



OR SO THE STORY GOES...

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I attended college in a typical Midwestern university town; bars advertising cheap beer specials lined its streets, grassy areas were covered by picnic blankets with students napping in the afternoon sun. On the far edge of town, away from the pedestrian mall and college-themed shop windows, sits an unusually large cemetery surrounded by a cast iron fence. Once inside, you have to walk a ways before you find a notable grave monument towering over all others alone next to a tree. It is the sculpture of an angel, standing over eight feet tall, its wings outspread awkwardly, its face looking down. And, as if not formidable enough, it is completely black. Known by all the local college students as the Black Angel, the cemetery's most popular inhabitant is surrounded by rumors. So the story goes, the woman buried in the grave almost a century ago was so evil that the angel standing guard over her soul turned completely black. So the story goes, roses appear mysteriously at the angel's feet and no photo taken -- regardless of angle -- will ever show her down-turned face. That's how the story goes, anyway.

Kansas City has its own stories, some spookier than others, and a few that make even this ghost-story veteran think twice before turning out the lights. Chances are, you know some of these places and have driven by without a thought as to what happens when the sun sets and the doors lock behind you.

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When you think of a typical winery, lush landscapes with elegant wine tastings and cheese plates fill your mind in a Napa Valley sort of way. The tranquility of a winery seems in direct contrast to the restless energy that accompanies haunted locales with restless spirits. The Belvoir Winery in Liberty strikes a balance between these two extremes, a portrait of grandeur and classic architecture that greets you with a feeling of something more. Something guarded by its brick exterior and hidden within its walls. Something that has a story to tell and wants -- more than anything -- for you to stand up and listen.



The ground's use as a winery is just the latest chapter in a century-old book of history. Built in 1900 by the Independent Order of Odd Fellows--a fraternal organization devoted to helping those in need--only three buildings of the original complex remain. The Children's Home, Old Folks' Building, and the Old Hospital rise to greet you at the end of a paved drive through iron gates that remind you, in case you

had forgotten, that you are entering a special place: a unique place with one foot still planted firmly in the past.

The former Children's Home -- or orphanage -- now boasts a wine tasting bar, exquisite stained glass accents, and stylish banquet rooms. The children who once ran the halls and called this building home, however, are still a pronounced presence. From the banisters worn smooth

from the touch of small fingers, to the subtle grooves in the wooden stairs made by single-filed steps, the energy of a time long ago is as palpable as the sweet tasting wine waiting for a sip in the parlor. Sometimes, and more often than you think, the children's presence isn't just felt; it's also seen and heard.

Jesse Leimkuehler, Chief Executive Officer and Operations Manager of the winery, has become used to the grounds' spirited energy. Although a skeptic years ago when they began renovations of the property, his journey to becoming a believer has

been filled with footsteps, unexplained voices, and sights that defy explanation. Although he tried to rationalize his experiences, he resigned himself to the fact that "there are things that can't be explained away."

Take for instance the sound of running footsteps and giggles in the hallway of the third floor -- a floor currently under renovation, with blackboards hanging in old classrooms and tiny wall hooks waiting for coats and hats. Current staff have seen full body apparitions standing in hallway corners, heard the echoes of footsteps when they

were alone in the building, and have dealt with spirited pranksters (or, more aptly, prankster spirits) who like to play with the lights and make closing up shop a bit more difficult.

Leimkuehler's two young daughters have both had ghostly experiences that would leave even the most resolute skeptics at a loss for words. His youngest, two years old at the time, had been with him in a banquet room and walked into the hallway while he continued with his work. Leimkuehler then heard a female voice say, "Well, hello, little one."



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When he walked out of the room, his daughter was alone, looking up at nothing. Or, perhaps, she was just looking at something that only she could see. His older daughter once heard the voice of a little boy introducing himself, in what I choose to believe was a sweet attempt at making a new friend. Now six years old and somewhat used to the spirits' activity, Leimkuehler says his daughter greets the spirits warmly when she enters a room just in case she's not alone.

There is an energy, perhaps a residual presence, that greets you at the door of this three-story building and



The Belvoir Winery is both serene and active. Walking its hallways is not unlike peering through a looking glass and wondering if anything is looking back. Although I was fascinated by the stories that surround the building, I prayed silently that I wouldn't feel a tug on my purse by a curious little spirit of yesteryear looking for candy. I wanted the experience while I visited, but not the whole experience. At least not yet; maybe next time.

Some people run from ghost stories like these, others listen attentively with a cautious ear, and still others seek these stories out with an interest toward investigating further. Elite Paranormal

accompanies you throughout your visit. I felt it; it was as real as the energy that fills a room of loved ones and as dense as the hot summer air. Leimkuehler doesn't disagree. The spirits of this building are as real as the guests he welcomes through its doors for wedding receptions and wine-tastings. Just in case he had any doubts, the building's spirits do their best to remind him that they're never far. Most recently, he saw the apparition of a little boy in the corner of a room wearing a red shirt, knickers, and small brown boots. Even with all of his prior experiences, this encounter was enough to spook Leimkuehler and keep him on his toes.



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his role as evidence-gatherer and doesn't set out to convince anyone of the presence of paranormal activity. "Nobody's an expert in this field," Garcia explains. "All of this is theory."

Sometimes, however, the evidence speaks for itself. Although most of the cases investigated by Garcia and his crew are non-malevolent in nature, darker energies have made themselves known over the years. He considers a private residence in Lawrence as one of the most spiritually active – and darkest in nature. Occupants contacted Garcia after hearing voices and being touched by unseen forces. Capturing numerous electronic voice phenomena throughout their investigation, Garcia considers this house on the top of his list for haunted locations. The owners eventually moved to escape their unwanted houseguests. Who can blame them?

"There is a spiritual side to our universe," Garcia says with a confidence built on first-hand experience and years of investigation. "It does exist and it can come into our physical world." Just walk into the Tea Room at the Main Street Galleria and see, or rather feel it for yourself. Built in the late 1800s,

this charming attraction in Weston also earns one of the top spots on Garcia's list of active investigations. With reports of things mysteriously moving on their own and unexplained noises, Garcia and his team captured electronic voice phenomena and unusual fluctuations in electromagnetic fields during their investigation. Perhaps, as some believe, the spirits of the prior owners still roam the halls and are letting their presence be known. Or maybe the antique desk that once belonged to a Confederate Army Officer carries its former owner's spirit with it like an ethereal memory. Then again, there will always be some who claim that it's all just a clever trick played by overactive imaginations. Those who believe will always believe, and those who do not may never be convinced. There is an allure that comes with never really knowing.

October is here, and the smell of pumpkin pie



and apple cider offers comforting warmth in a time of year that brings a chill to the air. The seasons are turning and, with the fall of leaves, comes a fall in temperature and darker nights that bring us safely indoors. Perhaps, however, there's something more to that chill in the air than a change in seasons. Perhaps that tap on the window isn't just a tree branch and a sudden shiver shouldn't be dismissed so quickly. Perhaps, just perhaps, there's something more out there. Or, so the story goes.

of Kansas City falls into the last category, with seasoned investigators who walk into darkness that so many others fear to find answers and confront the things that go bump in the night.

Rob Garcia, founder of Elite Paranormal of Kansas City, has investigated paranormal hotspots for over eight years. Intrigued by exploring the scientific side of the supernatural, Garcia and his team use high tech devices to detect electronic voice phenomena or instrumental transcommunication from the other side. After conducting over 150 investigations over the years, including five or six private residences in the Northland, Garcia and his team have collected a significant amount of evidence of the paranormal. He considers



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