

Where's Howard?

*by Kenita Gibbins*

We felt excited after moving into our first “new” home. We crawled into sleeping bags just too exhausted to put up our bed. I fell asleep immediately only to wake because the light was on. I poked David. “Why did you turn on the light?”

“I didn't.”

“Well, get up and turn it off!”

The bulb glared in the morning. I asked David to check for a short in the electricity.

My mother arrived at supper time with food, our nine months old daughter Brittany and our huskies, Greta and Minta. After our meal, I invited Mother to see Brittany's room. Brittany immediately started crawling to her toys. I had childproofed the room. I put up a gate to keep our little girl safe and gave Mother a tour.

When we went to the basement, the dogs stayed at the top of the stairs. Mother moaned, “What a mess. I'll help you sort.”

The next day Brittany and I went for a walk and enjoyed meeting Roberta. Toward the end of the day I said, “Honey, I think someone is watching us.”

David said, “Now, just who do you think is watching us? A ghost?”

“Yes!”

Brittany and I went to see our new friend Roberta. She said, “I'm so glad you are my neighbor. The house sat empty for a long time.”

“Why do you think it stayed off the market?”

“Janet Mitchell moved soon after Howard died. I think she couldn't stay after losing both her husband and son.”

“Both?”

“Their son Michael died of leukemia just a month before Howard was killed in a head-on car collision with a drunk driver.”

I asked, “Where is Janet now?”

Roberta said, “She told me she couldn't sever all ties at once. I heard after two years she married her high school sweetheart.”

I left Brittany in her room with the door open while I painted down the hall. I could hear her jabbering. I worked for an hour. When I went to get Brittany, she was happily playing with a soft doll. I tried to take it away from her to examine it. My baby cried and would not let go. I decided my mother must have given it to her. From the hall, the dogs watched.

I told David what had happened. He said, “Of course it came from her grandmother.”

“David, how can you be so blasé about the possibility of having a ghost?” I yelled.

“Just who do you think this ghost is?”

“It's Howard Mitchel. He didn't get to say goodbye.”

“The next morning I called, “Roberta, do you think you can find Janet's address for me?”

Roberta did find an address for me. I asked, “Do you mind taking care of Brittany for a little while?”

She said, “Sure.”

I marched down to the family room and shouted. “Howard, Howard, can you hear me? You don't frighten us, but you are not wanted here. Your family doesn't live here anymore. Janet has moved to 2020 Jefferson Way. Find her. Howard, please leave.”

Tears rolled down my cheeks. I was trying to send this poor man into oblivion. He was my daughter's first friend.

“Greta, Minta, what are you doing down here?”

They happily barked. I thought to myself, *We like your home, thank you for letting us have it.*

Where are you, Howard?