

# Ghosts of the Queen Mary, Gram Parsons & Room 307



**Story:** Gary Koz Mraz **Photos:** Ron Sinoy/ Mraz

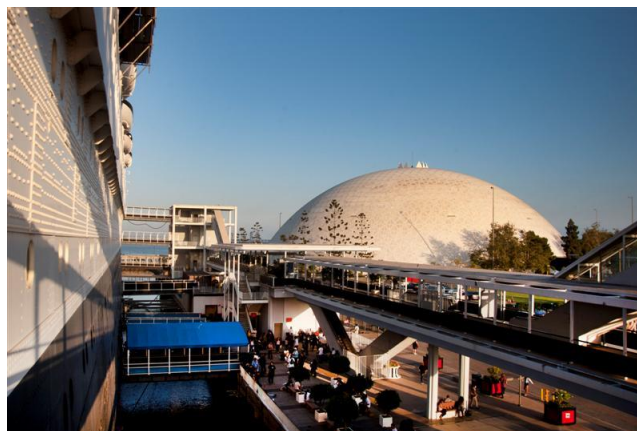
Ghosts are all around us. We humans have limited perception bandwidth of sight and sound and whether real or imagined, echoes of the past surround us constantly. It's scientific fact that old radio broadcasts appear every now and then because they've bounced off the moon. Imagine if you could see and hear all the TV, satellite, cell phone, infrared radiations that flow through the room you're in right now. We're designed to filter out unnecessary frequencies and that includes ghosts. Southern California has some notorious haunted locations and this Ghost Writer took a haunted motorcycle jaunt and spent the night at three of them. First, the infamous Queen Mary, then room 307 at Glen Tavern Inn, purported to be in the paranormal top ten and finally room 8 at the Joshua Tree Inn. The hotel room songwriter/musician Gram parsons of the Byrds died in.

## Ghost in the Machine



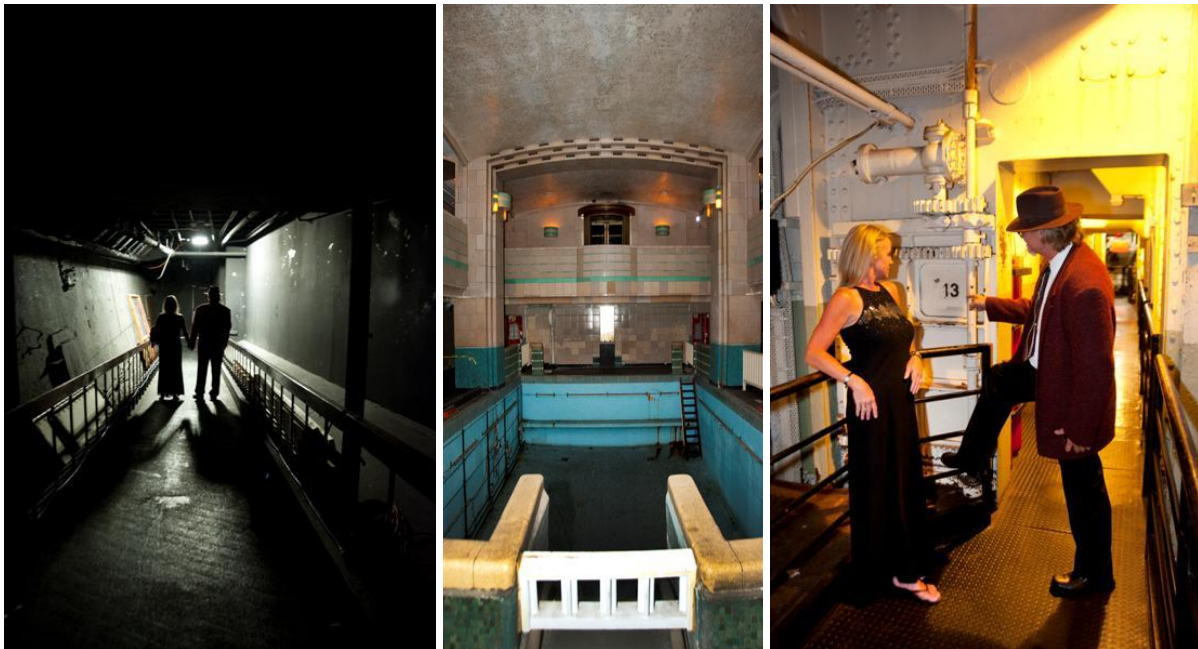
I took this vexing trek on a CVO Road Glide Custom. Each year Harley-Davidson builds special limited-edition bikes at its top secret (CVO) Custom Vehicle Operations compound. A select team is charged with creating the brand's most elite motorcycles. The distinctive Shark Nosed twin-headlight is unique to Road Glide as is the fixed fairing which is mounted to the frame instead of the forks. The frame takes the load off the fairing resulting in a nimbler, more aggressive riding motorcycle. My Maple Metallic with Vivid Black & Real Smoke Graphics looks ominously dark in daylight and black a night. A bold Willie G brushed nickel skull medallion on the faring peers into my impending fate and is the perfect mount for a haunted jaunt.

## The Grey Ghost



First stop was the Queen Mary with its long history of paranormal haunting. Her maiden voyage was in 1939 and considered the most luxurious form of travel for decades. As a troop carrier in WW II was aptly named “Grey Ghost” and carried over 800,000 service personnel to and from Europe, my father was one of them. Her orders were full steam ahead as she zigzagged the Atlantic to avoid German torpedoes.

While on mission she broadsided another ship cutting it in half and was forced to leave 300 survivors behind to be eaten by sharks or drowned. It is reported that the mysterious pounding often heard on her hull are ghosts of those men trying to come aboard. An exterior walkway allows visitors to view the massive propellers that chewed up men in that horrific accident. There are in fact so many reports of ghosts that special tours for psychics and paranormal investigators are offered. Mike, QM security brought us into the bowels of the ship to visit paranormal hot spots. Yes, he's heard things, strange things like the laugh of Jackie echoing in the pool where it's said a child drowned. And the notorious engine room where John Potter was crushed by massive steel door 13. The spirit of John Potter frequently manifests throughout the Queen Mary and is said to prefer attractive females.



We dined at Sir Winston's; named after Sir Winston Churchill and report the food was outstanding. In fact, the seared Ahi with sesame crust, spinach, shitake mushrooms, and roasted potatoes in a mushroom ginger broth ranked as best seared Ahi I've eaten to date. Everything was exceptional from the raisin walnut bread to the service. Sir Winstons offers a fantastic view and everyone is welcome aboard to dine, parking is validated. We capped off the evening with cocktails and dancing at the fabulous art deco Observation Bar. An entertaining swing band played into the night against the backdrop of the city skyline.

I even tickled the ivories on the boat's original piano in the main lobby and channeled the spirit of Liberace who once played it, rather well I may add, patrons bought me drinks.



*You probably won't be wearing period 1940's evening wear on your ride but the opportunity to change from Clark Kent into Bikerman was just too compelling.*

## **A Panting Potter**

Sleeping quarters are very comfortable, circa 1939 totally immersing one in the ambiance of a bygone era. In the dark of morning dawn my girlfriend swears she heard breathing in our room and every time she pointed that out, it stopped. My take it was a guest next door through the paper-thin cabin walls but to this day she believes it the ghost of John Potter. All in all, staying aboard the Queen Mary is a truly unique experience and well worth a daytime visit, romantic dinner and dancing or a full on haunted overnight adventure.



*Events at the QM range from Art Deco festivals to the Calendar Motorcycle Show. During our stay the Long Beach Roller Derby had a bout in the adjacent Geodesic Dome.*

## **Glen Tavern Inn: Santa Paula**

The next morning, we rode north from Long Beach to Santa Paula's Glen Tavern Inn, rumored the most haunted structure in Ventura. It's only 100 miles but we took the scenic route up PCH to Hwy 23. These 36 miles stretch to Fillmore on 23 turns you through sinewy twisties in Malibu, the long languid desert terrain of Simi Valley and sweeping foothills of Fillmore. It will take 2 hours to traverse but well worth the ride.

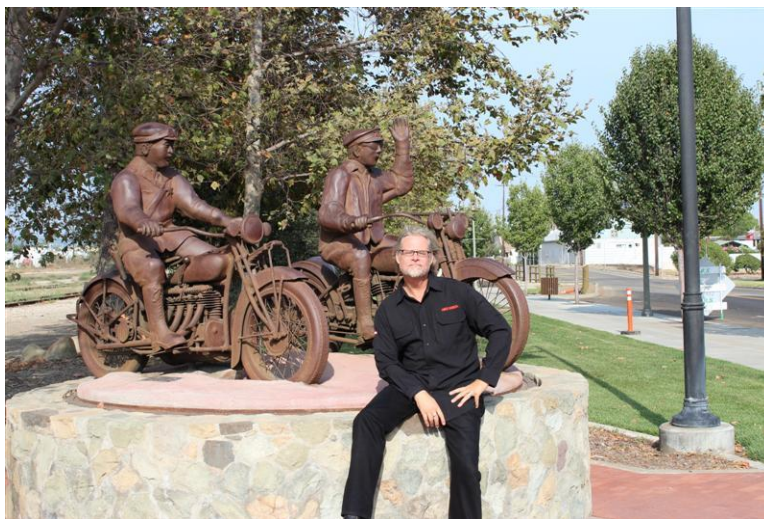


## Devil Be Damned



The Glen Tavern Inn is a Tudor-style hotel built in 1911 and numerous guests have reported odd manifestations in their rooms late at night. At least 50% of the hotel staff has encountered one of the several phantoms that wander the Inn. The history of decapitated prostitutes and crooked card dealer's shot to death in the 1920s during the infamous 3rd floor poker games haunt these hallways. It's purported the piano in the lobby often played itself and there have been sightings of shadowy figures looking out room 23. Author, clairvoyant, Heather Woodward states room 307 has had more than one person murdered there and writes about a blonde prostitute who was decapitated for unknown reasons, her corpse deposited via a dumbwaiter used to smuggle liquor upstairs during Prohibition. Guests have recounted hearing scratching sounds emanating from the closet and knocking on the door, as well as seeing impressions on the bed spread. Quite honestly, the room felt pretty creepy and after the door closed by itself with a classic horror movie eerie squeak we made every excuse to leave and walked the town.

## Paul Revere Rode a Harley



Down town Santa Paula has an amazing statue dedicated to two motor officers who became known as the Paul Reveres of Santa Paula based on their heroic midnight ride. The monument called (*The Warning*, sculpted by Eric Richards) was erected in 2003 to mark their heroic ride. Motor Officers Thornton Edwards (on the Indian) and Stanley Baker (on the Harley) were on duty the evening of March 12, 1928, when the recently completed St. Francis Dam, 36 miles upstream in Santa Clarita collapsed. Killing an estimated 470 people to this day is still the second worst disaster in California history. The collapse released 52 billion gallons of water that headed directly towards Santa Paula. The Police Department learned of the impending danger shortly after the dam broke and Thornton and Baker spent the next 3 hours riding their motorcycles throughout Santa Paula, notifying residents and evacuating the town. As a result of these two officers' actions, the residents of Santa Paula were successfully evacuated and few died that night.



Back at the Inn we had dined at Enzos inside Glen Tavern and must say this is some gouda Italian food. A glass of Valley of the Moon Chardonnay and their lightly toasted sourdough with rosemary bread hinted at what was to come. My roasted eggplant served with succulent home made marinara on a bed of al dente noodles was excellent. Dessert was a creamy panna cotta with a light raspberry sauce to die for.

## **Bloody Mary**

Finally, we had no choice but to retire to the close quarters of room 307 (I had a martini at the lounge and brought a fresh one to the room). We decided to shake (not stir) the spirits with a séance in the unusually large closet and call forth the dead. It did not take long until we felt like children and decided to act like adults, take the candles into the Jacuzzi tub in the bathroom *which* I might add fits two and is well worth a night in room 307 alone.



After a good night's sleep in a very comfortable bed my girl friend asked why was there blood on the white sheets on my side of the bed and sure enough, there were multiple red droplets, fresh, because they stained me. No, it wasn't her time of month No, hadn't cut myself in a drunken stupor. Had the decapitated prostitute been in my bed? I was pretty freaked out. Yes, I took photos and we eventually wrote it off as flower petals we had picked in the garden the day prior, an anemic explanation. I felt compelled to apologize to the hotel manager but she smiled and said no worries...its 307. I suggest you spend a night in 307.

### **Final Destination III**

We opted to ride the backside of the San Gabriel's from Santa Paula to our final destination in Joshua Tree. Hwy 14 to Hwy 18 through Apple Valley is beautiful 200-mile ride through an arid desert. Harley ditched the trunk on this Road Glide Custom CVO in favor for a streamlined look. The saddlebags have ample space for weekend trips but for distance touring a color matched Tour-Pak trunk is available. The stitched seat is acceptable but the passenger pillion leaves a little to be desired for 200-mile treks (so girlfriend says). Road Glide wears minimal chrome. Instead, this CVO has many parts sprayed black for a darker look and even the clutch and brake lines are braided-black stainless steel. Sporting exclusive 19-inch front and 18-inch rear "Agitator" rims, Anti-lock Braking System (ABS) and cruise control. CVO gave the Road Glide a powerful 200-watt Harmon-Kardon stereo system with six speakers. Very audible at 85mph and every one of these bikes comes loaded with its own 8 GB iPod that plugs into a holder located in one of the saddlebags. We rocked the Best of the Byrds to Joshua Tree.



## High Desert Phantoms



Our final hotel on this Ghost Writers haunted jaunt was The Joshua Tree Inn. Room 8 is where Gram Parson (The Byrds music group) died. It's a really bizarre true story made into a movie called Grand Theft Parsons. Parsons had made a pact with his manager Phil Kaufman that whoever died first the survivor would cremate the other in Joshua Tree. When Phil learned of the plan to bury his friend in New Orleans Kaufman, honoring his vow commandeered a wildly painted hippy hearse and wearing cowboy boots, cowboy hat, and Levi jacket with "Sin City" stitched on the back headed to Van Nuys airport. Kaufman somehow persuaded an airline employee that the Parsons family had changed its plans and wanted to ship the body privately on a chartered flight, they loaded the casket, he loaded up with beer and Jack Daniels and drove to Joshua Tree. The stone that marked the desert cremation has been relocated in front of room 8.

Upon entering room 8 I froze in astonishment and blurted "My God" as a chill went up my spine. My girlfriend and the hotel manager stared at me in shock as if I'd seen a ghost...I had.



It turns out that an original framed art print next to the bathroom and the hotel room mirror are only the two original artifacts in the room. The print, by unknown artist Dick Swift, was the image that Gram saw while laying in bed during his two day stay in this room. I have had the exact SAME print for 30 years in my bedroom and see it every night.

What are the freakin odds of that! Especially since only 50 were printed in 1963, it felt like seeing a ghost. I came to learn Dick Swift 1918-2010 lived in my hood, Long Beach all his life and his artwork is available online.



We settled in with a bottle of Jack and watched Grand Theft Parsons, a must during your visit. Legend has it that burning candles while looking into the circular mirror and calling out Grams name evokes his spirit. I couldn't keep my eyes off David and Bathsheba but I can guarantee that after enough Jack Daniels spirits *will* appear.

The room is filled with all things Parsons and respectful visitors have left behind picks to drumsticks. A gold cowboy hat donated by a famous artist hangs over the mirror. On the relocated shrine right outside room 8 are artifacts honoring Grams musical contributions. A thick guestbook inside the room chronicles visitor's thoughts and experiences over the years and is full of fascinating prose, poetry and art. A reoccurring theme is a knocking sound in the dead of night, with no one to be found. That evening we experienced an amazing double rainbow accompanied by a spectacular sunset, Thanks Gram.



Waking to a searing desert hangover a massive double veggie omelet breakfast at the Route 62 Diner was the cure. It's a cool 50's style diner replete with Seeburgs at every booth and motorcycle memorabilia fills the walls.

## Hey Mr. Spaceman

Homeward bound we visited a bizarre structure called the Integratron built by Dr George Van Tassel. He was one of the leaders in the UFO movement of the 1950's and held annual "Spacecraft Conventions" at Giant Rock for 25 years. He built the Integratron, a 38-foot high, 55-foot diameter, all wood structure originally designed as a rejuvenation and time machine but it was never actually turned on, George died before it was finished and his original plans lost. Only 10 miles from Joshua Tree Parsons, an avid motorcyclist, would have surely visited this mysterious place many times. Perhaps inspiration for the Byrds hit song Mr. Spaceman.



## Angels or Demons

Ultimately the Harley Davidson Road Glide Custom CVO possesses unique attributes that must be experienced to appreciate. And are the spirits of John Potter, beheaded prostitutes and Gram Parsons still traipsing about taking tickets from an endless procession of amateur ghost hunters? Unequivocally yes, whether it's the energy of believers' laser focused on a specific location or lingering remnants

of lost souls, these haunted hotels also possess very unique attributes that must be experienced to appreciate. Sleep well.

