



(Picture compilation ufodata)

## Carl Sagan Believed in UFOs

By Harv Howard

[hhoward@ecpi.com](mailto:hhoward@ecpi.com)

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The depositing of Carl Sagan by fate or happenstance into the climatic last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was a strange and remarkable occurrence. So placed, he lived in the best of worlds and the hidden, worst of worlds. The public had no clue about the dark side. However, he could not have escaped the awareness of and the uncomfortable duality of straddling those worlds. The one he loved. The other he denied and had strong reasons to hate.

The best of his worlds was bifid, of two aspects. It consisted of being a very much engaged, brilliant, and cutting-edge member of the modern scientific world actively exploring new worlds through the generosity of government.

While trained as a traditional astronomer, Sagan had little use for

the mundane peering through a telescope at the small disk of a planet and making notes and drawings. His main interests were in all areas of exobiology, a field that he was instrumental in creating. It is the search for and study of life on other worlds. His life-long interest, his obsession, was the possibility of life currently or formerly on Mars.

The other aspect of his loved world was to become what some have called a social gadfly scientist, a very public and out-spoken spokesman for himself, Science as a whole and NASA's planetary efforts. Perhaps not coincidentally or by accident, he also took on the mantle as the frequent if unofficial government mouthpiece for denying all aspects of modern UFOs. While this was his personal and professional right, this latter role should not be viewed necessarily as

an understandably objective scientist expressing his views stemming from knowledge of his field, or from the unofficial field of UFOs. For him, to so adamantly argue against UFOs served an obvious, necessary, and deeply personal purpose. The presence of the UFOs represented the worst of his worlds. But such was not always the case in his life.

Sagan actually grew up with the UFO saga unfolding before his maturing eyes and mind. The UFO phenomena burst upon the scene in June of 1947 when Kenneth Arnold a private pilot sighted a fleet of fast-moving, strange-shaped craft weaving around Mount Rainer in Washington state. Early in July newspapers and radios rushed to the public with official news releases from the Army Air Corp that it had recovered the remains of a crashed disk near Roswell, New Mexico. Sagan was 12 at the time. Such astounding news would have been a strong jolt to his belief system. The news dovetailed precisely into his interests and goals. An avid science fiction reader, he was an easy, if not already, convert. William Poundstone, biographer of Sagan in his book, *Carl Sagan: A Life in the Cosmos*, had these words to say about Sagan's early views on UFOs. "...Sagan sincerely believed in UFOs—not as swamp gas, not as mass hysteria, but as alien spacecraft visiting the Earth."

On July 19, 1952, UFOs buzzed the White House. Newspapers around the world carried pictures of several mysterious objects moving in restricted airspace over the Capitol area. The objects were picked up on radar at both Washington National Airport and Andrews Air Force Base. Hundreds if not thousands of persons, military officers, government employees and elected officials, witnessed the objects. The bizarre event started a fresh wave of sightings and public fervor. However, the resulting official explanation for the Washington objects

was that they resulted from a "temperature inversion" of vehicle lights and were not real objects at all.

Poundstone continues: "There was nothing Sagan wanted more than to see a UFO himself. He did not think it wise to leave that to chance. All summer long, (1952) Abrahamson (Sagan's roommate) would drag himself into the apartment after a long day's work and Sagan would bug him to go out and look for UFOs. Abrahamson acquiesced once or twice. They saw nothing more than a few shooting stars.

"To Sagan the great mystery was why other people didn't take flying saucers as seriously as he did. 'Not a single adult I knew was preoccupied with UFOs,' he later wrote. 'I couldn't figure out why not.'"

On August 3, 1952, Sagan took a personal step with getting involved with the UFO phenomena. While a grad student working in a university lab in Bloomington, Indiana, he started directly at the top. Poundstone writes: "...Sagan took a sheet of Indiana University stationery and wrote Secretary of State Dean Acheson. He asked what the State Department planned to do 'if the unidentified aerial objects sobriqueted "flying saucers" were conclusively proved to be extraterrestrial vehicles investigating the progress of the United States and other nations in the fields of astronautics and nuclear physics, in order to prevent our expansion into space at the present time.' He wanted to know whether the United States had plans to communicate with the aliens and/or to pool defenses against 'the common enemy.' "...A State Department underling wrong back tersely, 'Under the circumstances of a purely hypothetical situation, the Department has no comment to make on the questions you asked.'"

The uninitiated should understand that before and especially after 1952 and

for years to follow various government panels, committees and projects made it plainly obvious what was to forever be the official policy toward all things deemed UFOs. In a word, they were to be *denied* at every turn. The implication of that unstated policy was clear: It was an unhealthy career move to be a scientist or official working for the government or in the educational field and be receptive and outspoken about UFOs. In fact in those days, it was risky enough for a scientist to even talk much about the exobiology except in general terms. At that time, we were still very much the center of the Universe. As an ambitious, maturing scientist on the brink of deciding the specific game plan of his future, at some point the young Sagan evidently made a calculated choice.

He could chase UFOs wholeheartedly and commit professional (and perhaps even personal) suicide as did some scientists that followed their hearts headlong after the phenomena. Or he could create a unique option for himself.

Sagan, to put it bluntly, was no fool, to the contrary, he was super-intelligent, and he was very ambitious. He saw into the political, social and personal logic of denying UFOs whenever necessary for social, cultural and governmental purposes while at the very same instant constantly espousing his passion for alien life forms barely within the bounds of accepted science for the exact same reasons. It was a brilliant strategy and worked handsomely for him throughout his professional career. He gained many accolades over his later years from governments, institutions and organizations for his words

It was a book by the Soviet maverick astrophysicist I. S. Shklovskii that gave young Sagan the opportunity to burst into the public's eye. In retrospect, it was a daring if not reckless act for Sagan to join. The book could have been badly received or at the least could have gone unnoticed among

similar works. But it came at an opportune time and was a bestseller. The space race was making people and nations look outward with questions. And always a man with forward thinking, Sagan found himself among the new thinkers about life beyond Earth and he, as Shklovskii, was not afraid to speak out..

Shklovskii's book was published in the Soviet Union in 1963. Entitled *Universe, Life, Mind*, it went through several printings. The premise of the book was to give substance and validity for scientific and mathematical views that intelligent life throughout the Universe was a reasonable concept to hold in mind. With a strong, statistically solid case he argued for the inevitability that other life must exist on millions of stars within our own galaxy and many were far older and more technologically advanced with near god-like abilities.

One scientist not put off by Shklovskii's views of life in the Universe, just the opposite, but who was avidly enthralled by them, was the still young Sagan, then about thirty years old. When he got his hands on a translated copy of Shklovskii's book, having had some prior correspondence with the Russian, Sagan wrote him and suggest that the book be translated into English and that he augment it with more information. (This suggests that Sagan probably gained his version through a CIA program that routinely obtained and translated into English pertinent Soviet scientific works.) The outcome was an English version. After a long delay after the agreement was reached, Shklovskii was surprised to discover that he shared joint authorship in the new version with Sagan. The book was basically unchanged from Shklovskii's original except Sagan had doubled its length with large additions unbeknownst to Shklovskii. Yet, he was supposedly delighted with the result. Sagan's additions were set off by letter-sized

triangles at the beginning and end of his words. The book went to press in 1966 with the name changed to *Intelligent Life in the Universe*. It was an instant success. Sagan had established himself. According to Poundstone's research for his biography, many acquaintances of Sagan consider it to be Sagan's best work.

At that time Sagan was teaching at Harvard and for all indications was set to become a tenured professor in the astronomy department. But something happened. Sagan got the message that he was not to be granted a full professorship, and he started looking for a position elsewhere. MIT was close and his likely next home, but he was not asked to join them either. He then gravitated to Cornell University. Poundstone wrote that Sagan never discussed his being turned away by Harvard and MIT (nor did Poundstone), but the rejection affected him deeply. The obvious conclusion, of course, is that Sagan's brash views on exobiology, and possibly his work with Shklovskii, were too brazen for the dogmatic, older professors. Certainly at that time Sagan learned, perhaps anew, a personal, hard lesson about how to conduct himself in academia. One can imagine that somewhere within that period of his less-than-ideal advancing in his life's work that he vowed never to positively speak of UFOs again. He would keep strictly to science.

Yet at that point in 1966, his fate took a slight turn to the area of UFOs. The air force was receiving a lot of criticism of its Project Blue Book. It was an ongoing investigation of UFOs under one name or another since 1948. Prior project names had been Project Grudge and Project Sign. To squelch the criticisms, Dr. Edward Condon of the University of Colorado was tasked to review the air force's work that was not finding much validity in the phenomena despite the thousands of sighting reports it had received.

Condon knew Sagan and of his interests and asked him to join the team of six he assembled to conduct the review. Before long the team produced a short report that did nothing to settle the issue but urged that more of Blue Book's information be made available. It was a full three years, March of 1969, before a massive 967-page tome was published under the title of *Scientific Study of Unidentified Flying Objects*. (Sagan is not listed as a contributor in the final work.) The report was widely panned as a "whitewash," ignoring some of the best cases both leaving some out of the study and including some within it but totally dismissing them with asinine conclusions. A major criticism was that the witnesses were almost universally doubted about observational abilities. At least one book was published by a disgruntled member of the group detailing the preconceived debunking conclusions that the report was mandated to follow.

Somewhere between Sagan's 1952 letter to the government inquiring about its plans to deal with the UFOs, and his maturing into a savvy scientist in 1966 or so, he changed from a hot-blooded UFO enthusiast to arch critic and continual debunker of the total topic. It is most important to interject here that there was a super critical change in the reports about the phenomena during that time. It was traumatic enough for the world's populace (and governments) to consider the arrival of superior alien beings into our atmosphere. It was quite another to add to these exotic accounts the emerging and far more horrific tales of human abductions and even later the cattle mutilations of the early 1970s. Such travesties far overshadowed the relatively benign overflights of earlier years. The stereotypical 'little green men' of cartoons were joined by a more sinister version of the large-eyed grays.

The mental states of witnesses and abductees became a major part of the interpretation and understanding of cases. Earlier, psychologists were used to generally discuss the impact of UFOs upon cultures and societies. Eventually, this involvement became more focused on an individual's UFO experience. Great efforts were made to explain an abduction experience by such things as childhood sexual abuse, implanted memories, and mental disorders. This was a clever move; a psy-ops weapon used against the witness in addition to the outright debunking of the account. Such prevent personal attacks even if generally applied to witnesses (by the mere mentioning of such words as "hallucinations"), discouraged reporting of the sighting itself and certainly put the witness under suspicion for being someone less than normal. The drumbeat of denial was required to intensify and covert and overt operations were put into action.

Sagan attempted to not quite dismiss the phenomena in a book he edited with Thornton Page in 1972. Entitled *UFO's A Scientific Debate*, it was, nonetheless, a continuation of the whitewash using his favorite ploy of conventional rules of Science to dismiss ETs while turning a partially blind eye to the evidence. In the introduction Sagan argues, "... There is insufficient evidence to exclude the possibility that some UFO's are space vehicles from advanced extraterrestrial civilizations, but he maintains that other speculative hypotheses are equally probably or improbably, and that the insignificance of our civilization and the vast distances between the stars make the extraterrestrial hypothesis unlikely."

This writer had the opportunity to witness him lecturing on that premise in 1973. Sagan followed an excellent presentation by Allen J. Hynek detailing the famous Michigan swamp gas case and other credible cases that he had personally investigated. When

Sagan followed, his dogmatic, old-school presentation reminded me of an old story about meteorites. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century two members of the Yale faculty were sent to trace down the seeming then preposterous myth that stones had been witnessed to fall from the sky. Thomas Jefferson, as enlightened as he supposedly was, had this to say about the men's investigations and correct conclusions: "It is easier to believe that two Yankee professors would lie than that stones would fall from heaven."

Sagan was never a field UFO investigator, such as Hynek. Like the late Philip J. Klass, however, if he bothered, Sagan could dismiss the best of cases without ever leaving his chair. At that time Hynek was beginning to suspect after years of study and investigations that UFOs were utilizing a far different—or escape from—physics than we could imagine. Of course, he could never explain the workings of that physics, but he did point out the discrepancies between actual observations and our laws of physics that were being violated. Sagan rose to the attack to protect the old order. He seized upon that as a weakness of the reality of the phenomena rather than observing that Hynek was making an honest, objective and telling contribution. When something was pertinent to his exobiology, no clever idea, no optimistic parameter was left unexpressed by Sagan. Yet, with UFOs, he was the rigid conservative, ignoring multitudes of UFO data to mouth the standard propaganda in order to appease the secretkeepers and to reassure the public. It would have been far more characteristic of Sagan's true nature if he had glanced at some of the best UFO cases demonstrating mass-canceling abilities and concluded that the UFOs obviously possessed that attribute. Canceling mass in some fashion would be an astounding revelation but not necessarily violating the laws of physics as he understood them at all.

(It is simply a technological technique.) But the problem for Sagan was that it obviously made his mantra instantly worthless. In addition, that attribute was one of the big secrets to be contained, and he could only respond to Hynek by denying UFOs as a whole.

A simplistic critique of Sagan's life could readily surmise that the reality of the UFOs simply stole Sagan's thunder. They gave him the worst world of his worlds. At any moment they were in a position to short-circuit the process of contact. And that was one thing that Sagan, in one way or another had been specifically and personally working for most of his adult life. The reality was that the aliens existed HERE AND NOW, and he desperately wanted them to be out *there* where he could search for them and most importantly, be instrumental in finding them and bringing on Johnny Carson to show to the world. His only defense, therefore, as a scientist and individual was to deny the creatures he sought elsewhere were really hiding here, quite plainly, under his bed. Rather than embrace UFOs as he learned more about them, he turned against them. He knew he could not make a grand assault on disproving them locally with science—the reverse would have been true if a serious effort were to be made (which NEVER has been done publicly). The best he could do was to buttress himself with obviously out-dated and misinterpreted rules of science from the Ivy Towers, and he did very well at it..

His constant mantra he uttered over the decades bears repeating because it needs to be of special attention. It is a clear testimonial to his denial of the issue in the most basic sense. He would say (paraphrased) time and time again, "Yes, there is intelligent life out there in the depths of the Universe, the Drake equation tells us that, but they cannot get here. Relativity

physics won't allow it. They live too far away."

Above all, those words preserved his safe place in conventional science while at the same time gave the reassurance that the public needed to hear from a strong, visible member of the establishment. In the area of his work and goals, he and NASA found that they worked fabulously together as a team effort. No one seemed concerned about how he could use the science of mathematical probabilities to predict and expect that other life existed out there for untold ages in great numbers in our galaxy and in the next breath to deny the most explicit evidence of a local UFO that questioned Relativity.. But few scientists destroy their own pet theories they cling to, and for Sagan, that spiel was more than that. It was his *only* argument.

An in-depth attempt at understanding this odd behavior of Sagan's is more charitable in some ways. Perhaps it was no more than that he never got over his early convictions that UFOs were genuine ET craft, but he did learn to curtail his wild enthusiasm for the practical and logical reasons cited above. But the situation the UFOs present to Earth is a confounding, complex matter. Sagan's direct relationship to the situation was not only a simple matter of putting aside his personal views. We must allow that Sagan perhaps secretly accepted UFOs as being genuine ET devices. But for the sake of the greater good of cultures, societies, and governments he chose to take the same position those in power have been dictating for over half a century. That would be understandable for a man of Sagan's ilk. But a following question arises and needs some searching for an answer. Did he simply assume that position and followed it entirely by his own efforts, or was he enabled in various ways to rise to the prominence he obtained? There is data that indicates that Sagan was an insider, a co-

conspirator from early on. That even extending to his NASA work with Mars. The logic for such a conclusion is simple even if general in nature. First, there has always been a conspiracy against the UFO, anyone remotely connected to the field knows that truth. It is a given. Such conforms to the first law of political science. It is an automatic reaction in the natural order of the way governments operate and protect themselves. And second, it is difficult if not impossible to image that Sagan would be so involved in the topic of life in the Universe that he would not be in the inner circles of these dealing with the situation. Does that make him a bad guy? No. Not at all. How many others leaders, politicians, officials and ordinary folk must be guilty by the same measure? I know that great suffering has been endured by many people as a result of the UFO interactions. I have had my share. But understanding and forgiveness are in order for those favoring stability and social order over the chaos that a total revelation of the "truth" would have wrought.

As for Sagan, I sincerely feel that in some fashion of what is given above, he sacrificed himself for the greater good. In light of that understanding, he was and must remain a world-class hero in both the best and worst of his worlds.

***'Carl Sagan passed away in 1996 he was just 62 years old.'***