

THE HAUNTING, PART I

We scoured the annals of paranormal investigations to find real proof of ghostly activity. There wasn't any...until we found this bizarre case. You know how, during a horror movie, you always think, "Don't go in the attic"? Here's why.

FROM BAD TO WORSE

FIn November 1988, 26-year-old Jackie Hernandez was looking for a safe harbor to land in after her marriage fell apart. With a toddler in her arms and another baby on the way, Jackie found a run-down bungalow in the busy port town of San Pedro, California, just south of Los Angeles. As Jackie settled in to her new life, she noticed that something in the 90-year-old house just didn't seem right. Things started happening: The television would turn on all by itself. Pencils leapt out of a pencil holder. Her cat would chase shadows...literally. At one point, Jackie even thought she saw a disembodied head floating near her attic.

She thought she was imagining things—chalking it up to the stress of separating from her husband, being in a new place with few friends, and being pregnant. Besides, even if she wanted to, she couldn't afford to move again. So Jackie had her baby and maintained an uneasy truce with...whatever it was. But by late summer 1989, the activity started getting out of control.

FOUL SPIRITS

The house took on a nasty stench. Weird sounds emanated from the attic. Late one night, she looked into her baby daughter's bedroom and saw what seemed to be a “grayish, decaying” old man sitting cross-legged on the bed. He looked right at her, and then disappeared. A few days later, she saw the other ghost again: the floating, disembodied head. It could only be seen near the attic, and it too looked decaying. And it had mean, penetrating eyes.

Jackie's neighbor, Susan Castenada, was there the night that an orange, viscous liquid started oozing out of a light switch, and tiny balls of light flew through the house. “You need someone to come in here and help you,” she said. Jackie said she could handle it, but Castenada made a call anyway. She telephoned a UCLA parapsychologist that she'd seen on television, Dr. Barry Taff.

THE ATTIC, PT. I

On August 8, 1989, Dr. Taff's team arrived at the house, including professional cameraman Barry Conrad and his friend, photographer Jeff Wheatcraft. A former elementary school principal, Wheatcraft was a skeptic but came along because Conrad told him it might be fun.

While the video camera rolled, Jackie told her story. The team was fascinated by her account but a little frustrated that none of this so-called activity was happening when the camera was rolling. So Wheatcraft decided to check out the attic. He went into the laundry room, climbed up onto the washer, opened the trap door in the ceiling, and pulled himself up. He later said he felt a little unsettled up there, as if someone were watching him. He started snapping some pictures while the others waited below. "Suddenly, without warning, all of us heard a scream," recalled Conrad. "Jeff bolted down from the attic! He held out his trembling hands: 'My camera! It pulled the camera from my hands!'" Now the team was excited. And Jackie, though relieved that they finally believed her, was a little put off by their enthusiasm. But Taff reassured her that they were there to help. "It's fearful of something," she told them. "It doesn't want you to be here."

THE ATTIC, PT. II

Whatever *it* was in the attic, it was making a lot of noise. It sounded, they said, like someone was stomping around up there. But regardless of the noise, Wheatcraft wanted his \$1,200 camera back, and Conrad wanted to film a ghost. They climbed back up. Looking around with a flashlight, they noted that there was no other way in or out and that the room was empty, except for an old, wooden fruit box in the corner. Conrad started filming, but his camera went dead. He replaced the batteries, but it still wouldn't work. Meanwhile, Wheatcraft found his camera lens—it was behind the trap door, standing on its end, as if it had been placed there. It didn't have a scratch. But where was the rest of the camera? He finally saw it...sitting in the fruit box. How'd it get there? He didn't know, but he slowly reached in and retrieved it.

Both men were ready to get out of there, but first Wheatcraft wanted to flash off a few shots. Just as he took the third picture, a foul stench overtook them. "It's behind me," he said. Then, he

said, something pushed him hard in the back, nearly causing him to topple down through the trap door opening. As the two men scrambled down, they noticed three large glowing lights in the attic. Once they reached the safety of the kitchen, Conrad's video camera started working again. They didn't need any more convincing. There was definitely *something* in that house. And it was angry.

THE ATTIC, PT. III

Over the next month, the activity intensified—doors and cabinets opened and closed. The TV suddenly turned on and blared at full volume. Pictures fell from the walls. Lights and shadows passed through the house. Conrad spent a lot of time trying to film what he could, but he couldn't be everywhere at once, so he missed most of the activity. One night when he wasn't there, Jackie told Conrad that the ghost pinned her to the floor for several minutes. Then it threw a full can of Pepsi at her head. She couldn't take it anymore. On September 4, she called Conrad and left a frantic message: "It takes my fear and gains energy from it. The more scared I get, the stronger it gets." Conrad and Wheatcraft, along with another photographer, Gary Boehm, showed up around 1:00 a.m. and found Jackie and her two children waiting for them on the front porch.

The men wanted to go in, but Jackie thought they'd come to get her out of there, and pleaded with them not to go into the house. They went in anyway. Boehm was anxious to check out this attic he'd heard so much about. Wheatcraft was hesitant but willing—he hadn't been back since the night he was pushed. Conrad refused to take his camera up there, so Wheatcraft and Boehm went up into the attic without him.

At first, they didn't feel anything weird in the dark room, so they decided to leave. Then came three loud snaps, followed by a muffled scream from Wheatcraft. Boehm snapped some pictures so he could see. The flash revealed Wheatcraft pinned face-first against the slanted wall with his legs wrapped awkwardly around a support beam. Jackie yelled from below: "Come down! Come down! I told you what this thing was capable of!"

HANGED OUT TO DRY

Boehm rushed over and discovered that Wheatcraft had a length

of clothesline wrapped around his neck. He was actually *hanging* on a nail from one of the rafters. And he was completely unresponsive. Boehm couldn't untie the knot but was able to bend the nail and get his friend down and out of the attic. Finally back in the kitchen, Wheatcraft regained his senses but had a nasty headache and severe rope burns around his neck. The clothesline was tied in what they later determined to be a "seaman's knot."

The final straw came later that night, when Jackie discovered a bit of the strange, orange goop that had come out of the walls... on her baby's forehead. On several previous occasions, she'd told the spirit: "I demand you stay away from my kids!" And until that night, it had. But now, according to Jackie, "It was saying, 'I can do what I want to.'" She knew as long as she stayed there, she'd never be able to escape whatever it was. It even haunted her sleep: In a recurring nightmare, Jackie was a young man, standing on the San Pedro docks. She was hit on the head with a lead pipe and then held underneath the water. Jackie could feel the life being pulled out of her as she struggled to wake up. She knew that this ghost was telling her how he had been murdered.

TIME TO LEAVE

The next day, Jackie started looking for a new place to live, but she was nearly broke and had to tough it out for a few more weeks. Meanwhile, the investigation continued (although Wheatcraft never set foot in the house again). Reviewing his video from the previous night, Conrad saw balls of light flying above Wheatcraft's head. They seemed to follow him around the house.

Jackie didn't care what they saw on the video: She just wanted out. She and her husband agreed to try to patch things up, so she packed her stuff, put the kids in his truck, and they moved 300 miles north to the tiny town of Weldon, California. "I thought I had left the ghost back in San Pedro," she said. "I thought everything was going to be okay."

*But would it? Well, you've probably guessed
that because there's a Part II (page 399),
the answer is no.*

THE HAUNTING, PART II

When we left Jackie Hernandez in Part I of this ghost story (page 297), she had finally escaped the terror of that San Pedro house...or so she thought.

YOU CAN RUN...BUT YOU CAN'T HIDE

Not long after Jackie arrived in Weldon, her husband left her. Once again, she found herself alone in a new town. But she wasn't really alone. It started with a familiar pounding noise coming from the shed behind her trailer at night. Jackie recognized that sound. Then two of her neighbors got the scare of their lives when they were carrying a TV into her house and a face appeared on the screen. When they described its "evil eyes," Jackie knew whose face it was. Then one evening when she was in her baby daughter's room—Jackie turned around and the bedspread caught fire for no apparent reason. Had she not been there...

On April 13, 1990, the investigators got a phone call. Jackie was hysterical. Barry Conrad and Jeff Wheatcraft immediately jumped in their car and drove to Weldon. They arrived around midnight, but of course the house was quiet. Conrad turned on his camera and conducted some interviews. Nothing happened. So Jackie had an idea: "Let's use a Ouija board and see if we can get it to talk to us." The investigators weren't too keen on the idea. It wasn't that they believed the stories that a Ouija board could somehow "open the door" for evil spirits; they thought it was just a toy. Still, they agreed to give it a try.

THE CONVERSATION

Conrad trained his camera on the Ouija board while Jackie and a neighbor looked on. Wheatcraft and Conrad sat at the table with the board placed between them. Then the camera shut off. Conrad got up and turned it back on. And it shut off again. Just like that first night in the attic, he couldn't get it to work. So although there were four witnesses, there was no camera to record what happened next. Here's what they reported.

Shortly into the séance, the room grew very cold. As the two men asked questions, the pointer moved from letter to letter,

sometimes with their hands upon it, other times by itself. It spelled out its answers while Jackie wrote everything down.

Q: Are you really a ghost?

A: YES

Q: How many ghosts reside among the living?

A: PHANTOMS FILL THE SKIES ABOVE YOU

While Wheatcraft and Conrad tried to make sense of the response, the table began to shake. Then a candle went out. Then another one went out. They resumed the session.

Q: Where did you die?

A: SAN PEDRO BAY

Q: Did you drown?

A: NO, I WAS HELD UNDER WATER

Q: Did you live in the San Pedro house?

A: MY MURDERER

Q: Why do you follow Jackie?

A: ENERGY

As the night went on and dawn approached, the spirit revealed even more: He died in 1930, and he hanged Jeff Wheatcraft because “YOU HAVE THE LIKENESS OF MY KILLER.” Then Conrad asked, “Is there anyone in this room that you hate?” The letters spelled out: “J-E-F-F”.

And then, wrote Conrad: “For in a furious few seconds, Jeff and chair were levitated off the floor and hurled backwards into the trailer wall. The impact was so great that the entire trailer shook as Jeff toppled to the floor, unconscious.” Petrified, Jackie quickly took her two kids out of the house. Conrad was able to rouse Wheatcraft and get him to safety as well. Knowing that she couldn’t escape the spirit and that there was nothing left for her in Weldon, Jackie and her two children went back to San Pedro to stay at a friend’s house.

NAMES TO THE FACES

“The majority of paranormal cases aren’t worth pursuing,” explains Barry Taff. “There’s a lot of invention, a lot of embellishment, and a lot of outright fraud.” But Jackie Hernandez’s ordeal was differ-

ent. “This is the first case, out of more than 3,000 that I’ve been on, where the phenomenon went after the researchers.” It even followed Wheatcraft and Conrad back to their L.A. apartment, taunting them by—among other things—turning on the stove burners and placing scissors under their pillows. Wheatcraft said he was even pushed again.

DOCK OF THE BAY

So who was this malevolent spirit? After the séance, Conrad looked through old newspapers and found an article dated March 25, 1930, about a young sailor named Herman Hendrickson who was found dead in the water at the San Pedro docks. He had a large gash on his head, and foul play was suspected, but there were no witnesses. So police ultimately ruled the death accidental, believing that he probably slipped, hit his head, and drowned. When Jackie read the article, she felt right away, “That’s him.”

And what about the other ghost—the old man? Jackie believes she found out during the summer of 1990, after she moved back to San Pedro. While staying at her friend’s house, she saw a bright light outside one afternoon. Jackie followed it to a graveyard a few blocks away from her old house. It seemed to hover above the grave of a man named John Damon. “It went around and around the grave and just disappeared,” she recalled. Jackie later learned that her old house had been built by that same John Damon.

MOVING ON

Barry Conrad produced a documentary movie about the case called *An Unknown Encounter: A Haunting in San Pedro*. He also wrote a book about it. Barry Taff, still in the paranormal business, says he’s never seen a case like this one, before or since. He doesn’t know why or how this entity was so focused and so powerful, but he believes that it was somehow “feeding off the negative energy emanating from Jackie” in those troubled times. “One theory is that the environment can somehow store information,” he said. “And under the proper circumstances the information is reconstructed so that you can feel it, see it, or hear it.

Jackie Hernandez settled in an apartment in San Pedro. (She had it blessed by a priest before she moved in.) Then she started repairing her life. As things got back to normal—and she stopped

...and an entire floor of closets. Interested? It’s on the market for \$150 million.

bringing the investigators around—the “activity” grew quieter and quieter over the next couple of years. Today, she still lives in San Pedro, and claims that although she hasn’t been attacked since the early 1990s, the ghost of Herman Hendrickson still makes its presence known to her every once in a while. And at last report, Jackie’s old house is still haunted. The present owners have said that no previous tenant lasted more than six months.

CONCLUSION

To date, no one has ever been able to produce video proof of a haunting. Yet with the Jackie Hernandez case, everyone involved took and passed lie detector tests. In addition, the investigators captured footage of what appear to be floating balls of light, including one that can be clearly seen flying *into* Jackie’s head. Video experts and insect experts have examined the footage—as well as the still photographs—and all said the same thing: “These are not bugs or reflections or anything else that can be easily explained away. They’re like nothing we’ve ever seen.” That’s not all. Conrad filmed objects that moved on their own, as well as “something” dripping out of the wall. When Taff took the liquid to the forensics lab at UCLA to be tested, it was determined to be human plasma.

So why isn’t the San Pedro case the “smoking gun”—the one that makes everyone believe in spirits? “The problem is,” admits Taff, “these days, anything can be faked. So it’s not truth beyond a reasonable doubt.”

And the search for the proof of ghosts continues.

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PERSISTENCE SQUARED

A 22-year-old British man, Graham Parker, bought a Rubik’s Cube in 1983 at the peak of the puzzle toy fad’s popularity. He started trying to solve it, and kept trying...for 26 years. Finally, in 2009, at age 48, Parker solved it. “I’ve missed many important events,” he said, “and I’ve had wrist and back problems from spending hours on it, but when I clicked that last bit into place, I wept.”