One, Two, Three, Four, There’s a Shadow in Your Dorm:

A Scientific Investigation of Goucher’s Ghost Stories

Part 4:

There are many scientific theories as to why people have ghostly encounters. As someone who believes in the afterlife, I could just say Ms. Everly had an actual spiritual experience, and close this part of the case. But not before I tested all possibilities. Voices are often heard by people with mental disorders like schizophrenia. But my witness did not mention having any such issues, and my personal evaluation of her during our conversation confirmed that she is completely mentally stable, as were the rest of the people I met. But when I began my research into what she might have experienced, I got some really surprising results. It turns out that hearing voices and other sounds isn’t necessarily a sign of mental illness. In fact, according to modern science, it is now considered normal. The explanation for this comes from the fact that while one is growing up, they are surrounded by a social circle. Parents, friends, grandparents. Many of the people in this circle were people you actually looked up to. And sometimes, you sacrificed things you wanted to do, in order to do things they would like you to. Becoming an adult, you realize you are now on your own, and can do absolutely everything you desire. But because your brain often works like an old treasure chest, it sometimes stores these memories of uncertainty deep inside. Whenever you decide to do something you really like, the conflict comes, causing your subconscious to basically split into two opposing sides. (WhyDoPeople.net). This could stand as an explanation for people who do not feel confident and satisfied in life. But this theory cannot work in my case. First, Ms. Everly seemed to be telling me that instead of being inside her head, the voices she heard seemed to be coming from inside the empty building. Was this another case of acoustic pareidolia? Seemed too far-fetched. But there is one other possible explanation. When Ms. Everly told me about her having had many previous spirit encounters in her life, I did not give any kind of special attention to it, as it was not related to the Goucher hauntings. But while looking at how I could scientifically explain her testimony, I came across a very interesting fact, that, on the other side, is a no brainer: The more you’ve experienced something before, the more likely it is you will blame it for something else later. And, of course, the greater your fear of something is, the greater the chance your brain will conjure it. I am not going to reveal any of Ms. Everly’s non-Goucher paranormal sightings in this article, as I have not asked her permission to do so. However, I can now paint a clearer picture of what had actually happened: That day, she had come down to Julia Rogers for cleaning. As soon as she came onto that floor, one of three things might have happened:

**Theory 1: Ms. Everly heard echoes of a conversation occurring somewhere else in the building.** Her mind, having already gone through a lot involving the spirit world, immediately went to the supernatural explanation. This can be confirmed by the fact that, as mentioned before, walls in some places of Goucher are so thick people can hear absolutely everything. The downside of it is that my examination of Julia Rogers showed me the walls in that spot aren’t thick enough for noise to come through. Echoes, however, are still a possibility.

**Theory 2: Ms. Everly fell victim to acoustic pareidolia, misidentifying other sounds as voices.** As someone who is aware of the existence of spirits, she is a suitable candidate. However, if the voices were clear, and were actually saying things, something her responses seemed to suggest, then this theory must be rejected.

**Theory 3: Prank.** Pranks are still possible, but not confirmed. I have asked several people whether pranks are known to be played on students, and they all responded that they are not that common.

As for Katherine Shane, she reported strange noises and a slam on her desk. Without examining her former dorm room, I cannot give one specific explanation to what she experienced. But I can certainly say that she may have misidentified another sound for a slam, bringing us back to pareidolia. She did not specify any further what the “strange noises” actually sounded like, leading us to the conclusion that they could have been made by anything and anyone on campus, with imagination once again attributing them to something mystical. There are also a variety of sounds that sound extremely similar to a slam, and they don’t necessarily come from something falling inside the room. Finally, as Ms. Shane herself said, the bottle might have fallen from her desk due to wind. But that wind does not necessarily come from open windows. The gust that knocked over Ms. Shane’s bottle could have come from many places, such as a small opening between the window frame and the wall, or the campus’s air purifying system. It upset me greatly that my witness could not recall the room she stayed in the previous year, in order for me to go and examine it. However, any of these theories is extremely likely in the setting we all live.

There was also the fact that Katherine Shane saw someone trying to open her door, without seeing any shadows underneath it. This could be explained by the fact that the person behind the door, either a prankster or a lost student, was standing at a considerable distance, or at a different angle when touching the doorknob. Even though a different building from Mary Fischer, Gamble also has its door problems. Another witness told me he had seen his door move back and forth by itself, without actually opening. However, he later explained his theory that the hole where the lock was meant to go was simply too big, with the incoming wind having no difficulty in rocking the door, making it look like it was being pushed or pulled. My examination of the lock area confirmed this. However, what I had a chance to earlier witness myself, seemingly lacked any possible explanation.

I was speaking to another student, who said that she had never experienced anything supernatural herself, although her friend who apparently did, was in class at that moment. Coming out of her room to talk to me, she closed the door behind her, and turned to face me. As the two of us were chatting away, I noticed the handle of the door briefly move downward. For a second, I almost stepped aside, thinking someone else wanted to come out of the room. But nothing else happened, and when I asked the lady whether someone else lived with her, she replied negatively, even offering me to come in. I thanked her and refused, her offer having refuted all possibility of her lying. When she opened the door, I did notice that her windows were open, and a strong current was blowing. But even such a current could not have caused a door handle to be pushed. In fact, at first I didn’t even pay much attention to what happened that moment, dismissing it as my own imagination. But once I returned to my dorm, I began to analyze what I had experienced using the scientific method. First of all, I am myself a person who is extremely easily affected and manipulated by what others tell me. Minutes before the incident had occurred, I had been told of a similar incident happening to Katherine Shane. Although I was not thinking excessively of it, it most probably remained in my subconsciousness. When I looked at the door handle, my consciousness brought the incident to the surface, causing me to misidentify a loose handle for a ghost. This is supported by the fact that some of the handles on these doors were somehow loose, therefore able to be moved by minor physical forces. Whatever it was, it surely wasn’t an intense pulling and pushing of the door handle, but rather a small movement that looked like someone was trying to come out into the hallway. Although my subconsciousness might have distorted the picture and created a false memory due to me constantly replaying the incident in my mind, I now think it did look like the combination of a loose door handle, imagination, and my easily affected psychological state.

Earlier, I had visited the Office of Public Safety to inquire about any footage they might have had of the October 2011 incident, involving the ghost tour that ended in students being trapped behind an archive door. As I somewhat expected, no footage of the happening has been preserved, mostly because the recording tape could not function after so many years. However, after everything I had experienced in Gamble, I could now properly analyze the events of that night, giving them a possible explanation.

That evening, a group of students had come down to the archives for an exciting ghost tour of the facility. As soon as everything was done, the students decided to exit the building, only to find out that the door was closed, and that, when they attempted to open it, it simply wouldn’t do so. (*Ghosts of Goucher*). The article I just cited also specifies that none of them had closed the door when entering, and that none of the doors had been locked. However, as I have stated earlier, the building became the new archives in 2009. That would mean that the locks used were not old. But many times, new equipment and parts can malfunction in an even worse way than old, especially if installed incorrectly. After a brief examination of web images of various locks, I’ve come to know that enough times, the locking mechanism fails to take the exact position it is supposed to, in order to properly open. This could be either due to a foreign object stuck inside, or rusted interior parts that are not visible without a closer look. Sometimes, one even ends up needing tools, such as screwdrivers, to remove the bolts and open the door. The door wasn’t closed by any of the students. But that doesn’t mean it couldn’t have closed by itself. Of course, not because of a ghost, but physical forces instead. The fact that no one heard it does not make it any more mysterious. How much noise a closing door makes sometimes depends on how far it is opened. If the students opened the door just a smidge, it probably wouldn’t attract anyone’s attention when closing, especially if they decided to quickly go about with their tour. If the door was opened widely, there is still a chance that it was very well maintained and bolted in place. That would cause it to close very slowly and soundlessly. As for the question why it couldn’t open, it was most likely due to its lock having stopped itself in a very unsuitable position. The month being October, humidity might have played a role in the incident as well. As the article says, a professor unlocked the door about 10 minutes later, by “pushing, using her entire body,” (*Ghosts of Goucher*). Although I am not familiar with the lock system in the archives, and didn’t get a chance to examine them, the explanation now becomes even easier. The pressure from the mass of a human body got the jammed lock out of its position, allowing the door to open. This also explains the fact that, when opening and closing the door as a trial, professor Kristine Krieger saw that the problem was entirely gone. To confirm this, I sent an email to the Archives, inquiring about possible door problems and their frequency. Though I never received an answer, this theory is entirely possible.

I had already spent an hour in Gamble, getting more ghostly mysteries than actual scientific answers. Furthermore, I had no way to leave even if I wanted to. Gamble has no elevator and a very simplistic, but long staircase. This makes the building entirely unsuitable for people with special needs, such as myself, and if I were to choose another topic to write for my article, it would probably be the inconveniences of Gamble for the disabled. But I wasn’t going to give up. I saw the fact that I was stuck as an opportunity to collect more evidence. Swallowing the pains of my hungry stomach, I walked up and down the hallways, knocking on some more doors, to no avail. I stopped to talk to a student who had just come out from the bathroom area. As I sat down on the seat of my walker, my eyes looked upon the bathroom ceiling, and I froze. *Could it be?*-I thought to myself. On the bathroom ceiling, right next to the door, was a small opening compartment. It looked like an opening for electrical wires and other such apparatus. Nothing made it look too suspicious, besides one fact: The lid of the compartment was covered with a strange substance, looking like dirt. Or, more precisely, like *mold*. I asked the student what he thought about it. His response was something along the lines of: “Yeah, I guess it might be mold.” He also added something like: “I think there’s generally a lot of mold in here. I think if you look, you’ll find a lot”. Bingo. Clue. Breakthrough. Now all I had to do was look a little deeper, and if I did, I could prove the theory that had just come into my mind.