

I will never forget

Like the paranormal itself, my journey started with the unknown. I did have an experience when I was younger that may have sparked my curiosity about the paranormal, but I can't say for certain that it was the sole reason I ventured down this rabbit hole. Most people who enter this field do so for one of three reasons: they had an experience at a young age, they believe they possess abilities beyond the ordinary, or they are searching for answers about what happens after we die. For me, it was probably the first reason that opened the door. However, it isn't the reason I stayed.

Before I explain why I continue to investigate the paranormal, I need to start with the experience that first made me question what we know about the world around us.

When I was around thirteen or fourteen years old, my family moved into a house that desperately needed renovations. In fact, the house was in such rough shape that we spent our first summer living in a pop-up camper in the backyard. As the renovations neared completion, my brother and I shared a bedroom upstairs. At the top of the staircase was an open room to the right, while our bedroom sat directly ahead.

One morning before school, I woke up, stepped out of our bedroom, and looked to my left. Standing there was an older woman. To this day, I remember her appearing translucent and slightly faded, almost as if she weren't entirely there. Yet, in that moment, my teenage brain didn't fully process what I was seeing. As I headed downstairs, I casually said, "What's up?" and continued toward the kitchen. It wasn't until I reached the bottom of the stairs that reality caught up with me. What did I just see? Was I still half asleep? I convinced myself that was the most logical explanation. After all, I was a teenager who routinely woke up five minutes before leaving for school.

As I stood in the kitchen trying to make sense of it, my mother looked at me and asked a question that stopped me in my tracks. "Oh, did you see her too?" I hadn't said a word about what I had witnessed. I simply replied, "Yes." Then I brushed my teeth, threw on some deodorant because teenage boys aren't exactly known for smelling great, grabbed my Pop-Tarts, and headed off to school. A few months later, that open room became my bedroom. I never experienced anything else in that room, but one thing has always remained certain in my mind: there was something in that house.

Ironically, that experience wasn't what fueled my fascination with the paranormal. I wish it were because it would make for a much simpler explanation. The truth is that I didn't seriously think about ghosts or investigating until nearly fifteen years later. Sure, I occasionally watched paranormal television shows with my mom, but I never imagined myself becoming an investigator. That changed when a friend invited me to investigate Madison Seminary.

I wasn't looking for answers about life after death. I wasn't trying to prove ghosts existed. Honestly, it just sounded like something fun to do. After several investigations at Madison

Seminary and another at the Ohio State Reformatory, my interest began to grow. At first, it was simply a hobby. I know some investigators dislike that word, but that's exactly what it was for me at the time. Then something shifted. The paranormal wasn't making me think about what happens after we die. It was making me think about something else entirely.

When I was eighteen or nineteen years old, my grandfather passed away. He was more than a grandfather to me; he was my mentor. As his health declined during my final years of high school, I made every effort to spend as much time with him as possible. Looking back, I don't think I fully understood why I felt that urgency. I simply knew I wanted every moment I could get.

Some of my favorite memories are from those summer afternoons spent sitting in his garage, talking about life. Every now and then, I'd sneak him a cold beer he wasn't supposed to have while my grandmother shouted through the door, "You better not be drinking that beer!" Without missing a beat, he'd respond, "No, it's for Ryan." We weren't exactly tearing through a twelve-pack. Usually, it was just one beer. He enjoyed the taste, traditionally with a dash of salt, though we skipped that part because of his heart problems.

Those conversations shaped me in ways I didn't fully appreciate at the time. My grandfather always seemed to have a lesson hidden somewhere within his stories. One day, however, it was a question I asked that would leave the lasting impact.

"Tell me about your mom and dad."

Growing up, I had rarely heard him talk about his parents. As he began sharing stories about his childhood, I realized something surprising. I knew almost nothing about the people who came before him. These were my great-grandparents. They were only one generation removed from my grandfather, yet they felt almost forgotten. As I listened, I found myself wondering how many people spend their lives focused on work, responsibilities, and daily routines that they unintentionally forget the people who helped shape their family history. I wasn't thinking about my parents. I was thinking about the generations before them, the people whose stories slowly disappear with time. That realization stayed with me.

A few years later, while I was in college, I received the call. "Your grandfather passed away." Even now, it's difficult to revisit that moment. The calling hours were hard. The funeral was harder. What I remember most clearly wasn't where I sat or who attended. It was standing alone in the back of the funeral home after everyone else had left.

I wanted to walk up to him one last time, but I couldn't. I simply didn't have the courage. Then I felt a hand on my shoulder. It wasn't some paranormal experience. It was my grandmother. She quietly told me it was okay and offered to walk up there with me. As it turned out, she hadn't gone up yet either. Together, we walked toward him. She stepped forward first, whispered a few words, and kissed him on the forehead.

When it was my turn, I knew I wanted that final kiss to belong to the love of his life. So instead, I grabbed his hand and spoke the four words that had been sitting in my heart since those conversations in his garage.

"I will never forget."

That moment explains why I investigate the paranormal far better than any ghost story ever could. I don't investigate to prove the existence of spirits. I don't investigate to discover what happens after we die. I investigate because every location has a story. Every person who once lived has a story. And every one of those stories deserves to be remembered.

When I ask people what they're most afraid of, most answer with the same response: dying. I understand that fear. But I believe there is something many people fear even more—being forgotten.

Death is inevitable. Every person who has ever lived has faced it. What truly matters is whether our stories continue after we're gone. That is why I do what I do. Not to prove the afterlife. Not to find all the answers. But to preserve the memories of those who came before us and remind them that they are still remembered.

Because if we're afraid to die, how can we ever truly live?

Ryan

Trapped Souls