

BUDGET

September 25, 2000

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Ghosts I Have Known

There are two memorable stories about ghosts I'd like to pass along. One ghost has never been seen but certainly is around; the other was seen only once - in this very room.

Today the current owners of the house my aunt and uncle built believe the house is haunted. The ghost sounds like my loving and fun-filled aunt.

This large and wonderful house was built on a then lonely hillside overlooking the river. During their happy years in it, relatives and friends filled the place with party after party. My aunt and uncle insisted on the open-door policy they had designed and built for. A party could develop almost any night (Sunday breakfasts were special, too), and family parties were a must on all holidays. My! Such good times we all had there.

As happens so often, time was very cruel to all that warmth and love. My uncle was felled by an always weak heart. Death began stealing other family, too - her brothers and sisters and their spouses, then even some of their children. Just before her death the family was down to 42 from the 70 who had been regulars. I counted only 20 recently.

The younger generation doesn't "family" as we did in those days. A crushing blow was the last bring-your-own-covered-dish family reunion. One young cousin, who just doesn't understand, brought a bucket of Kentucky Fried Chicken.

That's what has happened to America!

Please bring back the diplomatic skill needed when there are two kinds of blackberry jam cake.

So that, at last, brings us to today. The current residents in that once wonderful laughing, crowded and affectionate house live very quiet lives, doing almost no entertaining. The two sit alone and watch television night after night, quite possibly eating Kentucky Fried Chicken.

Can you imagine the devastating change?

Maybe that's why - the current residents say - the door to a guest room often swings open unexplainably and, even more unexplainably, why a bathroom shower frequently turns on by itself.

There are no rattling chains, screeches, or ghostly appearances. My aunt, if she is the spook, is far too gentle to do those scary things, but I believe she could be telling those new people they are mistreating her house. They should be having company. The house is not a tomb; it should ring out.

Now. Look around.

These walls are hallowed, we'll all agree, but they are haunted, too. I offer a proof.

The late Jim Elder was a strong believer in this club. He attended regularly and worked hard, eventually becoming president. For you who didn't know Jim, he was an attorney, sometimes dour, always driven for exact quotes and the real facts. He was such a stickler that once while filing out of church I heard him tell the minister a Biblical passage used in the sermon had been misquoted.

We attended the funeral of Judge John Weld Peck, another longtime and devoted member here, also a former president. Mr. Elder and Judge Peck had been friends and neighbors in Glendale for years.

At the regular meeting here a few days after that funeral, Jim and I were standing above the steps, near the bar questioning whether to go home immediately or have a bit of food. We looked out over the crowd surrounding the Reader.

Quietly Jim said, "There's John Peck."

I saw him too.

John D. Caldwell
