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Linda Perez

Ghost Stories and Beliefs of the Hispanic Community

Dr. Tim Evans

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Ghosts and stories of the supernatural have intrigued people of all cultures from all over the world for centuries. I chose to focus on ghosts and stories of the supernatural from Chiapas Mexico and Guatemala. The first part of the paper will focus around research while the second part will focus on four separate interviews. I recorded an interview with Hector Natareno. I collected written interviews with Orbelin Perez, Reyes Ovando, and Esau Jiminez and will share a short personal narrative of each and their stories. These stories were told in Spanish by Hector Natareno, Esau Jiminez, and Reyes Ovando. My husband Orbelin Perez translated these stories to me in English as well as telling me his own stories in English. I paraphrased the stories since the subjects had a hard time keeping their stories in an ordered sequence.

I asked each one the interviewees what they thought a ghost was. They all told me that they felt a ghost was a spirit who returned to the earth because they could not pass over into the other world. "The Spanish colonists of the sixteenth century called the other-worldly spirits that return, "Almas que andan penando, (souls in search of peace)" (Aragon:2). They also agreed that ghosts are lost souls searching for peace that they can not find. That is why they return to our world and haunt places and people.

After conducting the interviews I found that one ghost story, La Llorona, is commonly known by most Hispanic people while the rest are specifically related to their certain regions. "As customs and traditions vary from village to village or from one region to the next, so do there versions of La Llorona and her plight as she searches in vain for her lost children," (Kraul & Beatty: xi). Three different

versions of La Llorona are told throughout this paper. "The La Llorona story appears in many forms, and villages through the Spanish - speaking world claim the La Llorona legend as their own," (Vigil:11). "La Llorona is a supernatural being whose mournful wailing is said to foretell death," (Aragon: 4).

The La Chuza "literally a barn owl, (West: 75) also plays an important part in Hispanic Folktales throughout Latin America and America. The La Lechuza is usually depicted as a witch who has changed from a human into an animal. The La Lechuza is seen as bad omen that people are afraid of. There are many different stories that the La Chuza plays an important role in. One example of this is the story by Hector Natareno told later in this paper. Many other examples can be found in various books but only a few are listed here such as *Cuentos*, *Tales from the Hispanic Southwest* by Jose Griego y Maestras, and *Mexican Ghost Tales of the Southwest* by Alfred Avila.

Tales of the supernatural and ghosts as told by the Hispanic people are usually told as true experiences that happened to them or someone they know. Hector Natareno, Orbelin Perez, and Reyes Ovando share stories that are told as true experiences that happened to them while Esau Jiminez shares a story he was told by his grandmother on the history of ghosts.



Hector Natareno

Linda Perez

Interview One

The first interview that I conducted was on October 13th, 2007 on Spring Street in Russellville Kentucky at the home of Victoria (a.k.a Vicky) Perez. I interviewed Vicky's father in law, 42 year old Hector Natareno. He was born on Enero quince, (January 15th), 1963. He is from Sector La Delisias Guatemala. He has two sons. He is of the Protestant faith. He does believe in the supernatural and thinks religion does not play a role in his beliefs. He tells his stories because they are real and only when he is asked.

The first story is a legend about a woodsman also called Dueno del monte

told to Hector by his dad. They believe the woodsman owns the forest and the animals and that he does not like anyone to mess with his animals. They believe that if you hunt the animals and use your own dogs to hunt with the dogs will disappear. It is believed the woodsman takes the dogs to keep them safe. Hector's and his friend had a personal encounter with the woodsman about ten years ago. Hector and his friend were hunting in the woods when they saw a man dressed in green. His friend told him it was the woodsman. They were both very scared. It is believed that if you see the woodsman and want to talk to him, you have to be very strong and courageous, if you are not then you will go crazy, get sick, or die. A lot of people have seen the woodsman riding his mule. A few months after this incident Hector's friend got sick and died. Hector believed he died because he was not as strong as he should have been when they talked to the woodsman. Hector thinks he was strong because nothing has happened to him.

The second story is about La Llorona. He was told this story every time he was bad as a child while he was growing up. La Llorona would show up where he used to live about midnight every night and she would scream and cry very loud scaring everyone as she would began to play soccer by herself. La Llorona was believed to have murdered her own children. She is able to come back and duplicate herself into any human form. Hector believes that she can not hurt anyone physically but that she comes back and hurts them by duplicating herself as a boyfriend or girlfriend and making the other think she is their boyfriend or girlfriend and lets the opposite one catch her, causing them to

break up for revenge since she was left by her children's father. He believes she exists everywhere. He has not seen her in America but he has seen and heard her while he was in Guatemala during a full moon which resembles the versions of "*La Llorona Of The Moon*" by Alfred Avila. This is a story when La Llorona is permitted only to leave the riverside during the full moon to go get adults or children who are promiscuous and bad.

The third story Hector shared with me is a true story about the La Lechuza (owl) which is most commonly associated with "Brujas (witches) or brujos (sorcerers)," (Roeder: 318). He is not sure if he believes in the La Lechuza or not but he does get scared when he sees one come near his home. He gets afraid because his great grandmother (abuela) was sick and dying while he was there with her when he said around five in the evening a La Lechuza flew into the house and started singing, staying around thirty minutes until he and his family chased it away. He and his family believe that when the La Lechuza does this it means that his grandmother was passing into the next world and around two in the morning she passed away. He believes the La Lechuza had something to do with her death.



Reyes Ovando Herrera (brother-in-law)

Interview Two

The second interview that I conducted took place in my home in Bowling Green, Kentucky on November 4th, 2007 at 7:30 p.m. with Reyes Ovando Herrera, my brother in law (cunado) who was born in Kiringuycharo, Chiapas Mexico on Decembre treinta, (December 30th) 1982. He has been in the United States for about five years. He has three brothers and three sisters. His religious faith is Seven Day Adventist although is not practicing his faith at the present time. He does believe in the supernatural and ghosts. He shared several stories with me that he believes to be true or have happened to him personally.

On December 25th when Reyes was seven years old and living with his grandfather, he saw his first ghost. They lived by a little river in Chiapas Mexico where a tree stood that was in the shape of a ball. They would use this tree to eat and drink out of because they had no dishes. He was standing in front of this tree when he turned around and saw an apparition of himself and his brothers in front of him. The ghosts were standing approximately fifty feet away from him. He tried talking to the ghosts but they would not answer him. As he was talking to the ghosts his grandfather and brothers came out of the house to see who he was talking to when they saw the ghosts as well. The ghosts just simply disappeared after they saw them. A lot of people where he comes from believe this story because they believe the devil or something evil hid gold and money in the past at the river area so evil forces have taken over this area.

The second story Reyes shared with me is a true event that took place also when he was seven years old. He called it the Dirty River Ghost. He called the story this because everyone in the town would dump their trash into the river because it ran very fast and would quickly wash away all the trash they put in it. Reyes went alone down to the river to dump the trash. There was a coconut tree by the river. He saw someone cutting coconuts from the tree. The person was using a stick (luco) to cut the coconuts. When he saw this his mind changed and he started hallucinating. He looked at the river and saw the ocean instead of the river. He said at this point he shook his head and walked toward the water, when he looked up again there was no ocean there, only the tree and the river. He was the only person to ever see this. He saw these five or six

times. He believes he saw this because it was a warning to let him know something was going to happen. Not long after he would see these visions it would rain so much that the river would flood the whole town and destroy his neighbor's homes but it never bothered his grandparent's house where he lived.

The third story he shared with me was about La Llorona. His grandmother told him the story of La Llorona. He was eleven years old the first time she told him the story. He was talking with his grandma about his past experiences with ghosts when she told him the story of La Llorona. His grandparents went to Chiapas in search of land. They found some land and founded a small village they named Ursulo Garban. There were only a few residents of town when this event took place. Reyes was not yet born. Every evening around six when his grandparents were still young they would hear La Llorona crying. The crying would start out really low sounding and as it got closer it would get louder and louder. When the towns people would hear her cry they would always run in their casas (houses), shut the doors and not come out till morning. His grandmother, Antonia, saw La Llorona wearing a white dress. She saw her come to the town and stop and sit on the fence like walls of the houses. As La Llorona left she would start crying again. La Llorona would leave the town and return several times in the same night doing exactly the same thing. This would last until nine or ten at night. He says that his grandmother never knew why she was crying.

Ghosts can come in human or animal form. "Ghosts, or spirits, are the souls of dead individuals- human or animal- that continue to have a separate

existence," (West: 77). In this next interview Orbelin Perez shares stories of both human and animal spirits.



Orbelin Perez-Garcia (my husband)

Interview Three

The next interview was conducted on November 25th, 2007 at 7:00 p.m. in my home at 1306 Spring Valley Drive Bowling Green, KY. I interviewed my husband, a native Zoque Indian, 30 year old Orbelin Perez. He came from a family of 12. He has nine brothers and sisters. He was born on Abril venticinco, (April 25th) 1977 in Chiapas Mexico. He came to America in 1996 when he was 19 years old. He came to America to work and send money back

home to his family who had relocated to Veracruz Mexico when he ten years old.

He was born Catholic. He considers himself to be religious. He does believe in the supernatural. He feels that religion does play a part in his belief of the supernatural because he thinks that something evil or ghosts are sent to harm you and kill you. He feels his belief in god (Dios) does play an important role as to protecting him against all that he has seen and heard. He tells ghost stories because he believes they are real. He tells the stories to anyone who will listen because he enjoys telling what he calls his history.

This first story is a true event that happened to Orbelin and his little sister Vicky around 1985. He was eight years old when he saw his first ghost. His father Lucio Perez had planted some corn that they watched constantly because they were trying to keep animals away from eating the corn. Orbelin and his sister Vicky had walked all day around the corn field watching the corn and they became very tired so they decided to rest in a little building they used for eating, cooking, and etc. They were eating when they heard something coming through the corn field toward the building. They got excited because they thought it was their father coming so they ran to an orange tree to see who it was, only they did not see anyone. They just stood their wondering who it was. They were scared so they started looking around to see what it was they heard. They climbed up a big rock and looked down and saw what they thought was their father walking in the coffee trees beside the corn field when the form jumped down a little hill and disappeared. They realized what they saw was not their father even though it looked just like their father wearing the same clothes and hat and carrying the

same rifle he always carried around. Afterwards they went back to the little building and stayed for a while. Then they went to a hill and climbed a fruit tree to look around the land in order to see everything. They looked at the river (Napac) and beside the river was the coffee trees and they seen what they thought were cows walking around in the trees so they went down to the where the trees were to get the cows. When they got there, no cows were anywhere to be found or any trace of cows anywhere to prove they had been there. Around three for four in the evening their dad came to get them when they told their dad they had seen him earlier that day but Lucio was shocked to hear his children tell him this. He told them that he had not been there that day at all until then. To this day Orbelin and his sister do not know or understand what they saw but Orbelin believes it was a denude (like a ghost's energy) that he saw that day because the energy forms that people see in this area can take on the form of anyone or anything. He thinks he saw the ghost of a man watching over the cattle while walking them around. Orbelin and Vicky went home. On the way home Orbelin passed the river and became violently ill and started throwing up to the point of almost dying. His grandfather, a curandero, "folk healer; someone who heals; Indian medicine man" (Roeder: 319), made him some medicine that he used for this illness all during the night. His grandfather burned garlic and pepper and started cleansing Orbelin with smoke and rituals to send away the ghost that they believed he saw and that was trying to take Orbelin's soul causing him to almost die the same night he and his sister came back from the fields. The next day after the cleansing Orbelin started getting better and

eventually got well.

The next story takes place in Blanca Rosa, Chiapas Mexico right before Orbelin was born. His mother Germana Garcia told him this story. This story is also true. Every evening at sunset near the house they were living in, black birds would come and sit in the Orange and Pimienta tree outside their house. The birds would fly back and fourth from one tree to the next. After this the family would here strange sounds in their home such as knocking on the walls and things walking around. Germana would go outside to see what was going on but whatever side of the house she would go to she would hear the sounds on the opposite side of the house. They never saw anything outside or inside. His mama believes it was an evil spirit in animal form putting a curse on the house they lived in because afterwards his six year old sister, Maria Flore, stepped on what they believed to be a sacred place behind the house and fell down not being able to get up. She screamed and screamed until her mother came and picked her up. They checked her out and found nothing wrong with her even though Maria Flore kept saying she hurt in her feet and could not move them. She became really sick afterwards, being sick for about three years. His family or the doctor never figured out what was wrong with her. She got well after three years and stayed well for another three years. At the end of the three years she got sick again. Orbelin remembers her being sick since he was born during her well period before the sickness returned. She remained sick for six months until Henardo Gonzales, a family friend, told them he knew a curandera by the name of Marina that could heal Maria Flore. She lived in Cuapilla,

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Chiapas. They took her to the curandera, "a woman folk healer who heals," (Roeder: 319), and she helped his sister get well. Maria Flore stayed with the curandera for six months and then came home but still she had to go back twice a month for regular cleansings. The family asked her why their daughter was sick and the curandera told them that there was something evil in their house trying to take Maria Flore's soul. She told them they needed to leave the house or the evil would kill her. The curandera said she could fix their problem by performing an exorcism on their home. This was going to cost a lot of money that the family did not have so they decided as Maria Flore got well again to pack up and move the family to Veracruz Mexico. Maria Flore stayed well for several years until she was 21 years old, when she finally died from the mysterious illness. The family believes it was because someone had put a curse on them and they were not able to go back and continue the cleansings at least once a year for Maria Flore since they had moved so far away. After this Orbelin's older brother, Sanroque, who was perfectly healthy went back to the same place in Chiapas and never made it back home because he died mysteriously while he was there even though he was only 19 years old. The family feels the evil spirits took his soul as well.

The third story takes place at a ranch owned by Orbelin's uncle in Mexico called Elias. He was 12 years old when he decided to leave his home and go to his uncle's ranch. He lived there about five months. His uncle sent Orbelin alone to care for Elias, his ranch, because he lived in the city. It was about eight at night when Orbelin was in the bed and saw a lot of black birds fly into the

house. They were flying around the ceiling. They flew very close to his face. He was so afraid he was shaking. He grabbed his aunt's bible and started reading a chapter from Solomon. He kept reading the whole time the birds kept flying around the ceiling. He put his head down and was reading and concentrating on the bible and when he looked up the birds had disappeared. He finally went to sleep after this. The next morning around six he awoke and the birds were outside the house so he decided to go outside and they followed him every where he went. He tried to go to the next house where his friend, Santiago lived but he did not make it because the birds were after him. He ran back in the house and grabbed the bible and started reading again for about one hour until the birds left him alone. The next day his aunt came and he told her what happened. She told him that she believed there something evil at the ranch because she had three or four dogs that had already disappeared. He believes whatever was there was trying to kill him and take his soul. He feels that if he did not read the bible the birds would have taken him. He believes god saved him from the evil trying to take his soul. He stayed on at the ranch for another week and then he left because he felt if he stayed the evil would come back and take him.

The fourth story is about Orbelin's nightmares. He believes his nightmares warn him of bad things that are to come in the future. He believes while he is asleep he sees things. He sees black dogs, cats, and various other animals come to him in his sleep. They come and lay down on his chest causing him not to be able to breathe or move. The animals put him in a state of

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paralysis. This relates to the old hag experience that folklorists are familiar with. He does his best to get up. He prays while he is sleeping during his nightmare and he says that while he is praying the animals mock him. He finally gains enough energy and jerks awake. He gets up and immediately starts praying. He believes if he does not pray after he wakes they will come back to him again when he goes back to sleep. He prays and goes back to sleep and they leave him alone. The bad things that have happened to him after these dreams include someone in his family or himself getting really sick, getting in trouble, or being hurt. He says you never know what is going to happen but whatever it is it will be something bad.

The fifth story is about La Llorona. He was told the story of La Llorona when he was a child. She was the ghost of a lady that would come out at night and everyone could hear her crying. The crying would start out really low sounding but it would keep getting closer and louder. His mom told him that if he did not go to sleep she would come in and take him away because she had killed her own children, but if he went to sleep she would take him. Orbelin grew up hearing that if he was bad or did not go to sleep the old ugly lady would come and take him. This story is used to make children scared and to make them do what they are told. It is used to set examples that if children do not listen to what they are told then bad things will happen to them. Now that he is grown up he tells our children that they better behave and go to sleep or La Llorona will come and get them. They do get scared and they do what they are told. "The legend of La Llorona was and is often used to frighten children into proper

behavior," (Vigil: 12).



Esau Jimenez Villarreal (my husband's
cousin)

Interview Four

The next interview took place on November 26th, 2007 at 6:00p.m. I interviewed a native Zoque Indian, 17 year old Esau Jimenez Villarreal from Chiapas Mexico. He was born on Julio dies y siete, (June 17th), 1989. He came to the United States on October (Octubre) 20, 2006. He lived in Phoenix Arizona until July 2007 at which time he came to Kentucky. He is Orbelin Perez's cousin (primo). He is not religious. He does not believe in ghosts and thinks they are a part of the imagination. His mom, grandma, and uncle used to tell him ghost stories while he was growing up. He tells the stories when asked by someone.

He says ghosts can be real but can not hurt you. The ghost story that Esau wanted to share is one that his uncle (Tio) Feliciano Villarreal Morales told him as a child. It explains the history of why people are afraid of ghosts.

In 1827 the people that discovered ghosts (fantasmas) was a family of ten people who lived together. The family was really poor. They separated into two groups because many ghosts were taking over the town Mistla Joya and some of the people of the town were practicing witchcraft. Ghosts started terrifying the people and bad things started happening to the people in the town. Both groups of people started walking in the desert and mountains till they found a cave in which they decided to live. After a year had passed the same ghosts came to the people at the cave and started terrifying them again. The ghosts followed the people wherever they went. The people were very afraid so they left the cave and went back to Mistla Joya. The two groups of family that had separated came back together at the town. They started adapting and living their lives with the ghosts. They were scared but realized that the ghosts would not hurt them. The people lived with the ghosts for five years. The people started trusting the ghosts and were not afraid anymore. Some people of the town who were not of this family started practicing witchcraft. They started harming other grown people and children in the town by making them sick and die. They even started harming their own families. The family of ten people started thinking that the ghosts and the witchcraft were related because a lot of people were sacrificing their families and animals by burning them alive. This was done because the evil people thought that it was not right to not be afraid of the ghosts as the family

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that had learned to accept the ghosts. They wanted the town to remain afraid of the ghosts and it is believed that this is why some townspeople started practicing witchcraft. They believe this is the reason why most of the world is afraid of ghosts today.

Tales of the supernatural and ghosts come abundantly in many different places and cultures. They vary from place to place and person to person. It can be seen that La Llorona and the La Lechuza is a very important part of the Hispanic culture throughout Latin America and America. "For those who might ask which story of La Llorona is true, the answer she might offer is this: Whatever your reality is, that is what I am; it is for you, the reader, to decide," (Kraul & Beatty: xii). "As is said in her own tongue, "Cada cabeza es un mundo - Each head is its own world," (Kraul & Beatty: xii).

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