

Things That Go Bump in the Night

*I think of horror films as art, as films of confrontation. Films that make you confront aspects of your own life that are difficult to face.*¹

– David Cronenberg

When I was a kid my family used to go on vacation to Prince Edward Island, the small province across the Northumberland Strait from Nova Scotia. It was always an adventure because before the federal government built a massive bridge that connected PEI to the mainland in 1997 you could only get there from the mainland via one of two car ferries, and the Island itself had a magical, timeless quality as a result.² To a young boy from the city it was a rural paradise, full of mystery, like something out of a Hardy Boys novel.

PEI has always been best known for its pristine beaches, its potatoes, and of course Anne of Green Gables, but it also had a number of family-friendly attractions back then, small-town, low-budget “theme parks” like Rainbow Valley, where the highlights included things such as petting zoos and slides bigger than the ones you could find in your schoolyard back home. In the years since, much larger and flashier amusement parks have replaced most of these older gems from my childhood years, and I think that PEI lost something in the bargain. As a kid, we relied on our imagination; now the attractions do much of the imagining for you. Some people

¹ “David Cronenberg,” *They Shoot Pictures, Don’t They*. <http://goo.gl/i3FZn>.

² One of the things that stood out in a positive way was the fact that you could only buy bottled soft drinks until very recently. Plastic bottles and aluminum cans were forbidden by the law. See “Islanders pop tabs as PEI’s ‘can ban’ ends,” CBC News, 3 May 2008. www.cbc.ca/news/canada/prince-edward-island/story/2008/05/02/can-ban.html.

consider it progress, but I'm not one of them.³

In the 1970s, however, there was definitely a slower pace, and my brother and sister and I had all sorts of adventures because we had imagination to spare. One of my favorite places to visit was an attraction in Harrington, a speck on the map just outside the capital of Charlottetown. Looking back I realize that it was a pretty small-scale operation, even by the standards of PEI at the time, but it had the one thing that I remember above all others – a house of horrors!

In hindsight I realize that it was more of a “mobile home of horrors,” but to a nine year old boy it seemed a lot bigger than it really was. I remember the first time we went there like it was yesterday. There were spooky sounds and music playing as we walked up to the “house,” just like the kind my Dad still blares out the windows of his house on an old record player every Halloween from a well-worn K-Tel album he found in a bargain bin decades ago. The building just kind of sat there next to the parking lot. Some fake cobwebs were strewn around the entrance, and a skeleton as well, but there really wasn't a whole lot else. Nevertheless, it was all too real and frightening to me. For several minutes I refused to go in. Even after my Dad pointed out that my younger siblings had made it through unscathed I was convinced that I would go in and never come out.

I finally screwed up the courage to face both the monsters within the haunted “house,” and the fear within me. As I recall, it wasn't the reassurance by my Mom and Dad that got me through the front door; it was my brother's taunting from the other side of the fence that separated those who had gone through the building from those who had not. With one too many “fraidy cat” jibes still ringing in my ears, I decided that I would rather face demons from Hell than spend the rest of the vacation listening to Jim make fun of me. So in I went.

And then out I came. It was as scary as I thought it would be, but I made it through in one piece (although I did scrape my elbow when I

³ See “Closed Canadian Parks: Rainbow Valley.” <http://goo.gl/K1X3t>. Rainbow Valley was perhaps best known for its replica flying saucer gift shop. See “Futuro House – Home of the Future: The UFO Home of PEI, Canada.” www.futurohouse.com/pei.html.

turned around suddenly as a witch puppet popped out from a wall). Before we left I went through again, but it wasn't nearly as frightening the second time around because I knew what was going to happen and therefore most of the anticipatory dread was gone. But my encounter with the "haunted house of Harrington" has stayed locked in my memory ever since, even as many others from my childhood have faded or disappeared altogether. It was the thrill that was scary, and the scare that was thrilling, the kind of experience that speaks to us all on the most primal of levels and is never forgotten.

The Maritime Provinces of Canada are famous for ghost stories, hauntings, demons, old hags, and various other tales of "creatures that go bump in the night," as well as some very interesting UFO stories.⁴ I have many friends and family members who have related what can loosely be categorized as "ghost stories" to me over the years. The drummer of my old band grew up in a house where the walls dripped blood (among other strange things). When we were first dating in college Linda Wood showed up at my residence one night at 2 am shaking and in tears after a terrifying experience with a ouija board (she still won't go anywhere near one all these years later – when we were using one for *Ghost Cases* in 2009 she made me store it in the trunk of our car rather than in our house). Just the other day I got a letter from a woman in Dartmouth who is convinced that her house is haunted by ghosts tormenting her young son, asking me what she should do about it.⁵

I also know a few people who claim to have seen a UFO. My good friend Ron Foley MacDonald, a theatre and film critic, was a young boy when he saw something fly over his home in Rockingham, Nova Scotia, in 1967, on the same night of the famous Shag Harbour incident.⁶ All these years later he can still recount the story as if it had

⁴ See, for example, Helen Creighton, *Bluenose Magic: Popular Beliefs and Superstitions in Nova Scotia* (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1968), and Helen Creighton, *Folklore of Lunenburg County, Nova Scotia* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1976).

⁵ I recommended her son see a child psychologist instead of the alleged psychic / exorcist whom she wanted to call.

⁶ For the definitive description of the Shag Harbour UFO incident, see Don Ledger

just happened.

A salt-of-the-earth family I know in Prince Edward Island once told me a story about what appeared to be a silvery, egg-shaped object surrounded by a bright light that appeared in a field near their house. It was witnessed by several family members for a minute or two and then flew away. They thought it was some sort of “forerunner.” For those not familiar with the term, the Maritime folklorist Helen Creighton defined it in *Bluenose Ghosts* as a “supernatural warning of approaching events... usually connected with impending death.”⁷

Even when someone around here has described something to me that most people elsewhere would categorize as a UFO case, like the egg-shaped object in the field noted above, they often place it within a more supernatural framework. If someone in New Mexico had relayed the story of the egg-shaped object, for example, they probably would have been interpreted as aliens.⁸ In the Maritimes, however, it was viewed as a forerunner, but it just as easily might have been seen as a will ‘o the wisp, or a phantom ship. As Creighton wrote, “The supernatural in Nova Scotia is... a part of our way of life.”⁹

It should therefore come as no surprise that after several years of making films about the UFO phenomenon I finally got drawn into the world of ghosts.

In the Spring of 2008, just as I was beginning pre-production on *Eternal Kiss*, I was contacted by Dale Stevens, a fellow television producer in Halifax whom I had met while developing one of the

and Chris Styles, *Dark Object: The World's Only Government-Documented UFO Crash* (New York: Dell Publishing, 2001).

⁷ Helen Creighton, *Bluenose Ghosts* (Halifax, NS: Nimbus Publishing, 1994), 1. There was actually a death associated with this story – later on the same day that they saw the object in the field a neighbor was killed in a car accident on his way to a funeral.

⁸ The famous Socorro, New Mexico “UFO” case of 1964, for example, involved an object that the key witness, police officer Lonnie Zamora, described as roughly egg-shaped. See Jacques Vallee, *Forbidden Science: Volume One, Journals 1957–1969* (Documentica Research, 2007), 121-123, 130-131.

⁹ Creighton, *Bluenose Ghosts*, 280.

myriad projects I've worked on over the years that never quite got off the ground.¹⁰ Dale had come up with an idea for a series about ghost stories in the Maritime Provinces of Canada, and he had sold it to a local television network. He had cast four Nova Scotian ghost "investigators" as the hosts, but as he hadn't written, directed or headed up a production before the network wanted him to bring someone on board who had some experience. Dale knew about my interest in the paranormal and asked me if I wanted to get involved as his partner. As the series sounded like fun, and as it wasn't going to begin until after *Eternal Kiss* had finished shooting, I readily agreed.

Once *Eternal Kiss* wrapped production in October, 2008, I immediately turned my attention to the ghost series, which we had decided to call *Ghost Cases*. Each of the thirteen episodes would focus on an investigation of one particular location. We took the small crew and the four hosts to the town of Sherbrooke on the Eastern Shore of Nova Scotia, where there was a house and a library that were supposedly haunted.

As soon as we started filming, however, I realized that while the four hosts were nice people, and genuinely sincere about what they did, they weren't quite what we were looking for. We wanted to highlight the personal experiences of our hosts, and we also wanted hosts who were a bit off kilter, a little quirky, and not quite what you would expect to see on your average, run-of-the-mill, bog-standard, "on every network in the world" ghost show. By the end of the three days in Sherbrooke I had decided to make a change, a decision with which the four hosts happily agreed as they had come to the conclusion that they weren't comfortable with the constraints that a half-hour television show placed on them.

With a tight shooting schedule ahead and set delivery dates for the first episodes only a couple of months away, Dale and I didn't really have time to open up a search for new hosts, so I hit upon what the character Baldrick in the old *Blackadder* television series might have called a "cunning plan" (or what some of my friends would have

¹⁰ Coincidentally, I wound up shooting the film on a sound stage that was located in the de-commissioned naval station that had been at the center of the Shag Harbour UFO story. Or was it synchronicity?

called “Paul’s ego run amuck”) – I would host the series, while continuing to co-write, co-direct and co-produce it with Dale.

Being well aware of my own limitations as an on-screen personality as well as the success of the male-female co-star dynamic that can be seen in shows such as *Moonlighting* and *The X-Files*, I convinced Dale that we should hire my good friend Holly Stevens to be my co-host.¹¹ I knew Holly had an interest in the paranormal, and she also had a degree in biology, which I thought added at least a thin veneer of scientific credibility to our efforts. I had worked with her on *Eternal Kiss* both as an actress (she had a small role) and as part of the production crew, and knew that she was a team player and a hard worker. As an aspiring actress she had the kind of on-screen experience and understanding of how a television series worked that a co-host required. Finally, there was little doubt that she and I had “chemistry” – many people who saw the show thought we were actually a “couple,” which we weren’t. Once you added all of this together, it was clear that she was the perfect choice to be the “beauty” to my “beast” – particularly as she shared my off-the-wall, no-holds-barred sense of humor!

Over the next seven months Holly and I investigated stories of ghosts, demons, and all sorts of other weirdness at thirteen unique locations in eastern Canada and England. I went into the process as an ardent skeptic about “ghosts” and “haunting,” but after what I saw and experienced I came out of it much more open-minded to the possibility that there might be something genuinely “paranormal” to at least some of the stories. That’s what happens when you encounter events for which you can’t come up with a prosaic explanation, no matter how hard you try.

What follows are the most intriguing stories from the adventure that was *Ghost Cases*. Each of them altered my perception of the “paranormal,” and my thoughts on the possible nature of an advanced non-human intelligence and its relationship with us.

¹¹ Holly Stevens, *Holly Stevens*. www.hollystevens.ca.

The Case of the Haunted Graveyard

When I was a kid, maybe ten or eleven, I read a short story in which a young boy and girl wander into an old cemetery at night. They decide to play a game of hide-and-seek and the boy makes the mistake of walking around the church in a counter-clockwise direction as he searches for a hiding place. Because the church had been cursed this caused him to become invisible, as if he had run into a portal and shifted out of phase with the universe or something like that. The only way he could get back to our plane of existence was by walking around the church in a clockwise direction which would reverse the effect. As I recall, the boy eventually figured it out and escaped from the trap, but not before both he and the girl were frightened out of their minds.¹² Little did I know that three decades later I would find myself at a church in England where the truth would prove stranger than childhood fiction.

In order to broaden the international sales appeal of *Ghost Cases* I decided that we would film four episodes outside of Canada. Our first choice was Louisiana, and we had the locations and the trip booked, but we were turned away at the airport by US Customs, apparently because they don't like any competition for the dire ghost shows produced in the United States. Or perhaps they had read my Facebook

¹² The fear of walking counter-clockwise in Anglo-Saxon culture dates back to 16th century Britain, where it was known as widdershins. The *Oxford English Dictionary* entry cites the earliest uses of the word from 1513, where it was found in the phrase “*widdersyns start my hair.*” It was considered unlucky in Britain to travel in an anti-clockwise (anti sun-wise) direction around a church, and a number of folk myths make reference to this superstition. In the fairy tale “*Childe Rowland,*” for example, the protagonist and his sister are transported to Elfland after his sister runs widdershins around a church. There are also references to widdershins in Dorothy Sayers’ novels *The Nine Tailors* and *Clouds of Witness*. See Rosemary Ellen Guiley, *The Encyclopedia of Witches and Witchcraft*, 2nd ed. (New York: Checkmark Books, 1999), 360; James MacKillop, *Dictionary of Celtic Mythology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 378-379; and M. M. Banks, “Widdershins: Irish Tuathbheal, Tuathal,” *Folklore*, Vol. 38, No. 1 (1927): 86 – 88. For “Childe Rowland,” see Colin Bradshaw – Jones, comp., *World Folk Tales, Vol. 1* (Maesteg, Wales: World Folk Tales, 2006), 70 – 77.

postings critical of American foreign policy. They didn't really give us a reason.

Fortunately, I had met a good bloke named Dave Sadler when we were both speakers at a paranormal conference in Altrincham, England, a couple of years before. At the time Dave had made the mistake of telling me that if I ever needed any help from “across the pond” all I had to do was give him a call. With our American trip now a non-starter I definitely needed help, so I rang him up. He was more than happy to work with us, and two months later, largely thanks to his research and connections, we landed in England to film the four foreign episodes.

Dave picked Holly and I up at the airport, drove us back to our hotel in Congleton (a town about a half an hour south of Manchester), and introduced us to his fellow investigators from a group known as the Unknown Phenomena Investigation Association (UPIA).¹³ This somewhat motley but serious-minded crew included Steve Mera, an experienced investigator who would join Dave, Holly and I for all four episodes.

Thus began a week of all around strange happenings, the likes of which Holly and I had not quite run into before.

Our first stop was the White Hart Hotel in Uttoxeter, a location where a number of supposedly paranormal happenings had occurred, including the voice of a small child in the basement and a demon-haunted bedroom.¹⁴ Dave was very skeptical – he thought that the hotel manager might be pulling a fast one in order to make a few bucks by billing the location for haunted tours. However, during our evening at the hotel a room that we had locked off and left a camera running in was found to have a substance that was subsequently confirmed to be blood spattered on a shower curtain. *No-one* had entered the room.

Then the manager took Holly and I down to the basement to conduct a “séance” in an attempt to contact the little girl that people had reported hearing. I thought the exercise was a bit daft so I excused

¹³ *Unknown Phenomena Investigation Association*. www.upia.co.uk.

¹⁴ *The White Hart Hotel*. <http://goo.gl/8iIqL>

myself shortly after we began, but Holly stuck it out. Nothing happened and after about half an hour she and the manager called it quits. Holly, however, had left her tape recorder running, and unbeknownst to any of us at the time it picked up what appeared to be the sound of a little girl crying out “no” just after Holly can be heard saying to the manager that it was time to head back upstairs.¹⁵

Our second location was another old inn, the Lion & Swan in Congleton, where we were also staying for the duration of our time in the area.¹⁶ One of the stories about the Tudor-era location was that a painting stored in the basement was supposedly cursed – if anyone touched it, someone close to that person would die. This story sounded impressive – and more than a bit dangerous – until I actually saw the painting, which was a cheap 60s knock-off of a half-clothed woman.

As Holly, Steve, and Paul Reeves (another member of the UPIA) investigated other areas of the inn, Dave and I set ourselves up in the basement with “Caroline” (the name we gave to the woman in the painting). Not taking things seriously, we mocked the story of the curse, and then I reached over, paused for dramatic effect, and grabbed the painting. After a moment I handed it over to Dave. We had a good laugh and then continued with filming our part of the investigation. Nothing happened in the basement and the entire evening passed uneventfully overall.¹⁷

When I wandered into the inn’s dining room the next morning for breakfast, however, I was surprised to see that Reeves, who had been quite excited about coming with us to the next location, was not present. Dave and Steve, who both looked more than a bit shaken, explained to me that Paul’s father had died suddenly the night before.

¹⁵ The White Hart Hotel investigation can be seen in *Ghost Cases*, “The Case of the Demon-Haunted Inn,” directed by Paul Kimball and Dale Stevens (Toronto: Breakthrough Entertainment, 2009). Television.

¹⁶ *The Lion & Swan*. <http://www.lionandswan.co.uk/>.

¹⁷ The Lion & Swan investigation can be seen in *Ghost Cases*, “The Case of the Cursed Painting,” directed by Paul Kimball and Dale Stevens (Toronto: Breakthrough Entertainment, 2009). Television. Part 1 at: <http://goo.gl/3G8e5>; Part 2 at: <http://goo.gl/mASvE>.

As Steve wandered off to tell Holly, Dave pulled me aside.

“Do you think...” he asked, and then his voice trailed off.

“No,” I answered. “Absolutely not.”

“Yeah,” he said. “Pure coincidence.”

“Right,” I replied.

Despite our dismissal, neither of us seemed completely certain of ourselves as we joined the rest of the team in the dining room.

After we finished breakfast we made our way out into the English countryside to our third location near the small village of Shocklach close to the Welsh border. At the end of a lane which ran off a deserted country road we found St. Edith’s, a small Norman church built in the 12th century, which makes it one of the oldest ecclesiastical buildings in Cheshire.¹⁸ Dave had been to the church dozens of times while Steve was visiting it for the first time.

As we walked around the grounds Dave recounted some of the strange things that he had experienced there over the years. He started with a story that involved a little girl who seemed to move through time by running around the church, which immediately caught my attention.

A friend and I came to the site a few years ago. It was his first time, and he brought his young daughter with him. We wanted to talk about some things away from the prying ears of the child so we walked to the rear of the church. He lit a cigarette, took a drag of it, and asked her to go play. She ran to the opposite side of the church, and then as she went around one corner she automatically appeared around the corner closest to us, straightaway in an instant. I’m probably talking, for an eight year-old child to run that distance, about thirty seconds.

Dave followed up the “time slip” story with one about audio anomalies. He told us about how numerous visitors, including other members of the UPIA on a previous investigation, had heard the sound of horse’s hooves on cobblestone and the neighing of the

¹⁸ See “St. Edith’s Church – History,” *St. Mary’s Tilston and St. Edith’s Shocklach*.
<http://www.tilstonandshocklachchurch.co.uk/index.php/history>.

horses, despite the fact that there are no horses anywhere near the church and certainly no road that would sound like cobblestones. When Holly asked him what he thought might have caused the noises, he offered the following theory:

There's a report from the 1800s of funeral processions coming to the church. At the time, obviously, it wasn't hearses but horse-drawn funeral carriages coming down the road.

After our walkthrough of the site I got the crew ready, set up the lights that we would need later in the evening, and then Holly, Dave, Steve and I began our investigation. As the sun began to set we split up and wandered through different areas of the large cemetery surrounding the church. Within a matter of minutes Steve saw Holly standing next to the church, where she looked out of sorts.

"Clear as anything," she told him when he went over to check on her, "I heard... I heard the horse's hooves."

"You heard the horse's hooves?" he asked.

"I heard the horse's hooves," she repeated. "I thought that was laughable because we had heard so much about them, but it was so clear, and so distinct, and so close."

She was laughing, but it was laughter to cover her nervousness. She looked over at Steve, who was examining the surroundings, and said, "It's very disconcerting to hear something that's not there." All that he could do was nod in agreement.

The sun tucked itself beyond the horizon shortly afterwards, at which point things proceeded to get even weirder. I had parked myself on a bench tucked up against the front of the church where I sat scanning the night sky. There was no-one else anywhere near me. Dale Stevens and the two-man camera crew were at the other end of the grounds filming an interview with Dave, and Holly and Steve were out by the car checking the monitors. And then I saw... well, here's what I had to say ten minutes later after I had excitedly called the crew over.

So here's the crazy thing. I wasn't going to say anything,

because I'm the skeptical member of the team, but I've been talking with Dale and he and I have seen the exact same thing at different times and in different places. Trained as a lawyer, as an historian, what I want is confirmation and now I have it. What Dale described, and what I've seen, I would describe it almost in a science fiction sense as if a door opened and a shape formed. It was totally black and surrounded by the night sky, which was slightly illuminated by the moon and a town off in the distance. As soon as it was there it was gone, maybe two or three seconds afterwards. What makes it really weird is that it appeared exactly over the spot where I was standing two hours ago, filming a segment where I was discussing Holly's experience. The way my mind works, it was like a trans-dimensional door opening or something, full of blackness, as if the sky was totally blacked out.

Dale and I seeing the black void in the sky at different times and in different places set off a rapid-fire succession of anomalous events. First, the batteries in our sound-man's equipment completely ran out of juice despite the fact that he had just put brand new ones in the equipment twenty minutes before. Steve also experienced battery drains on his flashlight; he had to change them four times that night.

Then Steve reported seeing some unusual moving lights behind the church. As he explained it to me later:

I was actually situated in the back of the church, along with an infra-red camera, and I saw this light appear across a tomb. So I went around the corner of the church to look for somebody and I couldn't see anybody there, so when I actually brought it to your attention, trying to rationalize the experience, I thought that maybe somebody further down in the lower graveyard may have been flashing a light around and maybe somehow it had caught a reflection and strayed up to the top end of the church where I was.¹⁹

¹⁹ "Dave Sadler and Steve Mera," *The Paracast*, hosted by Gene Steinberg and Paul Kimball (Making The Impossible, Inc., 2010). Radio. <http://goo.gl/WTgVf>.

We accounted for everyone's whereabouts at the time, and established that none of us could have been responsible for the lights. Despite Steve's initial attempts to rationalize his experience in the same way that I had tried to rationalize the black void he remained genuinely puzzled.

"We couldn't replicate it, so I can only presume that it was something unusual," he concluded.²⁰

It was at this point that I told Holly I had also heard the horse's hooves earlier in the evening in a different part of the cemetery. As with the black void in the sky I think I was going through my own process of trying to rationalize it, and when I realized that I couldn't come up with an explanation I decided to tell her.

"Are you serious?" she asked me with a mixture of anger, relief and curiosity. "Why didn't you tell me?"

I started to explain off-camera, in a sort of stream-of-consciousness way, when I suddenly stopped talking and looked directly at her.

"Did you hear *that*?" we asked each other, at almost the exact same time.

It was the horse's hooves again, and this time we both heard them for five or six seconds.

None of our cameras or audio recorders picked up anything anomalous that night. But those of us who were there all know that we saw and heard things that were genuinely out of the ordinary.

As Holly put it, "What happened to us that night at the church? I still don't know. But we all saw and heard things that we can't explain – it's almost as if the whole night, something was playing with us."²¹

I still haven't been able to come up with an explanation for the events that occurred that night at St. Edith's church, or the previous evenings at the White Hart and the Lion & Swan, but I can tell you one thing – once the weirdness started to happen in Shocklach I made

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ The St. Edith's Church investigation can be seen in *Ghost Cases*, "The Case of the Haunted Graveyard," directed by Paul Kimball and Dale Stevens (Toronto: Breakthrough Entertainment, 2009). Television. Available on-line at: <http://goo.gl/m9xwl>.

sure that every time I walked around the church I went in a clockwise direction.

Just in case.

Sergeant Hutchings, I Presume?

In 1942 a young Royal Air Force sergeant named Tom Hutchings was stationed near St. Andrew's, New Brunswick, a small village near the border with Maine that looks like something straight out of a Stephen King novel. He left a dance one night with a pretty local girl named Bernice Connors who was found murdered the next day. Hutchings was convicted of the crime and hanged. He spent his final days in a small, dark, cold cell in the jail, within earshot of where his executioners constructed the gallows.²²

By all accounts Hutchings was a model prisoner in his final days, passing the time quietly. He made his way to the gallows without a struggle and had nothing to say by way of a final statement.

Unfortunately for him, however, the gallows hadn't been built correctly. Instead of the quick death that he might have been expecting, it took Hutchings eighteen minutes to be pronounced dead. Ever since, people have reported strange occurrences in the jail, and in his cell in particular, which led to speculation by the locals that the gruesome nature of his death had somehow trapped Hutchings' soul in that spot, destined to haunt it for all eternity.

Given the circumstances it seemed to me that his old jail cell would be an obvious spot for an episode of *Ghost Cases*.

As a result, in February, 2009, Holly and I found ourselves in St. Andrew's, sitting in the cell at the jail trying to make contact with Hutchings. Just for good measure, and on the theory of "in for a penny, in for a pound," I came up with the bright idea of trying to antagonize the spirit of Hutchings by bringing along a noose that was on display at the jail as a "trigger" item.

For a laugh, as much to amuse Holly as anything else, I placed the noose around my neck as we were locked in the dark cell by the crew. Holly and I sat next to each other on the remains of Hutchings' old

²² "Murder of Bernice Cecilia Connors (1923 – 1942)," *Pennfield Ridge Air Station*. www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~nbpennfi/penn8b1ConnorsMurder.htm.

bunk, with an EMF meter to Holly's right, and out of my sight, as we waited to see what would happen.

After almost thirty minutes Holly and I hadn't experienced anything other than the winter cold and some pleasant conversation. It was at this point that I decided to turn off the low-level camera light we had set up in one corner of the cramped cell.

I took the noose off my neck and plunged us into almost total darkness, with only the barest, almost imperceptible hint of moonlight coming through the slit of a window in the wall of the cell.

Within minutes, I felt Holly shudder beside me.

"Oh, fuck..." she whispered.

Holly is about as level-headed as they come, and definitely doesn't frighten easily, so for her to utter a profanity out of the blue was an indication of just how shaken she was.

"That's weird," I answered. I turned to Holly and said, "I was sitting here and all of a sudden I felt this cold go around my throat, like colder than the cold, the freezing bitter cold that's in here anyway. I haven't felt that since I was in here, and it went right around my throat."

I thought Holly had felt it too and that's what she had caused her reaction, but she had actually experienced something completely different (which she thought *I* was reacting to). In her case she saw a black shape move in front of her, and felt a "presence." Then she had looked to her right, and noticed that the EMF meter had spiked from zero to a full-on reading of activity.

We were both pretty spooked but we decided to stick it out in the cell a bit longer to see if anything else would happen, although we were no longer quite courageous enough to do so in continued darkness, so I turned our camera light back on. Just a couple of minutes later, it happened again.

Holly looked down at her EMF meter and said, "It's up again... it's up again...it's up....and it's gone." As she had looked away from me to see the EMF meter she hadn't noticed what I had been doing, but the camera definitely picked it up.

I turned to her and said, "I can't see the EMF thing. There will be camera confirmation on that, that just before you said that, look where

my head went, back down, I felt the same...” I couldn’t finish the sentence, because I was so shaken – it had been the same sensation of deathly cold wrapping around my neck.

“Are you serious?” she asked.

“Yup,” I replied, as I recreated the action of my head pushing down into my chest so that my neck would not be exposed, sort of like a turtle. I kept my neck there as I said, “I don’t actually want to expose my neck at the moment.”

Holly was genuinely concerned. “I don’t think I’ve seen you like this before, Paul,” she said.

“Yeah, well I have this thing about strangling and necks and throats and stuff,” I replied. “Maybe in another life I was hanged. The noose was funny, because the noose was no threat, but this – who knows?”

At this point we called out to the camera crew that we wanted out of the cell. They obliged, and we made our way out of the cell block and back to the offices in the building as fast as we could. It wasn’t any warmer there but it sure felt a lot safer.

As we recounted what had happened inside the cell, Elaine Brough, who works as a guide on tours of the jail, told us that what we had experienced was pretty much exactly what other people had reported happening to them when they went into the cell. She hadn’t mentioned this to us before we went in because she wanted to see if we would have the same experience without knowing what to expect.

Holly and I laughed nervously.

“Mission accomplished,” I said, as I gave a final glance back at the cell of Tom Hutchings.²³

The Baby in the Basement

In March, 2009, the *Ghost Cases* crew drove down to the western end of Nova Scotia, to the small community of Quinan, about a half an hour’s drive from the town of Yarmouth. We hung a right off the rural highway that runs through the center of the community and after

²³ The St. Andrew’s jail investigation can be seen in *Ghost Cases*, “The Case of the Haunted Jail,” directed by Paul Kimball and Dale Stevens (Toronto: Breakthrough Entertainment, 2009). Television. An excerpt is available at: <http://goo.gl/278Z3>.

a few miles we came to a small, isolated farmhouse that's been owned by a woman named Darlene for thirty-three years. Unexplained occurrences had been happening for decades, but when Darlene's daughter Shelley moved in with her in September, 2008, they became even more intense and frequent. The strangeness manifested itself throughout the house and surrounding property, but three areas in particular seemed to be the most active.

The first was the basement, where Shelley and Darlene described being pushed by an unseen force as they walked down the stairs and experiencing intense cold once they were in the room itself. The second area was Darlene's spare room on the second floor. She claimed that she would hear footsteps on the stairs leading to the room and that when she entered it she felt a malevolent presence. Finally there was the field behind the house. Both Darlene and Shelley described the sensation of someone watching them when they were out there, and Shelley told us that, "Whatever it is, I won't come out here at night. I won't stay out here. I don't want to be out here. It's not nice."

No matter how many technological bells and whistles you employ when you're investigating an allegedly haunted location, from digital video recorders to thermal cameras, in the end I really believe that it all comes down to whether or not you have a personal experience because that's what we're all really looking for. Sometimes, however, that personal experience turns out to be more than you bargained for, and at Darlene's farm that's exactly what happened to me.

On the surface the investigation began in the same way that it always did – Holly and I arrived with the camera crew, met with the owner of the location, got the back-story on what was supposedly going on, and then set up our gear and prepared to film. But at this particular location something was a bit different from the beginning, and both Holly and I sensed it.

For one thing, the owners were genuinely afraid, which was something we hadn't really encountered on previous investigations. As Darlene described the basement to us she was visibly shaking.

"The basement is pure scary," she said. "You get the feeling when you walk into my cellar that somebody is there to grab you. Not only

the feeling of coldness but just pure fear. Something's down there and it's gonna get me." When you see that kind of fear in someone else's eyes it can definitely have an effect on you as well.

There was definitely a real sense of isolation at the farm. The house is literally at the end of the road, out in the middle of nowhere, like something out of one of those horror films where people take a wrong turn and head down the one road to the one house that no-one should ever visit.

It's one thing to investigate a building like a hotel, where there are other people just a minute or two away, but it's something altogether different to spend a night in a supposedly haunted house miles away from anyone who might be able to help if you get in trouble. That plays on the mind, particularly when the owners of the property describe whatever it is that's going on as "evil."

As Shelley said, "I get the feeling that something wants to get me, to harm me and mine and I don't know how to protect me or others from it."

Presumably whatever wanted to do them harm would be just as eager to have a go at Holly and I.

Given that the basement was a key nexus of reported paranormal activity, I decided that I would spend time down there alone while Holly and psychic Kelly Muise were upstairs in the kitchen conducting a sort of séance to try and contact whatever spirits were in the house.

While I've never ruled out the possibility that some psychic phenomena might be real, I had never been a proponent of using a psychic in one of our investigations. However, Dale prevailed on me to make an exception at a couple of locations because he thought it would make for good television, so in order to be a team player I acquiesced.²⁴ The results wound up challenging all of my preconceived notions about both psychics and ghosts.

As I sat on the stairs in the frigid cold basement with the door tightly wedged shut behind me, I could hear the proceedings upstairs

²⁴ I should note that I was never comfortable using the psychic in the show, so in the four episodes in which she eventually appeared I managed to make sure that Holly was always her on-screen partner.

in the kitchen through the floorboards. No matter what I thought of using psychics, I was struck by the fact that at least it was a shared experience between Kelly and Holly (and our camera crew), while I was stuck in the basement alone. That definitely ratcheted up the creepy factor. I couldn't help but think that if there *was* a malevolent presence in the house it would probably go for me first, as opposed to the group upstairs, because that's what I figured I would do if I was a ghost with bad intentions. As a result I felt like a lone wildebeest, cut off from the herd by a group of hungry lions.

About thirty minutes after I began my watch in the basement, surrounded by dead spiders and cobwebs, I heard Kelly and Holly start to talk about a "murdered baby" in the basement. They were both encouraging the spirit in the house to make contact with me and show me where the baby was buried. This was a development I wasn't exactly in favor of – indeed, the digital video camera which I had set up to record whatever happened caught me talking to myself, saying repeatedly, "I don't want to meet the baby," and "don't come show me where the baby is."

And then *it* happened. Just after another exhortation from Kelly and Holly for the ghost to pop by and pay me a visit, the door opened behind me.

As a skeptic my immediate reaction was that it had been the wind, but I could hear when the wind was blowing – as it had been earlier (without moving the door, I should add) – and it hadn't been blowing this time. It was as still as the grave outside.

Adding to the mystery was the fact that the door didn't open easily as it wasn't a perfect fit for the frame and got caught along the ground as it opened. Not the kind of door, in other words, that was likely to be pushed open by a simple breeze.

I immediately went outside to investigate. My first thought was that one of our crewmembers was playing a practical joke on me, but there was nobody out there. No wind, no people, just the still of the night, and Darlene's dog, a rather disinterested German shepherd that was lying next to its house at least thirty feet away from the basement.

That was it for me. I was genuinely scared and had no intention of going back down into the basement. Despite the fact that it was well

below freezing outside, I didn't want to interrupt the filming upstairs (scared or not, I'm a consummate professional when it comes to filmmaking), so I waited near the back door for another forty minutes until Kelly and Holly had finished their séance before I went inside. I told everyone what had happened, and I'm not sure they believed me, at least until we went downstairs, retrieved the camera, and played the tape. Sure enough, there was the door opening behind me at the same time as Kelly and Holly had been exhorting the spirit to go to me in the basement. We were all a bit shaken, and I could see Darlene and Shelley nodding their heads as if to say, "We told you so."

Stranger still is the fact that when we reviewed the data from the audio recorder that I had with me in the basement, we heard what sounded like a baby crying at the same time as the séance was going on and the door opened!

The next day we all headed out into the freezing cold towards the back field, where the house had originally stood, to conduct what Kelly called a "spiritual cleansing."

Normally I would have been in a joking mood because I'm very dubious about things like this, but given what had happened the night before I kept my mouth shut and simply observed the proceedings.

Perhaps it was by chance, but as Kelly was spreading what she described as "holy water" over the area some of it landed on me. I still wasn't sure if I had encountered an evil spirit in the basement the night before, but I have to admit it crossed my mind that maybe a little holy water wasn't a bad thing, just to be on the safe side.²⁵

It would be easy to chalk this all up to coincidence. After all, that's the simplest explanation, and as a result probably the most comfortable one for people to wrap their minds around. The problem with simple explanations, however, is that they're not always the *best* explanations.

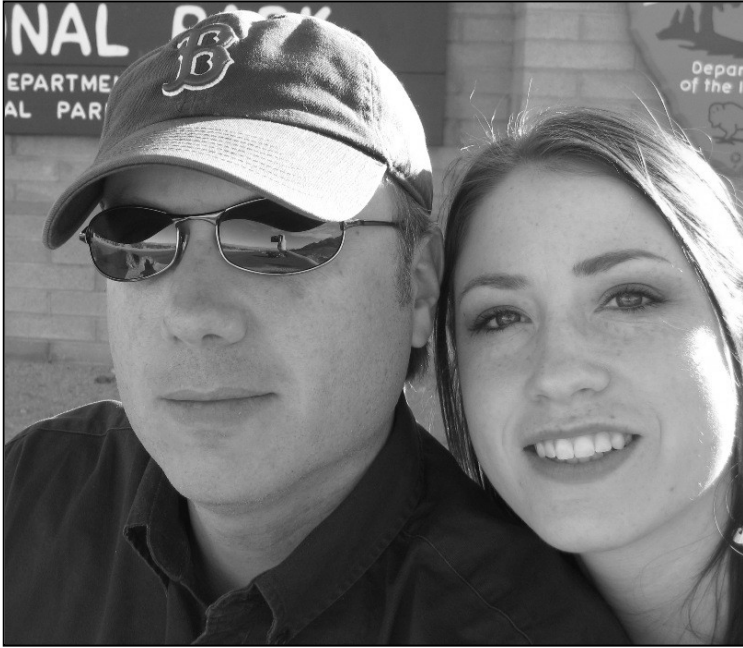
With the farm in Quinan and the baby in the basement, as well as the other cases I've discussed here, from the graveyard in Shocklach

²⁵ The Quinan farmhouse investigation can be seen in *Ghost Cases*, "The Case of the Baby in the Basement," directed by Paul Kimball and Dale Stevens (Toronto: Breakthrough Entertainment, 2009). Television. Available on-line at: <http://goo.gl/lz4QA>.

to the jail cell in St. Andrew's, and all points in between, I can't help but think that I encountered something extraordinary that challenges everything I thought I knew. But that's what great art does – it upsets our pre-conceived notions of both the world around us and ourselves, and forces us to look at everything in a different light.

Which is *exactly* why I seek out these experiences in the first place.

Little did I realize as we finished filming the last episode of *Ghost Cases* in England in May of 2009, that things were soon to get even stranger. What had been an impressionistic experience in confronting my fears up until that point was about to turn the corner into surrealistic abstraction.



Holly Stevens and I in California, November 2008.



Yours truly at the Quinan farmhouse, 2009.



Holly in the field at Quinan. Behind her is psychic Kelly Muise.



The old Charlotte County jail, St. Andrew's, NB, 2009. The cell where Tom Hutchings spent his final days is at the end of the hall on the left.



St. Edith's church, Shocklach, 2009. I was sitting on the bench underneath the window when I saw the black void in the sky.



The White Hart Hotel, Uttoxeter, 2009.



The Lion & Swan, Congleton, 2009.



Yours truly directing *Ghost Cases*, with cameraman Aaron Gowlett, at Shocklach, 2009.



Holly Stevens, yours truly, and Dave Sadler, near Congleton, 2009.

The Shadows of Český Krumlov

*Find beauty not only in the thing itself but in the pattern of the shadows, the light and dark which that thing provides.*¹

– Junichiro Tanizaki

One of the fringe benefits of shooting a television series on the road is that you can always build a vacation into the process, which is exactly what Holly and I did in late May and early June of 2009 once we had finished filming the four episodes of *Ghost Cases* in the United Kingdom. After all, we were already there, which meant that we didn't have to pay for the airfare from Canada to Europe, so we took advantage of the situation. In many ways it had been a stressful eight months since we had begun production on *Ghost Cases*, much of it a carry-over from the *Eternal Kiss* shoot, so Holly and I were definitely looking forward to some time to decompress.

After we bid adieu to our good friends Dave Sadler and Steve Mera in Manchester we made our way south via London to the small village of Gillingham in Dorset, where we spent a couple of days with my old friend and colleague Will Fraser, who had hosted *The Classical Now* a few years back.² With Will as our gracious host and tour guide we visited the ancient sites of Stonehenge, Woodhenge, and Avebury, as well as Salisbury, where we all climbed to the top of the Cathedral (and I also got to see the grave of former British Prime Minister Edward Heath, which I'm pretty sure I found more interesting than either Will or Holly did). I remember at one point, as we wandered about the Cathedral, that Holly made a joke about how we were still

¹ Junichiro Tanizaki, *In Praise of Shadows*, trans. Thomas J. Harper and Edward G. Seidensticker (Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle, 1988), 30.

² Will Fraser, "Bio," *Fugue State Films*. www.fuguestatefilms.co.uk/bios.html.

spending most of our time with dead people. We both had a good laugh.

After our stay in Gillingham Holly and I headed back to London where we saw five musicals in four nights (for those keeping score, the musicals were: *Wicked*, *Phantom of the Opera*, *The Lion King*, *Les Miserables*, and, on the spur of the moment, the final performance of *Joseph and His Amazing Technicolour Dreamcoat* at the Apollo Theatre, which blew the lid off the joint). We toured Buckingham Palace, Trafalgar Square, Baker Street, the British Museum, The Tower of London, and the Imperial War Museum, and also attended the lecture at the RSA by Michio Kaku that I discussed earlier.

From London it was off to Scotland, where I had studied in 1987 and 1988 whilst an undergraduate student. Back then I spent almost all of my time in the eastern part of the country at the University of Dundee and the surrounding region, so this time I decided to see what the western side had to offer. We flew into Glasgow, rented a car, and made our way up through Loch Lomond and Crianlarich to the Highlands, where we walked amongst the Three Sisters and Glen Coe, and then caught a ferry from Oban to the mystical Isle of Mull.

Three days on Mull based in Tobermory provided for some great whisky, a couple of castles, some ancient standing stones in Lochbuie and castle ruins at Aros, hill-walking galore, and a day on the Isle of Iona, which is one of those places that everyone should try to visit before they shuffle off this mortal coil.³ I also made sure to visit every cemetery and burial ground that I could find because I've always been drawn to the history that one can discover there, and the connection you can make with the past. Luckily I had a great traveling companion who felt the same way, or was at least willing to indulge what many other people might consider my ghoulish interest in the final resting places of the dearly departed.

Our trip back from Mull took us through Inverary, which was beautiful. We then spent two days and nights in Glasgow where we wandered the streets, poked about more old churches and cemeteries,

³ See *Isle of Iona Visitor's Guide*. www.isle-of-iona.net/.

drank some great beer, and unfortunately went to see *Terminator: Salvation*, a truly dire film. Still, that evening had a memorable moment. Before we went into our theatre in the multi-level cinema complex we popped by the bar for a beer. As we sat there chatting I noticed that there was a small black spot on my leg (I was wearing walking shorts). I took a closer look and discovered a heretofore unnoticed tick that I had picked up whilst hill-walking the day before. It was the second one on the trip; before we left Mull, the very nice lady who ran the bed & breakfast in which we stayed had removed another one that was... well, let me just say that it was too close for comfort for any man!

Having observed our host's technique for safe tick removal in Mull Holly said she would help me out. I figured it could wait until we got back to the hotel after the movie so we went in and found a couple of good seats. After five minutes of sitting in the theatre, however, I couldn't stop thinking about the bloodsucking little devil, so I asked Holly if we could get rid of it before the film started. We went out to the lobby where we quickly realized that we would have to use the child changing room given that she couldn't go into the male washroom and I couldn't go into the female washroom (a lesson I once learned the hard way after a night of hard drinking in San Juan, Puerto Rico).

We waited until the coast was clear and then snuck into the room and locked the door. I can only imagine what the people who were walking by must have thought when they heard the following rather animated conversation coming from inside.

"Do you see it?"

"It's so small"

"I can see it from *here*, and you're kneeling right next to it – how do you *not* see it?"

"Okay, there it is. I've got it... I'll just give it a twist."

"Be careful!!

"Does that hurt?"

"Ow!!!"

When we eventually exited the changing room there was a small crowd gathered in the hallway, evenly split between those patrons

who thought we were horrible people engaged in some sort of carnal escapade and those who thought we were really cool people engaged in some sort of carnal escapade. I admit that I did nothing to disabuse them of their notions as we went back into the theatre. For those who were unfortunate enough to join us for *Terminator: Salvation*, at least we had provided some entertainment.

As our time in the United Kingdom drew to a close we flew down to London and stayed overnight at Heathrow before our flight early the next morning for the final destination on our grand adventure, the Czech Republic. Neither Holly nor I had ever been on the continent of Europe before, so we had debated where we would spend our last week on vacation. Romania was a contender because we both thought hiking through the mountains around Cluj and checking out the land of Dracula would be great fun. Greece was also a place we considered, for more leisure-oriented reasons, as was Italy, but we eventually settled on Prague, which came highly recommended by a number of our friends back home who had been there.

I'm sure Romania, Italy and Greece would have been wonderful (and I plan to visit all three someday), but we made a good call with the Czech Republic, where we had an amazing time. We spent the first five days in Prague, walking around the city for hours each day. Part of the charm and romance of Prague is getting lost on a walkabout, and we certainly managed to "misplace" our bearings on more than one occasion. One local I chatted up while asking for directions congratulated me on being so far from where I thought I was and then told me that if you didn't get lost in Prague you hadn't really been there, which I thought was pretty zen.

We popped into myriad shops and cafes and restaurants, and toured the magnificent Prague castle, where the Kings of Bohemia, the Holy Roman Emperors, and the presidents of Czechoslovakia and the Czech Republic all held "court". We also attended enthralling performances at the State Opera (Prokofiev's ballet *Cinderella*) and the National Theatre (Dvorak's *Rusalka*, which I mentioned earlier), and I managed to catch a little black light theatre while Holly was doing some shopping for her mother.

While we were based in Prague, we also wanted to see some of the rest of the Czech Republic, so we took two day-trips outside of the city. The first sojourn was to Terezin because I wanted to visit the former concentration camp. It was a very moving place, and both Holly and I came away with a different perspective on our world after spending the day there. We also continued our habit of poking about in places where we weren't supposed to go when we opened a door and walked into a series of dark tunnels which ran underneath the fortress. Eventually we made our way out to what had once been the grounds on which prisoners were executed by firing squad. Only when we looked behind us did we notice the sign indicating that the tunnels were off limits, presumably for safety reasons.⁴

For the second day trip we hopped a train to Kutná Hora, where we immediately made our way to the famous Sedlec ossuary, which contains the skeletons of between 40,000 and 70,000 people (a wide margin of error, but at some point when you're piling up skeletons I imagine you lose count). It was definitely a creepy place, with skulls and bones placed everywhere. As we walked out I once again thought to myself that for two people who were trying to decompress from several months of ghost investigating we were certainly spending a lot of our time in places where you would expect a few ghosts might be lingering.

We had some wonderful goulash for lunch and then took a tour of an old mine that was so dark and confined I was sure I was going to get stuck underground (having had a double portion of the goulash probably didn't help as I tried to navigate the tightest spots). I don't like dark, confined spaces, so it was definitely a "confront your fears" moment. Finally, we visited Saint Barbara's Church, one of the most famous Gothic churches in central Europe and a UNESCO world heritage site. Somewhere along the way Holly managed to get us lost. As with our rambles in Prague, however, her error in Kutná Hora led to something we wouldn't have otherwise seen – a beautiful field of tulips on the other side of town, far from the regular walking routes

⁴ For more information on Terezin, see Ludmila Chládková and Miroslava Langhamerová, *Terezin and Litoměřice: Places of Suffering and Braveness*, trans. Petr Kurfürst (Prague: Jitka Kejrova, 2003).

taken by tourists.⁵

Holly and I decided to spend the final two days of our trip in Český Krumlov, a small city in the South Bohemian Region of the Czech Republic best known for the fine architecture and art of its historic old town and the State Castle of Český Krumlov, second only to the castle at Prague itself in size and splendor.⁶

I love riding trains so I convinced Holly that we should take the four hour train ride to Český Krumlov instead of what would have been a somewhat shorter trip by bus. It was a bad decision. The train was old, which was great, but it was musty, which aggravated my hay fever. Opening the window made it even worse as it was the beginning of June and pollen was everywhere. I spent four hours with watery eyes, a runny nose, and more than one roll of toilet paper next to me by way of tissue paper. To her credit, Holly never once said, “I told you so.” Of course, she spent most of the time sleeping, which is probably what I would have done if I had been her sitting across from a de facto Snuffleupagus.

I had booked us a double room at the Pension Ve Vezi, an inn shaped like a small wizard’s tower about a ten minute walk from the castle and another five minutes from the old town.⁷ Unfortunately, when we got there things went from bad to worse. The new owner of the inn, who had taken over after I made the reservation two months earlier, had placed us in a room with only one bed, and all of the other rooms were occupied. He apologized profusely for the error and assured us that he would switch us to the room with two beds that we had reserved the next evening, but this still left us in a bit of a quandary.

We could have moved to another inn, but it was late in the afternoon, we had just arrived in town, I was still suffering from hay fever, and we really liked the Pension Ve Vezi. After all, who

⁵ For more information on Kutna Hora, see “Kutna Hora Regional Information Service.” <http://www.kh.cz/?l=en>.

⁶ “State Castle of Český Krumlov,” *mesto Český Krumlov*. <http://goo.gl/KrnH1>.

⁷ “Pension Ve Vezi,” *Krumlov Hotels*. www.krumlovhotels.cz/ve-vezi_e.php.

wouldn't want to spend a couple of nights in a wizard's castle? We told him that the arrangements would be fine, and he reimbursed the cost of the difference in rooms and gave me a break on the total price by way of apology, which was a nice gesture that I appreciated.

Holly and I made our way up the winding staircase to our room. It was quite cozy, and would have been great for a couple, but we were *not* a couple, so someone was going to have to sleep on the hard floor. Holly offered to do so, but I am nothing if not a gentleman, so I insisted that she take the bed. With a smile on my face I assured her that as a *Star Trek* fan I fancied the idea of sleeping on a good, solid floor, just like a Klingon warrior would. I'm pretty sure that she didn't believe me, which might have had something to do with the way I kept looking down at the floor and wincing, but I was insistent and she eventually agreed.

As it had been hours since we had eaten we decided to take a walk through our section of town, past the castle, across the bridge that spans the Vltava River, and into the old town square, which was ringed with hotels and restaurants. Despite our grumbling stomachs we couldn't help but meander because there was so much to see. There were cubby-holes, narrow lanes, and winding side-streets that made Prague look like wide-open Los Angeles by comparison, and we were drawn down more than a couple of alleyways by the sight of an interesting looking shop or building.

As we walked along, I turned to Holly and said, "Now *this* is a place where we should have come to look for ghosts."

She nodded, and then replied, "Maybe we'll see some while we're here."

I just shook my head, smiled and said, "I certainly hope not. I'm retired from ghost hunting." Before she could answer, I began to imitate Dave Sadler in a most exaggerated manner, and she broke out into laughter.

We eventually made our way to Lazebnický bridge where we got a great look at the castle, which was perched precariously on top of a rocky outcropping like something out of a fairy tale. The bridge itself is fairly short, with statues of various religious figures on the sides, including a very impressive one of Jesus framed with the castle as a

backdrop.

We found a nice restaurant in the town square and plunked ourselves down on the patio. A very friendly waitress came by and immediately made us feel at home. She recommended the goulash, which was fine by me. Holly and I each ordered what turned out to be really good Czech beer and settled in for a couple of hours of great food, people-watching, and conversation, during which we conducted a spirited recap of our zany adventures.

One of the subjects that came up was the question of whether she and I might be carrying any “negative energy” (for lack of a better term) from our ghost investigating. Perhaps even more ominous, we considered the possibility that by opening the door as we did time and again to “contact,” maybe we had allowed something unwanted to come in and attach itself to us, something about which we had been warned by more than a few people we had met over the preceding months.

Holly had discussed this subject at our blog a few months previously when she wrote:

There's always a risk you'll get burned when playing with fire, and the idea of a spiritual realm is definitely a metaphorical fire, if not a literal one. Paul and I have joked from the beginning about having to travel to Peru at the end of the series to be "cleansed," but perhaps there is more truth there than I initially realized. I've never doubted the significance the unknown can play on a person's physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being, and with that knowledge, I have entered the world of "ghost hunting" with my eyes wide open, so to speak. However, being aware of the unknown doesn't make one any better equipped to deal with it. With the number of completed episodes mounting, and unexplained experiences increasing, I've recently redirected my research back to this idea of "aura cleansing." Just in

case.⁸

As the conversation continued I casually mentioned to Holly that I knew a priest back in Canada who was an expert on exorcisms, and that perhaps he could save us the price of a trip to Peru, or some of the other destinations we had considered for some sort of shamanistic retreat. She thought it would be a good idea, although she still wanted to test the transformative powers of ayahuasca.

“If it helps break down the walls we erect and allows our own minds to battle the demons we all have within us,” she said to me, “then paranormal or no, I’m all for it.” I agreed, even as I wondered whether some cheap Czech absinthe might do the trick just as well. Still, a trip is a trip, and all doors open to the same pathway of elevated consciousness, which is something I either heard Jim Morrison say once or read on the wall of a dingy bathroom in an even dingier bar in northern Alberta. But I digress...

As I chatted with Holly I thought about relating an anecdote from *Three Men Seeking Monsters*, by my good friend Nick Redfern. In chapter nine, the Bard of Birmingham recounted a meeting he had with an alleged witch named Sarah Graymalkin. “You don’t realize that while you are looking for these things,” she told him, “believing in them and telling others about them who also become emotionally charged believers, they are manipulating you and your followers as a food source.”⁹ In the end, I decided to keep that tidbit of information to myself, particularly as our own “food sources” has just arrived.

Speaking of Nick, he and I had discussed the question of being “stalked” over margaritas in San Juan, Puerto Rico, in 2005. We were there investigating the legend of the chupacabra for my documentary *Fields of Fear*, and had just spent the day interviewing a number of people in rural areas who claimed to have seen the alleged vampire-like creature. One in particular stood out for me because he was

⁸ Holly Stevens, “Ayahuasca - Paranormal Investigator's Ghost Buster?” *Paul Kimball & Holly Stevens*, 10 February 2009. <http://goo.gl/OgZIE>.

⁹ Nick Redfern, *Three Men Seeking Monsters: Six Weeks in Pursuit of Werewolves, Lake Monsters, Giant Cats, Ghostly Devil Dogs, and Ape-Men* (New York: Paraview Pocket Books, 2004), 113.

convinced that the chupacabra was actually a demon from hell sent to torment him. I remember asking Nick as we sat on the hotel patio next to the Caribbean Sea whether he ever got worried about the forces that we might be dealing with.

Nick thought about it for a moment, then smiled and shook his head. “Bring ‘em on,” he said defiantly.

I wasn’t quite sure whether he meant the forces of evil, or another drink, as he had just finished his margarita.¹⁰

The interesting thing about the chupacabra, as I look back on our adventures in Puerto Rico, is that it easily fits within the “performance art” interpretation of the paranormal. I think the vast majority of sightings of the alleged creature have simple prosaic explanations, but there were some cases recounted to us that were far more bizarre than just a few chickens being attacked in a cage by what was surely a wild dog. For example, a man named Pucho and his family told us about seeing a strange, shadow-like creature that resembled a huge bird. His account was not all that dissimilar to what I experienced at St. Edith’s church in Shocklach, and the link is made even more interesting by the fact that Pucho’s sighting occurred next to a small rural church (The Church of the Three Kings). Pucho ascribed it to the chupacabra because that was the meme his culture had created as a sort of “one size fits all” explanation for weird happenings, whereas with my interest in science fiction my first thought had been some sort of Star Trek-like trans-dimensional void. But what we both described was more or less the same thing.¹¹

With this on my mind Holly and I finished our dinner and then meandered through the streets of Český Krumlov for about an hour, during which time I noticed a toy store that intrigued me because all of the toys were made locally and by hand. I filed a mental note to stop by the next day and see if there was anything there that would make a good gift for friends or family back home, particularly my

¹⁰ Nick recounts our adventures in Puerto Rico in *Memoirs of a Monster Hunter: A Five Year Journey in Search of the Unknown* (Franklin Lakes, NJ: New Page Books, 2007), 207 – 231.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 226.

niece and three nephews.

By the time Holly and I made it back to the wizard's castle it was about 10:30 pm. We chatted for a little while as I tested the floor, which I discovered was every bit as hard as it looked. Holly gave me all but one of her blankets, which provided at least a bit of separation and cushion from the floor, although it was a far cry from the comfortable beds that I had gotten used to on the trip. Around 11:20 pm we turned out the lights, intent on getting an early start on our sight-seeing the following day.

Within a couple of minutes I realized two things. First, the less time I spent lying on the floor the better, because I'm definitely more Ferengi than Klingon. Second, my hay fever was still acting up, which added insult to injury (I think it was probably the dust on the floor). After a few minutes of trying to get comfortable, and not sniffle every five seconds, I gave up. I turned on one of the lights and told Holly that I needed to go for a walk to clear my sinuses. She asked me if I wanted her to come along but I said that I would be okay. After all, how much trouble could I get in on a weeknight in a beautiful and peaceful town like Český Krumlov?

I wandered out into the night and stood in the small garden next to the inn. I let the cool breeze waft over me for a few moments which definitely helped clear up the sinuses. The area was completely deserted as I started to stroll down Pivovarská. I had my MP3 player with me and I was listening to some Radiohead as I passed several buildings on my left and trees on my right. After a few minutes I reached Latrán, the street which cut through the center of the town. I hung a left and headed towards Lazebnický bridge across the Vltava River and the town square on the other side.

Despite not being very late, at least by my reckoning, there wasn't another person out and about, which I guess wasn't surprising given the fact that it was a Monday evening in early June, before the real height of tourist season hits the town. A few lines from an old song I had written years before but never recorded suddenly came to me as I took in my surroundings:

The streets are quiet in this old town
the bars are closed and the girls have gone home,

The streetlights shine, from end to end,
and I wonder about the message that they send...

As I ambled along, stopping to look into shop windows or down darkened alleyways, I played a little game that I often engage in whilst on a walkabout where I sort of experiment with time travel, at least as a concept. I look at a place further along on my route and take a moment to imagine myself standing there. I continue on until I reach that point, and then look back at where I was and remember myself from that time. Sometimes it almost seems like I can see myself in the future, and then in the past.

By the time I reached the Lazebnický bridge I had worked myself into a routine of picking the two points and then walking between them, almost like I was attaching pitons one by one as I climbed a mountain. I imagined myself at the end of the bridge, attached my mental piton, and then started across. When I got to the other side I leaned against the railing, looked back across the Vltava to where I had been standing just moments before, and pondered where and how we all fit into the grand scheme of things.

The lyrics from another old song of mine intruded on my thoughts again:

Sly scissors separate the threads,
look to see if the time, it does fit,
as it slips through the needle.
Stare softly at this sudden leap of faith,
catch the wind and fly away,
no destination, just a landing.¹²

My gaze wandered down to the river. I picked up two small stones and tossed one into the water below. As I watched the ripples move out from the point of impact I thought to myself that in many ways the interaction between the stone and the water served as a metaphor for our lives. I threw the other stone into the river at a spot a couple of

¹² Paul Kimball, "Horseshoe Heart," Perf. Tall Poppies, *Tall Poppies - All Points in Between* (2012). <http://youtu.be/6WCF3TC-eo>.

feet to the right of the first one and watched as the ripples from its impact eventually met up with the ripples from the first stone. Then I continued on to the town square, having indulged myself in enough philosophy 101 for one evening.

When I got there everything was closed and there still wasn't another person to be seen. I sat down on one of the benches scattered about the square and enjoyed the solitude, the location, and the crisp night air, which was invigorating. I spent ten minutes looking around at the various buildings and imagining the people who might have lived in them over the centuries. From time to time I glanced up at the sky to see if I could pick out a satellite or a stray meteor.

Then, as I was looking down the street towards Lazebnický bridge, I realized that I was not completely alone after all. I turned my head and saw what appeared to be a man walking slowly across the square at about roughly the same pace I had been moving at earlier. He was perhaps twenty meters in front of me. Although the square was lit to a degree, the level of illumination was insufficient for me to get a good bead on him, particularly as he wasn't looking in my direction. I didn't really think much more about it as he reached the center of the square, and I turned my head in a different direction. A second or two later, however, I felt obliged to have another look at the man – when you're in a foreign country, alone in a strange town at night (no matter how peaceful it might seem), it pays to be careful. When I looked back to where the man had been walking, however, he was gone.

I surveyed the entire square but there was no sign of him. What made it strange to me was that he had been walking at a slow and deliberate pace, and he was nowhere near the edges of the square or any of the various hotel doors when I looked away for just a second or two. I hadn't heard anything that would have indicated he had suddenly run to a door and opened and closed it, even if he could have made it in time.

Maybe, I thought to myself, I had looked back towards the bridge for five or six seconds instead of just one or two, but I immediately ruled that out. I remember shaking my head and saying aloud to myself, "I know the difference between a quick glance over my

shoulder, and a shift that lasts several seconds longer.” Eventually I just shrugged and figured that it was time to head back to the inn for some shuteye because I was obviously starting to see things.

I stood up and gave the area a final, curious look. I thought back to Dave Sadler’s story of the young girl and the “time slip” at St. Edith’s church in Shocklach, and wondered whether something similar had just happened to me. Then I laughed, and asked myself what I would have said if someone had told me, just a year before, that I would be standing in the town square of Český Krumlov talking to myself about shadowy figures and time slips. I know that I probably would have dismissed the idea as ludicrous.

As I made my way down the street towards Lazebnický bridge I decided to stop and have a look in the toy store I had noticed earlier in the day. I leaned up close to the window and surveyed the display. There were wooden cars with little mice driving them which I thought were cute and would make a perfect tongue-in-cheek gift for Linda, who has a pronounced phobia about mice.¹³ As I moved closer to see if I could make out a price tag I once again saw something out of the corner of my eye. I lifted my gaze up from the wooden mouse, and over my shoulder I could clearly see the reflection of a shadowy figure in the shop window.

I immediately clenched both fists, stepped to my left, and turned around – not because I expected to meet someone from the Men in Black, or a demon, or anything like that, but because I thought I might be about to get mugged. Somewhere in my mind, as I turned to face whoever was standing behind me, I was kicking myself for having forgotten my standard operating procedure for walkabouts. I’ve spent years living in Halifax and taking long walks every night, and the one thing that I’ve learned is that the best way to stay safe is to stay focused on your surroundings. The five months I spent as an RCMP special constable in the wilds of northern Cape Breton in the summer of 1990 also taught me that you react defensively to an unknown

¹³ Her version of Hell would probably involve spending eternity in a room full of mice and ouija boards.

situation first and worry about whether or not someone gets offended afterwards.

In one sense I need not have worried, because as I stared out into the street I found that I was still alone. But while the lack of a mugger was a relief, the situation I now faced created an entirely different set of concerns for me. I had definitely seen the reflection of someone in the window, only to turn around and find that there was no-one there who could have made that image.

For the first time I felt a very palpable sense of unease, mixed with a tinge of fear. The disappearing man in the town square had been one thing because he hadn't been right next to me, so it wasn't really a threatening situation. But a figure appearing in a window over my shoulder when there was no-one there was something else altogether.

As I left the toy store I quickened my pace a bit. I reached the bridge, and started to walk across. At about the half-way point, next to the statue of Jesus, I heard footsteps behind me. The sound was as clear as the horse's hooves had been in the cemetery at St. Edith's a month before. I came to a stop, and could feel my jaw locking, which is something I do when I'm nervous. Trying to play it as cool as I could under the circumstances, I turned around slowly.

The footsteps stopped. There was no-one else on the bridge.

And then I felt it.

A force on my shoulder, like a hand. Not hard like a blow being struck, but the kind of feeling I imagine you would get when a police officer walks up behind you and places a firm hand on your arm.

I pivoted at the same time as I took a step forward, away from whatever was behind me. I'm not a fighter, but I learned a couple things during my stint in the RCMP.

One again there was no-one there.

I didn't run, although somewhere deep in my soul I wanted to take off as fast as Dandelion, a particularly speedy rabbit character from my favorite novel, *Watership Down*.¹⁴ But after eight months of myriad strange experiences my curiosity had come to equal my fear, at least to the point where I maintained a semblance of dignity as I got off the bridge.

¹⁴ Richard Adams, *Watership Down* (London: Rex Collings, 1972).

With a brisk pace, and more than a few nervous glances over my shoulder, I walked up Latrán, hung a right on Pivovarská, and made my way back to our inn. By the time I got there I had calmed down a bit, although when I pulled the key for the front door out of my pocket I dropped it on the ground. My hand wasn't shaking, but it wasn't perfectly steady either.

When I got back to the room Holly was asleep. Normally I would have washed up and changed before going to bed, but I just closed the door and lay down on the floor. I didn't care about how uncomfortable it was – I was just happy to be back inside with someone else in the room.

I thought about waking Holly and telling her about what had happened but I decided against it. I wish I could say that I let her sleep because it had been a long day, and as a gentleman I figured at least one of us deserved a good night's rest. The real reason, however, was that I didn't want to tell anyone about what I was already starting to think of as the "shadow man." As was the case at St. Edith's church in Shocklach, my natural inclination is to keep an experience like this to myself lest I seem like a fool to others.

I pulled out my MP3 player, turned it on, and put the headphones into my ears. I cycled through the music until I found Radiohead. I scrolled down through the songs and finally came to the one I wanted: "Where I End and You Begin". I hit play and leaned back to listen as Thom Yorke sang:

There's a gap in between
There's a gap where we meet
Where I end and you begin...
X will mark the place
Like the parting of the waves
Like a house falling in the sea
In the sea
I will eat you alive

There will be no more lies...¹⁵

As I lay there on the floor I noticed a narrow ray of light coming into the room from the small window. After a moment, I held my hands out in front of me and started to form shadow figures on the wall, as I thought back to a song lyric of my own from 1993:

A troubled shroud it calls out loud
amidst the music and the singing,
it is ignored
by the guilty ones,
condescend to turn around
deduce the nature of this conversation,
try to remember
what you once were...¹⁶

We're all guilty of something, I thought, as I closed my eyes and tried to get some sleep. Maybe what we see on the outside is a reflection of what we have on the inside. In its own way, that notion was as disturbing to me as the possibility that I had actually encountered some sort of supernatural being.¹⁷

When we got up the next morning I had a sore back to go along with more questions than answers about my strange experience the night before, but I didn't mention either to Holly. It was the second last full day of our trip and there was much to see and do in Český Krumlov, so I didn't want to provide any unnecessary distractions.

After a quick breakfast at the inn we walked up to the castle, which is even more impressive once you get inside. We toured an art exhibit located in underground catacombs and climbed to the top of the castle

¹⁵ Radiohead, "Where You End and I Begin," Perf. Radiohead, *Hail to the Thief* (London: Parlophone, 2003).

¹⁶ Paul Kimball, "Guillotine," Perf. Tall Poppies, *Tall Poppies - All Points in Between* (2012). <http://youtu.be/6WCFf3TC-eo>.

¹⁷ For a good look at the Men in Black phenomenon, which bears some resemblance to my experience in Český Krumlov, see Nick Redfern, *The Real Men in Black: Evidence, Famous Cases, and True Stories of These Mysterious Men and Their Connection to UFO Phenomena* (Pompton Plains, NJ: New Page Books, 2011).

tower, which tested my fear of heights just as much as the ascent to the top of Salisbury Cathedral had a couple of weeks earlier. The other highlight was a guided tour through a section of the interior of the castle where we got to see the antique furniture, paintings, and other artifacts from centuries past.

After the guided tour we wandered around the grounds for another hour or so and then made our way back to Latrán, where we proceeded towards Lazebnický bridge. As I walked across the bridge I thought about my experience the previous night for a brief moment, but I was having such a good time with Holly that I didn't dwell on it. The toy store was open, and we both went inside and browsed for what was probably close to half an hour. I bought some small toys for my nephews and niece, and the wooden car with the mouse behind the wheel for Linda.

As we left the store Holly and I decided to split up. On our trip we had spent almost all of our time together (particularly in the evenings – my walkabout the night before had been my first such solo foray at night during the entire trip), but from time to time we had wanted to see different things so we would head in separate directions for an hour or so. In this case, Holly was on the hunt for some gifts for her mother, while I wanted to check out a book store I had seen earlier. We agreed to meet in an hour at the restaurant where we had eaten the night before, and headed off in our separate directions.

Almost as soon as I turned a corner down the side-street that led to the bookstore I saw something drawn on the wall of a building that made me stop in my tracks. Outlined in black was a giant eyeball with three lines that ran straight down from the center like legs, and two hooked lines that jutted out from the sides like arms, or tendrils. What I found most interesting, however, was the center of the eye, where someone had drawn what appeared to be the shape of a shadowy figure.

I thought it might be my over-active imagination so I took a closer look. As far as I was concerned, the center of the eye was definitely not the kind of thing that you would expect someone to place there if he just wanted to indicate the pupil. I took a photograph of the strange

graffiti, and then made my way to the bookstore.

Holly and I met up as planned in the town square where we had another lovely dinner, after which we decided to find a bar and sample more of the local beer. As we walked back towards Lazebnický bridge Holly noticed a sign hanging over a door. She skipped over and stood next to it in the way a *Price is Right* model stands next to a car in the final showcase showdown. A big smile crossed her face.

“C’mon,” she pleaded. “This is perfect!”

I walked over and stared up at the sign. It looked like a piece of abstract art, and had just two words on it: Horror Bar.

Sometimes you just have to shrug your shoulders, and go with the flow. This was definitely one of those times.

We walked in and immediately descended a staircase to the cellar of the building where the bar was located. All you really need to know about the Horror Bar is that it looks like a dungeon out of a 1930s horror film, and it has a coffin for a table where patrons can sit and enjoy a beverage. In other words, it comes by its name honestly. I almost expected to see Bela Lugosi hunched over behind the bar, hissing “yes, master” as Basil Rathbone ordered a nefarious-looking drink.

The joint was sparsely populated when we walked in. While neither Baron Wolf von Frankenstein nor Ygor were present, my disappointment was immediately ameliorated when I saw the waitress leaning against the bar. Wearing a Lana-Turner-at-the-soda-fountain face, she was possessed of the kind of physical beauty that carves a permanent little corner in your memory as soon as you behold it, like a first kiss, or a magic hour sunset.

Standing across from her was an older man whom I pegged for either a regular or the owner. There were a couple of locals huddled together at one of the tables near the bar talking to each other in low whispers, and a group of three young Americans tucked into a corner table by the door who were much more animated.

The waitress came over and asked us what we wanted (at least I assume that’s what she said, as she was speaking Czech). As soon as we replied in English, she smiled and said, “Ahh... more Americans,”

a statement which drew a few glances from the group of boisterous gringos in the corner.

“Nope,” I replied good-naturedly. “Canadians.”

Her smile disappeared in an instant, and she became very apologetic.

“I’m so sorry,” she said in English that, whilst broken, was a lot better than my Czech. “Many apologies.”

I smiled and shook my head. I had seen this more than once in my travels. A few Canadians with low self-esteem get offended when they’re mistaken for our southern cousins, and I suspected that she must have run across a couple of these obnoxiously defensive types at some point.

“No worries,” I said in a cheerful tone. “Tonight we’re all Czechs!”

She smiled again, broader this time, and asked us what we wanted to drink. I told her to bring us whatever she felt was their best local beer on tap, a gesture of confidence in her knowledge of the local scene that she clearly appreciated.

In a couple of minutes she returned with two very fulsome brews. As this was our last real night of the trip Holly and I were planning on making it a late evening, so I inquired when the bar closed.

“When the last customer leaves,” answered the waitress with a friendly laugh.

“My kind of bar,” I said, as she smiled and then moved off to check on the Americans.

Holly and I raised a glass to toast eight months of adventures together.

“It’s been a wild ride,” she said enthusiastically, and then took an approving sip of her beer.

“No kidding,” I replied, as I tasted what turned out to be an excellent lager. I gave the waitress a wave of thanks and a nod to indicate that she had definitely made a good choice.

“Flirt,” joked Holly.

“Absolutely,” I countered.

“She’s pretty,” Holly commented, looking over at the bar.

I took another sip of beer and played it cool.

“Hadn’t noticed.”

“Well, if you want some alone time,” Holly said, tongue planted firmly in her cheek “just let me know, and I’ll take an extended bathroom break.”

“Deal,” I replied with a grin, but knowing full well that I wouldn’t go beyond casual flirting.

As the evening wore on Holly and I descended into a state of happy-go-lucky inebriation as we conducted something of a retrospective of our time working on *Ghost Cases*.

“What would you say was the scariest experience you had,” I asked at one point.

Her face tightened as she took in a deep breath.

“Churchill Mansion,” she said quietly, and then exhaled, as if it had been a Herculean effort just to say the words, much less conjure the memory. There was no need for her to say anything else. I remembered *that* investigation very well.

Churchill Mansion is an old home in Yarmouth, Nova Scotia, that had been converted to an inn. It has a well-known reputation for being haunted, and we weren’t the first television show that had filmed an episode of a paranormal-themed show there.¹⁸

The stories at the Mansion revolved around the original owner, Aaron Churchill, a famous seafarer and entrepreneur who was said to haunt the place with lascivious intentions towards any female guests, and his niece Lottie, who eventually suffered a mental breakdown and wound up in an asylum in Boston.¹⁹

On our first night there, Holly, the crew and I sat down with the owner, a gnome-like old-timer named Bob, who related to us all of the various stories surrounding the mansion.

“I don’t really want to go on the record with this,” Bob told us cagily, although I’ve always found that as soon as someone says

¹⁸ *Rescue Mediums*, “Churchill Mansion,” (Toronto: Lamport-Sheppard Entertainment, 2006). Television.

¹⁹ Aaron Churchill was an ancestor of mine. Yet another small coincidence, or synchronicity. For a recounting of Churchill’s exploits as a sailor see Michael Rafuse, “Aaron Flint Churchill,” *Yarmouth and the Age of Sailing Ships*. <http://goo.gl/51oNv>.

something like that it means that they really *do* want to go on the record, so I always keep the camera rolling unless they specifically request that I turn it off (at which point I always oblige). In Bob's case, the persuasion came from a bottle of whiskey that he kept close by. After a swig or two, he continued. "One of the stories is that Aaron and Lottie had..." He paused, and swallowed hard. "A relationship." Churchill died in 1920, but Bob explained that in a small town like Yarmouth there were some stories that you just didn't discuss publicly, at least not with outsiders. I knew exactly what he was talking about because when I was stationed with the RCMP in northern Cape Breton, perhaps the most isolated region of Nova Scotia, we often had trouble getting people to talk about various crimes. They preferred to keep it "in house," and then let us pick up the pieces after they had served their own rough brand of local justice.²⁰

"This is hard to do without getting into trouble," he said. "We feel that there was a special connection between Aaron and Lottie. She was brought up as his daughter, and maybe she even was his own daughter. Lottie I think thought a lot of Aaron in ways other than as her uncle. There was certainly a connection between the two of them."

Bob intimated that Lottie may have murdered a servant at the mansion, which he hinted was covered up. He then quickly moved on to other areas of the overall story, and we didn't press him further as we all shared in the free-flowing whiskey.

After a while Holly left the living room. I assumed she was going to the bathroom. A few minutes later I was feeling peckish, so I stood up and asked Bob if there was any food in the kitchen. He told me that I was welcome to rifle through the large and well-stocked fridge and take whatever I wanted.

As I turned the corner from the living room and headed down the hallway towards the kitchen, I saw Holly leaning against the wall. She

²⁰ This theme is a staple of Maritime fiction. See, for example, Vernon Oickle, *One Crow Sorrow* (Chester, NS: Bryler Publications, 2010).

had clearly been crying.

“Hey there,” I said without my usual sarcastic edge. “What’s wrong?”

“Can I have a hug?” she answered with a quavering voice.

I’m not much of a touchy-feely type, but a friend in need trumps my naturally reserved nature, so I embraced her, and we just stood there for twenty seconds or so. Then she lifted her head, said “thanks,” and we stepped away from each other. I didn’t press for an explanation as she wiped the tears from her eyes. I just waited for her to get comfortable and tell me on her own time what was going on if she wanted to.

“He’s here,” she eventually said, her voice steadier, but still a bit uneven.

“Who is?” I asked.

“Aaron,” she answered. “I can feel him.”

“Is there anything I can do?”

She looked around her and shook her head. I could tell that she was getting her bearings again.

“I think I’ll be fine,” she said, and went back to the living room while I continued on to the kitchen. As I piled various types of deli meat onto a couple of slices of whole wheat bread I found myself hoping that Holly was all right, and wishing I could have done something more to help.

When we finally called it a night I went to my room at one end of the upstairs hall and Holly went to hers at the other end. Mine had originally been Aaron Churchill’s room, and she wanted no part of that, so she wound up in Lottie’s old room. The crew had positioned small digital cameras to monitor us as we slept, because allegedly paranormal activity had been reported in each room.

I managed to fall asleep in short order, only to be woken up about an hour later by Holly knocking on my door. In the episode, she described the circumstances as follows:

I tried to fall asleep, but couldn’t shake the feeling that there was someone else in the room with me. I was so spooked that I went down the hall and asked Paul if he would come up to Lottie’s room and keep me company while I tried to fall

asleep.

I had never seen Holly quite so shaken before. She was almost on the verge of tears again, but there was something else at work, something that ran even deeper. I went back to her room (where we left the door slightly open, lest anyone get the wrong idea if they wandered by), and sat down on the second bed. We chatted for about half an hour and then she finally fell asleep. I nodded off shortly thereafter. All the while, the DVR camera kept recording, which gave us a record of what became a very strange and disturbing evening.

The camera recorded Holly tossing and turning in what she later described as one of the most restless nights she had ever experienced. She wasn't the only one who found the room uncomfortable, however; I was lying on top of the blankets and was woken up by an intense chill, after which I crawled under the covers for the rest of the night.

As Holly and I were trying to get a decent night's sleep in Lottie's room, the digital camera we had stationed in the hallway recorded the door to a crew member's room suddenly and violently opening and closing. There was no draft whatsoever that could have accounted for the savage force with which the door was moved.

Meanwhile, back in Lottie's room Holly was still having trouble sleeping.

"It was made even more disturbing," she later explained, "by the fact that I also couldn't roll over. It was as if there was a person in the bed next to me."

We both got a surprise when we reviewed the camera footage once we got home, because we discovered what appeared to be an unnatural indentation beside Holly in the bed as she slept, as if someone else was indeed lying there.²¹

I asked her about it all again as we enjoyed another beer at the Horror Bar.

²¹ The Churchill mansion investigation can be seen in *Ghost Cases*, "The Case of the Haunted Mansion," directed by Paul Kimball and Dale Stevens (Toronto: Breakthrough Entertainment, 2009). Television.

“It was almost as if I could sense the presence,” she recalled, as if it had just happened. “Remember the footage where I suddenly woke up shortly afterwards?”

I nodded.

“I could definitely feel something or someone in that room with me,” she said.

I thought back to the strange shadowy figures I had run into the previous evening and the feeling of the hand on my shoulder as I stood on Lazebnický bridge. I wanted to say something to Holly – to let her know that I understood exactly how she felt. But we all cast our own shadows, and we have to walk with them by ourselves, so I just nodded, took a sip from my beer, and changed the subject.

The answer most often given by people who believe there is a paranormal aspect to ghostly phenomena is that ghosts are the spirits of the dead who simply refuse to accept the nature of their situation, and so they remain trapped in a netherworld between this life and the next. To the disbeliever, on the other hand, ghostly phenomena are nothing more than a trick of light here, a coincidence there, and any one of a number of other prosaic factors everywhere else.

In the vast majority of cases I have no doubt that the disbeliever is right. Indeed, there were times whilst filming *Ghost Cases* where we uncovered clear evidence of a hoax, or a story that had simply spun out of control over the years. But when confronted with experiences like those that Holly and I had in multiple locations in 2008 and 2009, I’m forced to conclude that there’s probably something more at work – something that reminds us of who we really are deep down inside.

I don’t believe, however, that these unexplained experiences represent the spirits of the dead haunting us, at least not in the sense of “my dead grandma is sitting on my bed with me.” There may indeed be something waiting for us beyond the grey wall that is death, a subject I will address in greater detail a bit later, but in my opinion it doesn’t involve our being trapped in this realm of existence to wander the same hallway or haunt the same bedroom for all eternity. I can’t imagine that the afterlife, should it exist, is so banal.

As far as I’m concerned we either die and that’s the end, which is an outcome that has a certain poetry to it, or there is something much

more interesting waiting for us. Even purgatory would involve something more than aimlessly puttering around your old house as a disembodied “spirit,” unless of course we choose to posit that “God the almighty” has no more imagination than a reality TV producer.

Of course, there are those who think that ghostly phenomena are brought about by demons. But what is a demon, exactly?²² Once you cut through the clutter and ideological detritus of thousands of years of religious dogma, myths and legends, a “demon” represents nothing more than an advanced non-human intelligence. Over the years it has suited organized religion, as a tool of social control for political authority (regardless of how that authority has been constituted), to present us with a Manichean view of good versus evil, and angels versus demons. God is on “our” side, which is of course the “good” side; the “demons” are on the other side. But that has been an interpretation, and as with all interpretations one must consider the circumstances and the motivations of the people who created it. As I look at it, it’s an interpretation based solely on a desire, a need even, to keep people divided and shackled by fear, and to keep them from thinking for themselves.²³

As far as ghostly phenomena goes, I think that as with UFOs one can reasonably speculate that at least some unexplained cases of the phenomena we ascribe to “ghosts” are brought about by an advanced non-human intelligence, interacting with us under a different guise but for the same reasons.

I’m a big fan of Cirque de Soleil. I’ve been to Las Vegas several times over the years and always go to see a Cirque show when I’m there. While they are all wonderful entertainment experiences, my

²² For an interesting take on how some people within the UFO research community view “demons,” see Nick Redfern, *Final Events*, 109 – 121, 201 – 205. Nick also discusses how demons might be related to the Men in Black stories in *Men in Black*, 221-233.

²³ One of my favorite Bob Dylan songs, “With God on Our Side,” addresses this idea of “God” taking sides throughout our various wars. Bob Dylan, “With God on Our Side,” Perf. Bob Dylan, *The Times They Are a-Changin’* (Columbia, 1964). www.bobdylan.com/songs/with-god-on-our-side.

favorite remains the original, *Mystère*. As the name implies, it's a mysterious and magical journey that touches upon all aspects of the human condition. I've seen it four times, and each time I've taken something different away from it.

The second time I saw *Mystère* I was with the actress Kris McBride, a friend who had narrated my film *Best Evidence*. We managed to get seats in the front row of the upper section of the theatre. There was a wall about four feet high between us and the walkway which separated the two sections. During the show there's so much going on that your attention wanders all over the place and you can sometimes lose track of the various performers who engage at different times directly with the audience. Anyway, as Kris and I were sitting there, watching a spectacular act on stage (I think it was the aerial high bar, but I can't recall), some performers had made their way out into the crowd. I remember them as "bird people" because to me their costumes had a distinctly avian character. You could see them crawling on the walls and slinking along the walkways and floors. Given what was happening on stage, neither Kris nor I paid them any real attention. To us they were like shadows, lurking at the corner of our awareness.

As the act on stage ended and the audience erupted into well-deserved applause, one of these "bird people" suddenly popped up from behind the wall right in front of us so that the performer's face was no more than seven or eight inches from Kris' face. The performer's appearance definitely startled me and the people sitting around us, but our response was nothing compared to Kris' reaction, as she grabbed my arm with a vice-like grip and let out a shriek of terror that could be heard throughout the theatre. I suspect that the Cirque performer had never encountered a reaction quite that visceral because he stumbled away from the wall in surprise and fell back onto the walkway.

He quickly regained his composure, gave me a concerned look as if to say, "hey, make sure your friend doesn't have a heart attack," and then he beat a hasty retreat to the opening at the end of the walkway which led backstage.

Meanwhile, Kris still had the vice grip on my arm, even as she was

being consoled by a very nice elderly couple sitting next to her. For at least twenty seconds she was breathing rapidly and deeply, even as she kept muttering over and over again: “What the hell was that?”

She finally calmed down, although she remained on a bit of a manic high for the rest of the evening. Everyone in our vicinity had a good laugh about it all, including Kris after she had regained her composure.

Over drinks after the show she and I both agreed that while it had been scary for her at the time it was something that she was going to remember in a good way for the rest of her life, just as the memory of the house of horrors in Prince Edward Island has remained with me for decades.

“I felt so alive,” she said as she took another sip of her drink. “It was real.”²⁴

That’s exactly how I felt in the cemetery at Shocklach, the jail cell in St. Andrew’s, and on the streets of Český Krumlov. I’m willing to entertain the possibility that those experiences could well have been a form of performance art by an advanced non-human intelligence designed to appeal to one of our most primal emotions: fear. In doing so, perhaps that intelligence is giving us greater insight into the full range of human experience and thereby helping us to a more complete understanding of ourselves.

Then again, like the filmmakers who created hits such as *The Blair Witch Project*, *Paranormal Activity*, and *The Exorcist*, or even the Cirque performer Kris and I encountered, they may just want to entertain us (and themselves), and see how far we’re willing to go in

²⁴ Kris is one of the most creative people I’ve ever met. She had the lead role in the first run of *Doing Time* in November, 2007, and did a wonderful job, but like Veronica Reynolds she was replaced in one of the lead roles for *Eternal Kiss* because the distributor didn’t think she had enough experience. I handled it all very poorly and she hasn’t spoken to me since, which I greatly regret (I also don’t blame her). A mutual friend told me that she moved to western Canada a couple of years ago and directed me to Kris’ writing blog. I wasn’t surprised in the least to see that her work was very good. Wherever her journey takes her, I wish her nothing but success and happiness. See Kris McBride, *The Best New Blog on the Internet*. <http://bestnewblog.blogspot.ca/>.

the face of the unknown.

H. L. Mencken believed that the one permanent emotion of what he called the inferior man is fear – fear of the unknown, the complex, and the inexplicable.

“What he wants above everything else is safety,” Mencken wrote. “His instincts will incline him towards a society so organized that it will protect him against all hazards, and not only against perils to his hide but also against assaults upon his mind – against the need to grapple with unaccustomed problems, to weigh ideas, to think things out for himself, to scrutinize the platitudes upon which his everyday thinking is based.”²⁵

It’s a point of view with which I have always agreed, and something I wrote about in “All Afraid,” one of my first songs as a young musician.

What are you so afraid of / What has brought you to this state?
Where are your natural emotions?
You’re such a sad, sad thing...²⁶

An advanced non-human intelligence would understand that reality is far more complex than we can imagine. Many things may remain inexplicable even to them. But they would also understand that safety isn’t an option if one is to progress. Fortune, after all, favors the bold. But we have been taught to fear the unknown, to the point that we live in a world where fear seems to be the guiding principle. We have become the “inferior man” of whom Mencken wrote.

Perhaps an advanced non-human intelligence has built a “haunted house” and opened the doors to all of us, to see if we can understand our own fears, confront them, and overcome them. If this is the case, then there’s only one question that we really need to answer.

Do we have the courage to enter, or will we let our shadows of our fear continue to haunt us?

²⁵ H. L. Mencken, *Prejudices: Second Series*, (London: J. Cape, 1921), 76 - 77. Available on-line at: <http://goo.gl/Ks4XP>.

²⁶ Paul Kimball, “All Afraid,” Perf. Tall Poppies, *Tall Poppies - All Points in Between* (2012). <http://youtu.be/6WCFf3TC-eo>.



The castle at Český Krumlov, 2009.



Town square in Český Krumlov during the day, 2009.



Holly enjoying a local beer at dinner; behind her is the town square.



Yours truly in the castle tower, overlooking Český Krumlov.



Český Krumlov central square at night. I was sitting on the bench in the foreground when I saw the shadowy figure for the first time.



One of the narrow streets in Český Krumlov at night.



The window of the toy store where I saw the shadowy figure.



The strange drawing I saw on a wall near where I had an encounter with the shadowy figure.



The statue of Jesus on Lazebnický bridge.