

AN OPEN LETTER TO DR. SWORDS

By Whitley Strieber

Dear Dr. Swords:

I have read your "Reader's Guide" to my book *Communion*. I was fascinated to see the way in which you chose to dismiss the witness testimony in order to fit your desired outcome that my experience be limited to internal generation. To describe Annie Gottlieb's testimony, for example, as confused because she changed one statement is an error. Given the high level of strangeness that she encountered, her testimony is rather cogent.

Overall the care you took to try to diminish the validity of the witness content of the book strikes me as suggestive that you began your undertaking with a less than objective set of preconceptions about the nature of my experience--no doubt because what has happened to me is too strange to fit the desired model of an experience with more-or-less comprehensible visitors.

The tendency among UFO investigators to unconsciously seek after a hoped-for outcome interests me. I wonder if you do not secretly hope that some sort of comprehensible "nuts and bolts" ETs will eventually emerge into common life, and we will be able to gain sensible and understandable knowledge from them. Certainly the lectures you have given and the material you have written for the MUFON Journal would suggest that you hold this outcome very dear to your heart.

Thus you seek rather hastily, I think, to dismiss the possibility that my experiences derive from an external physical source. To do this you bend over backwards to ignore the witness testimony by choosing to assume that my named witnesses are incoherent and that any unnamed witness can safely be ignored. I left some of the witnesses unnamed because of the concern that they will be hounded by members of the UFO community, debunkers and believers alike. Had the

public and the media rejected the book, they had steeled themselves to provide affidavits of their experiences. But this has not proven necessary because of the generally healthy atmosphere of open-minded skepticism that prevailed.

The purpose of *Communion* was not to prove anything at all. The book was written from a skeptical viewpoint. However, I will resist any attempt to foreclose any hypothesis at this time. Such a course is premature.

I am increasingly becoming certain that there are large elements of the UFO community who cannot successfully address the issue of abductions in general, and my own case in particular. I would not expose my unnamed witnesses to you, for example, because I would worry that any inquiry you made would also be tainted with the same emotionalism that you displayed in not addressing the witness issue objectively in the first place, and would thus be no more useful than your present analysis.

By contending that my experience is in no way external, you foreclose to yourself the compelling possibility that a very real external force intentionally disguised itself behind a screen of seemingly internal material. Certainly, after having now read hundreds of abductee accounts sent me "post *Communion*," I would argue strongly that this possibility should not be ignored. Much of the reported material that has not been subjected to the effects of hypnosis by UFO believers with "nuts and bolts" preconceptions has the same odd quality that my case displays.

The truth is that there is an eerie combination of internal and external material here, made more difficult to sort out by the fact that the stress and extreme strangeness of the experiences disrupts the ability of even the most well-intentioned witness to provide an accurate report of his or her encounter.

The absurdity of UFO investigators dismissing this sort of testimony based on the fact that it is often contradictory and full of confusion again suggests the subordination of good thinking to emotion, in the sense that the investigators are overly eager to dismiss that which does not fulfill their wishes.

I was warned by the other abductees before writing *Communion* that it would be dismissed by the scientists and engineers in the UFO community because it dealt primarily with the spiritual and metaphysical aspects of the experience. I believe that most of you--whether consciously or not--seek a hoped-for outcome that comprehensible, physical entities will one day emerge from discs and provide you with a sensible solution to the mystery.

The abduction experience is primarily a mystical experience, in the sense that the stresses generated are similar to those created by initiation into the mystery cults of the old animist religions. And the postlude experienced by abductees--one very different from that reported in accounts carefully edited and "massaged" by UFO investigators--is usually replete with spiritual and paranormal life events.

The abduction experience as it really happens is far more strange than UFO literature would suggest--far richer, far more important, far more filled with implications about the nature and future of man.

I suspect that all or most of the abduction experiences as reported by UFO investigators may suffer from a sort of unintentional fictionalization. They have been subtly altered to suggest that a quite comprehensible force is behind them. The strangeness of my account makes some UFO investigators hasten to conclude that it must represent internal experience, when the facts of the case even as

present in *Communion* suggest that this is quite uncertain.

My visitor experiences continued in 1986 and into 1987 and were far more extensively witnessed than anything that has happened to me before—and, I think, than any other case that I am aware of.

If I report these experiences, the witness testimony will form an important part of the story.

I am uncertain at this time if I will ever write further about it, though. I do not wish to subject myself to the annoyance of contending with “investigators” and “debunkers” much longer, and I certainly don’t want to expose my witnesses to the unpleasant and disturbing experience of being publicly doubted by clever people who are, in essence, nothing more than ungrounded ideologists for one scenario of contact or another—or for a scenario of no contact at all.

Personally, I have little interest in identifying the force behind the abductions, and dislike seeing my testimony suborned by those who concern themselves with this issue. The issue of whether or not UFOs are real doesn’t much concern me. What does interest me is how to make this difficult and stressful experience useful, or at least endurable, to those who have it.

The direction I have taken involves working with mental health professionals who are interested in helping people cope without demanding that the possible quite inexplicable source of what happened to them be understood before they can

be effectively treated. It is possible to live with uncertainty and to do so at a low anxiety level. This is, however, a learned behavior, not one readily available to the unprepared individual.

I do not have any faith in the search for “answers.” If visitors are real, they appear to me to be in almost total control of the situation. Therefore the search is useless because it will not bear fruit until and if they want it to. And when they are ready to reveal the answer, the mystery will at once be solved.

It is therefore counterproductive for abductees to be bothered by what are, in essence, no more than curiosity seekers. What is of primary importance is the mental health outcome of the people subjected to the visitor experience.

Insofar as the inquiries of the UFO community challenge the veracity of abductees or—as in your case—seem to be dismissive of obvious possibilities to suit a hoped-for outcome, they do not further the goal of enabling people to live comfortably with this extraordinary and difficult experience, but rather make it even harder for them. Thus, as far as those of us who must actually cope with the experience are concerned, your approach is potentially just as undermining as that of a debunker like Philip Klass.

The idea of the visitors being as strange as what is actually encountered is threatening even to many open-minded scientists because you sense that this means you cannot ever understand the situation in terms that are intellectually satisfactory. This

experience may never be admissible to final understanding, not even if actual physical evidence is eventually found. Not even, for example, if the government eventually turns out to have actual crashed discs hidden away.

Should physical artifacts be revealed, I feel that our best scientific insights into their true meaning will be about as appropriate as that of the Papuan witch doctors who formed a cargo cult around the back cover of an old Agatha Christie novel found on a roadside.

All of their magic, even when it perfectly fitted the intellectual paradigms out of which it emerged, was not enough to get the picture of old Agatha to give them a car in which they could travel to the heavenly city beyond the hills.

I would suggest that the intellectual paradigm from which you are operating—your entire mind, the mind of science—is inappropriate to the study you have undertaken. This particular reality cannot, I suspect, be made to fit the patterns of thought with which you seek to address it. Understanding is going to elude the old, deterministic mind. As I said in *Communion*, this may be mankind’s first encounter with a quantum reality in the macrocosm. If so, then entirely new paradigms of thought are going to be needed. As a visitor said to an abductee, “your words are a misfortune.” When they are used to try to twist new modes of experience into old forms of thought, they most certainly are.

Sincerely yours,
Whitley Strieber

LONG-TERM EFFECTS OF CLOSE ENCOUNTERS

By Rosemary M. Decker

A chick, once hatched, can never return to the shell...

—Old proverb

In order to get a clear view of the long-term effects of close encounters on the encountered, we need at least a brief review of typical short-term

effects: those of the first few weeks, months or years following the event or events. That the initial effects on the persons’ lives and personalities are disturbing, often extremely so, should not be amazing when we consider that their entire personal universe has, in a matter of moments or hours, blown

wide open.

As the initial, emotionally protective shock wears off, the contacted persons become aware that not only must their pre-concepts of what is scientifically possible be modified; *their entire concept of earth-man’s place in Creation must be re-*