

Back from the Dead!

WHEN PARANORMAL
INVESTIGATORS TURN
TO FRAUD



She is dark-haired with a beautiful olive complexion. Her coffee-colored eyes flash with curiosity and intelligence. Some might call her hauntingly beautiful, but for one group of self-described paranormal investigators, Meryl Holt-Chambers, was the centerpiece of a five-year haunting drama. More to the point, Ms. Holt-Chambers, who gives every indication of being quite alive as she sits across from me nibbling a bagel and drinking an iced tea, was a ghost. Yes, you read that correctly. A ghost.

“I had no idea that someone was using my name and my image and claiming I was dead,” she tells me. “In a million years, I never would have assumed that I was being cast as a ghost by a bunch of people I’ve never even met.”

You can read Ms. Holt-Chambers’ story at www.outcastearth.com, the official website for a troupe of amateur ghost-hunters originally based on the island of Kauai. But if you don’t want to devote the time to sorting through Outcast Earth’s five year melodrama, allow me to nutshell it for you:

Ms. Holt-Chambers is the step-sister to a former Outcast Earth member known online only as “Trespass,” although she tells me that his real name is Steven John Carradice. Her father married Steven’s mother in the early 1990s. They lived in the very small, very rural town of Dry Tree, Louisiana. The father was an abusive alcoholic who later, in the chaotic days following Hurricane Katrina, ended up murdering his wife, faking his own death and hiding under an assumed identity in Florida until he was finally unmasked in late 2008. As unbelievable as all that seems, Ms. Holt-Chambers claims that part of the tale is completely true. Where the story goes south is how Outcast Earth described her role in this family tragedy.

“I sat down and read the Outcast Earth website in one night,” she tells me. “I didn’t stop. I was both mesmerized and outraged.”

According to Outcast Earth’s version of events, Ms. Holt-Chambers shared her father’s love of strong drink and one night, while in the company of Steven, she fell off a rowboat and drowned in the Louisiana bayou.

“They even had me buried in the local cemetery,” she snickers, “and apparently I was making ghostly visits on a regular basis to my step-brother. I’m reading all this and thinking, ‘My god, this all reads like some second-rate horror novel.’”

The truth of Meryl Holt-Chambers is quite different, and thankfully, much happier too.

“My father is a very disturbed man,” she concedes, “and living with him was difficult at best. The town was small and our options were few and far between. I suppose I did what a lot of young people might do in that kind of situation: I married young and moved as far away as I could.”

Her marriage to a local boy named Clifford Chambers does not appear anywhere in the Outcast Earth storyline. Nor does her subsequent move to Virginia, her rather unremarkable career as a veterinary technician, or her divorce from Clifford in 2009. Of course, why would it? According to Outcast Earth, she was dead and her restless shade was busy following Steven around the globe on a series of paranormal adventures. According to online materials, Ms. Holt-Chambers’ ghost fed the team information from the Other Side using Steven as the reluctant conduit.

“After Cliff and I left Louisiana, I fell out of contact with the rest of the family including Steven,” she tells me as she swirls her iced tea. “I tried to put that whole part of my life behind me until the FBI knocked on my door and told me that my father was being held on murder charges. I can’t say it surprised me and I had to think long and hard about whether I wanted to return to Louisiana for the trial.”

But at the same time, Ms. Holt-Chambers’ marriage was falling apart and she only made it home to see her father sentenced for the crime.

“I was surprised that Steven wasn’t there for that,” she says. “After all, it was his mother who was murdered. I found out he had shown up in Florida shortly after Dad was first arrested, but then he vanished again, never showed up for another hearing.”

Ms. Holt-Chambers’ father was sent to a Louisiana State prison and it seemed like the ugly chapter of her life had finally ended. It took her over a year before she felt strong enough to again wonder about Steven.

“Steve and I had a strange relationship,” she frowns. “I was quite a bit older than him but it was obvious from day one that he was carrying a big torch for me. When I decided to marry Cliff, he went berserk. There was a lot of what I would call stalking behavior. Cliff and I actually eloped early just to get away from Dad and Steven. Soon after, I heard through the grapevine that Steven left Dry Tree and moved to Hawaii to become a ghost-hunter.”

Finally, curiosity got the best of her and she traveled to Kauai to find Steven. Uncertain of which ghost-hunting group Steven had joined, she started contacting all of them until she finally ended up on my doorstep. Since I was quite knowledgeable about Outcast Earth, I had the unpleasant duty of filling in the gaps in Ms. Holt-Chambers’ knowledge. The revelation left both of us stunned and appalled.

So was Ms. Holt-Chambers’ online death an act of revenge from a spurned love interest? Or did the entire Outcast Earth team deliberately perpetrate an act of fraud in order to raise their own reputation? “I really don’t know what motivated such an outrageous lie,” she tells me.

