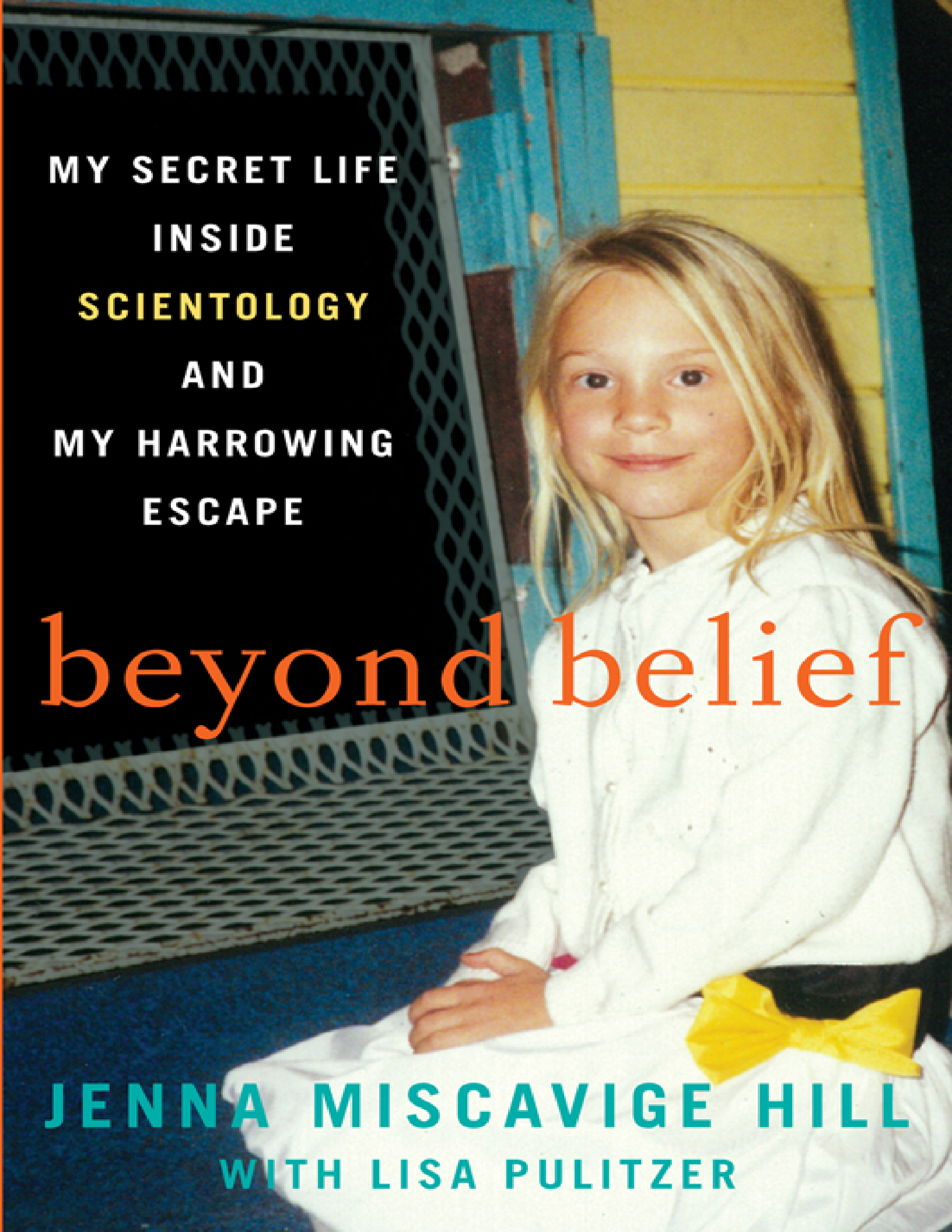


MY SECRET LIFE
INSIDE
SCIENTOLOGY
AND
MY HARROWING
ESCAPE

beyond belief

JENNA MISCAVIGE HILL
WITH LISA PULITZER



BEYOND BELIEF

**MY SECRET LIFE INSIDE
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ESCAPE**

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WILLIAM MORROW

An Imprint of HarperCollinsPublishers

Dedication

*I would like to dedicate this book to my many good friends who are still in the Church. I love and miss you all and I truly hope you someday have the courage to stand up for yourselves and get the chance to leave and really live your life.
You all deserve so much better.*

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Author's Note

TALKING ABOUT SCIENTOLOGY IS HARD—NOT JUST BECAUSE OF the memories that it stirs up or because Scientology itself is a complex and layered religion—but because in the past, Scientology's practices have made it difficult for anyone to criticize or talk about life in the Church.

The story in the pages that follow is true to the best of my recollection. The dialogue has been re-created to the best of my recollection. I have changed the names of some individuals in order to preserve their anonymity, and the goal in all cases was to keep certain names confidential without damaging the integrity of the story. Towards this end, the following names are pseudonyms:

Joe Conte

Karen Fassler

Maria Parker

Cathy Mauro

Melissa Bell

Eva

Naomi

Caitlin

Teddy Blackman

Sondra Phillips

Sophia Townsend

Olivia

Julia

Mayra

Laura Rodriguez

Kara Hansen

Melinda Bleeker

Steven

Linda

Charlie

Molly

Sylvia Pearl

Tessa

Mr. Wilson

PROLOGUE

RAYs OF MORNING SUN POKED THROUGH THE CLOUDS AS I STOOD toward the back of the line of children waiting to meet two important adults in the Church of Scientology. I didn't know exactly how long I'd been there, but it seemed like forever. At seven years old, minutes seemed like hours when I was waiting for something. There were at least ten kids ahead of me, so my two friends and I were singing songs and playing handclap games to pass the time. Although I was certainly giggling along with them, I was mostly distracted and anxious. The two visitors were recruiters from the Church's international headquarters in Hemet, California, and they were standing at folding tables that had been set up along the road to the School House.

I'd been too far back in line to hear the exact explanation of why the two had come to "the Ranch," the Scientology boarding school where I lived with about eighty other kids whose parents were executives of the Church. Whatever their reason, I figured it was important, or they wouldn't have made the twenty-mile trip from the base to speak with us in person. Dressed in naval-style uniforms complete with lanyards and campaign bars, they looked impressive, even powerful. I knew they were members of the Sea Organization, Scientology's most elite body comprised of its most dedicated members. My parents had joined the very same group years earlier, just before my second birthday.

Several songs later, my turn to approach the tables was upon me. The faces of the two recruiters were stern and intimidating. Eager for adult attention, I tried to please them by being cute and smiley. When they did not seem impressed, I changed my tactic and tried instead to seem smart and inquisitive.

One of the two handed me a sheet of paper bearing the Sea Org coat of arms and the word "REVENIMUS" printed at the top, with places for dates and signatures at the bottom.

"What does '*revenimus*' mean?" I asked, most curious about that.

“It is a Latin word meaning ‘we come back,’ ” the recruiter responded. She further explained that it was the official motto of the Sea Organization, seemingly pleased for the opportunity to enlighten an eventual candidate.

“Come back to *where*?” I asked.

“We come back lifetime after lifetime,” she explained. “You are signing a billion-year contract.”

“Oh, right,” I said, realizing how silly and ignorant my question must have sounded.

As Scientologists, we believed that when our current body died, the spirit inside it would begin a new life in a new body. Our founder, L. Ron Hubbard, said that, as spirits, we had lived millions of years already, and we would continue to do so with or without bodies. I had believed this as far back as I could remember.

On this day, I was all too willing and ready to commit myself to the cause that was so dear to my parents. Being in the Sea Org had meant so much to them that when I was six, they had placed me at the Ranch so they could dedicate all their time to the Church’s mission. They only saw me for a few hours on weekends. Nobody’s parents were at the Ranch to share the moment we pledged our loyalty to the Sea Org. Signing this document, though, meant I would be one step closer to joining them in the Sea Org, and hopefully to seeing them more frequently.

“Where should I write my name?” I asked eagerly.

The woman pointed out the spot, but directed that I read the document first. The unavoidable final line was:

*“THEREFORE, I CONTRACT MYSELF TO THE SEA ORGANIZATION
FOR THE NEXT BILLION YEARS (As per Flag Order 323).”*

Before I signed, images from the *Little Mermaid* flashed in my mind, particularly when Ariel signed the Sea Witch’s magic contract. I knew that contracts meant I had to keep honest to my pledge, so I made mental notes of the things I was agreeing to: following the rules and mores, forwarding the purpose, and serving a *billion* years.

I can do this, I said to myself. And with that, I tried to write my name in my best possible cursive with the proper connectivity of letters, exactly the way I had been learning in school. I wanted my signature on this important document to be perfect,

but the recruiters were rushing me, still having to enlist the rest of the children behind me. As a result, my signature didn't turn out as nicely as I had hoped.

Still, I had goose bumps as I walked away. Nothing about the billion-year contract was strange to me. I knew that my parents were with me in spirit, wherever they were. My contract was the same commitment they themselves had signed for the first time when they were teenagers. Besides, at my young age, I had little understanding of larger numbers. To me, a billion years was no different than a hundred years—both an unfathomably long time. If I wanted to be with my parents and friends for the next billion years, the obvious thing to do was to sign my name.

One by one, my friends wrote their own names down on their contracts—each pledging his or her service to a cause that none of us could possibly fully understand. As I stood there in the road between the playground and the pink and white oleander trees, I didn't know the true significance of what I had just done or the full extent of the expectations that would now be placed on me. Just like that, I had gone from singing “Down by the bank with the hanky pank” to full-on committing my soul to a billion years of servitude to the Church of Scientology. Whatever my future held for me, one thing was now certain: my life was no longer my own.

CHAPTER ONE

IN THE NAME OF THE CHURCH

ONE OF MY EARLIEST MEMORIES OF SCIENTOLOGY WAS A CONVERSATION that happened when I was about four years old. At the time, my family was living in Los Angeles in an apartment that had been provided to us by the Church, and one Sunday morning, I was lying in bed with my mom and dad wondering what it would be like to be out of my body.

“How do I go out of my body?” I asked.

My parents exchanged a smile, much like the one my husband and I share when our son asks one of those difficult questions that can’t really be answered within his frame of knowledge.

“Can we all go out of our bodies together and fly around in the sky?” I asked.

“Maybe,” my father responded. He was always eager to indulge me.

“Let’s do it now,” I demanded impatiently. “Just tell me what to do.”

“Okay, just close your eyes,” he instructed. “Are they closed? Now, think of a cat.”

“Do we all think of it at once?” I asked, wanting to make sure I was doing it right.

“Yes,” was Dad’s reply. “Okay, one, two, three . . .”

With my eyes closed, I waited, but nothing happened. I could hear my parents laughing, but I didn’t understand what was funny, and why they weren’t helping me. Were they not allowed to help me out of my body? Could they only help at certain times? Could I only get out of my body when I was older? Was something wrong with me?

I knew I was a Thetan. I had always known I was a Thetan and had never believed anything else. *Thetan* was the term Scientologists used for an immortal spirit that animated the human body, while the body itself was essentially a piece of

meat, a vessel that housed the Thetan. A Thetan lived lifetime after lifetime, and when the body it currently inhabited died, it picked its next one and started over again.

The idea of having past lives fascinated me. I would often ask grown-ups to tell me stories about their past lives. I couldn't remember any of mine, but I was always assured that they would come to me eventually. My father's secretary, Rosemary, would tell me things that had happened in a past life of hers, when she had been a Native American girl. They all sounded so amazing and romantic to me. I couldn't wait until I could remember one of mine. I hoped I hadn't been a bad guy or a solitary old man. Surely, I must have been a princess at least once.

Back then, as young as I was, that was what Scientology seemed to be about: past lives, leaving your body behind, being a Thetan. Beyond that, there wasn't much that I knew about it, but for a child who really couldn't understand the layers of complex belief, there was an excitement to it all. I was a part of something bigger, something that stretched into the past and the future; something that seemed impossible and yet somehow was completely believable.

And so, I sat there, eyes closed, waiting to fly around the sky with my parents at my side, waiting to leave my body behind.

I DIDN'T KNOW THEN THAT ONLY SCIENTOLOGISTS BELIEVED IN Thetans. Everyone I knew was in the Church, and as a third-generation Scientologist, my life was Scientology. My grandmother on my mother's side had started reading books by L. Ron Hubbard, the science-fiction writer and founder of Scientology, in the mid-1950s. On my father's side, my grandfather had come into the Church in the 1970s when an acquaintance told him about it. They'd each gotten hooked right away.

In Scientology, there was no god, no praying, no heaven, no hell—none of the things that people generally associate with religion. It was a philosophy and a self-help program that promised greater self-awareness and the possibility of achieving one's full potential. This unconventional self-help quality was precisely what drew both of my grandparents to it. Each, in their own way, liked Scientology's focus on controlling one's own destiny and improving one's life through a series of clearly laid out steps; each brought children in, nine on my mom's side and four on my dad's.

Once my parents joined the Church as children, they stayed. By the time I was born in Concord, New Hampshire, on February 1, 1984, they had been Scientologists for more than fifteen years.

From my first breath, I was a Scientologist, but it wasn't until shortly before my second birthday that the Church actually began to shape the course of my life. That was when my parents decided to give up the life they had started in New Hampshire, move our family to California, and dedicate our existence to service in the Church. Prior to that, we had been living in Concord, where my parents had built their dream house, a four-bedroom, two-bathroom wood-and-glass home on a parcel of land. Mom and Dad both had well-paying jobs at a local software company, and my nine-year-old brother Justin was a fourth grader in the local public school. At least on the outside, our family had all the markings of a normal, suburban existence.

All that changed in the fall of 1985, when my father, Ron Miscavige, Jr., went to Scientology's Flag Land Base in Clearwater, Florida. Covering more than a few city blocks, the Flag Land Base was a massive complex that served as the Church's spiritual headquarters, a place where Scientologists from all over the world gathered and stayed for weeks to months.

My father went down for a couple of weeks, and on this particular trip, the clergy of the Church, known as the Sea Organization or the Sea Org, was in the midst of a massive recruitment campaign. The Sea Org recruited and employed only the most dedicated Scientologists, who were willing to devote their lives to spreading Scientology to all mankind. L. Ron Hubbard had created the group in 1967 aboard a ship called the *Apollo*, which he referred to as the *flagship*. L. Ron Hubbard was a Navy man and had a passion for naval traditions. The word was he had taken to the seas to research the spiritual component of Scientology without interruption or interference. There was speculation that he had moved into international waters to avoid accountability to the United States Food and Drug Administration, after some of his medical claims, such as applying his teachings could cure psychosomatic illness and other physical and psychological ailments, had been criticized by members of the medical community, who debunked his miracle cures as fraudulent.

Regardless of the reason he operated at sea, he mandated that the members of this special group wear naval-style uniforms and gave the Sea Org its own navy-like rank and rating system, which set its members apart from other Scientologists. He

went so far as to have crew members address him as Commodore and high-ranking officers as “Sir,” whether they were male or female. He even selected his own group of personal stewards within the Sea Org who ran programs, related his orders, and followed up to make sure they were carried out. He called this important group the Commodore’s Messenger Organization, CMO.

In 1975, the Sea Org moved onshore to the Flag Land Base in downtown Clearwater, where members lived and ate communally in facilities provided them. Even though the organization was no longer stationed on ships, it still kept the naval terms from its sea days—living quarters were “berthings,” staff dressed in naval-style uniforms, and L. Ron Hubbard was still the Commodore.

Ten years later, this was where my father found himself in the midst of the all-out recruitment effort. Dad later told me there were Sea Org recruiters stationed at various locations around the Base looking for young, successful, competent, ethical Scientologists. Anyone who entered the Sea Org would have to sign a billion-year contract that bound their immortal Thetan spirit to lifetime after lifetime of service to the Sea Org. Its members also had to work grueling hours, seven days a week—with minimal time off to spend with their families—often for as little as fifteen to forty-five dollars per week. Qualifications for membership included having never taken LSD or angel dust, having never attempted suicide, and having no anti-Scientology immediate family members.

My father had once been a member and felt he still fit the bill. He was a dedicated Scientologist, he was willing to make the full commitment, and he was the older brother of David Miscavige, one of L. Ron Hubbard’s top executives and a rising star in the Church. At only twenty-five, my uncle Dave was chairman of the board of Author Services Inc., which oversaw all of the financial aspects of L. Ron Hubbard’s copyrights, texts, and intellectual property from his writing. Like my father, Uncle Dave had been a Scientologist since my grandfather had introduced the family to the church. From the start, Dave was so passionate that, with my grandpa’s permission, he dropped out of high school at sixteen to join the Sea Org.

When my father returned home to New Hampshire, he informed my mother that he had decided to accept re-recruitment into the Sea Org. Although my parents had been in the midst of settling down, he again felt the calling and wanted our family to move to the Church’s Los Angeles base, where we would begin our new life. Mom would have to reenlist in the Sea Org as well, as Sea Org members could not be married to non-Sea Org members. Without hesitation, my mother agreed.

As impulsive as this was, my parents knew what they were signing up for. Not only had they both in the Sea Org before, they had first met at the Flag Land Base when each was only nineteen. At the time, they had each been married to someone else in the Sea Org. My father had a stepson, Nathan, and my mom had two-year-old twin boys, Justin and Sterling. My parents became romantically involved, got in huge trouble for it, as it was a violation of Church policy, and had to work hard to make amends for their behavior. Eventually, they got permission to marry, and Mom's ex-husband remarried, too. Sterling lived with his dad and his dad's new wife, and Justin lived with my parents, but both twins were able to spend time in both households, an arrangement that made everybody happy.

My parents made a handsome couple. My father was five foot eight, slender but strong. He had sandy hair, a mustache, blue eyes, a warm smile, and was an all-around friendly guy. My mom, Elizabeth Blythe, known as "Bitty" to everybody, was beautiful, five foot six, and quite slim. She had hazel green eyes and brown hair that came down to her waist. Her ivory skin had just a few freckles. Unlike my father, she was a smoker, and had been since she was a teenager. Around strangers, she was shier and more reserved than my dad, but when she was with her friends, she was confident, blunt, and funny, with a very dry sense of humor. Mom was opinionated, and sometimes judgmental, but also an amazingly capable, woman.

Even with the huge time commitment that the Sea Org required, my parents had actually been happy there until the late 1970s, when they started getting frustrated with the management at the Flag Land Base. In 1979, after being in the Sea Org for five years, they both quit. While that was a breach of their billion-year contracts, at that time leaving was not catastrophic. They were allowed to remain public Scientologists, loyal to the church, but without the full-time commitment of service to the Sea Org.

For years after they had left, my parents' lives were normal. They lived in Philadelphia with my dad's parents for a bit before moving up to New Hampshire, where they lived a typical middle-class life—two working parents with job security, two children at home (they'd retained full custody of Justin after they'd left the Sea Org), a nanny for the daytime, and a house built to order. Much of our extended family, including my father's sisters, Lori and Denise, and my grandmother on my dad's side, was also living in New Hampshire, and we were on a path to settling down surrounded by family. It seemed like rejoining the ranks of the most die-hard devotees of Scientology could not have been farther from my parents' minds.

And yet, with one rash decision, they did just that, returning to the Sea Org and putting all of our lives on a drastically different path. What my parents knew at the time, and what I would only learn later, was that being in the Sea Org meant that they would spend a lot of time away from me. But that didn't change their decision. The Church was their priority, and their minds were made up.

Later, my parents would tell me that their decision was made spontaneously, without much thought, and in hindsight it was the worst decision of their lives. While I can't say whether they considered the impact that their choice would have on me, most likely I was just one of the many sacrifices they were willing to make in the name of the Church. They had quit once, so perhaps they figured that they could leave again if it didn't work out. Another part of their thinking may have been that they really believed it would be awesome to raise a child in Scientology, because I would experience Scientology from the beginning of my life.

There was likely a restlessness in them, a feeling that something was missing. They preferred being out in the world on an important mission and serving some higher purpose than being in New Hampshire, working nine-to-five jobs, and raising children. They were motivated by the Church's mission and they wanted to be involved in something bigger. One thing is clear to me: That decision was when normal stopped having a place in our lives. There had been an opportunity for our lives, for our family, to look very different; my parents considered that future, then walked away from it.

CHAPTER TWO

LRH DROPS HIS BODY

LIVING IN CALIFORNIA WAS GOING TO BE A MISCAVIGE FAMILY reunion of sorts as my dad's father, Grandpa Ron, and my dad's brother, Uncle Dave, already lived there. The year before, my grandpa had also succumbed to the recruitment effort, when he decided to leave Philadelphia and join the Sea Org. Meanwhile, Uncle Dave, who'd been a rising star in the Church for years, was quickly becoming one of the most powerful figures in all Scientology, and what none of us knew then was that, before long, he would be leading it.

On December 11, 1985, after a long cross-country drive, we arrived at our new home, the Pacific Area Command (PAC) base in Los Angeles. The first Church of Scientology had been established in the city in 1954, and L.A. still had one of the largest populations of Scientologists anywhere. The PAC base was comprised of many buildings within walking distance of each other, most of them along Fountain Avenue, Franklin Avenue, and Hollywood Boulevard. The "Blue Building" at 4833 Fountain Avenue was the heart of the PAC Base. Once Cedars of Lebanon Hospital, it was the most recognizable Church building in the city. High on its roof was an eight-pointed cross, a religious symbol of the Church, and the word "Scientology" in huge letters. At night, they were lit up and visible for blocks. The seven-story building now housed the Church's administrative offices, some staff housing, and the galley and mess hall. Uncle Dave and his wife, my Aunt Shelly, had an apartment in the Blue Building, although their main residence was two and a half hours away at the Church's international headquarters in Hemet, California.

Our first apartment was in the Fountain Building on Fountain Avenue, a block from Sunset Boulevard. It was in a somewhat dodgy area of Hollywood with some crime and known gang activity. The apartment consisted of two dingy and dark rooms, each about fifteen by fifteen feet, and one bathroom. The smell of mold hung

in the air. In an attempt to make the place nicer, my parents had the original chipped linoleum floors covered with carpet. They also went to a nearby discount store and bought a bunk bed for Justin and me as well as some other furniture, placing the bunk bed in one room and their bed in the other. I still preferred to sleep with my parents in their bed.

Those hours asleep with my parents were just about the only time I had to be with them. The typical Sea Org member was required to be on duty for at least fourteen hours a day, from about nine in the morning to eleven-thirty at night, seven days a week, with a break for an hour of “family time” in the evening, when parents were allowed to see their children before heading back to work. On occasion, they would get a day off for liberty, or libs, but libs was not a guarantee—at most it was one day off every other week. It was a reward for good performance.

As arduous as the days were, my parents didn’t complain. My dad’s office was conveniently located across the street from our apartment. He had been assigned a management post in a branch that dealt with computerizing Scientology, known as INCOMM. In Scientology, almost every division, building, office, department, or base was identified by an acronym. Even the job positions/posts and the courses we took used them. L. Ron Hubbard himself went by the acronym of his initials, LRH.

My mother was put in charge of the Ship Project, a massive venture involving the purchase of a new ship to be used as a floating base. It would be called the *Freewinds* and would operate much like the original flagship *Apollo* had during the early days of the Sea Org.

Because my parents were working long days and nights, Justin and I were watched by other caretakers. When we first got to L.A., I spent my days at a nursery in the Fountain Building, where I stayed until my parents came to pick me up for dinner, which was served in the mess hall. Afterwards, Mom, Dad, Justin, and I would go back to the apartment for family time. I was taken back to the nursery when Mom and Dad went back to work. There were plenty of cots and cribs where the children could sleep until pick-up time, which was typically 11 p.m. or later.

During the day, when I was at the nursery, Justin went to the Apollo Training Academy (ATA), another building on Fountain Avenue. The ATA was for older children of Sea Org members. They were considered to be cadets, basically Sea Org members in training. I didn’t know what they did there all day, but Justin hated it enough that he begged my parents to let him go back to New Hampshire where his friends were.