

Ghost stories

AN OLD FRIEND DROPS IN FOR A SEANCE

by Rich Warren

I have recent information that the spirit who shares my home is named Abraham. He's not very bright, and he's afraid of losing his job. He's gay. And he likes me. He really likes me.

Although I didn't know his name, I've been aware of Abraham's presence for several years. Appropriately, I live in a very old house—109 years old—so it's not surprising I have a spectral houseguest. It's a beautiful old house with many interesting architectural features—a cupola, a loft effect and a large, dramatic Palladian window in the living room that overlooks a ravine. I've fallen in love with it myself, so it doesn't surprise me that some former resident liked it so much he, too, has elected to remain, even though he's inconveniently separated from his physical body.

That resident, Abraham, made his presence known to me fairly soon after I moved in eight years ago. I was in bed talking on the phone late one night when I heard very loud footsteps treading across the living room downstairs. You can imagine my hysteria—just ask the friend I was talking to on the phone. Somehow I worked up the courage to search the house, only to find nothing. Even then, I had a sneaking suspicion about what I'd just heard, a suspicion confirmed when the footsteps returned every few weeks or months, not always late at night and frequently, I noticed, on

Sundays.

At first the pattern was always the same—footsteps starting and stopping at the same spots in the living room. I began to assume it was one of those spirits stuck doing the same thing till the end of time. Then the footsteps began to migrate to other portions of the house. Fortunately, I was always in another room, and over time I actually became comfortable with them. Somehow I knew Abraham and I had an agreement—he knew I never wanted to see him. The day I rounded a corner and came upon a full frontal apparition would be the day the "For Sale" sign went up out front. So he kept his distance, polite and respectful—the perfect roommate.

Lately there's been such a distance I've begun to fret about him. It's actually been two years, appropriately enough on Halloween Day itself, since I've heard the big guy's heavy tread, and even though that visit was a little disconcerting—it was the first time he invaded my bedroom—I began to wonder if he was OK. Friends told me I should try conversing with him, but if you think I'm loony for believing there's a restless spirit wandering my home, you'll at least be comforted to learn that I never indulged in idle chatter with him. Oddly enough, I missed him. And I worried that I'd offended him somehow and he'd stomped off to haunt somebody else. So I decided to find out if he was still there.

Two years ago I arranged a seance at the Kelton House downtown, a historic home-turned-museum that is supposedly inhabited by three ghosts, one of them quite sinister—the one in the attic. These spirits' antics are so well-known that the house is a stop on the Columbus Landmarks' annual Ghost Tour. As I reported in *Columbus Alive*, I convinced one of Columbus' pre-eminent psychics, Bill Mitchell, to get in touch with those spirits. He had very specific images of the three presences, even smelling the cherry tobacco one of them had smoked. Most memorable, however, was when he and a fellow psychic approached the door to the attic with me close behind. Simultaneously, they both ducked and shrieked, claiming that a black cloud-like apparition had just erupted out of the door, trying to stop them from entering. It was way creepy.

I really didn't think the presence in my home would pull any malicious stunts like that, but I thought Bill could give me a reading to see if Abraham was still there. After making arrangements, Bill asked if he might visit my house the next day with a television crew, since he was preparing a documentary for Channel 19 on spiritual presences in Columbus buildings. I flipped, knowing my house to be in one of those pigsty states it is prone to disintegrating into. I thought I had a week to get the house in shape for the seance, and even then I wasn't too worried, figuring we could always leave the lights off for atmospheric effect. So I spent a frantic evening scrubbing and scouring.

The next day, the film crew was already there when I got home, filming exterior shots of the house. They were just using a little hand-held camera, kind of like *The Blair Witch Project*. I let them in, and they immediately started studying camera angles and filming several bizarre little knick-knacks I've picked up over the years, including some dancing Indonesian frogs I keep on the fireplace mantle. Bill was late, arriving with a carload of fellow psychics;

The seance: writer Rich Warren (left) and psychic Bill Mitchell (center).



when he walked in, he was completely in command, waving his arms and issuing orders like Cecil B. DeMille.

Bill brought a make-up artist with him, and he soon collapsed into an easy chair to be done up in advance of the lights, camera and action. Meanwhile, my home was not unlike a Hollywood studio, with the psychics and film crew buzzing through every corner of the house, me all the while noticing various cobwebs and dust bunnies I hadn't seen the night before. The actual filming seemed carefully scripted, closely following Bill's vision of what he wanted to portray. He placed his psychic friends around an enormous crystal ball on my dining room table and asked them to share the "vibrations" they were picking up. I can't recall a thing they said—all I remember is noticing with horror that I'd forgotten to Windex the glass table and it was covered with smudges and little kitty footprints.

A week later, Bill returned for the seance itself, this time with just one psychic friend, and I'd invited several of my own. Even though one of my friends was pushing to get an actual "visitation" from the spirit world, I was surprisingly calm. Most of my anxieties had gone into what to serve, since Miss Manners gives absolutely no guidance on what snacks are appropriate for a seance.

When the time came, Bill sat us in a circle around a table I'd placed in the living room on the very spot of the spirit's first wanderings. To encourage a flow of energy, we held hands in a very specific pattern, kind of like AC/DC. Bill shut his eyes, started nodding, and then words began coming in a torrent.

First came the name, Abraham. Then came the information that he was what we might call "simpleminded," although his simplicity also meant that he was a gentle soul (but I already knew that). He'd been a caretaker of the house, kind of a servant, although it wasn't clear whether he'd actually resided there before his death. He decided to remain because it was a place he loved and felt comfortable.

Some of Abraham's duties were apparently outdoors—Bill saw him working with horses, and there was a very specific image of him standing at an open fire in the wintertime with snow dripping from the branches of trees. He was a large, burly man with blondish/reddish hair, and he'd been concerned in his lifetime about job security, although he needn't have been because the family he worked for adored him and took good care of him. He wore a heavy coat and heavy boots that reached to the knee (the

better to make heavy footsteps with).

Then came the disturbing information that he liked me very, very much because he knows I love the house as much as he does and won't throw him out. In fact, he likes me a little *too* much. There are some jealousy issues that surface when I have dates over to the house. Hell, it's no wonder I'm single—I've got a spectre chasing dates away! But it works to my benefit also. Bill said if anyone ever tried to break into the house to harm me, Abraham would leap to my defense. I asked point blank and yes, he's gay.

During the seance, Bill's friend Debby reported seeing Abraham on the ledge of the loft above us. She also told me I could see him whenever I wanted—I only needed to say the word. That word will never be spoken. I'm a little too concerned about waking up some night to find myself cuddling with some slimy green ectoplasm.

Then it was over almost as quickly as it began. My friends left after Bill, joking that I would probably have a "visit" that night. At 4 a.m. there was a very loud whack underneath my bedroom window, but it doesn't take a psychic to figure out what it was—my paper boy's car has a hole in the muffler the size of Connecticut and I can hear him approaching from several blocks away. He'd been especially vigorous in his fling that morning.

Since then, there's been a whole lot of nothing, footsteps or otherwise, although it's comforting to know I apparently can conjure Abraham up whenever I want. What a great party trick. I'm reminded of a story I heard of a couple who purchased a house in German Village and spent tens of thousands of dollars in renovations before moving in. On their first night in residence, they awoke to find a presence at the foot of their bed—a disembodied face, its contorted features frozen into a permanent silent scream. Needless to say, they were a little, well, disturbed. But after all the money they had spent, they decided to just get used to it. Apparently, the eerie face returns every night, but they've learned to just roll over and go to sleep.

And I kind of feel the same way about Abraham—as long as he keeps his distance he can walk through my house till he wears holes in those heavy boots. But please, Abe, stay out of the bedroom. My love life is problematic enough as it is. The last thing I need in a romantic moment is to find myself being watched by Abraham, the Voyeuristic Ghost.

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