

INSIDE SCIENTOLOGY | A TIMES SPECIAL REPORT

THE TRUTH RUNDOWN

HIGH-RANKING DEFECTORS SAY SCIENTOLOGY'S LEADER ENFORCES LOYALTY WITH BEATINGS AND BULLYING.



Times (1998)

After L. Ron Hubbard died, David Miscavige became Scientology's leader. Former church executives say Miscavige beat his staff. Church officials say the defectors are lying.

PART ONE OF THREE

BY JOE CHILDS AND THOMAS C. TOBIN
TIMES STAFF WRITERS

The leader of the Church of Scientology strode into the room with a boom box and an announcement: Time for a game of musical chairs.

David Miscavige had kept more than 30 members of his church's executive staff cooped up for weeks in a small office building outside Los Angeles, not letting them leave except to grab a shower. They slept on the floor, their food carted in.

Their assignment was to develop strategic plans for the church. But the leader trashed their every idea and berated them as incompetents and enemies, of him and the church.

Prove your devotion, Miscavige told them, by winning at musical chairs. Everyone else — losers, all of you — will be banished to Scientology outposts around the world. If families are split up, too bad.

To the music of Queen's *Bohemian Rhapsody* they played through the night, parading around a conference room in their Navy-style uniforms, grown men and women wrestling over chairs.

The next evening, early in 2004, Miscavige gathered the group and out of nowhere slapped a manager named Tom De Vocht, threw him to the ground and delivered more

blows. De Vocht took the beating and the humiliation in silence — the way other executives always took the leader's attacks.

This account comes from executives who for decades were key figures in Scientology's powerful inner circle. Marty Rathbun and Mike Rinder, the highest-ranking executives to leave the church, are speaking out for the first time.

Two other former executives who defected also agreed to interviews with the *St. Petersburg Times*: De Vocht, who for years oversaw the church's spiritual headquarters in Clearwater, and Amy Scobee, who helped create Scientology's celebrity network, which caters to the likes of John Travolta and Tom Cruise.

One by one, the four defectors walked away from the only life they knew. That Rathbun and Rinder are speaking out is a stunning reversal because they were among Miscavige's closest associates, Haldeman and Ehrlichman to his Nixon.

Now they provide an unprecedented look inside the upper reaches of the tightly controlled organization. They reveal:

- Physical violence permeated Scientology's international management team. Miscavige set the tone, routinely attacking his lieutenants. Rinder says the leader attacked him some 50 times.

Rathbun, Rinder and De Vocht admit that they, too, attacked their colleagues, to demonstrate loyalty to Miscavige and prove their mettle.

- Staffers are disciplined and controlled by a multilayered

system of "ecclesiastical justice." It includes publicly confessing sins and crimes to a group of peers, being ordered to jump into a pool fully clothed, facing embarrassing "security checks" or, worse, being isolated as a "suppressive person."

At the pinnacle of the hierarchy, Miscavige commands such power that managers follow his orders, however bizarre, with lemming-like obedience.

- Church staffers covered up how they botched the care of Lisa McPherson, a Scientologist who died after they held her 17 days in isolation at Clearwater's Fort Harrison Hotel.

Rathbun, who Miscavige put in charge of dealing with the fallout from the case, admits that he ordered the destruction of incriminating evidence. He and others also reveal that Miscavige made an embarrassing miscalculation on McPherson's Scientology counseling.

- With Miscavige calling the shots and Rathbun among those at his side, the church muscled the IRS into granting Scientology tax-exempt status. Offering fresh perspective on one of the church's crowning moments, Rathbun details an extraordinary campaign of public pressure backed by thousands of lawsuits.

- To prop up revenues, Miscavige has turned to longtime parishioners, urging them to buy material that the church markets as must-have, improved sacred scripture.

Church officials deny the accusations. Miscavige never hit a single church staffer, not once, they said.

STORY CONTINUES ON PAGE 10A

EXCLUSIVE VIDEO INTERVIEWS WITH CHURCH DEFECTORS AND MORE AT TAMPABAY.COM/SCIENTOLOGY

Just too many lizards to monitor

As the economy pushes people from Cape Coral, an invader takes over, meeting fewer challenges.

BY MICHAEL KRUSE
Times Staff Writer

CAPE CORAL — The biology professor from the University of Tampa bent down to the floor and pulled out of a black trash bag a fork-tongued, 5-foot-long, flesh-eating African lizard.

It was big, dead and about to be cut open. The professor dropped the lizard on a long plastic tray in the environmental resources building here. The body hit the counter with a thud.

"Welcome to Cape Coral," Todd Campbell said.

These things live here, thousands of them, in this sprawling city in the southwest corner of the state. They're not supposed to live here, of course, which is why scientists like Campbell call them an invasive species.

Invasion implies a war, which is appropriate. That's what this is. Us against them.

This particular conflict has been going on for almost a decade now. The battleground is the city's more than 400 miles of man-made canals.

» See **INVADERS, 8A**



JOHN PENDYGRAFT | Times

A Nile monitor lizard, estimated to be 2 or 3 years old, sits in a trap at the Cape Coral Public Works building.

IN FLORIDIAN

The accidental dad

As a former foster child, Rick Kelly didn't think he was up for having kids of his own. Then he met Christian. **1E**

IN LATITUDES

The Forgotten Coast

For a trip worth remembering, make St. George Island and Apalachicola in Florida's Panhandle your next getaway. **1L**

IN SPORTS

Barnes' promise kept

Leading the U.S. Open with a 36-hole course record of 8-under 132, Ricky Barnes is finally living up to expectations, including his own. **1C**

TODAY'S WEATHER

Heat advisory

8 a.m. Noon 4 p.m. 8 p.m.
82° 92° 93° 87°
10% rain chance.
More, back page of Sports



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A key to health care: same cost everywhere

Regional discrepancies in Medicare spending are a major challenge as reform plans loom.

BY LETITIA STEIN
Times Staff Writer

During the final two years of his life, the typical senior in Miami sees doctors 106 times. He receives an astonishing array of lab tests, MRIs and medical procedures, and spends a month in hospital beds.

The bill for all that care adds up. Medicare, the federal health program for seniors, spends a staggering \$16,351 a year per Miami patient, more than anywhere else in the nation, and roughly double the 2006 national average.

That distinction places Miami at the center of the nation's debate over health costs, and has people everywhere asking the same question: What's going on in Miami?

Just a few hundred miles away in Tampa, Medicare spends \$8,991 per enrollee. Sarasota provides care for \$7,467 per senior, less than the national average.

But Miamians on the whole don't appear to live longer than their fellow Floridians. Nor do they seem to have more medical problems that call for so much more expensive care.

In fact, there's little evidence

that patients get much benefit from such huge regional disparities in Medicare spending. What the cost divides do reveal are local differences in how medicine is practiced, disparities that affect taxpayers and patients of all ages.

But while the numbers are black-and-white, how to address them is the real debate.

"There's no question there's a significant variation across the country and in Florida in cost of care, and actually in the way we go about rendering care to patients," said Dr. Michael Wasyluk, a Tampa orthopaedic surgeon who chairs the Florida Medical Association's managed care committee.

But he said the numbers don't show doctors what kind of care is safe to stop. Nor do they show consumers' role in escalating costs. "Imaging is demanded by patients when it often isn't necessary," he noted.

The White House contends that excessive spending isn't just wasteful — it actually hurts the most vulnerable Americans.

» See **SPENDING, 17A**