



JIM HAROLD'S CAMPFIRE: TRUE GHOST STORIES

By Jim Harold

Stories of the Supernatural: Not Just for Entertainment Anymore

Is it time to take ghost stories seriously?

I say it is.

An interest in the paranormal is not on the fringe anymore. Television entertainment programs like *Paranormal State* and *Ghosthunters* have made the supernatural a national pastime. Yet, the key word in that sentence is the word *entertainment*. I submit that the mainstream media and society itself does not take reports of paranormal activity seriously, and considers them much like it would something like *Survivor* or *Fear Factor*...an interesting diversion but nothing of substance.

I believe that the supernatural is much more than entertainment to a great many people, it is core to their life. Yes, the paranormal *is* entertaining. I don't deny it and there isn't a thing wrong with that. Many things based in reality can have entertainment value. I enjoy reading history biographies, for me, they are very entertaining but that makes them no less rooted in reality. The same can be said for things like ghost stories, UFOs, life after death, etc. They are all entertaining to read about or to watch TV programming dedicated to their study – but that doesn't necessarily make them fictional!

For six years, I have hosted the most popular paranormal podcasts on the Internet. Two years ago, I started a program called *Jim Harold's Campfire*. It was a show dedicated to listeners sharing their own stories of the strange. I thought it would be a nice little

diversion from my main show, The Paranormal Podcast, which is a Larry King-style interview show dedicated specifically to authors and experts on the paranormal.

I thought that it would be great to hear people's real stories, that it would be *entertaining*. There's that word again. I thought producing *Jim Harold's Campfire* would expand my audience and be interesting but nothing of greater overall importance. I was wrong and did not realize it would change the way that I think about what the paranormal means to people in a radical way.

My interest in the supernatural has always been largely been one of curiosity, not spirituality. Since watching *In Search Of* and reading Brad Steiger's books as a child, I have always *thought* a lot about the unexplained. Not felt, but *thought*. I have had a few of my own experiences, still for me the interest has always been intellectual.

In talking to people from around the globe (I love that about podcasting, I talk to people from all over about their experiences) I think they have learned a few things, they include:

- ☹ Most experiencers are not fringe individuals who sleep with mini pyramids under their bed
- ☹ Experiences are very similar across cultures
- ☹ Most callers are sincere, they believe what happened to them was real
- ☹ Experiences stay with people for a lifetime, 20, 30, 40 or 50 years after the initial event
- ☹ Experiencers are afraid to share their stories, thinking they will be thought crazy

It is my thesis that in society it is OK to watch paranormal programming or read paranormal books but you are immediately thought mad if you say you have actually say you've seen a ghost or UFO! That's why I think my *Campfire* show has struck a chord with experiencers. It has given them a safe space where they know they will not be judged or made fun of...one where they can tell what happened to them without fear of retribution.

Why is there this disposition to *pishaw* experiencers, why do TV channels automatically whip out the *X Files* theme when they do a paranormal story? Years ago, there was some serious consideration given to paranormal stories...more so than I think there is

now. Primarily, I believe that is because the media has lumped in legitimate reports of supernatural activity into four camps:

- ☹ Hoaxes
- ☹ Ravings of crazy people
- ☹ Phenomena totally explicable by real world mechanics
- ☹ Reports that can't be explained made by seemingly sane and since people. They are good for entertainment value, but *they couldn't be true...*so let's cue the X-Files music!

I do not deny the first, second and third categories exist. In fact, I think that only a small minority of “paranormal” fall into the fourth category. However, the problem is that the fourth category is framed by the mainstream as being inexplicable at face value but ultimately still not reflective of any real activity.

Here is where I part ways with mainstream thinking. I believe the people that call into my *Campfire* program are telling the truth as they see it and I also believe that many of them have actually experienced something truly supernatural beyond the explanation of our current scientific body of knowledge.

Now, don't get me wrong. I have always been a “believer” to an extent but it was always an intellectual belief. How can there not be a Higher Power? Creation is too magnificent. How can there not be something beyond this life? If not, isn't our whole existence largely an exercise in futility. How can military pilots report UFOs and be totally off base? They are credible sources. Yet, these justifications for the reality of the paranormal were soulless to an extent. Based totally on *thinking*, nothing more.

The listeners and callers of Campfire have taught me that the supernatural and its possible existence are not just an intellectual exercise. They are real experiences, they are emotional, they are visceral and unforgettable.

Ask the woman I feature in my book who had a terrifying premonition 30 years ago that led her to ask for a totally unreasonable request that saved her life? Ask the young lady who worked at a record company and had a late musician come to her in a dream with details she could not possibly know and demand that his final CD be finished! Ask the hospital patient who was served tea by a nurse in an old time uniform, only to be told later by another employee that she had seen the hospital's resident ghost.

These experiences never leave them, years later these callers tell me that the stories still give them goosebumps. I am proud to provide them a place where they can relax and tell the stories as they happened without judgment or ridicule. I thank them for teaching me that the paranormal is more than a diversion or interesting thought experiment. I am also proud to bring their stories to a wider audience with my book, *Jim Harold's Campfire: True Ghost Stories*. These stories are their stories, and this book is dedicated to them.

Jim Harold is the author of "Jim Harold's Campfire: True Ghost Stories", published by New Page and due out September 15, 2011. ISBN: 978-1-60163-194-7 List Price: US \$14.99, Canada \$16.95