

Ghosts

A ghost is a form of energy. In life, that energy is in the form of a person, an animal, or any other being. When that being dies, the energy takes on a new form, as a ghost. Ghosts are mostly associated with an event, usually a tragic moment when a life is lost suddenly. The heart stops beating in this world, but the sound of the beating heart remains, leaving a bit of the energy among us. The rest of the energy transfers to a spiritual plane. Generally, ghosts appear around the place of the tragic event, and they relive it repeatedly. Usually this energy is angry because it feels trapped. It is looking for a way out. Many cultures believe that ghosts are not here to harm us, while others consider them dangerous. In my experience, they have little to no physical effect on the living—unless someone hurts themselves when reacting to a ghost! Indeed, some ghosts may carry a message that can save lives or warn people of trouble. While less frequent, the ghosts of animals may also relive the tragic event that took their life. In the end, of all possible otherworldly events, ghost encounters are the least dangerous. Sometimes ghosts are confused with spirits—but they are just one kind of spirit. And many other spirits have far more complex agendas, as we'll find out in Chapter Two.

My Great-Aunt's Last Ten A.M. Visit

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It is an old belief of the Ponca, my tribe, that after a person passes away, they come back for a last visit to all their relatives.

While we may not see them, or they may appear only in our dreams, they let us know they have come.

We lived in the country far from town, but members of our extended family had homes nearby. One was my great-aunt Agnes. She had lost her husband many years before my time and she was quite elderly, but still active. Almost every day that weather permitted, she would walk from her house to our home, a distance of about a quarter mile, or three blocks by city measure. It was her daily exercise and maybe the reason she had lived so long. We knew when she'd gotten to our house because she always came in the door of the screened-in porch. You could hear the old screen door make a creaking sound as it opened and its spring was pulled taut, followed by the slam as it closed hard.

Aunt Agnes would walk the few steps across the old board floor to the back door of our kitchen. She had a very distinctive walk with a limp—she walked heavier on one side, with a louder footstep than on the other side. While she made her way across the old porch floorboards, her steps



were amplified, and from about anywhere in the house you could hear her entering. She would always visit at midmorning, around ten a.m. You could set your clock by her visit. When Mom would first hear the screen door stretching its spring, she would yell out, "Go help your aunt Agnes open the back door." And my father or one of us kids would run to the back door to let her in.

My great-aunt Agnes was a historian of our tribe, and she would spend about an hour with my mother on each of her visits, telling her about our heritage. Mom always had water on the stove to boil and would make tea for the two of them. After her visit, Aunt Agnes would be off, back to her home. Mom would offer her a ride, but Aunt Agnes would always refuse it and say that the walk did her good.

It had been a few days since Aunt Agnes's last visit, but the weather had been bad, with rain and storms in the late morning and afternoon, so it wasn't of any concern to us. During that time my father had started to replace some of the old boards on the back porch. He had cut the boards to length and set them in place, but he hadn't nailed them all down. One of those stormy mornings, my mother and sister and I were sitting in the dining room when we all heard the spring on the screen door being pulled taut as it opened.

My mother said, "It must be your father working on that floor."

"No, Mom," my sister replied. "He went after some nails in town."

Then my mother turned as white as a sheet, thinking her aunt had come for a visit and may have fallen through the loose boards. She sat straight up.

"It's your aunt Agnes. Go help her!"

We all heard the old boards creaking and Aunt Agnes's signature limp moving to the kitchen door. Mom and my sister were up in a flash, and I followed behind them as Mom began to open the door. Then she turned to us with a look of relief, as my aunt was nowhere in sight. "That was strange," Mom said. "I swore I heard her!"

That's when there was a loud knock on our front door. It was my cousin

Susan, who had clearly been crying. When my mother asked her what was wrong, Susan said words that I still remember to this day: “Dear Aunt Agnes. They found her dead early this morning. She died in her sleep.”

At that moment it was ten a.m.