

LEGENDS OF GHOSTS, MINERS AND GUNFIGHTS By Patricia Arrigoni

BISBEE, SOUTHEASTERN ARIZONA – The ghost stories started in Tombstone before I had even reached my destination of Bisbee. Traveling with my sister, we had stopped off in this famous old western town to see a reenactment of the gunfight at the OK Corral where, 127 years ago, Wyatt, Morgan and Virgil Earp, along with Doc Holliday, shot it out with Billy and Ike Clanton, and Tom and Frank McLaury. The date was October 26, 1881. In less than thirty seconds, three men were wounded and three more lay dead. Wyatt Earp survived untouched and was taken to the Cosmopolitan Hotel where he was placed under house arrest.

The Cosmopolitan Hotel was later turned into a hospital and today is a shop called Whistle Stop Gifts at 430 Allen St. owned by Sandy Nikkari. I mentioned that I was headed for Bisbee and Sandy began telling tales of ghosts who lived at the former Stock Exchange in that town.

Upstairs is the old Bisbee Inn (now Hotel Lamore) where she was strangely locked in a bathroom, felt blankets being pulled off her all night and later saw a soldier in her room. He was dressed in a uniform from the Mexican War and when he saw she was awake, tipped his hat saying “Ma’am” and then faded through a wall.

Sandy, by this time had developed an upset stomach and went downstairs looking for a soda. She walked into a common room around 2:00 am and found it full of men watching TV. Suddenly the TV went off and all the men disappeared.

Sandy’s own store in Tombstone is also haunted with a group of ghosts she calls the “Night Crew.” There is a young boy, age 14, from the East coast who ran away and joined the Cavalry. He was shot in a battle and brought to the hospital.

Then there was the woman who died in childbirth, plus more ghosts running up and down stairs causing doors to open and slam closed, pictures to fall off walls, and items to levitate off shelves. Once Sandy saw a man come out of her shop's bathroom and walk right through a cabinet.

More ghost stories were waiting for me when I reached Bisbee. The wife of a friend there told me she was clairvoyant and was going to do an exorcism of a house down the street later that afternoon. She explained that when a person knows they are going to die, like someone about to crash in an airplane or a soldier in battle, then he/she may leave their body shortly before death. These ghosts live in a disengaged state and hang around.

When my friend does an exorcism, she goes into a trance and asks the entities to identify themselves and then to move on to a better place. She mentioned that the old mines in Tombstone and Bisbee are full of ghosts, the result of many tragic accidents.

“Old Bisbee” built in the hills of the Mule Mountains only six miles north of Mexico, has, over the years, morphed from a mining town into an artist's colony with antique shops, art galleries and stores featuring Native American jewelry and other artifacts.

A fascinating place to visit is the Belleza Fine Art Gallery at 27 Main St. owned by the Renaissance House, a refuge for homeless women and their children. Besides a gallery full of high quality art, the store features Adirondack garden furniture with chairs, rockers, ottomans and porch swings actually made by the women living in the Renaissance House.

This woodworking program was begun by Sam Presley, an architect from Berkeley, CA. who recruited his sailing friend, Grady Meadows, to help him. Every cent from the sale of the furniture, and percentages from the art, goes directly to help the women.

While I missed taking the Old Bisbee Ghost Tour, I did join a walking tour of the town with Michael London, and was able to visit the Bisbee Mining and Historical Museum and take a Queen Mine Tour. Our guide for the mine tour was Ron McGinnis, a former miner himself, who explained there were 2400 to 2600 miles of tunnels in this old Phelps-Dodge copper mine. I signed a waver that said if anything horrible happened to me like a cave-in, death by poison air, or a dozen other catastrophes, the city of Bisbee who runs the tours would not be responsible. Swell...

We donned yellow slicker jackets, hard hats and a belt with a big battery which provided a light. Our little group then climbed astride a miniature railroad and rode off into the subterranean tunnels. Ron told us many tales of the mines including the cruel jokes played on new employees and how they blew up walls of copper with dynamite. As a guide he was cheerful, funny and very informative.

Other activities in Bisbee include the Old Bisbee Repertory Theater which specializes in musical comedy, and the Lavender Jeep Tours which take visitors over the “twisting back road and high trails” of Bisbee.

IF YOU GO:

Getting there: Fly into Phoenix or Tucson and rent a car. Take I #10 south to Tucson and Benson, then #80 southeast to Tombstone and Bisbee (90 miles southeast of Tucson.)

Hotels: **Gym Club Suites Hotel**, 39 Howell Ave., Bisbee, AZ 85603. 520-234-5921; www.bisbeelandmark.com. Remodeled red brick building holds 17 units. Our room, 201 contained a queen bed, full kitchen and loft upstairs with another queen bed plus a small bath. Downstairs was furnished with two sets of couches and a footstool, flat TV, & a high table with 4 stools. I paid \$233.20 for two nights which included tax. Rates: \$85 to \$185. No maid service

Copper Queen Hotel, 11 Howell Ave., Bisbee, AZ 85603, 1-520-432-2216, www.copperqueen.com; email: info@copperqueen.com. Single \$122 up; double \$177 plus tax. Built in 1902 with a lovely lobby furnished in a Victorian décor, a large dining room, old fashioned saloon and guest swimming pool.

Restaurants

Winchester's Restaurant at the Copper Queen Hotel, "A Mesquite Grille" serving breakfast, lunch, dinner and dessert. Dine inside or on the verandah. We enjoyed lunch there with a friend trying a variety of dishes from Mexican food to a salad, sandwich and omelet. All were delicious. 11 Howell Ave. Bisbee, AZ. 85603; (520) 432-2216.

Bisbee Coffee Company – Located in the Copper Queen Plaza on Main St., this breakfast and sandwich shop also features homemade pies and other pastries. (520) 432-7879.

Bisbee Visitor Center: For information on the Ghost Tour, Queen Mine Tours, Bisbee Mining & Historical Museum, Lavender Jeep Tours, restaurants and accommodations: www.discoverbisbee.com. #2 Copper Queen Plaza, P.O. Box 1642, Bisbee, AZ 85603; 520-432-3554.

Bisbee Chamber of Commerce: For relocation/business information. 1 Main Street (PO Box BA) Bisbee, AZ. 85603. (520) 432-5421; Email: chamber@bisbearizona.com.