

Clearwater Sun

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Police release transcript of Scientologist's statement

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Clearwater police Monday released a transcript of a tape-recorded statement made last month by Daniel Cotrino, a New York Scientologist who claimed he had been held against his will at the sect's 210 S. Fort Harrison Ave. headquarters.

The transcript indicates the 30-year-old Cotrino, a Scientologist for 11 years, was frightened and angry at the time he made the statement. It is also clear that Cotrino did make the statements he later accused police of fabricating.

The transcript of the tape was released after Pinellas-Pasco Assistant State Attorney Charles Holloway had reviewed it and determined no criminal charges are warranted in connection with the March 5 incident.

Cotrino, a New York painting contractor, had complained to investigators that he had paid \$7,000 for a series of Scientology "O.T. Preparation" courses, and that when he arrived in Clearwater to

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take the courses, he was told he could not. Instead, Cotrino alleged, he was told he must pay \$1,165 for another course, the Sunshine Rundown, before he could take the one for which he had paid.

When Cotrino decided not to take the course and tried to leave the former Fort Harrison Hotel, he said two men "physically detained him."

However, when the *Clearwater Sun* published a story—based on a written police report—detailing Cotrino's claims, sect officials labeled the story "a fabrication" and Cotrino recanted his statements and called police liars.

Specifically, Cotrino said he never was physically detained and that he was taken to the police station against his wishes.

(Please see * TAPE, next page)

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* Tape

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"At no time was I ever physically detained ... by anyone from the Church of Scientology," Cotrino wrote in a letter to the editor of the Sun. "I did not ask to be taken (to the police station) ... (and) I did not have anything to complain about to the police."

Cotrino also was quoted as saying, "What the police report said was a very serious lie."

But the transcript of Cotrino's March 5 statement to police indicates otherwise:

"When I came over here (to the Fort Harrison) to get the O.T. Preparations, they did not deliver that," Cotrino said in the taped statement. "It's like you go to a butcher to buy meat and they give you chicken. I felt I was lied to because I was told I would get certain services and when I came here, they told me I can't do those services. I have to come up with more money."

"... And, uh, I didn't want to get into debt or anything like that to do this and I was very upset about the whole thing. ... I just wanted to go home."

Cotrino stated further that "they didn't want me to leave because it was very important that I do the Sunshine Rundown because if I didn't do the Sunshine Rundown, then bad things can happen to me."

At that point, Clearwater Police Detective Ken-

neth Fairchild asked Cotrino what he thought was meant by "bad things."

"I didn't felt (sic) they were threatening me physically, but I, uh, they were trying to suggest to me that, uh ..."

"Something on your mental welfare?" Fairchild queried.

"Yes, yes, right," was the reply.

Upon further questioning, Cotrino said he did not feel imminently threatened, "(but) I don't know if they are going to break my bones or anything like that but I don't want ... they have, they know a lot of things about my personality and they can, they can, you know like, they can probably by, by, by using this knowledge that I have about me, they can make me feel really bad, you know, without even touching me, you know, because they do have a lot of things they know."

Cotrino then told investigators he walked out of the Fort Harrison and a person named Jim "was physically stopping me and when the police car passed by, which I didn't know it was a police car, I was whistling at different cars to see if anybody would stop to take me to the airport. So he (police Sgt. Jeff Kronschnabl) went around and turned around because he saw they were holding me."

"He saw they were holding you?" Fairchild

asked.

"Yeah, he saw that this guy was pushing me around," Cotrino said. "I would turn around and he would go and push me, so by him holding me the policeman saw this, you know, so ... he stopped and they let me go. As soon as they saw the police car they said, 'That's police!', you know, they let me go. This guy wanted to physically take me back, you know, and I didn't want to go back there."

Ellis then asked Cotrino why the duo ran when they saw the policeman.

"Because they knew they were doing something illegal. ... You're not supposed to hold somebody else against their will," was Cotrino's reply.

In the transcript, Cotrino details for investigators how he prepaid the \$7,000 for the courses and his difficulty in trying to get the courses for which he had paid. He also talks about the inner workings of the sect's operations, stating that some of the people who manage the sect "have interest in a lot of money and, uh, they aren't interested in doing anything for the individual, but get as much as they can from the individual. That's how they're operating."

Cotrino told investigators he did not want to press charges at the time: "I just want to make a report. They lied to me by telling me that I was going to

come here and I was going to be able to do my O.T. Preps, but when I came here I started getting auditing and I did not get my O.T. Preps. So, somebody lied to me, OK?"

"... It's a big thing of fraud because it was a lie," Cotrino continued. "They told me they promised one thing, but I never got anything in writing that they had told me this, so this is whatever I say that they can say, 'Who said this?' so it's refuted."

Cotrino did not return numerous calls to his home in New York. His Tampa attorney, Benny Lazzara, said he was "pleased that the State Attorney's Office has made that decision (not to prosecute Cotrino for filing a false report) so the case not go any further. The whole episode is unfortunate."

Richard Haworth, spokesman for the Church of Scientology in Clearwater, disassociated the sect from Cotrino, saying, "This is a matter between Mr. Cotrino and the police."

"I'm not in any position to comment on this ... it's not something that involves the church," he said, refusing to comment on Cotrino's taped allegations of physical restraint by sect members and frustration at not receiving the courses for which he had paid.

"I have no comment for the paper," Haworth said. "What you've got is what you've got."