

The Unfortunate Truth about Ghost Hunting Teams
By Chris Tanner

Well, here we are. I've been thinking about writing this for a couple of years now, but I wanted to wait until I had the right combination of material that went hand-in-hand with this subject. Just recently, I stumbled upon some new information which clarified that for me.

The first thing I am going to discuss is my views regarding the current state of "professional paranormal investigations ". This is very important, especially to those who feel that they need help in this area. For a person who is experiencing frightening events in their own home, the desire to find a solution that will put an end to these experiences can be very powerful. They really want somebody to come to their home and straighten things out for them. They need somebody with the knowledge to understand and explain all the crazy things that are happening.

So they go to their computer and log on to the Internet. One minute searching for ghost hunting groups on Google can turn up an absurd number of results. It's literally amazing how many experts there are out there..... or so it seems.

Now before you go and schedule a group to come to your home to " help " you, I have decided to be the one to shed some light on the truth of what you're going to be dealing with.

I am fully aware that I am likely to be widely disliked by many ghost hunting groups for the viewpoints that I will present in these following pages. I am fine with that. My goal here is not to win a trophy for my popularity in the field of ghost hunting. My goal is to educate the person who needs the help the most with the truth that nobody else is going to tell them.

There are many good, mature, well-meaning groups out there, and they may actually really care about you and your situation. However, the things I will tell you here apply almost universally. I ask you to read with an open mind, and I will do my best to tell you all that you need to know.

The Truth hurts, doesn't it?

Consider this: When you have a bug problem in your house, what do you do? Chances are you go to the yellow pages and find an exterminator. You probably get drawn first to the bigger, more colorful advertisements. Bullet points like “free estimate” or “20 years experience” capture your attention, because you want the best deal, and you certainly want someone who knows what they are doing. You might go to a referral source like Angie’s List to get a referral on the best person to call. They then come out and take care of your problem. Sound about right?

Now consider this: When you feel that your house might be haunted and you need someone to come in, appraise the situation, and possibly get rid of the problem, you go through the same methods, though most likely on the internet instead of the phone book.. The same situation applies. The big colorful phone book ad becomes the flashy web page. Similar promises are there, such as “confidential investigations”, “10 years experience” and “innovative equipment and techniques.”

Now even though it all sounds similar, there are a few very VERY important factors here between these two examples.

FIRST: The exterminator can get in big trouble if he puts a bunch of stuff in his ad that isn’t true. The Ghost Hunter will not get in trouble.

SECOND: The exterminator is governed by such agencies as the Better Business Bureau (BBB), and other official groups, the ghost hunter is not.

THIRD: The exterminator most likely went to a professional school to learn about how to deal with bugs. No such school exists with the ghost hunter.

FOURTH: And this is a big one...the Exterminator is dealing with something that is undeniably proven as real, with can be examined under a microscope. He can look as SEE that bugs are there, and SHOW you bugs

are there. He can get rid of the bugs and PROVE that he in fact, did take care of your problem.

The ghost hunter cannot say yes to any of that. So where do we go from here?

It doesn't end there. There are NO controls out there for ANYTHING regarding Ghost Hunting Teams. People can (and do) pretty much make any claims they like, and nobody can tell them they can't. They might make all sorts of claims. "We care about you" "We're in it for the long haul" "We respect your right to confidentiality" (actually...most groups are pretty good about this). They give you hope. They give you faith in their abilities. After all, they are the experts right?

I have been ghost hunting for about 9 years. One thing I have noticed is very, very few people that invite me out to investigate a haunting ever question anything I say or do. A lot treat me like a Rock Star or Celebrity. They give me a lot of leeway and put a lot of hope on my shoulders. I mention this only because I reckon that that is the case with most groups, as long as they attempt to present themselves well.

However, here is the ugly truth: A good portion of ghost hunting teams out there don't have one tenth of the "experience" that they claim to have. They don't have half of the equipment that they claim to have, and do not know how to properly employ the equipment they DO have, a lot of which they do not even NEED. A very large portion (I estimate 90%) of them educated themselves from another groups website, which in turn learned what they know from yet another groups website, and so forth. That's why a lot of the information you read out there is mostly the same stuff. It is an endless copycat cycle.

I do not feel that it is within my humanly power to properly express just how much of a problem that this is. There are very, very few people out there anymore that offer much original thought on this subject. It's the same old recycled crap. But to the layperson, the stuff that comes out of their mouths can sound impressive. However, sounding impressive is not always equal reliable information.

Nowhere else in society is it acceptable for an alleged "expert" to have learned everything he or she knows from a TV show or a website. Would you hire a lawyer whose law training involved watching every season of

“Law and Order?” I think not. However, there ARE groups out there that are brand new, claim to be experienced, but only know what they watched on “Ghost Hunters.” I’ve seen them with my own eyes!

Ghost hunting groups HAVE TO make themselves look like experts so you will contact them! How many times have you called a service person to your house that ran an ad that said “Self taught, Brand New, No experience”. I’d feel safe putting my whole paycheck on the fact that you have NEVER done that! So if these groups were truly honest, they’d never get any experience to start with!

Let me give you an example: Here is a line or two from the website of a ghost hunting group that I personally know for a fact has no experience and just got started:

“We will be upfront with you from start to finish”

And then...

“We do claim to be very experienced and good at what we do”

Not very up front, huh? Unfortunately, that is the case to some extent or another with most groups out there.

The REAL reason ghost hunters want to come to your house is this: They want to have a paranormal experience. Period. They want to get something on video. Because some real good footage might just make them famous, and in turn, just might make them rich. Your needs and feelings come a distant second.

Case in point: The Atlantic Paranormal Society (TAPS) have had a hit show on the Sci Fi channel for a few seasons. They made it big. They got famous and they got a lot of really expensive gear out of it. They made a LOT of people JEALOUS. Everything they did on TV resulted in someone claiming that “they could do it better”. Any evidence they produced was claimed to be made up. A lot of people really hated the fact that they were getting all the glory. So other than all the hateful comments people threw at them on online forums and chat room, people just made themselves look better on their websites. It’s sad really, but its true.

So considering the fact that most groups are truly coming to your home to fish for evidence, if they have an uneventful evening, you'll be lucky to see them again.

And the problem with that is this: More often than not, paranormal activity will cease while outsiders are in your home. But as soon as they leave, it's back on again! This is one of the most frustrating truths about the paranormal field, both for clients and investigators. I will return to this later in the book to explain an opportunity that is being missed.

Sounds pretty bleak doesn't it? I admit I am painting it that way. It didn't always used to be this way though... At least concerning the ongoing problem of the misrepresentation of experience. Back before paranormal stuff became trendy, the people who were doing it were much more serious about their field. Many of them are still around, but if you don't already know who they are, you'll have to do some digging to find them.

Now as I mentioned in the comparison between the ghost hunter and the exterminator... there is no real education one can get to become a paranormal expert. It just cannot be done. You cannot take a ghost, physically put it in a Petri dish, dissect it and study it. You cannot touch it, see it, taste it, hear it or smell it on demand. You cannot put it in a cage and study it. And for that reason, the field of paranormal investigation will always be one of "best guesses" and personal theories. Now there are many out there who believe that their diligent attention to logging the readings from their electro-magnetic field meters and their thermometer will someday allow us to unravel the secret of life after death.

That's wishful thinking. It stems from the trend of "assumed fact" that permeates the ghost hunting community. Ghost Hunters assume that ghosts are at least in some part comprised of electro-magnetic energy, and thus chase them with EMF meters. Problem is, we can never PROVE that they are, so those readings may very well be worthless, and second, our world today is flooded with EM energy. It's everywhere.

Another assumed fact that has only recently begun to unravel is that somehow, Infra-Red Non-contact thermometers can detect paranormal cold spots. IR Thermometers are used to detect SURFACE temperature. An example you might be familiar with are those 1-click instant thermometers

you stick in your child's ear when they are sick... The ones ghost hunters use are different, but the same principle. They use those to allegedly find cold spot in the air, because someone told them they could do that.

Everyone followed suit and few, if anyone, questioned the logic. I questioned it to a few choice people back in 2000. I was berated for it. About 6 years later, the Thermocouple thermometer became popular for its ability to read instant ambient air temps. Only then did people begin to let go of the idea of using the IR thermometers. However, there are still many, many groups active today that are using them.

Assumed fact is the basis for all pseudo-science., which is obviously very un-scientific in principle.

Beyond assumed facts, you will also be wading in a virtual sea of different personal beliefs. These are shaped by each person's experience, his religious beliefs, the websites he educated himself with, etc. In short, they're all going to be different! Person A might tell you that you have a ghost of a man who was murdered. Person B might suggest you have a demon from hell and that you need some sort of cleansing ritual. Person C might tell you that you are having hallucinations caused by badly shielded electrical wire in your home. None of them can prove their case. Person C might have the highest likelihood of being proven right scientifically, but it is not in the capabilities of 99.9% of ghost hunting teams to prove such a diagnosis.

Are you starting to see the problems here?

Now there ARE a few things many ghost hunting teams CAN do that makes a compelling argument. Notice I said "compelling argument" and not "proof." But at least it is something, right?

When I think about it, I tend to believe that whether they admit it or not, a lot of ghost hunters are simply doing grown up play acting. I mean think about it, how "cool" is it to be a ghost hunter? I meet people all the time that "ooh" and "ahh" over the fact that I am a ghost hunter. Since anybody can be one, ghost hunting is something exciting that you could easily jump into the role of.

When we were kids, we might have pretended to be astronauts, soldiers, or something of the like. We didn't really have any knowledge about the things

that astronauts really have to know, and we didn't have any specific combat training that soldiers are taught... but we played the part convincingly. Ghost hunting kind of works the same way, except that it is no real tech manual full of the knowledge that we're supposed to have. Instead, we get to make it up as we go along. And that is what I think the draw is for a lot of people to become Ghost Hunters. It really is a grown up role-playing adventure that anyone can do, with no real training or education either available or needed.

If anyone wishes to argue that last line, I challenge you to come forth with all the applicable education and training you went through that qualified you to present yourself as a paranormal authority. Go ahead, I'll wait.

So the point I want to finish with here is basically this is a "buyer beware" situation. Don't put all your eggs in one basket. Don't get me wrong, many groups out there are sincere in their intentions, but you take their visit and their "evidence" as just one part of the puzzle. The ones that I would most want to work with would be the people who are quick to explain that everything that they do, say, or suggest is simply a best guess. At least then you know that they're willing to admit the reality of the situation.

SO WHAT ARE GHOST HUNTING TEAMS GOOD FOR?

We've covered the bad...now it's only fair to shed some positive light on the field that I, myself, participate in.

A good ghost hunter, in my opinion, knows and accepts the fact that he or she is working in a field full of "best guesses." They do the best with what they have to work with. 95% of anyone I would recommend someone who has been at it for 4 years or more. They've had time to earn their stripes and gain first hand experience. They've formulated their own thoughts on the subject and do not base their thinking solely on the works of others. They've been at it before Ghost Hunting became the new trendy hobby, brought on by the success of the show "Ghost Hunters." They've matured in the fact that they do not need to play a "I'm better than the next group" game of one-upmanship. They've written books, authored a lot of web content and have displayed a serious interest in the subject matter. Most are at least well into

their 30's. A good ghost hunter chooses his words very carefully, and doesn't make outlandish statement or suggestions that he or she cannot back up. They try and help others to learn and try and help clients to the best of their ability. They handle their business well and act mature and professional.

Some of my favorites are those who I learned the basics from reading their materials, such as Troy Taylor or The American Ghost Society, Dave Juliano of South Jersey Ghost Research, and John Zaffis of the Paranormal Research Society of New England. I may not agree 100% with everything they believe, but I respect their experience and their dedication. They are the Varsity as far as Ghost Hunters go.

Now even though all of the above are extremely commendable traits for a ghost hunter to have, the fact remains that NO ONE knows for CERTAIN what is what and how things truly work in the paranormal. More likely than not, we won't know until we pass on. We are all still limited to working within a field where the subject matter is impossible to explain, define, or prove. We may feel we KNOW what is what from our first hand experiences, but the perception each of us has is not indicative of absolute truth.

In other words, we just CAN'T know for sure. Remember that the next time someone tells you what you have in your home.

IF YOU STILL CHOOSE TO INVITE A TEAM TO YOUR HOME....

A lot of times, just having someone else to experience what we experience to let us know we aren't crazy is enough. Or maybe you're just curious about what Ghost Hunters do, and can take their findings as one piece of the puzzle (which I suggest). Although the next two sections of this book will show you how to do the job with out ever having a ghost hunter in your house, let me err on the side of caution and give you some guidelines to help you choose someone to come out to your home.

If you so choose to invite a team, you should first (obviously) thoroughly check them out. A few things to look for:

- Does their website appear serious and professional, or does it look “spooky” and “cartoon-y” with creepy music and flying ghosts?
- Are there indications that they have been around for some time, such as dated media mentions, an extensive stockpile of equipment, (Which also shows a level of commitment, as a lot of that stuff costs hundreds and hundreds of dollars), or a lot of rich, original site content.
- How old do they look? I know this will upset the 20-somethings, but there is a big difference between a 22 year old investigator and a 35 year old investigator.
- Are they affiliated with a larger group that could be used to verify their “credentials”? Some larger groups require some degree of standards before accepting them into their organization. This doesn’t always mean something bad...our own group chooses not to affiliate with a larger one. But it’s something to consider.
- Do they have much “evidence” posted on their site? If they have a lot of laughable stuff, such as orb pictures or “EVPs” that just sound like noise...it may indicate someone who is a little...imaginative. If they have a lot of compelling evidence, it shows that they have been at it awhile, since it takes a lot of cases to get something good. If they have nothing at all, then they probably don’t have a lot of time under their belt.
- What EXACTLY do they claim on their website that they will/can do for you? If they claim to be able to “Help you with your situation”, do they explain exactly HOW they intend to help you?
- When they speak to you on the phone or email, do they sound professional and sensible, or do they start making wild claims about types of spirits you probably have, or what not?
- When you email them, fill out their form, or call them, how long do you have to wait before they get back to you?
- Do they explain well, in detail, what they can and cannot do?

Make sure you get a full detailed description of what they intend to do while they are at your home. Know how many people they intend on bringing, and what time and how long they will be there. Find out what things they may require of you.

If at any time you feel uncomfortable with the people you are dealing with, politely bow out and tell them you want to think it over or discuss it with your spouse. If you choose not to use them, at least send them a courtesy email and let them know.

The truth is, by asking a ghost investigation team to come to your house, you aren't putting them at an inconvenience, but instead doing *them a favor by allowing them you use your home and situation to further pursue their interests.*

But again, only do this if you are completely okay with it. You are not obligated to run a training camp for new, would-be ghost hunters. It CAN be an interesting experience, to see what they DO get. But at least know that you have this book, you will not have to pin all your hopes on them to help you.

Instead, we'll begin right now to give you the knowledge and the power to better understand your situation, and change it for the better!

Now, before I end this, I want share with you the story of a client and friend of mine's experience with multiple ghost hunting teams. It is a good example of what *could* happen, if you aren't careful!

I have changed all the names in this story to protect the privacy of all those who are involved.

We have lived in a haunted house for a little over nine years. However, my first experience with actual ghost hunters came in February of 2005. I had been posting my story on a popular internet ghost forum. I was contacted by a group of ladies from a nearby city who were into investigating haunted houses. They had been doing it for a few years.

Two of the ladies were the actual investigators, and the other one was a self-proclaimed “medium” who I thought was a little bit goofy. She would go on and on about being able to see ghosts all over the place. It was a little bit hard to swallow. The best part was when she told me that she had a “little green ghost” that lived under her couch. (I wonder what HER favorite movie is?) And of course, she said that often times, spirits would follow her home from investigations to live with her. She claimed her house was full of ghosts...like a ghostly version of the “cat lady” that lives in every neighborhood.

The investigators did get the first EVPs I had ever heard from my house. As a side note, I have since gotten tons of EVPs from my home, to the degree that we all recognize voices. They also caught a milky ball of light that flew through my son’s room and made his Guinea Pig squeal. THAT was interesting.

They were only here about a grand total of 4 hours, and never came back. The Medium only told me about what she sensed AFTER I made the rookie mistake of telling her where all the activity in the house was. That’s when she would tell me what she saw, and of course it always coincided with whatever I told her. Not very believable!

All in all, it wasn’t too bad for my first experience as far as evidence goes, but they didn’t seem much like a “professional” ghost hunting group.

Around that time, I had also been contacted by another ghost hunter nearby, who asked if his group could come out and hold a more “scientific-based” investigation than the previous investigators.

A few weeks later, now March 2005, the person I spoke to and an associate from his team showed up to meet me and conduct a tour of the house and give me a long interview. We set it up the investigation for several weeks later.

In early May, this new Ghost Investigation group came out. The leader of the group did not attend, but his next-in-charge did, along with a few ladies from the group. They had quite a bit more equipment than the previous group. They got several good EVP’s and caught some unexplainable things

on camera. They told me they would get back to me after they reviewed all the audio and video they collected. Actually getting the evidence would prove to be a chore...

Later that month, Ghost Group #3 comes out. I contacted them because I was getting interested and wanted to get as many opinions as possible. We were still having a lot of activity. This new person was a brand new investigator, and his group consisted mostly of various members of his family. One was his 16 year old son, another was his oldest sons girlfriend!

Like I said, they were very inexperienced and didn't have a lot of equipment like the other group did. I wondered why they were even doing residential investigations this early in their "career". But I wanted to see what they would come up with.

*They didn't get any audio, but did get an interesting piece of video. They only stayed for **TWO** hours and seemed really disappointed that there was no real activity while they were here. I figured, for 2 hours...what do you expect?*

One of them was afraid to go into my sons room and do EVP's unless my son (who is 15) went with him. Not real impressive.

Throughout the month of June I talked with the second group. While they seemed the most promising, I was having a devil of a time getting the leader to bring me any of my evidence to review. He must have scheduled and cancelled 3 times on me.

I finally agreed to have them back out towards the end of July, mostly because of the guy who ran the investigation the last time. He seemed to feel bad that his partner hadn't made good on his promise to give me evidence. When he came back, he gave me all the copies of HIS stuff from the last trip, which was nice.

However, THIS time, they had a couple new people with them. One was a heavyset "Medium" (here we go again!) and the other was a quiet girl with a nice personality. The medium was really out there. While the head guy was setting up cameras and running video feed lines, this lady proceeded to tell me that she communicates with JEFFERY DAHMER (yes, you read that right!) and writes letters to his father from him, on his behalf.

That visit they did an experiment which turned out nice...they were able to entice the ghosts to move something and caught it on tape! Too bad I was so creeped-out by the Jeffery Dahmer girl.

I found out a few days later that they kicked her out after hearing about the whole Jeffery Dahmer thing. I guess that's not good for your image.

After this visit, I was not surprised to be re-scheduled by the head guy again. At this point I am finished with him.

In October of 2005, the one investigator I liked has moved to a new group, and now wants to bring them out. 5 of them came out for the investigation. This new team has twice as much stuff as the other group did! They too had a "medium" though they do not 'rely' on him. He was able to tell me some VERY interesting things that made perfect sense regarding the history of my home, and before I told anyone about the history. That was a credit to his credibility.

They got many good EVP's and one very interesting picture, which they came out a second time just to try and de-bunk it. After about a hundred test shots, they DID successfully de-bunk their own picture.

LAST BUT NOT LEAST....

Don't think I could end on a good note! Almost a year later I joined another internet forum and a new group contacts me for an investigation. This time it is a boyfriend-girlfriend team who boldly state that they will be able to tell me WHO is haunting my house by doing complete history on the house and the property along with an investigation. By all means! Please Do!

They claim to have been investigating for about 3 years and had a lot of experience. They showed up as promised for their investigation...although I prefer to call it a 'circus'.

First things first...he shows up and his breath smells like alcohol. (He claimed to have 2 beers with his dinner). He very quickly makes it known that while they are in the house for the investigation, HE is now in charge of MY house! He gets upset with me when I set up my Sony Nightvision camera in a room to get a different angle than his crappy JVC camera. He berates me for knocking on the wall (I was describing things we had heard) because

he was trying to get EVP's on the walk-through. The whole time he is treating his girlfriend like a slave.

He gets out some props for his investigation. A toy tractor, to entice to little-boy spirit we believe we have, and a PORNO magazine for the Old man spirit we believe we have! Note that I have 3 children in the house! We told him to put that back in his car.

One funny thing is I caught an EVP that said "Who ARE these people?"

The whole time the guy was rude to us. They only stayed for TWO hours, but that was more than enough of him for us.

Two weeks after the investigation, he emails me to state that he has found EVP's and will email them to me. Two more weeks go by without an email. So I email him back and he says he's not done yet and will send me what he has in one week.

Two more weeks go by and I email his girlfriend. She steals the tapes from him and sends them to me in the mail. He then blew his stack to me in a nasty email.

He states that my stupid family wouldn't keep their big mouths shut during the recordings, and that he had thrown the recorder across the room more than once trying to listen to the tapes. He stated that my son is smart mouth that thinks he knows it all and needs his head slammed. He also states that if I wanted any evidence that was caught then I should have sent them some money for their time and gas money to come here (even though they were in town to do another investigation that night anyway!).

I received NO history on my home and no ghostly activity on their recordings (though I did on mine!)

I emailed him back and told him where to shove his ego and that I wasn't about to send a rude person money for their hobby. I also advised him not to drink before showing up to a clients home and telling them what to do.

Throughout all this time, I have stayed in touch and become friends with the one investigator who came with 2 different groups. He was always

professional and polite, and did things with a purpose in a manner that applied common sense.

The point I wanted to make with my story is that there ARE some good people in the paranormal investigation field, but it's a crapshoot to find them. Everyone in this story had a website stating how great their group was. Only one proved to be true. Granted, I have learned to deal with what is in my house and was not in dire need of assistance. God help me if I would have been. If you want an investigation done, check out the group THOROUGHLY! That's the best advice I get give you.

Pretty ridiculous stuff, huh? The sad part is, it's 100% true.

I hear you asking....Why in the world would you post an article making ghost groups look bad when you yourself are a ghost hunter? I don't think it's that strange at all. I'm sure there is a mechanic out there (somewhere) who feels bad because he knows every time a woman comes in and says there's something wrong with her car, someone is going to try to stiff her with a \$1000.00 estimate because they think she doesn't know any better.

I point this stuff out because I feel it is getting waaay out of control. Over the last 4 years since the Ghost Hunters show started and interest in the paranormal has exploded, we have become overrun with groups who are exactly like what I have described. There's no accountability. When I got started, there weren't THAT many groups out there. Now there are thousands. It's hard to get into some places these days because they tire quickly of the incessant requests from groups wanting to get in.

Where once we walked a fine line of credibility, now we have been shoved off that line and thrown off the cliff by the sheer amount of flakes out there who claim the title of "Ghost Hunter / Paranormal Investigator." Nobody is content to do it is a hobby...they all have to have a website proclaiming themselves to be seasoned, experienced pros. It really makes me sad.

But in the end, just know that there ARE good, mature ghost groups out there that do care about your case. You might have to look hard, but they are there. In my own city and surrounding area, there are over 10 ghost groups that I know of. There is only one other group that I would possibly refer someone to besides my own, and that is Jim Willis's "The Ghosts of Ohio."

We may differ in our methods somewhat, but he's a mature adult with a group made up of respectful people. (He's also the only one around with a smidge more time under his belt than me).

So there are good teams out there, but now you know the reality of the situation, and what to look out for. Also, I hope this has given you reasonable expectations if you DO need to call a group. Maybe we can't get irrefutable evidence that will satisfy the world at large, but we can get something that will convince you and us that something is going on. We can't say for sure what anything is, or how it operates, we can only guess. Most times though, we can help find something that goes hand-in-hand with your faith, or we can de-mystify it just enough to make you comfortable again in your own home, and that is what most people REALLY want.

SUMMARY:

- Ghost Investigation Groups do not have any arcane knowledge of the workings of the spirit world. It is a field of "best-guesses" and no provable facts.
- The information you find on a great many Ghost websites is either greatly exaggerated, rehashed information, or just plain made up. The honest claims are sprinkled in there and harder to find.
- Although there are good, sincere groups out there with a lot of experience, you have to do some digging to find out who they are...and chances are they are nowhere near you!
- Ghost Investigation is an unregulated field with zero controls over what anyone does.

- The beliefs of various ghost hunters are as varied as the people themselves.
- Always thoroughly research someone before inviting them to your home.
- The ghost hunting community is plagued with people who will do anything, say anything, and grossly over-exaggerate their experience in order to be perceived as the best experts in town.