

# Ghost writers

## Area residents tell haunting tales of horror

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- The ghost of a murdered man who haunts a farmhouse in Spencer County.
- A house with a back door that opened on a steep ravine.
- A young girl who was frightened to death in a graveyard.
- A "witch" who scared kids in the neighborhood.
- A headless horseman near Bedford.

These are some of the ghost stories turned in by area residents in response to the Indiana University Folklore Institute's search for Hoosier Halloween folklore.

Six persons turned in tales and the sixth grade students at University Middle School were asked by English teacher Ruth Schneider to write down scary stories they had heard. All the stories will go into the Folklore Institute's archives.

Dr. Linda Degh, chairman of the Folklore Institute, was pleased with the results. "They are all good stories. All of them are very interesting. Each is quite localized."

Many are different versions of traditional legends. Most deal with the supernatural — hauntings, the return of the dead.

"All are dealing with questions we can't answer," Degh said.

Hope Raney of Bloomington wrote about the girl who

was dared to stick a knife into a grave that was rumored to be haunted. She did so on Halloween night, but mistakenly stuck the knife through the hem of her skirt. When she got up to leave, she felt something pulling on her skirt and died of fright.

"THAT IS A classic story," Degh said.

Margaret Dutton of Bloomington related a story which her uncle had told her as a child about a haunted house on a farm in Spencer County where he and a friend had gone to work as farmhands.

Others had said that after midnight the front door of the house would open (even if it had been locked) and footsteps could be heard moving through the house. Her uncle told about experiencing this same phenomenon.

He later learned that a banker had been murdered and left dead under a tree in the front yard and that he had gold buried in the house. One summer Dutton asked her uncle to take her to see the house.

She described having an "eerie" feeling upon seeing the vacant house, which had been empty since it gained the reputation as a haunted house.

CAROL NORRIS of Bloomfield told about her experience with a woman in her neighborhood who was thought to be a witch. The woman was pulling her car out of the driveway one day while Norris was riding her bicycle past it. Tall shrubs blocked the view. The woman's car knocked her bike over, and Norris was so

frightened she grabbed the bicycle and ran with it all the way home.

Rad A. Drew of Bloomington wrote about a strange encounter in an abandoned graveyard in Laughery Valley in southeastern Indiana. He had been hiking in the area at twilight when he came upon the cemetery and saw the following poem on one of the tombstones:

"Remember, reader, as you pass by,  
As you are now, so once was I.  
As I am now, so you shall be.  
Prepare for death and follow me."  
He didn't stay around to read the inscriptions on any other stones.

HAZEL CAIN of Springville said her grandfather told her about a headless horseman who would return time after time on Goat Run near Bedford. She also had an encounter with a strange person while waiting in a car on a dark rainy night for her father and a friend, who were fishing. A man came up to the car window. She couldn't see his head. He disappeared and she decided to leave and come back later. Later, she heard a man had been killed there and his head had been cut off.

Many of the schoolchildren wrote about experiences they had had while trick-or-treating. Others gave their versions of what Degh called "universal" horror tales — hauntings of bridges or houses after a murder. The escaped killer story has several variations. One of these

has a couple on lover's lane hearing a report about an escaped killer with a hook arm. After hearing the story they see the "hook" man outside the car window.

THE VANISHING hitchhiker is another popular tale. It involves a person who is picked up by a motorist or a bus driver, then disappears. The confused driver goes to the address of the home where he was told to drop off the hitchhiker, but is told by the family that the person is dead.

Students also turned in a couple of versions of the story about a wife who always wears a scarf around her neck. Her husband demands that she remove it and when she does, her head falls off.

Degh isn't surprised that the common ghost stories turned up. "Human beings are pretty limited. The stories are very standard," she said. "I was surprised these kids are such good storytellers."

This time of year is a time when people want to be scared, want to believe in ghosts. "Really they (the children) want to go out and be in the dark and imagine scary things," she said.

Halloween doesn't affect only children, however. Once while doing research in East Chicago, Ind., Degh heard a tale about the ghost of a woman murdered by her husband. The woman's ghost was supposed to appear every seven years at Halloween on Cline Avenue, where the murder occurred. The story was so well known that people blocked the street hoping to spot her and the police had to be called to clear the area.

