

“What we wanted to do is make this an event for all ages and all different types of people, whether they were into the paranormal or just (the) historical side or even just skeptical about ghost stories,” Smith said. “I think having an opportunity for kids to be involved is important.”

Often all things haunted are culturally reserved for “when you’re older” and considered “too scary” for kids, Smith said.

“It’s the complete opposite. The adults may feel that way, but the kids don’t,” Smith said. “Adults have more of a fear, but kids have more of an open mind. Most of those people with paranormal experiences have them as kids. Kids were open about what they are seeing.”

Haunted toys

Ross Allison, a longtime Pacific Northwest ghost hunter, will be leading the discussion about haunted toys during the kid’s portion of the conference based on the book “Haunted Toys,” which he and his co-writer, David Weatherly, published last year.

“I had a mother that loved ghost stories,” Allison said, “and I grew up listening to them and became very curious: Do these things really happen?”

His curiosity bloomed into a 25-year career internationally investigating paranormal activity, collecting ghost stories, researching cemeteries and giving ghost-hunting lectures. He now co-owns Spooked in Seattle Ghost Tours and, when he can spare a moment, teaches “Ghostology 101 — Becoming a Ghost Hunter” at the University of Washington.

In his career, Allison noticed that many stories he would hear, particularly from children, were not being documented. Aside from Chucky and Annabelle, stories of toys coming to life, innocent and malicious, were not being recognized.

“What I found in this field is that these (ghost-hunting) groups start out of the hype from these TV shows. They have interesting experiences, but then they don’t have the proper experience and they die out,” Allison said. “All these stories and experiences are getting lost because groups fold. I wanted to get these stories written down.”

The Boogie Man

Allison scoured paranormal message boards and Facebook groups and tracked down kids from all over the world who shared games and experiences they had with their haunted toys.

Most haunted toys share common traits: reanimation, strange sounds and suspicious origins — think antique store or your grandma’s basement.

Some experiences children reported



Ghost Conference Director Rocky Smith at a past event

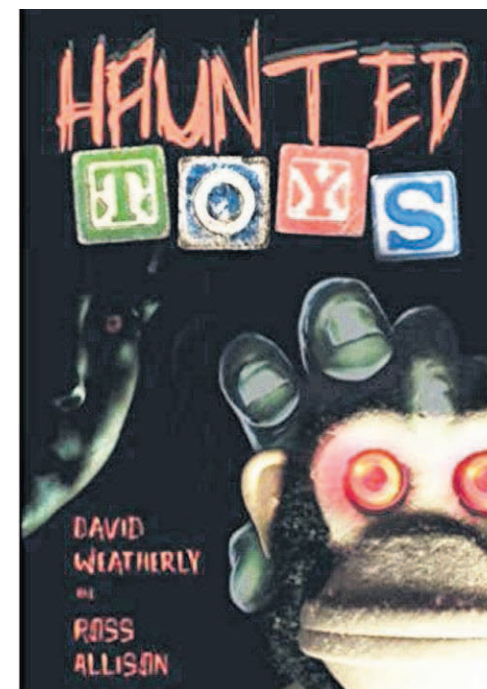
were pretty dark — like “conjuring evil spirits by playing hide-and-seek with a doll” kind of dark. But Allison finds that most experiences people have are relatively positive. One of his favorites is a story from a mother who lost her daughter in a car accident. The stuffed lamb she had in her hand mysteriously showed up on her porch, she said, with her daughter’s spirit.

“We’re taught through the media (that) spirits are out to harm us, to get us. This is where there’s lots of misconceptions. TV shows focus on scaring their audiences,” Allison said. “I’ve been investigating

for years, and it’s extremely rare to come across a negative case. But people are so terrified because they think it’s got to be evil. Maybe it’s just a child ghost that just wants to play.”

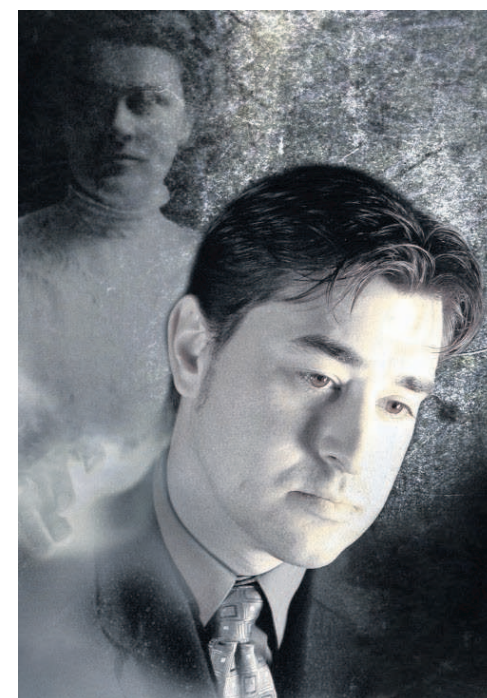
Allison’s goal during the kid’s portion of the event is not to scare but to educate and encourage kids to be curious, he said.

“I find the common thing is, children are more open to the paranormal. When a child becomes frightened of something they don’t understand, it becomes ‘the boogie man under your bed.’ No parent wants to see a kid frightened, so the first



COURTESY ROSS ALLISON

“Haunted Toys” by David Weatherly and Ross Allison



COURTESY ROSS ALLISON

Ross Allison, co-author of the book “Haunted Toys,” will lead a discussion on the titular topic at the seventh annual Oregon Ghost Conference.

thing they tell them (is), ‘There is no such thing as the boogie man.’ That’s what begins our conditioning,” he said. “There are things happening in this world we can’t explain, but they are happening out there. It’s not fair closing off the child’s thought process when it comes to spirits and ghosts.” 