

East Mountain LIVING

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PROFILE continued

His two newest books cover stories told by gay and lesbians and those who work in the medical profession. Stories by real estate agents and war veterans are forthcoming.

What makes these books unique is that not only do they feature firsthand stories directly transcribed from interviews, they are also written by someone whose background in the paranormal has made him extremely respectful of his subjects. "We don't refer to ourselves as ghost hunters," Estrada says, "because that [spirit] was a human being . . . someone's relative. You don't 'hunt down and destroy' your grandparents, right?"

The stories run the gamut from the scary to the bittersweet to the touching. There are tales of ghosts who haunt houses and hospitals, restaurants and hotels, cemeteries and old military forts. Of spirits who send objects flying, flush toilets in empty bathrooms, and make random phone calls asking strange questions.

Perhaps Garcez's most affecting interview was of an old man, sound in mind and body, who lived alone in the long-abandoned village of his childhood in a remote area north of Las Vegas, New Mexico. Everyone had long died except for him and his cat and two dogs, yet he reported regular interactions with the spirits of his relatives and former neighbors. "That was very satisfying, to see how humans can interact with spirits on a common, daily basis," Garcez says. "Nothing demonic or terrifying, just a relationship between two planes of existence."

Garcez no longer has to go looking for his subjects. He is now considered one of the foremost paranormal experts in New Mexico, so

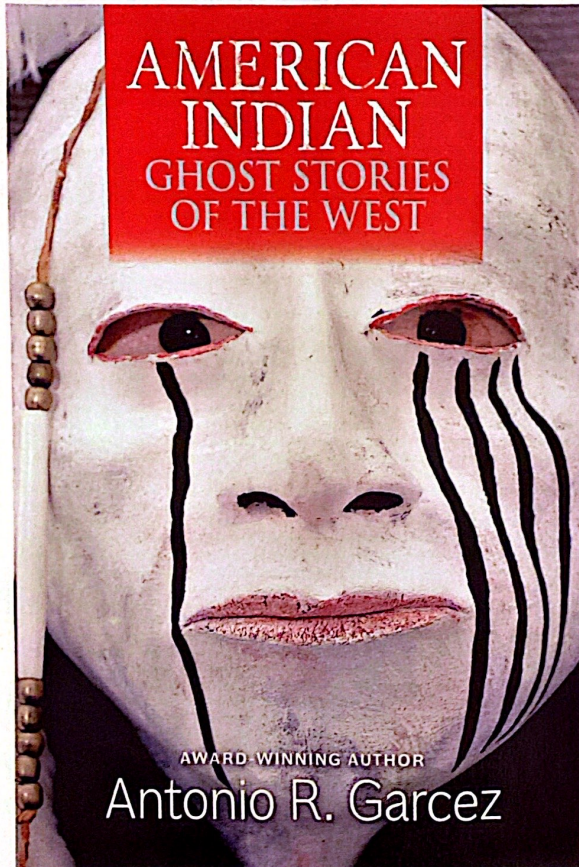
can tell by looking at their faces and in their eyes."

While the books are certainly entertaining as straightforward ghost stories, Garcez's primary aim is not to spook but to encourage consideration of a world beyond that which we call "reality." A skillful and thoughtful writer, he prefaces each ghost story with fascinating histories of the places and times in which they occur. Preserved for posterity in this way, they are more than just anecdotes—they are vital parts of a region's historical record.

Skeptics would say there are rational explanations for these experiences, but 21 books and counting—not to mention basic physics—tells us we shouldn't be so quick to dismiss them. After all, energy and matter can neither be created nor destroyed, so perhaps it eventually just changes shape and moves into a realm between the real and surreal. Some of us might be more attuned to that realm than others, like people who are born with a preternatural ability to write music or do advanced mathematics.

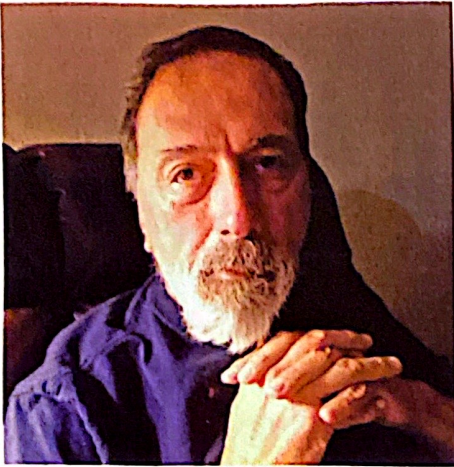
As one of Garcez's interviewees, school teacher Harold Rooney, whose students encountered a ghost on a field trip to Bent's Old Fort in La Junta, Colorado, puts it, "No one can prove the existence of ghosts, but can anyone disprove them?"

Antonio Garcez's books are available online at [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com), in Albuquerque at [Barns & Noble](#) and [Old Town bookstore in the Plaza](#), in Santa Fe at [Sissel's Jewelry](#), and for direct purchase at the website, ghost-books.biz.



people find him by word of mouth. Even though his voice can be slurred due to the Parkinson's, his warmth, intelligence, and sensitivity always shine through, making him an easy man to trust with such emotionally fraught subject matter.

He also requires each potential interviewee to fill out a lengthy questionnaire, which clues Garcez in to whether or not they are telling the truth. "Everyone wants to tell a story, right?" he says. "I ask some very pointed questions that tell me whether or not they are on the level." Then there are his own instincts. "I



Ghost Writer

Local paranormal expert Antonio Garcez chronicles everyday encounters with the supernatural

By Rena Distasio

Photos courtesy of Hank Estrada

Antonio Garcez still remembers his first paranormal experience. He was learning to walk, holding his father's hand for support, when a small dog ran up to him and then . . . disappeared. The family did not own a dog. Only eight months old at the time, Garcez, now 64, says the event wasn't at all scary. "It made me feel good," he says. "Happy."

Most people would chalk his experience up to the vivid imagination typical of young children, but Garcez comes from a family for whom interactions with the spiritual world have always been commonplace. His maternal grandfather, a Mescalero Apache from southern New Mexico, passed his sensitivity to the spiritual world, as well as his healing abilities, on to his daughter. Her work, which included cleansing homes and people of unwelcome visitations, was accepted as a matter

of course by her husband and children.

"My childhood experiences taught me to be sensitive to the unexplainable, yet real examples of a life beyond the tangible," Garcez writes on his website. "In my family, we did not make fun of such subjects as ghosts, hauntings, or brushes with the supernatural."

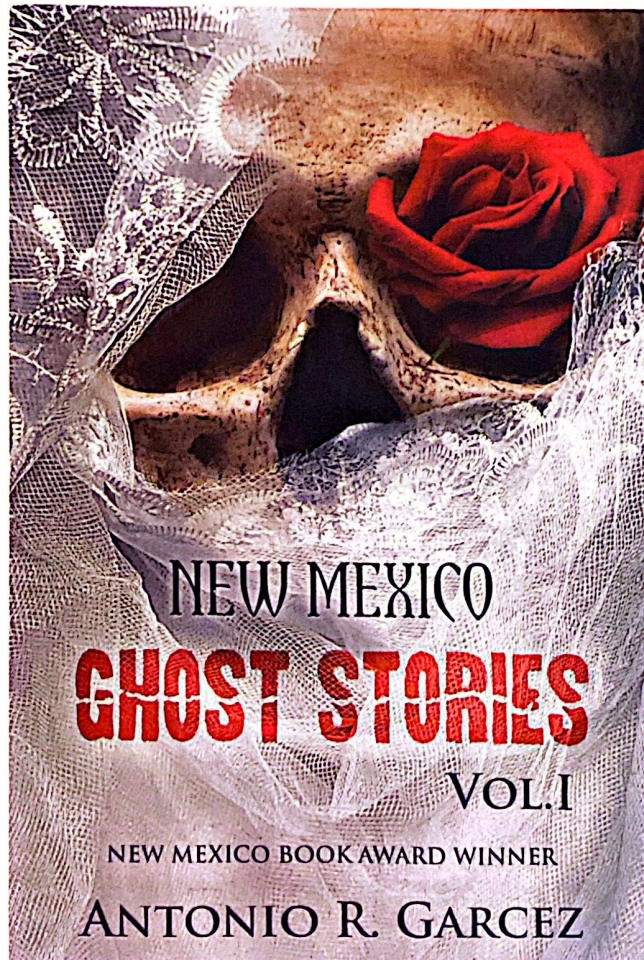
Born and raised in Los Angeles, Garcez studied psychology at Cal State Northridge and the University of Wisconsin. He came to New Mexico in 1989 with his life partner, Hank Estrada, whom he had

also flipped houses), they moved to Santa Fe. Garcez's grandfather had also attended St. Catherine Indian School there, so he felt a connection to the area. Once there, they ran a bed and breakfast while also flipping homes.

But something else called to Garcez. He had inherited his mother's healing abilities and sensitivity to the spiritual world—he has seen many spirits in his lifetime, and at one time even performed cleanses (he now limits them to himself and his home environs). This instilled in him an interest in telling the stories of

New Mexicans who had had similar first-hand experiences with the paranormal. "But all I found was books on ghost towns and on folklore and legends," he says, "nothing about direct experiences."

A chance encounter with a local bookstore cashier put him in contact with someone who did have a personal encounter. That person led him to others, until Garcez had enough material for his first book, *New Mexico Ghost Stories Volume 1*, which he self-published in 2003. The book was such a success that it paid for his first home



met while the two were working as counselors at the American Cancer Society. When the real estate market started to tank in Los Angeles (they

and in 2007 earned him a Turquoise Award for Best Nonfiction Book by the New Mexico Book Co-op Association.