

## On the Trail of the Unknown By Sean Feeney

“The UFO research and investigation business is a cruel and shallow money trench, a long plastic hallway where thieves and pimps of corrupt ideology run free, agenda dictates, delusion is rampant and ignorance prevails. The infestation of wrongful motivation and the beggarly depths of belief reign supreme amidst a universal disregard for truth and factual actuality... where good men die like dogs. There's also a negative side...” -Kenny Young, UFO Investigator

In eighth grade most kids are reading *Harry Potter* or still weaning themselves off of the Stine series of elementary yard horror. I was reading a book by the name of *Flying Saucers 101*, a Christmas gift from my skeptical science teacher, Mr. Pattinson, who would have much rather had me reading the *Chamber of Secrets*. Looking back on the book now reveals that it's little more than propaganda from the Unconventional Flying Object (UFO) believers standpoint, but having read only a children's book by the name of *How to Catch a Flying Saucer* up to that point in my life it was a welcome transition to the broad range of adult literature on the subject.

The best thing to come out of that book, aside from inspiring me to teach others about UFOs, was my contacting of Mutual UFO Network Headquarters (MUFON HQ) through the UFO organizations list in one of the books appendixes. I'm not sure exactly who received my email there at HQ, but I'm sure it gave them quite a laugh: In my email I had asked them about a “career in ufology” as if it was just like any other profession. They replied that aside from a few top level people in the organization there were no careers in ufology and suggested that I get in touch with Carol Bieber, the Northern Kentucky Section Director at the time.

Carol was ecstatic to meet someone new who was interested in UFOs enough to join Kentucky MUFON. She didn't host any meetings of her own so she invited me down to Elizabethtown for the fall 2001 statewide meeting.

“I have someone that I think you should meet there. It'd be great if he could teach you some of what he knows,” Carol said.

Curious, I decided to go but was too young to drive so she arranged to have me carpool down there with him. When I saw his forest green Toyota Echo pull up in front of my house I had no idea what I was in for.

We got to know each other a little on the trip down there. He told me about how he worked at the Community Programming Center (CPC) as a graphics designer and about some of the cases he had investigated over the years. I told him about how I was into computers and how I was starting up my own group of investigators called the Northern Kentucky Paranormal Youth Group (NKYPYG).

“So you're into ghosts, huh?” he interposed.

“Yeah, in fact there's a little abandoned graveyard that people think is haunted down there in E-town. If it's not too late after the meeting gets out, do you mind if we go check it out?” I responded.

“Heck yeah dude, maybe we can scare us out some spooks!”

And so my first field investigation with Kenny Young was planned. The MUFON meeting was interesting to say the least. I met Earle Benezet, the assistant state director,

for the first time. He was a trip, talking about government cover-ups and ancient astronauts and just about everything in between. Kathie Grimes and her preacher friend were also there. The meeting wasn't half bad until the preacher got up to talk. Suddenly I found myself in the midst of a group of "believers" each privately saying amen to his sermon about how "ETs are real and ETs are here." Kenny sat patiently in the back of the darkened room behind his video camera, filming the meeting for playback on CPC.

The meeting let out at about 7:00 p.m. so we headed over to the abandoned graveyard to see what we could find. It was at the end of St. John's Road, a road that starts as a state highway and ends at a gravel driveway where the cemetery begins. As we approached the end of the road the trees leaned closer and closer inwards towards the car, seemingly reaching for new souls to protect. Kenny got out his video camera to document my investigation. I was armed with a tape recorder to try and record any electronic voice phenomenon (EVP) that might be present and a 35mm camera to take photos.

"Wooh! Wooh wooh wooh wooh!" A succession of unfamiliar sounds in the distance rattled the trees. I started to speculate as to what they could be.

"Shh! Shh shh." Kenny cautioned, using his boom microphone to record the sound, and my expression, onto tape.

Later review of the recordings showed no EVP, but the 35mm camera was able to pick up several orbs. One was exceptional in how it appeared to move away from the top of a broken gravestone during the fraction of a second that the shutter was open. Kenny and I figured that the distant sounds were probably caused by a pack of wolves.

Kenny gave me a call a few days later. He decided that he wanted to put together a segment about NKYPYG for air on CPC. I consented and over the next few weeks he filmed me investigating various haunted spots around Northern Kentucky like The Cody Road RR Bridge, Narrows Road and Bobby Mackie's Music World.

The final product was exceptional. It was Halloween by the time it was finished, and I was invited to some live shows at CPC that wanted to air it. City Nights was the first, and then I was interviewed on The Show with David Conner. It also ran standalone in a thirty-minute spot of its own.

I got involved at the CPC shortly after. I took all of the training classes they offered and volunteered to help any shows that needed a crewman. After taking the training classes I was allowed to check out their camera equipment to film my own shows. "NKYPYG: Special Report" was out in time for the following Halloween.

I continued to correspond with Kenny by email and by phone, learning from him about the proper ways to investigate UFO sightings as well as how to edit video and create cool animations. In return I answered his questions whenever he needed to know something about computers or the Internet. We often would go into discussions about the theoretical aspects of disclosure, where and why to apply objectivity, and how to better get the public involved in our work. Usually we would just vent about the shortcomings of current leadership in the UFO field.

Still too young to drive, Kenny would pick me up and take me to conferences or on investigations with him. The road afforded us a chance to talk in person about whatever was on our minds, the long stretches of lonely highway oft resembling the solitude of the egotistical ufologists we were discussing. From time to time we casually glanced out the windows, hoping that we had picked the right time of year to catch a flying saucer skipping across the sky.

One notable event that we attended was a Bigfoot conference in Newcomerstown, Ohio in the spring of 2002. On the way up there I wondered if the speakers could convince us of the veracity of the numerous claims of Sasquach, the infamous, elusive creature spotted hiding behind trees in wooded areas late at night. Donnie Blessing, an associate researcher of Kenny's accompanied us. Bob Liebold of Natural Light Productions was also there filming some interviews for "UFO Update" and Kenny was filming some side interviews of his own. I got to interview a few Bigfoot investigators about current cases they were working on.

Todd Neiss, the first speaker, gave an interesting introduction to the conference by giving numerous juicy details as to what the Bigfoot creature supposedly looks like and some reported actions it has taken. Mr. Neiss actually witnessed the phenomenon first hand as a sergeant in the US army. The main point he made while describing the sighting was that three creatures showed up in a quarry immediately after a large C4 blasting exercise. The perimeter around the area was locked down and a sentry should have ensured that no humans could access the site for obvious reasons. The three beings at first appeared human in shape, but after closer examination of their facial features Neiss ascertained that they could not possibly be human.

He then went into a lengthy speech about numerous facets of his "Bigfeet" investigations, which included a description of the tools he uses. As a field investigator I found this very interesting and noted that he obtained some seismic activity sensing equipment from his military pals. And rather than promote the use of night vision sensing equipment, he highly recommended 'thermal detecting' cameras. His reasoning for this is that if some form of creature is camouflaging itself behind trees, the thermal cam can see right through the tree whereas the infrared cam cannot.

While his presentation was the only one that I got to sit in on full, I did find the second speaker's video very interesting. The Enigma Project was given a video to analyze of a large "Bigfoot" taken in 1992 by Don Keating. While it could possibly have been a hoaxed event, if the video is indeed true then it opens a number of questions that were not satisfactorily answered by the speech. How tall was the creature in question? Was it really white or could it have been another color? What was it?

All in all, I found it an enriching experience but I do not believe it was so mind blowing that we will be returning to the annual conference for a number of years. The veracity of the claims remained a mystery to me. Did you know that the same type of people who show up to UFO conferences also show up to Bigfoot conferences? I didn't, but it's something that I would come to get used to.

That summer the Bigfoot theme continued and I was invited to tag along for a little proactive investigation in Ross, Ohio. Ron Schaffner had received reports of activity in the area and Kenny was sent a recording of a supposed Bigfoot call from somewhere in rural Kentucky. Put those two things together and add Jeff Sindiong's mobile pro-audio equipment and you've got a fun night. Kenny cleaned up the recording and put it on a CD for playback in the field. We drove to a secluded spot in Ross a little after sunset and got out of our cars and spread out our camping chairs around the back of Jeff's van. Jeff hooked up his AC inverter and sound equipment and played the recording over his loudspeaker a few times, hoping to get a response from anything that might be "out there." We sat and listened for a while but heard nothing except another van coming up the road.

“What are you all doing out here?” the driver asked as he rolled down his window.

“We’ve been getting some reports of a ‘Bigfoot’ in the area so we’re conducting an investigation to see if we can find anything,” Ron answered.

“Really? That’s awesome.” The driver and his passenger got out of their van and joined us around the speaker for a few minutes. They related how they had heard stories about the creatures but hadn’t seen anything themselves.

“Why don’t you pull up a chair and join us?” Kenny chimed in.

“I wish we could ... but we’ve really got to be getting home soon,” the driver answered and got back into his van and drove off.

We sat around telling stories for a few hours and played the Bigfoot call a few more times before calling it a night. There were a few times when somebody would say, “What was that?” and we’d get quiet and strain our ears towards the woods but we didn’t really hear anything as a group. It was a fun exercise nonetheless. Bob later told me that there were reports of a “loud Bigfoot call” by residents in the area that night.

“Jeez, I wonder what caused those,” he laughed.

It wasn’t long before the UFO sightings picked up again and Kenny wrote an article for the MUFON Journal connecting the July 26, 1952 Washington, DC sightings with the July 26, 2002 sightings over our nation’s capitol.

“On two consecutive weekends culminating on July 26, 1952, UFOs were sighted visually and on radar over the hot summer skies of Washington D.C. Alarms sounded and planes took to the skies. The nation was captivated and banner headlines shouted the event across the land. The public was mystified and the event has withstood firm explanation to this day,” he began.

In September Kenny was coaxed into hosting the 39<sup>th</sup> Annual National UFO Conference at the Kings Island Resort and Conference Center in Cincinnati, Ohio. I helped out with the advertising by running commercials for the conference during the breaks on “NKYPYG: Special Report” and recommending that he get on one of the local morning shows.

The conference itself was a hit, bringing in a diverse crowd of over 150 people of all ages and interests. Even though I wasn’t a paying vender, Kenny printed up a nametag for me with a little sticker of a planet in the upper right corner. I shared a vender table with Kentucky MUFON and put up a board showcasing NKYPYG. The crowd must have been interested in the handouts that I left out as there weren’t very many left by the end of the night.

The speakers were top notch. Rick Hilberg gave a wonderful presentation on “Ufology: The First 30 Years”, from the WWII Ghost Rockets to the Betty and Barney Hill abduction case. He was followed by Don Weatherby and Wendy Ban of Ohio MUFON, former IBM employees and the creators of MUFON's Worldwide UFO Database, which, to the detriment of the field, is accessible by MUFON members only. I took quite an interest in their talk and noted the equipment and programs they said that they used. Jerry Black came next with a fiery speech on “Credibility in Ufology”. He asserted that contrary to popular belief he does *not* polygraph everyone who comes to him with a UFO sighting. Then came John Timmerman of CUFOS followed by “UFO Hunter” Derrel Sims.

The highlight of the night was Stephen Bassett's speech on the "Politics of Disclosure". He argued that there was a fundamental tear in America's Social Contract because of the "need to know" basis, the "don't ask, don't tell" policy, and a "you can't handle the truth" ideology. According to Bassett, these three tears were not planned for in our founding documents like the Constitution or Declaration of Independence and we won't be able to repair the social contact if it gets too far damaged. I had a chance to speak with Bassett after the conference and he asked me to get in touch with John Greenewald, Jr. since he started out in ufology at my age.

Hosting the conference put a strain on Kenny that took a while for him to shake off. Bassett's train came into Union Terminal at like 3:00 a.m. the night before and Kenny had to be at the WKRC morning news show by like 7:00 a.m. so he didn't even sleep that night. By the end of the conference he was exhausted and I felt bad having to ask him for a ride back to Covington. It was on his way to his home in Florence so he didn't mind though.

In anticipation of my getting my driver's permit in January of 2003, Kenny was the first person to let me practice driving. He still had his Echo at the time. He brought Boo, his faithful dog, along with us to Devou Park and let me drive around the parking lot and side roads. He couldn't have chosen a better place to teach me how to drive – the roads in Devou are some of the narrowest, windiest roads you can find. I could tell he was happy that he would soon have someone else to do a share of the driving.

We went to and spoke at various other UFO meetings, most of them at the Covington branch of the Kenton County Public Library or at some extension of the Cincinnati Public Library. Kenny was leery of holding regular monthly meetings – a constant point of tension between him and Earle – so we held larger biannual meetings instead. Donnie was, and still is to this day instrumental in bringing in speakers to the events.

The three of us went down to the Louisville Ghost Hunters Society's annual Mid-South Paranormal Convention that year. I was surprised at the number of people who came up to me and already knew of my work. The others who didn't know us took our literature and enjoyed our little TV that was setup to play some of Kenny's UFO shows. I had my laptop with me and took some on-the-fly UFO reports from the public. Some of the researchers that were associated with the Multi-Sensor Energy Array (MESA) Project were there talking with people about the project and I got a sneak peak at the array itself. A fun time was had by all and I came away with some new contacts in the ghost field.

After returning home to Northern Kentucky, Kenny ran his idea for a Star Wars fan film by me. He soon had "Legacy of Darkness" scripted and asked me to create a website for it. The website announced an open call for cast and crew, but I don't think much came of it because Kenny gave up on production after only a few months. I bet that the Cincinnati Star Wars Fan Club that he announced the production to was disappointed!

He always managed to keep a sober distinction between the fictional element of UFOs and the real life reports that he investigated. He knew that Strieber's *Communion* wasn't a true story and regretted that MUFON embraced authors like him without question. "If you knew that your child was being abducted and subjected to horrible experiments every time you went out to a cabin in the woods, why would you continue to go there? It would be parental instinct to get your child as far away from the place as possible, or at least not to leave him to sleep alone in a place that you knew he would be

abducted,” Kenny reasoned. He respected their right to write books like that, but asked only that they not lie and label them as true stories.

When I put together my application to Channel One News’ Student-Produced Week 2004, Kenny was more than willing to help me out. I asked him to be my cameraman for the video portion of the application. We met up at Devou around dusk on a cold, windy day in November of 2003. It wasn’t a big project – just some panning and zooming shots of me telling Channel One why I would be good for the job with the city as my backdrop. Like usual, he didn’t mind that I stumbled on my lines here and there and started over like five times. Some cameramen get angry but Kenny was always cool about it. He got the footage to me in miniDV format, which was a task since he recorded in Hi8, and I edited it and submitted it with my application to Channel One. Surprise, surprise, I made it! I’m eternally grateful for his hand in getting me out to Hollywood for the experience of a lifetime.

We kept in touch throughout the rest of 2004 but around fall he started disappearing for weeks at a time. Donnie and I weren’t sure what was going on. He told her that he wouldn’t be able to help her with cases very much anymore and as a result I got to get a little more involved in the investigation groundwork and filming for shows. I just figured that he was having trouble with what he told us was a “neurological disorder.”

Then Donnie gave me a call about a case in early January of 2005 and we got to talking about Kenny and I told her how he gave me a call a little after New Year’s and sounded kind of tipsy. She explained to me that she just found out that he had cancer on his tongue that was recently removed and as a result he couldn’t eat or talk well and was going in and out of the hospital. I was shocked. He hadn’t mentioned a word about any of that to me.

But that’s how Kenny stayed happy for as long as he did. He didn’t tell any of us about his health conditions because he didn’t want sympathy; he wanted to be accepted as the hardworking investigator that he was without any special treatment on our part. It turns out that the “neurological disorder” was leukemia, and he passed away on January 31<sup>st</sup>.

Kenny’s legacy is now in our hands to share with the world. His file cabinets full of paper case files going all the way back to his work with Leonard Stringfield, his website containing editorials and news articles going back to 1997, and his UFO-themed shows that he used to air on CPC were all left to us to continue his work. The lessons that he taught me about how to survive in the field of ufology will stick with me forever, and since his getting me started in videography I’ve had a whole new world open up to me. “Healthy skepticism is a necessity,” he used to tell me, “but always keep your mind open to new possibilities.” Thanks for blazing the trail, Kenny. I’ll keep it well lit.