

Giving Up the Ghosts

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BY VICKY PETERS



Given Toronto's 175 years, it's not not a stretch to wonder about what shadows of the past remain lurking in our darkest corners. Most of us are familiar with well-known spooky spots like the [Lakeshore Psychiatric Hospital](#), [Mackenzie House](#), [Queen's Park](#), or the [Don Jail](#). But a quick peek at our favourite local [ghostly web sites](#) reveals a much wider range of phantom beliefs: a friend of ours, for instance, once told us about a resident ghost that would gently rock her cradle while her parents watched from across the room. We don't know if there was any truth to her story, but we can still pick out the house on Inglewood Drive that she said was haunted.

How many people in Toronto have experienced unexplained events? Toronto-based television production [Ghostly Encounters](#) is counting on plenty. So far so good—the series is heading into its third season and all of its stories occur in the greater Toronto area. The accounts come from everyday Torontonians, most of whom weren't believers before a spectre rocked their cradle, as it were. And the production is looking for more.



The series format grew from the concept of a good campfire story told by someone who had experienced strange phenomena. Each basic story is shot as a first-hand account—told by real people, not actors—then intercut with the usual embellishments of eerie film shots, reenactments, and a chilling music score. The production has enlisted the help of local academics to provide possible explanations for the occurrences and to advise on what stories may pair well together thematically in an episode. There is an effort to respect the experience being told, and it shows. If the series has a weak point it isn't the limited production value—it's the host.

Lawrence Chau introduces segments with the studied gestures that underscore his entertainment newscast background. His deliberate performance detracts from the other-worldly quality of what he's there to sum up. Maybe he just needs a good scare.

Knowing the series shoots locally, we were curious to hear whether the production had experienced its own ghostly encounters during filming. "There's been odd activity, things falling off walls," offers series producer Brian Dennis. He adds quickly that whoever or whatever was responsible for disturbing the crew wasn't necessarily from beyond the grave. However..."One house we've filmed at a few times as a location...turns out it has a documented ghost. There's a one hundred-year-old resident—a number of people have seen Tweety." Tweety? Dennis explains that the homeowners had done research uncovering a previous resident matching several witness descriptions. That glimpse into unknown personal histories may be a big part of what's so fascinating about our own ghosts.



Lower Bay Station. Photo by [matthewfromtoronto](#) from the [Torontoist Flickr Pool](#).

Most of the *Ghostly Encounters* portrayed have occurred at residences or private properties. The reenactments are filmed on location, but not necessarily the original setting of the story. As for experiences that occur in public places, this season someone has been brave enough to speak up about a ghost at the [Hockey Hall of Fame](#). And it's not the ghost of Sundin. Other places? Apparently there are ghosts on Toronto's subways, too.

While the production has a link on their [website](#) for submissions, and a [Facebook page](#), most of the stories simply turn up in conversation or by word-of-mouth. (Like from the producer's dentist, for example.) Seeing a ghost won't necessarily get you a guest spot, though. Because the show uses real people, guests need to be able to spin a good yarn and have enough charisma to carry the story. "The story has to pass the scare test," says Dennis. He knows he's got a winner if he looks around at the crew while shooting a first-hand account and everyone's face has gone pale.

Dennis admits straight away that he didn't believe in ghosts when he started the show. And now? "Now I'm changing my mind," he says. "At least, I'm not a disbeliever. But I haven't experienced it." The production is hoping that if you have, you'll consider letting them know.

All images unless otherwise noted courtesy of Ghostly Encounters.
