

SIMPLY SPIRITUAL

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Foreword

A friend of mine once said to me that the work I do as a medium can mean the difference between hope and sorrow. She described grief as being like a long, dark and damp corridor that is lonely, scary and seemingly never ending. But then she said that a conversation with me changed everything, and it was as if an 'Exit Ahead' sign suddenly lit up in the corridor. She told me that being a medium is a great gift and that ten minutes of my time can bring solace to someone's soul – so I should try to reach out to as many people as I possibly can.

I wrote this book as I was asked to do by the spirit world, for all of you - to give you hope in the darkest of situations, to help you to find the strength to overcome pain and anguish and replace it with love and understanding, to somehow make sense of the experiences that you have on this side of life and to know that others have been there before you. You may never understand totally, but with time comes acceptance of the beautiful person that is you.

“Small is beautiful” says Schumacher. The key is to remember that no matter how much more you become in the world of people around you, you are always just part of the infinite plan. Maintain that thought and you could be bigger than you ever thought possible. Don't buy into scenarios that promise to make you 'more important', as that will eclipse the true you, the beautiful you.

Know that you are never alone in this world and you are always loved by forces unseen. There are forces that love and guard you, no matter who or what you are. That is very important to understand, no matter what happens to you and what path you find yourself on – there are no exceptions. So trust your heart, love yourselves first and treat it as gently as you would a child. Honour yourselves first, and then give to others; miracles can happen and you will find your 'more'.

The role of a medium is exactly how it sounds – the middle man or woman. I am not special in any way. I am human. I am me. I love to laugh - humour is in all places, even the darkest ones where you believe no light exists. As we travel through our lives we soon learn that this is one of the strongest gifts we possess. It has the ability to push all other feelings aside in its bid to fill our lives, so let it do so. I use that energy to connect like a telephone from this world to the next, in order to prove there is life after death.

A very long time ago I was asked by a lovely man in the spirit world who I was. I said, after some thought, “A mother, and a wife” and I was told, “No, that is what you do, not who you are.” I couldn’t answer any further. I didn’t really understand the question, to be honest. Now I do, although it took years of searching and utter confusion. It’s a search that you can only complete yourself. It has taken me many years to become a good medium. The journey is tough but beautiful, and everything I have experienced has made me who I am. I am imperfect, as we all are, but I’m content with that.

In this book I describe my journey to the point that I am at now. I talk a little about spiritual philosophy and offer an insight to the world of spirit, as both worlds are connected, one around the other. There are plenty of books that describe what happens when you get to the other side; that is not what this book is about. It is about the human journey, about finding your way, your truth; but also about knowing that we are not alone travelling along this path and how to understand that, and to find the possibilities that exist for each of us and within each of us. Someday, hopefully, we shall all be able to see, sense and experience its beauty in our lives.

I hope that my story helps you to understand, in your own way, and to believe a little of something more.

Prologue

My eyes flickered open but it wasn't morning. Why was I awake? I heard a noise and saw a shadow in my room. "Oh, no! No, it's not happening again. Please, no." I prayed that I was still asleep and that I could close my eyes and when I woke up it would be morning. I told myself that I was imagining it, it was just a dream, the vivid imagination of an eight year old – that's what my mother said whenever I tried to tell her about it.

There it was again. A bolt of fear stabbed through me. My heart rate sped up. My hearing sharpened, the fuzzy security of sleep had vanished. It was 2.40 a.m. and my bed was shaking. My eyes shot open and I didn't move an inch, not daring to breathe. My heartbeat was drumming in my ears and I felt pure terror. Someone was walking around my bedroom. It was a man. I didn't know him. Then I heard the noise again, the most awful noise. Someone was climbing the stairs, slowly, rhythmically, with deep rasping breathing sounds in time with each heavy step taken.

Oh, no! It's going to get me! I put my fingers in my ears but I could still hear it. I started whimpering. I sat up on the side of my bed, hugging myself as I shook with absolute terror and the certainty that it would get me this time. Grandmother, with whom I shared my room, stirred and blinked open her eyes as if she had been woken by something – could she have heard it too? My frightened, glaring eyes stared at her and her face said it all. I could see initial shock, disbelief, then a knowing look on her face - did she understand what it was? She saw my feeble form shaking and the petrified look on my face and threw back the covers of her bed and hurried over to me; grabbing me in a protective hug she said, "Don't worry, they won't hurt you."

I had so many questions that I wanted to ask. "What is it? Who won't hurt me? Why do I keep hearing it?" But all I could do was collapse sobbing with relief into her nightdress and she rocked me and stroked my head with soothing words of comfort. At last I wasn't alone.

When I eventually calmed down and my heaving sobs and hiccups had abated, my grandmother sat on her bed facing me. She took my hands in hers and told me not to be afraid. She said that the noises wouldn't hurt me.

I asked her to tell me what they were and how she knew they wouldn't hurt me. She was careful not to say any words that would scare me, but I knew what she meant. She said that they wanted to be with me, to protect me. I was confused and thought 'But who are they? And why do I need protecting? And if they are there to protect me, why do they scare me so much?' I asked her who it was, hoping she would know. She just calmly said, "I don't know".

Her explanation didn't help me at all really, because I just wished these 'ghosts' would go off and haunt someone else and leave me alone. I knew that there was more to it than just a noisy spirit - there was something deeper going on. I still didn't understand why it was happening to me though, and my grandmother could not, or would not, answer that question. I didn't mind that so much though, because I was just so relieved there was someone else who knew what I was talking about. Someone else who understood the fear and confusion I was feeling. I felt so relieved by the knowledge that it wasn't just my imagination and someone knew that I wasn't mad and that I wasn't making it up. In those moments of abject fear I wanted it all to stop so badly, but little did I know that all those terrifying experiences would shape my future so significantly.

Chapter 1 ~ The Very Beginning

I want to tell you how and why it all began, and I want you to see the similarities within your own lives, to know that the experiences we have right from the beginning mould us into the people we need to be. I am grateful for them now, but it was not always like this. So let's start...

My journey began in 1963 when I was born in the middle of England, the fourth child of Pat and Cyril, and younger sister to three brothers, Graham, Martin and Andy. We were an ordinary family, in an ordinary town. My Mum was a housewife and Dad worked for an electronics company in the local city.

I don't remember much about those early days, but I'm told I was a very mischievous child pretty much as soon as I could walk. I was small for my age, did not eat well, was really inquisitive and would not do as I was told - I had such a convincing angelic face then! It seems that I have always been the same, going my own way, carrying on regardless.

There were the usual sibling squabbles and whatever we did wrong Andy always took the blame. He was Mummy's boy and we always coerced him into being the fall guy as he could get away with any misdemeanour. We didn't know why, we just thought she liked him more. I found out why many years later - when he was a small boy Andy had accidentally knocked a bowl off a table and it smashed onto the floor, cutting the whole of his finger open. It was never straight after that. Mum never forgave herself.

Spending time with my brothers was the best! My brothers were great fun. Graham was the eldest, had a mop of blond hair and he was the quiet one, five years older than me. Then there was Martin, who was the loud, noisy one - always the centre of attention and larger than life, two years older. I was closest to Andy - there is only eighteen months between us. I was always comfortable in their company, even though they would torment me terribly. Being the only girl made me tough, though. As time went on, having a protective older brother was very useful, especially when people bullied me

at school. I was not knowingly aware at this point of my life that I would be any different. There was nothing exceptional about me.

I was definitely a Daddy's girl, all the way. He'd always wanted a girl and after three boys there was great excitement when I arrived. My Nan always told me that he wanted a girl so much, he already had the name of Jacqueline Ann picked out. Now it's only used when I am in trouble; mind you, come to think of it, I always have been.

Dad was my whole world and I adored him completely. Of course I loved my Mum but I really wanted to be with Dad every minute of every day. Every work day, around tea time, I would sit with my nose pressed up against the window of the front door. It was opaque glass and I waited and watched for the familiar blob through the window which grew as he pulled up closer to the house. I knew his car so well. I loved that big smile, his hugs. We had such a strong bond. Mum was so busy - can you imagine having the responsibility of four children under the age of five to raise? She deserved a medal.

Dad was a musician and he played the double bass in dance bands all through the forties and fifties. The bass had its own special place in the corner of the hallway wrapped in a rough cloth cover. Occasionally he would play for my brothers and me. He used to thrum the bass like drums and we would run around him, whooping and howling, pretending to be Indians, building a wigwam in the lounge out of cushions from the sofa. Sundays were special for me and my Dad, it was our day. He would cook the lunch and then take us all out somewhere, usually to the park, to give Mum some respite. I always liked to sit on the coin-operated pink elephant in the park, but once was never enough; simple pleasures; simple memories. Returning home, it was bath time. After that came my favourite hours, when I would sit curled up in the chair with him. Even now I can remember that feeling,

and nothing touches it to this day. I lay in his arms. Sunday was a time when I could have warm hugs with my Daddy, looking up at him, with his big blue eyes and his slightly addled smile.

Nothing else mattered in my small life, he was everything to me. My life then was idyllic and wonderful. I was happy, well cared for and everything was warm and safe, right up until I was six years old. We would have idyllic summers playing in the sunshine and winters playing in the snow.

Dad developed a cough which was too persistent, so Mum eventually persuaded him to contact the doctor who decided further tests were required at hospital. Shortly after this all our lives changed forever. Mum received a phone call from the doctor, telling her that Dad was very ill and needed to go to hospital immediately. She rang him at work; he came straight home and when he arrived they just held each other. She told him he would be ok, he would beat it; he never replied.

I was too young to really understand what was wrong, but I knew that Dad always had a cigarette in his hand. He always smelled of smoke, always had. It was part of him and he always walked around with a cigarette hanging out of his mouth for as long I could remember. He'd been diagnosed with lung cancer. He was very ill but he wanted to carry on as normal and kept going to work until he was told he must leave work to receive treatment. When he was in hospital, I used to sit for hours on the bed next to him, keeping him company and holding the basin and his toothbrush while he washed his face and hands. It was such an important job to me, to help; I wanted to be there with him and it was just natural.

The doctor had prescribed some experimental drugs that gradually took away the use of his legs. In effect he was paralysed from the waist down. Eventually it became obvious that he would have to stay in bed permanently, so a bed was brought into the lounge. It was one of those old metal hospital beds that used to have a pulley and a chain to raise you up. It rattled. I used to hear that noise in bed and it was a comforting kind of sound; that's where he stayed until the end. We all adapted to Dad being downstairs very quickly; he was in his bed in the lounge and we would sit

around him, watching TV together or chatting about what we did at school. He was there, and that's how it was, it was normal.

The fact that Dad would die was never discussed with me, not by him nor anyone else. Nobody sat down with my brothers and me and explained what it meant, or what would happen, or why it was happening. Then about a month before he died I was upstairs sleeping and I had a very vivid dream.

A Chinese gentleman came to me and told me that my Dad was going to die, as it was his time to leave. I understood exactly what he meant, there was no ambiguity. I was standing in a beautiful garden and he walked up to me, bent down and said it. I remember us staring deeply and meaningfully into each other's eyes; he was full of knowledge, full of love. He spoke to me like it was a very normal conversation. I didn't know this man, but he sure knew me.

I woke up with a start and burst into huge sobbing tears. I scrambled out of bed, went running downstairs and threw the door open into the lounge. I leapt onto Dad's bed and lay in his arms sobbing my heart out. My parents were both in the room and were trying to calm me but I was having none of it. I knew it was right, I just didn't know how. I just knew it meant that he wouldn't be there anymore, which to me was not an option, so I didn't think about it. I clung to him and wouldn't let go. Mum tried desperately to get me to let go of him, but Dad told her to leave me be and I hugged myself to him, sobbing until I fell asleep.

Mum had a friend named Jean who owned the local paper shop. One Sunday she visited Mum and offered to have us to stay with her overnight, as they knew it would not be much longer until he passed. She was worried about us children being in the house. We were all packed off to stay at Jean's house, so that Mum could have peace and quiet while caring for Dad in his last hours. It was so difficult for her, caring for four children every day, with a sick husband, and she was only thirty-three.

While my brothers and I were safely tucked in at Jean's, my Nan and Granddad were with my Mum and Dad. Mum rested by his side in the chair, as she did every night. She had hardly slept properly during the previous six

months, and she was tired, so very tired. Dad woke up and told her to lie down on the sofa to get some sleep, as she'd been awake continuously for almost twenty-four hours. She was hesitant, but he insisted, so she moved to the sofa and tried to read, to keep awake and watch over him. But for the first time in many nights she fell into a deep sleep.

She woke suddenly, disorientated; it was so quiet - no heavy breathing. She knew he was gone. Fear consumed her. Trying to calm her panic and draw her strength, she noticed how the room was cold and silent; sorrow gripped her but she knew she had to face this. She sat up and opened her eyes.

Many years later she told me all this and said she was so angry. She wanted to be with him by his side, telling him he was loved whether he could hear it or not, as he passed. Dad must have known the time was close and he didn't want to hurt her any more. Mum later realised that when she awoke the blanket she had covered herself with had been removed from her and was folded neatly and placed on his chair. To this day she has no idea how it got there.

The next day I went to school from Jean's house. Nothing seemed out of place to me, but it was the day my life would change forever. I was collected by the Headmistress at about ten o'clock and taken to her office. I was wondering what I'd done wrong now. As I walked in I saw Mum was waiting for me. She had been crying and her eyes were red. She was very composed as she quietly and calmly explained to me that Dad had gone, he had died. He had become very poorly and he had to leave, but he would be watching over me. I couldn't understand what she was saying initially. Of course he hadn't gone - how could he go? My brain would not process the information. It was like the earth beneath my feet started to disappear and I was falling... it felt bad, very bad. I will never forget the feeling of heaviness in my chest.

I was aware of being steered out of the school to go home, and I remember telling my Mum that I had to see him. I had a desperate physical need to see him. When we got to the house my grandparents were there. Mum told them what I wanted and with Granddad by my side she led me into the lounge. I was scared, I don't know why. She slowly led me to the bed. Dad was covered with a white cotton sheet. As she pulled it back, my eyes drifted

onto his face and I screamed! Who was that? He was grey, not like my Daddy at all. I collapsed, sobbing uncontrollably. My Granddad scooped me up, took me in his arms and brought me upstairs to the front bedroom to try to soothe me and explain to me what had happened and that everything was all right. I cried with a fierceness that I didn't repeat for many years afterwards. I sat and stared from the window; it was then that I saw an ambulance arrive. I knew they were going to take him away. My mind uttered a silent plea, "Please don't take him away"; he was my all, my life. My fists banged against the windows as I was screaming, "Stop! Don't take him away!" I was in panic and very angry; it felt like such a betrayal. I didn't understand why they were taking him. Where were they taking him? All I knew was that he was leaving me and I didn't want him to go. How could anyone explain this in words that would heal or make any sense to a six year old? I was desolate, destroyed. I wanted to die too.

My life went hazy over the following few days. Mum told me it was best that I didn't attend his funeral because I was too young and I didn't really understand. I understood enough! That was very wrong. Surely you should always be given the choice, no matter what your age. I knew that it had happened, but apart from my dream no-one had told me it was going to happen. It was from this point that my trust in anyone went flying out of the window. I felt betrayed and alone.

Every night for quite a while afterwards I cried for my Dad. I missed him so much. A child's pain is so hard to articulate and parents sometimes do not notice, wrapped up in their own pain. In the year after that, I rarely smiled. No-one talked about it. Mum had to carry on as normal, to keep us all fed and clothed, but not me. I couldn't carry on like before. I had changed. I would not eat and I lost weight. I wanted my Daddy back - he was my life. I used to talk to Mum and cry that I wanted him back, but she would cry too

and that made me feel awful so I stopped talking to her. I would crawl into her bed, on his side; I didn't want to be alone at night, the dark scared me. I became withdrawn and nervous, scared of everything and everyone.

Then, quite out of the blue, I developed a stutter. This was to become the enduring bane of my life. It was terrible and resulted in many years of humiliation, including at the hands of certain teachers at school. They thought it was hilarious to get me to say my name when I physically couldn't. One teacher in particular did not understand that I couldn't control it, and kept saying, "Just say your name" when I could not without stuttering. They made me do it again and again, in front of the whole class, everyone laughing and giggling at me – it was complete humiliation day after day, added to the heavy burden of sorrow that I was carrying around with me.

Conversation about Dad with my brothers, too, was very limited. They hardly mentioned him. We just didn't discuss it much. It was a painful episode for all of us, and we all suffered in our own ways. Sometimes, when I would try talking to them about him, they would shrug it off, obviously too painful.

I spent a lot of time with them. I became 'one of the boys' and they treated me as such. No-one could ever get me in a dress. Mum despaired of me, her little girl, her Jacqueline. I thought it was horrific to be treated any differently. I would sneak upstairs to their bedroom at night when I was supposed to be asleep. I was forever being scolded, but I would just rather be with them. I was closest to Andy, and he is now the only brother I have on this side of life. I have loved my Dad every day since he left this Earth. It is now more than forty-three years since he passed and each year in May I email Andy, just the date... "I know," he always replies.

When I think back now to how Mum coped, she was amazing. Money was so tight she had no option other than to start working, and my wonderful grandparents would come to the house daily when we came home from school to help care for us while Mum was at work. Life continued but Mum found it very hard. Finances were strained with such a large family so she rented a room in the house to a lodger - I thought he was wonderful and he

was a great support to all of us, like one of the family. I would creep into his room and curl up on the bottom of his bed to sleep while he was working. He never said much, just looked at me and nodded his assent. I felt safe there with someone watching over me. I suppose he took over the authority role for all of us and I remember him being very strict - we were all a bit scared of him when he shouted. But he was always kind to me and I was really upset when he left us.

Painful

*Life is sometimes painful,
too much to bear, it seems.
Those times I find it best to live
wrapped up in my dreams.*

Ray Edwards

Chapter Two ~ Change

I started hearing noises and seeing strange things around the time that my Mum remarried. I was eight years old and not happy about it at all.

I didn't want anyone to replace my Dad, not ever.

Mum was beautiful and very young to be widowed, so it wasn't surprising that she would find someone else. Even I could tell that she loved Ernie, though at the time I thought she was being a traitor to my father. I was not going to let her get married without knowing how I felt, but I didn't know how to put what I wanted to say into words. So I took action.

On the day of their wedding, I didn't smile at all for the whole day and was deliberately miserable. I have the photos to prove it! I was a bridesmaid and wore a similar dress to Mum's. My hair was set in curls with a velvet headband and I looked sweet and cute - but sullen, boorish and mean. How could anyone replace my Dad? I felt incredibly bitter, sad and angry, and it was the only way I could express my pain. I didn't tell anyone this, but how could they not know? Was it only me? I just didn't get it. How could these people act like they were happy? Even though it was two years after Dad's death, that was no time to me.

Mum was sad about my behaviour which made me glad, because it meant she knew how I felt. Having the freedom to make judgements is a luxury granted to children. But I feel bad about it now; I couldn't know then what she knew, or have to face what she faced. And I don't blame her in any way for all that ensued.

Then it all began...

Six months after the wedding, I started hearing strange sounds and seeing strange people in the house. I was eight years old and I cannot put into words how utterly terrified I was. I understand these things now but, as a child, how could I explain to people so they'd understand? So they'd believe me? Unless people have had such experiences, they either can't or don't want to know. When you first become aware of the 'spookies' visiting, it can get very scary even for an adult.

I distinctly remember a conversation that happened just before the strange events. My brothers and I, with Mum and stepdad Ernie, were on holiday in Kent to see Ernie's family. It was a good holiday with lots of sunshine and playing on the beach, and it was good to get away. We went to visit his brother, John, who was a very animated man and completely different to my Dad. I liked him, he was funny. One evening we all went to a pub and he bought us crisps and fizzy pop as we sat and listened to him relate a ghostly experience he had had the previous week. I remember thinking to myself, 'A ghost... what's a ghost?' He explained it as someone who is dead but comes back here. 'Oh,' I thought, 'can they do that?' It sounded scary, so I put it out of my mind.

Then a couple of nights after we returned home, I was awoken suddenly by my bed shaking, moving with an unseen force. At first I thought it might have been one of my brothers playing a trick on me, but then I saw shadows walking around the room, clearly visible in the dim light that glowed through my curtains. I was terrified. Then the noises started, splitting the night silence loudly - someone was rasping for breath, and unearthly footsteps the like of which you have never heard, in the hallway and onto the stairs, climbing slowly, rhythmically, one step at a time...

I thought, 'Are these the ghosts?' Every single night without fail I would be woken between 2 and 4 a.m. I could clearly hear them downstairs, my hearing spiked to perfection, as if I were in the same room. My bedroom was on the first floor at the back of the house, directly above the dining room which led out to the garden through a metal door, and whenever the key was turned I could hear it quite clearly. It was usually a familiar and comforting sound, someone being awake downstairs and guarding the

house; I could sleep in peace because I was convinced 'they' would not come around when people were up and about. But this key, in the dead of night, would be turning and turning - like someone was locking and unlocking the door. It was clear and precise. Then the door to the lounge would bang downstairs. Whoever it was did not do quiet - they wanted to be heard.

The most frightening experience was of someone sitting on my bed and shaking me awake. It was a single bed flush against the wall and - no ambiguity here - I clearly felt the bed dip down under their weight. As soon as I found the courage to move, which took me a while, and steel myself to turn the light on, it stopped. I would put my fingers in my ears and hum to myself because I didn't want to hear people walking around the house in the dead of night. Yet out of the silence someone was stamping across the landing, time after time, and doors were opening and closing. The bathroom light was on a pull string and this would make the sound of being turned on and off; I even saw the light under the gap in my door. But I heard no-one else moving around in the other bedrooms of the house, only mine, only ever mine.

It happened every single night with no respite. I would dread going to bed because I knew what was going to happen, but I was made to go at the same time every evening and off would go the lights. "There's nothing there," my mother would reply when I said I was terrified of the dark. No, not terrified, that doesn't even come close! I always tried to leave the light on, but it would be turned off by Mum or Ernie. I lay in bed crying, begging for it to stop, wishing someone else in the house would wake up so it would stop.

I didn't experience so much during the day but there would be strange occurrences, objects moving and doors opening before I walked through them. Could my life could get any worse? My stutter got worse. I could barely say one word after another. I did try to tell Mum about the noises and the other experiences but she would say, "Don't be silly" or "You imagined it" or even "It's just the house settling", not even contemplating that they could be real. For many people in those days, things like that just didn't happen; it was not in the media spotlight like it is these days. Back then it was 'out of sight, out of mind'. I just didn't know what to think because when you're

that age you completely rely on adults telling the truth; you believe they're telling you the truth, and in their minds they were. Only now does my Mum know different.

She did start to leave her bedroom door open at night, so that she could hear the noises too, but no-one else heard them. It was just me. I used to sit and wonder if there was something wrong with me. Someone hated me, or I'd done something very wrong to deserve this. What was it? I tried to discuss it with my friends, but learned to shut up very quickly when they looked at me 'that' way. I told some of my teachers about it. They were kind and listened to me but all they said was, "Have you told your parents?" The looks they gave me - they didn't believe me, it was pointless. I was completely stuck, with no-one to talk to, with continuous wide-eyed fear. I just had to put up with it.

Eventually, because of my constant unhappiness, Mum decided to take me to see a doctor. He questioned me thoroughly about what was happening and I told him everything truthfully. After the session he told Mum that there was nothing wrong with me and that I would grow out of it. I was both relieved and cross at the same time, and said to Mum, "See? I told you so!" Maybe the doctor just thought I was a little strange - a lot of people did. So I hid within myself, kept my head down, did my best to cope and eventually stopped saying anything to anyone, because no-one else could see what I was seeing or hear what I was hearing. Why was I the only one? I just prayed that it would eventually go away.

Salvation came in the form of my beautiful maternal grandmother, Gladys.

She believed me, and I will love her forever for that. She gave me hope.

My Granddad was such a warm, funny and kind man. I used to sit on his lap while he held his breath until his face turned pink. I found it hilarious. He used to laugh too and his teeth would drop down, so he'd hurriedly push

them back, feigning embarrassment. Nan was a very fussy lady. She was always busy and it seemed like she was everywhere at once, bustling about in her pinafore, running a ship-shape home. She was always talking about ships and used to say to me, "One day if you're lucky, your ship will come in and you'll have all you need."

Granddad died suddenly in 1975. He'd gone into hospital as he wasn't well, and I was told he would be out shortly - but he just died. I was twelve years old and asked myself, "Why do they keep leaving me?" I cried so many tears. It felt like it was something to do with me. Nan moved in with us and slept with me in my bedroom. I never minded sharing with her; she was great company and I loved her dearly as she'd always been there for me when my Mum couldn't be. I also felt I would be safer with her in the room. Surely 'they' would not be so noisy with her there? How wrong that was! Unfortunately, if you're not meant to hear the spirit world then you won't no matter what you do. Some experiences are meant for you and some are not. I don't know why, but I never woke her up when the noises started. Maybe I should have but I didn't want to hear "Don't be silly" again. I wanted so much to wake her, to have her hold me, to tell me it would be all right and that she could hear them too and it was all real. Grandmother just slept soundly on. So it continued as before.

But then one night things came to a head and she did wake up. My frightened, glaring eyes stared at her and her face said it all. I saw initial shock, disbelief, then a knowing look on her face - did she understand? She looked at my feeble form, threw back the covers of her bed and hurried over to me, grabbing me in a protective hug. "Don't worry," she said, "they won't hurt you." I collapsed sobbing with relief into her nightdress and she rocked me and stroked my head with soothing words of comfort. At last I wasn't alone.

I believe my grandmother had some connection to the spirit world in the same way that I had. She did tell me a few times that she saw Granddad looking at her in the night. That cheered me up immensely. "So, you too!" I thought. She was such a kind, loving woman and always understood and

tolerated me, and never judged me. She didn't think that I just had 'a vivid imagination'. She believed me and gave me hope.

When I was twelve years old, we were all sitting in the living room around the television watching The Muppet Show. It was a Sunday evening. I remember the details vividly and this experience will always be indelibly etched on my mind, as it was the first time I saw true evidence of the spirit world.

It was winter and dark outside, quite early in the evening. I was wearing purple trousers with an orange motif on them. I was fiddling and pulled the motif off, leaving a big hole in the trousers; I have no idea why I did things like that. Mum saw me do it and was furious with me, sending me straight upstairs to bed as a punishment. I didn't want to go, it was dark, but refusing was not an option. At least the landing light was on though, and it shone a glow through into my bedroom. Then suddenly all the lights went off. I knew this was part of the punishment, as Ernie knew how much I was scared of complete darkness. I sat in my room, hoping and praying that I wouldn't hear any noises. After a few minutes, feeling brave, I crept out to go and switch on the landing light but Ernie was waiting there, hiding to see if I would try to escape my punishment. He shouted at me to get back into my room and keep the lights off, so I ran back inside. How I hated him!

I waited, straining my ears until I heard the living room door click shut downstairs, then crept out onto the landing again and gingerly looked down the stairs... I stood there rigid with fear and disbelief as I saw my grandfather standing at the bottom of the stairs, looking up at me with an affectionate smile on his face. I had never been so shocked. Completely spooked, I was riveted to the spot! He glowed with a soft, golden light around him illuminating his whole body very clearly. I could see his clothes, his face and his loving smile. He was completely solid as if still physical, his cardigan

hanging around him as it always did, wearing his old slippers. His eyes were the same. All his features were as I knew him.

There were so many sudden and conflicting feelings, it was overwhelming. My eyes were wide, my mouth was dry. Although I was scared, there was nothing scary about him – but he shouldn't be there. Just his being there was scary. I could not reason this. My heart was in my mouth and I wanted to be sick. I panicked and ran, jumped back into bed as fast as I could, hid under the blankets and burst into tears. It was almost as though I passed out; I slept deeply until Mum woke me three hours later for supper. I tried to tell her what I saw, but again she said that I must have imagined it.

So, I thought, maybe it was my grandfather and not my Dad who was visiting me at night? Or maybe it was both? Oh great, both of them! And so it continued, night after night.

The summers seemed so much longer and hotter when I was a child and children were expected to play outside most of the day. My brothers and I always played boys' games together, climbing over fences, leaping off the shed roof and always getting told off for it. I was treated like one of the boys. It was about this time that my name became Jac or Jacqui, never Jacqueline. I refused to answer to that. Only my Dad could call me that and he wasn't here anymore, so Jacqueline no longer existed.

In those days, it wasn't a problem if you went out to play and didn't tell anyone where you were going. Around this time I started to go to the churchyard, to Dad's grave. I would always go on my own, sneaking away and never telling anyone; it was my secret. In the winter it was a very stark place, but in the summer it was beautiful, with the pungent aromas of many trees and flowers. His grave is at the rear of the churchyard and it was one of the first in a new section. I could lie down on the grass and not be seen, and believe he was with me. I felt closer to him there and was completely

hidden from prying eyes by the lines of graves in front of his. I felt so much peace there and used to spend hours making daisy chains and talking to him. It just seemed completely natural to me.

These days, there's a plethora of TV shows and films about spirit, so it's not a taboo subject anymore. But back then, everyone I met seemed to think that if you can't see it and you can't touch it, then it doesn't exist. My parents' generation said, "It's just your imagination" as an explanation for anything strange because they couldn't relate to it. We mustn't judge the past and the people in it by what we know now. We are where we are now because of the past – it has its purpose and its meaning.

But now, I think the worst thing that a parent can say to a child in my kind of situation is, "I don't believe you." I really wish my Mum had sat down with me and talked to me about it, or just listened to what I was saying even if she didn't believe me. Offloading my fears would have really helped me. In my work today, I have many calls from parents asking for help in talking to their young children who are experiencing what I did - albeit not to the same degree. It is sad to find that parents are still scared. So much fear, and for what benefit?

Please listen to your children if they come to you with stories like this. Children are closer to the spirit world, so they will always feel much more. Be patient, comfort them and tell them they are in control; they can tell the 'spooky' to leave at any point and they will listen. Tell children they can choose. Help them to understand that spirits are not evil or scary, but are very loving. More than likely a spirit is someone close, wanting to watch over and care for the child.

