

Common Mystics Podcast

Episode 10: Where the Soldiers Lie in Shelbyville, TN

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00:00:09 On this episode of Common Mystics, we are led to a haunted cemetery outside of Nashville, Tennessee, to give voice to fallen Confederate soldiers who still roam those grounds. I'm Jennifer James. I'm Jill Stanley. We're psychics. We're sisters. We are Common Mystics. We find extraordinary stories and ordinary places. And this week we found a story outside of Nashville, Tennessee in Shelbyville. We left the Midwest. Finally. And this is our last episode of the season. Our last destination episode. Are you sad inside? Yeah, it's bittersweet. So let's, let's describe what we were doing in Nashville. Well, our lovely sister Kim lives in Nashville and she was so generous to put us up for the weekend. She has a big, beautiful house and she made it hard to return to ordinary life. We had a sister suite. We did have a sister suite in our special wing.

00:01:15 We had a wing. So we started in Nashville at our sister's house and she came with us and she drove us around. She was so sweet. She drove us around Jennifer and I are in the back seat. Jennifer, can you set our intention for us before we get right into it? Sure. We set our intention, like we always do, to find a verifiable story and also to give a voice to the voiceless. And we end up driving south and we see a sign for Lynchburg. But we were already starting to get some impressions in the car. That's true. That's true. And actually I asked Kim where she thought we were going to end up and she said right away, "I think we're going to end up in a cemetery." I do remember, because I said I had a feeling of a cemetery on a hill where I can like overlook a town.

00:02:12 And the cemetery in my mind's eye felt thick with energy. And I was seeing a silhouette of a soldier, with a very long gun. Also I was picturing a border wall with stacked thin stones. What were you thinking? Well, when you said cemetery (you and Kim both said it) and I knew it was going to be a Confederate cemetery. That's true. Just right off the top of my head. I'm like, well, it's going to be Confederate. And then, this is weird though, in my head, I was seeing a nest, (how random!) a large bird's nest with eggs in it. And so I was like, I don't know what this is, but sorry, this is what I'm getting. And also a woman picking cotton, like off the plant. So that's, that's what I was getting.

00:03:03 So yeah, so we're driving South, we're having these conversations and we see the sign for Lynchburg, Tennessee. And both of us were like, we are going to Lynchburg. Absolutely. That's where we're driving. It was calling us. But on the way to Lynchburg, there was this little town, Shelbyville, and it looked really cute. So we took a little detour on our way to Lynchburg and we just drove like in a loop around the town, the town square. And that's where we saw that they had a Habitat for Humanity thrift store. And these girls like a deal. I am all about the thrifting. So we stop at the Habitat for Humanity and we are loose in the store and, I kid you not, one of the first things I see when I walk through the door, there is this table display and on it is a large ceramic statue of a nest with eggs. It was not functioning as anything at all. It was just a really strange ceramic knick knack. It was huge. I thought it was going to be a cookie jar, which might've made some sense. But no, it was just a statue. Super odd... but right away, I was like, this is a bread crumb. For some reason we're supposed to be here. Right. And then do you also remember the cotton? I do. There was... maybe this isn't... I don't go to the South a

whole lot. Maybe this is pretty common, but they had for sale cotton on the plant. Like the little dried crispy cotton plant with the little crispy hands holding the cotton... you know what I mean? And so like, I guess you put them in a vase and it's like a decoration, right? Right. So they had those too. And again, I knew, okay, for some reason we are supposed to be right here.

00:04:53 So Jen is bringing this to our attention. And we're like, we are staying here. That's fair. So we do, we decide to walk around the square. Right. And we're going to all these little antique shops. It's a really cute area. And as we're going through these different antique shops, we noticed that a lot of things in these shops are things like someone had taken out of our childhood, like specific, random, crazy things that our mother owned. (And our mother helps us on these adventures.) So when we see something that belonged to our mother, that is a bread crumb, right? So for instance, there was this Roman perfume bottle, which is so weird. It's like this blue bottle with etchings, a white man in a toga. It's like a Roman scene, like the same perfume bottle. Exactly. Like identical. I've never seen that before and I do a lot of thrifting and antiques. Right. You've never seen anything like that. The only time I've ever seen anything like that was in mom's hutch. Exactly.

00:05:55 Also the fireplace wood holder. The brass one. It kind of looked like a boat shaped holder for the firewood, identical to the one we had. It could have come straight out of our house. I literally have not seen these items since living in our house in Forest Park. So we knew Shelbyville is where our story is. And to tell you the truth, we found a story just off the square. We were just headed out with that story we're saving for next season. So we are headed back to the car and ready to go to Kim's house. And so Kim is like, "You guys, we have to go to the cemetery."

00:06:34 I find about four local cemeteries that we could have driven to. So I choose one and I was like, okay, we're going here. Yeah, we're tired. This is the one, this is the one we're going to. Exactly. The name of it was Willow Mount Cemetery. Right. So right away, we're driving up to the gate. And what do you notice, Jen? I notice that there's a sign there. Do you know what the sign said? The sign said, "Soldiers in the Confederate section of the Willow Mount Cemetery: In the cemetery north of the road are buried Confederate soldiers of the Army of Tennessee who fell while opposing the advance of Rosecrans' Army of the Cumberland through the Liberty Gap and Guy's Gap in late June, 1863. Also buried here are soldiers of Forrest's cavalry killed in minor operations."

00:07:32 So we're like, okay, this is cool. I've personally never been to a Confederate cemetery before because we're from the North. That's true. So I was really excited. And as we drove through the gates into the cemetery, I see off to the right, in quite a distance, I see a statue. And I'm like, Kim, will you please drive us towards that statue? So I get out of the car and I'm looking at the statue and I go right to it. I'm passing a bench, I'm passing a plaque, and I'm looking at the statue. And I'm like, this guy has a really long gun. It was an unusually long gun. I'm not kidding.

00:08:08 Moving on. Okay. I'm already feeling uncomfortable, because I felt as if this was definitely our story, but I'm standing among what I think to be Confederate graves. And I'm like, Oh, this can't be good. This can't be good. Right. Right. So I'm having a bit of a panic attack because, because we find the soldier who has that rifle. Right. And so right away, we're like, Oh crap. Our story is NOT to talk about the Confederacy. Our story is NOT going to be to give voice to Confederate soldiers.

00:08:52 And as Jennifer's going through that... I'm literally like hyperventilating, leaning against the statue. Like, Oh no. Oh no, we are NOT. There's another story in the cemetery.

00:09:04 Yes. I am reading what's inscribed on the side of the statue, on the base. And as I am reading it, I think on the statue base, it says "voiceless." And I'm like, Oh dude. I was like, Jen, I think it says "voiceless." And Jennifer's like, no, it doesn't. And she starts climbing the statue to feel the indentation of the words.

00:09:29 That's fair. Yeah. That's a fair assessment of what was happening. Sure enough. The bitch says, "voiceless." Can you read what was inscribed on the base of the statue? You know, I can. "This marble soldier's voiceless stone is in deathless song shall tell when many a vanished year hath flown the story how ye fell. They rose to defend their homes and firesides they endured every hardship w/o complaint. Their souls rest with God. Their fame is immortal but the bugle call and the battle ball again shall rouse them never. They fought and fell they served as well. Their furlough last forever. Gather the scared dust of the warrior tried and true who bore the flag of our nations trust and fell in a cause though lost still just."

00:10:37 So at this point, there's absolutely no way we can walk away and pretend that we don't know that this is the story we were supposed to tell. Exactly. It was like downloaded in my head. I knew exactly what the story was. We have to give voice to the voiceless Confederate soldiers that fought apparently to keep people enslaved and perpetuate one of the most original evil sins that this country had bore. That's what we thought. That's exactly what we thought. That's what you thought. That's exactly what I thought. I'm sweating right now. Just as you said that. So yeah, in the time where people are burning things and Lady Antebellum is now Lady, and the Dixie Chicks, are just the Chicks. Great. And so now you and I have to pretty much, I'm thinking, defend, slavery... Exactly. Or defend the people that wanted to enslave. Exactly. So now we back away from the statue and we noticed that the statue is in the middle of neat rows of Confederate graves. On the gravestones, on top of them, have numbers on them, right?

00:11:46 Yes, exactly. All neatly lined up in a row, just numbers, no names, but there was a plaque towards the road. So we went to the plaque and there it listed the names, right? The Confederate soldiers who had fallen and were buried there, but the numbers didn't match up with anything. Right. It was very confusing. You couldn't find who you were looking for. Right. Right.

00:12:09 So we thought, all right, we'll figure this out later. Right now, this place is haunted. It felt as if we were being watched. That's when I saw in the periphery of my vision, just to the left, underneath two beautiful trees, I see a shadow figure. Hmm. So we walked towards an area where the shadow figure was, and it was the grave of Willie E. Lipscomb, "Son of Dr. T. and R. Lipscomb. From a mortal wound received in a charge made by Forrest's Escort of which he was a beloved member. Gently we heap the turf above thee With gushing tears beneath the sod, And in our heart of hearts enshrine thee Submissive trusting thee to God."

00:13:02 So right away we recognize, well, he's not buried in the section for the Confederate soldiers, right? Yeah. He was a Confederate soldier who fell with Forrest's Escort. So right away... why is this one not memorialized with the others in that same area? Exactly. What's happening here? Very disjointed, very disjointed. So what did we know at that point, Jill? Unfortunately we knew we were going to give voice to fallen Confederate soldiers, but we wanted to learn more about the state of Tennessee and specifically the city of Shelbyville and

it's position during the Civil War as well as the soldiers buried at Willows Mount Cemetery. Nice. Nice.

00:13:44 Let me tell you a little bit about Tennessee during the Civil War. As many of us remember from our history classes, by 1860, the nation was coming apart. The Southern States were outraged that Abraham Lincoln was elected as president. Right. And of course, many of them decided to secede the union pretty quickly after that because Abraham Lincoln was very firm about his stance to abolish slavery, right? So the ones that succeeded formed the Confederate States of America or the Confederacy. But what, personally, I don't remember from history class is that some of those Southern States were actually divided on the issue. You didn't know that either? No, I did not realize that that some of those Southern States were actually divided on the issue of, not only of slavery, but of succession. Right? And so Tennessee was one of the most divided on the issues.

00:14:48 In fact, in February of 1860, Tennesseans actually voted against leaving the Union. Wow. I know. But Tennessee then later, in June of 1861, did decide and voted to leave the Union and joined the Confederacy. But Tennessee was the very last Southern state to do so. I did not know that. I did not know that either. That's I think really important to understand, because in my mind, I'm thinking Southern state, everybody here loves slavery. Right. But that wasn't the case. Here's another thing: Tennessee actually remained divided even after the war started and even after it seceded from the Union. In fact, Jill, 100,000 Tennesseans joined the Confederate Army. Duh. Yeah, exactly. But 54,000 joined the Union Army. I did not realize that Tennesseans fought for the Union. I had no clue. Also, the people in east Tennessee largely remained loyal even though their state had seceded. And it was in east Tennessee that had a strong anti-slavery tradition. I had absolutely no clue. The very first anti-slavery newspaper in the entire United States was first published in east Tennessee in 1819.

00:16:14 Shut up. I knew nothing of this. Crazy, right? Yeah, absolutely. Well, Bedford County, right in the center of the state where Shelbyville is located, was also divided on the questions that led to the Civil War. And when the time came for action, Bedford County furnished almost as many soldiers for the North as for the South. I did not know that. We were in Bedford County. Yes, yes. We were. And not only this. Shelbyville was so loyal to the union that it actually earned the name "Little Boston." Oh my gosh, this is looking so much more complicated than I ever could imagine in my mind. Exactly. This is not Gone With the Wind. This is nothing like Gone With the Wind. We were in Little Boston. Right. So I have already said how I was so surprised to learn that the state of Tennessee was so divided on the issues that brought about the war and how I didn't even realize that there were Tennesseans who fought for the Union. And I also didn't realize that the Confederacy had a draft. You know, in the movies that you see, the war starts and all the rebels are like rip rearing to fight. Literally, when I think of what you just said, it reminds me of Scarlett O'Hara on the porch of Tara and the two boy callers being like, "we're going to war Miss Scarlet!" And they were so happy. Yes. Oh my God. Yeah. And they were so happy about it. That's how I assumed every Confederate was. Right. Well, yeah,

00:17:58 But that assumption was false. The first draft act in the Confederacy was passed in 1862 and it made any white male between 18 and 35 years old liable to three years of military service. But by 1864, when the Confederacy was running out of the 18 to 35 year olds, the law was changed to 17 to 50 year olds. They were liable to service of an unlimited period of time.

Oh my God. So the draft was really unpopular, first because it made men fight against their will. Right. Right. And then secondly, the law let wealthy men that owned 20 or more slaves avoid the draft. That sucks. That meant they did not have to fight if they didn't want to. This led to a lot of bad feelings. A farmer in North Carolina complained to his wife, "This is a rich man's war, but the poor man has to do the fighting." And ultimately the dying. Oh, so true. What did you find out about Willie? Because we still don't know why he was separated from his unit and buried in a different place.

00:19:18 Well, we knew right away from his gravestone that he was the son of a doctor and that he was part of Forrest's Escort, but we didn't know what that was. Right. I looked into Forrest's Escort and as it turns out, it was a very elite company. In 1862, it was formed as a company of a hundred men that would act as an escort to the daring cavalry commander, General Nathan Bedford Forrest. And they were mounted men. So they were on horses and they were known as Forrest's Escort. Now these men were picked specifically for this elite job and they were provided with the choice arms and the best horses that the county could afford. Wow. Yeah. So this Willie Lipscomb, he was a man that was specifically picked for this elite unit. Right. Now, we also know that Willie was mortally wounded at an engagement at Mount Pleasant, Tennessee on November 23rd, 1864. And his doctor father, Dr. Thomas Lipscomb, came from Shelbyville to attend his dying son during his last hours. So he was actually with his dad when he died three days later. And then his dad was able to take his body back to Shelbyville and he had a proper burial with the family.

00:20:40 Oh, well, that's nice for Willie. Absolutely. And that's why Willy's not buried with the other men? I believe so. So I knew that day when I was standing beneath the soldier with the very long gun, in his shadow, I knew that we were supposed to give a voice to the Confederate soldiers or to the Confederate soldiers that were seemingly being buried around us in these unmarked graves. And so I go online and I try to look up some of the names from the plaque that was in front of the statue. Right? What did you find? Every name that I researched? They were poor young men. They were a part of the draft. They had no choice but to fight because they didn't own 20 slaves. They couldn't hire someone to fight for them. They weren't exempt. There was this one gentleman that I looked up, Robert Nelson, 18... his family, his entire family of like six kids and his two parents, they only owned what was about \$5,000 in today's money. Today's money? Today's money. Wow. So those men buried at Willow Mount, seemingly underneath those marked headstones with the numbers, they were the majority, everyone I looked up was poor. Wow. I still couldn't find out why the headstones didn't have their names.

00:22:17 Well, I found out why. Tell me. So unlike the Union that was organized and had national cemeteries where they buried the fallen Union soldiers, the Confederacy was not organized. And when Confederate soldiers fell, they just buried them. Sometimes they buried them where they fell. And so actually in Shelbyville, those who were buried at the time had simple wooden markers above their graves. And it wasn't until the 1900s that those wooden markers were replaced with the numbered stones that are there today. But here's the thing. Those numbered stones were all put in that same Confederate section, but the bodies were never moved.

00:23:07 The bodies aren't there. The bodies aren't there underneath those numbered stones and nobody knows where they are. Exactly. Oh my God. In fact, some of them have been located off the cemetery premises on private property. Oh my gosh. Exactly. So Jennifer, the

story that we're supposed to tell, do you think that this story is of those Confederates whose remains have not been claimed and buried properly? I absolutely do. Let's debrief. Hit me. Tell me what you got.

00:23:43 I was seeing visions of a nest with eggs and cotton. That totally checks out with that ridiculous nest with eggs at the Habitat. Right. Strange. You were seeing stone walls. Yes. And the cemetery, Willows Mount Cemetery has stone walls. Not only around specific plots, but around the entire perimeter it looked like. And so, obviously, when you were seeing a cemetery on a hill when we were driving in the car... Literally, in the cemetery, when I looked back at you and Kim, I could see Shelbyville. We were up on a hill. We were elevated. Right, right, right. And of course that cemetery was haunted. Oh. And the soldier with the long gun, it was an awful long gun. Easy. The soldier with the long gun, literally was what I saw in my head as we were driving towards Shelbyville. Right. And which was the exact thing, the exact image on top of that memorial statue.

00:24:44 And don't forget about the statue monument saying "voiceless, which is always our intention, to give voice to the voiceless. Exactly. How nuts is that? What about your Psychic impression of Willie? When we were in the cemetery, I believe it was the ghost of Willie that called us over to that grave. Why do you think Willie made himself known to you? I think he wanted to make it known that he was somehow separate from those soldiers who had unmarked graves. Think about it. He had a name on his grave. He did. And not only that, his body was actually in the grave where his headstone was. And he was with his family. And let's not forget, he was privileged. He was part of a privileged cavalry company, Forrest's Escort, and his family, let's not forget, was one of wealth and prestige. They were very active in the community at the time. In fact, they called his father when he was dying.

00:25:41 Oh my gosh, that's such a good point. Right. And so he got to die with, with at least his dad there with him. That's very, very different, very special and very different from the rest of the Confederates that are buried there. And to tell you the truth, when you called me with the research and Willie, you spoke with disdain when you described that. Oh, sorry, Willie. It was a knee-jerk reaction. Really? She can be kind of mean sometimes.

00:26:10 Hmm Hmm. Anyway. So Jill, I think I know what Willie wanted to say to us. What do you think the other soldiers wanted us to say? You knew from the beginning that we were supposed to give them a voice, but what do they want to say?

00:26:26 Jen, I'm really ashamed of myself, to be honest with you. Because before doing this research, I assumed that I knew these people and I assumed I knew what motivated them to fight. And I didn't know any of that. And so what they were saying was, "You don't know me." You don't know me. I just got the chills. I knew in the cemetery, like I said, I knew it was like downloaded into my brain, that these people needed a voice. But even in their need and then being so specific bringing us there, I still didn't want to tell their story because I just fundamentally didn't like them. And didn't like what I assumed they believed in. Wow. But they weren't all the same. They weren't, they weren't. They were victims of their circumstance, many of them, and they fought bravely. They did. And we, if nothing else, should honor that sacrifice because I wouldn't, I wouldn't fight like that. I can't think of a single thing that I would give my life for, not a single principle that I would willingly rush in the battle and lay down and die for. I mean, that alone, even if we don't agree with them, deserves respect. Right. And we don't know them. We don't know. We didn't know that they were drafted and they were made to fight for a

cause that was really not going to benefit them. Anyway, most of them weren't slave holders and had nothing to do with slavery. So although we didn't want to tell the story for obvious reasons, I'm glad that I did, because I learned something personal about it. Not to be so judgmental and not to assume, not to make an assumption about how someone is motivated or what their intentions are.

00:28:15 Right. It really opened up my eyes. And usually when we tell a story, we always try to bring something new to it, some new information. I think this is the first time that we're not really bringing new information. We're bringing a new perspective hopefully. Right. And hopefully it will ring true for some of our listeners too. Well, and honestly, we're bringing a new perspective about healing and empathy in these current circumstances. So topical. Exactly. And I think that's why we were, that's another reason why they called us. They were like, "Hey, not only are you being an asshole, but also this is relevant today. So talk about it and shut up." Exactly. Stop your whining. Get it together. So Jennifer? Yes, Jill? As we said before, this is our last destination podcast of the first season. What does that mean to our listeners?

00:29:11 We are going to take a much needed break. That's right. We're going to take a much needed rest. So all those people listening, stay tuned. We're going to drop bonus episodes every so often just to keep it going and keep the momentum. And we want to say hello and thank you to the newest countries. Listening to us. Well, we have listeners in Israel. Yay! The Netherlands. Yay! France. Yay! England. Yay! and Wales. Yay! That is amazing. Thank you guys so much. And thank you, of course, for our hometown listeners and our listeners here at home in America. Thank you so much for listening. Jill, tell the people where they can find us. Well, check out our website, commonmystics.net. Find us on Facebook, listen and subscribe on Stitcher, Spotify, Amazon Music, Google Podcasts, and Apple Podcasts, where you can leave us a positive review to help other people find us. Thank you so much to all of you who have supported us through season one. We love you all. Thank you. Have a good night. Thank you. Good night.