

Just Smile – A History of Alien Abduction Research in Australia

By Bryan Dickeson

Adelaide ufologist Fred Stone visited New Zealand between September and November 1964 on a private tour. For five weeks Fred travelled all around the country, talking to the local UFO groups that he had long corresponded with from Australia.

Soon after arriving in New Zealand, he was interviewed by a television reporter in Auckland, who finally asked him, "If you ever meet an alien, what do you do?" Without hesitation Stone simply sighed and said, "Just smile and act naturally." (Fred's reply is probably my all-time favourite quote from ufology – I still like to use it from time to time.)

Fred was joking, of course, because if you've spent any time with this subject then you know there's not much smiling during an alien encounter. Witnesses usually 'freak out' completely and experience severe shock.

As children we are all told about Santa Clause, the Tooth fairy, Easter bunny, bogey man, guardian angels, and so on. These early 'facts of life' are usually extracted in the transition to adulthood without too many ongoing psychological problems – in a process referred to as 'growing-up.'

Aliens from outer space are different. Thanks to Albert Einstein and his light speed barrier, we know that aliens have never existed, or that if they do, then they are too far away to be relevant to life here on earth.

So when someone sees a UFO or meets an alien they must suddenly 'add-on' a universe full of possibilities to their expectations of life on Earth. It is much more difficult to take on board a host of new possibilities than it is to subtract a Santa, especially at such short notice. This difficulty is increased when there are plenty of people around you who haven't had the alien experience and who can reasonably expect not to have it. Most experiencers develop severe 'ontological shock' because aliens don't have the scientific decency to believe Mr Einstein, in the way most humans like to believe in him.

Fred Stone died on 20 February 1977 and much has happened in the 35 years since. Most notable has been the emergence of the alien abduction phenomenon. Abduction events are certainly the most extreme up-close and personal type of alien encounter and give those who experience them a lot less to smile about. They can recur over several decades and abductees have much less control over their situation, much less input – they just can't walk away and put it down to inexperience.

Also, after 30 years of alien abductions, many UFO investigators still find the phenomena hugely problematical. They are glad the subject has now lost its novelty value to the general public, and are only too happy to ignore abductions altogether, as being 'old news'.

Many researchers find such incidents confronting because they are inconsistent with their own personal view of what UFOs are all about. They still see aliens as agents of something 'angelic', God-linked, all-powerful. This tradition of linking aliens to an omnipresent power means that if you meet an alien that alien must automatically know all about you and your innermost thoughts and secrets, and your worthiness as a human being.

Therefore, long medical examinations and anal probes should be unnecessary – your most intimate medical status would be 'sensed' by any real alien or 'angel'. Yet alien abductions involve what seem to be unnecessary and intrusive medical procedures which diminish the alien's divine status.

Of course, the easiest way to maintain the divine status of aliens is to believe that those who do abduct humans are 'evil', not real aliens at all, and their activities should be ignored. However, this judgemental indifference is of little use to abductees and of less use in ufology. After all, aliens may be more technically advanced, 'smarter' perhaps, yet similar to us. They may be more accessible, less divine – just 'different', or 'alien'.

When UFOR(NSW) became interested in alien abductions and set up its first special interest group (SIG) in 1992 to investigate the phenomenon, many members (some of them on the Committee), strongly resisted the move. Alien abductions and anal probes were too sexy, too sensational, too 'yucky' for proper investigation by serious UFO groups. Ufology was seen as being a 'family interest'. Thus abduction research would scare off families with children, and reduce the group's public support.

(Something similar happened in the UK several years earlier. When several BUFORA members tried to set up a sub-group to investigate alien abductions, one particularly influential individual lobbied hard, and successfully, for a moratorium on the subject. That moratorium has become a permanent state of mind, so that now there are NO abductions in the UK at all – unless you read material by Nick Pope, or a few other 'non-mainstream' investigators. Alien abductions happen all over the world, except in Britain.)

Once you start investigating alien abductions, the question soon arises: Are aliens more like veterinarians than 'angels'? And here I use the term 'veterinarian' to mean someone trained to perform medical procedures on a range of *other* species.

We recognise important cultural differences between *veterinarians* and *doctors*. Own-species medicos are 'doctors', who operate in a *professional* environment, where permission to perform intrusive medical procedures requires some kind of informed consent by the *client*. Otherwise the activity is considered unprofessional and even 'abusive'. Consent is only unnecessary in the case of extreme medical emergency.

However, only twenty years ago most people would go to a hospital, sign a simple form, and just let their doctor 'do his job', whatever that was; and no questions were asked. Nowadays, medical treatment is very different. So 'informed consent' is a modern, evolving, 'same-species thing', a very new concept to our 21st century civilisation. It is something cultural and acquired.

With alien abductions you quickly realise the abductors are not angels, they're vets and about as divine as you or me – this greatly simplifies your research when you are looking for common attributes over a range of abductions. And of course, you soon realise from when you take your cat or dog to a vet, that vets have good reasons for placing thermometers in anuses.

It is also important to see that there is nothing *personal* or *professional* about these alien encounters. Not in the way we now think of what is personal and professional. Our personal response to them is not about culture, it's about 'shock and awe', or, more specifically, an excess of shock and a lack of awe.

And you soon find that many alien abductors use this shock and awe to help get them what they want. That is, they will interact with abductees in some subtle, obtuse, yet limited way to make them more compliant for a series of abductions.

The abductor actually becomes a 'handler'. For example, in one case, when I asked an experiencer under hypnosis what skin colour her regular abductor /handler /interrogator had, she immediately replied, "Blue!"

Me: "Blue?"

Her: "Well, he's not really blue, he's grey – but blue is my favourite colour!"

In another case, I was presented with a coloured drawing of an abductor who had blue eyes and wore an ancient Egyptian, pharaonic, headdress before our interview even began. This entity had walked through a hospital room wall late one night to provide the abductee with medical assistance and was 'definitely not, Not an alien – NOT a grey!' During the session, when asked the skin colour of the Egyptian gentleman, there was a pause and then, "Dark."

Me: "Oh you mean, dark-brownish, like a negro? (After all, ancient Egypt was once ruled by a series of Nubian pharaohs?)

Her: "(pause) .. No, more like an elephant."

Me: "Oh, you mean grey?"

Her: "(pause) .. Yes (pause), grey."

The headdress turned out to be medical head covering; the 'jewel' in front a light reflector. The female abductee got much better very soon after her visitor left. There are numerous cases of such culturally screened memories; and many can be very complicated.

It appears from these sorts of reports that aliens may also have a public relations problem – being an alien is 'not cool' and not necessarily an asset in many encounters.

And this is very, very interesting. Because the manipulation of abductees' perceptions, suggests their handlers actively try to obscure their activities; that they themselves perceive there is something dishonest about what they are doing. Are their activities seen as being 'abusive' to our modern, space-age sensitivities? In extreme cases, should we compare their camouflage to the string quartets and shower blocks used to give gas chambers the appearance of normalcy by World War Two Nazis?

If alien abductions are good for us, then why is such stealth and subterfuge necessary?

Another client being abducted regularly told me that her aliens were lovely. They were here to help us, that they had only good intentions towards her, her family and Mankind. They told her they were helping our world towards a newer, brighter future 'in the light', a 'Golden Age', and only wanted to make her feel good.

Now, I don't hypnotically regress abductees just because they ask me too. I usually try to talk them out of it. Whenever you take someone back, the events they recall are never exactly what they were originally thought to be, and their restored memories can become quite confronting. You must always try to minimise any harm or alarm.

When I told her that she really had no problem if everything was lovely, and asked why she wanted me to regress her, she said: "They say one thing, or say nice things, but are doing other things that I only vaguely remember, that seem 'wrong'. They have no idea of pain and how badly I feel (physically and psychologically) after my abductions, or what my concerns are."

Her misgivings were such that she wanted to know if there was something else going on. Why did the bits she remember only vaguely seem to be wrong?

Usually, after a regression, it's best for an experiencer to remember ALL that has happened to them. Then they can better evaluate their experience, and feel more empowered in the process. Most trauma seems to come from the abductee 'not knowing' fully what has happened to them, or fearing what may have happened to them. If any trauma has been generated, experiencers will start to develop their own methods for managing that trauma. They feel less stupid, less 'dumbed down', and actually become more interested, more involved, in the abduction process. Aliens can be rather patronising.

UFO Research (NSW)'s very first attempt to run an abductee research group in 1992 was a disaster. The initial, exploratory meeting of its three convenors and a handful of abductees soon became acrimonious and was quickly wound up.

The convenors quickly regrouped (SIG Mark 2), relinquishing any research components in favour of a 'case-worker' model that offered client support only. They began actively scouting for sympathetic professional therapists (mental health workers, community workers, psychiatrists, hypnotherapists, who might have the skills to manage traumatised clients) and the substantial resources needed to maintain this model. When the UFO Research (NSW) Committee could not agree to allocate its entire budget and efforts to the new group's aims, they set themselves up as an independent organisation and completely split from UFO Research (NSW) to offer abductees subsidised one-on-one professional support.

Several years afterwards I was able to re-establish contact with some of the abductees who stuck with the support-only program (this now seems to have concluded). The program had referred several dozen clients for therapy over several years, with mixed success.

A range of therapists had provided a variety of support, but there had been little consistency in their approach overall and no effort made to develop a support program specifically for alien abductees. No initial guidelines had been set up for therapists to follow and fine-tune, and no feedback sought later as to whether the support they were providing might actually work.

Clients were never even asked whether the support provided had actually helped them cope better. Some participants felt their experiences were not considered valid or real by their therapists. In some cases, copies of tape recordings of sessions were not made available to clients or discussed with them.

Experiencers were consistently told under hypnosis to 'forget all about their experiences'. Their experiences were treated as aberrant behaviour, the experiencers as fantasy-prone personalities. (This fantasy-only approach has been problematical since the Betty and Barney Hill case of the 1960s. The Hills were told to forget their experience, so their account came out via their hypnotherapist. Barney always had tremendous difficulty managing thereafter. Nowadays, researchers prefer to consider experiencer accounts as being tendered honestly.)

Afterwards, several clients felt they were no better off for the support provided, and were actually much more confused about their experiences. The program showed little, if any, co-ordination. Several therapists had since commented that their involvement with the program had been detrimental to their professional reputation.

As there was no research program, no abduction details were gathered from clients for collation to look for similar phenomena, or trends, or characteristics which might be later shared to help validate abduction experiences. There had been little coordination and no 'data mining'.

In 1998, several people involved on the support side of this group (Favaloro, Marx, Delillo) did produce an essay on the real extent of the alien abduction problem. This has been very well-received. Their discussion showed how, if only 2-8% of the world's population was being abducted by aliens, several times a year, for several hours at a time (as was being advocated by Budd Hopkins, David Jacobs and other researchers in the United States), there were insurmountable logistical problems:

That is, for our planet of seven billion people (7,000,000,000) there would be some 140 to 560 million people being abducted per year for about 1260-5040 million hours of abductee processing time. There are only 8760 hours in a (non-leap) year, so planet Earth must be surrounded by large space ship armadas, with 'conveyor belt-scale systems' to transport all the abductees who require processing. It would be hard for us not to notice such large-scale activities, or the large numbers of craft around the Earth that this required. Therefore, the 'real' numbers for abductees that were being promoted by some investigators, were far too high. (Any reduction in these figures should make the work of abduction researchers more manageable, however!)

There are inherent problems whenever you attempt to scale up rare phenomena into something world-wide, and this discussion was entirely valid and worthwhile. But the lack of information generated from the Australian abductee support program, suggests that an important opportunity for research has been lost.

UFO Research (NSW)'s third attempt to investigate alien abductions in the late 1990s attracted few clients to its monthly meetings on Sydney's North Shore, because it lacked the therapists to provide client support. Potential participants were diverted to the other support group and SIG Mark 3 lapsed within a year due to a lack of clients and organisational problems.

Several UFO Research (NSW) Committee members undertook hypnotherapy training soon afterwards and a fourth attempt at abduction research and support was made in mid-2003. The meeting set up to launch a program which balanced support with research, lost focus. A follow-up meeting several months later quickly fell apart due to personality conflicts and a lack of purpose.

Given such difficulties when managing abductees and the potential for group self-destruction, why should UFO Research (NSW) even bother researching this subject? After all, there is always plenty of new abductee material from experiencers for UFO enthusiasts to access on the internet and in bookstores.

It is important for researchers to "Know the Veterinarians" better. Individual accounts are valuable, but there is a need for an 'averaged' view, because individual accounts can be very idiosyncratic. Experiencers do not lie, but do fill the gaps between their abduction experiences with material that is more familiar to them, material from their 'normal' lives.

They edit their experiences and may even promote a context which gives their abductions a more intense, mystical dimension. This is done to make the unthinkable seem more valid and appropriate.

For example, from the case I described earlier, the experiencer might later feel inclined to say that ALL alien abductions are actually performed by time-travelling ancient Egyptians, to help 21 century humankind. I would not dismiss such an assertion outright, but would see it as an untested and unmoderated account. The abductee is not lying, but has been affected by their 'screening' process. If the researcher regressing the abductee has not been diligent, or if they have their own ufological agenda, then the viewpoint will be further skewed, further 'enhanced'.

A researcher has to assess groups of reports and find consistencies which help to separate idiosyncratic from substantial phenomena; to find what recurs through a range of experiences. Previous attempts at this have been made by lone researchers, mostly in the United States; people such as Budd Hopkins and David Jacobs, for example. Their techniques and presumptions are not always stated up front and have to be deduced from their published work, which tends to have a mass publication orientation. The findings from this valuable material must also be taken on board and subjected to further refinement, further development.

The closest alien to human contact produces individual or unique differences you cannot easily compare with other accounts – each experiencer has a unique ‘fingerprint’. However, when you review several accounts, there are common elements (such as the sequence of events and activities, décor/surroundings, light effects, etc.), which can be ‘averaged’ out for research purposes. These common elements may seem exotic, even magical or humorous, but their occurrence across the abduction experience is persistent and requires more serious attention.

Another example. During the late 1990s, UFO Research (NSW) co-hosted a weekend conference in Western Sydney. Memorable highlights from that weekend for me were an address by New Zealand abductee Sue Hanson, followed by an informal evening session about alien abductions. One participant in the evening session was so moved by the occasion he mentioned how his night-time abductors routinely floated into his room through the mirror.

Almost everyone in the audience of about 60 people laughed, but I had already recorded three independent cases of this phenomenon and did not. For it may have a sound scientific basis – a truly alien technology utilising something called the *Casimir effect*. And there are many similar cultural or mythological references to back up the phenomenon where non-humans appear or disappear through a mirror. (One of the best modern accounts of this phenomenon I read only recently was in Bill Chalker’s, *Hair of the Alien* (2005), Paraview Pocket Books, Chapter 7, *Tape of Lost Memory*, section: *Through the Mirror more Darkly*, where experiencer Peter Khoury describes floating through a mirror in some detail.)

This is but one of many potential alien ‘technologies’ that keep cropping up, and something we could know more about. Furthermore, it should be possible for us to improve the quality and veracity of abductees’ recollections, with suitably-designed research projects:

For example, when you fill a glass jar with dried beans and ask a number of people to guess the actual number of beans in the jar, you get a wide range of answers.

In a hundred guesses, only three or four people will actually get close to the correct number of beans, and some of the numbers suggested will appear excessively high or low.

However, if you total up all the numbers guessed, and divide this by 100, the ‘averaged’ result is usually much closer to the actual number of beans. It appears that when a wider range of human experience is surveyed, you get a better result.

Social surveys use this averaged human experience to produce reliable data for a range of activities such as advertising, marketing, political polling, and so on. I have been involved with projects that successfully used these techniques to help assess the needs of public housing tenants from a range of socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds in inner Sydney, for example.

It should be possible to use such a structured process to get a more accurate picture of alien abductions, as follows:

1. Set up a small group of facilitators (maximum of 5) to provide client support and assessment, with an agreed outlook, a common list of expectations/limitations, and a focussed methodology.
2. Use UFO Research (NSW) membership to advertise the research project and invite experiencers to participate.
3. Initially vet applicants to assess 'suitability' – preference given to locals (to minimise travel, maximise resources, etc.), assess whether any special requirements, and their availability for interviews. Successful applicants would have a preliminary meeting to inform them about the purpose of the project, what their role would be, what to expect and how their information would be used. (Any comments?) Notes made to tailor subsequent interviews for each experiencer.
4. Interview/regress each participant on two separate occasions with two different facilitators, who record/refine their accounts. (Different interviewers should get a similar story, but details may vary). Facilitators to review/fine-tune their methodologies part-way.
In some cases a third client interview may be needed to clarify earlier interview material.
6. Facilitators collate all data and comments by abductees and interviewers, then produce a series of 'raw data' accounts/reports.
7. Feedback to participants in small discussion groups. Copies of original reports provided. Some overall assessment made – comments from participants? Further follow-up needed?
8. Make results of project known – to experiencers and UFO Research (NSW). Write up materials etc.
9. Continue reviewing 'lone' accounts published by sole experiencers elsewhere.
10. Follow-up six months later. Some participants may require additional interviews/follow-up.

Such a project would need about 50 participants – one hundred would be better, but the resources for that would be prohibitive. It would take 2-3 years to complete the estimated 120 interviews and ten group discussions needed for the initial program.

The project would not answer all questions; in fact, it would probably generate a lot more. But it should provide a solid basis for further work and valuable feedback for experiencers. It would also provide valuable information that lets us assess alien interactions from a more 'human' perspective, instead of just reacting with shock and awe.

And of course, with less shock and awe, we should get to know our veterinarians better. We may even get to smile, as Fred Stone has suggested.

References

Chalker, Bill, *Hair of the Alien*, (Chapter 7: *Tape of Lost Memory*, Section; *Through the Mirror more Darkly*), Paraview Pocket Books (2005).

M. Favaloro, R. Marx and R. Delillo, *UFOs, The Conveyor Belt and the Real Size of The Problem* (1998).