



## Souls, Sighs and Spirit Guides

Exploring the world of Woodbury's New Age publisher, Llewellyn Worldwide.

WHEN IT COMES TO THE SPIRIT-WORLD, a believer I am not. This in spite of the fact that stuff routinely falls off my bathroom shelves for no reason. And I did see something once at the bottom of the stairs that almost resembled ectoplasm (!). But if you asked me point-blank if I believe in ghosts I would have to say, firmly, "No."

So why am I still drawn to haunted houses, witches, extra-terrestrials and all that jazz? I don't know the answer, but I suspect the folks at Llewellyn do, which is why their books and products continue to fascinate. The Woodbury publisher's best-seller list offers titles like *Magical Housekeeping* (and who couldn't use some of that?) and metaphysical books like *Destiny of Souls*.

Llewellyn was founded by Portland, Ore., astrologer Llewellyn George in 1901, moved to Los Angeles for several decades, and then was purchased in the early 1960s by Carl Weschcke, who brought the company to

St. Paul, and finally to Woodbury in 2005. Weschcke had always been interested in things occult and helped create the "Principles of Wiccan Belief," a set of 13 shared beliefs for witches adopted at a Wiccan conference in 1974. As the Age of Aquarius ripened into the New Age, more practitioners of new/old religions like Wicca and paganism began surfacing, and Llewellyn grew to meet their needs.

Around this time, Llewellyn also published the *Golden Dawn* series, now famous for its explanations of rituals and occult practices like tarot and astral travel. Today, Llewellyn's books and products encompass alternative health and healing, occult philosophy, paranormal phenomena, Earth-based religions, astrology, tarot and more. Who are Llewellyn's writers? "We look for authors that have actually experienced these things," says Gabe Weschcke, vice president.

While there's no such thing as a typical customer,

Weschcke believes open-mindedness and curiosity are hallmarks of those who buy Llewellyn's books. "They are your friends, neighbors, family," he says. "I think the world today has changed so each of us can pick and choose what we want to explore."

One of Llewellyn's most sought-after topics explores paranormal phenomena like haunted houses. Author Annie Wilder's *House of Spirits and Whispers* chronicles the first 11 years she lived in a house called "Grand Central Station for ghosts" by a psychic channeling spectral inhabitants. At first, Wilder was terrified of incoherent voices, walls pounding and flickering lights. After investigating the source of these activities (with paranormal researchers and on her own), Wilder says she came to understand their energies and use them positively. "I actually find it quite comforting to think the spirit world can communicate with us," she says.

Wilder may be onto something. The hunger for spirits is evident not only in Llewellyn's growth but in numerous films and television shows. In fact, Llewellyn titles and posters have been seen on *Dawson's Creek*, *CSI*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and the movie *The Skeleton Key*, among others.

Recently Llewellyn put Colin Wilson's classic book *Poltergeist* back in print and will soon release *The Haunting of the Stanley Hotel* about the Colorado hotel that inspired the movie *The Shining*. You can also find books from new imprints: Midnight Ink, launched in 2005, publishes mystery fiction, and Flux, created in 2006, is fiction for young adults. Llewellyn is also branching out into e-books.

My own curiosity was piqued by two new titles out this month: *Dictionary of Demons: Names of the Damned* by Paranormal State's Michelle Belanger and *Biting Back: A No-Nonsense, No-Garlic Guide to Facing the Personal Vampires in Your Life*. Whether you're a believer or not, demon definitions and tips on facing down personal vampires just seem like something every well-stocked bookshelf should have. //