

Haunting at Sycamore Lake

Karl C. B. Muilliwey

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By

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PSP

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Preface

“Nobody reads the preface,” said my editor confidently. “You can reveal plot secrets, give away the ending, make outrageous statements, and cast aspersions upon the reader’s parentage. No one will ever know.”

I, of course, typically read the preface. An author would not have included one if s/he didn’t have some prefatory remarks worth reading.

So, let me give away my essential plot: This is a true, real, actual, genuine ghost story. Non-fiction. It happened. The end.

Well, thankfully, there is more to it than that. In any book “based on a true story,” there will be extrapolations. For instance, I don’t remember verbatim conversations (other than a few choice phrases), so I have reconstructed them to the best of my recollection, retaining the overall content without, I hope, undue amplification. The events have sometimes been rearranged out of chronological order because it improves the story’s flow. However—and I must be emphatic here—the incidents I will relate actually occurred.

It is, of course, entirely reasonable that readers will doubt the authenticity of what is contained in these pages. That’s fine—I would expect nothing less. If you retain an open, but critical, mind, then you have done your part. Skepticism is beneficial when examining fantastic claims, but the purported facts must be weighed objectively, without filtering through one’s preconceptions or prejudices. If you can do this much, then I ask nothing further, except that you enjoy the tale.

“Do you expect people to believe you?” wondered my editor. Belief is irrelevant; instead, I hope that readers will open-mindedly consider the events portrayed and decide for themselves whether or not the story is factual or fanciful. As for myself, I know what actually occurred. “You’ll know it’s real when it happens to you,” said Rosah Brando, the woman you will meet whose life became intertwined with the spirit that haunted her abode. Fraud, hallucination, or sensory processing error cannot explain what I am certain repeatedly occurred in front of all five of my senses.

Most people say they want to be famous, but when pressed on the matter, they will probably admit that anonymity has enormous advantages. It prevents one’s privacy from being unduly invaded. It also removes one from critical public scrutiny. None of the parties involved in this case (myself included) wished to be publicly identified; all insisted upon pseudonyms. So, in most cases, I have converted actual names into anagrams (because that’s fun), but when this was too clumsy, I just created an appropriate *alter ego*. The locations are disguised, too. The actual

“haunted house and barn” are situated on a farm somewhere along the Indiana-Ohio border. Sycamore Lake, though, is an authentic name; however, you won’t find it on any maps (I’ve checked), so that doesn’t reveal too much.

As will become obvious throughout the book, I am neither a professional paranormal investigator nor a parapsychologist. I have spent over 35 years reading and researching psychical phenomena, but it is only a hobby. I am an attorney, so I am accustomed to critically analyzing alleged facts to determine their truth or falsity. I have never accepted a witness’ testimony lightly.

One last confession, which may seem superfluous: I am not a professional writer. I teach college students. I publish academic stuff—boring tomes and articles in scholastic journals to which colleagues subscribe and place, unread, upon their shelves to impress undergraduates. Professors publish or perish. So we write with lots of technical jargon designed to impress tenure committees. It is a difficult style to shed, and if it creeps into this work, I apologize, most wholeheartedly. I definitely could profit from a “ghost” writer (cringe!), but that costs money, and since no “apports” of coins or precious jewels have rained down during séances I’ve attended, we will have to make do with my writing ability, such as it is.

Thanks for disproving my editor. Having survived the preface, let’s get on with the ghost story.

Chapter One

"It's a sex toy," she said.

I hurriedly placed the plastic cylinder and accompanying hand pump down on the pile of the tenant's abandoned personal property.

Rosah Brando, the landlord, laughed. "We can go back up to the house if you want to wash your hands." My facial expression must have conveyed my disgust.

"Is this all of your tenant's property?" I asked.

"Everything he left in the lodge. There was a lot of trash, too, but I've disposed of it already."

Rosah was one of my law clients. She had consulted me regarding this matter, in which her previous tenant, a police officer, had failed to pay several months' rent, ultimately moving out and leaving the premises in deplorable condition. He had left much of his personal property behind, which prompted my advice to Rosah to store it in a secure location. She had selected the southwest corner of her barn, which was adjacent to the rental house she called "the lodge." Rosah was a naturalized American from England, and so the policeman was her "lodger."

"The barn is secure?" I continued through my mental checklist of legal requirements.

"Yes. The big doors are padlocked when we aren't parking the car inside the barn, and the side door can't be opened." This door had swollen shut in its frame from years of high humidity and poor maintenance. There were chains padlocking both sets of large doors, through which the farmer who once owned this land had driven his tractors, and where Rosah now parked her car in winter. Cold weather was approaching, as it was now the beginning of November.

"How long should I keep this junk here?" Rosah inquired.

"A year should be sufficient time for him to reclaim it. After that, you can get rid of it. You will need to notify him in writing that you're holding his personal property in storage."

"He didn't leave a forwarding address."

"Mail it to his last known address," I suggested.

"This was his last known address," she replied.

"What about his place of employment?" I offered.

“About three months ago, he was fired from the police force. I don’t think he has worked since.”

“Send a letter to him there; perhaps they will forward it,” I prompted. “Also publish a notice in the local newspaper classifieds.”

“Why does the landlord have to keep spending money when it’s the deadbeat lodger who doesn’t pay?” Rosah kicked a bag of clothes onto the top of a pile.

“Be careful,” I warned. “Remember, you’re safeguarding this until the tenant reclaims it.”

“Which will be never,” she replied. “Don’t worry. Everything’s safe in here. Nobody comes into the barn.”

“What about your boys?” I asked. Rosah had two sons, Vaddi and Seth, ages nine and seven, respectively. “Do they come in here to play?”

“No. They’re afraid to come into the barn.”

“Really? What’s in here to scare them off?” The barn was largely empty. Aside from the tenant’s personal effects, there were a few hand tools, a couple of lawn mowers, some old tires, scattered automobile and tractor parts, and similar junk.

Rosah paused, looking intently into my face. She was obviously considering her response carefully, gauging my likely reaction. I couldn’t help thinking that she was calculating whether to trust me with what she was about to say.

Finally, she spoke. “The boys don’t like what’s in here.”

That seemed unlikely. When I was their ages, I explored my grandparents’ barn thoroughly, sorting through all manner of interesting, peculiar artifacts. There was plenty here for the boys to occasionally explore. I said as much, and, again, Rosah eyed me cautiously.

“The boys are afraid of *who* is in here,” she said flatly.

I was intrigued. “You have another tenant living in the barn?” It then occurred to me that the rafters could be home to bats, owls, or other nocturnal predators. There were all manner of hiding places for snakes or small mammals. “Do you have rats?”

She shuddered. “It’s getting cold. Let’s go back up to the house.”

She was right. Suddenly, the air was distinctly chilly. This, despite the 70 degree sunshine outside—warm for early November in Indiana. It

felt like the temperature had dropped 20 or 30 degrees where we were standing. We walked toward the westerly set of tall doors on the front of the barn. As we approached, the air was instantly warmer again. That was strange.

I involuntarily looked over my shoulder into the rafters above at two large perpendicular beams joined near the center of the structure. For some reason, this made me feel very uncomfortable.

Rosah noticed my upward glance. "What do you know about the history of this place?" she asked.

"Only what you've told me." Her parents, an English couple, had purchased the land, which included the barn, the old farmhouse, the lodge, and a lake, about ten years before from an old farmer who had lived there for over half a century.

"There are bad vibes in the barn," she said. "Let's have some tea, and I'll tell you about what happened in there."

Chapter Two

Rosah gave me a brief tutorial on the proper way to make hot tea. “You put too much water in the kettle,” she complained. “You only need half that, and you should let it boil a bit. Let the tea steep for a few minutes. Then add milk.”

This, apparently, was an English way of drinking tea. Well, it was probably sensible to defer to more extensive national experience.

We sat at her dining room table, which was adjacent to the kitchen. “My parents,” she began, “Bought this farm from an old farmer who had moved here in the 1950s. The old farmer dug the lake shortly after moving here.”

Rosah always referred to the previous owner as the “old farmer.” To assure anonymity, I’ll keep this moniker. You will see why this is important when you learn what happened in the barn.

I could tell that the farmhouse was considerably older than half a century. Based on the architecture, interior structural arrangements, and type of plaster boarding and baffling used in the walls, I could tell that the oldest portion of the farmhouse was post-Civil War, probably built during the 1880s. The barn was likely constructed at approximately the same time. A separate kitchen, dining room, and bathroom had been added to the rear of the structure, along with an open front porch and enclosed westerly workroom, in the early 1910s and 1920s. Rosah’s parents subsequently enclosed the front porch, which Rosah now used as her beauty parlor (she was a cosmetologist and barber). The farm covered about 75 acres, including the farmhouse, barn, a tiny shed, and a small outbuilding the old farmer used to sell bait to people who paid to fish his pond. The shed and outbuilding had been constructed prior to 1940 and had been used to store small equipment and fuels. Rosah’s father and brother, who were both contractors in London, had renovated the outbuilding into a much larger structure, converting it into a rental house. *Figure 1* shows an aerial photograph of the site’s arrangement.



Figure 1. Layout of Sycamore Lake property, as it appeared in 2008. The original barn, which burned down in 1995, occupied the rectangular area that appears brown against the green grass above. The additions to the farmhouse are also visible. (Copyright © 2010 by Google Imagery & IndianaMap Framework Data, GeoEye.)

The lake was 25 feet at its deepest point near the center. The banks along the main part of the lake fell sharply to about 10 feet before leveling off. One could swim the lake easily enough, but it seemed dangerous to attempt to wade near the banks. Rosah's boys, Seth and Vaddi, fished almost daily during warmer weather. The lake was stocked with all manner of fish, including bass, blue gill, and, allegedly, Northern Pike, which had grown to impressive size but could not be caught.

The farm was situated immediately north of a county road that connected a nearby town with the county seat, which was roughly eight miles west. Rosah's parents had originally purchased the land to develop subdivision plots, and this was done to a limited extent over the next two decades.

"The old farmer lived here with his wife and teenage son," Rosah continued. She paused so long that I thought she had finished the story. She took a sip of tea. "He committed suicide."

“The old farmer?”

Rosah glared. It was a particularly stupid comment, even from me.

She sighed. “No, the teenage son. He hung himself in the barn.”

“How awful,” I said. Knowing this beforehand would have explained the creepy sensation I felt while inside the barn.

“He tied a rope to the rafters and jumped off,” Rosah explained. “Right where you were looking when we were leaving the barn. You can still see the marks the rope made on the wood.”

That seemed a fanciful flourish typical of most folk tales. “When did this happen?”

“It was in the early 1960s, I think,” she wrinkled her brow. “The old farmer’s wife never recovered from the shock and died a few years later. He continued to live here alone until my parents bought the place five years ago.”

“When did you move in?”

“A few months after my divorce, when the renovations were completed.”

“Do the boys know about the suicide?” I wondered.

“Of course.”

“That would explain why they don’t like going into the barn,” I concluded. “What a terrible thing to have happened.” I assumed that this is what Rosah meant when she said the boys were afraid of *who* was in the barn.

Rosah finished her tea. “He’s still there.”

I looked up. “What?”

“I don’t mean figuratively,” she said flatly. “He is still in the barn. He also lives in the house with us.”

“You’re not serious.”

Rosah got up and walked into the kitchen, washing out her cup and setting it next to the sink. “I expected more curiosity from you.”

I was no stranger to ghost stories or psychical research. I had been reading the subjects since childhood. I had studied folklore in college. I had extensively read paranormal and parapsychological literature since

junior high school. I had encountered many well documented, highly credible cases of authentic haunting and spirit presences. This was familiar territory.

Still, it seemed pretty “far out” to be talking about it as an actuality while drinking tea on an unusually warm November afternoon.

“Well,” I began, “You have to admit that it’s rather far-fetched. I can appreciate being creeped out by somebody having killed himself in the barn, but an actual spirit’s residency requires clear and convincing evidence.”

“You sound like a lawyer,” she smiled. “There have been lots of things that have happened in the years we’ve lived here. I’m hardly some gullible fool; I’ve had too many rough experiences in my life to indulge in fantasies.”

“Can you give me some examples?”

“Sure. I can’t tell you how many times my car or house keys have moved from where I left them.” That, of course, could be easily explained away—she simply misplaced them and forgot. “Lights turning themselves on and off.” Faulty electrical wiring, I thought. “Doors locking themselves.” She or her kids could have forgotten they locked doors, or the kids were playing pranks. “Footsteps on the floors at night, mostly upstairs. Knocking inside the walls.” It was an ancient house; strong winds and mice or rats could do that.

Rosah seemed to know what I was thinking. “You can find ordinary explanations for all this,” she said, “But you would feel differently if you had actually experienced them yourself.”

“Even so, there are usually quite ordinary explanations for what appear to be paranormal phenomena.”

“You’ll know it’s real,” said Rosah, “When it happens to you.”

I stood up. “Okay,” I said, “Let’s consider this from an evidentiary standpoint. We need to objectively investigate these alleged phenomena to determine if a rational explanation is satisfactory. Corroborating witnesses will be essential. If we could document sights and sounds by video or tape-recording, that would help. I’d like to give this a try, if you’re willing to invest some time.”

Rosah shrugged. “I live here,” she said, “So it’s no great demand on my time. As long as it doesn’t interfere with the boys’ routines or my work, then I’m game if you are.”

We sat down and prepared a tentative schedule. We would need to account for the activities of the known residents at all times during the investigations. We would invite independent witnesses to participate. Perhaps we could discover what was really happening.

Besides, chasing ghosts might be fun.

Chapter Three

"We call him Buddy."

It was hard to hear Rosah talking over the roar of the carpet vacuum, which we had rented at a nearby grocery to clean the lodge carpeting. The rental house had been filthy, but we were making progress.

"Your tenant was a pig," I grunted. "You should sue for damages as well as unpaid rent."

She was making notes and taking photographs of the damage, as I had advised.

"Why Buddy?"

"Oh, the ghost? Well, Buddy seemed like a friendly nickname, and he doesn't seem to object."

I had found Buddy's obituary among the newspaper microfilm at the library of the state university at which I was employed. It had taken some time to track down, but it provided his full name and, surprisingly, included a reference to his "suspected suicide."

"How can you tell if he objects?"

"When he's unhappy about something, he makes more fuss. Light bulbs start burning out all over the house, or things get knocked onto the floor."

"Have any paranormal events occurred in the lodge?"

"Not that I am aware of. Of course, the lodge wasn't here then. It was just a little outbuilding where they stored stuff, and the old farmer sold bait."

We finished the carpet cleaning and other restorative work. Rosah had found a new tenant, who would be moving into the lodge within the next few days.

We had begun experimenting with the mysterious disappearance of personal items. Rosah now placed her house and car keys in a small tin box above the kitchen sink. I had suggested that we use a small padlock to seal the box, but she complained that this would be problematic. "When I need my keys," she said, "I don't want to fiddle around unlocking a box to get them." So we admonished Seth and Vaddi not to touch the box, which, admittedly, was not foolproof security. Still, it would have to do.

For other “mysteriously mobile” personal items, such as Rosah’s jewelry, she agreed to padlock her jewelry box and keep the padlock key locked inside the glove compartment of her car. We excluded her wristwatch and favorite necklace from this incarceration.

I asked if I could use Rosah’s shower after our cleaning regimen. I had brought clean clothes, which were locked inside my truck because my wallet and personal effects were inside the pants pockets. I was carrying my key ring in the front pocket of my work pants.

I retrieved my clean clothes from my truck and carried them into the bathroom. I distinctly recall moving my key ring from my dirty pants to my clean pants, which were sitting on the edge of the sink. I locked the bathroom door, since the boys were outside fishing, and since this was the sole bathroom in the farmhouse, I didn’t want any surprise visitors while showering. After getting cleaned up, I put on my clean clothes and gathered the dirty ones and returned to my truck.

“I’ll return the carpet cleaning machine to the grocery,” I called out to Rosah. I reached into my pants pocket to retrieve my truck keys.

My keys were gone.

I checked all my pockets and searched through my dirty clothes. No keys. I looked along the ground leading from my truck back to the farmhouse, and then inside from the back door to the bathroom. Nothing. I carefully checked the bathroom, the dining room table, the kitchen countertops, and everywhere I might have inadvertently set down the keys. But they were nowhere to be found.

I was certain then, and remain certain now, that I had placed the keys in my “clean pants” pocket while standing inside the locked bathroom. It is highly improbable that they could have fallen out.

“You’ve probably just set them somewhere and have forgotten,” Rosah casually commented.

It was my turn to glare. “No, I am 100 percent positive I put them in my pants pocket before showering.”

“Well, you keep looking around, and I’ll take back the carpet cleaner.” She walked into the kitchen to retrieve her car keys from the tin box next to the sink.

My keys were inside, along with hers.

I narrowed my eyes. “Did you take my keys and put them here while I was in the shower?”

Rosah laughed heartily. “I didn’t know you were inviting me in there. Anyway, didn’t you say you locked the bathroom door?” So no one could have entered the bathroom, and I know I had the keys with me after locking the door.

I sat down at the dining room table. “You look stricken,” she said. “You could use some tea.”

It was a singularly peculiar circumstance. I had read about “spirit apports” in the British and American Society for Psychical Research journals and proceedings. These were objects that mysteriously transported themselves inside and out of locked séance rooms, some of which were recognized to have been situated elsewhere in the same houses or clearly taken from an outside venue (such as flowers or plants freshly uprooted, with dirt clinging to the roots). The séance rooms had been previously searched for planted objects, and, in the most evidential cases, nothing secreted was found that could later have been fraudulently introduced into the darkened room.

Rosah’s jewelry and keys had supposedly been “apported” to various places around the farmhouse, but I had discounted this entirely. She had misplaced things, or the boys were playing pranks. Now, in light of this personal experience, I was compelled to rethink these events.

Psychokinesis, or telekinesis as it is sometimes called, is the purported power to transport physical objects through space without touching them. Many tightly controlled scientific experiments, especially in the former Soviet Union, had been undertaken to demonstrate the validity of this psychical ability. Spirits were alleged to have this skill, to which spiritualists attributed apport phenomena; however, living, incarnate persons had also been shown to possess the talent. Could Rosah, Seth, or Vaddi be moving personal items, either consciously or unconsciously, by psychokinesis? There were cases in the parapsychology literature of troubled teenagers who lived or worked in places supposedly haunted by poltergeists (German for “noisy spirits”). In these instances, objects were moved, often violently, inside houses or workplaces. In those cases in which fraud could be excluded as an explanation, it was theorized that the teenagers living in or working at these locations were subconsciously responsible for moving objects through psychokinesis. The alternative theory, discarnate spirits, was usually discounted as less likely.

During the many years I have known Rosah and her now full-grown sons, they have never displayed any “mind over matter” abilities. Rosah seemed highly intuitive at times, but the boys showed no psychic proclivities whatsoever. It seemed improbable that they would have been unconsciously responsible for apport incidents.

Let me emphasize at this juncture that deception or dishonesty may be excluded as an explanation for the events that occurred at Sycamore Lake. There was no evidence whatsoever to suggest that Rosah, Seth, Vaddi, or anyone else who witnessed or participated in our investigations was perpetrating fraud.

I reviewed the various possible “normal” explanations through my mind as I sipped my tea. The simple, irreducible fact was that my key ring had been moved from my “clean pants” pocket from a locked bathroom and placed inside a box above the kitchen sink. No living person could have entered the bathroom to have accomplished this.

Could Buddy have done this?

I was not yet prepared to acknowledge that “Buddy” existed. Something strange and, at present, inexplicable had occurred, but I would not invoke spirits as the causative force behind my keys’ mysterious movement. Better, more persuasive proof was needed.

During the next few months, Rosah’s keys were moved from the sink box to various places around the house, including a bottom desk drawer in the living room, Seth’s upstairs closet, the pocket of a coat Rosah never wore in a closet under the stairs, and next to a pistol Rosah kept in built-in shelves of the headboard of her water bed.

“You keep a loaded gun in your headboard,” I was incredulous.

“I live alone with two children,” she retorted. “That gun saved our lives once when a prowler tried to break in.”

“Do tell.”

It was New Year’s Day a couple of years before, Rosah related. A man to whom she had been introduced at a party a few months beforehand had asked her out on a date, but she declined. She had heard through the grapevine that he had a criminal record. She was lying in bed at about 3 A.M. when she heard the distinctive shuddering sound of one of her living room windows being pushed open. Given decades of humidity and rain, the wood had swollen so that it jarred from side to side as one opened or closed it. Some effort was required to move the window up or down, but it moved

moderately well. Rosah grabbed her pistol and ran out into the living room. She saw a dark figure halfway through the window. Aiming the gun, she shouted a warning. Suddenly and violently, the window slammed down onto the small of the assailant's back, pinning him in place. He cried out in pain but could not move. Rosah stepped through the kitchen door and dialed the sheriff while she kept the gun trained on the man. She had turned on the living room overhead light, and she recognized him as the spurned romancer. Her boys were awakened by the commotion and came downstairs to investigate. She told them to awaken her lodgers, a friend whom we will call Cindy and her boyfriend, both of whom later served as witnesses to, or participants in, our investigations. Since the assailant appeared to be in significant pain, Cindy and her boyfriend attempted to raise the window slightly, but not sufficiently to allow the intruder to escape. Both were tall and muscular, but their combined efforts could not budge the window. "It wasn't jammed," Cindy subsequently told me. "It felt like there was a lot of pressure pushing down on the window." Within a few minutes, law enforcement officers arrived and took the perpetrator into custody. A deputy pushed the window open easily to release the suspect. "You're lucky he didn't get loose and attack you," said the deputy to Rosah.

I tried opening and closing the window to check its dynamics. It shuddered in the frame, but it moved freely and relatively easily. The window would slide down a couple of inches when fully opened and then stop itself. It had to be pushed with moderate force to close.

I later asked Cindy and her boyfriend to recreate the "feel" of the window when they had tried to open it. They pushed down on the window while I pushed up. I could feel the downward force preventing my raising it. "That's the way it felt that night when the guy tried to break in," Cindy said.

Although this story is not evidential of paranormal activity, it certainly raised some interesting questions. Why would a window that slid shut by itself exert pressure to pin a trespasser to the sill? Was the window actually jammed in its frame, which Cindy and her boyfriend misinterpreted to be downward pressure? That seemed the most rational, ordinary explanation.

Rosah and I packed the carpet cleaner in the back of her car, collected the boys, and drove into town. Before leaving, she had left only one light on in the house—above the kitchen sink—and we had previously checked all the windows and doors to ensure that they were securely locked. Rosah

had the only set of house keys with her car keys. We locked the rear door upon our departure.

When we returned after dinner, every light was on in the house.

Chapter Four

Rosah's father and brother were (and still are) London contractors with vast residential and commercial construction experience. They had repeatedly checked the farmhouse's electrical system but found no defects that could explain the self-activating (and deactivating) lights throughout the home. About a year previous to my involvement, Rosah had had a local electrician examine the wiring, fuses, and other electrical intricacies, and he found nothing amiss. Electrical shorts or other deficiencies, then, could not explain the strange lighting phenomena.

Typically, the lights turned themselves on, although they also turned themselves off. The occurrences were not restricted to any particular fixtures; rather, every light in the house was affected. Incandescent bulbs burned out at triple the ordinary rate, at least based upon my experience. Fluorescent light fixtures in the farmhouse were also affected but did not seem to burn out more often than average.

I lost track of the number of times lights turned themselves on or off during our investigations. Usually this happened whenever we were absent from the premises, although we each witnessed lights going on and off at various times. Unlike the flickering that ordinarily occurs when an electrical short is present in the wiring, Rosah's lights switched on or off and remained in the changed state. This was, by far, the most prevalent paranormal event we experienced.

When lights behaved autonomously in our presence, there were sometimes noticeable changes in air temperature in the rooms in which the fixtures were located; however, this was rare. There was one exceptional event. An incandescent light bulb exploded in a living room desk lamp while Rosah and I were standing about three feet away.

Cindy and Rosah decided that we should use a Ouija board to communicate with Buddy. I was quite skeptical, given my limited success in communicating through this method. A Ouija ("yes" in French and German) board purportedly enables living, incarnate persons to communicate with discarnate, deceased individuals. Typically, the board contains numbers zero through nine and the letters of the English alphabet, along with the words *yes*, *no*, and *goodbye*. There is a pointer or indicator, sometimes called a planchette (French for "small plank"), which is mounted on castors and moves around the board to spell messages. *Figure 2* illustrates a standard Ouija board.



Figure 2. A typical Ouija board and planchette.

Cindy was particularly keen to try the Ouija board in the barn, but I felt that communication would be less likely there than in the farmhouse. We made an attempt on one chilly November afternoon, with Cindy, her boyfriend, Rosah, and I participating. Although the planchette moved, it did not spell anything meaningful.

We followed the same procedure each time we attempted to communicate using the Ouija board and planchette inside the farmhouse. We would sit in ordinary light at the dining room table with the board before us. Each person was seated around the table at the cardinal compass points. We would place our fingers lightly atop the planchette, so that there was no way that we could deliberately or unintentionally move it with our hands without immediately being detected by the others. As the planchette moved beneath our fingers, we would try to maintain physical contact without influencing its movement.

Rosah's sons, Vaddi and Seth, were not permitted to partake in the Ouija board experiments. Rosah and I were always present, and other acquaintances occasionally participated, but, usually, Cindy and her boyfriend were our partners.

There was an odd occurrence while we were trying out the Ouija board in the barn. Seth and Vaddi were outside playing baseball. One of them hit their baseball through the open barn doors, which rolled past where the adults were sitting. Rosah got up to retrieve the ball, which had stopped near the *northeast* corner of the barn. Although none of us saw it stop, we all saw it bouncing across the floor in that general direction. Rosah called out that she could not find the ball in that corner. Cindy, her boyfriend, and I began searching but also came up empty. All the time we were looking for the baseball, the boys stood at least 20 feet outside the barn, wearing anxious expressions. At last, I glanced westward and caught a glimpse of white roundness near the former tenant's pile of personal property, all of which was located in the *southwest* corner of the barn. We couldn't believe that it bounced across the barn; that was over 30 feet away, and the ball lacked sufficient velocity to ricochet such a distance. It was another puzzling event for which we had no commonplace explanation.

With the failure of our barn "séance," we subsequently decided to conduct further Ouija board experiments inside the farmhouse at the dining room table. Although the planchette apparently moved by itself each time, nothing comprehensible was spelled out until we had sat a half-dozen times. We then received an alleged communication from Cindy's deceased grandmother, who provided some personal details known only to Cindy and herself. The board also told us to "go away" once, and, more often, it spelled obscenities. Otherwise, after about a dozen attempts, we had received nothing more substantive. I recommended that we discontinue this method of investigation for the moment, as it seemed unproductive.



Figure 3. The barn at Sycamore Lake. Our sole outdoor Ouija board experiment took place just inside the larger doorway on the right. The tenant's personal property was stacked at the opposite end of the barn, near the far left in the photograph, which is where the errant baseball was found. Based on its trajectory when it entered the barn, it should have ended up in the far right-hand rear corner. Photograph by the author.

The disappointing results from the Ouija board in the dining room were not, however, an indication that the room was, if you will pardon the expression, a “dead” zone for paranormal activities. Several out-of-the-ordinary events transpired there. For instance, about three months after the barn séance, I took a photograph of Rosah sitting at the dining room table. While looking through the camera viewfinder, it appeared that the picture frame immediately behind her moved out of alignment. It might have been a trick of the light, but I think I *saw* it moving. Of course, I was so taken aback by this that I forgot I was holding a camera, and so when I finally snapped the shutter, the picture (*Figure 4*) showed the crooked frame, but there is nothing to corroborate when or how it was moved. My testimony alone is insufficient; I cannot say for certain that the frame actually moved. I could have misperceived it, and it could have been a distortion created by looking through the camera viewfinder.



Figure 4. The lower right end of the picture frame behind Rosah Brando appeared to tilt downward immediately before the author took this photo.

Rosah mentioned that picture frames tended to become off-kilter, although she routinely straightened them. “I hate crooked pictures,” she indicated. “I straighten them, and they unstraighten. Maybe *he* [Buddy] unstraightens them.”

I had a more prosaic explanation. Her boys were active youngsters, playfully jumping and racing around the house. The resultant vibrations could easily move hanging objects on the walls. This, of course, cannot explain the apparent movement of the frame in *Figure 4*, since the boys were asleep upstairs at the time.

Most of the psychical phenomena occurred in the farmhouse, but there was outdoor activity, too. Late one evening, about three years before I met Rosah, she had been standing outside the back door of the farmhouse looking north past the west end of the barn. Rosah believed she saw a spectral figure moving laterally from the exterior wall of the barn toward the pond. *Figure 5* shows the relative area involved. Unfortunately, there were no corroborating witnesses, and it could have been an hallucination—it was, after all, late at night, and she was likely fatigued—and, so, while anecdotally interesting, it is hardly evidential.



Figure 5. Rosah claimed to have seen a spectral figure walking from the west side of the barn (right) diagonally across this open area toward Sycamore Lake (to the left). Photograph by the author.

A neighbor living along the west bank of the pond stated that she had seen a ghostly figure moving at night across the water's surface toward the rental house. "It looked like a man," she claimed. "He was transparent"—she probably meant *translucent*, since his transparency would have rendered him practically invisible against the background—"and he *glided* along, like he was flying." I later asked Rosah if this neighbor routinely imbibed in alcoholic or pharmaceutical nightcaps. She laughed. "Actually, she's a teetotaler, very religious," Rosah explained. "She thinks all this spirit stuff is the work of the devil."

These were the only visible ghost-walking episodes that anyone related during our investigations. "You can't see Buddy," Rosah reported. "But you can *feel* him near." I involuntarily shuddered. I had felt the sudden cold in the barn and in the farmhouse, like suddenly stepping into a refrigerated booth. Rosah was ambivalent. "It scared me at first," she said, "but not anymore. Even the boys aren't scared of Buddy when we're together in the farmhouse. It's only the barn they're frightened to enter. It's oppressive inside there; I've felt it many times."



Figure 6. Looking east across Sycamore Lake toward the lodge, from the perspective of the neighbor who claimed to have seen a spirit “walking on water.” A small storage shed is in the center, and the farmhouse is on the right. The barn’s roof is just visible above the lodge. Photograph by the author.

I understood this mood from being inside the barn myself. There was something dreadful that made the air stagnant, clinging, and palpably unpleasant. Once I knew of Buddy’s suicide, I considered such emotions to be the likely product of our imaginations. In retrospect, looking back at all that happened at Sycamore Lake, I think some of Buddy’s misery that led to his untimely demise might have been perpetuated in the barn. Dowzers and psychometrists, who seem capable of experiencing psychical memory traces from places or objects, report experiencing intense emotional trauma associated with suicide locations. If Buddy really existed as a spirit, and if he were “earth-bound” because of his overwhelming sadness, then the barn must have been a centrifuge of negative energy. No wonder Vaddi and Seth refused to go in there.

Chapter Five

Then there were the self-locking doors . . .

There were three exterior doors: A back porch door leading into the dining room, which was the most commonly used entryway; a side door leading into the beauty shop (formerly, the front porch); and an access door leading into a storage room connected to the kitchen, from which the basement was entered. These doors had a variety of locks, including deadbolt locks, doorknob locks, and interior slide bolts. All of the deadbolt and doorknob locks operated by the same key, which Rosah kept in her possession whenever leaving the farmhouse. The storage room access door was never used and, thus, always locked. The side door leading into the beauty shop from outside was almost never opened, either—customers came through the dining and living rooms using the back porch door—and, so, it, too, remained securely locked at all times during our investigations.

The farmhouse’s former front door, which was now an interior door leading into the beauty shop from the living room, also had a deadbolt lock, two interior slide bolts, and a skeleton key lock. The skeleton key lock was never used—in fact, it had rusted and was immovable.

The key-operated locks were never problematic during our investigations. The only “paranormal door locking” that occurred was to the doors containing the interior slide bolts—primarily, the back porch door, which had two interior slide bolts.

Whenever we would leave the farmhouse, we would first ascertain that all windows and doors were securely locked. We always exited through the back porch door, but we *never* engaged the interior slide bolts on the back porch door when leaving. It simply could not be done from the outside; someone would have had to lock them from inside the house after we had gone. The slide bolts could not accidentally lock, such as by vibration created when the doors were slammed shut. The slide bolts had to be forcibly pushed several inches into their locking slots, and this required some effort, since the slots were slightly misaligned with the slide bolts, and so one had to force them into place.



Figure 7. Rosah Brando sitting next to a renovated back porch to the farmhouse. About six months after our paranormal investigations, she replaced the “self-locking” back porch door with a key-locking sliding glass door (shown above). The sliding door never “self-locked.” (Photo by the author.)

On the first occasion that slide bolts apparently locked themselves, we had left the farmhouse to run an errand into town. The interior slide bolts were unlocked on the back porch door; those on the other doors were locked. When we returned a few hours later, *both* back door interior slide bolts were locked firmly in place. Nobody had entered the house during our absence, as all windows and doors remained securely locked. There was no sign of break-in, at least until I took a rock and broke a small hole through the former front door window (now in the beauty shop) to disengage its locks, enabling us to reenter the home. (The second time the “self-locking” happened, the glass had not yet been replaced; on the third occasion, a couple of months later, I threw my briefcase through the door window.)

This scenario was repeated several times. In each case, both interior slide bolts on the back porch door would be locked upon our return. They could not have been locked when we left, because we exited through that door each time. Nobody was inside the farmhouse, and there were never indications of forced entry.

After the second incident, I began disengaging the interior slide bolts on the former front/beauty shop door each time we left, so that we could at least have access to the house by unlocking its keyed deadbolts. Usually, and inexplicably, these would remain unlocked; however, once, these slide bolts, too, apparently locked themselves, along with the back porch door slide bolts, during our absence. (This prompted my “briefcase flinging” episode.)

At the risk of exhausting the reader’s patience, I must emphasize that, in each instance in which the interior slide bolts appeared to lock themselves, there was nobody inside the farmhouse during our absences, and no one could have entered or exited the home without leaving signs of forced entry. The slide bolts could not have accidentally fallen into the locked position when we shut the doors, because of the distance and force required to lock the bolts into their slots.

How did this “self-locking” happen?

During our investigations, I could detect no human agency that could have been responsible for the self-locking events. Rosah and the boys were prepared to accept “Buddy” as the culpable party, but this could not be conclusively proven outside our presence. We did not actually witness the locks being engaged; rather, this always happened when we were gone. This was suggestive, but not conclusive proof, of paranormal phenomena. We needed sensory evidence—to see, hear, smell, taste, or touch some action that occurred without any visible causative force—that could not be explained through conventional, rational means.

Plenty of that was coming soon.

Chapter Six

“Did you just hear that?” I exclaimed.

Vaddi and Seth were watching television so intently that neither flinched nor otherwise reacted when the booming occurred upstairs. It sounded as if someone were hitting a wall with a baseball bat or mallet.

“That’s Buddy,” observed Rosah without looking up from the book she was reading. “He’s upset that you’re spending so much time here.”

I walked upstairs to examine the rooms. I had done this many times before to check to see if anyone were secreted under furniture or inside closets, when the lights mysteriously turned themselves on or off. As was always the case, nobody was upstairs.

As I approached a wall light to turn off the switch, the light obligingly turned itself off. I turned in the dark and walked downstairs.

“What makes you think he is angry with me?” I inquired.

“He hits the walls upstairs whenever he’s mad,” Rosah said, in a matter-of-fact tone. “He doesn’t like you much.”

“Why?” I was genuinely puzzled. What had I done to offend anyone?

“You’re skeptical of his existence,” Rosah explained. “He doesn’t like to be dismissed. But that’s just part of it,” she added, cryptically.

“What’s the rest of the story?”

Rosah smiled. “Give it some thought. It will come to you.”

I reflected on the history of these strange, apparently self-generating sounds. The noises that seemed to come from the walls or ceilings could best be described as ranging from dull thuds to raucous slams. The noises seemed to come from somewhere inside the walls themselves, but the exact location was rather difficult to ascertain. There were no water pipes or heating ducts in these locations that could have provided a natural explanation for this clatter. Nor were other traditional explanations, such as the house settling or wind striking the house exterior, sufficient explanations. The sounds were too powerful and localized to particular places to be caused by wind or settling ground.

Rosah reported that she and the boys had frequently heard footsteps on the upstairs floor, but I had never heard this during my investigations. That was about to change.

The wall/ceiling clatter continued, so Rosah and I climbed the stairs to investigate further. She turned on a light switch at the bottom of the staircase, but the bulb did not light. It was burned out. It had been working earlier in the day, but, then, light bulbs burned out frequently in this house. We stepped into relative darkness and I approached the wall fixture that had extinguished itself earlier. Before I could turn the switch, the light soundlessly came on.

We carefully examined the three upstairs rooms but found no one present but ourselves. This was, of course, to be expected, as I had just completed this exercise within the past ten minutes. There were milder, but distinctive, thuds apparently arising from the walls in both of the boys' bedrooms. These seemed to randomly move around the rooms and were both high and low along the walls or ceilings.

I suggested that we attempt to communicate with "Buddy" and receive wall-banging replies to specific yes-or-no questions. One standard code for this type of communication was a single knock for yes and two knocks for no. We stated aloud that we would be attempting to communicate using this method. If "Buddy" were real and present, we asked him to answer by hitting the walls or ceilings using our code.

I covered a battery of informational queries, such as his name, his age at death, if he were alone or with others in a spirit condition, if he lived in certain parts of the farmhouse, and other mundane things. There was nothing but silence following each inquiry.

This was slightly annoying. Why stop the racket now, when we were trying to generate a meaningful dialogue? Whatever was responsible for the noises, it wasn't being particularly cooperative.

"Are you in love with me?" Rosah suddenly shouted.

For Pete's sake, I thought, what a ridiculous thing to say. I wished she would take this more seriously, and I said as much.

She sauntered over and, putting her arm around my waist, kissed me and said, "I wasn't talking to the ghost." She then turned and walked downstairs.

Now "Buddy" was not the only one stunned into silence.

None of these wall or ceiling noises convinced me that "Buddy" actually existed as a spirit entity haunting his old family home. However, the cumulative effect of all the phenomena to date was highly suggestive of his survival of bodily death.

The final episode, however, that pushed me across the threshold of incredulity occurred while I was alone in the farmhouse, a few months after the incident related above.

Rosah was hospitalized overnight for a minor surgical procedure, and Vaddi and Seth were staying at their aunt's house about ten miles from Sycamore Lake. This afforded an ideal opportunity for me to remain alone overnight in the farmhouse. I was prepared for anything, equipped with camera and hand-held cassette tape recorder in the hope of recording paranormal phenomena.

For most of the night, the house remained utterly quiet. I was reading on the couch in the downstairs living room. Immediately above me were the upstairs rooms. I could hear the ticking of a clock hanging on the kitchen wall two rooms away.

Then I heard footsteps upstairs.

The sound was distinct and unmistakable. Someone was walking in hard-soled shoes on the wooden floors above me. Of course, only some of the wood was exposed; most of the flooring upstairs had been covered with wall-to-wall carpeting. There was, however, wood flooring underneath the carpet. The sound crossed the "play" area outside the boys' bedrooms and then walked first into Vaddi's bedroom, and then backtracked to walk into Seth's bedroom. It then retraced its steps and walked a different route around the upstairs. The walking was interrupted by pauses, as if the walker were stopping every few feet for dramatic effect and then continuing. The walking was unhurried, casual, relaxed, but audibly clear and impossible to confuse with any other noise. It continued for what seemed like hours but was actually less than five minutes.

There was definitely somebody walking up there.

I grabbed the boys' baseball bat (forgetting about Rosah's handgun in her bedroom) and, turning on the overhead light at the bottom of the stairs (which lit this time), I charged up the staircase ready to knock the head off of whomever I encountered. Naturally, I had taken the precaution of searching the farmhouse thoroughly when I arrived there earlier to ensure that I was alone. I searched in every nook and cranny, not only upstairs but throughout the entire house, but I found no one else on the premises. While searching, I heard no further footsteps or other unusual noises.

In my haste to search I forgot to take along my equipment. In fact, I never activated my tape recorder. I was simply too stunned by the footsteps to think about it. Today, of course, I could have used a continuously-operating video camera with a built-in microphone, but in

those days such technology was not available to me. A sound recording alone would not have been of much evidentiary value in any event. A listener would simply have scoffed, "So you recorded somebody walking on a wood floor. Big deal." Nor would still photographs have proven much. Nonetheless, I know what I heard. It was not an auditory hallucination. They were footsteps as real as if I had been walking there myself.

"You'll know it's real when it happens to you," presaged Rosah. She was completely correct. Along with all the other evidence, I was now convinced.

Whatever he was, Buddy was real.

Afterword

“Nobody reads afterwords, either,” advised my editor. “If you haven’t said all you were planning to say before the afterword, then don’t expect the reader to keep slogging through your drivel.”

Ouch. Harsh words, to be sure. Like prefaces, I read afterwords to see what last bits of wisdom the author may have in store for me.

But my editor was correct; I haven’t got much more to say. There are some interesting post-investigatory details, such as the barn burning to the ground a couple of years after I completed my examination of the haunting. Vaddi and Seth were allegedly responsible. The fire chief thought they had been playing with matches and set fire to some rubbish that set the ancient wood structure ablaze. The boys, especially Seth, always maintained that they had not started the fire; rather, they described it as seeming to arise by itself among the sundry items lying about. One thing may safely be concluded: there were no further paranormal activities in the area once occupied by the barn following its destruction.

Nor have paranormal incidents been reported in the farmhouse since the barn’s demise. A little more than a year after the catastrophe, Rosah and the boys moved back to England, where they continue to live today. Her family continues to visit Sycamore Lake on holidays and occupy the farmhouse and use the surrounding property, but Buddy appears to have vacated the premises.

To conclude this short synopsis of the haunting at Sycamore Lake, I would like to share some final photographs of the principal participants. I regret that I have no pictures of psychical manifestations from Buddy, but, as an amateur paranormal investigator with neither budget nor proper equipment, I was not fully prepared to make a definitive investigation. But I never set out to prove or disprove to anybody what was or was not happening there. I simply wanted to know for myself and for those of us who experienced these events. We have drawn our own conclusions. We invite you to do likewise.

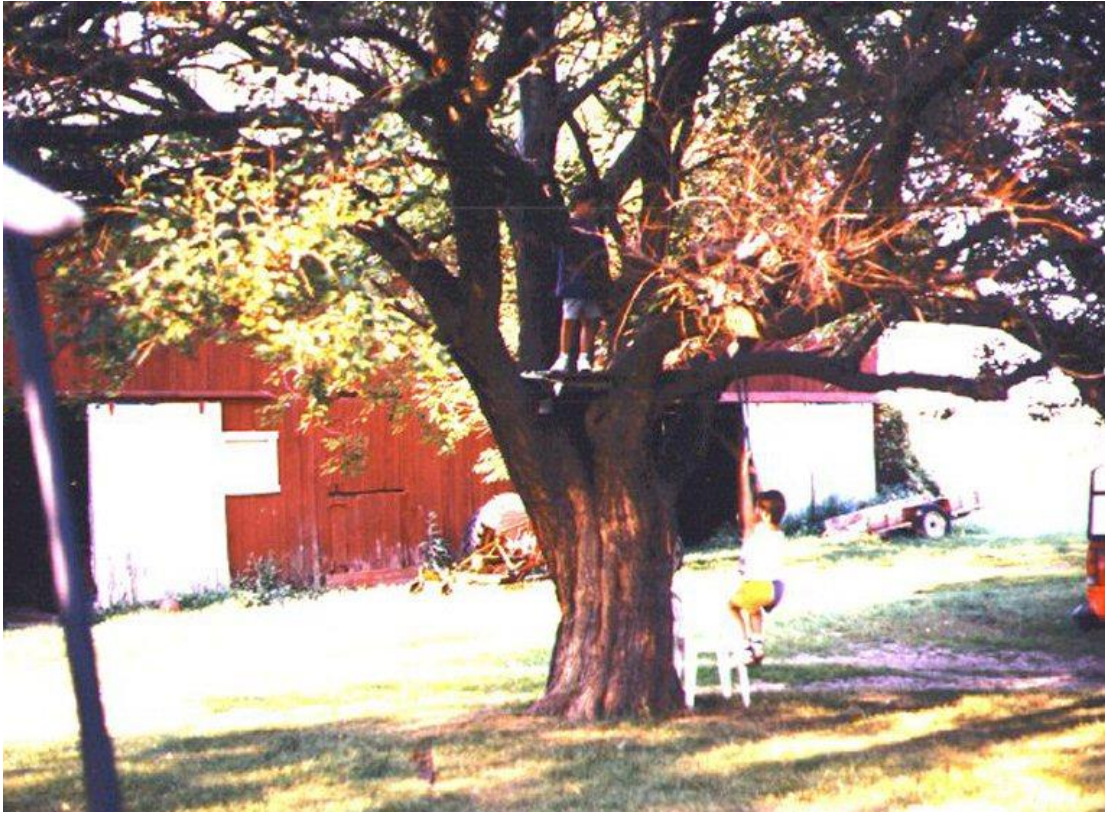


Figure 8. Vaddi and Seth playing in their tree house outside the barn. At this time, they rarely approached any closer to the barn than this. Photo by the author.



Figure 9. Rosah Brando sitting at a picnic table outside the back porch of the farmhouse, which was added after our investigations.



Figure 10. Ducks swimming along the westerly bank of Sycamore Lake.

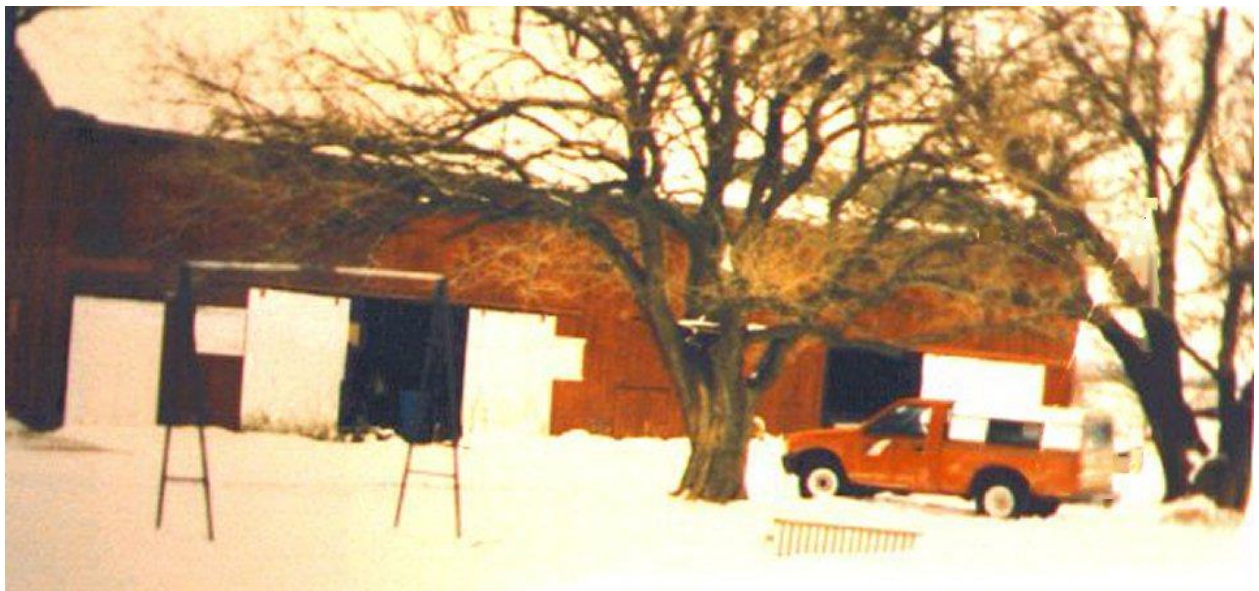


Figure 11. The barn in winter, with both sets of outer doors unchained, unlocked, and left open.



Figure 12. Looking west across part of Sycamore Lake.



Figures 13 & 14. Rosah Brando (left), together with the author (right).