



Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory

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Dear Eric:

My recollection of the event involving Fermi that you wrote to me about is clear, but only partial.

To begin with, I was there at the incident. I believe it occurred shortly after the end of the war on a visit of Fermi to the Laboratory, which quite possibly might have been during a summer.

I remember having walked over with Fermi and others to the Fuller Lodge for lunch. While we walked over, there was a conversation which I believe to have been quite brief and superficial on a subject only vaguely connected with space travel. I have a vague recollection, which may not be accurate, that we talked about flying saucers and the obvious statement that the flying saucers are not real. I also remember that Fermi explicitly raised the question, and I think he directed it at me, "Edward, what do you think. How probable is it that within the next ten years we shall have clear evidence of a material object moving faster than light?" I remember that my answer was " 10^{-6} ". Fermi said, "This is much too low. The probability is more like ten percent" (the well known figure for a Fermi miracle).

This incident I have clearly in mind and I believe it was on the same occasion where the other question arose which you have mentioned. This latter point, however, I am not certain of.

At any rate, the conversation, according to my memory, was only vaguely connected with astronautics partly on account of flying saucers might be due to extraterrestrial people (here I believe the remarks were purely negative), partly because exceeding light velocity would make interstellar travel one degree more real.

We then talked about other things which I do not remember and maybe approximately eight of us sat down together for lunch. The discussion had nothing to do with astronomy or with extraterrestrial beings. I think it was some down-to-earth topic.

Then, in the middle of this conversation, Fermi came out with the quite unexpected question "Where is everybody?" What I am sure of is that your quote, "If you are right, then where is everybody?", is wrong. Fermi did not tie his question to any conversation which was then going on. The result of his question was general laughter because of the strange fact that in spite of Fermi's question coming from the clear blue, everybody around the table seemed to understand at once that he was talking about extraterrestrial