

A PORTION OF THE SALE OF THIS ISSUE WILL GO TO THE AMERICAN RED CROSS

ORANGE COAST

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*The spirit of America
lives in
Orange County*



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ABOUT OUR COVER:

Every Fourth of July, neighbors Shawna Valbuena and Sandy Kikawa of Huntington Beach round up the neighborhood children to have a flag-painting block party. More than 30 kids gather and paint a huge flag in the middle of the street. But after 10 consecutive years, they decided to break with tradition and paint Old Glory a little early for 2002. "We thought it would be appropriate to do it now to show our support and patriotism and have a good experience for the kids," says Kikawa, whose six children participated. The kids painted the stars by dipping their hands in white paint; "God Bless America" is written on the bottom stripe.

COVER PHOTOGRAPHY AND PAGE 54: MARK OWENS

PHOTOGRAPHY PAGE 124: JASON WALLIS; PAGE 152: BOB HODSON

the truth is out here

By Edd Whetmore

Illustration by Nancy Harrison

“Get off my back!” exclaimed a panicked Lori Gudinas on that warm August night in 1995. Something—or someone—had a hold of her and refused to let her go. Yet somehow her words never materialized. “I felt like I was spitting tooth-picks out of my mouth,” she explains.

“It was like a hologram or a hallucination ... walls were moving—everything was distorted. It was like a whirlwind going through my house. I was terrified.” She recalls a very distorted sense of time as well. How long did it last? Was it a minute or 30 seconds—or no time at all?

*That's what a group of OC locals
and others believe, as evidenced by a*

“When you are with them you can't tell ... you remember the oddest things. There was an ottoman with the exact pattern of my other furniture. But there was one prob-

lem—I have never owned an ottoman. It was as if they constructed a model based on mine, to make me feel at home ... but they just didn't take the time to do it perfectly.”

When it was suddenly over, Gudinas found herself sitting up in bed in a cold sweat trying to make sense of it all—trying to pretend that it was all a dream.

“You try to rationalize—to find a place to put it all but there simply isn't any place to put it.

“There was a part of me that was outraged. I remember thinking—it's 9:30 in Orange County. Everybody is still bustling outside. I live in a very crowded area. How can nobody see them? How is this possible?”

Looking back on it now, she recalls that the night had certainly begun on an eerie note. Peeking out through her blinds as she was preparing for bed, Gudinas noticed five bright orange lights emanating from what appeared to be a large silver dome in the distance. The more she stared the less sense she could make of it. The dome appeared to be moving at times.

“I finally decided it must be some kids—maybe playing up in the trees ... playing tricks on me. I know that sounds strange now, but I kept searching for something that made sense—something in the realm of the believable.”

Asked to describe her mysterious visitors, she can only recall what her senses

*recent Irvine conference on UFOs
and extraterrestrial encounters*

Lori Gudinas



revealed. "What I felt was a female presence," says the office manager for an Orange cabinet manufacturer. "She was in a dark black robe." At that moment, Gudinas joined the growing ranks of "abductees"—those who have reported being captured and detained by unidentified alien beings.

Gudinas has long since quit telling that story, or the details of her two other abductions, to strangers. "Not one single person has believed me," she observes with a smile. "I can't really blame them. I was one of those people, too. I can relate to their perspective. Unless it has happened to you ..."

"In the beginning, I thought I was the only one in the world that this happened to. I started calling university astronomy departments. I didn't know what to do." Eventually she reached a professor who gave her the phone number of the Mutual Unidentified Flying Objects Network (MUFON). It was then she learned that she was not alone.

Pick up a phone and dial 714-520-4UFO and you've reached the Orange County chapter of MUFON. A sane and very rational-sounding recorded male voice will inform you that this is the place where "Orange County's UFO questions are answered." There's a bit of news about the upcoming monthly meet-

"It was like a hologram or a hallucination... walls were moving — everything was distorted. I was terrified."

— Lori Gudinas



John E. Mack, Harvard professor

ing and then—almost casually—the voice adds, "To report a sighting, press one."

"We get an average of about one sighting a month on the hotline," notes

Orange County MUFON public relations director George Meadows. "Of course, most of them turn out to be IFOs (identifiable flying objects), lights in the sky around Disneyland or distant sequences of colored searchlights." Still, every once in awhile there is a sighting that cannot be explained so easily.

People seem to have a difficult time "thinking about matters that seem so far outside of the bounds of reality that have been defined by their education and upbringing."

— John E. Mack

A visit to the organization's Web site (www.mufonoc.org) yields a photograph that appears to depict a 1965 saucer sighting near Dyer Road in Tustin. Another 1999 photo purportedly features saucers near John Wayne Airport. Meadows says it was taken by one of the chapter's regular members. The loosely knit group of 100 or so holds public programs each month in Costa Mesa. The chapter's mission statement explains that it exists to "actively facilitate awareness, acceptance and interaction between mankind and intelligent life throughout the universe."

As part of its mission, the Orange County chapter recently played host to the 32nd annual national MUFON sym-

THE TRUTH IS OUT HERE

posium held at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in Irvine. UFO experts from around the world—many with advanced degrees and impeccable credentials—gathered to address the 1,000 or so attendees.

John E. Mack is a professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School. Though his day job is mentoring future psychiatrists, increasingly his passion is the Program for Extraordinary Experience Research, which he founded. In one session he explains, "For nearly 12 years I have been working with people from many walks of life in this and other cultures who have reported profound, life-changing experi-

ences through encounters with human-like beings reaching them, apparently, from other dimensions."

Mack has interviewed more than 200 abductees who have reported encounters similar to those experienced by Gudinias. In the face of what he calls "overwhelming evidence," he nonetheless under-

stands why there is so much resistance to accepting such ideas. "I came to realize that the problem I was facing was not simply a matter of evidence but the persistence of a world view." People seem to have a difficult time "thinking about matters that seem so far outside of the bounds of reality that have been defined by their education and upbringing."

Variations of his theme are echoed by at least a dozen other speakers during the weekend conference. A journalist explains that this story is "a cosmic Watergate"—the biggest he's ever encountered. A Ph.D. in astrophysics explains how *Star Trek*-like wormholes that allow time travel are based on principles discovered in 1985 at Cal Tech and are very much in line with Einstein's General Theory of Relativity. A Mexican TV reporter shows convincing videotaped footage of saucers playfully flitting around the sky in broad daylight.

The truth may be out there, but most

MUFON exists to "actively facilitate awareness, acceptance and interaction between mankind and intelligent life throughout the universe."

— mission statement

of us continue to refuse to believe it. Who is to blame? Since the famous Roswell incident—in which, some contend, a flying saucer landed in the New Mexico desert and was whisked away, along with its occupants, in a massive military cover-up—there have been those who blame the government. One of the popular T-shirts at this year's conference proudly proclaimed "UFOs are Real—the Air Force Doesn't Exist!"

Attorney Daniel Sheehan is a former editor of the Harvard Civil Rights Review at Harvard Law School. Over the years, he has been retained on cases

"I would hate to think that they were here to harm us. I like to think that they may be helping us instead — maybe in ways we don't yet realize."

— MUFON's George Meadows, on aliens

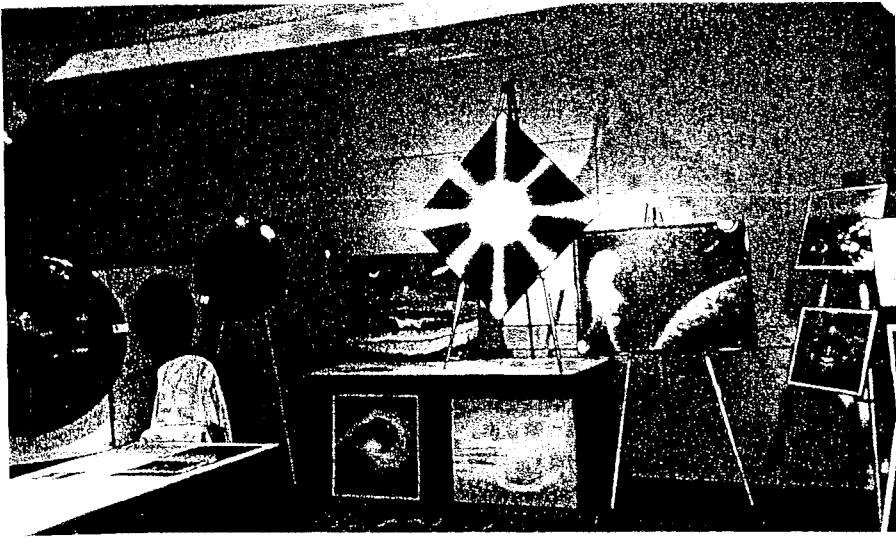
ranging from the famed Karen Silkwood suit to Iran/Contra, the Watergate burglary and litigation involving the Three Mile Island nuclear disaster.

When asked what might motivate aliens to visit, he politely declines. He has never had an encounter of his own and says he has no way of making judgments

about who these beings are and why they are here. However, he is adamant about the role the government has played in covering it all up. "They deny having records but they have them. Saucers have been sighted over nuclear weapons test sites—in one documented instance the aliens actually shut the weapons systems down for a brief period of time."

Sheehan's experiences with other "government cover-ups" lead him to believe this is no different. "During the Cold War they used it for their military advantage ... I've got documentation from U.S. Air Force personnel and many other sources." He adds that we are fortunate that these beings have thus far been content to limit their visits to mere observation because they obviously possess technological expertise far superior to our own.

Sheehan is particularly worried about President George W. Bush's new elaborate missile defense plan because, he



contends, it sends the wrong message to these visitors. Instead, he calls for what he describes as a "new human paradigm" that would not only acknowledge the presence of aliens, but embrace them as we attempt to earn "citizenship in our galactic community."

Wandering through the rest of the vendor area one is struck immediately by the sheer amount of material—books, videotapes, coffee mugs and statues of little green men abound. For better or worse, the UFO movement appears to have taken on all the trappings of any industry.

While rummaging through some videotapes, attendee Judy Cameron reveals that she is a clinical hypnotherapist from Fullerton and has come because she "would like to know the truth. I've been a teacher in the public space program and I'm open to the possibilities of

extraterrestrial life," she says. If it exists, she contends, it "changes all the rules. What about organized religions? How are they going to react?"

The one question that no one at the conference or the local MUFON chapter can really explain adequately is the first one that comes to mind: If these aliens are really here, why don't they simply show up at the White House lawn and hold a press conference? Some experts contend that there may be a contamination problem. Just as our space travelers were quarantined when they got back from their trips, so it would be with alien visitors. Who knows—they may carry a virus that could wipe us all out.

Indeed, abductee Gudinas reports that she had been in great health all her life but since her first abduction she has suffered many health problems that she di-

rectly attributes to these visits. She is, in UFO parlance, "a resister," someone who has tried to fight back from what she describes as a very frightening series of unwanted encounters.

Gudinas has come to see those encounters as a personal battle. Ultimately, what does she want to come out of all this? "I'm looking for the right word; it's not revenge or reprisal but I want to have the satisfaction that I could get over this and somehow put it behind me. I would love to know that it would never happen again and then I would have won."

The potential dark side of these visits is something that has been given a lot of thought by Meadows and those at the local chapter. But in the end, he explains: "I would hate to think that they were here to harm us. They certainly have the capability to do that. I like to think that they may be helping us instead—maybe in ways we don't yet realize."

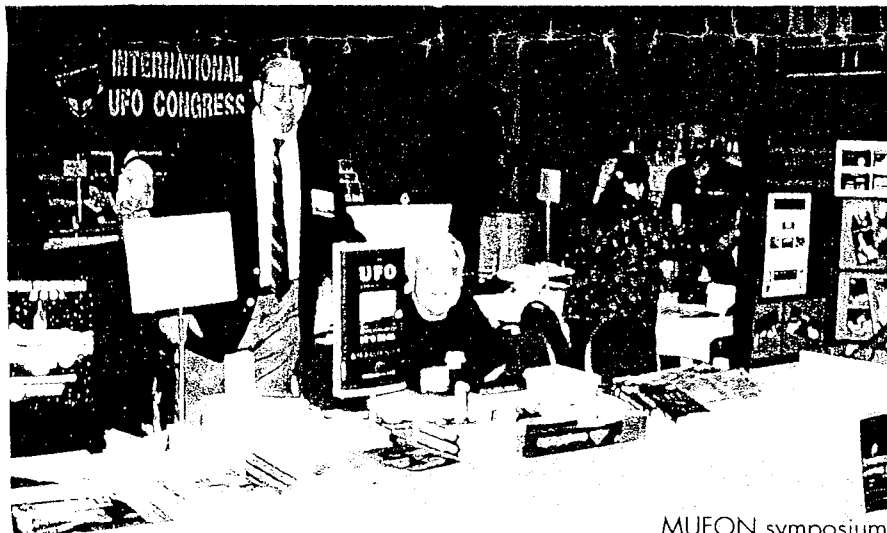
Like Meadows, most UFO enthusiasts seem to have a pretty benign view of the aliens. From their perspective it appears that these beings simply don't think we are ready to handle a direct public encounter just yet. "To them, the human race may seem like juveniles," Meadows explains. "Here we are killing one another left and right—who can blame them for not getting involved?"

Nuclear physicist Stanton Friedman agrees and says we have failed to recognize that "earth isn't the center of the universe and that our planet must surely be seen as a primitive society whose major activity is tribal warfare."

Despite it all, there is a thread of hope that runs through most of these conversations. Hope that the aliens are here with noble intent. Hope that they will help us solve our technological and social problems. Hope that they will see beyond the evil in us and seek out the good.

"Once we recognize the real world of our cosmic neighborhood," beams Friedman with an all-knowing Mr. Rogers kind of smile, "perhaps we can qualify for admission to the Cosmic Kindergarten." OC

Edd Whetmore writes the "Between the Lines" column for Orange Coast Magazine.



MUFON symposium

PHOTOS COURTESY OF MUFON