

PARANORMAL PONDERINGS

A Memoir



AN ILLUSTRATED DIGEST OF
PARANORMALITY AND MY
JOURNEY FROM CONFUSION
TO ACCEPTANCE

Patricia Mullen Dunn

PARANORMAL PONDERINGS - A MEMOIR:
An Illustrated Digest of Paranormality and
My Journey from Confusion to Acceptance

MULLEN DUNN, PATRICIA

Copyright © 2019 Patricia Mullen Dunn

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or used in any manner without written permission of the copyright owner except for the use of quotations in a book review.

This book is a memoir. In it, I have recreated events, circumstances and conversations to the best of my ability. In instances where I had only an overall recollection of these things, these gaps have been filled in with artistic license. I tried to remain true to the overall feeling or essence of the scene. That is the only way I know to get a book of this kind written. The memories of paranormal events that make up the central purpose of this book have been recorded faithfully as they have remained clearly in memory as these things generally do.

In order to maintain their anonymity in some instances I have changed the names of individuals and places, I may have changed some identifying characteristics and details such as physical properties, occupations and places of residence.

This book is not intended as proof of the paranormal or proof of anything. It is one person's recollection of a lifetime's experiences. I can offer no proof of the paranormal - only more anecdotal evidence to add the pile that has been growing since as long as there has been human memory.

This book is not intended as a substitute for medical/psychological advice, diagnosis or treatment. The reader should regularly consult a professional in matters relating to his/her health and particularly with respect to any symptoms that may require diagnosis or treatment.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION

PREFACE

INTRODUCTION

Angel on the Staircase

Moon Maid and Past Lives

Attic Ghost

Premonition of Dad's Death

A Shared Death Experience

The Séance and the Radio

Premonition of a Future Job

Angel on the Parkway

Premonition of a Bloody Finger

Bottle-Throwing Ghost

Out of Body Trip to the Office

Out of Body Trip to a Friend's House

Premonition of My Dog's Death

Paper Route Ghost

Premonition of a Future Home

Premonition of My Mom's Death

An Orb in a Tree

A Near Death-Like Experience

Poltergeist at the Wedding

Ghost Cat

Silver Sphere UFO

Goodbye from My "Best Girl"

The Mirror Portal

Glowing Red Triangles

Ghost in the Theater Aisle

Ectoplasm on a Stranger's Head

Your Stories:

Author's Letter to those Trauma from

Paranormal Events:

About My Artwork

Thank You

DEDICATION

For my fellow travelers who life has pulled
into the wonderment enthusiastically,
unwittingly or reluctantly...

May you find that which you seek or that
which seeks you.

PREFACE

This is a book that deep down inside I always knew I would write. Looking back, I can see that I've been keeping an unofficial tally of these strange incidents for my whole life. In a deeper way, it has also been a search for meaning.

Maybe having had my "angelic" experience in infancy set me up to see things differently from that point on. Maybe having a life-changing spiritual experience at age nine re-emphasized the fact that there is another facet to life quietly running parallel to my everyday world showing itself only sporadically and on its own terms.

Perhaps those of us who have had these kinds of experiences in childhood before the cultural filters were firmly in place, are unable to block them out or dismiss them the way our contemporaries later will. Perhaps as in my case, we apparently became sensitized to this other reality, leaving us open to future experiences.

Two things that did result from these childhood revelations for me are my lifelong fascination

with the so-called paranormal and my compassion for my fellow experiencers. Much like me, I know that many of them long to hear an account that approximates their own. Some, also like me, have a sense that these things are somehow meant to be shared. A sense that these incidents serve as indicators of something beyond the normal experience of life and that those indicators are not meant for the experiencer alone.

There is an internal imperative to alert the tribe. It seems that at some point, the paranormal must cross into the spiritual and it wants to be shared. In the way our ancestors were notified of extraordinary circumstances or occurrences by particular tribe members, perhaps we experiencers are modern day shamans. If we are shamans, then we are shamans operating wholly without the benefit of training, tradition or understanding. We are operating in a tribe that mostly rejects and discounts any such revelations. Often these prejudices have just cause, but just as often, if not more, they are simply knee-jerk responses to what has been

heretofore unrecognized. It seems that during the Age of Reason we threw out the baby with the bath water.

My experiences have put me on a spiritual seeker's path. I have come to understand that the material world is both very real and an illusion. This is a paradox that my brain still struggles with, though I know intuitively that this is so. It seems that a large part of our life here is about reigning in our instinct to control the ambiguity and inconsistencies of life. Learning to be comfortable in the uncertainty, however, is difficult for most of us.

Science has taught us not to fear the phenomena produced by the natural world. It has allowed us to let go of countless superstitions that ruled the lives of our ancestors. It seems that the more we learn however, the more we understand that the material world itself, is informed by something else – something that does not comply with the rules. This something does not qualify as part of the known world.

For some, religious belief explains this. Others just can't close the book with the explanations

that come from that quarter either. It seems that we now have to accept the fact that there are things beyond that which our senses can register in the so-called normal course of events. It seems at times, for some people at least, these things are detected. Is the reason for this with the sensing equipment of the person detecting it or is it with the phenomena itself? I believe that this becomes a pivotal question.

For me, even more important than these debates and questions is human kindness. In many ways, as a culture we have been moving in the direction of inclusion for groups that have been previously relegated to the fringes, or targeted for abuse based simply on the fact that they're different than the mainstream. In this culture these groups have had to fight their way to what is sometimes an uneasy acceptance. If what distinguishes us from the mainstream is an unacceptable experience, this doesn't seem a viable option. Tell a group of people that you've just seen a ghost and you will generally not even find the thinnest veneer of political correctness. We can't force belief. Nor should we.

Perhaps one answer and maybe the only answer, is to drop our own trepidation about sharing our experiences and become more visible as a group. Of course, many people have done this singly and have suffered the consequences. Some have done this seemingly without the anticipated negative effects. So, the response to our sharing is actually unpredictable – another uncertainty. Uncertainty is another word for “run the other way” for most of us.

For me and for most people, I think, it becomes about control. Not being able to control an unpredictable response stops us in our tracks. When the negative responses we might receive begin in our own homes with our own families, it becomes even harder to override this fear.

It was in this spirit, the spirit of adding my voice to those of others who have stepped out of line that I finally began formalizing my own list of unexplained phenomena. From that list, I was able to transport myself back in time and reconstruct the normal events of my life within which these phenomena were couched. To the best of my ability, I have recounted not only the

events but my thoughts and feelings about them at the time. In many of these cases, the events are distant in time, so I wrote my life around them in chronological memoir fashion. The names of all persons, living and dead have been changed. I did this because I know that stories are important. At the end of the day, we are our stories. What follows are some of mine.

Patricia Mullen Dunn New York, 2019

INTRODUCTION

Since childhood I have been interested in people's accounts of the paranormal intersecting with their lives. Long before the internet allowed an endless indulgence of this passion, I scoured the library shelves in my little town for books that addressed these subjects practically daily. I often found myself in the adult section trying to comprehend things that were well above my understanding and mostly mind-numbingly tedious. I often had to settle for novels at my age level that treated these topics in a watered-down, comical way.

These subjects were generally not discussed at home and the unspoken message I got was that they were taboo. Once in a while my mother would recount some tidbit of such an experience that she'd remembered happening either to herself or someone she knew. These would be told in hushed tones and followed up with a shudder and an elaborate crossing of herself. Any

time I mentioned the subject of ghosts or anything else that smacked of the supernatural, she would sternly inform me that it was “against my religion.” While her words were stern, her eyes told a different story. The story in her eyes was summed up in one word: Fear.

These days were long before the revolving door of paranormal shows that are available on television today. Shows that although blatantly suspect are at least moving the topic more into the mainstream. As a child, I think I would have been satisfied with reading the books put out for my reading level if I hadn't had my own brushes with what we call the paranormal so early in life. I was looking for answers.

I knew no one who shared my interest and the general mood regarding these things was that they were fantasies and not to be taken seriously, so I was looking alone. I needed to know why. Why did the things that had happened to me elicit such negative reactions from others? What were they and why did they happen? Why did they happen to me? Why did they happen at all?

I know now that I was far from alone in this. I have read many accounts of other people whose experiences started in childhood and for whom there was nowhere to turn. I count myself as very lucky in that the lifetime of experiences that I've had were overwhelmingly positive. I know that this is not the case for many, many people who as children and as adults have been terrified and tormented by things that are not supposed to be there. If this is your story, my hope is that this book helps in some way. Having gained some small perspective on this subject and on my life, I realize that the answers were never there in that dim library nor are they on the countless websites, blogs and forums of the internet. The answers are certainly not in the stream of dubious paranormal shows on television. More importantly, I realize that what I was seeking was much more than just an answer to "Why?" Despite all my years of searching, that question remains stubbornly unanswered.

I realize now that the searching was more about the need for acceptance and acknowledgment of a reality beyond this one. The searching was more

about the need to come to a place of knowing that reality is not just about what we see, hear or touch. The searching was more about the need to come to a place of knowing that we who call ourselves “human” are not at all what we think we are.

ANGEL ON THE STAIRCASE



As soon as the hands set me gently on the cold tile floor of the hallway, the bubble is broken and sound returns.

I am flying. My mother has lost her grasp on me and I am flying backwards down the long narrow staircase.

The wretched pink snowsuit is now twisted around me and my mother is frozen with horror at the top of the stairs. She is screaming but I don't hear her. I don't hear anything. I am enveloped in a bubble of softness and comfort and I'm airborne. I don't feel the smash of stair treads breaking my tiny bones. I don't feel my skull crack on a series of balusters all the way down. I don't feel my neck break and I don't feel myself die in a crumpled pink heap at the bottom of the staircase.

All I feel are the strong hands supporting me in a cushioned envelope while I travel in a slow-motion glide – down, down, down.

As soon as the hands set me gently on the cold tile floor of the hallway, the bubble is broken and sound returns. I am completely unhurt and not frightened.

From my perspective, the whole thing has been a gleeful ride. Like the slide at the park. I don't see the owner of the hands but the sense of loving presence and the physical pressure of the individual fingers and upturned palms will brand my body with memory for the rest of my life.

Minutes before, red-faced and angry, I was wrestling against the dreaded snowsuit. Anyone who's ever tried to attire a tantruming two-year-old in one, knows that it's like trying to get an octopus into a straight jacket. That my mother chose the top of the hallway stairs in the dark hallway of the ancient Brooklyn brownstone to do this, puzzles me still. In her defense, I am choosing to believe that she was out of her mind with grief. Only two or three weeks before, my eighteen-year-old sister died of an un-diagnosed heart defect. A fact that will begin another downward descent for my family. One that is unequivocal.

I never knew my sister, my parents firstborn, but the effect of her tragic death will profoundly affect me. Already sixteen-years-old when I was born, she was two years older than our brother and four years older than our disabled sister. Somewhere in the years between myself and the next youngest, my mother also gave birth to a full-term stillborn daughter. Some families seem to cope with grief and get to a place of healing. Mine didn't. In the days before it was "okay" to talk about your feelings, the only option was to cut them off, ignore and deny them.

Of course grief and anger of this magnitude won't be denied, not really. It just bleeds out in all kinds of toxic and complex ways. In my family, the usual and customary way began with the disagreement. Somebody said something or did something or didn't do

something. Starting off small, it would become a screaming/slamming door/throwing things match followed by days of cold silence.

My sister's death naturally had a profound effect on my siblings. My brother began acting out shortly after our sister's death and found himself in juvenile detention for two years. He then escaped completely by marrying young. My disabled sister had lost her biggest champion and mentor. Emotionally challenged already, she was often both the subject of and initiator of much of the conflict.

My mother's coping method was to become an indomitable whirlwind of activity, anger and anxiety. Even the smallest thing became a matter of urgency to her and I swear you could hear her crackle with energy. My father who had begun a series of heart attacks in his thirties became her opposite – sullen and morose. He had to retire early with strict instructions not to exert himself. His life became a series of journeys between the couch, the kitchen and bed. Unlike my mother's, his brand of anger was of the slow-burn variety – exploding suddenly and without warning. His broken heart would kill him just seven years after his daughter.

A classic “lost child,” I learned how to dodge bullets and disappear at will.

Drawing and reading upstairs in my room became my refuge as the war raged on beneath me. I often note that I was born just in time to sweep up and turn off the lights in my family. By the time I came into the picture, the family was well into the process of annihilation.

I often wonder what would have happened if I had died or sustained massive brain damage on that wintry day in Brooklyn. How much worse would it have gotten for them? How much worse could it have gotten? It seems uncannily fortuitous that such a mercy would be bestowed at such a time of tremendous stress.

Most people don't have any memories at all of their two-year-old self. I'm sure I wouldn't either except for the indelible memory of those hands.



I am enveloped in a bubble of softness and comfort and I'm airborne.

I was too young to correct my mother when she'd retell the story of how the miraculous pink snowsuit saved my life. I couldn't understand why she'd be lying. Didn't she know about the hands? It took a few years for me to recognize the fact that invisible hands are not something experienced in the normal course of events. Nor are they accepted as even possible. Like the lifetime of so-called paranormal incidents ahead of me, I kept it to myself.

Was it an angel? A spirit guide? Was it the spirit of my recently deceased sister? Was it some aspect of my higher self? Is there a force in the universe that decides when one more death would be too much? If so, how do you account for the staggering succession of children lost to single families in generations past – before there were inoculations against things like Diphtheria and Polio?

To say I am grateful for that near miss would be to simplify it. While I am grateful, of course, I am also confounded. Of course I didn't know it then but it was just the beginning of a lifetime's series of things that would both intrigue and bewilder me.

Angels appear to transcend all cultures, races, and systems. They are a part of human history and civilization, sometimes at the forefront, other times in the shadows, but they are always there. They don't belong to any one particular religion, although many modern people try to associate them with Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. No one religion holds total responsibility for the belief in angels. In truth, these religions only support the existence of angels, they didn't create them.

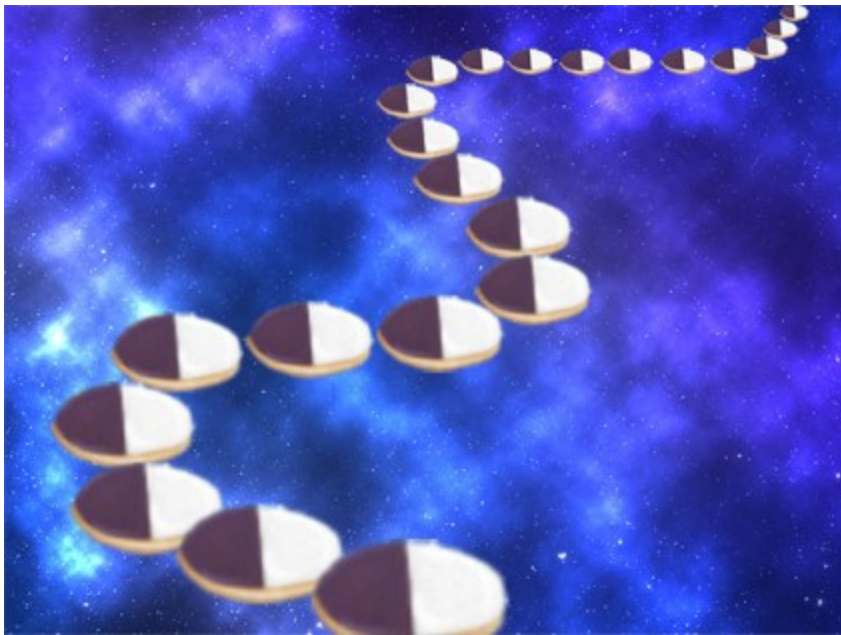
SILVER RAVENWOLF

MOON MAID AND PAST LIVES

We make a bee-line from church down two Sunday morning blocks directly to Truder's Bakery. The aroma of yeasty donuts and chocolate wafts through the air long before we hit the door. I push between the stockinged legs and folded newspapers of the church-garbed people to go to the front where my eyes can ravish the neat doiled rows of cookies that are a wave of sweetness behind the polished glass.

From left to right, powdered sugar gives way to chocolate dipped, then rainbow sprinkles and finally jellies. My mother becomes part of the larger crush of adults. Behind the counter the accented voices of the Truder family shout directions at each other and the murmur of the crowd behind me is broken only by the occasional jingle of the door followed by the click-click-click of the ticket dispenser.

The only real decision will be between the sweet, smooth glaze of a black-and-white cookie or the powdery crumble of a Linzer tart overflowing with jam. I am allowed one cookie for the walk home and I will decide on one of these because they are the big ones.



In celebration of the Black and White cookie.

Each has its finer points: You can alternate your bites of the former between its contrasting sides or precisely limit them to one side or the other until you are left with an all-vanilla or all-chocolate cookie.

The latter, Linzer tart is more haphazard in that if you don't immediately lick the raspberry jam from the sides where it oozes out, you are in danger of leaving a trail of blood-red dribbles down the lace layers of your dress. The powdered sugar is another consideration. You can lick it off in several large swoops or allow it to billow everywhere with each bite.

It will take me exactly half of the six block walk home to complete negotiations with the cookie of my choice in one hand while red and white string digs deeply into the other from the weight of the jelly donuts that swing in a box while I skip behind my mother.



Dad and me and the Sunday comics

Sunday mornings belong to my mother but the afternoon is all dad.

My dad lives on an island in the living room called the couch. He sleeps there, eats there, watches television there and drinks endless cups of milky tea there while the ashtray beside him fills with Lucky Strike cigarette butts.

My mother's frenzied energy spills over and is everywhere while my father is stationary – bounded by the island/couch. I know that this has something to do with his heart which is sick. When I think of sick, I think of pale and quiet and feeble. He is none of these. He is large and solid and loud, so I often forget that he's sick at all. I forget when I squeeze tightly next to him and we marvel at how our hands look exactly the same. Mine are miniature replicas of his bulky, square ones.

Despite our small apartment, conversations between my parents are held at the top of their voices so that they can hear each other over the television and the banging of pots.

Some days the island/couch is not an open affair and my presence there is an annoyance. I am being too noisy or my questions are endless or I am blocking the television. On those days my mother escorts me out of the living room and into her territory. Sundays are different. On Sundays I am welcomed on the island and can sit smushed right up next to my father or on his lap while he reads the funnies to me. He is a different dad on Sundays. Side by side, we sit each holding an edge of the funny pages. Dad reads the captions in a dramatic news announcer voice. Little Orphan Annie, Dondi and all female characters have a high-pitched, breathy slur while the males are a lower pitched version of the news announcer. Our favorite is Dick Tracy with his two-way wrist radio and parade of odd characters. We follow the story line twists as the house fills with the aroma of roast beef or Virginia ham. Our favorite is Moon Maid with her platinum hair, giraffe-like horns and Magnetic Air Car.

Dad and I talk about many things and during these times. I tell him about the memories I have: memories from before – before when I wasn't five but when I was a grown up.

He has a million questions about these lives.

I tell him details about the place that I lived and the things that I did. I tell him about how I left that place and how I came to be here. These are the memories of an adult. I am frustrated because there are things that he should remember about those times too but he can't or won't.

He yells out to my mother: "She's lived before!" Pots rattle in response. "I think this one is from the moon!" he adds.

I *am* the Moon Maid now.

Soon I too will forget. I will be left with a single frame in my mind: In it I walk briskly past a white picket fence. In that snapshot memory I clearly see the fence from above – an adult's perspective. This is an image that I will keep with me for some unknown reason.

Not long after these Sunday afternoons, my father's heart will finally take him and with him the secondhand account of my memories of lives before this one.

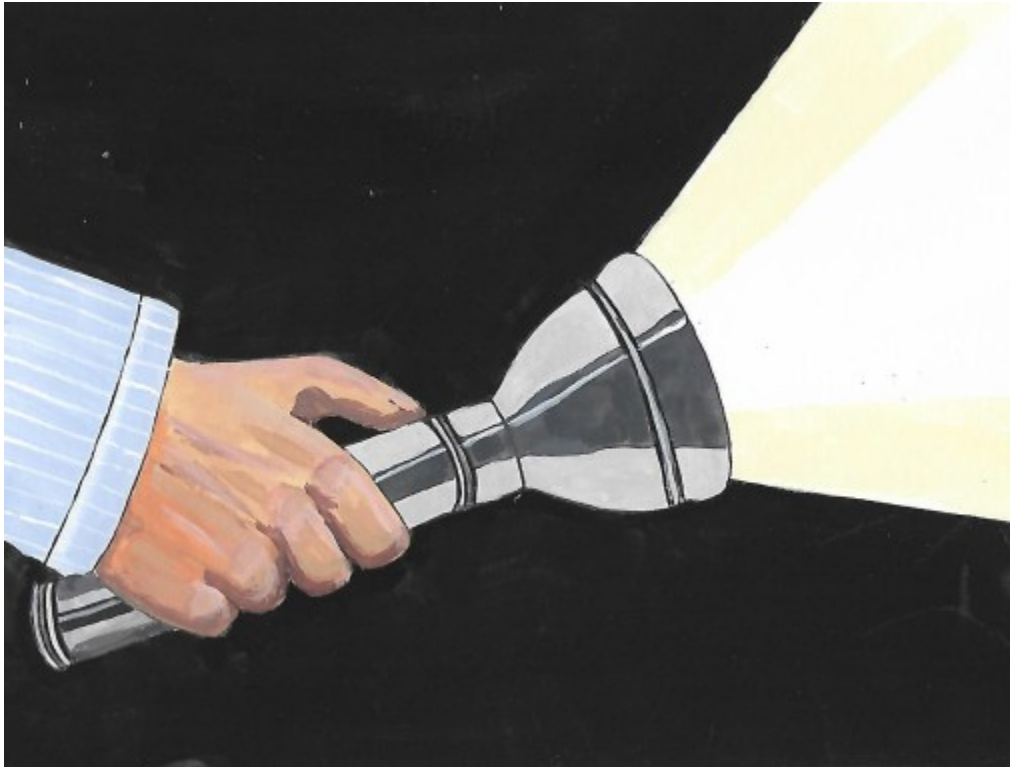
"For truly we are all angels temporarily hiding as humans."

— Brian Weiss

ATTIC GHOST

Now it is the time of night
That the graves, all gaping wide,
Every one lets forth his sprite
In the church-way paths to glide.

-William Shakespeare



"Damn it!" My

father grabs the flashlight from the top of the refrigerator.

I am dreaming. I dream this dream a lot. My dream is crowded with cartoon characters. I am one too. I am Cinderella dressed for the ball. I look down at my gown – floating blue organza shooting cartoon sparkles in all directions. I am the only child in a group of comic-strip teenagers. We are gathered in a loose circle at the corner of my old block where my sister Ann used to set me on her shoulders or pass me to her friends. When I'm awake I know that we no longer live here. I have a new block now and Ann is gone forever. We live in Queens now – only fifteen – yet a million miles away from Brooklyn. When I'm asleep I don't know this.

Someone has tossed a firecracker into the middle of the circle and I feel myself jolt backward. Someone is cursing. Only it's not a cartoon teenager, it's my father: **"What the hell was that?"**

All the lights in the apartment snap on. I squint at the assault of the overhead lamp. It's happening again. My parents are out of bed. My brother and sister are rubbing their eyes. Their voices rise and fall in the kitchen until a loud dragging sound intrudes. My mother gathers me up and we are all in the kitchen now staring at the ceiling as the attic above us comes alive with footsteps. Now the dragging sound again – slow, then fast. A ripping sound so loud, my hands go to my ears.

There is someone in the attic. Clearly, someone is moving something very heavy by pushing or pulling it across the floor above us but there will be no one there.

The whole repertoire repeats: A loud crack followed by the heavy dragging – twenty feet, right to left. A flurry of footsteps and now the dragging again starting slowly, then accelerating and followed immediately by the snap-hiss of canvas being ripped violently in two.

"Damn it!" My father grabs the flashlight from the top of the refrigerator. We listen to his footsteps as he stomps up the staircase. A door slams above.

We wait. My mother nervously removes dishes from the dish drain and stacks them in a cabinet. Even though it's the middle of the night she can't sit down. I examine the pattern of light on the tabletop in front of me. Red boomerang shapes dance across the shiny white formica in tangles that end abruptly at the chrome edge. I yawn.

My sister and brother are at the open apartment door when my father strides in, flashlight in hand and striped pajamas speckled with dust.

"Nobody." He says slamming the flashlight back into place. "Not a god-damned thing."

My mother makes the obvious inquiries: "broken window? Tree branch? Animals? Hanging wire?" She sets a cup of tea in front of him. I watch as her shaking hand rattles the cup on its saucer. A splash of tea spreads into an oval shape, magnifying a cluster of the boomerangs.

“Same as last time...” my father blows on the steaming cup. “...and the time before that and before that...” He gives up on the tea and lights a cigarette instead. “There’s not a stick of furniture up there and it’s freezing. There’s not an open window – there’s nothing:

N-O-T-H-I-N-G – nothing!”

His voice rises and my mother glances in my direction. “I’ll call the landlord again.”

“Don’t bother.” A perfect circle of smoke floats above his head and I watch it as it spreads out and finally breaks apart. “We’re moving.”



I want to go to bed but I don't think my mangled panda bear will be enough to keep the noises away if they come again.

I lay my head on the cool formica. I want to go to bed but I don't think my mangled panda bear will be enough to keep the noises away if they come again. I'm relieved when my dad picks me up and sets me in the middle of my parents' bed.

It will be quiet for the rest of the night but it will happen again and again – many times before we move out to live a few short blocks away.

It will happen in the middle of the night. It will happen in exactly the same place, with the same unearthly sounds and it will happen in exactly the same undeviating order of events. It will remain ever a mystery.

I will learn later on that the oversized old building had served as the boys' dormitory attached to a school in the previous century. What was that sound of furniture being dragged? The loud snap followed by footsteps? I've heard almost exactly this sequence of events described in what people term as hauntings. Was something or someone entering this dimension?

Premonition of Dad's Death



“She has dumped her purse on the table and is searching through the resulting mound of balled up tissues and crumpled receipts.”

The late November chill instantly turns my skin to goose bumps as I leave the warmth of my bed and bound downstairs in bare feet. I take the stairs two at a time, a bowl of Cap'n Crunch on my mind. Halfway there I am struck by something so heavy that it stops me in my tracks. I stand stock still and listen. Normal morning noises. I can hear my mother's swift footsteps as she gets ready for work. Dishes clatter in the sink. The radio chatters from the kitchen and trucks rumble on the street outside. Everything seems normal but everything is not normal. A darkness has settled on me. It presses on my shoulders and envelopes me so completely that I am almost unable to see. This is not a familiar sensation and I try to shake it off but it clings like wet cement. In the years to come, I will identify this feeling as a profound sense of dread, but at nine I don't know this. I have no words for this.

I pass my parent's bedroom and my father's sleeping form as I move toward the kitchen.

"What's wrong with you?" My mother doesn't miss a beat. She has dumped her purse on the table and is searching through the resulting mound of balled up tissues and crumpled receipts. I slump into a chair and begin mindlessly shoveling in the cereal like I do every morning. "Mmmph." I say. She ignores this and turns off the faucet which has been running full force on her way to the bedroom. I can hear her rattling through drawers.

I do a quick inventory of myself. The heaviness is increasing and my legs are weighted and rubbery. My body wants to cry and I have no idea why.

Her eyes are glancing at the wall clock as my mother returns to the kitchen with the sought-after keys in her hand. "Shit." She says and ramps up her movements around the kitchen.

She is at the sink with her back to me when I say: "I'm not going to school today." She spins on her heels and looks at me for the first time. "What's the matter with you?"

"I don't feel good." I say

"Do you have a fever?" her damp icy hand is pressed against my forehead. "Do you have a stomach ache?"

"No."

"Well, what then?"

I have no answer. "I don't know... I just don't feel good." I can sense she's getting mad.

"Well, you'd better know. You can't just stay home from school." She turns back to the sink. "Get upstairs and get dressed. I'm already late – hand me that bowl."

The heaviness turns into something more desperate and frantic as I move back up the stairs. I wonder if I'm going crazy like Mrs. Reed down the street. I sit at the tiny vanity that I've long outgrown and try to do normal things. I pick up the hairbrush and run it through my coarse hair. It has no effect whatsoever. The cowlick that stands straight up refuses to be tamed. I stare into the mirror. I am frozen and confounded. I know one thing and that is that I can't leave the house.

My mother yells up the stairs. "What the hell are you doing now? Goddamit. I'm late for work."

"I'm not going." I yell back, bracing for a reprisal. I've never insisted on staying home from school before. I love school.

Silence.

"Fine." My mother finally responds. I can hear the confusion in her voice. "Stay home."

I hear the front door slam and the house is quiet.

I set the hairbrush down and stare into the mirror again. The heaviness begins to melt away and I feel as though I'm surfacing from deep water. I take a long, slow breath. Now I feel completely normal and I wonder what will happen when my mother gets home. I'm sure I will be deemed a "faker" and for a moment, I wonder if I am one.

Suddenly thirsty, I head to the kitchen for some Tang. I pass my parent's room and my father calls to me. "C'mere." He says.

"I'm in trouble," I think. "C'mere." He repeats, holding out his arms. I lay down next to him. He doesn't say anything but wraps me in a bear hug and squeezes my shoulders. I'm confused. This kind of intimacy is not at all familiar to me but he's not mad so I'm relieved. I lay there for an uncomfortable minute. Neither of us say anything. I'm not sure how to extricate myself but in the end I just pull away confused by this abnormal display of affection.

Spending the day in my room, I'm unaware that very shortly he would be dead in his bed and I would be fatherless. That hug would be my last interaction with him on this side of the veil.

A Shared Death Experience

My grumbling stomach makes me think about the brand-new jar of Marshmallow Fluff ...

Unusual for me as a serious fourth grader, I have unilaterally decided to stay home from school much to my mother's chagrin. I can tell by the slamming of the door that even if my father isn't mad, I will still have my mother to deal with when she gets home from work. I decide to forget about it and throw myself across my bed. I pour through the collection of books crammed into the cubby holes of my headboard.

I pick Pippi Longstocking although I've read it six times already. It's the first of the Pippi books and it's my favorite one. I lay on my bed reading about Pippi, her horse and her pet monkey, Mr. Nilsson. I wonder what it would be like to be the strongest little girl in the world and live in my own house with my own pets and a suitcase filled with gold. I share Pippi's outrageous adventures as a chill wind blows last of the autumn leaves across my window.



Now the sun has changed positions and the shadows have sharpened. My shoulder is stiff from leaning on one elbow for too long. I close the book and head downstairs to the bathroom. **My grumbling stomach makes me think about the brand-new jar of Marshmallow Fluff that sits on the top shelf in the kitchen cabinet.** The thought of a peanut butter and fluff sandwich makes it growl even louder.

I tiptoe past my parent's bedroom where my father is still sound asleep. I know not to wake him on the days that he's not feeling well. I decide that if I sit right in front of the t.v. with the sound turned down, I can watch some cartoons while I eat and I won't be in danger of waking him.

The light silky marshmallow fluff is a perfect topping for the creamy peanut butter and I slather them both between two pieces of squishy Wonder bread. The afternoon cartoons are strange and old fashioned. Some are even silent. I watch the black and

white sketchy figures of farmers and cats as they bash and smash each other to a classical music score.

The commercials are what really have my attention. I know that Christmas is coming and I desperately want a Troll doll and a Twister game. Both toys my father has deemed “too ugly” and “too ridiculous” respectively. My mother thinks I’m too old for the doll that actually skates on her own skates. I’ve been asking for a pretzel maker and a bug making kit even though I’m not too interested in the bugs. You can make lizards with it too and I like lizards. I don’t have too much hope for these either because they both plug in and mom doesn’t like toys that plug in.

The light is changing again and the shadows in the living room are deepening. Suddenly the high-pitched ragtime piano of The Soupy Sales Show is playing. I watch this show after school every day. Three-thirty. I know that my mother will be home in half an hour. I look down at myself. Still in my pajamas. How did the day pass so quickly?

Even when he’s laid off and sick, my father usually greets me from the couch after school. I decide I’d better wake him up so he can take my side when she gets home.

As I approach my parent’s room, I’m taking an inventory of the state I’d left the kitchen in. Bread and jars left on the table. Crumpled towel on the floor. Dirty dishes in the sink. Tang powder spilled just about everywhere. I know I’d better step it up.

My hand reaches across the bed to shake my father’s arm.

In the moment it takes my brain to register why his arm is ice cold, he speaks to me. He says: “Everything will be alright.” Years later, I would finally decide that the voice is in fact inside my head although it is his voice – clear and strong. His voice emanates from a place above his body. It comes from over the bed, near the ceiling a little to the left of me. I know this completely.

I don’t have time to react. I don’t have time to feel horror, panic or fear. I don’t have time to contemplate why his voice would simultaneously be in my head and at the ceiling or why it wasn’t coming from his mouth.

The moment those words enter my mind, I am removed from my body. I am still aware of my body standing there, hand pressed against my father's arm but the essence of me is sucked out. As if by a powerful vacuum cleaner, I am pulled out in one motion. I am joined to my father in an embrace that doesn't involve arms. There is movement. A swirling or rushing of some kind but no sight. Somehow, I can sense color in this state but I can't say I see it. It's as though sight itself is somehow different. I can see and hear nothing with my normal senses but I am overwhelmed with feeling. The feeling is bliss. Complex bliss. It is a bliss with many levels and nuances, yet it is simple and clean. There is also a sense of vastness – endlessness. I know with certainty that he is headed into that vast landscape.

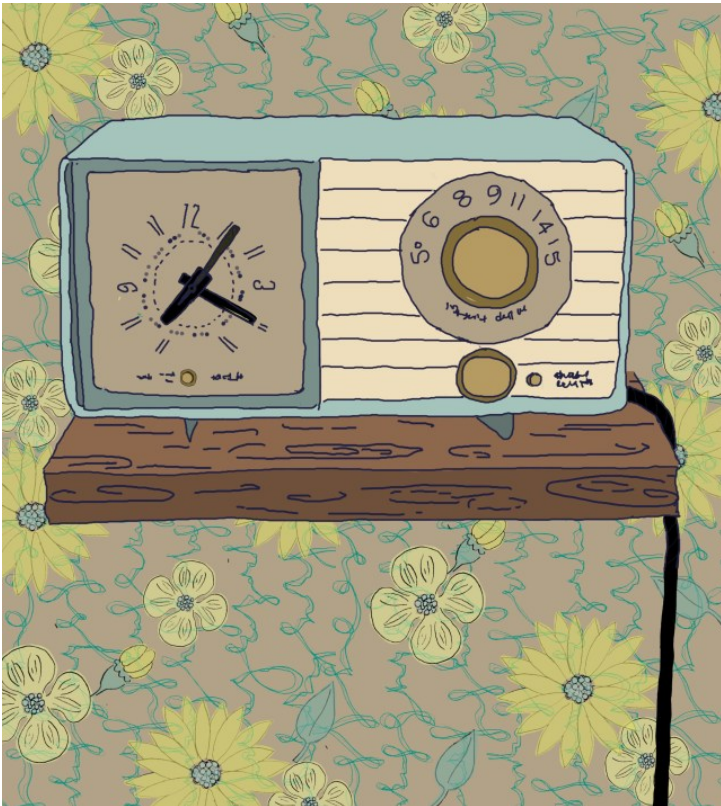
The sensation of time is gone. So is gravity. I am suspended in an endless sea of timelessness. In this place, I know without doubt that "everything will be alright" because it has always been alright and there is simply no other way for "everything" to be. I am privy to a "rightness" and a perfection that is not normally apparent, yet I know now that it is there and it is true.

I don't know how long this experience lasted. The next thing I remember, my mother is standing at the darkened door.

"Didn't your father get up to eat anything?" she asks. I can tell by her face that she knows the answer to this even as she asks it.

The trauma will come. It's just delayed by this event. I won't escape the fallout of witnessing a parent's death so early in life. Nor will I avoid the broken parts of growing up without my dad as so many others haven't. I certainly won't avoid the burdens borne by my mother who experienced far too much tragedy in her life. **I have been compensated, however, as many others haven't by a glimpse of something bigger than fathers and mothers and daughters and sons. Something wonderful. Something that we are all part of.**

The Seance and the Radio



Before I can finish my sentence my mother's little Bakelite radio explodes into life.

"Whaddya wanna do?"

"I dunno, whadda *you* wanna do?"

I know we can go on like this for a long time – sometimes hours. I hate to be bored. Jonni hates to be bored. When we're bored like this, it usually breaks down into a brand of bickering and snottiness only adolescent girls can cultivate.

I shove my cards at her so she can tap them into a unit tight enough to slip back into the box. I realize that I should have played out the hand. I had two Queens. Too late.

We've been playing Rummy lately. A lot. We're both sick of it. Before this, there was a marathon game of Canasta that went on for a month-and-a-half between dips in Jonni's pool. There will be no pool today. The sky is a dreary shade of ash and a chill mist fills the air. Summer is ending and school looms large.

We've made our requisite run to the corner deli under one umbrella. There, as we did every day, we came away with a large dill pickle sliced lengthwise and wrapped in white paper. We scarfed this down with peanut butter and jelly sandwiches from Jonni's kitchen followed by long swallows of fizzy cola.

Downstairs a vacuum cleaner hums and we know that if we make an appearance, Jonni's mother will enlist us in endless sweeping, polishing and scrubbing.

“Let's go to your house.” Jonni says as she slips out of her white shorts into her favorite bell bottoms with tiny embroidered pink flowers along the seams.

“Ughh.” I groan. She knows I don't like to hang out at my house. I look around Jonni's bedroom. Bright and cheerful, lamp light gleams off the shiny white of her matching dresser, bedframe and nightstand. A pink and green calico print covers her double bed with matching curtains. A faint aroma of cinnamon. I shudder at the thought of my house where light is absorbed into the very walls and shadows predominate in every room. I'd rather stay here.

I don't tell Jonni about the hours I spend at the kitchen table doing homework, trying not to glance in the direction of the darkened living room and longing for the sound of my mother's keys in the door. I don't tell her about the way the shadows sometimes move toward me and I have to abandon the relative safety of the kitchen to wait downstairs in the drafty vestibule. I don't tell her that every night something in my attic bedroom wakes me up at 2:46 exactly and that I've long stopped looking for it and now just pull the covers over my head.

“Why don't we string some more love beads?” I offer, knowing that her mind's already made up.

“No.” she counters. “Your mother's not home yet. Let's have a séance.” For the tenth time, I'm sorry that I described in great detail the events of a recent birthday party I'd attended. In a crepe festooned basement, seven pre-teens including my cousin Maura and myself attempted to summon the spirit of Harry Houdini.

“I *told* you it wasn't real.” I snap. “We just pretended that Maura's face was changing to Houdini's.” I cringe with shame at the remembrance of Maura in tears. The whole

group had pretended her face had taken on the visage of the famous magician as Maura dissolved into confusion and terror. I remember how easy it was for me to align myself with the group, betraying Maura and really scaring her.

“We lied” I say.

Jonni ignores this as she searches through various drawers and boxes. “Here it is.” In her cupped hands she holds a candle in the shape of a round, smiling Santa Claus. “We need a candle.” I roll my eyes. “Fine.” I huff.

We take our usual short cut between the buildings across the street from Jonni’s and over the fence of Mr. Miller’s small print shop. This lands us conveniently behind the line of garages in my back yard. I hold the candle while Jonni climbs and then hand it over the fence. Once we’re both over, we dart between two garages and run down the driveway to the house. We’re covered in a silvery mist that dissolves into our hair and clothes in the relative warmth of the vestibule.

My hand trembles from the chill and I fumble with the keys. The apartment is as I anticipated – dreary and dark. The utter silence is underscored by the sound of the faucet dripping into a left over coffee cup in the sink. The fluorescent light hums as I click the switch.

“No. No. No light. Let’s stay in the dark.” Jonni seems immune to the creepy sensations that are making my heart sink and my skin crawl.

I retrieve two hot pink towels from the bathroom and after drying ourselves, we both drape them over our heads. “Remember when we used to do this and pretend we were brides?” I grin at the memory.

“Yeah,” Jonni smiles back. “Let’s leave them on.”

Jonni lights the candle on the front burner of the gas stove and we sit opposite each other. Holding hands across the smooth formica, the candle burns brightly within the circle of our arms.

“Harry Houdini – we summon you!” Jonni says in a whispering falsetto.

Drip. Drip. Drip. The faucet chimes in.

We stare at the candle flame and say in unison: “Harry Houdini, Harry Houdini, Harry Houdini.”

Drip.

The shadows seem darker and the candle flickers.

Drip.

Our eyes meet. Again, in unison: “Harry Houdini, Harry Houdini, Harry Houdini.”

Boredom is overcoming the creepy. “I told you, it’s not re-“

Before I can finish my sentence my mother’s little Bakelite radio explodes into life. Sitting on its own shelf above the table at ear level, the blast of sound is so loud that it nearly knocks us out of our seats. Both chairs hit the floor as we scramble for the door without looking back.

Our screams echo in the empty stairwell and we bolt out onto the darkening street. Jonni and take the long way back to her house at full speed barely noticing the rain that has become a steady torrent.

Later, it is left to me to explain these things to my exasperated mother: why the front door and the apartment door are both wide open, why two hot pink towels are draped sequentially on the staircase and why the kitchen table now sports a puddle of red and white melted wax.



In her cupped hands she holds a candle in the shape of a round, smiling Santa Claus.

“They’re here.”

-Carol Anne (from the movie Poltergeist)

Premonition of a Future Job

Dream of an ordinary commute to where I'd be working four years in the future



A medley of distant car horns and I am suddenly aware of my dream.

The bright sun of early summer glints off the stainless steel handrails and seatbacks of the bus. I am sitting in the back. Sunlight pours into the windows and the other riders are starkly lit as they quietly turn newspaper pages and sip from paper coffee cups. The scene is peaceful, only interrupted by the occasional rush of air brakes and distant car horns. The gentle side-to-side swaying feels comfortable and somehow reassuring. My eyes light on the continuous line of colorful ads circling the bus above the bowed heads of the commuters; ads for cigarettes, airlines, tanning lotion.

The blur of greenery past my window feels both familiar and strange. I am on my way to work. A mundane day and an ordinary commute. I feel my body tense slightly in preparation for my upcoming stop.

Finally, the bus veers to the right just before a busy interchange. The air brakes shush loudly and it comes to a stop. I can see traffic moving at the wide intersection just

ahead. We pull up to the corner. As I prepare to leave my seat, my eyes fall on the green and white reflective sign that announces *Greenvale* between the bustling passengers.

The alarm rings. My eyes open not to the brilliance of early summer but to the watery light of mid-winter. I contemplate the dream. Greenvale. Never heard of the place. Mine is a city world and my commute consists of subways and the New York skyline. I shake off sleep, and forget the dream as my day begins.

FOUR YEARS LATER:

“What are the odds of my car being in the shop and the LIRR being on strike at the same time?” I wonder. The answer to this, I actually know is that my car is broken down so often that it’s bound to coincide with just about any random event. It has broken down at least six times this year alone compelling me to board the rattling rails.

I’ve had the car for just a little over four years. Driving was something I’d always assumed I would do *some day* but some day came in an unexpected announcement from my boss. The company would move from its conveniently situated offices in midtown Manhattan to an obscure little settlement on Long Island which just happened to be minutes from his home.

My driving life begins with intensive lessons from a professional in thick glasses and plaid pants. His instructions are restricted to two phrases: “Use your brake!” and “Go!-go!-go!” I go from non-driver to licensed driver in just over two frantic weeks. Having procrastinated as long as I could, I now have to find a car in a matter of days.

I know nothing about cars. My friends and family know nothing about cars. We are subway people. I scan newspaper ads until I find a car that fits my sole criteria: price. Of course, the seller sees me coming. I ask no pertinent questions. I don’t even negotiate price. Complete ignorance makes me a terrible car owner while abject fear makes me a cautious driver.

I park my new acquisition proudly in the driveway and examine its modest features. Born during the gas crisis, it is built for economy. The steel grey vinyl interior clashes terribly with the outside which is somewhere between school bus yellow and flat

brown mustard. I affectionately dub it “baby shit brown.” The hydraulics that keep the hatchback open fail ever so slowly, creating the need for a length of two-by-four as a permanent part of the car’s accessories to save fingers and hands.

At speeds over fifty, the car begins to tremble. Increase the speed and it becomes a rattle that you can feel in your internal organs. I counter this by driving no faster than forty-nine miles per hour which substantially increases my commute-time.

Worse, the car has a mysterious electrical problem which no mechanic seems to be able to solve. The car eats alternators. I became aware of this for the first time on a sunny Father’s Day. Squeezing my infant daughter and mother into the car, we set out for Holy Cross Cemetery in East Flatbush, Brooklyn. What should have been a two-hour outing tops, turns into an all-day and half-the-night ordeal involving a tow truck and a bouquet of wilted flowers that never make it to my father’s grave.

I quickly become savvy about where to buy the cheapest rebuilt alternators as it seems that the car needs one about as often as it needs fuel. I would find out eventually that it is the regulator that is actually at fault. Through some strange electrical anomaly, the regulator persists in arcing on the car’s hood and burning out alternator after alternator.

I don’t learn this, however, until well after I have been stranded at numerous times in numerous locations, sometimes with baby in tow by what I come to call the Terror Mobile.

I am glad for the sunny morning as I begin my trek to the bus that will take me along unfamiliar roads to my job. I settle into a seat in the back and visualize a checklist of the tasks I will need to complete today in order to leave the office early enough for the return bus. The day is beautiful with soaring sunshine and soft breezes. I regret the fact that I will spend it a basement space lacking windows. I project myself to lunchtime where I envision crossing the busy intersection headed for the southwestern restaurant that has recently added outdoor seating to its concept. This thought comforts me and I’m aware of the gentle side-to-side swaying of the bus as I gaze out the window.

A medley of distant car horns and I am suddenly aware of my dream. I remember my bedroom and waking up on a cold winter morning with the name *Greenvale* on my lips. I look around. The other passengers ignore me as they silently sip coffee and

turn pages. The bus slows and the air brakes shush. I do the math furiously, judging the passage of time by apartments, my short-lived marriage and the birth of my daughter. Four years. I am stunned to my very feet. I look over the heads of the passengers, knowing what I will see – ads. Garish ads for cigarettes, airlines and tanning lotion. A wash of familiarity runs over me. The bus veers to the right and between the rising passengers, I am able to see the green and white reflective sign for the town I have now worked in for two and a half years: Greenvale.

“Intelligence is a necessity, but when one is without a supernatural sense, intelligence becomes senseless.”

— *Michael Bassegy Johnson*

ANGEL ON THE PARKWAY



The bucket is empty. There are no fish and there is no water.

The traffic has gotten so dense that my hazard lights aren't visible in the multi-colored tangle of cars.

Each driver pulling up behind me finds me stopped and themselves having to negotiate into the center lane. Most of them find imaginative ways to signal their irritation with me. The Cross Island Parkway is one of those narrow roadways built in New York City before cars were so numerous that they packed every thoroughfare.

Up until now, I believed in my three shots theory. Let the engine cool off a little and then try the ignition again three times in rapid succession. This isn't working.

I am wracking my brain for a plan. None will come. I try to visualize the nearest

possibility for a telephone and I remember that a marina entrance breaks up the miles of guardrail further down the road. For the life of me, I can't remember how far, and it's not visible from where I'm stopped. It could be just around that curve or miles and miles away. I look down at my shoes. Standard office fare for the eighties—pointy-toed, strappy beige stiletto heels. They won't get me far.

I gaze out across the bay, sparkling in the sinking sun. Featureless except for the distant sailboats against the backdrop of Long Island's Gold Coast. The view doesn't help me orient myself. Surrounded by thousands of people in slowly moving vehicles, I am completely alone.

Approaching my passenger side window is a young man. He is walking up the grassy verge between the roadway and the tall bushes that border the beach. A fishing pole is slung across his shoulder and he swings a five gallon bucket as he walks. Instead of relief, I feel fear creep in – suddenly and palpably. It hits me like a punch to the gut.

I tell myself that the fear is because he startled me but as he approaches, it grows until my heart is pounding. In an automatic New York motion, I pull my wallet from my purse and chuck it under my seat.

He is tall and has to stoop low to lean in my window. Probably younger than me by a couple of years, he has the kind of black eyes that look dead. I ask him if he knows where there is a telephone. He stares at me and for a moment, I wonder if he speaks English.

“Do you know where the nearest phone is?” I ask again, trying to seem in control.

“Yes.” He says in a mocking tone.

I ignore this and go on. "Do you think you could call a tow truck for me? I don't want to leave my car."

I run down the possibilities in my mind. I do not want to follow this guy anywhere. Despite sitting in a four cylinder sweat box, I feel goose bumps rise on my arms and a chill run down my neck.

He stands there for a long moment, backlit by the glare of the bay with only his eyes darting back and forth. I have the feeling that I am some kind of prey and I contemplate squeezing out of the driver's door and flagging down a friendly looking driver.

Finally, he says "Watch my fish." He sets the bucket down next to my car.

I nod affirmatively.

"No, I mean it. Watch my fish. Don't let anyone take them." Suddenly he seems edgy.

I raise my eyebrows.

He raises his in response. "I'm not kidding, lady. Watch my fucking fish."

It takes me a second to realize as I watch him stomp away that he's going in the direction I came from and there's nothing back there. No houses. No businesses. No phones – just miles and miles of shoreline.

I try the ignition for the twelfth time and wonder if my three shots theory is really wrong

or I just miscounted. I don't want to be here when the black-eyed man gets back. Something about him is not right and he's setting off all my warning bells. I look wistfully at the traffic to my left. There are considerable breaks between cars now and speed has definitely picked up. The tick-tick-tick of my hazard lights sounds louder. The sun is broiling and the briny smell from the bay is staggering. I decide to take a look at the precious bucket of fish.

Climbing over the center console in a sweat soaked skirt and stockings is no easy feat but I manage to end up kneeling in the passenger seat. I push my head and shoulders out the window and my heart freezes at the sight below me. The bucket is empty. There are no fish and there is no water. Gray confusion descends and I scramble back to the safety of the driver's seat. I stare into the rearview mirror searching for any trace of the black-eyed man.

Thump-thump-thump.

A car has stopped behind me and someone is thumping on my roof.

"I'm gonna push 'ya,. Just steer the car okay?"

I swivel in my seat and the man is now at my window.

"I'm gonna push 'ya." He repeats raising his voice over the road sounds.

He's saying something but I'm not focusing on his words. I'm taking in his long, thin white beard and the piercing blue eyes above it. He's dressed in a decades-old-style leisure suit in powder blue that appears three sizes too big for his narrow frame.



“Where’d he go?”

And he’s tall. Very tall. He wears eyeglasses that are so outdated, one would call them spectacles. On his feet are leather sandals. He is not only out of place, but out of time and he makes an absurd picture. All the tension melts from my shoulders and neck I actually feel a giggle rising in my throat.

He flashes a reassuring smile at me. His eyes are the bluest I’ve ever seen.

“You alright?” he asks.

I nod emphatically, finding that I can’t manage to speak. The black-eyed man and his bucket forgotten, I watch as this comical creature retreats back to his car. His car is old, too. I can see that much. Faded green with a dirty white roof. Old and boxy. 60’s Rambler, I guess.

Bump. His car connects to mine. I take it out of park and steer as gently as I can. He

pushes me slowly as cars speed by in the center lane. In a couple of minutes, I see the wide entry way to the marina approaching. I let out a sigh of relief when I'm able to turn the wheel just enough to allow the pitch of the driveway to pull my car smoothly down the long driveway to the parking area below.

I note the presence of a phone booth just feet away as I throw the gear shift into park. The white bearded man has followed me down and stands outside his car. I begin to approach him and remember my wallet under the seat. I have a ten in it that I can offer him and I reach down to retrieve it.

Wallet in hand, I find myself spinning around in search of him. I have heard no tires on the ground. There is no car making its way back up the driveway. I search the scattering of parked cars in vain. I stand wobbling on my heels, stunned that he's not there. Not there. Not where he was mere second ago. The place where he was parked looks as though it's never held a car. There is no trace of the white beard, powder blue leisure suit or the kind blue eyes.

I'm not sure how long I stand here. Long enough for a sense of peace to overtake me. Gazing upward at the empty road, I make my way to the phone.

When the Angels arrive, the devils leave.

EGYPTIAN PROVERB

Premonition of a Bloody Finger



“Seamus is sitting in front of her and her hand is dripping blood.”

It's a lovely afternoon, early fall – the season I love. I'm in a nesting mood and I have the makings of a celebratory apple pie in my trunk. It's a short distance from the supermarket to home and I spend the driving time lost in thought and enjoying the scenery. I'm trying to remember which pie crust recipe calls for a splash of vinegar. I remember that it produces a tender, flaky crust – the perfect foil for tart apples swimming in syrupy juices. I can taste the first bite exploding in a symphony of succulence.

Around me, the Hudson Valley is beginning to celebrate too. Trees clamor with yellows, reds and golds. My heart sores at the prospect of bon fires and pumpkins and sweaters. The leaves still clinging tightly to their branches will be knee deep in a few weeks' time. I mentally search the garage for the rake that I know I will need soon. The

sky is only visible in jagged blue shards through the blaze of maples arching towards each other over the roadway.

I breathe in the crisp air and pull my thoughts back to the pie. Now I am mentally searching for the pie plate that I want to use – the deep glass one with the slightly chipped edge. I think it belonged to my grandmother but that may just be my own wrong inference. Nevertheless, I think of her every time I use it, so I perpetuate this myth for myself.

I'm enjoying my grandmother and her ersatz pie plate when my thoughts turn suddenly turn to Seamus, my aging dog. It is like somebody switched a channel in my mind. The thought doesn't seep in, it's suddenly just there. Along with the thought is a tightening of my throat and the sick feeling that something is not at all right.

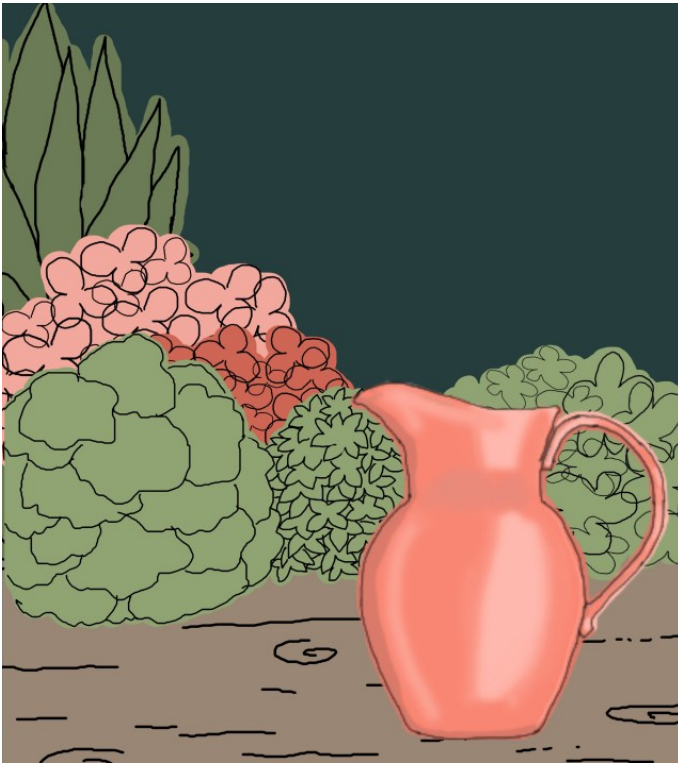
Seamus is nine years old and he's sick. The vet's not sure exactly what the problem is but he is scheduled for tests. For nine years, he has been a happy-go-lucky gigantic puppy. Always up to play comic relief and always up for a cuddle. Despite his hundred and twenty pounds, he has never been intimidating or aggressive. Lately, though, there have been problems. On occasion he has nipped at my daughter and her friends. Apparently, he is no longer able to tolerate their constant frenetic motion. I have been making it a habit to keep him separate from the kids but today Diana is home alone with him while I make my grocery store run.

Suddenly, a picture snaps into focus. In it, I have just entered the house and Diana stands above me on the second level of the split-level. Seamus is sitting in front of her and her hand is dripping blood. I feel my heart skip a beat as I turn down the main road of our development. There is not a fiber of my being that doesn't know what I will find. I will find my twelve-year-old daughter with a dog bite. I am out of the car and up the front steps in a flash, all thoughts of pie having evaporated.

I enter the house and just as in my vision, Diana is standing above me on the landing of the next level in front of the accordion doors of the pantry. Seamus sits waiting in front of her. Her hand is dripping blood.

“Mom!” she screams. I bound up two staircases. “I was trying to give the dog a treat from his jar in the pantry and my hand got cut on a hinge.” Seamus, still waiting for his treat, greets me with his tail, reluctant to take his eyes off the pantry doors.

BOTTLE-THROWING GHOST



I devise a counting system that enables me to circle the table without missing a plant or over watering another.

“Puhleeeeeeze, mom.” Diana holds her hand over the mouthpiece of the telephone. She is tapping her foot on the floor and grimacing as if in pain.

“I’ll think about it and talk to dad.” I say. I’m beginning a list in my head of the possible dangers associated with my daughter spending two weeks four states away at the Fiori family’s summer place on the North Carolina coast.

In the end, my list is too small to make the cut and I wave goodbye to Diana as she takes off in the packed van with her best friend and family.

Sherrie has closed up the Shore house. Mail has been stopped. The two feisty golden retriever’s are boarded and the cat is at friend’s house.

I have been enlisted to water Sherrie's extensive plant collection one time each week while they're away. I suddenly remember this a few days after they've been gone and utilize part of my lunch hour to perform this task.

The day is beautiful. A typically sizzling day in late September. I glance at my watch as I pull my car up to one end of the house where the kitchen resides. I have a busy afternoon at the law firm ahead of me. The unaccustomed silence hits me like a brick wall as I turn the key and open the door.

The house is so very still that it's eerie and I go about my work quickly and as efficiently as possible.

The house is huge enough to be considered a small mansion. Many remnants of its former life as a turn-of-the-century private nursing home are evident. An enormous central hall still sports the old brass cage-type elevator. I have been told by Sherrie and my daughter that the place is haunted. The ghost it is thought is owner and proprietor of that nursing home and the woman for whom the premises are named – Mrs. Shore. Sherrie has told me that she still watches over the day to day activities in the house.

My daughter who sometimes sleeps over recounts lots of incidents of middle-of-the-night footsteps up the enormous staircase and marching down the upper hallways. Mrs. Shore is still keeping watch over her charges.

One of several dining rooms annexes the kitchen and this is where Sherrie has set out her houseplants for me. The massive table is covered in plants and the room is filled with sunlight.

I devise a counting system that enables me to circle the table without missing a plant or over watering another. I am focused on this system as I slowly circle the table, pitcher in hand.

“Six, seven, eight...”

A loud crash reverberates from the kitchen. I am struck frozen. I remember Mrs. Shore and I feel my knees go rubbery.

A deep breath and I enter the kitchen. Despite the energy and the explosive percussion of the crash, nothing appears to be out of order. Next, I inspect the tiny laundry room adjacent to the kitchen. Again, nothing.

Back in the dining room, I am forced to stick my finger in several pots, having lost track of my counting.

Finally, I begin again: “nine, ten, eleven, twelve...”

Clunk, clunk clunk! Crash!

My spine has turned to ice-cold steel and I hold my breath. I stand here for what seems like hours just listening. My ears strain for any sound. There is nothing. I am afraid to move. I know that I could exit by the front door, avoiding the kitchen altogether if I have to run. This thought emboldens me and I slowly move toward the kitchen once again.

This time, the kitchen has taken on what can only be called an “atmosphere.” Despite the September heat, even more oppressive in a closed up house, the kitchen is absolutely freezing. Thankfully, I see no one. Again, nothing seems out of place until I notice the three two-liter soda bottles laying at the foot of the door that I’d come in just minutes before. Clunk, clunk, clunk. I look around the room and see that one of the counters, clear on the opposite side of the room holds a number of soda bottles with space where three more would have easily fit. There’s no way these bottles simply fell from that or any surface and landed right in front of the door I came through.

I search for an explanation for the crashing sounds which were enormous in their violence but I find nothing.

My breath coming easier now, I decide to take control of the situation and return to the dining room to finish what I started.

I make it a point not to look up from the watering as I say in a loud but trembling voice: “Mrs. Shore, I’m only here to water Sherrie’s plants and then I’ll be gone. I don’t mean you any harm.”

Silence.

As I finish watering and as an afterthought, I add: "I'll be back next week, too because they'll need more water by then. Thank you."

As it happens, I am saved from further dalliance with Mrs. Shore by an even angrier spectre, Hurricane Fran, who will chase thousands of vacationers from the outer banks and coastal regions of the mid-Atlantic, Diana and the Fiori family included.

When Sherrie asks if the plant watering went okay. I take a deep breath, hand her back her key and say: "Absolutely."

**Some Places speak distinctly. Certain dark gardens cry aloud for a murder;
certain old houses demand to be haunted; certain coasts are set apart for
shipwreck.**

-Robert Louis Stevenson

Out of Body Trip to the Office



My desk. One corner piled with a mixture of stacked papers and manila files.

Ahhh – Saturday. Two days out of the office with its stress and frantic activity. Lots of chores – but time to take a breath and focus on what’s important to me. The yard work is done and early afternoon light fills the bedroom bouncing off the walls and washing across the Navajo white walls. I pull down the shades. Ahhh – Saturday. Ahhh naps.

The muscles in my upper arms ache from pulling weeds and my legs are slowly adjusting from the squat they’ve held for two hours. I stretch out but have to adjust for the crash of Bruce’s body immediately followed by the equally powerful slam of Seamus who wriggles between us. The warmth of their breathing lulls me into sleep. The sunshine and the room disappear. I am gone into darkness.

I am awake again. Wide awake. I can feel the rough wall of my office behind me. This isn't right. I am in my office seven miles away from home. Something's not right, but I can't put my finger on it. I reach into my mind but it's as if I've hit a wall. Understanding is beyond the wall but I can't reach it. It hangs there suspended, in a clump tantalizingly out of reach.

I am leaning back surveying the room. My desk. One corner piled with a mixture of stacked papers and manila files. Things that will be reviewed and acted on next week. There's my chipped coffee mug filled with a mixture pens, pencils and emery boards. A single dying carnation in a soda bottle sits beside it.

The bank of file cabinets lines the wall to my left. On top rests a complication of file trays and large bound files that don't fit in the draws. I can see my burgundy tote crammed behind the cabinet where it's sat for many months, causing permanent folds in the leather.

All is familiar and comfortable but the light's wrong. Somehow the whole scene is bathed in a light that has no source. Each object lit equally casts no shadow as if standing in its own personal spotlight. It's not just the light, though, something bigger is wrong. The clump of clarity stills hangs out of reach. It glows dimly like a cat's eye in the semi-darkness. It feels important. Something has been interrupted but I can't think what that is.

For the first time, I notice the window just beyond the bank of cabinets. It's dark outside. Very, very dark. This feels wrong. This is a daytime room. As I look at the window, I see that it's not really a window at all. It has become a doorway. I tentatively grab at the nugget for an answer but it remains elusive.

The door intrigues me. Beyond its frame should be an expanse of manicured lawn followed by a tree line that announces acres of pine forest. A memory washes in – a gravity-stricken groundhog slowly ambling across the green expanse – clear summer day, the clatter of the office behind me. Blackness, still and deep lies beyond the door and I feel myself move toward it.

I am about to enter into the black depths when they appear. Suddenly like images in a 3D movie, they are in front of me standing at the doorway blocking my entrance. They

are tall. Their length is contained by the entire doorway. She stands to the left. Statuesque and rigid. He stands to the right. They are equal in both stance and disposition. Deep dark skin, hair and eyes they are dressed in tight fitting black warrior garb. In their right hands, they each carry an object. She is balancing a small box on upright on her palm and he holds a twist of tree branches. They have the bearing of defenders, pokerfaced and deliberate.

They don't seem to look at me. Their gaze is over my head into the distance. Absolute terror suddenly explodes from deep inside me. **My attempt at flight is instinctive – a body ruling.** As I back away, they move forward. Their movement toward me is instantaneous like the zoom of a camera lens. They seem to bridge more than just distance. They move so fast that time itself is traversed. They are in exact tandem with me. I am being chased but more than chased. I am being pushed out.

Something like adrenaline propels me and I am flying. Below, I can see the lazy spring afternoon spread out in a tangle of roadways and rooftops. What should be a blur stands out in stark detail. The glint of the sun off chrome fenders, individual leaves swaying in a gentle breeze, a changing of traffic lights. Without conscious intention, I am pulled spontaneously across the seven mile distance between office and home.

The enormous speed stops abruptly and I am powerfully launched onto my bed. I can feel the impact followed by the reverberation of powerful force. This is followed by utter stillness. I am on my stomach, one hand curled beneath my pillow. My heart pounds, slamming against my chest and the mattress. The contrast between speed and stillness creates the sensation of being pinned in place.

My return is so violent, my slam into the bed so furious that I'm sure my husband and dog will be wide-eyed with shock but one glance tells me that they're soundly asleep. I let my heart wind down as I watch the edge of the shade billow slightly with a breeze, allowing the sharp line of sunlight broaden and then narrow again.

What just happened?

Out of Body Trip to a Friend's House



Suddenly at eye level and comparable to my own size, is a mouse.

I am haunted by the out-of-body experience I had earlier in the week. It makes me a little afraid to fall asleep. I am haunted by the image of the man and woman. All week they are on my mind. I can still see them in my mind's eye. My heart pounds each time I think of them and the impossible speed at which they chased me. Taller than any humans I've ever known and powerful. They reek of symbolism but the episode had none of the passivity of a dream. My office was real. Every detail stood out in stark certainty. I remember the curling corner of my desk calendar and my large loopy handwriting visible from across the room. I know I should write it off as a bizarre dream but I cannot because I know that it wasn't. What I don't know is that it is about to happen again:

I am dreaming. Something about standing in the driveway and trying to get into my car. **Suddenly, I am flying and I am awake.** I can see the grid of the suburban streets below me. Long dark roads weaving through intersections and past stretches of

open fields punctuated by forest. Suddenly, I am flying faster and the lights below are a smear of orangey-red and white.

Before I know it, I'm over a house. I can see the shingled roof between the tree branches. I find myself hovering then effortlessly propelling downwards. I feel drawn to enter. It's a strong and compelling energy that pulls me through a wall on the side of the building. I can feel the rough shaker shingles as they brush against me.

I am passing through the interior of the wall. Like the objects in my office a week ago, the interior is bathed in a soft glow that throws no shadows. **I am seeing a cross section of the space between the exterior and interior walls.** A neat bundle of electric wires is visible to my right. I can see where they have been bound together and firmly stapled in place. I can see the upright two-by-fours as well as the horizontal cross-beams. Little fluffs of insulation are scattered about.

The space is wider than it should and in a moment I will understand why this is. Suddenly at eye level and comparable to my own size, is a mouse. Now I am aware of six or seven mice scampering between the walls. Field mice, they are several varieties of brown and grey. Somehow, I am the size of a mouse but before I can fully appreciate this, I find myself passing through to a room that I recognize. It is the kitchen of my friends Don and Cassie. It too is lit with a shadowless glow. Moving across the room up near the ceiling, I am over the rustic farm table ringed with the ponderous chairs that I've sat in many times.

I find myself searching the house for my friends. My heart is suddenly filled with warmth towards them and I want them to see me. Through the living room, down the hall and I am in their bedroom.

From my vantage point, I hang over Cassie who is sitting up in bed and reading. Her husband, Don is standing next to the bed and he's leaning over fiddling with something. I feel the excitement rise in me. I'm here. I'm really here.

Something has caused Cassie to look up from her book. Her head tilts upwards to the ceiling. She detects something. As Cassie jumps, half climbing out of the bed, I am hit with a blast of fear so powerful that I am slammed down into my body with the force of moving train. I am instantaneously back in my body. There

has been no exit, no pass through the walls, no bird's eye view of the roadways. Just an enormous crash and my heart pounding so forcibly, I fear it will escape my chest.

Fast forward two days: I feel self-conscious as I seat myself at the table in one of our go-to restaurants. I find it hard to meet Cassie's eyes but she gives no indication of remembering my uninvited visit of two nights ago.

Over dinner, Don mentions to my husband that they've been having crazy problems with mice this season.

"They're scampering in the walls," he chuckles, "we can hear them at night." The rest of the night's conversation becomes a buzz to me as I contemplate what these out-of-body forays could mean.

Premonition of my Dog's Death



Good Boy Seamus

It's a warm night in the middle of summer. The old air conditioner clanks its best but it's still hot. I am tossing and turning throwing the covers off and then pulling them back on again. I finally fall into a restless sleep.

Suddenly, I'm awake yet again but this time with something to write in my dream journal. I slip into the bathroom with my notebook and pen so as not to disturb my husband's sleep by turning on the light. My hand shakes a little because the dream had been so real and so disturbing.

It was the tail end of a larger dream, most of which I've lost upon waking. In it I am looking down at the foot of our bed. Instead of the pale beige circle of our dog's bed that usually sits on the floor, there's an open drawer that if closed, would slide under the bed. It's the same shape and color as Seamus' bed but I recognize it as a mortuary drawer containing the skeleton of a dog.

Sleep is over for me this night because I know it's an omen and a bad one.

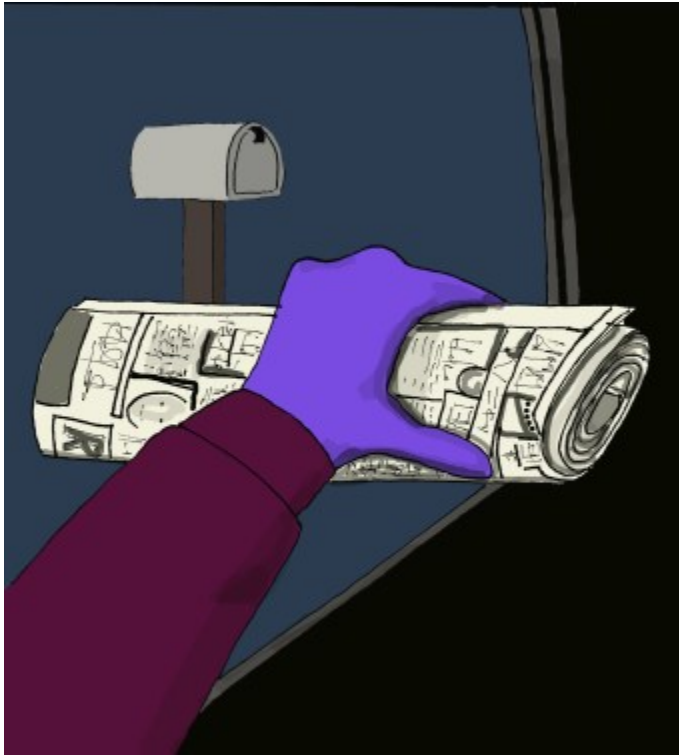
Two days later, the dream momentarily forgotten, Seamus and I are on a Saturday afternoon walk through the neighborhood. We've only gone a few blocks when he begins to wobble a bit and then collapses.

In the days before cell phones, I rely on one of the neighborhood kids to run to my house and have my husband bring the van. At well over a hundred pounds, I know I'm not carrying him home.

The dream comes back to me. I am grateful for the forewarning even as graphic as it was. In the weeks that follow, his usual happy-go-lucky demeanor will change and in the end we will receive a diagnosis of cancer. We opt for a little bit of the chemotherapy prescribed for what turns out to be Sarcoma but we don't push it and when his time comes, we let that sweet spirit go.

Not only did the dream alert me to what was coming, it also gave me the sense that it was part of a bigger plan. In the end, it afforded me some comfort.

PAPER ROUTE GHOST



I raise my eyes again as I pull in front of the driveway

It's a mechanical process and I've been doing it for years. Car radio on low enough not to wake the neighborhood. My vinyl clad hand reaches across to the passenger seat where a freshly unbound stack of papers awaits. Grab the topmost, roll it up in one swift motion, deftly transfer it to my left hand just as I slide in next to the paper tube.

It's somewhere between three and four o'clock. Winter. I'm bundled up against frigid darkness because I keep my window open. Nearing the end of my route, I've begun yawning in anticipation of my waiting bed. I have a tremendous route and I will move quickly to get this last bit done.

I see her. She is moving toward the end of the upcoming driveway. Not unusual to see an elderly person who can't sleep and has been waiting for her morning link with the larger world. I divert my gaze momentarily as I transfer the rolled paper from right hand to left preparing to hand it off.

I raise my eyes again as I pull in front of the driveway. Nobody. Nobody stands where she should be. Confused, I look around for the woman but find no one. Paper in hand, I slide out of the car and start searching: the bushes, the garbage cans and inexplicably under my own car. The driveway is empty. The neighbor's driveways are empty. The house is closed up and dark.

“Hello?” I yell softly. No answer. I am stumped.

I slip back into my car, determined to wait her out. She must be somewhere. Turning down the radio in case she calls for help, I replay the whole moment in my mind's eye.

She is a medium built woman with gray wavy hair. She is slowly shuffling down the driveway in a floral house dress. **Wait a minute! It must be ten degrees out.** No one in their right mind would leave the house at this hour in this cold without a coat or jacket of some kind no matter how briefly. I playback the fleeting moment again and again and I realize that at no point did she look in my direction or acknowledge me in any way. Her gaze was straight ahead and vacant. She moved matter-of-factly, no squeezing of her arms against the cold or scrunched shoulders. The pale flowered fabric of her dress hung straight without a ripple despite the slight breeze that had continued all night. I keep coming back to her face, a profile only. Eyes straight ahead and zombie-like. A shiver runs down my spine. I have just seen a ghost.

There are an infinite number of universes existing side by side and through which our consciousnesses constantly pass.

In these universes, all possibilities exist. You are alive in some, long dead in others, and never existed in still others.

Many of our “ghosts” could indeed be visions of people going about their business in a parallel universe or another time — or both.

-PAUL F. ENO

Premonition of a Future Home



“Now I notice that the entire space is basically filled with cardboard boxes piled high and wide.”

In my dream I'm in a small, dark space. It feels damp and old. There is a small but deep channel of water running through it. It has the feel of a Disney ride – something like Pirates of the Caribbean where you step down into the small carriages that will seemingly float away from the boarding area and into the ride itself. Instead of carriages there are cardboard boxes lined up end-to-end in the water. I am saying goodbye to my nephew who is seated in one of the boxes and I know that he will be travelling a great distance and to the north.

Now I notice that the entire space is basically filled with cardboard boxes piled high and wide. To my right the wall seems to be missing and I'm aware that there's a river running perpendicular to where I stand. The dream feels heavy and a little hopeless but I'm not sure why.

Fast forward nine years. My nephew who would have been around ten at the time of the dream is now living with us in a house on the river while he's in college – a day's drive to the north. He comes home to work on weekends. We have lived on this property for about five years. At the time of the dream I lived at least forty miles away and had no clue it even existed. While living in a smaller building on the premises, we've been working on the big hundred-year-old house and using it to store boxes from our move. The house is literally filled with boxes – piled high and wide.

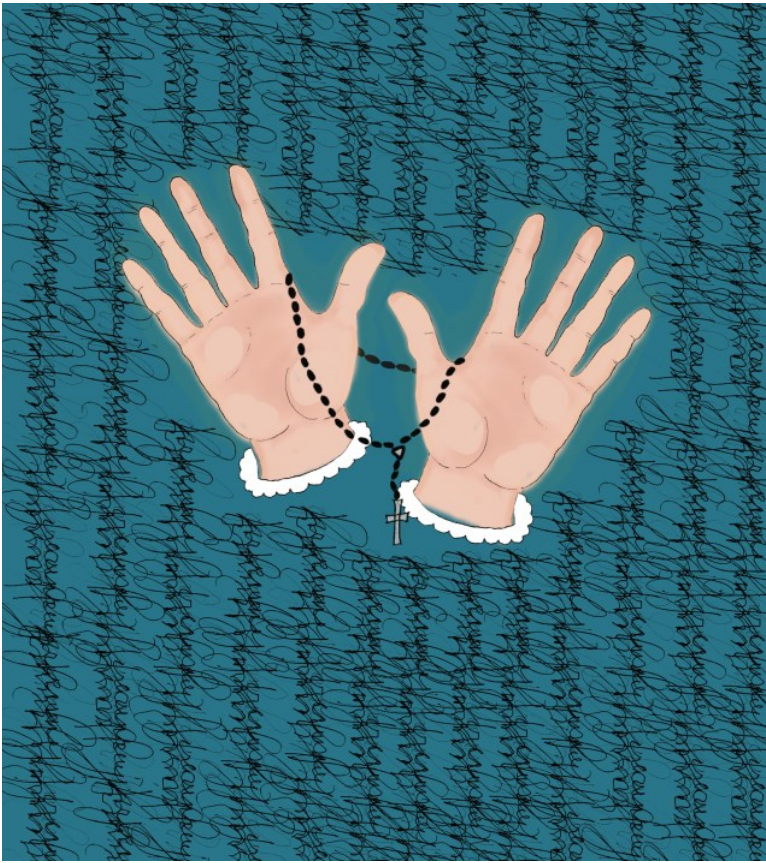
The dream comes back to me one day while my husband and I are assessing the damage caused by a massive flood of the Delaware River that has impacted the house. I am standing in precisely the same position as in the dream with the open garage door to my right, looking down at the water that has inundated the garage.

A cold chill runs down my back and I'm suddenly back in the dream – every nuance of it. I freeze as I take it all in. The damp old feel of the place, my nephew, the boxes... The ambience of that dream written down nine years before is all here. A bunch of images, sensations and "knowings" essentially correct but laid out in a meaningless mish-mash.

Not long after this, following an even worse flood not to mention a landslide, we move to higher ground. Was that dream trying to warn me not to buy the ill-conceived project that was that property? If so, why wasn't it more clear? Why bombard me with images I had no way of linking with anything real? It would have been nice if the dream was more direct. It would have been nice if it just said: "Hey, you're gonna get this crackpot idea to move to the country in a few years – DON'T DO IT!" That would have saved us a ton of misery and heartache. There was literally no chance of that dream forewarning me in a way that I could use. Yet there it is.

Who do I lodge a complaint with?

Premonition of my Mom's Death



“So, you’re going on a journey.”

It’s been a year of worry and in the last several weeks it has grown increasingly despairing. The myriad of medical tests, all the promising prospects have finally boiled down to my mother’s diagnosis of pancreatic cancer.

In a matter of three days she goes from a vibrant bundle of energy to a bedridden shadow.

On Thursday the hospital bed is set up in her room. A Hospice nurse comes on Friday and gives instructions on how to use the oxygen machine and the mattress overlay that alternates between inflation and deflation. She is sweet and friendly. She assures me that in her opinion mom has anywhere from three weeks to three months. Hospice is formally scheduled to start on Monday but she has come to make sure we’re set up for palliative care.

Since she's not eating well, I will spend the rest of Thursday and Friday preparing as many nutritious soups as I can and then freezing them in tiny containers for ready use. I don't know what to do to help her so I do what I know. I keep busy and tend to the practical. My overnight job of delivering newspapers allows me to be home during the day to provide the care she needs.

I repeatedly enter what used to be her bedroom and has now become the lair of giant sleeping dragon as the air mattress inhales and exhales. The t.v. chatters away softly. If she's awake, I help her to the bathroom or administer her morphine or try to entice her to eat "just a tiny bit" of soup.

On Saturday morning, having finished my paper run, I sit at the dining room table. I am utterly exhausted and completely numb. Suddenly without knowing how or why I know – I absolutely know that today is the day she will pass away. Even though it's only seven in the morning I call Hospice. I have nothing to report. She is exactly the same as yesterday, the same Thursday and so the nurse on call assures me that everything is "fine." We will keep Monday as the day Hospice begins in earnest.

By the afternoon, I am so sure that it will be today, I call the local parish to have a priest come to administer last rites. The only priest available is a young, visiting priest from South America. My husband will have to go and collect him because he doesn't drive. My husband, who I'm sure sees me as on some kind of edge of insanity, goes without question in order to keep me plunging over said edge.

My mother looks good. She's sitting up and she's chatting. Even I can't believe that she is on the brink of death on this sunny day. She is still refusing food but she is glowing. I notice that her skin glows like it belongs to a much younger woman. There's something golden about her.

When the young – almost juvenile, priest arrives she greets him warmly with a huge smile on her face.

"So, you're going on a journey." he says.

I watch from the corner of her room as he anoints her with oil and mumbles Latin blessings. She holds her hands out in front of her, her rosary draped over one in a gesture that seems meant to absorb all the holiness into her palms. She is beaming.

The blessing done, I stand in the hallway as the priest prepares to leave. He carefully removes his stole and fumbles with his bag. He chides me with his heavy accent for calling him out when my mother is “perfectly fine.” I know that she’s not but I won’t argue about it.

Having had no sleep for at least twenty-four hours, I’m easily convinced by mom to take a nap. She is sitting up watching her “shows” on t.v. My husband joins me and we both fall into a restless sleep.

It seems like only minutes have passed when he wakes me.

“She’s gone.” He says.

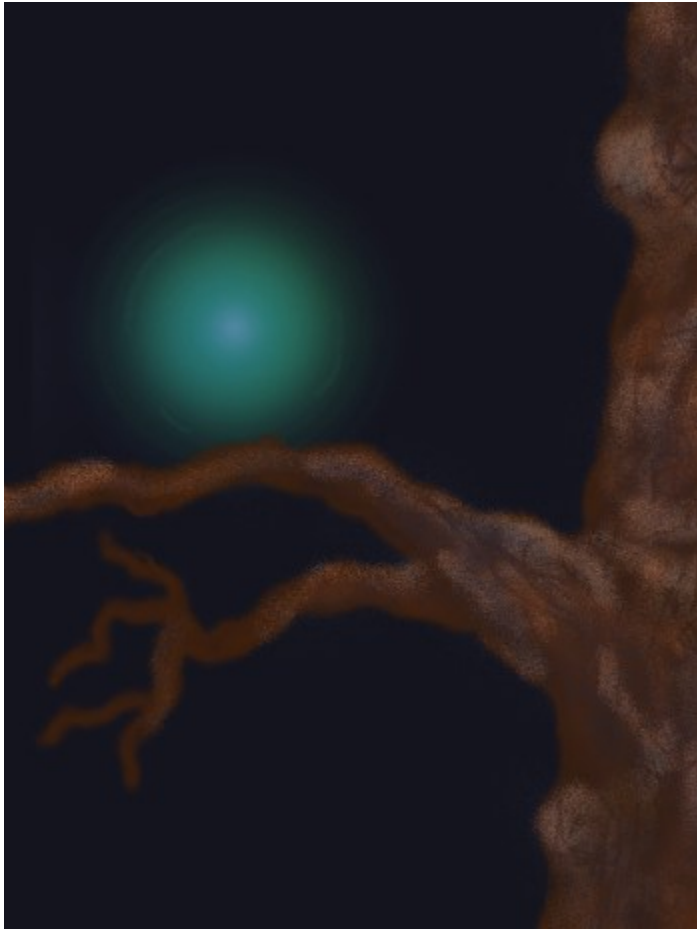
He woke up from his nap, peeked in her door and he knew.

Together we stood to the left of her bed and marveled at what can only be described as the column of peace that surrounded us. It was incredibly palpable and I was even able to step and in out of it. We stayed by her side basking in that column for some seconds until it finally dissolved into the multitude of immediate duties that death brings.

“There is something about losing your mother that is permanent and inexpressible—a wound that will never quite heal.”

Susan Wiggs

An Orb in a Tree



Across the street, sitting on the lowest branch of a tree is a glowing ball approximately the size of a volley ball.

January and it's freezing. The night is still and black and the pre-dawn cold is absolute.

I roll up in front of one my newspaper customer's homes. Mrs. Tibbs is one of those who is extremely fussy about where and how her newspaper is delivered. She has designated an exact spot on a table on her porch which will allow her to open her door a just a crack in the morning and retrieve her paper. She will not tolerate the paper simply being tossed in front of her door. I know this because we have had a rather nasty discussion about this very thing.

I quickly bound up the stairs to the appointed table as quietly as possible. I don't want to continue our heated discussion in the freezing cold at three A.M.

Coming down the stairs again my eyes are caught by something out of the ordinary. Across the street, sitting on the lowest branch of a tree is a glowing ball approximately the size of a volley ball.

About twenty feet off the ground, this ball is seated squarely on the thick branch. I have the sense that it is in fact, sitting. The way a person would sit. I don't know why I have this thought about it but it's the impression I have.

I look around the dark street. Devoid of anyone at this hour, there's not a sound except for my running car. The neighborhood is typical with neat houses separated by a bit of lawn and driveways. Streetlights are sparse and the nearest one is some distance down the block. I can see no logical explanation for this orb of light.

It doesn't move at all. As I stand watching it, it continues to sit in its spot on the tree branch. It glows like a dull neon. Green with a slight tinge of blue, its edges are well-defined and it's definitely round.

Inside the green-blue glow seems to be gently churning – glowing smoke inside a discrete globe. It's actually quite beautiful. Luminous color but not bright. **I can't shake the feeling that it's conscious and it's watching me intently.**

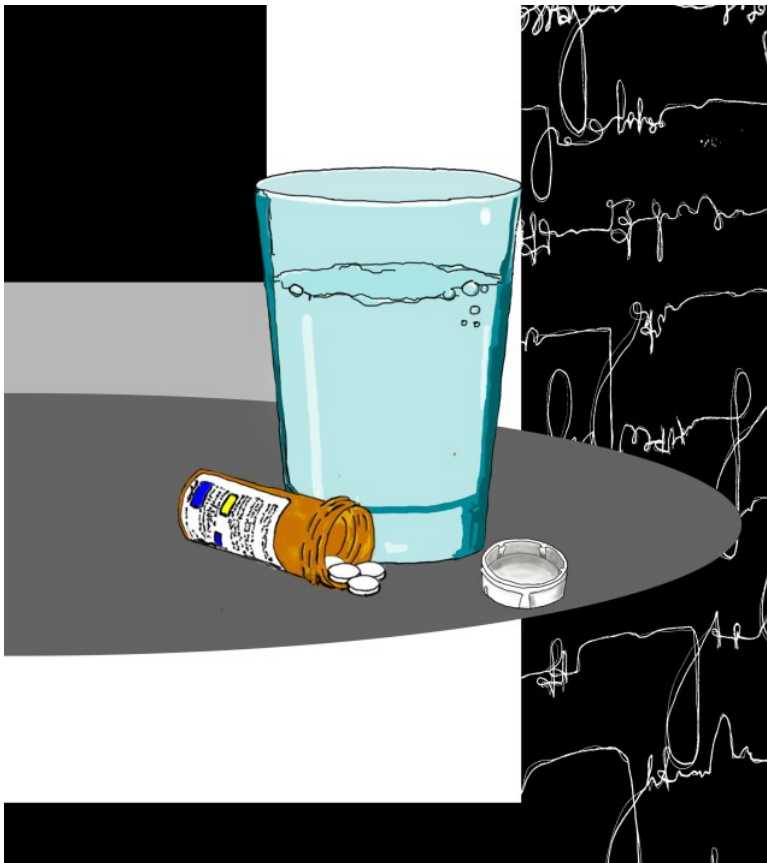
I stand here staring up for several minutes, I'm wishing I had a camera but it will be close to a decade before we're all toting cameras around on our phones.

Finally giving in to the cold, I decide to come back and check on it after delivering a few papers in the cul-de-sac that intersects this street a short distance away. When I do, it has vanished – utterly and completely.

The next day, I drive back to the spot in the cold January sunshine and examine the tree and the ground. I can see nothing that would account for this phenomenon. I do suddenly realize that in order to drive here, I've had to pass two large adjoined cemeteries perpendicular to this street and only a short distance away.

It seems that Mrs. Tibbs may not be the only scary thing in the neighborhood!

A Near Death-Like Experience



I cut the little white pill in half. Then I think again and cut the halves in half.

Before I even swallow the damn pill I know it's a mistake. I don't do well on painkillers but with a mouth filled with gauze and the oral surgeon's anesthesia quickly wearing off, I decide to chance it.

I cut the little white pill in half. Then I think again and cut the halves in half. I'm hoping that one quarter will at least move the pain away from me a little. In fact, that's exactly what it does but almost immediately the waves of nausea begin.

I will spend the rest of the day and the night vomiting. One of the surgery requirements was to have an empty stomach so by nightfall I have not eaten at all but this doesn't seem to matter. I continue to vomit despite the fact that there's absolutely nothing in my stomach. By the middle of the night I've lost count of how many times I've made the trip from the bed to the tiny bathroom.

Nearing dawn, I get up one last time and leave my husband sleeping soundly not five feet from the bathroom. This time is different.

As I stand in the doorway, I begin to feel myself wobble. The last sight I remember on this side of things is the tile floor zooming up to meet me. Then blackness.

Before I even make contact with the floor, I am in another place but I don't know this. I am fully conscious and fully aware. I am suspended in an unending space that is more than just blackness – it is living black. It is love and it is home. I sense that I am a tiny point in this vastness with the ability to perceive 360 degrees in all directions at once.

I feel joyous and supremely comfortable. I have no connection to the person on the floor in the bathroom. As a matter of fact, I know nothing about bathrooms, being a person or earth itself. I have shed this identity completely and I'm simply hanging and gently swaying in this velvety blackness which feels like an ocean of love. I exist only in this moment in this ocean. This moment is all there is or ever has been. I am consciousness without time and it is glorious!

The person on the bathroom floor hasn't "entered" a different state, she has simply becoming aware of one that is ongoing. I have existed in this state always.

There are things I know without question. I have always known them. I am not actively thinking but rather these things are simply part of me and my understanding of my existence. It simply is. Even to use the word "understanding" doesn't ring true. It's more like all knowledge and all wisdom is laid out and can be accessed at will. It doesn't need to be contained by me to be part of me. I just have to shift my focus ever so slightly.

For instance, I know that I will become part of whatever I focus on. I am aware that I can focus on time in different ways. I am aware of an image of time as a series of separate "flowing things" like rivers or energy that are running parallel to each other. I know that I can experience time differently depending on which one I put my focus on.

I know that I have been in this state for eternity but I also that I exist in many other states as well. I am fluid and there are no barriers to my awareness.

I know I am connected to everything in some way and that if I choose, my ability to focus myself outward is limitless.

I know that I am a discreet, self-contained being while also part of the endless whole. There is an “I” here but it is not my only option. I am also “All.” I am both. At once. I know that all beings are this.

I know that all things are simultaneous and that my experience depends wholly on my focus. I know I have been in this state forever but I also know that I have been many other things. Simultaneously. I can choose what to experience.

I know these things in the way we “know” about gravity on earth. It doesn’t merit a thought, it’s simply part of the framework of existence.

The one thing that is being blocked from me somehow is my identity as the woman on the bathroom floor, so none of this is even mildly surprising.

Suddenly, I sense something coming at me from what feels like a great distance and it’s coming fast. I feel myself brace for the impact and then I’m suddenly “hit” with these words in the voice of the woman on the bathroom floor:

“Oh shit! I’m supposed to be doing that!”

Now a shock of fear runs through my point-of-consciousness self. It is the kind of fear that you might feel if you’ve driven twenty miles to work before realizing you’ve left your infant child alone in a high chair in the kitchen with the stove blazing.

It’s a profound sense of shock coupled with self-recrimination. It’s as if I’m in a major play and I’ve missed my cue. It feels as though I’ve screwed up – majorly. “I’m supposed to be doing THAT!” “That” meaning this life in this identity in this earthly body. I have the sense of a strong commitment to something that I’m actively failing at.

A sense of speed and I open my eyes to find myself on the bathroom floor. There is a gouge between my eyes where my eyeglasses have dug in when I hit the edge of the sink.

The skin is peeled away revealing the bleeding flesh beneath in precisely the shape of India. I come to cherish this wound.

Poltergeist at the Wedding



“I have finally kicked off my shoes and have seated myself in one of the low slung chairs...”

I am exhausted. It’s the kind of exhausted that vibrates with a warm glow of satisfaction. The kind that you get at the end of a long action-packed, emotionally fulfilling day.

I have just caught a glimpse of my beautiful daughter and her handsome new husband as they slipped out the front doors of the massive hotel on their way to Hawaii and a brand new life.

Somewhere in this vast complex, the wedding party goes on but I’ve called it a day. My husband who has endured the day with a nasty cold has already found our bed upstairs. I am spending a few minutes with three family members in the lounge before joining him for a good long sleep. It’s late and the lounge is nearly empty.

I have finally kicked off my shoes and have seated myself in one of the low slung chairs that encircle the equally squat cocktail table. The four of us sit in a semi-circle around the large table. These fashionable seating arrangements are scattered throughout the room.

We are pleasantly chatting about the day's events and winding down for our beds.

Glasses tinkle from the bar to my right which is dotted here and there with patrons. To our left the room stretches into vastness. It's clear that a party has recently vacated the space as it appears that many of the tables and chairs have been pushed toward the back of the room to make a dance floor. Most of the tables are covered with left over dishes, glasses and cups. The tables are vacant except for a distant group occupying a space against the back wall. The distance between us and them is so great that they produce only a low murmur.

Across the ersatz dance floor the nearest group of tables to us sit awaiting clean up. Not a single person occupies this space.

The tables like the chairs are low-set and very heavy. Massive furniture for a massive public space. While the chairs resemble carved-out barrels, the tables are like those huge cable spools that I've sometimes seen on the verge of a highway when there's construction going on. The pedestal base is equal in diameter to the tabletop and both are five feet or better across.

The conversation turns to relatives that we haven't seen for a while and then inevitably to my mother who has passed on six years prior and how much she would have loved the day.

Our low-key conversation is suddenly interrupted by a loud crash. We turn our heads in unison to view the nearest table across the dance floor just as a pile of dishes are swept onto the floor.

As we're watching, the enormous table also moves. It rapidly tips toward the floor ejecting the last of the tableware then it tips back, righting itself.

I cannot believe what I'm seeing. There area is completely empty of any person or mechanism that could have caused this. There is no way a person could have passed us from any direction without being seen.

"Did you see that?" I ask automatically.

Yes. They all agree on what we have just witnessed.

"Amazing!" "Wow!" "Look at that!"

I can't take my eyes off the table or the resulting pile of dishes on the floor beside it. Stillness. Nothing else moves or shows any inclination towards motion.

Gradually and amazingly the conversation around me returns to normal post-wedding topics.

I ask again: "Did you see THAT?"

I recount what I've just seen: "The dishes flew off the table and then the table tipped over with no earthly way it could have happened."

They agree. That's what they've seen.

They continue their conversation completely underwhelmed. I stare at the table while trying to digest exactly what's going on.

The glasses continue to tinkle at the bar to our right and I glance in that direction. The barkeep is busy with customers and doesn't appear to have noticed the crash.

Finally, I move in the direction of the table, feeling as confused by my family's reaction as I do by the event itself. An examination of the table and dishes clears up exactly nothing. It's an ordinary table and the dishes on the floor are ordinary dishes. I notice that despite the thunderous crash, none are broken.

Returning to the group, I find no curiosity about this occurrence. The conversation has moved on the bride's maid's dresses and the flowers.

I ask again if they really saw that. Everyone agrees that they have except they react as if I'm harping on some ordinary circumstance. It's as if they see this kind of thing every day.

Eventually, I decide to give up. Since I can't seem to chalk it up to anything at all, I put it out of my mind long enough to say good night. With one last glance at the table, I find my way to the elevator bank and finally sleep.

Ghost Cat



Out of the corner of my eye, I see movement in the direction of the bathroom to my left.

She's a lovely woman and she's one of my first Hospice patients. We'll call her Millie. My purpose here as a trained volunteer is to provide companionship and help with the little chores she can no longer do for herself.

My first impression of Millie is that of a side-show fortune teller. She is a tall woman, draped in a colorful caftan, her head is wound in a turban that no doubt hides the ravages of chemotherapy. She has cancer and she won't recover. In a few short weeks it will take her.

In the meantime, I've been getting to know Millie. She has been a daughter, wife and mother. Like most women of her era, the roles she played in life tended to dim rather

than exalt her wisdom, intelligence and sharp wit. She is friendly and upbeat. I am basking in it.

We often sit on her sofa perusing photos of her family and most particularly of her grandfather who was a veteran of the Spanish-American War. She is very proud of him and his service and I wonder if it will be her grandfather who meets her on the other side.

It quickly becomes my custom to arrive at Millie's with a stack of pages downloaded from the internet containing facts and photos from his war. A small mountain of dog-eared paper begins to accumulate on one corner of her coffee table.

Millie never complains about her pain and never even suggests that she harbors the slightest fear about her impending death. Not a religious woman, she does mention that she often sees her late husband around the house and this brings her great comfort.

She also has Theodore for comfort. Theodore is an ancient tabby who is mostly asleep during the days that I'm here. He is sweet but mostly disinterested and spends his days curled up against his mistress. He will tolerate a quick "hello" caress from me but basically regards me with a cool tolerance that cats are so accomplished at. Theodore is very, very old and it seems as though it will be a close call as to who will leave this world first – Theodore or his mistress.

In Millie's home, as I will come to find in all my Hospice patient's homes there is an atmosphere. Not at all scary, it's a feeling of profound peace and sacredness. It's a feeling of expectancy but not in a negative way. It feels as though there's a crush of spirits gathered in the corners waiting in joy to greet their loved one.

Although I can feel them, it never crosses my mind that I might encounter one of these spirits in the house. It certainly never crosses my mind that I will encounter a non-human spirit but this is what will happen.

This day, I am in Millie's basement attending to a few things I've put in the wash for her. The basement is semi-finished and it's a single large room. It's light and airy and recently swept as though someone has emptied it of an accumulation of things. I notice

that there is only a modest trail of small boxes and appliances in the center of the room. The last remnants of a life.

I am looking around the space as I lean on the washer waiting for it to complete the final cycle. Suddenly a small smoke-like tendril appears across the room – probably ten feet away but right in front of me. I watch mesmerized as the tendril seems to grow exponentially taking on the clear and distinct form of a cat.

The smoke-like image is in motion and the cat is clearly looking at me as it strolls by. The whole apparition lasts only a second or two and it moves gracefully through the gathering of boxes, its legs obscured by them until it simply fades out.

Forgetting the laundry, I immediately check on Theodore who is snoring away in concert with Millie on the sofa. Was he somehow out-of-body or was this some other cat? A ghost cat?

I say nothing to Millie when she awakens.

Several days later, the ghost cat tucked into the back of my mind, I am in Millie's kitchen preparing her lunch. Out of the corner of my eye, I see movement in the direction of the bathroom to my left. As I turn my head, my eyes are met once again by the now fully-formed-of-white-smoke ghost cat headed into the bathroom where I know Theodore's litter box resides. Spatula in hand I watch in astonishment as the cat makes its way toward the litter box, slowly dissipating into thin air as it goes.

As Millie eats her lunch, I sit alongside her petting the indifferent Theodore. Trying to sound perfectly innocent, I ask:

"Is Theodore the only cat you've ever had?"

Millie smiles "Oh no, Dear. Theodore lost his sister, Ophelia just two months ago. He misses her terribly."

"You cannot live with a paw in each world."

— Erin Hunter

Silver Sphere UFO



It seems to be fairly low in the atmosphere, so I judge that it's about basketball size – maybe a little larger.

It's one of the first truly beautiful days in mid-April. The sky is a deep blue scattered with thick whipped-cream clouds that look as though you could reach up and touch them.

It has been my routine to make the short drive home for lunch on the two days a week when I facilitate groups at night in the clinic. As I drive, I'm thinking about the tasks ahead of me: let the dogs out and feed them before scarfing down something myself that will have to hold me until I get home well after eight.

I am also thinking about tonight's group – Relapse Prevention – where we will discuss triggers for relapse and proactive ways to avoid them. I enjoy this group as on the whole they are smart, talkative and challenging. They are also a good mix of genders, ages and experiences making for some lively and meaningful discussions.

My turn is coming up and although I'm lost in thought, my body prepares to move into the right lane on the wide road.

Suddenly my eye catches a bright glint against the deep velvet of the sky. In the one o'clock position and seemingly not too high, there is a silver sphere.

I have the sense that it's not too big and if I were to frame it with my fingers through my car window, it would be about the size of a marble. It seems to be fairly low in the atmosphere, so I judge that it's about basketball size – maybe a little larger.

As it moves, the sun glints off it in multiple directions. What it is doing is as astonishing as the object itself. It seems to be interested in a specific cloud. One of the smaller, low-lying whipped cream clouds.

It is moving in an out of around the edge of this cloud. Ducking in and coming out again. I feel as though I'm watching a sewing motion: needle in, needle out around the periphery of the cloud. WTF?

I watch for as long as I can before a tree blocks my view and my turn is upon me.

Driving back to work, I search the sky intently but the silver sphere is nowhere to be found.

Goodbye from my "Best Girl"



Deirdre Molly

“Dogs do speak, but only to those who know how to listen.”

– Orhan Pamuk

I know losing her is going to be hard. Just thinking about it makes my throat tighten. I am learning mindfulness techniques that I will use with my clients and I pay special attention. I know that I too will need these techniques for when that day comes and I know it's coming soon.

Most dog lovers have had the experience of that “one” dog who just steals your heart forevermore. You may love and appreciate many dogs in your lifetime but there's always that “one.” Deirdre Molly is mine although it would have seemed pretty unlikely at the start.

The product of a border collie mother and black lab father, she has the laser focus and relentless intensity of her breeds.

As a puppy, I had no choice but to take her everywhere simply because she would wreak havoc if left at home. I swear you could see her “brother” and “sister” border collies sigh with relief as they watched me escort her out the door. Her puppyhood was a misery for them.

Absolutely fearless, she once managed to let down the back window of my car and jump out as I backed out of a parking spot. If not for the slash of red that was her flying leash in my peripheral vision, God only knows what would have happened.

Once she managed to remain unscathed after falling between the steps of our high deck. She even wound up in the vet’s after investigating an angry bee too closely, swaying on her feet with both eyes swollen shut.

Deirdre’s Lab-style paws were so strong, that she could shred you to pieces just in her exuberance to say hello.

Then there was the day that she took a fancy to my leather cigarette case and managed to play keep-away with it all day as I chased her around the yard in the pouring rain.

She was a clown who lived life to the fullest with all the glee she could muster and she constantly made me laugh despite myself. She was a tough fit but when she grew on you, it was solid. She was *that* dog.

Deirdre was born on the very day that I buried my mother. Many was the time, I would roll my eyes and say “Thanks, mom” under my breath. In a strange way, though, she became the last link I had with my mom and I knew that her death would signal an even bigger end than just her canine years.

Now that the end is here, I am able to sit and feel the tidal wave of grief as it consumes me and then let it go back into the ocean. It hasn’t been easy but relying on the proficiencies I’m learning, it’s better than expected.

Deirdre is gone and I grieve but slowly, as it does, life fills in the empty spaces again.

This morning I am up very early and sitting at the dining room table in the stillness of the still-sleeping house. Probably for the first time since her death, I'm completely absorbed in thought that doesn't include my grief.

I've gotten a new tablet and I'm very busy making sure that my treasure trove of electronic books have transitioned onto it. I don't have the heart to disturb my cat, Tucker who is sleeping on the corner of the table, a place he knows is forbidden.

Suddenly we both look up. It's Deirdre's bark – loud and strong and it's coming from the bedroom just a few feet away. I recognize not only her bark but which of her repertoire it is. It's her happy, "look-at-me bark." One I haven't heard in a long time due to her illness.

Both Tucker and I leap to our feet, it was so loud and so definite. Investigating the quiet bedroom, of course we find nothing. If not for Tucker's strong reaction equal to my own, I'm sure I would always wondered if it was real or just an artifact of grief.

I miss you still, Deirdre Molly.

THE MIRROR PORTAL



I've decided to do a spiritual cleansing and then paint a life size angel on the mirror.

Our last border collie, Bobby is dying. Until just a couple of days ago, the cancer hardly seemed to slow him down at all but now it's become clear that time is running out. Once discovered, the vet informed us that there were no options and thankfully there was no pain.

My husband and I have *that* discussion. The one where you decide that tomorrow's the day you'll take your loyal friend for one last vet visit. It's a hard day for us. It's especially hard because we lost Bobby's "sister," Deirdre just a couple of months earlier.

What started as confining himself to his bed has become a comatose state by early evening. He is breathing regularly but is now unresponsive. As the night continues, we

know we've made the right decision. **In my heart I'm hoping that he will pass quietly in this state without the trauma of the vet's office.**

I rise from my sleepless bed throughout the night to check on him but his condition remains the same. Around four in the morning I decide to make one last check and to my amazement, I find his bed empty.

Looking across the stretch of livingroom for him, I find him in a very strange posture. He's sitting at attention on one of the sofas. A place he's never sat before – ever. With a look of rapt attention on his face he is staring wide-eyed across the room at an overly large mirror propped against the wall.

I feel as though I've intruded on a sacred moment and I wonder if Deirdre has come to get him. He looks fine – better than fine. He looks better than he has for days. I stand here for a full minute or so and he never looks in my direction. I feel like I shouldn't be seeing this and I decide not to disturb him. Confused and wondering what tomorrow will bring, I return to my bed where I finally fall into a deep sleep.

In the morning, we discover that he has indeed passed over.

The trouble begins almost immediately. One of our two small rescues, Daisy is suddenly acting out in ways she never has before. Suddenly her head is on a swivel and she has begun to see things in the house that no one else is seeing.

It's as if something unseen is going out of its way to make her crazy. Once she sees this something – she reacts by barking and growling as she follows it across the room and even up and down the walls with her eyes. This is happening multiple times every day and no amount of reassurance will calm her down. Sometimes she will walk towards the mirror, slunk down and just stare. It begins to get very unnerving.

I begin to notice changes in the house too. I begin to feel a heaviness that hadn't been there before and I tell myself I'm just creeping myself out. I tell myself that the occasional thumps and bangs I hear coming from upstairs is just the cat but I can't lose the sense of presence. I find that I don't like walking past that mirror. I keep remembering how transfixed Bobby was by it.

The mirror is over six feet tall and over four feet wide. It's too heavy to hang so we keep it propped against the wall at the bottom of the staircase that ascends to the rooms upstairs. We bought it new from a furniture store so it has no history other than in this house unless you count the thousands of furniture shoppers who probably passed by it in the store.

I am trying to understand why my own dogs if in fact they're somehow "visiting" from the other side would make me feel so awful – why they would bring this heaviness. Not knowing what to do about it, I try to put it out of my mind and carry on – until the night that changed everything.

My friend Chris and her dog Max often spend the weekend and have done so for years. Max knows every smell, every nook and cranny and every sound this house makes just like it's his own. He's also one of those Zen dogs who rarely barks or makes a fuss.

This night however, it is different. Suddenly, in the middle of the night, Max explodes into hysterical barking at the staircase that the mirror reflects. He is ballistic and inconsolable. Chris is terrified. She's never seen him do anything like this before. She says he was staring at the staircase, all the hair on his hackles raised and barking and growling.

Needless to say, there is not a whole lot more sleeping this night.

Now I know I have to do something. Now I know that my own dog and my own instincts are correct and I have to take action.

I can't move this mirror. That's out of the question. Cover it? That would make it even creepier. I wonder how many years' bad luck might result from shattering approximately twenty-four square feet of mirror. I wonder if painting it would work as well as covering it in some enormous black cloth. I wonder a lot of things and feel crazier with each thought.

I contact a few spiritual healers online to learn how to do a "do-it-yourself" house cleansing. Most of them don't want to give me the time of day. Finally, I get a gracious and detailed email from a well-known figure in the spiritual/paranormal world.

I've decided to do a spiritual cleansing and then paint a life size angel on the mirror. I want to paint an image of peace and protection but I've decided that if there are entities using the mirror to pass in and out of, I don't want to trap any of them on this side until after the cleansing is complete. I want them to be able to at least squeeze back into the mirror.

Ignoring the fact that this whole thing sounds totally insane, even to me, I apply a coat of gesso to the entire mirror, leaving a small "open" space dead center for the possible spirits to pass through. After completing the cleansing I gesso over this spot too and spend the rest of the day painting my protection angel.

She has kept her post for a couple of years now and things have been quiet. The house immediately felt lighter and more joyful after the cleansing so whether she was even necessary is up for debate but she's grown on me.

On rare occasions, Daisy who is now completely blind still reacts to something as if she's seeing it but it's nothing like it used to be.

I used to think that the old fashioned notion of covering the mirrors in a house where someone has died was a lot of folklore and superstition. I no longer think that.

Did Bobby open some kind of portal when he died? Did that portal allow other, darker energies into my home? Does death open a portal to the other side? Once again, I am left with questions.

Glowing Red Triangles



My first thought is that there is an airplane on fire in the sky. But I soon dismiss this because there are two of them and they are completely stationary.

I am contemplating the connection between childhood experiences and substance abuse as I pull my car out of the darkened parking lot and head for home.

My evening featured a passionate group discussion on the subject of relationships and families. The subject seems to uncover a great deal of emotional baggage and my heart breaks for some of the group members who endured truly horrific circumstances in their childhoods.

With Thanksgiving only days behind us, I know that in one way or another, family relationships have been on most people's minds. Unlike the portrayal in popular culture, most of the people I work with don't have memories of love and acceptance from their families. Many have recollections of only trauma, betrayal and despair.

During this season where we are bombarded with images of warm homecomings and smiling families, I go out of my way to give these people a voice. I too am disturbed with the relentless portrayals of happy family gatherings. This has not been my reality either.

It takes me some time to complete my notes, lock up the clinic and finally head for home. The late November air has a distinct chill that tells me winter is getting serious. The clock on my dashboard reports that it's already after eight. I turn onto the quiet main street and begin the uphill drive toward home.

Something catches my eye in the sky just ahead of me. Two bright red spots are hanging stationary in the sky. As I continue up the hill my view moves from the top of my windshield to my car's moon roof.

My first thought is that there is an airplane on fire in the sky. But I soon dismiss this because there are two of them and they are completely stationary.

The traffic is light and I am able to pull over. I have to crane my neck to look almost straight up at them. They seem to be high up there with one closer and one at a higher altitude. Somehow I can tell that they are large and far away rather than small and close.

I hear no sound although my windows are rolled which might explain that. They continue to glow steadily as I watch. There is no movement or flickering.

I give a quick thought to my phone which contains a camera but sits in the back seat somewhere in my bag overflowing paperwork. I dismiss the idea of a photo because of the time it would take to arrange it.

Instead, I simply examine the objects as best I can. They are definitely triangular in shape but softened and a little lighter in color at the edges. There are no lights on them,

per se, but rather they are brightly glowing from within. The red is so bright that it resembles a car's red tail lights. The objects seem to have an oval or oblong shape within them. This shape seems somehow more solid than the outside and it is lighter in color. It looks to me as though the solid oval is surrounded by the triangular red glow.

As I watch, the larger object begins to move slowly. The smaller, further away object follows suit. I watch as they move into a position from which my view is blocked by trees. They are headed in the direction of the river just a few blocks behind me.

I continue to search the sky as I move onto the street again but I can no longer see them. As I drive to the top of the hill and the traffic light, I am looking around for other witnesses. There are no pedestrians and the cars are moving normally.

The second thing I do upon arriving home is to write down what I've just seen. The first thing I do is check the clock to make sure I haven't lost any time!

In the weeks that follow this, after submitting my account to MUFON, I search the data bases for any other reported sightings in my area. I finally come across a report wherein the witness claims to have seen these objects in exactly the same time frame. His or her report describes the red color, one being higher than the other and the slow trajectories. This witness claims to have seen them on multiple occasions in an area near the river. In this witness's sightings though, the objects are described as orbs.

Are those orbs described my triangles? Are they sometimes orbs and sometimes different shapes? Did I see a morphing U.F.O.?

Ghost in the Theater Aisle



Suddenly, I'm aware of a tendril of smoke-like substance that seems to be developing out of thin air.

It has been several minutes of bustling activity as the audience files in and search for their seats in front of the stage.

I am once again with my friend Carol and for once we've arrived early for something and we just watch as people pour into the theater. Any conversation would have to be in raised voices due to the loud murmur of the crowd. So we sit quietly just witnessing.

Finally the house lights go from bright to half lit and a semi-hush falls over the crowd. We are all waiting for the world famous medium to step on stage. There is a palpable air of expectancy.

We are seated on the extreme right on the aisle about midway from the front of the room to the back. We are separated from the center rows by a wide aisle to my left. I am looking at the backs of endless heads and marveling at how much grief must be in the room. I wonder how many people are there to get messages from children who have crossed over.

Knowing what my parents went through after the death of my sister, my heart breaks for them. I think that I'd gladly give up any reading that might come my way for one of them. I know that nothing can compare to their pain.

Suddenly, I'm aware of a tendril of smoke-like substance that seems to be developing out of thin air. In a second it's gone, but I've seen enough to conclude that it could be a spirit joining his or her earthly family.

About three feet high, it manifests as a thick mist or smoke tendril that is moving down the aisle several feet in front of me. There is something about its movement that is exactly reminiscent of a person walking. It is that kind of bobbing motion. I watch as it stops at a row of seats and then simply vanishes.

As the evening progresses, I wait intently for someone in that row to get reading. **After seeing the mist, I'm really curious to see if the whole process works.**

Sure enough, sometime near the end of the show, a tearful woman is given words of solace from her dead little girl through the medium on stage. I come away from that show with all my doubts about the possibility of mediumship invalidated. I feel entirely blessed to have witnessed such a thing.

Ectoplasm on a Stranger's Head



On top of her head there is draped a dense white mist.

It's a clear beautiful day as my friend Carol and I set out for a two hour drive westward into a rural area of Pennsylvania.

Her estranged uncle has died and she is interested in obtaining a few random memories of her grandmother which she hoped had been in his possession. Over the past few weeks she has learned through other family members that his neighbors with whom he was apparently very close, had removed a number of things from his property already.

A single elderly man, the inference is that he's been being taken advantage of by these neighbors for years. One of the things his neighbors were purported to have taken were his guns. Given that bit of information, we have no idea what to expect when we get there and we discuss aborting the trip many times.

The problem is that Carol has precious few memories of loving acceptance in childhood and the ones that she does have are with her grandmother whom she revered. This is an emotional journey for her and I do my best to be supportive.

The landscape does indeed get more and more rural as we travel. We pass through a number of small towns that appear to be deserted and decaying.

We follow the GPS directions until we come upon a rural road mostly devoid of houses. Deep in the woods we finally turn off on a gravel road and then into a cluster of buildings that appear to be part of a compound.

Numbers on the first building tell us that this is indeed her uncle's small neat log cabin. The front is covered with a sheet of plywood and the windows are covered from inside.

The whole area has a strange vibe and Carol decides that she just wants to leave. I am about to agree and turn the car around when we spot a tiny woman walking towards us.

The woman is elderly and very short. Her steel grey hair is close to her head in tight curls. She wears a loose cotton dress. She is about a hundred yards away and I can't make out an expression but I'm not sure I even looked at her face.

On top of her head there is draped a dense white mist. It covers her head like a hat with one end draping off – tail-like. The white mist roiling slightly and so I can tell that it's not some strange hat but is actually a smoke-like substance.

I punch at Carol's arm.

"What's on her head?" I yell.

Carol scrunches away.

"What? What do you mean?"

I continue to stare at the approaching woman. If anything, the mist is growing larger. It seems to be coiled on her head with the tail-like part hanging behind her to her left. My heart is pounding and I just want to run from her.

“What’s on her head?” I repeat becoming nearly hysterical.

“I don’t see anything! I don’t know what you mean!” Carol is getting upset.

Without another word, I make the fastest three point turn in history and without further conversation we speed up the driveway throwing gravel in our wake.

Our conversation all the way home returns again and again to strange vision and what it could have meant. It certainly got us out of that creepy place and quickly!

Your Stories:

For those of us who have had one or more spiritually transformative experiences, the problem often becomes that we feel so alone with them. We might even feel disconnected from the people in our lives who support us in other ways.

Finding a venue to express ourselves freely and talk honestly about what really happened to us can be difficult if not impossible.

A search for such a venue can often lead to avenues that want to exploit, minimize or patronize us and our experiences. Sometimes we are met with dogmas or belief systems that don't resonate with our own. Some of them can be downright scary! Perhaps nowhere else in life will we find such a wide variety of opinions and beliefs as we will in the so-called paranormal world. Both experiencers and non-experiencers often seem inclined to build a belief structure around these experiences. This can swing in countless directions - from the purely scientific who demand material proof for things that don't comply with their notions of "proof" to the purely

spiritual position with its own long-held assumptions.

If you would like to tell your story in non-exploitive, non-judgmental venue. I would like to provide that place. You can email your story to me at the address below. Your anonymity will be respected and vigorously guarded.

Paraponderings@gmail.com

Author's Letter to those Experiencing Trauma from Paranormal Events:

It should come as no surprise that for victims of paranormal trauma, their best bet for support is often not family or friends or even those professionals versed in trauma informed care. Often the most useful support will come from other experiencers.

I would posit that this is why the podcast interviews of so many experiencers end with "Thank you for letting me tell my story and for not thinking I'm crazy." Podcast addicts (like me) who listen to these kinds of shows will hear this phrase or others just like it over and over.

Having been traumatized by something paranormal has no parallel with other kinds of trauma except in the aftermath of post trauma symptoms. Even then, in my estimation, these symptoms themselves will tend to be intensified by having experienced something that "shouldn't even exist."

It's a terrible thing to be victimized by another person or some violent or dreadful life circumstance. It's quite another to have your

whole understanding of life and reality itself ripped out from under you by experiencing something momentous that you didn't even believe possible.

Being victimized by another person or natural disaster will open the door to apprehension about one's safety in the world but that apprehension still exists within the parameters of the known world. You may develop fears but your fears remain in the imaginable world view. If you've been victimized by something that "can't even exist," that door is ripped off its hinges. Now things that are even beyond your own imagination become possible. You exist in a completely new paradigm. This new paradigm is something that your loved ones may not even be willing to accept as real although this is now your reality. Conversely, you may never invite anyone else in for fear of rejection or just because of your inability to articulate it.

I believe how we react to trauma is a very individualized thing depending on scores of characteristics pertaining to both the trauma event(s) and the experiencers themselves. For

someone who already has a trauma history, the effects are greatly compounded.

As someone who personally identifies with the effects of trauma and has also worked with others affected by trauma, some attributes have stood out for me on the subject.

In terms of triggers, there is a difference between intense single-incident events and more low-key but repetitive occurrences. In the paranormal, a powerful single event could be like being chased by a cryptid or a shadow figure. Something up close and personal enough to cause an overwhelming shock of terror.

More low-key but repetitive events could be a nightly haunting or repeated poltergeist activity - definitely scary especially in childhood but not particularly threatening. The key here is the repetition of that fear and the need for the central nervous system to respond again and again.

In single incident events, you may be triggered by a smell or sound or something similar and suddenly become flooded with the traumatic memory accompanied by all the emotions attendant to it.

In the case of more low-key, repetitive trauma you may also be triggered but may experience only the panic with no specific memory to attach it to.

In the psychological world this could roughly correlate to the effects of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder vs. Complex Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. In both scenarios you will feel as though you have lost control of your own emotions. In the second scenario, however, it is likely that you won't even know why.

Another attribute of trauma that has impressed me is just how physical it is. Trauma is by no means confined to the mind, but is lodged very firmly in the body. Trauma can get stuck and when it does, it can make us sick.

With this in mind, it is becoming more and more common to find trauma therapies that include somatic (pertaining to the body) components. Perhaps most notably is Somatic Experiencing therapy developed by Peter A. Levine, PhD. In his seminal book *Waking the Tiger*, Dr. Levine describes a study of animals in their natural habitat. These animals are able to recover from life threatening experiences quickly and

naturally. The example he uses is that of a gazelle being chased by a tiger in an unsuccessful attempt at attack. The animals are traumatized by coming extremely close to death.

He noted that these animals, once exposed to a traumatic event, complete a full sequence of reaction and recovery consisting of a prolonged trembling which seems to initiate a chemical reaction that allows the body to discharge excess energy and reset the nervous system.

Why does this happen so naturally for animals while humans tend to be scarred by these experiences? There must be something about our brains, our conditioning and/or our ability to create stories around our experiences that simply isn't an impediment for animals. Instead of being discharged, trauma seems too often gets "locked" in our bodies and brains.

There are examples of how this therapy works on You Tube that involve artificially getting the body to tremble through muscle exhaustion. I would caution anyone who is interested to get medical/psychological clearance before trying it. I feel compelled to say this because trauma is

serious and can have serious consequences if not handled well.

Another non-talk therapy that seems to be successful for trauma is E.M.D.R. which stands for Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing which involves rapid movement of the eyes while recalling the traumatic event. My understanding is that this successful for most people but like all therapies, not all.

Another thing to be noted, in my opinion is the fact that although support and the ability to communicate one's traumatic experience seems like a slam-dunk in terms of trauma therapy, there are schools of thought that are demonstrating a caveat in this regard. It seems that sometimes talking about and re-living a trauma or talking about it too soon can cause more damage.

I have come to believe that while talking about one's traumatic memory is ultimately therapeutic; it may take time to achieve the psychological distance needed to avoid re-living and re-traumatizing oneself. This time will necessarily vary from experiencer to experiencer.

Since all of one's senses seem to be shocked and overwhelmed simultaneously, maybe our psyches need time to create some kind of order from the chaos. Maybe time is necessary to be able to retrieve it in its whole state. Maybe the body and mind have to find a way of interfacing the experience before it can be articulated.

So, if you've been beating yourself up about not being able to "talk about it," give yourself a break and some time. Things may change. Don't force the issue or let anyone else force it.

On the whole, if you've experienced any kind of trauma, I think it's important that you are gentle with yourself and accept where you are with it at any given moment. Conversely, help should be sought if you are struggling in any way, particularly if those struggles produce behaviors that are harmful to yourself and/or others.

As a writer and an artist, I am interested in stories. In my own life, art and writing have been ways to cope. Journaling can definitely help with the effects of trauma. Not only can it help one to cope, reduce emotional dysregulation and other symptoms, it can help one to find the "gift" in the experience.

I find that journaling can move us out of a victim stance and into a healthier frame of mind. It also has the benefit of naturally giving us only what we can deal with in that moment. We aren't being pressured to "say more" or enter territory that we're just not ready for. We're in charge of what we write – even if something deep within us emerges, we're still in control. We can put down the pen.

Some Thoughts on Journaling for Trauma:

1. Create quiet, sacred space – whatever this means to you. Soft music, closed window shades, light a candle – whatever makes you feel safe.
2. Approach it in a light-hearted, playful manner even though the subject itself may be anything but light-hearted. Don't have any goals. Approach it with a "let's see what happens" attitude. Don't make yourself write if overwhelming fear comes up but don't let a little trepidation boss you around either. There needs to be a balance between pushing yourself and not requiring enough push from yourself. Keep in mind, those of us who have experienced trauma, are never going to want to embrace it so some resistance is natural. Only you can determine if your fears around it are overwhelming to you.
3. The idea is not to write directly about the trauma necessarily, but to allow whatever wants to come up, come up. Have no expectations and accept whatever comes up. It can help to sit for a minute or so calmly in solitude and quiet and set your intention for healing from the effects of your trauma. Allow but don't insist.

4. Don't hang on to these writings. That is, of course, unless you feel they are exceptionally literary!

The idea here is not for good writing but for raw expression. This writing should be just for you. It should be about getting stuff out – moving the energy. What you write doesn't even have to make sense to you. Let it be what it is.

5. Start with a writing prompt. Something like: "I remember..." or "What really bugs me is..." It doesn't matter what the prompt is – you'll invariably get to the same place no matter what, but it takes away that "how to start" hesitation.

6. Outrace the critic. This kind of writing should be done in short bursts rather than long sessions. Set the timer for ten, twenty or thirty minutes then start writing. Try not to stop writing. Keep your hand going. Just keep writing the next thing that comes to you – just let it flow. Taking a cue from Proprioceptive writing therapy, if you get stuck and your hand stops moving, write the following: "What do I mean by...?" Then write something to clarify the last thought written. This will usually restart the flow. Forget about

punctuation or spelling. Just keep moving your hand.

7. Consistency is key. Don't just do this once and expect miracles! It takes time for the soul, mind and body to get on the same "page" and see this exercise as a tool for healing.

Make it a point to journal at least once or twice a week. Daily is even better.

8. Have patience with yourself and love yourself through this. You can definitely begin to heal and you can feel better. If you have been traumatized by a paranormal occurrence, my heart goes out to you. If you feel you need help or support, please send me an email or visit my website:

Paraponderings@gmail.com

<https://www.paranormalponderings.com/>

About My Artwork:

I began my art career in infancy. My mother had a gift for drawing she passed it on to me. She taught me to hold a pencil and make stick figures when I was still a colicky baby and she was desperate for something to stop my crying.

One of my happiest memories is having my Kindergarten painting on display in the local bank!

I learned to use art to soothe myself when my childhood world was falling apart. I would spend long hours sprawled out on the floor of my bedroom illustrating my stories while various family members battled downstairs. Life in the time and place I grew up didn't afford me an art education and in a lot of ways I'm glad about that. I like to say that I was taught how to make art by a child – me!

I worked for a time with many other artists, some highly trained. During that time, I saw that art had become a stressful exercise for many of them. It was as if the ghost of some art instructor still hung over them dishing out rules and criticisms.

Of course, you have to know some rules about art if only to break them intelligently and so I did learn from many gifted artists over the years. Art has never become a source of stress for me. It remains a joy as ever and I'm grateful to the child who taught me. I recognize that my art remains child-like in many ways and I'm cool with that. You may notice that in many of my pieces I incorporate squiggly lines that resemble unreadable handwriting. This is a nod to another interest of mine - Asemic Writing. Simply put, Asemic Writing is "wordless writing." There is something about this that appeals to me. Perhaps it's because I am a trained graphologist and handwriting has always had a fascination for me. Whole books have been written in this art form. A visit to Pinterest will reveal some absolutely beautiful examples of Asemic Writing.

Thank You

No matter what your interest in the paranormal is, I'm honored that you chose to read my stories. I hope that you found them enjoyable. Please review this book on Amazon and elsewhere. It would mean so much to me!