

# Museum News: La Llorona and other Creepy Things

by C. W. (Bill) Smith

As another Day of the Dead comes and goes, we are reminded of the things that go bump in the night. Living in the Great Southwest, we find the lonely desert area produces eerie, unexplainable experiences.

Juan Salazar had one of those experiences. I interviewed him for a small book of survivor stories for the Chamber of Commerce and the Visitor Center in the spring of 2015, the 50th anniversary year of the tragic 1965 Flood. As dramatic as his story was, it was matched by scores of other stories submitted at the time.

It seems that in times of disaster and tragedy, especially flooding, the old Mexican folktale of "La Llorona" surfaces. Although there are many variations, the basic story tells of a woman who has drowned her children and searches the earth at night looking for them. The story is at least 500 years old, dating to the Spanish conquest of Mexico. The web site, [LaLlorona.com](http://LaLlorona.com), is one of the best at telling the story.

Historically, La Malinche was a young Aztec girl who lived in the 1500s, and who was sold as a slave to the Mayans. She was bilingual in Nahuatl, the Aztec language, and Mayan, and was the perfect translator for Hernán Cortés, the Spanish Conquistador. La Malinche, who he called Doña Marina, bore Cortés two sons. When Cortés was recalled to Spain he wanted to take his two sons and his Spanish mistress with him, but leave Doña Marina behind. She could not bear to part with her children so she took them down to Lake Tenochtitlán and stabbed them to death, throwing their bodies into the lake. Not long after her death a figure draped in white with a white veil was seen near the lake, crying out for her children, "Oh hijos míos...ya ha llegado vuestra destrucción. Donde os llevare?" (Oh my children...your destruction has arrived. Where can I take you?) Through the centuries the story spread through the Hispanic world, often told to children as a "boogey-man" story to keep them in line. All of the Southwest is steeped in the lore of La Llorona.

But, back to Juan Salazar. Immediately after the flood he had a strange thing happen to him. One morning as he got ready to go to work he was in the back yard taking a shower with a garden hose...their bathroom had disappeared down the creek.

As he stood there he heard a low, mournful cry, "like a woman in pain," he said. He looked around and couldn't see anything. He kept hearing it and suddenly a bone-chilling thought occurred to him...La Llorona! The old folk tale of his childhood came back to him in a flash, and the curse that is said to accompany it, that those who hear her wails are marked for death. And that was giving Juan Salazar pause...could he really be hearing La Llorona?

Continuing to hear the mournful cry, he went into the house and told his wife, but she was having none of that. She was already upset enough from recent events and she didn't even want to think about it, let alone talk about it. He went outside and scanned his surroundings to see what might be making the eerie noise.



Finally, he saw movement in the direction of the sounds. As he squinted against the morning sun he saw an old hound dog across the creek, made homeless by the flood, crying softly in the ruins for a master who was no longer there. He thought to himself, "La Llorona! Hah! Better get to work, I'll be late."

As long as we are on the subject, let me tell you about the strange goings-on at the old Lemons Homestead, the Terrell County Memorial Museum. I don't like to be in the house alone after dark. The only ghost I believe in is the Holy Ghost, so I find run-of-the-mill, standard spook stories entertaining, but nothing more than that.

HOWEVER (and that's a big however)...I am loathe to have to go into the Museum late at night. A feeling of foreboding comes over me, totally uncharacteristic of the "normal" me. As my grandfather used to say, I get the "willies" when I think about having to go down to that place at night, and for good reason.

On numerous occasions I have come into the Museum in the morning to find one or more lights turned on. I have gotten calls from folks wanting to be helpful to remind me that a light is still burning down there. So, I make myself go down to make sure the lights are off.

And then there is the noise problem. Almost always when I venture into the museum after dark I hear thumping noises. Sometimes as light as a footstep repeated in a walking pattern, or sometimes as pronounced as a nerve-wracking BANG!

Ever the scientist, I tell myself that it is just the house cooling off, metal and wood and plaster shrinking or expanding, but it occurs in the wintertime as well as the rest of the year.

And then, there are the creaking noises, as though someone is standing in one spot, rocking back and forth over a noisy floor board like my kids did when they were little and we lived in old creaky houses. I have no explanation for either sound, but I guarantee that I definitely will come unhinged if I start hearing a wailing woman or rattling chains!

And then there was the time that psychic investigators came to visit. I think they just visit any old building to see what they can see, and were they ever thrilled when I told them of my experiences in the Museum. They took photos and immediately went on about the number of "orbs" in the pictures. I thought to myself, don't poke around under the bed because you may be attacked by a dust-bunny! They promised to return and do a feature on the museum, but they never came back. My fifteen minutes of fame was not to be.

Sooo...La Llorona...or...overactive imagination...you be the judge!