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## Science and the unknown

Private citizens who have reported UFO sightings to government officials sometimes complain of secrecy, frustration and laughter.

Floyd Petri founded the Center for Instrumented UFO Research in Bastrop in part to circumvent such bureaucratic hassles.

"Our purpose is to confirm the existence or nonexistence of the UFO by scientific means," said Petri, a retired police chief.

"Before organizations such as this existed, an individual was nothing more than a UFO buff or a witness. Often, after people made a report to the authorities, that was the last they heard of it. Any physical evidence they offered went up in smoke."

Petri said the 10-year-old center is accumulating equipment and personnel to set up a monitoring station and a field unit, probably in a van. Both will be equipped with devices such as radar, magnetometers, cameras, video equipment, radiation and sound detection equipment, and chart recorders.

"There are many Americans who are funding this kind of research right out of their own pockets," he said.

"Just like there are people who spend thousands of dollars a year fishing. This is my hobby. This is where my money goes. There also have been donations and benefactors interested in our research."

The scientific instrumentation — much of which the center owns — sounds impressive. But some of the most fruitful research — retrieving government documents pertaining to UFOs — forces the private UFO investigator to use simpler but equally powerful tools such as typewriters and the mail.

"The Freedom of Information Act is one of the nicest things that ever happened to us," Petri said. "There is a world of information in the hands of government and individuals. If it was gathered, studied and disseminated properly, the information would shed some light on the UFO enigma. Many groups are trying to do that now."

Petri's organization is interested in investigating suspected landing sites and trace materials from all kinds of encounters — from cattle mutilations to indentations thought to be made by saucer landing pods. And the center is involved in the computer enhancement of photos showing UFOs to determine their validity.

UFO abduction cases also draw the center's attention if there's evidence in addition to an abductee's account.

Petri also serves as state section director of Bastrop and Travis counties for the Mutual UFO Network.

The center and MUFON work together to train UFO investigators, discuss cases and plan field trips for investigations. Joint meetings are under the acronym PULSE — Project UFO Landings, Sightings and Encounters — so the two organizations can maintain separate identities.

"The goals are to share information and ferret out bad, distorted information," Petri said. "So the organizations don't mind communicating."

Ten members are training to be field investigators. Three have been trained. Most are professional people with skills such as photography, computers, legal investigation and medicine.

Membership is by invitation. The center seeks people with professional expertise that could be of use in UFO investigations. Though it costs nothing to join, members must subscribe to the *MUFON UFO Journal*.

"We're not here to make converts but to collect evidence," Petri said.

For information on the Center for Instrumented UFO Research, write to 1 Box 180K, Bastrop 78602 or call 21-6919 in Bastrop.



# ALIENS

## UFOs showing up in closer encounters

Stories by Carlos Vidal Greth  
Illustration by Sharon Kilday  
American-Statesman Staff

Humans have always gazed wonderingly at the heavens, struggling to understand unexpected changes of scenery and casting in the galactic play being produced overhead.

Traditionally, most reports of unidentified flying objects were these kind of distant encounters observed from below, usually explainable as manmade or natural phenomena.

At 8:10 p.m. on Jan. 20, for example, hundreds of Texans witnessed a spectacular fireball streak across the sky. The object turned out to be a Soviet rocket body that officials had expected to re-enter the atmosphere.

But lately, UFO encounters have moved much closer to home. They have migrated from outer to inner space, and from the realm of astronomy to psychology.

The trend started several years ago, when a number of books were published detailing stories of abductions by extraterrestrial creatures, most notably *Intruders* by Budd Hopkins and *Communion* by Whitley Strieber.

The best-selling volumes prompted a storm of reports from people who thought they, too, had been visited or kidnapped by aliens. Eerily, many of the accounts shared certain characteristics, such as:

- Missing time, where folks can't recall what occurred during a period of hours or days — except when put under hypnosis;
- Interbreeding of human and alien species, involving artificial insemination or long-term genetic studies;
- Physical exams, some indicating a positively inhuman absence of bedside manner on the part of alien "physicians."
- Short, slight visitors with almond eyes or robotlike creatures that can be kindly, cruel or dispassionately curious.

No one can say for sure whether the rash of recent UFO encounter and abduc-

See Aliens, F5

## Strangers in the night

The case of Gwen, who believes she was — and continues to be — kidnapped by extraterrestrials conducting mysterious experiments, is typical of UFO abduction reports that have been made public. And like many self-described abductees, she prefers to remain anonymous for fear that her neighbors may turn out to be less understanding than the aliens she suspects examined her during the night.

Here is the way she remembers her encounters:

Things have happened to me all my life that I couldn't explain. My parents said it was the result of my artistic imagination.

My dad worked in aerospace, but I remember being unimpressed with his work. I had this feeling that I had already been in space and that we could already travel to the stars.

The summer of 1968, when I graduated from high school, was the first time I saw a UFO. I was sitting in the front yard with a friend. A bright, golden object swooshed across the horizon. We were living in Midland so you could see a lot of horizon. It stopped on a dime, then *poof!* it was gone.

Soon afterward I had a real strong time-lapse event.

My boyfriend's parents had retired to Ruidoso, N.M. In June, I went to visit him. It was about an hour's drive from their house in the mountains to Roswell, where the airport was.

We left two hours before the plane was to take off. The speed limit was 70 miles an hour. That should have given us plenty of time to get there. We were trucking across the desert when my boyfriend looked at his watch and said, "This is impossible."

He had been driving like a bat out of hell, but when we got to the airport the plane was taxiing out on the runway. I could never explain what happened to that hour and a half of lost time.

On another occasion when my family lived in Tulsa, I woke up in the middle of the night and saw this being standing at the foot of my bed. It had red eyes and wore a black cloak. It was robotic, but not completely — it was mostly a bionic-type being. It had a silver, polished dome head.

I lay there for about 16 minutes looking at this thing, wondering, "What the hell's going on?" I closed my eyes and prayed. "Dear God, please let me understand what's happening here." When I opened my eyes, it was gone.

I learned about much of this event in a hypnotic regression conducted by an Austin psychotherapist. It would have made a really great science-fiction movie.

One night, I bought the book *Communion* and couldn't put it down. I realized that what he was talking about had been happening to me all my life. The hair stood up on the back of my neck.

I've also become aware of a mother ship in the night. I don't know how I know what it is, but most of the time it appears in the eastern sky. It pulsates from blue to white to orange-red, sometimes very rapidly.

If someone had told me two years ago that this would be happening to me, I would have backed away from that person.

I have trouble talking to human beings sometimes. How could I be talking to extraterrestrials?

Handwritten marks at the bottom of the page, including a circled 'X' with a checkmark, a signature 'm', and the number '2' with a checkmark.

# Belief in UFOs comes in several forms

tion accounts represents the early warning signs of an alien invasion or the tabloid-inspired products of fevered imaginations.

But for many, the abduction experience is charged with spiritual overtones. Hard evidence, of course, takes a back seat to faith in such an environment. One of the most common commandments is: Thou shalt not foul thy planet with pollution and armaments, because the visitors won't stand for it.

Glenda Richmond of Austin, who said she has had several close encounters, thinks that the extraterrestrials are contacting a wide range of people.

"In order for there to be change in consciousness, you can't just change the leaders," said Richmond, a computer programmer. "That's why the visitors don't choose only people of power and position."

She said that the governments of the world are conspiring to keep citizens from knowing the truth about the aliens.

"They are supposed to protect us but can't. So they are afraid to tell us what they know. I'm not paranoid. But the people who lead us don't always have the public's best interest in mind."

Richmond said her most memorable encounter came when she was 12 and visiting her grandmother's house in rural Illinois. She recalled that though the second-story bedroom overlooked a 20-foot-deep ravine, an intense beam of light suddenly shot through the window and coursed up and down her body.

"I believe it was an intelligent probe," she said. "It was measuring something indefinable in me. It also gave me information that I would be able to use later."

Richmond, more curious than afraid, went to the window, where she said she saw a spacecraft with red, orange and golden pulsating lights.

"I told my grandmother the next morning, and she said it was just a dream. My family, who already thought I was a strange child, told me I had just imagined or dreamed it."

But Richmond never doubted it was real.

"I had been a blissfully ignorant child. Several days after the visitation I began to change. I decided I was going to get an education and be different from the rest of my family, I became goal-oriented."

Many people who report UFO encounters, however, describe negative experiences that haunted their lives in conscious and subconscious ways.

"I find it appalling there aren't more support groups for people who have had UFO encounters," Richmond said. "Whether these phenomena are authentic or not, people feel they are real. Therefore, we should be able to treat it."

Dan Overlade, a clinical psychologist in Pensacola, Fla., who has conducted hypnosis sessions with half a dozen people reporting close encounters, also thinks it's time to provide help.

But before that can happen, Overlade said, there must be a change in the way such victims are perceived by the health and social science professions.

"When one gentleman who thought he had an abduction told people about it, he was institutionalized briefly and put on Thorazine," he said. "It was considered ipso facto proof of insanity."

Despite the shortage of hard evidence, a Gallup poll reveals that 68 percent of Americans believe UFOs exist. And it seems that those who think there is intelligent life out there have the odds on their side. Carl Sagan, an astronomer who doesn't believe aliens have visited Earth, hypothesizes that in the Milky Way galaxy alone there could be a million planets that might be able to support life.

Believers and disbelievers fall into four basic types, said Michael Rigg, who works for the Mutual UFO Network in Indiana:

- **Blind acceptor:** a UFO watcher who will not change his mind and cannot be swayed no matter what evidence is presented. Unfortunately, Rigg said, more than 85

percent of believers fall into this category.

- **Hypothesizer:** a walking library of UFO lore who can reproduce practically any close-encounter case verbatim. May be reluctant to engage in free thinking.

- **Analyzer:** a person who resists making snap judgments or hypotheses that can't be proven, concentrating on presenting the facts he observes in a logical, coherent manner. The perfect UFO detective, as described in the *MUFON Field Investigator's Manual*.

- **Rejector:** a close cousin of the blind acceptor, he refuses to acknowledge any scientific basis for serious UFO study and may go to considerable lengths to debunk research and eyewitness accounts.

"The only way you can account for these reports on a psychological basis is that the people are schizophrenic, pathological liars or have a rare form of hysteria coupled with memory lapses. But the people I interviewed are none of these."

"I don't know if there are aliens, if the abductees have been physically moved or if they have received some kind of telepathic imagery. But I rather imagine there has been some kind of contact."

Though Overlade, who administered many hours of standard psychological tests to his interviewees, has begun to accept the possibility of extraterrestrial visits, many scientists remain unconvinced.

Harlan Smith, director of the University of Texas McDonald Observatory near Fort Davis, said he tries to keep an open mind while awaiting the presentation of solid evidence.

"I would welcome some exciting, true event involving UFOs," Smith said. "I'm interested in the possibility of extraterrestrial life."

He said that though he has had three UFO experiences, a little research enabled him to identify all of them as natural or manmade phenomena.

Smith, however, has little patience with reported UFO kidnappings and alien encounters.

"The abductions are the stuff of *National Enquirer*," the astronomer said. "There has never been any proof that would hold up in a court of law."

"It is far easier to conclude that we're dealing with the credulity of the public. It is easier to conclude that we're dealing with the desire of some individuals to make money."

Lewis Branscomb, former chief scientist with IBM, also has scoffed at UFOlogy and its excesses: "The stronger the incentive to discover, the greater the temptation to let down one's guard."

The "guard" — call it rational or scientific inquiry — often comes down at UFO conferences, particularly those associated with New Age and psychic phenomena.

Conference participants, for the most part, accept as givens that UFOs exist and that extraterrestrials often drop in unannounced. Common topics of discussion include the motivations and behavior of alien abductors and coping with "post-abduction syndrome."

At a recent event sponsored by the Central Texas Parapsychology

Association in Austin, panelists and audience members shared the thrills, chills and occasional trauma that extraterrestrials reportedly induce in those they visit.

Guest speaker Juanita Deering told how she was once able to identify an extraterrestrial by analyzing his aura, the multi-hued energy field some people believe surrounds living beings.

"The man was definitely not

one of us," she said. "He had a silver aura with metallic dust."

Panel moderator Elaine Ireland, a psychic reader, recalled a UFO experience she had while visiting the ancient Mayan ruins of Palenque, Mexico. She went to the village last year for the Harmonic Convergence, a worldwide New Age event that was supposed to inaugurate a different era of consciousness.

Overlade, past president of Florida Psychological Association, recently agreed to act as a consultant for the Mutual UFO Network. The 2,000-member international organization, based in Seguin, investigates UFO cases in the most careful, empirical manner it can muster.

"One reason I got involved with MUFON was to help make professionals aware that there are victims out there who are experiencing post-traumatic stress disorder similar to that experienced by some Vietnam veterans. Whether their encounters are real or imagined, they are suffering." Fortunately, Overlade said, some cities have support groups where people can go to tell their UFO stories in comfortable environments.

The phenomenon, however, is misunderstood, and the study of its causes relatively new.

"We're gradually escaping the kind of attitude that would lead a competent psychiatrist to throw someone in the hospital for making such a report," Overlade said.

"Five UFOs were dancing in the sky overhead," Ireland said. "They made no attempt to hide. It was like the Thunderbirds (the U.S. Air Force aerobatic team). They were trying to entertain us."

"I've had a psychic impression that in the mid-1990s, some public manifestation will occur. I'm hoping that as a race we'll be able to learn from them."

Walter Andrus, international director of MUFON in Seguin, also is interested in UFO abduction cases, though he is more selective than many UFOlogists about the credibility of the witnesses.

"We stay away from the New Age folks," he said. "No channelers or psychics. We deal in scientific facts."

"We're talking about credible, professional people whose reputations are beyond reproach. And we don't work with people who have histories of alcohol and drug abuse. There are too many legitimate people to talk to."

Andrus said there are more people contacting him with suspicions or reports of UFO abductions than there are qualified

professionals willing to administer hypnosis. The psychological technique is used to explore the subject's often submerged recollections of an encounter.

"One day last week three people called me with abduction reports," he said. "There's a lot of merit to some of their claims. That's one reason (abduction expert) writer Budd Hopkins is on our staff."

Andrus, who has witnessed a number of hypnotic regressions, said the experiences moved him.

"People reliving a real abduction experience often cry and moan. It is traumatic. There are many promising cases. They just have to be sorted out. We go in with our eyes wide open."

"Personal UFO Experiences," a panel discussion sponsored by the Central Texas Parapsychology Association, will be at 7:30 p.m. Feb. 3 at the Austin Marriott, U.S. 290 at Interstate 35. For information, call 331-9593.

For information on the Mutual UFO Network, write to MUFON, 103 Oldtowne Road, Seguin 78155-4099, or call 3-