



Local Matters.

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Close encounters of the suburban kind

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On a late afternoon in April 2009, college student Will Chambers was leaving his parents' home in Littleton. His trips back to school in Fort Collins were usually uneventful — though this time, the drive would prove more interesting.

Chambers was taking University Boulevard to I-25 — a route he had driven many times since graduating from Arapahoe High School in 2007. He could likely drive it in his sleep — a good thing, since this time he was having a hard time keeping both eyes on the road.

"When you see something like that, it changes everything that you know," Chambers said of the incident.

As Chambers passed University's intersection with Arapahoe Road, he entered a stretch of University that meanders around DeKoevend Park and the tree-lined residential neighborhoods in west Centennial.

"Right as I was making the first turn, I spotted a bright white object in the sky. It was probably northeast," he said. "It looked like it was either cigar-shaped or disk-shaped from the side."

With one eye on the road, Chambers slowed down, while keeping the other eye glued on the mysterious object. As he weaved up the hill toward Orchard Road, the thing — whatever it was — disappeared into the trees.

"I kept looking for it," Chambers said. "I almost gave up on it, but as I looked more westward, it had moved to a new position. It seemed like it came closer to me, almost overhead."

As Chambers waited at the stoplight, he took the opportunity to study the unidentified flying object more carefully for a few seconds.

"As it came out from under the cloud, it turned blue to match the sky. It was like camouflage," he recalled. "It definitely looked like a solid object. I definitely felt like it was an intelligent design."

UFO Central

Colorado has recently become something of an epicenter for UFO-related activity. Although not yet rivaling Roswell, N.M., the site of a famous alleged spaceship crash in 1947, the state is increasingly on the UFO community's radar screen.

Colorado sees about a dozen reports of UFO sightings every month, according to the Mutual UFO Network or MUFON, an international organization that tracks such activity. The group celebrated its 40th anniversary at its annual conference in Greenwood Village last August.



UFOs were photographed in 1956 over Jasper, Colo. in the southwestern part of the state. Courtesy photo

"Colorado does seem to have a higher rate than other states," said MUFON spokesman Alejandro Rojas. "We're not 100 percent sure why. The vast majority of these investigations turn out to be something mundane."

Rojas thinks the fact that MUFON is headquartered in Fort Collins and that NORAD, the North American Aerospace Defense Command, is based near Colorado Springs may have something to do with the large culture of sightings.

Whatever the cause, there are quarters in Colorado that have seen a new interest, concern and even fear about the implications of UFOs and occurrences that some attribute to alien visitors.

Southwestern Colorado was hit recently by a string of bizarre cattle mutilations. Several ranchers in and around the San Luis Valley reported their calves had been killed and mutilated in ways that have left law enforcement baffled.

Calves' chests were cored out and their organs carefully removed. There were reportedly no pools of blood or signs of struggle. Perhaps most mysterious were the lack of footprints or tire tracks.

Then, Elbert County resident Marcia Burke was on "The Montel Williams Show" last year to discuss her alleged encounter with a space alien she says she saw on her horse ranch near Deer Trail.

"I felt like I got some telepathy where he was trying to tell me not to be scared," she told Colorado Community Newspapers. "It was too much for me to handle. I went inside my house and locked the door."

Such reports have prompted UFO activists in Denver to collect enough valid petition signatures to place a proposed ordinance on the city's August ballot. Proponents say the local, state and federal governments have done too little to keep the public informed on such issues.

If it passes, the ordinance would create a seven-member city commission of "experts" to collect evidence on reported UFO sightings in the city and actively provide information to the public. The commission would also ensure that police and firefighters were trained to handle UFO-related incidents

"The commission would essentially serve the purpose of briefing the general public about extraterrestrial intelligent beings," said Jeff Peckman, the measure's chief proponent.

Peckman, himself, claims to have seen UFOs and has publicly screened a video that purports to show a space alien peering into a Nebraska man's window. Peckman tried unsuccessfully to show the video to then-Sen. Barack Obama during the 2008 Democratic National Convention in Denver.

UFOs over Lone Tree

Alex Kalkman, 22, was hanging out in Lone Tree's Daniels Park with a few friends one afternoon when he saw a flying object in the distance to the west. A hang glider, he thought, at first.

"We watched it for probably a minute, moving really slowly," he said. "Then it came to a complete standstill and stayed there for a solid minute. The object started moving north again."

Whatever it was, it did not make any noise, according to Kalkman, who by now was convinced that the object was no regular aircraft

"It was invisible for a good 30 seconds," he said. "When we were able to pick it up again, it was moving in an eastbound trajectory. It panned across the sky for a good 10 minutes."

Kalkman says he later had another UFO sighting on a desolate highway in Utah.

Whatever one makes of such sightings — space visitors, top-secret government projects or overactive imaginations — there has been an apparent increase in the public's willingness to talk about their UFO experiences.

Celebrities ranging from Muhammed Ali to former President Carter have publicly discussed their own UFO sightings, helping to bring credence to what many have dismissed as a dubious phenomenon.

Nuclear physicist Stanton Friedman has tried to lend credibility to UFO research since the late 1950s. He worked on advanced nuclear aircraft for government contractors before writing such books as "Crash at Corona: The Definitive Study of the Roswell Incident."

As he lectures around the world, Friedman, a frequent MUFON guest, has noticed a slow, but growing tendency for people to acknowledge their UFO experiences when he asks for a show of hands.

"The hands go up reluctantly. They know I'm not going to laugh," he said. "As I'm counting, by the time I get to the other side of the hall, the hands go up rapidly. Everyone thinks he's the only one who's had a sighting. When I ask how many reported what they saw, 90 percent of the hands go down."

That's where Doug Wilson, MUFON's chief Colorado investigator, comes in. He leads 24 other volunteer sleuths and has investigated about 60 reported UFO sightings in the state over the last four years — some with accompanying photos or video. According to Wilson, his work is not unlike any other serious investigative query.

"I take whatever data I can from the interview and compare it to the initial report," he said. "I take that information and try to find out — Could it be a weather anomaly? Could it have been a weather balloon? Could it have been an aircraft? We check all of that."

As many as 70 percent of the once mysterious sightings can be explained away that way, Wilson says.

"There are also a significant number that can't be explained," he added. "But you'll never see a MUFON report that says this man saw an extraterrestrial vehicle. That's not for us to decide."

Both Chambers' and Kalkman's reports remain in MUFON's unexplained file. That leaves such witnesses to interpret their own experiences for themselves — sometimes in ways that become life-changing.

"It really puts things in perspective," Kalkman said of his two experiences. "I was raised in a Christian family. I don't know that I believe the same things my parents do. It's definitely changed some fundamental beliefs."

Chambers agrees.

"You start to wonder what else is out there," he said. "There's so little that we know about the universe."

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