

Spooky sightings sparked an interest in the unknown that has transformed itself into a burgeoning career for one author

# Childhood vision helped me get into the spirit of writing



**G**HOSTS have a bad reputation. If a spook is seen, it's automatically assumed it's up to no good. Slurs on spectral reputations have been enshrined in our popular culture: films, TV, books, all depict the spirit world as something to be afraid of.

Post-death appearances, at best, are attempts to alert the living to some grave injustice. More usually it's just haunting, screaming, bumps in the night and outright terror.

One Staffordshire woman is doing the best she can to change opinions about the world beyond the veil.

Stephanie Brookes, aged 25, is one of the youngest publishers in the *Mind, Body and Spirit* genre.

She's already appeared as an expert on the BBC's Sunday morning *Heaven And Earth Show*, and claims apparitions are nothing to be scared of at all.

"I was seven years old when I first saw spirit," Stephanie says, curiously choosing to use the singular. "I saw an elderly gentleman dressed in a dark suit and a lady also dressed in black and they stood by the door and didn't come any closer. They would just be standing there."

The pair came to Stephanie's bedroom at night. And while most children are prone to cry out if the wardrobe door's left open, she remained unperturbed.

"I was terrified but at the same time level-headed. I dismissed it as a dream, but soon I realised they were more than that - I could see things that meant they weren't members of the family or friends, but I had no idea what they were. It wasn't the stereotypical image of the ghost that you see in films. Nothing was exaggerated or embellished, and that's why I thought this must be reality. It went on for a couple of years, and the



## The Interview

Tom Whiteley

memories stayed with me through my childhood and my teenage years."

Remarkably, while most people would at least mention a pair of regular midnight visitors over breakfast, Stephanie didn't tell anybody about her experiences for years.

"I kept it a secret," she says. "I didn't say anything to anyone because I thought maybe everyone saw something and they just didn't say anything. Maybe I should have said something to a friend but it didn't cause me any great concern, so I didn't. It was only when I became a teenager I stopped seeing anything that I began my quest to find out what it was about."

It's a quest that has made Stephanie a published author at a tender age.

Born in Stoke-on-Trent, she encountered her spirits when she was living in Church Lawton, near Alsager.

"I went to Church Lawton Primary and I spent a lot of time around Stoke because I've got family in Chell and my dad's family were all from Tunstall."

Stephanie, who currently lives in Welwyn Garden City, Hertfordshire, began her career as a writer even before she met her spirits.

"I was really young, only six years old when I started jotting stories down and I've still got them. I'd have a pad and a pen everywhere I went."

"They were just little kids' stories but after that I started to write about what I was able to see and that's what set me off. It was a great way to express what was going on in my head."

Her first novel, *Some Silent Hero*, is the story of a woman in her 20s whose father died in California the year before. Living now with her alcoholic mother she undergoes something of a crisis and sets out to America with a young spiritualist in search of her father's spirit.

"What I wanted to do was to write about my spirits in a novel form," Stephanie explains.

"People read it as fiction but it was introducing the spirit world in a very gentle way. Reactions to it have been really positive."

"I've been on the radio, on TV, all over. Once a girl and her mum came up to me when I was signing in the Potteries shopping centre in Hanley."

"She read about my experiences on the back of the book and the girl said, 'That's me.' The book has tapped into a need that I don't think has really been expressed."

Stephanie also claims her current career as a writer was something she saw in the spirit world as a child. She actually had a premonition of sitting in a shopping centre, surrounded by people and signing pieces of paper.

The sights and wonders of the spirit world are, however, a little harder for her to explain.

"We all have the ability to see spirits and when people want to see them they bring

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them into their lives to help them," she says. "It's not that they're hanging around watching our every move but they can help us with certain things. When I want something I send it out and ask for some help and they come to me."

"The common misconception is that spirits are frightening and something to be shunned. Instead it's something to learn more about and to be discussed...It's still a little bit of a taboo, though more and more people are embracing these ideas."

Can anyone have an encounter with the spirit world? Stephanie says: "It's something that you have to practice and work at."

"It comes to people on very different levels. Some people hear things, some people see things."

"I've a friend who's never seen anything and he's got no desire to, but he hears things all the time."

"He's what they call a clairaudient. Some people might not see anything now but they might have the most incredible experience at a different time in their lives."

"People have very strong feelings on spirit. They're completely for or against it, but if it's something you haven't encountered then it's hard to say. There's a bit of fear of the unknown."

Given that Stephanie has premonitions, she should have a very clear idea of what's next in her career.

"I'm in the middle of writing the second part of the trilogy," she says.

And those bedroom spirits, who watched over her all those years ago?

"I have a feeling they were family members and at the moment I'm sifting through old photographs and trying to find out who they might have been."

"I remember their faces clearly so I'm going to see if I can recognise them from our history."