

LIFE
WITH THE
AFTERLIFE

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13 Truths I Learned about Ghosts

AMY BRUNI
with Julie Tremaine



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For Charlotte

*Nothing makes me happier than raising you
in my magical, ghostly world. I love you and
I can't wait to read your book one day.*

And for Mom

*I miss you constantly. I can say with
certainty you're the ghost I wish I'd find
more than any other.*

Introduction

WELCOME TO THE STRANGE SIDE

If you had told me one day there would be a drinking game devoted to every time I got a swear word bleeped out on television, I would have told you that you were f***ing crazy. And yet, here we are.

You might recognize me from *Kindred Spirits*, or from *Ghost Hunters*, or from lots of weird and fun paranormal events all over the country. But what you probably don't realize is that I know a lot less about the afterlife than I did when I began investigating and researching unexplained phenomena. I started out with a very distinct idea of what I believed, and what I thought ghosts and spirits were. The more I learned, the more I realized I have no idea.

So when I say this book is “thirteen truths” about the

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afterlife, what I really mean is these are thirteen different ways of learning about ghosts and the paranormal, of opening your mind to new possibilities, of challenging your expectations, and of considering other perspectives and new ideas. The very nature of paranormal investigation prevents us from having any answers to the questions we are raising. No scientific tests exist to prove these paranormal phenomena we experience are real; there are no definitive conclusions to reach. There are only new experiences, and new ways of thinking.

People who have been seriously doing this work are the first ones to tell you they can't say for sure what the paranormal is, and they will never pretend to have any solid answers. I hope you didn't come to this book looking for me to explain the unexplainable. This book is a conversation between me and my ideas, you and your ideas, and the perspectives of many other experts in the field who have spent years and years developing their own theories.

This book, too, owes a debt to all the weird and wonderful paranormal researchers whom I've worked with throughout my career. Ghost hunting doesn't happen in a vacuum. It's working with other people who are equally as passionate about discovering the unknown corners of existence as I am that has truly allowed me to grow as an investigator, and to develop the theories and practices that have led me to where I am today. My hope is you'll

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read this, stretch the boundaries of what you think is possible, and reach outside the box the next time you are trying to rationalize something that defies explanation. And, you know, get a little bit scared in the process, because that's half the fun.

Thank you for coming on this journey with me. Now let's get strange.

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Chapter 1

GHOSTS ARE PEOPLE, TOO

FOR WALT DISNEY, it all started with a mouse. But for me, it all started with a ghost.

When I was growing up, it was just an accepted part of life that our house in Alameda, California, was haunted. From the moment we moved into our little Craftsman bungalow, it was clear there were ghosts in the house, and my New Agey parents certainly didn't shy away from that idea. In fact, they encouraged me, my brother, and my two sisters *not* to be afraid of what we couldn't explain. We felt spirits in the house, and we talked about them. My mom, especially, talked about seeing a little boy running between rooms. My dad dabbled in supernatural research. To us, it didn't feel weird at all. *Sometimes there are ghosts,*

the thinking was in our family, *and sometimes they're in our house*. It was totally normal to us.

Totally normal, right?

Maybe it sounds strange now, but that thinking opened a whole world to me. I was raised to be receptive to the idea that there are things in the universe we can't easily understand, and I was never told I should be wary of them. This paved a path of weird and wonderful possibilities I never could have imagined as a carefree child of the eighties, playing outside until after dark every night in Northern California.

So the night I saw a man standing in the window, eight feet above the ground, in a place where there was nowhere to stand, and wearing a kind of clothing I had never seen before, I knew I was seeing a ghost. But I wasn't scared.

Since then, there have been many moments in my career as a paranormal investigator when I have been frightened. Sometimes, downright terrified. But not at that moment. At that moment, I saw a man who couldn't possibly be there. He wasn't a scary ghost to me. He was a person.

So I did what any normal kid would do. I ran to get my mom.

By the time we got back, he was gone. It had just been a flash, for only a moment. But I knew what I'd seen. The man was wearing an old-fashioned green uniform and standing in the window, in clear view, even though that window was eight feet off the ground.

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Alameda, a midsize city in the San Francisco Bay Area, has a long military history. Even now, after the base has closed, it's still home to the Naval Air Museum. We learned later that our little house had been military housing, and a family who'd lived there had had a son who died serving in World War II. There used to be a wraparound porch where I had seen him standing, which explains why he was visible in a window so high off the ground. When he lived there, he would have been standing on that porch.

A man who wasn't there, standing on a porch that wasn't there.

You might say my whole life has been a path leading me to professional ghost hunting.

After that day, my appetite for weird knowledge was insatiable: about the afterlife, about who that ghost might be, about anything pertaining to the supernatural and anything not easily explained. My mom, Debbie, would drop me off at the library, and I would head straight for the ghost section. I read everything I could get my hands on by Hans Holzer, the famed paranormal researcher who investigated the house from *The Amityville Horror*. I examined and reexamined old photos of mediums in ridiculous situations, like having ectoplasm coming out of their ears. In the eighties there was a huge interest in the unexplained and there were new books coming out faster than I could keep up with them. (Holzer himself wrote

more than 120.) I devoured as much as I could, and I accepted it all as fact. Now I have a better understanding of how to determine what is credible when it comes to evidence. Back then, it never occurred to me that any of it was fake, and I loved every word of what I was reading.

At home, spooky things kept happening. The ghost of a little boy showed up more and more. Once, our neighbors were over for dinner. They had a young son who was about my age, who had fallen asleep on the couch at some point in the evening. His mom kept looking toward the bathroom. “Where’s Alex?” she asked. “I saw him go in there and I thought he’d be out by now.”

“Alex is asleep on the couch, sweetie,” her husband replied.

Her face went white. She was sure she had seen her son get up and walk across the room. Positive. But it wasn’t her son she was seeing. It was the boy who had passed away from leukemia years and years ago. At another dinner with that same couple, my dad, Gene, told them about the ghost, and how he would appear often in the house. They were totally skeptical, saying they didn’t believe in ghosts or the supernatural, and that none of it was possible. They said this even though we all knew they had seen the same paranormal activity we had. And then a picture came off the wall, hovered in midair for a moment or two, and crashed to the ground.

They left and never came back. The woman would

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come into our yard, but neither she nor her husband ever set foot in our house again.

I know now that there are many instances when paranormal activity ramps up in a location once people start acknowledging the presence of ghosts, especially in homes with lots of kids, like ours. They know we can see them, or hear them, and they want to make contact, so they try even harder to get our attention. The idea that we could talk to them, or ask them what they wanted to say, wasn't a theory I had back then. We were just wondering what was going to happen next.

When I was maybe eight years old, I took a picture of my sister standing on the porch of our house. I thought she was the only person I was photographing. When the film was developed, though, we all saw an image of an elderly woman standing behind her. My mom took it to our photographer neighbor to ask if it was a double exposure or something similar. The neighbor replied that it looked to her like the elderly woman who had lived in the house before we did. Evidently, when her husband would leave, she would stand in that spot and wait for him to come home.

Was it a spirit photo? I can't say for sure. It definitely looked that way to me, but whether it was or not, it sparked something in my mind. *There are actually people who look for ghosts*, I realized. *I could look for them, too.*

I didn't think about it that way at the time, but knowing

the stories of the people who lived in our house before we did, and who stayed with us in the house after they died, formed a different perspective about ghost hunting in me. Like many people, I started investigating the paranormal as a hobby. All those hours in the library poring over books eventually turned into a desire to find more ghosts in real life. But for me, it was always important to have a knowledge base—who I might find, why that soul is still there, what this spirit needs to hear or experience to feel like they can move on.

My dad, seeing an opportunity for both quality time together and for teachable moments, started taking me on paranormal investigations to supposedly haunted locations. We went to places like Fort Ross, the site of a Russian settlement from the early 1800s where the oldest known graves in Sonoma County are located. When I was in high school, he would pique my interest in historic locations in California by telling me there were ghosts there. We'd go with an old tape recorder, a Polaroid camera, and a notebook filled with research notes—a far cry from the ghost hunting equipment we use on the show now—and just sit there, asking questions, using what we knew about the place to inform our EVP sessions. (EVP is short for “electronic voice phenomena,” and it's what a recorder will pick up that we can't hear with our own ears. We'll talk a lot more about this later.)

I'd spent so much time learning about the paranormal

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that it was a total rush to put it all into practice. Suddenly, I was doing it myself: using all the things I had heard about research and investigating to try to make contact with the other side. But it wasn't about trying to be scared—or, at least, not *only* wanting to be scared. It was about learning who these ghosts were in life and why they were still around now. I was trying to figure out why they were making contact with the living. For my dad, it was about spending time together and simultaneously teaching me about history. It was incredibly effective and so interesting. Those times we had together are some of my best childhood memories. Using haunted history to teach kids about the past is something I tell other parents about all the time, and something I definitely plan on putting into practice if my daughter Charlotte grows up to have an interest in ghosts.

Eventually, I started taking vacations to do amateur investigations at haunted locations like the Stanley Hotel in Colorado, from *The Shining*, and the *Queen Mary*, a notoriously haunted cruise ship that's now a hotel permanently docked in Los Angeles. It was definitely a thrill to put all my preparation into action, and in the beginning, I really was scared and felt the adrenaline rush of brushes with the unexplained.

Through those investigations, through finding the people behind the scares, I eventually realized something so simple, but so often overlooked by enthusiasts of the

paranormal: *Ghosts are people, too*. As much as ghost hunting is about the excitement of making contact, it's also about something else. You're talking to a person on the other side. A person who was once alive, and a person who is in a position that you could potentially end up in yourself one day.

They're not sticking around for the hell of it—okay, maybe that's a bad choice of words—but they're certainly not sticking around for the fun of it. (Seriously, does haunting the same three rooms for two hundred years sound like fun to you?) My theory, like many people's, is that usually they're still here because they have unfinished business on this plane. Sometimes, it's because they have things they want to communicate. Sometimes, they don't even know they've passed away and that it's time to go.

Those restless spirits want to be heard. They *need* to be heard. And those of us who are lucky enough to get to talk to them have a responsibility to listen, really listen, and not just try to treat them like an evening's entertainment. There were so many times on *Ghost Hunters* when my investigating partner Adam Berry and I would find ghosts who were so clearly in need of help—but because of filming constraints and the format of the show, we'd have to leave before we could do much to aid them. That show was designed around helping people figure out whether they had hauntings in their homes and businesses, not to help

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the dead with whatever was keeping them on this plane. The more often this happened, the guiltier we felt.

We once filmed an episode of *Ghost Hunters* at the Waverly Hills Sanatorium in Kentucky, which is an enormous hospital that once held up to four hundred patients at a time at the height of the tuberculosis epidemic in the early twentieth century. After the TB hospital was closed, Waverly Hills became a long-term care facility for the elderly and mentally ill, which was finally shuttered due to claims of patient neglect. Current owner Tina Mattingly, who purchased the building long afterward, claims that anywhere from 20,000 to 62,000 people have died there in the 120 years Waverly Hills has been around.

During filming, Adam and I were in the nurses' wing, which had never been professionally investigated before. For all we knew, we were the first people in that area in decades. At the end of the night, at maybe 2 a.m., we started communicating through a series of knocks with some ghosts we thought were nurses. We made the communication choices clear: Knock once for yes, and twice for no. It was constant—they were answering every question, and their responses were clear and consistent.

At one point, we asked them, "How many of you are there here? Knock wherever you are in the room." We heard knocks all around us. Seventeen of them, as though there were seventeen different people trying to reach out to us.

We asked, “Do you want prayer?” *One knock.* So we prayed for them. I wouldn’t call myself a really religious person, but if someone is asking me to pray for them, I’m going to. I believe it’s all about energy and intention. As we prayed, it was completely silent all around us. No knocking at all. But as soon as we said “Amen,” the knocks started back up again. It was almost as if they were trying to thank us.

The knocks kept happening. It seemed like the nurses were so eager to talk, to have someone acknowledge that they were actually there. We finally had to leave for the night, because the camera crew has limits on how long they can work in a day. We felt so bad when we told them we had to go. They clearly didn’t want us to. As we were walking down the hallway, they knocked on the walls all around us, following us as we left the building.

I was in tears as we were leaving. It was heartbreaking to make contact with ghosts who so desperately wanted to communicate with us. I wanted to hear them, and try to help them, so badly. When I got back to my hotel room, as the sun was coming up, I heard one final knock on the wall above my bed.

Adam and I had a lot of experiences like this, where we saw a real need for help. There were spirits wanting to communicate messages to the living, or needing to fix a problem tethering them to a location, and yet, we couldn’t resolve things for them. There were many times

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when we'd hear something say *Help me*, but we had to walk away because of the kind of show we were on and the constraints of that format. At the time, the common thinking was more about trying to find evidence that ghosts exist, and less about who those ghosts were and what they were saying. That was the public appetite when *Ghost Hunters* started: People wanted to know what we were finding, and whether it was real. So in the analysis at the end of an episode, we'd present these clear EVPs of people crying, or asking for help, but then no one would try to find out what they were asking for help with.

This is how the idea for *Kindred Spirits* materialized: from finding spirits in need and then having to leave them, knowing there was more work to do. It just felt like there was something *missing* from the conversation about ghosts. Eventually, Adam and I decided we needed to leave *Ghost Hunters* and find a way to bridge the gap between the living and the dead that addressed the needs of both sides like real people. We wanted to focus on what we could do to help all of them at the same time, and not just find evidence and leave. Ghosts aren't just for fun to me. They're people who have needs just like we do.

Now, through *Kindred Spirits*, we travel the country looking for people who really need our help. We have gone into the home of a woman who wasn't using an

entire floor of her house because she believed it was haunted by her brother, who had been murdered by their other brother. We have investigated for a terrified mother and son who weren't using their living space because the son kept seeing a "shadow man." We've gone deep into the woods to try to figure out who was breaking things and scratching people at a family's cabin.

To help us get to the bottom of what's really going on, we often bring in local historians or other paranormal researchers. Chip Coffey is a psychic who once had his own show, *Psychic Kids*, and has joined us on many *Kindred Spirits* cases to try to get readings from spirits in the locations we're investigating.

"It's almost like social work for the living and the dead," Chip said. "It's attending to the needs of both. When we go in, we're trying to determine: What are the living experiencing there? And what are the dead experiencing?"

Do we really help? I'd like to think so. We dig deep into the history of the area, especially the history of the home, to try to find out what could be causing activity. We talk to family members of former residents, and family members of the people experiencing the activity. We've found gravestones hidden in backyards and wells in the basements of three-hundred-year-old homes. Creepy? Absolutely. But in all of those instances, even if a spirit has clearly just said that it wants to be left alone, I've walked away feeling like I did

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something to help someone, whether that person is alive or dead.

“A lot of times, I think they’re just ready to have their full story told, or they’re looking for someone who will actually listen to them, or pay them some attention, or get their story right,” Chip explained. “It’s like we’re asking them what we can do to make their existence better.

“It’s dealing with bringing some understanding, and hopefully comfort, to the people in the location who are still living, and addressing the needs of the dead,” Chip continued. When it comes to talking to spirits, “I think the word is ‘acknowledgment.’ Maybe they’re imparting information that no one has ever acknowledged from them, or a message they haven’t been able to get across.”

If there’s one thing I hope you’ll take away from this book, it’s that most ghosts are not frightening. They are not some novelty sideshow act, either. We’re all going to end up the same way in the end, and some of us are probably going to stay behind to finish what we couldn’t in life. Most living people, though, see ghosts as scary. My feeling is that once we learn more about the spirit world, and the people who populate it, we start to humanize ghosts and become less afraid of them. That is exactly what happened to me, and it taught me to handle the paranormal with more respect. It has also brought me down the most unconventional career path I can think of, and taken me into some totally hair-raising

situations. I have found myself everywhere from abandoned sanatoriums, to haunted prisons, to shuttered mental hospitals where spirits are, quite literally, coming out of the walls.

So for now, let's talk about some crazy good ghost stories.

BABY AMY AND BABY GHOSTS

When I was very young, maybe three or four, we lived in an apartment building. None of my siblings had been born yet, so it was just my mom, my dad, and me.

One day, I was playing in the living room and something caught my eye from my room. It was a shadow, peeking out of my bedroom closet. A very distinct little shadow figure, maybe the size of a kid like me, that definitely wanted to play.

It would peek its head out of the closet, then dart back in again, over and over like it was playing a game. Finally, my curiosity got the better of me, and I decided to go investigate. (You're shocked. I know.)

By the time I walked over, it had disappeared.

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I remember that I wasn't scared, but more puzzled that something that had just been there was now gone.

Later, I asked my mom about it. She looked shocked for a moment, then glossed over it. It's the exact same thing I would do now if Charlotte saw a ghost and told me about it. Maybe it's genetic?