look like they’re inspired by Hubbard,” says Lacour. “They see addiction as a kind of moral deprivation—people have to remove the bad. Purify themselves.”

ONE SATURDAY LAST summer, during a modest protest outside the Vancouver org, at the otherwise nondescript corner of West Hastings and Homer streets, Gerry Armstrong told Tom Cruise to quit Scientology. “Celebrities as well cannot easily just leave the organization,” Armstrong, 65, told a reporter. “They really should leave because their staying actually harms the many people who will be drawn into Scientology based on their participation—so shame on the celebrities.”

For several years now Armstrong, a former church member, has demonstrated against Scientology alongside members of Anonymous, a protest

collective most active online but known for donning Guy Fawkes masks and as the unofficial publicity arm of last year's Occupy movement. The collective's actions against the church followed Scientology's attempts to suppress an in-house video interview with Tom Cruise that surfaced online in 2008, citing copyright infringement. Anonymous, which condemns censorship, responded by inundating branches with pizzas and pornographic faxes and choking the Scientology hotline with prank calls, says Gabriella Coleman, Wolfe chair in scientific and technological literacy at McGill University, who has written about the interactions between Anonymous and the church.



The renegade: Once Hubbard's personal archivist, Canadian Gerry Armstrong became a vocal critic, and paid for his epiphany with his youth

Anonymous is not the first online threat to the church. Indeed, Scientology's legal fight to remain as mysterious on the Internet as it is elsewhere has played a crucial role in defining the way intellectual property is handled online. As far back as the early 1990s, apostates and Scientology critics began congregating on a Usenet newsgroup called *alt.religion.scientology*, where they disseminated secret church documents. Scientology responded aggressively, claiming posters were circulating copyrighted materials; lawsuits, police raids and seizures followed. "Some of the first battles over copyright, anonymous remailers and trademark on the net had to do with these protests," says Coleman. Another church innovation, she adds, involved flooding the

newsgroup with pro-church messages: “People joke Scientology created the first spam.”

Armstrong himself was an early adopter of web-based dissent, posting a vast store of legal documents outlining his battles with Scientology on his site. Those battles have been numerous and intense: Armstrong has the zeal of a convert. Forty years ago, as a budding Scientologist, Armstrong embarked on a spiritual path within the very church he now pickets. In 1971, more than 35 years before Adam Holland joined Scientology’s most elite order, Armstrong too enlisted in the Sea Org. Their stories could not be more similar: both would suffer schisms with father figures. For Holland, that man was his biological father; for Armstrong, it was L. Ron Hubbard himself. Holland was born to the church. Armstrong came to it as an intelligent, articulate young man, and became enthralled by Hubbard’s philosophy in an era in which Scientology tapped into a deep reservoir of countercultural momentum and baby-boom idealism. It took the contents of dozens of cardboard boxes, dredged up from Hubbard’s past, to help turn Armstrong into a genealogist of Hubbard’s deceptions and one of the church’s highest-profile apostates. He paid for that epiphany with his youth, and now earns his keep sweeping the streets.

Tall, slight of build, intense and fine-featured, Armstrong never looked the part of the Chilliwack logger. In 1969 he’d just returned home from an unhappy stint at a logging camp when a friend began telling him “marvelous” stories about Scientology, L. Ron Hubbard and something called the state of “clear.” Then 22, Armstrong devoured Hubbard’s books and signed up for courses at a Scientology franchise in Vancouver. Soon he’d spent hundreds of dollars on an e-meter; Armstrong’s was an early model housed in a wooden case, like a sea captain’s compass. “Scientology installed in me a purpose, and I’d not really had a purpose before,” he says.

Hubbard’s hopes for humanity captured Armstrong’s imagination: Hubbard did not want merely to “clear” individuals—“the goal became to clear the planet,” Armstrong says. When he found he could not save enough money for more advanced training working full-time for Scientology, Armstrong sold everything he owned and took a job at a lumber mill, earning enough for airfare to L.A. There he enlisted in the Sea Org.

Within a few days the church had flown him to Madrid, put him on a train for Algeciras, on the Strait of Gibraltar, then on a ferry for Tangier. There the Apollo, the Sea Org’s 350-foot flagship, awaited. It would be Armstrong’s

home for the next four years. It was also where he would come to know the church's reclusive founder: Hubbard had fled to the ship from Britain, where authorities had begun cracking down on Scientology. The Apollo became a floating Scientology school, a Sea Org base 400-strong—and Scientology's international headquarters.

Armstrong quickly worked his way up to become the driver, nosing the tiny Fiat 500 sedan the Sea Org kept on board into Casablanca, Madeira or Lisbon. He was soon handling immigration, customs and police as the legal officer, communicating with port authorities, arranging for tugs. Ultimately, after the Apollo chugged into the Caribbean, he became its intelligence officer. "We did not admit to being Scientologists," he says. "We claimed to be a Panamanian business management company. We lived secret lives."

A kid from Chilliwack still in his 20s, Armstrong found on the ship a whole community of like-minded seekers—including Terri Gillham, Hubbard's top assistant, whom Armstrong married on board in 1974 during a double wedding ceremony; Hubbard himself gave away the brides.

Hubbard was 'a disturbed, malignantly narcissistic man. We were all so completely compliant around him.'

But life on the high seas wasn't all romance. "There was an unrelenting feeling of fear or dread and pressure, lack of sleep, which made it *never* enjoyable," says Armstrong. The source of that dread was the charming but mercurial and relentlessly exacting Hubbard. On good days he cut a distinguished figure, with great sailor's forearms, his sideburns grown white but his hair still red, in an ascot and sea captain's hat; on bad days he was, in Armstrong's words, a "disturbed, malignantly narcissistic man." He kept a small army of mainly girls and young women, all in a uniform of white hot pants, halter tops and platform shoes; known as the Commodore's Messengers, they acted as his agents, mimicking his tone of voice when delivering orders. "He could be charming at one instance and snarling the next," says Armstrong. "We were all so completely compliant around him. He would look at me when I had close conversations with him with—he used this term—'swinish suspicion.' He exuded suspicion."

In the early days aboard the Apollo, Hubbard punished transgressions by throwing followers overboard, forcing them to reascend by ladder. Then

things got worse. When in the Canary Islands Hubbard fell off the Harley-Davidson presented to him as a gift by the Toronto org, his injuries put him in a foul mood, Armstrong recalls. It was in this state, he says, that he invented the Rehabilitation Project Force (RPF), what critics call Scientology's jail.

Hubbard believed his bad luck derived from the evil intentions of some of his followers, and he devised a way to segregate these rotten elements. In Armstrong's time with the church, he twice landed in the RPF for minor infractions, spending in total 25 months suffering its rigours. Those in the RPF must run wherever they go and cannot speak unless spoken to. They wear special uniforms—in Armstrong's day a black boiler suit—and eat scraps left over from communal meals. They undergo hours of "sec checking"—"to confess all of your crimes against everyone, any person, any planet, life form, vegetable, you name it," says Armstrong. "It was like Milgram experiment after Milgram experiment," he adds, referring to the famous '60s-era experiments examining obedience to authority figures, "where we all participated in these terrible acts against our fellow Scientologists."

In a demonstration of Hubbard's power over followers, Hubbard ordered Armstrong's wife to leave him after his second stint in the RPF. "That ended our relationship," he says. "It made me extremely sad." (Terri has since also left Scientology; she and Armstrong have never spoken as non-church members.)

ARMSTRONG'S BREAK FROM the church didn't come for another two years, and it began with an unusual assignment that dovetailed with some of the most dramatic events in the church's history. In early 1980 Armstrong was working at a home Hubbard owned at Gilman Hot Springs, Calif.—now the site of Scientology's international headquarters, David Miscavige's base—when church leaders grew concerned the FBI was poised to mount a raid. They told Armstrong and everyone at Gilman to destroy any evidence that Hubbard intended to live on the property, issued orders to the church or controlled its finances.

Scientology had been under increasing scrutiny from law enforcement since 1977, when FBI agents descended on church offices in L.A. and Washington, part of an investigation into Church of Scientology's attempts to infiltrate government offices in the U.S. Scientology's Operation Snow White, as it was dubbed by church officers, sought to monitor investigations into church business by the government, including the U.S. Internal Revenue Service, and to steal government files damaging to the church. This the church

accomplished by ordering low-ranking members to seek employment in these government offices.

Although the extent of these operations today seems outlandish, in Canada they were deemed real and in 1992 resulted in breach-of-trust convictions for the Church of Scientology of Toronto and Jacqueline Matz, a Scientology “case officer” who ran agents planted inside the Ontario Provincial Police and the provincial ministry of the attorney general. “Between 1974 and 1976, Scientologists secured employment with government agencies perceived to be enemies of the church, and signed oaths of secrecy as public officials,” wrote Justice Marc Rosenberg in 1996 as part of an Ontario Court of Appeal panel that upheld the 1992 convictions. “In breach of their oaths of office, they then took copies of confidential documents from the agencies that employed them and provided them to the Church of Scientology of Toronto.”



Wedding day: Trudy Venter and Terri Gillham (right) with Hubbard, who gave the brides away

In the U.S. the infiltrations were bolder still, involving burglary and wire-tapping, and are described by Reitman in *Inside Scientology* as “the largest program of domestic espionage in U.S. history.” (A number of people served jail time for their roles in the plot, including Hubbard’s wife, Mary Sue.)

It was the fallout from Operation Snow White and other legal issues that had

prompted Hubbard to go underground in 1980. In anticipation of yet more raids, Armstrong and his colleagues were scrubbing the house at Gilman Hot Springs when an underling approached Armstrong clutching a beat-up cardboard box. "It was old and open so that I could look in and see that these letters and documents predated Scientology—Boy Scout books, family photographs," he says. They located 20 more boxes containing hundreds of thousands of similar documents, including Hubbard's highly revealing journals.

Hubbard always said his personal papers had been lost or stolen. Armstrong was intrigued. "I thought, 'Now we have this material from which a biography can be written, and all the lies about Hubbard put to rest,'" he says. He petitioned Hubbard to name him his personal archivist, with a view to assisting a writer with an authorized biography. Hubbard approved the request. "I think he considered me very ordinary, and so safe," says Armstrong. "He had twice assigned me to the RPF and I had submitted, I had not betrayed him. He probably considered me completely under his spell."

Armstrong eventually amassed half a million pages of Hubbard-related documents, and travelled across the U.S. to interview associates and surviving relatives. It was a quest for hagiography, and Armstrong painstakingly, as though handling holy relics, made copies of the papers, organizing them into binders. The first hint that Hubbard's life did not match the tales he told came when the church organized a screening of the 1941 film *Dive Bomber*, starring Errol Flynn, and written, Hubbard always said, by Hubbard during his stint as a Hollywood screenwriter. The screening was a Scientology fundraiser, and Armstrong set out to uncover all he could about Hubbard's role in the film. He soon found he could make no connection between Hubbard and *Dive Bomber*—his name did not appear in the credits, and there was little likelihood he'd used a pseudonym. Hubbard's nearest involvement seemed to be writing a pulp-magazine story, *The Dive Bomber*, which bore no resemblance to the film.

Armstrong informed his higher-ups. Hubbard, still underground, responded by letter that Warner Bros. had forgotten to credit him but had paid him by cheque; he'd used the money after the war on a Caribbean holiday. This too proved problematic: by Hubbard's own account the war had left him blind and crippled and in no shape for island jaunts. Armstrong, still absolutely loyal, set out to resolve the matter, and consulted Hubbard's military records, obtained under the Freedom of Information Act.

Ultimately, *Dive Bomber* proved the insignificant thread that, once pulled,

unravelling Hubbard's past. Two years of research convinced Armstrong that little of what Hubbard told his followers checked out: it seemed impossible he had ever extensively explored Asia as a teenager; nothing in his military records suggested he was a war hero—in fact, quite the opposite; and his academic achievements (he claimed, among other things, to be a nuclear physicist, a civil engineer and a Ph.D.) amounted to flunking out of university after two years.



The fabulist: Hubbard claimed to be a nuclear physicist, an engineer and a war hero

Still, though Armstrong recognized Hubbard as a fabulist, he continued to believe in Hubbard the man and in his teachings. He wrote requests to Scientology's upper echelons seeking to correct the record and thereby maintain the integrity of Scientology's methods. He was, he says, first rebuffed, and then threatened. Higher-ups "ordered that I be sec checked," he says. "I understood by this time that security checks were these very abusive, metered interrogations. I was not going to submit to another security check."

Armstrong had just remarried. He and his wife, Jocelyn, a fellow Sea Org member, soon concluded they could not remain in the church. Little by little, so that no one would notice, they began emptying their room at the iconic blue Church of Scientology complex in L.A. off Sunset Boulevard. The last thing they removed was a large piggybank, disguised with a ribbon on its

snout as a Christmas gift. They left with the pig and never returned, fleeing first to B.C., then to Costa Mesa, Calif.

In 1982, the church filed a lawsuit against him for breach of trust and theft of Hubbard's personal documents. The case came to trial in L.A. in 1984 and went badly for Scientology. Armstrong's testimony was enormously damaging, and helped trigger an oft-quoted ruling by California superior court judge Paul Breckenridge, who called the church "schizophrenic and paranoid . . . a reflection of its founder, [L. Ron Hubbard]. The evidence portrays a man who has been virtually a pathological liar when it comes to his history, background and achievements. The writings and documents in evidence additionally reflect his egoism, greed, avarice, lust for power, and vindictiveness and aggressiveness against persons perceived by him to be disloyal or hostile. At the same time it appears that he is charismatic and highly capable of motivating, organizing, controlling, manipulating, and inspiring his adherents."

Even after Hubbard's leadership faded, Breckenridge's judgments held true—for Armstrong, perhaps more true than before. In 1986, after an elaborate church-run sting, during which Scientologists masquerading as dissenters secretly videotaped Armstrong discussing their plans to overthrow the church's leadership, Armstrong and some 20 other former members with claims against the church or Hubbard negotiated a collective settlement. In exchange for what ultimately became around US\$500,000, Armstrong returned the Hubbard documents and signed a settlement agreement containing confidentiality conditions banning him from speaking even privately about the church—at pain of paying \$50,000 each time he did so.

Armstrong found it impossible to keep quiet. The church sued, repeatedly, driving him into bankruptcy. Its appetite for litigation had already ruined his second marriage. The tangle of lawsuits between Armstrong and the church last surfaced in court in the mid-2000s, when a California court of appeal reinstated a court order remanding Armstrong to 26 days in jail. A previous judgment requiring him to pay the church \$500,000 still stands. He has not crossed the U.S. border in years for fear of getting locked up.

Meanwhile, Scientology continues what Armstrong describes as a "black PR" campaign against him—for example alleging that he fabricated documents, and providing *The New Yorker* magazine with an embarrassing picture of Armstrong apparently naked and embracing a large globe (Armstrong was wearing shorts).

He now lives in Chilliwack, the small Canadian city where he first heard of Hubbard. He has remarried—another ex-Scientologist—and earns money as a street cleaner. Armstrong is otherwise nearly penniless, having divested himself of all his worldly possessions in 1990, a decision he says he made with the guidance of God but which nevertheless prompted Scientology to file yet another lawsuit accusing him of trying to avoid claims arising from an earlier matter.

The last time he ever saw Hubbard was in Gilman Hot Springs, in 1979, when Hubbard arrived for a promotional photo shoot. He was looking thinner than he had on the Apollo, and his hair was thinning also. “Ah, hello Gerry,” Armstrong recalls him saying. “You look natural.”

“Those were his final words to me. A somewhat oblique compliment.” ♣



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