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CALIFORNIA / Father of two claims he was abducted by aliens while camping

Man describes close encounter of the weirdest kind

By **BEN HELLWARTH**

N.Y.T. Regional Newspapers

SANTA BARBARA, Calif. — Clarence Walker knows he was abducted by space aliens.

He also knows that you would think he's crazy for believing this, which is why he didn't want to use his real name and prefers not to discuss what happened the night he went camping near Red Rock Canyon north of Santa Barbara, Calif.

But if you can get him to talk, what you'll hear is an emotional account that has become so familiar that some mental health professionals think stories about alien abductions deserve to be taken seriously.

The so-called UFO abduction syndrome is still written off as a sleep disorder or hallucination by many experts. But accounts of ordinary, apparently sane people like Mr. Walker have intrigued others in recent years, perhaps most notably John E. Mack, a Harvard Medical School psychiatrist who won a 1977 Pulitzer Prize for his psychoanalytic biography of Lawrence of Arabia.

"The fact that a phenomenon defies conventional explanation, or even challenges our notions of reality, should not permit us to ignore its existence or prevent us from exploring its dimensions and significance," Mr. Mack wrote last year.

He has declined to be interviewed while finishing his forthcoming book, due out in April, called *Abduction: Human Encounters with Aliens*.

Like the 1991 Roper Organization survey — commissioned by

UFO believers — that suggested one in 50 adult Americans has been kidnapped by space aliens, Mr. Mack's book is certain to fuel the debate about the feelings and experiences that people like Mr. Walker typically describe.

Mr. Walker, a 42-year-old father of two who looks like anyone you might see in line at the supermarket, vividly recalls the night more than two decades ago that he, along with four teen-age chums, hiked from Paradise Road toward Red Rock Canyon and set up camp.

Early the next morning, just before sunrise, Mr. Walker woke up and found himself outside his sleeping bag a few paces from the Santa Ynez River.

That was strange, because when he went to sleep he had been inside the bag at the campsite, which was farther from the river.

What followed was even more strange, Mr. Walker said. A yellowish, oval-shaped light, with blinking blue and red lights around the edges, zigzagged mysteriously over the water for several minutes. He woke up one of his friends so that he, too, could witness the light.

Mr. Walker remembers pinching his friend to make sure they were both awake. They were awake, all right.

Then the light vanished.

Mr. Walker didn't remember much else about that night. But for years he had recurring nightmares and would wake up feeling as though he didn't know where he was.

It wasn't until a friend recommended a popular book on UFO abductions that something clicked. As



J. ALBERT DIAZ / Los Angeles Times

Hypnotherapist Yvonne Smith, who leads support groups in Southern California for people who believe they have been abducted by extra terrestrials, has gathered these representations of the supposed aliens.

Mr. Walker read, he began to sob uncontrollably.

Under hypnosis, he learned that what happened that night out at Red Rock was a lot like what happened in *Communion*, Whitley Strieber's 1987 best seller that was made into a movie about his own close encounter of the fourth kind (abduction).

Mr. Walker now remembers

seeing four gray-skinned, bug-eyed aliens at his feet. A flash of white light left him numb, unable to move. Immobilized, he was lifted in a blue beam of light inside a craft. Mushroom-colored faces loomed over him as he lay naked on a platform.

His left arm was probed. Invasive procedures were performed on his rectum and genitals. He was told he would not remember what happened to him. Two taller aliens did something to his head that caused him to black out.

Eventually, he remembers waking up outside his sleeping bag to the sight of the zigzagging light.

UFO sightings, nightmares and anxiety provoked by the mention of UFOs are some of the common symptoms that so-called abductees report. So are episodes of missing time, bright lights, high-pitched buzzing and seemingly inexplicable scars or scoop marks on the body.

"This is very, very typical. I hear this over and over again," said

Yvonne Smith, a Los Angeles hypnotherapist and founder of an abductee support group called the Close Encounter Research Organization, or CERO.

It is often under hypnosis — another controversial subject — that abduction stories similar to Mr. Walker's surface.

The anxiety and depression abductees often feel is similar to the post-traumatic stress disorder suffered by war veterans or accident victims.

"Our understanding of post-traumatic stress disorder is that something objectively happened to these people," said Michael Lindemann, the Santa Barbara researcher who wrote *UFOs and the Alien Presence — Six Viewpoints*.

That's what Rima Laibow, a New York psychiatrist, has found. She got interested in the subject in 1988 after a patient she knew suddenly became highly upset after walking by a row of books in which *Communion* was displayed.

Ms. Laibow founded TREAT (Treatment and Research of Experienced Anomalous Trauma). The international group is devoted to the subject of alleged alien abductions, which Ms. Laibow prefers to call "experienced anomalous trauma."

"We take no stand on the reality status. We're looking at a way to explore the phenomenon — sociologically, philosophically and psychologically," she said.

But experts like Carl Sagan say that the whole UFO abduction phenomenon is nothing but a modern-day version of age-old tales of witches, fairies and demons.

"These stories have been with us since the beginning of time," said Robert Baker, a retired University of Kentucky psychology professor. "Only recently do we have little gray aliens from outer space."

An abundance of sci-fi images in books and films feed people the idea that aliens lurk in our midst, Mr. Baker said.

Combine that pervasive media influence with the relatively common phenomenon of sleep paralysis and you've got legions of potential space aliens, Mr. Baker and others say.

As far as Mr. Walker is concerned, however, his abduction experience was real — and disturbing.

"This feeling is no feeling that I would wish for anybody to have."

Ben Hellwarth is a staff writer for the Santa Barbara (Calif.) News-Press.

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