

'Bed trailer' glowed eerily in the sky

By Suzanne Solo
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WINNIPEG — Marie Melnick remembers It was somewhere between midnight and 1 a.m. on a cold, cloudy January night earlier this year when she saw something in the sky she still can't explain.

The retired school teacher from Great Falls, Man., was out walking her German shepherd dog, Tammy, as she usually does in the evenings, when suddenly the dog became frightened.

"I'd never seen her react that way to anything. She didn't make a sound and her ears were standing up very long and very moderate," Melnick said in a telephone interview.

What terrified Tammy was a bright light accompanied by what Melnick describes as a peculiar whining sound.

"As it came closer I could distinguish there were four bolts, green, which cast an eerie glow for about the length of a bed trailer," she says.

But it wasn't a bed trailer because, Melnick says, it flew away over a nearby farmer's field leaving no traces on the soft snow.

The incident left Melnick so perplexed that the next day she contacted the Centre for UFO Studies which operates out of the planetarium at the Manitoba Museum of Man and Nature in Winnipeg.

The centre, founded by Ed Barker, the planetarium's art director and production manager, has examined and documented hundreds of cases like Melnick's since it became operational in 1975.

Barker, an artist, photographer, designer and ex-pilot, has been with the planetarium since 1967. He says despite his interest in UFOs and his research on sightings, he still counts himself among the skeptics.

"It's important that you keep an open mind and a very skeptical mind because you can be so easily reduced and led astray by the subject," he says.

Barker's office and telephone at the planetarium serve as the centre's headquarters. He explains that all the work he and two others, one a planetarium employee and the other a retired museum worker, put into the centre is strictly voluntary.

"It's a study group. We don't have memberships or anything like that," he says.

The centre receives an average of two to five calls a week from people who think they have seen an unidentified flying object.

Barker says unlike Melnick's experience, most of the reported sightings turn out to be logically explained events. Low-flying planes, weather balloons, and natural phenomena such as falling meteors and lightning are commonly mistaken for UFOs.

"I maintain that I can explain roughly 95 to 96 per cent of the sightings. A very small percentage comes in that we can't explain," he says.

Those events that can't be explained are the most fascinating, Melnick says. The most interesting and important unexplained UFO case still remains the Steve Michalak case which occurred 20 years ago.

Michalak, a 60-year-old hobby geologist at the time, had been prospecting near Falcon Lake, Man., when he saw two low-flying objects.

One of them landed and Michalak, who is now 90 and still a resident of Winnipeg, says he tried to communicate with whatever it was. Suddenly, however, the object shot off into the sky, spewing hot gases over

Michalak and burning his chest and legs. He still has the scars on his legs.

Since the incident, Michalak has shied away from publicity. Holding the tattered and burned white shirt he wore that day, he says he's been accused of being drunk and worse.

Barker says a common misconception is that those who say they've seen UFOs are crazy, liars or both. However, most people reporting sightings are quite normal and sincere in what they believe.

"I have gotten very few calls from people who hallucinate, perhaps

schizophrenics who are on leave or on treatment, but they are not difficult to spot," he says.

Schoolteachers, farmers, policemen, pilots and housewives have been known to call in and Barker says no one seems to be immune to UFO sightings.