

Common Mystics Podcast

Episode 1: Mystery and Legend in Nashville, MI

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00:09 On our first episode of Common Mystics, we stumble upon a young girl's untimely death. Was it murder, suicide, a potential coverup? Join us as we revisit the Putnam Library in the small town of Nashville, Michigan. I'm Jennifer James. I'm Jill Stanley. We're psychics. We're sisters. And we are Common Mystics. We find extraordinary stories in ordinary places, and we certainly found an extraordinary story in Nashville, Michigan. It's true. So what compelled us to do this? That's just what we do. That's what we've always done: use our psychic abilities to have adventures. So in this particular case, where did we start? We started at your (Jill's) house and you are just outside of Battle Creek, Michigan. We're in Barry County. And this was a day in February. It was. It was a day in February, so it was cold and snowy. So how did we start?

01:05 We started at your (Jill's) house by making an intention and we put it out into the universe that we wanted to find a story that we didn't already know. And that was somewhat verifiable. That was really important to us. Right. And when you say a story, we were looking for, um, like a supernatural story, something like that... I don't think we knew what we were looking for. That's a really good point. Honestly, that's a really good point. So how did you start after the intention? How did you...? Yeah, well, I reached out, outside myself, into the universe to tap into my connection with my spirit guides, my people, our people, who've already passed on the other side. So mom, grandma, Aunt Genie, grandpa, you know, those, those people who were part of my life. How are you engaging with them? How are they communicating back with you?

01:56 Yeah. Well, that's a good question because you know, I'm not always sure that they are. But in this case, um, I see visions outside myself a lot of times. So in the case of mom where, you know, I set the intention, we set the intention to have an adventure. Um, I actually saw her not outside myself, but in my mind's eye. And she was pointing north. And so I told you to drive North. And in that moment, when you saw mom pointing us north, did you think like, "Oh, this is just in my head"? "Too good to be true"? Or were you like, "Nope, that's mom, let's go"? Yeah. I was like 50, 50. It could have been my imagination. It could have been mom leading us somewhere, but you know, stakes were low. It was just me and you in the car. So we just went with it.

02:42 Yeah. So I wasn't at all self conscious about the fact that I could be wrong. I was just like, drive north. So we're north on M 37. We're heading towards Hastings and what came up? Yeah. Well, the next thing I saw in my mind's eye was the Dowling Public Library, which I know of. I've driven past it with you so many times. But the reason that it always stuck out in my head is because it's adorable. It's this old farmhouse that's been converted into a library. But that was the vision that I had in my head when we were driving north on M 37. So I said, I'm seeing the Dowling Public Library. So that's where I drove. And so now we drove up to the Dowling Public Library and I look at you, I'm like, are we getting out of this car?

03:29 And you know what the answer was? No, I didn't feel at all compelled to get out, to go into the library. It just seemed to me at that moment like it was a guidepost, like an indicator that we were on the right direction. Okay. So we went past it. I was like, make a right here. And we kept driving. So now we are driving in the country roads, um, surrounding, um, Barry County, Eden County. And we end up passing the, um, village indicator for Nashville, Michigan. That's right. That's right. And at this point, what are you feeling? Well, as soon as I saw the sign, "Nashville, Michigan," of course, I immediately thought Nashville, Tennessee, right? That's an obvious connection. Um, and we have a sister who lives in Nashville, Tennessee. So you and I have traveled there, and you know, we traveled there many times and we have a lot of different associations.

04:22 I know I do with Nashville and all the good times that we've had there. But the immediate thing, the first thing, that came to mind was a war connection, civil war, war connection. And it was an overpowering sort of civil war connection, um, that I felt so moments after we passed, um, the Nashville, Michigan sign indicator. And within minutes we pass this huge tank that's parked outside the VFW and at that moment, um, which is kind of goosebumpy, but what were you feeling? I felt that's validation. Like, okay, we are here. This is the place we were supposed to be. Okay. So we found our destination. I had no idea why this was right. Did you know? We didn't even know why we were there, but the fact that there was this strong war connection, we saw the tank. I was like, okay, here we are.

05:12 Now what? Yeah. So what did we do next? Well, you tell me, because you led us to the next destination. So at that moment we had no reason why we were there. So when in doubt always find the cemetery. So that was my goal. We had to find the cemetery. You had never been there before. So how did, how did you get us there? So, um, I have been through Nashville, Michigan, but I've never like gone off that main drag. So I had no clue where the cemetery was. So I had just put a shout out there to our people on the other side. And I was like, well, we need to find the cemetery folks. And so using, um, my gut feelings, like, should I make a right? Yes, no. Okay. Make a right. Make a left. That's how I, um, led us to the cemetery.

05:58 So when we got there, again, let's set the scene. Yep. Snow on the ground, deep snow. You can't tell where the roads are within the cemetery. You can see the gaps certainly between the headstones, but we weren't comfortable at all driving around. So like you had said, we were just kind of doing the perimeter of the cemetery, but you notice something right away. Right. It's um, from a distance you can see that there was a lot of American flags staked. There was a lot of metal stakes indicating some sort of service. And then upon approaching and driving around the perimeter, you notice that there are, um, really specific plaques that are on different types of headstones, but the plaques are uniform and they are, um, commemorating, um, service, um, whether it's in different types of wars. So like the, um, Vietnam War, the Korean War, throughout the cemetery.

06:55 And it looks like to me, there was an organizing body that had, um, commemorated these, um, veterans in that way. Right. And so here we have that war connection again. Right.

So you and I are driving around the cemetery. And, but because it was so cold and so windy, we couldn't do what we normally do in a cemetery, which is walk the grounds. Right. And get up close and personal. We couldn't do that. There was just, the weather was not cooperating in that regard, but we were intently focused on the veteran's headstone at this time. How are you feeling? I am feeling incredibly frustrated because I'm looking for something and I don't know what I'm looking for. Right, right. Absolutely. So, so at this point, um, how were you feeling at this point? I felt the same way. I felt like, um, earlier when we were talking, I said, it felt like you were looking at one of those seeing eye pages like that Magic Eye.

07:49 Yes. So you're looking at something and you know, something's there, but you're just not focusing on it yet, but something's in that image that you're just not seeing clearly. That's a great analogy because that's exactly how it felt. So we were frustrated, but we knew we were onto something and we decided to go get something to eat at Good Times, which is a diner off M 66 in Nashville, Michigan. So, um, as we go to Good Times, we pass the public library there. And, um, just thinking like, Oh, that's cool. It's a, it's a public library, whatever. Right. So we're at the restaurant. Right. And you think to ask the waitress, just like a local, you know, is there a war connection that's notable? Uh, do you remember what she said? She was like, do you want an extra cheese...? Like she was not interested at all.

08:34 She was like, I don't know what you're talking about. And she was like, nothing out of the ordinary to her, but remembering that, hey, this town has a library, we just passed it. And it's a couple doors down. I was kind of feeling deflated at that point. Oh, totally. Yeah. I feel like when we were eating, it was like, Ugh, we can't make sense of it. And it was a little frustrating, especially after the waitress, her response to us was like we were being ridiculous. Yeah. Um, so from there, from there, we knew that there was a library, just a few doors away. So we thought, Hey, why don't we see if there's somebody who knows something about the history of this town or something about a war connection, it's probably a librarian. Right. Right. So you call to make sure it was open.

09:18 And luckily it was. And so after lunch, we decided to go down to the Nashville Public Library. Yeah. So, um, when we drive to the library, a couple of doors down, um, what do you immediately notice about this library immediately? I noticed that isn't, that it's an old house that's been converted into a library and there's a historical marker. There was a plaque right next to the door. Um, that said that it was a building of historical significance once owned by Charles M Putnam built in 1884 and 85. Charles and Agnes, he was a hardware merchant and a banker at the time. Um, and he will, they willed, their home to Nashville for the use, for use as a public library. Yeah. It was a very cool old building. Like the doors were old, heavy, the doorknobs were lower. It was just, it felt like you were walking into an era.

10:17 Totally. Yeah. So we walk in and Jill, what's the first thing, what's the first thing that we did when we walked in the door? So when you walk in immediately to your left, there's a staircase. And we, we beeline for the staircase and start to go off as fast as we can. I did not realize that there was a hatch door that closed off the staircase to the second floor. So it's like

I'm walking up into a ceiling. And at that moment, the librarian was like, "Can I help you?" So that was embarrassing. Um, so I backed down, down the staircase and I was like, ha um, I asked her, um, I said, we're, we're new to town. We were just driving around. We realized that there seems to be a really significant emphasis that you folks put on veterans and their service. And what can you tell me about that?

11:12 Um, and as we're having that conversation, we're walking back towards her desk. That's right, right. So we were trying to one get answers, but to try to forget that we made a total ass of ourselves trying to run up the stairs that had no way up. So when we get to the desk and you're, you're talking to the librarian who was very nice but really didn't have any personal information to share, any personal knowledge that would help us out. There was a young lady sitting at a computer station, just a few feet from the circulation desk. And she looked up and said, "I thought you were here for the legends."

11:50 So when you heard her say that, what were you thinking? Um, I didn't know what she was talking about, but it sounded like a group, like either like a social group or a band. So I thought it was cool. Just the name. I was like "Arrrrr?". And so we're like, tell, tell me more. And so I asked if we can record her and we engaged her and asked her questions about what she was talking about. So take it from there. Well, you know, she was such a nice young lady and she was actually not talking about a social group or a band. She was talking about the legends surrounding the library, which is purportedly haunted. So she said that there are multiple versions of the stories. Um, but the Putnam's were obviously important people at the time. Um, and that library is of course, as we already knew the original Putnam house from the 1800s.

12:43 Now the upstairs has been shut off as we already knew, found out the hard way. But she said that you can hear noises and people moving around up there when nobody's up there. She said that she and her friends as teenagers would hear noises coming from the library at night when it was closed. She said that some of the stories say that Charles Putnam got a mistress pregnant and that he shot his wife, his mistress, and then himself, she also said that one of the stories was about his nephew and that his nephew had an affair with a maid and got the maid pregnant. Now we specifically asked Elizabeth if there were other haunted places in the town, if this was like something, you know, that's all over the town. And she said, no, that really it's just the library that has this reputation for being haunted.

13:35 We also asked her if she had had any sort of psychic experiences, just in general, just to see if she was that sensitive. Yeah. And she said, no, really. It was just the library where she had experiences hearing noises, you know, purportedly of ghosts in the library. So that was super interesting. Yeah. It was unexpected. Really cool. So I'm talking to Elizabeth, we kind of were like, Oh, this is really cool. And I asked the librarian, if we can get upstairs, I was like, we need to get up there. And she said, well, once a month, they opened the upstairs by appointment with the Nashville historical society. And she gave me a telephone number to contact, to schedule an appointment so that I can get upstairs. Um, so at that point I was super excited and Jen and I, we were walking around the library.

14:28 Right. Is there anything, when you were walking around that you thought was cool or interesting, cause we're only downstairs at that point, but still kind of cool. Right. You know, I was going to ask you the same question. I really connected to the portraits that were on the wall. It was, I always find it very interesting looking at old pictures of people who have passed. Um, and there was a portrait of Agnes and Charles both and also some other older pictures of the property in the town from the era. Right. So at that point, I think you made an appointment to come back. Yes. I made, um, I let her know that I would be contacting the historical society and the head librarian to make an appointment to go upstairs. But, um, really, we had nothing else to do at the library that day. So we left and where did we go?

15:17 We went back to the cemetery and why? Well, because we had heard those stories that Elizabeth told us, right. And some of the stories involved, Charles Putnam killing his wife and then himself. And we thought, well, if we wanted to corroborate that we could go back to the cemetery right now, find their gravestones. And then we'll know if the dates match that, um, we were, uh, that we would either prove or disprove at least a portion of those tales. Right. So, um, we, we were able to find the... okay, so we're driving back towards the cemetery. And again, we can't really drive through the cemetery. We just have to go around the perimeter. So we're feeling like this is a long shot to find their graves. Right. And so we're driving and do, do, do... And all of a sudden Jennifer yells and scares me going, "Oh!" cause she sees the Putnam family headstones.

16:12 So we found them. Yeah. Yeah. Jennifer found them like, like a hound dog. She was on it. Anyway. So, um, we didn't stay long. No, it was way cold. But we did drive back into the cemetery. We got out of the car for like a second to check the gravestones. And then we were able to see that he couldn't have just killed his wife and himself because he died years before his wife. Right. A few years. Right. So that couldn't have happened. Right. But we also knew like, there's a story here and we don't know what it is, but we know that we're onto something. But, um, we didn't have the means at that time to further investigate. So we had to kind of lay low and figure it out. So then we went back, circled around and did some research and you really took the lead on the research.

16:56 Jill. So why don't you tell us, what did you find out about the Putnam's? So really, um, what I found out about the Putnam says that they had two twin daughters that ended up passing away. Um, Charles Putnam, like you had mentioned earlier was a, a wealthier man, um, of society in the Nashville area. Um, there was no evidence that he ever committed a murder or had an affair. Um, there was a newspaper article regarding his death. So the Provenomont Courier, uh, published August 15th, 1918 said that he had shot himself three times in an attempt to kill himself. He said when he had woken up from those attempts that he had tuberculosis and that he would prefer to die rather than spread the horrible disease. So, um, on July 25th, 1918, he did, um, pass from a self inflicted gunshot wound to the chest.

17:56 Um, the death certificate did state the cause of death that was via gunshot wounds through the apex of the lung and the right temple. Okay. So he did kill himself. At least that portion of the story was true. Was there anything else that you found in your research that might have explained some of the more outrageous stories that Elizabeth shared with us? Well, there was, um, a brother that Charles had, again, a wealthy man, um, from the area, uh, further south though around Hinsdale, Michigan, and his brother was murdered and the wife of his brother, his sister-in-law, was on trial for that murder. Okay. So that was a little salacious, right. So the family was associated with scandal in some aspect. Right. So I can see how over the years, the story might've gotten elaborated upon. So what I did find, um, wait, I have another question for you though.

18:55 Did you, did you feel like during the research you were able to tune in psychically to Charles? I did. And it felt like, um, when I was focusing on Charles and I was looking at the picture of the portrait that I had taken, it felt like he was annoyed that his memory and his legacy was kind of skewed in a way up in this scandal. Yeah. It was, it was like, that was what he left behind and it wasn't accurate at all. Um, so I had that feeling from him. Interesting. But what I did find was in November in 1892, the Putnam's took on a 15 year old maid named Gertrude Beigh. She lived with the family at the residence and the family at the time that was living there included Charles, Agnes, and Agnes' nephew Frank Smith. On February 16th of the following year, so February, 1893, Gertrude was found shot upstairs in the residence.

19:57 And, um, there is a newspaper article that, um, that I had printed out for you, Jen, if you can read it for us. Okay. So what I'm reading from is an excerpt from the Nashville News that was owned by Len Feighner, correct. Okay. The title is: By Her Own Hand, Ms. Gertrude Beigh Shoots Herself Through the Heart. Our village was thrown into a state of excitement yesterday afternoon by the sad death of Ms. Gertrude Beigh at the residence of C M Putnam on North Main Street at about half past two o'clock. She had done up her work and went upstairs to sweep and had been there, but a short time when the occupants of the house, Mrs. Putnam, Mrs. Emma Simpson and William Feighner, who were downstairs, heard what they supposed to be a pistol shot immediately afterward, a thump as if someone had fallen.

20:51 Mrs. Simpson immediately ran upstairs and went to the door of Miss Beigh's room and not seeing her she called to her, but no one came. And stepping out of the room, she glanced into another room and a horrible sight met her gaze. There lying on her back just inside of the door, lay the poor unfortunate girl in a pool of blood with her right hand clutching a revolver. She immediately gave the alarm. And Dr. W H Young was summoned who found that the lower portion of her heart had been shot away, which had caused death instantaneously. A coroner's jury was paneled by Justice Mills consisting of the following gentlemen... (I'm not gonna read their names). Ms. Beigh was a brunette about 16 years of age. And as the daughter of Julius Beigh and wife who live about one and a half miles south of town. She had been in the employ of C M Putnam since last November, and has always been cheerful and happy until yesterday morning when it was noticed

21:55 By Mr. and Mrs. Putnam, that she acted melancholy. And Mr. Putnam asked her if she was sick, she replied that she was not, and they thought no more about it. The weapon used was a 32 caliber rim fire revolver and belonged to Frank Smith, a young lad who lives at Mr. Putnam's. A sealed letter was found on which was only the words not to be open for one year. The letter will however be opened by the coroner's jury, which will convene at nine o'clock this morning. Her parents and relatives are nearly prostrated with grief. And then there's one more short paragraph. The coroner's jury, which investigated the death of Ms. Gertrude Beigh decided that she came to her death by a pistol ball fired by her own hand. But whether done by accident or with suicidal intent, they were unable to decide. The letter found in her room proved on being opened to have no bearing whatsoever on the case, being merely a sort of memorandum of passing events.

22:54 So when I found this article and shared it with you originally, I was feeling like I was outraged. Do you remember like, like unproportionate to the actual article, as it turns out yeah. You, you were really upset about it. It felt like, um, it felt one sided to me, the emotion, unfair, dismissive of Gertrude. That's how it felt. And having re-read, listening to you reread it today, I don't have those same emotions. Right. Because it was several months, we're in June now. Right. So we've had several months to put this aside and process it. Right. Um, but initially some of the notes that you and I took about the article was, um, that it doesn't mention where Charles or Frank was at the time of the shooting. Um, also we made the assumption that there were other guns in the house and that she used Frank Smith's gun was a little suspicious.

23:57 So armed with that article and that information that we had based on it. I went back to the library for that, um, once a month appointment where they opened up the upstairs. So I was with the, um, Nashville Historical Society, a representative from that organization, and the head librarian at the library. And so they opened up and gave us access to the records and the different rooms upstairs. So immediately, um, when I walked up the stairs and, um, the gentlemen from the historical society that was giving us the tour, he showed us where Gertrude's room was, where the maid's room was, the maid's quarters as he called it. And it is in the farthest bedroom, in the closet. Wow. So it's, to get to where Gertrude was living, you pass every other doorway, walk into the farthest bedroom and into the closet to knock on the door.

24:54 So Mrs. Smith's version of how she found Gertrude and going to her door before noticing her on the floor, um, couldn't have happened that way because Frank Smith's bedroom where some of Frank Smith's belongings still resides. It's the first bedroom on the right. So, um, having noticed that, I asked the gentlemen from the historical society and the head librarian, if the floor plan had been changed upstairs, maybe they put the closet in, there was a hall closet in front of the bedroom closet, and they confirmed that it was the original floor plan that they did make no changes to the floor plan upstairs. So what do you think is the significance of that discrepancy between the article and the, the layout, like knowing that that couldn't have happened the way she described? Like, how do you make sense of that discrepancy?

25:48 I feel, I don't know. It's just a bizarre discrepancy that seems unnecessary in my mind. What do you think? Well, I think, you know, we had talked about this off the air about how there's so much that doesn't make sense. There's the, with this article, I mean, I have so many questions after reading this it's like, nobody really wanted to investigate what really happened here. I mean, why did she shoot herself? What was the relationship between her and Frank? Where was Frank? The night she killed herself? How does she have access to Frank's gun? How did she know where he kept it? Right. And then, and then of course the obvious question, whose room was she in when she shot herself? Right. Because she wasn't in her room. And why wouldn't she shoot herself in her room? Right. I don't know. It's just all bizarre. So I think in my mind, it's just, it, it, it speaks to the fact that nobody really cared enough.

26:56 Right. Nobody really cared enough to figure out what really happened to this girl. What was the real story? There was no investigation. Right. And why do you think that was Jill? I mean, what is, I mean, honestly, I think it was scandalous that a young lady who committed suicide in a, in a wealthy gentleman's home. Um, I feel as if, when I was researching, um, this story and I was at the library, I discovered that Frank Smith himself had a connection to the gentlemen that owned the Nashville News and who wrote the article and Feighner, Len Feighner. Um, when Frank was a boy, he had written a mock newspaper to, um, to, to look like the National News. And, um, there was a gift that, uh, Mr. Feighner had given Frank, um, years before. So I feel like this, the article and the way in, I don't know if there's any evidence of this, but it feels like this was specifically to address the event in a way that would squash any kind of scandal around it.

28:00 So Frank had a connection to the newspaper people. Right. Did Mr. Putnam have a connection to the newspaper people? Well, if you recall the article, there's a William Feighner that was at the residence at the time of the death. That's right. So we know that they, the families were acquainted with each other, but we don't know the specific William Feighner because there were many in the area. Okay. All right. And then also for, um, it would have been certainly scandalous for a young lady to kill herself in this wealthy, um, you know, social socialite type person's home. Right, right. That would have been scandalous. But what about a relationship between his wife's nephew and a maid? Well, Frank Smith was 17 at the time when Gerdy was 15 at the time of her death. Um, it does seem plausible, especially during those ages, um, that something would have come up.

29:02 Um, maybe in terms of a relationship between the two, of course we can't say definitely. We don't know for sure, but it certainly would have been scandalous, that certainly would have been scandalous. And again, I'm referring back to the article, this young lady killed herself, shot herself in the chest with his gun in his bedroom, and the doorway in his bedroom. I have no evidence of that, but psychically. Yeah. Well, we know that if she was in a different doorway and the doorway that she was in, we're assuming is the doorway, um, to Frank's room. Right. Which again, seems like she's almost pointing the finger at Frank from the grave. That's what my thoughts are. Very interesting. So during your research, did you find anything out about Frank? I did. I looked into Frank. I found out that Frank's father died of an, um, an opium overdose.

29:54 And I found out that, um, Frank himself was a veteran and died during the Spanish, um, War. And they had brought... American War, Spanish American War... and they had brought his body back to Nashville and he is buried in the family plot at the cemetery. We were at the cemetery. The cemetery we were at, looking at all the veterans' headstones, contains Frank Smith's veteran headstone. Correct. Marking his death in 1899. Correct. His, um, his headstone, next to his headstone has one of those metal stakes, um, commemorating his service in the Spanish American War.

So let's debrief. Okay. So I want to just bring up now that we, um, are debriefing the start of the story. We had a bunch of breadcrumbs that just didn't make sense. They're out of sequence, right? Well, the whole, the whole, uh, Dowling Library makes sense now.

31:02 Right? In retrospect, I had a vision of an old house converted into a library and we ended up at an old house converted into a library that happened to be a haunted house that also housed this mystery. Right. Of Gerdy. Right. Do you feel that Gerdy herself, led us there? I definitely do. I feel like she took the opportunity of someone being curious and she, um, she collaborated with mom to get us there. What about the war connection? It's Frank. We were in that cemetery looking for Frank and it's like a Magic Eye picture. We, we just, we didn't see it until the end, after the research. Right. And it was completely verifiable, which is what we set out to do in the first place. Find a story that was somewhat verifiable and you were able to verify a lot of it via research. And, um, the research that I was able to verify will all be in the notes in, um, either on Facebook or in the notes of this episode.

32:09 All right. Is there anything else that you wanted to discuss? I just want to say that I feel, um, when I was researching this, I really do feel a connection to Gerdy and I do feel like her death was mishandled and, um, really, really not, like you said, investigated, and I just hope people keep her in, in your prayers and just send good thoughts and love to Gerdy. Uh, thank you for saying that. So, um, check out our website at commonmystics.net for the show notes and photographs about this episode. And also you can find us on Facebook and Twitter. And if you like this episode, leave us a positive review, like, and subscribe to Common Mystics.