

The Extraterrestrial Therapist

Dr. David Gotlib treats those who believe they've been abducted by space aliens. He doesn't think they're crazy



When I met Dr. David Gotlib at a mutual friend's in May, 1992, he had just returned from an exotic country where he and several others met with a famous world figure to get his views on UFO abductions. "Please don't mention the country or the person," he asked, "because his enemies could use it against him that he even discussed the subject seriously." At that point, I knew little about the complex, bizarre, and often paranoid UFO subculture to which Gotlib, a Toronto psychotherapist, belongs. That would soon change.

"Next month I'm taking part in a five-day scientific conference on abductions," Gotlib said. Ufologists (their term) refer to abductions by aliens as CE4s – Close Encounters of the Fourth Kind. In a typical abduction, a female child or woman (the majority, by far, are female) is forcibly removed from her bed or from an automobile, levitated into a spacecraft, and subjected to experiments on her reproductive system while lying naked on a Y-shaped table. By most accounts, the abductions are horrifying and comparable to rape.

"They're letting a few media attend but only if you agree not to disclose the location and not to quote anyone who doesn't want to be quoted," Gotlib went on. "A lot of people don't want to be associated with this topic." That's understandable considering the intense ridicule faced by anyone who reports alien visits. It's also dangerous for accredited therapists to admit their interest in and acceptance of the outer edges of the paranormal, which makes Gotlib a most unusual – some would say foolhardy – exception. Quiet and shy, the thirty-seven-year-old therapist is one of the few mental-health professionals in North America, perhaps the only one in Canada, willing to treat people who believe they've been abducted by aliens, a number that runs into the thousands worldwide. ▶

by Paul McLaughlin

"The people I've seen - and I've worked with about seventy of them so far - are not crazy, they're not psychotic," he says, adding that UFO cases make up less than five per cent of his practice. While most people scoff at abduction reports as delusions of the mentally unstable or concoctions of publicity seekers who've read too many supermarket tabloids, Gotlib believes those descriptions apply only to a few isolated cases. "I'm certain something objective is happening [to the abductees] that is causing them real trauma," he says. "Now what that is I don't know exactly, but I'm open to a variety of interpretations."

Gotlib does not believe aliens are literally visiting earth. "I lean towards the 'imaginal' theory put forth by Ken Ring," he says, referring to the U.S. psychology professor and author of *The Omega Project: Near-Death Experiences, UFO Encounters, and Mind at Large*. Ring hypothesizes that abduction reports "are real but... they take place in an imaginal world... that you can tune into if you have the right faculty of expression." The imaginal, Ring emphasizes, should not be confused with the imaginary. A complex concept to understand, an imaginal experience is similar to a lucid dream, where the dreamer is awake and can feel every emotion and sensation that takes place. Ring likens the imaginal to another dimension, one that has its own form and reality. From his study of near-death experiences

(NDEs) and UFO abductees, he concludes that some people have "an encounter-prone personality," which makes them "vulnerable to a variety of extraordinary encounters." Many have suffered childhood abuse or trauma. "If you disconnect from the ordinary world," he says, "you don't just go numb, you go elsewhere, you find other realities."

While Gotlib professes no certainty as to what causes the abduction traumas, he is unwavering in his belief that self-described abductees, many of whom display classic symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, have a right to professional treatment. Most professional therapists, however, refuse even to discuss UFOs with a patient. As a result, many abductees turn instead to the diverse UFO community for support and affirmation. Once connected with an investigator, usually a self-bestowed title, most undergo hypnosis to help remember and explore abductions, particularly from their childhood. (Some also remember abductions consciously.) Hypnosis is seen as an effective method to unlock forgotten abduction memories, which ufologists believe the aliens deliberately cause the victim to repress.

Induced into a highly suggestible state by amateur hypnotists, some abductees have suffered emotional and even sexual abuse. The cause is usually, although not always, the investigator's ignorance. "Almost all investigators are male, and the majority of abductees are female, and younger," says Gotlib, pointing out that some hypnosis sessions take place in hotel rooms. "In one example that I know of, a male UFO investigator made an inappropriate sexual advance on the woman abductee while she was in a trance. It triggered repressed sexual-abuse trauma from her past and she ultimately suffered a nervous breakdown." Gotlib tells of cases where people contemplated suicide after dealing with investigators, a concern echoed by Dr. Jo Stone-Carmen, an Arizona therapist. "Thirteen out of twenty-three abductees I worked with [in one period] considered suicide," she says.

"The main reason I'm going to this conference," Gotlib says, "is to

fight for the establishment of ethics and standards to protect abductees. These 'investigators' are playing with something far more dangerous than they realize."

David Gotlib stepped unknowingly into the UFO community in 1986. A recent medical graduate who had studied hypnosis, he had just begun practising hypnotherapy when a woman randomly picked his name from the register of the Ontario Society of Clinical Hypnosis. She suffered from anxiety, nightmares, insomnia, and other ailments she believed were connected to a UFO experience. "She called four or five other hypnotherapists from the registry but they refused to see her," Gotlib recalls during an interview in his Toronto home, which is decorated in a kind of Art-Deco space-age chic. He's reclining in a large black leather chair that wouldn't look out of place on the *Starship Enterprise*. "I guess they assumed she was paranoid or schizophrenic or whatever, but I didn't think I was in a position to make that determination over the phone, so I agreed to see her."

Although the woman described a classic abduction scenario, she and Gotlib discovered through traditional therapy techniques that her problems were caused by identifiable earthly concerns. This initial contact had two important ramifications: it established Gotlib, through ensuing word of mouth, as a therapist who'd lend a sympathetic ear to abductee tales; and it imprinted his consciousness with the need to treat UFO patients with the same standards and practices as anyone reporting emotional distress or trauma.

Gotlib's empathy with abductees is buried in his own background. Short and slight with curly hair, he has a serious nature that strikes you first, although his compassion soon emerges. "I was quite seriously clinically depressed from thirteen to twenty-eight," he says. "I didn't realize I was depressed and people around me didn't realize [it] because I was highly functioning." Following an especially bad bout of despair, a friend took Gotlib to the head of a Toronto mood-disorder clinic. He was immediately diagnosed as depressed and was prescribed therapy and antidepressant drugs. Gotlib's world changed dramatically. "I had been in a state in which all I

knew and could perceive was coloured in shades of grey. Now I had a palette, a rainbow of colours." It also taught him "a deep appreciation for experiences outside my understanding or biography."

Gotlib begins his treatment of abductees by taking a complete medical, psychological, and biographical history. "I attempt to discover whether they're psychotic, schizophrenic, drug abusers," he says. "I've had people come to me with sleep paralysis, hypnagogic hallucinations [referring to the period just before the advent of sleep], and hypnopompic hallucinations [the period between sleep and full awakening]. Nocturnal panic attacks. All of which have flavours of the abduction experience. In sleep paralysis, your consciousness is awake and your eyes are open but you can't move the rest of your body because your voluntary muscle system has not yet been activated. It's quite frightening. It happened to me a couple of times in medical school. But if you're a lay person and you read about [abduction reports] where these creatures came in and the person couldn't move [in bed] you might say, 'Gee, that was me.' If I think they need to be referred to a sleep laboratory or a psychiatrist, I tell them."

If there's no clinical explanation for the UFO encounters, Gotlib

Gotlib doesn't believe aliens are literally visiting earth. But something, he says, is happening and he's open to a variety of interpretations.



explores the abductions as part of the therapy. What often emerges after he and his patients have dealt with the terrifying aspects of the memories is the redefining of the experiences as "transcendent or visionary." Many abductees receive messages from the aliens about the need to prevent nuclear holocaust and save the environment. Often these revelations – the abductees are often shown images of future global destruction – inspire positive changes in their lives, both spiritual and practical. Joyce Halfin, a patient of Godlib's, now hosts "Interstellar: The UFO Show," on community television in Newmarket, Ontario. "[The aliens] basically told me to get off my ass, stop watching Phil Donahue and eating cookies, and do something with my life." Godlib finds that, once an abductee perceives the trauma to have some larger meaning, "the experiences slow down, decrease in frequency, and, with some people, stop altogether."

"But that doesn't seem to happen with people who go to the UFO investigators," I say.

"I find that notable," he replies.

Budd Hopkins is the world's leading UFO investigator. A sixty-three-year-old artist whose abstract works have been collected by such illustrious galleries as the Guggenheim and the Whitney Museum of American Art, Hopkins lives in a spacious and multi-levelled Manhattan apartment that serves as his home, studio, and the office for the Intruders Foundation, a not-for-profit organization he established to further research into UFO abduction reports. Tape cassettes of hypnosis sessions are piled everywhere, along with stacks of articles, research documents, and boxes, several marked "unopened," crammed with letters from around the world.

"I did a mail log [recently] and figured I was getting ten to twelve letters a day that were largely new cases or people asking for information," Hopkins says. "I [also] receive about two phone calls a day." "I'd guess that at least eighty per cent of abduction cases go through Budd," ventures a colleague.

Hopkins first became intrigued by UFOs in 1964, when he sighted a curious object in the sky over Cape Cod. That was some seventeen years after the modern UFO era began, on June 24, 1947, when an American civilian pilot named Kenneth Arnold claimed to have seen nine crescent-shaped objects skittering through the mountains in the state of Washington, at speeds far beyond the capability of man-made aircraft. "They flew like a saucer would if you skipped it across the water," Arnold told a newspaper reporter, coining one of this century's most memorable phrases. Hundreds of similar sightings followed. The 1950s marked the advent of "contactees," people who spun elaborate tales of visits with aliens and jaunts through the galaxies on spaceships. Like the abductees of today, contactees played the role of the chosen few, regaling the public with messages from their "Space Brothers" to end war, stop testing atomic weapons, and live in peace. Their "mission," as they described it, aptly reflected the collective fears of the Cold-War 1950s.

The public's interest in UFOs faded for a time, only to be rekindled in 1966 with the publication of the October 4 and 11 issues of *Look* magazine, which featured excerpts from a book on the purported abduction by aliens of Americans Betty and Barney Hill. According to *Interrupted Journey: Two Lost Hours Aboard a Flying Saucer* by John G. Fuller, the Hills were driving from Montreal to Portsmouth, New Hampshire, on September 19, 1961, when they were kidnapped onto a spacecraft and subjected to physical examinations. They repressed the memory until it came out during a hypnotic-regression session with a prominent Boston psychiatrist and



"They flew like a saucer would if you skipped it across the water," said the first man to report UFOs, coining a memorable phrase

neurologist, Benjamin Simon, whom they had consulted because of their lingering uneasiness over their two "lost hours."

Among Betty's memories was the insertion of a needle into her abdomen as part of a "pregnancy test," which is how the small, large-eyed aliens described it to her telepathically.

The excerpts introduced a basic abduction template to Western society, one that featured "missing time," medical experimentation on women, telepathic communication, and hypnotic regression. Was the flood of similar abduction tales in the decades ahead a result of "hysterical contagion," also known as "cultural tracking," whereby people believe something has happened to them after they learn it's happened to others? Or was the Hill case simply the first big break in solving an incredible cosmic puzzle?

Budd Hopkins was one of the many fascinated readers of the Hills' disturbing adventure. His deep obsession with UFOs began to evolve nine years later. In November, 1975, Hopkins had a casual conversation with the seventy-two-year-old tectotal owner of a liquor store across the street from his Manhattan studio. (Coincidentally, NBC had broadcast *The UFO Incident*, a TV movie about the Betty and Barney Hill case, on October 20, 1975.) The rough-hewn New Yorker nervously confided to Hopkins that he had recently seen a thirty-foot-around spacecraft land in New Jersey's North Hudson Park early in the morning. About ten small beings that "looked like kids in snowsuits" descended from the craft and began to dig up soil samples.

Hopkins undertook his own investigation and found enough evidence to convince himself an inhabited UFO had indeed landed on the perimeter of downtown Manhattan. In March, 1976, he published his findings in the *Village Voice*. Other witnesses, who had been too afraid of ridicule to come forward at the time, emerged. Hopkins was propelled to the forefront of the UFO community.

The two books he wrote in the 1980s, as well as his frequent media appearances and presentations at UFO conferences, have since made Hopkins the lightning rod for the world's UFO abductees. *Missing Time* (1981) presented his thesis that an unexplained loss of time, particularly in conjunction with the appearance on the body of previously undetected incisions and scoop marks, was a high indicator of alien abduction. Positing that the abduction memory was probably erased by "some sort of posthypnotic suggestion," Hopkins enthusiastically endorsed regressive hypnosis as "the most efficient method of unlocking the forgotten period of time."

His second book, *Intruders, the Incredible Visitations at Copley Woods* (1987), took that speculation one enormous step further. ▶

It was the story of a woman Hopkins called "Kathie Davis," a divorced mother of two young children who lived in rural Indiana and suffered from a long list of physical and emotional troubles, including anxiety, insomnia, and fear of the dark. After reading *Missing Time*, she wrote to Hopkins about a UFO sighting she'd had earlier that year, a frightening dream she'd had in 1978 involving little creatures, and strange identical scars she and her mother have on their right legs. Over the next two years, Davis visited Hopkins in New York for several hypnotic sessions. She gradually remembered a series of abductions in which she was impregnated, had her embryo removed, and was shown, four years later, a little girl that was hers. ("IT'S NOT FAIR! IT'S MINE!" she screamed, under hypnosis, as the aliens took her child from her.)

By 1995, Budd Hopkins had worked with more than 500 abductees, a few of whom he hypnotically regressed as many as forty times. He developed his techniques, he says, by watching professionals in action over an eight-year span. He is now unequivocally convinced that all abductions involve nine basic patterns, which he published in a "position statement" (reproduced here in abbreviated form):

1) An abduction can occur with little or no conscious recall on the part of the abductee.

2) Almost invariably, the same individuals are taken numerous times, at irregular intervals, over the course of decades. The abductee becomes, in effect, a tagged animal.

3) A "cell-sampling" operation is often inflicted, leaving scars of two types: a round, shallow depression, or "scoop mark," or a long, thin, scalpel-like cut.

4) The [aliens'] central focus is the study and laboratory use of human beings, with special attention to our physical, genetic, and reproductive properties.

5) Members of the same family are often abducted in what seems to be a longitudinal genetic study or experiment.

6) Apparently [there is] a systematic attempt to create a hybrid species, a mix of human and "alien" characteristics.

7) Widespread artificial-insemination techniques result in human pregnancies; the pregnant women are abducted again to remove the developing embryos, which are then "grown" in laboratories or nurseries within the UFOs themselves.

8) The final event involves the re-abduction of the ostensible human "mother" – or sometimes the "father" – so the human can hold the infant or child in a kind of bonding procedure.

9) The alien personality seems to lack emotions. The aliens seem interested in acquiring, or at least understanding, the basic human emotional spectrum.

Noticeably absent is any mention of messages from the aliens, positive life changes, or spiritual transcendence for the abductees. If selected by the aliens, Hopkins says, an abductee is powerless and can do no more than learn to cope and accept that she and her children and her children's children, ad infinitum, might be scooped up to spaceship laboratories at any time. Needless to say, such a dire prognosis can be deeply disturbing to the thousands of abductees who come in direct contact with Hopkins, or who read his books.

Hopkins never charges for his services, nor does he entertain self-doubt. During hours of questioning he never once reflects that he might be wrong about any aspect of his belief system. Asked about David Godlib's concern that only mental-health professionals should perform hypnotic regressions, he replies that he does it "better than most shrinks.... You see, David Godlib is an extraordinarily cautious young man," he says, not meaning it as a compliment.

To illustrate, Hopkins relates an anecdote from a UFO conference in Pensacola, Florida, in 1989, at which Godlib appeared and

called for abductees to be treated with extreme care by UFO investigators. "David went into how it can lead to suicide, how people can be driven to fall apart, they are so fragile, their whole life can go up in smoke, one thing after another," Hopkins recalls. "It was a plea for caution." After the talk, a woman who had read *Intruders* came up to Hopkins and within minutes burst into tears, explaining that she and her twelve-year-old daughter were abductees. "She said, 'I was so scared yesterday,'" Hopkins recounts. "And I said, 'I hope what I said wasn't upsetting to you.' 'Oh no,' she replied, 'it was Dr. Godlib. He was talking about how fragile we all are ... and I thought am I going to go crazy and kill myself?' So David's thing of trying to discuss the sensitivities actually ended up scaring her, while me actually being a bit more forthright wasn't. So you really don't know what approach will work with what person."

Godlib tries to subdue his anger when later I recount Hopkins's remarks. "If you subscribe to the idea that aliens are invading our planet and stealing our women and traumatizing them and leaving scars, sure, any other approach to it would be overly cautious," Godlib fumes. "Am I cautious about the use of hypnosis compared to Budd and other UFO investigators? I guess I am, but I prefer to think of it as being responsible."

Like almost all abductees, Andrea (not her real name) has no taste for publicity and the scorn she knows will come with it. Intelligent and sociable, the thirtysomething office manager became Godlib's patient in 1991 after meeting him at a UFO conference. The focus of their therapy soon shifted from her UFO experiences to other problems she wanted to resolve. Since entering therapy, her UFO encounters have greatly diminished. Nonetheless, Andrea is a tad paranoid.

"Do you notice they're reading old, yellow newspapers?" she says during our meeting in a hotel lounge, pointing to two middle-aged men in suits sitting nearby. She suggests they're aliens spying on us.

"They're reading the *Financial Times*," I reply. "That's its normal colour."

Highly hypnotizable in her own estimation, Andrea, as is typical of abductees, has had paranormal experiences all her life. Also typically, it was a book that triggered her awareness that she's an "experiencer," a term she prefers to abductee. In July, 1989, she read Whitley Strieber's *Communion* and *Transformation*, two best-sellers that tell of the successful horror writer's personal encounters with aliens. "All these memories started flooding back," Andrea says. "It was a dreadful feeling, because all of a sudden I knew this stuff was real."

The following summer, she met with Joe Nyman, a UFO investigator from Massachusetts. Several times over the weekend, Nyman hypnotically regressed Andrea, focusing on a conscious memory from when she was nine. "Me and my younger sister were sleeping in the living room because we had overnight guests. We both woke up and saw a small person in what looked like blue pyjamas running down the hall and rattling the dishes in the kitchen. The next thing we remember was waking up the next day and not feeling very well, and we both ended up staying home from school."

Under hypnosis, Andrea remembered her and her sister being invited on a trip by two stocky aliens that night. "They were short and grey, three-and-a-half to four feet tall, three digits on each hand, large heads with protruding foreheads, no hair, almond-shaped slanted eyes that were totally black, vestigial nose and mouth, no gender indicated." The craft was filled with about ten children. All were calm except for one little girl who was hysterical. Andrea and a boy abductee told the aliens telepathically that they'd do "extra work" if the aliens let the girl return home. The extra work turned out to be ▶

an anal probe by a long snaky tube (a common occurrence in abduction scenarios, including Strieber's) and a nasal probe (also common). The nasal probe was particularly traumatic because during it they removed and then replaced Andrea's right eye. They also cut an incision above her left breast and implanted what looked like a dime-sized wafer. As compensation for her pains, she believes, Andrea was taken to meet an entity "who has been incarnated in the flesh here on several occasions to do great good amongst humanity. You could call him Krishna, you could call him Christ, you could call him Mohammed." Telepathically, he told her to do good work and not waste time because life is short. Then she was returned to earth.

After the first hypnosis, Andrea went for a drive to break the tension. Just for a laugh, she unbuttoned her blouse to look at where the aliens made the incision on her breast. To her shock, there indeed was a scar, one that neither she nor her parents had ever noticed. But dealing with the scar was child's play compared to what lay ahead during her next hypnotic session.

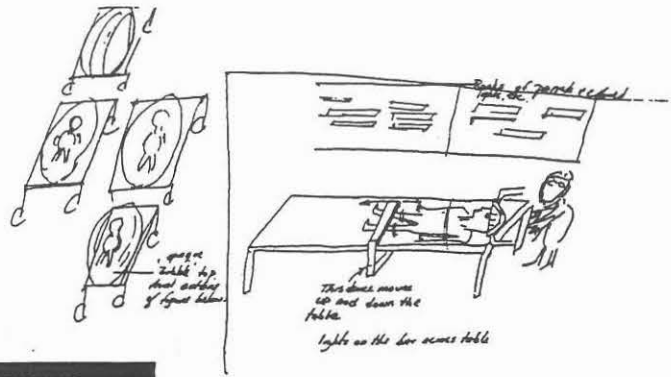
Nyman led her through a series of regressions, back to when she was still in the womb. The culmination was Andrea's realization that she herself was an alien. During the regressions, she saw aliens around her at all stages of her life — and "one of those beings was me." The revelation was, needless to say, shattering. Andrea was too afraid to admit to Nyman the implications of what she'd seen in the regression. He didn't push her but, instead, arranged for Janet, another abductee he worked with, to phone Andrea several days later. In their conversation, Andrea says that Janet asked: "Did Joe take you back to before you were born... did you see yourself... which one are you?" On hearing Janet's questions, Andrea felt as though she'd stepped out onto a yawning precipice and discovered that the air held her up. "There was an immediate restructuring of my world-view," she says. There was also a profound sense of relief. "At the moment of dual reference I lost my anxiety. That was the point of realization that I had given my consent."

"Dual reference" is a concept Nyman promotes. It means, basically, that all abductees are actually aliens. Of the more than eighty people he has worked with, he says, he has "only succeeded in *getting it* [dual reference, my italics]" in thirty to forty per cent of his cases. "[But] I absolutely believe it's there for the rest."

The abduction conference takes place at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (the news is now public) in Cambridge, Massachusetts. All the heavyweights are here — a roster that includes Budd Hopkins, Joe Nyman, and Dr. John Mack, a charismatic professor of psychiatry at the Harvard Medical School and the Pulitzer prize-winning author of *Prince of Our Disorder*, a biography of T.E. Lawrence. The hundred or so delegates include a dozen or so abductees, scientists, academics, doctors, psychiatrists, and psychologists (most of whom are also abductees), two spooks from the U.S. government (conference gossip), one debunker, a slew of UFO investigators, and a few invited media members.

The conference is funded by Robert Bigelow, a Las Vegas real-estate developer, and an "anonymous donor," who, I learn later, is His Serene Highness Prince Hans Adam II, the ruling monarch of the tiny European principality of Liechtenstein. The five-day event is overloaded with talks on everything from "Investigating and Correlating Simultaneous Abductions" and "What's Missing: The Ship Has No Bathrooms, Kitchens..." to "The Overstated Dangers of Hypnosis."

David Godlib's presentation on "The Abduction Investigator's



One woman remembered abductions in which she was impregnated, had her embryo removed, and, four years later, was shown her little girl

"Duty of Care," urges that only qualified mental-health professionals should perform hypnosis or any other form of therapy with abductees. Investigators, he says, should stick to the gathering of facts and evidence. His plea seems doomed. For one thing, Budd Hopkins, who dominates the conference the way Don King rules professional boxing, isn't there to hear it.

It is also clear that UFO investigators harbour none of Godlib's reservations about hypnosis. Hypnosis is a simple procedure. "It's easy to learn despite all the mystique that surrounds it," says Robert Nadon, an assistant professor of psychology at Brock University in St Catharines, Ontario, and an expert in age-regression hypnosis. "You could learn to do it in an hour." What can't be quickly acquired, Nadon emphasizes, is knowing how to apply hypnosis or deal with what might emerge during a hypnotic regression. "People who are untrained should no more do hypnosis than I should take out someone's appendix," he says.

The benefit of regressive hypnosis is that forgotten or repressed memories can surface while a person is deeply relaxed. But there's also a danger. "People are so highly suggestible in a hypnotic state that what they remember is totally unreliable," says Dr. George Fraser, director of the anxiety and phobic-disorders clinic at the Royal Ottawa Hospital and the man who taught hypnosis to David Godlib. "Unless you can come up with some external verification, the memory may or may not be true." The suggestibility factor is so powerful, confirms Robert Nadon, that about half the subjects given suggestions during hypnotic-regression experiments he conducted incorporated the suggestions as part of their real memory. "One subject was so convinced that her memory couldn't be altered that even after showing her a video tape [of us inducing a memory] she was convinced that we'd changed the video tape somehow." Subjects can be affected by leading questions, and even by a social context that endorses a particular belief. "Just by going to a hypnotist who specializes in UFO abductions, there's an unconscious suggestion that they're going to remember the thing," says Dr. Fraser.

UFO investigators discount charges that inexpert use of hypnosis leads people to imagine abduction scenarios. "I've never come across a hoax," says Budd Hopkins. When I listen to one of Hopkins's taped sessions, I hear a calm and gentle voice and an unhurried and supportive approach. I also hear him ask numerous leading questions. "I try leading in virtually every single hypnotic session I ever do," he says. "I try and lead them in a logical way away from the UFO [memory]. You cannot do it." If the person doesn't follow his many leads, Hopkins says, he assumes they're telling the truth. Joe Nyman downplays the clinical concerns about hypnosis, saying it is not much more than a relaxed state. "It's just a question of whether the individual working with you trusts you enough to *follow your suggestions* [my italics]." ▶

Godlib's presentation includes "a cautionary tale" that begins with the hypothetical emotional breakdown or suicide of an abductee during or after an investigation. "An angry relative might then bring a civil suit against the investigator and others involved in the study of the case, citing negligence," he says. "Faced with such a charge, I believe an unlicensed therapist [in the absence of accepted standards and practices] would be unable to mount a credible defence. He would be eaten for breakfast, hung out to dry, burned at the stake." He calls on the conference to begin work on a Code of Ethics for Abductee Investigation and Therapy that would include a commitment to explore all possible medical and psychological explanations for abduction reports before any discussion of alien experiences takes place.

One of those psychological explanations is what therapists call "screen memories": abductees using UFO experiences to block out memories of sexual and other forms of childhood abuse. Not surprisingly, UFO investigators reject the notion. So does Harvard's Dr. John Mack. He began studying abduction accounts after meeting Budd Hopkins in 1990. After that he became heavily involved in the UFO community and quickly emerged as one of its most prominent voices. In 1994 he published *Abduction: Human Encounters With Aliens*. "There's no way [the abduction stories] can be explained in terms of what I have known in forty years of psychiatry," says Mack. "It takes a certain kind of mental acrobatics to [render them as screen memories]. When the memories of what they have been through are relived, especially under hypnosis," he says, "feelings are expressed of terror, rage, and grief as intense as any I have encountered as a psychiatrist." (*The New York Times* recently reported that a peer-review committee of senior faculty at Harvard is examining Mack's research methodology, concerned that he may have failed to pursue all traditional psychological tests before giving credence to abductees' reports.)

Budd Hopkins, in fact, says he has exposed just the opposite – a child-abuse memory that turned out to be a screen for an abduction. The woman in question was even a psychotherapist. "She had an experience when she was a little girl. Her father had come into the room and he was acting strangely and something happened which everyone assumed was child abuse." When Hopkins met her, she had been in therapy for years, with "everyone assuming she'd been sexually abused. I mean there wasn't any doubt of it." She contacted Hopkins because she had had experiences that seemed UFO-related. "Her husband's a psychiatrist. He begged me to do the hypnosis," says Hopkins. When he did, he found that the childhood event had been an abduction. "She's very much at peace with herself now," he says, adding that the woman's son has also turned out to be an abductee.

Andrea agrees absolutely that abduction scenarios are not screen memories. "I didn't have a dysfunctional upbringing. My parents didn't abuse me." But she does remember "going through a tough time socially" when she was nine. "Every class has a pecking order and I was always the one at the end of it. Don't ask me why."

"Were you ever abused by other people?" I ask.

"Nope." She pauses for a moment. "As a matter of fact, you know it's funny, one of the friends of my parents was a convicted child molester – we didn't know until we were all grown up – and he had very frequent contact with our family but he never laid a hand on my sister or me."

And Andrea is at peace too, her life much improved, she says, thanks to the knowledge that she's "not a victim" but rather a "willing participant." Her marriage was not so fortunate. She and her husband split up in early 1992, the result, she says, of her UFO beliefs. When I ask Andrea if she thinks that aliens are breeding with

us, she replies, chillingly: "I don't know for certain but I have my suspicions about my child's conception."

Almost three years later, in early spring, 1995, David Godlib closes down his Toronto psychotherapy practice. Recently married – "It was the happiest day of my entire life" – he's on his way to the department of psychiatry at Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore. For the next three years he'll work as a resident in order to become a full-blown psychiatrist. "I want to make a real contribution to the study of paranormal behaviour," he says. "To do that I need [to further] my skills and knowledge." Interestingly, the director of psychiatry for the Johns Hopkins Medical Institutions, Dr. Paul McHugh, is a member of the professional advisory board of the False Memory Syndrome Foundation.

"The Ethics Code for Abduction Experience Investigation and Treatment" was completed in early 1994, and adopted by the Center for UFO Studies (CUFOS), the Fund for UFO Research (of which Godlib is a director), and the Mutual UFO Network (MUFON). While it's encouraging that it was endorsed by those unofficial bodies, they have no meaningful control over their members, and Godlib admits the response from the investigation community, especially Budd Hopkins et al., has been "underwhelming."

Aside from their quarrel over the unreliability of hypnosis and the existence of screen memories, there is, of course, another reason for investigators to resist earthbound explanations for abduction scenarios. There is money to be made. Whitley Strieber pocketed millions from his books and the movie rights to *Communion*. Some investigators have questioned Godlib's motives for just that reason. "He just wants to keep the information for himself," one of them told me. "He's probably writing a book [Godlib assures me he isn't] or wants to become a consultant for a movie."

Whatever Godlib's future in this strange community, I walk away with the central question of this story still unanswered. What to make of the abduction experience? I tend to side with Kenneth Ring and David Godlib that many of the abductees are experiencing something beyond our understanding. Abduction tales are not new to Western culture, after all. Folklore is rich with first-hand accounts of kidnappings by trolls and other little people. Visitations by ghosts, witches, incubi, succubi, spirits, and demons are even more common. "You can find parallels to the UFO phenomenon in certain ancient cultures," says Godlib. "For example, Tibetan mystical traditions include the belief that spirit beings exist in another form and dimension than the physical."

Although *what* abductees are undergoing is hard to fathom, the *why* seems more accessible. John Mack believes abductees' visits to other realities tell something important about the state of our society. He "blue-skys" the theory that "our Western materialistic dualistic world-view has almost foreclosed the future of the planet, and this [alien contact] is challenging that foreclosure." Mack says he has regressed abductees who come to see themselves as "'messengers of cosmic evolution,' as one put it." Perhaps the pain and terror they feel during the abductions reflect their own spiritual emptiness and that of Western society. David Godlib also finds these spiritual explanations believable, but the psychotherapist in him can't deny another potential cause. Some of his clients, says Godlib, have "incorporated the notion of abductions into their lives as an explanation for their feelings of victimization and helplessness. Positive contact experiences may provide a sense of being different, special, chosen, and protected and cared for by supernatural entities when no-one on earth cares to do so." ■

