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Music: “Oh No, Ross and Carrie! Theme Song” by Brian Keith Dalton. A jaunty, upbeat instrumental.

Ross Blocher: Hello, and welcome to *Oh No, Ross and Carrie!*, the show where we don't just report on fringe science, spirituality, claims of the paranormal—no, no, no.

Carrie Poppy: We would never.

Ross Blocher: We read books ourselves.

Carrie Poppy: That's right. When they make the claims and write them down, we read them, so you don't have to. I'm Carrie Poppy.

Ross Blocher: Even if they were written when we were—when I was five, I think this came out?

Carrie Poppy: This is 1987. I was four, you were five.

Ross Blocher: I'm Ross Blocher. And this is our (*chuckling*) I was going to say promised episode—our review of Whitley Strieber's *Communion*.

Carrie Poppy: And if you can't tell, this is also maybe the earliest we've ever recorded.

Ross Blocher: That's right. Yeah. Good morning! This is what we look like at—well, now it's 730, but we met about an hour ago.

Carrie Poppy: It's audio. Oh! Yeah, yeah, okay. That's what you look like. I've seen you.

Ross Blocher: For us here. Oh my goodness. Georgie just drinks out of every cup, doesn't she? Okay. She's over on your counter drinking out of another cup.

Carrie Poppy: My little kitten. She wants to drink water.

Ross Blocher: Carrie's had to bring me water twice. Thank you very much. Okay. So, yes, we are early in the morning. We are talking about *Communion*.

Carrie Poppy: By Whitley Strieber.

Ross Blocher: By Whitley Strieber. And by popular demand—Carrie suggested this. Thank you for this book assignment. But we let the listeners vote. And just from Facebook alone, we had 107 votes for yes, do it. And we had 24 votes for “I get it, a guy thinks he was abducted by aliens”. Which is fair, and our apologies to all of you.

Carrie Poppy: Yeah, a guy does think he was abducted by aliens, and if that's all you need to know, keep going. It's fine. And I tweeted it myself and asked, broadly, if people want me and my friend Ross to read this memoir, because I didn't know Twitter would know what the heck I was talking about if I didn't—once there's like retweets.

Ross Blocher: Like, okay, this lady wants to know if she and her friend should read a book. Yeah, do it. I'm for literacy.

Carrie Poppy: (*Laughs.*) I'm always thinking through these—how this operation's actually going to play out. Okay, so my three options were A) yes, read *Communion*. Tell us all about it. B) I get it. A guy thinks he was abducted by aliens. C) don't like podcasts, love polls. 'Cause you always have these people who want to vote, and you got to give them a space to the wastebasket of the poll. So, we had 81.7% A. 13.4% B. 5% C, and that was out of 262 votes.

Ross Blocher: Okay. Sounds roughly similar. And thank you to people who responded on the podcast Twitter, the podcast X, where we exuded.

Carrie Poppy: Mm. Yeah, should I go look at that? That has 36 replies. And I'm just going to look for B's because I'm mostly seeing A's. One, two... five B's and 31 A's.

Ross Blocher: Hey, alright. Well, we see your B's, but—yeah, let's talk about *Communion*.

Carrie Poppy: The A's have it. I'm really glad I read *Communion*.

Ross Blocher: You know what? Me too.

Carrie Poppy: Yeah?

Ross Blocher: And it was exactly what I needed, this assignment, to get it done within a week.

Carrie Poppy: (*Chuckling.*) Oh, good. Okay.

Ross Blocher: There's a list of books like sorely missing titles from my reading adventures. And I kept thinking as I was reading it, what if I had read this when I was like really into aliens in the mid-'90s? Because I was aware of this book, as I've talked about. Definitely aware—as I think many of our listeners are—of this cover image that so many think of as haunting. I was thinking how differently it would have impacted young Ross. It would've affected me and my views on aliens, I think, for a long time. 'Cause it adds a lot of details on top of the type of thing you get from the *X-Files*.

Carrie Poppy: Do we know where the image on the front is from?

Ross Blocher: Yes! And there's a fun passage in here where he talks about sitting down with the artist and reading to him—kind of like a sketch artist. Here's what I'm seeing.

We should definitely return to that, because we'll want to establish a few themes first. But the character that you see with the big, black, almond-shaped eyes of this classic gray alien is a specific character that he gives a specific gender to that appears in his head and sticks with him.

Carrie Poppy: I think we can say the gender now.

(Ross agrees.)

She's a girl. Yeah, so he refers to her as she all the time, and she has a voice, and—yeah, she's a whole character.

Ross Blocher: So, when you see that alien on the front of *Communion*, know that you're looking at a lady alien. And there's a subtitle to this book.

Carrie Poppy: *A True Story*. I do believe that the author of this book believes that. Yeah, I completely do.

Ross Blocher: Yeah. I feel like that was usually one of my first conversation items. When people would see me reading it and want to talk about it, I'd say, "Oh yeah, I think he's fully convinced of all of this. I don't think this is a cynical ploy." He was already a fiction author. He even wrote like a horror book beforehand, and people thought—accused him of having just kind of done this as a ploy to get a lot of money and attention.

Carrie Poppy: Right, because you've got like your L. Ron Hubbards—people who do make that switch from science fiction to mystical claims.

Ross Blocher: This kind of—yeah, cynical money grab.

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And yeah, there are people like Hubbard who fit that template. I wouldn't put Whitley Strieber in that category.

(Carrie agrees.)

One thing that's just fascinating on the outset is we'll talk about the timeline here, as clearly as we can distinguish it. But these were events happening in 1985, early 1986. And this book was published in late 1987.

Carrie Poppy: He got it out.

Ross Blocher: And then there's a movie called *Communion* based on this exact story.

Ross & Carrie: With Christopher Walken!

(Carrie squeaks.)

Ross Blocher: Wow, what a person to put in your film. (*Imitating Christopher Walken.*) “Hey, I’m Whitley Strieberrr. I’ve been seeing thingssss.”

Carrie Poppy: Yeah, he doesn’t try to not do his voice.

Ross Blocher: (*Laughs.*) He’s just completely being quirky Christopher Walken, wearing a really weird hat.

Carrie Poppy: (*Laughs.*) But it’s so perfect in some ways. Well, we’ll get there; we’re gonna get there; we’re gonna get there.

Ross Blocher: But that came out in 1989! So, just the pacing of this astounded me. Like, all of this happened really fast, and I could see how that would lead someone from the outside just to say like, “You’ve just found a way to kind of quickly turn this into a big phenomenon.”

Carrie Poppy: And he was writing movie scripts and stuff before that. He was a well-positioned writer.

Ross Blocher: And he wrote the screenplay for the film and was a producer. So—oh, and this is apropos of nothing, but I checked the book out from the library. Which is kind of a bummer, because you can’t write all over it. Though, someone else had been writing their notes! And it’s always fun to see other people’s reactions to a book. But when I looked it up in the good old Dewey Decimal System, it was cataloged as 001.942. So, like at the very beginning of all nonfiction. I was just kind of curious like what is the category for this?

Carrie Poppy: Yeah. What’s 001?

Ross Blocher: ‘Cause sure enough, there’s a lot of books on the shelf that are about either aliens—

Carrie Poppy: Mm. *Reality Check*, *Secrets of the Fields*, *Unsolved Mysteries*. Yeah. Okay.

Ross Blocher: And actually I think *Reality Check* is written by our buddy Don Prothero! Oh yeah!

Carrie Poppy: So, *Tales of the Unknown*, that kind of stuff.

Ross Blocher: *Unsolved Mysteries*, *Roswell*. Yeah. These are the kind of titles. And I was like why is this at the very beginning of the Dewey Decimal System? So, apparently the 001 category is knowledge. And the site that I looked it up on has a little picture of an owl.

Carrie Poppy: Aah! Owledge!

Ross Blocher: (*Chuckling.*) I thought—I don’t know. That was just kind of fun. Kind of fun.

Carrie Poppy: Perfect. Yeah, because owls play a big role in UFO lore and in this book in particular, because Whitley saw maybe an owl during his experience.

Ross Blocher: But also, I've just got to say there's so many people respond to this cover and the cover image, I still felt conscious reading it out in public. Because I knew people would react to the cover, and they still do nearly 40 years later!

Carrie Poppy: Oh. Huh. No one has reacted to my cover.

Ross Blocher: Like, yesterday I was working at the election and still reading this, and I would kind of keep it angled down. And one person came by and said, "Oh, what are you reading?"

So, I flipped over the cover and started telling them and they kind of recoiled.

(Carrie "woah"s.)

And went, "Oh! Oh my goodness. Okay. Good book, huh? Alright.

(They laugh.)

Carrie Poppy: Maybe I'm just too acclimated to it. I don't get a start from it, but maybe I've seen it 1,000,000 times, and that's it.

Ross Blocher: This pallid, yellowish gray alien with the big black eyes and the little vertical slits for a very slight nose and almost kind of a Mona Lisa smile. The slightly upturned lips.

Carrie Poppy: Yeah. Kind of pursed lips, kind of duck lips.

Ross Blocher: Anyways, what happens in this book?

Carrie Poppy: Okay, so Whitley Strieber.

Ross Blocher: He gives us on the first page, as you open up—it says, "When you read this incredible story, do not be too skeptical. Somewhere in your own past, there may be some lost hour or strange recollection that means you also have had this experience. This book is about forming a new relationship with the unknown. Instead of shunning the darkness, we can face straight into it with an open mind. When we do that, the unknown changes. Fearful things become understandable, and a truth is suggested. The enigmatic presence of the human mind winks back from the dark."

Carrie Poppy: Yeah. So, even though he doesn't talk about this very much—though, he references it—a lot of this just relies on this notion of memory that's incorrect.

Ross Blocher: Yeah. He name drops Freud multiple times in the book.

Carrie Poppy: Yeah. Talks about screen memories—this old idea that our worst memories just live in our subconscious and get buried, and our mind tries to repress them to protect us, and then if you get safe enough, those memories come leaping forward.

Ross Blocher: Is that how that works?

Carrie Poppy: That's not how that works.

Ross Blocher: That's not how that works.

Carrie Poppy: This is very solidly disproven.

Ross Blocher: Another reason I wish I had read it earlier is that I think when we were talking to Mike Clelland, I would have realized just how strong the connection was between their takes on alien visitation. It just seems like they're kind of working from very similar starting points with the screen memories, with the owls.

(Carrie agrees.)

And Mike Clelland has really dove—dived? Doven?

[00:10:00]

I didn't set the sentence up well. He's—

Carrie Poppy: 7:45AM people!

(They chuckle.)

Ross Blocher: He's really locked in on that particular piece of the puzzle, the whole owl thing. But fully consistent with Whitley, who also goes on to talk about praying mantises and other things.

Carrie Poppy: And Whitley has a podcast called *Dreamland*. I think he has a few podcasts, actually, but *Dreamland's* his big one—and a website, Unknown Country. And on there, he full on recommends Mike Clelland's stuff and talks to him.

Ross Blocher: They're in ca-hoots.

Carrie Poppy: Hoots!

(Ross cackles.)

There we go!

Ross Blocher: Alright. Hey, I'm waking up. I'm waking up.

Carrie Poppy: (*Laughs.*) Okay, so there are lots of event's details in this book, and all given the same amount of very finite scrutiny as if they are all equally important. But if one zooms out the way Whitley Strieber cannot, one notices that there are really only a couple that ha-happened in real life?! A couple that weren't—that don't seem like, uh, (*chuckles*) hypnotically induced or a dream state or anything like that.

Ross Blocher: Yeah. The struggle to put that into words I think is apt, because it is so nebulous in the book. But yeah, you have these kind of two inciting incidents. There's sort of a minor event that happens at his cabin. And then there's a later one. That's more like just on the nose. And it feels like a real big abduction that he remembers afterward. And that sends him back to all of this hypnotic regression, recovery, where he gets more details about both of those events. And then there's a later one that happens, and then he starts getting earlier ones. And then everything just starts expanding and flowering and growing and getting more and more confusiing!

Carrie Poppy: And Ross, the truth happens in order.

(*Ross chuckles.*)

But this chronology is all over the ding dang place! You'd think that as a writer, you'd pick one of two pathways. You'd either be like, "I'm claiming that this happened in 1952. I'm putting it before 1987." Or! You say, "I'm going to write this in the order in which I became aware of these events."

Ross Blocher: That's almost what he's doing.

Carrie Poppy: Almost what he does, but still no! Still no! So, the first actual—

Ross Blocher: (*Sighs.*) It's confusing. This is a confusing book.

Carrie Poppy: Yeah. So, what really pops out to me as the truly inciting incident is October 4th, 1985.

(*Ross agrees.*)

Okay, so he tells this story totally out of order, but I've tried to put it back in order. So, he had already been having paranoia for a while when this happens.

Ross Blocher: Yeah, because this inciting event happens, as it does in the film. The film is, I would say—

Carrie Poppy: Pretty accurate! Or pretty—(*laughs*) faithful?!

Ross Blocher: Faithful, yeah. That's a good way of saying it.

Carrie Poppy: Faithful to his own book.

Ross Blocher: That he and his wife and their young son have this apartment in New York, but they've bought a house out in the sticks. It's a fair drive away, but it's like upstate New York. And all he tells us is it's not only like off the beaten path, it's an off the beaten path off of another, you know, service road or something. It's hard to access. There's a small community of people. But he's investing, to your point, in all of these security—not cameras. I wish he had gotten freaking cameras! But he's got all these lights that turn on, these motion sensor lights. And instantly I'm thinking, okay, what's going on Whitley, that you're so paranoid already about intruders?

Carrie Poppy: Yeah. And this comes up a bunch. Like, and I mean, sometimes he uses the word paranoid, but yeah. I mean, he is got all these concerns about people following him. This thread continues throughout the book. There'll just be moments where you're like you don't need to be suspicious of this person. But he is.

Ross Blocher: And he—yeah. And he seems to at least be semi-aware of that.

Carrie Poppy: Yeah, that's true. Okay, so on October 4th, 1985, Whitley, Anne, and their son, Andrew—another Andrew for us to remember. Jesus.

Ross Blocher: That's so confusing. You've got an Andrew. I've got an Andrew.

Carrie Poppy: Now Whitley's got one. So, they drive up to their cabin in the company of two close friends—Jacques Sandulescu and Annie Gottlieb.

Ross Blocher: Yeah, and that's not confusing at all, because his wife is Anne. And like the one other major female character, aside from the alien, is Anne.

Carrie Poppy: Annie. Yeah, so there's Anne and Annie. Try to keep them straight. Annie's the guest.

Ross Blocher: And Jacques and Whitley. And Andrew, heading for the country.

Carrie Poppy: So, the Striebers are Anne, Andrew, and Whitley. So, they all have dinner at a local restaurant. They get to the cabin at 9PM. They had not drunk more than one glass of wine and a drink each at the restaurant. So, they're tipsy, but they're not schnockered.

Ross Blocher: And I get it. It makes sense for this, but he does regularly remind us that he is not a user of substances generally. So, he lets us know how moderate he is with his alcohol intake. They had very little.

Carrie Poppy: Now from this point forward and for a second, we're just going to be hearing Whitley's experience. No one else witnessed this.

[00:15:00]

So, sometime well after midnight, Whitley woke up to a blue light on the ceiling that scared him, because it wasn't possible for there to be any light there. He says the light could not have been a flashlight, because it was so uniform and so broad and so distinctly blue. And then as the light crept up the ceiling, he decided that the chimney must be on fire and dropping sparks into the front yard. He knows he must do something, but he immediately falls into a deep sleep.

So, then if we jump to Jacques's experience, he says, "I was sleeping and all of a sudden something woke me up. The room was full of light—bright, like daylight, not like the moon. I thought we overslept. I look at my watch; it says four 30. Then I hear you, Whitley, through the door saying, 'It's okay. The light is gone,' so I go back to sleep."

Okay.

Ross Blocher: Got some corroboration from another person.

Carrie Poppy: There was light. Okay, then we have Annie's experience, so the guest. She says, "It was a bang. Then I heard the scurry of little feet running across your bedroom upstairs." Whitley replies, "Annie, the cats were in the city." So, it couldn't have been kitties. Annie goes on that she only vaguely remembers the light but mostly remembers noises and Whitley coming downstairs to tell everybody not to worry. And then Anne basically has almost no relevant recollection of this night. But before hypnosis, she said she had a vague memory of Whitley warning her of fire on that night and of hearing an explosion. "And our son calling out to me," which actually sounds like a very active night. (*Laughs.*) I don't know why she characterized that as like not that active a night, but—

Ross Blocher: Yeah, we usually have loud noises and my son crying.

Carrie Poppy: Then there was an explosion. I don't know; normal night with Whitley!

Ross Blocher: And my husband saying, "There's a fire." (*Chuckles.*)

Carrie Poppy: It does sound like Whitley gets up out of bed and checks for intruders basically all the time. So—

Ross Blocher: Yeah, that's something where we get a very different report from him and his wife about how often he gets up from bed. He's like, "No, it's very rare that I get out of bed!"

She's like, (*muttering*) "He's out of bed all the time."

Carrie Poppy: (*Laughs.*) "This fucker. I can never go to sleep."

So, then back to Whitley's experience. Whitley is re-awoken by a sound like a firecracker popping in his face. The entire house is surrounded by a glow, which then suddenly disappears when Whitley gets up to do something about the fire and encounters Jacques in the hall. So, now back to Jacques and Whitley together. They're very startled by this

encounter. Whitley reassures Jacques that nothing's wrong. The next morning, little is said about the incident, and Whitley doesn't remember any confusion about the fire.

Later that week, Whitley feels agitated but doesn't know why. He has a persistent memory of light flashing in his eyes that night, and he vaguely recalls an explosion. And then the next weekend, he has a clear and dramatic memory of a huge crystal standing on end above the house, "a glorious thing, hundreds of feet tall"!

Ross Blocher: Yeah, sure. Normal.

Carrie Poppy: "Glowing with unearthly blue light." He says—

Ross Blocher: Hundreds of feet tall, giant glowing crystal. Sure. Okay. Yes. By the way, yeah, just now—by the way, remember a few days ago? I know there was a loud noise and stuff, uuuh, but there was this crystal as big as a mountain.

Carrie Poppy: I think this is the first time we get a hint of what's going on for Anne.

(Ross chuckles.)

"I told Anne about it, and as I was talking, I experienced a hollow sort of feeling. I knew that she didn't believe me. Of course she didn't. And I didn't believe myself."

Ross Blocher: Oh, this will come up beautifully later in her hypnosis.

Carrie Poppy: Yes. And then this line. "Wasn't there some problem with the stove?" She asked. I was embarrassed and never mentioned the crystal again. I put it out of my mind permanently." As a person though, who has had carbon monoxide poisoning, I see the stove and I go, *(shouting)* "Check the stove!" Yeah. This is 40 years ago now. So.

Ross Blocher: She was not subject to his crystal persuasion.

Carrie Poppy: *(Laughs.)* And then, okay, last part of this story. Whitley asks Andrew, his son, about his dreams. And he shares that he has had a nightmare about little doctors who took him out on a porch and put him on a cot. And that, to Whitley, is verification that something happened. They had some visitors. And that's what he'll go on to call the aliens who he is convinced actually began their abduction experiences.

Ross Blocher: The visitors, right. Yeah! He, I'm sure, uses the word aliens in the book but very little. It's really about the visitors. Yeah, I think he wants to normalize that phrase. Make it happen, not unlike fetch.

Carrie Poppy: I think it might be Anne's influence, too. Because we learn near the end of the book that she gave him the title. He wanted to call the book *Body Horror!*

Ross Blocher: It's not Anne. She's asleep at that moment.

Carrie Poppy: Oh! Oh. I thought it was Anne.

Ross Blocher: No.

[00:20:00]

He's talking to Anne, and he thinks it's her for a moment, but it turns out it's the alien speaking directly into his mind. He wanted to call the book *Body Terror*.

Carrie Poppy: Oh, *Body Terror*. Okay. Also shocking and disgusting. I mean, I have to say though, probably more accurate.

Ross Blocher: Well, he describes the scene. He's in bed with Anne, and he's ready to call the book *Body Terror*. But the basso profundo voice—and this is how he describes the voice of his alien female companion. “The book must not frighten people.” Oh, wait, I guess I should speak like her. (*Clears throat and drops his voice to something deep and sonorous.*) “The book must not frighten people. You should call it *Communion*, because that's what it's about.” So, not only does—

Carrie Poppy: Yeah. I still—you don't think that it's Anne?

Ross Blocher: No. I mean, it's either the alien talking through him—but he said she was asleep. Like, he looked over and like, “Oh, you're not talking to me. Oh! It's the voice from the alien.”

Carrie Poppy: Yeah, I still just took that to mean like she said it, and then he was like, “I know that voice. Oh my god. She's somehow connected to the alien!”

Ross Blocher: We've only got Whitley's recall on this.

Carrie Poppy: Yeah, who knows?

Ross Blocher: But according to him, not only is this character on the front of the book that haunts everybody's dreams, not only is this the female alien companion that he doesn't mind touching him—that's another story we'll get to—but she also is responsible for the name of the book! She just has taken over.

Carrie Poppy: And my case is that alien is connected to Anne in Whitley's mind, and Anne said it somehow. Who knows? Yeah, in some way he gets the message that he's supposed to call it *Communion*. And that's so interesting, because his terror is so evident throughout this book. Like, he is scared of these beings. He is not having a good time. He wishes this weren't happening. So, then to have it be called *Communion* feels strange.

Ross Blocher: He does have a few notes where he talks about how he's kind of come full circle, that he's learned to live with this and see the benefits, the positive aspects of it. And I think that's what he wanted to do with the book. He didn't want it to be on the whole a

frightening book. And *Communion* is a great title, because coming out in the '80s—I think even now—we all associate that with a religious ritual, one of the sacraments. And you see this alien thing, and it's tying it to religion with this title *Communion*, and it's invoking all these other images. I think it's a great title! So, she was right. “She” be Anne or—we never get a name for the female visitor. But—

Carrie Poppy: Yeah, why does he give her a name or ask her name?

Ross Blocher: Probably like the queen. Because we'll unpack this more, but he thinks of these aliens as kind of like a hive mind. That's sort of his working theory, that they're sort of insect like. And so, I'm just going to call her the queen from now on, because I feel like she's maybe sort of a thought leader that drives these other aliens, perhaps, that are drones. Anyways! Okay. So, yes, that was the inciting incident, October 4th. I enjoyed the constant references to October 4th. That's my anniversary.

Carrie Poppy: Oh, I didn't know that!

Ross Blocher: Yeah, it just felt kind of fun.

Carrie Poppy: That's cool. Oh, well, wait. So, you were born on a Raëlian high holiday, and you got married on—

Ross Blocher: A Whitley Streber holiday.

Carrie Poppy: An alien abduction holiday. (*Spookily.*) Oooooo!

Ross Blocher: Coincidence?! Yes.

Carrie Poppy: Yeah, probably. Okay, so the next event was December of that year, December 26th, 1985.

Ross Blocher: 1985! Which is a *Back to the Future* year. So, whenever people are talking about December 26th, 1985, I'm thinking of Doc Brown saying it. Alright, what happened?

Carrie Poppy: Okay, so, since the fall, Whitley had been increasingly paranoid. He—on this particular night, it was a cold and cloudy night. And he—first he hears a peculiar whooshing, swirling noise coming from the living room downstairs.

Ross Blocher: ‘Twas the night after Christmas and all through the house, a whooshing, swirling noise was coming from downstairs.

Carrie Poppy: “This was no random creak. No settling of the house, but a sound as if a large number of people were moving rapidly around the room.”

Ross Blocher: I'm sorry, this needs to rhyme.

Carrie Poppy: (*Laughs.*) Sorry, uh, rapidly around the room—

Ross Blocher: Like a mouse.

Carrie Poppy: —which gave him a feeling of gloom.

Ross Blocher: (*Laughs.*) Okay, thank you. Okay, you can dispense.

Carrie Poppy: (*Laughs*) Okay. So, then we get sort of a teleportation event that only Whitley is present for.

Ross Blocher: Yeah. And this time they don't have the visitors. So, it's just the core family.

Carrie Poppy: Well, they don't have the human visitors.

Ross Blocher: (*Laughing.*) Oh, touché! Boy! Boy, did I miss that!

Carrie Poppy: They don't have Jacques and Annie there.

Ross Blocher: You're right. That's a loaded word I'm just throwing around, that they don't have visitors. Touché.

Carrie Poppy: So, Whitley suddenly appears in what he calls a depression in the woods. He's still paralyzed. There's no snow on the ground in this dream world.

Ross Blocher: And he's naked now, right?

Carrie Poppy: Oh, is he? I missed him being naked.

Ross Blocher: He ends up naked a lot.

Carrie Poppy: Okay. (*Laughs.*) There is someone to the left out of the corner of his eye. Then he teleports to a round room.

Ross Blocher: This corner of the eye thing is important, but we'll talk about that later.

Carrie Poppy: Yes!

[00:25:00]

Agree. And I just want to say, I'm using the word teleport just because it's clear, but he doesn't. There's a tiny, squat person who's about to perform surgery on him. But Whitley starts screaming. So, that person asks, "What can we do to help you stop screaming?"

And he replies, “You could let me smell you.”

(Ross wheezes with laughter.)

So—I've met this guy! *(Laughs.)* So, lets her smell him. And as he's taking in her scent, they perform the operation on his head! He doesn't realize that until it's over. And next, he is anally probed with an enormous and extremely ugly object, which swarms into him.

Ross Blocher: Yeah. Some giant, gray, metallic thing that they—he's trying to like be tasteful and discreet as he describes these things. So, oftentimes you'll reread this passage and be like, “Oh, they put the thing up his butt.” But he won't say it that clearly.

Carrie Poppy: Yeah. And you can tell also that he has shame around this. You know, he says like—he actually says, “It feels like I was raped.” You know—like, so—yeah, it's clearly making him uncomfortable to even recall this. So, about that odor that he smelled when she let him smell her.

He said, “The odor was distinct. It gave me exactly what I needed, an anchor in reality. It remained the most convincing aspect of the whole memory, because that odor was completely indistinguishable from a real one. The alien had the slight scent of cardboard to it, faint but distinctly organic sourness, and a little like cinnamon.”

Ross Blocher: Yep. Those were the flavor notes he kept hitting on in subsequent experiences. Wet cardboard and a hint of cinnamon. Interesting.

Carrie Poppy: Yeah. Such a weird profile.

Ross Blocher: But clearly smell data is very anchoring for Whitley.

Carrie Poppy: Yes. So, he awakes the next morning very much as usual, but “grappling with a distinct sense of unease and a very improbable but intense memory of seeing a barn owl staring at me through the window sometime during the night.” This marks the beginning of a personality shift that Anne notes to him. They both see this as the worsening of an existing pattern. And things get worse from there. He says, “I became mercurial, frantic with excitement about some idea one moment, in despair the next. I was suspicious of friends and family, often openly hostile.”

Ross Blocher: Yeah! So, he's recognizing his own behavior changes.

Carrie Poppy: Yeah, but much later when Anne is asked about this night, she has like no memory of it. This doesn't stand out to her at all.

Ross Blocher: Okay. Yeah. And what you were presenting there was kind of like the first version we get. But then he's going to keep revisiting these stories and adding more details through hypnosis, through recollection, through dreams, where he kind of like takes the visions he sees from dreams and adds them to the reality of the real world. And it gets so

murky in this book, just constantly you're kind of like flipping back like, "Wait, wait, where are we now? Where did you—? Okay, so you're outside, but I thought you were in a parking lot. Oh, okay. Wait, you're in a room now?! Where—how did we get in this room?" And it's just so fleeting and evanescent and unclear.

Carrie Poppy: And it seems like that's how a lot of Whitley's life is. Like, when this is happening, he's in his early 40, I believe.

So, he's almost 80 now. So, like his memory problems now, if they started today, we would expect they were just dementia. But he's talking about memory problems in 1987 that are like—they sound serious. Like, he's like, "I just suddenly arrive in completely different environments and don't remember how I got there." You know, stuff like that.

Ross Blocher: Yeah, and (*sighs*) this comes much later when he sort of expands the gamut, like Carrie was saying. You have these core events that happen, but then he just keeps adding more stories and revealing bits of his college travels or what have you. This reminds me of one time when he's talking about traveling around Europe, and he says he has like weeks where he had a place rented in London, and then he told them that he would be gone for a couple weeks. But then he ended up being gone for months, and he like had a companion. This is before Anne. But he like abandoned the companion and then just like showed up the next day in this—you know, now he's in Spain. Now he's in Germany. Now he's over here.

Carrie Poppy: Yes, he moves so much. And he'll say like, "I was overwhelmed with the feeling of needing to move, or I had to get out of London immediately. I needed to get out of San Antonio immediately!"

Ross Blocher: And constantly he's just wondering, "Wait, how did I get here? And where's my stuff?" And he says, (*turning pages*) let me get the wording here. "If such incidents were a frequent occurrence in my life, I might suspect some sort of trance or fugue state." He misspelled fugue. Interesting. That is a hard word to spell. "There are certainly many odd incidents, but they are too variable in their nature to suggest the symptomatic consistency of disease." And this is a constant refrain, where Whitley will consider the explanation or the hint of a solution that most people might kind of look into next. He'll consider it. He'll put it up on the docket. He'll dismiss it for whatever reason. And then we're off to the next stop.

[00:30:00]

Carrie Poppy: And without much awareness that he hasn't given a compelling dismissal. So, me the reader, I'm still like, wait, hang on. Actually, the concession you tried to make has stolen my attention now, because that actually makes more sense.

Ross Blocher: I think this requires a liiittle more attention. We might have a solution here. Yeah. That story in particular really said a lot. We also mentioned the alien in the corner of his vision. This is constant. Like, we talked last episode about his talk where he knew that a video that he saw of an alien interview was correct, because there was a green bouncing light.

And then he describes how he had seen that green bouncing light while he was writing *Communion*—which by the way, he did not mention once in this book. But he described that—

Carrie Poppy: (*Chuckling.*) Good point.

Ross Blocher: He would see this green bouncing light in the corner of his eye, his vision, his peripheral vision. And then when he would go to examine it with his fovea, it would go away. And you know, then he couldn't get it again. But then if he looks away, oh, there it is. And constantly in the book, he's describing phenomena like creatures that he would see in his apartment that would just be lurking in the corner of his eye and then instantly disappear. Okay. We've got bad peripheral vision, floaters in the eye.

Carrie Poppy: Yeah. Vision problems. Some kind of vision problem.

Ross Blocher: Yeah. Vision issues that involve his peripheral vision. And it was just interesting how many times he kind of copped to that without seeing that connection.

Carrie Poppy: Yeah. And one time he says something about like having myopia. It's just like off handedly. There are a couple moments in this book where he just off handedly drops a detail, and you're like wait! Uh—it—uh! Helloooo? Central!

Ross Blocher: You commented on one last night.

Carrie Poppy: Yeah, it's maybe the most central detail of the book. Oh my god. Here we go, you guys.

Ross Blocher: Now we're off the beaten trail. Because we're going to be jumping around.

Carrie Poppy: Doesn't matter. We're doing so much more ordering than he ever did.

Ross Blocher: But they have—at the cabin, they have this young girl coming to visit who's, I guess, a friend of the family or friends with the son. But she's staying.

Carrie Poppy: Yeah, a friend of the son.

Ross Blocher: She's staying over with them, and Whitley's secretly asking the aliens for something to happen that night, so that she, this young girl—and she's probably what? Like eight or something?—can corroborate his stories. And I'm thinking from what you're describing of the nature of these events, if you believe this is true, this is horrible malpractice to bring this young girl over, this friend of the family.

Ross & Carrie: Maybe she will be abducted!

Ross Blocher: Yeah! Maybe she'll have horrible things done to her, and then she can make me look less crazy!

Ugh, goodness. Well, so—

Carrie Poppy: But it's a *Communion*.

Ross Blocher: (*Chuckles.*) Right. And apparently it is a theme in the book that they seem to be nicer to children, but given some of his backstories when he's 12, maybe not. Anyways, the girl does come over, and she has one observation. She sees something outside the window, and nobody else sees it. But while they're having dinner, she's like, "Oh, I just saw like a tiny plane with flashing lights."

Carrie Poppy: And Whitley responds—

Ross Blocher: (*Exhausted.*) Yeah, Whitley. Uh-huh.

Carrie Poppy: Getting my book. "There's an air base near here. The National Guard base is 30 miles away!"

(*They laugh.*)

Ross Blocher: Oh! Relevant detail that we only hear once?!

Carrie Poppy: "We don't let those things bother us. Best to just forget about it." Page 170.

Ross Blocher: That's when we find out that there's—

Carrie Poppy: That he lives at 30 miles from a military base.

Ross Blocher: And then because she says that—she doesn't have any kind of narrative later about visitors or anything like that. But because she said that one thing, he keeps referring to her as another independent voice that has backed up his whole synthesis. And he'll do this—

Carrie Poppy: Right. Putting her in a great position.

Ross Blocher: Right. And he does that regularly too, where he'll—again—sort of raise the possibility of particular brain states or maybe something about his physiology, and he'll say, "Well, but we also have corroborating evidence from Anne and my son and the visitors Jacques and Annie. So, do they have the same brain states?" Well, they're not describing anything like the stuff you did! You found like one or two corroborating pieces of info that fit within the overall story that—

Carrie Poppy: That feel confirmatory to him. So, he doesn't notice everything that's missing around it. Context blindness, such bad context blindness.

Ross Blocher: Yes. Yeah, absolutely. And I guess he doesn't realize that to us, we're going to be like woah, woah, woah. You skipped a few steps there. You can read the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey*, and you can understand that Lesbos is a real island, but that there are no Cyclops,

you know, living out in the Mediterranean. You can have fake events set in a real location, and you can have certain pieces of an event—like a loud noise and a bright light—that other people agree on.

[00:35:00]

That doesn't mean we get to lump in all of this other detail about the alien queen.

Carrie Poppy: Yeah, in court it would be circumstantial evidence. It's just surrounding detail that doesn't disconfirm, but it doesn't confirm any of the central things you're trying to prove.

Ross Blocher: And this feels a little connected to like the Mike Clelland experience as well, where we get so excited about a connection, and then in our mad dash, forget the missing pieces.

Carrie Poppy: And then if enough people agree with you, it becomes the 30,000 Navy SEALs can't be wrong effect. Yeah.

Ross Blocher: Yeah. Or 50 Frenchmen.

Carrie Poppy: Yeah, or whatever.

Ross Blocher: That's weird. Speaking of an owl at the window, I see one over by your window. Maybe we should let him in.

Carrie Poppy: Wha—? Woah! Hello?

Ross Blocher: Oh, he's got a message. What is the message, owl?

Carrie Poppy: (*Elongating her vowels, especially O's.*) Oh, here we go. Well, I have to go on to the next guy, but here's a note. Here you are.

Ross Blocher: Oh, it's a jumbotron! Thank you. Oh, bye! Bye!

Carrie Poppy: No problem. I'm going to go poop.

Ross Blocher: I was already yelling at the owl as if it had flown far away, but yeah.

(*They laugh.*)

Thank you, Mr. Owl.

Carrie Poppy: Okay. Now I'll get up and go.

(*Returning to her usual voice.*) What does this note say?

Ross Blocher: Oh, yeah. It's for Sam Krieger.

Carrie Poppy: Oh, Sam!

Ross Blocher: From Nathaniel Krieger.

Carrie Poppy: Okay. Okay. Let's see. This says, "Happiest of birthdays, and thank you for getting me into this podcast."

Ross Blocher: Aww. "There is no one else in the world I can yell 'OWL, OWL, OWL, OWL' at aside from you."

Carrie Poppy: "You're a wonderful sibling and an excellent friend. And don't worry, I also got you a book."

Ross Blocher: Is it *Communion*? "Love your best and only brother."

Carrie Poppy: I love that.

Ross Blocher: That's great. And boy, couldn't have timed it for a better episode to talk about owls. Amazing. And while you're at it, listen to this Maximum fun show!

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(Music ends.)

Carrie Poppy: So, on page 171 by the way, he also says something that I was like, oh, okay! He said, “A child like I was, brought up in the ’50s, would have known about flying saucers. They were big news in those days.” Okay! Okay, because you're always trying to make the case that you never even thought about UFOs, and how could this have just popped into your head. But elsewhere he says, “I had only read two books on UFOs.”

I'm like, two books?! That's a lot!

Ross Blocher: He's like, “I think I remember hearing a story about like, I don't know, this Hill couple.” He knew about Betty and Barney Hill, the first abductees. This is relevant! And he's just throwing this aside. Also, he mentions *Skeptical Enquirer* a couple times throughout the book.

Carrie Poppy: Yeah! Yeah, a magazine I've written for.

Ross Blocher: Yeah! And we know many people from, including the editor.

Carrie Poppy: He doesn't like it. Well, he doesn't like the article he's talking about.

Ross Blocher: Yeah, that one article. But early on, he does say like, “I was a subscriber. I was into this.”

Carrie Poppy: Oh, that's right! That's right.

Ross Blocher: And he said, “Originally, that was kind of my crowd.” And this alien—I'm going to keep saying alien. But again, this visitor thing “was of forced on me. But otherwise I would've been with all y'all. And now I feel a little guilty that I laughed at people.”

Carrie Poppy: I bet! I bet he does.

Ross Blocher: Also, to the point of what you're saying about him trying to act like he's more of a blank slate than he actually is—he does that with his son as well, where he kept saying, “And my son knew nothing about any of this.”

And I'm thinking no! You're having conversations with him about his dreams and asking him, “Oh, and what did they say to you? And, wow, that's interesting. Oh, I had—” And he gives his kind of like cleaned up version of what happened to him. It's like your son is aware.

Carrie Poppy: Yeah, your son's taking in all the inputs of the conversations around him. I mean, there are even times where he kind of lets slip that he said something. He has enough self-awareness to sometimes note when he does that, say, “Oh, I realized after that, that was kind of a leading question, buuut I'm still taking meaning out of the answer.”

Ross Blocher: Yeah. And that's another thing about Whitley Strieber in this book is that he is a good writer. And every now and then, just like when he's speaking—as we've encountered—he'll go into these dramatic, deeply philosophical passages where you go like, oh, that's really well put. I like that. For example, here's some that we really liked.

Carrie Poppy: “The easy route would be to dismiss this material as entirely psychological. That would also be a mistake, at least until the physical effects are explained completely in detail and satisfactorily.”

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“A terrifying thing happened to me. Perhaps it involved visitors from somewhere, maybe even from inside the human unconscious. For me though, the most important thing about it was its essentially human effect. I was a human being, and my part of things involved having a human experience. Even if there was a visitor, it seems clear that concentration on the human part of the encounter was the key to understanding what meaning it may have for me. And the visitor was no more than wind in the eves or moon lighting the fog. Then it was a key to what I mean to myself.”

Ross Blocher: “Even the issue of where science stands in relation to this material has been with us forever. The first debunker was probably the Bishop Agobard of Lyons, who—in the time of Charlemagne—saved from an enraged crowd three men and a woman who had been seen climbing down from an airship by half the citizens of the town. They claimed to have been taken for a period of days. The bishops saved them by announcing to the crowd that the whole thing was obviously impossible, and that people had not seen what they thought they had seen, nor had the poor victims been in any airship. Because there were no airships. Thus, the first debunker had the distinction of saving the lives of the first abductees.”

Carrie Poppy: “Another thought was that the visitors might really be our own dead, or perhaps something very real had emerged from our own unconscious mind—taking actual, physical form and coming forth to haunt us. Or maybe we were receiving a visit from another dimension, human time travelers who assumed the disguise of extraterrestrial visitors. I had been assuming that any visitors would be vastly more intelligent than us. What if that was only part of the truth? In terms of earthly evolution, man emerged only very recently. Maybe that also means that man is not the lesser creature, but the more advanced one. If this was so, then older, less quick-thinking and flexible forms might view us as quite a danger to them. They might even want to imprison us here in our Earth or do worse than imprison us. And yet, I did not have the feeling that they were hostile so much as stern. They were also at least somewhat frightened of me. I was certain of that.”

Ross Blocher: “This matter is a garden of luminous weed through which only a fool would dash yelling any doctrine at all, whether it be that of the creationist and debunker or that of the UFO true believer. Even to approach the idea of the visitors, it is necessary to study a

whole history of tall stories, bizarre tales, and—just possibly—truths. It is our American habit to assume that there is something irrelevant, even a little silly, about the past. Our relationship to former times is expressed as nostalgia, not history. When our government first started studying flying saucers in the late '40s, it never even occurred to anybody official to consider having a look at the past.”

Carrie Poppy: “I remembered my protest to her, when she reassured me about the operation not hurting me. The sense of helplessness was an awful thing to contemplate. “You have no right,” I said.

“We do have a right.” Five enormous words, stunning words. We do have a right? Who gave it to them? By what progress of ethics had they arrived at that conclusion? I wondered if it required debate or seemed so obvious to them that they never questioned it. Maybe their right came from a different direction than one might think. If they were a part of us, it might be that we granted them the right they assert. Listening to the crackle of the fire mingle with the ticking of the clock, I thought that perhaps I might welcome voices of instruction. I began to feel strongly that the present world situation was unsustainable.

“Of course, we ourselves barely question our rights over the other species on Earth. How odd it was to find oneself suddenly under the very power that one so easily assumes over the animals. I thought of some lowing cows, their bells tinkling on a long-ago Texas evening, or of my cat, asleep on my lap, back in the city, trusting its little self utterly to an affection that to me was casual. But to Sadie, it was the center of the universe. I remembered when my father took me to a slaughterhouse in Fort Worth, and I heard the rumble of panic and saw the bucking backs of the steers and the creamy whites of their eyes. I smelled the slick of manure and urine and blood and heard the steady crunching of the blows and the blare of the saws.”

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“And at a research institute in San Antonio, I saw monkey cages with rows of doctored capuchins shaved, their pink heads sewn or laid delicately open, and the trembling brain probes, and the gabble of noise when the vocalization center of one of them was stimulated for the information of graduate students. What did the monkey, with the needle in its brain, think of its observers? Were they gods to whom it submitted itself with a noble passivity, because it could do nothing else? I saw monkey carcasses in the dumpster, too. Try as I might, I simply did not have the feeling that the visitors were applying the same cold ethic to their relationship with us that we did to ours with the animals.

“There was something of that in it, though. Very definitely. I had been captured like a wild animal on December 26th, rendered helpless and dragged out of my den into the night. Nor did I feel that they were simply studying me. Not at all. They had changed me, done something to me. I could sense it clearly that night, but I could not articulate it. Later, I thought to myself that they were taming me.

Ross Blocher: “Budd Hopkins has developed great sensitivity to the problems people face after they encounter the visitors. He has dealt with more than a hundred cases and knows the pattern of response. When he suggested that I meet the loose support group of others in the New York area, I was at first relieved. Then I became uneasy. ‘Don't worry,’ he said,

‘Everybody half believes that they're dreaming all this up. And that's the healthiest way. Nobody is going to show you an extraterrestrial belt buckle and blow your mind.’ Still, I was not eager to meet the other abductees. Just a few days before, I had interviewed a person who believed that he had been contacted by people who, ‘Gosh, just look like the most beautiful gods and goddesses you ever saw,’ who explained to him that the world was soon going to end and that the chosen would be taken to live on a moon of Jupiter. I hope it isn't Io.”

Carrie Poppy: So, there's a third incident that happens that's much briefer. That's in 1986. It's on January 3rd. So, this is all happening in winter of 1985/1986 that this all begins.

Ross Blocher: October, December, and now early the next year.

Carrie Poppy: Exactly. So, Whitley and Anne are skiing. I'm not sure exactly what makes them stop and her come up and say this, but she comes up and looks at his ear and says she sees a tiny pinpoint of a scab behind his ear. And that confuses him, but it jogs a bunch of memories. And then later he reads a book called *Science and the UFOs*, and he reads a standard abduction experience so similar to his own depression in the woods experience that he cannot bear the similarity. He slams the book shut, admits to himself that he believes he's been abducted by aliens, and promises himself he must never tell anyone. Not even Anne.

And the reason the scab becomes important is that he comes to believe that's a place that the visitors implanted something.

Ross Blocher: Operated on him. And as he revisits these key events by hypnosis, he adds additional details to them like the instruments that they're working on him with. They seem to really like triangles. Triangles come up a lot in this book, but they'll have like these little wands essentially that they're holding. They'll be bright and shining or silvery, and they'll perform some kind of surgery on him. And sometimes it's this lunging attack, (*chuckling*) where they sort of race at him and then hit him behind the ear or implant something in his face. But other times it's up in the ship or what have you.

Carrie Poppy: And we should also say most of these are while he's lying in bed. Like, most of these appear to be a sleep influence.

Ross Blocher: And of course, he'll even mention hypnagogic and hypnopompic hallucination, night terrors. Like, he's aware these things exist!

Carrie Poppy: Yep. But he'll just give them like a sentence and be like, “Well, here's one way I thought around that.”

Ross Blocher: Yeah, because how would I possibly then have this memory of this thing? So, it couldn't be that!

And we're off to the races again. Oh man, my brain's taking me in a lot of different directions right now, but let's talk about the hypnosis.

Carrie Poppy: Okay. Yeah. So, he gets to hypnosis through a kind of intermediary step.

So, there's this guy named Budd Hopkins who we've talked about before, and he was—

Ross Blocher: A big figure in alien abduction. He was someone who was—

Carrie Poppy: He was a very sloppy researcher, Budd Hopkins.

Ross Blocher: Yes. But he had this kind of imprimatur of respectability of, you know, clinical approach. And he would collect alien abductees, befriend them, and hear their stories, get them together to talk to each other. His name pops up all the time in the literature, 'cause he's the one sort of moving, shaking, making connections between these contactees.

Carrie Poppy: And wrote his own books.

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So, the reason that Whitley, I think, even had this option in his mind is because he and Anne, his wife, were art collectors. And Budd Hopkins was like a big art collector in the same world. And so, when he starts to suspect this alien narrative, he knows exactly where to go. Go to Budd. So, he talks to Budd. And again, Whitley's sort of playing both sides in his head. He's like, oh, the critics are going to say you're friends with Budd Hopkins. So, he says, "Budd, can you recommend me to some other hypnotist?" Thinking this is enough control somehow. "Can you recommend me to another hypnotist? You can still come! You can sit in the room! You can ask me questions! But it's just like you can't lead the thing."

Ross Blocher: And yet again, Whitley will say, "Yeah, we met with this respected guy, Donald Klein. Here's his bona fides; we can trust this guy. And he didn't ask me any leading questions." And then he gives you this transcript of the hypnosis session where Budd Hopkins all of a sudden shows up in the question asking, and you're like, wait, who let Budd in the room?! And there are leading questions. Absolutely. For example, one where they're looking a year earlier about this—oh my goodness—totally different event where Whitley drives into a fog bank. He goes off the road 'cause he's curious about the fog bank. And then two figures in blue coveralls show up and lean in through his windows. And next thing you know, he's on a ship or in a room somewhere, getting things done to them.

But the hypnosis interviewer, they suggest horizontal lips and they haven't talked about the lips or anything. Asking the phrase like, "Oh, and did they have horizontal lips?" That puts in your mind like, oh, there could be another option!

Carrie Poppy: Oh, ooh, I see. I see.

Ross Blocher: Or it just hadn't come up yet in that transcript. And that's just the sort of example of the thing that wasn't even offered and were—

Carrie Poppy: Right. Like if I said, "So, I'm thinking of a particular dog, and I don't want to lead you, but the dog you saw last week—did it have four legs?"

Ross Blocher: (*Chuckles.*) Exactly. Oh, no, this was a three-legged dog!

Carrie Poppy: No, of course it was a three-legged dog! Because four is the default. You wouldn't be asking this question unless there was some exception you're pointing toward.

Ross Blocher: But Whitley keeps assuring us, “Out of caution, we had Anne go to a different hypnotist.” And so, you see Anne's transcript, and all of a sudden there's Budd Hopkins in the room! Who let Budd in?! Budd, get out!

Carrie Poppy: Okay, well, speaking of Anne and hypnotism, may I? Here is, oh my gosh—

Ross Blocher: Let's do it.

Carrie Poppy: Really kind of a revelation of reading this book. So, we've talked at length on this show about his very touching relationship with his deceased wife, Anne. Clearly, as in love with a woman as a person gets.

Ross Blocher: Very sweet.

Carrie Poppy: Yes, such a unit, did everything together. And as you can see, he's kind of a paranoid guy who isolates himself. So, she was kind of his one and only, and then they have a son and probably his two and only. But he's always painting her as in cahoots with him! As you know, like on his side, believing everything he's saying, writing his books with him from the grave.

When we actually get to the transcript of Anne's hypnosis sessions—and hypnosis even seems like the wrong term for her. Her interviews. She is so straightforward. She is down to earth about this. She refuses to call him down to earth when they try to level that term.

Ross Blocher: Down to earth is the right phrase.

Carrie Poppy: She's like, “Well, no.” (*Laughs.*)

Ross Blocher: Oh, I love this exchange. So, they're asking her about that giant crystal. And the hypnosis interviewers ask, “Did you look for it?”

And she said, “Oh no, because I knew it wasn't real.”

“How did you know it wasn't real? Whitley's a fairly down to earth guy.”

“No, he isn't.”

“He's not?”

A little later, she says, “Whitley, you know—he said he'd flown around the room. What do you say to something like that?”

But clearly she's trying to be supportive of him and trying not to shoot down his ideas. And oh my goodness, before her hypnosis, he even tries to defray it a bit by saying, “Her hypnosis does not reveal a person trying to concoct a story, but rather one trying hard to avoid remembering something she has been told in the strongest terms to forget. She was compliant, alright, but not with the hypnotist. She complied, it appears, with something else that issued previous, stronger suggestions. And they overpowered the hypnotist's efforts for a very obvious reason. My wife appears to have been made to believe that my mental health depends on her not remembering, on her providing me with a safe haven in ordinary reality when I need one.”

Carrie Poppy: So close to an accurate perception. I kept thinking as I was reading this like—you know, you hear the term unreliable narrator, and Whitley is not an unreliable narrator the way that term's usually used.

[00:55:00]

But he is an unreliable analyzer. Like, he'll tell you kind of the bits and pieces of a story. And you, the reader, will be like, “Okaaay, I see a very clear picture, A.” And then he'll just analyze it in a totally different picture Z.

Ross Blocher: And once he's got a pet theory in his mind, then he can point to hesitations by Anne, where she's just, you know, not remembering an otherwise unmemorable night. And saying, “Ah, but earlier in the day, her memories were good. Therefore, this tells us something that parts of her memory were erased.” Because he can't say that his own beloved Anne is against him in any of this.

Carrie Poppy: Yeah. Which brings us to something that I kept thinking was so tragic about this story, which is like this false dilemma that he either was abducted by aliens and is the subject of some multi-planet conspiracy theory. Or he's—and this is his word—insane. Like, he's beyond anyone even reaching him anymore. He's sooo nuts. Like, that's the dichotomy he's set up for himself. And it like leaves no third space for just like maybe I have like a parasomnia disorder, maybe I have Schizoaffective, and I just like need a pill I take once a day.

You know, like not—no! No third category where you still have the potential to live an average life, and you just have a disorder, and that's it. And that's so many people!

Ross Blocher: Or he'll say something that feels nice and balanced like that, but then he'll spend the other 80% of the time just pummeling these other points. He says this in the epilogue. “I do not have it in me to be a believer, nor can I be a true skeptic, because I loathe the narrow and love the broad. I cannot say in all truth—”

Carrie Poppy: (*Chuckling.*) That's so not true.

(They laugh.)

Like, he's such a fine detail thinker, but okay.

Ross Blocher: Fair. He says, "I cannot say in all truth that I am certain the visitors are present as entities entirely independent of their observers, nor can I say that I do not think they are here at all." So, okay, it's this nice poetic sort of balancing of, oh, well, could be this, could be that. I'm not ruling that out.

(Chuckles.)

It's making me think of—

Carrie Poppy: You certainly aren't ruling that out.

Ross Blocher: Makes me think of Georgio Tsoukalos saying, "I'm not saying it was aliens!" But the clear implication is, I've only left you aliens.

Carrie Poppy: Right, right, right. So, yeah, I feel like there's this uncomfortable question when you read this book of like, "So, what is up with this dude? Like, what's actually happening here?" And in psychology this is always a weird position, because like the people who would hand out diagnoses—therapists—are instructed not to speak on this publicly unless they can meet the person in person. So, it puts everyone in this kind of position of like, "Well, the experts can't speak." *(Chuckles.)* And that's real rough!

Ross Blocher: That opens a window for...

Carrie Poppy: Yeah. Yeah. It opens a window for these people to have the only explanation on a veil.

Ross Blocher: I hate to make another Trump example, but he'll come out of the courtroom in all of these recent court cases, and he'll just say, "This is unfair. This person is against me, and this is a witch hunt," and all of this stuff. And the prosecutors and the judge, they can't say these same things. They have to be far more circumspect and careful and cautious in their language. And so, you get this lopsided narrative.

Carrie Poppy: Yeah, true. Well, guess who can make guesses?

Ross Blocher: Whitley.

Carrie Poppy: *(Cackling.)* That's true!

Ross Blocher: That's quite good.

Carrie Poppy: I was going to say students. So, I've been taking classes at Harvard Extension School, and guess what?! They're psychology classes, and they make us guess about people.

Here's what they do. They hand you these case studies and they say, "Okay, Carrie, if this were a real person, what differential diagnosis would you run through to figure out what was going on with them if you were going to be a therapist?" (*Mumbling.*) And what they don't realize is I don't want to be a therapist. So, now I just know how to do this.

So, okay! So, here are my six things that I would tell my professor I wanted to run the differential diagnosis on. I'm going to do them in reverse order of how confident I am. So, least confident, Korsakoff Syndrome. So, this is when you're low on—I think it's vitamin B1, but it can happen from—there are a bunch of different causes. One is alcoholism, and that doesn't seem to be at play here. But vision problems, psychosis, disorientation, confabulations—which is like the aversion of false memory—amnesia, and confusion. Those are all Korsakoff Syndrome.

Next thing, I would want to look into potential CO poisoning. If we could. Can't do that now, but—

Ross Blocher: Yeah. Is there some gas leak in that cabin?

Carrie Poppy: Worth finding out.

Ross Blocher: Entirely possible and worth checking.

Carrie Poppy: And it doesn't mean we'd rule out everything else.

[01:00:00]

It could mean that triggered something preexisting for him. Okay. Crawling up the list, I would want to look for bipolar. He mentioned suicidal thoughts. He mentions marital and family instability.

Ross Blocher: I can hear Whitley already. "Well, Anne wasn't being affected in the same way, and she was equally exposed to potential carbon monoxide, if that's the—"

Carrie Poppy: Yeah. I'd love to read her memoir, Whitley. Schizotypal Personality Disorder, involves poor social relationships. Conjuring is actually like listed as a common issue. And then—okay, these are the two that I feel the most like this is where I'd put my money. Schizoaffective, which is basically where bipolar meets schizophrenia. So, your delusions and hallucinations and stuff really kick up when you're already like in a bad mood state. Yeah, paranoid delusions are common, visual hallucinations are common.

And then, most of all, I feel like this guy's autistic.

Ross Blocher: Oh, interesting! A sensitivity to stimuli?

Carrie Poppy: Oh, context blindness. Here's what I've got down. Context blindness, special interests, archiving and cataloging, unnecessary detail.

(They chuckle.)

Increased risk of paranoia or its opposite, over trusting, and parasomnias. All of those are associated with autism spectrum disorder. And also autism spectrum disorder has high comorbidities with some of the other things on this list. So—

Ross Blocher: Okay. And we've also talked about—and he raises this possibility—temporal lobe epilepsy.

Carrie Poppy: Yeah, so he did raise this, because he—you know, smell was such a big part of his experience. And that made someone say, “Oh, temporal lobe epilepsy!” Which is totally a good guess, because he's seeing aliens, and that's one thing that can happen. But he got a test that some people argue is not sufficient to rule out temporal lobe epilepsy, but he got a test. He made a faithful effort to rule that out.

Ross Blocher: Yeah. He had two people look at him and said, “I feel confident ruling it out.” But he does write early on that Dr. Kline, his first hypnosis guide, wrote a letter saying that his symptoms—Whitley's symptoms—were consistent with temporal lobe epilepsy. And that's where Whitley does the little judo move of, “Well, what about all these other people that saw the same things? So, dismissed.”

Carrie Poppy: And he did get this test where they like put things in his nose and try to make the epileptic seizure happen.

Ross Blocher: Absolutely. He did do some due diligence there. So, got to give him credit for that.

Carrie Poppy: But it's also worth mentioning seizure disorder is also correlated with autism.

Ross Blocher: And just constant, where he'll just be doing something. And next thing you know, he's four hours later. At one point, he tells a story of losing 24 hours where he just keeps kind of like popping up in his house and being like, “Oh, wait, where am I? It's the middle of the night. Oh, geez, I better eat a lot of food, because it's the next day from when I was last paying attention.” And he'll share lots of stories of other people where they're riding a bike, and they find themselves somewhere else on that bike, or they're driving a car and find themselves somewhere else in that car. Like, okay. If you're saying that they just popped out and were on a spaceship for a while, we have to account for how the car didn't crash.

Carrie Poppy: Well, he was always saying that—he feels like for some reason that argues for his point of view. I couldn't follow it! But he was constantly mentioning that. “Why aren't they going off the road?” And I was like YEAH! Why aren't they going off the road?!

Ross Blocher: Yeah, exactly. He is like, “Well, they should be in a ditch.” Well, okay, but if you're abducting the person, are you abducting the car as well? Is that also in the little room with people prodding it?

Carrie Poppy: And it's the believer's point of view that it was several hours. It's my point of view that it was probably a few seconds. My point of view is that you probably zoned out for a few seconds, and then there was a confabulation incident where you restored a bunch of hours that weren't actually there. That's my hypothesis.

Ross Blocher: That feels like the more parsimonious explanation. And you're talking about details. Just constantly he's throwing out these stories, and they're full of so many strange elements, and he kind of pitches this as the visitors sort of messing with us by having these things happen to you, the taken—that's a phrase that he uses for people who are contactees, abductees. He thinks that they're doing these kind of purposely odd things to sort of mess with the minds of these taken people, so that when they tell the stories later, it'll sound incredible and unbelievable. Incredible as in not credible.

Carrie Poppy: Yes. The screen memory part.

Ross Blocher: The screen memory part, or even just the details recovered from hypnosis or what have you. They're just so random and bizarre. Like, he had this one incident. This was one of the little side stories not with the core narrative, but it was back at their place in New York. There was a loud sound and a seltzer bottle had exploded into smithereens. And you wonder, "Well, why? What does the seltzer bottle have to do with anything? Why is that connected?" Or another person who was taken in this almost therapy group that Budd Hopkins had put together, they had seen green triangles on their walls. Like, well, what are the green triangles for? Just all these weird little incidental details that for me were crazy making.

[01:05:00]

Because I just kept thinking like how is this connected to your narrative at all?! Oh, you saw a weird thread descend from the sky? What are the threads in this narrative? What do they do?

Carrie Poppy: I mean, these are great notes to keep. Like, keep them in your files, Whitley. But like, there's the note taking, there's the archiving, there's the science of it, and then there's the, "You're writing a book."

Ross Blocher: You're editing a book, yeah.

Carrie Poppy: So yeah, go ahead and summarize, find narrative through lines, figure out what's important!

Ross Blocher: It doesn't have to be 299 pages. It could be 250.

Carrie Poppy: Yeah, but you're right. He really can float between this like very analytical, locked in, rigid, like looking right at two things and lock out everything else. And then this like flowy state where he's just like, "You know, anything's possible." And I just wish I could sort of take into the middle a little!

Ross Blocher: Yeah, it's a lot. And it's confusing. It's the book puts you in a little bit of a fugue state just reading it. We're like, what—wait, what just happened? What's going on?

Carrie Poppy: Well, what about the movie?

Ross Blocher: It's interesting. 'Cause the movie shows us the version of events where we've sort of built up already not only his initial recollection of the experience, but all of his hypnosis induced ones as well. So, you'll have, you know, grays showing up immediately. And oh, the grays are funny looking in the movie. Because they look really—

Carrie Poppy: I love them, yeah, yeah. Kind of like Jabba the Hutt?

Ross Blocher: Yeah, yeah, and like they're made out of putty or something. They look very fake.

Carrie Poppy: It's all like practical effects. It's so great. I loved this movie.

Ross Blocher: And they'll have like a scene where he's just dancing with them. They have like a little dance party, him and the aliens. And you know, that is in the book.

Carrie Poppy: And it's Christopher Walken, so he's a great dancer.

Ross Blocher: Yeah, you've got Christopher Walken in this bizarre ass hat.

Carrie Poppy: (*Imitating Christopher Walken.*) “Heyyy, I’m just dancing with these alienssss.”

Ross Blocher: (*Imitating Christopher Walken.*) “I’ve got this really tall hat, and I'm dancing with the puppet aliens. This is good movie making.”

You told me he wanted Dan Aykroyd for the film?

(*Carrie confirms.*)

Oh, that would have been—I want to see both versions, but I think I would prefer the Dan Aykroyd version.

Carrie Poppy: I think it's another vote for my hypothesis.

Ross Blocher: Which is?

Carrie Poppy: Oh, of autism spectrum disorder. I mean, Dan Aykroyd just openly has autism. Yeah.

Ross Blocher: Okay. And Dan Aykroyd is a big supporter of the paranormal.

Carrie Poppy: And I think he would have also been very interesting!

Ross Blocher: Yeah. It would have been a totally different movie.

Carrie Poppy: And I—but I loved Walken. I thought he was so great and so strange. And Drew said, as we were watching, he was like, “This is what it would be like—like, where you think, oh my god, am I going crazy? And then you're trying to convince everyone around you like, no, no, it's funny! Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha!” You know.

Ross Blocher: It's funny you say that, because there's this one moment where Christopher Walken has this really just bizarre laugh in response to something that happens. And so, my son, Drew, and I—like, we kept repeating that laugh for Cara, and it was really annoying. She was just like, “Stop it!”

Carrie Poppy: What's the laugh?

Ross Blocher: And now I'm trying to remember. It was kind of like (*forced*) eh-ha-ha-ha-haha! Kind of a laugh.

(*Carrie laughs.*)

This staccato, strange—

Carrie Poppy: Percussive, yeah.

Ross Blocher: And just speaking back to the aliens again. So, Whitley doesn't just have the grays. I think that's an important thing to get across here is that it's not just these short gray aliens with the big black eyes. He has a whole panoply of—

Carrie Poppy: Little blue guys.

Ross Blocher: Yeah, the little blue dwarf guys. And in the book, he keeps talking about coveralls. Everyone's wearing coveralls, like they're ready to work on your car or something. But you've got like these little bluish gray guys. And then you've got—like, he remembers from earlier in his childhood, blank-page white aliens with blue eyes. And those don't play as big of a role. But the praying mantises, they certainly show up! And we've heard about praying mantises before from Linda Molten Howe. Like, the giant praying mantis.

Carrie Poppy: Oh, yes! And they're my spirit animal, you know.

Ross Blocher: That controls the universe. Right! And your spirit animal. So, they definitely make a big showing in here. And that's not even all of it. He not only talks about multiple types of aliens that he's seen, but ones that others have seen as well. And he just kind of gladly lets all of these species in. And for all of his speculation, he doesn't do too much speculating about different races or planets. He'll just kind of acknowledge broadly that could be the case.

Some of the puppetry work is just so bad. Like, you have this alien that rushes at him quickly. And that's how he describes it in the book, you know, with this glowing object in his hand. (*Giggling.*) It looks so silly. Like, this thing's on rails. It's being flung at—

Carrie Poppy: I love practical effects though. They're so much better than special effects.

(*Ross agrees.*)

So, it's really fun to watch. The cinematography is really fun too. They just picked these like extreme Dutch tilts. They're just like, "Let's set the camera almost on its side! Why? He's going on the bus!"

Ross Blocher: Another weird thing about the movie is—and he wrote the screenplay, but Anne is not depicted as this like loving, supportive wife. She's more of this like accusing, termagant wife who's constantly saying, "You're not doing enough! And stop it with all this craziness!" And yelling at Christopher Walken. It's just strange like that he would sort of allow that portrayal of Anne in the movie.

Carrie Poppy: Oh, interesting. I didn't even clock that part of it. There was so much going on. I feel like we should also mention little blue men come to visit him at night, and they're like workers. They're like day laborers or something.

[01:10:00]

Look what was also on TV at the time.

Ross Blocher: *Smurfs*.

Carrie Poppy: *The Smurfs*. Remember them? That lasted till 1989, and it was about little blue men who were workers. I don't know. It just feels like his mind is so porous to pop culture.

Ross Blocher: And all the clues are in there, and I've got to give him credit at least for including these things that potentially could be used against him. He'll kind of like—I don't know.

Carrie Poppy: And here we are.

Ross Blocher: Reading the Gospels, every now and then you say the quiet part out loud. And you're like, "Wait a second, what does that mean, Whitley?" But thank you also for giving me that piece of info. And maybe that's sort of a symptom of him including too many details, but some of that can certainly be interesting.

Carrie Poppy: Oh yeah, no, I like it. I mean like if he wanted to just hand me this full folder, I'm interested in it! It's just not well organized. That's my complaint.

Ross Blocher: Yeah. And I gotta say, there's things happening. Like, as I was taking notes on almost every page, I had some new event to talk about. So, we're leaving a lot out. There's like this whole memory of him when he was 12 and seeing his dad on a train, taken by these aliens and sort of tortured. And that changes his memories of that. And then he has this altered memory of his mom at his dad's death. And—

Carrie Poppy: But these will usually start with some index memory that's just like, (*nasally*) “I took the train.”

Ross Blocher: Right. “My friends and I were playing out on a lot, and we saw a fireball in the sky.” Cool.

And then you talk to the friend, and they're like, “Yeah, I remember the fireball.” Great. But he now remembers the motorcycle approaching, which turns out it was actually a praying mantis that was absurdly large, and it was staring at him, and it was making him uncomfortable, and it looked like a skull.

Carrie Poppy: But now I've included you in my book as confirmation! Do you want to speak out against me, your friend of many years? No? Okay, byeee!

Ross Blocher: And he keeps talking about how he's lost friends after this. Like, he was part of the writing community and then people left him. It's wild.

Carrie Poppy: Yeah. So, Whitley, I want to—we want to be your friend. We want to be your friend. Oh, I think he lives in Santa Monica.

Ross Blocher: Oh, you're nearby now!

Carrie Poppy: And I just want to say, I relistened to some audio of him from last year. It was actually during the Linda Moulton Howe talk that you weren't at. It was just me. And she couldn't get her slideshow to work, of course. And so, she asks him to stand up and vamp. Which, wow. I mean, what a gift.

(They chuckle.)

So, Whitley stands up. He just starts talking.

Ross Blocher: He can do that!

Carrie Poppy: He can do that.

Ross Blocher: Hey, we've got to fill 15 minutes. Whitley, go.

Carrie Poppy: But the story he told—I like, I quickly fumble for my recorder and turn it on. The story that he told at the time I couldn't quite follow. And then on relisting, I was like, oh nooo, this is a story about you driving through Santa Monica and having one of your

episodes. And the police officer pulls you over and is being very kind to you, but you think you're in a different world.

And so the police officer is—Whitley's like, “He looks at me so kindly, so lovingly—this police officer from another world. And he says, ‘Do you know how you were driving?’ And I'm like yes.”

And it's just like, oh, I see through this story. But it makes me concerned that he probably shouldn't be driving. You know. Yeah, so I don't know. It's so uncomfortable with a guy who's approaching 80 to be like, “Here are the things I think are up with you.” But the thing is, he's a public figure. And he's still out there saying all this and convincing people that it's aliens. So, here we are.

Ross Blocher: Yep, here we are. But like you say, Whitley, we definitely want to be your friend.

Carrie Poppy: Yeah, he's so cool.

Ross Blocher: It'd be fun to talk to you. And also, thank you to the listener who reached out to a friend at Rice University. We do have—we have a connection to the archives now.

Carrie Poppy: Oh, great!

Ross Blocher: And unfortunately they're not digitized, but yeah. I can tell you more later, but essentially all we need to do is get ourselves to Houston, and we can look through his stuff.

Carrie Poppy: I can do that! Okay, yeah! Cool!

Ross Blocher: So, yeah! That'll be fun. Yeah. I feel bad. ‘Cause like—oof, geez, I took like—I don't know—13 pages of notes. There's a lot—there's so much in this book that was really interesting, intriguing, funny, unexpected. It's not a funny book, let me say that. But there were things I found funny.

Carrie Poppy: And there are really beautiful passages.

Ross Blocher: Yes! Oh my goodness. And all this—like, he has this whole theory about triangles and how they're so important in all religions and in our history and how the visitors are forming a new triangle with us and that we're going to complete it together. Oh my goodness. It's wild.

(Carrie confirms and agrees.)

But hopefully at least that gives you kind of a broad view of Whitley Streber. I got to mention also—apropos of nothing, but I'm just looking at this part of my notes. He was talking about the discovery of the double helix by Robert Crick. I was like who's Robert Crick? Francis Crick!

Carrie Poppy: Oh yeah, that does sound right. Yeah, yeah.

Ross Blocher: Which is a weird thing to like get wrong in a book. And then he's like talking about how our entire race arose from a single female in North Africa between 140,000 and 200—it's like, okay, you're confusing mitochondrial Eve with this broad statement about how we all came from this one woman. Like, that's not at all a useful characterization of heredity. And he also talks about her walking on the Mesopotamian savannah.

[01:15:00]

Like, no! That's wrong too. She would still be in Africa. Anyways.

Carrie Poppy: She walked really far, Ross.

Ross Blocher: For this book that's so famous, I kept finding like little spelling errors and editing mistakes. And you know, that's always interesting as well. Just how did this happen?

Carrie Poppy: Yeah. Well, it tells you something about whether there was editing really at all.

Ross Blocher: Yeah, how much scrutiny was applied to this thing that ended up being—? And you know, presumably he didn't know it would blow up like it did, but it really did blow up.

Carrie Poppy: And you listened to the audiobook, and you noted that he makes these sort of in the moment corrections or updates to the language that may or may not be good. Because we want your—in something like this, I want your original thoughts from 1987. I don't care what you think about it now, Whitley.

Ross Blocher: Yeah. I wish I hadn't waited until near the end, but yeah, I got the audiobook. And I was curious to just hear his delivery of this in general. I was also curious to see if he left in descriptions where he talks about the visitor's eyes being “more slanted than an Oriental's”.

Carrie Poppy: Oh, right, right, right. He uses like a derogatory term for Black children.

Ross Blocher: Yeah, he sees some of these aliens with coveralls in his room and he counts them in his hypnosis. There's six of them. And then he yells out, “Tar babies! We've got tar babies in here!” And, oh—Whitley.

Carrie Poppy: I hadn't even—I didn't even know this term. But yeah, it certainly comes off racist!

Ross Blocher: Hasn't aged well, and I don't think it's damning of him as a person. But you know, he's under hypnosis, and that's sort of what comes up.

Carrie Poppy: Right. It tells you something about what things are floating around in the lexicon in the back of the mind.

Ross Blocher: I was really curious. When you're recording this in 2022—I think this was a very recent rerelease of the audio version—I thought maybe he'd clean these things up.

Carrie Poppy: There's the update you can make! There's the update that I'll give the thumbs up to..

Ross Blocher: But no. No, he stayed true to the text, except like you're saying, every now and then he'd just sort of change a word.

Carrie Poppy: Yeah. The example you gave me was that the original text said, "I went to bed." And then in the reading, he said, "We went to bed." Which actually is a factual difference.

(Ross agrees.)

Is it you, or is it you and Anne?

Ross Blocher: It paints a different picture. And yeah, I would find those just tiny little course corrections regularly.

Carrie Poppy: Yeah. That's not great.

Ross Blocher: Anyways. Okay. Well, we could go on a lot longer, but I've got to run off.

Carrie Poppy: Yes, Ross is going to go be a poll worker! Thank you, Ross.

Ross Blocher: Oh yeah! Go vote if you're in California or one of the Super Tuesday states. And if you're in a later state, vote! These midterm, smaller elections that don't get as many people voting—let your voice be heard. Of course, I'm speaking to people in the US, but also wherever you are. Exercise your suffrage!

Carrie Poppy: I will. I do. I do it every day.

(Ross chuckles.)

Yeah. Go get your voter guide. Spend 45 minutes on it. A lot of people build this up way too much. You go and read it.

Ross Blocher: It's intimidating. Check out recommendations from your local op ed board—

Carrie Poppy: People you respect.

Ross Blocher: People you respect. Yeah. And then, you know, when you have questions, look them up. Anyways, vote.

Carrie Poppy: That's a basic instruction on how to educate yourself and vote.

Ross Blocher: I mean, it's a process. It does take a little while.

Carrie Poppy: Yeah, yeah. No, yeah. I feel like people will get to like the day of and be like, "I don't know anything!" And I'm like the day of you can still know more than most people do.

Ross Blocher: I've seen people hang out in the poll booth for well over an hour on their phones, just kind of looking things up. And hey, I'm all for it. Do it.

Carrie Poppy: Good for them. That's their dedicated time. That's their study hall.

Ross Blocher: Well, that's it for our review of Whitley Strieber's *Communion: A True Story*.

Carrie Poppy: Loved it. A+. Movie A+. Didn't expect that. Oh! (*Off-mic.*) Drew, what did you give *Communion*?

Drew: (*Distantly.*) Uuh, I give it a thumbs up.

Carrie Poppy: Thumbs up. (*Returning to the mic.*) And one thumbs up from Drew.

Ross Blocher: Okay. I gave it two out of five stars when I watched it six years ago.

Carrie Poppy: WOW!

Ross Blocher: And I gave it the same this time around.

Carrie Poppy: Wow-uhh!

Ross Blocher: I mean, it's not a good movie.

Carrie Poppy: WOOOW-UUH!

Ross Blocher: But if you're interested in the story itself and wanna see the film version—

Carrie Poppy: I think it's a good movie.

Ross Blocher: Okay. Well, good. I'm glad you enjoyed it.

Carrie Poppy: But my movie taste is inexplicable. I can never explain what I like. I'm just like, this was good; this was not good.

Ross Blocher: I kept thinking my alternate suggestion for a subtitle for *Communion* would be *Whatever That Means*. Because I kept saying that throughout the book as I was reading it. Like, whatever that means! Whatever that means! And I think it fits with the title too. *Communion: Whatever That Means*. That's my proposed ultimate title.

Carrie Poppy: (*Laughs.*) That's a polite way of saying you need an editor.

Ross Blocher: Yes. Alright. Well, that's it for this review. Our administrative manager is Ian Kremer.

Carrie Poppy: This episode was edited by poll volunteer Ross Blocher.

Ross Blocher: Our theme music is by Brian Keith Dalton. You can support us. Maximum Fun Drive is coming up. You know what? Don't support us now!

Carrie Poppy: Don't you fucking dare! If you become a member right now, I will come to your house, and I will take out all your potted plants, and I'll throw them on the lawn.

Ross Blocher: If you even think of going to MaximumFun.org/join, fie upon you!

Carrie Poppy: Bleeeh! We're gonna put tombstones on your lawn!

Ross Blocher: If you could see the look on Carrie's face, you wouldn't even dare!

Carrie Poppy: Why are all my ideas lawn based right now?!

Ross Blocher: I don't know.

Carrie Poppy: I don't know either.

[01:20:00]

Whitley would make hay out of that, I'm sure.

Ross Blocher: But you can support us by leaving positive reviews, telling a friend, blow up the internet with us.

Carrie Poppy: Why not? And remember!

“There's another possible explanation for Anne's testimony. It could be an expression of faith for a man she deeply loves and desires to protect, even from the toils of madness, by a subtle act of confirmation—really a hidden communion. An indirect sharing of an experience she

did not have enough information about to confirm in convincing detail. One night in April, she talked in her sleep. I had thought to call this book *Body Terror*, because of the extreme physical sensation of fear I'd felt on December 26th. Suddenly, she said, in a strange, basso profundo voice, 'The book must not frighten people. You should call it *Communion*, because that's what it's about.'

"I looked over at her, intending to say why I thought my title was better and saw that she was totally asleep. Then I realized where I have heard that voice before. I went to my wife, and I looked down at her sleeping form—my mind full of question and wonder."

Whatever that means!

Carrie Poppy: "Oh No, Ross and Carrie! Theme Song" by Brian Keith Dalton. A jaunty, upbeat instrumental.

Promo:

Music: Playful, quirky music.

John-Luke Roberts: *Sound Heap with John-Luke Roberts* is a real podcast made up of fake podcasts, like *If You Had a Cupboard in Your Lower Back, What Would You Keep in It?*

Speaker 1: So, I'm gonna say mugs.

Speaker 2: A little yogurt and a spoon.

Speaker 3: A small handkerchief that was given to me by my grandmother on her deathbed.

Speaker 4: Maybe some spare honey?

Speaker 5: (*Seriously.*) I'd keep batteries in it. I'd pretend to be a toy.

Speaker 6: If I had a cupboard in my lower back, I'd probably fill it with spines.

John-Luke Roberts: *If You Had a Cupboard in Your Lower Back, What Would You Keep in It?* doesn't exist. We made it up for *Sound Heap with John-Luke Roberts*, an award-winning comedy podcast from Maximum Fun made up of hundreds of stupid podcasts. Listen and subscribe to *Sound Heap with John-Luke Roberts*, now!

(*Music ends.*)

Transition: Cheerful ukulele chord.

Speaker 1: Maximum Fun.

Speaker 2: A worker-owned network.

Speaker 3: Of artist owned shows.

Speaker 4: Supported—

Speaker 5: —directly—

Speaker 6: —by you!