

#1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER

RON MISCavige

WITH DAN KOON

Scientology,
My Son David Miscavige, and Me

RUTHLESS



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*To my children, Ronnie, Denise, David and Lori;
my grandchildren and great-grandchildren,
some of whom I have never met;
as well as to the families that have been
torn apart by the policy of disconnection
as practiced by the Church of Scientology*

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PROLOGUE

THE POCKET T-SHIRT IS A HANDY ITEM. CELL PHONES, READING glasses, shopping lists—they all fit neatly inside that little cloth cavity. Of course, if you've got your cell phone in there and you bend over, it will more than likely fly out.

In July 2013, I was living in Whitewater, Wisconsin, a town of 14,000 that lies 45 minutes southwest of Milwaukee. One morning, I had to do some shopping at Aldi's market in nearby Janesville. I came out with my bags and leaned in past the steering wheel to set them on the floor in front of the passenger seat. As I did so, I reached up with my right hand to keep my phone from falling out of my shirt pocket. I've done that a million times. After you've dumped your cell phone or glasses on the ground once or twice, it becomes an almost automatic action.

There is something called the butterfly effect. Mathematician and meteorologist Edward Lorenz came up with the theory that a butterfly flapping its wings in the Amazon jungle could result in a hurricane some weeks later in the Caribbean.

Little did I know that the simple, automatic action of reaching my hand to my chest was not only being observed but, like the butterfly's wing, would set in motion events that I, and many others, never expected.

About a week later, I was sitting at home in Whitewater one evening when I heard a knock on the door. I answered and was surprised to see an officer from the Whitewater Police Department.

“Are you Ron Miscavige?” he asked.

I don't have a guilty conscience, but a police officer's appearance in a place where I have been living for only a few months and asking for me by name sent my antennae up immediately.

“Let's go to the garage so we can talk privately,” I said.

I had no desire to alarm my mother-in-law unnecessarily. She did not have a clue about why my wife, Becky, and I had suddenly showed up in

her life in the spring of 2012, and I was stumped as to what the officer wanted. I closed the front door, went around to the garage and opened it.

“What’s this about?”

“I have some information for you,” he began. “You have been followed by two private investigators hired by the Church of Scientology for the past year.”

“What?! You’ve got to be kidding me!” Physically, this was like being punched in the gut. Emotionally, I was totally shocked.

“No, sir, I am not kidding about this.”

“Jesus Christ, man. I’m being followed?” I could not believe what I was hearing. It was totally out of the blue.

“As far as getting more information about this, you can go to the West Allis police station because they are the ones that arrested one of the PIs.”

The officer left, and I called Becky, who was at work, to tell her what had just happened. My mind was racing. I began scouring the past year of my life, trying to find clues. Who had been following me? Were there signs that I had ignored? I told myself I should have known something was going on. How could I have been so blind? After a few minutes of mental cacophony, my head cleared and I contacted the police in West Allis. They arranged for me to come down, but the very next day they sent someone over from the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) with another member of the Whitewater police to check my car. Apparently, the PIs had attached a GPS device to my car to track my movements. I was even more stunned, if that was possible. Honestly, I was in disbelief about the whole thing. Life had been going really well, and suddenly a bombshell was dropped right in the middle of it.

The ATF agent wasn’t feeling well, however, and he never completed the check of my car to locate the GPS, but the following day Becky and I went down to West Allis and talked to the police. They sat us down at a long table in a conference room. Shortly, the detective who had made the arrest a few days earlier came in and introduced himself as Nick Pye. He was built like an NFL linebacker who could bench-press 400 pounds, and, after we got to know him, it turned out that he actually could bench-press 400 pounds. Yet his demeanor was utterly calm and unpretentious. In my experience, those are the toughest guys of all—the ones who don’t need to act tough.

“I am going to fill you in on what happened, but, first, let’s get your car checked out,” he said.

We brought the car into the service bay where they work on the police cars. They put it up on a lift and a mechanic checked the wheel wells.

“Yep, this is where they had one,” he said, pointing up to a rear wheel well. “It’s no longer there, but you can see the scratches where the magnet was,” and he shined a flashlight up into the well so I could see the spot. I’d been driving around for a year broadcasting my every turn to the two guys that had been following me. Goddammit, what a sickening thought.

“This is wild,” I said to Detective Pye. “I can’t believe it.”

“Do you have any idea why they were following you?”

“Well, maybe they were concerned that I would go to the media or something. I’m the father of the Chairman of the Board of the Church of Scientology, and last year we left the organization. And maybe he was a little concerned about my health. But I really don’t know.” I was fumbling for an answer because the whole thing was still unreal to me.

“Listen,” he said, “I hate to tell you this, but I’m going to have to.”

He thought for a minute, and I could see that he was searching for the right words. I was a little apprehensive. What now? Finally, he let me have it straight.

“Look, they saw you in a parking lot at a store, and you bent over and grabbed your chest with your hand. These two guys thought you were having a heart attack. Their instructions were to call if anything like this happened. When we pulled them in, they told us that none of the PIs had ever spoken to your son before. The routine was that they would contact the PI firm they were working for. The head of the PI firm would call an attorney, and the attorney would forward the information on to your son.

“So they called their contact, and within minutes a man who identified himself as David Miscavige called them and he told the PIs, ‘If he dies, he dies. Don’t intervene.’”

To say that I was shattered by Nick’s words is the understatement of the century. Shocked, stunned, incredulous—fill in your own adjectives. I couldn’t believe my ears. In fact, I heard it but did not accept it for quite some time. I think it is one of the most basic human impulses to help others, especially someone who is in dire need and *especially* a family member. And for a son to say that about his own father—just to let him die?!

This book is the story of how that came about.

ONE

BEGINNINGS

ON APRIL 30, 1960, A COOL, CRISP MORNING, I SAT IN THE waiting room at the Lower Bucks Hospital in Bristol, Pennsylvania. My wife, Loretta, was in the delivery room. Three years earlier, we'd had our first child, a son we named Ronnie. Now we were expecting twins. Loretta was a nurse, as was her sister Dolores, who was assisting in the delivery. I sat there waiting, waiting, waiting, growing more nervous by the hour. Suddenly, the doors burst open and the obstetrician, Dolores and another nurse came out. All three were holding blankets. Yikes, I thought, she had triplets. Well, the bright side was another tax deduction. We already knew she was going to have twins, so a third didn't bother me at all. I liked kids. I enjoyed having them around.

I sprung up and went over to Dolores, opened up the first blanket and looked into the blue eyes of my daughter, Denise. "Hi, little kid," I said and gave her a kiss. I went to the next blanket, pulled it back, and there was another set of baby blues looking back at me, David's. I gave him a kiss. The other nurse threw the third blanket up in the air and they all laughed. A little joke on the proud papa and the beginning of my relationship with my son David.

I know that life takes many twists and turns and that we can't hope to see what the future holds, but when I think back to that moment and my first look at that sweet little face, it's still hard to understand the transformation that took place.

My reason for writing this book is to focus on the journey David's life has taken. As a grown man, now middle-aged, he still possesses the energy and intelligence that I saw in him as a child. But, while he employed those traits in his youth to get excellent grades in school or to become good at hitting a baseball, today he sits atop a multibillion-dollar church that is

controversial, litigious, secretive, manipulative, coercive and, in my mind, evil. Yes, I firmly believe that Scientology has morphed into an immoral organization that hides a long list of abuses behind First Amendment protections.

I was born and raised in the Pennsylvania coal region. There I learned a healthy respect for honesty and industrious work but also a commonsense attitude about rules, regulations and authority. By that I mean that I think the spirit of the law is more important than the letter. When Loretta and I started our family, we tried to pass on these same values to our kids. We had two boys and two girls: Ronnie, the twins Denise and David, and the youngest, Lori. Each learned the value of hard work, but I have come to realize that a parent can do only so much, and a child ultimately determines his or her own path.

For many years now David has been the head and ultimate authority of the worldwide Church of Scientology. He came into positions of power in the early 1980s and assumed full, uncontested control several years later after a power struggle with the two people that Scientology founder L. Ron Hubbard had allegedly appointed as his successors. In earlier years, David's accomplishments were a source of fatherly pride, but they no longer are because I came to learn and experience firsthand the mean streak and ruthless ways that surfaced after he left home and went to work for the organization.

L. Ron Hubbard was a writer by profession, and in 1950 he published *Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health*, the book that evolved into Scientology a couple years later. Now, Hubbard was never all that the church has made him out to be. One can read church publications or one of its websites and come away with the impression that Hubbard was a demigod, a master of any activity he put his mind to, and humanity's greatest friend. The reality, as I have come to see, is somewhat different, which I will explore later. Yet I believe that if one reads a smattering of his writings or listens to even a few of his lectures, one cannot but conclude that, for all his personal shortcomings, Hubbard did possess a sincere desire to see people become happier, understand themselves better, improve their lives, and through that to improve society and the world.

Hubbard headed Scientology from its inception until his death in 1986, and so long as he was in charge, the focus of Scientology was to help people achieve those stated purposes through study of the philosophy he

developed and to apply it in life as well as to one another through the counseling techniques he called auditing. Scientologists purchased Hubbard's books and lectures and paid fixed donations to receive auditing or to take courses to learn how to become an auditor and audit others. Delivering these services is how Scientology organizations obtained the wherewithal to continue to exist.

In David's regime this has changed diametrically. Today Scientologists are pressured to donate money to pay for a new building for the church in their city and then to donate more for renovations to convert it into a grand edifice. The coercion exerted by church staff on public Scientologists to cough up has wrought financial hardships on many people and their families. The Internet is full of such stories.

One Sacramento couple borrowed everything they could against their home equity when real estate prices were high; when the housing market crashed in 2008–2009, they were forced to declare bankruptcy. An owner of an insurance company donated upward of \$10 million to Scientology; his company went bankrupt when the economy crashed in 2008. My own involvement with Scientology began in 1969, long before these arm-twisting practices began. In those years, I was a regular parishioner in the movement. In 1985, I went to work inside the organization itself, becoming what is termed a staff member, which is a different animal than regular public Scientologists. Because of that I was never subjected to the demands for money, which were not prevalent during my early days involvement with the subject. But I know my son, and I don't doubt the tales I read.

The Scientology movement under David's authoritarian leadership has morphed from a group that I believe was basically sincere in its efforts to help people understand themselves and better their lives to one that, today, I am sad to say, is primarily a coercive organization. I have watched this transformation over more than forty years. David runs Scientology with an iron fist and, to my mind, it has become a cult, pure and simple. I believe that his obsession with power and control have made him do things that will shock many, just as I was shocked when I learned that he had instructed the PIs following me to let me die.

On his watch, the church has spent millions to follow, harass and intimidate Scientologists, critics and former members who dared to leave the church and speak publicly about the abuses they suffered inside the organization as well as since leaving. Though the church under founder L.

Ron Hubbard took actions to silence critics long before David came to power, David has spent outrageous sums and gone to great lengths to carry on the practice. Any person the church perceives to be a threat or an enemy becomes fair game, and all manner of tactics, including litigation, private investigation and infiltration, are used to discredit or, better still, utterly ruin the target. The church denies that it does anything illegal or unethical and argues that it has been targeted by hostile government and private forces. But believe me, I know what I am talking about, far better than I wish I did.

To my mind, perhaps the most despicable acts the church engages in under David have been the destruction of family relationships owing to a policy called disconnection, which forbids any contact between a Scientologist and a family member or friend who might speak critically of the church or of David personally. I have no idea of the number of families that have been torn apart by disconnection, but I know at least one—my own. Yes, even I, the father of the leader of Scientology, have had my daughters and their children and grandchildren “disconnect” from me because I dared to leave the organization. In that sense, I guess you could say that Scientology is an equal opportunity abuser. When challenged about disconnection, though, the church reliably cloaks itself with protections afforded by the First Amendment.

Say what you will about Hubbard or Scientology through the years, but a Scientologist from the 1950s or '60s, '70s or even the '80s would not recognize the subject and its organizations today under David.

How did Scientology arrive in the place it finds itself today? And how did things get so screwed up that my own son had PIs following me around for more than a year? I will shed what light I can on that from the perspective of a father from a small mining town in Pennsylvania and, later, from a desert compound in southern California.

Interest in Scientology and its practices is intense and polarizing. Most people hate it or, at the least, are extremely skeptical; a dwindling number support it unconditionally. The church's PR machine claims millions of members throughout the world. If there are as many as 100,000 worldwide, I would be shocked. Despite its thirst for mainstream acceptance, Scientology has always been on the margins of society. From its earliest days, it tended to attract the sorts of people who were looking for a different path through life. Because of David's corrosive management style, any influence it manages to exert is negligible, and today even that is shrinking.

The mountains of bad publicity keep potential new members away, and the constant demands for money disaffect existing Scientologists, who then become inactive or quit outright.

One of my purposes for writing this memoir is to furnish a context for David's life and bring some understanding to his actions since he came to power in the church. Because his mother is no longer living, I have the unique opportunity and, I feel, a duty to explain things, and I intend to give a glimpse into his early years that no one else can. Better minds than mine have wrestled with the nature/nurture question—that is, whether our personalities are inborn or develop based on our environment—and still it remains unanswered. I will add only this: for my whole life I have believed that, regardless of the hand we are dealt, each of us chooses how we play our cards.

To understand David, I think it will help to say a little about the influences that shaped his mother and me, and that takes us first to northeastern Pennsylvania.