At UNH: Many captivated by couple's alien abduction story

ROBERT M. COOK | Fosters Daily Democrat

It may have been nearly 50 years since Betty and Barney Hill said they were abducted by a UFO, but their story continues to captivate both believers in extraterrestrials and skeptics alike.

Janet Jillette of Concord said she's firmly believed in UFOs and the Hills' compelling story ever since she saw a UFO in 1973.

It was Labor Day weekend and she, her son and her son's friend were riding their bicycles on Route 87 in Epping at night. Jillette said she suddenly saw a large oval object with bright lights in the sky move back and forth very quickly.

She recalled her son and his friend were frightened, but she was mesmerized.

"It stayed with me all these years," she said. "I believe that they exist. I really do."

Jillette said she saw Betty Hill speak at the annual Portsmouth UFO conference in 2002 a few years before Betty Hill passed away. Barney Hill died in 1969.

Jillette was one of many people who attended a forum and exhibit opening at the University of New Hampshire in Durham Friday afternoon honoring Betty and Barney Hill, their story of being abducted by aliens in 1961 and Barney Hill's work in the civil rights movement.

Jillette pored over the exhibit's documents, photographs and other items at the Milne Special Collections and Archives room at UNH's Dimond Library. Many photos were of Betty Hill or were photos of UFOs that Betty Hill had taken. The exhibit also features a map showing the route the Hills traveled when they were reportedly abducted, the dress Betty Hill wore that night and a bust of an alien nicknamed "Junior," based on the description Betty Hill gave years after the incident.

"She was an amazing lady. I believed her," Jillette said.

George Saufley of Rochester, an aerial observer for the U.S. Forest Service, said he believed the Hills' account also. He attended the forum, held at the Memorial Union Building, along with 30 other people.

He heard Kathleen Marden, Betty Hills' niece, walk the audience through the night of Sept. 19, 1961, when she said her aunt and uncle were abducted by aliens in an area in the White Mountains town of Thornton.

The Hills were on their way home to Portsmouth from a vacation in Canada. The couple said they saw a large spacecraft and that they were taken aboard by aliens who examined them and released them unharmed.

The couple later gained international fame as the story about their alien encounter spread.

Saufley said he's convinced he had contact with extraterrestrials after a vivid dream he had in Maine. He said he dreamed a space ship flew overhead and did an MRI on him from a distance. He said his dream led to premonitions about the Fox Run Mall in Newington a year before it was built and the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks several years before they happened.

"I to this day don't know if it was a dream or a real experience," he said. "Improbable things happen. It's hard to tell reality from fantasy."

But unlike the Hills, he said, "I have never actually seen a UFO."

Marden and Ufologist and nuclear physicist Stanford Friedman recently cowrote a book titled "Captured! The Betty and Barney Hill UFO Experience," detailing the Hills' experience.

Marden said she remembers her aunt telling her mother all about the abduction and swearing her to secrecy. She said the Hills didn't want to tell the world their story because they feared it would hurt their reputations.

She said Betty Hill was concerned she could lose her job as state social worker and Barney Hill was worried he'd lose his job as U.S. Postal worker.

Marden said she spent years researching the Hills' story herself and even took several trips into the White Mountains to retrace their

journey on the night of the abduction. She also showed slides of the area in Thornton, located off Millbrook Road, where the Hills say the abduction took place after the aliens hovered near and over their car along Route 3 from Indian Head to Thornton. Marden said that area is now a housing development.

Marden said she's convinced the abduction happened, based on everything the couple shared with her and the recorded recollections made by the couple while Dr. Benjamin Simon put them under hypnosis in Boston.

She said one of the most telling clues is how the Hills were put under hypnosis separately and related the same details about their alien captors, what occurred on the spacecraft and how they were abducted.

Marden said both Betty and Barney Hill said they saw eight to 11 men at a roadblock after they drove onto Millbrook Road near a steel bridge. They also said there were later approached by three men as they sat in their car.

"One man put his hand out and I don't know what happened," Betty Hill said on one recording Marden played.

"This provided evidence to me this was a real experience at this point," Marden said.

During those sessions, which lasted several months, Marden said the Hills described in great detail what their captors looked like, the inside of the spacecraft, and even a star chart Betty Hill said one alien showed her when she asked the alien where they came from.

Marden said the couple's car also had several spots on the body where the aliens had used a beam that made their car and bodies vibrate. The spots faded away during the winter of 1962, but Marden said when the couple put a compass on the hood of their car, the needle would just spin and spin.

Some people who attended the forum said they find the Hills' story fascinating even if they remain skeptical about UFOs.

Bob Reed, a retired UNH librarian, said he came to the university around the same time the news broke about the Hills' abduction in the Boston Traveler in 1965.

"I find it interesting that there seems to be people who've had experiences," he said.

Catherine Adams of Northwood, a sophomore at UNH, said she attended the forum because her English class is reading Marden's book and she wanted to learn more about the Hill's story.

"I think it's possible. Anything is possible," Adams said. "It happened so long ago, but you really don't hear about anything happening nowadays."

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