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Accounts of Personal Phenomena
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A Dowser at Work

My First Exposure to a Mysterious Practice

By the time I reached fifty years of age, I'd been aware of dowsing for many years but didn't know anything beyond the Midwestern rural lore that some people could determine good locations for wells by sensing the tugs of a tree branches they held as they paced back and forth across farmers' fields.

The incident I'm relating here changed all that for me by taking dowsing out of the realm of folklore and placing it firmly in my reality. It sparked an interest that's held my interest in dowsing for nearly 20 years.

My wife Christine and I moved in 2003 to southern Ohio for a sabbatical while I did research on a historical novel I was writing. We bought an 1833 Federal-style cottage in the village of Lynchburg – population 900 – in Highland County, forty miles north of the Ohio River. The village was demographically on the northern edge of Appalachia, with the rural poverty that characterizes that region. People got by as best they could.

In the yard directly behind our house, the concrete remains of an old septic tank stuck a foot above the ground. In the summer months, the broken chunks of concrete offered a perfect place for young snakes to sun themselves. A plumber I met had a sideline running a little excavation business, and he offered to use his back-hoe to smash down and bury the concrete in the ground where the septic tank had been.

The problem was, we could see where the sewer pipe left the house and ran toward the old septic tank, and we knew the sewer line was now connected to the village sewer line at the back end of our property. But we didn't know if the sewer line ran through the old septic tank itself. If it did, and if we crushed the tank's concrete walls, we would smash the sewer line and I'd have a problem — a very messy and expensive one at that.

I needed to know the exact location of the sewer line, so I called the village water department and three men showed up. (Being a small village, these men were the village street department and parks department as well.) One of the men told me that finding the sewer line's path would be tough because a fire in the village offices a few years back had burned all the maps showing where the underground utilities ran.

"You mean we have to dig up the whole yard to find out where the line goes?" I wondered. Meanwhile, one of the other men, a small fellow named Denny, walked back to the village dump truck and returned with L-rods, two bent pieces of metal he held in his hands, pointed in front of him. I saw Denny and the L-rods and said to myself: "You've got to be kidding."

Denny paced back and forth behind the house holding the two L-rods in front of him. Every time he crossed where we knew the sewer line to be, his rods crossed. And as he continued to pace deeper in the yard where the sewer line's location was a mystery, his rods kept crossing and uncrossing until he reached the main sewer hookup on the rear property line.

"Your sewer line goes around the old septic," Denny eventually told us. "Not through it. You can bury this all this cement, no problem." No one questioned his findings.

Afterward, I talked with Denny for a few minutes about dowsing. He didn't say much about it, other than he saw nothing unusual in his ability. It was something shared by a lot of people in these parts, he told me. I decided then and there to make a pair of L-rods and figure out how to dowse.