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Restaurant serves up ghost stories all year

Workers at Barney's Beanery in West Hollywood see -- and sometimes feel -- the evidence of mysterious beings.

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Barney's Beanery manager Jonah Dumont says he has seen the image of a man in a white shirt walk past his upstairs office about 20 times. (Robert Gauthier, Los Angeles Times / October 25, 2011)

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By Bob Pool, Los Angeles Times
October 30, 2011

Thousands of costumed revelers will end this year's West Hollywood Halloween Carnival outside the front door of Barney's Beanery.

Real ghosts and goblins, however, will already be inside, employees there insist.

Workers say that years of strange experiences at the 91-year-old Santa Monica Boulevard eatery have convinced them the place is haunted.



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Restaurant manager Jonah Dumont says he's often watched a strange figure walk past the rooftop office as he finishes the bookkeeping after Barney's closes at 2 a.m. nightly.

"I've seen it 20-plus times. At first I assumed it was a busboy in a white shirt walking by," said Dumont, who started working there a year ago.

Oddly, the figure walking past the office's open doorway failed to trigger the rooftop's motion sensor-controlled floodlights.

The next time he closed up, Dumont made sure all his workers were gone and the restaurant door locked before returning to the upstairs office. Once again, the figure in the white shirt walked past the door, he said.

Dumont thought it might be a robber. "I threw everything in the safe and left. I didn't finish up any of the other work," he said.

Dumont said he hadn't believed in apparitions, but Barney's has changed his mind.

When Dumont mentioned his experience to others, he found out he was not the only one who had experienced strange things.

A bartender revealed he had seen the rooftop figure. "He said he thought it was just an employee too. 'It's in a white shirt, right?' he told me," Dumont said.

"People started telling me their ghost stories about the coolers downstairs. The same bartender who also had seen the white shirt walk by said that at one point the beer system would keep messing up — someone would switch off the levers."

Dumont said he heard other stories too: Servers said they felt something brush them when they walked downstairs. Nothing was there when they looked, but their skirts would still be moving as if something had just gone past, he said.

Chanhsy Khamta, who has tended bar at Barney's for 14 years, said she has learned to check out the basement thoroughly before walking into its cooler and freezer. That's because once she was inventorying beer kegs when someone walked past her, turned and walked past again before disappearing.

"The door was still shut. It freaked me out, so I ran out of there," she said. "But I've gotten used to it after so many years.

If I'm in the keg room and feel something, I brush it off, saying 'OK, you're not tricking me today.'"

Waitress Ashway Lawver has refused to go into the walk-in cooler by herself ever since the time she went to fetch pickles and suddenly felt that someone was behind her.

"I heard a *whoosh* sound go by. I looked over at the kegs of beer and saw something off-white, like an amoeba, moving past the kegs. I went back upstairs and told a bartender that I thought I'd seen a ghost and he asked, 'Did it look like a big blob moving across the kegs?' I hadn't told him what it looked like before that," said Lawver, who has worked five years at Barney's.

Cook Raul Reyes' cooler encounter came when he stepped out of the walk-in refrigerator and heard the sound of beer kegs being dragged across its floor. When he poked his head back inside he saw two of the kegs still wobbling.



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After that, he transferred to a kitchen job at Barney's Santa Monica restaurant.

Dominique Kadison, who has spent 21 years as a Barney's waitress, said she has also seen the rooftop apparition. "I was upstairs counting money and the door was open and I saw something out of the corner of my eye going by the door real fast.

"I called security. I got chills — something definitely moved past the door," Kadison said.

She said a former cook claimed he often spied two frightening figures — small boys with long teeth and long fingernails — in the restaurant kitchen at night when workers were closing. "He said on the nights he'd see them, the knives on the magnets on the wall would spin around. That's one of the scariest things I've heard."

What's behind the strange experiences at the legendary haunt?

Kadison said she knows of three murders that have occurred in Barney's — two stabbings and a shooting.

But over the years, its clientele has also included various famous now-departed souls: Jim Morrison, lead singer of The Doors, once climbed on the bar and urinated on it, an event commemorated by a plaque. Morrison was unceremoniously kicked out.

And in 1970 bluesy rock singer Janis Joplin stopped in at Barney's for drinks the night she died from an overdose of heroin, apparently combined with the effects of alcohol.

Perhaps a pair of rock 'n' roll ghosts is roaming the place. And we're not talking the Grateful Dead.

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I love this ghost story

TomCat at 11:20 AM October 30, 2011

I had a hamburger there once that tasted like it died twenty years ago!

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