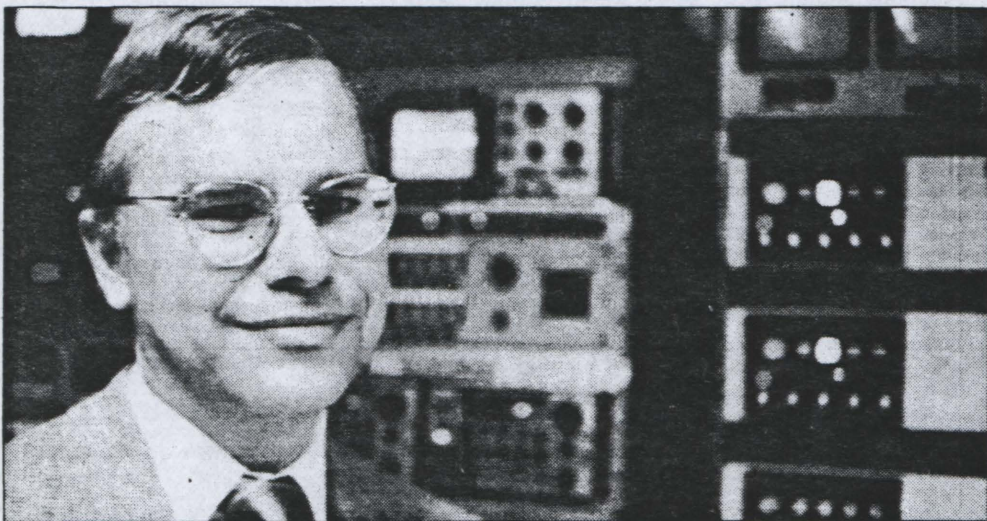


Whitley Strieber: UFO fanatic or truly serious author?



UPI

Author Whitley Strieber, shown here after a TV interview recently, claims to have experienced close encounters with UFO-borne visitors. Strieber's last two books detail what he says are his true-life encounters with extraterrestrial beings.

WASHINGTON (UPI) — Author Whitley Strieber, who claims to have experienced close encounters with UFO-borne visitors, has been hooked up to a lie detector, endured derisive laughter on the Phil Donahue Show and has been snubbed in literary circles.

But Strieber's two latest books detailing what he says are his true-life encounters with extraterrestrial visitors have rocketed to the best-seller lists, earning him more than \$1 million.

And Christopher Walken is portraying him in a movie version of his encounters, due out next year.

Strieber first made his mark with the horror fantasy tales "The Hunger" and "The Wolfen." He went on to co-write apocalyptic visions of war and environmental collapse, "Warday" and "Nature's End."

But since 1987 he has become best known for the two purported non-fiction books that struck a chord in a public long-fascinated by the notion that aliens have been watching Earth for a long time.

Strieber says these visitors may eventually help mankind to grow enough to stop the destruction of the environment — presaged by the past, sweltering summer.

Speaking about his latest book, "Transformation: The Breakthrough" (Beech Tree-Morrow, 256 pp., \$18.95), Strieber quickly says, no, he's not a crackpot or a hoaxster out to make a fast buck.

"Communion," published in 1987, recounted how the creatures studied him. It was on the best-seller lists for six months, selling 3.5 million copies in the United States alone.

"Transformation" zoomed to the best-seller lists after only a week at bookstores.

Despite how outlandish his latest books seem, Strieber insists they are non-fiction and that he actually believes that what he has written about happened to him.

"It's a true story, it remains true," are his first words to a skeptical interviewer. "I have to tell you I'm sure they're quite real."

A professorial-looking man, Strieber notes that since the publication of "Communion," some 5,000 people have written to him to say they have had similar experiences and thousands of others have claimed close encounters since the 1940s.

"If I'm mad, tens of thousands of others are mad," said Strieber, 43,

who admits his latest books have made him persona non grata in literary circles. "It would be a case of mass schizophrenia."

He says he passed three separate lie detector tests, including one conducted by a dubious British Broadcasting Corp. when he visited Britain to promote "Communion."

In the books, Strieber recounts how the 3 1/2-foot to 4-foot-tall "visitors" have sporadically visited him since 1985 at his weekend cabin in upstate New York, which he visits with his wife and 8-year-old son. His wife also had encounters.

Sometimes the encounters were terrifying. He claims he was probed with strange "wands" wielded by the visitors, who sometimes appeared after UFOs hovered over the cabin. He claims he has been paralyzed. He also claims the visitors came to him in childhood but that he had screened the memories out until recently.

Sometimes the encounters were wondrous. He alleges the visitors channelled their voices into his head, taught him to float for out-of-body experiences and transported him to a "golden city" in an otherworldly place.

In "Transformation" he claims the experience forced him to confront his worst fears, and grapple with and finally understand the meaning of the soul, death and love.

"I was taken on an inner journey sparked by an outer presence so that I grew by leaps and bounds," said Strieber, sitting cross-legged, guru-style in an armchair. "I was transformed. I have emerged from my experience a thousand times stronger."

Hence, the title. But he denies trying to start a UFO cult or religion, spiritual though his message sounds.

"I just want to tell other people about my experiences so if they have similar experiences they can grow from them and not succumb to fear and anger, which is often a normal response to visitor experience," he said.

He leaves in question what his purported visitors actually are. "Mankind has always had

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"Mankind has always had myths," he said. "In past times, we might have called the visitors, fairies, little people, angels, demons or gods. But now we live in an era of demythologizing, so since the 1940s we have seen them as 'E.T.'s' on UFOs."