

When Good Investigations Go Bad

By: Larry Flaxman

President, ARPAST

<http://www.arpast.org>

I had never anticipated the need to write an article concerning this topic...most likely due to the fact that (on the surface at least), it would appear extremely obvious. Almost like tying one's shoes – the topic of personal safety should be almost second nature.

But...alas, “should” and “would” are often mistaken for “may” or “could” – and, as we are all so painfully aware, we do not live in a utopian society. In today's day and age, one's individual safety cannot be stressed enough.

Let me begin by regaling you with a tale of drugs, deceit, and drama...in other words - the very tale that spurred this topic.

Several months ago we were contacted by a family who had been experiencing a variety of alleged phenomena at their residence. After several telephone and email consultations, we scheduled an investigation. As a member of the TAPS Family, you can imagine how hectic our caseload is. We finally were able to investigate the home two weeks ago.

Upon arrival at the residence, our case manager knocked on the door, and the younger of two daughters answered. Upon entry into the home, we immediately smelled a very peculiar odor. Several members of ARPAST are in law enforcement, and much to our dismay, we immediately recognized the smell.

After introducing ourselves, the daughter went back to her parents room where we could hear them screaming at her to “get out.” We had to wait several long, tense moments until they came out of the bedroom. Once they did, they seemed very distant and advised us to “do whatever we wanted.” Both the husband and wife had an unusual demeanor, and frankly, it made me exceedingly uncomfortable.

Four investigators began taking initial environmental baseline readings. Immediately, they were confronted with extremely high levels of carbon monoxide. In fact, I have never seen the meter register so high!

While I was interviewing the couple, it became extremely apparent that they were under the influence of some type of narcotic. From my training, I knew that their behavior and mannerisms were consistent with users of methamphetamine.

After the interview was complete, and all of the data had been entered into ParaTracker (our case/member management system) my curiosity got the better of me, and I began to explore the home. I found a large supply of pool chemicals in the garage (a fairly telling sign of meth production – especially when there is no pool – like in this house!). In addition, there was corrosion around metal objects (i.e. sinks, vents, etc.)...yet another sign of possible meth production.

My case manager asked me to step outside for a moment. I did, and she produced a small wad of toilet paper. She advised that our videographer had found this on the floor in the back bedroom. Instinctively, I knew what it was. I opened it up, and there lay a fairly substantial size piece of crystal – aka methamphetamine. After grinding it to dust on the asphalt driveway with my shoe, we immediately made plans to leave.

We concluded the investigation very quickly – in fact, we may now hold the record for the shortest investigation in the history of paranormal research!

Every investigation is a learning experience for us, and we definitely learned a few things on this one!

I would like to share a few tips, which may seem obvious...but, may make the difference between going home sick (or worse)...

- 1) Always conduct an extensive phone or in-person consultation with owners of any private residence before an investigation is scheduled to help weed out potential problematic situations.
- 2) Once at the site, remain alert and observant at all times both inside and outside the property.
- 3) Listen for screaming/yelling/fighting inside of the structure. If you hear it – leave.
- 4) Introduce yourself clearly and present identification or a business card.
- 5) Never doubt your instincts. Your instincts are your most powerful asset, and are generally correct. If something does not “feel” correct, it is likely not.
- 6) Do not enter locations alone! Always have a “buddy” or go in a group.
- 7) Always be sure that others know where you are and when you will return. Everyone has a cell phone – use it.
- 8) Be vigilant for weapons, drug paraphernalia, etc. and leave immediately if you find any.
- 9) Do not reveal personal information about yourself or others.

- 10) Never handle materials or objects which you suspect may have been involved in drug production.
- 11) Always have an "out." In our case, we simply explained to the homeowners that our data collection was complete and we would be reviewing the data as soon as possible.
- 12) Always wash your hands after an investigation! You never know what you have touched!

Besides the aforementioned tips, there are a few additional things which must be mentioned. As much as you might want to rudely denigrate the other party, you must always remember to:

- 1) BE PROFESSIONAL!
- 2) Always treat the client with respect and dignity.
- 3) Appear confident and in control.
- 4) Leave immediately if your instincts (or physical evidence) tell you to do so.

Though the goal is always to perform the most professional investigation possible, this should never come at the expense of your own safety, or that of your group members. This should be obvious, but as stated at the beginning of this article, sometimes the obvious remains hidden beneath our excitement over an investigation.

Safety first works for the Boy Scouts. It can work for paranormal groups, too.

I shall leave you with one parting bit of wisdom, in the form of a quote from the illustrious Mr. Mackey from South Park: "Drugs are bad, m'kay."

About the author:

Larry Flaxman is the founder and President of ARPAST (www.arpast.org) – the Arkansas Paranormal and Anomalous Studies Team, which is a member of the TAPS (The Atlantic Paranormal Society) family. He has been actively involved in paranormal research and investigation for over ten years, and melds his technical, scientific, and investigatory backgrounds together for no-nonsense, scientifically objective explanations regarding a variety of anomalous phenomena.

Larry has appeared in numerous newspaper, magazine, radio, and television interviews, and has authored several published articles regarding science and the paranormal. Larry is also co-authoring a series of books with Marie D. Jones, author of "PSlence"

and "Supervolcano," starting with "11:11- The Time Prompt Phenomenon: The Meaning Behind Mysterious Signs, Sequences and Synchronicities," due for release in February 2009 by New Page Books.

In addition to involvement with ARPAST, he serves as technical advisor to several paranormal research groups throughout the country.