



'I hope I'm not a chosen one,' says abductee Janet Russell.

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What's left of LUFON?

The LUFON (Los Angeles UFO Network) was a group of UFO enthusiasts who were active in the Los Angeles area. They were known for their investigations and reports of UFO sightings. However, the group has since disbanded, and its members have scattered.

Abduction at Montauk

Montauk, New York, is a small town on the eastern tip of Long Island. It is known for its alleged UFO sightings and alien abductions. In 1975, a group of people were abducted in a field near Montauk, and they were held there for several days. The incident is one of the most famous UFO cases in the United States.

We investigate stuff when no one else will listen.

Steve Friedman, owner of Island Voice, says he has investigated many UFO cases over the years. He has interviewed dozens of people who claim to have been abducted by aliens, and he has written about their experiences in his magazine. He says that he has always been interested in the subject, and that he has always been willing to investigate, even when others are not.

11. ISLAND STAFF PHOTOGRAPHY BY JIMMY WOOD

'I don't want to be a chosen one. I want to be me.'

Janet Russell, 42, of San Francisco, says she was abducted by aliens in 1975. She was taken to a secret base in the desert, and she was held there for several years. During that time, she was subjected to various experiments, and she was forced to reveal the secrets of the alien world to her captors.

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11. ISLAND STAFF PHOTOGRAPHY BY JIMMY WOOD

UFOs, Aliens and L.I.: What are they Doing Here?

A lot of people say they have seen UFOs or have been abducted by aliens. They emerge forever changed and pay a steep price. They get divorced. Friends snicker and shy away. But they don't change their stories. Now, the leader of the Island's oldest active UFO investigation group is in jail, accused in a bizarre plot to kill Suffolk pols, his followers scattered. The committed strive on, looking skyward, hoping the truth will set him—and them—free.

What would it take to get you to believe? Only two sides exist in the debate over UFOs and alien life. You are either someone who has had contact or is open to the idea that it's possible, or you are not. Often, membership in the second group requires that you think those in the first are completely out of their minds.

If your most trusted friend said she saw a UFO, you would probably urge her to seek psychiatric help. If a Harvard professor spoke out about alien abductions, your faith in the professor would falter, your faith in your reality would not. If a string of military officials wrote books confessing to government cover-ups, you'd chuckle and say, I guess those guys got too close to the chemical research department.

You would stretch your imagination with unparalleled mental acrobatics, develop the wildest theories to explain the phenomena in the context of the world as you see it (yes, the same world around which the sun revolves, the flat earth which would put us smack in the middle of India), all in order to avoid walking over to the other side of the fence, looking up into the sky and saying, hmmm, maybe there is such a thing as alien life...

Well, whatever you think, there are people on Long Island who see a different world than you. Their reality is one of regular UFO visits, frightening alien and military abductions, massive government and police cover-ups, harassment for what they know, and sky-splitting spaceship crashes in quiet Suffolk parks.

Here is a telescopic look at the other side, the lore of UFOs on Long Island. This is their reality.

But what would it take to get *you* to believe?

Welcome to their world

It was Nov. 24, 1992. A Mastic Beach man had gotten off work and was on his way home around 7 p.m. He drove along his usual route, east on Sunrise Highway near Southaven County Park in the Yaphank-North Shirley area of Brookhaven. It was a quiet night, and Thanksgiving was in two days.

The bright white light first caught his attention. It shimmered into his windshield, in the windows. He glanced at the clock on his dashboard. It was 7:12 p.m. He looked outside, out the window, and up into the night sky. A large blue and white object hovered 50 feet above, keeping pace with his car.

The tubular object was flying above the trees that separate Sunrise and Montauk highways. It had large dazzling blue lights on both ends and a dull, metallic gray texture. Suddenly, in a splash of light, the object accelerated. It made a wrenching, unbelievable right turn. It flipped end-over-end and smashed deep into the park's woods.

The man stopped his car on the shoulder and stared out the window. Light glowed, like a fire, from the area of the park where the flying object had crashed. He thought it might have been a test aircraft. Another man pulled up his car and said he too had seen the object and that it was definitely a UFO.

They weren't the only motorists who saw something strange that night. Coming home from food shopping around 7:30, Jerry and Denise Gasowski and their 8-year-old son parked in their driveway on Horseblock Road in Brookhaven. They found that the power in their house had gone out. Then they saw the bright flash of light in the western sky. "We saw the sky light up; it lit up like I'd never seen it before," says Jerry Gasowski, who works in a power plant. "I'd never seen a light that bright. The night turned into day."

The first man drove home, and then returned to the park with a friend. Military and police officers had completely sealed off the area. No one was getting in.

Around 7:30 or 7:40 p.m., Robert Reich, who lives on North Shirley's River Road, abutting Southaven Park, was on his way home from work at the sewage treatment plant in West Babylon. On Victory Avenue, which runs along the southern edge of the park, he ran into a police roadblock. No lights, no flares. Just a plain white sawhorse barricade. One Suffolk County police car was parked nearby, and the officer waved him onto Gerrard Road. Reich had to travel around the entire park to get home. For the next three or four days, he saw military helicopters flying over the area. They shook the windows of his house.

Some people, many people, called the Long Island UFO Network about a week later.

Since the '80s, the network's investigators, headed by a retired court officer named John Ford, had investigated a string of cases: alien abductions, sightings off the LIE and, most notably, dunes of Smith's Point Beach near the entrance to Moriches Bay. LIFUON sent out press releases on the 1989 crash and detailed how black copters and Brookhaven National Laboratory scientists had blown the thing out of the sky with a massive electronic weapon, and how they had retrieved the alien technology for study back at BNL. So, when LIFUON started getting calls on the crash at Southaven Park, they were ready. They had been waiting for something like this.

Steve Iavarone, LIUFON vice president and chief investigator, a robust guy with close-cropped black hair and a mustache who is built like a weightlifter, and another investigator named Richie, a balding blond Vietnam vet who always wears his dog tags, were on the site by the beginning of December. They interviewed the witnesses. Neighbors recalled fire trucks and large flatbeds entering and leaving the park. The investigators found widened roads, treetops sheared off. Remnants of Brookhaven Fire Department equipment and a buried silver radiation suit.

And then the story of the night began to unfold. One of the firemen from the local department that responded had a camcorder and got some of it on tape. A defense Department analyst from Rocky Point smuggled the tape to LIUFON and briefed them on the events. Men in black jumpsuits appeared on the scene in a flash and told Suffolk County police to leave the area, which they did immediately. The tape showed raging blazes and firefighters working over the scalding hot wreckage. Officials shut down the

park, but two witnesses saw them drive the object out, covered on a flatbed truck. LIUFON received word that the wreckage had been transported to Brookhaven National Lab for study. The park remained closed for several days, supposedly for duck hunting.

The LIUFON investigators walked through the park hundreds of times, in the snow, in the rain, over two years. "We are the guys," says lavarone, 39. "Nobody but me and Richie. We spent two years in the park, two fuckin' years. I began to hate Southaven Park. No one investigated it but us." They took electromagnetic readings and discovered abnormally high radiation levels. Everybody got sick. They began to feel weak and to lose weight.

One day in January, nearly two months after the crash, lavarone was in the park taking video recordings. A black Cadillac with tinted windows began trailing him from behind. He swung the camera up to catch it on tape and it zipped away. It returned, he swung up the camera and it zipped away. They were trying to intimidate him, he says, the men in black.

That wasn't it for the harassment. lavarone began to wake at night to see eyes peeing into the windows of his shingled-and-brick house in Holtsville. He began to get messages on his answering machine, in computer-altered voices. "Mr. lavarone," one echoed, "we know you have been contacted. We know where you go. We know what you do. We will be watching you." Ford said he faced similar harassment on a regular basis.

The story that won't die

Officials still maintain that a UFO did not crash at Southaven Park on Nov. 24, 1992.

Bud Corwin was inside the park that night. As one of the park superintendents for Suffolk County, he was living in the lodge in Southaven at the time. It was the middle of duck-hunting season, and some of his friends were staying with him, ready to go shooting the next day.

They didn't hear a thing that night. The next day he heard people talking about this UFO crash. He got phone calls at home about it. Hunters were out, and the area of the park near the river where they shoot was closed. Visitors could go anywhere else in the park, he says, and the hunters were only out Wednesday, Saturday and Sunday, so anyone could head down there any other day. But still that one section was closed three days a week, and he says that's why people started saying the park was shut down because of a UFO crash. "It's all ridiculous," he says. "I believe in UFOs, yes. But nothing crashed in that park."

Still, LIUFON was sure they were on to something. They planned a demonstration outside the Suffolk government administration building in Hauppauge in

July of 1993, and a candlelight vigil in August at police headquarters in Yaphank. They held another demonstration, "End the UFO cover-up now!" at headquarters in 1995.

"LIUFON has gone to war," read the beginning of a letter John Ford sent to LIUFON members. "War that is over the cover-up of the Southaven Park UFO Crash...The cover-up continues and overt and covert government pressure to debunk and ridicule the Southaven Park Crash has begun with every effort to destroy the Network in the offing...LIUFON intends to fight and fight it will."

Ford was getting upset that the media had ridiculed their efforts. But they also contacted more press about the incident, many of which came storming to check out the story. One day, a TV reporter headed to the Suffolk police headquarters in Yaphank.

It was Sgt. Vincent Ward's first day on the job with the public information department, and the other officers, as a practical joke, sent him outside as the resident "UFO expert." Today he's still known as the department's "UFO expert."

"Does this story ever die or what?" Ward asks. "I wouldn't give it any credence. I checked with the fire department's 911. There were no calls. Don't you think people around the park would've called 911? I checked with fire and no trucks were dispatched. I checked with the park rangers, and they say the park wasn't closed...I checked it out at the time and found no evidence. We can categorically deny any cover-up. They think that's part of the cover-up, that we're part of the government conspiracy.

"We write it off as UFO organizations living their life through Hollywood."

"You've got three-thousand Suffolk cops going to cover this up?" asks officer Robert Boden. "C'mon!"

Well, actually, that's exactly what the UFO investigators think.

Cover-up. That's the word on the UFO scene, as the Southaven crash has ballooned in international attention, causing one Houston UFO group to publish a piece entitled, "Long Island Crash: Son of Roswell?"

Unfailingly, officials spirit the materials from UFO recovery scenarios to Brookhaven National Laboratory. If there's an expert on UFOs and Brookhaven, it's spokeswoman Mona Rowe. "It's predictable," she says. "The federal government sponsors us, we get the blame...They *have* to be feds."

She says UFO reports involving BNL are tied to their press releases about the lab. When BNL releases information about their underground particle accelerators, it comes back in a month that they shot down a UFO. When they release information about advances in DNA research, two weeks later they get calls about how they're researching alien DNA. When they release information about a fire in their reactors, it rebounds in a few days as a UFO experiment gone wrong.

“I know what’s going on at BNL and I can categorically say that we are not doing UFO research,” Rowe says. “We do not study it, we do not shoot it down, we don’t do anything.”

Rowe, who has been at BNL for 20 years, is a huge science-fiction fan. She used to talk to John Ford about UFOs and Brookhaven. She used to say she’d give him a tour of the entire facility and open any door for him to look inside. Her dream, although she doesn’t think it will happen in her lifetime, is to have her particles, in atomic form, disassembled and reassembled on a faraway planet. She’s sure that will be able to happen someday. She believes there is life on other planets. “I believe that there is classified research the government does,” she says. “It’s possible; it’s not hard to believe. I would hope the government is studying this stuff. I think someone needs to. I know we’re not, but I would not be surprised at all that some people are studying alien life.”

But she remains adamant about the crash. “All I can do is deny it,” she says, flatly. “But people just see me as part of the entire conspiracy.”

BNL has a team of radiation experts, like a SWAT team, on call 24 hours a day to deal with radiation scares. It’s called the Radiological Assistance Program, or RAP. Rowe makes calls with them to field the press. One night, at one or two in the morning in June last year, she headed down to a house in Bellport with the RAP team on a report on radioactive materials. Team members kept talking about the weapons, radium and UFO literature inside. She knew Ford lived in Bellport. She stood there in the dark, thinking, “What if this is John Ford’s house?”

By the time she got to Suffolk District Attorney James Catterson’s office with the team to brief him at noon the next day, she knew that it was John Ford’s house.

Ford had been arrested and charged at his home. The DA was saying he had masterminded a plot to assassinate three Suffolk Republican officials by putting radium in their cars, food and toothpaste. Two other guys, Edward Zabo, who had allegedly supplied the radium to Ford, and Joseph Mazzuchelli, a convicted thief, also were charged.

It was a prodigious blow to the Long Island UFO Network, and the national UFO community. Researchers from around the world, and especially local friends like Lavarone, were trying to get in touch with Ford, to talk to him. Ford had always talked about how the government was after him, how they were going to get him somehow. Many LIUFON members thought this was the conspiracy come to a head. They said Mazzuchelli, who along with Zabo has since copped a plea and agreed to testify against Ford, was a police informant who had set him up and that the radium was used to calibrate the Geiger counters the group uses to measure UFO activity. “John bad-mouthed the government,” Lavarone says. “You can’t do that. It’s not a free country. It’s as free as they want it to be.”

Ford's lawyer, John Rouse of Port Jefferson, agrees that Ford was set up, but not by Mazzuchelli. He blames an unnamed police informant, whom he claims was trying to erase pending charges, and contends that Ford is ensnared in a web of Suffolk good-ol'-boy politics. "I want to see justice done," Rouse says. "Justice means that John Ford walks out of jail a free man. He shouldn't be there."

Conspiracy or not, things had become very real. Ford, the renowned Long Island UFO researcher, was sitting in jail, behind real bars, in a real cell.

What's left of LIUFON

The Long Island UFO Network scattered. Regular meetings and newsletters for the more than 400 members ceased. Major investigators vanished, moved out of state. And lavarone was left holding the bag, him and Richie. They sat on soft couches on the second floor of lavarone's Holtsville home-which looks like a ski chalet shrouded in trees and branches-and thought about it. What are we going to do?

It seemed everything was frozen. But they would never quit. It was all too important. They had already given their lives to this, and incorporating UFOs into your life takes an overhaul of your everyday existence.

lavarone's family doesn't talk about his obsession. His brother (lavarone calls him his "moron" brother) makes fun of him. lavarone acts cautious with customers of his electrical wiring business. If they found out that the electrician who fixes their wires on their side was really on the other side, they would drop him before he could switch on a light.

lavarone says Ford was starting to back off. He wants to stay in the public eye, so that if something happens to him, someone will wonder. Right before Ford got nailed, lavarone says Ford had been talking about the fires in the Pine Barrens. Ford called lavarone and told him he had information about what really happened there, about intentionally set fires, developers, local politicians. He said he'd call back in two days to discuss it. Two days later, he got arrested.

lavarone and Richie feared for their lives. Richie is on disability after getting hurt on the job, and he was nervous about officials cutting him off. That's also why he wouldn't give his last name. ("They could as me right away and I'd be screwed," he says.") lavarone remembered the calls on his answering machine, the people peering in his windows. They quit going out to the parks to stare into the night sky. The halcyon days of trudging through Southaven Park, researching the effects of the crash, were gone. What was there to do?

Today, they sit and rifle through the LIUFON files, most of which they say the cops took or destroyed. Rival investigators have even sneaked into Ford's house and

taken boxes and videotapes that interested them. Competition between UFO investigators can be tough.

Now there's even a new UFO group in town. Under the direction of a scientific-minded guy named Sal Giammusso, a 64-year-old retired engineer who lives in Commack, the Suffolk County chapter of the Mutual UFO Network has filled in where LIUFON used to be. They have certified six investigators using field manuals sent down from headquarters, several old LIUFON members have joined the organization, and UFO witnesses call their hotline to report incidents. "Every time we say something can't be true, it is," Giammusso says. "We couldn't fly, but it's done. Nothing is impossible. It's just a matter of time before we learn about it."

But the guys from LIUFON are also still there, and they still have extensive confidential interview tapes and a collection of UFO research. It's all entrusted to Iavarone, who is digging through materials from past years, when the investigators actually had time to investigate. Iavarone finds the album by Elijah, a collection of atmospheric synthesizer pieces. "Remember this?" he says to Richie. The room is quiet. It is close to twilight.

Richie nods his head. They had interviewed the musician behind Elijah years before: Maria Cuccia, an abductee from Commack.

Abduction

Maria Cuccia never watched science-fiction movies or *Star Trek*. She lived in a beautiful home with a finished basement, landscaping with weeping bushes and red flowers, two shiny vans, a basketball net and a white poodle named Sunshine, in an upscale Commack neighborhood. She taught piano lessons and loved to throw dinner parties for her friends. She cared for her three daughters. She had a miscarriage in the '80s, but other than that loss, her life was remarkably trouble-free.

Then, one night in 1992, her life changed forever. She was lying in her bed at 3 a.m. Her husband, David, a chiropractor, slept silently beside her. Suddenly, she felt herself leaving the bed, electricity racing through her body. She began rising into the air, and out the window.

She found herself on a ship with beings on both sides of her, directing her to stare out a large window. Through the glass, she saw a group of boys and girls. Children with large hairless heads and small bodies were boarding a school bus in the background. One boy stepped forward and waved to her. His arm moved in melancholy slow-motion. She wanted to run to him and hug him, but she could not.

"Is that my son?" she asked the being.

"Yes."

“What’s his name?” she asked.

“Elijah.”

They told her she must write music, instead of merely teaching it. They said they would send people to show her how. They said to reveal the meaning of the name, and they sent her back, flying downward fast. She hit the bed and sat up quickly, chest pounding. She looked up the meaning of the name— “The Lord is our savior.” David never even woke up.

It was the most dramatic in a series of events that happened to her in 1992. She says her three daughters had been running into her room often then, saying that they saw being and bright white lights in their rooms, that they heard voices. She tried to console them, but she didn’t know what was happening. She would wake up screaming and shaking. David would hug her, tell her she was dreaming and to go back to sleep. Finally, he took her to a psychiatrist who said she was psychotic and tried to give her lithium after only an hour’s consultation. David wanted her to take it, but she didn’t want to be drugged. She wanted to find out what happened on that night in 1992.

“I still don’t necessarily believe I was abducted by aliens,” says Cuccia, 37, “I do believe I was the victim of something, whether it was extraterrestrial or terrestrial.”

“But it’s clear I had an experience. Where did all this come from?”

Wherever she went, for weeks, electricity would go haywire, car radios and hair dryers would blow, computers would flicker in her husband’s office when she visited. But she and David stopped talking about it. He always got mad or said, “Maria, this didn’t happen to you. Get out and go on with a normal life.”

Her parents believed her, but what could they do? So, she split herself in two—the normal side, which vacations and lives the suburban life with her husband, and the spiritual side, the other side. She and David just celebrated their 15th anniversary together. They never talk about UFOs.

Meanwhile, everything else the aliens said has come true. She began to write music under the name Elijah. Producers and musicians entered her life.

But Maria Cuccia has lost a lot of friends. Many thought she had a nervous breakdown in 1992. She doesn’t like small talk anymore and never entertains. Her husband’s friends joke to David that they were abducted by aliens. “Ha ha,” she says. “I just shake my head. It’s nice that people get a kick out of it. It’s very serious for me.”

She doesn’t want to be paranoid. She doesn’t want to think she is being watched when she sees black helicopters flying overhead. Or when people hear clicks on her phone and think it is tapped. Or when the phone truck is parked outside her house day and night. But sometimes she does.

“I hate that, I hate that,” she says, clenching her fist. “I don’t want to be like that, but I wonder.”

And there’s another thing that Maria Cuccia thinks about a lot. When she had the miscarriage years ago, she says the nurse called the next day and told her to get down to radiology. Doctors thought the fetus was still inside her, that it had never come out. A doctor examined her again, found nothing, and said it was strange, but that she was otherwise healthy. She went home. They never found a fetus.

She has begun to attend the meetings of MUFON. One woman she met through the group, although not a member herself, is Michelle Guerin, 42 of Point Lookout. Guerin has not been lucky enough to have a hiatus from abductions. They have happened regularly since she was a teenager. Long fingers reach for her in the night. Puncture marks appear on her arms. “I didn’t want to face it,” she says. “It’s easier to think you’re going crazy. I went to the doctor and said, ‘I hope you’re going to tell me I’m going crazy.’ After my first regression, he said, ‘I don’t think you’re going crazy.’”

It all started in Montauk, a mecca for paranormal experience, in 1970, on a camping trip. She walked off alone. She headed down to the beach, met a boyfriend of hers and strolled to the dunes around noon. They spread out a blanket and started to make out.

Suddenly, a shrill buzzing sound pierced the air. They could not move, and two soldiers in uniform appeared, loaded them in the back of a Jeep and drove them to a secret bunker inside one of the hills. Guerin was conscious, but she could not move or respond, as they took her to a dark room and laid her on a table. From the shadows appeared a scaly, reptilian being. He came closer and closer...She silently cried out as he raped her.

She was taken to an examining room, and the next thing she knew, she lay back on the sand of the Montauk dunes. It was almost nightfall. She did not know what happened. She recalled the experience when regressed years later. “I still question it,” she says. “I can tell you what I see, but I can’t say for sure what it was. I tend to be skeptical about everything because I know some things can be based on human technology, not alien technology.”

At the meetings of the abductee support group Guerin runs, they smoke cigarettes and discuss their experiences. They often cry. “The one burning question every abductee asks is, ‘Why me?’ That’s the \$64,000 question.”

Janet Russell’s implant

“We investigate stuff when no one else will listen,” says Steve Iavarone, back with Richie at his house in Holtsville. Going through the files, going through the files, remembering all the different UFO cases. Most abductees or UFO witnesses across the

Island probably have had contact with at least one LIUFON investigator in their time. And now the two remaining investigators are going through the files, going through the files...

There was a swirling, spinning, magnetic pool of purple light in the sky. It looked like a moon, except three times the size. Janet Russell, a 22-year-old woman pregnant with her fourth child, was on her way to the obstetrician in Patchogue when she saw it. She had left the house at 6 p.m. for the 6:15 p.m. appointment. But she couldn't help herself; she pulled her car to the side of Route 112. The light turned midnight blue. A sky-blue eye opened in the center. Next thing she remembered she was pushed against the wall of a small, hospital-white room, with a metallic praying-mantis claw examining her.

Two gray beings led her down a hallway to a pink room with 20 incubators. In each, there was a baby at a different stage of life. In the 20th incubator lay an almost-human baby girl with a slightly enlarged head and aqua eyes. Russell felt such an intense, motherly love for the girl. But they tore her away, moved her on to a blue room with 20 more incubators. In the 20th incubator, there was a baby boy with a slightly enlarged head. And a tiny tail, going tick-tick, tick-tock.

They led her to a pale-yellow courtroom shrouded in mist. In the front sat a tribunal of humans and large, tadpole-looking aliens. A towering, hooded man presided. His appearance faded between human and alien.

"You are being tested," they said. "You are being judged."

And then, "You have passed."

A thin metallic wire jutted from the wall with a shrill, grating sound like a record played on high speed. It pierced her right arm. Then they sent her back down to the car, and soon she arrived at her doctor's appointment. It was 7:30 p.m. Her face was red and peeling, as if she had a bad sunburn.

"Where were you?" the doctor asked.

"I don't know."

Russell, now 57 and living in Medford, sits in the dining area of her white home, among the wicker furniture. She now has an implant in her right arm. 'It feels like a metal bead,' she says.

X-rays showed nothing, and that she has asked doctors about it, and they don't know what it is. She didn't know what any of this was, until she went to psychologist Jean Mundy for a regression several years ago. She plays the tape of her regression with solemn reverence on an old gray Realistic recorder.

On the tape, her breathing is heavy, strange. When she sees the incubators, she starts sobbing, her voice starts shaking. Mundy asks, "How do you feel about seeing this?"

"I'm not comfortable with this," she says, tremulously. "I don't like being in this room."

Russell sits nearby. "It's so embarrassing," she says.

The tape wheels continue to turn, as she enters the pale-yellow courtroom. They want me to be there. They greeted me...I feel like I'm being welcomed." When the wire shoots into her arm, she says, "They're feeding me, they're feeding me something...They want me to go. I have to go. I feel loved."

"These are sane people, truly credible," says Mundy, who graduated with a Ph.D. in clinical and general psychology from Catholic University and taught at C.W. Post before retiring in 1985. She says she takes people back to the level of consciousness they were at during the experience so they can relive the memories. She lives in East Hampton.

"If you work with them a long time, you don't change your mind. There's no motivation for people to pay you to tell you these stories except that they're on their mind. Just the fact that it changes their lives-they move to other places, change jobs, spouses. It turns around their lives."

The tape clicks to a stop, and the strange, otherworldly breathing, the tense emotions come to a quick halt. Like most abductees, Russell's experience changed her life. She now hosts a cable-access show called *The Unexplained with Joanne and Janet*, and she is deeply involved in planning the First Annual Long Island UFO Conference on Nov. 2, which will take place in Hicksville's Levittown Hall.

On a cold day in December of 1992, Russell traveled with a LIUFON member to Southaven Park. She remembers warning the LIUFON investigator that they were being watched. She could feel energy pouring into her boots from underground.

"Life is strange," she says. She continues, with her hands on the wood table, next to the old gray Realistic tape recorder and the miniature tape that holds her regression of several years ago. "I hope I'm not a chosen one," she says. "I don't want to be a chosen one. I want to be me."

When it comes down to it, who really wants to be a chosen one?

Truth-seeking under the stars

Long Island UFO investigator John Ford is sitting in a jail, held on \$350,000 cash bail, accused of plotting to kill three Suffolk County Republican Politicians-County GOP

Chairman John Powell, Legislator Fred Towle and Brookhaven Town Public Safety Director Anthony Gazzola-by poisoning them with radium. Two mental-health experts who examined him for the defense decided he wasn't fit to stand trial and recommended that he go to a mental institution.

He's just sitting there, waiting. Prosecutors are deciding what to do, whether they should have their own doctors evaluate him, or request a hearing to determine how the other experts arrived at their conclusions. He is scheduled to return to court Sept. 19. If the judge finds him incompetent, he's on his way to the Mid-Hudson Psychiatric Center in upstate New Hampton for an undetermined length of time.

Ford's friends say he was set up, and so does he. He spends his days writing letters. He writes regularly to Steve Iavarone. Iavarone and LIUFON members still blame Mazzuchelli, the convicted thief who has turned state's evidence against Ford. "He was setting me up all the way along to destroy me and the organization. He had succeeded," Ford writes. In the letters, he asks Iavarone to find his old friends and fellow UFO investigators to serve as witnesses if his case comes to trial. He directs him to family members' attics and garages to pick up secret LIUFON files: "It's very important to secure them!"

He composes tender endings, expressing gratitude for Iavarone's loyalty. "Thank you for standing by me Steve. We'll beat this thing...Your friend, John."

After the psychiatric ruling, he wrote, "The reason that the court has found me not competent to stand trial is based on the interview with the Doctors. I let everything hang out. CIA history, Israeli intelligence assassination attempts, etc...I don't like being labeled crazy...Anyway it will all come out in the wash and be exposed. Keep in touch, God bless."

In a letter to a Washington, D.C.-based UFO investigator named Elaine Douglass, an old friend, Ford reflected sadly on how much has changed. "Let me tell you what I've had to endure," he wrote in March. "I'm locked in my cell twenty-three hours a day with one hour for recreation. I'm in segregation for my for my safety because of my prior law enforcement background.

He writes of feeling so severely depressed that he must take medication. He relates how his pet dogs have been farmed out to other homes, how the mortgage company has foreclosed on the house he labored over for 18 years, how his three cars have been impounded. He says, "Now I have nothing."

"It has been an emotional burden for my entire family, who helped me at great expense. I have had to endure the emotional strain of police, DA and media slandering and libel."

Iavarone and Richie spend a lot of time hanging around the house in Holtsville. They are on the same side of the fence as John Ford, but they're still on the outside. "The organization's at a standstill because of what happened to John," Iavarone says.

If you call the LIUFON hotline, the phone number that dozens of abductees and witnesses with UFO information and informants have called since 1988, it just rings. One ring, two rings, three, four, five...

Tonight, they walk outside under a yawning twilight, under a sky of retiring soft blues and gray. Crickets chirp and night bugs swoop through the trees. Lavarone leans on his small car. Richie stands over by the truck with ladders strapped to the roof, the truck Lavarone uses in his electrical business. They speak in soft tones, and sometimes gaze into the sky.

"I want to know," Lavarone says. "It's very addicting to want to know."

Six rings, seven rings, eight, nine, 10...

It is getting darker, and a strong breeze begins to ripple the cool air, rustle the vines on the house and send a crackle through the thick leaves in the trees. White stars begin to peer out from the darkening sky, scattered across the horizon. The house seems very small. The temperature drops.

"They want people to believe we're mental cases, that we're goof balls. But the joke's on them. More and more people are starting to believe.

"Skeptics say there's no evidence. They're not looking hard enough. Everybody can't be lying."

Eleven rings, 12 rings, 13, 14...

"We're not trying to convince anyone. It's not a religion we're trying to push. It is what it is."

Richie pipes in from over by the truck, rumbling out with the gravelly, spectral tones of his voice.

He grabs his forehead when he speaks. It looks like a great effort. "I believe what I believe," he says.

"I do it for myself," continues Lavarone. "They'll know in good time. I do it for myself." He motions back to Richie. "I do it for him."

"I just want to know the truth," Richie says.

The 15th ring, still no answer. You hang up and decide to wait and see.