

JOHN RUSSELL

A
KNOCK
IN THE
ATTIC

TRUE GHOST
STORIES & OTHER
SPINE-CHILLING
PARANORMAL ADVENTURES

outskirts
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press

A Knock in the Attic
True Ghost Stories & Other Spine-chilling Paranormal Adventures
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Some names, identifying details and locations have been changed.

Where dialogue appears, the intention was to re-create the essence of conversations rather than verbatim quotes.

Also by the author:

Riding with Ghosts, Angels, and the Spirits of the Dead

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Dedication

I Dedicate A KNOCK IN THE ATTIC to:

The old black ghost. Thank you for opening up the portal that has allowed me to experience, so far, over 800 wonderful supernatural events in my life.



I would also like to acknowledge:

Spirit, for the inspiration; Marjorie, for her love; Eric, for being a son and a friend; and Melissa, for the freedom.



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To my publisher, Outskirts Press; what a great publishing team to have behind me.

And I owe much gratitude to all of those both on this side and the Other Side who have helped to make my life the fascinating adventure it has been.

Foreword

JOHN RUSSELL IS an unusual man. He used to deliver office supplies for some years, and I got to know him when, on a delivery, he happened to notice a particular Van Gogh poster in my office. He said something piquant about it, we began to talk, and not long afterward I was looking at his portfolio of abstract expressionism and other assorted works. I asked him to do a painting for me, using the colors of Texas birds and wildflowers, which were somewhat softer than his own taste. He did. I now have a brilliant acrylic that I value to this day.

So I first knew Russell as an artist. I came to know him better as an insightful talker. For a number of years, he would just stop by and rescue me from computer screens giving headaches and keyboards promising carpal tunnel syndrome. For fifteen to thirty minutes we would talk about something, usually art, or politics, or philosophy. He knew quite a lot about many subjects. He argued well and for years my impression was that he was pretty much a thoroughgoing rationalist who liked to paint. I could live pretty easily with that.

Then later Russell loaned me a copy of Carl Sagan's last work on science and the paranormal. Which I read. It seemed pretty straightforward to me: there was no scientific basis for Para-normality, so one could infer that there was not anything to it, which is what I thought anyway. That Russell loaned me the book seemed to reconfirm his rationalism to me. But when I returned the book, I got a

surprise: he asked me if I'd ever had a paranormal experience. Said he'd had many. Said most people he knew well had had at least one. My thoughts stopped short. But I was polite, jocular, and said I'd have to think back to remember. I did not know what to say and eventually changed the subject. But eventually the subject got changed back.

From that point on Russell began to tell me about his experiences. I remember his telling me about the gas leaks at his home, when they occurred. He did not put the emphasis on the paranormal when he discussed them at the time, except that he used the term "guardian angel," I thought, metaphorically, for his good luck. For that was a situation that could possibly be explained by simply, extraordinarily good luck. But there are other things that Russell says that defy explanation, at least any kind of explanation that makes sense to me, such that I am compelled intellectually to hold my tongue.

Russell knows this is the way I am. It does not seem to have discouraged him from telling me his experiences nor of telling others with his book. He knows I am profoundly skeptical of accounts like his, yet he did ask me to write this foreword. I do not know what to make of the apparitions he has seen, or the rocking chair that rocked on its own, or the curious sack of cans, or the object that floated across his yard, or his sighting of the UFO in downtown San Angelo, or...

What I have come to find by knowing Russell is that when it comes to a book like his, there are for the most part two kinds of readers. The first rejects the book out of hand; it makes no sense to them; it offers accounts of events that are so bizarre they dismiss it. The second believes it, swallows it whole and fits it into some kind of personal metaphysics, which to me is as bizarre, if not more so, than the very events Russell describes in his book.

I do neither. I accept the book as sincere, for John Russell is sincere, if he is anything. I wonder about the accounts in it; some are odd, some troubling, some amusing, and all mystifying in some way. Moreover, John has told me things about myself that he would have had no way of knowing, things about my family history that I'd even

forgotten. I accept that without explanation as well. It makes more sense to me to do that than to invent a theory that makes no sense.

Thus, generally, I just listen to Russell. I enjoy his conversation; usually it is full of insight. And I enjoy his book. I hope you do the same.

—James Cogan, San Angelo, Texas.

A Nocturnal Visit from an Old Black Ghost

NO NOISE WOKE me. I was just suddenly wide-awake for no apparent reason, and I was also without any post-sleep grogginess: My mind was as clear as a bell; my senses were on full alert. I didn't hear, or at first see, anything unusual. But then, as I rose up on my elbows in my bed so that I could look around, through my open bedroom doorway I saw an old black man's face peering around one of the doorways from down the hall. He was clearly visible in the night-light's glow as he gazed down the short hallway into my bedroom. He was looking right at me, staring me straight in my eyes. I was just five years old, and I screamed bloody murder at the top of my lungs, for my family was white and we didn't have anyone black living with us, so I fearfully assumed an intruder had entered our home.

To compound my fright the old black man responded to my scream of distress by venturing a few steps into the hallway. He stood facing me, and the glow from the night-light illuminated him clearly as he stood with his feet slightly apart and his arms hanging by his sides. He wore a red plaid shirt, khaki pants with a black belt, and black dress shoes. As I stared in disbelief he maintained his steady gaze, his eyes never once leaving mine. Feelings of terror overwhelmed me as my heart thumped in my chest, and my mouth was so bone dry I'm surprised I could still scream, but scream I did, a blood-curdling howl even louder than my first, and still the old black man stood staring at me.

He was not smiling. But neither was his look menacing. His close-cropped white hair gave him an almost regal appearance as he stared at me with a benign, slightly bemused expression as if he were intrigued by this strange white child who was howling like a banshee.

By now I was sitting straight up in bed, the tears streaming copiously down my face, and as I screamed again he began to disappear. Starting with his feet he began to vanish a bit at a time: his lower legs disappeared, and then his thighs, and then his arms and torso until all that was left of him was his handsome face, that face now floating in the air without a body to sustain it, and his face was still wearing that benign, slightly bemused expression until, at last, his face was gone, too.

As my parents came running I began screaming at the top of my lungs that there was someone in the house (even though I'd just seen him disappear), and I begged them to turn on the lights and look for the old black man, who I described to them in a sobbing voice. So powerful was the sense of reality and urgency I conveyed that while mom held my shaking body close and tried to comfort me my dad turned on every light in the house, and he looked through every room and even in every closet. I think I remember that he even looked under the beds. Dad checked all of our exterior doors, and of course, they were securely locked. None of our windows had been broken into. No one had come into our house. No one in a physical body, that is.

And after finding no intruder in our home and also discovering that our house was just as secure as when we had retired for the night my folks insisted it had all been a bad dream. A child's nightmare, perhaps provoked by watching something on TV that had unsettled me and had made its way into my subconscious and expressed itself as a night terror of some sort.

I knew better.

I had seen someone. Someone who was just as solid as you or me, someone who had subsequently vanished into thin air when I saw him and began to scream. And with a shiver I finally realized what else I had just seen: I had seen my first ghost.

Even though my parents attempted to comfort me and left the hall light on for me it took me long hours to get back to sleep. I peered down the hallway wondering if the ghost would come back, and what he would want with me if he did. Why was he visiting me in the first place, scaring me to death in the middle of the night? How was it possible that he could appear in a body with clothes that were every bit as solid as yours or mine, and then vanish like a mist? And why did he vanish when my parents came running in response to my screams? If he came back again, what would he say to me, what would he ask me if he were to talk to me? Would he want me to do something that I would consider scary? Would he hurt me? There was a whirling dervish of questions in my frightened mind, but there were no answers.

From sheer exhaustion I finally dropped back off to sleep.

I never saw the old black ghost again, but I remember him as clearly as if the incident had happened this morning.

He was only the first of many ghosts I would come to see, the harbinger of the beginning of my psychic, mediumistic, paranormal life, a life lived at the edge of the Veil which separates the seen and unseen worlds. He opened up the way. He opened up the door.

So, to that old black man, that old black ghost: I never knew your name, Sir, nor have I seen you since; but it is to you that I fondly dedicate this book. Because you opened up that doorway and allowed me to see, I've had over 800 incredible paranormal experiences in my lifetime. I've been able to show others the way, and to help many people because of the ghostly contacts I've been afforded. I've been startled; entertained; puzzled; and, because of those normally invisible folks on the Other Side, I've had my life saved several times.

Thank you, Sir, for opening the portal. It's been one incredible journey for me, and as for you my friend, I hope you found your way. And if you can, please come to see me again. It's hard to explain, but I've kinda missed you over the years. And this time, I promise not to scream.