

Episode Seven: "The Age of Enlightenment"

Superstitious

By Amy Bartram

February 2, 2018

Intro

"A good friend of mine that uh lived in Birmingham sent me a copy of the newspaper showing the Auburn students rolling Toomer's Corner" (CNN, "CNN: Revenge in Alabama?").

"Supposedly, the five brothers—the five Ball brothers, their ashes are supposedly up in the pillars" (Hernandez).

"The Davie Poplar tree: surviving the Civil War, lightning strikes and hurricanes..." (ABC, "Police ID Suspect in UNC Explosion").

"But that same statue that's in front of the Ball brothers' pillar, uh, if you kiss your true love underneath her, her wings will flap" (Hernandez, 2018).

"Well, let me tell you what I did. The weekend after the Iron Bowl, I went to Auburn Alabama 'cause I live thirty miles away ("Sure") and I poisoned the two Toomer's trees. I put spike 80 DL in 'em" (CNN, "CNN: Revenge in Alabama?").

"...flash your lights three times and then turn your car off and wait. You will, in effect, see a singular light from presumably, a motorcyclist" (Zimmerman).

"When this tree was planted it's possible North Carolina was still a British colony. That's how old this is. It's famous among students, it's famous among faculty" (ABC, "Police ID Suspect in UNC Explosion").

Dear Student,

Congratulations! On behalf of the college of your dreams, it is with great pleasure and enthusiasm that I inform you of your admission to said college as a member of the class of 2018. You were selected from an academically talented group of applicants. Our exceptional academic programs are designed to help you become a responsible, successful individual who will make an

impact in our growing and ever-changing world. We are committed to providing you with the best education possible.

Please return all requested materials as stated in the enclosed information sheet which includes detailed instructions for submitting your \$250 confirmation deposit. It is important to submit your deposit as a means of securing your enrollment at the college of your dreams. We must secure this deposit before we are able to send you any information on the orientation process, and ultimately, grant you any information on the skills needed to survive at this campus...

Being accepted to college upon high school graduation is a promise for the future, a shot at becoming someone bigger than you are. But being accepted to college means more than receiving a formal education. This is a moment in which one begins the transition from childhood to independence. Going to college means more than obtaining a Bachelors degree; it means experiencing sporting events, going to parties, joining fraternities and sororities; skipping classes. The ultimate goal of college students: to fit in with a community of his, her, or their peers. Sometimes this means rubbing elbows with the superstitious.

****Superstitious Intro****

"Superstitions, in my opinion, are urban legends that are passed down by word of mouth" (Hernandez).

"A belief or notion not based on reason" (Bartram).

"You have bad luck" (Kinney).

"An unsubstantiated belief that it may or may not have a basis in reality" (Hill).

"To be paranoid of certain objects or certain old fairy tales" (Reed).

Being accepted to your dream college can be an exciting time, but it can also be a time of uncertainty and fear. You're no longer a big fish in a little pond. You have the task of entering a new environment, and more than likely, living away from home for the first time. How will you fit in? Join a sports team? Chess club? Sorority? Whichever route you choose to go in meeting your new best friends, one thing is for certain: you will more than likely become a part of your scholastic family through superstition.

College Love

William Shakespeare once said, "My bounty is as boundless as the sea, my love as deep. The more I give to thee the more I have, for both are infinite." Granted, Juliet says this to Romeo, but this is a statement that can sum up a campus romance. Falling in love with a fellow classmate can be one of extreme passion. Your parents are no longer around to dictate who you can date, how, or when. An emotional, hormonal match made in drunkenness and pizza. These are the moments when a college student can see her potential marriage partner exposed. A couple can decide they're meant to be together forever, but several campus superstitions can put the couple's relationship to the absolute test.

Ball State

At Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana, an icon sits in a circle surrounded by five pillars. Her name is Beneficence and she is an angel; an angel that represents the generosity of the Ball brothers who made a donation of land to the state of Indiana. A donation that allowed Ball State University to flourish. Every year, new graduates and their families pose for pictures with the angel, affectionately called 'Benny' by students. And while Benny graces families with elegant pictures, she has another gift. Benny is also a soothsayer. It's said that if a couple attends the statue hand-in-hand and kisses under the statue, her wings will flap. This is only if the pair are truly meant to be.

College of William Mary

If you've never been to Virginia, the College of William and Mary is truly a sight to see. The historic town, brick and antiquated, possesses an air of romance. The Crim Dell bridge, spanning the Crim Dell pond is described as one of the most scenic areas in Williamsburg. In fact, when the bridge was erected in 1966, so too was a plaque commemorating the beauty of the area. It says, "...that one may walk in beauty, discover the serenity of the quiet moment, and dispel the shadows." It's said that young lovers attending the College of William and Mary can visit the Crim Dell only stopping to kiss at the crest of the bridge. This kiss is believed to seal the couple's relationship for eternity. However, should the relationship fail, the couple must return to the bridge, the scorned lover

pushing the other into the pond. Only then will this free them from lives lived in solitude (Tomar).

Murray State University

While there's no angel soothsayer or magic bridge on campus, Murray State University in Kentucky promotes the romantic belief that love eternal takes root on campus. It's believed that couples who meet on campus and marry must return to campus and nail a pair of mismatched shoes to a special tree outside of Pogue Library. Doing this will allow good fortune to the couple and remind all who see this spectacle that love "blossoms" on campus (Tomar).

Tests and Good Luck

So, maybe you're a student who's not immediately seeking love. You're there to make the grade, to get a formal education, and one day, score the job of your dreams. Being a college student can be a challenging, trying time. School is a full-time job which means you're constantly reading, studying, cramming for tests, sucking down coffee and energy drinks, and starting all over again, and again, and again, to the point that even drinking coffee is exhausting. There are, however, colleges that promote luck granting traditions to invest in for those who need a test-taking boost.

Tufts University

Jumbo the elephant performed with the Barnum and Bailey Circus in the 1880s until his accidental death. But the elephant's celebrity status didn't end with his demise. In 1885, P.T. Barnum had the pachyderm stuffed and gifted to Tufts University in Medford, Massachusetts. 90 years later, in 1975, Jumbo would be destroyed in a fire. The school saved what little they could of the circus elephant and built a replica Jumbo. The statue sits on campus to this day. The symbol is said to bring luck to current students undergoing the stresses of exams. It is believed that in order to pass an exam, a student must place a penny on the trunk of Jumbo.

University of Maryland: College Park

If you don't know what a terrapin is, the dictionary offers a couple of definitions. One: "A small edible turtle with lozenge-shaped markings on its shell," and two: "A freshwater turtle, especially one of the smaller kinds of the Old World"

(Dictionary.com). Either way, the terrapin is the mascot for the University of Maryland. And yes, terrapin is also a beer, but one is not likely to receive luck during exams giving up his studying time to the beer. However, there is another terrapin, made of bronze, that makes its home in front of the library on Maryland's campus. Testudo, the bronze statue, is said to bring students luck during the exam-cram. All a student has to do is lay offerings in front of the 80-something year old turtle. Students leave everything from blow-up dolls to flat screen TVs as offerings to Testudo, the lucky terrapin.

University of Texas at Austin

Those who are serious about getting an 'A' rather than a simple passing grade should try their luck at the University of Texas at Austin, especially if their vision is 20/20. Squirrels can be seen all over the campus at Austin, but seeing a rare albino squirrel can boost a final grade. It's believed that even catching a glimpse of the white squirrel guarantees success. This campus might sound too good to be true because it is. These white creatures aren't even albino squirrels; they're white fox squirrels. Regardless, the placebo effect of seeing one, boosts a student's belief in himself during finals week.

Reed College

Allen Neuringer, a psychology professor at Reed College in Portland, Oregon, had many secrets. While not on campus, the experimenting pedagogue created a collection of albino monkeys in an underground laboratory. Not only were these monkeys albino, but whether he intended to or not, Professor Neuringer had created *zombie* monkeys. And, of course, the monkeys escaped the lab when a flock of animal rights activists freed them. The activists, rather than containing the wild monkeys, allowed the zombie monkeys to escape into the canyon near Reed College. It's believed that these albino zombie monkeys only wander the canyon at night - but don't be frightened by these supernatural monkeys if you happen to run into one. Surprisingly, the albino zombie is said to bring good luck, just don't get too close, lest you get bitten and become a zombie yourself (Barrett).

Davie Poplar

Sending a child off to college can prove an emotional rollercoaster ride for any parent. The fear for a child's safety will be ever present no matter how old or mature the

child becomes. However, sending your child off doesn't mean you should live in absolute fear, and it's nice to know that certain schools boast safer campuses, even if those safety-nets are bolstered by superstition.

Safety on the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's campus can depend on one single tree.

ABC11_UNC_Tree

"Troubling and disturbing. That's the new reaction from UNC administrators after police say a former student set fire to an historic tree on the UNC Chapel Hill campus" (ABC, "Police ID Suspect in UNC Explosion").

The famous tree on UNC Chapel Hill's campus has a name: Davie Poplar. The tulip poplar is said to be well over 300 years old and was gifted the name from Revolutionary War general and university founder, William Richardson Davie. According to legend, plans for the university were being drawn in 1792 and the poplar was already a large tree. Davie, after having a lovely lunch under the poplar tree, decided to locate the school grounds based on the location of the tree. It's a sweet story, but it's just that: a story. The truth is, Davie Poplar was named in the late 1800s to commemorate Davie's legend.

The poplar tree on campus has had another legend grow with it; Popular superstition states that if the Davie Poplar falls, so too will the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. So far, Davie Poplar, also called "The Tree of Knowledge" has had numerous close encounters with the underworld. In 1918, Davie was struck by lightning. The Tar Heels, fearful of the school's fall, grafted a new tree, dubbed Davie Poplar Jr. Apparently that wasn't enough for the fearful administration at UNC. A second Davie Poplar Jr. was planted, and then Davie Poplar III was born from a seed from the original Davie Poplar.

The Tar Heels, adamant about keeping the school standing, and with a true devotion to the original Davie, thought it wise to help the poplar out. In 1953 they gave the tree a base filled with concrete, and cables to ensure he'll stand through hurricanes and other natural disasters; hopefully.

The myth of the potential fall still lives in the minds and hearts of diehard Chapel Hill folk, and perhaps out of superstition, the Tar Heels felt it necessary to truly preserve the school by spreading the seed. In 1993, 100 Davie seedlings

were given to 100 elementary school students, and a seed was planted in each county of the state. This was a good thing as the celebrity poplar would be damaged by Hurricane Fran in 1996, and this past year, on November 2nd, a device was planted at the base of the tree and set off, causing Davie to burn in a fire. A professor, trying to stomp out the flames, received burns and was transported to the hospital, but both Davie and the savior professor survived the attempted murder.

The good news: The University of North Carolina still stands, ensuring the safety of its student population.

Sports

Nothing says family quite like bonding through sports. Faculty, staff, and students alike have an uncanny ability to come together through school spirit. When a team wins an event, the school celebrates the success like the birth of a new family member, and when there's a loss, a mourning period occurs.

Florida State University

It's hard to believe that the Florida State Seminoles could ever be underdogs on the football field, but in 1962 against the Georgia Bulldogs, they were just that, unlikely winners.

Winning Sod

"In 1962 the Seminoles had only been playing football for 15 years. We were the new boy on the block in the Southeast and the Seminoles were gonna go play the University of Georgia in Athens. Nobody much thought they had a chance. Dean Coyle Moore was the dean of social work at Florida State but he was a mentor to many of the players and would often give some pep talks to many of the team. So on a Thursday before that game in October of '62 he challenged the team. He said, 'Fellas, I think you can go up there and I think you can win.' Dean Moore had challenged them. He said, 'If you win, when you win, bring back a little sod between the hedges.'" (ACC Digital Network).

As luck and perseverance would have it, the Seminoles would pull together and defeat the Bulldogs 18 to 0. To commemorate the big 'W', team captain Gene McDowell pulled some sod from the away game hosted by Sanford Stadium, returned to FSU and presented to professor and athletic board member, Dean Coyle Moore. From there, the special sod was buried on the practice field at Florida State and a monument was erected. Today, it's

called the Sod Cemetery. The tradition continues to hold: every away game where the Seminoles are considered underdogs but come out victorious, sod is taken from the field and buried upon return. While this isn't necessarily a superstition, something binding resides within this tradition. Current students, alumni, and visitors can attend the Sod Cemetery on FSU's campus in Tallahassee and pay their respects.

Toomer's Corner

The tradition of unravelling toilet paper and hurling it over a pair of Oak trees at the intersection of College Street and Magnolia Avenue has become a staple celebration at Auburn University in Alabama. Toomer's Drug Store has been in operation since 1896 and in the early days of Auburn University, reporting athletic wins was not something easily accessed. Tradition states that the only means of reporting an Auburn triumph was through telegram - and the only place that had the ability to do so: Toomer's Drugs. Supposedly, ticker tape from the reported telegraphs was then draped over the 130 year old Oak trees located in the corner of the street. Of course, no real record has been kept on this moment in Tiger history, and the story has been mythologized. Today, students gather in front of the old drug store to celebrate an Auburn 'W' by unrolling toilet paper and throwing the barrage over the Toomer's Oaks.

But the famous oaks would be poisoned by an angry Alabama fan.

Roll Tide

"They're not dead yet, but they definitely will die.

--Is that against the law to poison a tree?

Do you think I care? Okay, I really don't. Roll damn tide" (CNN).

Similar to Davie Poplar at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill, the Toomer's Oaks must stand tall for Auburn teams to boast winning records. The poisoner from Auburn, one Mr. Updyke, was taking the Iron Bowl loss personally, choosing to hurt Tiger fans where it counted: by striking them in the superstition.

The Toomer's Oaks, badly poisoned, were replaced in 2015, but even the replacements would come under attack. In September of 2016, after another win against the Louisiana State University

Tigers, the Toomer's trees were rolled - and their dangling toilet paper set on fire.

For now, Auburn and its athletics still stand, but the superstition has fans fearful of a losing streak.

Hauntings

Go to your computer and access your favorite web browser. Google, Bing, Yahoo... Type in the name of your college followed by the word 'haunted'. More than likely, information regarding someone's untimely demise on *your* campus will pop up; it seems that almost every college campus in the United States and overseas has a haunting.

Miami University, Oxford

Episode three of *Superstitious* featured a story about the Oxford motorcycle ghost linked to Miami University in Ohio. There's a ghost in Oxford, Ohio, and you have to summon him.

BZ Flash Three Times

"You know, in terms of like, more modern times they say that if you go and drive to the girlfriend's house um, and you pull into the driveway and flash your headlights three times, and then turn your lights off and back out of the driveway and go back along the windy bend up the road and pull to the side of the road, and again, flash your lights three times and then turn your car off and wait, you will, in effect, see a singular light from presumably, the motorcyclist going up and down the rolling hills" (Zimmerman).

This is a prime example of college students and their beliefs in the supernatural.

BZ Something They Couldn't Explain

"So many students before us had had, you know this experience, you know, of actually coming into connection with something they couldn't explain" (Zimmerman).

Queens University of Charlotte

I remember being in graduate school at Queens University of Charlotte and hearing stories about a woman who haunted Burwell Hall, the administration building. Some fellow classmates had read about the ghost in books while others had felt a cold presence graze them in the hallways.

Queens University was originally established as a private college for women. Founded by Reverend Robert Burwell and his wife, Margaret Anna, the school linked itself to the Presbyterian Church.

After Mrs. Burwell's death, it's believed that she was unable to leave campus. Wanting to ensure Queens University's care, the Presbyterian woman stayed behind. Several students, undergraduate and graduate alike yearn for a glimpse of the founder-ghost and have been known to break into the administration building to catch a glimpse of her.

But Mrs. Burwell isn't the only spirit that wanders campus. In fact, several others, even after passing, still find the campus a scenic home.

Queens Haunting

"Queens University of Charlotte in Charlotte was founded in 1857 and plays home to several haunted hot spots. In the girl's dorm the spirit of a girl who hung herself likes to show up in mirrors and around corners for a fright. A ghostly Civil War soldier has been seen crossing the courtyard at night and ghostly students in clothing from different eras have been sighted across campus stuck cramming for finals for all eternity" (Speakeasy).

Ball State University

Paranormal investigation teams have explored and examined Elliott Hall at Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana. Scientific proof or not, it's known about the student population, faculty, and staff that the third floor of Elliott Hall is reserved for someone who died on the property decades ago.

Elliott Hall Haunting

"Elliott Hall is the haunted dorm (supposedly) at uh, Ball State. Before it was a college dorm, it was used as a hospital back during World War II. So, apparently there was one soldier who was suffering from depression and things like that, and he hung himself on the very top floor; the third floor. So they say that he likes to play with the lights and the TVs. I mean, I never lived there but I had friends who did. But yeah, they said that he would play with the TV and the lights would flicker

a lot. And nobody uses the third floor. There are no dorm rooms up there" (Hernandez).

Whether or not the soldier of Elliott Hall exists is left for the Ball State population to determine. Not everyone believes in ghosts. Ghosts are recorded imprints in time, generally, the fog of things past. These spirits are attempts of the everyday person to explain something that one cannot understand.

Summation

Attending college is a complex and sometimes trivial situation for those exiting childhood and entering adulthood. This pre-adult moment is a discovery of oneself without the constant aid of parents or other adult familial relationships. Therefore, this growing period is a time bred for superstition whether it be through simple college traditions in the form of sporting events, ghostly superstitions, passing tests, or finding true love.

Idioms for Idiots - "Give it the Good 'Ol College Try"

Each episode of *Superstitious* features a segment called "Idioms for Idiots". On this episode we ventured into the realm of college-stitions. Whether you are attending college to receive a formal education, play sports, or just to discover some newfound independence, college is about learning life lessons. While you're in attendance, you'll want to give this idiom serious consideration and give it the "good 'ol college try".

To "give it the good 'ol college try" means to do one's utmost, to try one's hardest to achieve something great. The phrase dates back to the United States in the 1960s although it has also been attributed to much earlier when Babe Ruth was still playing baseball and was "playing to the grandstand" as a form of showboating or "making strenuous effort to field a ball that obviously cannot be handled" (Phrases.org). Teammates trying to keep a fly ball from going into foul line territory and unable to do so are known to have said, "Well, I gave it the old college try" (Phrases.org). In other words, giving something the "'ol college try" means to work hard at something that ultimately fails.

End

If you enjoyed the podcast, please join Superstitious on Facebook @superstitiouspodcast, on Twitter @superstitiouspo, and Instagram @superstitiouspodcast. You can also check out the Superstitious website at www.superstitiouspodcast.com. Make sure to join the Facebook page; each week a survey is posted regarding favorite superstitions and idioms. So make sure to join and vote! And if you have any superstitions you would like to share, I'd love to hear from you! E-mail me at: superstitiouspodcast@gmail.com. That's s-u-p-e-r-s-t-i-t-i-o-u-s podcast at gmail.com. "Superstitious" is available on iTunes and Stitcher, so if you enjoyed the show, make sure to subscribe and rate; it would be greatly appreciated!

Join me for the next episode of *Superstitious* on Monday, February 26th!

Sources

- ABC. "Police ID Suspect in UNC Explosion." *YouTube*, uploaded by ABC11, 6 November, 2017,
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sz1DBVUewUs&t=2s>
- ACC Digital Network. "Florida State Honors Past Road Victories with 'Sod Cemetery'." *YouTube*, uploaded by ACCDigitalNetwork, 25 September, 2014,
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2RECYIIItKCA>
- Barrett, Colleen. "7 of the Most Fun college Superstitions and Legends." *College Covered*,
<https://www.collegecovered.com/campus-life/best-college-superstitions/>
- Bartram, Truman. Personal Interview. 6 August 2017.
- CNN Newsroom. "CNN: Revenge in Alabama?" *YouTube*, uploaded by CNN, 18 February, 2011,
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R0uy6cUqcXY&t=2s>
- flyingmonkeysqq. "Haunted America #3: Elliott Hall." *GC3EE9H Haunted America #3: Elliott Hall (Traditional Cache) in Indiana, United States created by flyingmonkeysqq*, 12 Mar. 2012, www.geocaching.com/geocache/GC3EE9H_haunted-america-3-elliott-hall?guid=e5ae7094-e1fa-4211-8353-0b00ff046ffe.
- "Haunted Places in North Carolina." *YouTube*, uploaded by Speakeasy, 30 July, 2017,
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IL6JTYW6V_E.
- Hernandez, Samantha. Personal Interview. 6 August 2017.
- Hernandez, Samantha. Personal Interview. 29 January 2018.
- Hill, Ben. Personal Interview. 19 August 2017.

Kinney, Zella. Personal Interview. 6 August 2017.

Reed, Megan. Personal Interview. 19 August 2017.

Tomar, David A. "50 Crazy College Campus Traditions." *The Best Schools*, <https://thebestschools.org/magazine/50-crazy-college-campus-traditions/>

Zimmerman, Brian. Personal Interview. 13 September 2017.