



The Blawenburg Beacon

January 2010

A newsletter for the members and friends
of The Blawenburg Reformed Church

The Ghost Next Door

by Richard Van Doren

Part 1

It began as an amusing conversation piece, eliciting a smile, an occasional chuckle among those who claimed to see her, and a barely perceptible a shake of the head from those who listened with gentle mockery.

The ghost of Gladys Timms - or something - manifested itself just enough over the decades, in unusual and unexpected ways, to keep the legend alive throughout generations of inhabitants of the old parsonage where Gladys met her suspicious end in 1850. The slamming of an upstairs door on a still night, the trill of piano keys in an empty living room, the sound of - what? - muffled crying from the attic, and even the unshakable sense of another presence in the dining room startled the Whitney's, terrified the Magnussons, perplexed the Howards and invigorated the De Leos. "There's Gladys again," Sandra De Leo announced whenever a phenomenon occurred. "Hello, Gladys," she'd continue with genuine affection.

Supposedly, none of those who lived in the old parsonage spoke of their experiences to subsequent buyers. It could sour the deal, after all. When Shirley Howard called Wilma Magnusson and asked, "Is there something strange about this house?" Wilma's answer prompted Victor Howard to consult a real estate agent the very next day. The Howard's sold the place at far below market value.

The De Leos reveled in their good fortune, stemming they were told from the sudden transfer of Victor Howard overseas. Only when Sandra saw an indistinct figure sitting on the attic stairs late one night did she finally connect the Howard's rationale for selling with their purchase of a new home less than three miles away.

It had to be the ghost of Gladys Timms. Like dogs and cats, some people were and were not "ghost friendly."

It was Mary and Walter Trainor who lived in the house and served the Baileysburg Church in the late 19th century who uncovered what they believed to be the source of the haunting. Gladys was the wife of the church's third minister, Dominie Wolfgang Timms, a stern demanding and often unforgiving cleric, if the tenor of his sole existing sermons and the fact that he engineered the excommunication of at least three elders was any indication.

Gladys, a retiring only child was herself unable to produce children, which occasionally made her an object of public scorn by her husband, who may or may not have been the actual

"problem." Some parishioners saw it as a blessing when Gladys took sick in late February of 1850 and fought an ill-fated battle for life which ended in defeat four months later. Her spirit finally departed a body that weighed less than sixty pounds and appeared to be twice her thirty-six years of age. Shortly before a lifted sheet removed her from human sight for eternity, her neighbor Constance Sharp, who had been preparing some chicken broth downstairs, entered the noxious bedroom and threw her hands across her face, letting the tray, bowl and spoon crash to the floor. She later testified to all but Wolfgang that she had never seen such a heart-rending expression of despair on what should have been a countenance awash in peace, given the on-rush of paradise. Her eyes bulged and her mouth, which should have been agape to allow for the exit of the soul was instead clenched tightly shut.

For well over a century the legend of Gladys Timms grew, aided largely by intermittent communications among the various residents of the parsonage, which the church sold in the 1920's. It was finally decided - or discovered - that Gladys only wanted attention when she made her presence known, and when someone, anyone in the Baileysburg community placed some flowers on her grave she would withdraw to a secret corner or chamber of the house and remain there for years at a time.

Gladys - or something - had not appeared for several years when the Sellers took up residence just three years ago. Interestingly, Tom and Marsha were the only couple in all that time to have a child, whose name was Charles, nicknamed Chucky. Prior to their arrival in Bailyesburg, Chucky had demonstrated all of the qualities of a happy, well-adjusted toddler - bright, energetic and given to laughter. But soon after they moved into the old parsonage Tom and Marsha began to notice a change in the boy. Beginning at age three to his present age of five Chucky had become increasingly withdrawn, fearful even. He showed no interest in his peers, although his parents enrolled him in the church nursery school across the street, and he never returned the warm greetings of an adult - not even the wave of a hand. No amount of chastisement from his parents could coerce Chucky to make eye contact or even acknowledge another adult, except for themselves and occasionally his teachers. Some of the best child psychologists in the business were at a loss to explain it, ruling out the most common sources of trauma like abuse or an undetected physical illness.

Without a change of some kind, Chucky seemed destined to remain a ward of his parents for the remainder of his earthly days.

However, that change - or something - came on Good Friday, April 13, shortly before 11:15 in the evening. Chucky had seemed particularly restless before going to bed and practically begged his dad not to lead him upstairs. But the child finally yielded at the promise of his favorite story, which was a long one. By 9:30 he had fallen into what appeared to be a deep sleep. Relieved that he could now return to the Yankees game on TV, Tom quietly covered his son and slipped from the room. All remained quiet for about ninety minutes.

As Tom and Marsha ascended the stairs for bed they heard a thunder-clap pounding in their son's room and screams that pierced the night. Bursting in they froze in horror at the sight of Chucky sitting upright, screaming repeatedly and staring wide-eyed at something behind the opened door. They spun to follow his eyes and, moments before it seemed to disintegrate, looked upon an apparition of barely discernible shape. When it disappeared Chucky's screams subsided into sobs and whimpers.

Tom and Marsha rushed to their son, but locked on each other in stunned, jaw-dropping silence. They both saw something that would forever rob them of blissful ignorance.

And what they saw was not human.

Dora's Workshop and Supply Depot has a new plan designed just for you. Want to make a quilted pillow? a tote bag? a school bag for Church World Service? a prayer quilt? See Bernice to set up a convenient

A Big thank you to the ladies and students who worked on projects for our table at Sinterklaas

New Start Date for "Jog Through the Bible"

The passing of my father made it necessary to postpone the start of "Jog." Since I will be on vacation the week of January 16-23, and I have a schedule conflict on the 27th, let's begin on Wednesday, February 3 at 7 p.m. in the Memorial Hall Theater. (Wednesdays seem to work best for most.) This survey course will move swiftly, so I'm still pretty sure we can cover the entirety of scripture by the end of winter. Please come!

January Birthdays

8 Brian Van Liew
18 Taylore Fritzinger
19 Grant Soyka
Doug Wengel
24 Paula Peters
Kristin Reyes
25 Jim Beachell
28 Alex Johnson

Upcoming Events

February 16
Fat Tuesday Lunch (11:30 to 1:00)
Fat Tuesday Dinner (5:00 to 7:00)

Soup Sale
February 20
9:00 to 11:00 AM

Watch the website for more details

ONGOING MISSIONS

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Kits for CWS Baby, Student and Health

Barb A and Bernice were busy this summer providing us with blankets, sweaters and school bags. On the mission table in Cook Hall are lists of needed items for you to keep on hand as you see sales. We have lots of notebooks now. The biggest ticket item we need is cloth diapers. If you see them on sale ever, please pick them up for us. We will gladly reimburse you. We will plan to pack these kits in the spring with the Sunday School children.

Non-Perishable Food and Toiletry Items for our Township food pantry are collected in the Sanctuary and Cook Hall.

ONGOING MISSIONS

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BRC Women

Spa Night

January 21st at 7:30 in the Memorial Hall Theater

We will have Arbonne products to try; a massage therapist offering \$10 for 10 minute chair massages; healthy snacks by Nancy D'Alessandro; and a humorous video playing regarding Women and Stress by Bernice Van Nostrand.

Come out for a fun evening of fellowship.

eBay 101

February 18th at 7:30 in the Memorial Hall Theater

We have two computers with internet access in the theater but those with laptops should bring them. Also, bring a digital camera and an item that you want to list on eBay.

We need refreshments for this event

Men—you are also welcome to attend.

Family Life Pot Luck Lunches

The Family Life Committee will once again host our Pot Luck Lunches after church. Here are the following dates in case you want to put them on your calendar now.

February 7
March 7

Dear Friends,

We want to thank all our friends at Blawenburg Reformed Church for your prayers, your love, and your helpfulness during the time of Harold's hospitalization and after his passing. You have been so very supportive and have been a great help to me and my family. We would also like to thank Pastor Rich for the beautiful service in Harold's memory.

With Love,

Jean Skillman and family

Fifth Sunday Worship Begins this Month

Beginning on January 31 every fifth Sunday will be a "free preach Sunday" with an old fashioned gospel hymn sing. Please think of questions and scripture lessons that you'd like to have clarified or know more about and give them to me in advance, if possible. It's ok if you bring them to me cold on that Sunday, too. That's part of the fun and challenge of it.

Prepare to sing some old-time favorites like "I'll Fly Away," "The Church in the Wild-wood," "The Sweet By and By" and more. All guitarists are welcome to participate! Soon, we'll add other instruments as well. Please come, and bring some friends.

Croatia Update— Titus family returns to Croatia with your love

By Nancy Titus

Our hearts are full as our family prepares to head back to Croatia on Jan. 4. We are full of your well wishes and warm embraces, and truly content in the knowledge that you, our partners, are covering us with both financial support and prayer so that whatever this new year and new decade bring to us, we know God is already at work orchestrating everything that concerns us.

We have been so fortunate to have received warm hospitality and loving prayers across the country from Rochester, Minn., to Zellwood, Fla., from Lawton, Okla., to Clifton Park, N.Y. We also were the grateful recipients – again! – of the many kindnesses of the Pultneyville (New York) Reformed Church, as we were once again allowed the privilege of living in her lovely Koinonia House during our stay in the United States. Words cannot begin to convey our gratitude!

As we have had the honor of sharing with many of you in person about our work in Croatia, we have been strengthened by your response. Your questions show genuine interest in our work and also in the human side of living abroad, as you graciously have asked about our children, their school situation, our health and other matters that are not strictly work-related. Your care came through in every encounter, and we are so honored to be your missionaries.

Though we were not able to visit all of our supporting churches, we did visit 12 churches, one classis, and two schools as well as our extended family. That travel included two cross-country drives from New York to Oklahoma and Texas and back, which works out to about 3,000 miles for each of those trips in addition to the four airline trips and numerous shorter car trips.

In and around all that traveling to churches, we spent some quality time with our parents and siblings and watched as our son, Samuel, was confirmed at our home church in Fishkill, New York, in December. The celebration was doubly meaningful because it was held in the midst of people who have cared for us for more than a decade. It was quite emotional as we talked with members of the congregation who recalled the precocious four-year-old Samuel they first met when Eric became their pastor. They talked of how Samuel had grown over the years, beaming with pride right alongside his proud parents.

Since so many of you asked, I can assure you that we were able to do some relaxing during our time in the States. We will always remember fun times with the five of us at Disney-World as well as playing jokes on my sister in Oklahoma and Samuel's tall Texas tale of eating two T-bone steak dinners! (That came about as a result of a familial challenge which he easily met with the possibly unfair advantage of a teenage hunger. I'd be hard pressed to say who was the most proud when the story was related to me afterwards: son, father, or grandfather.) Penny got to sing in the elementary school musical, and all the kids have enjoyed making new friends and rejoining old ones at school.

We look forward to our return to Croatia and are anxious to catch up with colleagues and students at the Evangelical Theological Seminary and in the Reformed Christian Church in Croatia.

Thank you for your prayers for safe and smooth travel for this whole venture. We don't take that lightly as we know the many details that can go wrong and as we have many more miles to travel in future.

Militant Christianity

On Christmas Day a young Nigerian man tried and failed to blow up a Detroit-bound jet plane with 300 passengers aboard. He admitted to working for al Qaeda, perhaps the most extreme branch of Muslim extremists. A New York Post columnist, whose essay ran on the home page of Yahoo last week, said the timing of Christmas day was no coincidence. It signaled the escalation of anti-Christian militancy in a religion where 25% admit to being jihadists (if the polls can be trusted).

On Sunday, December 27 "60 Minutes" ran a story in which a high ranking Afghani official submitted to an interview. Although he knew this would further jeopardize his life, he did so in support of some friends, covert CIA operatives whose tireless work has prevented his country from falling into the hands of the Taliban - so far. "I expect to be killed," he said, "but I will fight them for the rest of my life. They have no vision for my country - or anyone else."

Militant Islam seizes a lot of media attention these days - TV, radio, newspapers, magazines, etc., yet in spite of all this exposure, the jihadists, the extremists, the Taliban, al Qaeda - whatever - have not managed to communicate a single positive goal or idea. They are all about tearing down. They know what they want to destroy, but they offer no alternative but pain, chaos and regret.

And Islam is the fastest growing religion in the world - much faster than Christianity.

It is time for Christians to become militant, but not in any way remotely resembling Islam. It is time to take our faith on the offensive, or be willing to offend, because the salvation of our beautiful world is at stake.

How do we do this? First and foremost, we never wield a weapon or cause physical harm in any way. Jesus set the divine example by forcing the political and religious authorities of his day to kill *him*, while never lifting a hand in self-defense or calling for armed support. The long and short of it is this: murder is evil, no matter how twisted the rationale. It is not divine; God does not condone it. And murder is not just physical. It can be spiritual and emotional, as well.

However, Militant Christianity is not all about turning the other cheek, either.

We live in an era where the gospel is either ridiculed or ignored by the distinct majority of any community nationwide. A significant percentage of those who attend worship, even, don't really buy in to the basic precepts of their faith. These people are the problem, not those of us who believe. And it is about time that we tell them so. The growing disrespect for God and a

structured spiritual life may very well be the death of us all.

In the gospel Jesus repeatedly compares the human race to an orchard, which is planted to produce one thing: fruit - and that fruit is spiritual faith in God. When the orchard ceases to produce, the trees get ground under and replaced by something new (Luke 13:6-9). Jesus also calls spiritual faith "salt." "You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot." (Matthew 5:13)

For too long we Christians have bitten our tongues, smiled and withdrawn in the face of bad behavior: open rudeness, snide remarks and fraud. By the last I mean those who take vows in joining a Christian church and then treat them with open contempt, who not only cease to attend worship and support the church in either time or money, but openly criticize the church's ministry in an attempt to justify their corrupt behavior. In forsaking their covenant with the church, they terminate any obligation the church may have to serve them. At least that's the way it should be.

Unfortunately, Christians in the ever-weakening church have taken the ungodly position that upholding the vows of membership and enforcing them when necessary should be avoided - because we might offend somebody or hurt their feelings. If the community of faith has become so lax, so disrespectful toward basic Christian responsibilities, what can we expect from those outside the faith? When mushroom clouds are rising above our cities, we'll take small comfort in the knowledge that "at least we didn't hurt anybody's feelings."

Do you want to avoid this, or something worse? Then plant your fannies in the pews on Sunday morning where they belong, open your wallets and pocketbooks, and read your Bible!

Otherwise, this could be a tough year.

Peace,
Pastor Rich

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Dated Material

The Blawenburg Reformed Church is a covenant community of God's people united in Christ through the Holy Spirit. We commit our gifts to worship, hospitality, life-long learning, serving those in need, and proclaiming the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ.