

A Button Mystery

by Frederick Wickert

In the spring of 1973 I retired from the Air Force. I bought a beautiful old home from the man who had delivered our mail when I was a high school boy. The main part of the home was over two hundred years old and had been the home of a doctor for many years. It had been added to and renovated a couple of times

The home was located on the banks of the Schoharie Creek in the Catskill Mountains. It had a higher bench of land a little way back from the house in the back yard. On that bench was a cemetery containing graves from the late 1700's and early 1800's. The location could only be described as picturesque.

We moved in, and all was well. In the master bedroom there was a large closet with a full length mirror on one of the double doors. My wife's and my clothes were hung here. Ample shelving was supplied above the hanging clothes. Some of the clothes would not be used for some time as it was the beginning of May and cooler weather clothes were not needed now. Among those was my favorite camel hair sweater with suede leather patches on the sleeve elbows and pockets. My wife also had a red corduroy coat that would wait until fall before use.

After living in the house for a month we had visitors. A friend of my wife and her two teenage daughters stayed for a week. One afternoon my wife's friend was doing something at the kitchen stove. I heard her from a distance say something about not fooling around and I wasn't scaring her. I was nowhere near but heard her talking. I wondered why she was talking to me like that. I went to see what was going on. She laughed and told me I wasn't fooling her.

I had no idea what she was talking about and said so. The woman accused me of making the window beside the stove go up and down. I assured her I was no where near that window. I told her where I had been. She was skeptical. She believed I was trying to play a prank on her. When my wife returned, we told her what had happened and I assured her I was no where around the window and had nothing to do with it. There were no further incidents of the kind and we all forgot about it. My wife and I had a number of dogs. We had a Toy Poodle to whom we referred to as his majesty. We had an English setter and four Beagles. We also had a number of Cocker Spaniel show dogs. We showed our dogs under the kennel name of Mountain Stream
Cockers.

I had a magnificent ASCOB (any solid color other than black) stud dog. We called him Pudge. His majesty, and Pudge slept in the master bedroom with Tae and I. Suddenly one evening, I was on my way to the bed room. Pudge dashed ahead of me. When he reached the entrance to the room he stopped abruptly, his hair stood on end and he began snarling ferociously. I called to him and told him there was nothing there. I gradually calmed him down and walked into the bed room. I looked all over and found nothing wrong. By that time Pudge had calmed down and all was well. I thought it very strange. I had never seen Pudge behave like that before. (See MY MAGNIFICENT OBSESSION)

A few days later, soon after Tae and I had gone to bed, Pudge jumped up and ran to the door of the room, snarling viciously with his hair standing up along his back. Tae was frightened by his behavior and believed there must be an intruder. I got up from bed and went to see what had upset him. I found nothing. Pudge finally calmed down and returned to normal. We were at a loss to explain his conduct. The same thing happened a number of times.

In the fall on a cool and brisk day in October, Tae and I were preparing to go to a dog match competition. I wanted to wear my camel hair sweater. I went to the bed room closet to get it. I found all the buttons missing from the sweater. I thought a mouse or squirrel must have got them. I searched the floor of the closet for the loose buttons. I could find no buttons nor could I find any debris from the threads that held the buttons on the sweater. There was no debris to be found. The buttons had been removed, complete with the thread. They had been round metal buttons covered with leather. There was no explanation.

In a few weeks , Tae went to retrieve her red corduroy coat from the same closet. The large flat metal buttons covered with material matching the coat, were also gone. Again, there was no debris from either the thread or the buttons. All trace of them had vanished. Both the sweater and the coat were removed and stored in a room sized closet in another part of the house.

In a few years we learned our daughter and grand children who lived in Japan were coming to live in the USA. My wife and I took care of developmentally disabled persons for the state. All bedrooms were in use except one. We needed more room for them when they came to visit. One wing of the house had been added in 1957. The second floor of the addition had never been finished and could only be accessed from the outside with a ladder to a trap door in the side of the building.

The one unused bedroom had a door in the back of the room going into a full room sized storage closet. The coat and sweater with the missing buttons were among the things stored in that room. I determined to finish the portion over the new wing of the house and make rooms there for our daughter and her family to stay when they visited us.

Before the remodeling work could begin, the big storage closet had to be emptied as the access would be through the rear wall of that room. That room would become a part of the new apartment. When Tae and I began removing the clothes hanging there, we discovered to our astonishment that the buttons on both the sweater and the coat had been restored. By examining them, it was impossible to tell they had ever been removed or replaced.

In January of 1997, a huge flood destroyed the possibility of the house being livable again and was destroyed by FEMA. It was necessary for us to move to a new home. We have often wondered if one of the residents of the cemetery behind the house was inclined to be a bit restless sometimes, and enjoyed a little prank from time to time.



This photo shows two men talking in the background. The one on the left is the author, wearing the sweater minus the buttons. The dog being shown is an offspring of Pudge.



The wing of the house where the second floor was renovated. In the corner area to the left of the second floor window is where the big storage closet was.



The second floor window on the left is for the bedroom where the dog Pudge reacted strangely and the buttons vanished from the sweater and coat.