



AMANDA R. WOOMER: PARANORMAL PHENOM

*Meet the ghoul creating space for underrepresented voices
and making death approachable*

She was just seven years old when it happened the first time.

It was the middle of the night. Amanda Woomer (she/her) tossed and turned in her small bed, trying to get comfortable, trying to will herself to sleep the way only a seven-year-old can, but sleep wasn't coming. Sighing, she rolled over to face the bedroom door. Out in the hallway she spotted it immediately.

An elderly woman in a bathrobe and slippers with the messiest bed head Amanda had ever seen. If she blinked, Amanda may have thought it was the hair of a cartoon character, but no—this real woman was silently walking down the hall. When she heard Amanda stir, the woman's head turned and the two locked eyes.

Amanda wasn't sure how long they stared at each other—what was likely a few seconds felt like an eternity to her at that age. All she knew was this wasn't a grandmother or aunt or anyone she knew roaming her house in the middle of the night. No, it was a stranger. Someone Amanda had never seen before. As the woman turned and walked straight into the linen closet, Amanda did the only thing she could think to do in that moment.

She screamed.

Her mother came running—ran right through the apparition, in fact—to see what was happening, and quickly assured her daughter it was all a bad dream, her eyes had been playing tricks on her.

"But it was like I was wide awake," Amanda says. "I know what I saw, and it's interesting because this is the only experience I ever had in my house. Growing up, I didn't feel like I grew up in a haunted house. I never had anything weird happened to me."

THE PARANORMAL OBSESSION

That experience stuck with her and as a teen Amanda found herself frequenting her local library to scrounge up every book about the paranormal. She was eager to learn anything she could, and a reality TV phenomenon was about to amp that up: ghost hunting shows.

"I became obsessed, just like everyone else, and that was the beginning of the end for me," she says. "I became absolutely fascinated, started going on investigations. I was only 14 at the time, but it was definitely that bridging the gap between being scared but also really intrigued to know more."

It was a significant event in 2015, however, that would solidify a lifelong obsession with the paranormal: the passing of her younger brother, Jed. Suddenly her interest wasn't just about answering the unanswered. It became an investigation to find out if her brother was okay and if she might see him again.



Spectral Jed vs. First Day of School Jed

"I always joke that when someone dies, some people start going to church, some people start going to bars. I started going to haunted places."

A NIGHT AT THE GHOSTLIGHT

It didn't take long for Amanda to get her answer. In 2017, she was participating in a ghost hunt at The Ghostlight Theatre, a local spot where Jed had been a member his entire life and one of his favorite places to spend time. Given his connection to the space, Amanda thought, 'Well, if he's going to be anywhere...' and decided to test that theory with an EVP session in the basement.

"That's something that I had never done prior," she says, "and I really haven't done since because I feel like it is a slippery slope. You can become obsessed with this, and it can become unhealthy."

Amanda hit the record button on her device and among her questions asked, 'Are you okay? I just have to know that you're okay.'

At the end of the evening, a family friend came up to Amanda and her mother and asked to show them something. 'I don't want to upset you,' she warned, but the pair asked to see what the friend had.

A photo, taken in the basement in the exact same spot where Amanda took her EVP.

"It is freakish," she says. "It's almost a carbon copy of a family photo that we have in one of our family photo albums of the first day of school when he was about 11 years old. You can see his long, shaggy brown hair. You can see his green T-shirt, his backpack, his jawline. It's uncanny."

A few days later when she listened to the EVP recording, there was Jed again. But this time, it was his voice, clear as day, echoing off the basement walls saying just two words to her:

'I'm fine.'

TURNING PAIN INTO PASSION

Those experiences could have taken Amanda to a place where she was constantly trying to connect with her brother. In the first few years following his death, she says things were happening that caught her attention—so frequently, in fact, that she started keeping a journal. But then they started to fizzle out.

"I feel like Jed knew what I needed when I needed it," she says. "He provided in the organic situations, not the paid psychics or the ghost hunts, and now that I'm okay, he's kind of backed off and let me do my own thing. Occasionally things will happen. I don't feel the need to pursue him because every so often he'll pop in, and it just puts a smile on my face."

Much like giving her the moments of connection she needed to grieve and process, Jed also gave Amanda a new creative outlet: exploring haunted locations.

SPOOKEATS

It's a passion that has turned into an impressive online presence. In June 2018, Amanda launched spookeats.com, a site dedicated to exploring haunted hospitality. Her goal was to give the everyday person access to hotels, restaurants, and bars around the world they could visit without having a TV show or tons of money to rent out the place. Her favorite spot?

"Best food, hands down, is the Old Canal Inn in Nutley, New Jersey," she says. "They are home to the death seat—a bar stool that has killed three or four people [from heart attacks]. You can't sit in it anymore. The floor is sticky from decades of beer not being cleaned up, and I say that with all the love in my heart. I absolutely love the place. I love the owners. I think they're doing it right—they're telling the story and doing it in a respectful way but also in a kitschy fun way because it's ridiculous four people died of a heart attack on a bar stool."

THE FEMININE MACABRE

Spookeats.com parlayed itself into a series of books featuring haunted hot spots in western New York and then across the United States. When the pandemic put a halt to travel, Amanda shifted her attention to another passion: making sure the voices of women and non-binary people in the paranormal space are heard.

"I was doing a show, and we were talking about historical women in the paranormal. I very quickly realized nobody had any idea who we were talking about," she says. "I started thinking, 'Well, if you ask a random person to name your favorite ghost hunters, I can guarantee you they would almost all be men.' They could name off men off the top of their head very easily, whereas if you were trying to name women in the field, they would struggle."

It was a surprising realization, given that women outnumber men at any paranormal event Amanda attends, and

while she says she didn't know how to make a TV show to gain notoriety for female investigators, she did know how to put together books.

In March 2021, she published the first volume of "The Feminine Macabre" as a place for women and nonbinary writers to share stories, research, experiences, and more in essay format. As of 2023, there are five volumes total with a sixth on the way in 2024. (Submissions open Sept. 1.) All published volumes are available on Amazon.

MUSEUM OF MEMENTO MORI

Amanda's most recent book, "The Art of Grieving: The Beauty Behind Victorian Mourning Customs", has added yet another passion project to her roster. Following Jed's passing, Amanda found herself drawn to not just learning more about Victorian customs but also collecting mourning artifacts. Her collection of nearly 100 items has turned into The Traveling Museum of Memento Mori, and she began doing pop-up appearances by request in 2023.

"I have post-mortem photos. I have

hair artwork, hair jewelry, funeral cards, coffin plates—all these different things—and working on this book was very therapeutic for me to kind of focus on how grief is a fundamental human emotion," Amanda says. "It's something that literally every single person on the planet has experienced and has survived. No matter how deep in the trenches you are in your grief, you are going to manage to work your way through it and find those coping mechanisms."

A GHOSTLY EXPLANATION

With her love for the paranormal and teaching others about it, you might wonder if Amanda ever backtracked to the night of her first experience to figure out what—and who—she saw.

The answer is yes: in her early 20s, Amanda's parents shared more details with her about what may have happened that night. It turns out the original owner was an older woman, and she passed away in the house prior to Amanda's family moving in.

And her bedroom? It was the same room as Amanda's. 🕯️

READING LIST

Wondering where to start with Amanda's books? There is a lot to explore! Here are my top five recommendations:

1. "America's Haunted Breweries, Distilleries, and Wineries"
2. "The Feminine Macabre: Volume IV"
3. "Harlots & Hauntings"
4. "The Teen's Guide to Ghost Hunting"
5. "The Art of Grieving: The Beauty Behind Victorian Mourning Customs"



LISTEN TO THE INTERVIEW

Want to hear more from Amanda? Listen to our full interview with her on my new podcast, *By Pumpkin's Light*.

