

## Chapter 12

*When I first heard about the pool, I was excited. It sounded like a good idea, but then we moved. I wasn't thrilled about that. I was comfortable in our other house. Bacchus and I had a lot of fun there. We enjoyed our routine, our walks particularly with Juan Carlos, and the yard. Even though it wasn't large, it was pleasant and inviting to sit outside. We liked when we had company. It was easy and comfortable.*

*Then we moved and little by little all hell broke loose. I worried our family would burst apart like a balloon exploding. We got through it somehow but it wasn't pleasant. For a while I associated everything going wrong [in life] with the pool construction and the unpleasant workers going in and out, the unending noise, the weird goings on, the ghosts, and too many unfamiliar sounds and smells. It wasn't always the ghosts that frightened me, sometimes it was the sounds I would hear. The creaking and groaning of some of the trees, voices in the wind, the sound of horses' hooves, and the screams and cries. Sometimes the house reeked of anxiety.*

*There have been many ghosts at our home. Some frightening, some interesting. I didn't want to be left alone with them. I felt vulnerable because my body has been weakened with age and disease. I didn't think I could fight back. I also knew they didn't belong here. That was one of my worst experiences, not them as much as the fear I couldn't protect myself, my family. As I've said before, I hate feeling vulnerable.*

*Ganimedes*

Honestly, I dreaded writing this chapter because if you are on board with the fact that my dog talks like a philosopher through my clairvoyant friend, now I have to ask you to wrap your mind around the fact that we accidentally bought a haunted house. Okay. Here goes.

Do I believe in ghosts? I do now. I don't know what I believed before I moved to this house. I suppose I thought it was possible, like anything is possible, but I didn't really give it much thought. I figured that most alleged ghost sightings had a logical non-ghost explanation. Do I see ghosts? Not really. I saw one once, but it was such a fleeting second that I'm not sure if I made it up.

I *can* tell you this—I did not have a bad feeling when I found the place for the pool, and I did not sense that anything was amiss. In fact, it was quite the opposite. I had searched for at least six months for the right place to build

Gunny's Rainbow, hoping to find a quiet place where the dogs who came to swim would be able to relax, have fun, absorb love, and heal. When I found a great piece of land in the middle of Bethesda, Maryland, surrounded by beautiful century-old oaks and other magnificent trees, I literally jumped up and down because I just *knew* this was it. This was where I was supposed to build Gunny's Rainbow. So, far from having a bad feeling about the place, my intuition told me that it was the perfect place. As a result, we didn't negotiate very hard and I paid a hefty price for the land.

The existing house on the property could best be described as a shack. It had been more or less abandoned for five years, so the chipmunks, squirrels, rats, and rabbits were the current tenants. There was no grass *anywhere*, just enormous overgrown azaleas and rhododendrons in the front yard, and waist-high weeds in the back. (This was most upsetting to Gunny, by the way, because grass was so very important to him.) There was a rotting picket fence in the front yard that made it impossible to see that there even *was* a house under the overgrown shrubs. Last but not least, there were about a hundred and fifty saplings growing on the street side of that fence—apparently each time a squirrel had dropped a nut during the previous fifty years, a tree had sprouted. In other words, the place was a dump. A giant eyesore sitting in the middle of one of the wealthiest neighborhoods in the area. And this eyesore was all ours, including the magnificent lot with fifty majestic old-growth trees.

The plan was to move into the shack, put most of our furniture into storage, get the pool built so that Gunny could start swimming, and then begin the process of expanding and renovating the house. This was supposed to take about nine months to a year. If you have ever renovated a house, you are rolling on the floor laughing right now at this time estimate. I had never renovated a house before. I didn't laugh then, and I'm not laughing now.

The house had been built in about 1942, and the original owners lived in it until their death. The husband died last, about seven years earlier. One of the neighbors told us that he had died in the house and that it "took a while" for him to be found. Oh. Well, that might explain the rather strange smell that occasionally seemed to be wafting about the house.

Gunny was unhappy from the moment we moved in. My buddy, the one who was attached to me at the hip and was never more than five feet away from me, tried to run away in the first week. Even though he couldn't exactly run at that point, he was high-tailing it as fast as he could through the woods behind the house, with me running behind shouting *stop*, trying to catch him. I finally tackled him and we both went crashing to the ground, thankfully unharmed. What on earth was going on?

Gunny also routinely refused to come back in the house after going for a walk. He either took off down the street or ran across it into the neighbor's backyard, all in order to avoid coming home. I would often have to drag him up the driveway against his will to get him back in the house. Then, the panic attacks started. He would go down into the basement, crawl under Juan Carlos' desk, and tremble. I couldn't get him to come out for hours at a time. Nothing like this had ever happened in any other place that we'd lived, and I was worried about him.

I took him to see Mark a couple of times, even to the emergency room once when he was having a panic attack, but no one could find a medical reason for his behavior. So I called Alexandra. She told me matter-of-factly that the old man who had lived in the house was "still here" and that was what was scaring Gunny. But it didn't stop there—she also saw several Native American spirits, including an older man on a horse whom we dubbed "the Chief", a young woman, and also a young man who seemed pretty mean. There were sometimes other Native American spirits around on horseback, but these three were the main characters. Apparently Gunny could see and hear them—it was probably the first time in his life that he had seen ghosts—and he was scared. (I don't know what Bacchus saw or heard, but he gave no indication that he was bothered in any way. He just wanted me to throw the ball and rub his tummy while his brother flipped out in the basement.)

On a bitterly cold morning four months after we had moved into our new house, the earthmovers rolled in to begin construction on the pool room. At the same time, Alexandra, an old friend from Los Angeles named Sharon, and I stood outside in the backyard of my fabulous new property and tried to figure out what to do about the spirit situation. Sharon is not clairvoyant in the same way that Alexandra is, but she is very intuitive. We agreed that we would all take ten minutes to see what we "picked up", and then huddle and compare notes. Sharon went to one side of the property and Alexandra to the other. They stood there quietly, concentrating intensely. I took the opportunity to contemplate my navel, because I can assure you, I didn't see or hear diddle. I was very cold, and was starting to doubt our sanity.

Sharon walked over to me and said, "A Native American girl was raped and murdered in your backyard, but I don't think she is buried here. The murderer was a young Native American." Then Alexandra came over and said that the Chief had shown her the whole thing like a movie: his daughter had been raped and murdered by a young man from a different tribe, and they had all essentially been stuck here and locked into this never-ending drama for the past several hundred years or so. And let's not forget the ghost of the prior

owner, a nice old man who loved his house, didn't want to leave it, and was a little lost.

We did our best to encourage them all to move on—we burned frankincense and sent them Reiki, a healing energy, to help them transition to their next stop. Nothing happened. No one seemed to leave. The one time I thought I saw a ghost, it was the old man—for a split second, I saw this hunched-over, gaunt old man walk past the window of the house. I still don't say his name because for so long we just referred to him as “He Who Shall Not Be Named” (like Lord Voldemort in the *Harry Potter* series), lest speaking his name should rouse him.

While I think the old man's presence annoyed Gunny, I felt it was the Native American spirits who really caused him stress—their history was much less benign. I regularly went through the house with a smudge stick—a collection of sage and other herbs—to shoo them out and get rid of any negative energy. Gunny didn't have a panic attack every day, but when he did, I would sternly tell anyone who was listening to get out of the house and leave us alone.

At one point, I actually made a sign in big black Sharpie that said, “IF YOU ARE DEAD AND YOU'RE READING THIS, STAY OUT OF MY HOUSE. YOU SCARE MY DOG.” I taped it to the window of the back door. I promise you that for the two weeks Juan Carlos tolerated that sign hanging on the door, Gunny did not have one single panic attack.

While all this was going on, we continued construction on the pool and the new garage. It took eight months or so to finish—the same amount of time that renovating the whole house was supposed to take. As Gunny told you, the construction was miserable. Indescribably miserable. And while all construction is bad, we had a series of events that read a lot like Gunny's list of illnesses—any one of them could have killed us but somehow didn't. Or at least they should have driven us from the property, shrieking, with our hair on fire.

Fire. Did I say fire? Why yes, I did. There were two of them—one was started courtesy of Pepco, the electric company, by a faulty “heavy up” of power to the house. Within twenty-four hours of their fine work, we lost power. When they opened up the electric box to look for the problem, all the wiring inside had melted. A faulty connection had caused the electricity to arc for the previous twenty-four hours, and the only unanswered question in anyone's mind, which a Pepco employee actually verbalized, was, “I wonder why the house didn't burn down?”

The second fire happened after a freak summer storm blew through, with downdraft/tornado winds that roared down our street, mostly in front of our house. The giant old tree across the street fell onto our property, taking down the

power lines and shearing in half a one-hundred and twenty year old oak on my property, before coming to rest on a smaller oak in front of the pool room. The top of the fallen tree was dangling over the house, poised to crash through at any moment if the small oak gave way. It was hard to focus on that impending doom, however, given the giant fire raging in the front yard and in the street from the downed power lines. The power lines had caught fire and ignited the fallen tree branches, and the flames coming out of the power lines in the street were so hot that they turned the cement curb into glass.

Did I mention that I was also declared a public health hazard? When we bought the house, the real estate agent (who also owned the property) had checked the box on the legal disclosure form indicating that the house was on public sewer; not a shocking disclosure here in the middle of the city. But when I brought my construction plans down to the County to get a building permit, they told me I could not add on to the house as long as I had that septic tank. *What septic tank?* Turns out, the old man had never put the house on public sewer, so if I wanted to build on the land, it was going to cost me about \$35,000 to connect to public sewer. But first we had to find the septic tank.

After hours of digging up the backyard with a backhoe, we finally found it—in about the same spot where Alexandra and Sharon thought the Native American girl had been murdered. The top had rusted off the septic tank and it was partially patched with a piece of plywood, rendering the tank unstable. According to the inspector, not only might the “contents” seep out, that whole section of the backyard was at risk of cratering. The County suggested that I rope off the area *to be sure that my dogs didn't get sucked down into the septic tank*. I would just like to say that I had been called a variety of things in my legal career, but I had never been called a public health hazard until then.

Last but not least, amid all the struggles with the incompetent, overpriced, lying contractors, an image of a skull appeared in the stucco in between the two new garage doors. No mistaking what it was. We painted over it, but I know it is still there, and it creeps me out to this day.

Now, you probably thought when this chapter started that it would be hard for you to believe that I had ghosts and spirits wandering around the property. Little did you know that the construction process to build Gunny's pool would be far more unbelievable. The two things are related, though, I have no doubt. All the negative energy of the spirits on my land poisoned everything. I was depressed and angry. If building this pool to help Gunny and other dogs was supposed to be my path, my true calling, why had everything gone so horribly wrong? My old job of flying around first class, staying in swank hotels,

eating fabulous meals, and making heaps of money was starting to look pretty good again. But it was too late. I had quit my job and this was my life.

Oh, and when the pool was finally finished, Gunny made it abundantly clear that he really, really hated to swim.

*“The pool. The bane of my existence,”* he said.