

**INSIDE SCIENTOLOGY | A TIMES SPECIAL REPORT**

# DEATH IN SLOW MOTION

SCIENTOLOGY DEFECTOR'S INSIDE STORY OF LISA MCPHERSON'S DEATH INCLUDES ADMISSION: I DESTROYED EVIDENCE.



Family photo

At a ceremony at the Fort Harrison Hotel in September 1995, Lisa McPherson is introduced as "clear," meaning that through Scientology counseling, she had rid herself of all interference from troubling images buried in her subconscious. Two months later she had a nervous breakdown. After 17 days in Scientology's care, she was dead.

**PART TWO OF THREE**

BY THOMAS C. TOBIN AND JOE CHILDS  
TIMES STAFF WRITERS

**T**he night after Lisa McPherson died, the leader of the Church of Scientology sent word for one of his top lieutenants to wait by a pay phone at the Holiday Inn Surfside on Clearwater Beach.

When Marty Rathbun answered the ringing phone in the lobby, David Miscavige let him have it: "Why aren't you all over this mess? The police are poking around. Do something."

"Yes sir," Rathbun said. McPherson, a 36-year-old parishioner in apparent good health, had spent 17 days in a guarded room at the church's Fort Harrison Hotel. Scientology staffers tried to nurse her out of a mental breakdown, but she became ill. She drew her last breaths in the back seat of a van as they drove her to a hospital in the next county.

Her death on Dec. 5, 1995, triggered nine years of investigations, lawsuits and worldwide press coverage. Alive on the Internet, it stains Scientology's reputation still.

Now, for the first time, comes an inside account from the upper ranks of Scientology — from the man who directed the church's handling of the case.

Rathbun, who defected from Scientology's staff in late 2004, admits that as prosecutors and attorneys for McPherson's family prepared subpoenas, he ordered the destruction of incriminating evidence about her care at the Fort Harrison.

He and others who have left the church disclose for the first time that Miscavige was involved in McPherson's Scientology counseling. Just weeks before her mental breakdown, they say, it was the leader himself who determined that she had reached an enhanced mental state that Scientologists call "clear."

For years Rathbun was adamant that the church did nothing wrong. Now he says that McPherson's care was a debacle from the start. It was a "perfect storm of incompetence and irresponsibility" within the church, he said. "You couldn't justify it."

He disclosed that the church was prepared to pay almost any price to make the case go away. He said he sent an emissary to McPherson's funeral in Dallas with authority to give her mother, Fannie, whatever she wanted. The approach was rebuffed because the family didn't trust the church.

"Whether it was financially or any other thing, we're taking care of that woman because it was on our watch. If she needed \$5 million, we would have come up with \$5 million."

Church officials say Rathbun is a bitter ex-member who inflated his importance in Scientology and whose motives are suspect. They say Miscavige demoted Rathbun in 2003 in part for missteps he made in the McPherson case.

A settlement agreement with the woman's family forbids them from providing specifics, said Monique Yingling, a longtime Scientology attorney and friend of Miscavige. Still,

she said that Rathbun botched the case from the start, and "possibly caused the whole thing."

**A LITTLE FENDER-BENDER**

McPherson joined Scientology in Dallas, her hometown, when she was 18. She worked for a marketing company owned by Scientologist friends; the company moved to Clearwater in 1994 to be near the church's spiritual headquarters, and McPherson came, too.

Shortly before 6 p.m. on Nov. 18, 1995, her Jeep Cherokee ran into a boat trailer stopped in traffic on S Fort Harrison Avenue.

McPherson, frantic, walked up to the driver pulling the trailer, put her hands on his shoulders and asked, "Where's the people? Where's the people?"

Firefighters had her move her car to the side of Belleview Boulevard. She signed a statement saying she did not want medical care. As officers and paramedics tended to other duties, they saw McPherson had stripped off her clothes and was walking along Belleview.

They took her to Morton Plant Hospital, where doctors discussed having her committed for psychiatric evaluation under Florida's Baker Act.

But Scientology considers psychiatry and psychiatric drugs evil. The church believes it offers less intrusive and more humane treatment for problems of the human mind.

STORY CONTINUES ON PAGE 8A

EXCLUSIVE VIDEO INTERVIEWS WITH CHURCH DEFECTORS AND MORE AT [TAMPABAY.COM/SCIENTOLOGY](http://TAMPABAY.COM/SCIENTOLOGY)

## Love of Cuba drove couple?

In the spy case, a diary refers to a "brilliant" Castro and "the abuses" of the U.S. system.

BY DAVID ADAMS  
Times Latin America Correspondent

Kendall Myers was a bookish history professor hailing from elite Washington society. Gwendolyn Steingraber was an alternative energy advocate doing solar energy workshops for the Public Utility Commission in South Dakota.

In 1979, sheriff deputies raided their home in Pierre, S.D., and found marijuana growing in the basement.

The incident didn't raise too many eyebrows at the time and was quickly forgotten when the couple moved back to the starchy, civil service world of Washington.

Looking back, the episode serves as a helpful metaphor for an underground double life that became public on June 4 when the couple, now in their 70s, were arrested on charges that for 30 years they had been spying for the Cuban government.

The evidence so far — diary entries, taped statements and inter-



Courtesy of the Myers family (1997)

**Kendall and Gwendolyn Myers are accused of spying on the United States for the Cuban government for 30 years.**

cepted conversations — appears to leave little doubt about the couple's guilt. Instead, discussion of the case has focused on what motivated the Myerses, neither of whom was known to speak Spanish and rarely, if ever, displayed any interest in Latin America.

From court documents and public records, what emerges is a picture of a very private couple

» See SPIES, 5A

**IN TAMPA BAY**

**Ex-commissioner charged**

Former Hillsborough County Commissioner Brian Blair, 52, is accused of punching his two sons at home and is being held in jail. **1B**

**IN SPORTS**

**Mickelson stirs gallery**

At the U.S. Open, loud cheers back Phil Mickelson, who would claim a signature moment with a victory today, Gary Shelton writes. **1C**

**IN SPORTS**

**Rays rally past Mets 10-6**

The Rays come from behind twice to win the game and the series in New York, led by B.J. Upton's four RBIs and three runs. **1C**

**TODAY'S WEATHER**

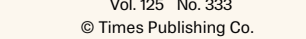
Partly cloudy

8 a.m. Noon 4 p.m. 8 p.m.  
85° 92° 93° 87°

20% rain chance.

More, back page of Sports

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## Sansom document refers to airport

The document is evidence that a \$6 million building was to be a hangar, prosecutors say.

BY ALEX LEARY

Times/Herald Tallahassee Bureau

TALLAHASSEE — A crucial document in the criminal case against former state House Speaker Ray Sansom is one spare page: three typed lines, a handwritten note in the margin and the number 1, circled.

No studies. No reports. No backup material. In the small orbit of real power in the state Capitol, that's all it took for the House's top budget writer and soon-to-be speaker to direct \$6 million to a "Jt-Use Emergency Response Workforce center w/ Okal Co. Destin Airport."

The margin note, with the initials of Sansom's top aide, said "per S.D. (speaker designate) to fund." Underlined. The circled number 1 meant it was Sansom's top priority. To prosecutors, this simple document dated April 17, 2007, shows that Sansom intended all along for the \$6 million building to be built at Destin Airport. The final budget entry omits the location,



**Grand jury documents reveal details that led to the indictment of former House Speaker Ray Sansom.**

which prosecutors contend was part of Sansom's attempt to conceal the true purpose of the building intended for Northwest Florida State College: to store private aircraft for Jay Odom, a Sansom friend and political contributor.

The document is one of nearly 16,000 pages prosecutors have made public by releasing them to defense attorneys as Sansom prepares for trial on felony official misconduct and perjury charges. In the mountain of documents and testimony transcripts are new details that Odom was going to store planes in the building, something Sansom, Odom and the college president long denied. » See SANSOM, 7A