

Amityville Hoax

Alleged 1970s haunting in Long Island, New York, which became the basis for sensationalist books and films loosely based on the claimed events.

Known Facts

In November of 1974, Ronald DeFeo Sr and his wife Louise DeFeo (née Brigante) lived in an elegant three-storey Dutch Colonial-style home at 112 Ocean Avenue in Amityville, an affluent community on the south shore of Long Island near New York City. With them lived their five children, Ronald Jr, aged 23, Dawn, aged eighteen, Allison, aged thirteen, Marc, aged twelve, and John, aged nine.¹

In 1979, the family was found murdered, except for Ronald Jr, who was convicted of the killings. He was sentenced to concurrent life sentences and died in prison in 2021.² Some maintain that there was evidence of multiple killers, but no other suspects were ever apprehended.³

The house was left empty until George and Kathy Lutz bought it for ,000 and moved in with their three young children on 18 December 1975.

Paranormal Claims

The events that the Lutzes said happened in the 28 days before they fled the house became the substance of a book published in 1979, *The Amityville Horror* by Jay Anson.⁴ According to Anson, a priest who was carrying out a blessing on the house as the family moved in was ordered 'Get out!' by a male voice, and suffered lasting ailments afterwards. The family felt strange sensations, suffered personality changes (becoming more quarrelsome), were plagued by foul odors, indelible black stains on the toilets, a proliferation of flies even though it was winter, and green slime running down the walls. Kathy said she felt unseen touches; George always felt a chill and saw his wife turn into an old hag, then levitate off the bed. They also reported [poltergeist activity](#) such as furniture moving, and windows, doors and banisters damaged or destroyed.⁵

Publications

In January 1976, George and Kathy Lutz, Ronald DeFeo Jr's defence attorney William Weber and writer Paul Hoffman met to discuss the Lutzes' purported experiences and how they might be made into a bestselling book. Weber proposed a contract which would guarantee the Lutzes 12% of the proceeds. However, the Lutzes were also in discussion with Jay Anson and chose instead his 50/50 deal.⁶

Hoffman later sold two nearly identical articles on the Lutzes' experiences to two magazines. In May 1977, the Lutzes filed a .5 million lawsuit against Hoffman, Weber and the two magazines, alleging invasion of privacy, misappropriation of name for trade purposes, and mental distress. Hoffman and Weber and one other involved party each filed a million countersuit for fraud and breach of contract.⁷

The Lutzes' suit was thrown out in September 1979, the judge commenting 'It appears to me that to a large extent the book is a work of fiction, relying in a large part upon the suggestions of Mr. Weber.' He also proposed referring the matter to the New York State Bar Association, noting 'There is a very serious ethical question when lawyers become literary agents.' The counterclaim was settled the next day.⁸

The Amityville Horror has sold tens of millions of copies and was made into a movie of the same title that grossed more than million. The family went on a nationwide tour promoting the book as their true story.

George Lutz continued to claim that most of the incidents described in the book were true. In 1979 he and his wife sat for polygraph tests and were both said to have answered the questions truthfully.⁹ However, Weber stated in *People* magazine, 'I know this book's a hoax. We created this horror story over many bottles of wine'.¹⁰

Investigations

The first parapsychologists to investigate the Amityville case were [Karlis Osis](#) and [Alex Tanous](#), on behalf of the [American Society for Psychical Research](#) (ASPR), and Jerry Solvin of the [Psychical Research Foundation](#). They quickly concluded that claims of paranormal phenomena were groundless. Tanous found a publishing contract kept by the Lutz family, which included a clause requiring them to continue promoting their story in order to boost book and movie royalties. Tanous, who was psychic, also refuted highly-publicized claims by clairvoyant Lorraine Warren that she sensed a presence within the property, having sensed nothing there himself.¹¹

[Hans Holzer](#), a paranormal investigator, wrote a book, *Murder in Amityville*, which spawned the 1982 sequel to the original movie (*Amityville II: The Possession*). He published two further books on the topic, despite his claim that the house was build on a former Native American burial ground having been debunked.¹²

Amityville Industry

Books relating to the Amityville incidents include:

John G Jones

- *The Amityville Horror Part II* (1982)
- *Amityville: The Final Chapter* (1985)
- *Amityville: The Evil Escapes* (1988)
- *Amityville: The Horror Returns* (1989)

Hanz Holzer:

- *Murder in Amityville* (1979)
- *The Amityville Curse* (1981)
- *The Secret of Amityville* (1985)

Robin Karl

- *Amityville: The Nightmare Continues* (1991)

Gordon McGill:

- Novelization of the 1983 film *Amityville 3-D*

Ric Osuna

- *The Night the DeFeos Died: Reinvestigating the Amityville Murders* (2002) (factual account)

Will Savive

- *Mentally Ill in Amityville* (2008) (factual account)

Amityville movies continue to proliferate. Some are related to the original events by no more than the name 'Amityville', a guaranteed moneymaker. Some are parodies. All titles below are linked to entries on the Internet Movie Database (IMDb).

- [The Amityville Horror](#) 1979
- [Amityville II: The Possession](#) 1982
- [Amityville 3-D](#) 1983
- [Amityville Horror: The Evil Escapes](#) 1989 (TV movie)
- [The Amityville Curse](#) 1990 (direct to video)
- [Amityville 1992: It's About Time](#) 1992 (direct to video)
- [Amityville: A New Generation](#) 1993 (direct to video)
- [Amityville Dollhouse](#) 1996 (direct to video)
- [The Amityville Horror](#) 2005 (remake)
- [The Amityville Haunting](#) 2011 (direct to video)
- [My Amityville Horror](#) 2012 (documentary starring Daniel Lutz, son of George and Kathy Lutz)
- [Amityville Playhouse](#) 2015
- [The Amityville Terror](#) 2016
- [Amityville Exorcism](#) 2017
- [Amityville: The Awakening](#) 2017
- [The Amityville Murders](#) 2018
- [The Amityville Harvest](#) 2020
- [Amityville Vibrator](#) 2020
- [Witches of Amityville Academy](#) 2020
- [The Amityville Moon](#) 2021
- [Amityville Scarecrow](#) 2021
- [Amityville in Space](#) 2022
- [Amityville Karen](#) 2022
- [Amityville Uprising](#) 2022
- [Amityville: An Origin Story](#) 2023 (TV miniseries)
- [The Amityville Curse](#) 2023
- [Amityville Emanuelle](#) 2023
- [Amityville Shark House](#) 2023
- [Amityville Bigfoot](#) 2024
- [Amityville Apt.](#) 2024

Resources

Author Ric Osuna's website [The Amityville Murders](#), preserved on the Internet Archive, contains a variety of items related to the killings including crime scene photos, testimony, documents, details of his legal battles with Ronald DeFeo Jr and the Lutzes, and more.

KM Wehrstein

Literature

Anson, J. (1977). *The Amityville Horror*. New York: Prentice Hall.

Cooper, C.E. (2015). [Alex Tanous](#). *Psi Encyclopedia*. London: Society for Psychical Research.

New England Society for Psychic Research (n.d.) [Amityville](#). [Web page.]

Osuna (n.d.). [Capitalizing on a tragedy](#). [Web page, preserved on the Internet Archive.]

Osuna (n.d.). [The DeFeo portraits: Worth a thousand words](#). [Web page, preserved on the Internet Archive.]

Osuna (n.d.). [Lutz vs. Weber](#). [Web page, preserved on the Internet Archive.]

Osuna (n.d.). [The murders: A night of hell](#). [Web page, preserved on the Internet Archive.]

[Polygraph Results from George and Kathy Lutz](#). Web.archive.org (Web page)

Underwood, P. (2009). [Obituary: Hans Holzer](#). *The Guardian* (18 June). [Web page.]

Endnotes

Footnotes

- [1](#). The Amityville Murders (n.d.) [The DeFeo portraits: Worth a thousand words](#).
- [2](#). New England Society for Psychical Research (n.d.)
- [3](#). Osuna (n.d.) [The murders: A night of hell](#).
- [4](#). Anson (1977).
- [5](#). Osuna (n.d.). [Capitalizing on a tragedy](#).
- [6](#). Osuna (n.d.). [Lutz vs. Weber](#).
- [7](#). Osuna (n.d.). [Lutz vs. Weber](#).
- [8](#). Osuna (n.d.). [Lutz vs. Weber](#).
- [9](#). [Polygraph Results from George and Kathy Lutz](#).
- [10](#). Osuna (n.d.). [Capitalizing on a tragedy](#).
- [11](#). Cooper (2015).
- [12](#). Underwood (2009).

