

News Updates

MISSING-PERSON REPORT FILED ON MADALYN MURRAY O'HAIR

Over a year after her disappearance, a missing-person report has been filed on well-known atheist Madalyn Murray O'Hair. The investigation by Texas police was precipitated by her son, William Murray. In August 1995, O'Hair left her American Atheists Inc. headquarters in Austin saying she was going to New York to picket Pope John Paul II during his visit to America.

Also disappearing with the famed atheist was her younger son, Jon Murray, and granddaughter, Robin Murray O'Hair. According to a Religious News Service report, William Murray has said that police told him "that they had located his daughter Robin's 1985 Porsche in a long-term parking lot at the Austin, Texas, airport." Austin police spokesman Mike Burgess said "the car has been processed and there is nothing suspicious." The automobile had been at the airport for several months.

The RNS article also indicated that on the day of her disappearance, O'Hair left a note on the door of atheist group's headquarters telling the staff that they had been laid off. Another report said that the memorandum stated that O'Hair and her family had been called out of town on an emergency.

Several rumors, including one that O'Hair is gravely ill or dead, have surfaced since her disappearance. Other theories are that O'Hair is living off secretly channeled funds from her organization or that she and her son and granddaughter were the victims of foul play.

O'Hair is best known for her 1963 landmark U.S. Supreme Court decision that outlawed organized prayer in American public schools. She has also received notoriety from a hard-to-quash rumor that she is soliciting the Federal Communications Commission to have religious programming barred from the public airwaves. Since the rumor first circulated more than two decades ago, the FCC has been inundated with petitions opposing the reported request.

—MKG

HOLLYWOOD STREET NAMED AFTER HUBBARD

The late science fiction writer and founder of the Church of Scientology, L. Ron Hubbard, will have a street renamed after him. The Los Angeles City Council voted early last October to rename a one-block stretch of Berendo Street in Hollywood after the controversial religious leader.

In spite of objections voiced by local citizens, the council approved the name change by an 8-3 vote. According to the Religious News Service, the residents accused Hubbard of "being a bigot, a charlatan, and a cult leader who was biased against homosexuals."

The church owns more than half the property on the one-block section, and is the site of its international headquarters. The Rev. John Woodruff, executive director of the church's Los Angeles branch, told the *Los Angeles Times* newspaper that the renaming of the "250 yards of street" was a "fantastic victory."

Hubbard, who died of a stroke in 1986, founded the Church of Scientology in the 1950s.

—MKG

THE WAY PURGES RANKS

The Way International has worked hard to purge all followers not completely committed to obeying president L. Craig Martindale by expelling them from twigs (small, home-based fellowships) or leadership positions or by restricting access to some of the group's activities.

The Way's late founder, Victor Paul Wierwille, named Martindale president in 1981 after placing his son, Donald Wierwille, and his closest associate, Howard Allen, on the three-member board of trustees. These three officers, who alone are technically members of The Way, control all aspects of The Way's policy, operations, finances and teachings.

After Wierwille died of cancer in 1985, the

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