

The Dark Side of South Main
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Before there were the Real Housewives of Atlanta, Miami, Beverly Hills or wherever, there were the Desperate Housewives. Yes, I will admit that I was glued to my TV on Sunday nights for eight seasons as I watched the not so normal lives of the four main characters on Wisteria Lane. The series started off with Mary Alice Young committing suicide because she was being blackmailed over a secret she had kept hidden for years. Mary Alice was then the narrator of the show as one person after another, fifty-two in all, were killed off during the next eight years. The final scene of the show left me thinking about the secrets we all keep hidden and if the ghosts of the past residents of the houses and neighborhoods we live in are indeed watching over us. As most of you know, I live on South Main Street and while my neighborhood has not seen fifty-two deaths in eight years, it has seen its share of tragic deaths over the decades, a few of which I will be discussing tonight in my paper titled *The Dark Side of South Main*.

We will start our journey in January of 1883 at the house located at 1702 South Main Street and the story of Ermine Stoner Tandy. Ermine was born into a wealthy farming family near Pembroke. She was a beautiful young woman and at the age of twenty-one married W.T. Tandy, also twenty one. Her death was reported in the January 9, 1883, edition of the *South Kentuckian* newspaper. The article entitled *A Sad Suicide* is a combination of an obituary, news report, and opinion column all rolled up in one. I am going to read the article in its entirety, as it does a much better job of explaining the events of that fateful night than I ever could.

Mrs. Ermine E. Tandy, wife of W. T. Tandy, who lost her mind about three months ago, escaped from her room Saturday night last and took her own life by hanging. Never in our

experience as a journalist has it become our duty to chronicle an item which we did with more genuine regret or sympathetic reluctance. Our warm personal friendship for the parties concerned and other reasons equally as potent, make it an exceedingly unpleasant task to treat of the melancholy affair, but as wide publicity has been given to it, it is best for all concerned that the true version of the affair should be given.

On January 2, 1879, Mr. Will T. Tandy and Miss Ermine E. Stoner were married. Mr. Tandy was the popular bookkeeper in Buckner & Wooldridge's warehouse, and was one of the steadiest, most moral, reliable, and universally esteemed young men in the county. He had just attained his majority and the future looked bright and promising. Miss Stoner was just out of school, young, beautiful and accomplished. They were members of two of the first families of the county, and both were consistent members of the Baptist Church. Mr. Tandy built a nice new residence on South Main Street and for three years or more their home was a happy one. About a year ago their first child, a bright little fellow two years old died, and the death of the child fell with terrible force upon the mother. This added to bad health for a time, made her moody and dejected, until last fall her friends realized that she was losing her mind. Some three months ago it became evident that her reason was gone. Every effort that a loving husband, kind friends and the best medical skill could suggest, was made to drive away her melancholy, but to no avail. She was afflicted with an insane desire to die, and neither her devotion to her husband, her love for her second son, only a few months old, or the kind and sympathetic attentions of loving friends could alter her determination. She was pronounced insane, and a strict watch was kept over her, and she was thwarted in several attempts to take her life. She frequently declared her intention to do so in spite of the vigilance of her friends, and last Saturday night she succeeded. It seems that she had made all her preparations for that particular night. Mr. Tandy went out after supper to attend to

some business, and she bade him good-bye in a most affectionate manner. All of the members of the family were absent except Mrs. Clarke, who lived with her, and Mr. J.D. Tandy, her father-in-law, an old gentleman quite feeble. At 10 o'clock she gave her baby to the nurse and in an unusually cheerful voice remarked that it was "about time for Willie to be back," and walked first to the window, as if to listen, and then to the door and before she could be intercepted quickly opened the door and darted out into the darkness. She was followed and the alarm was given, but she eluded her pursuers and was soon lost in the darkness. The night was very dark, not a star above in the heavens, and her dark clothing made it impossible to see her at a distance of ten feet. In an incredibly short time, fifty men with lanterns were searching the city, searching along the banks of the river and all over the city but she could not be found.

About 1 o'clock, while Dr. F.H. Clark and Mr. Bailey Waller were looking about in the large front yard of Mrs. Wallace, almost opposite Mr. Tandy's house, Dr. Clark saw something flash in the glass of his lantern. He looked again, went closer, and it proved to be a ring upon the finger of the object of his search. There, hanging in the limb of an apple tree, in sight of her house and only a few steps off the street, she was found and taken down – dead. She had taken a stout piece of domestic, made a loop in one end, placed it around her neck, stood upon a low limb and tied it to one above, about eight feet high, and swung off and into eternity. Not a feature was contorted, not a muscle was strained, but she looked like one asleep, while a look of triumphant joy was upon her face. The tree was one she could see from her window, and it had doubtless been selected during the day for the purpose. The domestic had been concealed in her bosom and she had probably taken her life in ten minutes after she escaped, as the tree was just across the street, not two hundred yards distant.

The funeral was preached yesterday morning at 10 o'clock by Dr. T.G. Keen, and the remains were buried at the city cemetery. The affair is one sad and melancholy in all its bearings. It is sad to chronicle a death always, sadder still to record the demise of one in the bloom of youth and surrounded by all that is calculated to make life happy, but it is saddest of all to write of a death that shocks and saddens, not only a family, but an entire community—and one that is the inevitable result of a disease brain. It is hard, very hard, to say and believe that it is “all for the best.”

It is obvious that the writer of the article was a close personal friend of the young couple and was quite shaken by Ermine's death. As if this story isn't sad enough there is more to be added. Will Tandy sent his infant son, Clarke Howell Tandy, to live with relatives of Ermine's family in Lexington. Before you judge Will as not being a good father for giving up his son you have to remember that in a period of about a year, he had lost his mother due to consumption, then twelve days later he lost his first son, then the birth of his second son, and finally the suicide of his wife. I am sure he was under an emotional strain himself plus at that time single fathers did not raise children, especially one as young as his son. Clarke Tandy excelled in academics and became the first Rhodes Scholar from Kentucky to study at Oxford University. After a tour of Europe, Clarke returned to Lawrenceburg, New Jersey, to take a chair in the faculty of the training school for Princeton University as a professor of Greek and Latin. He had only been in town for a week when he shot himself in the head. Two shots were fired with the first one failing to discharge. Friends in Lexington thought it might had been due to disappointment in a love affair.

For our next story we will move up the street to 2015 South Main to the house currently owned by Jack and Ruth Elliott. The year is 1942. Charles J. Barr and his wife Evelyn moved to Hopkinsville with their family in November 1937 from Goldsboro, North Carolina. They operated

Barr Jewelry Store at 908 South Main where the pocket park is now located. The store specialized in jewelry, watches, clocks, silverware, glassware, etc.

Thursday February 19, 1942, started out as a normal business day at Barr Jewelry Store. The Valentine's Day rush was over and things had gotten back to normal. Evelyn left the jewelry store at 10:30 that morning to go to the family's new home at 2015 South Main. She was supposed to have returned before noon in time for her husband to leave the store for lunch. Mr. Barr remained at the store until around 2 o'clock that afternoon before he was able to get away to see why his wife had not returned on schedule. It was he who found his wife hanging from the second floor back porch. The death certificate listed the cause of death as strangulation by hanging. Evelyn had taken her life two days before her 42nd birthday. Rumor around town was that Charles was having an affair. Did Evelyn find out about it and did she deal with it by taking her life? We shall never know for sure.

A short private service for Evelyn was held at the house on Sunday afternoon with graveside services at 2 o'clock at Riverside Cemetery. Her three adult children, Jayne Barr Hansen of Chattanooga, Walker Barr of the Great Lakes Naval Training Station, and Charles Barr, Jr. a bombardier with the U.S. flying forces stationed near Houston returned for the service. Charles bought a six-person cemetery plot for the family the day before his wife was interred. An impressive Barr tombstone was placed at the plot; however, the grave marker for Evelyn is the only one in the family plot. Cemetery records shows that the cremated remains of Evelyn's daughter, Jayne, were placed at her foot in 2007. Where is Charles interred - not in Hopkinsville? The 1946 City Directory lists Charles and his son, Walker, living on Cox Mill Road, not South Main. Walker is listed as a watchmaker at Barr's Jewelry Co, still located at 908 South Main. The next City Directory that the Museum has is 1951 and E.L. Sisk is listed at the homeowner of 2015 South

Main. There is no Barr's Jewelry Co. listed in the directory and Joys Jewelers is now listed at 908 S Main. So, Charles Barr moved away from Hopkinsville. Did he remarry? Did he remain in the jewelry business? Did he carry the guilt of his wife's suicide for the remainder of his life? These are questions that we will probably never know the answers to.

In 1998 Jack and Ruth Elliott bought the house from the Sisk family. The Elliotts have done extensive remodeling of the house including the addition of a sunroom to the rear of the house. Also, they closed in most of the second story porch to make an upstairs restroom. The spot where Evelyn jumped off the porch is now the corner of the bathroom. While the Elliotts were renovating the house, whenever Ruth would go into an upstairs bedroom on the front side of the house, now known as the Blue Room, she would get flashbacks of the first visitation of a family friend she went to when she was approximately six years old. She would smell arsenic which was used before modern embalming fluid. She would also see a casket in the bedroom. One day a friend of Ruth's, who had also been a friend of Evelyn Barr's daughter, Jayne, told Ruth that Evelyn's funeral was held in that bedroom. Apparently, that had been her bedroom. Once Ruth was told this, her flashbacks stopped.

Ruth and Jack have had other unexplained things happen to them. On more than one occasion through a side window facing the driveway, they have seen a white car racing up towards the back yard. They would rush to look out the back door and there was no car. At the end of the Elliott's driveway, there is a stone wall and there's no way that the car could drive through the wall. So, what happened to the car? One afternoon, Ruth had a small group of women over for a card party. All the women saw the white car through the window racing up the driveway; however, when they rushed to the back door to look out, again the car had disappeared. I moved into the house next door to the Elliotts in 2003 and I share the driveway with them. I have never seen a

white car racing up the driveway and the Elliotts say that it has now been several years since they have seen the mysterious car.

Ruth's flashbacks in the Blue Room and the random appearances of a white car racing up the driveway are not the only extraordinary activities that has gone on in the Elliotts' house. For a while a spirit of a thirteen-year-old boy that they named Billy resided in the house. Either Jack or Ruth would hear their name being called out thinking that it was the other calling them. When confronted with the question what they wanted, the spouse would deny ever calling out the other's name. Finally, Jack and Ruth concluded that there was a spirit pulling pranks on them. Billy would also pull pranks on company visiting the house such as poking them in their side. One day a friend brought her mother-in-law visiting from Nebraska to look at the house. The friend did not tell her mother-in-law about Billy. After the visit, Ruth's friend asked her mother-in-law if she felt anything and she said yes that there was a spirit in the house. The woman from Nebraska asked Ruth if she could try to contact the spirit. The woman went into a secret stairway, which was originally built to be used by the house servants, to communicate with Billy. She found out that the spirit was a thirteen-year-old boy looking for his mother. The woman told him that he was free to leave the house and find his mother. After that, Billy was never heard from again. You would think this would make the Elliotts happy but Ruth indicated that they wish Billy was still there. They miss him and the pranks he would do.

Since we are right next to my house, 2011 South Main, let's spend a few minutes talking about it. I am aware of at least four people dying in my house, all of natural causes. I have never felt any spirits or anything unnatural in the house. However, I want to talk about the death of Dorris Chewning. In 1963, Dorris and Beatrice Chewning, parents of John and Leroy Chewning and grandparents of Sands Chewning and Margaret Prim, bought the house I am living in. On the

evening of June 8, 1982, Mr. Chewning asked Leroy to come over to the house to try to talk his mother out of the idea of turning the front porch of the house into a sunroom. Leroy tried his best but his mother was determined to have her sunroom. The next morning, workers started to work. At approximately 2:30 that afternoon Leroy stopped by to see how work was progressing. Mr. Chewning was outside and Leroy commented to him that he didn't look well to which Mr. Chewning replied that he wasn't feeling well. Leroy told his father to go inside the house and rest. When he got inside, he had a massive heart attack in the living room and died instantly. Worked stopped on the sunroom and the workers were told to take down any work they had already done. I am glad that the front porch was not converted into a sunroom; however, I am sorry that it took Mr. Chewning's death to stop it. Puts new meaning into the phrase "over my dead body".

Sometimes bad things will happen because you are in the wrong place at the wrong time. Such was the case of seventy-three year old Edward Lee Major, Sr. Mr. Major was the owner of Metcalfe Florist here in town and was very active in civic affairs. On the morning of Thursday, November 3, 2011, Mr. Major had gone to Roundie's Restaurant for breakfast and was returning to his home on Harton Place to take his wife Betty for dialysis. At approximately 8 a.m. as he was driving down South Main, a very large old tree in the front yard of a house in the 1800s block suddenly fell over and landed on his car. Mr. Major died from injuries he received.

Our next and final story of the evening, occurred at the house located at 1820 South Main which was purchased by Tim Cato in 2015. The house is on a circa 1915 postcard which lists Dr. Preston Thomas as the owner of the house. It is apparent that the Doctor built the house as it contains a small room, accessible from a separate outside entrance, for after hours patients to visit him. On the glass panel of the outside door to his office one can still faintly see in gold lettering

Dr. Thomas' name. The wall dividing the Doctor's office and the room behind it has since been removed to make one large kitchen and breakfast area.

Dr. Frank Preston Thomas, dean of Hopkinsville physicians in years of service, was born October 24, 1873 at his family's farm in the St. Elmo area in southeastern Christian County. He attended Major Ferrell's School in Hopkinsville and graduated from the Louisville Medical School in 1894. He served as a medical officer in U.S. Army Hospitals in France during World War I. In 1894, he opened an office on the second floor of the Bank of Hopkinsville building located on the southeast corner of Main and Seventh and occupied the same office until the time of his retirement in 1956, a total of sixty two years. The doctor continued to treat former patients and friends in his home until 1959. The physician was among the first Hopkinsville residents to own an automobile. He acquired the vehicle during a trip to an American Medical Association meeting in Chicago in June 1908.

Dr. Thomas died June 5, 1961, and the tribute by A. Walker Wood that appeared in the *The Kentucky New Era* read as follows: "Last night, Gabriel blew his trumpet and there passed into history one of God's elect. A generation passed with him, the old country doctor, with his keen insight into human nature, his sympathetic understanding of the weaknesses of men and women, his long hours of vigil at the bedside of a young mother in pain, his deep interest as he counted the failing pulse of an old friend that he loved, his loyalty to his profession, his disregard to his fee or of time, passed away last night in the death of Dr. Preston Thomas."

Dr. Thomas married Elizabeth "Lizzie" Mercer in 1898. The couple had three children, the oldest was Frank Prentice Thomas born in 1900. In 1913 Prentice accompanied his father and Dr. E.H. Barker on a trip to Panama. They were the first Hopkinsville residents to see the newly constructed Canal or as the newspaper called it the "big ditch". Prentice graduated from the

Wharton's School of Finance and Commerce at the University of Pennsylvania. His career included holding different positions with General Motors.

At the age of forty-five, Prentice married Miss Julia English, also age forty five, of Manhattan and formerly of Brooklyn, on November 3, 1945. Julia's passport at age twenty-one indicates that she was a small woman, only five feet tall. She was very active in the Junior League of Brooklyn for many years and was chairman of the Arts and Interests committee and a member of the board. Her picture appeared frequently in the Society section of the Brooklyn newspaper. The wedding announcement in the *Brooklyn Citizens* newspaper states that the wedding took place on Saturday afternoon in St. James Episcopal Church, Manhattan. The bride wore an ice-blue crepe gown with halo hat to match and white orchids. There were no attendants. The bride is the daughter of the late Mr. and Mrs. Peyton Danley English of Little Rock, Arkansas. She is a graduate of the School of Fine Arts, Columbia University, and is associated with Mrs. Richard Kimball in Young Books, Inc. After the first of the year, the couple will reside in Lima, Peru, where the groom is the manager of General Motors operations in Peru.

The couple was well traveled due to Prentice's work. Whenever they traveled, they always went first class. Places visited included Puerto Rico, Cuba, and Beirut. After Prentice's retirement, they moved to Hopkinsville and moved in with his parents in their house on South Main. Prentice died in 1962, as previously stated Julia's father-in-law, Dr. Thomas, died in 1961 and the Doctor's wife had passed away in 1955. Julia's sister, Kathleen Metcalfe, moved in to be with her sister, but she died in 1973 leaving Julia alone in that big house on South Main.

The last picture I have of Julia is from an article in the *Kentucky New Era* in 1973 which would make her seventy-three years old. Julia had donated a piece of equipment which was described by the paper as the most modern equipment available for use in eye surgery. As you can

see by the picture just exactly how small Julia is standing next to the other three gentlemen. The article states that Mrs. Thomas made the gift due to the fact that her mother was blind the last several years of her life causing her to have a strong interest in eye care and preservation of sight. She also stated that her father-in-law, the late Dr. Preston Thomas, who practiced on the hospital staff for many years saw a great need for having the best equipment available to serve the people.

Julia, who was described as flighty and as one who liked to grab your chin when she talked to you, continued to live in the house alone until on May 28, 1978, she was found, clad in night clothes, slain in the bathtub located on the second story of her home, floating face up in water somewhat wrapped in a carpet. The autopsy showed that she had been beaten but died of shock, not of drowning. The official cause of death – homicide. Charged with the murder was sixteen-year old, Bobby Joe Hatcher. Bobby Joe was an African American youth, rather large in stature and often described as being slow. He did odd jobs, including yard work, for residents of the neighborhood including Ms. Julia. On the day of the murder, he was seen running from the house.

Assigned to defend Bobby Joe was a young public defender, John Atkins. Atkins, a recent law school graduate, started as a public defender in October 1977. At that time, public defenders were not employees of the state but private attorneys who were contracted with Fiscal Court. I talked to now Judge Atkins about the case. Atkins stated that when he was assigned to the case, his mother pleaded with him to turn it down because of the sensationalism of the case and she was afraid that it would look bad on her son. Atkins told his mother that it was his duty to defend whatever case was assigned to him and that he just couldn't agree to only take shop lifting cases at Walmart. I asked Atkins if he had any doubt in his mind that Bobby Joe committed the murder and his answer was no. I proceeded to ask him what was Bobby Joe's defense and he said that the youth had no defense only that he would say that he didn't do it.

Apparently Bobby Joe agreed to do some yard work for Ms. Julia at an agreed upon price. When it came time for payment, Ms. Julia did not pay the full amount stating that Bobby Joe had not done all the work. Bobby Joe got angry and acted out the only way he knew how, by striking the little old woman. It was shock that killed Ms. Julia not the blow or blows by Bobby Joe. He never meant to kill her. According to Atkins, Bobby Joe then acted stupidly by carrying the body up the stairs, finding a rug to wrap the body in, placing the body in the bathtub, turning on the water and running away.

Atkins gave me some insight on Julia Thomas. Apparently, Julia was unfair in her dealings and that she often bragged about taking advantage of minorities. Her circle of friends said that she was condesending and arrogant to people who worked for her. Her entire life, she had lived a life of privilege and she expected people to cater to her. In other words, she was not a Southern Lady. Bobby Joe admitted that he was cheated and even though he was intellectually challenged, he still knew right from wrong. In his mind he was wronged by Ms. Julia and he became angry. In a *Kentucky New Era* article, according to an unofficial source, who refused to be named but claimed to be close to the investigation, stated that the widow either hit or struck at the youth during the argument and he struck back hitting the woman at least once.

Because of Bobby Joe's age, the case was originally assigned to juvenile court. District Judge Peter MacDonald, who handled juvenile cases, sent the case to the Grand Jury which indicted him for murder causing the case to be sent to Circuit Court. Judge MacDonald stated that the seriousness of the offense, probable cause that the juvenile committed the crime, the best interest of the community as well as the juvenile, maturity of the juvenile and whether the juvenile justice system offers a reasonable opportunity for the juvenile to be rehabilitated were among the

reasons for his decision. Bobby Joe was in the county jail, awaiting trial, under a \$5,000 cash bond.

In early November 1978 Atkins requested a change in venue for the case. Circuit Judge Stephen White delayed making a decision on the request for a change of trial sites until Bobby Joe had undergone psychiatric testing. On November 15th Judge White refused a change of venue. With a trial date of November 20th quickly approaching, Atkins had what he called a very long discussion with Bobby Joe telling him that most likely he would be found guilty of the murder and that he could possibly receive the death sentence. On the afternoon of November 15th Bobby Joe pleaded guilty in return for a twenty-year prison sentence. Atkins stated that he was probably sent to Eddyville. Bobby Joe was eligible but did not receive parole after seven years. After fourteen years he did receive parole. Atkins does not know what happened to Bobby Joe after he was paroled. He does know that Bobby Joe did not return to Hopkinsville as his mother was no longer living here. There was good reason that the mother had moved away. At the same time Bobby was awaiting trial his older brother Justice, age eighteen, was also awaiting trial for the September stabbing of fourteen-year old Terry Knight. Atkins described Justice as being pure evil. The body of Knight was found on the porch of a North Vine Street house. The victim's body was clad only in a shirt and underpants with twenty-two knife wounds.

Some people think that the spirit of Julia is still at the house. Helen Cayce, before she entered the medical profession, was a bank teller at First City Bank. First City was taking care of the estate of Julia since she had no children. Employees of the bank were given the opportunity to sign up and receive extra pay to go over and clean the house to prepare it for sale. I talked to Helen about her experience when she volunteered to clean the house. Helen said that she needed the extra money as she was a single mother. She spent most of her time while at the house cleaning the

bathroom where Julia's body was found. The residue from the finger print powder was all over the bathtub and the rest of the bathroom. The powder was carbon based and it took her a while to get everything cleaned. Helen said that the whole time she was there she could feel a presence in the house. Helen only worked half a day and left. She refused to go back. At that time Helen lived on 19th Street which was very close to the house. Helen would later become friends with the new owners of house, Kenneth Gant and Sue Golladay who owned the house in the 1980s and early 1990s. Sue's mother, who had dementia, also lived with them. Sue would often tell Helen that her mother would have long conversations with "the lady". Tim Cato lived in the house for approximately five years before he moved and turned the house into rental property. I asked Tim if he ever felt any type of presence in the house. He has not but wishes that he had. I have been a guest in the house on numerous occasions while Tim lived there and I never felt anything.

However one of the renters that now lives in the house has had an experience. An out of town guest was making his first visit to the house. He knew nothing about the history of the house or of the murder there. He fell asleep in a chair in the living room and he awoken to a woman standing in front of him. The woman told him that he needed to move since that was where she always sits waiting for her husband, the doctor, to return. Knowing nothing about the murder, the guest asked "are you the woman that was killed?" The mysterious woman replied no, "she stays upstairs."

Needless to say, the renters were floored when they were told that.

So that brings us back to the question I asked at the beginning of this paper, are the ghosts of Ermine Tandy, Evelyn Barr, Billy, Dorris Chewning, Ed Major, or Julia Thomas watching over the current residents of South Main? Are the ghosts of your neighborhood watching over you? And if so, what are they observing? Are they seeing the secrets we are desperately trying to hide knowing they will eventually be revealed? Something for you to think about tonight as you fall asleep.