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Preach of trust

TONY ORTEGA | JUNE 18, 1998 | 4:00AM

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People wearing latex gloves sit on the floor of a west Phoenix living room, pulling artifacts from the life of Roger Somers Rudin out of large garbage bags and stacking them in leaning piles.

Court documents. Photographs. Church records. Financial ledgers. Religious tracts. Articles of clothing.

Nearly all of it is intensely personal. Rudin's bank records, his insurance policies, credit cards and other privacies lie strewn around the room.

It is not the memorial service Rudin would have planned. The Pentecostal minister and former owner of the historic Hotel Westward Ho has been dead three days, but he will receive no obituary. His congregation at the

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instead, a bitter memorial of sorts is conducted by the people patiently sorting his effects into growing piles, piecing together a remarkable life that included three decades of Phoenix history.

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Occasionally, one of them stops to point out an interesting item.

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On one stack of yellowing pages, there's a surprisingly fresh-looking church brochure nearly 40 years old.

Rudin looks barely out of his teens in a photograph on the 1959 brochure, a squeaky-clean young evangelist from Ottumwa, Iowa, with a firm grip on a Bible and a grin across his face.

In a mug shot on the back of a gym membership card issued 30 years later, the same smile is embedded in a tanned, doughy face lined with age.

Hundreds of envelopes, empty now, sit wrapped in bundles, each marked with the amount of money they once contained, each an offering to Rudin from the people who loved him.



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Scrawled letters contain panicked appeals to Rudin for money, others threaten him with legal action, and still others appear to be hastily drawn promissory notes and other legal instruments.

There are thousands of papers. Dozens of books and magazines. A

AA man's entire life, stuffed into the garbage bags. After his death, ladies from the Upper Room Fellowship had cleared out Rudin's office and unceremoniously dumped its contents into a trash bin.

Now the bags sit on the living-room floor of Ruth Stevens, who carefully pulls out their contents, item by item, sorting them into categories.

She's surrounded by family members--her husband, a sister, a cousin--who do the same, piecing together the life of a man they had been taught from birth to believe was a biblical prophet.

Almost their entire lives, they had worshipped Rudin as they would a



Rudin had special powers granted him by an angel of the Lord. He was prescient, could heal with a touch of his hand, and could read the hearts of men. Rudin had ruled the most intimate affairs of their lives, choosing their mates, approving their business decisions, and advising on their travel plans.

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His flock believed that his small Phoenix church was the only true church; they were the "Elect," the chosen people who prepared diligently for the great "catching away."

Ruth Stevens in particular believed in Rudin with a simple but burning faith.

Then, two years ago, doubts began to creep into her mind.

If Rudin were such a holy man, why would a trusted member of the church leave the fold and sue Rudin, claiming to have been swindled? Why would he become obsessed with gambling, and urge his flock to gamble often and give him any winnings? Why had Rudin predicted for more than a year that



FOR THE FIRST TIME, STEVENS and some of her kin began to wonder if there was something to the rumors about Rudin's private life, vague whispers that they had heard for years.

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A trip to the county courthouse did nothing to dispel their doubts. They found dozens of lawsuits against Rudin going back 30 years, with accusations of fraud and deceit and dozens of adverse judgments, as well as a recent criminal conviction for drug possession.

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When they showed copies of the court papers to fellow church members, they were scorned for investigating the minister; Stevens and her sister, Rebekah Lucas, were branded backsliders and were shunned by other church members, most of whom had family ties to the sisters through blood or marriage.

But that only made Stevens and Lucas more determined to find out the whole truth about Roger Rudin, and they pressed their



Stevens and Lucas recovered them. Now they sit, scrutinizing the detritus of the man they had believed would lead them to heaven.

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Instead, a very different man emerges from the scraps of his history, a man who led a remarkable double life he had carefully kept from the credulous members of his flock.

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And his former disciples begin to realize that for decades, they had been led down a very different path.

Rev. [Charles] Watson and his family were asked to travel with [Rev. Roger Rudin's] Crusade. . . . Rev. Watson and his family and many other families have felt led to sell their possessions and move to the Phoenix area, where there will be a greater promised outpouring of the Holy Spirit than ever before. . . . Folks are moving in from all over the United States day after day and hundreds more are coming. . . . Rev. Watson also expressed himself that he feels in



come and is manifested in the flesh and he is expecting the catching away of the Bride Elect. Rev. Watson admonishes all ordained Seed to make their move. Do not tarry--time is running out. Lay aside man-made church creeds and doctrines, repent and seek God for the revelation of the True Word.

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--from a Roger Rudin tract, circa 1968

Ruth Stevens hated it when Roger Rudin would stop one of his rollicking sermons to lift up his pants leg.

On his left ankle, Rudin would show his congregation a diseased scar that he blamed on the backsliding of his believers. Because they had all given themselves up to sin, he would tell them, God had plagued him with this putrescent mark.

The thing looked gangrenous, a ragged stain on his ankle that he claimed had the same shape as California's famed San Andreas

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an earthquake.

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Rudin's record as a prognosticator wasn't good. Years earlier he had convinced many people, including the Reverend Charles Watson and dozens of other Midwesterners, that by 1970 earthquakes would submerge California and make Arizona a paradise. Rudin

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persuaded his Iowa followers to relocate to Phoenix in 1968 for the calamity, and made Watson his assistant as they founded the Evening Light Tabernacle. (The congregation itself was dubbed the Evening Light Church for Christ, and later took the name Upper Room Fellowship.)

For some reason, California's survival hadn't convinced Rudin that his gifts of divination were faulty. The scar, which had shown up in the 1990s, was a sign from God that Rudin could still portend the future, he claimed.

Stevens preferred not to see it. She says the scar only added to the physical revulsion she felt for Rudin. even during the time she



forced into one: part Vegas lounge act, part revivalist speechifier, part flamboyant queen. Even at 60, Rudin wore the pompadour that he had adopted as a young man. The big hair and gaudy jewelry he wore only added to his resemblances to Wayne Newton, Liberace and fat Elvis.

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Watching a 1995 videotape of a Rudin sermon, which is more eye-rolling, gesturing and theatrics than homily, it's hard to believe that anyone considered him a legitimate preacher, let alone the most important religious figure of his age.

But for a small, close-knit group of Phoenicians, that's precisely what he was.

They belonged to an ultraconservative faith with a strict "holiness standard," a code of behavior that prevented women from cutting their hair, wearing makeup, pants, bathing suits or dresses shorter than the knee. Men could not wear shorts. Members could not smoke, drink, dance,



sense to bring children into it. Rudin discouraged them from planning far into the future or from educating themselves, telling them that it was a waste of time. Better to ready their souls for the great spiritual migration, which they were required to do by making extraordinary financial sacrifices.

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Like their 17th-century counterparts, these modern-day Puritans believed that strict attention to their behavior, and to the behavior of their companions, was a requisite for being the Elect, the few chosen people who would achieve salvation. The rest of us, everyone but the 200 people in Rudin's church at its height, were damned to hell.

Since leaving the church, Ruth Stevens has cut her hair and now wears earrings. She says her short hair would be a sure sign to her relatives in the church that she was headed to eternal damnation.

Such were the consequences of seemingly trivial transgressions, and it's important to keep that in



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She and her sister had puzzled over various plastic and rubber items they had found among Rudin's papers. There was a long rubber sheath which, at one end, was shaped like a human mouth. Above the mouth was a black mustache. In another bag there was a large plastic, cylindrical sleeve. And in other bags a length of rubber tubing and a small motor resembling an aquarium filter.

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Only after some debate do they realize what the devices all add up to: a masturbatory suction machine.

"Oh my God," Stevens exclaims. If to his congregation he was known as Roger Rudin, towering biblical figure and revelator of the endtimes, to Phoenix's gay community he was "Roger Rudino," flashy man about town with a seemingly endless supply of money, leather outfits and limousine rides.

At the same time, in 1985, that he railed against the sin of homosexuality in his church, only



mortgage payments to save a financially troubled church, he had convinced gay community leaders that he planned to establish a gay mecca, complete with country-and-western bar and leather dungeon.

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At the same time, in 1995, that members of his flock were asked to write letters on his behalf for, they were told, a part-time job, the letters actually went to support Rudin's plea for probation after his criminal conviction for cocaine possession.

At the same time that the gay community knew Rudin was living in Oregon avoiding court judgments and financial ruin, he somehow managed to show up each week to preach to his flock and maintain the fiction that he still lived in the Valley.

All but one member of the gay community contacted for this story say they had no idea Rudino was a Pentecostal minister with a church, an endtime message, a wife.



gay community or that their money had been spent lavishly in gay bars.

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About 30 adults remain in Roger Rudin's Upper Room Fellowship. Most are related to Ruth Stevens and her sister, and refuse to speak to them. The church members grieve for Rudin, and say they are struggling with the prospect of substituting the man they still consider to be a prophet.

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He seems irreplaceable.

A day after the wedding, when they had started on their short honeymoon, Brother Rudin became very weak in body as the enemy tried to oppress him. They immediately returned to Jeffersonville so that Brother Branham could pray for Brother Rudin.

---from a Rudin booklet

Roger Rudin was born in St. Paul, Minnesota, in 1938, but to understand how he came near to godhood, it's important to start instead in the farms of Indiana



for miracles.

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A generation of evangelists exploded in popularity in postwar America, including an uneducated, simple Indiana man with a limited vocabulary but an uncommon power for faith healing. Raised in utter poverty, William Marrion Branham had begun preaching in the 1930s, but it was after 1946 that his ministry caught fire. Through the 1950s, his legend grew; Branham was said to have raised the dead, could read minds, and could diagnose afflictions with a touch of his vibrating left hand. He gained huge popularity with Pentecostals. After 1960, however, he began to make truly astounding claims about himself which caused some churches to turn away from him; Branham proclaimed himself Elijah, the prophet which the Bible predicts will precede the second coming of Christ.

Branham said he had decoded the seven seals of the Book of Revelations (a feat that Branch Davidian leader David Koresh

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1900, Branham died several days

later. His followers waited months to bury him, hoping in vain that he would come back to life.

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While he was still alive, Branham was an inspiration to many aspiring evangelists, including a young Iowa preacher named Roger Rudin who in 1959 had begun traveling the revival circuit. Like Branham, Rudin claimed to have received divinely inspired visions portending the future; Rudin considered it a great honor when Branham performed the ceremony uniting Rudin with his wife, Patricia Brown, in 1963. As church literature indicates, however, Rudin's wedding night was not a blissful one. Several versions circulate among Rudin's former believers: One story has him panicked about sleeping with a woman; another describes him running through a motel parking lot until he's tackled by a friend. The official version promoted by the church claimed that the Rudins' wedding night was ruined by a "cloud of oppression" sent by

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in Iowa Rudin claimed that he was overtaken with a sense of foreboding. He excused himself from a Christmas dinner and retreated to a bedroom. There, Patricia found him "beside himself." Later, they realized that at that precise moment, the spirit had left William Branham.

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AA For Rudin's followers, the message was clear: Rudin had replaced Branham as the true endtime prophet. In his sermons, carefully transcribed and still preserved along with his many papers, Rudin would spend hours hammering away at the parallels between himself and Branham, cementing this relationship in their minds.

Rudin's followers believed that Rudin had not only followed Branham as a prophet but had superseded him, for Rudin's dire visions were more imminent than those of Branham. In the late 1960s, Rudin claimed that he had foreseen not only the destruction of California but of the entire country by earthquakes. An angel,



ministers in the Ottumwa, Iowa, area were impressed by Rudin's gifts--he seemed to be able telepathically to read what churchgoers had written down in prayer requests--and Bohi thought it a sure sign of Rudin's powers when, as Rudin was recruiting families for his Crusade, a small earthquake did roll through Ottumwa.

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In 1968, Ernie Bohi and dozens of others sold their farms and houses and moved to Phoenix in preparation for the looming rapture. Rudin had set a deadline for the calamity: By the end of 1970, earthquakes would pull California into the sea and inundate Florida with tidal waves. And, as a newspaper account later described it, Rudin had also seen in a vision that following the quakes, "The area of the already-raped land then was ravaged by giant ants as tall as 14 trees and birds with four-mile wingspans."

About 200 people assembled in Phoenix for the quakes. Bohi says

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As the end of 1970 neared and California and Florida remained unharmed, however, Bohi and others began to get suspicious. Bohi had not only given \$30,000 to Rudin out of the sale of his farm but had also paid thousands more for bonds to purchase a building on McKinley Street they named the Evening Light Tabernacle. He didn't like thinking that he'd been taken.

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Rudin, sensing trouble, announced that he would regain their confidence by traveling to the Holy Land and performing a miracle: He would reveal a hidden compartment in Egypt's Great Pyramid. Seventeen members, including Bohi, traveled with Rudin on a 25-day trip that took them through Chicago, London, Rome, Naples, Cairo, Nicosia, Tel Aviv, Haifa, Nazareth, Jerusalem, Zurich and Paris. It was a tense (and expensive) vacation, and Rudin was unable to pull off his miracle. "He came gasping for air out of that thing [the pyramid] like



of a million-dollar profit, he says), Bohi wanted his money back. He and several others would spend the next two years suing Rudin, claiming that the preacher had defrauded them by lying about the value of the bonds he had sold them. Bohi would eventually win several judgments against Rudin.

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Bohi also denounced Rudin as a fake in the church, and about 70 of its 200 members left the congregation; many, including Bohi, eventually returned to the Midwest.

But if Rudin's attempt at endtime prophecy had flopped, by 1970 he'd already recruited another source of believers who would make up the backbone of his church for the next three decades. And he had one man to thank for that.

Gilbert Pedroza was a Phoenix resident and Branham follower who fell deeply under the influence of Rudin. Before long, he had recruited many members of an extended Mexican-American clan made up of three main families.

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and suffered few of the doubts that had caused their Midwestern counterparts to turn away from Rudin.

An evangelist from no particular sect, Rudin answered to no other church, and was under no doctrinal yoke. Over the next 20 years, he would develop an idiosyncratic belief system that his followers accepted as the word of God. Increasingly, as the '70s unfolded, Rudin's message would mix Bible prophecy with numerology, New Age beliefs, and astrology.

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But mostly, Rudin's theology ran on cash.

"Buy faith,' Roger would tell us," Stevens says. "He would tell us to put off paying our mortgages or rent and give him the money and the Lord would bless us a hundredfold." Stevens regrets now that she often pressured her brothers and sisters to keep up their payments to Rudin.

Her brother, Gabriel Pedroza, says

Preach of trust

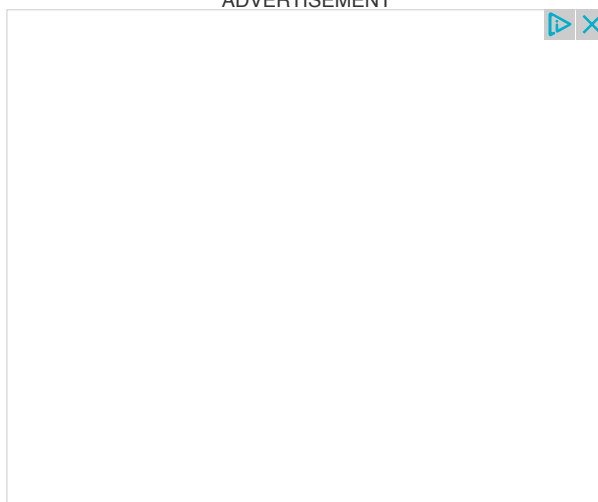
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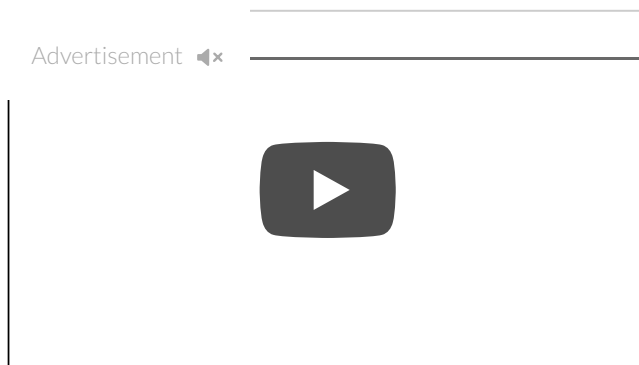
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records show that Rudin kept a careful eye on each member's offerings. A general ledger from 1989 indicates that the church was able to raise more than \$160,000 that year from a membership which by then had dwindled to only about 50 adults. Rudin paid himself more than \$80,000.

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Other records show that congregants turned over control of property and cars and made large loans to Rudin. Frantic handwritten notes from members desperately asking for payments on those loans lie among the piles of Rudin's papers, as do various liens and default notices on the properties the minister controlled over many years.

The most well-known of these was the downtown Hotel Westward Ho, which Rudin and church member Thomas Caprino purchased in January 1978 for \$2.3 million. Rudin and Caprino had begun investing in properties together nine years earlier and bragged to the Arizona Republic that an evangelist should be able to make



for the federal department of Housing and Urban Development to convert it to subsidized housing for the elderly. HUD would pay for construction bonds, and Rudin and Caprino would net approximately \$1 million in the deal.

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But Ernie Bohi, still holding a grudge against the preacher who had made him sell his farm, fed what he knew to the Republic, which splashed an embarrassing story about Rudin on its front page on Christmas Eve 1978, ridiculing the "self-proclaimed prophet" who stood to make millions on a government-funded deal. DeConcini withdrew his support of the project, HUD squashed the deal, and Rudin and Caprino sued the newspaper for \$105 million.

More newspaper stories revealed that Rudin had failed to make a single on-time payment on the hotel and had become delinquent on it. Avoiding foreclosure, the partners managed to sell it in 1979 for \$5 million (its new owners would eventually turn it into subsidized housing). Rudin and



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Financial trouble continued to dog Rudin's and Caprino's company, R&C Trust; settlements with the Department of Economic Security over failure to make unemployment insurance payments and liens for failure to pay federal taxes burdened the Caravan Inn. Rudin and Caprino would eventually lose the hotel in a bankruptcy in 1987.

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By then, unbeknownst to his faithful flock, Roger Rudin had made a splash in a very different part of Phoenix society.

Wink's. Good for one drink. --wooden token found in Rudin's effects

"Rudino? That slimy son of a bitch. He scammed a lot of people in the gay community," says Peter, the bartender at Wink's, a gay bar on Seventh Street north of Camelback.

The feeling seems to be general. "Rudino" is well-remembered by the bar's patrons, but not fondly.

Andre, a waiter, still remembers



remembers that Rudino had a fondness for leather. "White studded leather. Leather pants, leather boots, leather jacket. No shirt and a white leather harness. There are some people who look good in leather, but it wasn't Rudino," he says.

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Ofstedahl remembers that Rudino seemed to have money to burn. "He threw around a lot of cash. Rode in limos. He hated it when I would refer to his 'Elvis' hairdo.

"The man was insane, as far as I'm concerned. I think he was a habitual liar; I think that's a fair assessment. He was always trying to be something that he wasn't, and always making promises to organizations that he couldn't keep. . . . He was just a con artist as far as I'm concerned," Ofstedahl says.

In 1993, Ofstedahl served on the board of a nonprofit organization attempting to establish a Valley gay and lesbian community center. Rudino convinced the board that he planned to buy the old Blue



"Roger proclaimed that he was buying both to turn the four-story building into a gay mecca with a disco, restaurant, country-and-western bar, and a leather dungeon. The one-story building he said would be donated as a community center. We could lease it for a dollar a year."

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Negotiations on the deal started, Ofstedahl says, but soon ran into trouble.

"Someone did a background investigation and found problems. Roger made promises and didn't keep any of them. He really screwed the community and put the center back many months," he says. "After that fiasco, Roger dropped out of trying to be an important person in the gay community. But he was still doing the bar scene."

Ofstedahl also remembers that Rudino took out several ads in Echo Magazine for the restaurant Beef Eaters located on West Camelback. "Roger claimed that he was buying Beef Eaters, and he



to quit a good job to become an employee when he took over Beef Eaters. The deal never went through.

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Patrick Olivo says the same thing happened to him. A bartender at Apollo's, another gay haunt of Rudino's, Olivo first met the preacher in the early 1980s, when Rudino was telling people he planned to buy the Ramada Inn on West Camelback and "turn it gay."

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"Next month, it will be out of escrow,' he would say, again and again," Olivo says. Strung along by Rudino's promises to make him manager of a restaurant at the hotel, Olivo quit his job at the time and eventually went broke. "He was more of a pathological liar than anything else," he adds.

At the time, Olivo says, Rudino had a lover named Rick Raney. "Rick was really young and used to enter the wet-jockey-shorts contest at the Camel Club on the west side. That's where they met." What did the young Raney see in the older, flabby Rudino? "Lots of diamonds "



say they only knew that their minister did not live with his wife but were never told where Roger himself lived.

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In 1985, John King heard that a man named Rudino wanted to sell a gay bar named the Paradise Lounge. The place was located at Seventh Avenue and Camelback, and Rudino had only recently taken it over from a man named Hoover. King says Rudino told him he was disappointed at how little money the place seemed to bring in, and only weeks after taking it over, convinced King to buy it from him. King did, and renamed the bar Charlie's.

Then, King says, he realized that he'd been ripped off. The bar had not been Rudino's to sell. Hoover still owned the place; Rudino had run it for two months but had never paid Hoover to take possession of it. King angrily confronted Rudino, refused to pay him any more money and took Rudino to court to get back what he'd already spent. (Meanwhile, he had to pay Hoover for the bar it's



lawyer in his first year in practice. Roger Rea says he can't comment on the case, other than to confirm that his side lost and King secured a judgment against Rudino (which Rudino never paid, King says). Rea is willing to comment on the lawsuit's aftermath, when Rudino stiffed him on his \$3,000 legal bill.

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Rea sued his former client, and he, too, won a judgment which Rudino never paid.

Instead, facing bankruptcy in his real estate business and the judgments in the cases with Rea and King as well as other civil court losses, Rudino vanished with Raney. The year was 1987. For five years, Rea and others say, the gay community heard that Rudino had moved to Oregon, where people who had judgments against him couldn't locate him.

Says Rea about his former client: "Roger Rudin had no honor. No integrity. No principles. And no social redeeming value. He was the ultimate con. I believe Rudin was a psychotic, if not sociopathic,



he would have had to ask for a renewal of the penalty, and decided that it wasn't worth the trouble; he assumes Rudin still would have ignored it), Roger Rudino made his grand reentrance on the Phoenix gay scene.

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Olivo says that when Rudino moved back from Oregon, Rick Raney was dying from AIDS. Olivo claims to have witnessed Raney's death at a local hospital.

Rudino later lived with a man named Michael P. Watkins, another man very much his junior, says Jeff Ofstedahl. "Michael saw the dollar signs," he says.

After the debacle with the four-story gay mecca, Ofstedahl remembers Rudino disappearing from the gay scene again, this time in 1995. Watkins went away as well, he says, after being prosecuted on a federal drug charge. Federal Bureau of Prisons records indicate that Watkins was sentenced to 48 months in prison for conspiracy to possess and intent to distribute mariiwana. Rudino himself pleaded



Handy and is still remembered

well at his old watering holes. And so are his stories. They come back in a rush to Patrick Olivo, who shakes his head at Rudino's promises that never came true:

"I remember that when Rick Raney died, the two of them were planning to go around the world. So Rudino told us he'd take Dan, my lover, and me on the trip instead, and we'd stay at Sophia Loren's villa. Sophia Loren's villa! That's another one that just hit me."

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It has been difficult, to say the least, to sort out fact from fiction in this case. Your response to the above monitoring issues was thorough, but confusing, since for every bit of information we have, you provide a bit of counter information refuting our findings. . . It is difficult to accept a refutation of charges if there are so many that occur so frequently.

---HUD eviction letter to Rudin

Rudin pulled some sort of magic act in the years 1987 to 1992.

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Betty Jo White, Rudin's Oregon attorney, says that during those years Rudin did live in Silverton, Oregon, where he had bought a house and other properties. Also, Rudin's papers contain numerous bills addressed to both himself and Rick Raney at Oregon addresses.

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But during this entire period, Rudin continued to preach on Sundays at the Upper Room Fellowship, which by now had moved to a Glendale building.

There's also the 1991 document on file at the local HUD office which adds to the mystery of where Rudin actually lived.

The document says that a Glendale real estate agent became suspicious when he saw that expensive cars were parked at a HUD-sponsored home which was supposed to be part of a special program for leasing properties to the homeless. A federal inspector checked out the complaint, wrote down the license-plate numbers of the cars, and found out who owned them: Roger Rudin and Rick Raney.



a HUD contract allowing his church to administer several properties in the program for the homeless. Instead, the investigation found, Rudin had simply put himself, members of his church's board, and other worshipers into all but two of the 12 houses.

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HUD evicted the entire group in 1992.

"Nothing he ever said means anything to me. It hurts. We were robots," says Rebekah Lucas. She and her sister Ruth Stevens try to explain how, despite the many signs and rumors, they had never let their faith in Rudin be shaken. For one thing, both grew up in the church and had known no other.

"We were told going to church was like a marriage, and going to another church would be like committing adultery," Stevens says.

"We were conditioned to believe that we would lose everything-- our salvation, our life--if we left the church."

"I can't believe we believed all that.



room fellowship for a few years in the 1990s and who asked that his last name not be used. John was a rarity, a man who was allowed to join the church even though he had no relatives who were members.

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John says he never bought the idea that Rudin was a prophet, but by the mid-1990s, Rudin's message had softened considerably and was less strident.

Rudin had had revelations, starting in about 1991 according to various members, that sex was now acceptable between married couples, that homosexuality should be viewed with tolerance (earlier he had denounced it) and that gambling was no longer on the list of proscribed activities.

In fact, gambling would soon become a sacrament. Rudin gambled heavily himself, and eagerly handed out astrological readings to his followers, encouraging them to play the slot machines when their signs were favorable. He demanded that they



would be made during a Sunday service. "This was an ongoing thing, every week, the asking for money. Why does this little church need such a big budget?" John wondered.

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"Rudin would tell them that if they gave him a certain amount, he'd give them private time and special readings--\$100 would give you 15 minutes alone with him. I thought it was strange. I thought a preacher should be giving his time away for free," John says.

At least twice in 1996, John and others say, Rudin claimed to have lost an entire Sunday's collections, each totaling about \$3,000. Once, he claimed to have been robbed. The other time he apologized for his own forgetfulness: He had put the collections on top of his car and then had sped off.

"I thought, why does he have the money anyway? Why isn't it going into a bank account?" John says. One Sunday, after giving his offering in the form of a check, John received a phone call that



stopped going.

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Rudin's ministry continued to unravel in 1996. Evicted from the Glendale building for failure to pay rent, the church moved to a chapel in a West Camelback wedding mall.

The most significant event that year for Stevens and Lucas: Rudin's failure to show up at the funeral of their uncle. They said it was shocking; the congregation was small, and deaths did not occur often. There was no back-up minister to their prophet--how could there be? And no one seemed to know where Rudin was, not even his wife, Patricia.

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It was a mystery until, a year later, Rebekah Lucas made her search for documents at the county courthouse. That's when she learned about Rudin's 1995 and 1996 arrests for cocaine and methamphetamine possession.

On May 16, 1995, Rudin had been arrested by the Phoenix Police Department for passing a bad check; when he was searched, two



Rudin claimed that 500 people made up his congregation (about 10 times the true amount), that his monthly income was \$1,300 (records recovered from the trash bin show that six years earlier he had grossed about \$6,000 a month), and claimed that the drugs belonged to Michael Watkins, a man he was counseling (rather than his lover, with whom he shared a house), and from whom he had seized the drugs in an intervention.

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Noting that Rudin had admitted to arresting officers his recreational use of cocaine, probation officer Norman Hall concluded: "The circumstances surrounding the present offenses suggest the defendant is heavily involved in the use of drugs and possibly committing other crimes in order to facilitate his addiction. This officer finds his explanation as to his actions in the offenses somewhat questionable and it is felt the defendant is in denial of a serious substance abuse problem."

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Stevens and Lucas say they were

told the letters would be used to help the minister land a part-time job. They had no idea, they say, that the letters instead were being submitted to assure that Rudin not get prison time. He received a three-year sentence of probation.

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It wasn't the first time that Robertson seemed to help Rudin keep a darker truth from the congregation. If no one in the congregation knew where Rudin lived, Stevens and Lucas say, Robertson must have known, at least to make sure that Rudin received important legal documents.

"Helen was the piano player. She never did like me," says John. "She would get up and talk about how Rudin was the prophet, how we couldn't let him down, that he'd done so much for us. She would tell people to give wedding rings and things for the prophet. That's when I thought, 'Whoa,' this is beginning to look like a cult to me."

This past March, when Patricia



NOT LONG AFTER THAT, STEVENS

watched Robertson throw out Rudin's papers into a garbage bin behind the church.

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"We're under a little reorganization," Robertson says of the church now that Rudin himself has died. (The county medical examiner reports that Rudin's cause of death was atherosclerotic coronary artery disease.) "We need a new chapel. Our nonprofit status has expired, so we're going for status on that."

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Asked about Rudin's double life and his involvement with the gay community, Robertson says, "It doesn't matter what kind of life he led. He did counseling to many gays. He was involved in the homosexual community. He also counseled Hollywood stars."

Church members say that "counseling gays" was something Rudin claimed to do a lot of recently, but he never admitted to the congregation that he was gay himself. As for Hollywood stars, Rudin told the congregation that



times together," Robertson says. "I saw the truth of what he was preaching. It helped me through a lot in life, no matter what his personal battles were with people. He made some bad business investments. Big deal. Did people have faults? Yeah. But are the things people are saying about him true? No. He's never harmed a soul.

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"We're not a cult," she says. "If you don't like what we're teaching, you're free to leave. In fact, we'd prefer that you do."

Asked about finding sex toys in her minister's office, Robertson answered, "I don't know what you're talking about."

Robertson agreed to meet with New Times to go over the Rudin documents, then changed her mind, saying she didn't like that ex-members were speaking to the paper. Several other current members contacted for the story refused to comment.

IF YOU LIKE

After Rudin's
death, his body

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Ruth Stevens

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and her brother-in-law invented a ruse to convince the funeral home holding Rudin to let them in to see the body. Stevens says she wanted to see with her own eyes that the prophet had actually died. She says until she did, she couldn't help assuming the "death" was simply a ploy by Rudin to get out of financial problems.

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She confirmed that Rudin himself lay in cold storage, and added that it was a shock, since she had been conditioned to believe that the flamboyant preacher had been immortal.

She says she has no doubt about his present address.

Contact Tony Ortega at his online address: tortega@newtimes.com

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Phoenix Suns ...	Phoenix Suns ...
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Fontes Fight to Fix Maricopa...

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Thu., TICKETS
Mar. 15, 8:00pm

Sat., TICKETS
Apr. 7, 7:00pm

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Steve Montenegro

Gage Skidmore

Here's Your Recap of All the Drama in Congressional District 8

ANTONIA NOORI FARZAN | FEBRUARY 26, 2018 | 7:00AM



replace him would want to make sure they're squeaky clean.

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Yeah. Nope. In the weeks leading up to the primary – which takes place Tuesday – the competition between Republicans fighting to replace Franks in deep-red Congressional District 8 has gotten ugly. If you haven't been following along, here's a recap of the drama that's gone down so far:

AA

Everyone got to see Steve Montenegro's flirty texts.

There's no question that the biggest scandal of this election cycle revolves around former Arizona Senate president Steve Montenegro's text messages.

RELATED STORIES

- **[Here's What the Texts Between Steve Montenegro and Female Staffer Said](#)**
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-

Last year, Montenegro, a married pastor and "family values"



wife. Her ex-boyfriend later copied the text messages from her computer and **shopped them around to the media.**

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After the news broke last week, Montenegro (who has been dodging local reporters) **told the conservative *Washington Examiner*** that he "did not have any inappropriate relationships with that woman." As far as political performances go, it was not a convincing one.

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Hours later, the female staffer's attorney held a press conference where he released ***all of the text messages***, including the ones where Montenegro talks shit about Secretary of State Michelle Reagan, House Speaker J.D. Mesnard, and State Senator Catherine Miranda. One imagines that Montenegro is more eager than ever to leave Arizona behind for Washington, D.C.



Marc J. Bretz

32 mins · Goodyear · 🚗

...

Boom. I think **Clint** and I are the official celebrities of the Montenegro campaign...you'll see us in your mailbox!





Stacy Jarvis/Twitter

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Those regular working-class guys in hard hats on Montenegro's campaign mailer turned out to be members of his campaign team.

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This isn't nearly as bad as the sexting, but it is hilarious. Nothing says "man of the people" like forcing your staffers to dress up as construction workers. Best of all, they got busted because they **openly joked about it on Facebook.**

There was a fight over who owns the name "Bob Stump."

So, the guy named Bob Stump who is running for Congress in District 8 is not the same person as former congressman Bob Stump, who is dead. They're not even related to each other. In fact, candidate Bob Stump was known as Christopher Stump until 2002, shortly before he first ran for office in Arizona.

In January, former congressman Bob Stump's widow, Nancy Stump, called out the other Bob Stump in a



Stump apologize to her and her family.

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"To imply that a name is somehow the property of one family is the height of arrogance," she wrote. "I deeply resent it."

The issue still hasn't been fully settled, and it would be awesome if Mrs. Stump ends up fighting the other Mrs. Stump outside the polls on Tuesday.

AA

Former state senator Debbie Lesko's main rivals accused her of money laundering.

Last week, the *Yellow Sheet Report* noticed something slightly shady about Debbie Lesko's campaign fundraising: She'd taken \$50,000 from her state senate campaign committee and donated it to a super PAC named Conservative Leadership for Arizona, which has spent nearly that same amount on her Congressional campaign.

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While that appears to be legal, the ethics are





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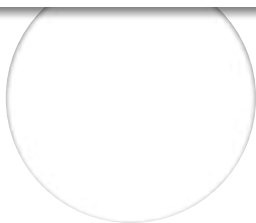
Courtesy of Debbie Lesko

situation often choose to return contributions to their supporters rather than use those donations to finance a difference race.

Predictably, Lesko's two main rivals, Montenegro and Trump superfan Phil Lovas, **accused her of illegal money laundering**, even though there's no evidence that she's guilty of any such thing.

Lesko promptly **threatened to sue Lovas for defamation**, which anyone with the slightest knowledge of media law can you tell is completely bogus. (The standard for defamation is extremely high when you're dealing with public figures.) In the end, no one came out of this one





Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism. Before moving to Arizona, she worked for the *New Times Broward-Palm Beach*.

CONTACT:
Antonia Noori Farzan

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After Florida Shooting, Phoenix Students Say More School Cops Isn't the Answer

JOSEPH FLAHERTY | FEBRUARY 24, 2018 | 7:29AM

AA

Phoenix students organized by two Latino groups marched downtown on Friday, mirroring student demonstrations around the country that erupted after a school shooting in Parkland, Florida, claimed 17 lives.

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These students wanted to raise a missing piece in the gun reform debate: More armed personnel in schools would actually make them feel less secure, they said.

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isn't safety," Milagros Renteria, a 15-year-old student at South Mountain High School, said at the gathering.

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Around 30 students showed up to march from Monroe Street to Civic Square Park. Puente Arizona and MEChA, or Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán, organized the rally. In addition to gun violence, the students said other problems are absent from the debate, including on-campus police officers, also known as school resource officers, and the zero-tolerance discipline policies they enforce.

Officers are common in the Phoenix Union High School District. Renteria said the presence of officers at her high school combined with Arizona's extreme anti-immigrant law SB 1070 creates a cloud of anxiety. The state law requires police to ask about the immigration status of people suspected of a crime.

The Phoenix Police Department

Phoenix, Arizona - February 26, 2017 - "SB 1070"



...is not that easy. Any discipline for an undocumented student that stems from contact with police on-campus could theoretically be grounds for deportation under President Trump's immigration orders.

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Schools shouldn't be a place where students are under surveillance, putting them and their family at risk, Renteria explained.

"I have to go to school five days a week and see a police officer watching my every move, waiting for me to do something wrong," Renteria told the crowd. "And even then, right when I walk off campus, they could ask me for papers."

An enhanced police presence in schools could bring undocumented students in contact with the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement Bureau (ICE), they say, risking deportation. And the **disproportionate discipline rates** for students of color, not to mention implicit racial bias, makes some people extremely uneasy with adding



students into the justice system when they're arrested at school for a relatively minor infractions, such as disruptive behavior.

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That process of police discipline in schools kicks off a **school-to-prison pipeline**, where students of color are heavily impacted, getting pushed out of schools as a result of zero-tolerance policies for school-based infractions. If the school had more resources, such as counselors, it's possible that the disciplinary problem might have been solved at the outset – no officer required.

In the aftermath of the Parkland shooting, organizers in Phoenix said that this perspective was mostly missing in the national debate about school safety and an epidemic of gun violence.

“There was a particular type of violence that was not being shared in media,” Leidy Robledo, an organizer with Puente Arizona, told the assembled students through a megaphone as the march began at ASU's downtown



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Puente in particular has made the issue of cops in Arizona schools an organizing cause. The

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immigrant-rights group's

AA

#CopsOuttaCampus campaign began in Spring 2017, around the same time the Phoenix Police Department **slowly moved toward revising** its policy related to SROs and SB 1070.

Chrisalma Enriquez, a 16-year-old sophomore at South Mountain High School, told *Phoenix New Times* that she wants to see education funds go toward counselors and ethnic studies courses instead of the officers that she sees walking around on campus.

“To me, it makes me feel like we’re criminals, or animals,” she said.

As the rally wound down and students prepared to catch a ride

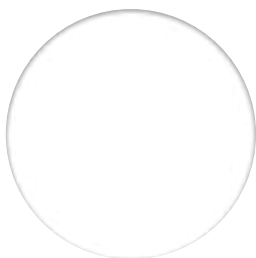
back to their campus, one of the



colored marker: “A life without discrimination,” “Updated history textbooks,” “Teachers getting decent salaries.”

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Joseph Flaherty is a staff writer at *New Times*. Originally from Wisconsin, he is a graduate of Middlebury College and Columbia University’s Graduate School of Journalism.

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