

Ghost Handprints

retold by
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My wife Jill and I were driving home from a friend's party late one evening in early May. It was a beautiful night with a full moon. We were laughing and discussing the party when the engine started to cough and the emergency light went on. We had just reached the railroad crossing where Villamain Road becomes Shane Road.

According to local legend, this was the place where a school bus full of children had stalled on the tracks. Everyone on board the bus had been killed by an oncoming freight train. The ghosts of the children were reported to haunt this intersection and were said to protect people from danger.

Not wanting a repeat of the train crash, I hit the gas pedal, trying to get our car safely across the tracks before it broke down completely. But the dad-blamed car wouldn't cooperate. It stalled dead center on the railroad tracks.

As if that weren't enough, the railroad signals started flashing and a bright light appeared a little ways down the track, bearing down fast on our car. I turned the key and hit the gas pedal, trying to get the car started.

"Hurry up, Jim! The train's coming," my wife urged, as if I didn't hear the whistling blowing a warning.

I broke out into a sweat and tried the engine again. Nothing.

"We have to get out!" I shouted to my wife, reaching for the door handle.

"I can't," Jill shouted desperately. She was struggling with her seat belt. We'd been having trouble with it recently. She'd been stuck more than once, and I'd had to help her get it undone.

I threw myself across the stick-shift and fought with the recalcitrant seat belt. My hands were shaking and sweat poured down my body as I felt the rumble of the approaching train. It had seen us and was whistling sharply. I risked a quick glance over my shoulder. The engineer was trying to slow down, but he was too close to stop before he hit us. I redoubled my efforts.

Suddenly, the car was given a sharp shove from behind. Jill and I both gasped and I fell into her lap as the car started to roll forward, slowly at first, then gaining speed. The back end cleared the tracks just a second before the train roared passed. As the car rolled to a stop on the far side of the tracks, the engineer stuck his head out the window of the engine and waved a fist at us; doubtless shouting something nasty at us for scaring him.

"Th..that was close," Jill gasped as I struggled upright. "How did you get the car moving?"

"I didn't," I said. "Someone must have helped us."

I jumped out of the door on the driver's side of the car and ran back to the tracks to thank our rescuer. In the bright moonlight, I searched the area, looking for the person who had pushed our car out of the path of the train. There was no one there. I called out several times, but no one answered. After a few minutes struggle with her seatbelt, Jill finally freed herself and joined me.

"Where is he?" she asked.

"There is no one here," I replied, puzzled.

"Maybe he is just shy about being thanked," Jill said. She raised her voice. "Thank you, whoever you are," she called.

The wind picked up a little, swirling around us, patting our hair and our shoulders like the soft touch of a child's hand. I shivered and hugged my wife tightly to me. We had almost died tonight, and I was grateful to be alive.

"Yes, thank you," I repeated loudly to our mystery rescuer.

As we turned back to our stalled vehicle, I pulled out my cell phone, ready to call for a tow truck. Beside me, Jill stopped suddenly, staring at the back of our car.

"Jim, look!" she gasped.

I stared at our vehicle. Scattered in several places across the back of our car were several glowing handprints. They were small handprints; the kind that adorned the walls of elementary schools all over the country. I started shaking as I realized the truth; our car had been pushed off the tracks by the ghosts of the schoolchildren killed at this location.

The wind swept around us again, and I thought I heard an echo of childish voices whispering 'You're welcome' as it patted our shoulders and arms. Then the wind died down and the handprints faded from the back of the car.

Jill and I clung together for a moment in terror and delight. Finally, I released her and she got into the car while I called the local garage to come and give us a tow home.