

Exploring the claims of UFO 'abductions'

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A TRUE STORY BY
WHITLEY STRIEBER
WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY JIM HANCOCK

Cover of Strieber's new book

whooshing noise awakened Whitley Strieber in his upstairs New York cabin on the night after Christmas 1965. He sat up in bed. The barglar alarm glowed armed and undisturbed. His wife, Ann, slept peacefully beside him. His dog, beneath the bed, didn't stir.

Then, slowly, the bedroom door began to open.

The next morning, Strieber, 41, remembered nothing unusual.

But in the next few days he was plagued by disturbing images: images of floating out of the room and above the treetops, naked and paralyzed of being examined by blood-tail gray creatures with huge dark eyes who inserted a hairlike probe into his breath, images that led the best-selling author to question his sanity.

Strieber's search for answers led him to a New York City support group of about 50 people who reported similar abductions and experiences by small gray creatures with bulbous heads and luminous black eyes. The group, which included cops and lawyers, doctors and truckers, a stockbroker and a composer, shared bizarre stories at an emotional "abductee party" last year in Manhattan.

Strieber's story, chronicled in his recently published book, *Communion*, seems the stuff of supermarket tabloids and science-fiction movies. But alien-abduction reports, and books on the subject, are increasing by and are being taken seriously by some scholars, including David M. Jacobs, a history professor at Temple University.

Jacobs, who wrote a book on the history of UFOs, teaches what is believed to be the country's only accredited undergraduate course on the UFO phenomenon. Last year he began interviewing area residents who had reported similar encounters. He is convinced, he says, that, because of the real anxiety reported by a growing number of "sane people," something is happening.

Mere sightings of UFOs, such as in November of a Japanese pilot who said a UFO followed him over Alaska while he was flying from Europe to Japan, are "throwbacks to the old reports," Jacobs said.

"The amazing thing about this is that it's absolutely impossible to explain what is happening to these peo-

ple," Jacobs said. "There is no explanation in science. No explanation in psychology. These are disparate individuals who are telling stories in great detail without any knowledge of the subject, without any knowledge of anyone making similar claims. They all sort of started at once, they have no ax to grind, and none of them ever exhibited anything like psychosis or mental disease or trauma."

There is no evidence of a mass hoax or hallucination, Jacobs said.

"We just have scores and scores of cases, and they are coming out of the woodwork. And they are all telling the same story, down to the minutest details."

The first reports of modern UFO sightings in this country were recorded in 1947. During the '50s American were titillated by charlatans who made fortunes selling books, photographs and music about their encounters with alien "space brothers," Jacobs said. Eccentric "Professors" George Adamski of California said little scout ships took him to a mother ship, which had elevators and a swimming pool, and he met the king of the moon.

"It was horrendous, embarrassing," Jacobs said, "and made ridicule seem like the appropriate response to all UFO witnesses."

The first case to be considered seriously by some scholars was that of civil-rights activist Barney Hill (who grew up in Philadelphia) and his wife, Betty, a social worker, whose tale of abduction from their Portsmouth, N.H., home was the subject of a *Look* magazine series in 1966, then a book, *The Interrupted Journey*, and a movie, *The UFO Incident*.

Strieber, author of several horror novels, including *The Hunger* and *Wolfen*, acknowledges that some critics will dismiss *Communion* as the work of a master storyteller. So he passed a polygraph examination by Ned Laurendi, vice president of the Empire State Polygraph Society, "to reassure readers that I honestly think that I perceived the things reported in this book."

Strieber also was examined by Donald F. Klein, director of research at the New York State Psychiatric Institute and professor of psychiatry at Columbia University.

"I have examined Whitley Strieber and found that he is not suffering from a psychosis," Klein wrote in *Communion*. "He is not hallucinating in a manner characteristic of psychosis. I also see no evidence of an anxiety state, mood disorder or per-

sonality disorder. He has approached the dilemma of what is happening to him in a careful and forthright way."

In the '60s, while reports of UFO sightings have leveled off to about 350 a year, abduction reports are rising at an "explosive" rate, Jacobs said.

Only 10 years ago, there were perhaps a dozen reported UFO-abduction cases. Now the number is about 200, according to Walter R. Anderson Jr., international director of the Texas-based Mutual UFO Network, a group of volunteers that records UFO reports.

Anxiety on I-95

Cases like that of Deborah Johnson, who lives in South Philadelphia. Driving to her home, which was then in Bucks County, from her job as marketing director of a Princeton, N.J., real estate company last fall, Johnson (who asked that her real name not be used) was filled with dread whenever she drove along a particular stretch of Interstate 95 about 10 miles south of Princeton.

"That really bothered me," said Johnson, 27, in a recent interview. "I'm not crazy, and here I was feeling anxious about stupid little things — a stretch of road [and] going up a flight of stairs at home."

Johnson underwent hypnosis with Jacobs to see if she was blocking any traumatic memories. In a hypnotic state, Johnson told of an incident that even she found hard to believe. She related a UFO's setting down on that same stretch of I-95 one night and told of being beckoned aboard by a tiny, large-headed creature with huge black eyes.

"I had never seen a UFO movie, never read a UFO book. I thought it was all a lot of baloney," Johnson said. "I thought UFOs were the product of three-martini lunches at the National Enquirer. . . . I thought I was losing my mind."

In the last four months, Johnson has begun to re-evaluate her entire life as she unleashed 400 pages of emotionally charged testimony of a "secret life" previously unknown to her, of being abducted by the same alien at ages 6, 10, 11, 17 and 18, and perhaps several times recently.

Childhood incident

When Johnson began to explore her unexplained anxiety over a certain hill outside her native Pittsburgh, she began only with a vague memory of an unexplained afternoon when she was 6.

"I was with a girlfriend, and all of a sudden we found ourselves on this hill. It was far away from where we used to play — we were not allowed to play there. We looked across a field, and we looked at these boys playing baseball. But we didn't see them get on the field. I certainly don't remember walking there."

Under hypnosis, Johnson recounted being abducted as a child by the same large-headed creature she would tell of seeing on I-95 years later, of being taken aboard a UFO, medically examined in a round room and returned to the hill with no conscious memory of what had happened.

"We were looking for butterflies at the very top of that hill, a big hill, and I felt heat on my back," she said in a recent interview, recalling what she had remembered under hypnosis. "I turned around, and there was a light on me. I feel faint, dizzy. The next thing I remember, I'm held in someone's arms, being taken to like a hole, a hatch. In there to the white room, the operating room. I kept thinking, 'This is a dream. I'm crazy. I'm sick.' There were two humansoids there, calming me down. They did a full examination. They started at my feet; they touched with the pads of their fingers — everywhere, my feet, my whole body. Then they did a gynecological exam. It was very upsetting."

Like many "abductees," Johnson's accounts include being taken into a flying saucer and then into a round room, colorless, sterile, with a white or gray operating table. Johnson's description of the alien beings matches the descriptions provided by other "abductees" in case after case: tiny bodies, large heads, no ears or noses, slit mouth and huge, piercing black eyes. Most report emaciated bodies, grayish or whitish skin.

As in other cases, Johnson was somehow paralyzed as aliens used a needle at the back of her neck and said, "We need a little piece of you to study."

How does a person, years later, come to believe he or she was kidnapped by an alien?

For Johnson, the climactic moment came while watching a television talk show. A woman who said she had been abducted by an extraterrestrial being held up by a drawing she made of the alien's face.

"I screamed," Johnson said. "I practically ripped the gears off the TV set, shutting it off."

She contacted the woman, who eventually referred her to Budd Hopkins, an abstract artist who has been investigating UFO reports for many years.

In his 1981 book, *Missing Time*, Hopkins, 55, was the first to report the similar patterns of UFO abductions, according to Jacobs. His newest book, *Intruders: The Incredible Visitations at Capley Woods*, to be published this month, is based on interviews with more than 100 "abductees." Assisted by psychologists, psychiatrists and physicians, he has investigated the bulk of reported UFO abduction cases in the country and holds "abductee" support-group meetings at his New York apartment.

Some discounted

Hopkins doesn't believe everyone who comes to him with a story of alien abduction. He is careful to screen out those with mental problems.

"When I run into a psychotic — and I do run into them," he says, "they are not telling this kind of story. They're telling stories of the CIA and Jesus and spacemen, a big mishmash. As one psychologist told me, who would even fantasize a thing like this?"

He will hold "key information"