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Nation

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Professor: Ancient diamonds fell from space

By Noah Bierman

McClatchy Newspapers

(MCT)

MIAMI - Professor Stephen Haggerty retrieves a 730-carat black diamond - the size of an apple - from his desk. It's nearly impossible to cut, potentially billions of years old and, he believes, a product of outer space.

Haggerty, 68, is a man driven by diamonds to far and dangerous places - Siberia, where he met his wife; the Ivory Coast; Sierra Leone; Liberia. But he is entranced neither by diamonds' beauty nor their cash value. He gives his wife emeralds.

Diamonds, for him, are a "window" into the earth's core and its history, "natural antiques." To him, the diamonds are less valuable than the geology lessons they contain.

"They're a time capsule," he said. "They're consistently the oldest objects on the earth."

A Florida International University geologist since 2002, Haggerty is a top expert in the science of diamonds. In December, he, a graduate student and a team from Case Western University published a study that he says provides the strongest evidence yet that the black carbonado diamonds on his desk were formed in outer space, perhaps more than four billion years ago, arriving to earth as meteorites.

In other words, these cold, hard pieces of cosmic dust may have taken their form before the planet Earth existed, and before the solar system was formed.

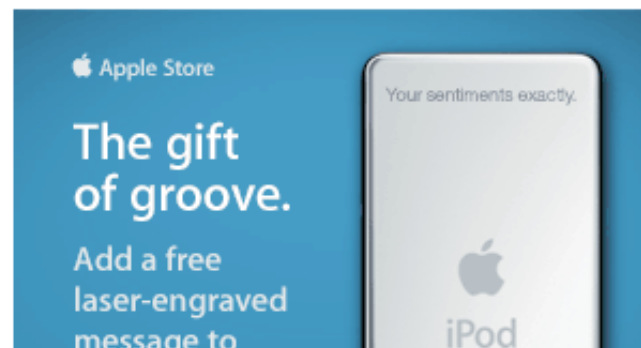


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