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Location: [Mothership](#) -> [UFO](#) -> [Updates](#) -> [1999](#) -> [May](#) -> Mack Meets Friendly Crowd In Contra Costa

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Mack Meets Friendly Crowd In Contra Costa

From: Stig Agermose <stig.agermose@get2net.dk>
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Stig

E.T. May Want to Call Contra Costa

Aliens take stage at monthly luncheon

John King

Saturday, May 1, 1999

=A91999 San Francisco Chronicle

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The topic of extraterrestrial life was served up with lunch yesterday in Pleasant Hill. Not one of the 60 people on hand was delayed en route by an alien abduction.

But if they had been, luncheon speaker John E. Mack would have known what to do. After all, he's the Harvard professor who wrote the book on the subject.

"I've been at this 10 years," Mack mused to the friendly crowd. "I still pinch myself when I hear myself saying certain things. I can't believe I'm doing it."

Mack is author of 1994's "Abduction: Human Encounters With Aliens" and founder of the Program for Extraordinary Experience Research. He spoke at the April installment of a monthly lunch that proves conclusively -- more conclusively than the evidence so far on alien beings -- that central Contra Costa County isn't as close-minded as critics like to assume.

"It's nice to see the consciousness in this place," said a woman who described herself as someone raised in Concord who "at 18 left screaming to go to Berkeley." "It's a sweet homecoming."

The lunches are organized by Sergio Lub, a Martinez craftsman who specializes in copper bracelets. The first get-together was simply a long meal with two friends in 1997.

"We had some fun, felt so energized, and then we realized that our friends have connections we can benefit from," I was told by Lub, a spirited man of Russian descent who was born in Argentina.

Since then, anywhere from 10 to 70 people have gathered to break bread and expand their minds by discussing such topics as how to create alternatives to monetary currency. Each lunch has a speaker; last month it was former state Senator John Vasconcellos, best known for founding California's Self-Esteem Task Force.

Not being up on aliens myself -- I don't even watch "The X-Files"

--before heading to lunch I checked Amazon.com's entry regarding "Abduction." Three of the four customer reviews were negative: "The fact that anyone can believe in stories such as those presented here," opined one reader, "is an indication that our society has lost whatever ability it once had to think critically and scientifically."

Yesterday, though, there wasn't a hint of skepticism voiced in the banquet room at Pacific Fresh restaurant. One man introduced himself as an abductee; one woman referred to herself a trifle vaguely as a "UFO experiencer."

Mack spent more than 90 minutes at the podium. And because he didn't need to argue the notion that Beings from Beyond are racking up frequent flier miles at our expense -- the what-if -- he spent most of his time speculating as to the why.

His theory: Someone up above wants us to straighten up our act.

"Some intelligence out there is concerned that this species is about to destroy the finest jewel in the cosmos' crown," Mack suggested. "The aliens are the emissaries of the divine. . . . God has sent scouts, a posse of beings to remind us of how far things have gotten out of hand."

Next topic: people who say they have mated with aliens, even have continuing relationships with them. Mack wonders if this is part of the beings' educational campaign.

Think of "human-alien relationships as being a model for relationships" between, say, you and your spouse, Mack said: "Nonjealous, nonthreatening, moving us to a different way of connection. . . . there are different kinds of values that each gains from the experience."

In person, with his charcoal slacks and gray shirt and intense but scholarly manner, Mack makes a straightforward impression. Aside from a turquoise-studded silver belt buckle, he looks as staid as any Harvard prof.

"He's definitely more on the serious side than the lunatic fringe," said Michael Shermer, publisher of Skeptic magazine, a Pasadena-based quarterly that follows through on its name.

Personal style aside, Shermer scoffs at Mack's notion that Earth is a favored destination of tour groups from Out There.

"If this has been going on regularly for years, something should have turned up by now," Shermer said by telephone. "At some point, anecdotes aren't good enough. We've got to have real evidence."

Facts, schmacts. Mack dismissed such criticism in the early stages of his talk.

"Empirical evidence, that's a minor thing. That's not the point," he said without prompting. "Whatever this is, if it's true, . . . then the whole game is different, who we are, our place in the cosmos."

The inevitable question came toward the end: Had Mack been

abducted himself? If not, how would he feel if he were?

"I'd be curious, sure. I don't think it would be frightening," Mack answered. He ended with a bit of logic worthy of Harvard. "After all, they bring you back."

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=A91999 San Francisco Chronicle Page A11

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