

# ALTERNATIVES

T O D A Y

## Alien alert

It is claimed up to 5 per cent of Americans have experienced being abducted by aliens. Now a support group for such people has started in Perth. KRISTEN WATTS reports.

**W**HEN you talk with 14-year-old Melissa, the first thing you notice is that she is well-spoken, pragmatic and mature for her age. But in many ways, she is not the normal teenager she appears to be.

Melissa is one of a growing number of Australians who believe they have been visited by aliens.

It is a phenomenon which has led to the start this year of an Abductee Support Group in Perth. Melissa and her mother, Maree (not their real names), are among the 11 members of the group.

Melissa's experiences date back about 12 months. They started when her mother had a dream of going up to a spaceship.

"A few days later I was lying down on my mum's bed," Melissa said. "We were just talking while she was getting ready to go out and suddenly at the end of the bed I saw something.

"It was just like energy and I thought I might play with it with my foot but as I looked at it a bit more, it seemed to be a different shape. I was playing with it and it felt warm and when I closed my eyes I saw this image."

It had the shape of an alien, with an elongated, oval-shaped head and big eyes. "It gave me a really big shock," she said. "After that whole thing happened, I was shocked, amazed and excited all at the same time."

Since then Melissa says she has been taken up on spaceships by different types of aliens.

"One time they took me into a room where there was the equivalent to huge telescopes, I guess, and when you looked into them, you could zoom in on any planet," she said.

Some of the encounters had been unpleasant. During a recent experience she had been paralysed for about 10 minutes before being taken on to a spaceship.

Melissa's mother also claimed to have encounters with aliens but said she did not deal with them as well as her daughter.

She had not seen the being Melissa had seen on the edge of her bed but had gradually started seeing aliens in energy form.

"I think I would be too frightened if I actually saw one (an alien) but I'm trying to get more courageous," she said.

"For the last 12 months it has been like my life has been put on another planet. No matter how much you try to tell yourself that you are dreaming, you know it is real."

Her experiences had often been terrifying and she had been paralysed regularly for up to 10 minutes by the aliens.

She believed people were sceptical about claims of alien abduction because the subject was a relatively new one.

"We have been brought up with the idea that we are the only intelligent life-form," she said. "So what we need to do is start talking about the possibilities. We need people to start thinking about what they have been conditioned to believe is the opposite to reality."

Counsellor Mary Rodwell, who specialises in dealing with alien abductions and helps run the support group, said she believed that up to 5 per cent of the American population were "experiencers".

"That is a huge number," she said. "And I believe that estimate may be conservative."

"I can't begin to work out how many people have contact here in Australia but I personally know of at least 31 experiencers," she said. "And that I know is conservative because there are others that I have just heard about but haven't actually met."

Mrs Rodwell, who has a background in nursing and midwifery but has never experienced alien abduction, admitted the concept of people having encounters with aliens shocked her at first.



"I was presented with my first abductee case about 14 months ago now and it blew me away," she said.

"I didn't know what to do with it. The gentleman who was sitting in front of me telling me about his meetings with these beings sounded credible, he appeared to be sane and he was talking to me in a matter-of-fact way.

"He was more concerned about how I was going to listen to him. More than anything he wanted someone to listen to him and I could see it was a great relief to have someone to talk to.

"But what he was telling me was bizarre."

Ms Rodwell was doing an advanced counselling course after winding up four years of work as a professional counsellor for a big Perth agency working with people on pregnancy issues, and relationship and adolescent problems.

She said the meeting encouraged her to find

out more about alien abduction and she soon had more clients with abduction stories.

"A lot of people are freaked out and don't want to talk about it," she said. "They won't go to normal therapists because they are frightened about what will happen."

Her clients had often told her they were afraid of ridicule.

People who come to her for help are treated with counselling, coping strategies and regression, which involves relaxing the client and taking them back through the events of the past.

"I honour their experiences — it is very important to remember that," she said. "I am not here to make a judgment. All I know is that I am treating real fear, real trauma. The symptoms are there. I can't say what has caused them. All I can do is treat the problem."

Mrs Rodwell and Elizabeth Robinson, a social worker and transpersonal therapist, started the support group.

Ms Robinson is also an experiencer and draws on her own contact with aliens to help others. She claimed that aliens regularly visited her in her home and she had had terrifying experiences of being experimented on after being taken up on spaceships.

"There was a time when I turned to my husband in fear saying, 'This is real, this is happening,' and he just looked at me as if to say, 'You are ridiculous,'" she said.

"It is lonely because you don't have anybody to talk to and this is confronting to the extreme. It is an enormous relief to get this out and to hear that others are experiencing the same thing."

To contact the Abductee Support Group, write to PO Box N1083, Perth, WA 6843.

● Book investigates abduction claims

— Today 18



Main picture: Melissa and her mother, Marie, who say they have been abducted by aliens.

Picture: RON D'RAINE

Above: Elizabeth Robinson (left) and Mary Rodwell from the Abductee Support Group.

Picture: DIONE DAVIDSON

## They're just dreaming, say Skeptics

**P**EOPLE claim to have been abducted by aliens because they crave attention, according to Australian Skeptics UFO spokesperson Steven Roberts.

He said abductees felt special or different because of their alleged contact with aliens and were often upset when someone was able to explain the encounters away.

"When you go in there and give them a logical explanation for what they say has been happening, they are devastated," Dr Roberts said.

"I have had the experience myself where I have seen something unexplained and felt very privileged but when I was told there was an explanation, I felt a real let-down."

Alien abductions and visits

could usually be explained as vivid dreams which the experiencer interpreted or misread as reality.

Abductees often complained of experiencing phenomena such as missing time but Dr Roberts said missing time was something that everyone experienced.

"For instance, you could be at work and look up and think, 'Gosh, is that the time?' but if

you were into this alien thing you would think you had been abducted."

The lack of any substantiated evidence also discredited alien abduction claims, he said.

"With so many people claiming to have been abducted, it is not unreasonable to expect that there would be some good evidence of the visits. But there isn't any," he said.

# UFO update

**B**EEN snatched by aliens lately? Most of the time, author and UFO researcher Keith Basterfield believes people's claims and will refer them to a psychologist for help.

But he examines some alternatives to extraterrestrial kidnapping in his latest book, *UFOs: A Report on Australian Encounters*.

The book comes at a time when all things alien seem to have completed the leap from sci-fi/fantasy geekdom into the mainstream.

X-File freaks and Trekkies — not to mention the people who make the Twisties ads — are apparently not the only ones hoping the skies are chockablock with spacecraft.

There have been at least three recent books about UFOs in Australia and there are 30 UFO groups.

Adelaide-based Basterfield, 46, is a social scientist who works as a local government community development officer.

For the book he interviewed 300 Australians to update his 1981 edition. The catalogue of reported encounters dates from 1868.

"People who know about the subject have appreciated a middle-of-the-road approach to the topic, that is, not an absolute believer but not an absolute sceptic," Basterfield said.

The most popular WA spot for UFO sightings was around Mount Magnet, where people often reported big balls of light at 100m or 200m from their vehicles, he said.

Many people often mistook weather balloons and the changing appearance of stars and planets for UFOs.

"Alien abductees" often said they had implants put into their bodies during experiments on spaceships but Basterfield said there was no physical evidence of this.

In the book, Basterfield discusses examples of female abductees reporting markings near, and infections of, their reproductive

organs and other places as proof of these "experiments".

"In Western Christianity we have stigmata . . . we know it is possible for markings to appear on a human skin, formed by what medical science will tell you is just the human mind," he said.

"So it could be an explanation (for the markings) in abduction cases. But there's no way of knowing."

Basterfield examines the "all in the mind" theories he initially thought would explain the whole UFO phenomenon.

He explores lucid dreaming and false awakenings as possible explanations (where you might dream you have woken up and then you actually do wake up).

The intense imagery generated by most people during the twilight between being awake and asleep is examined.

He notes that after aliens had either abducted people from bedrooms or appeared to them there, people often immediately went to bed and fell asleep when one might have expected them to be highly anxious and unable to sleep.

Basterfield also examines the "fantasy prone personality", discovered by American researchers in 1981, which could include up to 4 per cent of the population.

These people had no mental illnesses but exceptional "image generating capacities", over which they seemed to exercise no control.

They were excellent hypnotic subjects. At least 60 per cent of women reported at least one false pregnancy and 92 per cent said they were psychic.

"Enid Blyton wrote her books like this," he said. "Apparently clear, colourful, moving images just appeared in thin air in front of her and she just sat there and typed what they were doing."



Keith Basterfield: "People have appreciated a middle-of-the-road approach."

But he concludes known psychological processes do not seem to explain most abduction reports.

Most people were stable people claiming extraordinary experiences.

To Basterfield, it seems unusual that abductees or witnesses report similar-looking aliens — tall and hairless and slender or dwarf-like.

"If you were going to put it down to the fantasies of the human brain, I think you'd expect to find a bigger spectrum of 'beings' being reported and a larger range of possible encounters," he said.

"It all boils down to people being stopped in their cars, or bedroom visitations."

He says there is no government UFO

cover up in Australia, citing the "very interesting cases" displayed in air force files — the RAAF stopped investigating UFO reports in 1984.

"I can't say yes (alien life forms) are visiting at the moment based on what I know but it's a strong possibility," he said.

"People say extraordinary claims need extraordinary evidence. And that's what we're trying to find."

●UFOs: A Report on Australian Encounters is published by Reed, \$14.95. The catalogue of sightings — half Basterfield's book — will be available shortly on the Internet.

Vanessa Gould

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