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Houston Chronicle UFO article - 03-09-97

From: **Pat Parrinello** <pparri@republic.net>
 Date: Sun, 9 Mar 97 15:24:31 -0600
 Fwd Date: Sun, 09 Mar 1997 20:01:34 -0500
 Subject: Houston Chronicle UFO article - 03-09-97

Subject: UFOs
 Sent: 3/9/97 4:22 PM
 Received: 3/9/97 3:08 PM
 From: John Toth, jtoth@bulletin-ol.com
 To: pparri@republic.net

Pat: This story is running in today's [Houston] Chronicle and
<http://www.chron.com/>

West Columbia library, doctor have their own 'X files'

By STEVE OLAFSON Copyright 1997 Houston Chronicle

WEST COLUMBIA -- The search for extraterrestrial intelligence probably goes on in important, top-secret places, but in this small town 50 miles south of Houston, look no further than the public library.

In West Columbia, population 4,372, the library is UFO Central.

It not only keeps a healthy sampling of reading material on unidentified flying objects; it also plays host to occasional meetings of sky watchers who swap UFO stories and view videotapes of blinking lights they believe to be alien spacecraft.

As a result, people with UFO tales tend to confide in the town librarian, Sally Taylor, a good-natured woman who listens patiently and keeps an open mind.

"It's very prevalent in this area," advises Taylor. "There are so many people that come in and say something's happened to them. I just give them Doc's number."

"Doc" is what everybody calls M.D. Wagner, who is not a doctor but is the unofficial leader and father confessor of UFO watchers in Brazoria County.

A soft-spoken man of 60 who lives in a log cabin west of town near the San Bernard River, Wagner, a Dow Chemical Co. retiree, has been organizing UFO meetings open to the public since 1992. He admits his wife, Rose, "thought I flipped" when he told her of his plans to hold his first UFO talk at the American Legion Hall in Brazoria about five years ago.

Since then, the Wagners have remained married, and he's still holding meetings, the last one convening on a recent rainy night.

He warmed up the crowd by saying: "Brazoria County is a real hot spot -- has been for a long time. UFOs are real. Where they're from, I don't know."

A group of 17 spectators listened patiently before speaking up.

A nurse told of seeing three aircraft emerge from a larger object in the night sky. "They circled the mother ship three times," she said.

A middle-aged man in a gimme cap said alien visitors are interested in mining sulphur from the Damon area.

"They're watching us. They're studying us," he said, adding that he has suffered "missing time." In UFO parlance, that means he has been abducted but cannot recall what occurred because the aliens wiped his memory clean.

A woman seated next to him said she has been having flashbacks of being interrogated by men dressed in white smocks.

No one batted an eye at the stories, which went on for about two hours, except for an elderly woman who occasionally cast glances to either side and muttered, "My God."

These UFO believers are not alone. A poll conducted in 1995 by the Scripps Howard News Service and Ohio University in Athens found half of all Americans believe flying saucers could be real and the federal government is covering up what it knows about extraterrestrial beings.

In 1990, a Gallup Poll found 47 percent of Americans believe UFOs are real.

Brazoria County UFO watchers don't need opinion polls to assure them in their beliefs, however. Still, the UFO meetings seem to serve a purpose similar to group therapy: It gets people together and lets them talk about subjects they might not feel comfortable discussing elsewhere.

The nurse who spoke of three aircraft emerging from the "mothership," for instance, admitted she had not told anyone about what she saw for two years until she attended the UFO meeting.

"I didn't realize there was this much of it going on," she said, sounding relieved that other people have seen things similar to what she described.

Indeed, Bill Bertram, a 65-year-old Navy veteran and former West Columbia city councilman, says the UFO meetings have given many Brazoria County residents the courage to come forward.

"They've been keeping it to themselves all this time, thinking, 'Who's gonna believe me?' They're starting to come out of the woodwork now," said Bertram, who says he spotted his first UFO five years ago.

Of course, there are plenty of people who wouldn't dream of going to one of the UFO get-togethers at the library -- including some people who have seen startling, unexplained things in the sky.

Nancy Markham's husband, for example, was driving home on Texas 36 the night of Feb. 5 when he saw a formation of blinking red lights bigger than a football field pass overhead.

"It shook him up," she said. "He doesn't believe in this UFO stuff, but he almost went off the road and the guy behind him did run off the road. He really thought he was gonna see it on the 6 o'clock news."

Markham, a 52-year-old retired hairdresser, asked that her husband's name not be disclosed. She couldn't convince him to come to the library and talk about what he saw.

"He says that's just for people with nothing better to do than sit around and gossip," she said.

Maybe so, but plenty of people think otherwise.

"I could easily go into denial and become a total skeptic," declares Pat Parrinello, 48, a West Columbia computer programmer who helps Wagner organize the UFO meetings. "But I want to know where the suckers are coming from."

If enough other people do, the UFO meetings may become regular

monthly affairs.

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