

I Want to Believe

By Josh Sanofsky

I want to believe. Whenever I see that poster on Fox Mulder's wall in *The X-Files*, I think - "Hey, that should be on my wall." Sooner or later I'll get around to buying one and putting it up.

Because that's precisely how I feel these days. I want to believe.

As paranormal researchers, we don't have the luxury of swallowing every story hook, line and sinker. We need to apply a certain amount of skepticism and critical thinking, otherwise we run the (very real) risk of looking silly and losing credibility. And most of us have to struggle with credibility just because of what we're researching.

But I can't help feeling that in the process of applying those critical thinking skills and skepticism, I may have lost something, too. Am I being a skeptic, or a cynic?

When I was a child, the world was a magical place. I believed every story I read about ghosts and boogymen with all my heart. I was positive that all of these things were real, lurking in the darkness just past my line of sight. Of course there was a monster living under my bed, and another in the closet. That was simply a fact of life. Ghosts were things that people saw every day, the spiritual leaders of various religions battled the forces of darkness in a literal way, and somewhere people were learning to kill using nothing but their minds. Dragons, unicorns, gryphons and every manner of fantastic creature were all real.

But as I grew up, reality began to set in. There were no monsters under the bed or in the closet, ghosts - if they existed at all - were not a common thing, the battle against the 'forces of darkness' was not waged every day on visible battlefields, and psychic abilities were less *X-Men* and more suspect than supernatural.

Some of that, to be sure, was simply growing awareness of the world around me. Some of it was what I was learning in school and the insistence of elementary and high school science teachers that such things simply weren't real, they were just stories. Critical thinking and skepticism were more important than being willing to believe.

The magic faded, but I clung to it. Surely it was still out there, waiting to be found by

people interested enough and tenacious enough to seek it out.

As I've gotten older, skepticism has slowly faded into cynicism. The paranormal field is positively overflowing with phony psychics, bogus reports of ghosts and demons, and faked photos and videos claiming to be real evidence. Where once my first instinct was to say "Yes, that must be real!", I now have a tendency to immediately discredit and even laugh at most of the 'evidence' that crosses my desktop.

For example, I just finished reading one of Jason Hawes and Grant Wilson's collections of ghost hunting stories. When I was little, I would have accepted every story without question. Even a few years ago I would have been prepared to believe most of the stories. Today, I find it hard to take even the most believable of them at face value.

On one hand, I'm pleased that I no longer swallow every tall tale whole. But underneath that pleasure and satisfaction, there's something a little bit bitter: a fear that I've irrevocably lost something special. That the magic is gone.

But the magic isn't quite gone yet. I refuse to let myself stop believing entirely, because without a little magic, the world would be a much greyer and less exciting place for me. I've had personal experiences that I can't explain away, and that keep their foot in the proverbial door to make sure it doesn't close all the way.

Because I still want to believe.

They're important words, "I want to believe." They have the right balance between open-minded willingness to see what's still hiding in the darkness, and cautious skepticism. That balance is a vital thing for anyone who does research into any part of the paranormal field. Keep your eyes open, apply those critical thinking skills, and question everything. But be open to the possibilities and never completely rule out even the most wild of theories.

After all, that shadow on the other side of the bedroom at night is certainly just a t-shirt hanging over the arm of the treadmill and being moved by the fan.

But maybe...just maybe...