



# The ghosts of Ohio® Newsletter

FROM THE SPOOKY DESK OF JAMES WILLIS:

## Gather 'Round The Fire!



James

### HAPPY HOLIDAYS!

As this was the first Christmas for myself and my family in our new house, there was a lot of things we had to figure out: where to hang the lights outside, would we need

more garland to wrap the bannisters with, and of course, where in the living room the Christmas tree would reside. With all that going on, I totally forgot about one essential holiday chore: the cleaning out of the fireplace.

Aside from obviously needing to clean it out so Santa has a clear shot into our house, there's that whole nagging notion of not burning down the house while trying to ignite ye old Yule Log. Since this is an older house, I wanted to have someone professional look at it. Of course, in my case, "professional" meant I wanted someone who just stepped off the set of Mary Poppins (or at least wore a top hat).

Needless to say, I'm still looking for the right guy for the job.

But in all honesty, the reason I put off having the fireplace being cleaned was because I was too preoccupied enjoying our fire pit on our back patio. I can't tell you how much I love our new fire pit. There's nothing like sitting around a fire in your own back yard, surrounded by family and friends. The fact that our house is in the woods makes it even more heavenly... and the perfect opportunity to share ghost stories. It never fails to take me back to my childhood days, telling ghost stories on campouts and trying like anything to scare the heck out of my friends.

So I guess I neglected the fireplace because I didn't want to have to bring my fire inside, so to speak. Perhaps I figured I would have to leave my ghost stories outside or something. That's when it dawned on me that centuries ago, the fireplace was the place most people gathered to share their ghost stories. And, as you'll soon see with this newsletter, one of the most popular times of year to gather around the fireplace for ghost stories was Christmas. Suddenly, I felt it was my duty

to get my chimney cleaned out as soon as possible. I had a tradition to uphold, after all!

Of course, I would be lying if I told you that as I'm writing this, I am staring at a shiny-clean fireplace. Truth be told, it's still in need of a good cleaning. You see, this Christmas is the first one where my three-year-old daughter gets the whole Santa "thing." And because she takes after her father and likes to question everything, my daughter asked how Santa could come down the chimney if there was a fire in it. I didn't have an answer for that. Although it did give me an idea for a really twisted ghost story that will be perfect to tell around the fireplace next Christmas Eve. Hopefully, the chimney will be clean by then.

Cheers,

James A. Willis  
Founder/Director

## Ghost Stories at Christmas



James

OK, be honest with me: how many of you out there have been listening to Andy Williams' holiday classic, The Most Wonderful Time Of The Year, and been left scratching your head over the

following line:

*There'll be scary ghost stories and tales of the glories of Christmases long, long ago.*

The song, which was recorded in 1963, is a bit of reminiscing about traditions and customs from olden-day Christmas celebrations. Things like caroling out in the snow, hanging out near the mistletoe, and even roasting marshmallows. But telling ghost stories? Well, believe it or

not, many years ago in Europe, telling ghost stories around a fireplace was a Christmas tradition.

It's unclear exactly how or why the tradition got started, but up until around the Victorian Era, everyone in Europe was spending Christmas Eve huddled around the fireplace, sharing ghost stories. Most seem to think it was simply a matter of people telling stories about loved ones who had passed on and were no longer

# Ghost Stories at Christmas (cont.)

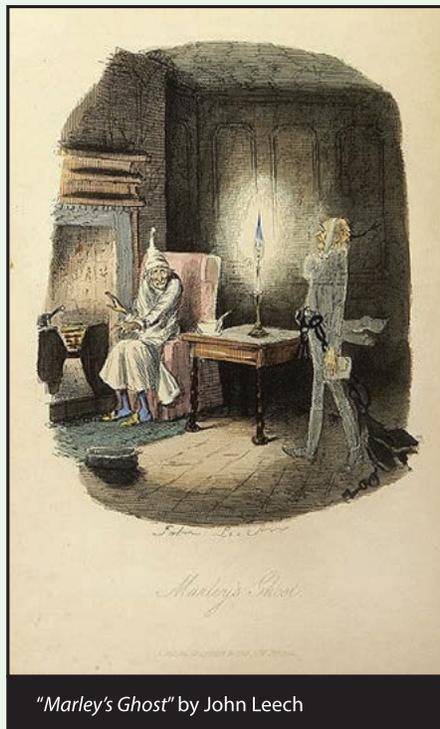


Ghost from "Told After Dinner"

present to celebrate the holiday season. And that, as the hour grew late, those stories morphed into ghost stories in general. Eventually, some began to believe that departed loved ones were able to return from the dead to visit with their families on Christmas Eve. Indeed, Christmas Eve came to be known as the night when all sorts of supernatural events would take place, including the notion that

at midnight on Christmas Eve, all animals were able to speak in human voices.

An interesting example of how popular ghost stories were at Christmas was, oddly enough, released when the custom of



"Marley's Ghost" by John Leech

history of ghosts and Christmas Eve might have just assumed it was because the ghosts wanted to get Scrooge to change his ways in time for Christmas Day. That may very well be, but there's also the added element that the ghosts all appeared on Christmas Eve because that was their night to make their presence known!

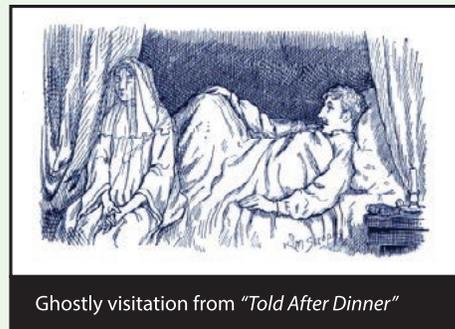
It is also interesting to note that, while it may be coincidental, when the story's first ghost, Jacob Marley, shows up, he appears as Scrooge is huddled around the fireplace. Indeed, several of the illustrations accompanying *A Christmas Carol* depict the ghosts telling their stories to Scrooge while standing next to a fireplace.

Regardless, *A Christmas Carol* was instrumental in the resurgence of the telling of ghost stories on Christmas Eve. As evidence of this, many authors, including MR James and, of course, Charles Dickens, began publishing fictional ghost stories centered around the Christmas season. In 1891, author and humorist Jerome K. Jerome published *Told After Supper*, a collection of ghost stories he wrote specifically to be read on Christmas Eve. In the book's Introductory



Scrooge and the Ghost of Christmas Present

telling such stories was starting to die out. Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* was first published on December 17, 1843, at a time when all of England was being swept up in all sorts of "new" Christmas traditions like decorating trees and sending everyone a lovely holiday card. Because of all this, a large number of the population began to long for the Old Days and a return to the old customs associated with the holiday, including the telling of ghost stories around the fire on Christmas Eve. This is the reason why Dickens chose to make his Christmas tale into a ghost story. It was also a contributing factor to *A Christmas Carol* taking place on Christmas Eve. Indeed, all of the ghosts in the story appear to Scrooge on Christmas Eve and/or the wee hours of Christmas morning. Those unfamiliar with the



Ghostly visitation from "Told After Dinner"

(this book's obviously so old it predates the word Introduction), Jerome states "Christmas Eve is the ghosts' great gala night" before proudly proclaiming "Oh it is a stirring night in Ghostland, the night of December the twenty-fourth!"

(continued on page 3.)

# Ghost Stories at Christmas (cont.)

Later on in the Introductory, while his tongue is firmly implanted in his cheek, Jerome lets us in on what happens on the night before Christmas:

*On Christmas Eve, everybody in Ghostland who is anybody—or rather, speaking of ghosts, one should say, I suppose, every nobody who is any nobody—comes out to show himself or herself, to see and to be seen, to promenade about and display their winding-sheets and grave-clothes to each other, to criticize one another's style, and sneer at one another's complexion.*

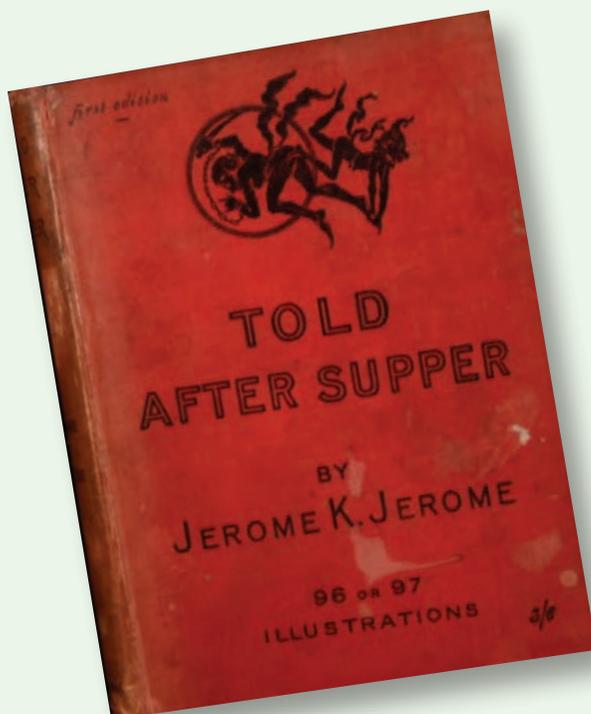
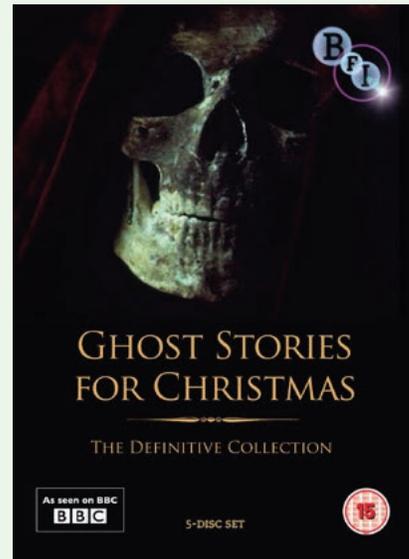
Jerome sums things up by saying that “for ghost stories to be told on any other evening than the evening of the twenty-fourth of December would be impossible in English society as at present regulated.”

Over the course of the next 80 years, the idea of telling ghost stories began to fade away. And with the advent of television, listening to people share stories on Christmas Eve started being replaced with watching stories like *A Charlie Brown Christmas*. But in 1971, BBC One attempted to embrace television and use it to try and resurrect the tradition of telling

ghost stories on Christmas Eve with their television series, *A Ghost Story For Christmas*. The series, which ran until 1978, featured a dramatic retelling of a classic ghost story, including ones by Charles Dickens and MR James. Each episode only ran once a year and was usually shown on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day.

Over 25 years later, in 2005, BBC Four began re-broadcasting the original series as part of their Christmas week programming. In addition, they also began releasing new spooky Christmas tales, which they continue to produce today. A five-disk box set of all recorded episodes was recently released in Europe, appropriately entitled *Ghost Stories For Christmas*.

There you have it: a brief history of the bizarre connection between ghost stories and Christmas. So next time Christmas rolls around and you feel the need to frighten a houseguest or two with a spine-chilling tale, go for it. You'll be doing you part to keep a centuries-old tradition alive.



## GOT A SCARY STORY TO TELL?

Have you had a ghostly encounter in Ohio? Want to see it featured in a future issue of The Ghosts of Ohio Newsletter? Then here's all you have to do:

Just write down your story and send it to [info@ghostsofohio.org](mailto:info@ghostsofohio.org) with the subject line "Newsletter Ghost Story." Be sure to also include your name as you'd like it to appear with the story. We'll take it from there and send you out an email letting you know which issue it is going to appear in. That way, you can get all your friends to sign up for the newsletter so they can see how famous you are!

## PERSONAL EXPERIENCES:

## Sleigh Bells

Angela L., Coshocton, OH

I don't think I was any different from any other kid when it came to Christmas Eve. I would be so excited that I wouldn't want to go to sleep because I was afraid I would miss something. Plus, I really wanted to catch Santa in the act and maybe get to meet him. My dad basically raised me alone when my mom left us, so I know that it was hard for him to get everything set up for Santa's arrival with me running all over the place. He would tell me that if I was awake when Santa got there, he couldn't come in. So I might not get any presents since Santa had a lot of presents to deliver and he might not have time to come back to redeliver my gifts.

I wasn't sure that I believed him, but the following year, when I was six, my dad and I were sitting around the Christmas tree when I thought I heard sleigh bells outside. Without missing a beat my dad said "must be Santa" and then told me I better hurry and get in bed or else Santa wouldn't be able to come in with my presents. That was all it took. I was upstairs and in my bedroom before you knew it. I don't know how I managed to get to sleep, but I did. I think because I woke up the next morning and found all my presents under the tree, I came to believe that Santa's arrival meant I would hear sleigh bells.

The next Christmas, sure enough, I heard sleigh bells coming from outside and ran as fast as I could to get in bed. And every

year after that until became an adult and learned the truth about Santa, I heard those bells. It never once dawned on me that my dad was always off doing something in another room or outside when I heard the sleigh bells.

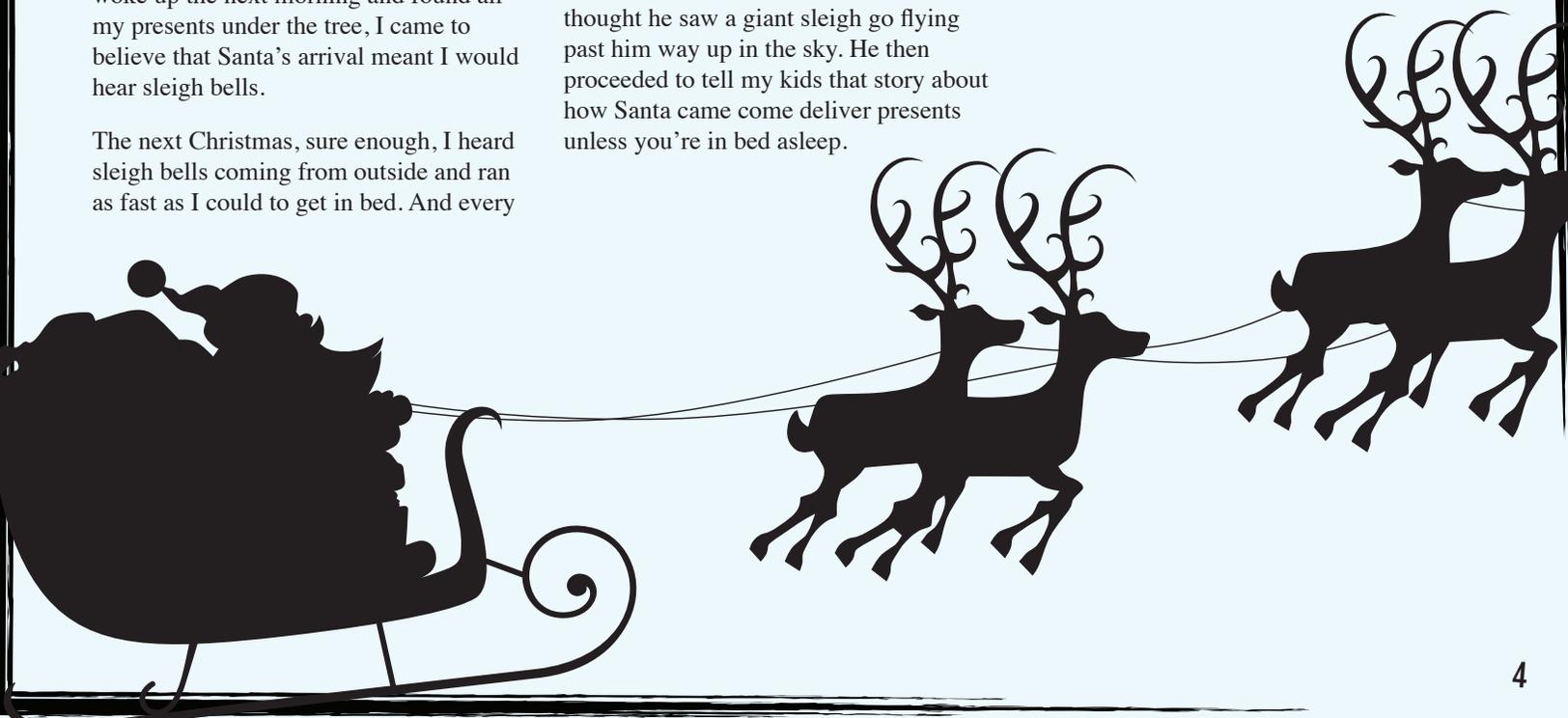
Fast forward a few decades and I was happily married with twin sons. Well, at least I thought I was happily married. A couple of years ago, my husband left me, leaving me to care for twin three year olds. That Christmas eve, when my dad called me, I sort of broke down because I just couldn't cope with all the madness. I was trying to get everything ready and my kids were just bouncing off the walls with excitement. My dad said he loved me and he would take care of it.

About an hour after talking to my dad, my kids came running into the kitchen saying they heard bells coming from outside the house. When I went to the front door to investigate, I saw my dad walking down the front walkway. He said he was just in the neighborhood and wanted to stop by to see how my sons had decorated the trees. When my kids asked my dad if he had heard the bells. He said he did and that he thought he saw a giant sleigh go flying past him way up in the sky. He then proceeded to tell my kids that story about how Santa came come deliver presents unless you're in bed asleep.

I've never seen my two sons get into bed so fast. After they were in bed, my dad kissed me, told me he loved me, and headed home. Of course, I heard sleigh bells one last time right after he left.

Christmas 2013 will be my third without my father. He passed away in July of 2010. But that Christmas eve, as my sons and I were sitting watching *A Christmas Story* on TV, we all heard what sounded like sleigh bells out on the front lawn. My kids immediately yelled out "Santa" and went running off for bed. As for me, I went and looked outside. There was nothing there. Not even footprints in the snow on the yard.

The same thing happened on Christmas Eve 2011 and 2012. Almost like clockwork, we would hear sleigh bells coming from the walkway in front of the house. And we never saw anything. Not that my kids are even looking. They think it's Santa's sleigh bells but I know what it really means. It means my dad is stopping by to wish us all a merry Christmas and to let us know that he still loves us and is watching over us.



# REMEMBERING THE DEAD: NEW MEXICO'S DIA DE LOS MUERTOS



Samantha

I love to travel, and one of my very favorite places to go is the “Land of Enchantment,” New Mexico. It was my love for the Old West and Billy the Kid that first drew me there in 2002. I got to

see history for myself—where the Kid lived, where he escaped from jail, and where he’s buried with his “Pals.” But my New Mexican experience didn’t end there. I’ve been back time and again because there’s always something new to see or do, like sand sledding at White Sands National Monument, hiking through the bed of black lava rock at the Valley of Fires, visiting the grave of the original Smoke Bear, road tripping to ghost towns like Chloride and Lake Valley, and so much more! There are also a number of festivals worth attending throughout the year. As you can guess from the title of this article, my new experience this year was attending the Day of the Dead festival in Old Mesilla.

*Dia de los Muertos*, or Day of the Dead, is a Mexican holiday that is gaining in popularity in the United States, especially in southwest towns like Mesilla. It is held on November 1st and 2nd, and its purpose is to honor and remember the dead, and also to invite those departed souls to return and visit with their loved ones. November 1st is the day of remembrance for children who have passed, while November 2nd is for adults. During these two days, family and friends pray for the dead and honor them by creating altars, or *ofrendas*, to their memory. Altars are set up in homes and on graves in cemeteries; and like works of art, each is unique, containing items like photographs, mementos, brightly colored flowers, candles, sugar skull candies, personal possessions, and the favorite foods of the deceased. Perhaps the

most alluring aspect of *Dia de los Muertos* is the fact that, instead of being a somber and depressing occasion, it’s actually happy and festive. It’s meant to be a celebration of life for both the living and the dead. It’s the reason I wanted to experience it for myself!

The Day of the Dead celebration in Old Mesilla takes place annually in the vibrantly decorated town plaza that is essentially a large square outlined with a



An altar we saw on the plaza.

sidewalk. The inside of the square was lined with colorful altars for the dead that loved ones erected for all to see. On the outside of the square were vendors selling all kinds of Day of the Dead-themed trinkets, jewelry and art. There were also a number of local shops surrounding the plaza. Visitors could peruse and shop at their leisure. However, the center of the square was where the action was. At the center of the square was a large wooden gazebo, and the sprawling concrete patio in front of it was where musicians and dancers

entertained the masses. While my sister and aunt were getting their faces painted like sugar skulls (a very popular tradition), I enjoyed two very different groups of dancers.

The first group was called Danza Azteca Omecoatl. This group performs authentic Aztec ceremonial dancing that goes back thousands of years; and their costumes with rattles and large feathered headdresses are reminiscent of that ancient time. Before they began, they stated that the entire 45-minute dance was a prayer, and I noticed that a repeated theme throughout the performance was their reverence to the four directions. Two members of the troupe pounded out the rhythms on drums while the rest danced. It was hypnotic, and I couldn’t help feeling like I wanted to get up and dance, too. I didn’t, of course. That would have been weird.

The second, and most entertaining, dance troupe was Valle del Sol Folklorico from El Paso, Texas. The dancers in this group ranged from age seven to 50, and they wore bright, colorful costumes with sugar skull masks. Their performance was like watching wordless musical theatre. The story was essentially about the cycle of life and death and began with the dancers lying on the ground as though they were dead and buried. One by one, the dead came to life, including a married couple that didn’t really like each other much. This was hilariously acted out! The story got even



Mackenzie getting her face painted.

(continued on page 6.)

# REMEMBERING THE DEAD: NEW MEXICO'S DIA DE LOS MUERTOS (CONT.)



A dancer in Danza Azteca Omecoatl (dance troupe)



A dancer in the Valle del Sol Folklorico (dance troupe)

funnier when a mistress came along and seduced the husband. It was macabre and hilarious at the same time, and completely unlike anything I'd ever seen before! In fact, I enjoyed the story and the dancing so much, that I watched them again the following day.

Before the end of the first day, however, my sister, aunt, and I got to participate in a nighttime candlelight procession to the cemetery. Everyone was given a candle, and we began the procession by walking around the square in the four directions—north to honor the elderly who have died, west for the women who have passed, south for the children, and east for the men. Along the way, mariachis with guitars sang songs in Spanish. When we arrived at the cemetery, there was an altar just outside the

gates for all of the forgotten souls. It was really quite touching. We then made our way back to the plaza, where everyone was treated to coffee and a sweet kind of bread with frosting called *pan de muerto*, or bread of the dead. It was a delicious ending to a long and festive day.

The second day's schedule wasn't nearly as full as the first. My family and I shopped around a bit, visited the historic Basilica of San Albino (only to find that they were beginning rehearsals for their Christmas play), ate dessert at my very favorite Mexican restaurant in Mesilla called La Posta, and, of course, watched the Valle del Sol Folklorico again. It was a relaxing day, but a somber one since it was the last day before we had to fly back home to Ohio.

I always get bummed when I have to end a vacation and get back into the daily grind. Of course, everyone does. Maybe we should take a page from the *Dia de los Muertos* handbook. Instead of being sad and depressed about the end, we should celebrate that we were there and that we had a good time doing lots of new things and meeting new people. We can share our experiences with our families, and maybe even convince some of them to check it out themselves (like I did with my sister and aunt). Plus, now that we're back, we can start saving our pennies and planning for our next adventure. I already know where I'll be going!



# I'VE SEEN THE LIGHT...FROM THE STATUE OF LIBERTY'S TORCH

## The Ghosts Of Ohio's Experiments Continue



James

One of the questions that all of us here at The Ghosts of Ohio have pondered (and argued over) for as long as I can remember is also one that puzzles many of you: how is it that some people can see

ghosts everywhere while others have never seen one?

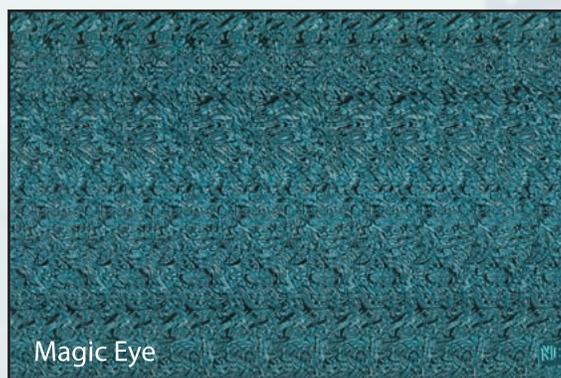
Before I go on, let me say that I believe we are all psychic to a certain extent. Call it "psychic," "sensitive," or "intuitive," I think we all possess the ability to sense things that cannot be seen. Case in point, we've all walked into a crowded room and immediately determined we like or dislike complete strangers based on the "vibe" we pick up on. I personally believe that some of us are better able to pick up those vibes and feelings than others. Of course, this is just picking up on a feeling. When it comes to actually be able to see something, that's a totally different story. I'm sort of on the fence on the whole subject because, try as I might, I just can't see ghosts whenever I want to, which is one of the reasons why I get very skeptical whenever someone starts telling me they can see a multitude of ghosts sitting around the table, chatting away. This was why I was quite excited when Mark, one of The Ghosts of Ohio members, came to me with a new, different theory about being able to see ghosts.

Mark's theory is that in order to see ghosts, one need only look at things differently. In other words, you go through your entire life seeing things one way and then, one day you just look at things a little differently and all of a sudden, you start to see things you never even knew existed. Mark's idea was that maybe it was the same way with being able to see ghosts. In essence, the ghosts are always there, but one needs to look at things just a little differently and you'll suddenly be able to see them.

This was all well and good, but I needed something that we could use to test Mark's theory. And after some time, Mark finally came to me with a possible answer...and one that would excite and annoy me at the same time: Magic Eye 3D images.

For those of you who aren't familiar with their official name, Magic Eye images are those weird posters that look like a whole lot of nothing. But when you stare at it for a while, three-dimensional images spring from the poster right before your very eyes...or at least that's what people tell me.

You see, I've never been able to see those things. I can stare and stare until my eyes cross and water and still see nothing. And during the course of my staring, someone



will walk up, glance at the poster, and say, "Check it out. It's a city skyline at night." It got to the point where I hated looking at those posters or anything that claimed to "magically make 3D images appear before your eyes." Of course, it made me the perfect candidate for Mark's little experiment.

In Mark's eyes, if I was eventually able to see those 3D images with my own eyes, we could then see if those images continued to jump out at me. If they did, then maybe, just maybe, there might be a way for us to train ourselves to look at things differently to enable us to start seeing ghosts.

But in order to get to that point, we first had to see if it was possible for me, as well as other Ghosts of Ohio members, to see these Magic Eye pictures. Sticking with me

for a moment, I couldn't see anything that Mark was showing me. Even when he would tell me what I was looking at (in this case, the Statue Of Liberty), I couldn't see a darn thing. It got to the point that Mark would spend a good 15-20 minutes explaining to me what I was looking at while I stared at...nothing. Every once in a while, I would start to think I was about to see something and then I would blink and it would vanish. I was ready to call the whole experiment off, but Mark kept at it.

This went on for months. Then, after the November meeting, Mark hung around and pulled out his now-infamous Statue of Liberty poster and leaned it against the wall. Half-heartedly, I started staring at it. All of a sudden, something magical

happened. Not sure what changed, but I found myself staring at a 3D image of the Statue of Liberty—an image that had literally burst out of the poster frame and was now hovering in the middle of my living room! I was speechless. What's more, I could tilt and turn my head and the image would also turn.

But there was still more. Most intriguing of all was the fact that Mark had me look away from the poster and close my eyes. When I opened them up and looked back at the poster, the image of the Statue almost immediately sprang out at me from the frame! So here was something that I had been unable to see my entire adult life that I could now be able to see almost on command.

So does that mean that I'm now going to be able to see spirits lurking around every corner? Trust me, we're a long ways away from that. But I am personally intrigued with the idea that, after all these years, my eyes and brain decided to get together and allow me to see something new—something I hadn't been able to before.

As for our experiments, our next step will be at our January meeting, where I'll once again take a peek at the Statue of Liberty poster and see if, after over a month, am I still able to see the 3D image "on command." If so, we're on to the next level of experiments to see how far we can test this theory. We'll keep you posted!

# Merry SCARY Holiday Party



One of the worst things about being in a "ghost group" is that come October, you're far too busy to have a Halloween party. But when it comes to The Ghosts of Ohio, we make up for it come December when we throw our annual Merry Scary Holiday Party!

This year, even though the weather outside was truly frightful (wind, snow, and freezing rain), plenty of ghosts, ghouls and yuletide goblins managed to show up for what was truly a wonderful evening spent with family and friends.



# GOT GHOSTS?

## REQUEST FOR MORE INFORMATION

From time to time, The Ghosts of Ohio learns about a haunted location that, try as we might, we just can't seem to dig up any additional information on. That's when we turn to one of the largest group of Ohio ghost experts out there; our newsletter readers! That's right, we're asking you to let us know if you have any information (or better yet, have had a personal experience) at any of the following locations. If you have, shoot us an email at [info@ghostsofohio.org](mailto:info@ghostsofohio.org). And who knows? You just might get the chance to investigate the location along with The Ghosts of Ohio!

**Black Mary Ann** (Cleveland/Cuyahoga county)

**Buffington Island** (Portland/Meigs county)

**Buckeye Belle** (Beverly/Washington county)

## COMING IN THE FEBRUARY NEWSLETTER

Spreading The Ghostly Love

Are Ghosts Really That Angry?

## Investigations & Consultations

The Ghosts of Ohio has already begun scheduling investigations for 2014. If you or someone you know is experiencing something unexplained in a home or place of business, contact us at [info@ghostsofohio.org](mailto:info@ghostsofohio.org) or visit our website to fill out an investigation request. All investigations are offered free of charge, and confidentiality and discretion are assured.

Not sure if you want or need an investigation? The Ghosts of Ohio also offers consultations. Let us sit down with you to discuss your current situation and what help we may be able to offer. For more information, please visit <http://ghostsofohio.org/services/investigations.html>.

## Interact with The Ghosts of Ohio

In addition to our website, here are a couple of places where you can find The Ghosts of Ohio lurking online:



MYSPACE

[www.myspace.com/ghostsofohio](http://www.myspace.com/ghostsofohio)



FACEBOOK

<http://www.facebook.com/home.php?#/pages/Columbus-OH/The-Ghosts-of-Ohio/60704381381?ref=mf>



TWITTER

<http://twitter.com/ghostsofohio>

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