



Staff photo by Jeff Richards

THE CENTER FOR CREATIVE LEARNING is located in a yellow building on the corner of Water and Columbia streets, Elmira.

Hoffman says she was threatened

Margie Kuentz Hoffman, the focus of this week's Star-Gazette series, "A Scientologist's Story," complained to police Tuesday that she had received a threatening note.

Checking into her report, Elmira City police questioned Harry Palmer, director of the Center for Creative Learning at police headquarters. They also questioned his partner, Avra Honey Smith, at the center.



Palmer

Hoffman received a note Monday which threatened to expose private, embarrassing statements about her if she failed to "clean up" things she said about her experience at the center.

It read (with typographical errors): "Maybe its time the wold knowxz the kin d of person you azre. Clean up the 3rd party on H or they will." In Scientology, "third party" refers to negative talk. Palmer commonly signed his correspondence "H," according to several former employees.

Efforts Tuesday to reach Palmer at his home and the center were unsuccessful.

Enclosed with the note were five pages from a five-inch file that Palmer has on Hoffman, according to Marianne Helsing, a former employee responsible for the files. It contains written confessions Hoffman made during discipline sessions over 12 years in the center's "ethics room." Hoffman documented, once over two straight months, everything she did and thought that she felt was bad or "not spiritual."

Palmer refused to return the file when Hoffman quit last October, she said. The envelope was addressed to Hoffman at the center, then forwarded by the center to her home address.

Police are continuing the investigation. — BENNETT.

Belief —

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hierarchy, the individual and the family are the least important things in life. More important is the group.

"But, at the center, the group was really considered most important," said Steven Caulkin, a former employee.

At the center, Hoffman and the others followed a man and a religion that professed to have a monopoly on the truth. "If you believed in anything else — in yoga or Christianity — I wouldn't have accepted that there was any truth in that."

She was not even supposed to listen to someone discuss his belief, nor read a book by anyone but L. Ron Hubbard, the founder of Scientology.

When it came to Wogs (non-Scientologists), there were only two things she could do: Convert them or pity them. She did try to sell her friends on Scientology. As a result, "I lost a lot of friends," Hoffman said.

But then she fell in love with a Wog.

Immediately, Palmer started a campaign against Hoffman's new boyfriend, Dan. The pressure was so intense that she didn't bring Dan around much, even though Palmer and his partner, Avra Honey Smith, were her best friends. It felt too uncomfortable, too unacceptable.

"In the real world, people don't usually criticize your mate. But there, it was very popular," said Marianne Helsing, a former staff member. "It certainly undermined marriages."

Gale Lyons was one who divorced her husband over Scientology. Their difficulties began after

The people in this story considered themselves members of the Church of Scientology, under the loqal direction of Harry Palmer, during the period in which most of these events occurred. However, as the result of a lawsuit, Palmer is no longer formally connected with the Church of Scientology. His local organization is now called the Center for Creative Learning. The lawsuit was settled in May, 1987.

ideals straight. I quit hairdressing," she said, pausing. "So, it was the wrong ideal. I should have picked door number two."

It was about then, however, that Palmer decided Hoffman was not hardhearted enough to succeed at the spiritual ideal. Under pressure from a lawsuit the worldwide Church of Scientology filed against him, Palmer pushed his staff to bring in more money. Hoffman's mistake was that she sympathized with people who said they were already in too much debt.

"I was booted out because I was not mean enough," Hoffman said. She was replaced by someone who was.

In Thursday's Star Gazette: All That Money

