

# Welcome to (Haunted) Hotel California

IF YOU PICK just one haunted house to review, you're going to alienate operators of all the others in this area. But, if you try to visit them all, you won't be done by Halloween.

So, we took a survey of teen friends and followed the consensus: **Haunted Hotel California**, the corner of 15th and California Streets, is worth a visit.

A bigger problem was finding qualified reviewers — a group of teens, with proper teen jaundice about such "childish" things as haunted houses, but with no experience in the genre.

Fortunately, we had a group of high school foreign exchange students in town Friday. No haunted houses for Halloween in Germany or Spain. (No Halloween in Germany or Spain, either.)

"IS IT WORTH waiting in such a long line?" asked Dennis Weiss, eyeing the queue that stretched about a block.

The three Germans, four Spaniards and American volunteer driver Brian Brownrigg, a Central High senior, waited patiently, if without much spirit, the half-hour till they were at the front door of the white building rented year-round by Genesis V to scare the tricks and treats out of visitors for just three weeks.

Things perked up slightly when Jason — the hockey-masked killer from "Friday the 13th," Parts 1 through ad nauseum — crept quietly into the line, eliciting a hearty scream from a girl in front of our group.

Naturally, she pounded on her date's shoulder, as if to ask, "Why did you do that to me?" sort of passing the fright buck.

MARIAN CALIZ of Alicante,

**Peter Citron**



Spain, lifted the hockey mask, found a green, disfigured face mask underneath: "You are *mas guapo* (more handsome) like this," she summed, pulling the hockey mask back down.

Listening to the gurgles and groans and growls as the line got shorter, Ivan Corretja of Barcelona felt it "strange that (Americans) pay (\$3.50 each) to get scared."

"I'd rather laugh than be scared," said Montsede las Heras of Madrid, opting at the last moment to stay outside.

Uncertain of their mission, Germans Rainer Lukas, Chris Muller and Dennis and Spaniards Ivan, Marian and Eva Sacristan entered with old-hand-at-haunted-houses Brian.

THE "V" AFTER Genesis is for the five who started haunting houses 10 years ago — Mark and Cheri Miller, Jack Jones, Don Hoffman and Frank Schneider.

Proceeds from Haunted Hotel California now go to groups assisting abused women and children, leukemia sufferers and the Tangier Shrine transportation fund.

Big Business, explained Miller. The house takes in about \$70,000 a year, costs about \$20,000 to set up and run.

It started as one of those sitting-around-at-the-bar discussions, and

someone said, "Let's do a house."

AND DO it up right, they do.

"We sit down in February and decide what we want to do," Miller said. They completely redo about half the 17 rooms and half-dozen cubbyholes each year with elaborate spook setups.

Main new feature this year is a papier mache walk-through dragon with a cave inside. Naturally, there's a ghoulish lobby for the hotel, and you've got to have something Freddyish from the "Nightmare on Elm Street" series and an area for Jason, accompanied to the tune of chainsaws.

If you're considering your own Halloween haunt, consider it takes about 30 "monster" volunteer drama students from Omaha public schools, another 20 adults for security and two or three off-duty police.

ABOUT 20 minutes and an equal number of screams later, our group emerged. This blase bunch of typical teens bubbled with excitement.

The other girls quickly reverted to their native Spanish to give Montsede an earful on what she missed. Ivan shivered at the memory of spooky things reaching out to touch someone. The Germans were ultra-impressed with strobe light effects "that make you not know where you're walking, and your head goes ..." (Rainer couldn't find the English words for wobble.)

Freddy provided the biggest fright, concluded the exchange students. And Brian felt "a lady with her face in a television set" was the best special effect.

If the other haunted houses in the area live up to a check-in at the Haunted Hotel California, looks like a very profitable Halloween for area kids and charities is in progress.