



The Blawenburg Beacon

February 2010

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

The Ghost Next Door

by Richard Van Doren

Part 2

At 11:15 on Good Friday evening, Rev. Terry Hansen finally decided to resign from the pastoral ministry, after twelve years of inner struggle. He could point to the pitiful turnout for the service earlier that evening, or dwindling enthusiasm for all aspects of church life among his congregants. He could even cite the church's long history of adversarial relationships with its ministers, as exemplified by the sale of the stately, spacious former parsonage next door and the purchase of the much smaller home in which he and his wife Janet now lived. But that was almost a century ago, and that, too, would be pointing in the wrong direction.

In truth, the problem was and would continue to be his own emotional emptiness, a simple but devastating lack of compassion, the most important quality of his profession. It wasn't that he hated anybody, it was just that he could feel nothing. He could feign sorrow in the face of grief, patience when attacked, amusement when the target of teasing, but he felt - nothing. Any appearance of emotional involvement was a sham.

For years Janet urged him to consider counseling (she, too, suffered from his emotional distance), and he even sought professional help for several weeks. However, the psychologist's findings failed to transcend the obvious. Spiritually and intellectually he offered superior gifts, but he never learned to attend to his own needs. The causes were irrelevant to the recommended cure: months, if not years away from the ministry until his emotional battery fully recharged. "Easy for you to say," he thought while reading the official report. "Give me the name of a corporate headhunter who specializes in placing burnt out clergy and I'll consider this time well spent." But no such person existed to his knowledge, and given the limited usefulness of a seminary education, he grasped desperately at a profession for which he knew, like so many of his peers, he was no longer qualified - if he ever was.

"Tonight's the night," he thought as he sat down at his laptop to begin typing, "Time to get out of the boat." As Janet brushed her teeth in the nearby bathroom, he pecked out the names of his elder board. Breathing deeply, he raised his hands to begin the body of his letter when a horrific sound froze his fingers an inch above the keys. It had been a gusty evening with a mild threat of mid-spring thunder storms, but only a tornadic wind could produce such a shriek. The windows, which rattled when a pick-up truck drove by, remained still, and the sound itself seemed muffled by distance and walls.

Hansen jumped to his feet and fumbled with his sneakers. On hearing the sudden movement, Janet rushed into the room. "What's wrong?!" she demanded, wide-eyed.

"There's something wrong at the Sellers' place," he gasped, visibly frightened.

"Should I call the police?" she cried. But he was already half-way down the stairs.

The wind had gathered strength, pushing thick ominous clouds past a nearly full moon and bathing the front lawns in intermittent blackness and light. Terry Hansen dashed onto the Sellers' property, oblivious to the threat of ground hog holes and fallen twigs. In seconds he stood before his neighbors' front door and pressed frantically on the lighted button.

Immediately, the door swung open to reveal an ashen-faced couple and child, the little one clutching his mother with arms and legs, his head buried into her neck.

At first, Hansen thought his discomfiting appearance - red eyes, wind-swept hair, a tattered bathrobe over blue striped pajamas and untied sneakers - startled his neighbors, but he quickly realized that a far greater shock had stricken them.

"Are you all right?!" Hansen wheezed, "D-did that sound come from here?"

Tense moments passed and neither Sellers spoke. Finally, Marsha strained to answer. "Y-yes, that was us, Pastor Terry." She shot a look at Chucky. "Please come in." As they stepped away from the door to allow entry, it occurred to Hansen that this was the first time either of the Sellers had addressed him as "pastor." Neither attended his church across the street, if they attended anywhere, and their casual greetings always comprised first names only.

Tom gestured toward the living room. Once seated, another uneasy silence followed. "So what happened?" Hansen asked.

Tom sighed, looked at the ceiling and shuddered. "We're not exactly sure . . ."

"Chucky started screaming, and we ran into his room . . ." Marsha blurted.

"Do you believe in ghosts, Pastor?" The suddenness of Tom's question startled Hansen. "Ghosts?!" He stifled a laugh, recalling the many stories about this house. "You don't mean Gladys Timms, do you?" he asked with a smile. When neither Sellers appeared amused, Hansen donned his serious face. "This is going to be a long night," he thought.

"I don't think it was Gladys Timms, Pastor. We don't know what it was," Marsha whispered, caressing the sleeping child in her arms.

Again, silence. Clearly, the Sellers expected an answer. "You mean you saw what made Chucky scream?"

"We saw - something." Hansen detected a slight tremble in Tom's voice. "The room was pretty dark, except for a night light and what comes through the windows from the street lamp. But there was something there - I swear to you - a dark mass, almost like a thick cloud, but . . . furry. I thought I saw red eyes . . ."

"It disappeared almost as soon as we saw it, but I saw the same thing," Marsha added, somewhat more composed.

They waited for the minister's response. "So it's this again," Hansen thought sourly, "a consultation about a brief foray into the unexplainable with the local shaman, who will soon to drift back into irrelevance. Might as well tell them straight."

"No. I don't believe in ghosts," he answered frankly.

"Then what did we see, Pastor Hansen?" Marsha handed Chucky to Tom and leaned forward. "There was something in that room, I assure you." She looked at the ceiling again and Hansen realized that Chucky's bedroom was right above them.

"I don't know, Marsha, but if by a ghost you mean the disembodied spirit of a human being - no, I do not."

Marsha sat back and glared at him. "Then you must think we're all crazy."

He glanced at Tom and saw a similar look of disappointment and anger.

"I didn't say that," Hansen scrambled to recover. "Clearly, you saw something, but what you saw was not a ghost."

"How do you know?" they asked simultaneously.

"Because Jesus said when a person passes from this life and enters the next a great chasm is fixed between us, and there is no returning from the next life or communication from it, which means that "mediums," "ghost whisperers," and "sixth senses," while fanciful stories, are all shams - every last one of them."

"So there is no spirit world," Marsha continued, more confused now than angry.

"I didn't say that, either," Hansen answered, his confidence somewhat restored. "There is indeed a spiritual world, and the human spirit may be part of it. Ghosts as we know them, however, do not stay here or come back. A room might contain residual energy from a human life, which could cause a psychic response in certain people, but *the energy* has no consciousness, no autonomy."

"Can anything come from the spirit world?" Tom asked in a barely audible voice.

Hansen nodded. "According to the Bible only two spiritual life forms have intruded into the human experience - angels and demons."

The Sellers exchanged worried glances. "So we saw a demon, then."

Hansen sighed. "I think before you jump to any conclusions, you should eliminate more believable explanations."

"OK, Pastor," Marsha said, caressing her son who now rested on Tom's thigh, "Maybe you'd like to come take a look at the room and see for yourself whether there's anything there that could play tricks on us."

"Uh, sure," he said a bit uncertainly, but not because of ghosts. He felt awkward invading anyone's private territory.

They left father and son on the couch, the little one sleeping soundly now, and climbed the stairs. Nightmarish memories of childhood flashed briefly through Hansen's mind, but quickly fled - the tentative gaze up at the second floor, steeped in darkness, and the mad dash for the light switch just beyond - before the monster emerged to devour him.

When they entered the room, they froze at the sight of a brilliant, crimson pulse bathing the walls. Hansen recoiled at this apparent vision of hell until reason prevailed and they came to the instant recognition of its source - a police car out front. Janet had called the department and was at this moment standing alongside two officers who knocked at the main entrance.

Marsha and Hansen looked at each other and almost laughed at their child-like susceptibility to the supernatural. "You see what I mean?" Hansen was about to say.

Tom called in a loud whisper from downstairs. "Honey, the police are here. Come get Chucky. We don't want him to wake up and get upset again."

Marsha gave the pastor a half smile and turned. "I'll be right back," she said.

As she descended Hansen glanced around the darkened room, dark being a relative term. The street lamp and night light illumined pictures of puppies and a toy-strewn floor. He heard muffled voices from below and footsteps on the staircase, ascending with a clump-clump-clump - mother and son drawing near.

Suddenly he felt it, the rush of breathable air from the room, the popping of his ears and the blurring of vision. All this he could have explained, but the rest he could not. He felt his heart about to explode from the unrelenting emotions of despair and rage - a madness beyond the bounds of insanity - alien, horrific.

And they intensified as Marsha and Chucky approached. Hansen imagined a pressurized chamber for deep sea divers, the desperate response to an onset of the bends, blood streaming from his ears and nose. He turned in time to see the boy bolt awake, the terror returning in a flash. A little hand shot out, a finger pointed. "Ai-ee-ee-ee," he screamed.

Hansen spun to see a huge, lurking mass in the far corner, shapeless but changing.

Marsha ran down the hallway with the boy as the police stormed up the stairs, Tom and Janet close behind. The first officer followed mother and son while the second pressed into the room behind Hansen who stood rigid.

"What. What is it?" the policeman demanded.

Hansen blinked. The vision was gone. "N-nothing," he said.

(Part 3 is coming in two weeks.)

Sewing Opportunities
still exist—See Bernice

Nancy is quilting on Thursday
afternoons with a BVS Mom

Dear BRC Family,

Thank you so much for the outpouring of sympathy on the loss of our parents. We were overwhelmed with all of the cards, emails, delicious food and lovely flowers. We sincerely appreciate your support and thank you for keeping our family in your prayers. Jean and Mike

The Blawenburg Village School
PO Box 153, Blawenburg, NJ 08504 609-466-6600



News from BVS:

We are starting our enrollment process for the 2010-2011 school year. If you are interested in a placement please contact the school so we can be sure church members receive priority placement. The school will be offering classes for students 2.3 years - 6 years old. Please help us spread the word by telling your family and friends!

New Start Date for "Jog Through the Bible"

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!

February Birthdays

1	Matt Nichols	10	Lisa White
2	Elaine Zeltner	11	Tom Miner
6	Marc Helberg	12	Neil Hunt
	Sonya Hunt	25	Tom Johnson
9	Barry Gurzo	28	Elmi Hill

ANNIVERSARIES

5	Janet Ulrey & Jim Roberts
7	Tom & Lisa Hunt

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

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

Check 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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Croatia Update

Croatian re-entry met with refreshed minds

By Nancy Titus

Even after only two and a half weeks back in our field of service, I can say that the months-long home assignment in the US was successful in one of its key functions: giving us the chance to look at our adopted culture with fresh minds and renewed spirits.

When we first came to Croatia, we were full of excitement and yet a bit apprehensive over the unknown of forging a life in a place where we didn't speak the language, didn't know the way things were done, and weren't sure how we would be received by others. Now, we return to familiar routines of daily life that differ from our US routines but are no longer foreign to us. Our fresh eyes help us to see what progress that in itself is.

For example, when we first came in 2006, laundry was one of the biggest hassles for me. I was at a loss to know how to take care of this practical need for my family of five when each load, already less than half the size of a US load, took an incredible two and a half hours to wash! It literally took me months to get over the shock of that reality. Then I was left with the dilemma on cold and wet days of how to get it all dry before the necessary next load came out. Three years of coping with that situation has made me less bothered by it. My time in the US made me oh so appreciative of the ease of doing laundry whenever it was convenient for me, but coming back to the way it is done here has not been a shock or the cause of consternation – even when we realized on our first attempt that we needed a new machine. (In fact, we knew our old one was on its last leg when we left in July, so we were prepared for that probability. Thankfully, the new one has a variety of cycles, including one that takes only 37 minutes!)

In addition, we return to relationships we have made here that have depth and meaning. It is good to have friends, both nationals and fellow Americans, welcome us back. For missionaries who can easily fall into the trap of sometimes believing that our presence doesn't matter, that can be a deep encouragement.

Already in our short time back, Eric has preached twice and I have had one English class at the seminary in addition to meetings with individual students and faculty. Eric has also renewed with gusto his research on his dissertation. (To date, we have received eight of the nine boxes of books we mailed. Thanks for your prayers for them, which we are sure helped to smooth the meeting at customs which we had last Friday. We trust that last box will come in shortly. It contains some home school books as well as an important piece of Eric's personal research notes.)

The children also are making the adjustment back to Croatian life. The home school is up and running, and they have all had time with Croatian friends. Samuel, especially, has received approving remarks on his Croatian language skills, as his increasing maturity and confidence in his abilities help him to overcome a natural shyness so that he can interact in both English and Croatian more easily with those around him.

As we begin anew our ministry here, we are deliberately trying to hold off the many tasks that come rushing toward us as we try to strike the right balance between work and family. This is one of our biggest challenges, as the workload is great and the needs never end. Your prayers that we would be wise in how we negotiate this constant dilemma are so important and a daily strength to us. On my end, I have emphasized my home school over seminary work for now as the children and I get into a routine. As I go, I am easing back into teaching at the seminary in preparation for the coming second semester.

We thank you, our partners, for your feeding of our spirits while we were Stateside, and for your prayers for our transition back to Croatia. You are such a blessing to us, and we pray for God's continued blessing on your lives as well.

Eric and Nancy Titus are RCA missionaries in Osijek, Croatia, where they work at the Evangelical Theological Seminary and with the Reformed Christian Church in Croatia. They have three children: Samuel, 15, Valerie, 12, and Penny, 10.

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P.O. Box 266

Blawenburg NJ 08504

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.