

Ghost Hunting 101

Do you hear bumps in the night? Does your hair stand on end when you walk into a room? Maybe you feel as if someone is watching you or perhaps you think you see someone out the corner of your eye, but when you turn to look no one is there? What you may be encountering in those unsettling moments is a ghost. So before you go running out of your house screaming, let's take a moment to talk about ghostly encounters and those that investigate this phenomena.

A ghost is believed to be the spirit or soul of a person who has remained on Earth after death. When a ghost has taken up residence in a location, it is referred to as a haunting. There are two different ways in which a ghost inhabits a location. The most common type of haunting is a residual haunting. A residual haunting is typified by ghostly energy that is static or goes through a number of movements over and over again. It can be likened to watching a movie clip that repeats itself or a record album that has a skip in it, causing the needle to jump back to an earlier point on the album and begin again.

The second classification of haunting is the classic haunting. In a classic haunting the ghost displays intelligence and interacts with the people in the environment. It is not uncommon during a classic haunting for items to be moved around, for lights or electrical appliances to turn on and off, to hear voices our sounds out of nowhere or to be touched, tickled, stroked or even shoved. These ghosts often reflect the personality of an individual, even after their death. With this type of haunting, the aroma of flowers, perfume, cigarette smoke or other scents that are associated with the individual are often detected.

So whether you think you are being haunted by a ghost and want to have a group of trained professionals to come to your home or are interested in investigating all that goes bump in the night, but don't know where to begin, here's some information that can help you get started.

It is held that ghosts are electro-magnetic in origin and they create these fields when trying to manifest into this dimension. The energy that is given off by a ghost causes disruptions in the locations magnetic field, thus making it detectable by specialized equipment and psychics alike.

Because the presence of a ghost can be detected by specific types of equipment, a ghost hunter can become well equipped with a number of affordable pieces of equipment, many of which you may already own. From basic to advanced, there are many different types of equipment you can use to detect an otherworldly presence. For someone thinking about participating in an investigation, this doesn't mean you have to own every piece of equipment in order to perform a reliable investigation. It does mean that you should at least possess a basic set of tools to use.

Basic Equipment

35mm or Digital Camera For a beginner, having a camera is probably the easiest and least expensive way to begin. Pictures, whether digital or recorded on film can capture paranormal activity, activity that is often invisible to the naked eye. This is especially true in the case of documenting the presence of orbs and ectoplasm.

Notebook & Pen or Pencil Simple as this may be, it is always a good idea to have something to record any notes, findings or experiences you may have during an investigation.

Flashlight Many times an investigation will take you to a dark or foreboding location such as a cemetery, old warehouse, abandoned building or other place that is dark or without electricity. In these instances you will need to have a portable light source.

Extra Batteries Depending on the paranormal activity of a location, batteries oftentimes will mysteriously and unexpectedly lose their charge leaving you in the dark. Regardless of the type of equipment you use, make sure you bring extra batteries along to replenish depleted ones.

Intermediate Equipment

EMF Detector The Electromagnetic Field Detector is probably one of the most important pieces of equipment to own if you are serious about doing an investigation. In addition to detecting the energy fields of ghosts, it is a key tool to use when taking baseline readings of a site. A baseline reading is a preliminary evaluation of a location, where investigators identify any existing or man made electromagnetic fields such as those created by power lines or electrical appliances.

Digital Video Camera Video cameras can be a useful investigation tool. Unlike still cameras, a video camera will document any activity in its entirety including the length of time the phenomena occurs, the surrounding conditions, as well as the phenomena itself. A tripod to rest the video camera on is also helpful, especially if it is going to be left in a stationary position to record the activity in a specific location.

Tape Recorder with an External Microphone There is no better way to capture EVP's (electronic voice phenomena) than through the use of a tape recorder. Whether using a traditional tape recorder with high quality tapes or a digital recorder, an external microphone should always be used. A detached mic will eliminate the sounds of internal gears and turning wheels that can contaminate your recording.

Advanced Equipment

Motion Detectors Motion detectors can be used to sense the movement of unseen forces. Many need to be plugged in to an outlet, but battery operated ones are also available. Before you go out and buy one, decide which type will best support your investigatory needs.

Thermal Scanner A thermal scanner or non-contact thermometer can be used to detect rapid temperature changes. A change of ten degrees or more from the ambient temperature (the temperature of the surrounding area) can indicate an ethereal presence.

Psychics As An Investigative Tool

In addition to tools such as cameras, meters and gauges that are used by ghost hunters, many groups also utilize the services of trained psychics as a means of gathering information about a site. This is the role I play when working with ghost hunting groups.

Finding a true psychic to work with can be a real asset to the quality of your investigation. They can play an invaluable role in supporting the efforts of any paranormal investigation. Like a good piece of equipment, a psychic can help to detect anomalies as well as provide additional insights into the nature of activity encountered.

If your group decides to include the use of a psychic as part of the investigation team, there are a few items that should be considered. To maximize the objectivity of the investigation, it is critical that the psychic go into a location "cold". This means that they do not know the details of the location or of any activity that may have been encountered by other members or the property owner. Telling the psychic the history of a property can cause the individual to become "contaminated", which can make it difficult for them to differentiate what they perceive from what they have been told.

Conducting An Investigation

With at least a basic kit of equipment in hand, you are now ready to explore the world of paranormal phenomena. Before you begin, there are a few ground rules to consider. First, never go on an investigation alone, in addition to personal safety, you never know what may happen. Next, consider the fact that ghost hunting groups are often judged by their behavior and professionalism so always try to be respectful of the people, places and situations you may encounter.

To do an investigation, the first step is to select a location. Locations can include cemeteries, old buildings, historic sites, private homes and businesses. Always get permission to be on a site. This will keep you from getting in trouble for trespassing. Before you begin a formal investigation it is a good idea to do some research on the site. Talk to the owner, check out old newspapers, or contact the local historic society to see if anything happened there in the past. It is also a good idea to evaluate the terrain for potential hazards or/ or to identify places where you can setup stationary video cameras, motion detectors or tape recorders.

Most investigations occur after dark, between the hours of 9pm and 6am. These hours are considered the "psychic hours" and are believed to be the best time to record paranormal activity.

When you get to the selected location, walk around to get a feel for it. Next, set up any stationary equipment and take baseline readings of the site. Then let the investigation begin. Take pictures, shoot video, record for EVP and take meter readings. Take them everywhere and anywhere, especially if you feel something or get a reading on another piece of equipment. When you are done walking around a site, turn your stationary equipment on and let it run while you and your group are out of the area.

When you have finished collecting your data, it is time for analysis. Here each picture, video and tape is reviewed for evidence of a haunting. This is probably the most important part of any investigation. As you review your materials, be skeptical. Look for earthly causes of any phenomena. Was someone smoking in the area? Was the room or location dusty? Where there reflective surfaces that could be the cause of the anomaly in your image? It is important to make sure your evidence will stand up to scrutiny by eliminating any other explanations. This will give your data more credibility.

As you pore over your data, what you will find is that not every location you go to will have ghostly activity. You may discover that many of the things you initially detected during your investigation actually have real world explanations as opposed to supernatural ones. What keeps many ghost hunters going is that one-in-five chance that this investigation will be the "real" thing.

When your analysis is done, presenting your finding to the home or property owner or sharing your results with others is often done. Many groups also post the results of their investigations on their group's website, thus share the outcome of their investigation with the rest of the world.

If you are interested in ghost hunting or think you have a ghost hanging around in your local, there is a plethora of information available on the worldwide web. Here you can find articles about ghost hunting in general, stories of other people's ghostly encounters, places that sell ghost hunting equipment and even sites hosted by ghost hunting groups in your geographic area.

So if you think you are hearing bumps in the night, don't be afraid it just might be a ghost!