

14. Ghostly Pigeons



My twin brother with my dad building the pigeon coop

In 1959 my father decided to build a pigeon coop in the back yard and for all the years that followed *Columba livia*, the lowly sewer falcon (as my dad called it), has kept its place in our world.

In my book *The Sands of Pima Arroyo*, I have written rather a lot about pigeons, yet it occurs to me now that there are three anecdotes I have yet to put down on paper and each has an image that goes with it.

The Pigeon of Turin

This first story is one my sister wrote after she returned from shopping to see the powdery, ghostly image of a pigeon that had struck the window on her door and died.

She sent her friend Catherine a picture of the image which she had named "The Pigeon of Turin."

"Sally, you could SOOO market this," said Catherine. "Call your nearest Catholic church."

She writes of Catherine: "We met in New Orleans, where the spirit world, competing with the daily grind, wins hands down."

She then tells of the endless shrines in the Big Easy and of the schools with religious names and of how "people burn their retinas watching Mary form in cloud banks, on oak leaves, through moisture on glass."



The Pigeon of Turin

In the end, she finds that she has perhaps made too much of the ghostly image on the glass. What happened was far more mundane: a woman came home from shopping to find a pigeon had hit her window.

The Death Valley Racing Homer

The next anecdote evokes less of a feeling of eeriness or ghostliness than it does

of simple melancholy—and then only when one begins to imagine what



might have happened to a racing homer whose remains were found at the edge of a pond in a tiny oasis in Death Valley. One imagines the thirsty bird flying through the blazing desert heat on its way to its distant coop

when it gets sight of the pond and descends. Upon alighting, it is seized by a hawk that has been lying in wait.

The visitor to Death Valley, a friend of my father, brought the pigeon's band back. It has LANK, AU71, and other characters on it.

Ghost Pigeons in the Coop

Standard ghost stories are very often based upon the premise that the spirit of the departed has been imprinted upon the place where they died and under the right circumstances may be seen to haunt that area.

The third story is just such a tale. It concerns the pigeon coop my brother and I built in the back yard in 1985.

Hundreds of pigeons lived there during its heyday. Often when the coop got too full of birds we would dump a few off at the Phoenix Zoo. But a lot of them lived and died there.

In June of 2009, long years after the last pigeon had lived in the coop, I took the following picture and later noticed the ghostly shadows beneath the perches.



Ghostly Pigeons June 13, 2009