

The Ghost at the Swinging Bridge

By Patsy A. Reckart

Grandma Bridget loved to tell stories. One of her favorites was a ghost story that happened to her brother Sam.

In the early 1900s, folks often got together just to play cards. Setback was a popular one. One Halloween night, a couple near Orlando (Braxton County) named Newt and Virgie were hosting a game at their house. Virgie spent the day making apple pies, and I'm sure they had coffee and other drinks. To get there, you crossed a rickety swinging bridge and a field until you came to the railroad grade.

Halloween was especially scary around Orlando because one Halloween night, Abagail Farley had been murdered in her bed, and her body was disposed of in the creek near the swinging bridge. Grandma always said that in the full of the moon, you could see her ghost, hovering around the bridge and looking for the men who'd murdered her.

My Great-Uncle Sam, Grandma's brother, was headed to Newt and Virgie's on this Halloween night. He was the kind who always hoped he'd win it big, even though they always played for mere pennies and nickels. He told Grandma he wasn't afraid of ghosts and didn't believe in such things. That night, he went whistling down the road under a full moon, listening to the coins jingle in his pocket and wondering how much he was about to win.

The game went until about midnight, when they took a break for some of Virgie's apple pie, coffee, and other

drinks. When the game resumed, the wind started whistling outside. The windows rattled. Then, there was lightning, a crack of thunder, and the sound of drenching rain. But Sam and his card-playing friends were safe and dry inside, having fun, gobbling up pie, and enjoying their drinks. Finally, the couples started to leave. It'd been a good night for Sam, whose pockets were a little heavier than when he'd arrived. Given the weather, Newt and Virgie wanted him to spend the night, but he wanted to head home.

Sam walked toward the railroad grade saying to himself, "I'm not afraid of any old ghost." Just then, he thought he saw something on the path ahead. Trembling in his shoes, he just stood there frozen for a few seconds. He wanted to go back to Newt and Virgie's but didn't want to admit he was afraid. While having this internal debate, he heard an owl hoot and then swoop right across his path. All of a sudden, a coyote howled in the distance.

Sam had never been this scared in his life. Plus, he was dripping wet from the rain, which was still pouring, and the lightning was getting closer. The clouds had totally blocked out the full moon, so it was pitch dark. As he approached the cabin where Abagail had perished, he thought he saw some lights and heard weird sounds from inside.

All at once, there was a flash of light, but it wasn't lightning. He couldn't help but think of how Abagail's ghost sometimes appeared to folks. As he inched closer, he heard a long, drawn-out moan

from the cabin that made his hair stand on end. Just then, the rain let up, and the full moon re-appeared. Sam knew he needed to get moving, but his legs weren't cooperating very well.

Then he heard laughter from the cabin. Apparently, a group of boys had been hiding inside scaring folks all night. But they were carrying on so loudly they didn't hear a wildcat screeching right outside. When it started scratching at the door, they jumped out the window and ran so fast Sam didn't even have time to identify them; however, he did put together that it was all a Halloween joke—except for the unexpected wildcat, who scurried away in all the excitement.

Breathing a sigh of relief, Sam continued his journey, now under clear bright moonlight. Just as he got to the swinging bridge, he saw something white in front of him. It seemed to be moving to block his path. He was so close to his destination he could see the lights from home. So, he got up his nerve, got a good running start, and dove to tackle what he thought was a ghost. Much to his surprise, he'd just captured a newspaper that'd been blowing in the wind.

When he got home, he told Grandma about the boys trying to scare him and about meeting the ghost but left out his heroic takedown of the newspaper—until later, at least. He closed his story with, "Like I said before, 'I'm not afraid of any old ghost.'"

Grandma passed away several years ago, so I guess I'll never know. One thing I do know—I'll never go through that field on a deep dark night. 

PATSY A. RECKART, a 1953 graduate of Burnsville High School, raised a family and worked in various jobs before opening a craft shop and restaurant in Weston in 1980. She retired in 2005 and began writing regularly as a hobby. This is her second contribution to GOLENSEAL. Her previous article was about the town of Orlando (Spring 2019).

Little Kokamoe Joe



Patsy Reckart

Patsy Reckart is the author of a children's book about a rusted, dented, and scratched dump truck that nobody wants at first—until he finds just the right person. This delightful little book is available from Amazon.

Corrections

An article in our Spring 2021 issue about the 1948 comic-book fire in Spencer noted that Paul Mace, one of the students, had passed away. We are delighted to report that Mr. Mace wrote to let us know he is "in very good health this 13th day of August."

On p. 21 of our Summer 2021 issue, the name Tennis Chafin should have read Tennis Hatfield.