

PRF Haunting Case Study: “The Mysterious Mr. Gordy”

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[This article provides an extended summary and discussion of a haunting case, known as the “Gordy” case, which was investigated in the late 1980s by the PRF’s long-time research director, the late Dr. William Roll.¹ It is based on a post that I’d originally written for a group discussion on Yahoo Groups in 2009. In addition to providing a good illustrative example of a haunting case, the Gordy case is particularly interesting for two reasons: First, it seems to be a cases that involves two well-defined apparitions (or “ghosts”) of deceased individuals. Second, unlike many contemporary haunting cases, it seems to contain a possible psychic component.]

Throughout the annals of human folklore, the classical image of an apparition (or ghost) has been that of a full-bodied, animated spectral figure of a person which lingers around after that person has died. Often times, the ghost of a deceased person is thought to linger in a place that the person once inhabited in life, forming the basis for a haunting. It is interesting to note, however, that many of the ghosts seen today at allegedly haunted locations hardly seem to resemble this classic image. Instead, they have often taken ambiguous forms, appearing as shadowy figures, floating lights (“orbs”), and misty, indistinct shapes. And indeed, documented cases of hauntings that contain a well-defined human apparition seem to be rather scarce in the present time.

There have been a few rare exceptions, however. One of them may be the “Gordy” case, which initially began in 1988 when Lisa and Andy Wyrick had moved into their new Georgia home, along with their three-and-a-half year old daughter Heidi. Soon after they’d moved in, little Heidi Wyrick met a man in her neighborhood named “Con,” who invited her to play on a swing hanging in a nearby yard. When she went to ask her mother for permission to do so, Mrs. Wyrick asked Heidi about the strange man she had encountered. In describing Con, Heidi said that he was wearing a bandage on his hand and a T-shirt “with blood all over.” Fearing that Con might be a kidnapper, Mr. and Mrs. Wyrick had the neighborhood searched for the strange man, but he could not be found.

Not long after, Heidi began talking about another man she’d met in the neighborhood named “Mr. Gordy,” who she would regularly meet with to play on the swing. Because Heidi kept referring to people who had never been seen, her parents soon reasoned that Con and Mr. Gordy were simply the girl’s imaginary playmates (initially, Mrs. Wyrick assumed that Con and Mr. Gordy were one and the same person).

Eventually, through a series of documents, Mrs. Wyrick discovered that an elderly gentleman named James Gordy, as well as a man named “Lon,” had once lived in their neighborhood many years in the past. A neighbor of the Wyricks also revealed that she had known James Gordy when she was a child, and she was able to confirm Heidi’s description of him. Interestingly, she had also known Lon, who was her deceased uncle. When she later presented Heidi with a collection of family photographs, Heidi was able to select from among them the man she knew as Con. The neighbor confirmed that the man Heidi had selected was indeed Lon, and that he’d lost his hand at young age in a machinery accident.

Mrs. Wyrick then became pregnant with another child, and after Heidi’s sister Jordan was born, the benevolent figures of Mr. Gordy and Con seemed to give way to a shadowy apparition which frightened Heidi. In addition, Heidi began waking up at night with scratch marks across her cheek. Her parents suspected that these scratches were self-inflicted, but then, on four subsequent nights, Mr. Wyrick woke up to discover similar scratch marks on his chest and back. No evidence

of insects, rats, or any other animal which could have produced the scratches was ever found. Worried that Jordan might also be hurt by these mysterious scratches, Mrs. Wyrick contacted Dr. Roll for help.

Through his investigation, Dr. Roll could find no clear way in which Heidi could have known or have learned about James Gordy and Lon prior to their identification. Upon presenting Heidi with a collection of random photographs of various people, Heidi was able to go through them and correctly select the one of James Gordy solely on the basis of her memory of his spectral appearance (which she described as being solid-looking).

In addition, no easy explanation was initially forthcoming about the mysterious scratches that appeared on Heidi's cheek and Mr. Wyrick's body. One possibility is that both Heidi and Mr. Wyrick were susceptible to a skin condition known as dermatographia, an allergic reaction which makes the skin sensitive to even the slightest pressure put on it. If enough pressure is applied, thin weals can appear on the skin, even with something as blunt as a fingernail.² While this explanation seems plausible, two potential arguments against it are that the scratches appeared at night while both Heidi and Mr. Wyrick were asleep, and, in the case of Mr. Wyrick, the scratches appeared down his back, an area that can be difficult to get at with the hands. Mr. Wyrick also described them as producing a burning sensation.

The scratches described in this case seem somewhat similar to another series of mysterious skin marks occurring in a poltergeist case that Dr. Roll had investigated in Indianapolis a number of years earlier.³ In that case, unusual puncture marks, described by the victims as being akin to "bat-like bites," appeared on the arms of the suspected poltergeist agent – an adult woman in her 30s – and her elderly mother. The two apparently shared a stressful relationship, and Dr. Roll noted that emotional problems can sometimes lead to psychosomatic reactions, including skin conditions such as rashes.⁴ However, in the original case report, Dr. Roll noted a difference here, in that some of the puncture marks would lightly bleed upon developing, an occurrence he apparently witnessed.⁵ In addition, the elderly mother was a diabetic, and the woman sometimes had to give her insulin injections, something the mother did not like. Dr. Roll noted that the punctures resembled pinpricks, like those one would receive from a hypodermic needle, an observation that seems consistent with the psychological situation. Given that poltergeist disturbances tend to occur in tense psychological situations, one might consider the possibility that some of these marks may have been produced through psychokinesis (perhaps through a form of biological psychokinesis). Eventually, these puncture marks subsided and seemed to give way to a different phenomenon – knocks and bangings.

A somewhat tense psychological situation was noted in the Gordy case. Mr. and Mrs. Wyrick told Dr. Roll that they felt that Heidi had become jealous of her baby sister Jordan and was angry at her father for paying so much attention to Jordan. On this basis, he speculated that the shadowy apparition that Heidi saw, as well as the scratches on her cheek, may have reflected her inner guilt over her jealous feelings. In addition, the scratches on her father's body may have reflected her anger towards him. Thus, we may be faced with three possible ways to account for the scratches: dermatographia (or some related skin condition), a psychosomatic stress response, or perhaps a biological PK effect. Whatever the case, the frightening shadowy apparition seen by Heidi no longer appeared after Dr. Roll had counseled both Heidi and her parents, suggesting that this aspect of the case may have been psychological.

An escalation of the phenomena in the Gordy case in 1999 brought Dr. Roll back to the Wyrick home, this time with environmental monitoring equipment. Jordan reported seeing the apparition of a girl, Mrs. Wyrick heard unintelligible voices at night that frightened her, and a

relative who stayed the night in Heidi's room felt pressed down into the bed by an unseen force. The Wyrick home was noted to be in proximity to a geologic fault, although measurements taken of the electromagnetic and geomagnetic fields during the investigation were within normal range.⁶

However, an extreme concentration of positively-charged ions in the air was detected in Heidi's room. Usually, most positive ions in the atmosphere are generated by radioactivity, and studies suggest that exposure to excess ionization can affect brain wave activity in the alpha range.⁷ Positive ionization may also affect peoples' moods, often leading to increased tension and irritability.⁸ On this basis, it might be speculated that the excess positive ions detected in Heidi's room may have resulted from underground radioactivity (such as that from the fault or from radon gas seeping into the home through cracks in its foundations), and that this excess may have contributed to any unpleasant experiences (such as Heidi's previous anger towards her father). To reduce this concentration of positive ions in Heidi's room, Dr. Roll suggested that an air purifier with a negative ion generator be installed in the room. In the meantime, Heidi began sleeping in another room.

The Gordy case is notable from a parapsychological viewpoint because it seems to contain an ESP-related component: it suggests that Heidi Wyrick was somehow able to psychically perceive the haunting apparitions of two men who had once lived in her local neighborhood in the past. How might we possibly explain this? One possible way is to consider the idea of "place memory," an idea proposed by the Oxford philosopher H. H. Price.⁹ He suggested that memories may not only be the property of the brains of living organisms, but also a property of physical space. If that is so, then physical space might somehow retain "memories" for certain events that might be re-experienced later by those who are sensitive to them (such as psychics and mediums), providing a possible way to account for well-defined haunting apparitions of deceased people. Physician and psi researcher Pamela Heath has suggested that a PK-related process may be involved in the formation of place memory¹⁰, a suggestion that receives some preliminary support from studies of applied PK efforts by psychics that seem to "linger" around for a short time before dissipating, or that seem to extend to the surrounding environment.¹¹

Although cases like the Gordy case seem to be quite rare nowadays, they are among the cases that seem to have a stronger bearing on the issue of survival after death. If more cases like it are able to come to light, they may perhaps offer us with additional evidence with which to weigh the issue.

References & Notes

¹Roll, W. G., & Persinger, M. A. (2001). Investigations of poltergeists and haunts: A review and interpretation. In J. Houran & R. Lange (Eds.) *Hauntings and Poltergeists: Multidisciplinary Perspectives* (pp. 123 – 163). Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc.

²Johnston, T. G., & Cazort, A. G. (1959). Dermographia – clinical observations. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 169, 23 – 26.

³See Chapter 5 in Roll, W. G. (1972/2004). *The Poltergeist*. Garden City, NY: Nelson Doubleday, Inc. (Reprinted by Paraview Special Editions)

⁴Roll (1972/2004), p. 60.

⁵See page 77 of Roll, W. G. (1970). Poltergeist phenomena and interpersonal relations. *Journal of the American Society for Psychological Research*, 64, 66 – 99.

⁶It's possible that, if high magnetic fields were involved in this case, they might have occurred infrequently and sporadically in conjunction with brief geophysical activity in the fault, only peaking at the time that the phenomena occurred; to test this idea, one would have to continuously monitor the

field strengths over time to see if any short-lived peaks in field strength occur, particularly around the time that haunt phenomena are reported.

- ⁷Assael, M., Pfeifer, Y., & Sulman, F. G. (1974). Influence of artificial air ionisation on the human electroencephalogram. *International Journal of Biometeorology*, *18*, 306 – 312; Silverman, D., & Kornbleuh, I. H. (1957). Effect of artificial ionization of the air on the EEG. *American Journal of Physical Medicine*, *36*, 352 – 358.
- ⁸Charry, J. M., & Hawkinshire, F. B. W. (1981). Effects of atmospheric electricity on some substrates of disordered social behavior. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *41*, 185 – 197.
- ⁹Price, H. H. (1940). Some philosophical questions about telepathy and clairvoyance. *Philosophy*, *15*, 363 – 385.
- ¹⁰Heath, P. R. (2004). The possible role of psychokinesis in place memory. *Australian Journal of Parapsychology*, *4*, 63 – 80.
- ¹¹A review of these studies can be found in Williams, B. J., & Roll, W. G. (2006). Psi, place memory, & laboratory space. *Proceedings of Presented Papers: The Parapsychological Association 49th Annual Convention* (pp. 248 – 258). Petaluma, CA: Parapsychological Association, Inc.