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## Aliens bring message of hope and goodwill to humanity

Sep 18, 2002

Met an alien yet? Your chances of encountering a real live Martian seem to have improved dramatically since 1970, when a mere 300 encounters were reported around the world. Today, with tens of thousands of alien encounters being reported each year, it's hard not to feel overlooked if you haven't yet heard a mutant message. Never fear: Krista Henriksen is here, and she has a pretty good grasp of what the aliens are telling people. Henriksen, now working in St. John's, Newfoundland, recently earned her masters degree in anthropology from SFU. For her thesis, *Alien Encounters: A close analysis of personal accounts of extraterrestrial experiences*, Henriksen interpreted the written stories of 60 men and women who claim to have met with alien life forms. Although Henriksen says she is "personally highly skeptical" that aliens have been in touch with earthlings, her research "suggested that aliens bring a pretty standard message of hope and goodwill. There are four key themes to their messages. The first is that the person receiving the message is in some way chosen or special—they have a purpose in life. Second is the message that that person is not alone; someone cares for them. Third is the idea that the world is at risk, but the recipient has the power to affect change. And finally, there are few aliens who bring malevolent messages, but they are definitely in the minority." As an undergraduate archaeology student at the University of Alberta, Henriksen minored in religious studies, and developed "an intense interest in faith and belief systems." Her interest in aliens was sparked during a summer road trip with a friend who was reading about a particular group of highly sociable aliens known as Pleiadians. "From an academic point of view, it's easy to dismiss marginal or fringe groups like the people who believe they've been abducted by aliens," says Henriksen. "It's much more work to try to understand where they are coming from, what motivates them. But that's what anthropology is all about: studying those who aren't us so that we are better able to understand ourselves." Henriksen believes the "whole phenomenon is a direct reflection of the search for meaning in western society." She notes that along with the increase in reported alien encounters, "there has been a correspondent explosion in new religious movements in North America." She sees a "direct link" between alien believers and the followers of New Age and evangelical Christians: "they are all vibrant communities, deeply committed and vocal, with an active web presence, and frequent opportunities for social get-togethers." A member of the United Church of Canada herself, Henriksen says she prefers her "religion old, tried and true, with a solid theological foundation and a long history." Still, she was impressed by the faith evident in the stories of alien contact: "I think it's just another way of making sense of pain and loneliness. Everyone wants to find to the place where they belong." Even if it is in outer space.