

Ghosts on Campus?

Strange noises, flickering lights, a swift movement in the bushes.

Mere coincidences or tricks of the mind?

Are there supernatural beings that reside among us? The mixture of cultures and views at JIS provides students with many distinctive ideologies that may seem foreign to some, but are, in fact, quite plausible.



One belief that is frequently questioned is that of the existence of the supernatural. Students, faculty and local staff alike have their stories to share, ranging from firsthand accounts of the haunted campus sites to the legends like those surrounding former superintendent, the late Denzel Widell.

THE MURDEROUS TREE

Mr. Tom Bartlett, drama teacher, explains:

"This is the story I told the cast at the beginning of *Once on This Island*, the musical we were doing in the Fine Arts Theater. The main character, Timoune, is challenged by the gods to choose between love and death. In the end, in the battle between love and death, she chooses love over death, so she ends up dying in the show. But she's raised up by the gods into a tree, a tree that breaks the gates that are a symbol of the separation between the two worlds of racism. Under the sheltering protection of this tree, the son of the man she loves and a young girl meet and then they bridge the gap between the two so her spirit becomes a tree.

"So the interesting thing was, we were doing it in our Fine Arts Theater where a tree once stood. A very large tree. And in Java, there is a strong animus belief that underlies Islam for many people. And one of the tenets of this spiritualism, this animism, is that some of these trees are homes to spirits: If you mess with the tree, you mess with the spirit and you could have consequences.

Legends say ghouls and demons may be lurking in our corridors.

"So the story goes that in 1979, on the very spot the stage is now, there was this tree. And to build the stage, the tree had to be cut down. But the Javanese workers would have nothing to do with it. They'd have nothing to do with it because there was a spirit in the tree, so they wouldn't cut it down. So two of the administrators, Denzel Widell, the superintendent, and Keith [Thomas], a counselor, went out one night or one afternoon and cut the tree down.

"The workers continued to build the stage. However, within no more than six months, both men were dead. One of them

[Mr. Widell], while jogging around the track, suffered a massive heart attack. [Mr. Thomas] had a heart attack [in February 1980]. Both men who cut down that tree died.

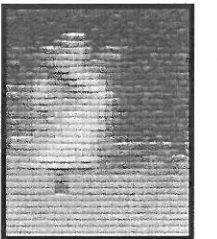
"Some speculate perhaps the spirits had their revenge. Some don't. But no one really knows."

MAY HE REST IN PEACE

Mr. Widell is also often associated with another story. Everyone has walked on that long ramp that connects the Simatupang dropoff and the New Gym to the rest of the school. While

walking up the ramp from the New Gym to the middle school science module, if you look to the left, you will see a small cemetery. The cemetery is the only area that lies between the Pondok Indah campus and the Cilandak campus that is not the property of the school.

Wanting to unite the area, Mr. Widell announced that he would uproot the cemetery and build over that area. Legend says the day he signed his consent on the contract to demolish the cemetery was the day before his tragic death. His memorial service was held Aug. 19, 1979.



POSSESSED?

According to legend, ghosts come in many forms and types, including demons, evil spirits, monsters and, of course, garden-variety ghosts. Ibu Enny, secretary to the principal, says that she had an encounter with a spirit on the school grounds.

Her story takes place a couple of years ago, between F-Module and the old G-Module, where a prayer room once stood. According to Ibu Enny, "All of a sudden, an Indonesian lady there began shouting randomly – her voice blaring across the module. I was there myself, I heard it. It was truly frightening and I know I won't forget it," she said.

All of the Indonesians present at that time could see that the woman wasn't being herself and concluded that some sort of spirit had entered her body. At one point, the lady even shrieked, "You can't fix me – don't try to fix me!" and fainted soon after.

Ibu Enny explained, "It took the Indonesian lady two hours to gain consciousness as we sat there waiting tensed and concerned. We all decided it was time to call the *dukun* [shaman] to heal her. He didn't use [any special equipment], just simply put two of his fingers on the skin of her arm, chanting a few words."

"When someone is possessed," Ibu Enny continued, "the spirit inside stops the blood flow. He had put his fingers on a specific point or area in her arm in order for the blood flow to return."

According to Ibu Enny, the lady reverted to her normal self within half an hour or so, yet didn't remember anything that had happened to her.

"I couldn't sleep for two whole weeks," Ibu Enny remembers. "The scream of her voice had followed me everywhere I went, especially at night. What I have learned is that you need to be more aware of your surroundings, especially in a place like Indonesia. Anything can happen at any time," she said.

AN INDONESIAN THING?

When Indonesians and JIS employees were asked if they believed in ghosts, not even one had to think about

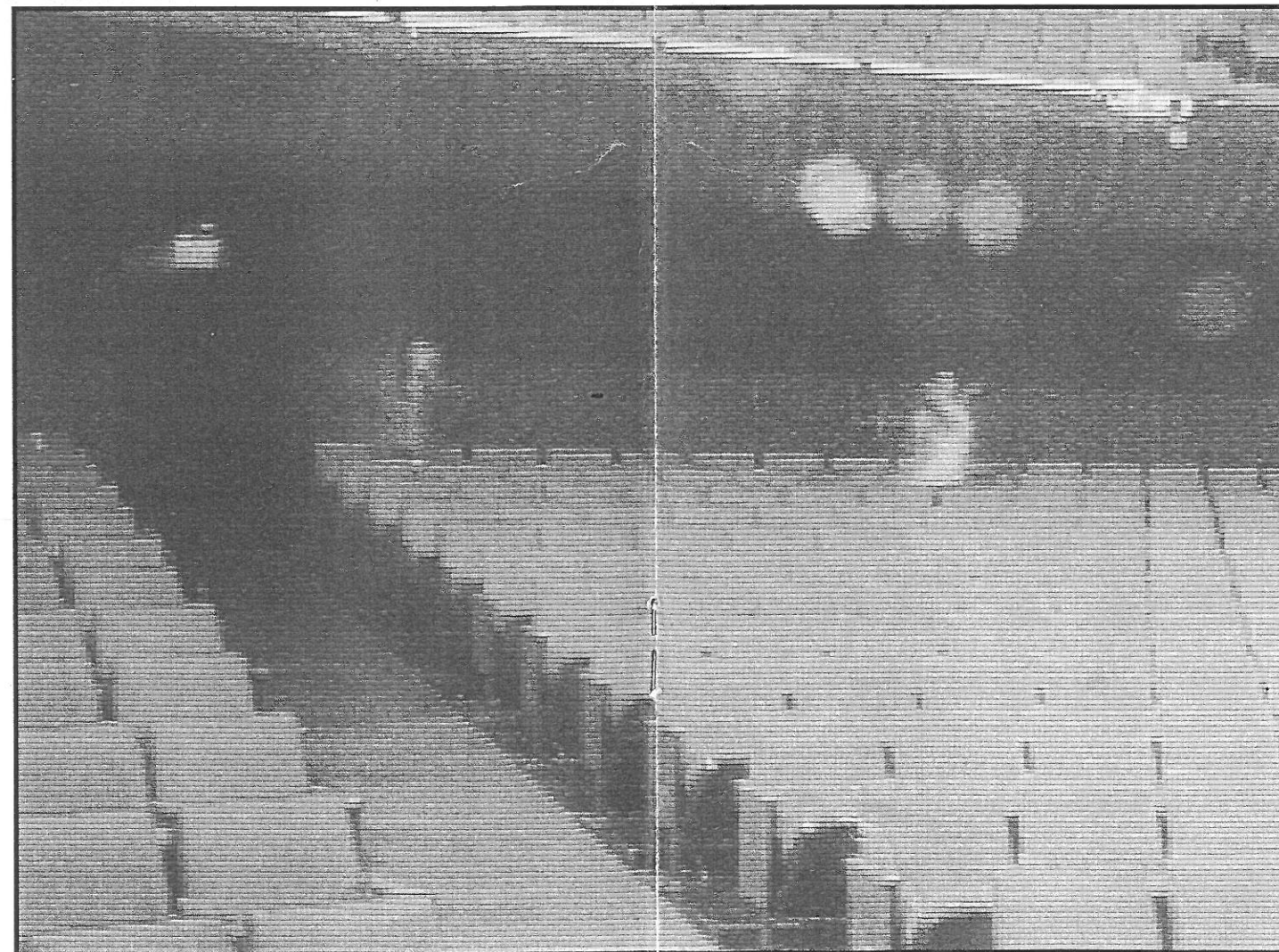


Photo illustrations by Jamie Javier

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