

LIGHT YEARS

The Controversy Over
The Eduard "Billy" Meier Case

In response to an ad in the January 23 issue of Publishers Weekly announcing the forthcoming publication of LIGHT YEARS, by Gary Kinder, both Kinder and his publisher received a flurry of letters and phone calls from UFO investigators across the country. The emotions registered in these calls and letters ranged from surprise to anger to indignation, but all those who wrote or called shared one trait: each was convinced that the Eduard Meier case was a hoax.

One UFO group described LIGHT YEARS in a press release as "a glorification of patently phony UFO photographs." A representative of another UFO group wrote that if Kinder's publisher proceeded with the publication of LIGHT YEARS, they would be "guilty of perpetuating one of the greatest hoaxes in ufology." Yet another wrote that he hoped the publisher "will elect to include a disclaimer of some type, if not make an outright statement that this is fiction, not non-fiction."

It is important to note that none of these correspondents had read a single word of LIGHT YEARS.

Why do emotions run so high in the ufo community over the Meier case? What could compel these people to condemn a book they'd never read? A word of explanation is necessary.

In 1979, the investigators on the Eduard Meier case -- Lee and Brit Elders, Tom Welch, and Wendelle Stevens -- published a photo journal titled UFO...Contact from the Pleiades. The book claimed that photographs, sound recordings, and metal samples offered by Meier as evidence of his experiences had baffled scientists. But it mentioned no names and quoted no reports. The book also maintained that many people in Switzerland had witnessed strange lights in the sky when Meier claimed to have a contact. But the investigators provided no names of witnesses, the UFO groups (who vie for such evidence) protested: The case was a hoax, they claimed, and the investigators had perpetrated a fraud. The groups published scathing articles about Meier in their monthly newsletters.

But the evidence did exist, and it was analyzed by scientists, engineers, and a special effects expert, all with impeccable credentials. This is the part of the story the UFO community knows nothing about.

Gary Kinder researched the Meier case for two years, beginning in the fall of 1983. Kinder conducted over 120 interviews, spending thirteen weeks in Switzerland to visit the alleged contact sights, speak with Meier and his family,

track down witnesses, and talk to neighbors and town administrators. He also interviewed witnesses in Munich and London. In the States, he traveled several times to Phoenix, Tucson, Flagstaff, San Jose, Washington, DC, and the Los Angeles area to speak with the people who investigated the case, the ufologists who called it a hoax, and the scientists who analyzed the evidence.

Well into his research, Kinder realized that the Meier case had drawn such hostility from the UFO community for two reasons: First was Meier's sometimes preposterous claims, and the general reluctance of ufologists to believe any claim of contact, especially repeated contact; second was the investigators' refusal to release the evidence. (In 1979 and 1980, some of the articles on the Meier case suggested that evidence may indeed exist, but until the investigators produced some of that evidence, they deserved to be castigated by the UFO community. The Elders then offered to make material available for analysis, as long as it did not leave their possession. No one accepted their offer.)

In the beginning, Kinder, too, doubted Meier's story for the typical reason: It couldn't be true. His editor gave him the option to quit the project at any time should he discover that Meier was a fraud; but Kinder found the story to be the most fascinating he had ever encountered. If the poor, one-armed farmer had faked the hundreds of clear, color, daylight photographs, the 8mm films, the sound recordings, the landing tracks, and the metal samples, no one knew how he did it; nor did anyone have an idea who could have been an accomplice.

Many of the witnesses that Kinder interviewed in Switzerland described seeing things happen to Meier that no one could explain. Louise Zinsstag, cousin of famed Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung and the most prominent of UFO researchers in Europe, visited Meier on several occasions and wrote of her experiences in a series of letters between June 1976 and October 1977. In one letter she called Meier "the most intriguing man I have ever met." In another letter she wrote, "If Meier turns out to be a fake, I shall take my whole collection of photographs to the ferry boat and drown it in the old man river of Basle."

In the States, Kinder interviewed four scientists, two sound engineers, an aeronautical engineer, a special effects expert, and the head of the photo lab at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory, all of whom (unbeknownst to those in the UFO community) had analyzed or otherwise studied the Meier evidence. (A sampling of what they had to say is enclosed.) After submitting portions of the LIGHT YEARS manuscript to these scientists for their comments and suggestions for changes, Kinder received not only approval from each of them, but two of the scientists -- Dr. Michael Malin and Eric Eliason -- wrote that they were impressed with Kinder's objectivity in presenting the case. "Thanks

for letting me see what you've written," said Malin. "It's a credit to your writing that I cannot tell whether you are a supporter or a detractor of Dilettoso, and of the claims of the people who supplied the UFO images." Eliason wrote, "Thank you for the accurate representation of my views on the Meier UFO photographs. If your LIGHT YEARS publication remains as objective as the pages you provided, I will look forward to reading what you have to say."

In February of this year, Kinder sent an 8-page outline of his research into the Meier case to one of the UFO investigators who had contacted him in response to the Publishers Weekly ad. In early March he sent a slightly expanded version of this outline as an open letter to the UFO community (a copy is enclosed). So far the response has been encouraging. Jerome Clark, editor of the International UFO Reporter, wrote to Kinder saying, in part:

"I can hardly wait to read your book. . . . I also look forward, by the way, to the reception your book gets from the ufological community. I think -- I know -- my colleagues are going to be astounded and confused. It really has been an article of faith among us (me included) that this whole business was just an exercise in heavy-handed fraud.

But apparently you have shown it is rather more interesting than that. It's ironic. Ufologists forever complain that scientists and debunkers won't take an objective look at the UFO evidence. You have demonstrated, I think, that in this case the ufologists acted just like the people they criticize!"

Mr. Clark then sent a letter to one of the UFO community's more vocal critics of the Meier case, in which he wrote:

"After correspondence with Gary Kinder. . . and a follow-up phone conversation, I have concluded that our initial response -- i.e., anger and resentment -- to the announcement of his forthcoming book was unwarranted. There seems no doubt that Kinder has conducted by far the most thorough probe into this peculiar episode."

As for Kinder himself, he remains fascinated but uncertain about the truth behind the Meier sightings. "I would not call him a prophet, though he may be," Kinder writes in LIGHT YEARS. "I would not rule out imposter, though I have no proof. I know that if you boiled the story in a kettle you would find a hard residue composed of two things: One would be Meier's ravings about time travel, space travel, philosophy, and religion; the other would be the comments by the scientists and engineers impressed with the evidence he has produced. I can't believe the former, nor can I dismiss the latter..."

"Meier may simply be one of the finest illusionists the world has ever known, possessing not the power but the skill

to persuade others to see things that did not happen and do not exist. Or, perhaps he has no such ability; perhaps beings on a much higher plane have selected him and used him for reasons far beyond our comprehension. I do know this: Trying to make sense of it all has been the most difficult thing I will ever do. Finally I realized, as the Elders had years before, that the truth of the Meier contacts will never be known."

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Now on to the substance of LIGHT YEARS. Many of the witnesses I interviewed in Switzerland, none of whom had ever been contacted by anyone in ufology, had seen things happen to Meier that no one could explain: Standing next to another man, he once disappeared instantly from the roof of a barn twelve feet off the ground; in a separate incident he suddenly reappeared, warm and dry, in a group of men standing in a dark and secluded forest in a freezing rainstorm. These scenes, associated with alleged contact experiences, appear in much greater detail in the book. They may be tricks, but if so they were performed by a master illusionist. When Meier claimed to have had a contact, sets of three six-foot diameter circles would appear in a meadow surrounded by thick woods. I did not see these myself, but I talked to several people who had seen them and who had photographed them while still fresh. Swirled counter-clockwise and perfectly delineated in tall grass, one set remained for nine weeks, until a farmer came and mowed the grass. Here is the mystery of the landing tracks: Grass that is green rises even after being mashed down; grass that dies turns brown and lies flat. This grass remained green but never rose; it continued to grow in a flat circle. The landing tracks puzzled everyone I spoke to who had viewed them, including Meier's most ardent detractor, Hans Schutzbach. Schutzbach told me that other people had tried to duplicate the landing tracks, but that their efforts were "a bad copy." Meier's were "perfect." I listened to dozens of such stories, so many I could not include all of them in the book, including nighttime sightings of strange lights reported by a variety of people, many of whom witnessed the same incidents and corroborated each other's accounts. One nighttime photograph, taken by a school principal from Austria during an alleged contact, will appear in the book. On the other side, I know that Meier's photos of the alleged future destruction of San Francisco, for instance, came right out of the September, 1977, issue of GEO Magazine. After one of the witnesses reported this to me, I found the magazine myself and compared the photographs. They were identical. All of this is in the book - the crazy claims, the apparent lies, the unexplained disappearances, the mysterious landing tracks, all weaved into the narrative.

In London, Timothy Good provided me with many lengthy letters from Lou Zinsstag (who often had been pointed out by the ufologists in the States as one who thought that Meier

was a fraud and "crazy"). Zinsstag had written the letters between June, 1976, and October, 1977, as she investigated Meier and reported back to Good. In one letter she calls Meier "the most intriguing man I ever met." She goes into great detail in her observations, including a description of "this feeling of discomfort" she experiences in Meier's presence. In another letter she writes, "If Meier turns out to be a fake, I shall take my whole collection of photographs to the ferry boat and drown it in the old man river of Basle."

Back in the States I interviewed nine scientists, engineers, and special effects experts who had analyzed or otherwise studied the Meier evidence. (One, Bob Post, is none of the three, but heads the photo lab at JPL.) Following is a sampling of what they had to say. Realize that where the photos are concerned an original transparency was never available for analysis, so none of the work done on those was definitive (Spaulding himself told me he had no idea the generation of the photographs he analyzed); however, knowing this limitation, the scientists who did agree to examine them told me they would have been able to detect all but a very sophisticated hoax.

Dr. Michael Malin is an associate professor of planetary sciences at Arizona State University; he wrote his doctoral thesis on the computer analysis of spacecraft images beamed back from Mars. He was at JPL for four years and he's worked with the special effects people at LucasFilm. He works under various government grants at ASU, and a recent experiment he devised has just been accepted for a future Shuttle launch. A friend of mine who is the science editor at National Geographic and who has researched and written many cover stories on the Universe, the Space Shuttle, etc., had spoken to Malin before and once told me, "If Malin says it, you can believe it." Here is one thing Malin said concerning the Meier photographs which he analyzed in 1981: "I find the photographs themselves credible, they're good photographs. They appear to represent a real phenomenon. The story that some farmer in Switzerland is on a first name basis with dozens of aliens who come and visit him...I find that incredible. But I find the photographs more credible. They're reasonable evidence of something. What that something is I don't know." Malin also told me, "If the photographs are hoaxes then I am intrigued by the quality of the hoax. How did he do it? I'm always interested in seeing a master at work." These quotes, and all of the rest of the quotes I attribute to the scientists here, appear verbatim in the book.

Steve Ambrose, sound engineer for Stevie Wonder and inventor of the Micro Monitor, a radio set complete with speaker that fits inside Wonder's ear, analyzed the Meier sound recordings. "The sound recording's got some surprising things in it," he told me. "How would you duplicate it? I'm not just talking about how to duplicate it audio-wise, but how do you show those various things on a

spectrum analyzer and on the 'scope that it was doing? It's one thing to make something that sounds like it, it's another thing to make something that sounds like it and has those consistent and random oscillations in it. The sound of the spacecraft," he added, "was a single sound source recording that had an amazing frequency response. If it is a hoax I'd like to meet the guy that did it, because he could probably make a lot of money in special effects." His findings were corroborated by another sound engineer names Nils Rognerus.

In 1979 Dr. Robert Nathan at JPL was sufficiently impressed with the Meier photographs to have copies made of Meier transparencies at the JPL photo lab. After the transfer he refused to analyze the photographs, however, because his developer discovered they were several generations away from the originals. Nathan felt that the transparencies were so far away in generation from the photographs he had seen that Wendelle Stevens had attempted to trick him. Later, I showed the Meier films to Nathan, and he laughed at some of them, but he couldn't figure out how Meier flew the ship into a scene and had it come to a sudden halt; or how it could hover motionless while a pine branch in the lower right hand corner blows in a stiff wind. Nathan said, "He would have to be awfully clever, because that's a very steady holding. It would have to be very, very good tethering." Then he said, "Apparently he's a sharp guy, very clever. So he should be given some points for effort." Nathan concluded about the films, "If this is a hoax, and it looks like it is to me but I have no proof, this is very carefully done. Tremendous amount of effort. An awful lot of work for one guy." From all of the scientists, these were the most negative comments I received.

With Nathan saying in theory the films could be hoaxed, I was curious about the logistics involved. Then I discovered that a special effects expert, Wally Gentleman, who for ten years had served as Director of Special Effects on the Canadian Film Board and who, for a year and a half, was director of special photographic effects for Stanley Kubrick's film 2001, had viewed these same films. This is what he told me: "To produce the films, Meier really had to have a fleet of clever assistants, at least 15 people. And the equipment would be totally out of (Meier's) means. If somebody wanted me to cheat one of the films, \$30,000 would probably do it, but this is in a studio where the equipment exists. The equipment would cost another \$50,000." That's for each of the seven Meier films. Gentleman also had examined the photographs. "My greatest problem is that for anybody faking this," (he pointed to one of the photographs), "the shadow that is thrown onto that tree is correct. Therefore, if somebody is faking it they have an expert there. And being an expert myself, I know that that expert knowledge is very hard to come by. So I say, 'Well, is that expert knowledge there or isn't it there?' Because if the expert knowledge isn't there, this has got to be

real."

Then there is Robert Post, who had been at the JPL photo laboratory for 22 years and was the head of that lab in 1979, when Nathan brought the Meier photos to him to have copies made. Post oversees the developing and printing of every photograph that comes out of JPL. Though he analyzed nothing, his eye for spotting fabrications far surpasses a lay person's. Post told me: "From a photography standpoint, you couldn't see anything that was fake about the Meier photo's. That's what struck me. They looked like legitimate photographs. I thought, 'God, if this is real, this is going to be really something.'"

Besides working in the highly classified field of military defense, David Froning, an astronautical engineer with McDonnell Douglas for 25 years, has done exploratory research to develop ideas and technology for advanced spacecraft design. As a longtime member of the British Interplanetary Society and the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics, he has presented many papers on interstellar flight at technical conferences in Europe and the United States. In October, 1985, he addressed the XXXVI International Astronautical Congress in Stockholm. Froning's wife discovered at a friend's house the photo journal published by the Elders in fall, 1979, and took it home to her husband because of one word in the text - tachyon. In Meier's notes from 1975, he spoke of the tachyon propulsion system utilized by the Pleiadians. For over a year Froning had been spending most of his spare time working to design just such a theoretical system. When he read more of Meier's notes on faster-than-light travel (he had contacted the Elders and Stevens for more information), he found that Meier's figures for the time required to achieve the speed of light (at which point, according to Meier, the tachyon system would kick in to make the hyper leap), and the distance a ship would have traveled at that point, were within 20 percent of his own calculations determined through the use of complex acceleration formulas. Froning told me, "If what this Meier is saying is just a hoax, he's being cued by some very knowledgeable scientists. I've only discussed this Meier case with scientists who are fairly open-minded about interstellar flight, but I'll tell you, the majority of them think it's credible and agree with at least part, or sometimes all, of the things talked about by the Pleiadians."

During my research I read an article from a British publication called *The Unexplained*, in which the author, referring to the alleged Meier metal analysis by Marcel Vogal at IBM, wrote, "Jim Dilettoso characteristically failed to further the cause by claiming that (the Elders) hold a 10-hour videotape of 'the entire lab proceedings' (which Dr. Vogal denies having made). 'And,' Delettoso incautiously persisted, 'we have about an hour of him discussing why the metal samples are not possible in earth technology, going into intrinsic detail of why it is not

done anywhere on earth." The author, of course, is poking fun at such a claim. I have seen that video. I have also seen another video in which Vogel states, "I cannot explain the metal sample. By any known combination of materials I could not put it together myself, as a scientist. With any technology that I know of, we could not achieve this on this planet." I've interviewed Vogel twice and he insists that the metal sample he spent so much time analyzing is unique. I spoke with him again three weeks ago and to this day he remains fascinated with the specimen. He said that if the metal sample had not disappeared while in his possession, he would now be continuing research on it with a number of other scientists from IBM and Ames Research. A reporter from the Washington Post also called Vogel two days ago and Vogel again verified the above quote.

With the exception of Vogel, and possibly Nathan, though he doesn't remember, none of these men had ever been interviewed by anyone in the UFO community. And Vogel even said to me on tape regarding one of the ufologists who did interview him about Meier: "Treat him with caution. He'll ramble on and he'll quote you out of context. So watch it." He also told me this same person "has taken my statements completely out of context and published them. This case has been badly mangled."

In the book, I go into much greater detail with each of the scientists and engineers. I mention each by his real name (as I do everyone else in the story) and I include his place of employment. After completing the final draft of the manuscript I mailed to each of the scientists a packet which included everything in the manuscript pertaining to him. I asked that each make any corrections, technical or otherwise, he cared to make. I have heard back now from all of them either by mail or by phone during the past six weeks. Some had nothing to change, others made minor changes. Everything concerning their analysis of the evidence will appear in the book exactly as they have authorized it to appear. (Two weeks before sending his letter to my publisher attempting to persuade him not to publish LIGHT YEARS, Walt Andrus called me and we talked for forty-five minutes. During that conversation, I told Andrus of the comments made by the scientists. I gave him their names, I spelled the names for him, I gave him their places of employment, and I encouraged him to contact them for verification of their statements, three of which appeared in an ad for the book in "Publishers Weekly." Apparently, he never did so.) In this letter to me Michael Malin opened with this: "Thanks for letting me see what you have written. It's a credit to your writing that I cannot tell whether you are a supporter or a detractor of Dilettoso, and of the claims of the people who supplied the UFO images."

Eric Eliason of the U.S. Geological Survey in Flagstaff, Arizona, is the ninth of the experts I spoke with. After receiving his packet, he wrote to me, "Thank you for the accurate representation of my views of the Meier

UFO photographs. If your LIGHT YEARS publication remains as objective as the pages you provided, I will look forward to reading what you have to say." Eliason creates image processing software so astrogeologists can analyze photographs of the planets beamed back from space. He spent two years producing the intricate radar map of cloud covered Venus acquired by Pioneer 10, and his software has been applied in processing space photography beamed back by both Viking and Voyager. He was sent to France and to China as a representative of the U.S. Space Program and an expert in image processing. He had analyzed the Meier photos on his equipment in 1981. He told me in an interview in August, 1984: "In the photographs there were no sharp breaks where you could see it had been somehow artificially dubbed. And if that dubbing was registered in the film, the computer would have seen it. We didn't see anything."

What would you do with evidence like this? Would you disagree it because Meier makes outlandish claims? Or because a ufologist reports that a colleague in Germany has a friend who saw ropes and pulleys hanging in Meier's barn? Or because Wendelle Stevens is a believer anyhow? Or because Wendelle Stevens is now in prison? Or because Meier has an 18-inch model of one of the Pleiadian beamships sitting in his office? Or because a group of believers has formed around the man? And if you had a choice between the analysis performed by Bill Spaulding at Ground Saucer Watch, on which would you stake your reputation? After all the bad-mouthing given the Meier case, I was surprised to learn that ufologists like Walt Andrus had never heard of Malin, or Eliason, or Gentleman, or Froning, or Ambrose, or even the alleged detractors in Switzerland Hans Schutzbach and Martin Sorge. Schutzbach was Meier's right-hand man for two years, with him night and day, driving him to contacts, organizing and cataloguing all of the photographs, measuring and photographing the landing tracks. Then they had a falling out, and Schutzbach left. He hates Meier and is certain Meier is a fraud; if anyone would know Meier's "technique" and be ready to divulge it, Schutzbach would be the man, yet to this day he has no clue how Meier could have made the tracks, or the photos, or the sound recordings, or the films. Nor does he have even one suggestion for an accomplice. Sorge, a cultured man with a university degree in chemistry and author of two books, had been mentioned frequently by ufologists as the one who discovered charred photographs and thereby exposed Meier as a fraud. He told me in the summer of 1985 that he is "certain" the contacts took place, though in a different fashion than Meier describes. He also told me the real story of how he obtained the burned slides. That, too, is much different than the version I got from ufologists here in the States. Again, all of this is in the book.

One of the more interesting ironies in the current uprising of the UFO community against the publication of LIGHT YEARS is that every time someone slams the book (before it has been read) he points to Bill Spaulding and

Kal Korff as the two authorities in whose skills the community places great faith. After all of the negative comments I have heard about Bill Spaulding's work from various members of the UFO community, why would anyone rely on his analysis of anything? Bill Moore, who is not known for his kind of feelings toward the Meier case or the people who investigated it, had this to say about Spaulding in an interview on March 25, 1985: "He's generally regarded by anybody in the field as somebody to ignore. It's all puffery. He wrote a paper on the analysis of photographs, and I have a critique of that paper by a scientist who knows what he's talking about, and he just rips it to shreds. It sounds good unless you know what the system is and then you realize that the guy's a phony."

While Korff was young and inexperienced, these factors do not necessarily discredit his work. But I am certain that few ufologists have heard him say what he told me in an interview on April 13, 1985: "I'm even open to the possibility that Meier had some genuine experience somewhere in there," he said, "but there's so much noise around his signal that I don't even know how to sift it. I've always maintained that, yeah, maybe there's something to it. Most of the people who have read my work say, 'Ah, the Meier case is totally a hoax, there's nothing to it.' I say, 'The claims (Stevens and the Elders) have made don't hold up; but it's possible the guy may have something somewhere.'"

After three years of researching and thinking about this story it finally came clear to me that two things kept the UFO community from taking a far more serious look at the Meier case: One, of course, is Meier's preposterous claims, and (in an ongoing effort to insulate itself from the fringe) the general reluctance of the community to accept any claim of contact, especially repeated contact; the other is that Lee Elders grabbed all of the evidence and sat on it. George Early, after reviewing the Elder's UFO...Contact from the Pleiadies, wrote in Saucer Smear that until the Intercep group produced some of the evidence they claimed to have, they deserved to be castigated by the UFO community. And Earley was right. So was Korff. The claims by themselves don't hold up. But the evidence in fact existed; I've talked to the people who examined it.

None of the foregoing is offered as proof that Meier sat in a Swiss meadow and conversed with Pleiadians, but only to demonstrate that people intrigued by the Meier case, who see a fascinating story in the man, are not simplistic in their thinking. No one, including Stevens and the Elders, has ever claimed he possesses irrefutable evidence of the Meier contacts, and I do not make that claim now. No one in ufology can make that statement about any case. After I sent a letter similar to this one to Jerry Clark, he responded that while he continued to have serious reservations about Meier's claims to meet with extraterrestrials, he, too, found the Meier story "fascinating." "My colleagues are going to be astounded and

confused," he wrote. "It really has been an article of faith among us (me included) that this whole business was just an exercise in heavy-handed fraud. But apparently you have shown it is rather more interesting than that. It's ironic. Ufologists forever complain that scientists and debunkers won't take an objective look at the UFO evidence. You have demonstrated, I think, that in this case the ufologists acted just like the people they criticize."

You will find the book a balanced report that holds many surprises for you and other ufologists, and in no way degrades the stature of the UFO community or impedes its progress. Due to cooperation from many of you, the historical sections in LIGHT YEARS will provide readers with a true appreciation of the UFO phenomenon and those who study it. Like Jerry Clark, I myself remain fascinated with Meier, but uncertain about the truth behind the actual contacts. I end LIGHT YEARS with this: "I would not call him a prophet, though he may be. I would not rule out imposter, though I have no proof. I know that if you boiled the story in a kettle you would find hard residue composed of two things: One would be Meier's ravings about time travel, space travel, philosophy, and religion; the other would be the comments by the scientists and engineers impressed with the evidence he has produced. I can't believe the former, nor can I dismiss the latter. He may simply be one of the finest illusionists the world has ever known, possessing not the power but the skill to persuade others to see things that did not happen and do not exist. Perhaps he has no such ability; perhaps beings on a much higher plane have selected him and controlled him and used him for reasons far beyond our comprehension. I do know this: Trying to make sense of it all has been the most difficult thing I will ever to. Finally I realized, as the Elders had years before, that the truth of the Meier contacts will never be known."

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