

READ IT FIRST



On the road with
EVERYDAY PARANORMAL

CHASING TEXAS STYLE GHOSTS



**BRAD AND BARRY KLINGE
WITH KATHY PASSERO**

THOMAS DUNNE BOOKS.

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Growing Up Ghost-Obsessed

The toy store had been closed for hours—its doors locked, its countless Barbies, G.I. Joes, and plush animals staring impassively into the darkness. Suddenly, the whirrrrrr of wheels broke the silence as a skateboard flew off a shelf and careened across the floor, crashing into the base of a display. As the security camera footage rolled, a second skateboard leaped off its perch and sailed down an aisle, as if guided by an invisible joy rider.

BRAD: I've been fascinated by ghosts for as long as I can remember. When we were growing up in the 1980s, my older brother Barry and I never missed an episode of *That's Incredible* and the haunted Toys“R”Us I described above was our all-time favorite. But it left us lying awake late into the night trying to piece together what was really happening in that video. *How could viewers like us separate fact from fiction? Was the store really haunted, or was there some logical explanation for the bizarre activity? If it really was haunted, who—or what—was haunting it? And why?*

Where do you go for answers to questions like that when

you're a second grader? I tried the library at Rose Garden Elementary School in Universal City, Texas, a suburb of San Antonio. But when I asked for books about ghosts the librarian led me to a shelf filled with the Hardy Boys series, which was popular back then.

"That's not the kind of book I want," I told her in frustration. "Those are goofy kids' stories. They're made up. Don't you have anything about *real* ghosts?"

We checked the card catalog for nonfiction and found only one listing, a book simply titled *Ghosts*. It turned out to be a small paperback Scholastic Reader tucked back on an out-of-the-way shelf, collecting dust. While I was signing it out of the library, I scanned the short list of names penciled in above mine to find out who else had read the book. Sure enough, Barry's name was among them.

I started thumbing through *Ghosts* on my way back to the classroom and was instantly hooked. This was the real deal. The pages were filled with accounts of reported ghost sightings from around the world. Better yet, the book contained a number of grainy black-and-white photos of what the captions claimed were actual ghosts caught on film. These were classic pictures: a transparent shrouded female figure dubbed the Brown Lady of Raynham Hall appearing to float down a wide staircase in an old manor house. Choppy waters off the bow of the SS *Watertown*, where the faces of two drowned sailors appear to bob in the waves. I wouldn't learn until years later that the photos I was looking at were considered to be some of the most famous paranormal evidence of the early twentieth century.

When I showed *Ghosts* to Barry after school, his face lit up.

“Yeah,” he said enthusiastically. “I remember that book! I liked it, too.”

I checked out that book again and again, until I had memorized every page, every story about someone hearing rattling noises on a stormy night and glancing over his shoulder to find a spectral figure gliding toward him. I studied the photos obsessively. Could the faces be random patterns of light and dark that people misinterpreted as human features, just like when you sometimes discern a face in a tree trunk or a wallpaper pattern if you stare at it hard enough? I wasn’t sure, but I loved contemplating the unknown.

Until I moved on to middle school and had to return *Ghosts*, the battered paperback spent more time with me than it did in the library. I finally convinced my parents to let me order my own copy. I still have it in a box tucked away in my house somewhere, though I don’t have to rummage through my old school mementos to remember it clearly. I can picture the cover perfectly if I close my eyes. It featured a single ghostly figure in a hood and cloak that always reminded me of the Grim Reaper. Who knows? Maybe that image stuck in my subconscious mind and influenced our choice of logos for Everyday Paranormal years later. (The centerpiece of our company logo is a ghostly cloaked figure, with its hood obscuring its face.)

In addition to learning *Ghosts* by heart, Barry and I devoured every other nonfiction book we could find about the paranormal. We never found the subject scary—just fascinating. We read anything we could get our hands on that began with the premise that ghosts might be real and that examined the supernatural using the same matter-of-fact approach kids’ science and nature books use to explain weather, volcanoes, fossils, or the insect world.

Unfortunately, there wasn't much of that type of reading material available in those days. This was before every home had cable TV and a computer, before the Internet became a household word. You couldn't just launch a Google search and locate fifty Web pages with detailed written accounts of hauntings, color photos, and audio files of disembodied voices. Tracking down the information we wanted was like finding the proverbial needle in the haystack.

Like most of the kids we knew, we went to church every Sunday morning. Naturally, what we learned there led us to question how ghosts fit into the picture: The adults in our lives told us that when you die, you go to heaven—or at least your soul does. So why would some people stay here as ghosts? Why wouldn't others? We started asking "what if" questions. We still ask them today. It's the cornerstone of our attitude and our approach.

I think it's sad that so many children tend to lose their sense of curiosity as they grow up; they get jaded. Not me. I'm still curious about everything. Even now I think like a little kid in terms of questioning what I see and hear. Sometimes it drives my wife, Jessica, nuts. We've got four children, ranging in age from three to thirteen, and I'll tell them, "Look at that star up there. Did you know that it could be light from a star that exploded three million years ago and the light's just reaching Earth now?"

"Can't you just let them enjoy looking at the stars?" Jessica sometimes wants to know.

But to me, asking questions and finding out the answers is what *makes* life enjoyable. And since the paranormal deals largely with the unknown, there's tremendous potential to ask "what if" and uncover groundbreaking new explanations. What could be more fascinating than that?

I tell my kids, “Hold on to your imagination!” All great scientists, authors, and innovators do. The polio vaccine would never have been created if Jonas Salk had lacked imagination—if he had just shrugged his shoulders and said, “Well, we’ve got to stick to the accepted way of doing things. We can’t try anything new.” If Albert Einstein had let detractors who challenged his work discourage him, the world would be completely different today.

Don’t get me wrong. I’m not suggesting our work with Everyday Paranormal is on a par with developing the Theory of Relativity. We’re just regular guys. But we do appreciate the importance of open-mindedness and radical thinking. Our quest for answers might eventually help to unlock a few of the secrets of paranormal activity that have mystified the world for so long. That’s our goal, at least. And in the meantime, for two guys obsessed with ghosts all their lives, there’s no better way to spend a Friday or Saturday night than holed up in a historic haunted landmark, whether it’s a Civil War fort, a former speakeasy, or a mental ward.

BARRY: Looking back on our childhood, I’ve tried to figure out whether anything could have predisposed Brad and me for a career in ghost hunting. But aside from our fascination with the paranormal, we were your average football-obsessed Texas schoolboys. We lived in a residential neighborhood in Universal City, Texas, a suburb of San Antonio. We moved there amid the Bicentennial fervor of 1976 and stayed, as did our older brother and sister, until we graduated from high school. I left four years before Brad did, to join the navy, then returned to Texas to attend the

University of Texas at San Antonio, where I earned a bachelor's degree in kinesiology. Brad went off to college at Southwest Texas State University to earn a degree in business.

San Antonio was an idyllic setting for kids like us—plenty of sun and located a stone's throw from the Alamo, hallowed ground for Texans, especially those fascinated by history like we were. We were surrounded by evidence of our hometown's past—Spanish, French, and German heritage mixed with cowboy culture. It was evident in the architecture, the cultural events our parents took us to downtown, the subjects we studied in school. We always felt a strong connection to history, partly because we lived in a place steeped in it.

We didn't grow up in a moss-covered historic mansion or anything—just your basic ranch built in the mid-fifties. But, as you know if you've watched *Ghost Lab*, even nondescript modern buildings can set the stage for paranormal activity. The ground on which the building stands or the objects inside it might draw spirits there. A nearby power plant, a river, or even a thunderstorm might act as an inadvertent battery to fuel paranormal activity. And we did have a number of odd encounters in our house over the years that we suspected might be paranormal.

The first involved our maternal grandmother, who lived with us from the time we were born. She passed away when I was in the tenth grade. Very shortly after her death, I woke up to use the bathroom late one night. Hanging on the wall next to the sink was a plastic Dixie cup dispenser, the kind you often found in houses in those days. As I watched, the dispenser opened and the cup on the top of the stack slowly slid upward and outward until it separated from the cups below it, then fell to the

floor. It wasn't until the next morning that I grasped how truly unusual this was. Had I been sleepwalking? It seemed unlikely because I remembered everything that had happened before and after the cup fell.

I spent a good twenty minutes trying to see if I could make it happen again. I shut the dispenser and waited for it to open. No luck. Then I tipped it open repeatedly to see what the cups would do. They either stayed put or ended up on a sharp enough angle that gravity took over and, because they were stacked so tightly, the whole sleeve of them toppled to the floor. You had to tug at them to get them to separate. So how had the cup detached itself from the stack and defied gravity the night before? Had one cup been loose and the movement of the dispenser somehow created pressure that pushed it upward? Or was it something more? Could our grandmother have been giving me a sign that she was still there in the house? My instincts told me she had.

There were other inexplicable occurrences too. More than once, I was in my bedroom when I glanced up at the doorway to see a person walk by. I would get up and look out into the hall, only to find that there was nobody there. For years we had an old-fashioned 1960s-style radio in the kitchen, and I would often see the dial turn, the needle flicking back and forth, when no one was touching it. Pictures fell off the walls on numerous occasions, too. Obviously there could be a lot of logical explanations for that. Flimsy hooks. Loose wires. Vibrations from movement in a nearby room or from construction on a neighboring street. A member of the family might have brushed past hurriedly and failed to notice that they had dislodged the picture. But we sometimes found the same pictures turned around so that the images were facing

the wall. Every member of the household was adamant that they hadn't touched the pictures. So who had?

BRAD: Our dad died on Christmas Eve 2002, following a long battle with lung cancer. By that time, my siblings and I had moved away from home, but Barry and I stopped by whenever we could to visit Mom and help her around the house. Dad had spent his last months at home with an oxygen tank to help him breathe, and for a long time after he died you could walk into the house when there was no one there and still hear the bubbling and the steady *whoosh-whoosh* of the oxygen tank.

The strangest and most memorable occurrence was the grapefruit incident. Dad loved grapefruit. He would sit at the head of the table with a grapefruit half on a saucer and eat it with a spoon. One day several months after his death, I walked into the kitchen to find a fresh-cut grapefruit sitting on a saucer with a spoon next to it at the head of the table, right in front of the chair where Dad always sat.

"Uh, Mom, do you have any grapefruit in the house?" I asked.

"No," she said, puzzled as she followed me into the kitchen. "Why?"

We both stared at the grapefruit. There was no one else in the house. I checked with my siblings on the off chance that one of them had stopped by, cut up a grapefruit, and then decided to leave without eating it for some bizarre reason. They hadn't.

Did those early family experiences inspire our interest in the paranormal? Maybe. Skeptics would probably argue that all the reading Barry and I did about ghosts made us suggestible—it

planted ideas in our heads that caused us to turn the ordinary into something extraordinary and to imagine that we were experiencing paranormal activity. But we don't think so. We have dealt with far too many clients who were lifelong cynics until they suddenly witnessed paranormal activity to buy into the notion that ghosts appear through wishful thinking.

BARRY: Does some sort of sensitivity to the spirit world run in the Klinge family? Maybe. But our research indicates that ghosts don't seek out receptive folks like psychics and mystics to contact. They appear to believers and nonbelievers alike. However, we are not the only Klinges who have had encounters with the paranormal. Our oldest brother, Paul, was sitting in a church parking lot near his home in Dallas one morning, reading the paper as he waited for his children to exit the church. He had stopped going to Sunday services several years earlier. Now, he was in the habit of dropping off his kids and picking them up every week, though he never set foot inside the building himself. He was engrossed in an article about the local news when he heard a noise nearby and glanced up to find a disheveled old couple—octogenarians and possibly vagrants, judging from their appearance—shuffling up to his car. They started asking him questions about the church.

“What do they do in there?” they wanted to know.

“Well, I can help you out,” he said kindly. He got out of the car and walked them up to the church. They followed him inside and stayed close behind him until he found one of the church elders.

“These people would like to know more about your church,” he told him.

The man gave him a blank look. “What people?” he asked.

Paul turned around and was shocked to discover that the old couple was nowhere in sight. He checked the pews and the parking lot, but there was no sign of them anywhere.

As a computer programmer, Paul focuses on numbers, data, and hard facts. He is probably the least suggestible person we know. And yet he swears to this day that the old man and woman were ghosts and that the incident was an intervention intended to lead him back into the church, in which he is still very active to this day.

Our mom used to claim our fascination with the paranormal drove her crazy. She was mortified whenever we talked about it in front of her friends, the neighbors, or even the extended family. “Are you two going ghosting again tonight?” she would ask. “Aren’t you ever gonna give up that ghosting nonsense?”

“*Ghosting?!*” we would respond, cringing at the term. “Mom, that’s not even a word!”

Like many people who are unfamiliar with the paranormal field, she found the idea of studying ghosts frightening. She also condemned it as disrespectful to God. She thought it was a topic no self-respecting Christian would want to explore. But paranormal study has nothing to do with devil worship. That’s another field entirely. We have never bought into the notion that investigating ghosts runs counter to religion. Why should it? Both deal with the idea of existence extending beyond death.



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