

A ghost story



Judy Walchuk

Judy Walchuk doesn't so much as see dead people, as feel them. Which is creepy enough for us. We accompanied the clairvoyant on a ghost crawl of rumoured Vancouver haunts to see what kind of spirits we could scare up.

Spooky stop number one is the Vogue Theatre. Built in 1941, it's reportedly overrun with apparitions. Mysterious doors opening and closing and regular glimpses of a long trench coat-clad man have all been reported.

"It's a very busy place," Judy says once inside. I glance around the dark, art deco theatre. Save the two we're sitting in, all 1,144 seats are empty.

"It's definitely playful. It's all about theatre. That's why they're here."

My arms prickle with goose bumps when Judy matter-of-factly states: "There's a girl sitting on the stage, right there, between the speakers. Her legs are swinging, like she hears a rhythm."

I've almost turned a shadow into a lithe dancer, but Judy's second sight is quicker: "She just got up and walked across the stage."

"I feel like I'm being pulled up," she continues, pointing to the balcony. We venture up and Judy says, "I sense a lot of people sitting in these seats right now." Again they're empty, but there's definitely an electricity in the air ... the hush of an expectant audience. More goose bumps.

The Vogue's general manager, Jon-Paul Walden, joins us on the way out.

"Everybody who's worked here has seen or heard something," he says, and isn't surprised at Judy's desire to move up. He points to the projection booth in the ceiling and confirms, "That's where he likes to hang out."

The 14th floor of the Fairmont Hotel Vancouver is next, where legend has it the elevator often stops on its own and a lady in red glides through the hall. I tell Judy none of this.

"I have a sense of something secretive ... something that's never been solved," she says the minute we step off the elevator.

"I can hear a lot of laughter. It's a party-like feeling," she says as we walk through a gilt door into a vestibule presided over by an ornate chandelier.

"I keep going back to one face ... one woman," Judy says of the invisible revelers. "She's flapper-looking with short hair."

"What colour is she wearing?" I ask, remembering the tale.

"White," says Judy. Not quite, but even ghosts are allowed to change outfits aren't they?

I can almost hear the clink of ice cubes, when a housekeeper pokes her head out of a suite scaring me half to death. Judy is already moving on.

"It changes down here," she says, walking down the hall. "I don't want to go down there at all."

I'm not going to push it, so we prepare to go.

As we walk back, one of the elevator's doors slide open. Two women inside look at us, then at each other and shrug, as the doors slide closed.

Finally, it's the main library at UBC. Apparently one spirit likes to hang in the bathroom à la Moaning Myrtle in *Harry Potter*. Judy and I check it out but, other than strange looks from co-eds, we get nothing.

While walking through the stacks, Judy surprises me with: "I get a sense of a playful young man, going up and down the aisles and peeking."

"It felt kind of new, maybe he hasn't been here long," she says, describing your average university student.

Modern ghosts seem scarier than antiquated ones, or maybe it's a flashback to exam stress, but I'm ready to go home.

Judy makes one more lap before saying she senses "energy" above us. We walk up a spiral staircase and Judy laughs, as if she just cracked a joke. "Of course, it's the science books," she says, running her finger across several tomes on molecular chemistry and electromagnetism.

- Carly Krug, 24 hours



- Carly Krug, 24 hours

The 14th floor of the Fairmont Hotel Vancouver.



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Book stacks at the UBC library.

