

They saw E.T., and not at the

By SCOTT FAGERSTROM
The Columbian

Call them Aliens Anonymous.

They come from all walks of life. They represent all ages, all races, all religions.

They have only two things in common: an experience so weird that it can't be explained by ordinary circumstances, and an almost overpowering sense of loneliness.

They believe they've been visited by creatures from another planet. And, until Saturday afternoon, there wasn't a soul they could tell.

"When this happens, nobody believes you," said a woman from La Center. "People think you're crazy."

But nobody was using the word "crazy" Saturday afternoon. About 10 local residents gathered at Columbia River High School to talk about close encounters of the first, second and third kinds, in what local psychic Linda Williams hopes will be the first of many such group encounters.

"People who've had these experiences need to find each other, to give each other support," Williams told *The Columbian* earlier this week. "We're not crazy. People are not lying about what they're experiencing."

The main speaker at the Saturday affair was Ron Chaput, a member of the UFO Contact Center in Seattle, who said he was a 37-year-old electronics technician for Boeing.

"I don't have all the answers," Chaput said. "I'm still looking for the answers, but I know something's going on."

While conceding that a certain percentage of UFO reports are filed by those who are "out for the publicity," he charged that the government is ignoring sincere people. The Air Force and other agencies refuse to look into UFO sightings, he said.

All sorts of qualified witnesses have seen UFOs, and world literature, all the way back to the Bible and ancient Indian folklore, is full of references to unexplained events in the sky, he said.

"It's a giant puzzle," he said. "It seems like everybody has a little piece."

Chaput's interest in UFOs was pricked by a

movie about the "interrupted journey," a famous flying saucer incident several years back. A husband and wife were driving through upstate New York late one night when their car was stopped by a flying object that landed in front of them.

According to the story, the couple didn't remember what had happened to them after that. But, under hypnosis, they were able to remember that aliens had taken them on board the craft and performed experiments on them before returning them to their automobile.

While watching the movie, Chaput said he started "shaking" because it triggered an early memory in his own life that he'd suppressed. He was only 5, and his parents'

movies

car had broken down for no reason in an unpopulated area of the Midwest.

Under hypnosis, Chaput said, he was able to remember a contact with aliens at that time, and again when he was 19.

Members of the audience told similar stories, although those who talked to *The Columbian* preferred to remain unidentified.

"You're not talking about kids imagining things," said a man from northern Clark County who said a UFO tailed him while he was driving down Interstate 80 in Nebraska.

No date has been set for the group's next meeting. Stay tuned for more details.