



Hints,  
Allegations, &  
Things Left  
Unsaid

by Carlos Valldeperas

# **INTRODUCTION**

**The first of the following stories is a ghost story. It deals with a sighting of what most would call a ghost or spectral being. But this collection of stories is not exclusively of ghost and such phenomenon. It is about the feeling different experiences bring. It is how certain things in our lives make us feel. How we react or are affected by things in our lives. It is said that as a child, even little things have a profound effect because to a child, even little things are enormous. So likewise, things that we experience in our lives, particularly early in our development, end up having some deep rooted, perhaps not apparent, but lasting influence in who and what we grow up to be.**

**Throughout here you will read of true things. Here are things that come from memories of actual events that were part of my life. I won't say that they changed my life or that they forced a change in me or that they were some weighty turning point in my growth. Each individually did make me pause, at that time. They made me think. They stopped me long enough to let me consider and open my mind a bit. Perhaps they had a deeper impact than I was (or am) aware of. Many experiences shape us as we grow, and it isn't always apparent to us that we are being shaped by these things. That these tales herewith occurred while in my youth may say a lot.**

**Call these fairy tales or the musings of a young mind or whatever dismissive rational that makes it easier to avoid giving credence to some truth that does not fit society's perceived norms. This is not to say that fairy tales are not often embellished or stretched or filled with**

**folly. Often times these embellishments, stretched truths, and silliness serve to make the core of the tale memorable. I will not add anything to my tales to make them memorable. They are going to include details that stand out in my mind; details that may read a fluff, filler, or inconsequential. To me, in my mind, the details give color to the memories and add to the feeling they left in me. I am sharing as much to make the memories greater than they would be if left only in my mind, as to relive the moment –a simpler, kinder, more hopeful time in my life.**

**Certainly, these memories are going to be similar to memories of the reader. My life has never being so idyllic, special, or unique that no other person could relate. Undoubtedly, some may find similar memories in their minds. Some will probably be able to share many similar memories. Some will likely outdo my little narratives. Maybe some can identify some direct link between who they are now to something they experienced. That may make their tale particularly meaningful to them. That I have these memories in my mind, that they are vivid enough to write them down, may suggest some influence, but that is not my reason for telling. I tell because they feel worthy of sharing. Hope they are worthy of reading.**

**(In sitting down to write about these events I realized that they occurred during a rather narrow span of time in my life time. I think one of the mentioned incidents, “Shadows in the Dark,” came to be when I was in my mid twenties. The last memory shared here, “Where Ghosts Should Live,” which is less an event and more a long experience, began when I was in my early twenties and lasted until I was in my early thirties. By itself this narrow time space does not add anything to the actual events. If anything**

**it is just something to distract –or fluff and filler. My intent here is not to add fluff or filler or to distract. My observation is that perhaps those early years of my life were somehow... more adapt at seeing and recognizing things that usually aren't compatible with society's accepted norms. I guess I see it much like one recognizes that children can and often do believe in things like supernatural beings and hold faith in fantasies and blind faith.**

**Anyway, my position after finding that these things did in fact occur during a narrow –and rather good, prosperous (perchance not prosperous in wealth but it energy, hope, happiness, and content)- time span is that maybe there is an association with the things I experienced and the state of my mind and spirit during those years. I know that my teen years were turbulent –as with many other teen's. And from my mid-thirties on life for me began to take a dark turn. Not over anything specific or in a clear, defined way, but without a doubt the hope, happiness, and contentment began to fade, soil, and putrefy. If there is anything to link together I cannot say with certainty. It is just a thought; an idea that hit me as I started to put these things down. Like the stories within, I am just sharing these additional thoughts, ideas, and words. Sharing is the key –I believe that if you have something, a gift, a talent, or something like those, it is best shared with others than kept caged for one or used penuriously.)**

## Wisp of a Face

For many years I lived with someone I met in High School. I shared a house with her, housemates, sharing in our lives together in a most amicable way. On a particular day, a day with no other uniqueness to it other than the few seconds about to be described here, a day that left no other memories than these, I saw something. Many explanations can be had to rationalize, to clarify, to rebuke or refute what I remember, but the memory is still there in my mind, and whatever it originally was, it is now part of a tangled web of experiences, teachings, thoughts, feelings, and much more that make up who I am, part of the fiber of my human makeup. When the event passed but was yet very fresh in my mind, I did not search out for answers or meaning or postulate on what it might mean; what it might have represented. As I remember it, I simply tucked it away, another unanswered question of life.

Again, of that day, I remember that it was an ordinary day. Details are sketchy. I was home alone. My friend and other housemate were out –at work, I assume. The day was quiet. The house was crowded with dogs and cats (four or five dogs at the time and some equal number of cats –my claim was only to two of the dogs, though I enjoyed the company of all the furry ones alike). Anyway, the memory is clear that the place, despite all the beating hearts, was calm and quiet. I had just finished doing something about the place or was finding nothing pressing to attend to, so I had gone to my room for a nap. As always the door to the room remained open –as with small children, dogs and cats that are too quiet screens out trouble, so even in sleep I always kept a finger on the pulse of the household.

As a teen I came to indulge in taking afternoon naps. In my twenties, the time this event took place, I would sometimes give in to this afternoon nap taking. Work prevented this from ruling my life, but on days when I was not working, it was not unusual for me to try to get in a few moments of down time. The wisp of a face came to be while I was reposed. Sleep comes easy to me, but it is a light sleep. It doesn't take much for me to go from eyes shut to wide awake during these naps. One of the things that I like –and find equally distressing— about these naps is that they bring on some of my most vivid, emotionally involved, and penetrating dreams.

But no, the wisp came to me, of which I write, not in a dream, but as I woke. As my eyes opened, there it was. There she was. I may have been groggy. I may have been bleary eyed. I may have been confused from fading repose. But the presence of that entity is hard to shake from my mind with anything other than what I feel it was. Science could give it reason. Common sense could dismiss it with ease. But to me, it was a wonder than I would rather not diminish with common reason or science or some established, accepted logic. To me, what I remember, was one of life's wonders that are best when left unmolested; left in mystery; left unexplained and left to faith, hope, and a sort of childish awe.

The awe is that even what I remember is not certain. That sounds like a granting that I have doubt that I even saw something, but that isn't the case. I did see something. What is to be admitted is that what that something was is unclear. The day was clear, sun shining in through the large windows, reflecting off of the polished tiled and wood laminate floors and pastel coloured walls, leaving no shadows. I remember being on my stomach, head turned to one side, opening my eyes, my face looking out of the room, towards the home's hallway, focusing on something foreign, moving.

What I saw, what is still embedded in my mind, was a wisp of a face. It was a woman's face. I remember soft lines and smooth skin. There was a mop of wavy hair, shoulder length, soft in color –like a light brown or dirty blond. The hair floated as the body moved. It was a slight, ephemeral movement, coming in and out of focus in dream-like smoothness and rapidity. Of a body, I can recall little. There was a lightly flowing covering suggesting a dress. It could easily have been a night slip or a robe. Perhaps it was something more elaborate. Whatever it was, it was bluish in color, perhaps with white or some other soft color. The light of the day glistened of the fabric making it appear unsubstantial or partly transparent. It hung over the body lightly as if floating in soft blowing air.

There may have been legs and feet. Of these, I remember nothing. In my mind, the dress seems to dissolve away from neck down like smoke dissolves as it wisps away from its source of birth. Arms and hands come into my mind as only assumed parts, but no image of them make up my memory of the experience. If they were seen by my eyes, they were blurs in movement and not the focus of my attention. Hair, dress, limbs, and movement all blur in memory like peripheral parts of a spotlighted stage center. In my mind she was passing by, set in partial profile, and flowing through lucidity like water flowing over mossy river rocks, captured on a camera lenses set too slow to pause still the flowing.

What is burned into memory, edged eternally into a recess of my mind, is the smile. No bright white teeth set in straight perfection. No dimples on cheeks or glint of eyes looking gay and merry. It was a simple smile. A grin, more like. But the kind of gesture that says: "it's all right" or "you know you are loved." It set my heart ablaze, not with love or lust or some type of desire but with life giving hope, peace, and vigor. It was like a child being told that the fright will pass or the pain will subside, and knowing that they are right and that as the words fade so will the bad of the moment.

And in a second that moment, that feeling, that warmth was gone; now smoldering more like a fire long left untended than a blaze raging free, reaching high. Now the shadows of dark creep tighter, darkening that smile and blaze. That smile though, what a thing of beauty; fairy tale beauty. The flash of it in my mind still sends a jolt of goodness through my spirit, like a jolt to the heart of a dying man.

## Shadows in the Dark

Back in my early to mid twenties I found myself alone at home. Sure, at that age it would be a thing to cherish, and I probably did. I don't remember the circumstances; the why I was alone that night. I know my father had been fresh in the grave. I just can't say where my mother was that night. It is certainly odd to me now that I was alone that night. I would have been the one staying away from home, not her. In telling this story I see how I should have been out on my own or in a place full of chums and compatriots – or with a romantic companion. But my father took sick while I was still living at home, going to school. With my father in bed sick and my mother having to be by his side I stepped in to become the bread winner of the family. And so in his passing I was still the bread winner and supporter. For the most part the arrangement was amicable to me and very helpful to my mother, now alone without her husband of some 20 plus years.

Anyway, so there I was, alone for the night. Just me and my dog –a yellow Labrador with all the affectionate, pliancy, and laxity associated with Labs. Not a watch dog but a four legged buddy. We were two warm bodies in a greater than 2,000 square foot home. The house was laid out length-wise on the small zero lot. Bedrooms at the back and living quarters, kitchen, dining room, living room and a den, all toward the front. Although the home sat on a corner lot bordering the neighborhood's main street, the neighborhood was small and traffic limited. The neighborhood was a quiet, seemingly safe place. Crime was limited. Still, not so much out of fear or insecurity but habit, all doors and windows were secure. All but the sliding doors out to the side covered, screened patio –which lead to the back yard. The slider's had an insert with a doggy door so the dog could come and go out as he wished (or so I would not have get up and let him out). The Lab was a big guy, so the doggy door was big as well. I know, because at least once, having found no other means in, I had to crawl through this doggy door to gain entry into the house. Oh, and the dog, MY dog was not the only to use the doggy door. A raccoon found it very useful once and a neighbor's dog, some several years later, used it to hang out and play with two female dogs I ended up adopting. Good fun –for them.

Whatever I did this particular night, fun or not, probably included sitting at the TV, popcorn in hand, watching movies and whatnot, and also perhaps spending too many hours at the keyboard and computer screen surfing the web (can we say porn? The web is for porn. Duh!). But whatever I did before going to bed is irrelevant to the story. Eventually I did go to bed; to sleep and rest. Up to this point it was like any other day. Alone, sure, but otherwise unremarkable. I crashed on my bed, quickly dead to the world in sleep. My buddy the dog took his place to sleep the night away –if that place was by my side, in the hall way seeking the coolness of the tile floor there, or on my mother's king size bed I have no clue. The choices were his. My bedroom door was open, the doggy door was flapping free, and he had the entire house to choose from, to let him come and go as he wanted.

Ever wake from the deepness of sleep sure that something caused it? You lay still, waiting to hear that thing that pulled you away from your slumber. Often times no sign of that thing ever resurfaces. Sleep just takes over again and the event becomes a mere hint of an experience, like a fading dream. Or, for some, it breaks the sleep cycle and sleep never comes back. That night, for me, what occurred felt like a dream that lingered. Something woke me from my comatose sleep. If it was a noise or movement or the sensation of a presence, I never figured out. I did wake from my sleep. And for many minutes I laid in bed, waiting.

You see, whatever woke me left a feeling that I was no longer alone with my dog. Frozen still on the bed, I laid waiting to hear them move. I laid still waiting for what I became sure was an imminent attack. Shadows filed the room like ghosts come to steal one's soul away. Had the room been covered in a total, all engulfing darkness, a black of night, my body may have driven away fear from my consciousness and absorbed away the adrenaline coursing through my veins. But light filtered in through the windows from streetlights outside. Shadows danced throughout the room but not clear enough to sedate apprehension and doubt. My eyes searched yet found nothing. Shadows and darkness played a game of hide and seek. My ears waited, but heard nothing out of place. The din of silence accosted my senses so that even the dim, distant chirping of insects outside seemed like laughing armies advancing in their attack.

I remember my mind was racing. Thoughts of knights mounted on their war horses, of dragons in the air breathing out fire, of soldiers full of fierceness and purpose charging, all of these and more may have raced through my swirling mind. No great possibility could have been set aside. With the certainty of the strongest, greatest faith, I knew someone –or something- had invaded the sanctity of my refuge and my home. Should I take preemptive action? I thought about that. Should I wait for the attack? Sure that one would come. But no, I was wrapped in my bedding. Any move I made would give warning, I was sure. Can I reach and retrieve my knife? I'd think this to myself. The knife was a diving knife, sheathed in rubber and secured to the bed's headboard (a young man's concession to being armed but not quite being a fierce warrior).

Time passed in what seemed like Chinese torture trickles. The din of the night's silence continued to assault my mind. Yet in the house, nothing seem to stir –except only my fired up mind. The choice to wait, to be prepared to react rather than to act and do replaced the yearning to move. Who ever has invaded my peace has the upper hand, I postulated. The choice then was to wait. Death may be swift, I considered. I believed I was ready. I believed that if it came, it was meant to be. Putting up a fight would only disrupt the sanctity of the night's peace. And so I lay and waited.

Naturally the body slowly cleared away the rushing adrenaline. With every passing minute (which no doubt felt like hours), muscles began to relax and return to a state of rest. The eyes began to register more darkness than living shadow. Things in the room began to fade away and melt into a familiar essentialness that belonged there. The din of the assault that didn't come faded or decomposed into a sort of soft purr. And eventually sleep pushed all other states aside and took control of my body. Come what may, I would be found asleep. That was the final determination. No further thought process needed. What was to be would be.

The next cognizant thought came in the dawn of the new day, light from the life-giving sun streaming through the east facing window, warming the room and chasing away all shadows back to their dark world. And that thought was not of doom or death; not of violence or pain; or of dark and shadows. It was just a simple feeling of entering into a new day; a visitor to the world of the living. It was a clean slate; a rested, unencumbered mind ready to assail the day's tests, toils, tribulations, thrills, and pleasures.

## Camp Dead End

For a period several years I indulged in several outdoor activities. Some could say these were inching towards the extreme. I don't see them as that, but they certainly were beyond other outdoor activities such as sports or single person affairs (say, cycling, running, or even mountain climbing) –or less macho things like gardening. I concentrated on two hobbies. One came with a one major expense to make it possible (with several other outlays of money to make it “safe”). With fondness and mirth I can see in my mind's eye the \$1,000 yellow sit-inside kayak strapped to the top of my very little, white Toyota MR2 (two door, two-seater, mid-engine car). Many little excursions through my area's waterways come to mind and many more I regret not having made it around to explore. There is a strong pang in my heart for these solitary excursions now. That's the pain of the should'a, could'a, would'a life's dilemma.

The other hobby of that time of my life, and the one that brings this tale, was hiking. Well, hiking may be a misnomer given where I lived and where I was... taking my walks. I suppose a better name for it, a better description is backpacking. The backpack I purchased was this hi-tech thing; lightweight, full of pockets, straps, and accommodations. I had specialized “bedding.” The first time out I carried food for an army. It also took a little experience to realize that many of the gadgets and doodads sold in sporting goods stores served little purpose and are often of dubious value out on the trail. One's ego and anima need not have more than one person smirk and laugh at you to get it that perhaps you have gone overboard or have done something in ignorance. (In defense of the very kind gentleman that took pity in me and gave me a ride, I had over packed and been weak to glimmer and glamour of the sporting goods store's stock. And he didn't really laugh at me. He just stated the obvious: “you kind'a took on more than you ought have.”)

Okay, back to this experience. My idea had been to explore all the available trails with primitive camping within a day's drive from my home. I was determined to avoid people; to avoid easy; to avoid “packaged.” (After learning what actually worked I even gave up packaged –freeze dried- food.) So if the trails went well off and away from trafficked areas, all the better. In my area that was more of a zig zagging, twist and turning trails thing than long, into the nothings, faraway travels. Still, I found a few state and local parks where I could go off-trail, as such, and get away from well worn, over used, crowded paths. And I was doing this alone –I WANTED to go walking (walkabout?) by my self. So the further away, the more alone, the more secluded the trail and subsequent camp site were the better.

I kept the walks to a distance I could handle. The first was an educated guess. It proved fairly close to what I could do within the time I had. Since most of my walks included a car ride out to the park, I usually had some four to six hours to walk before darkness rolled in. Traversing these trails in the dark was not something I ever wanted to do –even if I wasn't really all that far from civilization. It just made bad

sense. Anyway, at a pace of 10 to 15 miles per hour, I figured trails of less than ten miles would be best. As it happens very few trails were longer than ten miles. Those that indicated longer distances actually had camp sites dispersed within shorter distances. I would avoid camp sites near the trail head and excluded any that was over a ten mile hike away.

This particular park had very long trails but with several camp sites throughout. That was fine. I'd picked a site that seemed remote enough without being too arduous to get to. As it happened the trails meandered back and forth over a moderate area, often coming within sight of other trails. Actually, if I remember correctly, I found the trail markings wanting. It was too easy to wonder from one trail to another. I say this because I did it. Since I was out there to relax and enjoy nature I didn't allow the confusion frustrate me though I do recall making it to the camp site I had signed up for much later than I wanted –it left little time to explore the surrounding area before darkness moved in.

This camp site though was amazing. Most of the trails (if not all, actually) were out in open prairie land and/ or high grass mixed with areas of a swampy nature. There was no cover or shade from the hot sun. Mostly, the trails followed a very flat, sun-drenched, dry terrain. The camp site was an oasis. It forked off the trail, into a canopied dead-end. It was a wondrous clump of mature oaks and other large trees. (No, I am not nor will ever pretend or purport to be a dendrologist –I recognize Live, Laurel, and Shrub Oat. I am fairly sure the large trees about the site were, in part, Oak.) This clump of trees brought much appreciated shade. It was really like a totally different setting than on the trails. It was cool. It was mysterious –in a pleasant way. And it was beautifully secluded.

The canopied area was rather large. More than one camp “site” could be easily accommodated without impinging on neighbors (though I was totally alone). There was a primed well pump at the head of the site where the trail entered the canopy area. The transition from Oak cluster to shrub land was ringed by denser growth and smaller shrubs. This ring was the assigned “bathroom” area. Under the canopy several clearly defined sites were centered by a fire ring. (I had learned not to rely on open fire for cooking after on one trip I learned open fires had been temporarily banned due to dry conditions –so I brought my own little Propane stove.) The area I choose to set up my tent was midway into the canopy, inside a small cluster of low growth. It felt open enough to enjoy the vastness of the canopy yet secluded enough to make me feel isolated. It really didn't matter where I set my tent at since no one else was around. Throughout my entire walk I saw, in the distance, only one other person. I was surely alone.

So alone I set out to pass the night. Darkness fell alarmingly quickly in the Oak umbrage. It surprised me but did not cause undue stress –I had my site set up and ready. I'd prepared my gourmet meal –consisting of freeze-dried, dehydrated beef stew with mixed vegetables re-hydrated with iodine-treated well water washed down with a pouch of 100 percent real “fruit” juice. I can't remember if I had carried

any desert with me to indulge in on that first night. I know now, and it should have become apparent to me when I had packed my backpack and tried it on at home, that these packaged meals and fruit juice drinks were not the ideal things to carry on a backpack for a 5 to 10 mile walk by a scrawny neophyte unaccustomed to carrying his weight in food and camping gear. (Well, I wasn't actually carrying my WEIGHT in food and gear, but it felt that way after the first few miles.)

I had actually taken a short, exploratory walk out of the camp site and along some of the trail before sitting down to that lovely meal. The gloaming was rather spectacular out there in the solitude. The colors of the sunset sky seemed to be of more vibrant, deep reds and oranges and purples. The greens and browns of the various foliage also seem to have a grandeur aspect to them. Probably, it was all in my head. When night fell all there was for me to do was eat and lull the night away, alone and in a quiet peace. For isolation, peace, and tranquility, the place could not be beat. Sitting by my tent, listening to the night life of nature come to life and the sun drenched, bustle of the modern world fade out, I felt regret for having reserved the site for only one night.

Well, I was a modernized, technologically brainwashed neophyte in the woods. What did I do once the food was gone, the sun in hiding and the dark of night turned the land into a great unknown? There was no fire pit surrounded by merry people eager to share stories, so I crawled into my synthetic material, brightly colored, nano technology tent and on to my -0° rated fleeced sleeping bag with a specialized, ultra-light multi-celled, self-inflating mat underneath, turned on an LED camping light powered by smart-rechargeable batteries, and powered up and started trying to tune my 3" color LCD multi-band handheld television. I actually tuned in a several stations –and laid there watching TV. The modern world had whipped me into a mindless minion, programmed and obedient without question. I carried these “conveniences” of the modern world with me, for miles, twisting my spine and crushing my vertebra, and I thought nothing of it. There I was, “primitive” camping, away from people and their world – or so was my thought-- and closed myself off in my tent... to watch TV.

Anyway as I laid there wasting away my time, letting my brain atrophy and my soul dissolve and degrade with every second of laugh track and every second of senseless violence and gratuitous sexual innuendos, something happened. I heard a noise. Duh! I was in the woods. Surely there would be noises, right? So I turned the TV down. (EVENTUALLY I turned it off. Okay?!) I listened. I'd heard the expected nightlife already; creaks, screeches, and assorted chirps. I'd come across several critters during my walk/hike out to the site. There was plenty of wildlife. But something about this particular noise made the hairs on the back of my neck spike like a threatened Porcupine's quills. I laid there and listened, but for the most part all I could hear was the chirp of insects and the hum in my ears residual from living in the modern world. That quiet of the night was bombarding my senses. Think that's a contradiction? Cover your ears with your hands, nice and tight. All noise should be blocked out, right? But do you have silence?

Hardly. That's much like what I experienced. There was no silence –but the noises were mostly indistinguishable; static and white noise, like the pixilated nothing on the old TV's when the signal is lost.

Time seem to pass like molasses tends to flow in mid winter. It was as if I was waiting to hear every single grain of sand passing through from top to bottom of the hourglass. Plop. Plop. Plop. Slow. The TV did eventually go off. I was that freaked that that comfort I've come to rely on, that noise box we need around for peace, no longer served me. Sadly, even as my ears tuned to the world I was invading –and being threatened by- my eyes were blind. The flaps on the tent were open, like windows to a twisted, dark, scary fantasy world seeing through a door set in the real world. Shadows and shapes danced just beyond that synthetic material. But my eyes could not relay anything useful to my brain. Shadows and assumed shapes; that was the best I could do for a while. With the camp light off and the TV put away, my eyes did eventually adjust. Still, the din of the natural world was assaulting my ears. In the dark, my eyes just starting to make out details of things outside, that distinct sound that set my senses on alert came again.

Here is what I believe I heard: footsteps. To this day, I can attribute nothing else to the sound that came and went near my tent. To me, there, alone in this tent with only a diving knife as a weapon of defense, I heard biped footsteps. Two legs, two feet, walking. Listening from the solitude, confines, and darkness of my tent, the sound beyond was too much like what a person walking through leaves and twigs would make. Trouble was, the camp site was at a dead end. No trails came by or near. There was no other destination beyond the camp site itself. I was isolated, acres away from anything. I SHOULD have been alone out there. And why would anyone be out in the middle of the night; in the darkness of the night. That question above all else freaked me out.

That diving knife did little to settle my nerves. It was nothing, really. A token of machismo drama. Maybe I would turn to it if attacked, but most likely not. Besides, I was in a tent, trapped. Whoever, if it was a person at all, would have the upper hand if their intent was malicious. It would be trivial, a game, to assault, harass, and/or me raid my little confined world. They had the upper hand. It would be much like a cat playing with a helpless prey. I was the prey. Who or whatever was lurking in the dark was the predatory cat. That was my thought. That was the conclusion I took with me into my sleep and dreams. For what else could I do? Fight? Sure, but what? I had no clue as to what was outside. I was helpless prey, a mouse, surrounded by unknown predators. I could just as easily have been a fool surrounded by squirrels and insects.

The one and only thing I was sure about was that I was alone in the tent, and that that was the point of my being there. I wanted to get away from the crowded world of my life. If a malignant part of that world invaded my solitude, followed me out to this isolated place, I would deal with it as need be.

Troubling myself over what may or might be was foolhardy. So I set to leave the worry of the unknown behind me and slept. And morning came. The sun rose. The world was still there... and so was I.

## Where Ghosts Should Live

I was one of those youths who didn't have great aspirations for my life. No 'I want to be a fireman' or 'I want to grow up to be a doctor.' I felt a pang for the love of a companion, of little ones mirror images of my love and myself, and of a simple, uncumbersomed life sparkling with happiness, peace, and fundamental purpose. My high school years served as a subtle lesson at the reality of disappointment, truth of that darkness of the world, and tug at my insides towards hardness and aggressiveness. I suppose I did not get it. In bitterness now I am inclined to say that I was blinded by the glitz and glamour, of the technological brain washing, and the feeding of the soul of simple pleasures to the point of docile acceptance and subjugation. I never mustered the interest of reaching beyond the easy, of striving for much more than what was within easy reach. My dreams tended to be for the shortsighted tomorrow –the immediate future-, and rarely for a far distant future.

So it was no wonder that once high school was over I was a floundering fool, lost in a vastness of choice, opportunity, and potential with no rudder, no basic map, and no idea where I wanted to go. I figured out enough NOT to get drawn into military service. It pulled on me, but I had enough gumption in me to resist. Being under the capricious control of some potentially arrogant, self-serving, egotistical individual for way too many months of my life did not appeal to me. Perhaps it would have been good for me. Who knows, maybe going into the military would have given me that fortitude to grow into something. But I didn't take that route. Instead I took an easy path. I signed up for a technical program that gave me a taste of the medical field without over taxing my mind. It was a failure of will. And in the end, it was a failure as a choice.

What did come out of the few months that I was involved in this medical field was to kindle an interest in human health; particularly human anatomy. As luck would have it (or call it fate or even part of a high power intervention) I found out that the office of the Medical Examiner was literally within walking distance from where I was living. See the connection? An interest in human anatomy and a job with the medical examiner's office. It seemed right to me. Stepping out of my comfort box, out of my secure little world, I sought out the opportunity; I knocked on the door. That blind gambit turned into a solid, 14 year job. And not just a job but something that gave me purpose and a financial and intimate prosperity. To use a phrase from the job (I can't recall who said it) that summed-up those fourteen years –in a somber and cold-ish way-, my days began when someone's life ended.

From a medical stand point the job was extremely fascinating. The things I saw during those years were medically amazing. In any given couple of months I probably was exposed to more medical anomalies, diseases, peculiarities, and by-the-book medical conditions than many medical students would see in their entire matriculation. Heck, I may have seen more than some doctors would see in their life time.

It was a fascinating experience for me. Even with its less than thrilling aspects –politics and ego trips- I miss the potential of it dearly. I gave it up all too easily, as is the case many times in life. I didn't see what it truly was until I no longer had it. Sad how perfect our vision is when we see things from a far; when what was ours is no longer a part of us or is swiftly moving away from our reach like a ghost wisping past us without even seeing us there struggling to get purchased on their misty essence.

I regress though, so back to my other ghosts. For fourteen years my life revolved around the sudden, often unexpected, traumatic and often gruesome death of another human being. The morning news often served to tell me what kind of day I would have at work. A traffic report had the potential to mean a lot more to me than just a delay in my commute. Likewise, a breaking news story about some shooting carried more relevance to me than just a tragedy and a passing human story interest. And although these nuances may nauseate, disgust, and chill the soul of others, they were part of my life. In time a routine of repetitive tediousness and numbing regularity crept into my days, yet there was always a chance for something new, something different, something unexpected to happen.

There is little doubt that the first few years were the most interesting to me. I won't claim that nothing interesting happened later on, but those first few years caught me green and tender. It is in these years that the ghosts of death most marked themselves on my spirit and soul. I saw the fragility of human life. I learned how precious and delicate life was. I witnessed how infinitesimal a life could be, in the grand scheme of the world of humans. Missing that view of the cycle of life from such close proximity like I do now, now that I no longer have it, I wonder if it is something more people should be exposed to. My jaded soul tells me that too many in the world are blind to the certainty and absoluteness of death. They may fear an end but many do not respect life and the living. It is like forgetting that the waters of the oceans will snuff out life without compunction, without a care as to monetary value of a person or their place in the ever-crowded ladder of society and instead view it as just another toy to play with and disregard when they get bored. Details of that lesson seem to be fading in me, and the lesson didn't come to me over night. It grew slowly in me, reaching inside me like a large tree's root ball reaches out for nourishment through the soil. Yet I wonder if it is a lesson hidden from all too many people today.

Perhaps the ghosts of that lesson have given up –not just with me but with people in general. I am tending to believe that though we may grow older, maybe even smarter (certainly more technologically advance), we don't necessarily grow wiser. In my life, with my many faults, I have an inkling that there was a small window in my life when I was open to learning, to absorbing wisdom, and to knowing what was worthy of note. I would venture to say that that window, long now closed, was there, open and inviting, during my late teens and early twenties. I know, now looking back at my short life, that the years when I can say with some certainty that I was at my most happiest and most at peace with the world, where the years in my early twenties. The same years when I began to see life through the facts on a death report

of those whose lives had been terminated; early, traumatically. Despite the turmoils that encircled my life – things I wished I had but perceived as out of reach; things that I was but didn't like, that didn't fit within the perceived acceptable social norms—I think my mind's eye saw what things really matter and what was modern-world fluff.

Ghosts take on different shapes to different people. Maybe that is the lesson here. Hauntings come in different forms. Hollywood may portray things in ways that are visually stimulating but it doesn't mean that these are wrong or true or fantasy and conjurings of clever, artistic minds. How many great tales I could spin from my days at the medical examiner's office. They could be things of Hollywood. There was an old building. Not a gothic or ornate building but it definitely had its unique creepy mien. Countless hours were spent alone in there, surrounded by the carcasses of the dead. Odd, unexplained noises, creaks, and susurrations abounded. Dark places and shadowy spaces, alive in their own ways, were a part of the building just as much as the well lit and the well worn and used ones.

One time I choose to ride out a hurricane in the building. My home was in an evacuation zone and too close to the ocean for comfort. I was one of several coworkers who made the same choice so the tale here lacks that isolation and solitude theme needed for Hollywood and its ghost stories. But death still was with us. Surrounding us. I slept (or tried to sleep) with only a wall or two between me and the vessels of humans taken from the world of the living, chilled and shrouded in white linen and waiting for the attention from the living on top of stainless steel gurneys. Even with the sounds of the other living taking refuge, there were the sounds of the unknown things of the night. Added to these there were the ominous reverberations of the storm beyond the outer walls. The air was replete of an added unknown. The dark of the night took on additional depth and the shadows really seemed to come alive, slithering about with the wind gusts and the side-ways sheets of drenching rains.

I'd set my sleeping place in a room designed for grieving families to view their dead loved ones. A glass wall separated me from the cold, sterile world of the dead and the place of scientific and legal investigation. Through a door and down a short hallway people tried to pass the storm like me but I would be lying if I said that I didn't at least once feel like that little room of mine didn't somehow detach from the rest of the place and sink in towards some unknown dark world of ghosts and apparitions. That would certainly be in keeping with a Hollywood's version of death and ghosts. It would spin a great tale full of suspense, fear, and eeriness. Instead of soft music from a peer's radio, with breaks for weather news, there would be dirges added to the night's tone, infused with the creaks and howls of wind to give the setting of the place an even darker quality. Solid walls could be fashioned to appear to be liquid and pliable – pulsating to some unknown heart beat. The dark could be given a face, gruesome and threatening.

None of that came to be. After hours of rain, high winds, and waiting, the sun rose in the Eastern sky pushing back the night and shining down on the living. Dark, cloudy skies soon were blue and bright. Through streets paved in leaves and downed trees I drove home. The only ghosts were those of car-size traffic lights thrown down and about like kites by the wind; carcasses of technology. The only shadows haunting the living were from puddles of rains hiding low-lying places, rippling with the lingering soft winds of the passed storm. No souls of the dead came to me during that night. No whispers of those no longer taking residence in their skeletal caparison. No apparitions haunting my dreams or tormenting me in the dark of night. Those odd, creepy noises and susurrations were just sounds of machines and the machinations of human kind reacting to the natural world. For me, the only ghosts that touched me were those of lessons I learned –and now wish I remembered. Where ghosts should live I now feel only emptiness.