

UNSOLVED MYSTERIES PODCAST | SOMETHING IN THE SKY

S1E9 TRANSCRIPT

PETE BERTINE: I was standing under something two to three times larger than a football field, multiple lights all over it, and somewhat ominous.

LINDA ZIMMERMAN: These are not lights flashing through the sky. These were massive craft the size of at least a football field, often at tree top height and stopped directly over towns and major highways.

PETE BERTINE: What I witnessed was not any kind of conventional aircraft of any sort. And I have no idea what it was.

NARRATION:

HAVE YOU EVER LOOKED UP INTO THE NIGHT SKY AND SEEN SOMETHING YOU SIMPLY COULD NOT EXPLAIN? IF SO, YOU'RE NOT ALONE. IN 2019, NEARLY 6,000 PEOPLE IN THE US AND CANADA REPORTED UFO SIGHTINGS. TAKEN IN ISOLATION, THESE EXPERIENCES MIGHT EASILY BE EXPLAINED AWAY AS MISTAKEN IDENTITY, OR THE PRODUCT OF OVERACTIVE IMAGINATIONS. BUT WHEN THE SAME OBJECT IS DESCRIBED BY MULTIPLE WITNESSES, THEIR CLAIMS BECOME MORE DIFFICULT TO DISMISS, LIKE THE UNPRECEDENTED WAVE OF UFO SIGHTINGS IN NEW YORK'S HUDSON VALLEY DURING THE 1980s. WHAT WERE THE HUGE, MYSTERIOUS OBJECTS THAT HUNDREDS OF PEOPLE SAW IN THE SKY? IS THERE AN EARTHLY EXPLANATION? OR ARE THE SIGHTINGS EVIDENCE OF VISITORS FROM ANOTHER GALAXY?

I'M STEVE FRENCH AND THIS IS UNSOLVED MYSTERIES: "SOMETHING IN THE SKY."

LINDA ZIMMERMAN: I've actually been fortunate enough to have not one, but two sightings.

NARRATION:

LINDA ZIMMERMAN IS A RESEARCH SCIENTIST, AND AN AWARD-WINNING AUTHOR.

LINDA ZIMMERMAN: Growing up in the Hudson Valley, you heard about UFOs, basically, from the time you were born. It just has been going on every decade in the last century. We heard about it all the time. It was in the newspapers. Your friends and family were talking about it. So, for me, I actually thought it was normal. In the 1980s, during the big wave, I saw the classic massive V-shaped craft absolutely silently gliding along with huge, huge curved lights. Lights unlike I had ever seen before.

NARRATION:

THAT WAS 1988. BUT IT WASN'T THE ONLY TIME LINDA WITNESSED SOMETHING STRANGE IN THE SKY. AS A COLLEGE STUDENT, SHE HAD AN EXPERIENCE THAT SHE SAYS CHANGED HER LIFE FOREVER.

LINDA ZIMMERMAN: I was studying for a test and I get a call from a friend to run outside because something was passing over my town of Nanuet, New York. My boyfriend and friends, we all ran out and saw this, and it was three separate yellowish-white balls of light. Couldn't see a structure beneath it, but my immediate urge was to jump in the car and follow this. We followed it to a state park, and near a lake, we saw these objects come together. One from the north, one from the south, one from the east. And we were all like, "Oh no. They're going to crash into one another." And they came together in this brilliant blue-green flash of light and became one solid object, which then lowered to the top of a hill and just started pulsating with that light. It wasn't anything that I could understand according to our laws of physics.

LINDA ZIMMERMAN: What happened at that point was a state trooper pulled up and wanted to know why a girl in a bathrobe was in a car with two men in the State Park. And, we explained we were following a UFO and he thought that was, you know, a pretty bad excuse, but I said, "Just turn around and look." And he looked and saw this pulsating blue-green light, and he turned white as a sheet and he said, "Get out of here. Get out of here now." So, we started to pull away. He floored it. He flew by us at 90 miles an hour. He did not want to have anything to do with it. Several days later, my boyfriend and I did hike to the top of this hill, just to see if we could see any trace evidence, and there were broken branches and scorched areas.

NARRATION:

THE SIGHTING LASTED FOR OVER AN HOUR, AND WHILE THEY NEVER SAW WHAT HAPPENED TO THE PULSING LIGHT ON THE HILLSIDE, IT WAS CLEAR THEY HAD WITNESSED SOMETHING EXTRAORDINARY. BUT THEY WEREN'T THE ONLY ONES.

LINDA ZIMMERMAN: This was a very significant sighting because hundreds, if not thousands of people in that area saw these craft that night. They all thought it was a UFO. They knew it was not any conventional aircraft, and they all described it in the same way. Some saw it more whitish, some saw more yellowish, but again three round bright objects. From the moment I saw this object, I can only describe it as complete exhilaration. There was no fear. I was 19 years old and I was ready to run up the side of a mountain in slippers in the complete darkness because this was just, just amazing. So, when I finally decided, years later, to research and write about UFOs, this was always forefront in my mind, because I knew it was a real phenomenon. I graduated with a degree in natural science, which, comprised chemistry, physics, biology, and I worked for about 10 years as a research chemist in a medical diagnostics company. So, I know how to conduct an experiment. I know what to look for. I use those disciplines in all the research and work I do.

NARRATION:

LINDA IS THE AUTHOR OF MORE THAN 30 BOOKS, MANY ON UFOS AND THE PARANORMAL. SHE STILL LIVES IN UPSTATE NEW YORK, AND IS RECOGNIZED AS AN EXPERT ON THE HISTORY OF UFO SIGHTINGS IN THE HUDSON VALLEY.

LINDA ZIMMERMAN: So, I may be biased, but I think the Hudson Valley is one of the most beautiful areas of the country. It basically comprises the Hudson River area from New York City up to Albany. There's beautiful hills, and woods, and lakes. It's hard to believe, sometimes, within an hour you can be in midtown Manhattan.

NARRATION:

REPORTS OF UNEXPLAINED OBJECTS IN THE SKY ARE NOT UNCOMMON IN THE HUDSON VALLEY. LINDA HAS DOCUMENTED EYEWITNESS ACCOUNTS GOING BACK AS FAR AS 1909. BUT DURING A PERIOD FROM 1982 TO 1989, THE AREA EXPERIENCED A RASH OF SIGHTINGS UNLIKE ANYTHING SEEN BEFORE. HUNDREDS OF UNIQUE EVENTS, WHERE MULTIPLE WITNESSES ALL REPORTED SEEING SIMILAR MASSIVE CRAFT. IT BECAME KNOWN AS THE HUDSON VALLEY WAVE.

LINDA ZIMMERMAN: During the Hudson Valley wave, it was not uncommon for five to 10,000 people to witness that object. Because, you have to remember, these are not lights flashing through the sky. These were massive craft the size of at least a football field, often at tree top height and stopped directly over towns and major highways. Route 84, in particular, was one of their favorite places. Most people were fascinated, but obviously there were those who were terrified, especially the ones driving on the highways. When something would appear over the highway, they would slam on their brakes, drive off the road, almost have accidents. The police, they would be overwhelmed. You can imagine a small town having 5000 witnesses, even if 10% of them called the police, their phone lines are going to be ringing off the hook. So, it was really getting to a point that it was untenable. Something needed to be done.

NARRATION:

AUTHORITIES TELL WITNESSES THAT WHAT THEY'RE SEEING ARE SIMPLY SMALL AIRCRAFT FLYING IN TIGHT FORMATION. THE EXPLANATION HAS BASIS IN TRUTH.

LINDA ZIMMERMAN: In early 1983, there was a lot of newspaper coverage. And pilots, particularly from the Stormville airport, who flew both the small little ultralight craft and Cessna-152s, decided how funny it would be to fool people by putting extra lights on their craft, flying in tight formations, and they called themselves the Martians. And usually on a Thursday night, they would get together and

pick an area to fly. And it was, you know, an open secret. Everybody knew who they were. I spoke to the daughter of one of them and she said, "Oh, they were just like a bunch of kids having a good time."

NARRATION:

COULD A CHILDISH PRANK BY LOCAL PILOTS TRULY EXPLAIN WHAT WAS WITNESSED BY SO MANY PEOPLE?

LINDA ZIMMERMAN: When I first started researching these hoaxing pilots, I realized, if I'm going to debunk something, I need to experience it. So, I found a group of ultralight pilots and I spoke to them and told them what I wanted to do and they said, "Sure, we'll take you up." If you don't know what an ultralight is, it's basically a little go kart with a weed-whacker engine. It is open, tubular, you are just sitting out there completely exposed with nothing around you. They're unbelievably noisy. You have to scream over the headsets for the pilot to hear you. I also experienced how unstable they are. The slightest little breeze, you're bobbing around. So, when someone is trying to tell me that, "Oh, it was a formation of ultralights," now I can speak from a position of knowledge that, yes, that was an absolutely ridiculous excuse. The hoaxing pilots were actually a godsend to local law enforcement. Because now, whoever called, they could say, "It's the planes in formation. It's those pilot guys, you know, having a good time again." That would make it into the paper, so the number of calls dropped, and law enforcement was happy. The pilots were having a great time. And of course, those who suffered were the people who were seeing genuine craft unknowns, and nobody would listen to them.

NARRATION:

LOCAL RESIDENTS BECOME CONCERNED THAT THESE PRANK FLIGHTS COULD CAUSE SERIOUS CAR ACCIDENTS, SO THE PILOTS, FEARING LEGAL ACTION, EVENTUALLY STOP FLYING AT NIGHT. BUT THE UFO SIGHTINGS CONTINUE.

LINDA ZIMMERMAN: Just because the hoax was exposed did not mean they didn't stop using that as an excuse. To this day, I can be giving a lecture in some other part of the country and people will say, "Well, why do you even pay attention to that. Everybody knows it was just hoaxing pilots." It was the most effective disinformation campaign, I think, in the history of ufology and 40 years later, it is still sticking. If you saw the giant, silent craft, you knew how ridiculous the excuse was. It was an insult for witnesses to be told they're ultralights or Cessna planes. Many, many people I interviewed, hundreds of people, saw both the large silent craft and the hoaxing pilots, and they said there was just no comparison.

NARRATION:

EVER SINCE LINDA ZIMMERMAN STARTED RESEARCHING UFO SIGHTINGS IN THE HUDSON VALLEY, HUNDREDS OF PEOPLE HAVE REACHED OUT TO HER TO SHARE THEIR STORIES. 51-YEAR-OLD PETE BERTINE, A TECH ENTREPRENEUR, IS ONE OF THEM.

PETE BERTINE: First of all, I want to separate UFOs from aliens. I don't necessarily believe in aliens. Go on the Internet anywhere you want and people say they're breeding experiments or lizard people, you know, in charge of the government. And I don't believe any of that, because there's no evidence. If I was all alone, sitting in my backyard, and a spaceship came down and an alien stepped out, my first call would be to my therapist and say, "I'm having a hallucination." But this was such a fantastic experience. 20 kids standing outside a school looking up, okay. Something was there. There was absolutely nothing to explain what had happened.

NARRATION:

PETE RECENTLY SPOKE WITH LINDA ABOUT HIS ENCOUNTER WITH A MYSTERIOUS OBJECT HE WITNESSED OVER 35 YEARS AGO. HE WAS ATTENDING BOARDING SCHOOL NEAR THE SMALL TOWN OF KATONAH, NEW YORK.

PETE BERTINE: The area where the school was, Katonah, New York, is a very affluent community with a lot of horse farms and quaint and beautiful New England homes, properties of one acre, two acres, several acres, all spread out. Beautiful, old homes built in the 20s and earlier. If you were up there on the hill, it was just the school and you could see a couple of homes. It backed up onto, I think it was the Croton reservoir, where it became very, very rural.

NARRATION:

IT'S THE FALL OF 1985. PETE IS 14 YEARS OLD, JUST STARTING HIS SECOND SEMESTER AT THE HARVEY SCHOOL FOR BOYS, AND HE'S EATING DINNER IN THE DINING HALL.

PETE BERTINE: I was on the far end of the dining hall and a kid came in, very casually and yet excited and said, "Hey, it's back." And everybody knew what that was. Didn't say "UFO," didn't say "lights," didn't necessarily say anything. But that thing is back over the school again. And everybody rushed out and wanted to see it. It was an object, huge object, two to three times larger than a football field, just motionless. Four to 600 feet above the school, maybe even a little bit lower. It's hard to tell because of the size. It was many, many mostly white lights, if I recall correctly, but there were other colors. And they were strange lights. You know, it's not like you were looking at a group of hundred-watt light bulbs. These were bright, powerful, intense lights. And there was an infrastructure, a physical infrastructure, between the lights, not just like wires hanging, holding a light together. You could see solid material between the lights. It had a substance to it. You know, I was standing under something

that was solid and real and somewhat ominous. And for the next 10 minutes, everybody kind of watched it.

NARRATION:

ALONGSIDE AT LEAST 20 STUDENTS AND TEACHERS, PETE STARES TRANSFIXED AT THE MYSTERIOUS OBJECT HOVERING NEARLY MOTIONLESS OVER THE SCHOOL.

PETE BERTINE: So, I was just out there analyzing. I'm trying to figure out what was making the lights work. They were bright. There were many of them. So, I'm thinking there can't be battery's running these things. It would have to be a generator. I couldn't hear a generator. I was trying to get around to the sides of the thing to see if there's any possibility it was any kind of military craft.

NARRATION:

PETE'S FAMILY OWNS A CABIN IN THE ADIRONDACK MOUNTAINS AND HE'S SEEN A WIDE VARIETY OF MILITARY AIRCRAFT FLYING OUT OF NEARBY MILITARY BASES. HE'S ALSO OBSERVED OTHER NATURAL PHENOMENON COMMONLY MISTAKEN FOR UFOS.

PETE BERTINE: To get to our little cabin in the Adirondacks, we'd row across the lake. And I remember sitting in front of the rowboat looking back and seeing this kind of ethereal glow in the woods. And I said, "Dad, what's that?" He said, "Oh that's swamp gas. There's a swamp there, and sometimes it glows or ignites or does whatever." And I'm like, "Oh, well that's what it looks like." And then I've seen ball lightning roll down Honnedaga Lake in the Adirondack Mountains during a massive thunderstorm. I was about 13 or 14 when I began taking flying lessons in Westchester airport. So, I knew what was in the sky. We'd see helicopters, Chinook helicopters, flying at eye level. E-52s flying at treetop level. I've seen aerial flare drops at night out of air force ships, you know, where they drop these magnesium flares. And all of it, you know, I understood and made sense, except for the one night when I came out of the dining room at the Harvey school, and looked up and saw this and it stretched down. Part of it was obscured in trees. You know, you just couldn't see the edges of this thing. And it was there forever. It was there for 10 to 30 minutes, I'd say, before the kids started going back inside and go, "Yeah, yeah. We've seen this before."

NARRATION:

UNLIKE MOST OF THE STUDENTS, THIS IS PETE'S FIRST TIME WITNESSING ONE OF THESE STRANGE CRAFT HOVERING OVER THE SCHOOL. AS OTHERS LOSE INTEREST AND RETURN TO THEIR DINNER, PETE SOON FINDS HIMSELF ALONE OUTSIDE. AFTER A FEW MINUTES, THE OBJECT SLOWLY BEGINS TO MOVE, AND PETE DECIDES TO FOLLOW IT.

PETE BERTINE: The object had slowly been coming down the hill from the top of the hill where Harvey School was. And it began to kind of come down to the southwest, sort of following the road up to Harvey and the tree line. All of a sudden, there was a light moving from the group of lights that descended on an arc down, behind the trees, into sort of a gully, maybe two tenths of a mile away, and then it disappeared behind a house that was there. And that just sent chills. That was terrifying. That sent chills up and down my spine. There was absolutely nothing to explain what had happened. This, now an intelligent force, has moved something down through the trees to a house. I mean, for somebody to make that a hoax, in order to reproduce the number of lights in the sky, you would have needed to have had multiple individual aircraft all hovering silently in the sky, under 1000 feet, and then have a big, brightly lit white ball, come down in an arc down to this house. I'm telling you that this is not an aircraft of any kind. There was no noise. I pictured myself back there in the backyard, seeing this thing come down and do whatever and I just, there was no explanation.

NARRATION:

PETE'S MEMORY OF THE 45 MINUTES HE SPENT WATCHING THIS UFO IS CRYSTAL CLEAR. WHAT HE DOESN'T REMEMBER IS HOW THE ENCOUNTER ENDED.

PETE BERTINE: I witnessed the white ball of light go down to the house. And I don't recall seeing it disappear. The next thing I basically recall was my roommate, Kenny, came down the road and said, "Pete, what have you been doing? What's going on? I was worried. People were looking for you. It's been a long time." And I was disoriented at that point. I don't know how much time. Between witnessing the ball and when my roommate came out, I don't know how much time went on. No idea.

NARRATION:

TO PETE, THE ENCOUNTER AND THE LOST TIME WERE NOTHING SHORT OF EXTRAORDINARY, EVEN THOUGH HIS FELLOW STUDENTS AT THE HARVEY SCHOOL THOUGHT LITTLE OF IT. HOWEVER, WHEN PETE TOLD HIS FATHER WHAT HAPPENED, HE FOUND AN UNEXPECTED, CAPTIVE AUDIENCE.

PETE BERTINE: He drove me back from Harvey to Bronxville, where we lived, and I told him what I saw. And he goes, "Oh, I saw the same thing in the Navy." And I kind of looked at him and I'm like, "Why am I hearing this now? What? Why? What were you waiting for?" "Ahh, well I'm telling you now." Dad said, for about four years, he was the executive officer of one of three very powerful tugboats and my understanding was that they had been designed and built to move the ships around the Bikini Atoll area, where they were doing the atomic testing. And they would tow these ships that had been in a test on a two-mile cable. And, so one night Dad's, you know, sitting there in charge of the boat. The captain's asleep, and Dad, you know, I guess looks up and there, two miles away, is a gigantic object with beams of light coming down, illuminating the ship that was being towed. And he just kind of like,

“Eh,” you know, “Like father like son. Welcome to whatever is going on in the world.” There was no stress on his part. And his whole thing was, you know, what you've experienced shouldn't bother you.

NARRATION:

BUT PETE’S EXPERIENCE DOES BOTHER HIM, AND IT HAS FOR DECADES.

PETE BERTINE: Since this occurred, I've been waiting for aliens to show up for 40 years. Where are they? Why were they there, and where are they now? And what's the purpose? I can't even speculate at this point. I just want to know I wasn't hallucinating. I want to know that other people witnessed this event at the same time. The most important part of the story is the people that were there with me. I would love to hear their narrative of what happened.

LINDA ZIMMERMAN: Sightings are not just an interesting occurrence. They are life changing experiences. For people to come forward, I think it's very important for them because still, in this day and age, it is astonishing to me how people come forward, start to tell me their story, and then I tell them what was happening at the time and they thought, “I was alone. I didn't think anybody else saw this. I had no idea this was going on.” So, it makes them feel better. It helps other witnesses that they realize, “Wow, I'm not crazy. This person saw the same thing.” I have been even able to, years later, piece together witnesses who saw things on the same night in the same town, just from different positions. So, they feel this sense of relief and vindication that, “No, I wasn't hallucinating. I wasn't making this up. It was real.” People don't ask for these sightings, and they don't appreciate the way they're treated when they try to talk about it. And you obviously want to talk about the most incredible thing you've ever seen in your life.

NARRATION:

LINDA ZIMMERMAN PLANS TO CONTINUE AND EVEN EXPAND HER RESEARCH OF UFO EXPERIENCES. SHE’S CURRENTLY STUDYING A UNIQUE PHENOMENON: THE REACTION OF ANIMALS TO UFOS.

LINDA ZIMMERMAN: So many cases started out with, “My dog was barking like crazy so I went outside to see what was wrong, and I saw the UFO.” And animals have reactions way before craft are even seen. Predominantly, the reactions from animals are intense, unbelievable fear to the point of panic. Dogs running into barbed wire fences to try to get away. Cats clawing through screens outside to get into the house. Horses and cattle stampeding. Their reactions are far more intense than humans have. I think it's a critical component we've been overlooking in the field.

NARRATION:

COULD THE SIGHTINGS OF STRANGE OBJECTS IN THE SKY BE PROOF THAT WE ARE NOT ALONE IN THE UNIVERSE? UNTIL CONCLUSIVE EVIDENCE IS FOUND, WE HAVE ONLY THE EYEWITNESS ACCOUNTS OF PEOPLE LIKE PETE BERTINE, AND MAYBE YOU.

ACCORDING TO PETE BURTINE, AT LEAST 20 PEOPLE AT THE HARVEY SCHOOL FOR BOYS SAW THE SAME MASSIVE OBJECT HE DID. IF YOU WITNESSED THE KATONAH UFO, OR HAVE SEEN OTHER STRANGE OBJECTS IN THE SKY, PLEASE SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCE AT [UNSOLVED.COM](https://unsolved.com).

NEXT ON UNSOLVED MYSTERIES...

JOSEPHINE WENTZEL: This guy was a monster. He didn't have any intent of dating, having exclusive dates, or having a relationship. He had no intent of doing that. He was a liar. He was a big fake. He was a poser, a faker and everything about him was a lie.

NARRATION:

Unsolved Mysteries is a production of Cosgrove Meurer Productions and Cadence 13. It is executive produced by Terry Dunn Meurer and Chris Corcoran. Produced by Lloyd Lochridge, Christine Lenig, Courtney Ennis, and Paige Hymson. The Story Producer for this episode was Caitlin Cutt, and it was edited by Keith Shea. From Cadence 13, editing, mixing and mastering by Chris Basil, Andy Jaskiewicz and Bill Schultz. Production support by Sean Cherry and Ian Mandt. Artwork and design is by Curt Courtenay. Publicity by Josefina Francis and Hillary Schupf. The original theme music was composed by Gary Malkin and Michael Boyd.

THANKS FOR LISTENING TO EPISODE 9 OF UNSOLVED MYSTERIES.