

Further Analysis of the Ravenna, Ohio Picture



I posted this picture awhile back and since then, it has received quite a bit of attention. It has even been submitted to various paranormal investigators for their opinions, and has been seen making the rounds on the internet.

To recap, the photo was sent to me by a lady in Ravenna, Ohio in May of 2008. It is a photo of the front of her home taken by her 14-year old son using an Aiptek digital hand recorder. The family was not looking for ghosts and so were surprised by the image that appears to be a human face that appeared in the lower right pane of the second window (there was no one inside the home at the time and the woman has no other children). Unsure what to make of the photo, the mother eventually contacted me for my opinion.

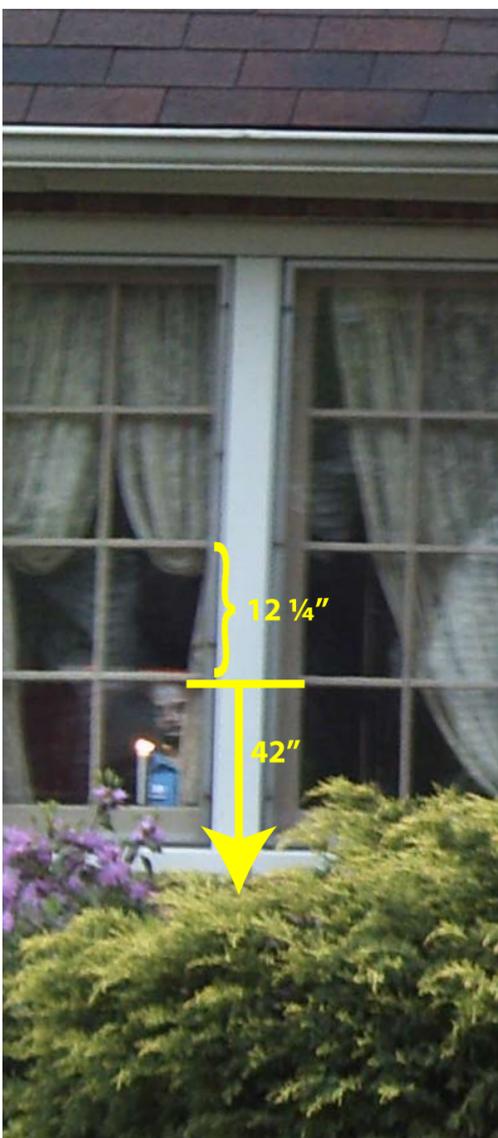
I get many "spirit" photos sent to me but few that are this clear. Usually when people see faces in a photo, it is almost always a result of something called pareidolia (also called matrixing) which is the brain's attempt to bring order to chaos by picking out familiar shapes--usually faces--out of a collection of shapes and shadows. I don't believe that to be the case here, especially considering how obvious the face is and the color variations evident in the picture. Impressed, I asked if she would permit me to post to photo on my website, which she graciously permitted me to do.

Since then the picture has stirred some controversy. Most investigators dismiss the face as a reflection, a smudge, or a hoax. Personally, I find neither of the first two explanations to be either particularly compelling nor scientifically sustainable and as for the third--a hoax--I discount that straight away, not because it would be impossible to hoax such a photo, but because I have corresponded with the woman a number of times since last May and am convinced that she is sincere. Also, there is no evidence that the photo has been tampered with or the "face" inserted or otherwise "photo-shopped" in place (the woman didn't even have an idea what Photoshop was when I first mentioned it).

As such, we are left with something of a dilemma here. If it wasn't hoaxed and it can't easily be explained away by the one-size-fits-all pareidolia explanation so popular with skeptics, what is it? A ghost? Perhaps, but that would be coming to a conclusion or, more correctly, rendering an opinion. The fact is that we don't know what created the image or how it got there, leaving us to simply ponder the possibilities.

While we may not be able to prove anything either way, however, there are a few things we might do to at least acquire some useful information about the figure in the window. One local paranormal investigator suggested the face is too small to be a real child, which did get me thinking. If this figure in the window is a person, how big is it? Is it, as my friend suggests, too small to be consistent with a real human being? (He estimated its height to be no more than two feet, which would be more consistent with an infant or toddler than a small child.) In an effort to find out, I've since contacted the lady in Ravenna and had her have her son take another picture of the house from the identical spot and with the same camera, as well as take measurements of the height of the window panes and the distance between the pane and the floor. I also asked that she have someone--in this case her husband--stand in the window for a true size comparison so we can get some real data about the true size of the figure.

First, some measurements: each window pane is 12 1/4" in height and the distance from the top of the lowest pane to the floor (which is the approximate height of the figure) is 42". In the reshoot photo she sent me, her husband standing in the window is 67" tall. Here are close-ups of the two photos with measurements inserted.



In comparing the two photos side-by-side, we immediately get a better idea of just how tall the figure in the first photo really is. The husband in the second picture is two full window panes taller than the figure in the first photo, or about 25" taller. That means that the original estimate that the child is 42"--about three and a half feet--tall, is accurate. Additionally, 42" would be about the average height for a child between the age of five and six, which corresponds pretty closely to what we see in the window.

So what does that prove? Not only that the figure is not unusually small, but that its height is perfectly consistent with what it should be if we are looking at the face of a five or six year old child. (Curious how pareidolia managed to reflect the face of a child at precisely the correct size.)

My initial thought upon seeing the photo was that the figure appeared to be older than that--around eight to ten years old. However, in comparing the face to that of a five-year old I found on the internet, I think five or six looks about right:



Some have also commented on the distortion in the face itself (which can be seen more clearly in this blow-up), claiming that the figure appears to have no neck and that its mouth looks "strange". I noticed this myself when I first saw it and wondered what would cause such an effect. A couple of ideas occur to me: either it is a result of mild shutter shake (the tendency to slightly move the camera when clicking the shutter) or such details are simply lost in the shadows. Additionally, the "child" could actually have a physical deformity (cleft lip, perhaps) that might account not only for the distortion in the lips, but the general air of timidity the figure puts out. It's almost as if it is peeking out the window, much as one might imagine a child who possessed such a physical deformity would do--especially in a less enlightened age.

Another interesting thing about the figure is that it appears to be wearing some sort of uniform or a shirt with a name tag on it. (One guy even suggested it was a pocket protector!) One explanation that has been suggested by a few is that the blue "uniform" is actually something sitting on the window sill (a small blue bag with a store logo on it, perhaps) but I tend to discount that. First, the lady swears there was no such item in the window at the time and, secondly, it appears to be more a part of the figure than a separate object. The way it seems to form a perfect collar especially argues for, in my opinion, it not being a secondary element in the foreground. Of course, why a five-year-old child would be wearing a uniform (much less a name tag) remains a mystery, but I suspect it's only such if we insist that it be a uniform. The distortion is such that it might simply be a blue collared shirt with a patch of out-of-focus embroidery work over one pocket.

So what is the final verdict? It's really up to you and what you are comfortable believing. For those who adhere to a traditional scientific stand-point and for whom post mortem existence--and with it such things as ghosts looking out a window--is an impossibility, it will always remain a strange reflection, a case of pareidolia, or a hoax. For those who believe that the human personality survives its own death, it may be a sad but very real example of a ghost caught in the act of observing a world it can no longer interact with. As for those who, like myself, believe that the universe contains far more secrets than it is willing to share, it will always remain a mystery.