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Psychic seeks paranormal on Waterloo ghost tours

BY LORRAINE ASH
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BYRAM TWP. — It was night at Waterloo Village and a worker rode his car around the grounds. Spotting a hooded woman in a black cape standing by a lamppost, he stopped.

The scene was ordinary, until he stopped the car and got out to find out who she was and if she needed help.

As he approached the woman, the story goes, she dissolved before him.

"The lady has been seen walking through the village, through the cemetery," said Jane Doherty, a psychic who investigates ghosts. "Sometimes the woman, who is thought to be a member of the Smith family that settled at Waterloo, is reported to

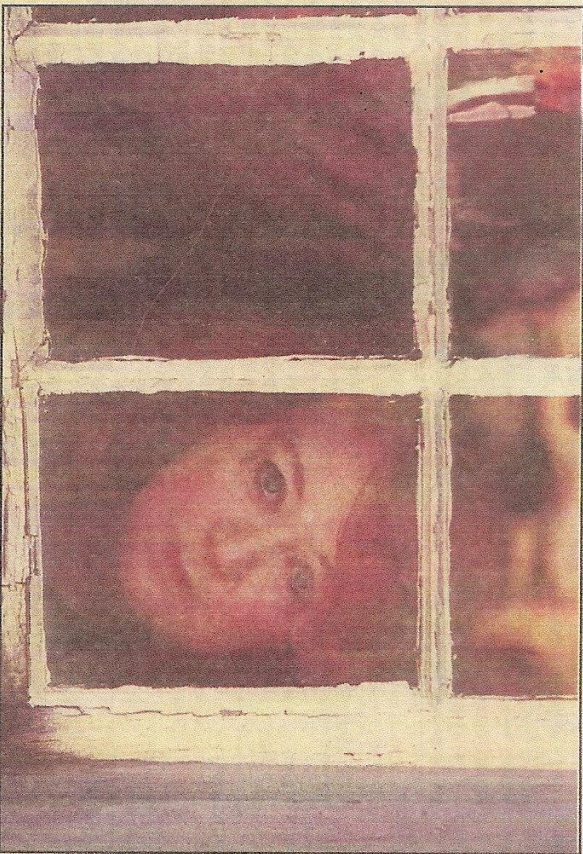
nod and say hello to passers-by."

"That is, real live passers-by. Doherty keeps a cool head in such circumstances, which is one reason at this time of year she conducts ghost tours of the village, as she will tomorrow and Sunday and, if demand is high enough, in November.

The psychic and the terrain seem to make a good pair.

Doherty is no run-of-the-mill psychic. She has a reputation. A former English teacher, the 51-year-old single mother of two is president of the Chatham-based New Jersey Society of Parapsychology. Her work has been reported in The New York Times and The Philadelphia Inquirer, and she

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Jane Doherty, a paranormal investigator, peers through a window of the blacksmith shop at Waterloo Village in Byram, where she conducts ghost tours. The 51-year-old single mother of two is president of the Chatham-based New Jersey Society of Parapsychology.

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has been featured on "Sightings" on Fox television. Her book, "Riding the Psychic Wave: A Guide to Fate, Prophecy and Psychic Readings" is soon to appear.

She is in demand and has been called to investigate hauntings not only at Waterloo but at the Spy

House Museum in Port Monmouth, Victorian inns in Cape May and, last June, at the Massachusetts bed-and-breakfast where Lizzie Borden was accused of murdering her father and stepmother in 1893. And certainly Waterloo, the site of more than 300 years of New Jersey history, seems to have plenty of ghosts. Many people have walked the fields and woods of the village — from the Lenape Indians to Dutch traders of the 17th centu-

ry through the early 18th century English, who created a settlement there that survived the Revolutionary War, the Civil War, the heyday of the Morris Canal and the rise of technology.

Spiritually speaking, it's a gold mine and Doherty covers many of the silent stories of the village on her tour. There's the one about the Heasian soldier seen riding up to the canal house and running inside, as if to hide something. A sword was found in a wall, Doherty reports.

There's the boy spirit who kissed a female guide on the lips.

There's the involved and eerie story of the woman who is seen running from window to window in one house. The key to her eternal agony eventually was found in her baby's crib. Hidden under the mattress was fabric from a ball of up and ripped dress dating to the late 1800s and thought to be evidence of a rape.

And, in the blacksmith's shop, the tools are forever disappearing. Such cases make wonderful stories. But Patrice Keane, executive director of the American Society for Psychological Research, which dates to 1885 and is the oldest center of its kind in the country, offers a caveat about just how easy — or difficult — it is to claim to have found a ghost.

"There's no definitive way to determine the presence of a ghost," she says. "No, there's also no ghost-catching machine, although some people like to try to prove the existence of a ghost using equipment."

Research, she says, must be rigorous. Rigor means sending 15 psychics independently into a given place that is presumed to be haunted, she said, and seeing how each of their accounts corroborate.

"If 10 say something awful happened in the living room, then you wonder if something awful didn't happen there," she said. "You also need to check that the living room isn't horrifically decorated because some people may be responding to that."

Applying rigor also means searching for physical evidence that would validate a psychic's vision. "If someone envisions a body in the basement and there is a body buried in the basement, well, then," Keane said, "the proof is in the proof."

And all that presumes, she says, that the psychic did not, inadvertently or not, read an account of a murder at the site in a newspaper before he or she "read" the site.

But even using a scientific approach doesn't lessen the intrigue of personal experiences and hearing those of people like Jane Doherty — like the story of how she got into the ghost business to begin with.

Doherty's awareness of her sensitivity started young and modestly. In 1958, when she was 12, she was eating lunch with her little friends in the school cafeteria when it suddenly occurred to her — and she announced that what people eat has a role in causing cancer and that vitamins will have a part in curing

it. "I also noticed that positive thinking causes things to happen," she said.

After that came the family trips to St. Anne de Beaupre in Quebec. On one such trip, a blind man became sighted. On another, an old nun told her she would become a missionary in this life.

Suffice it to say that Jane Doherty always had an awareness about the threshold between the world of spirit and the world of matter. What came later, much later, was discipline — the act of applying the mind to the otherworldly phenomena she sensed.

That application, she says today, is what makes her and others like her different from most people who encounter ghosts.

With repeated experience comes increased sensitivity and knowledge, just as with any other skill.

"We all have a psychic ability," she said, "but I am someone who has an extra sense of it, someone who can control it. I can get into the psychic mode and bring back the information. Others are just struck by something and then they let it go."

Her first real "case" came to her casually when a Whippany homeowner approached the New Jersey Society of Parapsychology saying he wanted someone to look into the ghost in her house. Doherty was the only one interested in helping, as she still does, gratis. "I went to the place in the house — the upstairs bedroom — where

the ghost was," Doherty recalled. "I felt a cold breeze go by me; the cold came from the closet. It was a distinct cold."

She checked for air conditioning; there was none. And no windows were open.

"Later, in the kitchen," she said, "I felt the spirit touch my back. I actually felt hands on my back — actual pressure, and there was nothing by me. I felt it was her husband, who I found out had back problems. He had died suddenly in an operation. He had something to say about a bank account, actually, and he wanted to say he loved her."

In many ways the experience was typical. It wasn't scary. It wasn't violent. It was a case of a spirit who wanted to get a message to someone.

In many other cases, she explained, a spirit is confused or so attached to a place that it does not want to move on or just plain frustrated.

"Totally frustrated," she said, "like trying to order a pizza at your favorite pizza place and no one can hear you."

THE ENTRANCE FEE to Waterloo Village (\$9 for adults; \$8 for seniors; \$7 for children 6-15) covers the cost of Doherty's ghost tours, which are scheduled to take place every hour from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday and every hour from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. Sunday. There are 40 spots per tour. Village spokeswoman Carla Rota said reservations are recommended. Call (973) 347-0900 during business hours.