

[Transcript] Morbid / Episode 497: The Haunting of Doris Bither

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Hey weirdos, I'm Alaina, I'm Ash, and this is Morbid.

Yup, that's finite.

That's it.

That's it.

That's the episode.

See you later.

Keep listening.

Keep it weird.

Keep it weird.

You're like, girls?

Like shut the fuck up and tell me a story.

Girls!

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Girls!

I realize that whenever I have a ponytail in my hair and I tell you a story, I do weird shit like this with it.

Yeah.

Like be talking and I'm just like, and then the guy was like, and I just do like this a lot.

We can post it.

I just like, I'll be doing like this, or like sometimes I'll do a little bit of this, and I'm just like, yeah, you know.

So we're going to post that.

I'm quiet because I'm taking photos, and we actually just talked about this.

I cannot multitask.

Nope.

I can't do two things at once.

We just had that conversation.

I also pulled my hair a little too hard.

If I'm concentrating on something, I cannot do something else.

I can't listen to you.

I can't.

Nothing.

That's funny because, wow, God damn, the tangles in my hair just ripped a piece out.

Wow, fuck.

My hair brought to you by that.

I can multitask.

I can multitask in the sense that like I can have a lot of things going on at once, and

I can take care of them.

I think it's a, it must just be like a focus thing.

I can't focus on, okay, or like maybe it's a hearing thing.

I don't really know how to describe it actually, because I can't hear.

I can listen to somebody while I'm doing something else.

If I'm going to pay attention to somebody or I need to hear something, I need to focus on that thing.

Okay.

Otherwise, it's just like, wah-wah-wah-wah.

Wah-wah-wah-wah.

Yeah, because earlier I was playing her the Andy Milanakis song because I got it on TikTok and we love the Andy Milanakis song, and she's just staring at her phone like so intently, and I'm just like jamming into the Andy Milanakis song.

And I was like, hello?

And she was like, oh, sorry, I was reading something, and I was like, were you reading something super interesting?

And I was like, no.

And I was like, bitch, it's Andy Milanakis.

It can be something totally not like interesting or needing of my full brain power, but if

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I am reading something, I'm not going to hear you.

It's just the way it is.

Facts about you.

Yeah.

That's why I need to like, when I go downstairs, I put my phone away, and I really don't, I try not to look at it again, because if I won't be able to pay attention to anyone else, if I'm even reading the smallest of things.

Even the, the breaking headlines.

Yeah.

Can't do it.

Oh, that's weird.

Sorry, I was just looking because my wave looked small, but I'm fine.

You're good.

I'm fine.

You're good.

It's my narration today, so I just wanted to make sure that my waves were waving, that you could hear her beautiful voice, all you audio production people out there.

So I have a haunting for us today.

Yay.

The haunting, actually, it is our research assistant, Dave.

It's his favorite haunting.

Oh.

It is the haunting of Doris Bither.

Oh, I'm ready.

Which that's a fun, that's a fun name in your mouth.

Doris Bither.

Doris Bither.

So it all starts in the summer of 1974.

Oh, your time, my time.

Your time to shine.

It's not like super seventies, but I mean it is, because it's like in the middle of the seventies, but it's not super seventies feeling.

Oh, okay.

But it starts in the summer of 1974.

Two paranormal investigators and UCLA students, Barry Taft and Kerry Gaynor, were approached in a bookstore by a woman who overheard their conversation that they were having about the supernatural.

Ooh.

And she went up to them and she was like, listen, I have a friend who needs somebody with you guys' kind of expertise.

Now the friend in question was Doris Bither.

She was a middle-aged mama.

She was a single mama of four kids and boy was she going through it.

She claimed that she and her family were under attack from unseen entities in their Culver

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City, California home.

Now according to Doris, the attack started a few months earlier and they included, among other things, objects moving on their own, random and inexplicable foul odors in the house, unusual noises with no point of origin, typical, and most distressingly, and this is like a little bit of a trigger warning moment, multiple physical and sexual assaults that were increasing in frequency and intensity as time went on.

Oh.

Yes.

That escalated quickly.

It did, yeah.

So all of those things were of interest to these two paranormal investigators who were just vibing in a bookstore a moment previously.

So they got permission from their supervisor at the UCLA Parapsychology Lab, Thelma Moss.

I like how you said UCLA.

Did I say it weird?

UCLA.

UCLA.

That's very nice.

I had to say UCLA Parapsychology Lab and that's a lot of L's.

It feels like how Alexis would have said it.

Oh my God.

Thank you for the compliment.

See, in my head, I felt like it was giving Sandra Lee.

Oh, there you go.

It was cocktail time.

You could have said UCLA.

UCLA.

So yeah, Thelma Moss, their provider.

I was going to say their provider.

Their supervisor at UCLA gave them permission.

Okay.

Okay.

Okay.

And once they got permission, Barry and Kerry headed out to Culver City and they started what would become a 10-week investigation of what has now become one of the most well-known and most controversial poltergeist cases in American history.

Barry and Kerry coming to you live.

Barry and Kerry, Barry and Kerry, they were almost Barry and Jerry.

Oh, and Barry and Kerry are somewhere scary.

Spooky.

So in the summer of 1974, like we know, Barry Taft was enrolled at UCLA and he was studying psychophysiology, which is a pretty broad field of study.

It focuses on like the mind-body connection.

Okay.

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And when he wasn't studying or taking classes, he worked as an assistant at the UCLA Parapsychology

Lab, which was like a niche little offshoot from the university's larger neuropsychology program.

So much psychology, all the psych, all of it.

And the neuropsychology program, like the big whole, it was kind of like a big whole program that had these tiny little programs under it, like an umbrella.

Yes.

It was headed by Dr. Thelma Moss.

So throughout the 1960s and 70s, there were new religious movements and occult practices that gained a lot of popularity across the U.S.

And that gave rise to what were previously little-known or short-lived academic programs like the UCLA app, I can't say UCLA anymore, UCLA lab that were built around scientific or pseudoscientific study of paranormal phenomena.

I like it.

So Barry found out about the UCLA program.

I literally can't say it.

I'm sorry that I did that to you.

You did it to me.

UCLA program as a teenager.

And that was when he was volunteering for a study on psychic phenomenon.

According to him, this experiment, when he was a teenager, it involved being handed a set of Dr. Moss's keys, who would later become his, like the head of the lab there.

So he got a set of her keys and he was asked to provide information gleaned only through psychometry, the supposedly supernatural ability to learn information by touching inanimate objects.

Oh, isn't that cool?

That's fun.

Right. I want to try it.

That's really fun.

I'm into it, yeah.

Yeah.

So he claimed that, among other things, he correctly identified the name of Dr.

Moss's deceased husband and the name of her best friend, actress Shelly Winters.

Oh, wow.

Which also he might have just known, but I don't know.

I don't know how he would know the name of her deceased husband.

Yeah, I mean, this was in the 70s still, right?

Yeah.

So he couldn't just Google it.

So exactly.

Now I'd be like, all right.

The only like Shelly Winters, I was like, well, maybe there was like a newspaper where like they got lunch together or something.

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Yeah, but the deceased husband?

Interesting.

Interesting.

So it was the start of something big for Barry, and it kind of sparked his interest in this whole world of the paranormal.

Hi, Barry.

So after enrolling at UCLA, he lobbied hard to get a position as a research assistant in the parapsychology lab.

And by 1974, as we know, he did.

He got accepted as a part-time lab assistant, but he did claim that most of his time was spent, quote unquote, in the field conducting research.

And it was at UCLA that he met fellow student, Kerry Gaynor, who was an undergraduate philosophy student, and Kerry also had developed a strong interest in the supernatural.

So they kind of teamed up together.

I like it.

Me too.

Do you have Spine Spooky?

Yeah.

It's giving Sam and Colby.

I'm into it.

You know, yeah.

So that brings us to August 1974, where Barry and Kerry were in a Los Angeles bookstore, loudly discussing the supernatural.

Loudly, loudly.

Ghosts.

Loudly and proudly being like, parapsychology, spirits, poltergeists.

What else?

Creaking doors, seances, ooooh, Ouija boards.

I love it.

It's fun.

That's what they did.

That was their conversation.

Yeah, that was an audio clip of their conversation.

Yeah, just so you don't ask us how we got it.

Yeah, I can't tell you where we saw it.

They were an amazing research assistant.

He's got it.

Incredible.

We told you this was his favorite case.

He went back to the past for it.

Hell yeah, he did.

So yes, they were loudly having that discussion previously inserted in here.

And that's when they were approached by a middle-aged woman who said, like I said

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earlier, her friend Doris Bither was having paranormal activity in her home for months.

And at this point, she was very, very desperate for help with the situation.

But at the same time, she was also afraid to seek help from traditional organizations, because I'm sure she was worried people wouldn't take her seriously.

Of course.

Now, according to the friend, Doris and her three sons, quote, claimed to have seen semi-transparent apparitions of roughly human shape and size in their home.

They had also seen objects move across the room on their own and had experienced other supernatural phenomena that they could not account for.

Like, no explanation.

Not super fun in their case.

No?

No.

So their interests were piqued.

So the two men, Barry and Kerry, gave Doris's friend their information and later they arranged to go out to Doris's house to conduct a preliminary interview.

Listen up, babies.

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Do you ever find that just as you're trying to fall asleep, your brain suddenly won't stop talking?

Do your thoughts start racing right before bed or at other inopportune moments?

Yes, mine do, that's for sure.

I'll be laying in bed and I'm like, remember that time that you told that girl that you liked your skirt and then she didn't say thank you and do you think she still hates you to this day?

Well, guess what?

That's a little cougar nuts bananas.

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So when they pulled up to Doris's house on the evening of August 22nd, 1974, they were surprised by what they saw.

Barry recalled this house was a little shack.

It was twice condemned by the city.

She shouldn't have even been living there.

Oh, so already it's like got creepy vibes.

Now, once inside, Barry and Carrie sat down with a noticeably anxious Doris and started their interview.

Now, from the moment they began asking her questions, it was clear to both of them that she was not comfortable talking about her personal history.

So they tried to make the like a decision to keep the interview focused on the

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paranormal activity occurring in the home and not getting like a ton of background information. Now, Doris elaborated on the experience that they already had learned about from her friend at the bookstore.

And then she told them about the worst aspect she believed was haunting. According to her on more than one occasion, and this is a trigger warning, it's like sexual assault.

More than one occasion, she had been sexually assaulted by an unseen entity, both while she was alone and while her children were home.

Oh, like in front of them.

What the fuck?

Super fucked up.

She told them, quote, the two smaller ones, meaning like the apparitions, held me down and one big one attacked me.

I hate this.

I know a lot.

In response, Barry said later, we just froze.

Carrie and I looked at each other and I rolled my eyes back and put my hands in my head and thought, oh my God, this woman's psychotic.

Wow.

His words, not mine.

There you go.

I was going to say, quote, quote.

So at that point, which you can understand why he might think she was like, you know, she was in a, you know, a different state of mind.

She was losing it a little bit.

So at that point, Barry and Carrie were pretty sure that she was experiencing some kind of symptoms of mental illness.

So they referred her to a psychiatric clinic at the UCLA

Neuropsychiatry Department and they left assuming that that would be their last interaction.

See, that's interesting that it started off that way.

It is.

It's interesting that they didn't immediately be like, pull your guys.

Exactly.

Like, you know, they, they were like, you know what?

Logical.

Sure.

This seems like you might have some mental illness that's going on and we should get you help.

Exactly.

And they tried to.

And nice that they tried to get her help.

That was nice.

Especially in the seventies.

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I was like, wow.

But about 10 days later, Barry got a phone call from Doris claiming that since the two men had last visited, the paranormal activity at the house had gotten even worse and was now being experienced by her friends and her neighbors.

Oh, wow.

So when she mentioned that there were other witnesses outside of the home, their ears kind of perked up again a little bit.

So they did agree to go back out for a follow up interview.

So a few days later, they were back at Doris, Doris's house on Braddock street, and they were immediately hit by a terrible odor as soon as they walked in the door, Barry said, it smelled like decomposing organic matter, rotting flush, a very sour, nauseating smell.

What?

Why do you smell?

I don't know.

That sucks.

Sorry, I was fighting that so hard.

And as the three of them stood there talking in the kitchen, all of a sudden, a cupboard opened on its own and a heavy frying pan came flying toward them. And what Barry described as a ballistic arc.

Oh, wow.

It's also very nice way of describing that.

A ballistic arc.

Wow.

He's a scientist.

That sounds painful.

Yeah, I don't think it hit anybody, luckily.

Would have been, would have been painful.

Exactly.

But imagine you don't believe this woman and then you walk in and you're like, wow, it smells like shit in here.

Like she trying to trick us, but then a cupboard moves on its own and something comes flying out of it.

Yeah, I'd be like, wow, okay.

It'd be like, we doubted this woman too soon.

Down the wrong path, I guess.

And I guess they said the frying pan moving of its own accord was evidence enough for them that the violent assaults Doris had described on her previous visit, including one where she claimed a fuse box was torn off the wall and hurled at her by an unseen force.

Why are they so mad?

I don't know, but it proved to Barry and Taft that regardless, or excuse me, that's the same person, Barry and Kerry, that regardless of the cause, there was indeed something happening at Doris's house and it was worth investigating formally.

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Wow.

Can you imagine you're just standing there?

Barry aggresses.

It's very sixth sense.

Yeah, it's just like angry.

That's the thing.

I'm like, what's your problem?

I don't know.

So in any investigation, paranormal or otherwise, the biographical information about the victim is usually pretty critical in solving the problem or understanding why it happened to begin with.

But in the case of Doris Bither, little is known about her life before the poltergeist activity began, other than vague allusions to a traumatic personal history.

Okay.

So it seems like she may have been haunted in more ways than one.

And isn't there like a belief system that like trauma can attract this kind of?

I think there is.

Yeah.

Like demonic activity and all that good stuff, all that terrible stuff.

Yeah, I've heard that because I think like somehow the demonic force or whatever, whatever have you like praise upon that weakness kind of thing.

Okay.

And can sense it maybe.

Yeah.

Or like attach itself to you in some way.

Yeah.

If those things exist, it makes sense that that would be what they would be attracted to.

Yeah.

So Barry said Doris was very evasive and somewhat cryptic regarding her background.

So much so that she refused to even tell us her age, which we knew was older than ours, but not by how many years.

Huh.

So they literally, they literally didn't even know how old she was.

Wow.

But what they did learn, which I do wonder if she like didn't want to give them too much information because she was like, almost like when you go get like a tarot reading or a psychic reading.

Yeah, you don't want to really like kind of reveal anything that's going to help them.

Yeah.

You want to keep it up to them.

Maybe that's what she was doing.

Yeah.

That could be it.

And she could just be like the first like she could be just being smart and being like,

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you don't need to have shit about me.

Yeah.

I'm private.

Just figure out my house, bitch.

Figure it out.

So what they did learn mostly from observation was that she was very poor and had an unstable employment history.

She had four children at the time, three boys, age 10, 13 and 16.

And they lived with her on the Kendemth house and on Braddock street.

And she also had a preteen daughter who was living somewhere else at the time of the investigation.

Now they also learned really quickly that she was a heavy drinker and she drink, she seemed to drink daily.

Oh man.

Now during their time in the house, quote, the investigators observed poor relationships between Doris and the children.

And there was fighting among the siblings.

Oh, this is so sad of a house.

It's on super sad and just like a very chaotic environment.

And just like the fact that they're living in a condemned house is awful.

Bad news bears.

Now among the most heavily criticized aspects of the Bither case is Barry and Kerry's failure to collect any personal biographical information or to press Doris for any additional details about her life.

Writer Benjamin Radford, Radford wrote, where a trained psychologist or social worker might have seen a troubled woman needing help.

Taff and Gainer saw a golden opportunity to research a real haunting.

Which is like, but they also, they did try to provide her help.

They don't think that's necessarily a fair overview.

No, that's absolutely true.

Now, Barry, he explained the lack of information as a simple matter of protecting the case.

He said, had we even attempted to secure the type of background information we currently collect, such as medical, psychological, family, psychodynamics, prescribed medications, as well as recreational drugs and alcohol usage.

Doris surely would have shown us the door from the outset.

So he agreed.

Like we wouldn't have been able to do this investigation.

And we tried to get her help and.

Yeah.

Name, you can only push so hard.

Exactly.

You do want to see what's going on in this house.

Yeah.

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And she wanted their help.

Like she was asking for help.

So, so basically she was a very private woman and they weren't willing to lose out on investigating the case by pushing her boundaries.

Yeah.

I get that.

I get.

She set up boundaries.

Don't push them.

I get that.

Now, in the year since more information about Doris has come to light, that gives a little more insight into her state of mind at the time of the investigation and possibly some explanation for some of the activity that she claimed to witness.

It should be said that most of the information learned after the investigation came from Doris' son, Brian Harris, who Barry Taft points out also struggled with addiction and he did contradict himself a few times during the interview.

But this is what we do know.

Doris was said to have been born in Illinois in 1940 to a very dysfunctional family and according to the accounts of those who knew her, she had a really, really hard life from the beginning.

As a teenager, she started experimenting with drugs and alcohol to escape her abuse of home life and she was generally just a rebellious teenager who was acting out more often than not.

And because of that, her parents kicked her out of the house while she still was a teenager and she was forced to fend for herself.

Oh, geez.

So you can kind of see how she became a product of her environment.

Yeah, absolutely.

No, there isn't much about her life that is known after she was kicked out of the family, I guess, between Illinois and California.

There were a couple of marriages that didn't work out and eventually she had the four children and then ended up in Santa Monica where she was living just before she moved to the house on Braddock Street in Culver City, the one that we're at now.

Now, the majority of the paranormal activity occurred in the house on Braddock Street, but the son, Brian Harris, claimed that there were, quote, some psychokinetic events and even the occasional apparition even before the family moved to Culver City.

Oh, damn.

So this may have been something that followed them to this house.

So it followed them.

And later we'll see that it may follow them when they leave this house.

So the haunting activity they said began somewhat suddenly, just a few

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months after they moved into Braddock Street.

It started with a weird inescapable feeling of being watched and then things escalated from there.

Again, objects were moving by themselves.

A lamp flew across the room at one point.

And at that time Doris and her children hadn't experienced any violent activity, but that changed one evening a few weeks later when Doris was sexually assaulted by an unseen entity in her bedroom.

In her interviews with Barry and Kerry, she said that whole thing where two smaller entities held her down and one big entity attacked her.

That's horrifying.

To think about that is literally mind blowing.

Just being held down by entities is because you think of like sleep paralysis.

Yeah.

What that feels like, how scary that is.

But then to add that onto it, I can't even imagine.

Because like sleep paralysis, you kind of know that your body is doing it.

Oh, like I guess.

No, you don't.

Oh, you don't?

Yeah.

But I mean, like she was seeing two things hold her down.

Like, do you see something hold you down when you have sleep paralysis?

A lot of times you see something in the room coming at you while you're being held down, or at least that's what I always see.

I hate that.

Yeah.

But I'm just saying, like she saw the things that were holding her down and saw the thing attack her, that's on like another level.

Yeah, no.

But from that point forward, the activity escalated more and more.

And then it started to involve the children in various ways.

According to Brian Harris, there were times when they were, quote, slapped by an unseen hand in the middle of the night.

Oh, and he specifically recalled an incident involving, quote,

one of the boys bumping into an invisible person in the hallway.

Oh, I don't like that.

Walking down your hallway and no, like you bump into a person, but there's no person there.

Oh, that like, I don't like that one.

And interestingly, Doris and all three boys described their experience in the house as having been with a male spirit.

They never saw a physical manifestation of the entity, but they all alluded to it being a male presence.

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Okay.

Which is, I definitely think you can kind of pick up on that.

Yeah, I would say so.

But interesting that all four of them felt the same way on that.

Yeah, that is interesting.

And it seems like obviously there were multiple entities.

So it's like a bunch of dudes haunting this place.

Oh, oh, I don't know.

It's like, I don't want anyone haunting me really, except for David Bowie.

Yeah, it's really all except I feel that.

So according to Brian Harris, not long after moving in, Doris received a knock on the door on the front door one afternoon and she opened it.

And this is a quote, she discovered an old Mexican lady, possibly in her seventies or eighties, who had come to deliver a message to the new occupants.

He said, the woman told his mother, you need to get out.

I used to live here in this old house back when it was just a farm.

And I was a little girl.

There's something very evil here.

This place is haunted and you need to get out.

Oh, no.

Yeah, I just went too much.

So the woman just turned around and left without saying anything else.

And a few months later, that's when everything started.

That shit is straight out of a horror movie.

Hate, hate, hate, loathe entirely.

I always love someone coming to the door

and saying, you got to get the fuck out of this house because I lived here once.

There's some shit in here.

You're going to die if you don't get out of this house.

And I love in the movie when the family goes, thank you so much.

And then does not leave that house because that's what it sounds like here.

I'm like, what the hell it does.

I think this family could not have gone anywhere else.

No, I was going to say in this situation, it's totally different.

But in the movies, you're like, get out of there.

And also it's like, if somebody comes up to your house, it is like, I lived here once and it's haunted.

You need to leave.

You're not going to pack up and leave.

No, like I realized that before I get a hundred comments of like, how stupid I am that I don't know that.

I was like, let me get ahead of that real quick is I mean, in the movies, when you watch it, you're always like, why the fuck don't you get out of that house?

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Exactly.

But this is real.

But here you're like, oh, I can see why I don't like, all right.

But that's the world is scary.

But still.

And also you said some, we were just saying about horror movies.

This became a horror movie.

Oh, it did.

I think it's, I'll say it later.

I think it's the entity.

So once Mary and Kerry were convinced that there was more to Doris's story than they originally thought, and they got that permission from Thelma Moss to conduct the study on behalf of the lab.

They began that 10 week investigation.

Now, similar into the investigation into Doris's personal history, the story of the paranormal investigation at the house on Braddock Street is light on the details with the exception of one well documented incident.

I guess in a lot of ways, Doris's description of the activity in her home was similar to countless other stories of haunted houses and haunted people at the time. You got the yucky smells, things moving on their own, weird noises.

Yeah, violent assaults by unseen hands.

And given the commonality of those experiences,

it is worth noting that Doris's report came less than a year after the release of The Exorcist, where all of these things also happen.

Yeah, it's worth mentioning.

Yeah, yeah, you got to give the both sides here.

You do have to be devil's advocate and you decide, dear listener.

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So what set Doris' story apart, though, from the more run-of-the-mill hauntings were the less common reports of the violent sexual assaults,

which I guess is sometimes referred to as spectral rape or spectrophilia.

Oh, I've never heard of that before.

I have not either.

But I'm glad that there's a name for it because you say sexual assault and you're like, well, it's even more than that.

Yeah, you're like, what's happening really here?

It's scary.

Now, Doris claimed that on multiple occasions, she was spectrally raped by the invisible entities of three men, the largest of whom the kids came to refer to as Mr. Who's It.

Mr. Who's It.

Mr. Who's It.

Shut the fuck up.

Isn't that absolutely terrifying?

Mr. Who's It.

Mr. Who's It.

Like, W-H-O-S-E dash It.

I don't know why, but I don't like that at all.

No, I hate it.

Like, there's nothing innately menacing about that.

But somehow it is.

It's the most menacing in my body.

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It's not like classically menacing.
But when you listen, you're just like, no.
Yeah, no, well, that sounds terrible.
When you put it into the, yeah, the context.
The context here, yeah.
I'm glad that we just have Skeletal.
Skeletal.
Skeletal just went home to his family.
No, that's great, you know.
I hope he stays there.
Oh, he was nice, though.
Yeah, she started talking about her closet the other day
and I got real freaked out.
I was like, is it Skeletal?
Did he come back?
No, I miss Skeletal.
I know, when it's Toppat.
Yeah, he just seemed awesome.
He did.
Well, he's with his family.
Every time we talked about Skeletal,
I just pictured somebody being like,
bada-baw, every time, you know?
Correct.
He feels very jazzy.
He does.
It's the Toppat.
Yeah, and like the way he poses.
Yeah, you know?
But in these events, Doris claims that she was held down,
pushed and even thrown across the room
and then assaulted by at least one of the attackers.
Barry Taffrow in 2014, according to Doris' testimony,
this event took place on several separate occasions,
each time leaving behind large and distinct
black and blue wounds,
especially around the ankles, wrists, breasts
and groin area of the inner thighs.
Oh.
So she was literally covered in black and blues.
And that's like very classic areas
where you would have bruising after an assault.
After being held down and assaulted, yeah.
So given the sensational and lurid nature of the assaults,

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it would be very fair to say
that they were the aspect of the case
that kind of elevated it above the more common reports
of hauntings and poltergeist activity at the time.
Of just like, oh yeah, like things are getting thrown around
and you know, it's smelly in here.

Right, this up to the end.

But it is worth noting that these attacks
were only experienced by Doris and her sons,
so there were no witnesses to the assaults
outside of the family.

Okay.

And if there wasn't any documentation
of the physical evidence that had been left on her body,
she just said what had happened.

Okay.

But I'm not doubting her, I'm just saying
there's no evidence if you look for it, it's not there.

It's just the reality.

Yes.

Now according to Barry,
the physical and sexual assaults stopped altogether
once the investigation began
and there were a large number of people coming and going
at the Bither House.

Okay.

So I don't know if maybe the ghosts noted,
like the demons spirits noticed that there was people
who were like, we're not gonna be able to get away with this.

I don't know.

I don't know.

And what do you have shame?

Is that, what the, I don't think they had that, but.

I don't know.

I don't know about that.

I think more people there to help her.

Yeah.

Perhaps, you know.

Yeah, I guess.

So despite the abrupt and kind of curious end
of the physical and sexual assaults
upon the introduction of potential witnesses,
Barry and Carrie maintained their belief
that Doris really was experiencing what she said,

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a genuine poltergeist activity.

In 2011, Barry wrote that Doris's case quote,
was not in my professional opinion,
the result of spectral rape,
but rather a disturbingly real poltergeist outbreak.

Oh, okay.

And he kind of became like the unofficial spokesperson
for the investigative team.

And he claimed the real focus of the investigation
was the moving objects
and the frequently reported balls of light
that manifested around Doris during this time.

Okay.

I mean, Barry and Carrie,
they saw one of those pans fly out of.

Yep.

Okay.

So they were like, we want to investigate the moving,
the shit that moves and flies on its own
and like the foul odors and stuff.

That honestly makes more sense to me.

And it makes me feel like they were at least there
to really get the, the real deal here,
because they were like,

we witnessed with our own eyes,
this pan fly out of this cabinet.

So we're going to follow this and not what the other stuff.

Because we,

that we're not there for that we've never seen.

Exactly.

I think that's a smart way to go about it.

So at the time of the investigation,
the UCLA parapsychology lab
was among the most underfunded programs on campus.

And because she herself was skeptical of Doris's claims,
Dr. Thelma Moss refused to direct any resources,
substantial resources toward the investigation.

So because of that,

Taff and the team of mostly student researchers
relied on pretty basic techniques
for collecting their evidence.

They did, you know, traditional photography,
temperature gauges, I believe it's a Geiger.

Is that what it is?

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Yeah, I think it's a Geiger counter.

Okay.

A Geiger counter.

And that can detect differences in radiation levels.

And of course, sound recording equipment.

That's the whole gamut of what they had.

Okay.

At first, they tried to communicate with the entity,

quote, asking spirits to create sounds

or manipulate lights in response to questions.

Now, they occasionally got responses to their questions,

but Taff admitted, quote,

the answers we received could not be confirmed

and never really made any sense.

So they made other attempts to communicate with the spirits

and they relied on Doris's friend

who claimed to be psychic, Candy.

And actually Candy was Candy.

Candy, Candy, Candy, Candy.

She was the one who originally approached Barry

and Carrie in the bookstore

while they were talking about the clip above.

Candy cane.

Candy cane, it's rust and nail.

Now, aside from occasionally screaming out,

quote, that there was something in the corner

not that she could see but sense,

these attempts at communication

were also pretty unsuccessful.

Okay.

Unfortunately.

Unfortunately.

Unfortunately.

So in an attempt to document the presence,

the investigators started taking photos

with their Polaroid cameras.

There were a bunch of photos taken,

but the images didn't really show

any kind of ghostly presence.

But then as they were assembled in the kitchen,

Doris's friend, Candy, shouted,

it's right in front of my face.

Carrie turned quickly, directed the camera toward Candy

and took two photos that the investigators claim

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are evidence of the entity's presence in the home.
I'm gonna show them to Elena right now,
but I'm gonna make sure that we post them
so you guys can see them.
No, we're not going to.
You can't see them.
You can never see them.
Okay.
Yeah.
All right.
Interesting.
This photo, which I'll talk about in a second,
is supposed to be the control photo that they took.
And I think that thing across her face
is like a scratch on the photo.
I don't think it's the entity.
Oh, that's interesting.
Okay.
So we'll talk about those.
According to Carrie, the two images in,
there are two images in the series that show Candy,
who is slightly obscured by what she said the entity was.
And she claimed it was right in front of her
at the time that the photos were taken.
And then the third image that I just showed Elena
was the control image.
And it's included for comparison.
It shows an unobstructed image of Candy
just after the entity photos were taken.
But as writer Kenny Biddle points out,
there is an obvious problem with the control image
in that the other two photos were taken
using the camera's flash.
Thank you.
I was literally about to point that out.
And the third was not.
Yeah.
Obviously.
He writes,
two entity photos we can clearly see
hard shadows cast by Candy silhouette.
Both hard shadows are consistent with the use
of a flash bar on the Polaroid camera,
which features single use bulbs, five on each side.

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However, the quote unquote control image is dark overall. In a nutshell, the three photographs were not taken under the same conditions, making comparisons difficult or impossible and invalidating their use as quote unquote controls. I was just gonna say that invalidates the control completely. It does. I was like, that's the same day, same day, same place. It also, to me, it doesn't look like the same place. Because they even took it at a different angle, it feels like. Yeah. A daily step back. It's hard because you guys will see it once we post the images. To me, it doesn't look like she's in the same room. Yeah, that's what I was thinking. It really looks like two different photos. Yeah, because in the third photo, which is the control photo, there's like a Ouija board in front of her. If you look closely, you can see like a curtain I think what's wood-paneled walls. But the curtain in the photos that she claims the ghost is in front of her or the spirit or whatever, there's different curtains. And she seems like there's like another lamp behind her. It just doesn't look like it's in the same room at all. Yeah, it's a little strange. But Biddle also notes, and he's the one that's like, I don't know about this, that in addition to the use of the flash and the two original photos of Kandy, the images are overexposed. That is another thing that it looks like. They just look different. They do look like something was done there. And because they're overexposed, it caused the overblown yellow hue that investigators claim as evidence of the entity to be present in those photos versus the control photo. Because it's like blown out. It looks like.

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The first two photos look blown out completely.
And the third one just looks like a dark, bad photo.
Exactly.
So Barry Taff admitted on multiple occasions
that they were not very familiar with the cameras
and made mistakes with the settings
quite often during the investigation.
And he did say it rendered most of the photos useless
regardless of their content.
I mean, at least he admits it.
And I do imagine in the 70s, I mean, even now
it's hard to take, like hats off to photographers
because I don't know the settings for a camera
that like make like, I don't know what to do with exposure,
what to do with like any of that stuff.
So in the 70s, I'm sure it was even harder
because you're like, I don't fucking know what any of this does.
And the cameras were newer.
Like a Polaroid camera hadn't been around forever, you know?
So according to him, as we spent more time there,
we began observing balls of light.
So now we're moving on to something else.
He said, what we call corpuscular masses of light.
Ooh, I like that.
I know.
That look like.
Corpuscular masses of light.
That look like plasma, which is the fourth state of matter.
Ooh.
He's getting scientific here.
I was just gonna say, let's talk science.
The word corpuscular, I like.
It's one of those that could go real wrong real fast.
Cause it's got pus in it.
Yeah, and when you think like pustule.
Yeah, I didn't think.
Like a pustule is not fun.
But corpuscular is just on the other side of that.
It's a high brow a little bit, you know?
You know, this was, you know, words.
We're absolutely not.
Thank you for tuning in.
But while many of the things Doris claimed
to have experienced before the arrival of the investigators

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were never really witnessed by anybody outside of the home, Taft claims that the balls of light that manifested around Doris were seen by many people on the investigative team.

Interesting.

In a summary note prepared by Barry and Kerry, they described the orbs of light as quote, displays of small, rapidly moving balls of light on several occasions, which occurred in the presence of a woman in her middle eight thirties, Doris.

The lights were reported to change their motion, size and intensity in response to the investigators' requests and to the occasional emotional outburst of the female agent, Doris.

Attempts to photograph the lights were reportedly met with no success on most occasions, although in a few rare instances, the lights were captured on film as curved arcs of light akin to the trails that can appear in photos of lighted objects.

I'll show you a picture in a minute.

OK.

So given the lack of other tangible evidence, the orbs of light quickly became the focus of the investigation and would go on to be the most heavily documented and most controversial aspect of the bit their case.

So they were determined to capture the orbs on film.

And about halfway into the investigation, the team decided they were going to set up several cameras in Doris' room because that was where the orb-based activity seemed to be the heaviest.

OK.

So at first, nothing happened.

But the team kept checking in, and sure enough, the orb activity increased in intensity.

Years later, Barry Taft described the lights as, quote, moving pulses, pulsing flashes of light, lime green in color, three-dimensional in nature, which were not stable in size or luminosity.

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Now, eventually, I guess the lights became so bright

that they illuminated the entire room.

Damn.

Isn't that crazy?

And during one of those incidents,

Taft says, the orbs collected in the corner of the room,

forming the shape of the upper torso of a very large man.

He said, it was an apparition made out

of not bathed in lime green light.

Oh, I like how he worded that.

Yeah.

That he was made out of not bathed in the light,

like the light made him.

Lime green light.

According to Taft, two of the assistants at UCLA, quote,

big hulking guys passed out because they were so traumatized

by what they were seeing, their brain just wouldn't accept it.

Holy shit.

Right?

So while the first experiment with the orbs

yielded some results, the orbs proved really, really

incredibly challenging to capture on film.

And when they did capture the orbs in a photo,

there was nothing else in the photos

that would allow for perspective to really show

the trajectory or the true identity of what it really was.

OK.

And so they realized that they needed to alter their approach

in order to properly document these orbs.

So Taft and his team devised a new plan,

and he describes that in his final report writing.

Our fifth visit to Doris' house resulted in large-scale magnification

of all phenomena.

We began by duct-taping large black poster

boards up on the walls in the ceiling of the bedroom, all of which

were numbered and identified with a magnetic orientation.

White duct tape was placed between the dark panels

that formed a grid network like graph paper,

there in providing us with a reference for further attempts

at photographing the lights.

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Black poster board were also used to seal off all light entrances into the bedroom that rendered the environment almost pitch black.

Wow.

So basically, they set up like a fucking hypothesis here and really executed a science experiment.

They just set up a hypothesis.

There you go.

You know?

I like it.

They had a hypothesis.

They did the scientific experiment on it.

Boom.

And that's science with Ash.

You're welcome.

And that's science with Ash.

With Ash, that's how it works.

So it was during this visit that Taft and his team managed to capture a now pretty iconic photo of Doris sitting on her bed with an arc of light streaming over her head from what they say is one of the orbs traveling through the frame.

Oh, I can see it.

You got it, this one?

Yeah.

So in his description of the event, and the photo more specifically, Taft notes that had the streak of light been a projection from a light source rather than an independently moving object in the frame, the arc would have bent when it hit the corner of the room where the two walls met an angle.

Yeah.

In his report, he described Doris as quote, cowering on the bed beneath the lights that were flying around her in a mad fray.

OK.

So that's his take on it.

And I can see what he's saying about the corner there.

Definitely, I get what he's saying about the corner.

I don't think she seems to be cowering very much.

She just kind of looks like she's looking at it.

She's holding like the side of her head, and she looks like she's looking back at something.

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Yeah.

And it almost to me looked like she was like moving her hair like out of.

Yeah, or she was like covering her ear.

Yeah, exactly.

But photo analyst Kenny Biddle, who is a bit of a skeptic on this case, points out the photo does not, in fact, show Bidder cowering, but instead sitting on the bed looking, if anything, a bit uninterested as the other team members sit idly.

I don't think you can say she looks uninterested.

Well, I think that's the thing.

I don't think any of us can look at this very grainy black and white photograph where you can't see her face.

That's the thing.

You can't see her face.

And take anything from it.

She's sitting there.

She's looking at it.

What I can tell you is she's looking back at something that looks like she's looking at the light.

But I can't say whether she's interested, uninterested, sick, healthy, sad, happy, scared.

And scared.

I can't say anything.

So I'm not going to.

She's sitting there.

She's looking at something.

Exactly.

Now Biddle also points out, while Taft described having hung black poster board with duct tape grids around the room to adequately document the phenomenon and do the scientific experiment, the picture clearly shows bare walls with no hint of poster board or tape.

That's what I was going to ask, because at first I was like, oh, maybe like, because it's black and white, we can't really tell that those are like covered.

But then there's like decorations on the wall that you can see.

You don't see any of that.

That's the thing.

Now, according to Taft, a few days after they set the room up with the poster board,

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but before they started taking pictures, they got a call from Doris who asked that they return as soon as possible. And he said when they arrived at the house, they discovered that the poster board they hung had all been torn down. And that's when they got this photo. Now Doris, very convenient. Doris claims that it happened one afternoon while she and the kids were out of the house, also convenient. But Taft even acknowledges the possibility that she had torn everything down in order to bolster her claim and get some more attention if this is what that was. So after 10 weeks of investigation in Doris' home, Thelma Moss came to the house to witness what Barry and Carrie had claimed was happening because she's like, you're spending a lot of time on this. What are we getting out of this? But during her visit to the house, she didn't witness anything unusual at all. Now, until that point, the majority of the activity Doris claimed to have experienced had been relayed to the investigators after the fact with no way to verify the accuracy of their claims. So given that Thelma Moss hadn't experienced anything unusual during her visit, and the best that Barry and Carrie could come up with was a couple blurry photos, she pulled the plug on the project and the investigation. Yeah, I don't blame her. I don't either. I think she was like, listen, this is supposed to be legit. And like, you guys aren't really getting a lot here and you've been here for 10 weeks. This isn't worth it. No. So the investigation into Doris' mother's haunting came to an abrupt and unceremonious end. Now, by the time investigators had exited Doris' life, excuse me, she had managed to save enough money from working part-time jobs

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to move from the house on Braddock Street
to a new house elsewhere in the city.

Well, that's good.

But she didn't leave a forwarding address
with Tafe or his team of investigators.

So luckily, by the time Doris had started working
with writer slash director, Frank DiFellitta,
it's hard to say.

He was working on the fictionalized account
of her experience, a movie called The Entity.

And it would later be adapted for a film
starring Barbara Hershey, I think, as Doris.

But at that point, he helped Barry Tafe and Kerry Gaynor
get in touch with Doris for a follow-up interview.

Oh, that was nice of him.

It was.

So she claimed that things were quiet in her new house
for a few weeks, but not long after moving,
the activity had started up again.

Uh-oh.

And by the time the investigators reached out to her,
she claimed it was affecting the houses
on either side of her.

Oh, talk to those people.

Talk to them.

So they arranged a visit to Doris's house
that brought some,
and they brought some basic recording equipment with them
to document the interview.

According to Tafe,
the three were standing in Doris's living room,
just chatting, when all of a sudden,
a vase flew off a nearby table
and landed right next to where they were standing.

Oh, damn.

Much like the frying pan.

Now, obviously frightened by the flying vase,
the trio turned toward the direction it had come from
and realized they were not alone in the room.

Oh.

Half claims they began hearing heavy breathing,
getting closer as they stood their motion lists,
followed by a kind of shuffling coming in their direction.

He said, quote, we could hear a footstep,

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another footstep, and then a drag.

Oh.

And then all of a sudden,
the reel-to-reel recorder that Carrie had been running
was turned off by an unseen hand,
and they decided right then and there
to conclude their interview
and get the fuck out of that house.

But they were recording when that happened?

Yes.

Okay.

That's what they said.

I don't know whatever came of it.

Roll the tape.

I don't think they ever did.

Because according to Taft,
Doris did move again a short time later,
and this time to San Bernardino,
and the paranormal activity supposedly continued,
but they lost touch with her a couple months later
when she moved to Texas.

Jesus.

And she didn't leave any contact information
that time either.

So, Barry Taft said,
the last time I ever heard from Doris Bither
was around when the film came out in 1983,
and she was at a screening at Fox with all of us.
I think she felt threatened by all this attention,
but on another level,
I think she appreciated that we were trying to help her
come to grips with what was going on.

This is wild.

It's crazy.

Now, in his assessment of the case,
skeptic Benjamin Radford wrote,
quote, as is often the case with haunted people,
the introduction of psychics, paranormal investigators,
and other self-styled ghost hunters escalated,
and arguably exacerbated Bither's situation.

So he's saying like,

I don't know, I think it all kind of got worse
when she got attention.

Yeah.

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I mean, you can see that happen in cases.

Totally, so.

But regardless of whether someone believes Doris Bither's account of spectral rape and demonic assaults and everything else that she went through in her house, everyone who knew her or came into contact with her during this period, agreed that she was a very fragile woman who was desperately just seeking any kind of help. That's really sad.

So no matter what, it's really unfortunate.

Yeah.

Now, unfortunately, some people feel like what she found was too opportunistic college students who were hoping to make a name for themselves. And become like big time paranormal investigators.

Allah.

Exactly.

The Warrens.

Mm-hmm.

And I guess they, and like those people feel like when Barry and Carrie had gotten all they could from her, they walked out of her life and never really offered much help or explanation for her experiences.

Oh, yeah.

Now, sadly, she died from respiratory failure in 1999.

Oh, wow.

At the age of 59.

Oh, she was young.

And according to her son, Brian, she was plagued by paranormal harassment until the day that she died.

Wow.

So I don't know what I think about this case.

Wow.

I don't, that picture with the light is really interesting, but I don't know if there's a way to make that happen.

That's the thing.

I don't know if it's like, cause it almost, there's like a little other part of the picture where there's like a slight bit of light in there.

On the top of the arc, like to the, to the left of the left,

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it's like an upside down arc.

Yeah.

And I'm like, with something shined at the camera that made some kind of reflection that didn't need to be bent in that corner because it wasn't directed towards that corner.

Exactly.

I don't know.

I don't know how those cameras work.

I wish there was just more evidence than what we got.

Yeah, I wish there was some, you know, throw a fucking tape recorder on.

Yeah.

Let me hear some stuff.

Exactly.

Like you had tape recorders back then.

Yeah, just, I don't know.

I don't know.

I think the lack of evidence here kind of makes me feel like maybe they were just hoping to make it big and they saw this as an opportunity.

Yeah.

But the fact that her son said that she was, he was, or she, excuse me, was haunted until the day that she died.

And like this activity even started before that house.

Yeah.

But then I was in my head.

I'm like, why would they leave the second house when the, when the curious paranormal activity started?

Yeah.

That's true.

Like you just suddenly decided to leave?

Yeah, I don't know.

There's a lot to think about in this one.

There is.

So let us know what you think.

Yeah.

Interesting.

And we hope you keep listening.

And we hope you keep it weird.

But that's so weird that your house is that fucking haunted because that's so scary.

It's so scary.

[Transcript] Morbid / Episode 497: The Haunting of Doris Bither

So scary.

And don't keep it so weird that you take advantage of somebody who's experiencing a genuine haunting.

Okay. I love you so much.

Bye.

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Hey, weirdos.

Before we get back to our regularly scheduled programming,

I wanted to let you know that Wondery's shocking true crime

podcast over my dead body is back for a fourth season

that will literally give you literal goosebumps.

The newest season covers the story of Mike Williams.

It was Mike's sixth wedding anniversary

when he set off on a hunting trip

into the gator infested swamps of North Florida.

He figured he'd be back in time

to take his wife Denise out to celebrate,

but he didn't come back.

Friends and loved ones feared he met his fate

through bad luck in a group of hungry alligators,

leaving his young family behind.

Except that's not what happened at all.

And after 17 years, a kidnapping

and the uncovering of a secret love triangle,

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