



# SCIENTOLOGY:

## How L Ron Hubbard's heir became his harshest critic

As a child, Jamie DeWolf idolised his great grandfather. Then he discovered the damage he'd done to his family – and many more families besides. By Sam Rowe

**O**ne Sunday morning in the early Eighties, as he sat among the pews in church, Jamie DeWolf's life was changed for ever. Then just six years old, DeWolf was handed *The Kingdom of the Cults* by his pastor, a book examining new religious movements – among them Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh-day Adventists and Mormons. Yet one group stood out for the young Baptist and, more specifically, one name. It was that of Lafayette Ronald (L Ron) Hubbard, a science fiction writer turned prophet who founded the Church of Scientology. He was also DeWolf's great grandfather.

"I remember coming home and saying, 'Mom, what's Scientology?' and her face went really pale," says DeWolf, three decades later in his home in Oakland, California. "I remember her explaining that Hubbard was a prolific writer, then at some point kind of lost his marbles and wrote different kinds of books. She was like, 'I don't think you'd like them, there aren't many guns and spaceships.'"

Never short of scandal since its first church opened its doors in California 60 years ago, Scientology was created with ideas derived from Hubbard's bestselling self-help book, *Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health*, published in 1950. Tired of being paid a penny per word for his

**FAMILY TIES** Jamie DeWolf, inset above, is by the far the most vocal descendant of Scientology founder L Ron Hubbard, pictured showing his children his 'Electrometer' in the Fifties

sci-fi tales, Hubbard reportedly adopted the motto, "If you want to get rich, start a religion". Dianetics, a theory of the mind which had been discredited by the scientific community, was subsequently transformed into something based around faith, not fact.

Hubbard never painted himself as a messiah, instead claiming to have learnt the truths of existence while "dead" under anaesthetic during a dental procedure. He none the less asserted, among other things, that he'd visited Venus, developed a protein formula for babies based on a Roman recipe and cured himself of debilitating optic nerve, hip and back injuries suffered during the Second World War.

Despite his declaration he was not God, it's Hubbard's picture you'll still find hanging in every Scientology building, and Scientologists fully expect him to return one day. They're so sure of this that an office in each church is reserved for him, along with a \$10 million mansion employing full-time staff to wash his clothes and tidy the property. Cars with full petrol tanks sit in the garage with keys in the ignition.

Ask Scientology's believers and they'll tell you the religion – recognised as such in the United States after a legal battle with the Internal Revenue Service in 1993, and in the United Kingdom as recently as December 2013 – is a pathway to spiritual freedom followed by many high-profile success stories such as the Hollywood actor Tom Cruise.

Scientology's critics paint Hubbard as the planet's most decorated charlatan and Scientology as a pay-as-you-go religion, one which extorts naive believers by promising the secrets of the universe in return for cash, while ordering them to sign a billion-year pledge of allegiance, disconnect from their families, endure squalid conditions and sometimes even suffer mental and physical abuse. Leaving is even tougher, it's said, with the lifetime confessions of members recorded, filed and used against them, should they ever attempt to abscond. The church denies all such allegations.

One of Scientology's fiercest and most vocal critics today is DeWolf. Late last year DeWolf (his birth name was Kennedy, but he changed it to avoid clashing with a comedian of the same name) became a viral sensation after a 2011 performance of his poem "The God of Man" was uncovered on YouTube by the news website Upworthy. The piece is a poignant account of DeWolf's awkward family history, his ancestor Hubbard and the tale of his grandfather, L Ron Junior, who endured decades of persecution by the church following his own defection.

Despite never meeting his great grandfather – who disappeared in 1980, while facing 48 lawsuits, and died in 1986 – DeWolf had a childhood fascination with Hubbard, in particular his writing, which spanned a Guinness World Record breaking 1,084 works. Today, DeWolf concedes it was Hubbard who drove him to pursue a career in the arts.

"I remember idolising L Ron as a kid, and I remember asking my mom all the time why couldn't I meet him," admits DeWolf. "I didn't know at that point that he had created a religion, I just knew when I went into a bookstore I could find books by him – he was evidence to me that you could be a writer simply by your will alone."

"Outside of this man running this crazy church and brainwashing millions of people, at the same time he was just another family member," he tells me. "It was incredibly painful that I couldn't meet him."

Now 36 years old, DeWolf is a writer, poet, film-maker and performer. Once a month, he hosts a variety event called *Tourettes Without Regrets*, an absurdist underground arts show merging comedy, burlesque, and poetry, along with bizarre contests such as “What’s Down Jamie’s Pants”.

DeWolf was once a “hardcore Christian kid” who hoped to become a Baptist minister; he would regularly hand out pamphlets on street corners. “I vividly remember acknowledging on the playground that all the other kids were going to hell and trying to understand that,” explains DeWolf. “There was a summer camp we went to where they said the Rapture was going to happen on the weekend. I hadn’t even reached teenage years and that was it: Jesus was going to come down and swoop us up.” DeWolf sniggers. “You know, we stood in a field for a *long* time. Nothing happened.”

Since denouncing his Baptist faith, DeWolf now sees all religion as “an inherently absurd and flawed human concept”. But he doesn’t consider himself an atheist: “I feel like [that’s] almost a little too easy.” As for Scientology, none of Hubbard’s descendants are known to subscribe to his teachings; the party line is to maintain a stoic silence.

DeWolf is the exception, and his encyclopedic knowledge of Scientology borders on the obsessive. Since discovering the truth as a boy, DeWolf says it’s been a “taboo subject”. During his childhood the family was both embarrassed and fearful of the church – mainly because Hubbard’s son, L Ron Junior, was still alive.

DeWolf’s memories of his grandfather are nothing but warm. He was a loving grandparent, DeWolf says, who visited every Thanksgiving and bought him *Star Wars* toys on his birthday. Yet he was also a guarded, solitary individual who was very sick – eventually losing a foot to diabetes. But Junior’s early years, and his role in the formation of Scientology, remain a mystery. He died in 1991, aged 57, and DeWolf admits his story remains “just as murky and hidden” as Hubbard’s own.

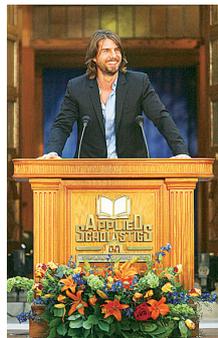
Born prematurely due to what he claimed was a botched abortion attempt (an allegation he later retracted under oath), Junior weighed just 2lbs at birth and was kept alive in a homemade shoebox incubator, then a cupboard drawer, kept warm with an electric light and fed with an eyedropper. He once recalled his father dabbling in black magic and drugs, which he would also give to his children. As a teenager, Junior later confessed, “I believed in Satanism. It was the only religion in the house!”

Later, when Scientology was in its formative stages, it’s believed Junior was Hubbard’s right-hand man and enforcer. DeWolf claims it was Junior who was largely responsible for penning Scientology’s infamous “Fair Game” doctrine to pursue defectors and those seen as enemies of the church.

The specific reasons for Junior’s exit from the church still aren’t clear. DeWolf claims it was partially a dispute over money, with Junior unhappy that profit went “straight to the top of the pyramid” and, ergo, Hubbard. Legend has it that Hubbard kept shoeboxes full of banknotes under the bed and routinely burnt incriminating documents, but DeWolf believes his grandfather simply began to see Hubbard for who he really was. “I think he came to the view quite early on that his father was truly a grifter and a hustler,” says DeWolf. “It was maybe exhilarating and intoxicating to be around this roguish character, but at some point he became just another victim. I think he started to see past the curtain and decided it was a house of cards.”

After leaving the church – or “blowing”, in Scientology speak – it was assumed Scientology agents wouldn’t pursue Junior, given they’d be using the very policy he had devised against him. However, as detailed in DeWolf’s *The God or*

*After leaving the church, L Ron Junior was stalked with ‘wire-taps, break-ins and death threats’*



**FAME AND FORTUNE** Jamie DeWolf, top, with his grandfather L Ron Hubbard Junior; high-profile Scientologist Tom Cruise, above; and the church’s HQ in Florida, right, representing just a fraction of its property empire

*the Man*, Junior was stalked with “wiretaps, break-ins and death threats,” the family were perpetually on the run, and “every aunt and uncle of mine were taught to use a gun,” for protection.

Things haven’t gone that far, but DeWolf has experienced similar scare tactics since breaking his silence on Scientology. The day after he first performed a version of *The God or the Man* in 2000, two men who DeWolf believes were Scientologists (they claimed to be fellow poets) turned up at his home. In 2012, DeWolf appeared on a US news programme and the same evening was attacked during his own stage show. DeWolf concedes that over time he has become paranoid, but claims that by this point “it’s impossible for them not to have created some sort of dossier on me, along with strategies on how to dismantle and



destroy me. That’s just protocol”.

These days, though, Scientology has enough to worry about. After cultivating a reputation as a boutique religion coveted by film stars, artists and creatives in the Sixties and Seventies, the church has suffered a PR battering in recent times. There are persistent allegations that Scientology leader David Miscavige (who took charge following Hubbard’s death) has physically assaulted church members – allegations the church denies.

There’s also the online “hacktivist” network Anonymous’s pledge to “dismantle the church of Scientology in its present form”, which has seen several Scientology websites shut down and protests organised around the globe. There is also a long list of prominent Scientology figures who have left the religion. Senior members have quit to expose the church’s inner workings, as have celebrities including film director Paul Haggis and actress Leah Remini, who was helped to defect by friend Jennifer Lopez.

Perhaps the biggest foe Scientology is facing, and one it will struggle to conquer irrespective of court action, is its own reputation. DeWolf believes Scientology has become “a one-sentence punchline” through its relatively new status as “a UFO cult”. Once, people were afraid to criticise Scientology. Now, thanks to the internet, DeWolf says it is “open season”.

Does Scientology have a future? It’s a matter of perspective. Lawrence Wright’s 2013 book *Going Clear* reports that Scientology has \$1 billion of liquid assets and 12 million sq ft of property around the globe – including a new £20 million London HQ – valued at \$168 million. This suggests Scientology as a business is in rude health. On the other hand, although the church attests to having 8 million members worldwide, only 25,000 Americans and 2,400 Britons consider themselves Scientologists. For the sake of context, in the 2011 UK census 176,632 people identified themselves as Jedi Knights.

As for DeWolf, he has a daily reminder of his great grandfather’s legacy – a Scientology symbol inked on his right arm. “I’m a huge fan of irony,” he says.