

ALIENATED

They're close encounters of the worst kind. And more and more people are saying they've had them

BY TANYA BARRIENTOS
Knight-Ridder News Service

IT USUALLY happens at night.

"Almost always the event is accompanied by a light source, an unnatural light source that is not headlights or street lights," said Wendy, a Philadelphia area woman who asked that her last name not be used.

"This light source enables them to travel. It's an energy field of some sort."

Wendy, 30, an articulate woman with a job and a family and strong religious values, is convinced that space aliens have been abducting her for years. Recently they've begun abducting her two children as well.

She is not alone.

Alleged alien abduction is all over the media, in books, on television, as fiction and even as could-be fact:

■ Much attention is being given to "Abduction," a new book by Harvard University psychiatrist John E. Mack that recounts first-person tales of space-alien abductions that Mack has certified as real.

■ Omni, a national science magazine, is running a six-part series about an alleged government cover-up of UFO visits since the 1940s.

■ The Weekly World News, a supermarket tabloid, recently ran a front-page headline declaring: "12 U.S. Senators Are Space Aliens!"

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Abductees have appeared on "The Oprah Winfrey Show," and have even hit big-time news shows such as "48 Hours" with Dan Rather and "Dateline NBC."

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camp say that through hypnosis and regression therapy, they've been able to uncover exactly what the space aliens are up to.

Skeptics, on the other hand, say the reports could be the side effect of a strange physical occurrence similar to sleepwalking. And doubts have been growing about all kinds of memories unearthed during hypnosis, from child abuse to past lives.

Indisputable evidence, however, is scarce on both sides.

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For 18 months, Wendy has been hypnotized by David Jacobs, a Temple University history professor who in 1992 wrote "Secret Life: Firsthand Accounts of UFO Abductions." She says Jacobs has been helping her re-create her experiences from her subconscious.

"One or two beings will come in with the light and take myself and my kids," she said in a recent interview at Jacobs' home office.

"Normally they just look at me. They have an ability with their eyes and their minds to give almost like a sedative effect, to knock you out and make you go without feelings of your own," Wendy said. "You become robotic. With that mind control, that's part of what facilitates their ability to make you forget. . . ."

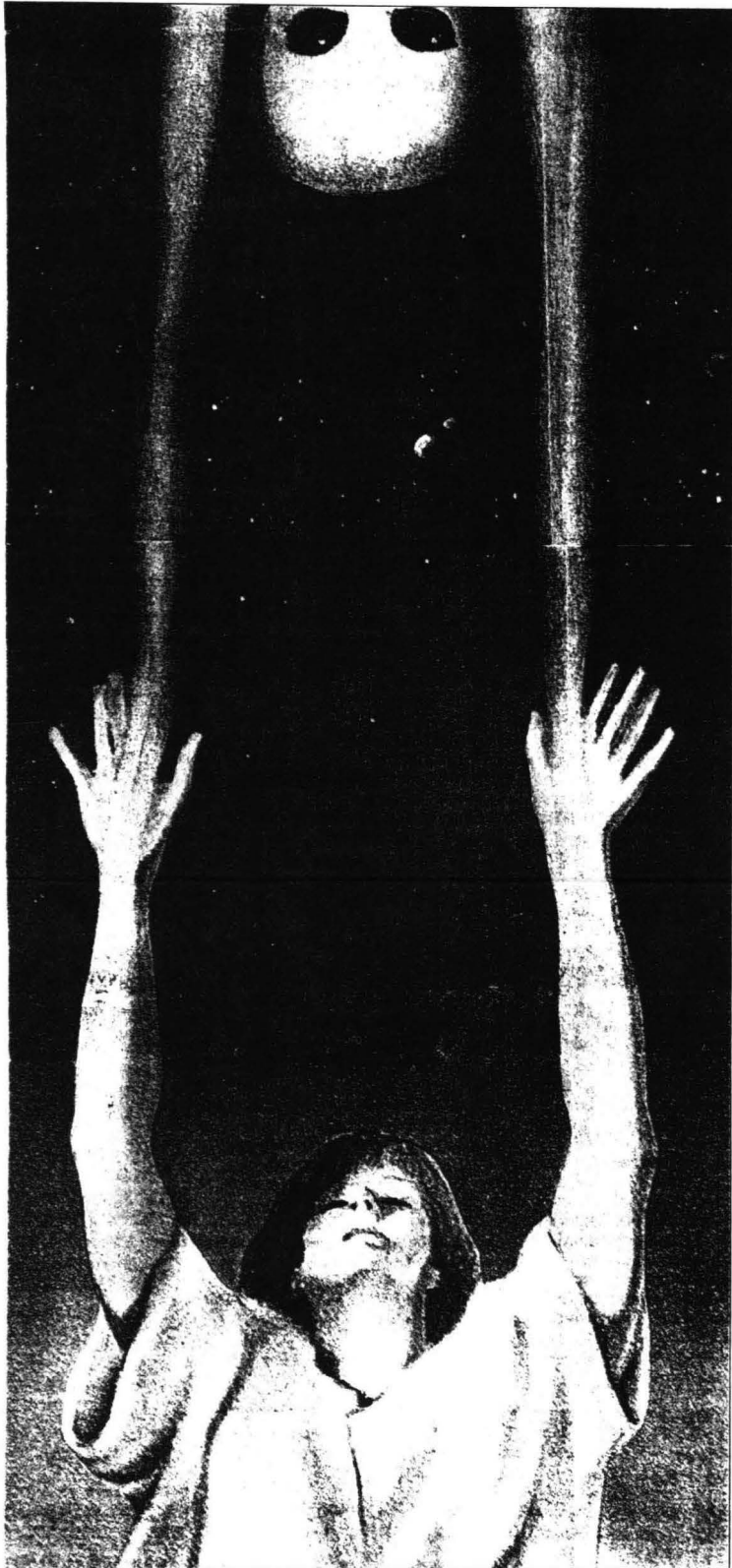
Wendy stopped herself, and then added: "I can't blame people for not being able to digest it, for not believing. I just ask that people don't make fun of me because I do believe it."

It took her a while, she said, to accept it herself.

For as long as she can remember, Wendy said she's seen "odd" things, balls of light following her and unexplained shadows in her house.

"But they would be far enough apart that I'd just say, 'What in the world?' and then go about my day."

But that all changed 18 months ago. That was when her 7-year-old son, afraid to sleep in his own room, woke up in terror while sleeping in



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Wendy's bedroom.

"He said he'd seen two alien beings in my bedroom," Wendy said. "He consciously remembered seeing these things, wide awake."

Wendy said neither she nor her husband had an interest in such things as UFOs or space aliens. They asked the boy to draw a picture of what he saw.

"He sat down and drew big heads with big black eyes," Wendy said. "He knew nothing about aliens and we hadn't shown him any movies with them so there was no way my son could have picked this up somewhere."

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Like Jacobs, Mack uses hypnotherapy, with all its attendant

dangers of suggestion. Wendy's account is similar to the 13 in Mack's book — and, for that matter, to those in Jacobs' book.

Mack performed psychiatric evaluations on more than 100 alleged abductees. He contends that their sincerity, the sheer honesty he felt in their narratives, and an apparent lack of psychiatric instability, convinced him that they were telling the truth.

"I originally thought it (alien abduction) was not possible in the reality in which I was raised," said Mack, in a telephone interview. "I didn't write anything about it for the first two years that I studied it."

Mack's academic credentials give his work some credibility. He is professor at the Harvard Medi-

cal School's Cambridge Hospital and the author of "A Prince of Our Disorder: The Life of T.E. Lawrence," which won a Pulitzer Prize in 1977. The New York Times printed a serious review of "Abduction," and Mack has been on a national public relations tour defending its authenticity.

"I think it (the abduction theory) is coming out of the marginalized status into the forefront," Mack said. "The denial is beginning to break down. . . . I think it's becoming increasingly legitimized."

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Once aboard the spaceship, Wendy says she and her fellow abductees (rarely is she alone on board) are disrobed and placed on

examination tables. "They have a standard physical, a head-to-toe check, kind of like to make sure there have been no changes in the specimen," she said. "They check the nose, eyes, throat, mouth, they run their hands down your legs and back."

In books about abductions, victims report that the aliens often take sperm from men and implant alien embryos into women. Wendy said it's happened to her. She said she's felt pregnant after some abductions.

"Once I missed my period for three months and I called the doctor," she said. "I made an appointment with the doctor, and the day before they (the aliens) came and it was done."

"It" refers to a procedure that

Wendy said the aliens do to extract fetuses and "put them in these columns with water. Well, I say 'water,' but I don't know what it is."

Wendy said sometimes abductees are led into the incubation room and made to look at the fetuses. Sometimes they are shown what looks like a nursery. "It's a room with children . . . Some look very alien-like, but they have some human qualities," Wendy said. "You can tell there has been a genetic splicing."

Once home, neither Wendy nor her children remember much about the abductions. But, she said, she has found what she considers solid evidence:

"Many times I've come back and my underwear is on inside-out and backwards, or I'll have no underwear at all," Wendy said. "Once I woke up with a sock on my hand instead of my foot. Sometimes my kids and I have woken up and everyone is in a different bed."

She also cites bruises that appear overnight and scars she believes have been left by the aliens' medical instruments.

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One possible explanation is something called sleep paralysis, a strange physical state somewhere between sleep and wakefulness.

David Hufford, professor of medical humanities and behavioral science at Penn State University College of Medicine, has been researching sleep paralysis for 20 years.

Normally, he said, the body's central nervous system goes limp during dream sleep. That paralysis keeps people from physically acting out their dreams. During sleep paralysis, the body remains limp, even though the person is conscious and no longer asleep or dreaming.

"They are aware of their environment. . . . No matter what the person's cultural background, with no regard of what they believe in, the majority are convinced that at the time there is a threatening presence in the room with them," Hufford said.

That's why, he said, people who report alien abductions claim they are not dreaming. Because, Hufford said, they are fully conscious while still suffering from an abnormal condition that sometimes leads to hallucinations.

"People report that the presence sometimes looks humanoid," said Hufford. "The little grays (the alleged aliens) sound a lot like gnomes or elves that people historically reported."

Hufford said victims of sleep paralysis from all over the world report similar occurrences, which include strange visitors and even the feeling of being prodded by the beings.

"The similarities are just too great for a coincidence," he said.

But Mack says abductions have occurred when people are not asleep. "Debunkers will invent the most outlandish of explanations," he said.