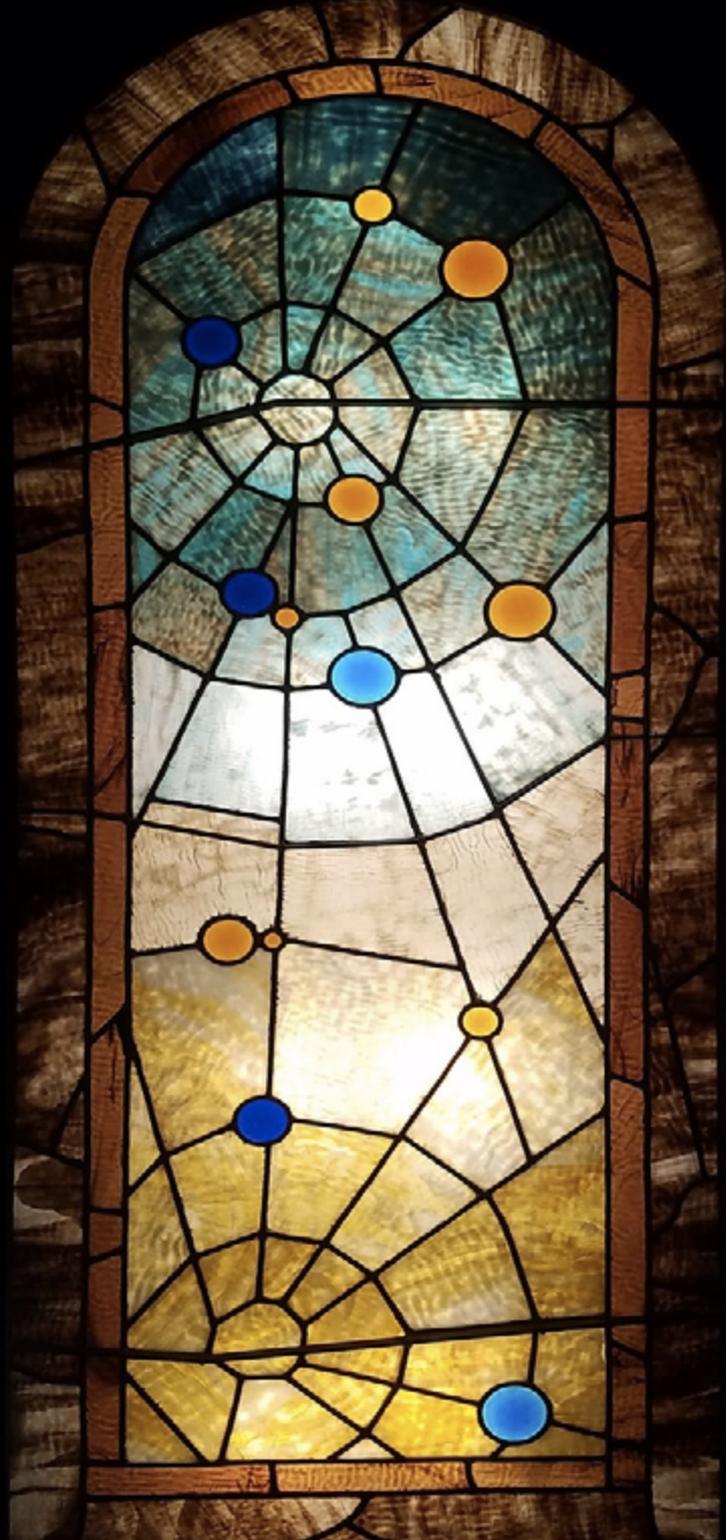




Wide Unclasp'd

Wide Unclasp'd Issue 1 - January 2020 Editor - Chris Garcia



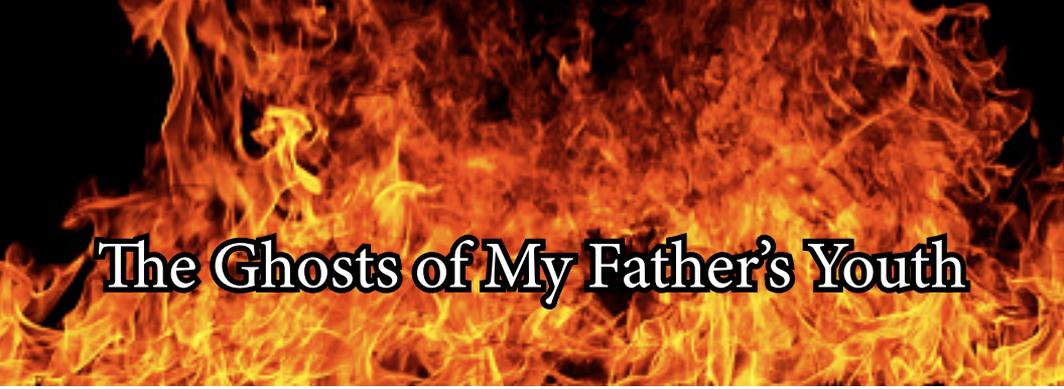
I started working on Wide Unclasp'd in 2015, knowing it wouldn't be out for years. I had a pregnant wife, then in Lucille Packard's Children's Hospital waiting for the arrival of our twins, and life was, well, life. I knew the idea, a zine about The Winchester House. There is nothing that's as important to my life journey as the House. I wanted to talk about the House, and the more I leaned into my thinking on the House, the more tendrils I felt rising out of the body of my thoughts. It couldn't be just about the House, it had to tie into the things around the House, the things that the House lead to, directly and within myself. I knew I wanted it to deal with the physicality of the House, but also about ghosts in general. And the block of theatres next to the House. And the ideas of the Unexplained. Basically, I realized that I wanted this to be the written form of Thinking Sideways, with a physical place to serve as the housing.

The name, of course, is a reference to the House itself. In the House, in one of the ballrooms, are two windows – 'Wide unclasp the tables of their thoughts' from Shakespeare's Troilus and Cressida and 'These same thoughts people this little world' from Richard II. Wide Unclasp felt stiff. Tables of Their Thoughts was a possibility, but in the end, I just love using 's in things.

The House itself is in the middle of a sort of transition. There's an Axe-throwing concession, and a new shooting gallery. This is nothing new, of course, as there was always an arcade (I'll talk about that later), but they also recently closed the Rifle Collection, which was a personal fave. No word on what they're doing with it next.

This issue will be a fine example of what I hoped to do while sitting in the sleeping lounge at LPCH three nights before the Boys would be born. The articles, on The Sighting I was closest to personally, on In Search Of, on my Dad, the source of my fascination, and on the Front Door. Future issues will cover elements of the House, my personal connection to it, media representations of it, and much much more. Next issue, for example, will feature a Love Story, a Book Review, and an interview.

So, let us go then, you and I, into the House, with minds Wide Unclasp'd!



The Ghosts of My Father's Youth

My interest started with my Dad. He was a good guy, a flawed guy, but a good guy with a heart like a pitcher waiting to fill any glass that came his way. He was into ghosts, and he knew everyone. He had told me he knew Sylvia Browne, and when I ran into her, a year or so after his death, she knew he was dead, said he was proud of me, and that I should spread his ashes sooner than later. I think she was both a fraud and a psychic, probably in equal measure. He ran in parapsychological circles, and over the years, had researched everything haunted in Silicon Valley, and he took me, endlessly, to the Winchester House.

Dad's interest probably came from an early childhood encounter he told me about when we reconnected as he was being eaten alive by cancer.

My Great-Grandmother, the last full-blooded Ohlone in our family, lived in a big house in Watsonville, CA. It was a large house with a big porch, a large set of stairs leading up to it. It looked out across a field, I believe of strawberries, and beyond that, a copse of eucalyptus trees, some of the first planted in California. It had been the house in the family since my father's Gramma, an Ohlone, had married a Mexican. Dad would stay there weekends, often, and the kids, at that point 5 of them, would stay up late.

Dad always stayed up the latest.

One night, Dad was sitting up and heard something going on outside. He looked out the window, and saw that there were people milling about. This wasn't normal, the neighbors wouldn't be up so late, or early for that matter, so he decided to go out and investigate, like any smart 10 year old.

As he stepped on to the porch, he could see that just beyond the end of the steps down from the porch were a mass of people, dressed in the way that he could instantly recognize.

Ohlone.

There were men and women, children, working baskets, sitting, talking, speaking a language he had only heard snippets of from his Gramma. He watched for a moment, looking out across the field, now devoid of agriculture, but full of structures more than temporary, and reeds. He walked across the porch and started down the steps. Looking across the area, he saw, just in front of where the eucalyptus had stood when the sun was up, a group of men on horses. He couldn't make out their faces, but even without, he could tell they were up to nothing healthy. Dad felt as if he needed to talk to his ancestors, though he could not speak their language, and he hurried down the stairs.

And then, the field erupted in flames.

A wall of flames seared the air in front of him, instantly consuming all the Ohlone he had seen – the men, the women, the playing children. Dad did the only thing he could think of, and he dove back, underneath the porch, behind the steps, where the kids would go to play, smoke cigarettes, listen to Uncle David's transistor radio. He covered his head, terrified, and waited to feel the heat consume him. He stayed there waiting, but when he finally could open his eyes, through the tears he could see that it was dark, dark as a moonless night. He lifted his head, looked out across the field. Smoke rose from land that was burned crisp, a smoldering structure, an abandoned basket. He ran up the steps, into the house, into his sleeping bag.

The next morning, his gramma woke him; it was nearly noon.

"You were up late, Johnny," she said. Dad didn't respond.

"You saw, them, didn't you?" Dad nodded.

"I see them almost every night, but I never go down the steps any more."



The Sighting of Sarah Winchester

Century 23, August 1995.

I've heard many stories about people sighting Sarah Winchester. Several from people who used to work at the House, especially those who weren't there to see her, but came across her very much as a simple by-product of their employment. One story, told to me by an old-timer at a meet-up at my favorite hotel in America: the San Jose DoubleTree, had the most interesting one from the House itself.

Others who have worked in the House have reported seeing her, most often on the grounds, but she also seems to have a thing for housework. Most report seeing her while vacuuming, dusting, or decorating for the holidays. As far as I can tell, she's never been seen by a guide on a tour. I've read stories online of such, but I don't know how true they are. I do have a near-hand experience, and one that really gets me thinking. It doesn't take place at the House, but on what would have been her land, before external development began in the 1960s.

It was a Wednesday, and it was hot. That describes about 1/7 of all days in August in San Jose. I was wearing polyester black pants, a black vest, a white shirt that showed the twice-weekly washing in un-separated laundry. I was a regular employee of the Century 21,

the largest of the three movie theatres that served as neighbors to the Winchester Mystery House. The Century 23 was the one that bordered the House itself, sharing a high, ivy-covered fence. I was loaned out, about once a week, to the other theatres during the Blockbuster summer nights. I was on popcorn at the 23, on that Wednesday night, with *Wolf* just having started about ten minutes prior. The box office was quiet, and she was reading a book, a Stephen King novel as I remember it, and the three others on the floor, Paul, Tanya, and Miquel, all older than my 19 years, and actually trying hard to get things done, were in their last hour. I still had two to go. They told me that they were going out to empty the concrete garbage cans in the parking lot. I knew this meant they were going outside to fill and drain a few nitrous balloons while also just happening to take the garbage out of the concrete containers. I went back to my popcorn popper, sneaking a few handfuls while no one else was around.

About ten minutes passed when I heard a scream, distant, and I figured it was just from one of the screens in the theatre, but a minute later, Paul ran back in, panting.

“Shit, dude,” he said, as Miguel ran in behind him.

“Fucking...” he just trailed off.

I could tell they were shaken, so I grabbed a couple of cups, filled them with Cherry Coke (because who doesn't love Cherry Coke?) and handed it to 'em.

“Man...man,” Paul said, shaking.

“It was... we were changing the garbage can over by the fence,” Miguel continued on, “and we saw someone coming out of the ivy.”

“I thought it was a crackhead,” Paul added.

“She was short, and kinda round. She walked forward, and there was this car in front of her, and...”

“She walked right through it.”

“Walked right through the car.”

Tanya walked back in, tears down her face.

“Right through it,” she said.

I walked back behind the counter and grabbed her a Diet Coke. She always had Diet Coke.

We kept peppering them with questions. Tanya hadn't come back in because she just had to stand there. She got the best view of the small woman – big, old-fashioned dress, and she was pale wearing a hat at the back of her head.

“It wasn't a bonnet,” Tanya added.

I hadn't noticed that Paul was still holding one of the half-full garbage bags. Miguel abandoned his the second he saw her walk through the car. I was the only one with his senses about him. I was also the only one who REALLY wanted to see what they had seen. I told them to go into the break room, take a few minutes to get it together.

“Yeah,” Tanya added, “it'll be nice to finally get our balloon in.”

I went out into the parking lot.

I saw the bag on the ground, about thirty feet from the fence, a few feet away from the concrete container, the metal lid of it hanging from the chain that kept it from wandering off. I picked up the bag, reached into the container and grabbed the roll of bags in the bottom, pulling a single bag out and tying it around so it wouldn't slip. I put the lid back on and checked the others. I changed the bags and dumped them in the compactor, then walked back in. Paul was standing behind the counter, leaning, eating popcorn and staring out into the parking lot. I knew Miguel and Tanya were in the breakroom, probably giggling.

The other stories of the Ghost of Sarah Winchester within the theatres are pretty legendary. The Century 22, at the far end, had a stockroom that was certainly haunted,, and the one story that went around the most was of an old woman, seemingly walking through the wall into the large theatre, A-House. She was seen in the middle of the road that separated the House from the Century 21. I can say I've heard that it was not an infrequent thing for her form to be noticed out the trailer windows in the old Winchester park next to the House.

But where she is rarely seen, is in the House. It's not that she's not seen, she is, and I will have the stories in future issues, but she seems to want to roam, perhaps after years of feeling cooped up in the old place.



The Front Doors

There is a story about the front door. Since Sarah Winchester took no visitors, and the workmen on the projected entered through the side, only two people ever went through that front door – the man who installed the door, and Sarah Winchester herself. A story, almost certainly apocryphal, says that when Teddy Roosevelt came to call, being a huge fan of the Winchester rifle, he pulled up and knocked on the door, only to be told by a workman, who presumably didn't recognize the President "go 'round the side, like ever'body else!"

That door is a lovely piece of work. It's certainly not of the original house, as it is incredibly ornate, and when the front portion of the House was closed up, after the '06 earthquake, it was never used again. The double-doors are broken into three general panel spaces – two of them with stained glass insets, and the third carved into a set of nine pyramids. The stained glass is of the William Morris variety, The stained glass uses a fleur-de-lis styling that is stunning. It's likely more lovely from within, but you can't get close to it on that side.

The door sits within an arch, with an air window above the door, with a similar stained glass setting. The dark wood of the surrounding arch is beautifully carved with another series of a pyramids. Above, a lovely lantern, four-sided. What I've never managed to ask anyone who would know is are the lanterns and lamps that are hanging in and on the House original? I'd imagine that they'd have been worth a pretty penny and should have been auctioned during the auction that sent the rest of the furniture to the winds.

The interesting thing, and much of the House speaks to this, is that it is a work that was created for no one but the lady of the House, but at the same time, it could not have been created for her. The argument that she was creating the House as her lasting project (and wasn't very good at it) seems weak to me specifically because of the door. It's not supposed to be a functional door, and the way the house is built, it's barely visible. It's set back, far back, surrounded by the porch, but unlike most houses of the time, even the large majestic houses, the door is not at all featured. The dark wood makes it almost invisible from even the nearest hedge. Oh,

it's lovely, but few if any, made it through those gates. That's as close as nearly anyone would have gotten, so why spend a fortune, and it would have cost a fortune, on such a door?

It's the performative aspect of the house, and in that, it seems to speak to a couple of different ideas. One, she was to build the grand house for the spirits, which it could be, but in addition, it could just be that she felt she needed the grand front door to make it a house, and furthermore, she needed it to be HER grand front door. The front door being there told her that it was her House, that she had built, and paid, for it herself. It served the role of the marker of her home, and if it's true that the front portion of the House was off-limits after 1906, that makes it more a marker for her, and not anyone else. It was performing the role of door, of entrance, but no one other than perhaps the gardeners would have encountered it. It was no longer even for her, but it had to be there. It was her showing it was a house.

I love the door. It's what I think of when I think of Victorian doors. I've never walked through it, but have, a few times, gotten close enough to hold the doorknob. It feels old, small, cold, but it also feels of history, and that might be what it was made for.



in search of

The 1970s Paranormal Gateway Drug

We all want to be Spock. It's a universal for Gen-Xers. And, well, OK, Boomers, too. We all love Spock, because we all want to be that logical, effective, powerful. None of us are, of course, but he is what we wish we could be.

And thus, the smartest thing the producers of a show designed to stretch all credibility could do is to have it hosted by the great Leonard Nimoy – Spock himself.

The idea was very simple, of course; the thirty minute program examined a phenomena in the realm of the Unexplained. It started with a special: In Search of Ancient Astronauts. That one was a really good, and I put a lot of the fascination my generation has for the Ancient Astronauts theory on this show. This wasn't hosted

by the great Nimoy, but by the great Rod Serling. Of course, it was still so great, and showed almost endlessly. There were a few of these done with Serling hosting, but it wasn't until 1977 that the show became one of the most important things to ever happen to paranormal fandom.

In 1977, they started *In Search Of* as a series, 24 episodes a season hosted by Nimoy. The topics for the first season were very much the kinds of things that appealed to the young Christopher J Garcia, and his Pops too! Voodoo, the Magic of Stonehenge, the Bermuda Triangle, and perhaps most famously of all, Bigfoot. These episodes are just about the best example of what was cutting edge in the realm of the Paranormal. The Bigfoot episode is probably the most important to the development of Sasquatchology as it presented fairly out-there for the time theory, including being the most mainstream presentation of the UFO connection.

But it wasn't all paranormal. There were episodes on Nazi Plunder, Amelia Earhart, Earthquakes, and Killer Bees. It was this idea that these were what the thinking person of the time would be interested in. You see, at the time, SciFi and Fantasy were big in the wide world. It wasn't that *Star Wars* had changed the world, but so many of the folks in their teens and twenty were big *Specific* fans that *Star Wars* grew out of that. That happens a lot, and it was just a continuation of a path that had been laid down in the 1950s, where the B-movies helped lead to *Star Trek*, which helped lay the foundation for *Star Trek*. Tangled webs.

The combination of paranormal with just dark stuff was REALLY captivating, and it's what makes the show so damn re-watchable. Watching the old series, it's incredibly modern feeling when it comes to topics and scope, while feel very 1970s in the presentation. It led to so many other shows taking on the ideas. There were shows like *That's Incredible*, and slightly later Ripley's *Believe It Or Not*, that took on many of the concepts, and added a more polished, though less serious, peel. And that's the reason that *In Search Of* could do both things like the Loch Ness Monster and Vincent van Gogh. Each episode was a serious investigation, no matter how out there the topic was. That allowed for some great work, and that must have driven every skeptic nuts; *In Search Of*

gave the paranormal and the simple cool-normal the same weight. I loved that, so much!

What *Unsolved Mysteries* and *America's Most Wanted* were to True Crime, *In Search Of* is to paranormal podcasting. You can find so many podcasts that take on things in much the same way as *In Search of*, notably *Thinking Sideways*. That shows how these twisting paths of influence work.

You can find almost every episode of *In Search Of* online today. I've watched them on YouTube mostly, and they're great. I can not recommend them enough for folks who are really into things like ghosts, or the Princes in the Tower, or ESP. The later series of *In Search Of*, with Mitch Pileggi, and later Zachary Quinto, are also good, but there's nothing like the original.



in
Search
of

myths & monsters



Jeremy Blake's Winchester

Before they were murdered by Scientology, Theresa Duncan and Jeremy Blake were Digital Art royalty. The story of their deaths is fascinating, but it is the work they left behind that I find to be the most interesting. Duncan's *Chop Suey* is a marvel of a game, all these decades later, but it is Blake's *Winchester Trilogy* that has stood as a prime example of what Video Art evolved into after MTV took over so much of it. It is a work of incredible complexity of meaning and influence, particularly an aspect of ghostly presence.

Morris Louis, an artist of the first wave of Abstract Expressionists, and Helen Frankenthaler, of the second wave, created paintings using paint thinned to the point of mere stain using lacquer. The result is ghostly compared to the starkness of so much of the AbEx work of the 1940s and 50s. Looking at the digitally-manipulated images that Blake layered atop photos of the House, you can see what he was doing: the painting of the House will never end; when they finish at one end, they start again.

But other images, such as the repeated images of cowboys

with rifles, Winchester Rifles, that really bring home the idea of The Winchester House as a site. The Rifle made it possible to build the House, but more over, it made the entire Westward Expansion, possible, not only as a weapon, but as a symbol. San Jose would not exist without the idea of the West as the Land of Promise, and the Cowboy mythology, that drew so many to the promise of the Valley of Heart's Delight. The Cowboy is what every tech entrepreneur of the 1960s and 70s compared themselves to, and their moral compass pointed in a similar direction.

The Cowboy images vary in opacity, and the idea of them as ghostly marks upon the House, and upon the West as a whole, is easy to draw.

At 50+ minutes, it is not an easy work to digest, and there is a coffee table book that captures stills that is a lovely thing, but working through it, perhaps moments at a time, is rewarding for those willing to sift the symbols, the false starts and dead-ends of meaning, to draw the truth of the place as if you were working your way through Mrs. Winchester's House in the dark.



Thanks for Reading. You can reach me at
johnnyeponymous@gmail.com

Next Issue - Feb 29. Topics to include Earthquake Weather by Tim Powers, Vacuuming as Attractant, the Wheelbarrow Ghost, The Winchester Obituaries.