



When volunteering is scary.(Editorial).Anna Hanks and Local Contributor. *The Austin American-Statesman (TX)* (Oct 31, 2005): pA13. (734 words)

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Byline: Anna Hanks, LOCAL CONTRIBUTOR

The 14-foot spider in the garage was a sign that Halloween had spun out of control. In early July, my husband started building "Charlotte" as a prop for this year's Haunted Trails at the Wild Basin Wilderness Preserve. He spent nights in the garage with her, instead of inside with me.

Although many women might resent their husband being ensnared in Charlotte's web, to me she was just a symptom of our crazed over-involvement in Halloween.

For normal people, October is time to start thinking about pumpkins and what to wear for the school carnival. For me, it means counting the days until the spooky holiday and Haunted Trails are over. (And fortunately this year, that was Saturday night.)

During the interactive Haunted Trails, night-time guests are led around the preserve by trained guides

who drag them from scary experience to scary experience -- a frisson of fantasy fear fueling their fun.

Haunted Trails was spawned 10 years ago by Richard Garriott's Britannia Manor haunted house, perhaps the most famous private haunted house in the country. When Austin's Garriott grew weary of having his own bedroom haunted till the wee hours, he put an "ixnay" on the haunting. Many Britannia hunters crept to the Wild Basin, and Haunted Trails became the basin's second largest fund-raiser. It annually generates between \$35,000 and \$50,000, heavily funding the basin's education programs.

My husband and I went to Haunted Trails as guests for several years. When he started dwelling on how it could have been better executed, I told him that we either had to stop going or that he had to get involved. Every year about this time, I could kick myself for saying that, but I haven't the energy.

For us, Haunted Trails is closer to a full-blown mania than a volunteer project. Given a budget of absolutely zilch, and the last-minute responsibility of lining up volunteers, I've had to be crafty. I've been to high schools, I've approached people playing guitar on the sidewalk, and I've posted and answered more ads on the local craigslist than most spammers.

When wrong numbers ask for Igor or Snake, I sweetly ask them if they are perchance calling to volunteer for Haunted Trails. I have tried to recruit my formidable gym instructor as a guide -- fear, fitness and fun being a fabulous fit for him.

My staple-gun finger is nearing exhaustion. If you've seen one of our orange fliers around

town, chances are I've cajoled it there.

This year, trying to find non-traditional ways to recruit volunteers, I asked the Alamo Drafthouse if it could announce it to contestants in the Bloodshots horror-film movie-making contest, where competitors had 48 hours to make a six-minute movie.

As mania has no limits, and I needed bodies, I e-mailed a director of the Fantastic Fest, the horror festival

screening the completed Bloodshots films. The festival director politely declined my plea, saying he had his hands full. Awkwardly, I ended up covering the festival as a journalist for the French horror and sci-fi magazine L'Ecran Fantastique.

All of this activity has led me, perhaps belatedly, to question my reasons for doing it. Independent Sector, which bills itself as a leadership forum for nonprofits, claims that 44 percent of adults volunteer. They estimate that an hour of volunteer time is worth \$17.55 to the receiving organization, and that volunteers do the work of 9 million full-time employees -- time worth nearly \$239 million.

Another Web site, www.charityguide.org, lists reasons

why people might volunteer, including: "to act out a fantasy," "to gain status" and "for religious reasons."

Since I was the voodoo priestess at Haunted Trails this year, I suppose all those reasons apply.

The only flaw in my master plan is that this year, Haunted Trails wasn't happening on Halloween. This means that I have to find a costume, just like everyone else. Of course, due to exhaustion, we might just turn off the porch light tonight and hide from the neighborhood kids. There's only so much Halloween that even maniacs like me can take.

Or maybe I can pass out fliers to next year's volunteer recruitment soiree. It's never too early to start planning ahead.

Hanks is an Austin journalist. She is also

volunteer recruitment director, sponsorship

coordinator and Voodoo Priestess for the Haunted Trails. If you'd like to volunteer for Haunted Trails cleanup, contact anna_hanks@hotmail.com.

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