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locations in nine countries, according to Palmer. He earns 15 percent in royalties.

Back home in Elmira, meanwhile, there were students like Kathy Raine, who had paid \$25,000 in advance for the courses that were no longer being offered. When she asked about the money, she was told there wasn't any money left. It had all been used up in legal and other expenses. When members asked about the money Palmer was getting from Avatar, they say they were told that was earned through Palmer's for-profit business, called Star's Edge Research and Development. The center is considered a church.

To students and staff members, who pledged money during the years of the suit, all of this boiled down to one impression: "He kept telling us to wait until our ship comes in," said Hoffman. "And," added Marianne Helsing, "when the ship came in, he threw everybody else off."

Raine, and others like her, were offered two options. She could use up her money on account by taking Avatar or receiving more counseling, which cost \$160 per hour. "He wanted everyone to do counseling because that way he wouldn't have to give them the money back," said Gale Lyons, who conducted the counseling sessions.

A moderate amount of counseling, like a moderate amount of psychoanalysis, is a good thing; but overuse is dangerous, former members said. "A lot of auditing (counseling) is finding the things in life you didn't feel good about," said Lyons. "Think about them enough and you start thinking you're really bad."

And they did. But that was not new. Former members say they lost confidence in their own decision-making at the center. Reason: Palmer's "belief" system.

"The belief was that behind all upsets was a negative belief on your part," said Steve Caulkins, a former staff member. In other words, he said: "If I had an argument with you, it wasn't because of something you said or did. It was because of something negative that I did."

Even when Raine asked about her outstanding \$25,000, she was told to think about what she had done wrong that caused her to complain. "It seems stupid," she said, in retrospect, "like a guy beats his wife and she thinks: What's wrong with me?"

Hoffman called it "a violation of human nature." Still, she was one of the most persistent believers. Many members left the center



Kathy Raine

The people in this story considered themselves members of the Church of Scientology, under the local direction of Harry Palmer, during the period in which most of these events occurred. However, as a 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 March 1987.

— she told her husband she might leave. Word of her disillusionment spread and reaffirmed others who were in doubt. "Harry's empire had fallen," Hoffman said. "I thought, My God, look what I did to this great spiritual leader."

But she was too angry, and disappointed, to support him any longer. The next day, Hoffman telephoned her friend and co-worker, Linda Rosin, in Elmira. "It's all over," she said. "I'm coming home." In two weeks, she would quit.

Shortly after, Palmer called "a meeting for the disgruntled." He announced there was no money left to pay them back. Helsing later asked if she could see the financial records. "He said they were all destroyed."

But Palmer offered to pay back half the money to some of the members. He said they should share in the loss of legal expenses paid during the court battle. Some took him up on it. "They took what they could and got out," said Helsing. Others are still planning lawsuits.

Hoffman does not have any financial claims against Palmer. But she has reclaimed part of herself. She has grown a little less trusting of others, though she has not become a cynic. "I'll always be open, ready for some adventure. I'll just be a little more skeptical first."

In the Sunday Star-Gazette: Harry Palmer's story.