



# Ghostly Tales of Iowa

Ruth D. Hein and  
Vicky L. Hinsenbrock



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## **Dedication from Ruth:**

To my father, Reverend William Ullerich; my mother, Emma Ullerich (who would be surprised that I wrote these stories); and my native state of Iowa.

## **Dedication from Vicki:**

To my parents, Dick and Bev Hinsenbrock.

To my nieces, Kelly, Kara, and Stacy, and their mother, my sister, Kim. To my great niece, Brooke.

To my husband, Charlie, who puts up with my clutter and my books and loves me all the same.

And to David W., Carl B., and Alan K., who all left this world much too soon.

In some instances, names and locations have been changed at the request of sources.

Content Warning: This book contains several references to suicide and may not be appropriate for all audiences.

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**sollalexta**: branches

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and Vicki L. Hinsenbrock

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# Acknowledgments

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With generous help from librarians and historical society personnel, we researched settings and backgrounds for the stories in documents, newspapers, and other publications. In some cases, names and locations are disguised to respect the wishes of the storygivers.

# Preface

**T**he stories in this book came from different people and places in Iowa. Many are from northeast Iowa because some of them were published in our earlier book, *Ghostly Tales of Northeast Iowa* (1988).

Iowans were willing and, in fact, eager to share their stories with us, so that we could share them with our readers. Some of the stories are well known—for example, those connected with the house outside Guttenberg, or Lawther Hall and the Strayer-Wood Theater on the UNI campus in Cedar Falls. But others are stories that have been handed down through generations from grandparents and great-grandparents. And some happened in the last few years.

We hope you enjoy these new and old Iowa ghost stories. Some will give you chills; some will make you laugh. But all have a place in Iowa's history of storytelling.



## Barney's Still Around

**I**t was opening night at The Landmark. Everything was in order. Dick and Diane had worked hard to ready their supper club for this night. After the remodeling was completed, finishing touches were added: old photos, an old-fashioned wall telephone, an antique buffet, “railroad chairs,” and other items reminiscent of the early years when the building had been known as The Landmark Inn.

When they heard car doors closing and people coming in the front door, Dick and Diane went downstairs to welcome their guests. Dick stopped off at the kitchen first to check whether the cooks were ready. Diane took one last look around the dining area before she went to greet a group of customers off to one side of the room. After several well-deserved compliments on how inviting the atmosphere was, someone asked her, “Has anything happened yet?”

Diane's first impulse was to answer, "Well, yes! We've changed the building a lot, put gobs of money and work into it—can't you see the difference?" when a loud noise made it unnecessary for her to answer at all. The noise came from upstairs, where Dick and Diane's living quarters were. It sounded as though something quite heavy had fallen to the floor up there. A couple of customers' smiles faded.

Diane excused herself to go back upstairs. As she went up, she thought, *No one is supposed to be up here!* What she found was the large photo of her parents not on the bedside table, but on the floor. It was mostly intact; just a small corner of the glass was chipped. But she knew that the photo had been placed so that it could not fall off by itself. Realizing its cast iron frame made it so heavy that it made the loud noise, she put it back and went downstairs.

As she rejoined the group, one woman asked a bit hesitantly, "Um...was it Barney?"

This group of customers and others who had lived in the area for a long time knew the history of the building. They had read about it in *The History of Allamakee County* and in the book *Past and Present of Allamakee County*. They knew that the main house was built in 1851 as a private residence by Colonel John A. Wakefield. At a very young age he had been a scout in the War of 1812. Wakefield then studied medicine and law and was admitted to the bar in 1818. He enlisted in the army and fought in The Blackhawk Indian War. Afterward, he served as a judge in St. Paul before moving to Allamakee County in northeast Iowa. He apparently was given the land on Lansing Ridge in 1851, and on it he built the grand, two-story house.

Under changing ownership, the building had later housed a brewery, a hotel and residence, a tearoom and restaurant, a general store, a post office, a bar, a gas station, and a dance hall before it had become and remained a restaurant.

They knew about the waitress who had seen Barney during a previous ownership. They knew he had been around for a long time.

Many years ago, when an old stage road went by there, the stagecoach stop was up the road about a mile, near the three-story, hand-built, rock school named the Lycurgus School. Back in the days when passengers, the mail, and other important cargo went by stagecoach to various destinations, passengers often stayed at the Landmark Inn for the night.

When one of the succession of owners operated a brewery in the building, drivers and teamsters found it an ideal place to visit while their horses rested. The men often spent the evening enjoying food and drink before their next run. Sometimes the natural competitiveness already present among them, augmented by a few drinks, led to arguments as to who was the better driver—or the faster driver—or who had the fastest horses or the smoothest-riding rig.

Late one night, when most of the weary travelers had slaked their thirst and had retired to their rooms upstairs at the inn, the arguments developed into a fight on the lower level. This resulted in the death of a teamster named Barney Leavy. That's about all anyone knows about it now, except that later owners claim that Barney's ghost still haunts the place.

Diane recalled the many questions asked of them while they worked at the remodeling. She knew that

the story about Barney had been perpetuated over the years. She could add to the story, if she felt so inclined. She could tell about the strange noises and flickering lights in the old building when they first came to it. A light in the kitchen often came back on after they had turned it off. And she remembered something that happened just once when they were first remodeling the building. It was in the middle of winter. They were working in the main dining room. When they locked up at night, everything was okay. But when they came back the next morning, there was a big pool of water on the floor in the middle of the room. She said, "There's a second floor, so it wasn't a leaky roof. And there was snow on the ground at the time, but we didn't find any tracks outside. And we checked the locks. They were all right. At the time, Dick looked at me sort of funny and he said, 'Barney?'"

So Barney must still be around. If you want to meet him, you'll find the former inn, now called The Landmark, on State Highway 9 between Waukon and Lansing about a mile and a half from Churchtown in northeast Iowa. Diane and Dick Prestemon operate it as a supper club—one with a past.

# The Cellar Witch

Clayton County in northeast Iowa was settled largely by German immigrants. Most of these were thrifty, hard-working, sensible farmers from the “old country.” But even these practical folks had ghostly stories.

A young lady and her parents had come to America when she was a small child. As she grew older, Clara wanted to be out on her own more. Clara’s mother had warned her several times not to dawdle on her way to and from town. Her mother especially warned Clara and her sisters to stay away from a certain house in town, vacant now but rumored to have been lived in by a witch. Many people believed the witch’s spirit still resided in the house.

Clara knew she shouldn’t, but several times she had driven by the house with the horse and buggy, always in the daylight. She secretly was just a little scared but

enjoyed both the tiny shiver of fear and the knowledge of her disobedience.

One cool fall day Clara's parents sent her to town close to chore time to get various things from the general store. There were several customers ahead of her and she got to talking to Otto, a neighbor boy about her age. When she finally picked up her packages and loaded them into the buggy, the sun was just starting to drop behind the heavily wooded hillside. She set the horse to an easy trot and headed for home.

Without her really planning it, she was suddenly near the house. The big, two-story home had many windows, and the last rays of the sun reflected a wavy red in the handmade glass panes. Brush obscured the porch to one side, but no brush or grass grew around the front of the house. Clara could clearly see the row of basement windows and the outside, almost flat entrance leading down into the limestone foundation.

Some force made Clara stop the buggy and get out. The wind picked up and the horse was restless, stamping and whinnying. An old iron fence with a series of spiked tops surrounded the house. Clara approached slowly, eyes fastened on the shining red windows and especially the lower basement windows, turning from red to black as the sun continued to drop. Her hand touched the gate, which looked rusty and felt very cold. It swung open smoothly and quietly, no sound coming from the rusty hinges. Clara hesitated. Everything she knew and believed told her to stop, but she seemed unable to control her body. She walked through, toward the basement door. Vaguely, she could hear the horse running away. She stood above the basement entrance and closed her eyes. In that instant, she knew

if she lifted the door to the basement, she would never come back.

Without warning, a strong arm pulled her back, dragging her away from the house. She felt as if pulled in two, a force pulling her back to the house and a powerful body pulling her away. The body yelled several times, and then the force let go. When she opened her eyes, she was on the street again, the gate shut, the house completely dark, and the wind blowing stronger still, like the beginnings of the tornado they'd had last year.

Looking up, Clara saw Otto kneeling beside her. Speaking in German, he asked her if she was hurt. She slowly shook her head from side to side.

"Why did you come? What happened?" she asked.

Looking less frightened, Otto spoke in English this time. "I was following you to be sure you came home safely. When your horse ran past me, I knew you had trouble. I came to look and found you standing here, about to go in. Why were you here? It is a dangerous place for you."

Clara looked down, embarrassed. "I don't really know. I—well, I've driven by here before and I just found myself here."

"Do you know the story about the witch?" Otto asked.

"I know my parents told me to stay away and said there was a witch who used to live here."

"Come to my wagon. I will tell you the story."

Otto helped her stand up and walked her to his wagon. Once there, he resumed his story. "The woman who lived here before was dreadfully afraid to die. My parents say she was a witch, but even witches can die. She wanted to live forever. But the only way she could

keep on living was to find another body, since hers was worn out and old.”

Clara shuddered. “Is she still there?”

Otto looked at her solemnly and continued. “Many years ago, she did finally die. Since then she has been looking for a body. She tries to lure young girls to her basement. If she can get a young girl to come to her basement, she will take her body and be young again. That is why parents tell their daughters to stay away. I could help you because she does not want men.”

Clara knew the reason for her feeling now. The feeling that told her if she went into the basement she would be lost forever. She smiled weakly at Otto as she said, “Let’s go home. I promise I will never come here again.”



# Charley's Ghost

**C**harley's ghost wasn't really Charley's ghost—rather, it wasn't the ghost of Charley. But because it was Charley Nelson and his family who were most affected by the phenomenon, it came to be referred to as “Charley's ghost.”

The Nelsons had come up to Iowa County from the South in about 1923, according to Jess Bean of Williamsburg. The family consisted of Charley; his wife; their son, Gordon, who was Jess's age; and their daughter, Mary, who was four or five years older than Gordon.

Charley's job was to shovel coal into raised hoppers for the steam engines on the railroad. That's why they lived in a remodeled boxcar that sat across from the depot. Except for a crawl space under it, it sat right on the ground, without any wheels. There was a door at each end for easy entrance and exit.

Jess Bean was 9 or 10 then. He and Gordon Nelson were pals, and their fathers became acquainted too. Jess's father, William T. Bean, was the security guard around supplies that came in on the railroad and were stacked near the depot, to be used for putting in the pavement around Williamsburg. So Mr. Bean and Mr. Nelson saw each other frequently and came to know each other quite well. The two men used to go hunting together, and they played poker with some of the same friends.

That's why it was Jess's father to whom Charley reported that sometimes when the family went to bed, something would scratch on the outside of their boxcar home and keep them awake. With no trees around their home, they knew it wasn't branches. And sometimes, he said, whatever it was would knock on the outside walls.

The depot and the boxcar had been painted a dull gray. When the men went to examine the boxcar to look for the results of the scratchings, they saw shiny, swirly circles on the exterior walls, something like the swirls in fancy penmanship. But when they checked the mud after a rain, or the fresh snow in winter, there never were any strange tracks in it. So it seemed to Charley that they must have a ghost that liked to haunt them.

Charley said, "At first the ghost only showed up at night when we didn't have any lights on. When we did have light, it came from our kerosene lamp. It wasn't long before the ghost got braver and started to show up when the lamp was lit too."

Jess said later on, "My dad tried to help Charley get rid of whatever it was that was bothering them. One

night, Dad carried a revolver and asked Charley and his family if it would be all right if he shot right through the wall if the scratching persisted.”

Jess explained, “Dad figured if it was anyone else trying to give them a fright or just pester them or watch them, a shot would scare him away.

“Dad was inside with his gun. He and the Nelsons were all listening. Dad hoped to aim at a spot near where the scratching sounds were made. When the scratching started again, Dad alerted the Nelsons that he was going to shoot. He did, and the noises stopped. When the men went out there, they didn’t see anyone or anything suspect. But the sounds started up again half an hour later, so the men didn’t think it was anyone that lived around there and was just playing around. No sane man would return after being shot at.”

Charley’s ghost acquired a name all its own too. Jess told the story of how that happened.

“One night Gordon, who was interested in Model T Fords, was listening to the scratching on the wall. At that time the family didn’t know that the ghost could think, but Gordon got the idea to give it sort of a test. He said, ‘Make like a Model T going uphill.’

“Charley’s ghost started rapping kind of slow,” Jess said. “Then it slowed down some more, and just as if the Model T had reached the top of a hill and started down the other side, it gradually increased the tempo. By that, Gordon knew it could think or had some form or measure of intelligence. Then he asked it if it could understand two knocks for YES and three knocks for NO. Right away, it knocked twice to signify that it understood. That’s how it came about that we could ‘talk’ to it,” Jess finished.

After that, at any chance the boys had, when they heard the scratchings or the rappings, they tried talking to it. One of the first questions they asked was, “Are you dead?”

Immediately came two knocks for YES.

In answer to, “Were you a carpenter in your real life?” the boys heard three knocks for NO.

Another question was, “Are you a Protestant?” The answer came as three knocks.

“Are you a Lutheran?” Three knocks. NO. “Are you a Catholic?” YES.

They figured by answers to other questions that it was the ghost of a dead Irish peddler. That’s why they started calling him “Irish.”

Other people “talked” to Irish too. Mostly they were friends of the Nelson family or people that Jess and his father knew. They heard the answers: the two knocks for YES and the three for NO. And if the question required an answer in small numbers, one knock meant one year or one month or day, or one item, etc.

Anyone who came into the home could ask questions. Jess said, “When my brother was only five, someone told him to ask Irish a question. William, my brother, asked, ‘How many fish are there in Old Man’s Creek?’ Irish couldn’t answer a question like that with his YES or NO answers, so he just made a series of quick rappings. Maybe that meant ‘Many fish.’ We weren’t sure.”

Jess said, “Some other people who heard Irish were the mayor of Williamsburg, the newspaper editor, the priest, my own father and mother, and my uncle.”

Then Jess continued, “This all happened over 70 years ago, right here in Williamsburg. There was

another house in Iowa County too. It was the second place the Nelsons lived, also in Williamsburg. It was just half a block off of the square. It's gone now. But the rappings on the outside walls were heard there. I myself heard them quite a few times at both places."

People would sit on the high school lawn across from that house on warm summer nights just to listen. They could hear Charley's voice when he was asking Irish questions, and they could hear Irish's knocks in answer.

There were other questions Irish could answer. For example, he could tell whether one of the poker players had a good hand, or which prizefighter was favored to win the next fight. You could usually bank on his having the right answers, and some of the poker players got disgusted and quit playing when Irish ruined their game.

Apparently a dead Irish peddler had been buried at the site where the boxcar living quarters were set down along the Chicago, Milwaukee, and St. Paul railroad yard. Gordon and Jess checked out the crawl space under the boxcar once, but they couldn't find any bones or any other indication of a burial there. But maybe they didn't go deep enough.

Jess went on with his story. "My father and my Uncle Wallace even contacted a ghostbuster out of New York City. The locals had put together a pot of money. It totaled \$5,000. Needless to say, the man went through the attic at the second place and mumbled something about radios and ventriloquism, but he couldn't explain anything clearly. He went back to New York City at his own expense."

Charley could get free passes for himself and his family because he worked for the railroad. When

his mother-in-law died in another state, though, Charley wouldn't let his wife take the free pass and go down South to bury her. After that, Irish claimed to be the ghost of the mother-in-law, maybe giving Charley a hard time for not letting his wife go down to her own mother's funeral.

Later on, Mrs. Nelson passed away in their second home in town. Jess said that the daughter, Mary, moved away and married, and the son, Gordon, lives in another state. He said that Charley left town too.

Jess wrapped his story up with this emphasis: "I don't want the story of Charley's ghost to die with me. All of this really happened. It's not just a figment of my imagination."

# A City of Many Ghosts

**E**vidently, Davenport would be a good place to live if you were interested in hosting ghosts. Or if you were a ghost, you could probably join a whole company of them there.

Jim Arpy, writing for the *Times-Democrat*, Davenport, wrote several stories about hauntings at the old Pi Kappa Chi fraternity house on Main Street in that city. Residents of the house at the time were students at the Palmer College of Chiropractic. Arpy related some very scary incidents that took place there, including heavy footsteps being heard, locked doors opening and closing, typewriter keys striking, and toilets flushing without human aid.

Arpy's May 11, 1972, story gave an account of celebrated Chicago medium Mrs. Irene Hughes' visit to the fraternity house. Hughes felt that the main spirit was that of a medical doctor who was also involved in politics. Later research revealed that a medical doctor

had owned the home for a long time and had also been involved in politics. Hughes described the doctor/spirit as one who felt that he was right in most things and wanted the present occupants of the house to do things his way.

A few years later, Arpy wrote about another apparently haunted house in northwest Davenport. In this case, an adult couple were experiencing unexplainable incidents that left them frightened and puzzled. Both had been in good health when they began to remodel the old schoolhouse that became their new home; after that, both had been sick much of the time. The couple told of furniture sliding all the way across rooms, day and night. Lights and faucets mysteriously came on, seemingly by themselves; their TV and radio came on, and in general things happened that they didn't direct or initiate.

A daughter-in-law who spent some time visiting the same couple in that house fell several times as the result of what she described as a push. Dark figures were seen, loud knocks and heavy footsteps were heard, and other unexplainable things happened. Was the remodeled old schoolhouse haunted by teachers and students of earlier years? Do they return to rearrange the furnishings and set the house in order, according to their accustomed plan?

In an October 31, 1971, *Times* story, Arpy told about another haunted house in McClellan Heights. There, the children in one particular bedroom cried at night. When the parents went to check, they were always surrounded by a terribly cold area just outside that door—like a very cold, chilling wind they couldn't account for. When he researched, the owner found out



that his house was built on land that was once part of old Camp McClellan, a Civil War training camp, and that his house was built near and possibly partly over a Native American burial ground.

A few days later, two staff writers wrote for Davenport's *The Leader* about a Davenport businesswoman who shared a house on Main Street with her elderly parents and "a friendly spirit named Elsie." That extra "presence" was felt both inside the house and out in the yard, where the businesswoman removed a lot of trees and shrubs and put in a new fence. A neighbor told the young woman that Elsie had once lived in the old house, loved it, and "spent long hours in the yard." It would seem that her presence was still being felt.

Arpy wrote of another huge old house in Davenport, this one on Ripley Street, where many young men had lived as students. The date and name of the newspaper were lost in the process of getting copies from the "Haunted House" file in the Davenport Public Library's Special Collections Room. But the article made it clear that the roomers in that house had been very frightened a number of times by various phenomena, including a man's figure, a strange cat, heavy footsteps, a cold room where a presence was felt, and locked doors being found unlocked.

In *The Leader* of October 29, 1986, the McClellan Heights house was again featured by staff writer Rita Pearson. Another story by Michael Ashcraft featured a young couple and their first house, an old one. When they first went through it, it felt "old and sad and lonely." The couple wanted to restore an old house; "they wanted one with spirit." The one they got had

windows that came open by themselves even if they were nailed shut. Apparently, it had spirit enough for them. What kind of spirit is lost in the file at the Davenport library, as page C2 of that newspaper is missing? Perhaps the spirit itself purposely misplaced the rest of the story.

## Do Playmates Live Upstairs?

**W**hen Jim and Judy first moved into their house in a quiet neighborhood in southwest Cedar Rapids, they didn't know it was still occupied. True, the people who sold them the house had moved out, but they hadn't told the buyers about any invisible occupants.

One evening about a year later, Judy and her 4-year-old, son Colin, were visiting Judy's mother. That left Jim at home with their infant son, Hunter. While Hunter slept, Jim was reading—until such a loud noise shook the house that Jim was nearly scared out of his chair in the den. The den and the garage shared a wall, which made Jim think someone had rammed a car into the side of the garage.

He didn't see anything wrong out there when he looked out the windows. He couldn't leave Hunter

there alone, and he did not want to disturb his sleep, so he called 911. When the police came by, they looked around but couldn't find anything that would point to a crash. Jim said, "In fact, they looked at me as if they thought I had been drinking. Then, as time passed, I sort of forgot about the experience."

One evening several months later, Jim got out of his chair in the den to go out to the kitchen. He explained, "The den is sunken, with two steps down into it from a small landing." Then he went on to tell what happened. "As I neared the landing, I had the sensation that a medium-size dog had just jumped into my arms. But we don't have a dog and none appeared. Even though I had seen nothing, I had a strong mental image of the dog. It had been there, somehow. Judy saw me as I jumped back in shock, and she asked, 'Did the dog jump up on you just now?' That was when I learned that Judy had had the very same experience in the same spot in that house."

The dog incident made them think back to when they first moved in. They started wondering if the sellers were so anxious to bargain with them because of spooky experiences they had had. They had left a lot of things in the house, including an upstairs bed, fully made. Jim and Judy thought that was really unusual, especially now that strange things were happening to them. And the sellers had also sold their business and left town and had not come back since.

Jim remembered, too, that when his sister stopped by with a housewarming gift, he had noticed her reaction. He knew about her previous experiences with ghosts and poltergeists. He remembered that she moved quickly but thoughtfully through the house, pausing

here and there, as if aware of a presence, but said nothing to them as to having sensed anything.

After the dog experience, things were pretty quiet until the 1992 Christmas holiday season. From then on, Jim said, “Our comfortable lifestyle in the home of our dreams changed dramatically.”

Jim’s niece Janelle and her boyfriend were with them a few nights after Christmas. Jim, Judy, Colin, Hunter, Janelle, and her guest were all in the den watching movies when Jim and Janelle heard the door to the upstairs stairway open and close. Though the door was in a different part of the house, they recognized its distinctive sound. Realizing that all the people in the house were right there in the den, the adults investigated, only to find the door “solidly shut,” as Jim put it.

More experiences started to surface. Janelle stopped by the next night to tell about what had happened to her the summer before, while she was housesitting for them. That same door had actually opened and closed one night while she was there alone. Though she had had some “bad vibes,” as she put it, before that, she had said nothing. Jim said, “Janelle was a very independent, confident 21-year-old used to living alone in her apartment. She wasn’t easily frightened, but she was that weekend here, alone. She ended up sleeping on the couch, while the door opened and closed on its own several times that night. She tried to blame it on a draft.”

After the December repetition of her experience, it seemed that it occurred whenever Janelle came by. Jim said, “We consulted experts. They suggested, one, that it could be the ghost of a boy who might be ‘flirting’ with Janelle, or two, that Janelle and I together create some

type of energy that triggers supernatural happenings in the house.”

On New Year’s Eve, Janelle and her girlfriend Bobbi stopped by to celebrate. That night, after the boys were asleep in bed, the adults were watching rented movies and playing some games when suddenly they all looked at each other as they realized there was someone else in the den with them—a presence or a spirit that they each knew was there, though they actually saw nothing physical.

As Jim made an attempt to describe it, he said, “The presence moved in a half-moon configuration from one doorway to the other, and a cold draft absolutely filled the room. We sat tight in our chairs, but I finally got up enough nerve to leave my chair and describe my sensation to the others. They all felt the same type of movement, as though all of us sensed exactly the same thing, but none of us saw anything real that could be described easily.

“We moved from the den into the front living room in the other part of the house. At that point we all became extremely frightened. Janelle described the spirit as actually standing over her, touching her. Yet no one saw anything! She sat and sobbed for the rest of the evening, and we all stayed up until nearly 4 a.m., scared to pieces! When midnight came, we didn’t even think about wishing each other a happy new year!

“We think the spirit ‘lives’ in our upstairs and that there is also a presence in our basement. My sister thinks so too.”

Jim said that he and Judy were both puzzled. In fact, they were frightened enough that each of them started waiting outside for the other after work, until

they could both go in together. They even adjusted their work schedules so they could leave at the same time each morning.

They were both truly afraid, even though they didn't feel that the presence or presences represented evil or the Devil at all. It was just so strange. They wished the contacts with the spirit or spirits would end. At night, they closed their bedroom door and pulled the covers up to their chins, yet were afraid and were unable to sleep. Some nights they barely slept at all, meanwhile trying not to say anything that would scare the boys.

But they soon learned that Hunter had already known something was different there. When he was 3, he burst into their bedroom one Saturday morning with a very strange look on his face. "He truly looked possessed," Jim said. "We followed him out to the living room. Hunter was frantic. While he tried to open the upstairs door so he could go up there, he was all the while yelling, 'Kids, come back! Kids, come back!'"

"Hunter appeared to be sleepwalking. When we got him fully awake and talked about it later, he told us that three boys, all older than he was, 'lived' in our upstairs. He thought they were maybe about 6, 8, and 12. Hunter said that at night they would all come down to the boys' room. They wanted to play with their toys. Sometimes they were hungry too. He said they would all sleep in our upstairs in our king-size bed sometimes, and they came from the house next door through our attic, into our upstairs, and down into his and Colin's room.

"We know all about young children having very active imaginations, and we know sometimes children have imagined playmates they talk to, but this was

something different. We saw it in Hunter's face as he tried to open that door and get the kids to come back. It seemed so real to us that we checked into who actually lives next door, but there were no children living there at this time.

"After learning about Hunter's experiences, we feel certain that the spirits living in our home are the spirits of children. Hunter also says that sometimes at night their Daddy drives them to our house to drop them off to play. Sometimes he even stands in the doorway to our boys' room and watches them play. That made us wonder if the garage/car crash sound was related. But how could it be?

"We contacted two professional exorcists," Jim said. "One of them suggested lighting white or light-colored candles and doing prayer rituals. We did that as a group of three adults—the two of us and Janelle. The other exorcist suggested hanging pictures of Jesus Christ throughout our home to protect us from potential evil. We tried that, too, although no one believes our entity to be evil. We feel that our ghost or ghosts are friendly, and since the 'weird' things tend to happen at holiday time, we believe positive experiences such as a holiday trigger their behavior."

Jim and Judy finally contacted some of the former owners of the home to ask if they had had any experiences like theirs. The family they had bought the house from were evasive, but they did admit to finding the house "full of religious paraphernalia." They said they removed all of it and burned it. The man said that a few things had been left in the attic, but he had been afraid to go up there to get them, "so maybe they're still there."



The man's wife said the only thing she ever felt weird about was the trim along the entire length of the front of the house. The trim was made up of unusual shapes—stars and circles carved into a decorative strip, and painted the same as the house. Jim and Judy had noticed it, but hadn't paid much attention to it.

The former housewife also told them that one time a stranger stopped by, rang the doorbell, and told them they should get out of the house because of those shapes, "those evil signs." But then, she also said she didn't believe the person enough to act on the warning.

Before that couple lived there, the occupants were grandparents of some of Jim and Judy's coworkers. They checked to find out if there were any weird incidents then, but only found out that the home was always filled with love and that holidays were a special time. Yet, they learned that each of those two elderly occupants had died at separate times in that same house, in the room where Hunter claims to host visitors and in the bed where the two boys sleep.

"We don't exactly know where to go from here," Jim said. "We love our home, but we don't feel totally comfortable with what's happening. Sometimes we feel perfectly safe. Then something else happens, and we're unsure.

"During the most trying weeks when we were almost afraid even to come home at night, Judy and I finally got out one day just for a chance to relax for a few hours' drive. The boys were with Janelle at her apartment. We had stayed home so much, just to avoid the fear upon returning, that it felt really good to get away and relax once.

“When Judy and I went back home, Janelle hadn’t brought the boys back yet. We sat down in the den, still feeling more comfortable and relaxed than we had for a long time, when a huge moan came from the corner of the den. Someone or something moaned once, then again about 10 seconds later. I was more scared than ever before. I thought I’d have a heart attack and die right then and there. If I hadn’t been barefoot, I believe I would have run out the door and abandoned the place. But there was deep snow outside. We tried to convince ourselves that the noise had come through the flue of the fireplace, or from an electronic toy, but we knew it didn’t. We both heard it, experienced it.

“That same week, we were called to a friend’s house on an emergency. Janelle and her boyfriend came to babysit the boys. When Judy and I returned, the young couple were huddled together in absolute terror in a corner of the kitchen. What had frightened them so? They told us that while they were in the den, the electronics in the house—the VCR, stereo, lights, everything—had gone bonkers, all these things turning themselves on and off. The two couldn’t abandon the children (they were in bed), so they waited in absolute fear for us to come back. Janelle’s boyfriend never did come back to our house.

“I can’t blame him a bit. Even though we think of our ghosts, or whatever they are, as friendly spirits, I’m home alone as I write this down for you—and it’s giving me the goose bumps even as I write.”

# About the Authors



**R**uth D. Hein grew up in Van Horne, Iowa, and was the middle child in a ghost-free Lutheran parsonage. With a masters degree from the University of Northern Iowa, she taught high school English as well as creative writing for 28 years, 21 of those in Decorah. Ruth lived near Worthington,

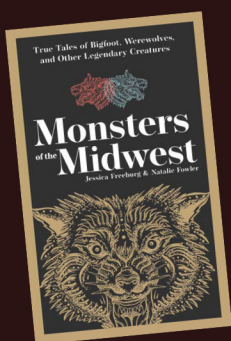
Minnesota, where she collected ghost stories and wrote the historical column for the *Worthington Daily Globe* for 14 years. She passed away in 2011.

**V**icky L. Hinsenbrock's German relatives loved to tell stories of the unexpected happenings when she was growing up in northeast Iowa. A graduate of Iowa State University with a major in animal science, she works for the USDA. She and her husband live in an old Victorian house in the country. No known ghosts inhabit their home.

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