

## Ah, What a Tangled Web We Weave!

Paranormal Investigators, like ice cream cones, comes in a variety of flavors, from plain vanilla to the more exotic Rocky Road. If you can engage them in a meaningful dialogue, you would likely find that each holds an often hidden belief on what it is they interact with in the field, some see Casper while others conjure up Jason from Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>. Some see a straight path to follow from point “A” to point “B” while for others the “solution” in some cases will take you through the alphabet twice; the later of course is closer to the truth.

It is always refreshing to become involved in a case that has just one ghost, the predictable kind, who lights all the meters and speaks when spoken to, but to be honest, those are few and far between. Many “ghost hunters,” will only visit known haunted locations to reconfirm the obvious, to sidestep the more involved cases. Revisiting Eastern Correctional is predicable, but it might be noted that no one has come up with a single verifiable name to be associated with the experiences so many report there. That is why they are called “Ghost Hunters” in the first place, they do little investigating, less research and walk away feeling fulfilled because they were present when something went bump in the night. Only the trained paranormal investigator sees the importance of finding names and tying earthly occurrences to the phenomenon observed. That is why we tend to shy from the “tourist” destinations, where the waters have been muddied beyond recognition and chose to focus on the lesser known sites. The drawback, of course is once we identify an active site and the spirited participants there, the place will soon be flooded with well meaning ghost hunters!

In one case, we recently received a call from a well meaning ghost hunter who asked if we had ever heard of Old Alton Bridge; he proceeded to explain that it was a very active site and when asked for more details, his verbal report was filled with half truths, legends, folklore and pure fiction. He seemed surprised when, after giving me the lowdown, I told him we had originated the real investigation of the location many years before and that we had published several articles in places like FATE, FORTEAN TIMES and HAUTED TIMES on the location. Finally, I explained the real nature of the existing phenomenon and our ongoing research there, including an archeological survey to locate the original homestead. He was amazed, he asked several times if I was sure that we were talking about the same place, he honestly thought he was the very first to visit the bridge, but also admitted that he and his fellow hunters did not stray more than 50 feet from the bridge itself, thus missing the really big parts of the location and phenomenon. But he was content with what he had experienced, an owl crying out on a moonless night and movement near the bridge, which they did not investigate.

What is my point? No, I am not bashing Ghost Hunters, I am simply trying to educate them to understand what it is that we do and why. We really are different.

The most mundane haunting is intrinsically complicated. Let me use the ASUP headquarters as a perfect example. Yes, the space is haunted but by totally friendly spirits and yes, we have several on the premises. Dubbed the “Dog Ranch” because we have adopted so many strays over the years, the ranch is about 80 acres and has been a homestead for well over 100 years and home to several interrelated families, including Joy Maner, the ASUP’s Director of Research.

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This is the kind of place where you commonly see folks sitting in adjacent rooms as you walk past, knowing you are the only living person there. Recently, the front door swung open while two members were sitting in the living room; to paraphrase one, “The door opened with purpose; as if someone were walking in, it stayed open a moment, then closed, as if guided by a human hand.” That could be interesting, if it didn’t happen daily! Dogs see what humans commonly do not, our smallest dog is in and of itself, a walking piece of Texas history; he is a true “Cow Dog” who is both fearless and competent to wrangle any livestock on command.

He also has a habit of “talking” to mirrors(not barking but talking), watching unseen movement intently and most recently was found laying in an antique rocker, cuddling up in unseen arms, as if being stroked and petted. He was laying on an old blanket, so it was difficult to see where “he” was being supported from, he looked like he was hovering about an inch off the blanket. “Spotty” continuously follows unseen folks in and outside the house. He also has been seen playing “ball” on the side of the house; yes the ball seems to be thrown to him, but no one is there, except for someone he alone sees. Ironically, this is a spot where a young boy died in an accident 50 years ago, he too had a faithful dog he loved to play ball with, relatives say.

Sometimes our lives intersect with our housemates. They seem stronger when you are brewing fresh coffee in the morning, you will find cabinets opened, cups moved and sometimes a rattling sound. Again ironically, we know of one former household member did not care for coffee, she was a tea drinker, but we have noticed the feeling that she still does not like folks using her cup at the kitchen table, the center of all social activity here. The spirits come and go in the house and around the grounds and have been seen out by the barn area. They seem to warn us when an animal is ill.

Sometimes the spirits will take us by surprise. One morning I woke with a start, I was in bed, on my back and looking up at a female spirit hovering over me, nose to nose. That got my attention! I was not feeling well and went to the doctor, then my cardiologist. He did all the requisite tests and I had suffered a “silent” heart attack. It was obviously good enough to arouse one of our ghosts.

In all, there are at least five ghosts who come and go at the ranch, the dogs recognize them, but don’t become upset; in fact, one of the best stories about one ghost, happened last year. Several members were congregated in the living room, it was late and Joi wanted to call the dogs in for the night. She called out, and most of the house dogs responded... all but “Murphy”, who seems not to think of himself as a dog at all, but rather a human who just looks like a dog. He did not respond to Joi’s calls and she was beginning to get upset. The area is infested with feral hogs and they have attacked the dogs late at night.

Suddenly, there was a shrill whistle, someone was calling the dog. The sound was emanating between myself and another ASUP officer, standing just a foot or so away by the door. We knew where it came from, but not from whom, nevertheless, literally in the next moment, Murph was standing at the doorway with a puzzled look as if to ask, “So which one of you learned how to whistle?” Obviously, one of our unseen friends had done what she did best... yes, we were able to confirm a member of Joy’s family who routinely called in the dogs with a quick whistle!

Sometimes, the activity is not as obviously explained; when a kitchen implement is there next to

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you one moment and gone the next and you are the only one there, it is easy to accept who might be the culprit. There is more than one ghost here that seems to enjoy my culinary efforts, but they have their own tastes, I was trained to pull out all the spices I will be using in a dish before starting, so they are close at hand, but I often find spices on the workbench that I would not normally consider in a recipe, only to later hear that it was a favorite of a former cook in that kitchen.

Other times, we have occurrences we can't hope to explain. We have a large train type engine bell out on a post at the front ramp to the house. One night, at about 3 a.m. that bell rang out clearly, very loudly. It rang just once; there was no "return" just one loud "Clang." I got up, and went to the front door, expecting to find someone there. But no one was and the dogs all encircled the bell post, staring intently at the bell, which was now quiet. I know that the bell rang, I totally understand the mechanism and how one would ring it; there was no wind and it only rang once, which in and of itself was odd and obviously the dogs heard it too, but I can offer no explanation why it happened at the exact moment.

Well, I've waxed poetic enough about the Dog Ranch; it is a great place to live and offers a good deal of otherworldly activity, but it also sets the stage for the true purpose of this lesson. NOTHING is simple! NOTHING exists in a vacuum! What may seem simple is almost never so. If ghosts are the spirits of those who once lived, they lived complex lives, even in a little whistle stop town in East Texas. The emotions are still the same and lives are complicated and intertwined. That is what makes paranormal investigations so complex; even Casper the friendly ghost had his interrelated troubles.

It is simply for that reason that background research is as important as it is in every ASUP investigation. We are not out in the field to prove the existence of the phenomenon, although that seems to be what the great majority wants. They want to know if there is a ghost, possibly what is his name and his history as it relates to his haunt. No one really wants to know much more and the possibility of doing psychotherapy on a ghost is virtually unheard of, yet it might only be through such intricate studies that we can really get to the heart of why certain spirits linger and do what they do.

All of this does however take time to master. First you have to educate the researchers, to discuss overall goals, and the methods you intend to utilize. Then you have to do the same with the client, who many times just wants the troublesome spirit to move on, to a place where they will not have to deal with them. It's all somewhat like a good friend who has a petulant three year old. If it were your three year old, the antics would be cute, but when it is anyone else's, you wish they would just go away. You may love them, but you don't want to interact with them 24-7. It is reasonable to suggest from my years in the field that if you can't tolerate kids under foot, you will probably have a hard time cutting it in paranormal research, unless you decide to sequester yourself in a nice sterile pod.

For the rest of us in the trenches, we will be interacting with the widest possible array of personalities, probably a much wider range than you might in the living world. You will have the opportunity to deal with the "Great unwashed" from many generations past, on a regular basis... no you don't get to pick your ghosts and no, they probably won't be anything like the people you normally exchange niceties with on a regular basis in your world. In fact, I would hazard a guess

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that you will find yourself dealing with exactly the kinds of personalities you tend to avoid elsewhere.

Does this mean we should call be psychotherapists to the dead? Funny you should ask! My old friend, Scott Rogo believed once upon a time that the only people truly prepared to do field work in parapsychology would be the “lettered professionals,” the Ph.D.s who I tend to relegate to the back office labs today. His theory was simple, in fact you are involved in the psychotherapy of the departed; to understand them you first have to understand their minds; therefore the best field investigator will be a trained therapist. Of course the problem is that I don’t know too many practicing psychologists who want to specialize in the analysis of a dead person’s psyche -- after all, who would you send the billable hours to? I didn’t know many back then and still have problems finding them, except for the occasional academic, who dabbles at arms-length from the safety of a classroom environment and waxes poetic about the “theory” of hauntings. Thus we must take another direction!

It was once said that when Mohammad was unable to go to the mountain, the mountain came to Mohammad. We have to take the same path. If we can’t find an adequate number of like-minded researchers with Ph.D.s then we will have to try to educate the rank and file researcher to do his job; something like the concept followed when the medical profession came to realize that they needed doctors out in the field to save lives... that was not a viable answer, so they created the paramedic, a hybrid medical professional with a very narrow field of understanding about medicine in general, but nevertheless a consummate expert in those things that are most life threatening on the street: trauma, heart attack, shock, etc. and how to adequately treat them enroute to the proper medical facility.

Paranormal investigators are very much like Paramedics, we just deal with departed spirits and the living who interact with them, rather than cardiac emergencies and trauma patients. It takes about as much time to train a good paranormal investigator as a paramedic, and what they learn is a very highly developed, yet narrow overview. Clients who are forced to deal with spirits regularly when they don’t wish to are certainly in need of paranormal “first aid.” The spirits themselves are usually very complicated, with no easy fixes and we have to handle them appropriately. If we are doing the job right, no one is left out of the initial equation or the final solution.

Nothing is simple! Every case is complex, a layered history that you must unravel to really deal with the problem at hand. Unlike our ghost hunting friends, it is not enough to walk into a case, confirm the existence of a spirit and leave. The job of the paranormal investigator is to study the phenomenon, untangle the layers, and plot a solution unique to this particular set of circumstances, just as a psychotherapist would do. Yes, mankind, dead or alive, weaves a tangled web, but if you really want to solve the puzzle of an afterlife, you must first address how that ghostly subject spent his time among us and come to understand his emotional direction and overall aims while he or she was here.

Yes, some ghosts just hang out because they are comfortable in a place. The ghosts of the Dog Ranch show that to be true every day, and if anything they protect the living who now resides on what was once their property; but just as in life, all humans are not motivated by the same things, there are good and bad, positively directed or otherwise. So if you really want to follow this

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path, you have to be prepared to deal with the plethora of otherworldly spirits because, just as in life, every spirit is different!