

# *Searching For Spirits*

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For some people, ghost hunting ends when they find the perfect Casper costume for their kindergartner to wear to school. For others, it's a nightly job.

"I'm part of a group of paranormal investigators called Unknown Utah, and we basically try to figure out if certain places are haunted," said Tom Young, producer of TV commercials by day and a ghost hunter by night.

Young's haunting quest began three years ago when a book mysteriously fell on the floor, open to a page that advertised ghost-hunting classes offered by Granite School District.

"So I took the class for two years until the instructor didn't want to teach it anymore, and then the school board asked me if I wanted to take over, so I did," Young said.

Now in his fourth year of hunting, Young has been recruited to lead a similar class at Fort Douglas. Beginning today, "Ghostly Guardians" meets every Wednesday or Friday from 8 to 10 p.m. for four weeks. Participants will be guided through several "haunted" places in the fort and around Salt Lake City, where they will use cameras, tape recorders, thermometers and other devices in an effort to detect paranormal activity.

"We brought [Young] in as a way of introducing the actual history of Fort Douglas to the public," said fort director Robert Voyles. "And because it's Halloween and everyone seems to be interested in ghost stories, [Young's class] is also for entertainment."

And entertainment is all ghost hunting is, says Joe Nickell, a professional paranormal investigator and writer for *Skeptical Inquirer Magazine* who lives in Amherst, N.Y. Nickell has spent 30 years investigating the spookiest places in the world - such as the Amityville house - and has appeared in countless TV documentaries detailing the truth behind ghost

stories.

"The paranormal is appealing because it promises great things - who wouldn't want to keep living after death? But the question is, are they any more than illusions?" Nickell said. "Science has never found a single ghost. Not one, ever.

"Ghost hunters start with a belief that there are ghosts and then they go looking for that. I've found that most [hunters] have fantasy-prone personalities; for instance, people who hear voices or had imaginary friends when they were children," Nickell said.

When asked about such scientific challenges, Young - and ghost hunters in general - admits that some believers are highly imaginative.

"There are some people who want to see something so bad that they can find something out of nothing. I don't indulge their findings if they're not real," Young said. But he maintains there are always a handful of people in each class who have found evidence of the paranormal.

Young described one encounter he had when he was asked to investigate Brigham Young's old home after caretakers told stories of strange creaking, cold spots in the house and bread smells in the empty kitchen.

"I went in there and instantly smelled something sweet cooking" like jam being canned, Young said. "Some places have what is called a residual haunting where activities of the past are continuously carried out by the spirits of those people."

Other examples he cites of common paranormal activity include hearing disembodied voices; photos of white, blurry orbs; transparent floating figures; intelligent haunting (when a ghost interacts with the living); and disgusting or unusual smells.

But Nickell said most of that so-called evidence has no basis in science. The popular orb sightings, for example, are really the camera's flash reflecting off dust in the air.

"It's pseudo-science. The equipment ghost hunters use are not made to detect ghosts, and there is simply no scientific claim that these instruments

can detect ghosts," Nickell said.

Still, Young and other ghost hunters remain firm believers in the paranormal. And Halloween month lends itself to multiple chances to connect with spirits. "Someday I hope to get some irrefutable piece of evidence that will change skeptic minds," Young said.  
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