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Thanks to Errol Flynn and friends, Musso & Frank was once the liveliest scene in town. Thanks to their ghosts, it's still anything but dead

BY JOSHUA TOMPKINS



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: stars Lorre, Harlow, Welles and Flynn at their favorite spook-easy

his clairaudient listening skills, which he now uses to channel via telephone.

Those gifts, packaged in the diminutive Kingston's twinkle-eyed, almost elfin brand of mysticism, eventually earned him clients such as Greta Garbo, Harry Truman and a sizable portion of Britain's royal family. He was the only medium Marilyn Monroe ever consulted, and his book *I Still Talk to . . .* details his confabs with other famous personalities no longer on "Earthplane," as he calls it. When not stumping on the paranormal lecture circuit or doing private readings for \$300 a pop, Kingston—who now lives in Studio City and refuses to divulge his age—is a fixture on talk-radio and TV. A recent appearance on *The Howie Mandel Show* generated more than 49,000 viewer letters. The first time I met Kingston, he saw my maternal grandmother hovering above me and warned that my colitis—which I hadn't told him about—might flare up.

But the visit to Musso & Frank begins without a peep from the spirits. Kingston, whose short, near-white hair is neatly feathered, chatters about an upcoming trip to Paris. I fear the evening will be a flop.

Just then, however, his eyes fix on something over my shoulder and flash with amusement. I follow his gaze to a nearby table, where a handsome young man is scratching the back of his neck, then his nose.

"Know why he's doing that?" Kingston asks. "Errol Flynn is standing behind him and tickling him with a feather."

I grill Kingston on the ectoplasmic hows and whys. Does Flynn appear now as he appeared in bodily life? Yes. Does Flynn know that Kingston can see him? Yes. Has Flynn said anything to him? "He says he's done more for L.A. real estate than anyone," Kingston says, "since so many homeowners claim Errol Flynn lived there."

Or maybe just slept there, I can't help thinking. I tell my brain to shut up before Flynn turns the feather on me.

The swashbuckler isn't alone. Kingston nods toward a table of four middle-aged men and says Lionel Barrymore is with them. Then he spots Orson Welles and Charles Laughton at the bar. All I can detect is a wide gap amid the living barflies, so I ask about the *Citizen Kane* director's size in the afterlife. "He's a large spirit," Kingston admits. Near Welles, Carole Lombard is dueling with an Earthplane woman for control of a bar stool.

Soon the place is brimming with more late Hollywood

IT'S JUST BEFORE EIGHT on a Tuesday evening, and the dinner clatter at Musso & Frank Grill is percolating like 80-year-old decaf. Smallish, old waiters whose faces seem tanned by scone lighting deliver platters of fried shrimp and corned beef hash to vacationing Nebraskans and off-duty movie grips. The loud party of four near the back just hit another punch line; a burly man wearing an *X-Files* ball cap asks for soy sauce. Cashier Ruth McCoy sits happily on her stool like a cherry on a sundae. The place opened in 1919, and the only things about it that ever change are the slogans on the tourist T-shirts.

But I'm not here for the ambience—nor is my guest, world-famous psychic Kenny Kingston. As the maître d' leads us to one of the swanky red booths in the side dining room, a woman recognizes Kingston and quickly turns her face away, as if trying to shield her mind. But ad hoc readings aren't on the menu tonight, either. We've come to spot celebrities—dead ones. Musso & Frank was once one of the favorite Hollywood haunts of Golden Age A-listers from Chaplin to Crawford. And, according to Kingston, it still is.

Kingston, as any channel-surfing insomniac will tell you, is most widely known for his *Psychic Hotline* infomercial. The operation, which he helps oversee but doesn't own, charges \$2.99 a minute and rakes in more than \$5 million a month. Kingston says he has been talking to the spirits since his childhood in San Francisco, where the ghost of his grandfather helped him study for exams and his mother taught him the technique of psychometry—reading impressions from personal objects. Later, the spiritually endowed Mae West honed



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greats than the wax museum down the street. Peter Lorre is dining at a booth across the room. Raymond Burr lingers near the restrooms with a thin man Kingston doesn't recognize. Even Tiny Tim pokes his head through the front door. But gossip columnist Louella Parsons, Kingston says, refused to show up because of her hatred of Welles. (Some old grudges never die.) Meanwhile, Flynn is still at it with the feather.

As the beset young man heads for the restroom scratching his lower back, I ask Kingston if the movie spooks congregate at Musso & Frank every night. "They knew you'd be here to write about them," he explains. "They love publicity now as much as they did on Earthplane."

The waiter arrives with our entrées, and Kingston seems intent on making him drop them. "Do you remember Father John?" he asks.

"Oh, yes," the waiter says matter-of-factly. "He was the priest where . . ."

"Father John says hello," Kingston interrupts. The waiter blanches slightly and hurries away.

Jean Harlow crashes a party at a booth near ours, and Orson Welles quaffs another Bud Eternal Light. Kingston devours a piece of swordfish and dishes up revelations about the few celebs who *didn't* show up tonight. James Dean wasn't driving the Porsche when it crashed—his mechanic was. Madonna's daughter is the reincarnation of Eva Perón. Howard Hughes is still alive. Elvis isn't.

By now it's after 10, and bodies and poltergeists are clearing out. As we make our way to the door, Kingston suspects the spirits have been tampering with the kitchen lights. I stop to inquire with the maitre d'. The man smiles and shakes his head politely. No wiring problems. Well, even a master psychic can get a little carried away.

But then I find Kingston near the kitchen entrance talking to a fortysomething busboy who looks like he could set a table blindfolded in 15 seconds. "The lights in the kitchen," Kingston says slowly. "Do they flicker on and off sometimes?"

The man nods somberly. **LA**