

## **Paranormal “U”**

### **Munchausen Syndrome**

*by Tracey Tanner, TnT Paranormal Investigators LLC*

Munchausen Syndrome is a factitious disorder. Factitious disorders are conditions where a person deliberately and consciously acts as if he or she had a physical or mental illness when they are in fact, not really sick at all. These disorders include other disorders such as personality disorders, Munchausen Syndrome and Munchausen Syndrome by Proxy. Munchausen Syndrome is the most severe type of factitious disorder and it mostly relates to physical symptoms rather than mental. It is considered rare; however, accurate statistics are difficult due to the dishonesty that is common with this illness. Also, people with the disorder usually seek treatment with many different healthcare facilities which can lead to misleading statistics. The disorder appears to be more common in men than in women.

How did this disorder get its name? It was named after Baron Von Munchausen who was an 18<sup>th</sup> century German officer. He was known for embellishing his stories of his life and his experiences. As far as ‘why’ does this happen or what causes it, researchers are not exactly sure. There are theories that it stems from abuse or neglect as a child or perhaps frequent illnesses as a child that required hospitalization. Some researchers are studying a possible link to personality disorders which are commonly found in people with Munchausen’s.

People with this disorder deliberately produce or exaggerate symptoms they are having. They do this in many different ways. They may lie about their symptoms, they may hurt themselves to bring on the symptoms, etc. In the medical profession, there are many ways to be able to tell if someone is showing signs of this syndrome but what do we as paranormal investigators have to look for when trying to help someone who may have this illness? People who have this disorder may exhibit/show:

- Very dramatic stories of paranormal activity but inconsistent facts/stories.
- Appearance of new or additional activity if during the investigation nothing was found.
- History of seeking numerous teams for investigations.
- Reluctance by the client to allow investigators to speak with or meet family members, other teams who have investigated, and/or friends.

Now all of these examples can be present and the client NOT have this illness. But doing your due diligence when interviewing a client is important because there may or may not be something more going on and it has nothing to do with anything paranormal in nature.

We have had cases where Munchausen by Proxy could have been an issue. This disorder is also an attention seeking disorder but with this one, the ‘caregiver’ gets the attention through those who are in their care. Most times, it is a primary caregiver, often the mother. In this case, the primary caregiver may contact a team for help and makes up symptoms that the child is experiencing. These caregivers will come across as very loving, caring, and extremely distraught over the child’s experiences and/or illnesses due to the experiences occurring in the house. They can simply lie about experiences or even go so far as to create ‘activity’ to cause the child to be fearful. We have had a case where the main caregiver planted ideas and stories of activity in a small child’s head for attention. The child was quite confused about what was real and what was NOT real because of this. After speaking with the child separately from the parent, which can be hard to do with a caregiver like this, there were many red flags that we were able to pick up on.

## Bumps in the Night!!!!

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People who you think are exhibiting Munchausen by Proxy may show the following:

- Not wanting investigators to speak to other family members and/or friends
- Other family members disagreeing with the activity being reported (or denying any activity at all)
- The person in the caregivers care, is inconsistent with the story once they are interviewed or removed from the vicinity of the caregiver
- Recommending medical attention or a physical and the caregiver refuses.

Again, not all of these examples are always indicative of Munchausen by Proxy. But doing your part as an investigator, you should make note of things like this and deal with the case accordingly. Unfortunately, with all of the TV shows out there, many people are looking for a team to show up with a camera crew. Many want the attention of having paranormal activity. But remember, it is the caregiver or your contact that has the issue and not the person in the caregivers care. Speak with as many family members or friends as you can. If there were previous teams investigating the location, speak with them to get their thoughts on the client as well as any data they captured. Make sure to ask many questions throughout your interview about their claims to check consistency. It can save a lot of time in the long run if you do your due diligence ahead of time.

Additional information can be found at:

<http://www.webmd.com/mental-health/munchausen-syndrome>



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