

~ Life in LAMORINDA ~

Is Moraga's Hacienda de las Flores haunted? You decide.

By Vera Kochan



Two orbs in front of Pavilion. One is upper left above doorway, and the other is "dead" center of photo Photo Vera Kochan

It's October. The month of Halloween. Could that be why things that go bump-in-the-night do so a bit louder than usual? Based on rumors of just such activities, this reporter paid an evening visit to the Hacienda de las Flores in Moraga to see if the stories were true.

On a tip from Moraga Police Department Support Services Coordinator Cathy Ghiselli about unusual goings-on at the Hacienda, I arranged to meet with the Parks & Recreation Department's Recreation Coordinator Donald Scully for a ghost stake-out one evening.

Before exploring the house and grounds, Scully opened up about some unexplained events that have recently occurred. "About one or one-and-a-half years ago, a custodian allegedly quit over sounds he heard -- unex-

plained noises like doors slamming. I noticed that he started wearing earbuds and sang out loud, but now I guess that was to drown out the noises in the house."

Scully had noted that one of his own experiences occurred after this past June's Hacienda Nights event. "I was in La Sala wiping up the counter next to the sink. As I was about to leave, I swear I saw a wet handprint on the counter -- no one had been there but me!"

This past summer has seen some unexplained action going on in the Casita's restroom. "The bathroom door kept locking itself from the inside," Scully stated. "It happened enough times that we decided to change the lock."

Scully also recalled, "About two years ago, I had turned off the string of lights on the patio. On

the way to my car I saw that they had come back on. I know that I didn't forget, because it was the last thing I did before going to the parking lot."

Both Scully and I proceeded to walk throughout the darkened, upstairs portion of the Hacienda without using flashlights, in order for me to capture anything unusual on my camera. Three of the photos I took showed orbs floating around either up against a wall, on a closed door, or on both the floor and table inside a room. Downstairs in the Fireside Room an orb was spotted against the wall above a doorway leading to the restrooms.

As we walked outdoors, we took the path along the creek that begins between the Hacienda and La Sala. Scully informed me of a stone chess board that is

located off the path near the creek, and jokingly said that maybe the former owner, Donald L. Rheem, might be playing a game. The minute my camera's flash illuminated the area, I heard what sounded like a loud, rumbling growl which I attributed to having freaked-out an unsuspecting raccoon. However, within seconds, the same sound came back to us even louder, but in the area of the Hacienda building directly behind us.

We simultaneously exclaimed, "Did you hear that?" Which at the time I assumed that everyone in Canada had heard it.

Scully and I stood stock-still before I managed to blurt out, "Was that a mountain lion?". For what seemed like a full minute we stared with eyes wide open waiting for something to bound out of its hiding

place and attack us. We both corroborated that it was the second such sound, only louder, thereby confirming to me that he had heard the first one as well.

"It sounded like a horse to me," stated Scully. As I replayed the terrifying noise in my head I realized that he was correct. It wasn't the typical high-pitched neigh or whinny, but rather the sound a horse makes when it breathes out and its lips flap, almost like a sigh. "You know there used to be stables on the property," he added.

"I can do you one better," I replied, as I composed myself long enough to add, "There used to be a race track on the other side of the property."

Having collected our dignity somewhat, we proceeded to make our way just a couple of feet when Scully noted a plaque on a rock dedicated to Yvette Nance, Moraga's first town clerk, and her father William C. Provence. Suggesting that I take a picture of it, which I did, immediately all of the grounds' lights on the property turned on, illuminating trees, bushes, and flowers. While we deduced that the lights were on a timer, we did find it rather odd that they came on at 9:30-ish in the evening -- well into what was already nighttime, not to mention the coincidence of the timing. I leave that for the readers to decide.

Going down the stairs to the Pavilion and once inside the gate, I began to take more photos. Orbs appeared in various spots of the "grass", but the biggest surprise was the massive one at the entrance to the building and another floating at the upper left side of it. Additional ones also appeared inside the Pavilion building itself.

As anyone who reads the Lamorinda Weekly newspaper knows, every October I write about someplace in our tri-city area that is purported to be haunted, and every year I hope that the location in question provides me with some type of ample evidence to that affect. While I was somewhat doubtful that the proof would be this bountiful at the Hacienda, I must mention that it's a shame the newspaper can only devote a limited amount of space for photos. As the saying goes, "A picture is worth a thousand words," but those pictures would leave anyone speechless.

Scully would not be doing his recreation coordinator duties without reminding me to let everyone know of the Town's "(not so) Haunted Hacienda" event being held Oct. 25 between 5 and 8:30 p.m. For more information about the family-friendly gathering visit: MoragaRec.com.

"Stories We Tell:" A creative journey unfolds at Lamorinda Arts Council artist reception

By Emma Wong



Photos Emma Wong

Ruth Stanton's "Conversation with Self" is pictured on the wall.

On Saturday, Oct. 5, a synthesis of art and writing was showcased at the "Stories We Tell" artist reception, hosted by the Lamorinda Arts Council (LAC) at the Orinda Library.

"Stories We Tell" drew inspiration from previous gallery exhibitions by a collaboration of the California Writers Club - Mt. Diablo Branch, the Lamorinda Arts Alliance, and the LAC. The exhibits, titled "Ekphrasis," paired an author's writing with an artist's work. Similarly, "Stories We Tell" opened a call for artists, who

then included a writing about their work after they were accepted.

LAC board members Elana O'Loskey and Bill Carmel were the main organizers of the reception. Carmel served as Curator for the exhibit. "All the artists who submitted found a place," Carmel said. "Most artists submitted three pieces, and I selected at least one."

"Bill has wanted to host 'Stories We Tell' for a long time—he's one of those people who loves storytelling and has always made art that tells a story," O'Loskey said.

O'Loskey is also on the Curation team for the art galleries at the Orinda Library and Wilder.

Carmel aimed to expand artistic diversity and encourage expression. "I am not a traditionalist, even though I work in traditional media," Carmel said. "I want to encourage all artists to exhibit in this phenomenal place, including young artists in high school and college."

Creative minds gathered in the library.

Artists milled about the room, chatting with visitors about their work. Lafayette cartoonist Betsy Streeter featured her comic series called "Sloth and Manatee," about the unlikely bond between two animals. "Sloth and Manatee" is all about friendship," Streeter said. "When the pandemic hit, I just kept drawing these two characters and gave them their own lives."

Another lockdown project became a passion for Orinda artist Joy Chew, who makes drawings of animals with foil. "I like to draw cat faces because each of them has their own personality," Chew said. "For this exhibit, I wrote a story of two of the cats I drew as if they were friends."

Other mediums included paintings, with styles ranging from acrylic to Chinese brush techniques. Shun-fei and Karina Hou, a husband-and-wife duo, created a watercolor brush painting titled "The Frog in

the Bottom of the Well," accompanied by calligraphy of a Chinese idiom. "Shun-fei did the Chinese writing while I did the English," Karina Hou said. "I think the words in the story are what I love most; they convey that when you think you know something, that's always just the beginning."

Ruth Stanton, Vice President of Exhibitions at the Lamorinda Arts Alliance, presented an acrylic painting with two mirror images of her daughter. "I titled my piece 'Conversation with Self,'" Stanton said. "I thought that we all have conversations with ourselves in our heads. So, I wrote about [my daughter] speaking to her alter ego."

Music also found a

home in storytelling. Georgianna Krieger of Oakland presented scores from songs she wrote, accompanied by illustrations. "I believe melody is a story that's so in touch with our emotions," Krieger said. "You don't have to know a specific language to feel something when you listen."

"Stories We Tell" linked artists from across the Bay Area in a space where they could share the vibrance of their lives. "There are over 50 wonderful paintings and narratives here—and we need to learn about each other's stories," O'Loskey said.

The impact of artwork goes beyond a single event. "Sometimes, art affects somebody deeply a long time after

one sees it," O'Loskey said. "It's almost impossible to track its effect on people, but I'm absolutely sure that art builds community." As with the Ekphrasis Exhibitions, it is expected that some people will return to "Stories We Tell" multiple times to take in the many details and nuances.

"Stories We Tell" will be available for viewing to the public during regular Orinda Library hours through Nov. 1. Upcoming events at the Lamorinda Arts Council include Art Embraces Words (Oct. 26) at the Lafayette Library, along with Poetry for the Ages (Oct. 29) at the Town Hall Theatre in Lafayette. For more details, visit <https://lamorindaarts.org>.



Ruth Staton "Seeking Our Someday"