

Neighbors

Ventura ghost hunter claims Reyes Adobe Rancho is haunted

By Stephanie Bertholdo
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What happens when we die has been one of life's enduring mysteries.

Ventura-based ghost hunter Richard Senate believes he has unraveled some answers to the puzzle. Ghosts, he said, either haunt places that they loved while alive or linger in the place of a traumatic or violent death.

Senate, an established ghost hunter, author and lecturer based in Ventura, has deemed that the historic 1850s-era Reyes Adobe Rancho in Agoura Hills is haunted.

In 2006, Senate's ghost tour produced some spooky results for guests who swear that a ghostly face emerged from the old barn. I was there and, believe it or not, I saw a swirling, smoky light that dashed under the stairs that night. Was it paranormal, or did the creepy environment allow my imagination to run amok?

This year on Oct. 24, Senate, his wife Debbie, daughter Megan and about 25 guests tried again to raise the dead at the rancho.

Divining rods and a variety of gadgets engineered to capture the sounds and sights of spirits didn't lure out apparitions, but the ghost stories told before the hunt were intriguing.

Richard Senate spoke of his first ghostly sighting in 1978. During an archaeological dig at the Mission San Antonio de Padua in Central California, Senate and some archaeologists stayed with the monks living at the mission. Having been assigned kitchen duty one night, Senate said he decided to grab a midnight snack before turning in.

"I (wanted to go) into the kitchen for cupcakes and chicken wings," Senate told the group. Before he entered the kitchen something caught his eye in the courtyard—a bright flame.

"I saw it was a monk with a hood carrying a candle," he said. "I wasn't scared. I just thought he was one of the monks who lived there."

Senate decided to see if the man



GHOST WHISPERER—Richard Senate describes to a somewhat spooked audience how divining rods help him to communicate with spirits. Senate has been chasing ghosts since 1978 when he said he had an encounter with a deceased monk.

wanted to join him for a snack.

"Our two trails converged, and all of a sudden he disappeared," Senate said. "Just, bam, he wasn't there. I thought he fell in a hole or blew out the candle, but we were on gravel and I would have heard him."

Senate told the monks about his ghostly encounter the next morning. One monk identified the ghost seen by Senate as "Brother Joseph," who years ago had lived at the mission. The monks said that every night at around 12:30, Brother Joseph would light a candle and walk around the courtyard for an extra hour of prayer.

"That 10 seconds changed my life," Senate said. "From that moment on, I've been trying to find out what ghosts are."

For the ghost hunt itself, Senate passed out divining rods, tools used to communicate with ghosts. Guests were given two rods and instructed to ask yes-or-no questions and wait for a response through the rods, which are made out of metal coat hangers with bent ends as handles. When the metal rods cross over each other, it supposedly means a ghost has answered the question.

The rods did seem to wave and

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