



Video Story Transcript

Lurking in the Silence: The KKK Haunts a Michigan Town

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<http://www.myblueape.com>

Link to YouTube Video:
<https://youtu.be/LCS86TVkczM>

Note: The following is a transcription of a spoken story performance and may not reflect textbook perfect English. It will guide you as you listen (or read) along.

Hi, I'm Jeff Doyle. In 2003, my wife Colleen and I decided to build a new office building for our business on the outskirts of Howell, Michigan located about ten miles from our home. It's, the town has a beautiful main street, it's centrally located. It's home to the courthouse, parades and festivals. It seemed like the perfect place.

But Howell has a secret. It has a dark past.

On a farm outside of town, Robert Miles the former grand dragon of the KKK once lived. For those who knew him he often hosted Klan gatherings and cross burnings on his farm. Those who knew him would say that he was charismatic, well-spoken and evil. In the 1970s, he was convicted of conspiring to bomb school buses in Pontiac, Michigan to stop integration and also was convicted of, of tarring and feathering a principal in Ypsilanti Michigan. He and a group of men ran the principal off the road poured hot tar over him and then dumped feathers on him.

This history and these facts, it haunted the town of Howell. They always come up but, but when we built our building, they were rarely ever discussed. If ever there was an incident, and there have been incidents, the city leaders would think, oh when will this ever go away. And, and then they would they would say,

“Oh, please don't print this in the paper. Please don't print that, that Robert Miles once lived here. Please don't print that there was a cross burning on it in an African-American's yard in the county in the 1980s.”

“Please don't print that there was a Klan rally on the courthouse steps in the 1990s.”

Because every time there is a racial incident these, these, these facts, this history gets printed. Of course, every time there's an instance the town is outraged and upset. The Diversity Council sponsors diversity training and sponsors films and focus groups on how to make things better, so that maybe this will this will never happen again.

But between incidents the town is largely silent. I, I am silent.

In 2014 when Howell High School, the Howell High School basketball team, an all-white team, beats a mixed race team from out of town. Some students tweet:

All hail white power.
#we white #KKK #burn the cross

The rest of the school, the other students are horrified. They sponsor more training and, and I think, what is the environment where these students would learn that this was okay to say?

But, I lurk in the silence.

I wonder what is my part? What should, what should I do? What can I do? I'm a, I'm a white male. What is my role in this?

But I lurk in the silence.

In 2016, my wife Colleen and I buy a building in downtown Howell across the street from the courthouse next to the historic Howell theater. It has always been our dream to restore an old building and live on the second floor.

But our son Mack, he asked, “Why would you want to move to Howell?”

His experience, his intuition tells him, he would not. I start to wonder; yeah, why would I want to move to Howell? What am I doing?

But I answer him, and I tell him, “The people I have met and had experience with in Howell, hate, do not think and act as racist. As a matter of fact, they hate the reputation. They hate the history. I tell him that, “You know, no matter where we have lived, and we've lived in a few places that there have been racists there, people say and do stupid and racist things.”

And then I tell him, “I guess that I figured out that battling racism is a constant battle. And you can't do it from outside. If I want to help with the problem in Howell and change the image, I have to be there. I, I have to become an advocate. I have to make the town more welcoming. That is what I can do.”

In 2018, Howell is named the winner of the great American Mainstreet award for small towns. In 2018 at the Howell historic theater. There is a Bollywood film showing. It's a fundraiser for a group from India that provides education for young girls in India. Colleen and I think this is great. Howell is welcoming the Indian

community. But while the film is showing, a racist group called Patriot Front from outside of town, plasters the cars in the neighborhood with racist, hateful flyers.

In front of the theater, in front of our building.

I, I, I guess I'm, I'm, I'm upset. I'm outraged, and I am called to action because you see our building has a window on Main Street across from the courthouse and it is the perfect place to end *my* silence. I order a sign that hate has no home here. Hate has no home here sign and I place it in the window.

The next day a woman from Howell calls me and said, "Where did you get that sign?"

She says, "I want one."

And I say, "I just so happened to have an extra one" and I gave it to her and I think this is what I can do. I can put that sign in here. I can be the one that says Howell is welcoming. I want to be welcoming. I want our town to be inclusive.