

Psyching Out The Spirits

By Antoinette May

■ A woman with a reputation for ghost chasing can expect to be asked anything. But most frequently it's, "Have you ever seen one?"

The answer is "no." I haven't seen ghosts, but I've surely felt their presence. One even accosted me at the nude beach in Santa Cruz. It was the scariest night of my life.

It all began on another, far pleasanter evening. At a crowded Tahoe restaurant, a friend and I shared a table with another couple, Bill and Vivian Marraccino. The usual get-acquainted question, "What do you do?", led to surprises for everyone.

"Have I ever got a ghost for you?" Bill exclaimed when I told him that I was a writer specializing in psychic phenomena.

"There's this haunted house down in Santa Cruz — all kinds of stuff happens there. Things fly around the room, lights go on and off..."

"Tell her about the ghost," Vivian broke in. "It's an old sailor who walks out the back door of the house and strolls about the camp ground. He looks so picturesque in his old rainslicker and cap that a new guy — Jim Hilburn, an engineer — tried to photograph him. Jim got quite close to what he thought was a flesh and blood, if a bit eccentric, man. Then, as he focused his camera, the old sailor faded away."

"Then there's the window," Bill picked up the narrative, "the window that doesn't exist." He explained that they and other campers at the Red, White and Blue Beach have often observed a lighted window on the hill above the water. "It really surprised me the first time," he recalls. "I couldn't remember any buildings in that area. I thought it was just a barren

hillside with nothing on it.

"The next day I discovered that it was just a barren hillside with nothing on it."

Of course I had to investigate this one for myself. A few days later I drove to Santa Cruz intending to interview Ralph and Kathy Edwards, the owners of the house and camp grounds. Even on a sunny day the place looks like a setting for a Gothic horror story. Coast Road winds its way through deserted stretches of hills and sea. On a weekday in November there was very little traffic.

The nudists can't complain of peeping toms here, I noted, turning off the road at the red, white and blue mailbox. Nothing else marked the narrow offroad which could easily be missed by passing motorists.

The narrow road wound downward from the highway, twisting and turning around rolling, mound-like hills. As I approached the isolated farmhouse, I felt that I had stepped

back in time a hundred years. If ever a house looked haunted, this one did. The tall, two-story structure was like some lonely sentinel, a mute survivor. Of what, I wondered: penetrating fog and sea gales certainly. But what else?

Ralph Edwards met me at the gate. He was a tall, rangy man with a taciturn manner. "I hear you have a ghost," I ventured.

"Better talk to my wife."

"You mean you never saw it?"

"I didn't say that." He turned back to his gardening.

Kathy Edwards proved the opposite of her laconic husband. She was full of stories — all of them frightening. "Things are relatively quiet now — those footsteps, they aren't much. They happen so often, Ralph wouldn't get any rest at night if he ran downstairs to check every time we heard them. And the doors slamming by themselves, that's nothing. They do it most every day. My perfume bottles dance around a lot and we hear the sound of crystal shattering, but never find anything broken.

"But when the girls were living at home,

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The Edwards' house in Santa Cruz.

Chuck Pelton

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that's when the house was really active. My daughter used to have a terrible time at night. Something seemed determined to shake them right out of their beds. Sometimes they'd make up beds on the floor thinking to get away from it, but there was no escape. Every time they'd pull up the covers something would yank them away. I remember Ronda was working as a medical secretary — a really demanding job that kept her very busy. Sometimes I'd hear her pleading with the bed to let her sleep.

"My son, Roger, didn't believe his sisters, so one night he slept in Ronda's bed. Nothing happened and he was soon asleep. Then in the middle of the night he awakened thinking it was an earthquake. The bed was shaking so violently that it seemed to leap right off the floor.

"Since the girls married and moved away, whatever it is seems to have shifted its attention to the first floor. People just won't stay overnight in this house. Our last guest was several years ago. A young relative sleeping on the couch was awakened by a rooster crowing. He could see its outline perched on the arm of the couch at his feet. But when he turned on the light nothing was there."

The Edwards have never kept chickens.

Kathy tells of a Navy picture of Ralph's which was hanging in the living room. One night it flew off the wall and sailed five feet before crashing to the ground with a force so great that some of the glass splinters are still imbedded in the wood. The nail that had secured the picture remains in the wall.

"If you think any of this is funny, don't laugh too loud," Kathy advised. "I told a visitor about our ghost once and he laughed at me. That skepticism didn't amuse whatever lives here one bit. Suddenly a drawer opened by itself and a baby shoe flew out and hit him on the side of the head. That stopped his laughing in a hurry."

On Thanksgiving Day of 1975, Kathy Edwards was just opening the refrigerator door when a large plant left its standard and flew toward her — a distance of some twelve feet. Her daughter prevented a serious injury by grasping the heavy pot in mid air. But the mess could not be avoided. The plant and dirt that had been in the pot crashed against Kathy and splattered the inside of the refrigerator. No fruit salad served at that holiday dinner!

Ronda was the target of another

attack which occurred one evening with nine people present. A glass of wine sitting on the piano flew through the air and deliberately poured itself down the front of Ronda's decollete dress.

"We have our own theories about that one," Kathy says. "Perhaps the ghost was jealous. In life she may have been very flat chested — Ronda definitely is not."

One mystery that continues to plague Kathy is the window on the hill originally described by the Marraccinos. "I kept hearing about the window; the campers were always asking about it. Then one evening I had to deliver a telephone message to the beach. As I walked back, I looked up and saw this great cathedral-like window on the side of the hill. It was very clear and I could see someone walking back and forth behind it.

"Something seemed to draw me toward the window, yet at the same time I felt that if I went there I'd never come back. I forced myself to return to the house. The next day I tramped all over the hill looking for some sign of what it might be, but found nothing. I never saw it again."

A few weeks later I returned to the house accompanied by a research team that included a group of mediums. The psychics walked about the house and grounds noting their impressions. I was the only one in the party who knew anything of the background of the place and I had not discussed it with anyone.

Chuck Pelton was the first of the mediums to speak. "There's a lot of current in the house, a lot of energy. Lights go on and off here by themselves."

"That's for sure!" Edwards affirmed. "The campers are always asking about those blinking lights. They say, 'Don't you and Kathy ever go to bed?' Actually the lights go on by themselves long after we've turned everything off and gone to sleep."

Chuck continued, "I see an old man wearing a raincoat and hat. I feel dampness, rain, mist. I think he was a sea captain."

This, of course, was corroborated by Kathy, who added that she'd found an old rain slicker and cap hanging on a hook on the back porch when they'd moved into the house. "At least a dozen people a year tell me they've seen an old man in a raincoat. I wonder sometimes if it couldn't be the sea captain who built this house in 1857."

The talking stopped. We were aware of the sound of animals howling outside. It was dark now and nothing could be seen from the windows. Chuck Pelton and Nick Nocerino went outside to investigate.

Sylvia Brown, co-director of the Nirvana Foundation, a psychic re-

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Perspectives *continued*

search organization headquartered in Campbell, began to speak: "You feel a heaviness in your chest at night, don't you Ralph?"

"Yes," he nodded.

She continued, "Things move around in this house. They seem to get lost, disappear for no apparent reason."

"They sure do," Kathy agreed. "The first year we lived here we were ready for the divorce court. I thought he'd taken things; he thought I had. Now I know that neither of us had. It was someone else, something else. Once I had a letter to deliver for one of the campers. It disappeared right out of my hand and appeared a day later in a laundry bag."

"I see an older man," Sylvia said. "He's wearing a long coat and walks about the grounds. In this life he killed an intruder. He doesn't like company even now. The people who lived here before were an angry, unhappy family. There was a lot of hatred, a lot of unresolved problems. I see unhappy young people... a beautiful girl... blood. There was a stabbing here. A baby died here, too. There were evil acts committed in the past."

Nick and Chuck had returned and I was very glad to see them. The atmosphere of the house had grown heavy, oppressive. I had a sense of danger, an emotion that I'd rarely experienced in the other houses investigated over the years. A dog was whining softly, cowering under a chair.

Nick Nocerino, a lifelong medium, sat down beside me. His words were anything but comforting. "There has been evil in this house — murder and incest. I see an angry man who dominated his children. They

were virtual prisoners here."

Kathy recalled that the former owner, a woman in her nineties, was the last of a large family who had lived for decades in the isolated farmhouse. "The stories she told me of her life were sad," Kathy said. "Her father took all the children out of school and refused to allow their friends to visit. He made his children work long hours in his dairy and then, as his health failed, he made them wait on him hand and foot. She seemed very bitter."

Frank went on, "There has been smuggling here — people mostly. People were brought here and some of them never left. They are buried here. There was bootlegging, too."

"Yes," Edwards agreed, "we found bottles of homemade whiskey and the remains of a still."

"A young girl came here to visit about the turn of the century. Her name was Gwendolyn. She was murdered."

Kathy gasped. "A girl named Gwendolyn did disappear mysteriously while visiting her uncle, who owned the place. That was in the very early 1900s. No one ever heard from her again. But a couple of years ago Ralph and I decided to put in a barbecue pit and dug up a skeleton. We thought it might be an old Indian burial ground and called in an expert from UC Santa Cruz. He said the bones were those of a woman buried seventy to eighty years ago."

The number of amazing "hits" says a good deal for mediumship, but did little to allay my fears. Directly across from where I sat in the living room was a window facing out onto the front

yard. From time to time I saw streaks and blobs of light at the window. It's my imagination, I told myself.

I could live with that until Ethel Pelton, who was sitting on the floor opposite me and directly under the window, spoke in a tight, choked voice. "I feel something terrible behind me. Something's going on outside, I know it is and I'm scared."

It really didn't help to have my skeptical friend, John Wilson, a Menlo Park attorney, confide that he, too, felt a sense of dread and oppression.

It was nearly midnight as the seance broke up. John and I walked out into the black night. A thick fog was creeping in from the sea. I felt certain that the evil presence menacing the house attached itself to me. Sick with terror, I stood shivering in the damp sea air — uncertain whether to continue on in the dark or to go back into the afflicted house.

John made the decision for me. "Come on, let's get out of this place," he said, grasping my arm and pulling me toward the car. Just as we got in, a great dark bird appeared out of nowhere and hovered above us. As we slowly navigated the narrow dirt road to the highway, the ugly creature preceded us. It had a wingspan of some six feet. What was it, I wondered — an owl, an eagle? I recalled that the place had at one time been known as the Eagle Run Dairy. What a relief when this gruesome harbinger of doom finally faded away in the night.

But that was not the end of our troubles. A heavy wind seemed to come up out of nowhere as we crossed the Santa Cruz mountains, making it difficult to keep the car on the road. I began to see flashes of light like bolts of lightning and blobs of white energy. There

seemed no doubt that some evil presence was pursuing us.

Some of that apprehension dissipated in the familiar atmosphere of my apartment. The streaks were gone, the blobs were gone, yet I could not rid myself of the feeling that I was not alone. Many times in the days that followed, I glanced up from my typewriter, certain that someone was looking over my shoulder.

Had I picked up a spectral hitchhiker? I recalled the story of "Lu," a woman who'd visited the farmhouse with her boyfriend, a long time friend of the Edwards's. Lu had felt so uncomfortable in the house that she'd left almost immediately. At home, she experienced a sense of possession. Again and again she heard the words, *unfinished* and *unburied*. She saw a vision of a man and large searing white spots.

Slowly, as the days passed, the sense of being watched diminished. I was alone again — really alone — and very glad of it. It was all imagination, I decided, and was beginning to believe it. And then one evening Nick called.

It seemed that he and Chuck had photographed the house while outdoors investigating the howling sounds. "What did you get, werewolves?" I tried to sound flippant.

"No, just blobs and streaks of light," he answered, also trying to sound flippant.

The pictures had been taken in darkness and yet the house was clearly revealed. The upstairs window of a darkened bedroom was illuminated and above the living room — where the seance had taken place — were found blobs of light and sometimes lightning-like bolts.

Some nights I wonder what they're doing down at the nude beach — but so far, I haven't had nerve enough to go back and find out. □