

Haunted jail—a spook's tour

By JIM WILLIAMS
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It was terrifying. There I was, on a dark, chilly night, standing in front of a spooky old building reputed to be haunted.

I am not superstitious. But suddenly I had a feeling of tension — a sensation of presences all around me. They thronged closer, until it seemed I could sense their breathing, hear their shrill cries. . .

. . . then the barred door creaked open and a figure appeared, cloaked in blue.

"All right, don't push!" she rapped. "Seven at a time. Stay together and follow the guide."

It was Jean Sorensen of the Pottawattamie County Historical Society, opening the Haunted Squirrel Cage Jail to the Tuesday night crowd.

People had been lined up around the jail's corner into the county courthouse sidewalk well before the 7 p.m. opening time. It was a mixed crowd — lots of little kids, a little apprehensive about entering the looming brick hulk; junior-high kids, determined to be cool no matter what; and a scattering of adults, some looking sheepish but expectant.

IT LOOKED like the visitors would get their money's worth as the first group vanished into the jail, escorted by a guide. Those in line could not see inside, but they could plainly hear a chorus of amplified clanks, groans, gongs and organ music, punctuated by recorded shrieks — and real shrieks from the patrons.

More groups were funneled in at intervals, to emerge down the stairs about 10 minutes later. Those in line studied their reactions. One little boy was howling, struggling in his father's arms; teen-age girls

tripped down smiling, but glancing back over their shoulders.

"Ah, it wasn't nothin'," said a junior-high-age boy as he passed friends in line — but he looked a little edgy, too.

COUNCIL BLUFFS' haunted houses, those traditional Halloween fund-raisers, seem to be operating under a curse this year. Sometime Tuesday afternoon, Mrs. Sorensen said, somebody broke into the jail and stole almost \$250 worth of masks and decorations. When the theft was discovered, she called the groups working in the house, and they improvised enough to let the show go on.

The Historical Society was not the only victim. Thieves got into the Council Bluffs Jaycees' Haunted Forest, a mile east of the river on Gifford Road, and stole many of the decorations before it even opened.

The March of Dimes haunted house at 1518 S. 8th St. was also hit by thieves Tuesday or Wednesday, but nothing appeared missing, police said.

Contrary weather also bedeviled the scare vendors. Monday's surprise snowfall hampered the Jaycees' outdoor show, while the cold snap that followed may have spooked some patrons reluctant to wait in lines to enter the other two.

But the initial rush had brought in over 130 people, paying \$1 each toward the society's fund for restoring historic buildings. It was down from the over 700 visitors the jail had on its Friday opening night, she said, but not bad for a cold school night.

It seemed to be settling down a little for Mrs. Sorensen, still standing in the doorway counting out groups, when everything went dark.

THE DIM BULB over the door was dead. The streetlights had faded to a sickly glimmer. From inside the jail, the recorded screams had faded — replaced by real screams, lots of them.

"Stay quiet!" voices bellowed inside. "Stay quiet and don't move!" Mrs. Sorensen grabbed a flashlight from a guide and bounded into the dark.

After a few minutes, the lights came on again. Patrons came out looking shaky, but relieved. So did Mrs. Sorensen.

"If I get through this night," she smiled, "it'll be a miracle!"

Eventually, I gathered up my courage enough to join a group and enter the jail itself.

From dim, blue-lit cells, awful things I could barely see shrieked, beckoned and grabbed at me. In one cell a man had hanged himself, and a crazed woman danced wildly with the blood-stained corpse.

Oregon cat going to the dogs

PORTLAND, Ore. (AP) — Venus, a black cat, is nursing five babies.

Three are female kittens she gave birth to at the Oregon Humane Society. Two are female puppies who became her babies when they were brought to the society.

Air pumps up gasoline mileage

NEW YORK (AP) — A recent survey by the Illinois Institute of Technology found that 50 to 70 percent of tires checked were underinflated during the summer and 60 to 80 percent had the same deficiency during the winter.

Not only is proper inflation crucial to the performance and safety of tires, says Firestone's

Every time I turned a corner, something grabbed at me or leered horribly into my face.

Finally, I escaped down the stairs. Something big and furry jumped out and snarled as a final farewell.

After a little over an hour, the crowd had thinned out. The guides ventured back in the cell cage, shouting, "Ten-minute break!"

The recorded shrieks and groans stopped, replaced by rock 'n' roll from an FM station. The ghouls pulled up their rubber masks and crawled out from their corners. They streamed outside for conversation, drinks, cigarettes.

"BOY, IS IT cold in here!" complained a girl tricked up to resemble a severed head resting on a box.

"Want to trade costumes?" offered a husky young man in a gorilla suit. "The sweat just runs down my face in this

With no nursing dogs in residence, the society staff gave the two puppies to Venus, who graciously accepted them.

Venus and her five babies now live at the home of Mardi Jacob, a humane society volunteer and field director of Pet Pride of Oregon, an organization of cat enthusiasts.

director to consumer affairs Jack B. Scarecliff, it also helps lower gas consumption, since underinflation increases rolling resistance.

Scarecliff said air pressure should be checked at least monthly, and preferably weekly, with an accurate gauge.

thing."

The husky young gorilla said he was one of several security guards spread through the jail, costumed so they would blend in with the other horrors — "plain-clothes guards," in a weird sort of way.

"We've had surprisingly little trouble," he said. Oh, there was one joker in a ski jacket who went through during the weekend, kicking and poking people. They had not caught him — but they were looking for him, if he came back.

Then the music stopped. "Group coming!" somebody yelled. The horrors jumped back in their cells and got ready for work again, as another group came through with its guide.

Being a guide apparently does not exempt one from the predations of the haunters.

"WHEN I TAKE those kids through, they don't know how scared I am," said one girl. "I'm just scared out of my wits every time. Whenever I jump, those little kids just grab onto me."

"I wasn't scared until after I saw 'The Fall of the House of Usher,'" said another. A third complained that she had lost her guide's badge, and the monsters harassed her unmercifully.

What kind of person would want to become a creature in a haunted jail? Almost any kind, Mrs. Sorensen said. There are 210 people involved, members of 12 groups — including a church and a citizens-band radio club.

"They're having fun, Mrs. Sorensen said of the CBers. "They want to reserve for next year."

And there is certainly



Sorting Supplies . . . at Mercy Hospital are William McBride (left), 112 Midland Drive, and Carl Fillman, 329 Mt. Vernon Drive, two of the volunteers placed with area agencies through

the Volunteer Bureau. The men became volunteers about two years ago to keep busy after retirement, they said. —Nonpareil photo.



Opening For Business . . . at the haunted jail, a tuxedoed vampire sizes up potential victims. Thieves and bad weather have haunted the

traditional Halloween happenings, but organizers still report good turnouts. —Nonpareil photo.

something about turning temporary ghost — a sort of power. One of the women from the "models' room" had to leave early, so I slipped behind a curtain into her nook.

"GROUP COMING!" somebody yelled. I held my breath as unseen feet trooped by me. Then, through a slit in the curtain, I stretched out my hand — and gently, but firmly,

clasped it around someone's neck.

The someone leaped and screamed in horror. YEEEEOW! It was great! They'll make a ghoul of me yet.