NINA MOINI: Halloween may be over, but our next guest says there's always something spooky and mysterious lurking around the corner. Isn't that the truth. Chad Lewis has spent decades researching the weird and unusual across the state of Minnesota. He does public presentations on Minnesota's lesser known paranormal history. Thanks for being with us, Chad.

CHAD LEWIS: Hey, great to be here.

NINA MOINI: You have a great voice as well, Chad. I think folks who like to be scared and like the fun and the emotional roller coaster, Halloween or not. I feel like the fall season and winter are just peak times, right? And so I think it's still top of mind for a lot of people. And they might even want to plan somewhere to go. I think people are wondering what your research entails. How do you know about paranormal events that have happened in the state?

CHAD LEWIS: Yes, you're absolutely correct. There's no time frame on the spooky and strange. People love it from bachelor parties going around, mother-daughter weekends, to geocaching. People just love the unusual. And this time of year, there's none better.

NINA MOINI: So how did you come to learn about these events? How did you get your start?

CHAD LEWIS: I blame it on my home state of Wisconsin because not only do we have a UFO capital of the world in Wisconsin, we had three of them. So when I was growing up, I lived near one of those UFO capitals. And during high school, I started interviewing people who were seeing UFOs.

And I started studying psychology the next fall and [AUDIO OUT] master's thesis on students belief in the paranormal. And that's what really spawned my interest of why some people believe in the supernatural and others do not. So it just kind of went from there.

NINA MOINI: So when you go to your presentations and you share what you found-- I understand this week alone you've got several events, one's called Paranormal Minnesota, another on Minnesota's most haunted places. Is there one story that is just so cool or so neat or scary that you include it in most of your presentations?

CHAD LEWIS: I love the legend of the Mississippi River monster, because back in the 1800s, people were terrified that there was a giant monster inhabiting the Mississippi River and that it was pulling people out to their watery graves. The news full of stories of people fearing these giant man-eating beasts in the water. And today, if you go to Lake Pepin, which many of your listeners will know sits on the Mississippi, dividing Wisconsin and Minnesota, they have a creature called Pepie, a lake sea serpent.

And it's been spotted since first Indigenous people there. Laura Ingalls Wilder, the noted author, she talked about it being there. And today it's been spotted and encountered so many times. There's a $50,000 reward being offered for its capture.

NINA MOINI: [LAUGHS]

And what are some of the reactions that you get? You know when people get mad (LAUGHING) or they don't want to hear about something that's paranormal? Or what are some of the different reactions that you get from folks?

CHAD LEWIS: Because I promote it as a fun, visual road trip through folklore, leaving it up to the viewer or the audience to visit these places and come to their own conclusion as to whether or not they believe, I think a lot of people love the idea of it. Whether or not they believe in ghosts or UFOs or Bigfoot walking the woods, especially this time of year, they have fun with it.

They want to get into the idea of some things might be unknown. So I think a lot of people approach it like that. I get an audience full of both skeptics, true believers, and everyone in between.

NINA MOINI: Sure, the full range, and maybe they've changed their mind by the end of your presentation. Are there parts of Minnesota you think people would be surprised to know have a rich paranormal history? We could be living in neighborhoods and not even know.

CHAD LEWIS: I always state that you can't throw a rock without hitting a place that has a haunted or supernatural reputation.

NINA MOINI: Scary!

CHAD LEWIS: Yeah. Sometimes you have to dig a little bit for it, sometimes literally dig. But if you are ever bored on a rainy day, flip through your old newspaper archives of your local newspaper and you'd be amazed at how many old legends are in there of strange haunted buildings and just cursed legends from your own local neighborhood. So these stories, I'm never running out of them.

NINA MOINI: Wow. It's shocking to hear, in a way. But I guess when you go looking for something-- but I also feel like, we mentioned people can be skeptical and there's a range, but that overall do you feel that maybe society, or maybe it's the internet, that people have become more open to exploring paranormal things?

CHAD LEWIS: Two parts to that. Certainly over the last 30 years I've been doing this, people are more comfortable coming forward. It used to be someone would approach me, look around to make sure no one was listening, and then whisper their story about their experience. Now I can do a lecture, and 20 people want to share their story with me about what happened to them. And I think over the years, people have at least come to the idea of believing in the possibility of these things, whether or not they actually truly believe in them.

NINA MOINI: Hmm. What do you think that people learn from stories like this? You mentioned sometimes people have their own experiences and they will come and share about that, or maybe just hearing about things. Are there lessons to be learned, or do you think it's all just about that feeling of a fright and those chemical feelings?

CHAD LEWIS: That's certainly part of it, being afraid and scared in a controlled manner. But I think on a deeper level, these stories, these folklore legends, they represent us as a people, what our beliefs are, what our culture believes in, how do we behave as a society, our values, our norms. And they're a lot deeper in that field than just ghosts or stories of the Wendigo up in the North Woods of Minnesota, that these are deeper.

They came here-- all of the non-Indigeneous legends, they came here when our ancestors came here. Those of us who are immigrants, they came here. They brought the stories of werewolves and vampires and sea serpents. So they've been with us since the beginning of time, and I think they persist of what happens when we die? Are we alone in the universe? Have we discovered every known animal? And I think those are just fascinating questions.

NINA MOINI: Yeah. Is there a specific place within the Minnesota-- I know we've kind of gone across the state a little bit together. But if there's an area, like, say, someone is listening and thinks, I'm going to plan a fun bachelor party to something, are there maybe like a top three places that you would love for people to check out or consider?

CHAD LEWIS: The number one question I receive from people is, where can I go to spend the night in a haunted place? And of course, people want to do that. One of my recommendations would be to head to the Palmer House Hotel in Sauk Centre. It's a haunted, old historic hotel that you'll love. It feels like you're walking back to the 1930s.

A lot of people love going to the North Shore. I highly recommend touring Minnesota's most infamous and most recognizable home, the Glensheen Mansion, which if you leave there without a ghost story, you're still going to have a wonderful time there.

Also, I highly recommend go to Anoka, Minnesota. It's the Halloween capital of the world. It's where Halloween really began in America, when they decided to bribe children from doing pranks on All Hallow's Eve by having a big parade and a festival to keep them busy. And now, 106 years later, it seems to have worked.

NINA MOINI: Hmm. Those are great recommendations, Chad. Thank you so much for coming by and for all your work. We really appreciate your time.

CHAD LEWIS: Hey, keep an eye out.

NINA MOINI: I will. (LAUGHING) That's a good-- I'm going to start using that. Thanks so much, Chad. Chad Lewis is a researcher of the weird and unusual.