


Does *this* energy

One-third of Americans believe in ghosts. And thanks to new technology, scientists are discovering that sightings often occur in areas of fluctuating magnetic energy. Here, we explore these “spirit hot spots.”



Feeling a surge of terror, Annie Wilder jolted awake from a sound sleep. Heart pounding, her eyes froze on the doorway to her bedroom. There in the shadows, Annie says she saw Leon—the former owner of the 120-year-old house she had just moved into...the *deceased* former owner. Annie would've happily chalked the vision up to a frightening dream, but this wasn't the first time she believed she'd encountered Leon.

The first night she and her children spent in their new home in Hastings, Minnesota, Annie insists she saw the apparition of an elderly man sitting at her kitchen table. She later confirmed his identity after seeing a photo of him with his daughter, who had sold Annie the house. In the photo, the man had been wearing the same baggy pants and sweater as the phantom at her kitchen table—the same outfit she now saw him wearing in her hallway.

Annie remembers the incident: She lay there paralyzed as Leon slowly glided toward her bed. As he got closer, Annie felt her terror being replaced by an overwhelming feeling of loneliness—Leon's loneliness. *He isn't scary or aggressive, he's sad and vulnerable*, she realized. After a minute he vanished, and so did Annie's fear of him, leaving her feeling exhilarated. From that moment on, one thing was certain: Annie believed in ghosts.

Can magnetic fields “bottle” spirits?

Leon was just the first of many spirits Annie believes have appeared in her

home over the past 17 years. Among her alleged visitors: a Victorian-era gentleman, the Hart sisters who lived there in the 1800s and a spirit Annie dubbed “Dark Man” for his dark clothing and ominous vibe. Annie, now 49, no longer fears her odd guests and jokingly describes her home as “Ghost Grand Central Terminal.”

Multiple investigations by paranormal experts have corroborated her claim, dubbing Annie's home one of the most haunted places in the Midwest. But many of the parapsychologists believe the home's allegedly amplified paranormal activity isn't due to its age, but rather its location: The house is surrounded by high-voltage power lines and situated in an area packed with underground springs—both of which create dramatic disturbances in the Earth's magnetic fields.

Indeed, there is a correlation between the frequency and intensity of reported hauntings and fluctuations in natural geomagnetic fields (GMFs) and artificial electromagnetic fields (EMFs), says Andrew Nichols, Ph.D., author of *Ghost Detective: Adventures of a Parapsychologist*, who has investigated more than 600 haunting cases over the past 35 years. “GMF fluctuations are caused by seismic faults, flowing underground water and quartz-bearing rock, whereas EMF variances are created by the presence of high-voltage power lines,” he explains. “Annie's home is surrounded by multiple factors that cause these magnetic anomalies—it's a prime location for a ghost hatchery.”

Nichols also explains that in physics, magnetically charged “bottles” are used to contain unstable particles—otherwise the particles naturally disperse into the environment. “Since ghosts are thought to be particles of energy without a body, GMF and

attract ghosts?

EMF anomalies theoretically create a magnetic 'containment zone' binding this energy together," he explains, noting that this could be why Annie has reported seeing Leon very *clearly*.

Ghosts...or memories?

Interestingly, Nichols maintains that bottling energy isn't the *only* side effect of EMF and GMF anomalies. "It's a possibility that magnetic field fluctuations also form a type of natural holographic recorder, in which images and sounds from the past—especially during emotionally charged situations—can be stored and then 'replayed' at random," he says. This "place memory" consists of phantom-like images doing things over and over again in a specific location.

"In the majority of my investigations, I believe people have mistaken place memories for ghosts," says Nichols. "They can certainly occur along with actual spirits, but place memories don't directly interact with people as Leon did with Annie."

Some of the best examples of place memories are in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, which sits on one of

North America's richest deposits of quartz—a powerful GMF disturber. Nichols believes the fluctuations, combined with the intense emotions of the Civil War soldiers who fought on the battlefield, imprinted on the area, resulting in thousands of reports from visitors who claim they've seen phantom soldiers. "We're unsure why, but place memories seem to fade or disappear entirely over time—like the images on a worn out videotape," he adds. This may be why many of Annie's guests seem to "come and go."

What the skeptics say

While EMF and GMF anomalies do have a proven effect on energy fields, some scientists say that the fluctuations have a greater influence on the brain and trigger hallucinations of so-called spirits. "Laboratory-based studies show that magnetic fields can disrupt neural firing patterns, creating visions and exceptional hallucinatory experiences," insists Jason Braithwaite, Ph.D., a professor at the United Kingdom's University of Birmingham, who studies psychology related to the paranormal. He asserts that the magnetic anomalies

can create a blended state of consciousness, much like a waking dream in which the subconscious generates personas, sounds and physical sensations.

Surprisingly, Nichols *agrees* that magnetic energy affects the brain—but feels the effects can be even more extraordinary. "The energy jump-starts paranormal experiences by stimulating the parts of the brain associated with psychic abilities," he says. "This makes certain people more susceptible to seeing apparitions—but who's to say if they are hallucinations, real spirits or place memories?"

Making peace

Whatever the cause of Annie's amazing experiences—whether magnetically bottled ghosts, place memories, a door unlocked in her mind or all of the above—she feels blessed to have found her "magical old house" and even chronicled some of her remarkable tales in her book *House of Spirits and Whispers*. Annie also believes Leon is there to protect her. "We fear what we don't understand," she adds. "So by staying open to life's possibilities, scary things turn into adventures." 🌸

"Our ghost has become part of the family"

Sue Van Peenen was thrilled when she and her husband bought their dream vacation home in Lavallette, New Jersey. But she couldn't have predicted that the home's proximity to the ocean and the power lines under the foundation may have formed a magnetic field that attracted a spooky houseguest.

Just after beginning renovations on the three-story home, Sue received a call from a terrified worker. He told her he had been removing the chairlift from the staircase when a ghostly woman appeared. Sue was skeptical...until

the first night she spent alone in the house. "I woke up and saw the reflection of a woman with frazzled gray hair glaring at me from the mirror on the dresser," she recalls. "I was totally freaked out!"

After three of her children also reported seeing the woman, Sue started asking neighbors if they'd heard any stories—and learned that the prior owner had sadly died of a heart attack...in the chairlift.

Sue also discovered the woman loved wine and entertaining. This instantly comforted Sue because she considered herself a gracious

hostess: "Maybe that's why she's hanging around—she likes all my parties!"

Eight years, two grandchildren and many gatherings later, the Van Peenen family still receives visits from the feisty ghost they named Jane. "I believe she's friendly and loves to play jokes or rearrange the furniture" says Sue. "Now she's just part of the family!"



Sue Van Peenen, 50, Wayne, NJ