

UFO

M A G A Z I N E

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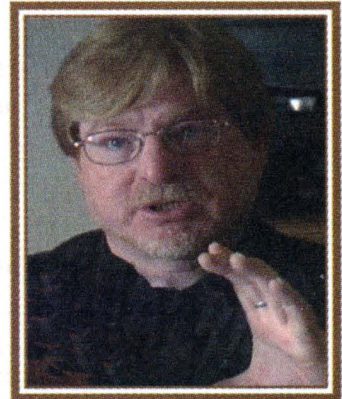
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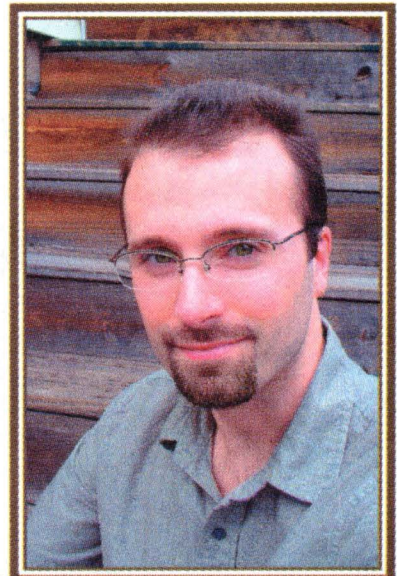
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Will Bueche remembers his friend and mentor, John Mack.

Dr. John Mack

By Sean Casteel

No one could quite believe the news of Monday, September 27, 2004. "At this time," the posting on the website read, "we must with great sorrow confirm that Dr. John Mack has passed away in London, England."

The details of what happened to Mack are the stuff of high tragedy. "Dr. Mack was one of several speakers discussing British officer T. E. Lawrence ('Lawrence of Arabia') at the T. E. Lawrence Society Symposium in Oxford on Sunday," the online press release continued. "Dr. Mack's 1977 biography of T. E. Lawrence, *A Prince of Our Disorder*, received the Pulitzer Prize for biography. Dr. Mack's presentation at an afternoon panel was so warmly received that he was asked to stay and present an additional talk, which again met with positive response.

"On Monday, he spent time in London and went to dinner with friends. On his return to the home at which he was staying in North London, while traveling on foot, he was struck at approximately 11:25 P.M. by a silver Peugeot 306 headed west on Totteridge Lane. Dr. Mack was in a crosswalk near the junction with Longland Drive. London police pronounced him dead on the scene. The driver of the Peugeot was arrested at the scene on suspicion of driving with excess alcohol."

In the days following Dr. Mack's death, *UFO Magazine* spoke with Will Bueche, communications director of the John E. Mack Institute, which until earlier this year was called the Center for Psychology and Social Change. It was Bueche who wrote the death announcement posted

on the Institute's website quoted at the beginning of this article.

"It's such a surprise," Bueche said. "I think he had like another 15 years in him, you know? Sure, he was 75. But you saw that police report? The initial report was 'a man in his fifties.'"

We asked how Bueche had first come to join Dr. Mack's team. "It was back in 1999," Bueche said, "around the time that (Mack's book) *Passport To The Cosmos* was coming out. I was originally one of the many transcrib-

ers who would type up the clinical sessions that he held with experiencers, with the subjects. When an opportunity to actually come into the office arose, they offered me that position. I was quite a young man at the time. I mean, I'm still only in my mid-thirties, but I feel I've grown a lot, mostly thanks to the environment that John created."

Bueche said his job at the Institute mostly entailed dealing with the media. "I was mainly trying to give the media the kind of language guidance that would enable them to write about the subject of alien contact with greater depth," he said. "So that was my main function. But beyond that, really the one closest to my heart right now, the one causing me the most sadness now, is that every week John Mack would come up the stairs to my office and hand me his latest handwritten revisions to whatever he was writing.

"And I typed them in for him," Bueche continued, "and we'd go back and forth on that. I always teased him that if he ever learned how to use his computer more fluently, he wouldn't need me anymore.

So I'm glad that he was old-fashioned in a sense—in the way he did a mixture of using his own Mac computer and then handwritten changes, which he depended on me to type. That was the best part of my job."

Bueche recounted the story of how Dr. Mack was first introduced to the subject of alien contact and abduction,

which followed naturally from Dr. Mack's earlier area of expertise as a psychiatrist. "I don't know if he would declare himself from this particular branch of psychiatry," Bueche explained, "but in my opinion, looking back on John's career, I would say that John Mack came from a branch of psychiatry called *transpersonal psychiatry*."

According to Bueche, transpersonal psychiatry had its beginnings in the 1960s and was highly influenced by Eastern philosophies. It involved the concept that



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individuals could transform themselves into someone who cared not only about themselves, but also “cared for the greater good, cared for others beyond themselves. Thus *trans* personal.”

That sort of compassionate reaching out to one's fellow man was typical of Dr. Mack, he says. “Let's be clear right from the start,” Bueche said, “that it's always been people [who were] John's interest, even when he was studying alien contact. What fascinated him and kept him involved in the field was seeing how people, when exposed to a different culture—as in the case of his study of T. E. Lawrence—how a person was able to transform himself.

“... Seeing how people who'd encountered other life were similarly transformed. They were, in a sense, given an opportunity, or forced into an opportunity, really, to redefine themselves. It forced them to re-evaluate their assumptions about reality, which in turn caused them to re-evaluate their assumptions about themselves, their assumptions about how people relate to one another, how people relate to other life, how people relate to the world.

“So that's the theme,” Bueche said. “If you look back through any of his work, it was all about human transformation. It's difficult to notice these things. It seems like he wrote on a very diverse range of subjects. But actually it's all about people who started one way and then encountered something else. In the case of T. E. Lawrence, it was a British officer who encountered the culture of the Middle East, and through encountering another culture, redefined himself and in doing so was able to transform a large part of the world—for better and for worse, but at least it was momentous.”

Bueche said there are two versions of the story of how Dr. Mack moved on from his earlier work on personal transformation to the study of alien contact.

“The short version,” he said, “is that he was introduced to Budd Hopkins and [on from there.] But the longer story is that some friends of his, people who were into meditation and altered states of consciousness, in-

roduced him to the subject. Someone had written some material about these alien-contact experiences, and it sounded on the surface to be similar to the kinds of spiritual contacts or spiritual connections which people engaged in meditation, and so forth, were having. So that in turn led to the opportunity to meet Budd Hopkins. So [it's] the longer story I like. That's just history.”

Dr. Mack subsequently produced two well-received books on the subject of alien contact, *Abduction* (Charles Scribner's Sons, 1994) and *Passport To The Cosmos* (Crown Publishers, 1999).

But that was the easy part.

After the release of *Abduction*, Dr. Mack was brought before a board of review at Harvard University, where he had long been on the teaching staff at the medical school. One wonders how he chose to persist in his own nearly outlaw brand of research, even though his job and livelihood had been put at risk.

“I'll tell you something kind of personal,” Bueche responded, “which is my personal opinion of why Dr. Mack continued to study the subject of human contact with aliens, even after he had been put through the grindstone at

Harvard. The answer is, if you look at the dedication page to *Passport To The Cosmos*, he wrote, “To the experiencers, who have been my teachers.” I believe that Dr. Mack, being raised in a scientific Jewish family in New York City, did not necessarily have a spiritually enriching childhood. Not to say it wasn't loving. I'm sure it was.

“But I believe that when he was able to hear from the experiencers, when the experiencers shared with him how these alien-contact experiences had both terrified them—traumatized them—as well as caused them to grow, caused them to re-evaluate reality, and oftentimes caused them to connect with a sense of reality being comprised of both matter and spirit—that transformation that the people shared when they were in that environment with John, I believe, personally enriched him.



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"So I think that his dedication of the book to the experiencers was in gratitude. Not simply for them being teachers in an intellectual sense, but I think that they gave him the personal sort of evidence that there is a greater sphere of reality that includes this spiritual connection to other life. Not just to alien life, but the same sort of love of the earth that these people would often talk about.

"But that's why he had the courage to go forward with it," Bueche said, "because he saw that what they were connecting with was something very real. Deeply real. More important than the institution of Harvard. More important than reputation. Really, the deep essence of what it was to be a human being alive in this world. When you're faced with something like that, you can't ignore it. You can't turn away from something like that."

Dr. Mack was probably most satisfied with the fact that he helped to influence a shift in alien contact research from a "nuts-and-bolts" study of just the concrete evidence to something that had a wider view of the phenomenon.

"He was part of a shared effort which included other people, such as Dr. Barry Downing," Bueche said, "that opened

up more broadly the concept that alien contact itself is not so much a meeting with a physical being who lands in a metal saucer, but rather it's an experience which seems to be a meeting of worlds.

"I think he was probably most satisfied to see that over the years the course of discussion evolved gradually from being one of a very matter-of-fact type of encounter, as one might imagine from the 1950s, to appreciating that it's rather more surreal. I often use the comparison to the filmmaker David Lynch, in terms of having qualities that seem to surpass the material reality and yet are very real."

And what did Mack feel was ultimately behind the alien contact phenomenon?

"I think he was undecided," Bueche said. "Because he wasn't an experiencer himself, he had to balance

what the experiencers told him, which was generally that they felt that these were actual species, actual distinct life forms with their own histories and their own past civilizations. He was balancing that possibility with the possibility he entertained that perhaps it was all simply an expression of *Source* with a capital S—that perhaps this was indeed an interaction with an independent consciousness. But it was perhaps something that was given characteristics which seemed to be alien but which may in fact be rooted more deeply

in the creative Source of all creation. He never came to a firm decision on that, which is why he kept exploring it.

"And to his credit," Bueche said, "he never came down hard on one side or the other. He gave room for people to come to their own decisions about what these experiences were. But he definitely highlighted the possibility that it was all sort of a metaphor made real, an environmental lesson being given to us. Not by another species, who cared for us in a way that we might compare a religious missionary to have a sense of caring, but perhaps it was actually more of the Godhead communicating with us in a way which our society depicted as alien beings because our society would



respond better to a futuristic symbolism."

Bueche said that maybe it didn't really matter how Mack interpreted alien contact. "Ultimately, he found value in how people's lives were changed. Not so much in whether it was aliens or whether it was God, but the beauty that he saw was the way that people responded, the way that people grew, the way that they transformed their lives. So I think that in a sense he did find God. He found spirit within humanity, within us, within everybody."

Bueche and his colleagues at the John Mack Institute hope to find the kind of funding that would allow them to continue Dr. Mack's work. "For the five years that I knew him," Bueche said, "Dr. Mack was defending people whose worldviews had broadened through extraordinary experiences of one kind or the

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other. Whether it was his study of alien encounters or his work with people who had spiritual epiphanies or his interest in that whole range of transpersonal experiences, he defended people. And I can think of nothing better than to continue to defend people, continue to defend the fact that human experience is broad—broader than what current science accepts.

“There are so many people across the country,” Bueche continued, “who have had deep and meaningful experiences, and these people are at the risk of being dismissed. Everything that they’ve learned from their experiences, everything that is probably of so much value to our culture, is preparing us for the concept that we are just one part of life in a multiverse of realities and a multiverse of other intelligent life. Everything that is preparing us is going to be lost if those people are demeaned and dismissed and ignored.

“John Mack was able to stand up for these people,” Bueche said, “and through his writing to give them voice, quoting them extensively, giving them whatever credibility he could possibly offer them. To continue to fight for these people is so important. We would like to carry that forward. And beyond that, I would also like to be able to defend John Mack’s reputation. I believe that he will eventually be known as one of the people who were major figures in the field of psychiatry, particularly in the bridging of psychiatry and spirituality, the crediting of people’s experiences as a way to know about reality. That recognition is proper.”

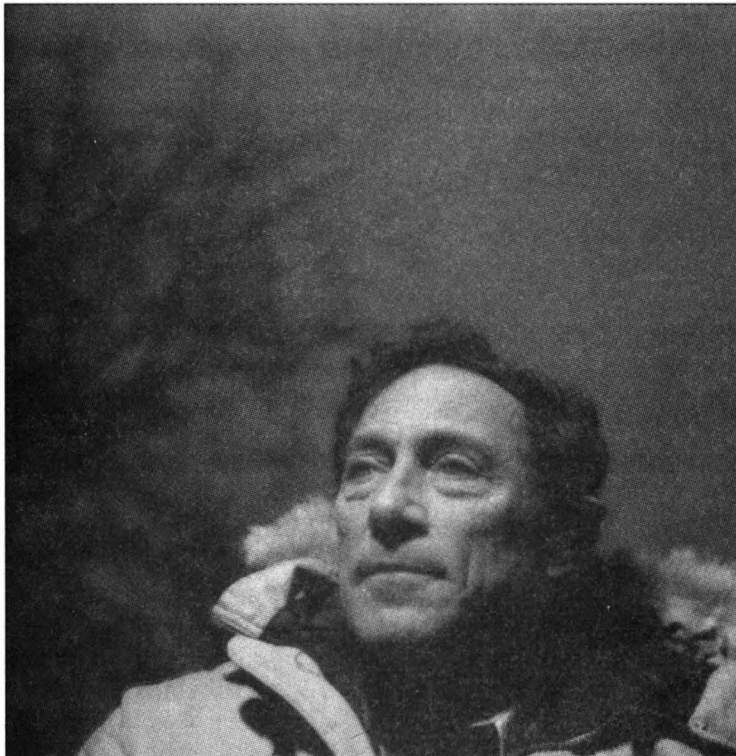
As of this writing, the legal aspects of Dr. Mack’s demise remain in a kind of limbo. “In the U.K. they don’t announce a [suspect’s] name or the background until the hearing. The hearing is scheduled for November. As you may know from the police report, the driver of

the Peugeot was a man in his fifties who was arrested at the scene under ‘suspicion of driving with excess alcohol.’ Now whether that allegation will be borne out or whether there are extenuating circumstances [such as] darkness or weather conditions—those factors will all be revealed once the authorities bring the charges in November.”

Bueche dispels any of the darker suspicions that arise when someone connected to the UFO field dies suddenly. “There’s no cause for expecting foul play under situations like this. Everyone knows that London traffic is exceedingly dangerous, as it is in any major city. This was a late-night situation, and whether there was recklessness or alcohol involved has yet to be determined.”

Bueche voices what will likely be Dr. Mack’s legacy: Just as he specialized in the study of human transformation, so did he hold a dream of the alien contact experience as having the power to change the world for the better.

“John Mack saw that the alien-contact experience was in some



ways comparable to a grassroots movement in the way that it touched so many thousands of people,” Bueche said. “The mission in a sense falls to everyone. So I would just say: Tell what you’ve learned to the people you love. Share it with your family. Hopefully this is a revolution in consciousness, a revolution in the way we appreciate our connections to one another and to other life. Carry the mission forward in your own heart and in your own life, in your own self.

“I think John would be very proud of us if we each do that.” UFO

To read an interview with Dr. John Mack conducted shortly after the release of his book *Passport To The Cosmos*, visit Sean Casteel’s UFO Journalist website at www.seancasteel.com