

Yarns From Ozark Storytellers

As for the other anthologies, I have selected and written out the beginnings of most of the entries in the anthology. They cover a wide range of topics and genres. All are aimed at intriguing you, perhaps making you feel uneasy or leave you wondering about your own world and life.

This book contains works of both fiction and nonfiction. The people, places and events depicted in “Imaginations running Wild” are fictitious (products of the author’s imagination and creativity). Resemblance to any real person, place or event is unintentional and purely coincidental.

The stories in “Real Life Can Be Just As Mysterious and Scary” are based on the author’s real life experiences. There may be some literary embellishments as each author’s memories and creativity are displayed in their stories.



Grandma Rose’s Escapades (The Thief)

by Loretta Gorrell

Katie pulled up in front of the retirement center and parked. Turning to her Grandmother Rose she asked, “Grandma, are you sure you want to stay here with Aunt Liz for a whole week?”

“Darlin’, my sister is lonely. She never had any kids, so the least I can do is spend a little time with her. Don’t worry, I’ll be fine.”

Katie knew her grandmother would be okay. It was just the fact that wherever Grandma Rose went, there was usually trouble. Between her and her sister, Liz, Katie wasn’t sure which one was worse. Katie just closed her eyes, shook her head, got out of the car and opened the trunk to get Grandma’s suitcase.



The Wild Woman of Harmony Hollow

by Ross Malone

The place is all full of homes and gardens now. The woods are full of hunters and darned near every stream has a fisherman somewhere along the stream bank. But it wasn't always like this. For more than a thousand years the Wah-Zha-Zhi people lived here. Then the white men came and called the Natives Osage or Huzzah because they couldn't pronounce the native people's name. When enough white people came, the Natives went further west and left a huge tract of land in the Ozarks completely unsettled.

Now, some of the folks who came here were good people just looking for a place to raise up a good family. They were looking for a "hollow" all to themselves. A good hollow would have a freshwater stream in the bottom with forests on both sides. Then they would have the firewood, the building materials, the hunting, drinking water, and everything else they needed. They were isolated and they liked it that way.

Another type of people came into those hills at about the same time. They were people with a dark past and they wanted to just disappear into the forest so no lawman could find them. Some of those people weren't bad neighbors so long as you didn't ask too many questions. Some others could make life miserable for the good folks. You had to be strong when it came to dealing with that lot.

Of course there weren't enough people to hire a Marshall or any other lawman. So they were pretty much on their own. The bad ones liked it that way and they often took advantage of any weakness. The most dangerous ones of all were the ones who had no honor. They would do anything to get what they wanted and they might even find some sort of joy in doing evil. That was the kind of man that tried to ruin my family's life.



The Red House

by Karen GoatKeeper

“Hey, Jeff, look what I got for us!” called Billy. “Mom took me to the store this morning and I found these. Perfect for our costumes. We’ll look like real pirates.”

“Wow! Bandanas with skulls and crossbones on them!”

“You’ll never guess what else I saw. Not in a million years.”

“I give up. What’d you see?”

“You know that old burned out house down toward the church? It’s gone, replaced with this two story red house.”

“Red? No one paints their house red.”

“This one’s red, bright red.”

“I’ll take a look on the way to Trunk or Treat at the church tonight.”

“That’s not all.” Billy stopped and looked around. “In the store, this woman dressed in bright red gave me this.”

Billy waved a red envelope under Jeff’s nose. “Know what this is?”

“No.”

“It’s an invite to a real Halloween party, not a fake one like at the church. It’s at the red house tonight.”



The Odor

by Karen GoatKeeper

The old man glared out the window at a woman walking across the yard as she approached the door. He yanked the door open as she came up to it.

“Mr. Smythe?” said the woman. “I’m Kristy Land from the real estate office. This is such a lovely location. The view off the cliff to the sea is spectacular. Are you sure you want to sell?”

“We’re sure,” said Mr. Smythe. “We decided to move closer to town. We’re getting older and this place is lonely, especially in the winter.”

“I’m sure it will sell quickly at that price. It’s far lower than this lovely place should bring.”

Mr. Smythe glared at his wife, then looked back at the agent. “Why don’t you add to it? Whatever you think is fair. We can always come down a bit.”

“I’ll do that. There will be people wanting to come out and look the place over.”

“Midmorning to midafternoon. We sleep late and don’t want our supper interrupted.”

“That’s fine. Sign here. I’ll list the place today. Here’s my card. Call if you have any questions.”

“I’ll do that.”

“Will it sell soon?” asked Mrs. Smythe as she showed the agent out the door.

“I think so. I’ll call before I bring anyone out looking.”



Death Was My Counselor

by Sharon Carr

“Yes, I do know where I am going! It’s down this old logging road right here.”

The driver jerks the steering wheel to the right. The tires scream as they leave the pavement, swerving onto the washed-out dirt road. The old van shudders as they speed to the river’s edge. Washboard ruts cause neck popping jolts. The thick brush scrapes the side of the van as the driver stomps on the brakes and slides to a stop, the momentum throwing heads forward and then snapping them back. Stopping near the embankment, they hear the creepy night sounds. The darkness is suffocating.

“Get her out of here, now!” the driver yells. Three men struggle to tie a blanket around Megan and drag her out of the van.

“Where do you want her?”

“Drop her down that ravine,” the driver barks. “No one is going to find the body here!” The men pitch Megan over the ledge and run back to the van.

Megan lies on the cold, damp mud of the river bank. The sound of running water makes her lips burn with thirst. Her eyes are swollen shut. Her legs have stabbing pains and are useless. She slips back into darkness.

The sound of footsteps brings her back. The pace is slow and mindful. Starting on the left side of her feet and making their way around her head. Then steps begin going the opposite way. She wants to scream. She wants to reach out and grab a foot, but she cannot move. The Presence stops and stands silently over her.

Megan can smell blood, wet and sticky on her chest. She feels the cold like never before. Her breath becomes short and choppy.

“Am I dying? Yes, I am and that person is standing there watching. What a creep!” Megan thought.

“I can hear everything you are thinking, my dear Megan,” says the Presence.



Family Matters

by Jo Ann Farley

I didn't mean to kill him.

We are having dinner, my uncle and I. I am carving the meat, when suddenly he says – so matter of factly – that he is leaving his art collection to the New York Museum of Art.

I just stand there with the carving knife in my hand. I knew I wasn't going to get his money. That will go to his nephew namesake, my cousin Ralph, the sycophant. Ralph, the brown noser, the yes man, the first born nephew, will get it all.

But I am supposed to get the art collection.



The Taker

by Tammy Brooks

New York City is said to be the city that never sleeps, but Tobias Wintermoon thought the same could be said of St. Louis, Missouri. It was not the noise of the crowded city that kept him awake. For Tobias, visions of crows tearing at his skin, ripped away any hope of sweet dreams.

He poured himself a glass of chocolate milk then stood at the kitchen window looking out to streets below his studio apartment. He watched a woman walking on the opposite side of the street. When she reached the lamp post across from his apartment, she stopped and stared up at him. She wore an ankle length black cape and her long,

black hair flowed behind her in the wind. Her eyes glowed red. She raised both arms and her cape appeared as wings. She flew straight up and out of sight.

Startled, Tobias stumbled back and fell onto the bed. He shot to his feet and stood rigid. His breath hitched in his throat.

He shook his head and hands. "Wake up," he said to himself.

He took a step toward the window, unsure if what he saw was real or a vision.

It has to be a vision, thought Tobias.

When Tobias arrived from Alaska, he rented a two room studio apartment above the Mandarin Oriental Restaurant. It was small and sparsely furnished. It smelled of old cooking oil and garbage, but Tobias did not mind. He did not need much. Tobias enrolled in the mechanical engineering program and four days a week, he took the number sixty-one bus and walked the four blocks to the Florissant Valley campus of St. Louis Community College.

On the morning he met Kat Ostenago, Tobias had been up all night studying for an exam and was running late. Kat was already on the bus when he got on. He took a seat in the middle of the bus. He reached into his backpack, took out a notepad and his *Introduction to Biology* textbook. He turned to the dog eared page and began to read. Studying on the moving bus was difficult, but he needed an A on the exam to bring his grade up.

A dark haired girl came up from the rear of the bus and sat in the seat beside him. With an outstretched hand, she introduced herself.

"I'm Kat Ostenago. Kat with a K."

Tobias looked up from his text book, his lips pressed together in a forced smile. He gave her hand a short shake.

"Nice to meet you. I am Tobias," he said returning his gaze to his book.

"You're a student?" Kat asked.

"Yes," Tobias said, not bothering to look up from the page. He did not want to lose his place again.

"Where do you go?"

Tobias raised his head and looked her in the eyes. He felt queasy. He sensed a shifting. He saw the red eyed woman with her black cape flying toward him. He reached out and grabbed the back of the seat in front of him to steady himself.

"Do you go to St. Louis University? Oh, wait, I know, you're studying to be a doctor at Wash U," Kat said, continuing the conversation as if she had not noticed his reaction.

"Community college. Mechanical engineering," Tobias said, closing his book and shoving it into his backpack. He stood to exit the bus. Kat remained seated, blocking his exit from the seat.

"Excuse me," he said.

Kat did not move and did not respond.

"Excuse me. I need to get off," Tobias said.

Kat cocked her head to the side and looked up at him with a sly smile. Her dark eyes suggestive.



Always with You

by Joellyn Becker

Stairway to Heaven

Summer solstice in 1986 was one of the darkest days of my life. My friends and I had just arrived back at our Florida hotel room, laughing and having a great time, when the phone rang at 1:00 a.m.

It was Mother's voice on the other end of the line telling me Daddy was dead. My father had died suddenly from an abdominal aortic aneurysm. A "triple A" meant death within minutes; there was nothing to be done. After 50 years of marriage, Daddy had died in Mother's arms at their home.

The shock made me numb, nauseated; the whole thing definitely felt surreal. In a panic to get back to Missouri quickly, my friends and I frantically searched for flights. We rushed to drop off their car with relatives, taking a taxi on to the airport. I was just going through the motions...thinking it was a nightmare and I should wake up anytime. Daddy and I had such a close connection...he just couldn't be gone. At twenty-nine, with so much life to still experience, the death of a parent was definitely not on my list.

Desperately trying to deal with the devastating news, I endured the bumpiest and worst plane ride of my life. We landed in St. Louis, rented a car, and drove three hours non-stop to get to my apartment. Still feeling sick and numb, I had to pick up my son from his father's house; somehow break the devastating news to a four year old who adored his grandfather; and then go to my parents' home and console Mother. In my grief, I turned my anger on my ex-husband and blamed him for my father's death. I believed my ex had upset my father on the morning of his death, when he had gone to my parents' home to pick up my son.

All of my family was devastated. While I was making my way back to Missouri, my three brothers and my sister had gathered at my parents' home to console Mother. Leaving to return to their homes, my oldest brothers and their wives witnessed phenomena that allowed them to say their good-byes to Daddy in a very unusual and special way.

My parents lived on a farm; there were two gravel roads that led to their home. Two of my brothers and their wives left my parents home at the same time. Each took one of the gravel roads; going in opposite directions. Both couples witnessed the same phenomena: they saw Daddy waving as he ascended into the clouds. All four people had

looked up and described seeing Daddy ascending into the clouds with a smile on his face and waving! In amazement, each brother confirmed with their wife that they had seen Daddy.



Green Lights and Lilacs

by Georgia Lynn Slawson

Many things can have an influence on our beliefs regarding the supernatural and afterlife as we grow up. Things ranging from fairy tales; stories told of the bogey man, ghosts and things that to bump in the night; fears of monsters under the bed; superstitions passed down by family members and friends; or learned religious beliefs. Sometimes beliefs are formed in a much more concrete way from personal experiences that cannot be denied by the individual who has them. These experiences can certainly be explained away by skeptics. However, it doesn't make the impact of those experiences any less powerful in forming life-changing beliefs.

By the time I was a teenager, I would often experience things such as knowing who was calling when the phone rang, déjà vu, lucid dreaming and sensing when something was about to happen. sometimes it would be something that would make me think "Huh, that was odd." Like the time my best friend, Sherry, in Arizona sent me a birthday present tightly taped up in a small box. It was so hard to get open that I made the off-handed comment, "Wow, it must be a wild tiger." My parents, grandfather and I were quite surprised when I finally pulled out a small stuffed tiger! A coincidence or intuition?

As I became older and even more open to the unseen world, I would talk to my mother about different happenings. She would often change the subject, but occasionally she would talk a bit. One of the first hints I got that she knew more than she was letting on had to do with the smell of lilacs when no lilacs were anywhere around. My mother commented that her mother had loved lilacs; they were her favorite flower. She seemed to be suggesting I was sensing the presence of my grandmother.



Girls' Weekend

by Linda Richards

The women had been looking forward to a weekend away from the hustle and bustle of their busy lives. And now they were meeting at a quaint little vacation rental home in a town known for its German heritage and wine. Not all of them had met before, but they all had one friend in common. Linda had organized this little get away, having contacted women from all of her different groups of friends from high school to college to varying jobs. The result was eight women from different walks of life coming together. Since the women were all coming from different areas of the state, they had agreed to meet at the vacation house.

Beth was Linda's best friend from high school and even though they lived fairly close to one another, they rarely had the opportunity to spend quality time together. Lynn was Linda's friend and partner in a business utilizing horses to provide mental health services. Lynn brought her best friend Joellyn. Linda had met Bonnie and Cathy through the equine business and they had become close friends in the process. Becky and Linda had met at work many years before and, although they had gone their separate ways professionally, still found occasional opportunities to get together. Becky brought her sister-in-law, Becky. Yes, there was a pair of Beckys coming.

Lynn and Joellyn were the first to arrive at the vacation house. Being there first gave them the opportunity to tour the home and choose which room they would stay in for the weekend. They had been let into the house by the caretaker, who had discovered the sump pump in the basement was not running the way it should. This was worrisome since the adjacent river was rising because of significant rainfall during the past several days. Fortunately, the caretaker was able to repair the pump while they continued their tour.

Lynn and Joellyn checked out the bedrooms located upstairs. As they got to the top of the stairs, they made a right, walked down a small hallway, and found themselves standing between two rooms. They decided to go into the room on the right. It was a quaint little room with a queen size bed, furnishings and décor that most likely dated back to the late 1800's. There was a window air conditioner that rattled the frame whenever it came on. Even though it was fairly warm outside, the room was at a comfortable temperature.

Lynn and Joellyn proceeded to the room across the hall. The second they walked into the room, the hair on their arms stood straight up and they both had a sudden chill.

However, the temperature was the same as in the other bedroom. It felt as though they were not alone. The energy had a soft, feminine feeling to it, but young, like that of a playful little girl. They both surveyed the room, not wanting to step in any further. No one was there. They looked at each other, agreed that they did not feel comfortable in the room, and quickly exited without exploring it any further. As they left, they heard the soft rustle of skirts and quiet giggle of a child.



This Scary House

by Lenore Marken

Sounds of creaking, showers and tubs leaking.
Water flowing under the foundation.
Is there mold creeping?

Wind is whistling through windows not sealing.
Mortar and bricks cracking, floors are uneven.
It's an alarming feeling.



The Rails

by Luis Marinez Rivera

This emptiness haunts me,
Eating at my brain as I attempt to compartmentalize the virus
Before it spreads further down my nervous system.



Southwest of Gig Harbor

by Lenore Marken

There is no reason why I can't complete the field review on my own. It's just that I have this 'funny' feeling.

Our boss has told us that if we ever feel uncomfortable about doing field work, we can take a coworker with us. I think I would feel better having a coworker help me, but all my coworkers are either in meetings or completing their own field reviews.

Well, I decide, whatever I'm feeling, I still have to at least begin the field review of the 140-acre property southwest of Gig Harbor. I gather up my field gear, including my rain coat, and head to the car. I might not need my raincoat now, but I could need it by the time I get to the property. This was, after all, the "rainy" Pacific Northwest.

I try to ease my apprehension about the field review as I load my gear into the car. "Remember," I tell myself, "the property is only a few miles from Gig Harbor and the surrounding area has several subdivisions. I will not have to go far if I need help."

It is just after the lunch hour so traffic is light, and it is a breeze to cross the Tacoma Narrows Bridge heading north. I make it to the site in less than half an hour and park the car off the road on the north side of the property. I put on my field vest and boots, and check my pockets to make sure I have all my gear. I look at the sky and critique the cloud cover. It is overcast, but it doesn't really look like rain. Good. I can leave my raincoat in the car; it's one less thing to carry. I grab the spade to check soils if I need to. The spade will also help me work my way through the thick vegetation. Then with a quick glance at the wetland boundary map, I dive into the woods heading south towards the closest delineated wetland.



The Fence

by Luis Martinez Rivera

The half-mile walk home from school went by without a second thought. I met my mother at the door of the square military installation housing as she stood there happy to see me. I asked for her permission to go to my friend's house two streets down the road. She said, "Yes."

My friend's house was directly behind my house through the woods and over a few hills. I ran down the street past the peach, box-like houses into the green thicket of brush and leaves. As I walked up the green hill, the branches scraped against one another and the *swoosh* of the wind rustles against the leaves. I felt every step on the twigs. They snapped beneath my weight. I could not wait to get to my friend's house. We had a long afternoon session of playing *WWE Backlash* ahead of us.

As I crested the hill and walked into a small draw, I realized that I was almost to my friend's street. All that I needed to do was walk along the draw and hop over the fence. I would then be in his cul-de-sac. A twig snapped. I stopped, realized that I did not snap the twig and something was behind me.



The Touch of Evil

by Georgia Lynn Slawson

It was a warm summer day nearing sundown. A friend, Janie, called and asked me to come over for a couple of hours. She and her two young children were home alone. Her husband was out of town on a business trip. So it was a good evening for us to spend some time just relaxing and talking, while the children played together.

After a quick supper at home, I hopped in the car to drive the short distance to Janie's house. By then it was almost dusk; that half-light time of evening when the shadows are growing longer and creatures of the night are beginning to stir.

Janie's house sat back off the road with a long driveway going through a wooded area. There were wooden gate posts on each side of the entrance. As I reached the entrance and began to turn left into the driveway, a horrible sensation hit me from the woods on the left side. It was so strong that it felt like a blow from an invisible force striking me in the face. I can only describe the sensation as pure evil, an intense feeling of rage and the desire to kill. I instinctively jerked the steering wheel to the right, away from the thrust of that awful feeling. I slammed on the brakes just in time to keep from plowing head on into one of the gate posts.



Life's Thrills and Chills

by Karen GoatKeeper

Horror films use eerie music, thunder storms and suspense to scare you. Life takes a different approach.

Making dinner at my house happens almost every day of the year. First, decide on a menu. Second, prepare the ingredients. Third, cook the ingredients. It is so mundane my mind begins to wander away.

One evening I hear thunder off in the distance. The old instruction to see the flash then count doesn't work as the lightning and thunder are so far away, so very faint.

Frittatas are on the menu this particular night. The garlic, onions and peppers are chopped. The eggs are whipped. The pan is heating on the stove with a bit of oil starting to swirl with heat.

I drop the garlic in the oil, give it a swirl, set it down. The onions and peppers are next so I turn to get them.

The light bulb in the stove hood explodes. Glass shards bounce off my back and onto the floor to join more bits scattered across the linoleum. Thunder cracks as though to drop the roof onto my head. The concussion almost drops me to my knees.