

WEREWOLVES

In a small densely-wooded area of Dennis sits a cluster of houses that bear a certain similarity to one another. They're shingled Capes, small enough by today's mega-house standards, but cozy and comfortable for the families dwelling within. These folks have all arrived within the past few months, and they belong to a unique retirement community that few if any Cape residents know about.

"Sure we all know one another," said Ed Grommis, who agreed to act as spokesperson for the little group. "We come from different backgrounds, but it's what we share that makes us a tight-knit community, easy for newcomers to blend right in with. We're pretty proud of that."

The group Grommis refers to is the Northeast's largest community of retired werewolves.

When your reporter - who had been alerted to the group's existence by a fuel oil delivery man alleged to be dating your reporter's niece, although it appears that the relationship has since cooled into a "good friends" mode and may not even survive that - expressed surprise that retired werewolves should in fact be living among us looking and acting for all the world like normal human beings, Grommis chuckled.

"No offense, but we are normal human beings - at least, now that we're retired," he said. "Folks seem surprised that we can get that way, but we find that the general population knows nothing about werewolves anyway. Ninety-eight percent of people that we meet base their perceptions on sources like old black-and-white Lon Chaney movies, where the protagonist grows a lot of hair and prowls around in the moonlight performing nefarious deeds of one sort or another. Eventually he's chased by villagers in lederhosen brandishing torches and silver bullets and crosses, and after he's killed he slowly morphs back into a handsome young man, and all the villagers - especially the young female ones - are heartbroken. End of movie.

"Well, all that may have been true back in the 18th Century - and even that we doubt - but today's werewolves ... well, we just aren't like that any more."

Apparently your reporter looked more than a little confused.

"Look," said Grommis, "I know it's hard for an outsider to comprehend, but we're really not that different from anyone else. But it's the same with us as with any other community - no two individuals are exactly the same. There are I think fifteen couples in this development, and - for example - my wife Doreen and I ran a used car business in Chicopee for most of our careers. Tom and Janice next door worked for the post office. Ted in 326 is a widower from Ohio who was the stitching supervisor at the Rawlings company that makes all the baseballs for the big leagues. Now is it starting to make sense?"

But where does the werewolf part come in? If you're all so normal now, what in your lives made you think you were werewolves?

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“Well, it all started with the website,” replied Grommis. “Or maybe I should say with the chat group that preceded the website by a few years. A few of us had had some experiences, some feelings that we weren’t too sure of, and we thought that talking about them might be helpful. Me personally, I found I was spending a lot of nights in cemeteries, nights when I should have been at the bowling alley or the Elks. I found that I couldn’t drive past a cemetery without wanting to spend some time there. It was hard to explain. I didn’t do much except hang around looking at the moon if there was one; if there wasn’t, I’d sit on somebody’s headstone wondering how the Sox were doing until the feeling left. Maybe I’d try a howl or two, kind of quietly so I wouldn’t bother anybody. Then I’d get back in the car and continue my other life.

“Don across the street - that’s him out mowing his lawn - told me that he got suspicious after he started going to the barber more and more often. He had been bald as an egg from an early age, then suddenly he developed this massive growth of thick brown-grey hair that he had to have trimmed every week. It was on his arms and legs too, and it got to the point where he couldn’t keep up with the shaving and the depilatories and the dermatologists and the barbers. He started doing some research on the Internet and eventually arrived at the conclusion that he was a werewolf. Naturally he had trouble with it at first, but after a while he got resigned to it, especially after he found out that he wasn’t the only one.”

“Tom and Janice arrived at the same conclusion after they routinely found themselves in the back yard howling at the full moon, not something that a pair of 50-something Michigan postal workers would normally find enjoyable. Tom, who’s of Italian ancestry, also noted an increasing aversion to garlic. “Eddie, I swear to God, I didn’t know what was going on,” he said to me. ‘Me not like garlic? What the hell was that all about?’ If I remember correctly, it was Janice’s sister who suggested the werewolf idea. Janice’s mother wasn’t too happy with that, but I guess she had never liked Tom much anyway. She was more worried about the grandkids, but they weren’t affected. They even thought the idea of their parents being werewolves was ‘kinda cool!’ “

“In the meantime a few of us had started a Lycanthropy chat group - that’s the scientific name for werewolf - and after we filtered out the whackos and perverts, we got busy trying to help each other cope with this aspect of our lives. Eventually someone started up a website where we could post pictures and audio clips, do some blogging, that sort of thing. There are links to other related sites ... I believe they put the one to the Mummy Horde on there today. The link to www.zombiepeople.com has been there a while.

“As we started to compare notes, it became pretty obvious that we were all werewolves. No one seemed too sure how it happened. By day we’d be car salesmen or mailmen or plumbers, but some nights we’d do this weird transformation thing. For most of us it lasted a few hours, then we were back to our day lives. None of us seemed to do much damage when we were in our wolf mode, but I guess we scared the heck out of a lot of folks. No surprise there!

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“When we first started our group, we had a lot of pretenders trying to pass themselves off as werewolves ... I could mention some pretty famous names, but I won’t. In any case they didn’t last long. One of them e-mailed me after he quit the group and told me that he was disgusted - he expected the website to be full of stuff about ripping the hearts out of freshly buried virgins, not banner ads for discount car insurance. But that’s what was important to our group.”

So our Cape Cod werewolves will indulge in no midnight prowling, no grave robbing, no hideous transformations into a slaving fanged beasts intent on all sorts of mayhem, no terrorizing of villages, no unseemly pacts with Dark Forces, no blood-letting competitions with local vampires, no driving unseatbelted or making left turns on Route 28 ... ? No invitations to Mummies and/or Zombies to spend a few weeks during the summer? No Undead reunions or cookouts?

“Look,” admitted Grommis. “I’m the first one to say that we’re not perfect. We don’t discriminate in this community - if you’re a werewolf, and you can make the payments on the house and keep the hedges trimmed, you’re welcome, no questions asked. But like I said before, we’re all individuals, and what works for Ed and Doreen Grommis might not work for other folks. Sometimes you get together with the guys for a few brewskis and you start hearing some werewolf shop talk that kind of surprises you. And I’ll be honest with you - some of the younger retirees in here get really mad at us older folks because we don’t want to get involved with that kind of stuff. ‘Why be a werewolf if you can’t raise a little hell?’ they say. But I don’t have to prove anything to anybody - if I feel like hanging around a cemetery or prowling for road kill for a few hours on a stormy moonless night, I’ll do it. But I’ll do it for me, not for a bunch of punks.”

Finally your reporter asked how the group had decided to settle on the Cape.

“Hey, look around!” said Grommis with a laugh. “This place has everything - the beach, golf, boating, the arts, plenty of social life, lots of old cemeteries - just kidding, just kidding! - it’s close to Boston and New York, but still has a quiet charm that makes it really different. We all agreed that we can be what we are up here without anybody really giving a damn. We’ll pay our taxes, paint our trim, maintain our septic systems, and you won’t even know we’re here ...

“Except maybe around Halloween ... “

THE END ... ?