

## Bonus- Hometown Haunts in Forest Park, IL- Part 1

00:00:09 On this bonus episode of Common Mystics, we reminisce about our hometown haunts in Forest Park, Illinois. I'm Jennifer James. I'm Jill Stanley. We're psychics. We're sisters. We are Common Mystics. We find extraordinary stories in ordinary places. And this week, Jill, we are going home to Forest Park, Illinois. Yay. We are. I'm so excited. This is going to be a very special two part series about our hometown. Yes, it is. Jen, can you tell the listeners why we decided on Forest Park? We are coming to the close of Season 1 of Common Mystics, and we wanted to end near Halloween with our spookiest stories. And as we were reminiscing, and as we were trying to decide what our spookiest personal stories were, we kept coming back to our hometown, Forest Park. It's true. It was a little creepy town. It is a little creepy town, so let's get into it.

00:01:13 Alright, Jen, tell us about Forest Park, Illinois. Well, Forest Park is a near west suburb of Chicago. That's right. It's directly 10 miles West of the Loop. Right? Which means it has a really urban feel to it. An older type of suburb. And also, it's small. I never realized how small it was until I was doing this research, but it's two and a half square miles total. Yeah, it's a little big town. It's a little big town. But even though it's small, it has five cemeteries. Okay. What's funny about that, is that when you're in Forest Park, you would assume there's a lot more cemeteries than just five because they're all around you. They're all around you. You're surrounded. Well, the five cemeteries are, to the north, Altenheim and Concordia, then south of that, Forest Home, then Waldheim and Woodlawn. Yeah. And we lived in close proximity to Forest Home and to Waldheim.

00:02:16 Yeah. Like just a few blocks from there, walking distance. Oh my gosh. Absolutely. At most it was three blocks. Not even right. We'll talk about that in a bit. Okay. So we lived about three blocks east of Des Plaines. And did you know that Des Plaines was actually a Native American trail? I did not know that. I didn't know that either. It's nuts, but it makes sense because it's right along the river there, it was surrounded in 1818 by woods, prairies, swamps and marshes. Okay. Now for thousands of years before 1830, when the White settlers started coming in, the Pottawatomie and the other tribes buried their dead along the Des Plaines River in present day Forest Home Cemetery. Oh my gosh. And that's one of the cemeteries that we would hang out at. That is true. That is true. And if you think about it, all of the cemeteries are pretty much along the Des Plaines river.

00:03:19 That's right. So basically the Natives started burying their dead there and then when the White settlers came in, they followed suit and just continued. Okay. That makes sense. Well, something creepy happened though. Hmm. Well, in the year 1900, there was a crew of workers at Forest Home Cemetery and they dug up some Native American burial mounds. Oh my God. Inside, Jill, they found some artifacts. Now, I don't know what the artifacts were. Isn't it interesting that this article I was reading doesn't specify what the artifacts were. Oh my gosh. So I don't know. Let your imagination run wild I guess. They found these artifacts and they decided to exhibit them in the cemetery office and they were there for about 60 years. That just seems so inappropriate. Doesn't it? Yeah. And then after that they moved them to the library. That's even worse. No, I don't know whatever happened to these artifacts, but um, yeah. That's not good news.

00:04:25 Back in the day, I guess they weren't so culturally aware. Yeah, they totally weren't. And then get this, you're not going to believe this. Tell me. In 1950, there were plans to develop the Eisenhower Expressway into the suburbs. It's a major artery that goes to Chicago and it splits Forest Park right in half. It sure does. Well, during the building of the Eisenhower Expressway, they had to demolish some buildings and also move about 1500 graves from Concordia cemetery. I just picture Poltergeist (the movie) in my head. "You only moved the headstones!" It just seems like a bad idea. Yeah. So I couldn't find what had become of those 1500 bodies, where they were moved. But yeah, that's troubling. That is troubling. Yeah. So that was home. So like we said, we lived awful close to, to Forest Home and to Waldheim Cemetery. So Jen, what was your relationship with the cemeteries? Oh my gosh. I would walk through the cemeteries if I wanted to go to the North Riverside Mall; I would rollerblade in the cemeteries; I would ride my bike; I would jog or I would just hang out. Yeah, absolutely. Yeah. What about you? Well, my friend Lisa and I would, like, spend every day after school in the cemetery and sometimes on Saturday. Yeah. We'd be, like, "Meet me there." And we had a specific mausoleum in the back left corner of the cemetery before you cross the bridge. Oh, that's not creepy. Well, speaking of the bridge... so the Forest Home Cemetery is cut in half by the Des Plaines River. So there's this rickety one-car bridge that takes you over the river. And if you are on the east side of the Des Plaines river and you want to head west, there was this sign. It was this huge sign, bigger than a palette. And it said: May your crossing be blessed with eternal rest. Oh, I get the pun. Not appropriate. Absolutely. Yeah. So that kind of scared us. Anyway, what else would happen between you and your friends in the cemeteries? Well, the local neighborhood boys would moped or like ATV in the cemeteries and some of them actually spent like a week there when they quote unquote ran away. Oh my goodness.

00:06:56 In one of the mausoleums, a huge one, a big beautiful one that's notable. (You know, if I showed you a picture, you would know what I was talking about.) Go on. But the basement door was open and two of my classmates spent a week in there and I would like bring them Wonder Bread, toss some bread through the mausoleum window. Yeah. Yeah. That's not cool. Yeah, it was, it was, you know... the thing about Forest Home is that that particular cemetery didn't freak me out so much. But I did find someone that had a haunting experience. In which cemetery? In Forest Home, the cemetery we were talking about. This account is from Alfred. So Alfred was with his grandson on the east side of the Des Plaines River by the bridge that I described. And he was looking for his wife's grave.

00:07:48 There was a woman dressed in black from head to toe. She seemed to be looking for someone. So they just kept on their way. And they realized within five minutes or so that she was gone. And it's not like she could have, it's not like someone picked her up in a car. She was gone. Weird. And in the distance as they looked, she was not visible. So they were pretty much like, Oh, maybe we just missed her, but they did feel like it was suspicious. So then they got back in the car after visiting his wife's grave with his grandson and they were headed out of town and all of a sudden the grandson was like, Look!

00:08:30 This woman, the one that they saw a few minutes earlier in the cemetery, was among houses staring at the car. And the grandson said, Oh my gosh, she doesn't have a face!

00:08:47 Yeah. And you used to hang out in this cemetery. I know. I did not see her. At first, I was like, well, maybe they saw me, but then, I'm like, there's no way; I'm not fast, number one. And I have a face. Oh. So they said that they hurried out of the area, but yeah, creepy. Right.

That is so creepy. I don't even know what to say. I know another cemetery that never really freaked me out. It never gave me bad vibes, but it's noted to be haunted. Which one? Woodlawn Cemetery. Oh yeah. That's the one on Cermak, on Des Plaines and 22nd Street, that we would cross through going to the North Riverside Mall. And in this particular cemetery, there is a portion of it called the Showmen's rest. Have you heard of that? Ooh. Tell me about that. Showmen's rest is a section of Woodlawn Cemetery that contains the remains from a circus train accident in a mass grave from 1918. Oh! I know. Between 60 and 110 employees were killed. Another train conductor fell asleep causing the train to hit the circus train. Oh no. Since many of the victims' names were not known, a lot of the markers say things like "Unidentified Male" or "Baldy" or "Four Horse Driver." Oh, the section is used today for burials for circus men and local showmen. Wow. It's reported that if you're in the area at night, you can hear phantom elephants.

00:10:27 Oh wow. I've never heard them. No I haven't. But I have seen the headstones and the statues of elephants because a lot of the animals were also buried there. Oh my gosh. Oh, it's terrible. No, I didn't hear the elephants. I mean, I've never heard them either and I used to rollerblade in that cemetery. Oh, I didn't know that. That was my roller blading, rollerblading days. What other cemetery can you tell me about that, that you had experiences with or heard of experiences? In my opinion, the creepiest cemetery is Waldheim. Agreed. Agreed. Yeah. And I was so surprised because this cemetery has given me nightmares and I'll share one later, but I did not realize how many ghost sightings occurred in this and around the cemetery. I can believe it. I didn't know, but I can believe it because I have my own story, but you tell me everything first. Okay.

00:11:24 Okay. Okay. Okay. Alright. It's creepy. So most people have heard of Resurrection, Mary. Yes. She is a famous Chicago ghost who is a hitchhiker ghost associated with the Resurrection Cemetery in the city of Chicago. That's right. But Waldheim has a hitchhiker ghost too. known as the flapper ghost. And she actually predates the more famous Resurrection. Mary.

00:11:54 I know nothing about this. Let me tell you. Okay. So this flapper girl ghost dates back to 1933 and 1934, when Chicago was having the world's fair or, more formally, the Century of Progress Exhibition. Okay. She was a beautiful young brunette with bobbed hair in the flapper style and a short skirted roaring twenties dress. And she supposedly was a young Jewish girl who attended dances at a place called Melody Mill Ballroom, which was formerly located on Des Plaines Avenue in North Riverside, Illinois. Okay. Right now... there haven't been many, many sightings of the flapper lately, but around 1933 and 1934, up until the start of WWII, she was seen all the time. For instance, she would be seen at the Melody Mill Ballroom and she would be dancing and conversing with people. And then later she'd asked for a ride home, usually from a young man. She said that she lived in the caretaker's house in Waldheim Cemetery.

00:13:16 If that's not a red flag, I don't know what is. Anyway. So the young man would drive her to the cemetery and she'd get out and she'd go to the caretaker's house. But then she'd turn around the side and disappear into the tombstones. And since no lights ever went on in the caretaker's house, the young men would, like, check on her and knock on the door... only to find, guess what? She doesn't live there.

00:13:48 That is really nice of those young men, because there's absolutely no way... I'd be like, um, later!

00:14:00 There were some young men who actually got out with her and she would duck and vanish in front of their eyes between the tombstones. She has even been seen during the day. On a spring day in 1973, a family, a father, a mother and their daughter, were visiting a grave of a deceased loved one when they were suddenly startled to see a girl dressed like a flapper walking towards a crypt, and Jill, suddenly she disappeared. So they ran over because they thought she might've fallen into an open grave.

00:14:39 Again, really nice of them. Not this girl.

00:14:43 As they ran towards the spot, they realized that there was no open grave and there was no girl at all. She had just vanished completely. Nope. Okay. The last story is interesting because it's from a North Riverside police officer in 1979. He sees a beautiful girl walking near the ballroom, the Melody Mill Ballroom, on a rainy evening about midnight. So he stops and he asks her where she's going. And she says that she's going home. Well, it's raining. And he's a nice guy. So he says, well, where's home? And she says, Harlem Avenue. So he says, get in, I'll take you home. She's in his car. And you know, he's heard of the ghost stories. He's heard of the flapper ghost in particular. So he noticed, like, what she was wearing. And later he said she was not wearing old style clothing, but he also said she wasn't wearing modern clothing either, which I thought was interesting.

00:15:47 It is interesting. On the drive home, she starts commenting about how she loves to go dancing at the Melody Mill. They turn north on Harlem Avenue from Cermak and she directs him to an apartment building just a little bit away from the cemetery's entrance. Then she gets out of the car and he's watching her. He's watching her go to the apartment building, but just then, a semi-truck backfired and it startled him and he turned around and he looked. When he looked back, the girl was gone. So of course he gets out to investigate. He walks to the building, he tries opening the doors and they're all locked, which isn't surprising. However, it was wet. Remember it was raining. And each door had an awning above it and not one door had any wet footprint marks. Oh my gosh. So once again, she disappeared. Crazy. I just have to say, and I'm not kidding, there are so many times that I went through that cemetery, sometimes at night, either coming or going from Sonia's house or the North Riverside Mall, and it is very scary. And when I would walk through it... the railroad tracks would take us to the destination. So I would be running on these tracks, but the railroad ties, they're elevated. They're not flushed with the ground. So you're looking straight down and trying to get every step correct before you, like, wipe out, right? Oh my gosh.

00:17:26 I remember doing that so often, like, focusing on my feet so I wouldn't fall, skipping on the railroad ties, and then seeing things through my peripheral vision. I can't. Jill, I know that there's the flapper ghost story, but there are even more sightings at Waldheim. Oh my gosh. Tell me. There was a man named Jacob and he was visiting the cemetery in the late afternoon with his parents. As they prepared to leave, he noticed something rising, like smoke from the ground. He said that it gave him the vague impression of a human form. And it was later that he realized that he had seen a ghost. That is super crazy. And then the last sighting that I could find occurred in 1984, when a couple passing by the cemetery experienced what they believed was a ghost-like figure standing by the main gates. They said it didn't quite look human, but it was definitely the figure of a young woman. Now you said that you had a particular experience at that cemetery. I have. Would you like to share it with us? Oh my gosh. Yes.

00:18:38 I was coming home from high school and that means that I was taking, (this is before I could drive)... I think I was a sophomore at the time... I was taking the Cermak bus east and usually I would get off at Harlem and then transfer buses to take the Harlem bus north and then walk a mile home. But I'm like, why don't I just get off at Des Plaines? it seems like it would be quicker. So I don't have to wait for the transfer. And I'm still walking about a mile, a little bit more. So what's the harm? Sure. Makes sense. Yeah. The only thing is that there are no sidewalks on Des Plaines. So I have to walk almost in the cemetery, just along the perimeter, really close to it. So I'm headed north and I'm walking and I have my backpack and it's a regular day. It's an autumn day and I get to the cemetery and there's a series of little openings for cars to go in, but it's not like a big paved area. It's like a little trail. And as you're walking past, there are pillars that are made out of old Chicago red brick. And at the top of the pillars, there are, there's a wrought iron arch, and this is uniform as you're heading north. So I'm walking past these bricks and these arches, and very close to me, I hear, "Hey!"

00:20:02 Oh! And I was like, What is that? And I jumped back almost in Des Plaines Avenue because there really isn't a walkway, you know? And I was like, Oh my God. I thought it was like a homeless person. And I didn't want to turn my back and like start hurrying home. So I was kind of just walking, looking at the pillars and looking directly in the cemetery as I was making my way. And I couldn't see anything.

00:20:28 Oh my gosh. Like I said, it was really close to me. Oh, I would have, I would have peed my pants. What do you think it was? I think it was a ghost. I really do, because there was no one there. There are so many ghost sightings at that cemetery. It was absolutely a ghost. God. What happened to you? Tell me about your dream. Oh my gosh. All right. You know what? I had forgotten about this nightmare until we started researching and I started looking into Waldheim and then it came back. So that in and of itself is really creepy. That is really creepy. Okay. So Waldheim was one of the cemeteries that we used to walk through together. Like you, me and our other sisters, when we were going to the North Riverside Mall. Right. And in my dream, we were all together and we turned into Waldheim Cemetery and it had been a bright sunny afternoon. But as soon as we walked through the entrance, through the entranceway with the brick and the wrought iron arch, suddenly it got dark and it was night. And we were in the cemetery and we were walking along the path and on either side of us were fresh graves with the dirt mounded up. And so we were freaked out. So we started walking faster, walking faster. And then we see in the distance, where the older graves are, a white specter of a ghost floating. And she was after us. She was evil and she was trying to get us. And at that point we were running and trying to crouch down so she wouldn't see us. And I don't know how the dream ends because I wake up every time. But yeah, that still haunts me. I don't like it. I don't like it at all.

00:22:29 No, no, no. So that's scary, Jen, didn't you, you hang out kiddie corner from that cemetery? Yeah. Right across the street. Now it's a car dealership. But when I was a kid, there used to be a flower shop and a greenhouse on that property. And at some point it had been torn down and nobody was doing anything with this property. So it was basically a vacant lot. Only after they had torn down the flower shop and the greenhouse, they left a lot of construction material and rubble behind. So there were hills of crushed rock and gravel and depressions in the earth and it made a perfect place to ride your bike. So I would ride my bike the four blocks over to that corner on Des Plaines and Roosevelt. And I would ride on the trails. And you could

tell, I wasn't the only person doing it because there was a lot of bike tracks on it. It was so fun, but it was also right up against a wooded area. And then the cemetery. Right. That would have been Forest Home Cemetery, the south end of it. And I would ride my bike, but it was also a lot of fun to ride it through the woods because you could see, like, those, those little trails, not official trails, but just, you know, pathways that people had taken. Right. So I'm exploring the woods adjacent to the Forest Home Cemetery. And I come to this area that almost looks like a little clearing, like it had been cleared out. And then there was a slab of rock. It must have taken a number of people to move this slab of rock. It was flat on one side and it was kind of situated up on tree stumps and on other rocks so that it made a table or more likely, an altar.

00:24:37 And I remember looking, thinking, what is that? And so as I'm coming closer, I see that it's smeared with what I assume and believe to be blood. Oh my God. So of course I froze. And I started looking around me like, Oh my gosh, people do bad things here. And I shouldn't be here. And I was just filled with terror and I got on my bike and I ripped out of there and I never went back unless I had someone with me because I was that spooked by what must have been happening in those woods. Do you believe that? I have two things to tell you. Tell. I found a news article from the Chicago Tribune and this is dated February 26, 1989. And the headline is: Satanic Cults Growing in Preserves. Shut up. I just want to read a little bit, because this is unreal.

00:25:46 "The demented cults that use the woods to sacrifice animals and it is feared, possibly even humans, in satanic rituals, according to law enforcement officers, this happens more than most of us can imagine. And cops themselves are warning each other to be careful, but all they can tell you right now is to stay out of the woods near the cemeteries late at night when fires are flickering, especially when the moon is full." Oh my. And that was in the Chicago Tribune. That was February 26th, 1989. Right around the time I would have been riding my bike through there. Holy... I have goosebumps... Crap! Is that not crazy? That is so crazy. Jill, did you ever have any experiences running into anything associated with satanism or devil worship in Forest Park? So I was at home. I was at our house and our sisters come in and they're like, we just found this devil worship stuff underneath the B&O railroad viaducts. And I was like, shut up. And they're like, no, they were devil worshipers. And I'm like, whatever you guys. I didn't want to tell them, but I went to go check it out. So I walked down Des Plaines and I crawled up underneath the bridge, the B&O railroad viaducts. And I stood up and I started looking around and sure enough, there were these weird perversions of Christian prayers. There were scrawled on the walls and the beams underneath. Just a little bit? Like one or two? No, everywhere. Like if you bent down and went to the next beam and stood up, there were pictures, there were goats. There was, Oh, it was like graffiti with horrible things. That is so troubling. That is so troubling. I, like, got down. I sat on my butt and scooted my way down that hill. And I went home and I was like, Nope, Nope. Oh my gosh. Crazy. There were a lot of creepy areas in the town of Forest Park, even away from the cemeteries. That's true. Tell me a part that you were especially freaked out by, for like no reason. Okay. So the Forest Park park... we had a great park. It was really cool. We had the best part. It was a great pool on Harrison street. Remember? And they had great, uh, equipment, tennis courts, soccer fields, full-sized baseball diamonds... but on the east side of the park where it ends where the tennis courts are, there was, back when we were kids, this lone sort of swing set all by itself and it was creepy over there.

00:28:47 I remember finding broken beer bottles over there and that's where the big kids would go to get into trouble. It was just a creepy area. Yeah. I totally agree with you really. You didn't go over there either? No, not at all. So when you were doing research, did you find that anything happened there? You know, I did. So in the Forest Park Review, the local paper, there was an article from March 29th, 1924. The headline is: Bootlegger Dies on L Platform. "John W. Coleman of Forest Park was found dead at the Hannah station on the L platform. The investigation said that he died from the effects of the booze he had sold, and had fallen from the platform. However, early reports were that he was rumored to be murdered for his dealings." Now this is a thing I know you're looking at me inquisitively, but let me explain because there is no L train platform on Hannah, right? So the railroad (the L train) today goes straight due east to the city. But back in the day where those tennis courts were, according to a 1914 map, that L train curved south, and that man died right there.

00:30:18 Yes, yes. And yes. And he was a bootlegger. Yes. So he was like into, into criminal activity. Yes. And it's weird that you would find beer bottles there. He liked his drink. Wow. I'm not saying it's him, but I'm, I really believe that spirits can inspire people's behavior. Like if you don't know that you're being influenced by something. So for sure, that is so, so crazy. You know, where else you said that you felt creeped out? Where else did I say I felt creeped out? You said you felt creeped out on north Circle where it bends towards Harlem Avenue. That's exactly right. Because I used to walk to Oak Park, downtown Oak Park, for the theater and the stores and the frozen yogurt. Mostly the frozen yogurt. But no, where it turns, Jill, I always got the creeps. Like I was always looking over my shoulder. Like, like it just didn't feel... it felt seedy, like something, something seedy happened there. And I don't know. Can you explain that? I sure can. What you got? What you got? In 1931: Two Hoodlums Shot to Death in George Connor's Saloon at 7228 Circle Avenue. Right where you were describing.

00:31:41 Oh my gosh. So two men Bernard Murphy and Harry Davis were standing at the bar with several other customers. When two other guys came in, the guys that barged in and ordered Bernard and Harry to put their hands up. They said, "Stick them up." But before Bernard and Harry could they, the two men opened fire, killing them both. Hm. Was this also mob related, just out of curiosity? Well, I'm glad you asked. It was later discovered that the men were murdered because they were ordered by "the gang" to kill a certain Sergeant McBride of the Bellwood Police Department. He was a rookie who was getting in the way of mob activity. Unbelievable. Who knew our little Forest Park had so much mob activity and freaking ghosts. And it's insane. So insane. We have so much more to tell. I know we have so many other stories, not just about our home and our personal experiences, but our friends were kind enough to share their experiences in their houses. And not only that, there happens to be a famous haunted house within the city of Forest Park where, um, we went to school like a block away from it. It's a true story. And this particular haunted house was written up in the Chicago Tribune and in different books. We have so much to tell you, so much more to talk about, but we're out of time for today. My goodness, look at the time. So Jill, tell the people where they can find us. Well, check us out at our website at [www.commonmystics.net](http://www.commonmystics.net) Find us on Facebook. Listen to us on Amazon Music, Stitcher, Spotify, Google Podcasts, Apple Podcasts where you can leave us a positive review. And thank you everybody for listening. Thank you so much. Have a good night. Good night.