Do ghosts exist?

How can we be so sure ghosts aren't real? I don't believe in unicorns, vampires or the Tooth Fairy, but I do think there is a definite possibility that people can leave behind residual energy after they die. Like many things that require a leap of faith, you can't definitively prove or disprove the existence of ghosts.

A lot of "ghost stories" can easily be explained away by logic. A creaky staircase? Rotting wood. A whisper in the night? Probably just the wind. But what about those experiences that you can't explain away? What about those times when logic is dismissed because none applies?

I'm not saying I completely believe that ghosts are real, but I'm also not going to discount thousands on thousands of years of folklore and supernatural experiences. Can that many people really be making things up, exaggerating, even lying? Maybe ­– but I'd like to hope not.

I'll tell you a ghost story from my hometown that makes me not so sure. It concerns my mom's friend, we'll call her Jane, who lived in a notoriously haunted house in town. The house itself is a total horror movie trope: grand, sprawling and constantly on the market, with an asking price far below its worth.

Rumors which circulate town to this day dictate that all the patriarchs of the house die of peculiar diseases after inhabiting it. The house has actually been searched for some kind of weird mold or any other cause, but nothing was found. It just so happens that Jane's husband died of a rare form of brain cancer not a year after they moved in.

Jane and her two small children remained in the house, despite her husband's death, despite her uneasy feeling about the goings-on of her new home. Jane was a hardworking professional at the time and not the kind of person you'd expect to catch spouting ghost stories – she was exceptionally smart, clinical and matter-of-fact – the words "high-powered" come to mind.

But the happenings of the household soon escalated. The strange things – doors slamming open and closed repeatedly, strange noises, her daughters' toys arranging themselves in a perfect circle in the playroom after Jane had put them away for the night – eventually drove her from the mini-mansion to a modest apartment until the house sold. They live in the south now.

Did Jane make this up? I can verify the following: they definitely moved, her husband did pass away in that house, and it was indeed a foreboding place – but the reasons why are less easily proved. So what about the in-betweens? The details that still make my skin crawl to think about? There's no way of truly knowing, but I choose to believe them.