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COURTESY PHOTO

This is an image from "Touched," Laurel Chiten's documentary about alien contact, which has proved popular in Santa Fe.

ET's No Alien to Abducted Santa Feans

■ *Hands shoot up when documentary film audience asked about other-worldly contacts*

BY WREN PROPP
Journal Staff Writer

Count alien abduction as yet another way the capital city upholds its rep as the City Different. Massachusetts filmmaker Laurel Chiten said she was "blown away" in December when maybe as much as

half of a standing-room-only Santa Fe audience who saw her film "Touched" raised their hands to say they'd had personal interaction with aliens from other worlds.

"Touched" is a documentary about people who say they have experienced alien abduction and contact. It was screened at the Santa Fe Film Festival in December with sold-out showings.

"I was kind of blown away. . . The film really found its audience" in Santa Fe, said Chiten in a telephone interview from California.

Chiten and Dr. John E. Mack, a Harvard University psychiatrist and researcher of those he calls "experiencers" — folks who report missing time, probes, sperm extraction, impregnation and hybridization experiments after contact with aliens — plan to be in Santa Fe on Tuesday and Albuquerque on Wednesday for additional screenings of the film.

Santa Fe's reputation as a place for people to heal — with alternative medical practices, lifestyles and reli-

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gious rituals — makes it prime stomping grounds for those who believe they have made alien connections, said Jon Bowman, executive director of the film festival.

"A lot of people come here to lick their wounds. It's kind of a way station, a crossroads," Bowman said.

And New Mexico's long-standing reports of crashing flying saucers from Roswell to Aztec and years of cattle mutilations provide fertile soil for those who would also be interested in "Touched," he said.

"It goes with the territory," Bowman said.

After a screening of "Touched" in Santa Fe in December, audience members talked about their own experiences, Chiten said.

Unlike discussions after other screenings elsewhere, the Santa Feans didn't argue about the existence of aliens or the possibility of mental illness on the part of abductees, she said.

"This audience asked questions about the phenomenon and broke into a discussion with each other, sharing their experiences," Chiten said.

When someone in the audience asked how many people at



CHITEN: Her film on alien contacts "found its audience" in Santa Fe



MACK: Santa Feans "might be more open spirited instead of digging in their heels"

the theater had experienced contact with aliens, about half raised their hands, Chiten said.

"I was shocked," she said.

Mack, who calls those who have reported contact with aliens "experiencers," said that perhaps those drawn to Santa Fe are also drawn to experiences sent out from other dimensions.

"I would guess that the people in Santa Fe would be different from those in New York," he said in a telephone interview from the East Coast. "They might be more open spirited instead of digging in their heels."

Mack earned a Pulitzer Prize for his biography of T.E. Lawrence titled "A Prince of

Get 'Touched' Again

In encore events sponsored by the Santa Fe Film Festival, "Touched" will be shown at The Screen at the College of Santa Fe, 1600 St. Michael's Drive, at 7 p.m. Tuesday. Another showing, along with appearances by director Laurel Chiten and Dr. John E. Mack, is at 7 p.m. Wednesday at the Madstone Theaters in Albuquerque, 6311 San Mateo Blvd. NE. Tickets for both showings are \$10 and available at the door. More information is available by calling the festival at 988-5225.

Our Disorder: The Life of T.E. Lawrence," whose life was explored in the film "Lawrence of Arabia."

The kind of discussion reported by Chiten in Santa Fe sounds similar to the kind of discussion Mack hopes the film will generate worldwide.

The film "avoids the rather sterile debate" over whether alien contact can be proved," he said.

Viewers "can't help feel these are authentic individuals. . . The film goes to the heart," Mack said.

He considers the film a conversation "provoker" that really gets people thinking and talking.

"I think it's a very effective educational tool," Mack said.

Mack has interviewed more than 200 "experiencers" and written essays and books on the subject. He also persuaded Chiten that she needed to investigate the "experiencers."

"John Mack abducted me," Chiten said jokingly.

Mack sought her out after hearing her speak. Chiten, whose credits include "The Jew in the Lotus" — about eight Jews who traveled to India to visit the Dalai Lama in 1990 — and "Twitch and Shout" — about people living with Tourette Syndrome — isn't completely convinced that those she filmed for "Touched" were actually abducted by aliens.

However, Mack and the people she met through him impressed her enough to make a film about their experiences.

"Their stories really blew me away," she said.