

Doing a Little Goodwill Haunting with Ghost Busters

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Pity those poor ghosts.

Every Halloween, it seems, the spook spectacle gets even more outrageous. There's a cottage industry of ooky-spooky costumes, books, movies and, of course, cheapjack suburban "haunted" houses all cashing in on paranormal activity.

And, yet, amid all the commercialism, the real spirit(s) of the holiday is getting overlooked.

Thank heavens – or hell, or purgatory, or wherever – for Spirit Seekers of Ohio. It's one of many ghost-buster posses in the area making a scientific case for those real wandering critters.

"Sure, we share ghost stories," says founder the Rev. Mitch Tolliver. "But more than that we conduct ghost investigations and show other people how to do it."

This is where it gets serious.

Spirit Seekers, founded by Tolliver and his sister, Gayle, investigates every shade of ghost, from orbs to mists to spirits to psychic imprints to death spots. It organizes field trips to cemeteries, fields, forests, even apartments, in search of the unusual suspects. The group even documents its findings online – www.spiritseekersofohio.net.

Since you can never predict what those ubiquitous ghosts are going to pull, you have to come prepared.

"There really is no such thing as a 'ghost hunter's kit,'" says Tolliver. "But you should always bring a camera, a flashlight and definitely a tape recorder.

"Digital camera photos can be fuzzy or capture dust particles, leading people to mistakenly believe that they've seen a ghost." he adds. "That's why you need a 35 mm film camera."

Very interesting . . . but what's with the tape recorder?

"That's how you capture EVPs – Electronic Voice Phenomenon," says Tolliver. "It's common for people who have visited a haunt to later hear the ghosts talking or laughing on their tape. The same goes with video."

What a coincidence: On Monday, I received an e-mail from a woman named Donna in which she describes a ghostly video her daughter shot of Gore Orphanage in Vermilion.

"We actually can see children behind the trees and in the mist," she says. "It's so eerie."

Perhaps, but not surprising.

Gore is now an empty field next to a ravine on Gore Orphanage Road, about a mile north of the Ohio Turnpike. But for decades, it's been one of Northeast Ohio's spookiest spots.

There's the tale about the fire that destroyed the orphanage in 1923, when a child dropped a lantern on a bale of hay and transformed 120 unfortunates into screaming balls of hell. There's the story of the ghosts who guard the grounds. The legend of the Headless Biker who still goes on hell rides in the woods.

"Most of the stories are untrue," says Tolliver. "There once was an orphanage there, but it closed long before there was a fire on the grounds. It is true, though, that four children died of diphtheria on the grounds and still allegedly roam the grounds."

It's that mix of legend and tragedy that makes ghost stories alluring.

"Any place where there was a traumatic death or where life was taken prematurely is fair game," says Tolliver. "But it adds to the mystery when the place is old, or some castle or cemetery."

He rates the following as among the spookiest in the area – and good places for "investigations":

Franklin Castle, on Cleveland's near West Side, where children, socialists and mistresses are said to have perished.

Erie Street Cemetery, across from Jacobs Field, where buried Sauk chief Joc-o-Sot has turned the boneyard into a field of screams.

Rider's 1812 Inn, where the ghost of the "ugliest woman in Painesville" still roams the joint dressed in a gown.

Monroe Cemetery, on Cleveland's near West Side, where tape recorders often pick up the chattering of ghosts.

Onward, ghost busters.

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