

by Michelle Kaplan • Photography by Jason Collins

Things That Go Bump in the Night

Whispers about the Lake Worth Playhouse being haunted have been going on for generations. The likely cause is the unusual story of the Oakley brothers who built the Playhouse back in 1924. One brother committed suicide, the other died on the very same day, one year later. Coincidence? Maybe, but that's all it takes to start a good ghost story.

The moon is full and the air hangs thick, dead and heavy on the ride to Lake Worth. Recently, the Florida Ghost Team has been investigating the Playhouse for paranormal activity and has given the general public the opportunity to spend the night and take part in a "ghost hunt."

Tonight twelve brave souls ride shotgun with the Florida Ghost Team. The team is a member of TAPS, The Atlantic Paranormal Society, which investigates paranormal activity for people who believe they are experiencing hauntings. TAPS also has a popular TV show, *The Ghost Hunters*, on the SciFi Channel. The teams collect evidence while trying to debunk the unexplained.

The briefing in the lobby starts with Carol Kassie, Director of Marketing & Public Relations for the Playhouse, who has experienced firsthand what it's like to be among the unexplained.

"One of our stage managers swears that one of the Oakleys unties her shoes. She'll look down and they're untied.... These are theatrical ghosts, maybe they just want to show off a little."

The twelve of us are split into small groups to tour the theater. Soon it will be lights out.

The basement dressing room is a long thin room with a low ceiling and a mirror running the length of the wall. Chuck Aurin, Supervisor/Investigator with Florida Ghost Team, gives a brief history of the activity of the room and is ready to leave three novices alone to see what happens after the lights go out.

Sitting in a small, pitch dark space with an overactive imagination is not going to work for me. So, as an observer (and not an actual participant) I make bathroom excuses and head for more open spaces.

The group in the main theater seems ready to settle in. I find a seat with a colleague who's along for the ride. The lights go off and a few flashlights go on. Some walk the isles. Some sit and wait.

My colleague, getting restless, shines the flashlight up to the balcony seats and suggests that we should head up there and check things out.

"Go for it," I deadpan.

I don't budge, but from out of nowhere a waft of heavy perfume goes by. He doesn't smell it. It's getting late; I must be having an olfactory hallucination. Ten minutes and another wash of perfume. I call to one of the guests to come sit over here. As she sits, she says to me, "Do you smell that?"

Two guests sit side by side in the center isle. One is holding a thermometer and getting very excited as she tells her companion that the temperature is suddenly dropping fast.

She is reminded that the air conditioner has just kicked on.

This is followed by peals of nervous laughter.

Ok.

Out to the lobby where I can see the street and feel a little more grounded in reality. I chat with Carol, who has smelled the perfume up in the office suite above the theater several times before.

After midnight.

There's a little flurry of activity in the main theater. Apparently something has materialized after all.

Chuck is checking the seats with a thermal camera and one is showing a heat image – a clear impression of a human form sitting in a chair.

He views the image with the camera from various angles to rule out the possibility of an infrared reflection. However, it remains. The team had encountered something, and they had it on camera.

“I felt as if I was a kid who just found the toy surprise in the Crackerjack Box,” he added. “I discovered something special that, while transient, made me feel like there actually IS something more.”

Steph Naumann, a team investigator, was skeptical at first.

“Usually, when we sit in a certain area for some time, our heat will remain on that area for up to 10 maybe 15 minutes while it slowly dissipates. This signature remained on that chair for about 30 minutes.”

Shaun Jones founded the Florida Ghost Team almost six years ago and as leader of the team, considers herself one very skeptical individual.

“I scrutinize every piece of possible evidence we obtain.

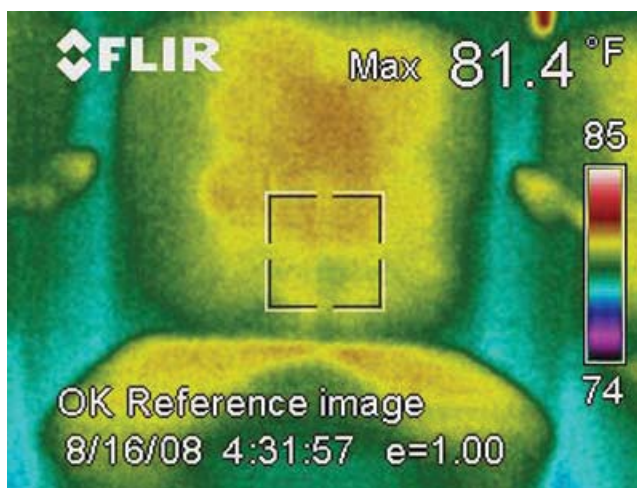
Someone or something with a substantial amount of energy occupied this seat prior to the discovery by Chuck who stated that no one was in that seat up until that point. There is no explanation for what was captured.”

A tape recorder is brought out. A member of the team begins directing questions at the empty chair. Later the tape will be evaluated. To get an uncompromised recording, we all leave the theater and head to the lobby for a little break.

Shaun asks Carol about that particular seat. Carol tells us that it belonged to a season ticket holder who died a week earlier. Apparently the apparition is intent on getting its money's worth.

The theater seats are seasoned; most still spring up after a person leaves the seat. Some are stuck in the down position, as the seat with the thermal image appears to be. However, when a piece of equipment was placed on that chair, it sprang back up.

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The team tried to figure out how the seat that had stayed down for thirty minutes, would not stay down now.

People sat in the chair – it sprang back up.

The seat was held down hard, but when let go, it sprang back up.

“We tried to recreate this thinking maybe it got jammed, but no matter how hard we tried, we could not get that seat to stay down on its own.”

It's well past the witching hour and time to head home. Thankfully, the car is parked directly in front of the theater... but I can't help taking a good long look in the back-seat before I get in and drive away.

The Florida Ghost team has ongoing investigations that are open to the public. For more information, visit their website at www.floridaghostteam.com. **PBG**