

SCRATCHPAD

FICTION SERIES

A ghost story for Halloween

By **ALYSSA EVANS**
COAST WEEKEND EDITOR



This week marks the ninth entry in Coast Weekend's fiction writing series. Here is "Ghost Story" by John Ciminello, of Naselle, Washington.

'Ghost Story'

I've never seen a ghost but I know they exist. Unlike George Saunders who says "I believe in ghosts but they don't believe in me," I know without seeing.

My grandma died in the house we lived in. She was ill. I was about 8 years old. She talked with me a lot towards the end. In her window she cultivated three small pots of basil. She called it her community garden.

Despite the plants, her room smelled of stale bedsheets, pee and the bitter taste of medicine. Sometimes, I hated going in there.

Almost every night she would ask me to read her a bedtime story. When I could tolerate the smell, I would accommodate. I read chapters from "Treasure Island," "The Sandman" and "Number the Stars." She never complained and told me what a good reader I was.

One night she had me pinch a leaf of basil from her garden. She held the leaf to her nose and took a deep breath as if to carry her spirit away from that bedroom. She asked me to take a whiff. I don't know why but I told her it smelled bad. She looked hurt and said, "It's OK, it's OK."

After she died, I refused to go into the

room. Her plants withered and died. Gradually, the bad smells left the room.

One night I entered the room looking for a book. As I crossed the threshold, I was overcome by Grandma's presence. There was no ectoplasm and no white sheet, but rather the overwhelming scent of sweet basil coming from somewhere near the window.



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our coast weekend

ON THE
COVER



From left, Rainier Reyes, Nathalie Kellow and Diana Gulley inspect a trap door leading to Astoria's underground beneath Commercial Street.

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