

## The Ghosts of Lambert's Dairy

By Bradley LeBlanc

Strong winds overpowering wild grasses in the Great Plains can be as vigorous as currents moving the waters of the great Mississippi during a hurricane. Nestled among former wheat fields and wild prairie grasses, which now wave to tourists driving along the old country highway, the once prosperous farm and dairy has been abandoned for over three decades. Memories of the old Lambert Dairy are kept alive in the minds of a few elderly townspeople and even fewer aging baby boomers.

Tourists passing by usually do nothing more than give the once prosperous farm and dairy a quick look. The more adventurous travelers sometimes stop to take pictures of the acreage to show their city friends the "quaintness" of America's heartland. On any given day, a handful of elderly locals, most of whom are widowers, spend the long daytime hours sitting in chairs and benches outside businesses along Rushview's main street. When not solving the world's problems on a daily basis, occasionally they meet interested travelers who take the time to listen to their stories of how the ghosts of Irvin and Mae Lambert still occupy their once prosperous homestead and chase away any interested buyers.

After Steve Lambert moved to Chicago to attend college, his parents realized they could not work the old homestead much longer. Irvin and Mae shut down their dairy and bought a much smaller house in town. Irvin was able to get a job at Daigle Industries as a truck driver, and Mae was able to get a job as a bank teller at Rushview National Bank. They just could not bring themselves to sell the family farm because they always hoped that Steve, their only child, would one day want to return to his roots and reopen the dairy.

After graduating from college, Steve accepted a position with an architectural firm in Chicago. Three weeks after starting his new job, Steve was getting dressed for work when he received a phone call, which totally caught him off guard. His Aunt Peggy called and told Steve that his mom had a major stroke, and he better come home immediately. He flew home and

was in Rushview early that afternoon. Mae woke up briefly and smiled at her son. They spoke for a few minutes; she went back to sleep and never woke up again. Mae, who was sixty-seven-years old, died two days later.

Shortly after returning home from the funeral, a coworker introduced Steve to Nancy Sullivan, a nurse practitioner and daughter from a prominent family from St. Louis. They married six months later. Irvin flew to Chicago to attend his son's wedding, his first time ever flying in a commercial airplane. Four months later, the newlyweds would drive up to Rushview so Nancy could see Mount Rushmore, the Black Hills, and the hometown where her husband grew up.

Two years later, Irvin Michael Lambert II (Mike), named for his grandfather, was born. Three years later, twin daughters, Renee and Tina, would join the family. Six months after the twins' birth, the family of five would drive to Rushview to attend Irvin's funeral. He would be rejoining Mae, the love of his life, on the fifth anniversary of her death.

High school classmate and realtor, Janice Leach, was hired to sell the family farm and the home in town where Irvin and Mae had been living in for over a decade. Janice told Steve she expected to sell the house quickly since it was in the center of town and in walking distance of the grocery store, post office, bank, and church. It really surprised Janice when the first couple that looked at the house asked her to write up a buyer's agreement. She had just put a For Sale sign in the yard the day before.

Selling the farm would not be that easy. After eight months with no success, Steve accepted Janice's offer to lease the land to Ed and Mayme Barlow. Steve hoped that Ed and Mayme, who had been neighbors and friends of his parents for many years, would buy the farm since the two farms were located next to each other.

Rushview and Gaines County residents heard the first Lambert Dairy ghost story soon after this real estate transaction took place. Ed and Mayme decided to add a chicken coop to the Lambert property and gain an additional income selling eggs to several local markets and restaurants. On a warmer than average September morning, Mayme walked across the acreage

to gather up the day's eggs. Her curiosity, which was well known to Rushview, Gaines County, and probably half the citizens of South Dakota, got the best of her. She decided to go inside the old farmhouse to see if anything valuable was left there by mistake.

When Mayme walked inside the house, she claimed that she suddenly felt very cold, which was unusual since the temperature that day was already near 100 degrees. She was shivering and her teeth were chattering as she walked into the living room, where she and Ed had spent many evenings visiting Irvin and Mae.

"Hello, is anyone here?" Mayme then claimed a closed window suddenly flew open and papers appearing out of nowhere were now flying throughout the house. A few seconds' later coffee cups and glass plates started soaring across the room shattering in unusually small pieces as they hit the walls in the living room, dining room, and kitchen. She suddenly heard loud noises as if someone was dragging chairs across the wooden floors in the abandoned house. Shocked and feeling like she was about to faint, Mayme let out a high-pitched scream, which of course, no one heard. Dropping the basket of eggs, she dashed out of the house at record speed screaming, "Ed, Ed."

Rushview, with a population of 423 people, heard of Mayme's bizarre encounter about twelve seconds after Ed called the police station to speak to Warren Green, the highly respected sheriff of Gaines County. Warren went to the farm to investigate Mayme's claim but did not discover anything unusual. The house was totally empty, and all the windows were tightly sealed making them very difficult to open. He was dripping in sweat and sneezing from the musky smell from the house being unoccupied ever since Irvin and Mae moved to their house in town. He walked throughout the house, walked around the barn and shed outside, and didn't notice anything unusual. Going back to his air conditioned patrol car, he mumbled, "Shivering and teeth chattering in 100 degree weather; the lady's nuts."

When Ed and Mayme asked the sheriff if he noticed the slippery floor made from dropping almost five-dozen eggs or if he had picked up Mayme's wire basket, Warren said that the wooden floors were dusty but there were no eggs on the floor or a wire basket there.

# Writing Raw

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Locals, upon hearing of the sheriff's observations, agreed it was probably Mayme's vivid imagination working overtime so she'd be the center of attention during her Tuesday night card club and her usual 1:30 Friday afternoon beauty parlor appointment at Gert's Hair and Flair.

Other stories of hauntings were said to take place from high school students, who were bored from having nothing to do in an isolated farming community. Somehow groups of underage teenagers would buy beer and cigarettes and go to the Lambert farm on Saturday nights. There, they would spend many hours drinking, telling stories, and partying. Cigarette butts and empty beer bottles were usually cleaned up so that parents would not find out about these escapades.

On the Saturday night before the state playoffs in 1987, Randy Whitehead, a graduating senior and quarterback of Rushview High's winning football team, rediscovered Jesus after he threw an empty beer bottle through a closed living room window because he wanted to hear the glass shatter. He and his group of friends then heard a voice from the house say, "Randy, you're just like your mother; you're becoming a drunk." The boys, all from pretty upstanding parents in the community, then left abruptly when the beer bottle, now full again, was suddenly seen being thrown back, and hitting Randy in the back of his head. Running to the car, the boys noticed that hole in the window was no longer there. Its reflection was shining brightly from the light of the full moon.

Of course being minors at the time, Randy, Dan Edwards, Ronnie Olson, Mike Barnes, and Jason Gaines kept the story to themselves until they reached adulthood. Nearly thirty years later, the banker and part-time minister, social studies teacher, offshore oil worker, auto mechanic, and UPS driver, still believe the old Lambert house is haunted. The five friends still get goose bumps when they remember the beer bottle hitting Randy in the head. The incident convinced the five friends to never drink another drop of alcohol. Through the years dozens of other underage high school students shared similar experiences, and their stories have been told once they reached maturity.

Another story told periodically by the main street widower's club, or old geezers with

nothing better to do, involved a prominent citizen in the community. Annette Gaines Harper, whose family developed Gaines County, also encountered her own hair-raising experience at the old Lambert Dairy. Being a devoted Christian woman, Annette placed no credibility in the alleged ghost stories heard throughout Rushview and Gaines County.

During a hot, cloudy, and muggy July afternoon, Annette was picking bunches of beautifully colored wild flowers, which were growing alongside the barn in Mae's old flowerbed. As president of the church ladies altar society, she and the other ladies planned to dry out the flowers and use them in making wreaths, which would be sold at the annual church bazaar in October. Annette said that suddenly she felt an almost freezing breeze and looked up to make sure that there wasn't a tornado about to hit the area. She then figured this cool breeze was God's will in helping her to stay cool since she was doing work for His church.

After going back to her car for some pruning shears she left there by mistake, Annette then realized she was sweating profusely from the hot humid day. When she resumed her flower picking, she realized she was once again chilly. Now believing these weather changes was something out of the ordinary, Annette then said an odd feeling overcame her. She suddenly began having a one-person conversation telling Mae that she had always admired her green thumb and these beautiful wild flowers would make the church's annual wreath making fundraiser even more successful. The cool, chilly weather disappeared as quickly as it arrived.

Annette then began to believe that maybe Mae was, in fact, still taking care of her flowerbeds.

With flying dishes, bottles being thrown, and freezing weather in July stories told in Rushview, Gaines County, and the surrounding area, it looked like the Lambert Dairy would never be sold, or at least sold to anyone locally. Added to the extraordinary list of events was finding the dead body of an escaped serial killer in of all places: the Lambert farm.

The latest crime spree, which was the talk of the nation for a few days and probably will be the talk of Gaines County for decades, took place on a chilly November morning. Sheriff Green spotted something unusual on the ground as he drove past the Lambert place. Stopping

the patrol car to investigate, he noticed what appeared to be a lifeless body. He used the police radio to contact Liz Freeman, the county police dispatcher, to report this incident. Warren left his patrol car with his gun ready to use in the event the suspect was playing a trick on him.

Checking for any vital signs, Warren recognized that the man lying there was convicted murderer, Eldon Gibson. Several weeks earlier, Gibson had escaped from prison, where he was supposed to spend the rest of his life without possibility of parole. The sheriff knew it was Gibson from newspaper headlines, networks news coverage, and from recent FBI Most Wanted flyers. The investigators from the FBI determined that Gibson was traveling at night in order not to be noticed by witnesses and local authorities. It was assumed that Gibson noticed the abandoned farmhouse and planned on staying there for a while but had a heart attack and died only ten feet from the front door of the house.

The Rushview Widower's Club (or old farts, as some of the locals and out-of-state travelers often called them) worried that this one time incident could be the start of crime becoming rampant in the community. Rollie Groh, who owned the local diner where the men would go for coffee and lunch every day, told the group they were all overreacting. He reminded them that the last murder in the county was on Valentine's Day in 1954 when Ida Ferguson killed her husband by putting strychnine in his second cup of Sanka.

A young couple from Florida, who couldn't help but hear the conversation while waiting for their plate lunch specials to arrive, asked Rollie about the Ida Ferguson murder case. He told them Ida was a frustrated housewife who planned to run off and marry Norm Watson. Norm was a young, handsome, traveling salesman from Des Moines. He usually visited Ida whenever he was in the area. Ida had been secretly in love with Norm since the spring of 1952 when she bought a vacuum cleaner and a dozen Watkins Company cookbooks from him.

Norm knew nothing of Ida's plan to kill Herb and was released after being questioned by Sheriff Hank Green, the current sheriff's late father. Ida was sentenced to life in prison, where she died from a heart attack in 1962. She was only forty-five-years old. Helen Winston, another of Norm's lady friends from Rushview, heard that Norm died of congestive heart failure in 1997

in Pensacola, Florida. Helen told everyone the obituary stated Bill Peterson, his companion since 1946, was at his side when he died peacefully in their home.

Steve would often joke around with his Chicago friends saying that it took his moving away from his family home to finally have regular activity taking place there. Except for residents of Gaines County, the rest of the nation soon forgot about the Eldon Gibson situation, and life went on. Steve used to picture the old geezers on Main Street talking about Gibson all day, with each man eventually retelling the same story since most of them were hard of hearing.

Two months later the annual bill for property taxes arrived. As usual, a check was mailed to Gaines County; even though, Steve had not been home since his dad's funeral. Steve had decided it was time he and Nancy should think about donating the land to Gaines County and get a tax break. Of course, as life sometimes goes, it was then that he got another promising call from Janice, possibly the best offer he ever received.

Janice told her lifelong friend that Mark Dowling, a wealthy real estate developer from the East Coast, had contacted her with an interest in buying the Lambert farm and several surrounding farms. The Lambert farm, which was about a mile from the interstate, would be used to build a hotel, a restaurant, a casino, a movie theatre, and a strip mall. Steve also learned that Dowling planned to build a hunting lodge along with fishing creeks on the surrounding farms. The lodge would cater primarily to wealthy businessmen and city dwellers around the country and around the world, who wanted to take a break from the stress of city life and their jobs to experience a year round sportsman's paradise in America's heartland. Steve told Janice that he was definitely interested in accepting an offer from the Dowling Corporation.

Two days later, Janice greeted Mark Dowling, his personal assistant, a group of accountants, and several lawyers. She introduced herself to the group, and immediately the accountants started walking around the farm to estimate the costs for each part of this endeavor in order to provide the best economic impact for the community and the most profit

for the corporation. While the accountants were punching numbers in calculators, Janice, Mark, and the others walked inside the farmhouse. Christine Cosgrove, Mark Dowling's personal assistant, commented on how grand the house must have been when the family lived there. Walking into the living room, the ladies suddenly noticed Mark looked extremely nervous, and his face was very pale like he was about to faint.

In what seemed like a split second, Mark now looked as if he was in shock. He then yelled, "Please, stop throwing all those plates at me." He then ran outside quicker than rats leaving the Titanic. With his heart racing, he was trembling as he learned that the rest of the group hadn't seen papers flying across the room or glasses and plates hitting him before smashing into the walls. His teeth were chattering as he spoke. He said his ears started ringing once the noises started from all the chairs being dragged across the floors upstairs. Everyone looked at each other, and no one said anything. Mark must have forgotten that the farmhouse was a one-story structure.

When Janice and the others told Mark they hadn't heard or seen anything unusual, he immediately started yelling at his staff telling them the house was possessed, and all deals were off. Mark informed everyone that they were heading back to Boston as quickly as they could board the corporate jet. Janice tried to offer other alternatives, but Dowling and his staff were now all seated in the limousine. The limousine sped off, and the last image Mark Dowling saw and barely heard, due to his still-ringing ears, was Janice running behind the moving vehicle waving a contract in her hand, and yelling, "We can still continue the project."

Mike and his wife, Brittany, were having Sunday dinner with his parents when Janice called Steve to update him on the Dowling deal. After hearing of the latest fiasco, Steve decided that it was finally time to make a trip home to salvage what he could with the family farm. Nancy immediately arranged to take the time off from her job. Mike and Brittany expressed an interest in going to Rushview as well since Brittany had never been to South Dakota, and Mike was only four-years-old the last time he went to Rushview for his grandpa's funeral twenty-one-years ago.



Driving from the airport to Rushview was a nostalgic one for Steve as he was pointing out points of interest to his family. He suddenly felt a moment of grief and regret when he realized it had been two decades since he had been home. In some ways it seemed as if nothing had changed, and at times, it seemed like he was driving in a foreign country.

Nancy had only been to Rushview twice and had never been to the family farm. She walked around the farm visualizing the farmhouse neatly painted, prairie winds drying clothes on long gone clotheslines, and her father-in-law on a tractor during the fall harvest. She pictured her mother-in-law outside feeding pigs, picking fresh vegetables from the garden, and waving to her husband, her son, and several farm hands to come inside for lunch. After nearly thirty years of marriage, Nancy was finally walking on the same grounds where her husband had grown up and received the love, stability, and moral character she most treasured in him.

Mike, who was a restless young man since graduating from college, seemed to find a joy both of his parents had never seen in him. Always preferring to work rather than going to school, Mike worked as a banker, teacher in an inner city school, and restaurant manager all within two years after graduation. It was only when he accepted a job as manager of a plant nursery, that everyone noticed a change for the better in his personality. He liked being outside watering the plants, moving yard accessories around, and teaching people how to care for certain plants when the opportunity arose. Steve and Nancy had then realized that their son was not the type of individual to be cooped up all day in an office.

Mike and Brittany walked the grounds by themselves for over an hour. His parents were sitting on an old wooden swing on the side of the house and enjoying the nice cool breeze. They noticed how both Mike and Brittany would occasionally make gestures by pointing at different locations on the farm. Soon Mike and Brittany walked back towards the house to make an announcement that Steve and Nancy would have never expected to hear if they lived for another hundred years.

Mike told his parents that he and Nancy had decided they would move from Chicago to Rushview. He then said, "The old farm here will have another generation with a Lambert male

farming it.” Mike talked about planting wheat and corn like his grandpa did and buying some pigs and a few head of cattle to start off his farming career. He was as ecstatic as a child at Christmas as he told of his plans to meet the country agent and sign up for agriculture extension courses. His mom and dad spoke through their eye contact as they realized that their unsettled son had finally come to terms with himself as he discovered his destiny, and that destiny was in a community that he had not been to in over two decades.

Mike and Brittany talked about how they would use some of the wood from the old house to build a new family home where they could raise their family. Mike told his parents that through hard work, he hoped in a few years, he and Brittany could also reopen the family dairy. Brittany said that she would apply at the local hospital and clinics for a nursing job to bring in a steady income during this transitional time. Steve offered his services and farm experience in helping Mike in hiring dependable farm hands.

After discussing the situation in private for a few minutes, Steve and Nancy then announced that they would build a cottage on the property where they would live during extended and more frequent visits home. Plans were now set in place, and in the morning, Steve, Nancy, Mike and Brittany would go to Rushview National Bank and talk to Randy Whitehead to secure a loan to once again make the Lambert farm a working one. Now the old farmhouse was filled with four extremely happy adults.

Suddenly the dusty, stale smells of the closed up house were replaced with the smells of fresh flowers, particularly roses. Mae and Irvin were devout Catholics and never missed Mass. Steve remembered the story his mother often told him of St. Therese of Lisieux, the Carmelite nun, and the belief that if a person received a blessing from God, the smell of fresh flowers would fill a room. Steve now believed that his mom and dad were looking down from Heaven to give their love and their blessings to this new venture.

A feeling of peace, a peace not experienced in several years, seemed to overtake Steve’s body. It was a warm and a loving feeling, and it felt so good. He came to the realization that although he would not be moving home permanently as his parents had always hoped for, part

of his family was. And so in a way, so was he. Oftentimes returning to the family home means that different faces or different generations now become its new occupants.

He and Nancy then strolled around the property. Steve was remembering and telling stories about growing up on the farm as they continued their walk. Nancy imagined her husband as a young boy playing in the fields and later doing his morning chores before leaving for school. She believed her heart was being filled with the love from her mother-in-law she never met and from her father-in-law she barely knew. With each story and each short stop, Nancy envisioned several generations of Lambert family members walking the same grounds and through their day-to-day living doing whatever it took to make the farm and dairy a success.

Looking across the vast acreage, the love Steve and Nancy had for each other shone through as they gazed into each other's eyes. He reached down and kissed her. She had a glow about her as she smiled at him, further sealing the bonds of their love. Then, looking at the old farmhouse and barn, which would soon be replaced with new construction he said, "Life is good, isn't it, Babe?" Enthusiastically, she said, "It is; it really is."

They continued to talk about what the new farmhouse and their cottage would look like and imagined their yet-to-be born grandchildren playing outside, running in the fields, and creating their own memories.

UPDATE:

Mike and Brittany have now lived on the family farm for five years. Katie is Steve and Nancy's first and very spoiled grandchild to carry on the Lambert name for the next generation. To date, Sheriff Green has not received any new complaints from the Lambert home regarding invisible chairs being dragged across floors, papers mysteriously flying through windows, flying dishes and cups crashing into microscopic pieces, or split second temperature changes inside or outside the home. Indeed, miracles do happen!

# Writing Raw

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The End

**Bradley LeBlanc bio:** Bradley LeBlanc is a freelance writer, teacher, and former businessman. Lockport, Louisiana, the small town where he grew up and offers much inspiration for his writing, is now a bedroom community to New Orleans. Today he calls Brookings, SD and Lafayette, LA home. His first book, *Web Footed Snowman: How a Middle Aged Man from the Gulf Coast Survived His First South Dakota Winter*, is expected to be published in the fall of 2015. He can be reached on Twitter (@bjcleblanc), or on Facebook.