



Followed at Lake  
Shawnee

Kat Craig

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『リサとガスパール』

# FOLLOWED AT LAKE SHAWNEE

*A ROAD TRIP TO A HAUNTED DESTINATION*

*KAT CRAIG*

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I love all things creepy and spooky. Raised on episodes of Scooby Doo and Saturday afternoon monster movies, I have always enjoyed ghost stories, legends, and a good scare. Halloween is my favorite time of year, and I encourage my friends to join in the celebration every year. I believe in costumes, spooky treats, and pumpkin spice everything.

I made the drive to the abandoned Lake Shawnee Amusement Park with a carload of friends. We drove from North Carolina to West Virginia after seeing the amusement park on several haunted history shows. The park was open for evening tours that October, and I was excited to visit. It was close to Halloween and the idea that I could visit a legendary haunted location was far more appealing than visiting any seasonal haunted house. I found out you could request to visit any time of year but going in the spookiest month was an opportunity I didn't want to miss.

They called the October tour events the Dark Carnival. Guests could come for a self-guided tour of the abandoned amusement park. Paranormal investigation equipment and cameras were welcome. For those who wanted a Halloween thrill, they were also offering a walk-through haunted attraction with actors and props called Lake Nightmare. While I love the adrenaline rush of haunted attractions, I was most interested in walking through the old park in the dark. I wanted to experience what the park itself felt like,

wondering if it would feel like a happy place or a wicked place.

We were boisterous and excited during the ride until civilization started to fall behind us after the sun set. As we got closer to the amusement park, there were no street lights and no gas stations as we drove into the night. A hush fell over the car as the miles rolled by.

It was so dark that we initially drove right past our turn, with our GPS randomly directing us to a cemetery instead of the amusement park. "You have arrived at your destination," the GPS repeated over and over as the car headlights shone upon numerous headstones. I laughed nervously and made a joke about this being how horror movies start, trying to get the car safely turned around on the narrow country road. My friends were urgently insisting we get out of this place as quickly as possible, freaked out by the cemetery in the middle of nowhere.

My friend Kim riding shotgun made a soft comment to me so the others couldn't hear about how that was a great scare to arrive at the cemetery, complimenting me on setting an eerie tone for the adventure. I shook my head at her and explained that it wasn't intentional at all, that this is where the GPS took us. I heard her startled intake of breath. I have no idea why the GPS took us to a graveyard instead of Lake Shawnee

Amusement Park. Were the ghosts of Lake Shawnee pulling us to their final destination on purpose?

More than a little scared by the cemetery and the misguided GPS, we slowly made our way along the winding country roads and eventually located the amusement park.

According to the lore, the property was haunted long before the amusement park was built. It is said that the children of settlers were murdered by Native Americans on this ground, and in an act of revenge, the settlers murdered Native Americans there, too.

The property became an amusement park in the 1920s. A child drowned in the pond on the park's property. Another child was killed when riding the circular swings. The park closed in the 1960s. The rides remained on the premises to be destroyed by weather and the passing of time.

We paid our admission to tour the park and walked across the grass together to an area where there were a few people gathered. There was a tour guide telling stories about the property's history. We were shown photos and newspaper clippings to support the tales. There were also clippings and photos to show that archaeologists had unearthed broken pottery and beads on the grounds, which backed up the legends of the Native Americans residing in the area. I nodded along with the tour guide's stories, as I had heard

much of this on the television programs that inspired me to visit.

Once our group walked away from the tour guide's station, we were on our own to roam the grounds. A handful of people were exploring the old park rides. In the distance, I could hear shrieks and laughter coming from the haunted attraction. The grass beneath my feet was neat, recently trimmed, a contrast to some of the plants and weeds twisting up into the rusting frame of the old Ferris wheel.

The other tourists soon wandered off from the rides and our group was alone with the old hunks of metal towering up into the night sky. I was glad we were alone so we could snap photos and explore without interruptions. There were a few lights underneath the old swings, and someone had left a teddy bear in the seat of a swing as a reminder of the children that once flocked to this park in its heyday.

Staring up at the Ferris wheel, I tried to imagine the laughter and joy the park once brought. I listened carefully to the sounds of the night, hoping to hear anything that was a noise from the past, any ghostly remnant of the olden days...nothing. I took a series of photos, hoping perhaps some anomaly would show up to indicate ghosts and phantoms at play. A quick review of the images yielded nothing that especially caught my eye.

As I scrolled through the photos, I got goosebumps on my arms and had a weird feeling that someone was watching me. I turned in a circle, taking stock of where my friends were, looking carefully out into the night to make sure there wasn't some park employee lurking. I didn't see anyone, but my body was in alarm mode; I trust my intuition, and my senses were telling me someone was there in the dark with us.

Rubbing the goosebumps on my arms, I walked over to the swings. It was hard to think about the history, knowing a little girl was killed on the swings when a delivery truck backed too close to the ride in motion. It was strange to me that the swings were still there. I tried to imagine being the family of the little girl who died. Would I want the swings taken down to soften the reality of what had occurred there? Would I want the swings to remain standing to remind others to find joy in every day and do what they loved? I wondered about the cemetery where the GPS had erroneously led us; was the little girl there now?

I walked around the swings, taking photos from all angles. It was quiet now. I guessed the group that was previously walking through the haunt at the edge of the park was done, because I could hear our footsteps in the grass and the camera clicks from my friends' phones and cameras. The silence had a weight to it in the night. A place that would

have been noisy on a Saturday night decades ago was now black and still.

The sensation of being watched persisted. It felt like someone was just on the edge of where the illumination from the lights ended, starting hard at us from the black. I didn't feel unwelcome, but I felt scrutinized.

We were close to the pond as we explored the area around the swings. A child drowned in the pond long ago, and that knowledge makes me wary of the pond, like it might send out a tentacle to drag one of us in. The logical part of my brain understands that accidents happen, and the pond was the scene for a tragic accident. The emotional part of my brain wants to imagine the pond as a swirling vortex, willfully trying to draw victims into an abyss. There are a few lights along the pond to keep the touring visitors safe. Gazing out over the black water, I am looking and listening for anything unusual. I came for the reputation of this place as haunted, and I want proof. I don't see or hear anything, but I continue to feel the unwavering attention of a presence watching our group as we move across the grounds.

The five of us decided to walk the trail around the pond. The tour guide had mentioned it to us earlier and had told us we were welcome to take the trail but advised us we would need flashlights and to walk carefully. We had to sign a waiver



when we paid our admission to tour the property agreeing we were responsible for our own injuries, accepting the risk. Signing waivers always feels like a dare to me, like I need to try everything to see what possible dangers are out there. Walking the trail in the dark seemed like a perfect opportunity to twist an ankle, trip and fall into the pond, and wander into a spider's web, so off we went. I've found that the spirit of adventure often includes a lack of common sense.

Charlie, Kim, and Sharon scampered ahead of Mathew and me, and they were gone down the trail in moments, flashlights out of sight. Mathew and I were the slow, careful investigators of haunted places, always lingering for another look and listen, so we were glad for the chance to be thorough and deliberate.

Standing at the beginning of the trail, we were quiet. I was listening for any unusual sounds, but I was also listening for footsteps or rustles to indicate perhaps a park employee was keeping an eye on us. I hadn't ruled out that the feeling of being watched that had started by the Ferris wheel and persisted by the swings could be a living human tasked with keeping visitors from misbehaving.

"Feels like someone has been giving us the hairy eyeball since we got to the rides," Mathew said to me in a low voice.

“Do you think they have people stationed out in the dark to manage the property for these tours?”

I said I didn't know but agreed with him on feeling watched. Mathew is good at noticing the feeling of locations, too, and I like that he was confirming the suspicion that I hadn't voiced. When exploring allegedly haunted spots, I don't share what I feel with others; I wait to see what they experience. While the sensation of being watched is hard to document, it's unmistakable. Your survival instincts go on high alert.

Mathew and I carefully made our way along the path by flashlight. The location of the abandoned amusement park is rural; there is no light pollution from street lights or businesses, just miles of black skies melting into a black landscape. Our flashlight seemed small in all the encompassing darkness.

The trail was easy to follow, a well-trodden path that had been recently manicured. There were tall bushes and brambles on each side of the trail, but they had been trimmed back to allow explorers to walk without being ensnared. We walked in silence, hearing the occasional splash of a fish or frog in the pond. I didn't hear any other footsteps or rustling that would have given away a park employee sneaking along to supervise us, but the invasive feeling of being observed by unseen eyes continued.

As we moved along the trail, I felt like someone or something was right behind me several times. I would pause and turn around, but there was no one that I could see or hear, so I would scamper along behind Mathew, following the beam of our flashlight. I didn't mention the feeling to Mathew because I wanted his experience to be untainted by my impressions.

After a few quiet minutes, Mathew stopped walking and turned to me. "I don't want to scare you," he said, "But I really feel like someone has been following us this whole time."

I breathed out a big sigh, glad he was experiencing the same feeling. I agreed. I said out loud to whoever or whatever was with us in the dark, "We mean no harm. We aren't here to take anything other than knowledge and experience. We're only curious to learn who is here and why."

We stood a few quiet moments, listening. There were no sounds at all. We couldn't hear anything from the haunted attraction nor could we hear our friends that had ventured out ahead of us. It was like the edgy silence in a scary movie when you anticipate the monster is about to leap out at you and make you jump.

We began to walk again slowly. I tugged my camera out of the pocket of my jeans, pushing the button to turn it on. The

feeling of being watched had intensified since I spoke into the night. If whatever was watching us had been breathing, I guarantee I would've felt the breath on my neck because it was so close.

I held my breath, turned around and quickly snapped a photo of the space behind me on the trail.

I turned the camera off and shoved it back into my jeans. We kept moving. As we neared the end of the trail, I said out loud, "Thank you for letting us know you're here. We're leaving, but you can stay here if you want. You can go to the light if you want, or you can stay here. Thank you." As we walked toward the car, the feeling of being watched ebbed, as though our watcher stopped at the property line and went no further once it was sure we were going away.

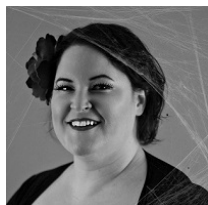
The next day, I viewed the photos from the abandoned amusement park. I scrolled through them, trying to find the image taken on the trail. There was a weird misty shape behind us as the photo shows. We were followed from the moment we viewed the Ferris wheel at Lake Shawnee, but by whom or what, I'm not sure.

This was a true experience, and I'm glad to share the photo to support my claim. There's something at Lake Shawnee. I didn't feel like the follower was a child; it didn't feel small or playful. It felt large and serious, but not menacing, like a guardian of the property perhaps.



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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



**Kat Craig** writes both fiction and non-fiction. She resides in the mountains of North Carolina where you might find her drinking too much coffee and eating the very last cookie.

If you enjoyed this, you will enjoy *Let's Be Creepy Together*, [available on Amazon](#) along with Kat's other titles.

Kat's website is KatCraig.com. Kind words from happy readers can be emailed to [kat@ketcraig.com](mailto:kat@ketcraig.com). I'd love to hear your experiences from visiting Lake Shawnee, too.

Follow Kat on Instagram and on Facebook @KatCraigWriter to find out what she's up to in addition to writing.