

What Was That?

By Kelly Crigger, www.rangerup.com

“You good with this?” Zak Bagans asked me as the sun set over the West Virginia hills. “Sure,” I replied with as much false bravado as I could muster. I wasn’t. In fact I was almost in fight or flight mode. Luckily my fight instinct beat the crap out of flight, so I stayed put.

Poking around the Trans Allegheny Lunatic Asylum around Halloween was never on my bucket list, but when the opportunity arose, I took it. However, standing in front of the most ominous building I’d ever seen since watching *The Amityville Horror* as a teenager injected a massive dose of regret into me that I had to fight off. But I wasn’t going to let Bagans know that, especially since he pressed my internal panic button.

We were dangerously close to kicking off the live seven-hour paranormal investigation on the Travel Channel when Bagans gave myself and the other two ‘superfans’ a lesson in how NOT to prepare your guests.

“I’m going to be honest with you guys,” he told us just minutes beforehand. “There is a lot of activity in there right now, so you better be prepared. We went in there last night just to see how active the place is and got more than we bargained for.”

Great, I thought. *I wasn’t scared until now.*

‘Superfans’ Join a Live Ghost Adventures Investigation

If you saw the most ambitious paranormal event of this Halloween



Superfan Kelly Crigger helped the Ghost Adventures crew investigate the Trans Allegheny Lunatic Asylum this past Halloween.

season, you might have seen me. I was the big galoot framed by two small females that the shows producers dubbed ‘superfans’ who were invited to tag along with Bagans and his crew in the Asylum for an hour.

It was like the first time I jumped out of an airplane — a great idea on the ground, but a terrifying reality in the air when you’re staring at 2,000 feet of open sky. But for a guy whose life had been dominated by stoic pragmatism, my raging curiosity about the afterlife banished my fear to its room, and for better or worse, I was going to jump out that door.

First let me set the scene. If you like creep-tastic places that dissuade Vlad the Impaler, this was your Valhalla. The Asylum itself is a dilapidated, 150-year-old, sandstone cut and gargoyle adorned fear cage that dominates the small town of Weston. A rusty walking bridge arches over the West Fork of the Susquehanna River (barely more than a brook) that the townsfolk once used to make the daily pilgrimage to work. It harkened to an earlier time of prosperity before the biggest employer in town abruptly closed up shop and left.

A 'Wave of Weird' Hits the Live Investigation

The chilly night, full moon, and bats just made it all the more horror film-ish and a strange coincidence just before going live didn't help.

An inventor named Robert Bess had brought his homemade Ghost-busting device, called the Parabot, to the Asylum in order to physically capture a spirit. Based on tesla-coil technology, the Parabot carried enough electricity to jumpstart Marty McFly's car in *Back to the Future*.

As night descended, a light fixture fell from the ceiling and crashed down on the Parabot, sending a wave of weird through the production trailers. The set technicians swore there was no extra weight that would have caused it to break free. Purely coincidence? Possible. Chris Flemming didn't think so.

"It's hurting them," the sensitive and former paranormal TV show host said to me in the mess tent. "They want it out of there because every time he turns it on it hurts them."

I wasn't sure I believed in angry spirits trying to get rid of a homemade toaster oven, but there was no way to ignore it. I kept reminding myself that no physical harm would come to me, but Hollywood convinced me otherwise: that an angst-filled spirit with a chainsaw was determined to make a skin out of my back flesh.

Seeing I was tense, a producer named Mickey pulled me aside. "What do you want to get out of this?" she said. "You can focus on the fear and go in there just trying to get through it or you can focus on what you want to get out of this. What questions do you want answered?"

Her motherly words were instantly comforting. If you haven't figured it out yet, I'm not a ghost hunter and have never been on a paranormal investigation. I'm not a skeptic of the paranormal, but I'm



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also not a true believer either, so Mickey's words were a blinding flash of the obvious. I was looking for proof in one direction or the other and needed to go in there with an open mind, ready for anything that would lead me in either direction.

I wasn't unlike professional paranormal investigators; I wanted answers and quickly realized that a paranormal encounter would be a good thing. Were I lucky enough to have one, I should embrace it instead of . . . well, screaming like a cheerleader and running in a panic. I wasn't ruling that option out though.

Entering the Asylum Leads to Strong Emotions

At 11:30 p.m., the two other fans and I entered the asylum. Besides the politically incorrect "Lunatic Asylum" sign that hung in the doorway, the first thing that hit me was the incredible temperature change between inside the house and outside. It was easily

20 degrees colder once we passed through the doors, which I quickly debunked as a by-product of the limestone structure that acted as a natural air conditioner.

One thing that wasn't environmental was the sudden desire to pass out. Within minutes of entering the building I felt the urge to curl up in a fetal position and sleep. No reason why. Could have been nerves for all I know, but I felt almost drunk. We ascended the stairs to the third floor and the drunken feeling passed, but that didn't stop me from making a joke about it.

"I kind of wish I was under the influence right now," I cracked with cameraman Aaron Goodwin. He laughed and I felt okay again. Then we made our way to Ward F — the former home of violent and uncontrollable patients and the sight of more than a few deaths.

On the way there, I found myself more curious than scared as my

eyes darted into every door, nook, and cranny, sincerely wanting to see an apparition run by. Like I said, I'm not a skeptic or a believer, but I found myself desperate to find irrefutable evidence that they exist rather than go away empty handed with the same questions burning in my mind.

Superfans Get a Big Surprise

The *Ghost Adventures* crew took us into a room where a patient had been killed by two others and invited us to ask the spirits that might be there a question. The other two fans must have prepared for this like it was a game show because they asked coherent, relevant questions while I had a sudden case of the dumbass.

Instead of contributing to the conversation, I rambled on like Miss South Carolina trying to describe why U.S. Americans need maps to help South Africans and the Iraq educate themselves. If there were spirits of the departed in the room, they were probably saying, "And WE have mental issues?"

Everyone likes to see the look in someone's eyes when they reveal a surprise. Bagans is no different. "We're going to use you as trigger objects," he told us. "We're going to put you in their isolation cells and see if the spirits will talk to you."

Uh . . . what? Isolation cell? Violent spirits? Trigger object? I'm out! True to his word, just minutes later Bagans placed us in three separate isolation cells, and for dramatic effect, locked the doors, taunted any ghosts that might be in the area a few times, and left.

In my life, I've never felt so much like a piece of bait as I did standing in that cell waiting for an ethereal being to make contact with me. I was a ribeye dangling from a tree for a tiger to gnaw on. Only the hunters were too far away to shoot the beast when he took it. Bagans

and his crew disappeared — I'm guessing for a smoke break. Okay, I made that up.

What happened next could certainly have been a figment of my imagination, or a by-product

"A wave of cold and static electricity that made all the hair on my body stand up engulfed me."

of watching too many paranormal shows, but a wave of cold and static electricity that made all the hair on my body stand up engulfed me. I backed away from it and uttered a profanity (or two), but it persisted for about 10 seconds. Just as quickly as it came, it left, and I was once again alone in a cage with a digital recorder, a camera, and EMF detector (no, it didn't spike).

For the next few seconds I tried to decipher what happened. Was a curious spirit checking me out? Was this the evidence of paranormal activity I sought, or was it just in my head? I finally came to the conclusion that if it was indeed a spirit, then it would be irresponsible of me not to try to make contact with it.

I talked like a politician for a half hour. I was nice, then charming, then taunting, and finally confrontational. "Hit me dammit!" was my last ploy. Nothing. A door slammed down the hallway, which could have been anything. Moments later Bagans, Goodwin, and Groff appeared to let us out. That's when something truly weird finally happened.

Did You Hear That?

"Did you hear that?" Bagans said. I did. Not only did I hear it, but it was LOUD, clear, and unmistakable. A woman screamed, and

there was no doubt about it. We all heard it, and we all stopped to freak out just a bit. Where it came from, though, is open to conjecture.

You see, I had a broken window in my cell, and when the scream

happened, my head instinctively jerked in its direction. To me, it sounded like it was outside, and one of the other fans said so as well. I instantly thought a real person was screwing with us out on the massive grounds of the Asylum. But everyone else disagreed and swore it was inside the hallway.

To this day, no matter how many times I watch the replay on Tivo, I cannot tell where the scream came from, and without being there, it's a mystery. One thing is for sure — it happened. It gave me the deepest chill of my life, and it was followed up by a massive temperature drop in my cell. I felt like I was standing in a refrigerator, and the cold air was definitely not coming from the broken window. I even crossed the cell to make sure a draft wasn't coming in.

Was a ghost in the cell with me? I don't know, and maybe I'm not the right guy to ask. One thing I'm fairly certain of is that I'm not a sensitive like Chris Flemming, Zak Bagans, or Jennifer Love Hewitt. I'm just an ordinary guy who wants answers, and my limited time in an allegedly haunted lunatic asylum didn't provide them.

But, I did learn to control my fear of the paranormal and got bitten by the bug to explore more. Anyone need a jumpy guy for a ghost hunt? ■