

## **HAUNTING LICENSE REQUIRED**

It seems to be part of the charm of an older settled area like the Cape to have at least one or two “haunted houses” to attract the curious but unwary visitor. I can think of several, mostly up along Route 6A, that although “haunted” seem to do a fairly consistent business as inns or B & Bs. I’d like to know more about the folks who seem willing to pay top dollar for the chance of spending a sleepless night in the company of a disembodied pirate or witch or parking-enforcement officer or - most fearful of all - IRS auditor, but that line of inquiry will have to wait.

By the way, is it just my imagination, or do the Chamber-of-Commerce-approved hauntings always involve a sad but beautiful young woman, never a toothless blood-dribbling serpent-haired blank-eyed hag with long gory fingernails and really bad breath, kind of like Mrs. Pforschmeister, your algebra teacher from freshman year at high school? I know that if I had my choice, a beautiful young woman in some flimsy white thing floating into my room would be a heck of a lot more appealing, disembodied and undead as she might be, than something resembling Mrs. P. But that’s just my opinion.

However I’m here to reveal a fact that up to now has not been widely known: there are other “haunted” locations on the Cape that don’t involve flowered wallpaper, guest books, and breakfast frittatas!

For example, the ghost that inhabits Porky’s Clam Shack in Brewster has been seen by literally hundreds of diners. The ghost apparently emerges from the kitchen at the stroke of 7 p.m. every other Saturday night and sweeps above the heads of the startled patrons humming show tunes. It leaves the restaurant for a few minutes but eventually floats eerily back into the kitchen, not to be seen again until its next appearance.

Psychic Loretta Bleibfuss of Falmouth has visited the Shack on many occasions and is convinced of the reality of the apparition, although she cannot explain it. “Usually I can make some contact with a spirit entity,” she commented, “but for some reason this one is just not responding.”

According to Shack owner Lester “Porky” Shumfelder, however, there’s a very good reason Loretta can’t contact the apparition: the “ghost” is his very-much-alive sous-chef Maurice Flern. “He’s a big tall dude, like six-eight or so, and he’s usually covered in batter when he goes out to take his break. He works every other Saturday night. Mo used to be a chorus boy on Broadway, so show tunes are a way of life for him,” said Shumfelder. “He might be a little strange, but he’s a good worker - and definitely not a ghost.”

But even if the so-called ghost isn’t really, could Porky’s still be haunted? The

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Falmouth psychic said unspecified emanations only she can detect have convinced her that the answer is yes. "Granted that Mo Flern may not be a ghost - there's still definitely something else going on at that place," Bleibfuss states categorically. "The ethereal vibrations, especially in the ultra-violet regions, never lie."

Again, Shumfelder disagrees. "I don't know what's vibrating her, but there is not now and has never been a ghost here. Listen, this place was built in 1956, not 1756. I've owned it since it was built. It's three miles from the nearest cemetery. It has none zero zip nada history, real or imagined. Nobody ever died in childbirth here, nobody ever hung himself here, no sea captains who died at sea ever lived here, no Indian princesses died for love here. Two years ago we had one city guy that started choking on a steamer, but he got the heimlich and end of story, not even a lawsuit. The only tragedy associated with this place is the quality of the summer help - that and the fact that my ex-brother-in-law still owns a piece of it. Other than that ..."

Another Cape mystery has been the well-documented Spirit of Vortner's Car Care in Mashpee. Over the past few years a considerable paranormal literature has developed about this miniscule entity, usually reported as dressed in green, that apparently dwells somewhere in Vortner's work area ("off limits to customers because of insurance regulations").

A detailed report on the Vortner's apparition appeared in the December 2005 edition of the Barnstable County Annals of Spirit Visitations, the journal of the Barnstable County Society for Investigation of the Paranormal. Extracted portions of this report follow.

"We called one morning in early April 2005 at the Mashpee location in response to the increasing number of reports we had received alleging spirit activity in this facility. The owner of the repair shop, Mr. Herb Vortner, listened carefully to our request to examine his work area with delicate instruments designed to detect ethereal and/or paranormal activity. His subsequent loud laughter and repeated remarks about 'April Fool's' and 'getting back at that SOB Artie' we found to suggest a certain skepticism on his part. We were not optimistic about the chances of conducting any meaningful research on his property that day or ever.

"However we were not to require such intrusion, because in the middle of a phone call by Vortner to this friend/competitor 'Artie', we were amazed to witness an inexplicable green entity emerge from a washroom, pick up a container of coffee, and begin working under the hood of a RAV4, apparently changing a fan belt. The entity was approximately four feet in height but otherwise exactly in human proportion. The features were more or less human. It was dressed in green coveralls, exactly as had been reported. Strangely enough, our instrumentation, which we activated immediately upon the entity's emergence from the washroom, indicated no increased

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levels of paranormal activity, which led us to conclude that (a) the entity was not a ghost, or (b) somehow the etheric emanations from the entity were so powerful that they overwhelmed our detecting devices.

“As we stood in silent amazement not twenty feet from the entity - which ignored us as it went about its work, whistling tunelessly - shop owner Vortner reappeared. He reacted to our presence as if he had forgotten us: ‘You people still here? Look, we’re pretty busy - anything else I can help you with real quick?’

“In spite of our full expectations that Vortner’s skeptical attitude would manifest itself brusquely and loudly once again, we whispered that we had reason to believe that the being working on the Toyota was in fact a spirit entity, one of a number that had been reported to our group several times in the recent past. We patiently explained to Vortner how we had come to this conclusion, and were pleasantly surprised to note that he listened with some interest. ‘Hmmm ... a haunted garage,’ he murmured several times during our explanation. ‘Might work. ... cousin’s B & B on Nantucket ... why not here? ... coffeee and doughnuts for visitors’ along with other muttered half-sentences that we could not hear.

“Eventually we became aware from these and similar dismaying remarks that Vortner had begun to regard the whole eerie situation in a far more commercial light than we would have wished. But our amazement and confusion increased markedly when Vortner went over and tapped the entity on the shoulder. ‘Hey Jimmy - come over here a second. I have some people I want you to meet.’ Wiping its human-like hands on a rag, the entity followed Vortner over to our group.

‘These nice folks think you’re a ghost of some sort,’ said Vortner by way of introduction, then whispered something we couldn’t catch in the entity’s ear. Laughter followed. ‘Hey folks - I ain’t a ghost or a - what do you call it? - “paranormal entity”, not yet anyway,’ said ‘Jimmy’ affably. ‘I’ll tell you the whole story ... no, I don’t mind if you tape it - be my guest!

‘I’m one of the “little people” Herb here hired for a Saint Patrick’s Day TV promotion a few years ago. ‘We won’t lepre-CON you here at Vortner’s Car Care” or something like that. It sure was a cheesy commercial, but people thought it was kind of cute anyhow. There were four of us little people hired: the other three have moved on, but I liked it here on the Cape and had worked in a garage when I was younger, so Herb agreed to give me a job. I live in a furnished basement over in Cotuit. One of the other guys who works here lives near me and gives me a ride to and from. I was born in Troy, New York, in 1956, been married and divorced twice, have a grown son and daughter - normal size - and my favorite hobby is candlepin bowling. I’m not crazy about seafood but I’ll crawl a mile over broken glass for a decent blue cheeseburger. Sorry I ain’t a ghost but that’s how it is. Oh, yeah - I’m a Yankee and Jets fan. Anything else?’

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**“How stupid we felt at this point can only be imagined. But before we could respond, Vortner interrupted. ‘Look, folks - I’d really appreciate it if you could keep this whole interview quiet for a while, say six months or so? I want to see if this “haunted garage” thing can help my bottom line.’ ‘And my Christmas bonus too!’ chimed in Jimmy as he playfully elbowed Vortner’s thigh.**

**“We advised the two of them that our official journal was published once a year and would not be coming out for at least another eight months. Out of an unspoken sensitivity for our own self-respect, we agreed that it would be in everyone’s best interest not to say too much about what we had experienced. ‘Excellent!’ replied Vortner, then turning to Jimmy informed him that he was now the ‘Official Spirit’ of Vortner’s Auto Body. ‘You got it, boss!’ said Jimmy, who then began waving his arms with what he apparently believed was ghost-like menace. ‘Listen to this - whoooooooo - ooooo ... spooky, huh?’ ‘Hey - I’m terrified!’ yelled Vortner in the role of a gullible customer. ‘Let me get a picture, quick ... and by the way what do you charge for an oil change?’**

**“We knew they meant no offense, but it was still a performance difficult for experienced paranormal investigators to watch, and we left the shop in a state of deep embarrassment shortly thereafter while Vortner and Jimmy were excitedly discussing a new series of commercials. Vortner promised to keep in touch, and when we next heard from him, revenues at the body shop had doubled. ‘Thanks, you guys - I never would have thought of this wheeze, but it’s really paying off. I owe you all dinner and a few glasses of SPIRITS!’ He actually capitalized that last word and underlined it twice. It was really pretty depressing for us, especially after his new commercials became cult favorites all over New England ... “**

**The Barnstable paranormal investigators say they’ll be a lot more careful when they check out recent reports about a couple of haunted Chinese restaurants, a haunted laundromat in the mid-Cape area (where skeptics attribute reports of poltergeist activity to a worn bearing in the number 3 dryer), and a pet shop haunted by the uneasy spirit of a shih-tzu named Boylston, who was apparently - according to Ms. Bleibfuss, the Falmouth psychic acting as his channeler - abducted by a coyote in Forestdale in February. “The trans-etheric conversation was going fine until I asked about paper training in the afterlife,” reported Bleibfuss. “Then bang - cut off. No goodbye or anything. But that’s the way shih-tzus are. I’ll try again tomorrow ...”**

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