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MY WORLD: Things that go bump in the night

By Karen Diekamp Hitchcock

At a church that's been around for 176 years, you might expect some sounds that can't be explained.

Bumps, thumps, moans and groans - and that's just the sound of us youthfully challenged members rising to our feet to sing on an average Sunday.

Still, over the years there have been occurrences at Friedens United Church of Christ, near the intersection of Highway 94 and Zumbahl Road in St. Charles, that have caused some staff members and church members to do a double take. Was that a door slamming in a supposedly empty building? Why is music playing in a locked, empty office? Is that the hum of the refrigerator in the fellowship hall or ... something else?

Patrick Keller, founder of Mo. Spirit Seekers, thinks it might be something else.

At the invitation of one of the church members, and with the approval of the church council, Keller and his group of paranormal investigators recently spent an evening at the church. They brought with them lots of technological gear: electromagnetic field detectors, an infrared thermometer, several digital voice recorders, digital cameras and camcorders and infrared cameras. If there was a ghost at Friedens and that ghost didn't mind appearing on camera, Keller and his crew surely would find it.

Now in case some of you are tempted to fire off e-mails about what kind of church would be encouraging the occult, or some such nonsense, let me hasten to say permission was given for his investigation in an open-minded spirit (pardon the pun), and not for the purposes of pursuing any kind of paranormal agenda. Most of us who attended Keller's follow-up talk after the investigation were there for entertainment purposes only. I can assure you that Friedens will not add seances to its worship services any time in the future.

We might be a little more open-minded than other congregations, however, as Keller repeatedly thanked everyone for allowing his crew to come in. He said it's very unusual for churches to allow paranormal investigators. I just figure it's right in keeping with the stubborn and independent German-American founders of Friedens, who often thumbed their noses at what the rest of the evangelical congregations were doing at the time.

Keller said Mo. Spirit Seekers (MOSS, for short) is a small, newly formed team and that they haven't conducted many investigations yet. "Most of my knowledge comes from books," he admitted.

I like a good ghost story as well as the next person, but I'm basically a skeptic. Still, I was impressed with his description of the way they conducted their investigation. In order to avoid data corruption, they were careful to document the whereabouts of the team members at all times, and kept meticulous notes with corresponding times of any noises or other occurrences during the investigation.

During his follow-up talk, he played both visual and audio clips, most of which could be explained as outside noises, such as a motorcycle revving up or thunder, and internal noises, such as those coming from the appliances in the church kitchen.

A few auditory clips were a little harder to rationalize away. In one instance, most of us in attendance admitted hearing what could have been a whispered response to one of the team's questions, in this case, "Why don't you tell us your name?" To some it sounded as if the response was "My name is Paul." To others, it sounded like "It's all over me."

Can such clips be faked or misconstrued? Of course. But I can't so easily dismiss the personal accounts of staff and congregation members who hear doors close when nobody else is in the locked building, or lights and CD recorders going on by themselves, or footsteps when nobody is there.

Even though I personally haven't heard anything in the church that I couldn't explain away with wind currents or the heater kicking on, or simply the acoustics of a noisy building, I don't discredit anyone else's experiences. I'm a skeptic, but an open-minded one, I guess.

Things happen all the time in life that we can't explain. Medical miracles do occur; we meet strangers who seem providential at that moment in time (some folks might even call them angels); and serendipitous circumstances sometimes seem divinely arranged.

When it comes to inexplicable occurrences, and things that go bump in the night, I think Hamlet said it best: "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy."

Visit [www.mospiritseekers.com](http://www.mospiritseekers.com) for more information about Mo. Spirit Seekers.

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