

GHOSTS FOR KIDS

Toys at the ghost conference have life of their own

By Brenna Visser
Seaside Signal

As a kid, there was always one in every toy chest.

A ventriloquist doll whose eyes shift on their own a little more than they should. An antique baby doll that just looks like she's seen too much. A stuffed animal that ends up in the corner of your room where you know you didn't put it.

Why is that? Are they haunted, and what are ways to tell? Delving into the phenomenon of haunted toys is one way the seventh-annual Oregon Ghost Conference is encouraging more kids to participate in the paranormal. About 1,000 people are expected to attend the conference Friday, March 23, to Sunday, March 25, at the Seaside Convention Center, which features dozens of classes related to the paranormal, ghost walks and spooky ghost investigations.

While the conference has always been open to families, this year organizer Rocky Smith decided to include a Kids Paranormal Zone, where kids can make spooky crafts, learn about ghost hunting equipment, taking pictures with the Portland Ghostbusters or, if they dare, attend a haunted toy show-and-tell.

"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 historical side or even just skeptical about ghost stories," Smith said. "I think



DANNY MILLER/EO MEDIA GROUP

David Snower, 2017 Oregon Ghost Conference attendee, tells a ghost story illuminated by a campfire during the conference's Ghost Stories Bonfire event.

having an opportunity for kids to be involved is important."

Often all things haunted are culturally reserved for "when you're older," Smith said, relegating paranormal experiences as something "too scary" for kids.

"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 ghost hunter in the Pacific Northwest, will be leading the discussion about haunted toys during the kid's portion of the

conference based on the book "Haunted Toys," which Allison and his co-writer David Weatherly, published last year.

"I had a mother that loved ghost stories, and I grew up listening to them and became very curious. Do these things really happen?"

His curiosity ballooned into a 25-year-long 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 can spare a moment, teaches "Ghostology 101— Becoming a Ghost Hunter" at the University of Washington.

Throughout his career, Allison began to notice many stories he would hear — particularly from children — were

not being documented. Aside from Chucky and Annabelle, stories of toys coming to life, both from places of innocence and malice, 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'

So 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 some common traits: reanimation, strange sounds and suspicious origins — think antique store or your grandma's basement.

Some experiences children reported were pretty dark. Like, conjuring evil spirits by playing hide-and-seek with a doll kind of dark. But in Allison's time, he finds 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 after she died, she said, with her daughter's spirit.

"We're taught through the media 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 educate and encour-

age 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 kid frightened, so the first thing they tell them 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 to close off the child's thought process when it comes to spirit and ghosts."

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Helping animals is their mission

Volunteers always sought at thrift shop, sanctuary

By Eve Marx
For Seaside Signal

Jean Nordmark has been involved with the Spay and Neuter Thrift Shop in Seaside for 20 plus years. The shop is a consignment business with all proceeds going towards vouchers for veterinary fees for spay and neuter for any dog or cat in Clatsop County. "We recently received a large donation from a private donor and we're putting that to work right away," Nordmark said. "We're working to increase the dollar amount we pay to the vets."

The Spay and Neuter Thrift Shop works with veterinarians in Astoria, Warrenton and Seaside. "We've been in our space for over 20 years," Nordmark said. "Everyone who works in the shop is a volunteer. We



R.J. MARX/SEASIDE SIGNAL

Seaside Spay and Neuter Thrift Shop is always busy with bargain-hunters, and proceeds go to a good cause.

accept donations of clothing, small household goods, home décor. We give donors a receipt for their taxes."

"We're always looking for more volunteers," Nordmark said. The Spay and Neuter Thrift Shop is located at 600 Broadway in Seaside; 503-738-7040. The shop is open 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. and is closed Wednesdays.

Angels for Sara

Angels for Sara is looking for a new home for their sanctuary. They are a 501(c)3 non-profit that fosters, prepares for adoption, and in some cases provides a loving, permanent home to abandoned senior dogs. The organization's newsletter, Senior Paws, recently described Bunny,

a 13-year-old, 6-pound ball of white fluff who became homeless when her owner had to go to a nursing home. A recent newsletter thanked Hammond Kennels in Hammond for their help grooming and nail trimming their sanctuary dogs, as well as Chandra Daniels, a dog trainer at Petco in Warrenton who gives reiki healing to many of the sanctuary's dogs.

"We are at the point we are turning away senior dogs because of our present zoning," said Jacque Pressly, Angels for Sara's director. "We're looking for at least one or two acres, preferably a ranch style home. We'd like two to three bedrooms, two baths, and out in the country where the dogs won't bother neighbors or be on a busy road."

Angels for Sara is looking for something to rent or lease with an option to buy.

Email them at angelsforsara@gmail.com. Read more about them on their website angelsforsarasanctuary.com or on their Facebook page.

Snowy plover nest could be a 'game-changer'

Plover from Page 1A

officials hoped the western snowy plover would return to traditional nesting sites. But the protections haven't yielded results, as a nesting site hasn't been seen on the Necanicum Spit since 2002.

The restricted area makes up about 25 percent of the 77-acre beach area between Gearhart and the Necanicum River.

While Nehalem Bay State Park saw the hatching of a western snowy plover chick last May for the first time in 30 years, most nesting sites on the North Coast, including Gearhart, haven't seen signs of nesting for a "very long time," according to Laurel Hillmann, an ocean shores specialist with the Parks and Recreation Department.

As a result, in February, Hillmann told the City Council the area will no longer be kept as an active bird management site and seasonal restrictions will be lifted. Less-trafficked areas on the central and southern coast are more inviting and will be the focus of future nesting protections, Hillmann said, and Gearhart's seasonally posted signs advising of



JOHN GREEN

A western snowy plover observed in Gearhart in December.

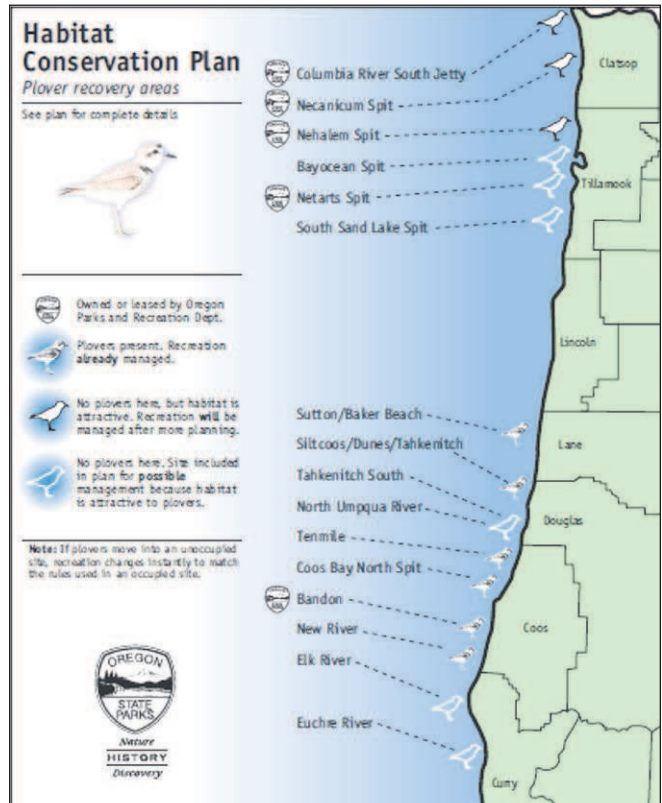
snowy plover habitat would no longer be posted.

Watching for nests

The Parks and Recreation Department will begin monitoring Gearhart later this month for the continued presence of plovers and any signs of nesting behavior. Seasonal restrictions went into place Thursday, prohibiting unleashed dogs, vehicles and bicycles in unoccupied plover areas.

If there is no nesting behavior by July 15, the department will lift restrictions.

Restrictions would also be lifted if the Parks and Recreation Department, state Department of Fish and Wildlife and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service conclude that it is in



OREGON PARKS AND RECREATION DEPARTMENT

Map of snowy plover management areas in the 2010 habitat conservation plan.

the best interest for species recovery to manage a different site, Blackstone said.

Agencies will still protect individual plover nests that are discovered, she added.

For now, Blackstone, Green and wildlife officials will keep

their eyes on the sand.

"A plover could be nesting and nobody would ever see it," Green said. "They are able to hide their nests in the bare sand pretty well. It's possible you could have plover nesting and not even know it."