

## Out of Time

As long as I can remember I have been intrigued by tales of the inexplicable. My family upbringing was unusual in that the non-material world was a topic of fascination and easy reference in conversation. My dad plotting his funeral would be a recurring theme in front of the children. He would ask what sort of sign we might like from him when the time came; that there was activity beyond our limited life.

Perhaps I have my parents to thank for my love of mysterious stories on which there are no fixed answers. I liked swirling off into speculation. Somehow this made my world seem a little larger.

It was an unusual cocktail of belief and religion in our house, and I found when answers were supplied, they were never quite satisfactory. For example, why would Jesus need to die to save us? Christianity permeated our society more than, but I never did enjoy the reluctant trips we made to our local godforsaken empty church with its loud, tinny, recorded bells.

What did speak straight to my emotional core were ghostly tales of mystery that involved other levels of sensory awareness which I didn't hear about in church.

My mum loved the drama of any good story, especially one that suggested reincarnation might be a reality. She recalled as a child knowing her way perfectly around a Scottish castle that she had never visited, and once

staying in a home where footsteps woke her, passing her room, but never returning. Yet her room was the last room on the corridor.

My dad had hosts of stories and enjoyed slowly generating an atmosphere of suspense, regretful that he had only one paranormal experience, aged 12, in the hot summer of 1942. His mother must have used up her petrol allowance to take him to the burnt down site of the infamous Borley Rectory situated in a hamlet of Essex. She hoped seeing that there was nothing to see, would dampen his interest. On their arrival it was utterly deserted, and she busied herself picking fallen apples from the orchard whilst my dad wandered around the remains on a still, sultry day. He said a brick hurled itself out of nowhere through the weighted air and thudded at his feet. This further consolidated his fascination in all things Borley.

I quickly gleaned as a teenager that mysterious stories were not of interest to most families; Christians regarded them as coming from a dark place and Atheists simply did not see the point of them.

I do like the possibility of an extra-sensory logic mirroring at another level the science of the physical world. For example, inexplicable phenomenon relating to a traumatic death being about the need for release, or a search for justice that has been breached or even an important message of support or warning from a loved one.

There was a book published in the 70's called 'Haunted Britain' which for a while accompanied our childhood car journeys but it lacked excitement in its delivery, demonstrating that even ghost stories could be dull: Kings

Langley; Herts 'Phantom monks have been seen in Priory Orchard.  
Continue north-east to the A41.'

Castles, religious sites, battlefields and stately homes surely did not have to be the only places that contained these energies.

As I hit my 30's I became enthused by the idea of finding supernatural stories from everyday people that might contain hope, support or encouragement.

A Hackney council colleague, Aneka, shared my interest. This was before the internet. Our A4 flyer went up in a couple of libraries near our workplace, saying, 'Tales from the Terraces- extraordinary uplifting experiences from ordinary people- We want your stories!'

Given the nature of our jobs [social workers] we were used to visiting strangers in their homes and found it an enlivening thought to be going with a new agenda. Two visits remain in mind. Our entitled sense of youth labelled our first client 'a sweet old lady'.

She was keen to tell of a psychic connection she had to a handsome man who owned the clothing factory she had worked in for over 50 years. They would know when they were about to see each other. It was only the impact of her being from a different class, him being Jewish and the presence of his wife that got in the way of them being united through marriage. Her current husband quietly padded around as she talked, making us cups of tea as we heard about the love of her life

On a hot summer evening we took the lift up a tower block to meet our next storyteller. We were led by a youngish Jamaican woman into a small front room- no one else was in the silent flat and no drinks were offered. The visit [like our previous one only required us as audience] and the subjects were betrayal, hexing and revenge against women who had trespassed against her. We were there about thirty minutes and we both wanted to get out, feeling claustrophobic with the intensity.

I drove my sturdy Toyota back towards Finsbury Park feeling unsettled. The route home took me along unfamiliar Victorian suburbs and finally, with my accelerator and windows down, I swished on to the north circular on that warm and darkening, summer evening.

Something was wrong. The car was resisting my steering. I slowed down and moved to the slower lane as I ascended over the bridge before Edmonton and wondered if I had a flat tyre. Determined to keep going, I pulled back with the steering wheel from an invisible force pulling me further left.

When I finally got home, I checked all the tyres for external evidence and found none.

The following morning as daylight cast more confidence, I drove to work; the car was back to normal. I was pleased to see Aneka in reception.

Her car was at the garage. She had a terrible journey back and thought there was something wrong with her steering wheel...

This marked the abandonment of our research. We were lightweights!

It is a heightened time in the weeks after a parent dies; the world seems more permeable, especially if you are aware there may be signs! My sister and I were rewarded with invigorating and heartening communications from both parents that lifted our spirits; ranging from a white cat and a white owl [as promised], a leaf stationary in the air to the unexpected smell of 1970's mothballs on the 144 bus.

To conclude, two experiences from my most sensible and non-suggestible friends have added strength to the feeling there must be more.

One recalled visiting a schoolmate who lived in a house reported to be haunted by a nun in a white habit, who was known to float down the stairs. She felt sceptical about this aged 13; 'And then I saw her'. That was how short her story was!

The other recalled, after the purchase of her Edwardian family home, that the sellers told them 'Not to mind the servant girl in the attic who may whisper to you; 'Don't leave me'.'

They minded not at all, not being believers. The marital bedroom was in the attic, and they slept undisturbed for ten years. But in the middle of the final

night before another house move, my friend was awoken with a female voice whispering sharply in her ears, 'Don't leave me!'

Make of it what you will. Are these sensory memories out of time and place that science has yet to explain? Mind you, if it did, I'm not sure I would understand.

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