**Michigan Urban Legends**

Compiled from various sources

**Question: What is an Urban Legend?**

Most people have heard the story, usually imparted as a thing that "really happened to a friend of a friend," of the crazy old grandma who tried to dry her damp poodle in the microwave. The dog exploded, sad to say, and Grandma has never been the same since. The story isn't true, of course; it's an *urban legend* circulating since the 1970s. It describes a mishap that *could* have happened, but we have no evidence, nor any good reason to believe, that it did. Plus, there's a *moral (or life lesson):* newfangled technologies, although great for humanity, can also be exceedingly dangerous when misused. It's a horror story with a point!

**Answer:**

An urban legend is an questionable, secondhand story, told as true and just plausible enough to be believed, about some horrific, embarrassing, *ironic* (doubtful) or exasperating series of events that supposedly happened to a real person. As in the example above, it's likely to be framed as a cautionary tale.

Whether factual or not, an urban legend is meant to be believed. There is a lack of evidence, however; the teller of an urban legend is more likely to rely on skillful storytelling and reference to speculative (but trustworthy) sources — e.g., "it really happened to my hairdresser's brother's best friend" — to convince hearers of its supposed truth.

Urban legends are a type of *folklore*, defined as the handed-down beliefs, stories, songs and customs of ordinary people ("the folk"). One way to differentiate them from other narrative forms like popular fiction, TV, or news stories is to compare where they come from and how they're passed on.

Unlike fiction or drama, which are usually produced by individual authors, urban legends tend to emerge spontaneously and are rarely traceable to a single source. Again unlike fiction or drama,
urban legends are spread primarily via interpersonal communication (like email or campfire stories), from individual to individual, and only in unusual cases through mass media (like TV or radio). And lastly, urban legends change over time due to repetition and embellishment; hence no two versions are ever exactly alike; there can be as many variations as there are tellers of the tale.

Common Characteristics of Legends

Accordingly, a typical urban legend will exhibit most or all of the following characteristics:

- It's a narrative (a story).
- It's alleged to be true.
- It's just plausible (sometimes just barely plausible) enough to be believed.
- Its truth is unproven.
- It's of spontaneous (or indeterminate) origin.
- It's likely to take the form of a cautionary tale.
- It varies in the telling.
- It circulates by being passed from individual to individual, either orally or in written form (e.g., via fax, photocopy or email).
- It's attributed to ‘supposedly’ trustworthy secondhand sources (e.g., "a friend of a friend," "my sister's best friend," etc.).

So, what does this have to do with us? Well, the great state of Michigan is FULL of wonderful, mysterious, and sometimes very spooky urban legends. There are many great websites you can find more information, but I thought we'd share a few of the more interesting ones here.

The Ghost of Minnie Quay

Forever searching for her lost love who was killed on the Great Lakes, Minnie Quay appears now and then, walking the shores of Lake Huron near Forester, Michigan, gazing longingly into the horizon, hoping a ship appears but always left heartbroken when no ship is seen.
During the 1800’s, the tiny town of Forrester was busy with the lumbering business. Minnie, who was fifteen at the time, fell in love with one of the sailors who came to port there. Minnie’s parents didn’t want their daughter with a sailor and the budding romance was forbidden by them. During 1876, a spring storm took down the boat Minnie’s lover worked on and he died. Torn with grief and the fact she didn’t get to say goodbye to him the last time she saw him, she jumped off the pier in Forrester and killed herself in the waters of Lake Huron.

They say Minnie can be seen along the shores of Lake Huron, looking off into the distance. Some women have even claimed she has called to them from the water, trying to lure them into death the same way she died within the cool waters.

**The Witchy Wolves of the Omer Plains**

The Witchy Wolves is an old Chippewa legend that has been passed down for generations. According to legend, there is a spirit animal - half dog and half wolf - that protects the souls and the graves of Native American warriors. It will attack anyone that disturbs the final resting place of Chippewa warriors.

Somewhere along the line, the legend became well-known in the mid-Michigan area and became associated with the Omer Plains. There are stories of teenagers in the 1970’s driving out to the Plains in search of the mysterious “Witchy Wolf”. For those who don't know the area, the Omer Plains is a rather eerie area. It is mostly forested, undeveloped and is divided by the Rifle River. If you travel down Jose Road, it will take you through the heart of the Omer Plains. Oh, and did I mention that there is a cemetery along that road - an old one?

**Michigan Mystery Cats**

The first of many "mystery cat" reports from southern Michigan began in February 2002. Near Niles, on February 2, the Young family saw a cream-colored large cat, the size of a German shepherd, 40 feet from their home’s French doors. They decided it looked like a cougar. The Youngs continued
to watch the animal as it strolled east toward Edwards Way, a subdivision off of Brush Road. Jesse Young then went to the home of a neighbor, an avid hunter, and the two checked the footprints in the yard. The animal had crossed the flower garden, about 25 feet from the patio door, leaving pugmarks of a large cat. The Youngs’s report was the first of many, and the Michigan Department of Natural Resources had an ongoing battle with the media all year, stating they did not feel these were really cougars. The DNR stated: "There is no substantive evidence that there are naturally occurring cougars in Michigan. Some argue that there are, but we don't have any good evidence there are." Of course, don’t tell that to the Youngs and the other witnesses that saw these mystery cats.

The Paulding Light

Every night, strange circular lights of red, green and blue can be seen moving about. The Paulding Light is one of Michigan’s biggest mysteries and is a public spot for everyone to visit. Sometimes the lights seem to follow the power lines nearby. Since the lights were first seen, legends surround the lights. One legend states that the lights are the ghost of a railroad brakeman; others say it is the ghost of a Native American. The National Forest Service has a sign where the lights can best be viewed. To this day, no one has been able to come up with an explanation for the lights. The light is most likely something natural, but for the time being, it gets filed under the mysteries of Michigan.

Michigan Stonehenge

Vikings, Phoenicians, Egyptians or the lost tribe of Israel in Michigan? What?! According to author Mark Jager and his Mystic Michigan series of books, Michigan might have been home to these four groups of people at some point. Writing his books based on mysterious archaeological evidence found in Michigan, Jager tells about a stone circle similar in nature to Stonehenge found on Lake Michigan’s Beaver Island that could have been built by any of these ancient groups. I raised my
eyebrow when I read this and wondered why us Michiganders had never heard of such an extraordinary discovery. According to the book, Beaver Island doesn’t want it to be a tourist attraction. There are “thirty-nine stones forming a 397 foot circle.” The stones vary in size and as to how the stones got there is the biggest mystery of them all.

The stones were discovered a little over two decades ago in 1985. Terry Bussey was looking for Native American artifacts and found something she wasn’t planning on. When she came upon the stones, something told her that they weren’t placed there by nature. There seemed to be a pattern and some stones appeared to have been hand carved. Bussey used a compass, spent a couple nights under the stars with the stones, and noticed that the stones connect to star positions and later research found the stones were aligned to the midsummer solstice. Some archaeologists shrug the stones off as nothing, while others speculate they were placed by the Mound Builders from thousands of years ago.

Questions

1. What is the definition of an URBAN LEGEND?

2. What is a MORAL? 

3. What does IRONIC mean?

4. What is the definition of FOLKLORE?

5. Write down THREE characteristics of Legends:
   A. 
   B. 
   C. 

6. Choose 1 of the Michigan Legends and tell why it is so unusual or strange:

7. Choose 1 of the Michigan Legends and write a short synopsis (summary) of it below:
Michigan Urban Legends

SURVEY: Record important titles, subtitles, bold-faced words, captions, etc.

QUESTION: Write out at least 3 "Who, What, When, Where, Why, or How" questions based on your survey.
1.) __________________________________________________________________________________________
2.) __________________________________________________________________________________________
3.) __________________________________________________________________________________________

READ: As you read, look for and write down answers to the questions from above.
1.) __________________________________________________________________________________________
2.) __________________________________________________________________________________________
3.) __________________________________________________________________________________________

RECITE: in the space below, list 10 new pieces of information you learned in this article

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