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*Gary Jansen*

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The extraordinary true story of a Long Island household haunting that forced a respected writer to confront the truth about life, death, his childhood home, and his town's past.

## **Holy Ghosts: Or, How a (Not So) Good Catholic Boy Became a Believer in Things That Go Bump in the Night Details**

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## **From Reader Review Holy Ghosts: Or, How a (Not So) Good Catholic Boy Became a Believer in Things That Go Bump in the Night for online ebook**

### **Caitlin says**

I have a fondness for ghost stories of all kinds - fictional or non-fictional. I think we all love the idea of haunted houses, of being scared by something not quite seen, but felt. If nothing else, the notion of the paranormal tantalizes our imaginations and gives us stories to tell about lots of things we may experience, but can't explain.

*Holy Ghosts* is less a book about a haunted house, and more a memoir about the author's experiences while living in a haunted house and his struggle to integrate those experiences within his deeply held Catholic faith. Jansen, a successful writer and editor, encounters spirits when he moves his family back into his childhood house on Long Island. There are footsteps and wall tappings, the feeling of being watched, an electrical buzz, toys that move and turn on and off with no explanation until events are too apparent to ignore.

A deeply felt and honest exploration of what it means to be Catholic, of childhood events and prophetic memories, of all the strange and wonderful things that can happen in old houses, *Holy Ghosts* explores a haunting from a unique perspective that is grounded in theology and religious practice. Mr. Jansen's paranormal experiences serve as a gateway towards a deeper exploration of his faith and the reader benefits from the scares, the education, and the author's insight. Not your typical haunted house story. Definitely worth the read.

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### **Courtney says**

3.5 stars.

Gary Jansen, the books author moves with his young family into his childhood home. The house has had odd occurrences happening in it as far back as he can remember, so it doesn't seem odd at first when he notices the strange things happening around his family. As time goes on, however, things get stranger and stranger until he finally reaches his limit and looks for help.

This was an fairly good book. Not really what I wanted to to get in the spirit of Halloween, as it really wasn't very spooky.

It was however fairly well written, and had some quite interesting sounding references in it (although it's also mentioned that the books are out of print and hard to find).

I also thought it was interesting that the main author was writing from a Catholic background. He has written two other books relating to his faith - it looks like they're on prayer. In this one, though he's dealing with the haunting of his home and coming to terms with it as a sceptic and from a religious background.

Since he has no recollection of ghosts and spirits being mentioned within the church, the haunting leads him

to do some research into the subject of ghosts as seen from a Catholic perspective, which is interesting. [Maybe one day we'll be lucky, and he'll look into publishing a book on his research... :)]

One particular issue that comes up is that in the bible it's forbidden for Catholics (and Jewish people? I think it was an old testament story...) for the believers to people like mediums and psychics, who can contact the dead. [Though this is mentioned more, I believe, as deliberately summoning through the use of rituals and such - not sure what the weigh-in is on gifts a person would be born with].

This comes up when the haunting drives the author to the end of his patience, and he contacts a medium he hears of through his publishing company (Mary Ann Winkowski of Ghost Whisperer fame).

His haunting wasn't that active compared to some others I've read of, but overall it was an interesting read.

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### **Holly says**

I picked this up at the library on a whim because A) it was just Halloween and I always love a good ghost story and B) having a Catholic background myself, I thought I could empathize a bit more. Oh, and I loved Ghost Whisperer, so that tie-in was also a lure.

And truly, it was interesting. We get a little more about Gary's early life than maybe I needed, but it was interesting. I liked seeing that he was always trying to rationalize what was happening and that he included his Catholic research in there, because I thought he made some good points. Like how even though the Church doesn't usually talk about ghosts, there are definite examples of ghosts showing up in certain stories, and he points those out.

I was super creeped out by certain elements of his haunting. It was cool, for sure (especially once Mary Ann came in), but definitely creepy. I should not have been reading those parts right before bed.

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### **Regina Teal says**

#### **Great book**

Such a great book. He makes you feel like you're not crazy and is also educational at the same time

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### **Laetitia says**

As soon as I began reading this, I wanted to stop reading. I didn't stop because I hate abandoning books. I wanted to give Gary Jansen the chance to change my mind about *Holy Ghosts*. Obviously he didn't manage to do that and that's fine. I have a lot of issues with this text and I don't know where to start.

First of all, I had different expectations of this book. The title was hilarious and I was convinced that Jansen wasn't serious about this whole ghost-thing but he is. I expected some sort of ghost-story parody or satire. I don't know what I was thinking. At some point I even tried to convince myself that this book might have worked as fiction. Probably not because it's full of overused clichés, the writing is terribly dull, the structure

is a mess. I felt like I was reading a blog.

Moreover, Jansen tries to persuade the reader that he was a skeptic to begin with but it's not true. He is biased from the beginning. He keeps going on about how he tried to find a logical explanation for the "unexplained phenomena" happening in his home. Not true! He claims that he's read a ton of books on ghosts, not only catholic texts but also scientific ones. However, he never reveals or even mentions what he found in the scientific texts. Also, he grew up with his mother telling him she could see ghosts. He explains that his mother claims to have seen Jesus and that she's a medium. She just sounds like she might be schizophrenic (she hears voices in her head, she's paranoid, she "sees" things). Then, telling your child that a ghost lives in the house is bad parenting in my book. Even when you are sure there is a ghost in your house, why on earth tell your children? Reading about Jansen's childhood felt very traumatic and painful to me and not because of the ghosts that he claims lived in his house...

Here's a "brilliant" quote from the book to conclude my review:

"... people ask me how could I be Catholic with all the atrocities the Vatican has committed over its two-thousand-year existence, I like to remind them that it was three big atheists - Hitler, Stalin and Mao, and not the Pope - who executed 60 million people in the duration of a generation."

Seriously?

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### **Jason says**

Great book to read at night with the lights turned down low. Really liked the balance of storytelling, historical research, and humor. This isn't a frightening read. Instead, it perplexes and makes you wonder. I just loved it.

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### **Julie Davis says**

#83 - 2010.

I received this review copy and in my "book sampling" mode began to read the first chapter. When I came to myself and looked up some time later, I had finished half the book. Easy to read, yes. Riveting. YES. Extremely creepy and not recommended for bed time reading, which I was silly enough to do. A more complete review may be found [here](#).

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### **Nancy says**

Honestly, it was a fun book to read. "Fun" is a relative word but the author brings his personality into recounting the experience of having a haunted house. It's clear he doesn't fully buy into the "haunting" but concedes the weird happenings can't be explained so may be paranormal in nature. With this possibility, he seeks out help from the unconventional spiritual avenues which are, by his telling, compelling in nature. Whether you believe in the paranormal or not, the author makes a strong case for the unexplained within his

home and the journey he embarks on to make it a more peaceful habitation is engaging and, at times, entertaining.

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### **Linda Lipko says**

While I finished the book, I cannot recommend it. It was ok, not great, not good.

The author purchased his parents house. Living with his wife and son, he experiences noises, strange sensations and images. The book started out ok, but then spiraled into babble.

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### **Sandie says**

Very much enjoyed this book! This author wrote about his own experiences at his own home with things that go bump in the night. Also, did an historical survey on what theologians through the decades have said.

All very interesting...

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### **Laurie Notaro says**

fun, unkooky book about a haunted house on long island.

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### **Jeff Miller says**

I received for review *Holy Ghosts: Or How a (Not-So) Good Catholic Boy Became a Believer in Things That Go Bump in the Night* and I am not quite sure what to make of it.

For the most part I really enjoyed the narrative of the book as the author relates a haunting of the house he lived in with his family that was also his childhood home. The author a Catholic describes the events that happened that convinced him that something was going on that was not material, but kept a mainly skeptical view throughout. If this was a novel and not a true account it would be an enjoyable read with some interesting chills, but not any real horror in the modern sense. Gary Jansen as an author is very engaging and you really come to accept all that he writes as he relates the haunting the strange coincidences piled on top of each other.

The sub title of the book describes the author as a (not so) good Catholic boy, which I found rather annoying. The author certainly seemed to be a serious Catholic in that for example when he was doing research on the subject who turned to the writings of the late Fr. Hardon of whom he trusted as an authentic source for Catholic teaching. At another point he turns to Peter Kreeft. There are interesting discussions between him and his wife on whether an action was something appropriate to the Catholic faith. He is also an author who has written a book of meditations on the Rosary. So while Catholics serious about the faith shouldn't think that they are ready to be canonized and should know that they are indeed sinners saved only by the grace of

God; at the same time humility is knowing the truth about yourself and being self-deprecating as in the subtitle is not really accurate. I probably dwell too much on this point and I love books like the Bad Catholics Guides to ..... It is just that I thought this was a book written by a fallen away Catholic.

This is not to say that all decisions made by the author in getting rid of his haunting I thought were prudential or even within Catholic doctrine. It was interesting to see the amount of research Gary Jansen did in learning about the spirit world and the realities of Angels and Demons and orthodox books on the subject going back of course to the Angelic Doctor St. Thomas Aquinas. With this type of grounding he still turns to a well-known ghost whisperer and follows her advice. This was the part of the book I have heavy qualms about. The idea that some hauntings are people who have died that need to find their way to the light after something has been resolved is common folder in stories. The concept that people in Purgatory might be doing this I find little credence for. Though as far as I know it is not something totally ruled out by doctrine and of course our knowledge on Purgatory is extremely limited.

While the author in the acknowledgements mentions a priest he had become friends with, what is missing is his actually going to the Church for advice about these hauntings. There is no mention of his discussing this with any priests, but this might have been left out. If so it is a curious omission. I just found strange the curious tension with him going to good and orthodox sources for research and then after some thought going with a ghost whisperer recommended by a friend.

Like Julie at Happy Catholic who reviewed this book I found rather disconcerting the authors use of occasional swearing which while not being particularly offensive, just seemed incongruous with the way he wrote. Despite some of my qualms and quibbles I did enjoy this book and it was a serious page turner in wanting to find out what would happen next. The writing makes you really want to accept what the author writes as a true experience and I certainly never had the feeling the story was less than truthful. I would certainly recommend this book with the caveats mentioned as it gives you much to think about.

For a book where the author wants to be seen as credible it seemed rather odd for me that one of the review quotes on the back of the book was from writer Whitley Strieber, author of Communion and other books. I have read Communion which is suppose to be a true account of Streiber's encounters with aliens and is also written with a skeptical view of what was happening.

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### **Carol says**

I really love a good ghost story and this one had a catchy title that caught my attention...so it got to go home with me. Gary Jansen tells the story of his childhood home, and the strange things which happened there. Coincidence piles on coincidence, until the prospect of the supernatural can no longer be ignored...not even by the skeptical Jansen. At the heart of this story is the story of a human being coming to terms with the fact that the world may not be as black and white as he once thought. I don't know if it's true or not...it's entertaining and it's true as far as the Jansen family is concerned.

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### **Ovie says**

I really enjoyed this book.

The writing was, as many other reviews have stated, down-to-Earth and felt conversational. During some moments, however, I was almost afraid to turn the page! That is evidence of damn good writing. The reason I docked it to four stars (I wish we could give half star ratings!) was the extreme amount of Catholicism. Obviously, the title gives that aspect away, but I found it to be a bit tedious. However, I know that the faith aspect of *Holy Ghosts* will appeal to those who carry those values.

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### **Joselito Honestly and Brilliantly says**

I had seen a ghost once. I was around 17 at that time, sleeping beside my father inside our solitary hut in our farm and it was almost daybreak. My eyes still closed, I awakened and my thoughts wandered off to a happy recollection of some of my high school classmates. Then I opened my eyes facing the direction of my sleeping father and there, standing beside him and looking down at him was a man. White-haired, round-faced, in a white get-up. Well, I wasn't really sure if he was standing or kneeling. But if he was standing, then he must be really short, like just over 4 feet tall. I was shocked and scared and terrified and he might move his head and see me looking at him. So I closed my eyes and kept very, very still. I waited for sunrise and slowly opened my eyes again. The apparition was gone.

Later I found out that he was indeed standing. My parents and some oldtimers who knew the history of our farm, inherited by my father from his grandparents, said that my description of the white-haired man fits that of the land's former slow-witted share-cropper who had lived alone, and apparently died there alone. We then had masses said in his memory.

Years later I began to doubt what I saw. In this book, the author (a rosary-reciting Roman Catholic) also had doubts about the seemingly paranormal experiences he and his family were exposed to in his family's ancestral home which, as he later "discovered" was haunted by two earth-bound souls: one, of a woman who had died before the house was built more than a hundred years ago, and another of a young man who died in a vehicular accident just a year ago.

The belief in ghosts, spirits and those beings who live strange and unseen persists in all generations and cultures. This belief is possibly tied up with the human need and tremendous capacity for love: love for oneself, which resists the idea of death being one's reduction to a complete annihilation and oblivion; love for others, which find repulsive the idea of not seeing and feeling dearly departed ones forever.

But ghosts, spirits, souls, immortality and God--who can really find these easy to believe in when without serious rational resistance they can be lumped together as hallucinations or superstitions vis-a-vis the reality of a selfish, material, scientific and godless world? Succinctly the French philosopher Simone Weil put it this way:

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"There is a God. There is no God. Where is the problem? I am quite sure that there is a God in the sense that I am sure that my love is no illusion. I am quite sure there is no God in the sense that I am sure there is nothing which resembles what I can conceive when I say that word."

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