



**KENTUCKY
HAUNTINGS
HOMESPUN GHOST STORIES &
UNEXPLAINED HISTORY**

**ROBERTA SIMPSON BROWN &
LONNIE E. BROWN**

Kentucky Hauntings

Homespun Ghost Stories and Unexplained History

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Scholarly publisher for the Commonwealth,
serving Bellarmine University, Berea College, Centre
College of Kentucky, Eastern Kentucky University,
The Filson Historical Society, Georgetown College,
Kentucky Historical Society, Kentucky State University,
Morehead State University, Murray State University,
Northern Kentucky University, Transylvania University,
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Editorial and Sales Offices: The University Press of Kentucky
663 South Limestone Street, Lexington, Kentucky 40508-4008
www.kentuckypress.com

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Brown, Roberta Simpson, 1939–

Kentucky hauntings : homespun ghost stories and unexplained history / Roberta Simpson Brown and Lonnie E. Brown.

pages cm

ISBN 978-0-8131-4320-0 (hardcover : alk. paper)—

ISBN 978-0-8131-4382-8 (epub) — ISBN 978-0-8131-4383-5 (pdf)

1. Haunted places—Kentucky. 2. Ghosts—Kentucky. I. Brown, Lonnie E. II. Title.

BF1472.U6B7756 2013

133.109769—dc23

2013018934

This book is printed on acid-free paper meeting the requirements of the American National Standard for Permanence in Paper for Printed Library Materials.



Manufactured in the United States of America.



Member of the Association of American University Presses

To our families and friends, here and on the other side, who gave us a love of stories.

And to the late John C. Ferguson, a great friend, storyteller, and writer. We thank his wonderful family for sharing him with us.

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Introduction

Are you ready for some smiles and shivers? The stories in this book will bring you both. In the tradition of Kentucky storytelling, we have included stories that are fun for all ages. We are fortunate to have grown up in a culture that still has storytellers who know the importance of passing stories from one generation to the next. Read these stories, but take them from the page to your imagination. Put them into your own words, and pass them on. In this way you can help these stories from historical headlines, and homefolks live forever.

We are often asked why we enjoy ghost stories and paranormal stories so much. Our answer is simply that they are exciting and fun! The love we had for them as children has carried over into our adult lives.

But scary stories serve more serious purposes than simply being entertaining. They can help us deal with fear. Fear is a universal feeling. Even though we don't all share the same fears, we do share the feeling. Scary stories help us identify our fears and confront them. Only when we do this are we able to control whatever is frightening us. Sharing stories helps us explore ways to deal with our fears. Learning how someone else handles fear can give us insight on how to explore our options and deal with the scary things in our lives. It is also comforting to know that others experience unexplained things as we do, and that helps us affirm our sanity.

We are amazed at the number of people, young and old, who tell us that they have experienced some paranormal experience. Some are confused and do not know what to do. They are afraid to tell anyone else because they are afraid that they will be subjected to ridicule. When they hear or read about an experience similar to their own, they are more inclined to open up and tell about their own experiences. Sometimes, individuals approach us and say that they have a story they want us to use in a book, but more often they just want to relate whatever has been bothering them that they can't explain. They aren't interested in being published. They are only looking for answers.

Storytelling brings us together as a culture. We are close to our families and our neighbors when we sit together, tell stories, and then discuss our feelings about them. Kentucky history is rich in stories passed down from generation to generation. Our heritage lives on through these tales. Our particular area passed on ghost tales. We passed on scary tales because that is what we heard.

People enjoy a good scare, but they don't like the bad kind. A bad scare is, for example, hearing someone breaking into your house or finding yourself in danger, but helpless. A scary story allows you to experience the thrill of being scared while being able to do something about it. You can always stop reading and take a break from the story, or you can cover your ears and avoid listening. In other words, you can take a "fear break" and gather your courage if our stories are too scary.

The stories we tell in these pages were told to us orally, but some accounts have been published in newspapers or posted on the Internet. Although we include notes with each story on any additional sources we used, we have not copied these sources. Rather, we have simply read all we could find about the tales we share here to confirm and provide supporting details for the stories here. We want you, our readers, to feel what the characters feel in the story. Our goal is not only to present facts, but also to write a book you will enjoy reading. So start reading the stories, and bring on the smiles and the shivers.

Stories from History

In our first years of school, we thought history was boring. The teachers we had made us memorize dates and events, but we were not told much about the real people from the past and what they did. Then, when we were in high school, we had a teacher named Mr. Tarter who told us stories that made history come alive. He was able to pull us into those stories and make us feel we were there in a time gone by. It was fascinating to study history from then on.

Another remarkable teacher named Leland Voils, in health class, also told stories, and he made health issues throughout history come alive too. He spoke of characters and events with such vivid detail that we were transported to whatever time period we were studying and we felt what those people must have felt. He was one of the best storytellers we ever met.

Stories give us glimpses into history that we could never see in timelines and strictly factual accounts. Stories paint a mental picture of daily happenings and introduce us to characters that become real in our hearts and minds.

A Chivaree Gone Bad

Roberta's grandmother, Lou Ann Simpson, told about many customs that we did not read about in history books. This is one of her stories.

The chivaree was an odd, but popular, social custom that thrived in Appalachia until the end of World II. It took place in the early evening after a wedding. It was meant originally to scare off evil spirits and to provide an occasion to have some fun with the newlyweds—a kind of old-time version of the modern wedding reception.

In those days, the bride and groom usually had a home of their own to go to after the wedding. Often relatives of the couple helped build the house on land provided by the parents. Money was scarce, so there were practically no honeymoon trips. After the wedding ceremony at the church, the newly married couple would usually stay for a while and mingle with family and friends, who provided food and drinks for the occasion. Then the newlyweds would go to their new house to start their life together.

The chivaree was supposed to be a secret event, but most newlyweds expected it and accepted it as good fun. As dusk approached, relatives and neighbors would gather all the noisemakers they could find—everything from musical instruments to buckets and pots and pans to beat on—and would meet at some common location, like the church. Then they would proceed to the couple's house when it was just about dark.

First, they would march around the house, singing and making as much racket as they could. They usually brought the couple to the door, but if it didn't, they would stop at the front door and knock. When the couple opened the door, three or four men would grab the groom, seat him astride a splintered rail from an old rail fence, and carry him off into the woods. Not too far from the house, they would tie him loosely to a tree or a fence post and leave him for a while to see if he could get loose and find his way home by himself. If it took him too long, some of the men would go back and get him.

While this was going on, the bride would invite all the visitors inside and offer them cookies and cake, with maybe some coffee or lemonade. Sometimes the guests would bring along additional refreshments, and the chivaree would turn into a party. Usually there would be music and dancing.

until bedtime. By the time the groom rejoined the group, he had usually calmed down if he had been angry, and everybody had a good time, including him.

After we heard this story, we were glad this custom was no longer observed when we got married!

Deep in the Kentucky hills on the first of June many years ago, young Nellie Crenshaw and her longtime love, Jeff Barnes, exchanged vows in the little community church they had attended all their lives. Everybody knew the young couple and showed up to witness their marriage ceremony and wish them good luck.

It was an especially beautiful wedding. The bride and groom had been childhood sweethearts, and this June day was the fulfillment of their dreams. They had heard whispers of a chivaree, but they went on their way home as if they suspected nothing more. The afternoon passed slowly and the sun set low. They ate an early supper, and Nellie made some cookies and a pot of coffee in anticipation of the visitors they expected to come. Jeff kept looking out the window, not eager for his upcoming role in the night's festivities. Determined to be a good sport, he just wanted to get it over with.

The setting sun was a prearranged signal for the relatives and neighbors to meet in the churchyard. As soon as everybody arrived with their noisemakers, the whole group headed to the young couple's house. Nellie and Jeff listened to the ruckus outside and then opened the door and faced their visitors. The group stopped the noise and began to serenade the young couple with "Let Me Call You Sweetheart." All was calm until the song ended.

As the singers were nearing the end of the song, two men quietly edged their way close to the door. When the last note was sung, they suddenly grabbed the groom, dragged him out into the yard, and seated him on the split rail from the fence. Jeff offered the expected resistance, but went along with the prank. Off they went with him across the field to the woods behind the house, with everybody cheering and shouting. Those left behind joined the bride inside to set out the food and drinks. They laughed and talked while they waited.

Meanwhile, the men stopped near the foot of a tree that stood at the edge of a small clearing not far into the woods. The surrounding woods were already filling with shadows as the men tied Jeff loosely to a tree. Laughter and music were drifting across the field from the house where the party was getting under way. Figuring Jeff would be back to join the party in around half an hour, the men turned to leave.

"Come on, fellows," Jeff called out. "You can't leave me here like this. You know a bear was spotted in these woods two days ago. Come on. You've had your fun, but it's dangerous. Now untie me!"

The men laughed and ignored him. The farther they walked away from him, the louder Jeff called. They could actually hear fear in his voice now. They were surprised that he was scared. They had heard about the bear sighting, too, but they figured that the animal was just passing through and was long gone by now. They didn't believe for a moment that Jeff was in any danger. They joined the others at the house and took some food and drinks outside to sit in the yard. They were relating how they had tied Jeff up when they were startled to hear terrifying screams from across the field from the clearing. There was no doubt the screams were coming from Jeff.

"Help! Help me!" Jeff yelled as if the cries were being ripped from his throat. "For God's sake, somebody help me!"

The men looked at each other. Jeff was really in trouble! Immediately, without a word, all the men ran through the field to the clearing at the edge of the woods. The screaming stopped before they arrived and, when they looked at the scene before them, they couldn't believe their eyes. What the

saw in front of them was unthinkable. Jeff lay perfectly still, mauled and bleeding. A huge bear beside the broken body looked at the men. One man, who always carried a gun, pulled it from his pocket and fired into the air. The men began to shout at the bear until it turned and ran into the woods. They ran for Jeff, but it was too late. He was already dead.

It was one of those things that absolutely couldn't happen; yet it did. The hours and days that followed seemed unreal. The little church where the joyous wedding had taken place such a short time before was now the site of unbearable grief at Jeff's funeral. The day he was laid to rest, the neighborhood men tracked and killed the bear.

Nellie moved out of the house that she and Jeff had built with so much love and happy expectation. She lived with her parents for a while, but she couldn't stand it for long. It was too hard to look at the woods and the house and the people. She moved away to live with an aunt in a faraway state. She never came back.

Nobody else moved into the house, and soon it fell to ruin. Nellie's father used it for storage.

People claimed that it wasn't really deserted, though. They claimed that, on the anniversary of the wedding and the chivaree, laughter and singing could be heard at the house. These sounds were followed by heart-wrenching screams coming from the clearing in the woods. Hunters who ventured into the woods on the anniversary night reported that they heard a growl and felt cold chills. They never saw the bear, but they felt its presence stalking them. The sense of danger was so great that they hurried from the woods and never went back at night.

As the years went by, people were so disturbed by the house that Nellie's father eventually tore it down. Those who had to pass by the woods went as quickly as they could. Stories circulated about odd sounds in the clearing and at the spot where the old house used to be. Nobody ventured close enough to check out the sounds, and nobody ever mentioned another chivaree.

Telling the Bees

Tom Simpson, Roberta's father, kept several hives of bees on his farm. He had many bee stories to share. He believed in "telling the bees."

This practice was an odd belief among some communities that may not actually be ghostly, but definitely falls into the categories of spooky and unexplained. It was said that bees must be told and their hives draped in mourning if the beekeeper or any member of the keeper's family died. If the practice was not carried out, it was believed that the bees would swarm and leave their hives in search of a new home.

It was important in earlier days to have bees on the farm. The honey was used for many things, especially during the Great Depression, when sugar was rationed. Honey was used for such things as healing remedies and for baking. A favorite breakfast treat was hot biscuits, honey, and butter. Naturally, people who kept hives of bees did not want them to swarm and go elsewhere.

Telling the bees was a custom brought over from England and prevailed in New England and the edge of Appalachia. In 1858, American poet John Greenleaf Whittier even wrote a poem about it called "Telling the Bees." Children read this popular poem in their textbooks at school.

Josh Simms, a Kentucky farmer, always kept several hives of bees at the end of his garden near his barn. He had a remarkable way with the bees that especially impressed his young niece Tina. She noticed that her Uncle Josh never got stung, even when he was taking honey from the hives. The bees would often land on him, but they would fly away without doing him any harm. They never bothered anyone who was with him, either.

One day Tina and Josh were in the garden gathering vegetables near the beehives. The bees were darting about their heads, but then would fly on.

"Uncle Josh, can you talk to bees?" Tina asked. "Do you tell them not to sting us?"

"Sure, I talk to them," he said, "but not exactly the way I talk to people. I guess they can tell what I'm feeling. They don't sting us because I let them know that we are not going to hurt them."

Tina just smiled. She didn't know if what her uncle said was the truth or just something he made up to tease her.

One day at school, her class read Whittier's poem "Telling the Bees." Tina was fascinated by it, and as soon as she saw her uncle again, she told him about it.

"Uncle Josh," she asked, "do you know that you are supposed to tell the bees if anyone in the family dies?"

"I've heard that," he answered, "and I've read the poem."

"Do you know any beekeepers who told the bees when someone in the family died?" Tina continued.

"Yes," he said. "I had a neighbor once who kept bees. When he died, the family told the bees and draped the hives with strips of black cloth. The bees didn't swarm and leave."

"Do you think they would really swarm and leave if they weren't told?" she said. "Maybe they would have stayed anyway."

He stood looking at his beehives for a minute before he answered.

"I think there is some truth to the custom," he said finally. "I think they would leave if they weren't told. In fact, I saw it happen once when I was a young man, and I'll never forget it. Old man Leach's bees swarmed after he died because nobody told them he was dead."

"How do you know that was why they swarmed?" she asked. "Did you see them leave the hives?"

"No, but I saw where they went. It was really strange," he said.

"Where did they go?" Tina asked him.

"The Leach family thought the custom of telling the bees about a death was just silly superstition," he told her. "They ignored it and made arrangements for the old man's burial several miles from home. Most of us in the neighborhood went to the funeral. After the service was finished inside the church, he was carried to the graveyard next to the church, where he was to be buried. A few of us stayed behind after the coffin was lowered into the ground and covered with dirt. People left enough fresh flowers to completely cover the grave, so we placed them over the top."

"Then we heard an odd sound, like a buzzing or humming of some kind. As it got closer and louder, we looked up and saw a dark mass of something approaching from the sky. We were surprised to see that it was a swarm of bees. They landed right on top of Mr. Leach's grave! We stood there and stared in shock for a few seconds, and then we all scattered in every direction."

"Maybe the bees were attracted to the fresh flowers on the grave," Tina suggested.

"Some people thought that," he said. "You know, the unbelievers. But the flowers hadn't been on the grave long enough to attract the bees. The bees had to have started flying before we put the flowers on the grave because the hives were several miles away. Some of us left immediately and went to Mr. Leach's house. We checked the hives, but they were deserted. The bees that came to the graveyard and landed on his grave were his bees. I'll never understand it, but they knew by some unknown means where to find him."

"Would you tell your bees if someone in our family died?" Tina asked.

"Yes, Tina," he answered. "I would definitely tell them."

A few months after this conversation with Tina, Josh learned he had cancer. When he died over a year after that, nobody in the immediate family thought to tell the bees. Tina thought of it during the funeral, and when it was over, she hurried to the hives to check on the bees. They were all gone.

already. Like their keeper, they had gone to a new home.

The Pie Supper

We were not in our teens yet when pie suppers were popular, so although we never baked any pies for these events, we did share in the pie eating. Miss Mildred, the teacher at the local one-room school, shared a particularly heartbreaking story of one pie supper long ago.

In early times, local churches and schools would hold pie suppers to raise money for the things they needed that did not come under regular budget funds or taxes. In fact, pie suppers provided a major source of funding for many of Kentucky's one-room schools in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

At the pie supper, women and girls would provide their homemade pies to be auctioned off to the highest bidder. The person who bought the pie not only got the pie, but also got to eat it with the pie maker. Pie suppers thus had romantic elements, with young men often competing for a pie.

No names were on the boxes containing the pies, but each box had distinctive decorations. The highest bidder did not know the identity of the pie maker unless he had some inside information from the girl or her family. Sometimes a girl who liked a certain young man would give him a hint about which box to bid on by secretly revealing some detail about the decorations of her box.

The ladies decorated their pie boxes with ruffles, ribbons, and flowers, mostly made from cloth or crepe paper purchased at the five-and-ten-cent store. Without hints, an element of mystery or surprise was added to the sale. If more than one young man liked the same girl, the competition in bidding would raise the price of the pie beyond the usual cost. Five dollars was considered a high price. Regardless of who purchased the pies, the money went for a good cause and most people had fun. Unfortunately, now and then there would be an exception. One such exception was always remembered.

Fred Doss and Bernice Swanson first met at a pie supper and kept steady company after that. She was sixteen and he was seventeen when it all started, but the romance blossomed and grew for four years. During that time, Houston Holleran had his eye on Bernice, too. Fred always knew (probably with a hint from Bernice) which pie was hers. He always managed to outbid Houston and end up with Bernice.

But the year Fred turned twenty-one was different. He had enlisted in the army and was leaving the day after the pie supper, so it was especially important to Fred and Bernice to share this last pie supper before Fred went off to war. It was equally important to Houston to outbid Fred on this special night. Bernice wanted to make sure Fred bought her pie, so she gave him a big hint.

"My pie box will be decorated in red, white, and blue in honor of your going into the army to serve your country," she said.

Houston figured Bernice would give Fred advance information, so he sent his little sister Alberta over to Bernice's house to spy. Alberta often went to the house to play with Bernice's younger sister, so Bernice thought nothing about the visit. Alberta learned what kind of pie Bernice had baked and even saw the decorated box. This was the information Houston needed. Then Alberta had her mother help her decorate a box that looked like Bernice's box. Alberta changed one tiny detail on the side of the box that nobody but Houston would notice. At the pie supper, Houston placed his sister's box ahead of Bernice's while everybody else was playing games and not paying attention to him. Then he waited.

When the pie auction started, the auctioneer picked up Alberta's box and opened the bidding.

Thinking it was Bernice's pie, Fred started to bid. Houston bid against him at first to fool him and run the bidding up. Then Houston let Fred make the final bid. Fred didn't realize that he had bought the wrong box until Alberta stepped forward and revealed that it was hers. Later, when Bernice's box came up, Fred didn't have enough money left to buy it, so Houston won the bidding with ease.

Everybody thought it was unfair, but the rules of the pie supper were clear. The guy who bought the pie ate the pie with the girl who brought it. On the evening that was supposed to be their own special time, Bernice and Fred had to eat with other people. Houston thought it was hilarious, but the young couple was very disappointed. When Fred walked Bernice home later, she was literally in tears.

"Don't cry," Fred told her. "Houston pulled off a mean trick, but I promise you that no matter what we'll be together at next year's pie supper!"

Bernice quickly forgot Fred's promise because Fred had to leave for training the next day. She missed him terribly and refused invitations to go out with Houston. She wrote to Fred every day and prayed every night that he would not have to go overseas to fight. She did not realize that prayers are often answered in ways we do not expect. One day, word came that Fred had been killed in a training accident in boot camp. He would not be going overseas to fight, but he would not be coming home to be with her either. Bernice was devastated. She stayed home and grieved the loss of her sweetheart.

Months passed, and Bernice still refused to attend any social events. Finally, the time came for the annual pie supper. Her parents reminded Bernice that the school needed to raise funds, so she finally agreed to go with them. She covered her box with black crepe paper and added one white rose. Houston decided right away that it was hers, so he bought it when it went up for auction.

Bernice tried to be cheerful afterward while they ate, but Houston knew she was remembering the previous year. Sadness was in her eyes. He felt a twinge of conscience about the way he had acted the year before and tried to make casual conversation. Two other couples joined them and tried to cheer Bernice up.

Suddenly, they heard a noise behind them. It sounded like someone stepping on dry twigs. They all looked around and gasped at what they saw. They couldn't believe their eyes. A figure in an army uniform stood there smiling and gazing at Bernice. There was no doubt about his identity. Fred had clearly kept his promise that they would be together at this pie supper. Bernice fainted and Fred's ghost vanished.

Bernice was never the same after that night. She refused to eat or have visitors. She began to waste away and was dead in a few weeks.

The story goes that as long as they had pie suppers at that school, a ghostly couple could be seen standing off from the crowd. If anyone approached them, they would vanish!

The Whittler's Trail

Some of Russell County's finest whittlers, Mr. Hughes, Mr. Ash-brooks, and Mr. Wilson, gathered on the porch of our little country store and exchanged tales as they whittled. All three could have told this story, but Mr. Wilson probably told it most often. Both the telling and the whittling could be considered art.

Whittling has been around almost as long as mankind itself. It is not a part of Kentucky life now like it used to be, but the tradition is still carried on by some skilled whittlers. In whittling, one cuts and shapes wood, usually into toys, bowls, and the like, using only a knife. The knife is usually a light small-bladed knife or pocketknife, and the whittler usually whittles objects as a hobby.

In Kentucky up through the 1900s, whittlers could often be seen whittling on the porches of the

homes, at the town square, or in front of an old country store. Huley Stanton was one such whittler. He was often seen at Harmon's store, passing the time by creating images of things he saw around him. Cedar wood was mostly his wood of choice because he liked the smell of it.

Five-year-old Danny Peterson loved to accompany his father, Lee, to the store so he could watch Huley whittle on the porch. Danny was amazed that Huley could pick up a piece of wood and turn it into a gun, animal, doll, or other toy.

"How do you do that?" he'd ask.

"I'll show you when you're a little older," Huley would tell him.

"I don't have a knife," Danny said.

"Well, I'll leave you my knife if anything ever happens to me," Huley promised. "This old knife can just about whittle out things on its own."

Danny didn't want anything to happen to Huley, but he certainly did want a knife of his own like the one Huley had. Whenever he asked for one, though, his parents always told him he was too young. He'd have to wait until he was several years older to get a knife of his own, so Danny had to be satisfied watching Huley use his for now.

Huley and his wife and Danny's family lived in the same neighborhood, but dense woods separated their houses. The woods belonged to Huley, and he often cut and sold timber off his land.

Danny's parents, Hattie and Lee, worked hard on their farm, but they made time to take Danny for walks in the woods. Danny loved all the trees and animals, but he listened to his mom and dad's warning that he must never go into the woods alone. They told Danny that even though the woods held great beauty, they also held great dangers. People in those days made children aware of danger without dwelling on it.

The Petersons lived in a world before security systems, so, like most people, they secured the doors at night by wooden latches. Danny slept in a small room off the kitchen. Lee and Hattie slept in a large bedroom off the living room. Since there were two rooms between, Lee took special care to secure the latches at night so nothing could get in and Danny would not be able to wander out.

All was well for some time. Then one day, life in the neighborhood started off as usual, but ended up in a way nobody would have expected. The Petersons were working in their garden, and Danny was playing in the yard. In the nearby woods, Huley Stanton went deep among the trees to cut some timber. The Petersons could hear the sound of Huley's axe chopping away. A short time passed with only the axe and the sound of the hoes breaking the silence. Then a crash and a scream rendered the Petersons motionless. Huley's voice was distant, but clear.

"God, help!" he called. "The tree fell on me. It's crushing me. Somebody help me, please!"

They listened for the direction of the sound, but nothing more came.

"Call for help," Lee said to Hattie, as he ran into the woods. Danny started to follow, but his mother held him back.

"Come inside with me," she said. "Your daddy will help Mr. Stanton."

But Huley was beyond help. Other neighbors came to aid Lee, but Huley's injuries were too severe for him to be saved. By the time they were able to remove the tree that was crushing his chest, he was dead.

Danny cried and cried because Huley was gone. He went to the funeral with his parents, but he wasn't quite sure what being dead really meant. What he did know was that his friend was gone and wouldn't be coming back. When the service was over and everyone went outside, Mrs. Stanton came up to the Petersons to thank them for coming.

"Danny," she said, turning to the boy, "Huley left you something. You may be a little young for now, but he always told me that he wanted you to have his whittling knife someday. I'll bring it over to you when things settle down a bit."

Her words made Danny feel better. His friend hadn't forgotten his promise!

~~When they got home, Danny was almost too excited about the knife to eat his supper. His mother urged him to eat because thunder was rumbling in the distance and she wanted to have supper over and the dishes washed before the storm hit.~~

“Do you think Mrs. Stanton will bring my knife to me tonight?” he asked.

“No,” Hattie told her son. “She's too sad now. Besides, a storm is coming.”

“But I want my knife now!” Danny insisted.

“Danny, that's enough,” his dad told him. “She'll bring it to you when she's ready. You're too little to use it now anyway. You might get hurt.”

Danny pouted, but said no more. They finished supper in silence and went to bed before the storm hit.

Danny did not go to sleep, though. He wasn't afraid of the storm's roaring and lightning. He was thinking about his knife. If Mrs. Stanton didn't want to come through the storm to his house, then he could go to her house. The more he thought about it, the more he thought that this was the thing to do.

He got out of bed quietly and put his clothes on. He tried to release the latch on the kitchen door but it was too high. He looked around, and his eyes rested on a kitchen chair. He moved it to the door, careful not to wake his parents. They would make him go back to bed. He climbed up on the chair and released the door latch. He didn't think about getting his raincoat. He didn't mind getting wet. It wasn't far to Mrs. Stanton's house anyway. He walked out the door into the woods while his parents slept peacefully inside the house.

Danny hadn't gone far when he began to realize he should not have done this. He knew he was lost. The woods didn't look the same on a stormy night as they did on a sunny day when his mom and dad were with him. He decided to go back home, but when he looked around, he had no idea of where to go. He was already soaked and chilled by the rain, and he wished he had a dry place to sit and rest. He looked around and noticed a large hollow tree standing by the path. He didn't know that hollow trees were dangerous in storms, so he crawled inside the opening in the trunk and rested.

As he sat there, the storm seemed to get a second wind. It blew with fury now, and suddenly a blast of wind uprooted the tree where Danny was resting. Danny tried to hold on, but he bounced back and forth inside the trunk. When the tree came to rest, Danny tried to crawl out, but a large branch pinned him inside. He was alone and lost, and nobody knew where to look for him. He cried and cried, and he thought he heard Huley Stanton tell him he would be all right.

Meanwhile, the renewed energy of the storm woke Hattie Peterson. She heard the kitchen door banging in the wind, so she got out of bed and rushed to the kitchen. One look at the open door sent her hurrying to check on Danny in his room. She knew what she would find. Her son was gone. His bed was empty. She ran into the kitchen.

“Lee, wake up!” she yelled. “Danny's gone!”

Lee pulled on his pants and hurried from the bed to the kitchen. One look at the chair beside the door told him what had happened.

“He's gone after that knife!” he told Hattie. “I've got to go look for him.”

“How will you find him in the woods in this storm?” she asked.

The answer to her question came from the darkness outside the door. Lee and Hattie both smelled the strong scent of fresh cedar right outside.

Lee grabbed his coat and lit the lantern. He opened the door, and the light showed a small pile of shavings right there by the door, with a thin trail of shavings leading into the woods. They were cedar shavings like the ones Huley Stanton whittled.

“Wait here,” said Lee. “I'll find him now. I have some help!”

Lee followed the trail of shavings into the woods for a few minutes. Then they led him off the main

path onto a smaller path that was seldom used. Soon he heard Danny crying.

“Danny!” he called. “Where are you?”

“Here,” Danny answered, whimpering now.

The sound was close. Lee looked around, trying to locate the source, when he saw what had happened. He ran over, lifted the limb, and checked Danny for injuries. His ankle was sprained, but otherwise he was unhurt. Just for an instant, Lee felt the presence of Huley Stanton beside him. He breathed a silent thank you to the whittler, picked Danny up in his arms, and carried him home.

Danny had to rest and stay off his ankle for a few days. He was feeling restless and bored one day when his mother came into his room and told him he had a visitor. He was surprised to see Mr. Stanton.

“I have your knife for you, Danny,” she said. “Your mom says you can't use it yet, but I am leaving it with her for you to use later. I brought you something you can use now, though. I found something that Huley whittled, and I know he would want you to have it.”

She handed Danny a wooden puzzle that he had seen Huley whittle at Harmon's store. In his mind, Danny could see Huley clearly. It felt like Huley was actually there.

It was many years before Danny used the knife to whittle. Each time he picked up a piece of cedar, he thought of the trail of shavings his dead friend had left that stormy night to save his life.

Burning Tobacco Beds

When we were young, as the time to burn the tobacco beds drew near, we recall hearing warnings to take care to keep the fire from spreading and for everyone to keep away from the flames so our clothes would not catch fire. The Cravens family, the Foley family, and Mr. Bray and his two sons were the ones who usually helped Roberta's dad. One of them told this story one night, but she can't say exactly which one because one story usually followed another, and she was so eager to listen that she did not always notice the transition.

Burning tobacco beds was an event most families enjoyed on the farm, but few people now would remember taking part in it, as it is now part of Kentucky history. Some farmers probably burned tobacco beds well into the 1970s. Up until that time, Kentucky had a lot of burly tobacco growers. Before modern methods took over, farmers grew their tobacco plants in a bed that was 8 feet by 50 feet or 8 by 100. To prepare the beds, they were first burned for weed control.

Long winters often left storm-damaged limbs and brush lying around everywhere. These were gathered, placed in piles, and burned like a huge bonfire over the area where the beds would be. The burning could be a family event or a neighborhood gathering. All help was welcome to carry the limbs and then to watch the fire and keep it from spreading.

The flames from the burning beds always looked spectacular against the early spring night skies. When the flames died out, the farmers raked and spread the ashes and let them cool overnight. Then they mixed the tobacco seeds in the ashes and sowed them in the beds. A cotton cloth was used to cover the beds, and the seeds were left alone to grow. When the seedlings reached a height of eight or ten inches, the farmers transplanted them in the fields. The introduction of methyl bromide and the ability to gas the beds pretty much eliminated the need to burn them. Before that happened, burning tobacco beds occurred every year.

The Grayson family looked forward to tobacco-bed burning each year so they could turn the procedure into a family bonfire. Faye and her younger sister, four-year-old Ruby Jean, always roasts

marshmallows on long sticks as the fire died down. Ruby Jean was fascinated by the flames and loved to stand close and feel the heat on the chilly spring nights. The family constantly had to warn her to stay at a safe distance, but her parents or sister often had to pull Ruby Jean back from the flames.

One night, as the Graysons were burning their tobacco beds, an unexpected wind whipped up the flames. Ruby Jean was standing near the fire when the flames shot out and caught the dress she was wearing. The little girl did the one thing she should never have done. She ran, frightened and screaming, through the field with the wind fanning the flames.

“Drop down and roll,” screamed Faye, running after her little sister. “Stop running!”

Mr. and Mrs. Grayson ran after both girls, but by the time Ruby Jean stumbled and fell to the ground, her burns were severe. There were no modern burn units back then, so Ruby Jean died that night.

People in the neighborhood say that the spirit of the little girl lives on, though. They declare that she returns on the anniversary of her death. Some swear that they have heard her scream and that they have looked out the windows to see a fiery light streaking through the field where she was burned. Most people refrained from burning their tobacco beds until that anniversary night had come and gone.

The Graysons never used that field for tobacco beds again. Neighbors said that each year, on the anniversary of that dreadful night, the family would go inside, close the doors and windows, and never look out. It was said that they spent that time praying for the tragic little girl.

Weather Forecaster

There were several teachers in our family and circle of friends. We loved the stories they all told, but Miss Sullivan was a favorite. She had a practice of ending each school day with a story. Storm stories were especially interesting because we had to deal with storms all during the school year. We could relate to these true tales.

In the days of one-room schoolhouses, there were no phones, no radios, and no TV sets in schools to give severe weather alerts. The teacher had to be her own weather forecaster. If a threatening storm approached in the morning, the teacher would keep the students at school and continue with the lessons. She knew that a morning storm was likely to blow itself out by the end of the school day. The little one-room schools were as sturdy as most of the students' homes, so it was safe for them to stay at school until the storm passed. However, if a bad storm approached in the afternoon, the teacher had to consider a different plan of action so her students would not be caught out in the storm.

There were no school buses in those days. All the children lived within walking distance of school and walked back and forth from home to school every day. The distance might be a mile or more for some children, so the teacher had to take that into consideration when storms were approaching. The storms that came up in early or mid-afternoon would sometimes turn into all-night rains, or at least rain that lasted beyond the regular time for school to be over. The parents and the teacher didn't want students walking home in the storm, so the teacher had to judge whether or not to dismiss school early to allow each child time to reach home safe and dry.

One midafternoon, a particularly bad-looking cloud loomed up without much warning. The teacher looked out the window and decided that, unless they all wanted to be stuck at school until after dark, she should let the students go home immediately.

“Boys and girls,” she said, “I want you to listen to me carefully. A very bad cloud is moving this way. I believe you can get home before this storm hits, but you must hurry as fast as you can. Get your

things now and run. Don't stop to play. Hurry!"

The students grabbed their books and lunch buckets (yes, buckets, because most students carried their food to school in little buckets that originally contained syrup), rushed out the door, and scattered in all directions. The teacher picked up her purse and some papers to grade that night and headed home herself, leaving the schoolhouse door unlocked as she always did.

One little boy had just reached the dirt road that led through the fields to his house when he realized he had left his arithmetic book at school. He had been having trouble with fractions, and his father had insisted that he bring the book home every night so they could study together. He didn't want his father to be angry, so he stopped and thought about what to do.

He looked at the darkening sky, but the main cloud still seemed to be in the distance. He knew the teacher always left the door unlocked for students who arrived early in the morning, so he decided he would go back. He hurried back to school, ran inside, snatched up the book, closed the door behind him, and dashed off for home as fast as he could.

Unfortunately, the little fellow misjudged the storm's speed. By now the storm had reached the boy, and the wind was whipping the limbs of the trees up and down furiously. He felt the cloud open up and saw a wall of rain heading right toward him. He clutched his book and wondered how he could keep it dry in the downpour. Just then he passed a hollow tree standing by the side of the road. The rain had reached him now, so he squeezed himself and his book into the huge hollow trunk.

The boy had been warned about trees like this. They were called widow makers because they often blew down in storms and killed the men who took shelter in them, leaving their wives widows. He did not heed the warning that day. He only thought of shelter from the storm, and that tree offered the only shelter available. The situation quickly turned tragic. A blast of wind uprooted the tree, crushing the little boy beneath the trunk as it fell.

The unbearable pain he was feeling brought darkness, so the boy wasn't aware that the storm soon stopped and that his father and his neighbors were looking for him. He lived long enough for them to find him and for him to tell them why he had gone back to school. He never knew that his arithmetic book had somehow remained dry and undamaged.

School was dismissed for the boy's funeral. When classes resumed, the teacher and the students missed the boy very much. They thought of him every day when they looked at his empty desk. The days came and went.

Then one day another storm headed for the school. The teacher was trying to decide if she should let the children leave when a student gasped, "Look!"

Everybody looked to where the boy was pointing. There stood the ghost of the little boy with his book under his arm, pointing toward the door.

The teacher took that as a sign that the storm was going to be bad and that they should all hurry home. She told the students to go. Remembering the fate of their former schoolmate, they wasted no time getting home. It turned out to be one of the worst storms of the year, but they felt that the ghost boy had saved them.

Until the school burned down mysteriously in a storm a year later, the ghost boy became a dependable weather forecaster. He didn't come in ordinary rain, but he always appeared if a storm was going to be dangerous.

Turkey Drive

Stories about cattle drives are common in the history of our country, but stories of turkey drives are rare. We were lucky to hear the personal stories of our grandfathers, Louis Franklin Simpson and

James Milton Rooks, who participated in some of the drives.

Milton said that the turkeys sometimes had their own ideas about where they wanted to go. The men would take the family dog along to help control the turkeys, but it wasn't much help. The gobblers would spread their tails and fluff up their feathers to look bigger, and the dog would be intimidated and just stand and bark.

When the turkey drovers were settled at their campsite for the night, Lewis Simpson would lead them in an evening of music, storytelling, and fun. He passed on one of those stories to us.

Turkey drives took place in the nineteenth century in the Midwest, the South, and even New England. Basically, cattle drives and turkey drives were the same. They were intended to get the livestock to market, and the journey was sometimes long and difficult. Louis always felt that turkey drives were more difficult than cattle drives. The cattle might become spooked and scatter in all directions, but they always stayed at ground level with the drovers, so they could be reached and rounded up. That was not the case with turkeys.

According to Louis, the turkeys were harder to control. They might be spooked by anything. Howling or barking dogs, rifle shots, paper blowing in the wind, or unseen things like engines or people talking often made the turkeys take flight. They might end up on the tops of buildings or trees, out of reach of the drovers. At that point, the turkeys were in charge. It was often impossible for the drovers to coax them down to continue on their way. Most of the time, the drovers simply set up camp where the turkeys had chosen to roost or take refuge from whatever frightened them.

The turkeys usually lived off the land, enjoying a diet of grasshoppers, nuts, plants, and the like. Drovers sometimes brought along a wagon filled with shelled corn, just in case the land did not provide food.

One late afternoon, a turkey drive approached a small town in south central Kentucky. Louis Simpson's old bluetick hound was taking a nap when he was disturbed by the drovers herding the turkeys down the road. He sat up and gave a couple of sharp, loud barks before deciding that the matter did not really require his attention. He lay back to continue his nap, but the turkeys flew into the highest tree seeking safety.

A boy who lived in town had heard that the turkey drive was coming through. He had never shot a turkey, and he decided it would be a good time to try out his new twenty-two rifle. This could be his lucky day. His luck held as he sneaked the rifle out of the house and hid in the bushes along the road. His luck continued to run as he heard the dog bark and the turkeys fly to safety in the treetops. His luck deserted him completely, however, when he failed to notice one of the drovers climbing up a tree to try to scare the turkeys down.

The boy raised his rifle and sighted only the turkey. It was a big one that would win him a lot of admiration among his friends if he could shoot it. Behind the tree, the drover climbed swiftly and silently, out of the boy's line of vision. Two things happened at the same time. The young drover leaned around the tree and reached for the turkey. The young boy on the ground pulled the trigger and sent a bullet into the drover's head. The horrified boy watched as the drover's body fell to the ground with a thud. The turkey they'd both been after fled to another tree and was later caught and sold at market.

The shooter, who was a minor, was not jailed as an adult. He was sent away to a reform school up north, and the victim was sent to the cemetery. That was not the end of it, though. On the anniversary of that tragic incident, people heard the sound of wings in the trees. They heard a single shot and the thud of a body hitting the ground. They always looked, but nothing was there. The scene was destined to be replayed over and over for many years until finally the sounds got fainter and fainter and

disappeared altogether.

Fool's Errand

The hunters in our community told this story. With little to do for entertainment when they were camped for the night on a hunting trip, they would resort to practical jokes to have some laughs. When they gathered at our home or the home of neighbors, they would recount their escapades. Most were innocent fun, but this one joke, which always stayed in our minds, had a terrible ending.

A fool's errand is sometimes also called a snipe hunt or a wild-goose chase. In early times in Kentucky and the southern United States, it was a type of practical joke that involved experienced people making fun of inexperienced people by setting them up with an impossible or imaginary task. Campers and hunters often practiced this kind of prank. The victim of the joke had to do silly and preposterous things to complete the task, but of course doing so was hopeless. The fool's errand came in two varieties: trying to find something that does not exist, or trying to accomplish an impossible task.

Many years ago, a group of hunters had pitched camp deep in the woods. After eating their dinner and cooking over an open fire, they were bored and looking for entertainment.

In the group was a young man named Ronald Wilson, who was on his first hunt. His presence made the opportunity for a fool's errand too good to pass up.

The group had considered a snipe hunt, but they discarded that idea because Ronald knew there really was such a thing as a snipe—it was a real bird that was very hard to catch. The group wanted something unreal and a whole lot scarier than a snipe. Finally, they came up with the idea of an imaginary monster called a Swamp Booger. Now that dinner was over, they were ready to put the plan into action.

“Boys, how would you like to catch a Swamp Booger tonight?” one hunter asked in mock seriousness.

“Naw, no way!” the others answered as planned.

“Ronald, how would you like to catch one?” the first hunter asked.

Ronald shifted uneasily on the ground and looked at the group.

“I never heard of a Swamp Booger,” he laughed nervously.

“Well, we've all seen it and had a crack at it,” said the hunter, “but none of us could catch it. You might just be the man to do the job!”

Ronald was tired from the day's hunt, and he didn't feel like hunting anything else that night. He did swell up a little with pride at being referred to as a man. All he really wanted, though, was to stretch out and go to sleep. It was obvious that this was not what his companions had in mind.

“What do you say?” the hunter persisted. “You up to giving it a try?”

All eyes were on Ronald, intent on their purpose of getting him to agree. He felt trapped and uneasy.

“I don't know,” he said. “What would I have to do?”

That was all the encouragement they needed. They all immediately moved closer to give him instructions.

“It's attracted by sounds,” one hunter said. “You have to beat two rocks together and call softly. ‘Swamp Booger! Swamp Booger!’”

“It may take a few minutes, but you will hear it coming,” said another. “It drags its tail and growls low growl just before it attacks. Don't let it get too close. It has paws with three claws only. You have to shoot when you hear the growl so it won't claw you to death.”

That didn't sound too inviting to Ronald.

"Why can't we all go hunt it together?" he asked.

"Oh, it won't show itself if it hears more than one person," said a third hunter. "We'll all hide nearby and be quiet, but you have to go out and call it by yourself."

"I wish I could catch it," said the first hunter, "but it's too quick for a man my age. The man that brings it in will be a real hero! I wish it could be me!"

Suddenly, Ronald was caught up in the action by the idea of being a hero.

"Okay, I'll give it shot," he told them.

One hunter handed him two rocks. Another passed him his gun. They helped him to his feet and pushed him along into the dark woods beyond the firelight.

They stopped and Ronald stumbled along alone, beating the rocks together. His self-confidence rose a little as he moved ahead. Maybe he really could catch this thing. It would be a great feeling to outdo the others. His walk was steadier now.

"Swamp Booger! Swamp Booger!" he called softly.

Back at the campfire, the hunters rolled on the ground laughing. They could hardly believe that anyone would really be dumb enough to think there was a real thing called a Swamp Booger.

They heard Ronald move farther into the woods. They followed at a safe distance so Ronald would not discover them.

"Swamp Booger! Swamp Booger!" Ronald kept calling.

Then suddenly they all heard something they were not supposed to hear. Something was dragging through the woods. Then it was growling!

The hunters heard the rocks go silent. A single shot rang out. The sounds that followed were terrifying. Ronald was screaming and struggling as the growling got louder. Then there was silence for just a minute. The hunters stood, unable to move, as they heard a dragging sound going in the opposite direction into the woods. They hurried to see what had happened to Ronald. It was horrible—and no longer a joke.

Ronald lay dead on the ground. His face had three claw marks. His gun had been fired once. The rocks were covered with blood, as if he had tried to use them to defend himself. Signs were evident that something like a tail had been dragged along the ground.

Ronald's death was ruled as "death by an unknown animal attack."

The hunters thought about it over and over in the next year. Of course there was no such beast as the one they had described to Ronald. It was just a coincidence that some animal had come out of the woods and killed him. They put it out of their minds and went on their annual hunt. Nobody mentioned the fool's errand they had sent Ronald on the year before.

They sat around the fire and ate their supper. They were thinking about turning in for the night when faint sounds came from the woods. The sounds came closer and closer, and the hunters realized they were hearing the sound of someone beating two rocks together.

"Swamp Booger! Swamp Booger!" a voice called softly.

The frightened men dashed water on the fire, grabbed their gear, and loaded it on their truck. They drove as fast as they could and never looked back. Their hunting consisted of day trips from then on. None of them was foolish enough to go back into the woods at night again.

Rest for the Traveler

We travel a lot with our book signings and storytelling, and we take for granted the reserved room at a hotel or motel, hot food and hot showers, and the privacy of a room to ourselves where we can rest and

feel safe. We live across the street from a historic inn, which gives us an idea of how it must have been long ago. There are lots of tales about peddlers and old inns, but this one illustrates the conditions you can imagine.

In the old days, hotels and motels did not dot the landscape of our country like they do now. Now when we travel, we take these luxuries for granted, but this was not always the case. In early times traveling salesmen (or peddlers, as they were often called) could not call ahead and reserve a room for the night. They had to depend on the hospitality of people who lived along the route they traveled to put them up for the night. This practice usually worked out well for all concerned. People living far from town welcomed a chance to buy things they needed from the peddlers, and they enjoyed their company and the news that the peddler passed on. The peddlers appreciated the food and a place to sleep, whether it would be a bed inside the house or a bed in the hay in the barn.

Naturally, there could be complications. Sometimes a peddler would encounter an unscrupulous host who would notice the peddler's money from prior sales. After offering the peddler a bed, the greedy host would wait until everyone was asleep and take action. He would kill and rob the unsuspecting peddler and dispose of the body somewhere nearby. Since there were no records of these travelers, the murderer would say that the peddler had left early or maybe never came by at all. Such disappearances were rarely pursued or solved.

The large farmhouse set among the trees was a happy sight for the peddler. He had done well so far but he was getting too tired to go on to the next town. He stopped and showed his wares to the occupants of the house, and was pleased with his sales there. When his host extended an invitation for him to spend the night, the peddler gladly accepted the offer. He was especially happy to have shelter that night because a nasty storm was brewing, and he didn't want to be caught in it trying to get to the next town.

The farmer's wife hurried to get supper on the table before the storm hit. She didn't like having her hands in dishwater when lightning was in the air for fear it would shock or strike her. She was relieved that they finished dinner and the dishes just as the storm arrived in full force. The lightning danced on the rooftop, and the rain poured down in sheets.

It was a great night for sleeping, so they all retired early. The farmer's wife made a pallet for the peddler on the floor in front of the fireplace. He placed his pack beside him on the floor. The farmer had seen quite a lot of money in it when he paid him earlier.

"You should rest well here," said the farmer. "We will try not to disturb you, but my wife will insist that we go to the cellar if the storm gets worse. She is afraid of storms."

The peddler assured the farmer that he would be fine. They said goodnight, and all went to sleep except the farmer. He lay awake thinking about all the money the peddler was carrying.

That money would pay off all my debts if I had it, he thought. A wicked plan began to form in his mind.

While the storm continued, the farmer slipped out of bed and crept into the living room. The peddler was sleeping peacefully on the floor, his pack beside him. If he heard the farmer's footsteps he probably thought it was the family going to the cellar. The peddler's rest was undisturbed until the farmer picked up the poker and bashed in his head with one blow.

With his actions covered by the noise of the storm, the farmer dragged the peddler's body to the cellar. He hid it in an old rug, knowing it would not be discovered until he could take it out and bury it later. He made a second trip to get the peddler's pack with his goods and money, and hid the pack in a trunk in the corner of the cellar. He cleaned the poker and went back to bed. Sometime before dawn the storm moved on.

The next morning, the farmer's wife was surprised to find the peddler gone. She had expected him to stay for breakfast.

"Where is he?" she asked.

"He left as soon as the storm let up," her husband told her. "He said he wanted to get an early start."

She knew that peddlers did want to get an early start sometimes, so she thought no more about it. Soon after, while the wife and children were visiting neighbors, the farmer took the body and the trunk with the money out of his cellar and buried them where only he would know where to look. He figured he could get whatever amount of money he needed from the trunk when he needed it.

The farmer was shrewd enough not to pay off all his debts at once. He did not want to make anyone suspicious. He justified his killing the peddler by telling himself over and over that he had worked hard all his life and deserved some good luck, even if he had to create it for himself. Now all he had to do was wait and spend the money a little at a time. Nobody would suspect a thing. He would not have to pay for this crime.

Some time later, another storm came up right after supper. There was no guest that night, but the family ate early and went to bed as they had done before. The farmer's wife was just dozing off when she heard noises in the living room. She heard footsteps, a thud, and the sound of something being dragged to the cellar. She gave her husband a shake.

"Wake up!" she said. "Somebody is in the house."

"It's just the storm," he told her.

"No!" she insisted. "I heard something inside!"

Just to satisfy his wife, he got out of bed and went into the living room.

"Nothing's in here!" he called.

"Check the cellar," she told him.

She heard her husband open the cellar door, and then she heard him scream! She sat up in bed as she heard what sounded like an inert body thumping from step to step to the bottom of the stairs. Her children were out of bed now and joined her as she hurried down to where the farmer's body lay. Nobody knows what he saw, but the look of fright on his face sent the wife and children running up the stairs to send for the sheriff.

The sheriff concluded that the farmer had tripped accidentally on the stairs and fallen to his death. He saw no reason to search the cellar.

The family tried to stay on in the house, but on stormy nights strange sounds kept them awake. They searched, but they could never find the source. Finally, they had to move away. Others bought the house and heard the same noises. One farmer plowing the field near the barn turned up the remains of a man and a trunk filled with money. The sheriff had no proof, but it was evident what had happened. Nobody wanted to live there after that, so the house was eventually torn down.

Since the peddler was never given a proper burial, some wonder if his ghost is still out there somewhere on stormy nights, hoping someone will help him find eternal rest.

Stories from Headlines

Our families were very interested in the news they heard. We did not get daily or weekly newspapers, but our relatives in cities would sometimes send us newspapers or articles. Discussion of a particularly dramatic story would go on and on. There are so many stories on TV, computers, or in newspapers and magazines today that any one story does not remain as popular. New stories come along so fast that a story that captures the imagination one day is replaced by another the next day.

Some of the best stories passed on to us were those that the tellers learned from headlines and newspaper articles. We didn't often see these sources ourselves; some of these stories happened before we were born. In this section we retell stories that intrigued friends or family enough that they read them and passed them on in their own words. Some of the original news articles may still be found in newspaper archives or on the Internet. To find them, just type the subject of the story into your computer and search the Internet.

The Ghost of Floyd Collins

A Kentucky death that made national headlines back in the 1920s was the death of Floyd Collins. Sand Cave in the Mammoth Cave area of central Kentucky is said to be haunted by Collins, an explorer who was trapped and died in the cave in 1925. This was exciting news to our families because it happened not too far away from us. We had relatives in the area. Thus, the story of Floyd Collins was close to our community and our hearts.

The Collins family owned Crystal Cave near Mammoth Cave. Crystal Cave was beautiful, but it attracted few tourists because of its isolated location. The owners of the various caves in the vicinity competed for tourists in those days, and Collins wanted to find another entrance to the underground cave system that might result in more tourists visiting his family's cave.

For three weeks, Floyd Collins worked on his plan to find an entrance or connection. During that time, he worked alone, exploring and expanding a hole that the news media would later call "Sand Cave."

Collins worked a few hours in Sand Cave on January 30, 1925, and managed to squeeze through some narrow passageways that he claimed led to a large chamber. His lamp was dying, so he decided to leave before exploring this chamber.

As he was leaving, Collins accidentally knocked over his lamp, extinguishing his light. That made his attempted departure even more difficult. Unable to see where he was going, he dislodged a rock from the ceiling, pinning his left leg and making it impossible for him to get out. Later, it was determined that the rock weighed only 26½ pounds, but the way it was lodged prevented him and his rescuers from reaching it. It was also discovered later that he was trapped just 150 feet from the entrance to the cave and 55 feet below the surface.

When Collins didn't come home, friends searched and found him the next day. They took him food and ran an electric lightbulb down into the passage to give him some light and warmth. Rescue efforts were started, but the unstable passage collapsed in two places on February 4. This eliminated his food and water supply and all contact except by voice. The rescuers believed the cave to be too dangerous and impassable at this point, so they began to dig an artificial shaft and lateral tunnel in a

attempt to reach Floyd through another chamber. Their efforts failed, but they kept trying to find something that would work.

Soon the life-threatening predicament of Floyd Collins caught the attention of the media, and people came from all over the country to visit the site where Floyd was trapped. A kind of carnival-like atmosphere took over as Floyd was trapped and dying. His own family is said to have made a nice amount of money from selling Floyd Collins souvenirs. Reporters sent stories to their papers across the country, and everybody waited and prayed for his rescue. Tragically, that was not to be. Rescuers finally reached him on February 17, but by then he was dead from exposure, thirst, and starvation.

At that point, rescuers decided that it was too dangerous to attempt to remove the body, so they left it as they found it and filled up the shaft with debris. Later, a doctor estimated that Floyd had died three or four days earlier, probably on February 13.

A funeral service was held for Floyd Collins on the surface of the cave, but this did not seem right to his brother Homer. Sand Cave did not seem to Homer Collins like a proper resting place for his brother, even though notable explorers in Europe were often buried in the caves they discovered. Two months later, Homer and some friends reopened the shaft, dug a new tunnel, and were finally able to remove Floyd's body on April 23, 1925. On April 26, Floyd's body was buried on the Collins homestead near Crystal Cave. Later the cave would be renamed Floyd Collins Crystal Cave in his honor. It seemed that Floyd would finally be able to rest in peace, but stories about him tell us that his rest was not for long.

In 1927, Floyd's father, Lee Collins, sold the homestead, along with Floyd's grave and Crystal Cave. By June 13, the new owner had thought of a wonderful tourist attraction. He had Floyd's body placed in a glass-topped coffin and exhibited it for many years at the entrance to Crystal Cave. People say it was a profitable move because many people came and paid to gawk at a man who had become a legend.

Later, other stories circulated. As if it were not disturbing enough for people to pay to look at the unfortunate man, someone stole his body on the night of March 18–19, 1929. Some people thought the owners of the property might have done it for publicity to increase tourist interest, but they had no proof. Others thought it was a prank, but nobody ever knew for sure. The body was soon recovered not far from the cave, but Floyd's left leg was missing. The leg was never found.

After this theft, the body was kept in a chained casket in a secluded section of Crystal Cave. Most of the family had long objected to Floyd's casket being placed in the cave for public viewing.

In 1961, Crystal Cave was purchased by Mammoth Cave National Park and officials closed it to the public. At the request of the Collins family, the National Park Service removed Floyd's body and interred it in the Flint Ridge Cemetery on March 4, 1989. It took a team of fifteen men three days to remove the casket and tombstone from Crystal Cave and take it to its final resting place.

After the long ordeal of his stay in the cave both in life and death, Floyd Collins's spirit may be more at home there than in Flint Ridge Cemetery. Some people have reported hearing a weak voice from the cave calling for help. Others claim to have seen him standing in the cave. Perhaps he is looking for his lost leg. True or not, the elements are there for the ghost of the fallen hero to return.

Kentucky's Killer Ghost

Two questions often come up in discussions about ghosts. “Are there evil ghosts?” and “Do they ever kill?” We rarely encounter stories that say yes to either question, but Kentucky folklore does have one such story, about a man named Carl Pruitt. Troy Taylor, our good friend and renowned author of many books on the paranormal, has written about this case in his book Beyond the Grave. His version

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