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PARANORMAL INVESTIGATORS:  
EXPLORING A POSITIVE SOCIAL CONSTRUCT THROUGH PARANORMAL  
BELIEF AND INVESTIGATIONS

by

Meagan E. Oltman

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

in

Folklore and American Studies

Approved:

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UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY  
Logan, Utah

2022

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## ABSTRACT

Paranormal Investigators: Exploring a Positive Social Construct Through Paranormal  
Belief and Investigation

by

Meagan E. Oltman, Master of Science

Utah State University, 2021

Major Professor: Claudia Schwabe  
Department: World Languages and Cultures

This thesis is a case study providing a more detailed look into how a local paranormal investigation team forms a community that cultivates social benefits beyond proving the supernatural's existence. Folklore provides a path to understanding supernatural beliefs and fears, furthering the understanding of paranormal communities and any advantages of being a part of or receiving help from paranormal investigators and investigations. The paranormal or the supernatural defies standard explanation. For example, ghosts and UFOs, at times, are not explained away with traditional scientific theories and hypotheses. Paranormal investigators, also called paranormal researchers, choose to study the paranormal phenomena considered unexplainable, often forming paranormal groups who discuss, investigate, and explore possible explanations of hauntings and other supernatural events.

Paranormal investigators help create and add positive benefits for the paranormal communities they serve and are worthy of further exploration and

discussion as investigators provide support, knowledge, advice, resources, contacts, and connections for their clients. I have analyzed how the paranormal investigator group *The Other Realm (TOR)*, located in Cache Valley, Utah, functions as a paranormal folk group that benefits their paranormal community. *TOR*'s paranormal community consists of clients and guests of their public ghost hunting events and other nearby paranormal investigation groups. *TOR*'s goal is to help those who feel they are experiencing a haunting by opening a safe space to share their paranormal beliefs and experiences without fear of ridicule and disbelief. Their focus is on the ghosts or spirits part of the paranormal phenomenon. The paranormal community serves a particular purpose for those who need help with their paranormal experiences and furthering each investigator's esoteric knowledge.

(51 pages)

## PUBLIC ABSTRACT

PARANORMAL INVESTIGATORS: EXPLORING A POSITIVE SOCIAL  
CONSTRUCT THROUGH PARANORMAL BELIEF AND INVESTIGATION

by

Meagan E. Oltman

This thesis contemplates the possible benefits of a local paranormal investigation team during their private and public paranormal investigations. I have interviewed team members to understand why they do what they do for their community and how their paranormal investigation experiences can help clients. Some of the potential benefits can help clients handle fear and loss while lessening negative attitudes some may have towards the paranormal field of study.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my most profound appreciation to my committee chair, Claudia Schwabe, who agreed to work with a folklore student studying the paranormal. Her kindness, support, direction, patience, and time are deeply appreciated.

I would like to thank my committee members, Lisa Gabbert and Keri Holt, who have always been willing to help me when needed, provide insight for improvement, many fun classes, and nudge the quietest person ever to speak up.

I give special thanks to my incredible family for their endless encouragement, helpfulness, and support.

To my folklore friends, I appreciate our conversations, friendship, and the fun times.

And finally, a big thank you to *The Other Realm* paranormal investigation team for the fun paranormal conversations and support of my thesis.

Meagan E. Oltman

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## CHAPTER I

### BEGINNINGS

#### **Introduction**

In this thesis, I argue that potential good can stem from paranormal studies, precisely benefits that may arise from paranormal investigators carrying-out paranormal investigations. Given that 45% of Americans believe in ghosts, with 36% reporting ghostly experiences, it is fitting for Americans to turn to someone to help them understand their paranormal experiences and ghostly encounters, a benefit that paranormal investigators may be able to provide (Ballard, 2019). People have believed in and experienced paranormal phenomena for a long time, and it is apparent that these beliefs and experiences are a part of our world and everyday life here to stay. Many individuals desire to be understood and accepted regarding their beliefs in and paranormal experiences. Prior research has shown that some people need assurance of an afterlife and are often unhappy with religious and scientific explanations<sup>1</sup>. Trying to understand the afterlife and connect with loved ones who have passed on are some reasons why paranormal investigations are conducted.

Since many Americans are interested in paranormal phenomena, paranormal TV shows' wide variety and popularity are unsurprising. The reality television genre has gained popularity since the early 2000s entering popular cable networks such as the Travel Channel. One of the highest-rated and most popular paranormal shows on TV is *Ghost Adventures (GA)*, seen on the Travel Channel, first premiering on October 17, 2008 (Ghost Adventures, 2008). This show has inspired many to try out ghost hunting or

develop their ghost hunting teams. Lead investigator Zak Bagans mentions in the opening credits of their TV show that he never believed in spirits until he came face to face with one. When Zak saw a ghost for the first time, it drove him to film a documentary in his quest to capture paranormal phenomena he had earlier witnessed. Along with Aaron Goodwin and Nick Groff, Zak filmed the *Ghost Adventures* documentary that subsequently led to their TV series with 22 seasons and counting. The GA crew travels the globe to understand their paranormal experiences and help others who have experienced unexplained phenomena and alleged haunting experiences.

The GA crew has investigated haunted locales in Utah, such as the “Nunnery” or St. Anne’s Retreat in Logan Canyon, well-known locations such as the Winchester Mystery House in California, to regular households experiencing hauntings. Zak has said, “The most rewarding part of investigations...Yes, it is about helping people, just showing up, listening to them, showing them that they are not crazy, and then ultimately doing cleansings for them blessings that is rewarding.” Zak’s statement echoes a sentiment of many ghost hunters.

According to [paranormalsocieties.com](http://paranormalsocieties.com), Utah has 63 paranormal investigation teams counting a few groups from neighboring states willing to travel to Utah ready to serve interested parties. According to their mission statements, many paranormal investigation teams in Utah show that these teams see a need in their community to help those dealing with supernatural phenomena. *Wasatch Investigative Society for Paranormal Studies (WISPS)*<sup>ii</sup> and *The Paranormal Investigations Team of Utah (The PI Team)*<sup>iii</sup> are two Utah groups that exist to help those with suspected paranormal needs, according to their mission statements.

A Utah-based paranormal investigation team, *The Other Realm (TOR)* that I have worked with and have interviewed for this paper functions similarly to the *GA* team. And *TOR* is much like other paranormal investigation teams based in Utah with their mission to assist those in need with alleged hauntings.

Todd Hinckley is a lead investigator for *TOR* and has been active as a paranormal investigator in the paranormal community for many years. Before *TOR*, Todd also served as the primary investigator for *Things of That Nature (TOTN)*, a paranormal online talk show and paranormal investigation team, a team that started around 2012 and closed towards the end of 2016. *TOTN* was often filmed professionally during their paranormal investigations and featured for Gamma River Media's special paranormal investigation features online at Oroot TV.

Todd's current group began officially as *TOR* in 2017 after a name change, and some group members changed after Todd's prior group ended. The *TOR* team consists of eight full-time members and three or four part-time members who join investigations here or there when they can make it. The *TOR* team has performed many residential investigations and over 50 commercial investigations.

Neicole Teare is an active *TOR* team member functioning as the team manager coordinating paranormal investigations, managing special events, and handling team funds. John and Mary Spencer,<sup>1</sup> two other team members, are a married couple often attending to security guard roles correlating to their backgrounds and have worked with

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<sup>1</sup> Names have been changed for privacy.

Todd years before *TOTN* and *TOR*. Special investigations are often filmed with the *TOTN* show's creator since, down the road, a paranormal show featuring *TOR* may be back online to continue the previous supernatural fun *TOTN* experienced.

One way that *TOR* finds cases to investigate is by Todd using his car as a moving advertisement personalized with paranormal investigator stickers. Upon seeing the sticker, people will approach Todd to inquire if the stickers are for fun or if he is an actual paranormal investigator resulting in an investigation. Other times cases will come about by word of mouth by friends and family or frequented businesses, leading to introductions and the ability to investigate new locations.

Commercial locations are often locales where residents have frequently heard numerous ghost stories for years, making them exciting places for investigators to investigate as a treat aside from residential investigations. The Bullen Center, The Ellen Eccles Theater, the Thatcher Mansion, and the infamous St. Anne's Retreat or The Nunnery<sup>2</sup> are local commercial properties explored by the *TOR* team within the last year. Todd had business connections to the individual who had owned St. Anne's Retreat, and that is how *TOR* was able to get in to investigate a site where not many are allowed to enter. These types of paranormal investigations that *TOR* has conducted have shown me potential positive benefits and positive aspects of paranormal studies.

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<sup>2</sup> All sites are in Cache Valley, Logan, Utah. St. Anne's Retreat is a former private summer home and Catholic retreat located roughly eight miles up Logan Canyon. St. Anne's Retreat is rumored to be haunted by spirits of drowned babies, witches, demon hounds, and more.

## **Literature Review**

The study of the paranormal field to many people and scholars has long been a joke. When parapsychologists have taken it seriously, it is often forced into the rigorous study methods and science standards. Many researchers, anthropologists, sociologists, and psychologists look to science to explain paranormal experiences and beliefs. Brain functions or malfunctions are often used as reasons why people experience and believe in the paranormal, so people understand that these things are not real. The folklore approach usually avoids the mistake of applying strict scientific methodologies. Folklore is concerned with why people believe and do what they do, neither being overly negative nor dismissing the beliefs and experiences. While there is much scholarly work on paranormal beliefs and experiences and how these two subjects work socially and with science, there has not been a lot of work done regarding likely social benefits arising from paranormal investigators investigating paranormal phenomena. I used a variety of sources for my research, from folklorists, ethnographers, social psychologists, and sociologists, to help me examine and support the paranormal investigation group and their social construct illustrating their motives and functions. I look at what good are paranormal investigators and their paranormal investigations.

Alan Dundes, a well-known folklorist, understood that science often wants to put the supernatural or paranormal to rest. Dundes thinks getting rid of the paranormal world would be a mistake, for the paranormal world can often be studied along with science. We can learn a lot by studying folk and folk groups (Dundes, 1980). Dundes helped progress folk from being defined as lower stratum people to including everyone. The folk can belong to multiple groups at a time if they share at least one common factor helping

me define the paranormal investigation team as a folk group as they share beliefs and experiences in the paranormal.

Folklorists Jeannie B. Thomas and Diane E. Goldstein mention the pervasive academic belief that the continuing rise of technology and education should put paranormal beliefs into an idea of the past. Goldstein and Thomas illustrate how paranormal experiences provide essential information on determining evidential standards for paranormal experiences and how experiences are insightful into how people deal with culture, individual perception, behavior, and the natural environment (Goldstein et al., 2007), echoing Alan Dundes. I use insights that Thomas and Goldstein put forth to further explore beyond ghosts communicating to people, why paranormal investigators want to communicate with ghosts, and why spirit communication can have a beneficial purpose.

Marc Eaton argues that “paranormal investigation (aka “ghost hunting”) is part of this quest for authentic spiritual experiences (Eaton, 2015). A popular pastime of the nineteenth century was to try to communicate with spirits by performing séances and using Ouija boards. Eaton’s research has supported my fieldwork as paranormal investigators are, as he says on a “quest culture,” ghost hunting made popular by TV shows such as *Ghost Adventures*. During Eaton’s talks with paranormal investigators, he noticed the influence of popular ghost hunting TV shows on amateur paranormal investigators, which coincides with my findings. The ghost hunting group I examine combines religious and non-religious members participating in paranormal investigations. Both the religious and non-religious members see ghost hunting as an act that has confirmed their religious and spiritual beliefs coinciding with the desire to establish proof

of life after death. Many paranormal investigators and their clients desire to have their paranormal experiences explained, aid in obtaining closure with passed loved ones, conquer the fear of the unexplained and speak out regarding their paranormal experiences without being called irrational or crazy. Much of Eaton's findings are like my own regarding paranormal investigators' motivations and the use of science or technological equipment aiding their quest to find proof of the afterlife.

Part of the academic world believes paranormal belief stems from a lack of proper critical thinking skills. Once essential thinking skills are corrected, it hopefully will lay to rest paranormal beliefs. Shane R. Thye and Barry N. Markovsky echo this sentiment as they write that they want to give their college students correct critical thinking skills "or at least in giving them the confidence to resist influence based on other's flawed judgments" as they want to stop growth in the paranormal industry. Both Thye and Markovsky perceive the paranormal industry as one profiting negatively. Paranormal investigators provide many people with a way to share their paranormal experiences and beliefs that will be accepted and understood by those in the paranormal community. Influential writers from the academic spectrum suspect that paranormal beliefs are symptomatic of a more fundamental and potentially harmful lapse in perceptual capacities, critical thinking capabilities, evidential reasoning, and, more generally, the education system. With the generally negative attitude towards the paranormal beliefs and experiences, amateur paranormal investigation groups have filled a gap where they have seen the need to support those who wish to have help and talk about their paranormal experiences without derision. Paranormal beliefs should not automatically be assumed to be flawed and wholly disregarded, nor should the study of the paranormal

studies. I have witnessed benefits provided by investigators during paranormal investigations, and we would miss the valuable information garnered from this culture, as Jeannie B. Thomas has said. Thye and Markovsky's work promotes why some people refrain from speaking about and seeking assistance for the unexplained phenomenon.

## **Methods**

For my thesis, I used primary and secondary sources for my research. I conducted interviews with willing participants of a select paranormal investigation group, *The Other Realm (TOR)*, for a case study to explore and understand possible social constructs created by the paranormal investigators that may provide potentially positive benefits. I also used scholarly articles and books to support my idea of the positive benefits of paranormal investigations and investigators and some of the hindrances of studying and exploring the paranormal world.

I have been associated with *TOTN* and *TOR* for many years serving as a paranormal investigator, researcher, and producer for the *TOTN* online talk show. To me, paranormal phenomena and beliefs are worthy of research without academia and others disdainful of the paranormal field, having experienced multiple paranormal experiences myself. Regarding the importance of studying paranormal stories, folklorist Jeannie Thomas writes, "I emphasize that there is much more to the realm of the supernatural than questions of belief, and I argue that ghost stories are a useful way to come to a better understanding of the worlds we inhabit." Adding, "—can point us outward and take us into realms of interest and significance (Goldstein et al., 2007)." Studying the paranormal field is tricky for any individual looking to remain skeptical and not jump to conclusions.



My earliest paranormal experiences happened as a young girl. Having been raised in *The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (LDS)*, a religion that has spirit belief, I believed in the possibility of spirits.

I often thought I saw a man walking up and down the hall in the basement of my grandmother's house. Shortly after my nana had passed, I mentioned this story to my mother. My mother informed me that my grandmother had seen a man in the mirror, and my uncle also had. In the house that I grew up in, my bedroom was the first room in the basement to be fully finished, so I was the only person living down there for a time. One night I heard soft yet distinct footsteps on the newly installed carpet walking from the door to the window across my room. My flamingo windchimes started to chime with no air coming through the ceiling vent, nor was my window open to explain the wind chimes suddenly moving on their own. I was unnerved, I said a prayer in my mind for what I presumed to be a ghost to leave, which it did, and I never experienced anything in my room after that night. Still, my early encounters with ghosts did not stop me from being interested in and further exploring paranormal phenomena and why I chose this topic.

## CHAPTER II

### FOLKLORE AND PARANORMAL INVESTIGATIONS

#### **A Paranormal Investigation Team as a Folk Group**

A paranormal folklore or folk group consists of two or more people who share at least one thing in common: a belief in ghosts or spirits. All of us belong to many different folk groups other than paranormal groups. Examples of other folk groups can vary from ethnic, racial, and religious groups to baseball players, cowboys, summer camps, and Boy Scouts. Folk groups provide a socially sanctioned framework for expressing critical anxiety-producing problems and a cherished artistic vehicle for communicating ethos and worldview<sup>iv</sup>. A paranormal folk group such as *TOR* uses its unique character, creating a framework allowing for various ways for members to demonstrate and express their beliefs and pursuit of paranormal phenomena. Paranormal investigation teams learn by doing their jobs through informal training by observing other investigators and obtain skills by conducting investigations using paranormal equipment such as a K2 detector, infrared thermometer, spirit box, and dowsing rods<sup>3</sup>. Team members also learn paranormal terminology and vocabulary such as residual, entity, and the meaning of a presence through observation and practice of paranormal investigations. No formal institution teaches paranormal investigators the terminology, conduct, and skills

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<sup>3</sup> See Appendix for a list of paranormal equipment terminology.

necessary for paranormal investigations or the institutional rules and regulations to adhere to, so each group sets up its structure as seen fit.

The paranormal folk group *TOR* creates and sustains a paranormal community consisting mostly of their team members and clients making a social construct out of their shared paranormal belief and active work in paranormal investigations. *TOR*'s paranormal community is sustained by continually absorbing new cases and clients and by participating in studies with other paranormal groups expanding their paranormal community. *TOR* has effectively created a social community for sharing paranormal experiences and ideas openly and safely without fear of ridicule and disbelief. Being believed in and supported by the paranormal community attracts many individuals to the community, as paranormal matters are often unacceptable or not usually open to being discussed in other groups or places seriously.

### **The Importance of Folklore Study**

In the folklore field, the goal is not whether spirits are, in fact, real or not. Instead, the study lens is on supernatural belief and what that may reveal about people and why they do and believe what they do. According to David J. Hufford, the intellectual pushback on supernatural beliefs dampens one's understanding of our supernatural experiences and beliefs in the academic realm. Academia wants to study the paranormal clinically in ways that the paranormal is not meant to be studied for its advancement and success. Clinical methods used in the physical sciences have pushed parapsychology and folklore studies to pursue the same clinical and staunch methodologies to be viewed through the same sensible and legitimate lens as theirs. Comments made by professionals,

not of parapsychology or folklore, remove the legitimacy and essential information from these areas (Hufford, 1983). Individuals accept physicists' or biologists' comments even though they have not trained in the fields of folklore or parapsychology is expected since they are still professionals. I believe it essential to stay with the folklore lens to look at the paranormal folk group created by the paranormal investigators. I move beyond why it is crucial to understand what they believe and do but to look at the possibility that the paranormal investigators and their investigations can elicit benefits that can positively impact others that do not lessen the meaning or importance to those studied.

### **Paranormal Investigations, Science, and Religion**

Understanding groups like *TOR* and *GA* can assist with paranormal needs with investigations, a way to know how a paranormal investigation is performed using technological equipment. Investigations are conducted at commercial or residential locations to assess and capture paranormal phenomena with special equipment often explicitly built for paranormal investigations.

Unlike the TV shows, *TOR* may need to conduct multiple investigations at a location to understand the situation better, unlike the one-night-only investigations often seen on many paranormal investigation TV shows. *TOR* has its own rules and regulations regarding accepting cases, applying for investigations at commercial locations, regulations, codes of conduct, and such that many workforces employ. “Usually, we take every case, and we will scope the place out to get information to verify accuracy. To see or feel if there are any spirits and to check out stories of the place. And if it can be investigated, we will then do a baseline reading to see if any anomalies can be detected,”

says Todd regarding taking on paranormal investigation cases<sup>v</sup>. *TOR* and other amateur groups often follow GA's framework for investigation procedures.

The *GA* crew utilizes various paranormal technological equipment such as EMF detectors, spirit boxes, and full-spectrum cameras, to name a few, in their quest to capture visual and auditory paranormal phenomena evidence at alleged haunted locations on video. *TOR* uses similar equipment to aid in capturing paranormal auditory and visual evidence just like their TV show counterpart.

Marc A. Eaton is an associate professor of sociology who studies paranormal investigators and their investigations, saying paranormal investigators' faith in using the paranormal equipment used for conducting investigations is further supported by TV shows such as *Ghost Adventures* that emphasize the use of technology to communicate with and collect data about spirits (Waskul et al., 2018). Paranormal equipment is essential to conduct investigations and imperative in aiding investigators in spirit communication with spirit boxes and DVRs, most popular for real-time conversations and capturing ghost voices.

A typical paranormal investigation involves three steps:

Step One:

One of the paranormal investigators will conduct an honest interview with the potential client to get to know them better and what type of paranormal phenomena are happening, such as dates, times, what the client was doing, and how the phenomena made them feel. A time is scheduled for the investigators to perform a house walkthrough to check for structural and environmental circumstances affecting investigations. Depending upon the clients and specific locations, additional research is conducted for more

background information relating to the clients and property history and any significant events associated with a paranormal investigation.

Step Two:

At the beginning of a paranormal investigation, investigators will conduct baseline readings at the location to establish typical EMF and temperature readings of each room or area too. Investigators will set up video recorders, cameras, DVRs, and static meters in the rooms reported to get the most activity, often called “hot spots.” EVP sessions are started or other forms of spirit communication while the investigators monitor the equipment and battery life. Multiple battery packs are on hand as many investigators believe that spirits will drain batteries to enable having the energy needed to communicate. Depending upon the number of investigators for the investigation, they will split up into teams and go into assigned areas to investigate and, if needed, duplicate alleged events that may bring on activity. Investigators take notes of the time, location, and witnesses of any activity digitally or by paper. Later, investigators will check baseline readings and note any differences that may have occurred during the investigation to see if other investigators had similar experiences.

Step Three:

Upon the investigation's conclusion, the team will analyze pictures, videos, and notes for an honest report to give the client regarding any paranormal phenomena or discovery of natural or man-made occurrences. The team will answer any questions from the client and provide resources for further guidance if needed. As always, the investigators will let the client know they are available in the future if the need arises.

I have talked about how paranormal investigators use equipment to capture audio, visual, and indicators of a supernatural phenomenon. Many investigators accept if there are other factors to corroborate something paranormal happening. The paranormal field is not established in scientific theory, and the scientific processes followed by many paranormal investigators claim to have little scientific value in their methods. Some people say that supernatural claims should not be given the same consideration as proper scientific theories, such as Einstein's theory of relativity (“What Are the Benefits of Paranormal Investigation?”, 2014). While amateur paranormal investigations seem very unscientific, it is not to say those serious studies of paranormal phenomena conducted in academic locations are not scientific, but often are and should be taken seriously, not ostracized due to other's perception that supernatural belief is remnants of ignorant old times or unable to be aided by technology.

Part of paranormal investigations is scientific tools used to help understand the science behind supernatural phenomena or ghosts and aid in phenomena detection. Scientists and skeptics have field days debunking the use of such devices. When scientists and heads of skeptical organizations dismiss the paranormal, it is easy for others to follow suit. Avinash Patil stated, "This is all pseudo-science...Paranormal researchers use scientific terminologies to mislead people. They just cheat people with scientific mumbo-jumbo," an executive president of the Maharashtra Andhashraddha Nirmoolan Samiti, an Indian organization dedicated to fighting superstition (Menon, 2017). *TOR* is aware of these pitfalls in the paranormal field and does not charge for services except for public ghost hunting events to cover location fee costs and obtaining the owner's permission to investigate premises. The pseudo-science will never tell anyone

what to believe. Still, it will adhere to the team's standard protocols of equipment used during investigations and not fake or manipulate equipment to create a spirit or other paranormal phenomenon.

Marc Eaton's research regarding paranormal investigators and their investigation equipment suggests that the scientific side functions alongside the more overtly spiritually centered investigative techniques intensifying the empirical aura of evidence of ghosts and hauntings<sup>vi</sup>. TOR uses methods to combine scientific measures with spiritual ones and many other paranormal investigation teams. Using the combinations of scientific and spiritual practices of collecting paranormal evidence can help indicate signs of a supernatural phenomenon or spirit presence. When multiple investigators' equipment detects paranormal phenomena simultaneously or finds anomalies in the same spot as others detected, it demonstrates that something unusual has happened. Investigators may feel shifts in the atmosphere, presence, or cold spot lends support to paranormal phenomena occurring.

*TOR's* members have different religious and spiritual backgrounds creating multiple ways of interpreting and handling paranormal phenomena during investigations.

I asked Neicole if she was religious, and she replied that she was not. Neicole said, "I am more of a spiritual person. I don't know what I believe in necessarily because I'm more of a skeptic, and I don't know necessarily about gods or deities, if you will. More into the universe's energy, I guess, was what they call the source. It's like a universal energy. The universe created everything. So that's my thoughts about it." When I asked if Neicole believed in angels and demons, she replied, "Just...I believe in entities because I don't know, you know." Some of the entities Neicole believes in can be



formerly human or some sort of energy that is non-human that she feels that she has encountered personally during personal paranormal experiences and at investigations.

Neicole uses multiple methods to handle spirits and other paranormal phenomena that coincide with her spiritual side. A favorite way is using crystals and stones; according to Neicole, some of the knowledge of using these items happens to be innate. Crystals and stones have different minerals and are believed to have unique properties that vibrate at different frequencies that absorb energy making the need to cleanse crystals and stones often (Cavanaugh, 2022). “I don’t know how to explain this. I just knew it was intuitive. Mostly some of it is read. I read many books about crystals, but my grandfather also was a rockhound and learned about them from him.” Crystals cleanse or clear negative energy from spaces and keep bad energies at bay. Crystals and stones are a method Neicole uses to set the stage for a positive and purposeful investigation and protection. An example of protection recommended by Neicole is to set selenite above all doorways to keep out darker energies. It is thought that energy can enter through mirrors, windows, and doors. Neicole remarks, “It’s funny because it also. I’ve had negative people stop visiting my house since I’ve put them up.” Furthering Neicole’s practice with crystals is her experimentation with gridding placing crystals in specific formations to amplify energy and increase the desired intention such as protection, manifestation, and healing.

Other spiritual practices Neicole uses during paranormal investigations are pendulums, runes with chants, and communicating with spirits to assist them into the light when they are ready to move on. It is thought that some ghosts or spirits are unaware that they are dead and are confused at times, feeling trapped or lost. Once spirits

are aware of their situation, they need guidance to move on into the light, which many believe ghosts and some investigators that assist these spirits can see in their mind's eye. Neicole says that she had a dream about a door in the light, and the dream has helped her guide spirits to look up into the light and go through the door, although finding the right way to communicate with ghosts to move on is key. Helping spirits move into the light is a process that can vary for each paranormal investigator but often is intuitive for the individual and the skill level.

Todd, John, and Mary are active *LDS* members and have noted that various aspects of their religious beliefs are confirmed while conducting paranormal investigations. And the three team members use similar techniques taught to them by their church that they may utilize during paranormal investigations and other paranormal situations that may arise. John and Todd have had the opportunity to use teachings and spiritual gifts bestowed upon them to remove negative entities and blessings and communicate with guides, spirits, or angels. Both Todd and John have spoken of their paranormal encounters to high-ranking officials in the LDS church, who have remarked that not everyone can see or communicate with spirits at such a high level as they do. The conversation with LDS elders led to Todd and John confirming their religious beliefs, especially concerning spirits, since they believe in the afterlife and paranormal talents.

When a combination of scientific and spiritual experiences occurs during paranormal investigations with similar experiences by many different investigators at a location helps to lend credence to technological equipment and spiritual methods.

Paranormal investigations are crucial to keeping a paranormal community alive and using technology that aids the investigation process. Conducting paranormal

investigations keeps paranormal investigators active in their community. And using technological equipment helps *TOR*'s clients with paranormal phenomena by presenting captured audio and visual evidence enabling *TOR* to find the most helpful way to assist.

## CHAPTER III

### PARANORMAL SOCIAL CONSTRUCTS

#### **Helping with Fear**

Paranormal beliefs can often marginalize individuals making it difficult to accept and vocalize their paranormal beliefs and experiences without having proper support<sup>vii</sup>. "Until the needed social support is perceived to be in place" (Thye & Markovsky, 2001), some individuals will keep their paranormal beliefs and experiences quiet until they find adequate support, often with groups like *TOR*. The possible positive benefits *TOR* can provide clients in lessening the fear of spirits, loss of loved ones, and acceptance of their beliefs and experiences without negativity.

*TOR*'s investigations for support and assistance are seen with rituals such as politely asking any unwanted spirits to leave, assisting lingering spirits in moving on or into the light, communicating with spirits into respecting and understanding the homeowners' boundaries or rules, and using crystals or sage to cleanse homes clearing spaces of negative spirits or energy. Clients can also be assisted with closure by communication with passed loved ones.

A frequent request of *TOR*'s clients is cleansings. Neicole says, "The past few residential's we've had the people want something cleansed out. They think something's negative." *TOR* only performs cleansing and other rituals with permission from the client due to respect for their client's property.

Through *TOR*'s paranormal investigations, it is possible to help reduce the fear associated with paranormal phenomena by assisting people to become familiar with spirit communication through devices such as dowsing rods, ghost boxes, and DVRs clients are present during the paranormal investigation. Any pictures, videos, and other equipment used in the investigation may capture and alert any potential paranormal entities or phenomena such as static meter. The investigators watch the equipment, and explanations are given to the clients to help guide them along the investigation process. Clients are often encouraged to participate in communication with spirits if they are interested in doing so or engage in any activity that seems to prompt paranormal activity to aid in capturing the phenomena. Not all paranormal investigators have clients present during the investigation, but it is essential to do what the client feels comfortable within their residence. At the end of *TOR*'s investigations that I have attended, I have witnessed most people become more at ease with paranormal phenomena, with only one or two people remaining fearful of ghostly activity. *TOR* explains to many people that most spirits were once living people like us with no reason to be afraid of our grandmas or perhaps someone else's. After reviewing the investigation's audio and visual evidence and notes, the paranormal investigators discuss with clients providing an honest evaluation. Explanations and proof of paranormal phenomena or other events often help reduce fear of what was once unknown and provide clients with tools to help handle spirits or hauntings.

During a commercial property paranormal investigation at an old mansion, an employee was observed and commented to *TOR* on how she found the paranormal investigation process fascinating. The details dug up during *TOR*'s investigation of the

mansion paralleled her knowledge of the place's past, validating the investigation's findings for her as she became part of the paranormal community with her participation. Later that night, a few other employees at a different location, an old theater, felt better about their paranormal experiences through their observations and involvement in the paranormal investigations. The employees felt more comfortable in their workspace as they gained paranormal knowledge and tools. Only one employee still showed apprehension about her workplace despite having acquired a better understanding of dealing with paranormal phenomena. With the instruction and expertise of the paranormal investigators, the employees had a paranormal community form that night, even if temporarily, where they could voice their beliefs, experiences, and concerns and, for some, reconcile them by understanding the spirits and how to set boundaries.

One employee will now talk aloud to the spirits to set boundaries, saying, "You are not allowed to follow me into the bathroom and scare me!" The bathroom can be a hot spot at the old theater for paranormal activity, with ghosts spotted lurking behind people in mirrors.

Since a handful of employees got rid of or lessened their fears of paranormal phenomena and developed better attitudes regarding the location by having the investigation and by being able to speak freely of their paranormal experiences and beliefs, I consider this to be a social benefit often provided by paranormal investigators and their investigations. *TOR* had one employee who was still apprehensive about voicing her concerns and experiences. She was worried that speaking about the paranormal would reflect poorly on her and hurt her in her future profession. Negative attitudes and ridicule of people who believe and experience the paranormal may often do

more harm than allowing people to think and experience the paranormal. Most of the time, it can be harmless. The more openly paranormal beliefs and experiences are accepted as part of our human experience, the less fear there will be of the unknown and ridicule for speaking about such matters.

A residential case of *TORs* involved a deeply superstitious Catholic family worried about potential demonic activity. The team sensed dark energy there, yet not demonic in origin. The group felt residual dark energy possibly caused by previous adverse events in the house that a sage cleansing for the house should do the trick to get rid of the dark energy. Paranormal investigators with *TOR* pinpointed reasons for this family's problems that had both paranormal and manufactured causes. A young boy residing in the house appeared to be gifted psychically but often troubled by the paranormal phenomena, so *TOR* suggested to the parents that he may benefit from training from an experienced psychic on how to use shielding protection from unwanted paranormal phenomena. Another aspect of this case was the problematic high EMF present in the home, often causing headaches and hallucinations by possible faulty electric wiring, a potential cause of some paranormal phenomena experienced in this family's home. The issues turned out to be high EMF in the house and negative paranormal energy resulting in relieved clients equipped and supported to move on from their recent struggles.

Another *TOR* residential case found a resident's significant other with a drug problem with a negative entity attached to them, creating paranormal issues in the home. *TOR* informed the clients of their findings and advised that these individuals needed to clean themselves up to ditch the negative entity and create a better home situation. If

unable to do so, the home issues will most likely remain unresolved unless that individual is no longer around. A negative entity attached to an individual is called a parasite, believed to feed off the trauma and illness from individuals emanating negative energy. The individual suffering must want a change for the better to rid oneself of parasitic entities. *TOR* cannot and does not assist those with drug issues, so the group is willing to provide information for proper resources to help clients in instances like these.

John, during college, received an urgent knock on his dorm door from a person who requested help with stopping some guys in the TV room playing the Ouija board. So, John goes into the TV room and says, “Hey guys, there are people here who aren’t comfortable with you doing the Ouija board.” The men refused to stop playing, saying that they didn’t care. Every time John stepped into the TV room, he noticed that the Ouija board would stop working. John thought about using the priesthood power, where the men in the LDS religion believe that they have power and authority granted by God to act on His behalf as God would act (Packer, 2021). John thought to himself, if these guys won’t quit on their own, I will try to make them realize they are doing something bad, and John started to send in questions to ask the Ouija board. John asked the board questions sent into the room written on paper. John's first question was, “Who do you serve?” and the reply was “Satan.” Another question was, “What are you?” with the response, “Demon.” In his mind’s eye, John saw six-foot-tall entities in each corner of the room with clawed hands, bird-like feet, and beak-like mouths. Upon seeing the entities, John thought enough was enough. Hence, he entered the TV room, raised his arm



to the square<sup>4</sup>, and rebuked the entities with the power of the priesthood. According to John, the entities left with “a gust of wind like a wind tunnel every went out of through the windows in that room” according to John. One of the drunk men in the TV room came to his room at 6:00 am sober the following day and asked John for the *LDS* church’s starting time for service. This man told John that what John had cast out of the TV room came and stood at the foot of his bed all night enough that he thought he had better straighten up his life. I asked John how the individual asking for help that night knew to come to him for aid, and he said that it was him that mostly went to church and that this man may have had some spiritual guidance directing him to John.

Dennis Waskul, a sociology professor studying paranormal experiences and haunted locations, has remarked that he reassures his informants many times that other people have had similar paranormal experiences making informants feel much better. Informing an individual about precisely what they are experiencing, such as a residual haunting or a loved one’s spirit labeling the phenomena, can comfort those who fear the activity experienced. When people have paranormal experiences, their beliefs and responses to supernatural activity are relevant, meaningful, and worthy of recognition and attention (Waskul et al., 2018). Paranormal investigators have long understood the importance of acknowledging paranormal belief, deciphering paranormal activity at hand,

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<sup>4</sup> The left arm is held in a horizontal position to the elbow and the rest of the arm is vertical to form a square. The right hand is out from the stomach with fingers extending outward. John believes this action is a nod to the Temple of Solomon.

and pursuing an understanding of the supernatural unknown. *TOR* has recognized paranormal beliefs, investigated, explained, and implemented dealing methods to support their paranormal community in need for many years now and many years.

### **Dealing with Loss**

Neicole from *TOR* believes spirits or ghosts are aware of paranormal investigations and often follow her to them, desiring to communicate with the living, and thinks the spirit friend of the couple did exactly that. A public investigation held by *TOR* at the Gray Cliff Lodge restaurant in Ogden had in attendance a couple suffering the abrupt loss of a friend. The spirit communicating with the couple divulged personal information that no one would have known other than the couple's friend. During the investigation, this communication with their friend validated the couple's paranormal experiences since their friend's passing. This couple thought the friend had been around in spirit but were unsure of what they perceived was real or not and had no idea the friend followed them to the investigation. According to Neicole, the couple got “really emotional” and that she could tell it had been a very healing experience for them.

Marc Eaton explains, “The loss of a loved one heightened others’ interests in paranormal investigation. In such cases, paranormal investigating fulfilled a very personal need to believe in a loved one’s continued existence (Eaton, 2015).” *TOR* has witnessed how spirit communication acted as a healing experience for the couple. The couple could conversate with their friend and obtain the closure they needed by saying their goodbyes. "The loss of a loved one heightened others' interest in paranormal investigation. In such cases, paranormal investigating fulfilled a very personal need to

believe in a loved one's continued existence (Eaton, 2015)." Mary related her experience of believing in spirit communication when her husband's mother passed away. "We tried to explain to her that she passed away and we wouldn't be able to see her anymore. And to explain to a child, you know. And she said I know she came and visited me last night. So, I believe that spirits can communicate with us here," Mary explains<sup>viii</sup>. I have witnessed at investigations the excitement and joy in attendees at the possibility of communicating with deceased family and friends. Paranormal investigators can often facilitate this unique line of communication aiding in loss or closure.

I remember one *TOR* investigation held at a local community center where John's brother communicated with a passed loved one. I saw this individual before and after the night's investigation, and there was a drastic change in his countenance. Before the paranormal investigation started, the brother appeared to be very sad and switched to a happier expression at the end of the night. During an interview, I asked John what he remembers of his brother's experience.

John's brother had said, "Well, what I thought was interesting was we all went down in the basement. And they had those divining rods that were spinning around, and all of a sudden, they pointed right at me, and the lady says something about I have somebody looking for you whose name starts with the letter C, and I lost my wife Carolyn, about three years before. And I found that interesting." As to how this made him feel, he responded, "Some peace of mind. And she (a paranormal investigator and psychic) said there was a sister there. John and I just, well, we don't have a sister. We had an older friend who was a little bit older than we were, who was the housekeeper when we lived in the Philippines. And she was like a sister to us. And we've lost track of her

over the years. And we've been trying to find her, and I felt like that maybe that she had passed on. So the whole thing was just interesting. All things were quite interesting."

Another interesting point is that John's brother is LDS. His experience that night confirmed his religious beliefs in the afterlife and gave him comfort that his deceased wife was still with him in spirit.

The messages that clients or guests receive are a validating, healing spiritual experience. Spirit communication provides a way to have a final conversation with a loved one who passed away before that could have been done. Spiritual communication offers a way to understand that a loved one is still present in spirit and looking out for their loved ones. It comes as a relief that loved ones continue in spirit for many individuals, watching over and communicating with them from time to time.

### **Combating Negative Attitudes**

Neicole, during our interview, told me how people she has encountered have either considered her crazy or on drugs due to her paranormal interests and practices. She said her family has often reminded her that the paranormal phenomena should not be taken lightly due to her family's superstitions and fears regarding the paranormal field. Neicole's grandmother spoke of her sister, who played with Tarot cards and possibly had not used the cards appropriately as the sister felt as though some sort of negative entity attacked her. According to Neicole's grandmother, this made her sister act crazy enough to go to the "deep end." Neicole proceeded to tell me what many paranormal investigators hear is that people often think paranormal experiences are made-up to appear exciting or just in people's heads that are a little unbalanced.

The negative attitude from the academic world regarding the paranormal has a trickle-down effect making some people refrain from wanting to speak or seek out help for the unexplained phenomenon. Some individuals may not want it to become known that their house or place of business is haunted if such knowledge may affect them and their livelihoods adversely. Shane N. Thye and Barry N. Markovsky have written that people's critical thinking ability leads them to believe others' flawed judgments regarding the paranormal. Thye and Markovsky hope to establish better necessary thinking skills in their students to "stem the tide of a burgeoning paranormal industry (Thye & Markovsky, 2001)." Thye and Markovsky do not acknowledge paranormal belief as anything other than social processes lacking specific scientific proof and irrational people's lack of critical thinking skills and Caroline Watt and Richard Wiseman add, "Psychologists are perhaps the most skeptical about the accuracy of paranormal beliefs, and some of their work has proceeded on the assumption that such beliefs are basically misguided and maladaptive (Irwin, 2009)." This type of thinking dissuades people from speaking up regarding the paranormal.

*TOR* has frequently investigated a location in Ogden Canyon, a building that was first built for a family to enjoy mountain living and is now in use as a restaurant. According to John, the restaurant owner was curious about any ghostly activity. Still, his wife was "scared of spirits" and did not want to deal with the social stigma if it became known that her restaurant was a haunted spot. *TOR* is not out to convince people to believe in spirits, although they enjoy the opportunity to discuss ghosts and share their experiences while explaining the paranormal side of things. *TOR* tries to keep their paranormal investigations and conversations balanced regarding paranormal beliefs so

that they do not appear too “weird” or “crazy” for skeptics and non-believers to accept the group and what they do. Once more people accept paranormal beliefs and experiences as a worthy field to study, it will become a more positive field.

Like those who studied paranormal phenomena before them, the *TOR* investigators are willing to take criticism and stigma to continue their mission of questioning investigating and paranormal phenomena. Often, family members or close friends who had passed on that communicate with clients or guests feel relief after having a chance for a final conversation, mostly when the passing on was sudden. *TOR* members have stated many times that helping individuals gain closure has been the way they have helped others the most. Assisting clients or guests at public ghost hunts in understanding the often frightening and perplexing events that they may be experiencing helps alleviate the anxiety and fright associated with these experiences and give them options on how to deal with the paranormal in a comfortable manner.

*TOR* faces individual and institutional stigma, just as many other amateur paranormal investigation groups. The show *Ghost Adventures* faces the same stigma even if they are on TV and maybe more so due to the groups' popularity and high visibility on TV and social media. Individual stigma often comes in the forms of ridicule and unacceptance of the paranormal investigator's belief and pursuit of paranormal phenomena by society. The ridicule investigators face may even come from friends and family who do not support the investigator's views and paranormal investigations. Paranormal investigators also deal with institutional stigma as some in academia are skeptical of supernatural phenomena and so-called peasant beliefs. Adding to the problem is subjecting paranormal phenomena to the same scientific rigor that, for example, the

study of physics goes through. Dennis Waskul says, "My research is built from a simple premise: one does not have to believe ghosts are real to acknowledge the reality of belief in ghosts; likewise, one does not have to accept the notion that people can experience a ghostly presence to acknowledge that some people claim to have such experiences<sup>ix</sup>."

Academia can often discredit paranormal studies and beliefs, something that many other people in society do as well. As Waskul states, one does not need to believe in the paranormal to understand others' thoughts. Many individuals experience supernatural phenomena and can benefit by joining the paranormal community as psychosocial aspects are essential to many individuals in their lives. Just knowing that someone or a group like *TOR* is out there will give them understanding without judgment significant. There is a difference between feeling nuts and being nuts, and many people who have experienced hauntings and ghostly phenomena are not crazy.

## CHAPTER IV

### CONCLUSION

For most families in trouble, having a paranormal investigator or team to turn to for help can make all the difference. No one enjoys being disbelieved or called crazy. Paranormal investigators may not be psychologists, social workers, or physicists, but being open-minded and accepting of the paranormal phenomena and scary situations can be a welcoming comfort, and having an investigation done provides possible answers. TOR has seen this comfort many times as they have helped clients, guests, and spirits receive comforting messages from loved ones that have passed on, allowing for the living and dead to gain closure. Also, *TOR* has helped individuals understand the nature of their hauntings or debunk it altogether. By assisting others in understanding ghosts or spirits better, many individuals are less frightened of them and their situation, explaining how to navigate and deal with their weird situation. Paranormal investigators help the living in these situations and the dead as well. Often spirits need help navigating and coping with the living who sometimes occupy the spaces they once owned or frequented. At times spirits are unsure where to go and feel stuck, and help is needed to move on to a situation that comes up now and again during *TOR's* investigations.

Even if there is no proof that ghosts or spirits exist, it does not matter. It has not stopped many people from believing in them or experiencing them. Many individuals display no mental illness, depression, or manipulation by others to indicate a different possible cause other than a haunting. When someone wants paranormal help, it usually does not harm the living or the dead. What can be more harmful is ridiculing and sleight someone asking for help.



Suppose paranormal investigators come across a situation that seems suspicious or individuals who may need professional help. In that case, they will give the client or individual contact information for resources to reach out to or contact the proper authorities. Most paranormal investigators I have interviewed have a genuine interest in helping others in compassionate and ethical ways and treating their property with respect while furthering their quest for esoteric knowledge and experiences. It is unfortunate that some others claiming to be paranormal investigators or teams sometimes trespass and vandalize property, pull pranks, act in fraudulent ways to just "mess" with people and places, or scheme ways to gain some fortune and fame. The latter legitimately trying to help people and advance the paranormal field seems not silly and fake but downright dangerous. The people who behave in these ways make it hard for those paranormal investigators.

As for serious scholars who want to study paranormal phenomena, those who have heard of all the damage done by fake paranormal investigators, fraud in the paranormal investigation TV shows, and legend trippers' adventures went awry. Unlawful activities may lead to a push back against any serious study of the supernatural, often trying to delegitimize the study of it and ridicule those who want to study the field. Until a scientific theory predicts ghosts or spirits with testable descriptions of spirits, the study of ghosts cannot follow the same strictures and procedures as other scientific fields. What matters is that folks believe in the paranormal and have paranormal experiences. And some of these people occasionally want help for such paranormal matters, and that is where those who are explorers and adventurers of the paranormal step in. All of this occurs in the paranormal community at times fraught with disagreements and territorial

possessiveness, but more importantly, a willingness to work and learn from each other, hoping to help others, further paranormal knowledge while enjoying the fun historical facts and haunted locations. Especially those old buildings with remarkable architecture reportedly housing multiple ghosts.

*The Other Realm* is an example of how a paranormal investigation team forms a community creating many possible social benefits for those in the paranormal community. By applying a folklore lens, one can understand supernatural beliefs and fear, gaining insight into the paranormal community and its advantages. The paranormal community can benefit from paranormal investigation teams conducting investigations to help explain and ease fears and anxieties while providing resources, support, advice, contacts, connections, paranormal knowledge, and opportunities such as becoming a new team member. In the above examples, I have shown how *TOR*'s paranormal community helps their clients experiencing haunting by providing a safe space to share paranormal beliefs and experiences without fear of being ridiculed or not being believed. Despite occasionally being ridiculed and lacking academic support, the study of paranormal phenomena continues, and groups like *TOR* will continue to serve the paranormal community as belief in the supernatural and paranormal experiences show no signs of dissipating anytime soon.

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## APPENDIX

### Select Paranormal Technology Terminology

*Apparition*- a full or partial visible spirit. Some individuals may use this term to refer to what is thought of as non-human entities.

*Commercial investigation* is a paranormal investigation conducted at a business, school, factor, or non-residential location.

*Debunk*- weeding out potential paranormal evidence as things that can easily be explained as normal processes where proof exists.

*Digital video camera*- used to record spaces in hopes of visually catching spirits and other paranormal phenomena. Most cameras used are high definition (HD), full-spectrum (UV), and have night vision (IR) to capture both ends of the light spectrum where spirits supposedly reside.

*Digital voice recorder (DVR)*- used to communicate with spirits by asking a series of questions and waiting for a minute before moving to the next question to give spirits enough time to respond.

*Entities*- are often used to describe alleged human and non-human paranormal sightings.

*Ghost/spirit* often means the same thing to some individuals, indicating a deceased human's visible or invisible spirit. Some individuals may use the term spirit for religious purposes.

*Ghost/spirit box* is a device that sweeps through AM/FM radio frequencies to clear the air, aiding in spirit communication where one can hear the spirits' voices.

*Hot spots*- locations within a space that have frequent spirit activity.

*Infrared thermometer*- monitors the temperature of a room for any sudden changes. An isolated cold spot in a room could signify a presence.

*K2/EMF detector*- electromagnetic field (EMF) sensors are used by electricians to locate the source of excess electromagnetic radiation in a room. If there is no obvious source for a massive EMF, such as cell phones or appliances, it could indicate a ghostly presence.

*Kinect SLS Camera*- equipment that works in the light or dark to detect and map out spirit forms that cannot be seen with the naked eye.

*Laser grid*- maps out a room to detect any anomalies during an investigation, such as a shadow or spirit walking through a room.



*Mel meter*- a device used to communicate with spirits by having spirits manipulate the device's lights. The meter detects natural, human-made EMF (AC/DC) and ambient temperature changes in the environment, and anything out of the norm may indicate a spirit.

*Motion sensor*- a device that will light up or make a sound when it detects movement nearby.

*Paranormal unity* is a way of thinking and behaving for some paranormal investigation groups that assist and collaborate with other paranormal investigation teams.

*Parasite*- a non-ghost or spirit that attaches to a living individual going through rough times, putting off negative energy that parasitic entities feed off, continuing the harmful cycle the living individual is experiencing.

*Phasma Box*- a software used on laptops to enable spirit communication.

*Portals*- alleged spaces that allow paranormal entities to enter the living's realm. They are typically thought to be used by hostile supernatural entities or demons.

*Presence*- a personal feeling or indication from paranormal equipment that an unseen spirit may be close by.

*Psychic/medium-* often used by many as meaning the same thing. A psychic uses extrasensory perception (ESP) to identify information that one cannot understand using the normal senses, usually telepathy or clairvoyance. Mediums can tap into the afterlife and bridge the living and dead communication.

*Residential investigation-* a paranormal investigation conducted at a typical family home.

*Residual ghost or haunting-* a recorded image of a spirit depicting a piece of the past that may have happened regularly. The recorded haunting is often repeatedly seen and heard simultaneously and place. Sometimes this may be footsteps or particular noises with no ghost seen.

*Sensitive-* a person who can adequately sense and detect spiritual presences.

*Spirit/dowsing rods-* copper rods once used to find water are now used for spirit communication for yes and no responses to questions where the rods will cross or uncross.

*Trigger object-* an object that a spirit allegedly liked a lot during life is placed in a particular spot in hopes of attracting a spirit into communication and interaction.

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