

From the Shakespeare play "MacBeth" to the NBC show "Medium," spirits of the dead have long made an appearance in our culture and folklore. Many people have reported seeing apparitions of both shadowy strangers and departed loved ones. Though definite proof for the existence of ghosts remains elusive, sincere eyewitnesses continue to report seeing, photographing, and even communicating with ghosts.

Living in a house where you often times hear unexplained noises or see things out of the ordinary may indicate that your house is haunted. For example, doors slam shut or open unaccountably, lights turn on or flash on and off, or you hear footsteps in an upstairs hallway but nobody is there. Since my grandma passed away and her house became mine, I hear and see strange things like this all the time. My house has been home to my family for many generations and grandma always told us that our deceased family members who had lived in the house before were still there with her.

According to Stephen Wagner, a writer, editor and researcher of paranormal phenomena, not all hauntings are alike, and they may exhibit a variety of phenomena. Some hauntings feature a single phenomenon - such as a particular door slamming shut that occurs repeatedly - while others consist of many different phenomena, ranging from odd noises to full-blown apparitions.

Unexplained noises can be very faint or quite loud. Most often, doors opening and closing or lights turning off and on, aren't seen directly. Over time, people get to know the distinctive sounds their houses make. The person experiencing this type of phenomena will return to a room to find the door closed or the light on when they are certain that it was the opposite when they left the room the last time.

Actually seeing a door open and close or a light turn off and on is known as psychokinetic phenomena. More severe experiences of this would be moving or levitating objects such as pictures flying off of walls or furniture sliding across the floor. When my grandma was alive she told me about a time that she came home from bingo alone to a dark house. When she opened the door she said out loud, "I know you're all here with me, ain't someone gonna turn on the light?" and the light came on without her help. Not too long ago I witnessed lights turning off and on in the bathroom while at the exact same time my son witnessed the side door to our house opening. That door opens inward and because of the thick carpet, it has to be pushed or pulled with a lot of force. I was sitting in the bathtub telling grandma to quit flicking the light off and on when my large Marine son hung to the outside of the bathroom door screaming that grandma had just opened the side door. I believe this to be possible because of the stories my grandma told and the fact that she was this type of joker in life. After the entire ordeal was over, I pictured my grandma laughing about it.

Feelings of being touched, overwhelming smells of perfume or cologne, cold or hot spots, cries or whispers, and apparitions are all greater proof that something unexplained is happening. This reminds me of a time when one of my other sons told me that while sleeping on the front room floor one night, he saw a tall dark figure coming down the hall towards him. He said after turning his head and then looking back, the figure was gone.

Ghosts stick around homes for a number of different reasons. Firstly they have been past residents of the house they are occupying or they may have resided near the home. Secondly they may have had some contact in the past with the present occupants, by being a relative or friend. This might help to explain the tall dark figure coming down the hallway towards my son. My grandfather committed suicide in the house next door after coming home from WWII and my great grandfather hung himself in the basement of the city park's pool building behind my house.

Although people experiencing any of these phenomena may believe that their house is indeed haunted, most experts believe that this is not the case. Any magician will tell you that the human mind and senses are easily fooled. The creaking sounds you hear might be from your house settling. Banging noises might be the cause of faulty plumbing. Things that may appear strange just might be a figment of your imagination. Or are they?