

Ghost stories belie the familiar

Climbing the ladder into the dark room above, he thought about all the unusual things that had been happening lately: tools disappearing, strange noises.

Once he reached the attic an eerie feeling crept over him, and he sensed that if he turned around he would see a ghost. He was right.

A very old woman donned in styles the Western pioneers might have worn floated a few inches off the ground, hanging there like the musty odor hung in the air.

The carpenter, Jim Alexander, realized he had to pass the old woman if he wanted to get out of this place. The ghost came closer and began to turn transparent. She had almost disappeared when she passed through Alexander.

Because of this incident, Alexander quit his remodeling job at the Heceta House, located on the Oregon coast a few miles north of Florence along Hwy. 101.

The Heceta House ghost — known as "Rue" to many — is one of several types of specters studied by Phillip Goodwilling, director of Haunt Hunters in Chesterfield, Mo.

Haunt Hunters, as its name implies, is an organization devoted to tracking down sources of the proverbial "bump in the night." More than 350 members of Haunt Hunters can be found delving into psychic phenomenon in all 50 states and in 17 foreign countries.

Goodwilling has been in the apparition-hunting business for 22 years, investigating 315 cases in that time.

Of the three kinds of ghosts Goodwilling hunts, the most common are Poltergeists. These ghosts have a short "haunt-span" — usually only a few days, he said.

Poltergeists, which are believed to be the spirits of children, are not known for harming people. But because they have the IQ and temperament of a child, their main objective is to get attention by moving or throwing small objects.

Female Poltergeists only haunt women and the male spirits only haunt men, Goodwilling said.

The second type of apparition Goodwilling investigates is the Psychic Imprint. "It's a recording of past events, sounds and atmosphere that someone or something triggers to be replayed," he explained. "Most people can see it, but since it is in its own time frame it cannot see the person."

Psychic Imprints are transparent. Because the spirits are forever trapped in time, they are not disposable, Goodwilling said.

The easiest ghosts to get rid of are called Surviving Remnants, in-

cluding human or inhuman ghosts, he said.

A human ghost typically will appear to deliver a message, then it leaves. It also has a good-natured reputation. Human ghosts most often appear when a house is being remodeled, as was the case when Alexander met Rue at the Heceta House.

Inhuman ghosts are usually very mischievous, Goodwilling claimed. They are known to cause fires, lacerate people, and throw large objects such as pianos and even human beings. These ghosts also tend to follow an individual, even to a new residence.

Some ghosts may possess characteristics of all three types.

Goodwilling said ghosts are created by the psyche of the people living in the house. "There is normally a focal person whom the ghosts and happenings revolve around. People draw ghosts to them, especially harmful ghosts, by their lifestyles. Abnormal lifestyles open households to ghosts," he said.

Incidences of deaths reportedly caused by ghosts are rare. Only one ghost has been considered a suspect in a death, which occurred in 1860.

Goodwilling theorized that ghosts mainly appear to either deliver a message, drive the hauntee insane or cause physical harm. He claims to have once seen a woman lacerated, supposedly by a ghost.

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When Goodwilling is called upon to rid a house of a ghost, he first ensures that the job is valid and not a prank. Next he judges the mental stability of the person who reports the ghost.

If everything checks out, he will begin by "calming the psyche of the person." Stress, fear and fatigue are the types of psychological turmoil that ghosts thrive on, Goodwilling said. Many times he must hold a seance in

order to clean the house of existing spirits.

Despite the roguish antics of some ghosts, Goodwilling's impression is that most are friendly. They mainly try to get attention, and do so by scratching the walls, whispering and misplacing objects.

Such is the ghost of South Eugene High.

In 1957, student Robert Grankey was walking on a catwalk between the ceiling and the roof of South Eugene's auditorium. Grankey attempted to jump from one catwalk to another, which was six feet away. He missed, falling 55 feet to his death.

Rumor has it that the two seats which Grankey fell into remain in the auditorium, but were relocated to another section of the seating area. Students bold enough to sit in the seats say they feel a "creepy, eerie" feeling.

A few students as well as a former assistant play director claim to have seen a "light-blue figure" in the upper balcony of the auditorium. As reported in a South Eugene student magazine, former drama director David Nale heard a noise in the catwalk area one evening and, thinking it was a student, decided to take a look.

"I could barely see this kind of glow and I was following right behind it in the dark," Nale was quoted as saying. "I thought it went through a door. But when I followed, I walked right into a wall. When the light came on, I saw I was a good 10 feet from any wall."

Although Goodwilling said this kind of ghost, a human ghost, is friendly, it was once blamed by South Eugene students for a falling brick. Supposedly, just before someone was to sit in one of the "haunted chairs," a brick fell into it from the ceiling. The auditorium is not constructed from bricks, but there had been bricks on the catwalk the day Grankey died.

The investigation into the ghost of Grankey was uneventful. The "creepy, eerie" feeling that many students had felt was not evident upon entering the auditorium.

A custodian pointed out the "haunted chairs." Again, nothing strange.

Up on the catwalk, wooden planks creaked while walking through what seemed like a long, dark cave. With camera in hand, peering into the darkness produced no sign of Grankey's ghost.

Descending the stage, a bank of lights flickered...perhaps some ghost's way of saying, "I'm here, but you can't see me."

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