

Ghostly Tales of Wisconsin

Ryan Jacobson



**Ghostly
Tales of
Wisconsin**

Dedication:

For my friends Chris and Amy, who dare to live in “the most haunted state in America.”

A special thank you to everyone who willingly shared their ghost stories and who allowed me to put their tales into this collection. I appreciate your time and patience. I would also like to thank the many people who gave me guidance and pointed me in the right direction during the process of researching this book.

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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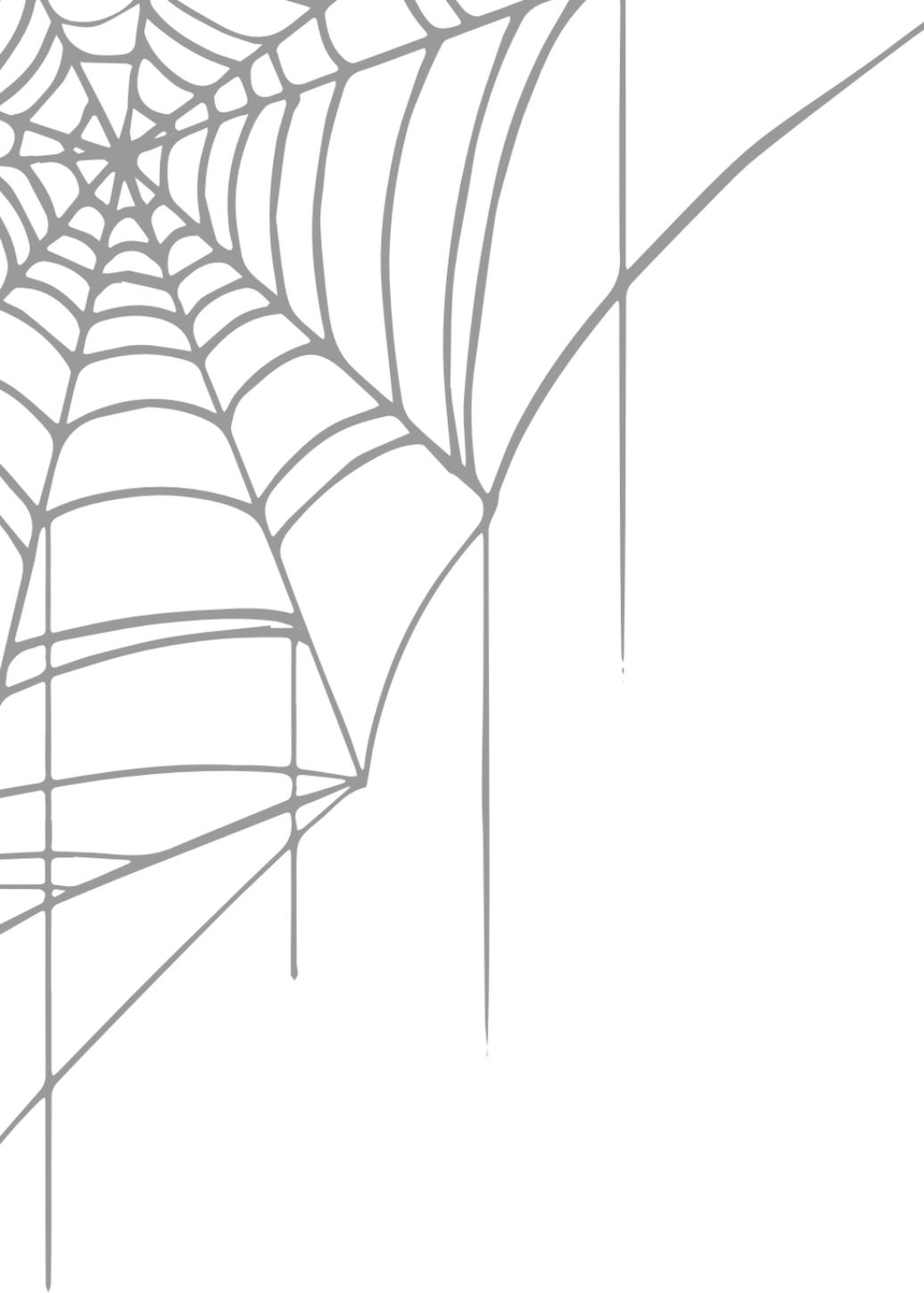
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Preface

This chilling collection was put together through countless hours of research, interviews, and fact-checking. It includes many of Wisconsin's most famous haunts, some of the state's more obscure ghost stories, and even a few terrifying tales that have never before been recorded.

The narratives were written using the information gathered, but some of the details were provided to me as checklists of unexplainable occurrences rather than *Ghostly Tales*. Therefore, while the information remains accurate, some of the scenarios (and characters) were reinterpreted for dramatic effect.

I can neither verify the validity of each claim nor the existence of supernatural beings, but I can assure you that the portrayals of the spirits in this book are as accurate as possible.

Enjoy!



Haunted Homes

Summerwind Scares

An Uninvited Guest

The property was glorious to behold. Sitting along the crystal-blue waters of West Bay Lake in northeastern Wisconsin—just a stone’s throw from Canada—the fishing lodge was a hideaway from the rest of the world, tucked within a plush, green forest.

“It’s perfect,” Robert Lamont proclaimed, inhaling a deep breath of clean Wisconsin air. “We’ll turn it into our family’s summer getaway.”

Thus it was decided: The man who would later become President Herbert Hoover’s Secretary of Commerce bought the land in 1916. He hired contractors to turn the wooden lodge into Summerwind, a mansion that history would remember as the Badger State’s most haunted home.

For 20 years, the gentleman and his wife enjoyed the house without incident. However, they often grew

tired of the superstitious housekeepers' warnings. "I'm telling you, Mr. Lamont," said one of the servants, "we've seen shadows. We've heard voices. This place is haunted."

"And I'm telling you," the homeowner answered sternly, "any more talk of ghosts, and I may become one myself."

Lamont sat down with his wife in their country-style kitchen and enjoyed a delicious lunch, followed by a tasty dessert. But to the Lamonts' astonishment, their meal was soon interrupted by a sudden, violent shaking.

"The basement door," cried Mrs. Lamont. "What on earth is happening?"

"I don't know," admitted her husband, as he stared at the vibrating entrance. He stood and reached into a nearby drawer where his pistol was kept.

Thud!

The basement door flew open, banging against the wall. A tall, dark-haired man stepped into the room. His face was unfamiliar to Lamont, but the scowl he wore suggested that he was out for blood.

The door slammed closed behind the stranger as he stepped toward Lamont's wife.

Not waiting to learn of the intruder's intent, Lamont grabbed his gun, aimed it at the man's chest and fired two shots. Both bullets passed harmlessly through the visitor, lodging into the basement door.

"My word," the homeowner exclaimed. "He's not human. He's a ghost!"

An instant later, the specter was gone. The terrified couple performed their own disappearing act, fleeing the mansion immediately.

Hinshaw Horrors

By the early 1970s, Summerwind had become something of a fixer-upper. The paint was faded and chipped. Several windows were shattered. Nearly every interior room required renovating. Nevertheless, Ginger and Arnold Hinshaw were not deterred.

“I love it, Arnold,” Ginger said. “I just love it.”

Her husband nodded. “It needs a little work, but there’s so much potential. This could be the house of our dreams.”

The couple purchased the old mansion and moved their family, including four children, inside.

Almost immediately, even the most mundane tasks became frightful adventures. The kids feared walking the hallways, as eerie shadows danced about. Arnold and Ginger could rarely move from one room to the next without hearing the chilling whispers of an unseen presence. Even turning on the water was a venture into the unknown, as appliances such as the water pump and hot water heater sometimes failed inexplicably. Yet, the machines always managed to fix themselves a short while later.

And then, on one occasion, the ghost almost took Arnold’s life.

“See you later,” the man yelled upstairs to his spouse, who was awake and already preparing the home for its first round of renovations.

“Have a good day at work,” she hollered back.

Arnold smiled as he stepped outside, into the brisk morning air. He marched across the lawn toward his car.

WHOOSH!

The vehicle was suddenly ablaze.

Arnold leapt back, nearly catching on fire himself. He frantically dashed around the yard, checking first to ensure that none of the children were nearby and second to see if anyone else—an arsonist, perhaps—was present.

He found no one.

Retreating safely away from the blaze, Arnold could do nothing else—except watch helplessly as flames engulfed his automobile.

To make matters worse, the Hinshaws began having problems with the construction workers they had hired.

“What do you mean you can’t work here anymore?” Arnold demanded.

“I mean the crew won’t go inside,” said the foreman. “They’ve been telling all sorts of tales, but the bottom line is this: Your place gives them—us—the creeps. You’ll have to find another team to take over.”

Unfortunately for the Hinshaws, replacement laborers proved just as difficult to secure, leaving the family to do the work themselves.

“Ginger, have you seen this shoe drawer?” Arnold asked his wife, as he scoured the bedroom closet.

“The one built into the wall?” she answered, applying a fresh coat of color to a nearby surface. “Yes, I have. Can you take it out? I want to paint it.”

Arnold did as Ginger requested and, to his surprise, discovered a dark crawl space hidden behind the closet.

“What’s this?” said Arnold, grabbing a flashlight. “What’s what?” responded his wife, but she was too late to catch her husband, who had already wedged himself halfway into the opening.

The man slowly panned his light around the area, unsure of what he might find back there. However, he never expected to discover . . .

“Yah!” he yelled, scurrying out in a panic. “What is it?” asked Ginger.

“A dead animal. A bear or something.”

“How in heaven would a bear get in there?”

“It probably crawled inside while the house was being built and got stuck,” said Arnold. “Let me get a closer look.”

He tried to squeeze farther into the hidden space, but he was too big. So when the children returned from school, his daughter Mary bravely volunteered.

“Take the flashlight,” said her father. “Crawl inside and tell us what you see.”

Mary disappeared into the mysterious opening, as the rest of the family anxiously waited for her report. However, what followed was a terrified, bloodcurdling scream.

“It’s a person, Dad! It’s a person!”

The carcass that Arnold had glimpsed was, in truth, an arm, part of a leg, and the black-haired skull of a human.

The Hinshaws chose not to disclose the gruesome find to police officials. (Later, when the story was reported, the explanation given was that the family believed the body was too old. They thought any crime committed would have occurred so long ago that police would not be able to do anything about it.) Arnold and Ginger left the corpse alone, abandoning it where they had found it, once again entombing it behind the drawer.

As the story goes, this was when the Hinshaw family began to unravel—and when Arnold became

obsessed with playing the Hammond organ he and his wife had purchased.

The organ's frantic, nonsensical song echoed through the mansion. Each macabre note sent a chill down Ginger's spine. Huddled beside her, the children wept.

She glanced at the clock. It was after 2 in the morning. Ginger composed herself, took a deep breath and once again trekked downstairs, where Arnold pounded the organ keys, sweat dripping from his face.

"Arnold," said Ginger. "You're scaring the children." He ignored her.

"Arnold, please stop."

Once again, her husband did not respond.

"Are you listening?" she snapped, grabbing his arm.

He spun toward his wife, his eyes blazing wildly. "I can't stop. I can't ever stop. The demons make me play!" He kept slamming his hands against the organ, time and again, louder and faster than before.

Ginger trudged back up the stairs, crying. When she reached the bedroom where the children were hiding, she once again stepped inside, this time locking the door behind her.

Within weeks, Arnold suffered a nervous breakdown, and Ginger reportedly attempted to kill herself. Arnold was hospitalized, leaving his wife to care for the children. She put Summerwind behind her and moved to Granton to live with her parents.

Ginger and Arnold eventually divorced, and the woman slowly recovered from her Summerwind ordeal. She once again found stability, marrying a man

named George Olsen. At last, she'd put the ghosts of Summerwind to bed forever—or so she thought.

But then, a few years later, Ginger's father informed his daughter that he intended to buy Summerwind.

The Carver Effect

"The location alone will make it a gold mine," said Ginger's dad, Raymond Bober. "If we turn the old mansion into a restaurant and an inn, we'll attract a ton of paying customers. We'll make a fortune!"

A popcorn vendor and an entrepreneur, Raymond had his heart set on purchasing the property. Along with his wife, Marie, and his son, Karl, he dreamed of transforming Summerwind into a lucrative business.

"You don't understand," pleaded his daughter. "I can't tell you why, but there's something about the place. It's a disaster waiting to happen. Please, don't buy it. Please!"

Raymond smiled warmly at his frightened daughter. "I already know what you don't want to tell me, Ginger. Summerwind is haunted." He patted her arm gently. "But I can also tell you something else. I know who the ghost is."

Ginger stared at her father in disbelief. "How could you? How is that possible?"

"I've been in contact with the spirit through dreams and trances—and even a Ouija board. It's the ghost of Jonathan Carver, an eighteenth-century British explorer."

Ginger shook her head. "Even if that's true, it won't help you. Summerwind tore our lives apart!"

"Carver's ghost just wants a little help. That's all. The Sioux Indians gave him a deed granting him the

rights to the northern third of Wisconsin. It's in a sealed box inside Summerwind's foundation. If we find it, Carver will leave us alone."

Ginger found little comfort in her father's revelation, but she could not prevent him from purchasing the mansion. She begrudgingly agreed to visit the home with Raymond, Karl, and her new husband, George.

The four of them spent several hours checking over the place, and before long they entered the bedroom that housed the hidden tomb. Ginger held her breath as George entered the closet, until at last she couldn't take it anymore.

"No, no, no! Get out of there. Get away!" She begged everyone to leave, almost to the point of hysteria.

Ginger's family rushed her downstairs and into the kitchen, giving her an opportunity to calm herself.

She swallowed hard, took a deep breath and at last said, "There's something I need to tell you." With that, she shared all of the details about the body concealed within the closet.

Her warning didn't stop Raymond. Instead, it seemed to pique his interest. Karl volunteered to venture into the closet (as Raymond and George were too large to fit). On all fours, staring at the crawl space, he stuck his hand toward his father. "Give me the flashlight."

Karl carefully slipped inside, while Ginger and the others waited in dreadful anticipation. They expected him to re-emerge at any moment, perhaps holding a skull in one hand. Instead, after a painfully long moment of silence, Karl finally shouted, "There's nothing in here!"

The corpse was gone.

Over Labor Day weekend, Karl visited the mansion to get an estimate on some work that needed completing. While he was alone there, a thunderstorm had him darting through the upstairs hallway, closing the open windows.

“Karl,” said a distinct, haunting voice.

The young man stopped, his heart racing—not from the exertion but from the frightful sound he had heard.

“Karl,” the voice called once again.

Cautiously, Ginger’s brother searched the hallway. No one else was present.

Certain that he was alone but also knowing his name had been called, Karl finished closing the windows and returned downstairs. But as he entered the front room, he heard an unmistakable echo.

Bang!

Bang!

A gun had been fired in the kitchen—twice.

Karl hurried to investigate, finding the room thick with smoke and smelling of gunpowder. But once again, his search of the premises turned up no one. In fact, all of the doors were locked.

It was then that Karl noticed the bullets left behind by Robert Lamont so many years ago. And that was enough to convince him to pack up and leave, which he did that very afternoon.

From there, the Bobers’ problems only grew worse. Similar to the difficulties that Ginger and her first husband had faced, Raymond found it nearly impossible to keep construction workers on the job.

“Every time we measure this room,” said one laborer, “it’s a different size.”

“How is that possible?” Bober asked.

“I don’t know, but the number never matches the blueprints. And if we can’t measure it, we can’t fix it.”

Furthermore, photographs taken at different times also seemed to indicate that the house had grown. In one instance, a picture Raymond snapped of the living room revealed a startling detail.

“Look at the windows,” said Ginger, holding up the photograph. “It shows the very curtains I brought home with me when we moved out!”

Sure enough, all of the windows were curtained in the picture, but there were no curtains in the room.

Given all of these strange happenings, it’s no wonder why Raymond and his family members spent their nights at Summerwind in an RV, rather than sleeping inside the house. And, not surprisingly, Raymond eventually had to abandon his dreams of turning the haunted mansion into a restaurant and inn. However, he did log several days in Summerwind’s basement, searching for Jonathan Carver’s deed and even chipping away at the foundation, but the document was never found.

Raymond later wrote a book about his supernatural communications with the ghost of Jonathan Carver. *The Carver Effect* was published in 1979.

The Fate of Summerwind

By the early 1980s, the old house sat abandoned and empty. It fell into ruin—windows broken, wood rotting, doors missing—but the mansion’s feeble condition did not deter three investors from purchasing the place in 1986.

Plans for the site were once again thwarted, this time by Mother Nature. Lightning struck Summerwind during a ferocious thunderstorm in June of 1988, burning the entire structure to the ground and leaving only the foundation, stone steps, and a chimney behind.



Neighborhood Nightmare

The neighborhood was different. Darker. Everyone could sense it, but no one wanted to talk about it. Who could blame them, though? Suicide wasn't exactly the most welcome of subject matters. The topic of ghosts was even more taboo.

The trouble had begun in La Crosse on August 1, 1904, the day that Nicolai Holmbo hanged himself in the front room of his house. From the moment his body was found, the neighborhood was shaken to its core. After all, those sorts of tragedies weren't supposed to happen so close to home. But as Holmbo's neighbors soon discovered, suicide was only the first of many horrors to come.

A husband and wife enjoying a quiet evening stroll were among the first to encounter Holmbo's ghost.

“Oh, Henry, look at that!” exclaimed Mrs. Carlson, as the couple happened past the vacant house.

A startled Mr. Carlson flinched at the frantic tone in his wife’s voice. But when he saw what had frightened her in the first place, his blood ran cold.

A white-shrouded phantom stood at one of the house’s windows. The ghostly specter remained motionless for a moment, but then it became animated, swinging its arms and gesturing wildly.

Mr. and Mrs. Carlson hurried away from the ghastly site. They chose not to walk past that house again.

Furthermore, a neighbor living across the street was taken aback by the brilliant lights that shone from within the home almost every night.

“It’s not natural,” he told his wife. “There’s something evil inside that house.”

As if to confirm his suspicions, terrible, disheartening cries began to emanate from within the Holmbo residence. “That does it,” declared the neighbor. “I’m going to fetch the police.”

When officers arrived on the scene, the screams grew louder. The policemen rushed toward the empty house. However, the instant they stepped foot onto the yard, the lights went out and the cries stopped.

A thorough search of the place turned up empty. No one was found inside.

Not surprisingly, the old Holmbo residence remained vacant for several decades. However, in recent years, it has once again become a private residence.

Night Frights

Karen Anderson had a choice to make. She'd earned enough high school credits to graduate a semester early. So now she could either stay home and bring in a little extra income, or she could move to Wausau to live with her father.

It wasn't a difficult decision.

"You guys got divorced a long time ago," Karen told her mother. "And that was right for you. But this is a chance for me to get to know my dad. I don't think I can pass it up."

Thus, craving an opportunity to bond with a man who was little more than a stranger, Karen moved to the central Wisconsin city in 1982, leaving her mom and her younger sister, Sheryl, behind.

Almost immediately, Karen had second thoughts. Upon entering her father's house, she felt uneasy, uncomfortable. But she wasn't certain whether it was the home itself or her father's new wife, Stephanie, that caused the eerie sensation.

This wasn't the stereotypical stepmother-stepdaughter resentment, though. As Karen told her sister in a telephone conversation, "She's into all sorts of weird stuff. I think she's a witch, Sheryl."

True enough, the woman openly dabbled in the occult and in dark magic. Conversely, Stephanie was obsessed with religion and with the Bible. She fanatically read the Good Book, maintaining stacks of scribbled notes and messages about it.

Stephanie's cats also acted in a bizarre fashion. Whenever Karen stood to leave a room, the felines darted out before her, ran directly to the place she was headed and waited, staring at her with their piercing eyes. It was as if the cats somehow knew where Karen was going—as if they could read her mind.

The teenaged girl was overwhelmed with relief when, three weeks into her stay, Sheryl came to visit. The sisters chose to share a double bed in the extra bedroom.

"Is it just me, or do you get a bad vibe in here?" Sheryl asked, as she unpacked her suitcase.

Karen gestured toward the alcove beyond Sheryl's side of the bed. "There's a cold spot over there. It's the only place inside the entire house where Stephanie's dogs ever go to the bathroom."

Sheryl frowned. "What does that mean?"

"It means I like to stay on this side of the room."

Later that night, at just before midnight, Karen was shaken awake by her younger sister.

"What's wrong?" Karen asked, her voice groggy.

"I can't sleep," whispered Sheryl. "I keep thinking there's something behind me in that alcove."

“It’s just your imagination. Now try to get some rest.”

“If it’s just my imagination, can we switch sides?”

Karen thought for a moment and then decided, “No.”

She rolled onto her side, away from her sister, signaling the end of the conversation.

A few hours later, Karen was awakened again. However, this time, it wasn’t her sister that stirred her. She bolted upright in bed, surprised to see Sheryl doing the same.

“What happened?” asked Karen.

“I don’t know,” said Sheryl. “I just woke up.”

“Me too, but why? Did you hear anything?”

“No, it was more like a feeling. A really bad feeling.”

Karen understood exactly what her sister meant. The room seemed clouded by a thick sense of foreboding.

Sleep did not come easily after that.

Unfortunately, the daylight hours brought little comfort for the teens. Sheryl confessed to her older sister that the adults—their father and their stepmother—did not seem to be on their side.

Karen felt the same way.

Each girl was the other’s only ally in the house. They could not discuss their fears with their parents, and the nightly task of sleeping in that room was an even more frightful ordeal.

Three nights later, Karen was again awakened. And again, she sat upright in bed at the same instant Sheryl did. However, this time, the reason was apparent.

As Karen stared into the alcove, horrified, she heard an audible gasp from her sister, followed by a

soft whimper. Karen wanted to scream, but she could not find her voice. Instead, she stared silently at the ghastly specter of a man hanging from the ceiling by his necktie!

Almost a week later, Karen received a phone call from Sheryl, who was safely back home with her mother.

“Karen, I need to tell you about the dream I had last night,” Sheryl whispered, almost afraid to speak the words aloud. “I was in that bedroom again, and I walked over to the alcove. I pulled up the carpeting on the floor, and I found a puddle of dried blood.”

Karen paused, and then she said, “It was just a dream,” although it was more for her own sake than for her sister’s.

“Are you going to check? ” Sheryl asked. “Under the carpet, I mean.”

“No. I’m never going in that room again.”

Years later, Karen’s father and Stephanie divorced. The house still belongs to Stephanie’s family, but neither Karen nor Sheryl has visited it in more than 20 years.

Something Scary on TV

The Evenson family's first television was a black-and-white machine, and it was small—its screen a mere 13 inches. However, it must have weighed 70 pounds. It picked up exactly three channels, although the reception wasn't great on any of them. Furthermore, there was no remote control for this ancient electronic device. In order to activate it, one had to stand, walk over to it, and pull the knob.

The family's oldest son, Scott, loved that television. For him, Friday night was the best part of every week. That was when his family gathered inside the living room of their small home near Madison, ate pizza, and watched whichever channel came in the clearest.

The following years brought new technologies. Soon Scott's family had a color console TV, and the black-and-white box was moved into the kitchen. Then,

in 1983, when Scott was 12 years old, the television was relegated to the upstairs bedroom he shared with his brother, Max.

Most children Scott's age would have been thrilled with a TV, and at first Scott was no different. However, all of that changed just a few days after the machine was moved to the second floor. That's when the haunting began.

It was a typically steamy July night, so Scott had been granted permission to leave a fan running in the bedroom window. It didn't help; he fell asleep sweating. But strangely, when Scott awoke at 1 a.m., he was chilled to the bone.

The boy crawled out of bed and scurried toward the fan in order to shut it off. But he only made it halfway to the window.

Click!

Scott heard the TV's knob being pulled. He swung around to scold his brother, but Max was still in bed—*asleep*. Scott could only watch in terror as the screen came to life, illuminating the room. The TV was on, but no one had touched the controls!

The screen's black-and-white static reminded Scott of *Poltergeist*, one of his family's favorite horror films. The mental connection served only to heighten his fright.

Forgetting his younger brother, Scott darted into the hall and down the stairs. He burst into his parents' room and dove onto their bed. "Mom, Dad, wake up!"

"What is it, honey?" his mother asked sleepily, as she rolled onto her side.

Scott tried to speak, but all he could do was mutter, "Upstairs . . . ghost."

The boy's parents calmed Scott and waited as he explained what had happened. They led him back to his room, where the fan was still running but the TV was off (and Max was sound asleep).

"See? It was just a bad dream," his mother whispered. "Everything is as normal as can be."

His father walked over to the fan and unplugged it. "There you go, buddy. Now hop into bed. You'll be asleep in a snap."

By the time his parents left the bedroom, Scott was convinced that nothing extraordinary had happened. And if that had been the end of the tale, he probably would have lived the remainder of his life believing it. However . . .

Click!

The TV was on again.

It was the fourth night this week that the knob had been pulled by an invisible force. But this time was no less scary than the first.

Scott and Max screamed. Then, once again, they raced to their parents' bed.

Mom and Dad were not pleased to see them.

"That's it!" exclaimed Mr. Evenson. "I've had enough of this ghost business. Tomorrow, I'm taking that TV to the secondhand store."

True to his word, Scott's father removed the television from the house early the next morning. And with the machine gone, the Evenson brothers' ghostly encounters came to an abrupt end.



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About the Author

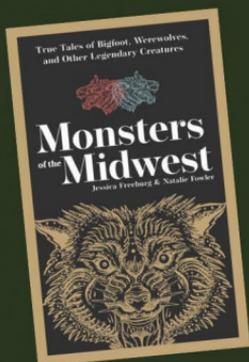


Ryan Jacobson is an award-winning author and presenter. He has written more than 60 titles, from comic books to Choose Your Path adventures. He prides himself on writing high-interest books for children and adults alike, so he can talk picture books in kindergarten, ghost stories in high school, and other fun stuff in between. Ryan greatly enjoys sharing his knowledge of writing and book publishing at schools and special events. When he isn't working on books, Ryan likes to build LEGO sets, play board games, and try new restaurants. He lives in eastern Minnesota with his wife and two sons.

Embrace Your Fears with Wisconsin's Spookiest Stories

A place so haunted it was featured on national television, the spirits of long-dead gangsters and serial killers, and perhaps the most famous werewolf story in US history—Wisconsin is among the most haunted states in America. This collection of stories presents the creepiest, most surprising of them all.

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For more from the Hauntings,
Horrors & Scary Ghost Stories
series, read *Monsters of the Midwest*.

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