

Secret Agents for a Church



Andrea and Ford Schwartz, who joined the "leftist" groups while still working for the Church of Scientology, met the time we met the group," says Ford, "the more

by Dennis Wheeler

"Theseus and his comrade Pirithous in their descent to Hades...sat down to rest for a while, only to find that they had grown to the rocks and could not rise."

— Carl Jung, *Modern Man In Search Of A Soul*

Ford and Andrea Schwartz are a typical American couple, perhaps. They're 33 and 28 years old, respectively, and they live in a middle-class apartment in Concord. A Volkswagen van rests in the carport. Their three-year-old son likes to dress up as Ralph, the Great American Hero.

But other parts of their lives aren't so typical. Until recently, for example, they were intensely dedicated members of an organization that some people regard as a dangerous religious cult. And even after they had supposedly left this group and were helping other people out of destructive cults, they actually were still working for the very same organization.

As members of the Church of Scientology, Andrea and

Ford say they lied, helped break up families, and enticed people to hand over huge sums of money for services they didn't need. And as "double agents" for Scientology they continued their deceit — all because they thought they were part of a glorious struggle to "help Ron clear the planet."

"Ron" is L. Ron Hubbard, the 71-year-old science fiction writer who founded Scientology in the 1950s. By "clearing the planet" the Schwartzes thought they were helping to rid the world of insanity, war, and crime.

But all they really did, they now say, was to add to Hubbard's fabulous wealth.

And now, they claim, they've both *finally* left Scientology for good.

Their first encounters with Hubbard's organization came years before they'd met each other, and on opposite sides of the continent. Ford's first exposure to Hubbard's teachings came in 1971, here in Sonoma County, when he became involved with a local movement known in Scien-

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tology slang as a "squirrel group" — that is, its founder had dabbled in Scientology and had borrowed some of its ideas.

Later, in Long Beach, Ford and his girlfriend started Scientology's "Communications Course." "I was absolutely amazed and overwhelmed by the clarity of Hubbard's thinking," he says, "and by the view of a man who knows everything there is to know, and having researched it all has done it all. His theory of the reactive mind and 'engrams' — mental pictures of past unpleasant experiences — paralleled my own experience so closely that I was absolutely ecstatic over the possibility of being able to really get audited, or counseled, by Scientologists."

Before long, Ford and his friend, whom he subsequently married, began thinking of themselves as "Thetans," the Scientology concept of the soul. When told that for a limited time only they could join the "Sea Org," they put all their belongings in storage, dropped off their dog at the pound, and showed up at the San Pedro docks the next morning, where they signed one-billion year contracts. The Sea Org, or "Sea Organization," is a fraternal body of members within the structure of Scientology, and at that time one of its ships, the *Excalibur*, was docked in Southern California.

Life aboard the ship was harsh, says Ford, and veiled in a strict military atmosphere. The couple were put to work swabbing decks. Ford grew concerned about his pregnant wife's health, but was reminded that she and her unborn child were Thetans and therefore couldn't be harmed, and that in any case any engrams they *did* receive could easily be audited out.

Nevertheless, Ford and his wife balked, and after paying a "Freeloader's Debt" of \$50 were allowed to work at Scientology's Los Angeles base. They paid thousands of dollars for auditing and training, encouraged by stories of other Scientologists who had supposedly learned to control the weather, communicate telepathically, and avoid traffic accidents by mentally "beaming" cars out of the way.

Up and up the ladder of Scientology they climbed, until eventually Ford became one of the top salespeople in the Los Angeles base, while his wife worked in the publications department. Eventually, though, he and his wife were divorced; the wife and Ford's son are still Scientologists.

Meanwhile, in Washington, D.C., Andrea too had begun her life in Scientology through the Communications Course, led to it by her older brother. Before long, she was desperately searching for the \$1,700 she'd been told she had to pay for more courses. When friends and relatives refused to loan her the money, she was told they were "Suppressive Persons." Finally another Scientologist co-signed a loan for her, but when she fell behind on her payments she became a staff member.

At one point her average weekly paycheck from Scientology was \$7. She lived in a two-bedroom apartment with 10 other women and slept on a mat on the floor. Her diet consisted of cheap hamburgers and soda; some days she lived on a small package of cream cheese.

But by 1975, she'd become the Chief Registrar in the Washington "org." Her first big sale, she recalls, involved a middle-aged woman whom Andrea convinced to hand over the \$2,500 she'd been saving for her own funeral. Later, Andrea made an average of \$20,000 a week for



Scientology — some weeks as much as \$47,000. After the first \$2,500, she was allowed to keep one-half of one percent; after \$5,000 one percent; and so on. She says she badgered people to deceive their spouses, helped children sever relationships with their families, and convinced people to quit their jobs in order to devote their lives to "Ron."

Scientologists who finish training in Washington are then routed to Los Angeles, and it was in this manner that Andrea met Ford. They were married, despite the disapproval of the Church, and Ford moved to the Washington org.

Eventually, however, the dark side of Scientology began to haunt them. Andrea spoke out more and more often, and began asking unpopular questions. At one point, she says, she was assaulted by a superior, and forced to undergo a "sec check," or security check, on the E-Meter, which Scientologists claim is a religious artifact but others say is simply a lie detector.

Andrea was threatened with being a Suppressive Person, and she and Ford requested a Scientology trial. They were found guilty on several counts, and it was recommended that they go to the Rehabilitation Project Force. Critics of Scientology say the RPF is the Church's equivalent of a concentration camp where Suppressive Persons work 14 hours a day, are separated from spouses, and aren't allowed to speak until spoken to. "People in the RPF are treated like lepers," Ford says, "or as if they're insane."

He and Andrea refused to go, and instead began to pay off their Freeloader's Debt which they were told now came to more than \$30,000. They moved to California, had a child, took jobs outside of Scientology, and managed to pay off \$5,000 of their alleged debt. Finally, though, they were granted an amnesty by submitting a list of their "overts" (harmful acts) to the Guardian's Office in San Francisco. (The Guardians, according to their critics, act as the secret police of Scientology.)

At this point, the lives of Andrea and Ford Schwartz take on all the aspects of a genuine cold war, with secret agents, counter-intelligence agents, and drop-off points.

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"In spite of everything," Andrea explains, "we had never relinquished our personal identities as Scientologists. We felt there was something wrong with certain Scientologists, but not with Scientology itself. We never broke with Ron. There's a difference between leaving Scientology and having Scientology leave you; we were still Thetans."

And still eager to help "clear the planet," Ford took the job of tracking down a "deprogrammer" who had mysteriously vanished. The deprogrammer had worked for the Freedom Counseling Center, an organization based in Burlingame that non-coercively assists people to leave religious cults. During this task, Ford pretended to be a deprogrammer himself, and before long he was actually hired by the Center.

To prepare himself as a counter-intelligence agent for Scientology, Ford received 400 hours of auditing and read up on other spy agencies, such as the CIA and the KGB. He prepared national and international work, but took most of his orders from the Guardians Office in San Francisco. He met his "operative" at least once a week, in bars, restaurants, or parked cars. All calls to his operative were from pay phones.

Andrea also became a counter-intelligence agent, infiltrating a Berkeley cult-awareness group called the Spiritual Counterfeits Project. "Our friends and family all believed we were out of Scientology," she says. "We started living our cover as real as we could — we had to remember that *anyone* contacting us might be checking our cover. At times we thought our home was bugged, and for a couple of weeks we even felt we had to go across the street to a restaurant to talk openly between ourselves."

Through the Freedom Counseling Center, Ford supposedly deprogrammed people out of various cults, although actually he says he wasn't very successful at it.

During more than a year of this double life, he was able

to tell the Guardians about an anti-Scientology article planned by the *Reader's Digest* a full three months before its publication. He directed a family suing the "Moonies" to a lawyer who also was working on a Scientology case, so he could get more information about the latter.

Andrea, meanwhile, wrote an anti-Scientology pamphlet for the Spiritual Counterfeits Project, but had it approved by the Scientologists themselves before its publication. And whenever possible, they both drove wedges between different people in the anti-cult field.

Perhaps they lived their cover *too* well. "People aren't saints just because they're against Scientology," Ford says. "But the more we met the enemy, the more we realized the enemy isn't all that bad after all."

Finally, while deprogramming a fellow cultist, Ford realized he had before him undeniable evidence that Hubbard had consistently lied about himself, and therefore may have lied about countless other things as well. He basically deprogrammed himself over a three-day period, he says, and before long had done the same to Andrea.

The couple consulted a psychologist well versed on the subject of cults, and talked with a lawyer and the FBI to find out if they'd committed any crimes. After the FBI declared them innocent, they finally shed their cover. Ford left his job at the Freedom Counseling Center, and Andrea no longer works for the Spiritual Counterfeits Project, although she may rewrite her original pamphlet, finally telling the entire story.

Both Ford and Andrea are now Christians, and they say that fact has sustained them through their fears. And both have absolutely no idea what their future holds.

"All things considered," says Ford wearily, "compared to the last nine years this is paradise."

Next week: Scientology responds to the *News-Herald* articles.