

LIVING WITH THE DEAD

"It's not that I'm afraid to die. I just don't want to be there when it happens."

—Woody Allen

"SLAM." I still remember waking up to an unknown, deafening sound, alone in my room at the age of four. I lay quietly in my bed, staring up at the ceiling towards the glow-in-the-dark stickers that had absorbed the daylight and transformed it into an alien green glow that shone down upon me. I wore red pajamas, with white feet. One of the feet had a small hole in it, and my toe popped out of it.

I pulled my flashlight out from under my bed and waved it in the air. My dad let me use it so I could play shadow

puppets if I got scared or nervous being alone. “That way,” he would tell me, “you won’t come waking me up.” Feeling protected in the bunkbed fortress that my uncle had built for me, I peeked around the headboard post.

Shining the light toward my closet, I saw an image—an image I will never forget. It was dark and foggy; it looked like a bunch of light had formed into an image or a picture. The man was dressed just the way I had seen him in many of our old photographs. I immediately recognized him; I didn’t even have to think. I just knew, almost as if I had been waiting for him to appear. I felt like I had prepared for this moment every second of my short four years on this Earth.

“Puppa!” I said out loud.

I wasn’t scared; I wasn’t surprised. I remember just sitting there—in awe.

Then, in a deep voice, I heard, “Jack has my watch, boy. Tell Mom and Dad. I love you.” He vanished just after making this cryptic statement.

Immediately, I heard my parents’ bedroom door opening. Within a second or two, as I stood in the middle of my bedroom, my father flung open the door. “What the hell is going on in here?” he said, standing only in tube socks and boxer shorts.

“Puppa come!” I said out loud, “Puppa come.”

“You saw Puppa?” my father asked in a gruff voice. “Boy, what the hell are you talking about?”

I started crying. My dad approached me and picked me up into his arms. He gave me a kiss on the cheek. That was my father’s way—he’d snap and then apologize. “It’s okay, son. Weird things happen at night.”

And so began my life as a psychic medium—a seer, a soothsayer, a mystic. But what I learned—almost immediately—is that weird things do not *only* happen at night: they happen all the time, and they happen to *me* on an almost continual basis. I quickly learned—at the age of four—that while the dead may be dead, they still have a lot to say, and it is my job to listen. As kids, we all learn to look both ways and never take candy from a stranger. I also learned to never argue with a dead person—they often know more than the living.

As a psychic medium, I have two particular abilities. First, as a psychic, I have visions about the future, in which I can see where people have come from and where they are going. Second, I connect with the Spirits of those that have departed. Taken together, it's a combination of hearing a lot of voices and seeing a lot of things. People are amazed by it, obsessed by it, confused by it, and always intrigued by it. It's the best and worst profession to have at a cocktail party—people either want to talk to you all night or run from you like the plague. But I'm not here to make you believe in the reality of psychic mediums. I am not here to convince you of the afterlife. Actually, I'm really not even here to tell you about myself (even though I am writing this book). This is the story of those that have passed on—those that have left us, but continue to guide us and love us in some way. This is the story of my clients who have come to me over the years and opened up their hearts to hear from beyond, and have trusted me to shepherd them along the way. This is a book about the fun, anecdotal stories that reveal the tremendous healing power of connecting with the Other Side—with our “team spirit”—of angels, loved ones, and guides.

There are a lot of unbelievable stories and life-altering experiences that accompany this work. Recounting experiences and answering the questions (as best I can) are the main impetus behind my writing this book. You will learn a lot about my life and work through this book, but ultimately, I hope that you will take the lessons that each deceased person brings forward in this book and use them to inspire you on your own path in life. Now, you might be thinking, *Wait a second—I'm reading a whole book about other people's dead people? Boring!* but let me stop you right there. This is not a book about dead people. This is a book about the universal lessons, messages, and healing that we all wish for in our lives.

People on the Other Side come through for a variety of reasons. First, they deliver a message to validate they are indeed in the Spirit World. They do this by bringing through identifying details like names, dates, and information about their lives that the person sitting with me can relate to. However, in many ways, while this is the most exciting part of the reading—mainly because it defies our logical minds—it could perhaps be the most useless in terms of resolving important issues that propelled you to seek a reading. The reason is simply that this “confirmation” of information is often stuff that you *already* know, such as specific memories or significant names and details.

While conformational messages fortify and confirm the connection, they do not serve to provide spiritual growth or inspire a change in my clients' life journeys. A whole different, and much more significant, class of information can be brought about when Spirit comes through and connects to living loved ones: *to teach them a valuable life lesson*. These life

lessons can be about unconditional love, gratefulness, serendipity, and forgiveness. The dead can teach us a lot about life on Earth and can guide us in many ways. For many of us, we constantly obsess about the past: what we should have done, could have done, or would have done. We dated the wrong person, married the wrong person, spent too much money, or took the wrong job. When something terrible happens, we become guilt-ridden instead of understanding that through this trauma, positive developments can happen—if we allow them. But the dead have a very different version of Earth—they view it as our classroom and playground—where everything is in the name of learning, and every experience we endure (positive or negative) can teach us a very important life lesson.

When people leave their physical bodies, their Spirit is able to see life and life's problems from an entirely new perspective. After achieving this clarity, our loved ones' Spirits are excited and eager to help us with their new knowledge. But they also move on. They move past the relatively common things that we become obsessed with in life. People often ask, "Are they always around us?" and the answer is a bit confusing, because it is both yes and no. I sometimes like to joke that the dead have lives too, and they can't be everywhere all the time. The truth is, they are around us a lot, but often, they are doing their own thing. They have many duties and responsibilities on the Other Side (many Spirits have come through in readings to me and told me about their Spirit World jobs, but that is another story). One thing I do know is that in the thousands of readings I've conducted—whether it be in groups, one-on-one at my Chelsea office, or over the

telephone, I have learned that they want to communicate with us. In fact, they actually enjoy the connection. And the reason they connect is that they love us. Connecting helps us, but it also helps them. It is part of their “job” on the Other Side: teaching the living lessons enables these Spirits to progress to higher dimensions. This book is about those sacred lessons and universal messages.

Another common question—probably the most common of all—“Do you see dead people?” The answer is yes, generally, but I also sometimes don’t. It depends a lot on how the Spirits from the other side want to communicate. They might communicate through signs and symbols, through images related to their lives, and through personal experiences. Often, they also do communicate through showing themselves in the physical body. So I do “see” dead people, but I also see images, feel sensations, and hear sounds that help me create a story about who I am connecting with and what they wish to communicate.

In this book, you won’t find many references to *super consciousness* and *chakras*, *channeling*, and other psychic mumbo-jumbo. I’ve decided to keep it simple and honest. I candidly share with you fifteen stories from my practice as one of Manhattan’s top psychic mediums—and every one of them has a message from a dead person. Some are touching (like a mother who came through to forgive her daughter who had accidentally killed her), some are creepy (like the woman who got a message from her husband whom she thought was living and meeting her for dinner after the reading), some are totally unbelievable (like a young couple who bonded over their fathers’ deaths), but all are true accounts of my encoun-

ters with the departed. Some happen in my Chelsea office, some happen at the Rite Aid I frequent, on the corner of 19th and 8th Avenue, and some happen on the A train after a long night in the meatpacking district. Some are predictable, and some will surprise you. I hope you laugh, and you might cry or be confused—but I'll try to make it as easy as possible as we go on this journey together.

I hope you enjoy this book, but whatever your reaction, believers and skeptics alike, I hope you'll agree the dead have a lot to say. This book is filled with true yet unbelievable moments when even I stop and say: "Is this for real?" And even though the stories might be about someone else's dead aunt or crossed-over grandmother, the messages that they have for their loved ones are ones that we all can bear witness to, understand, and heal from. This isn't about the specific message, story, or character that conveys something about our loved ones. Instead, it's about the lesson in the connection for all of us. For some, seeing is believing, but for me, it is the opposite: *believing is seeing*. Hopefully, by reading this book, you will believe and understand the Other Side. And if there's one thing I have learned about dead people, it's that they have a lot to say, and they're usually right—so don't argue with a dead person!

CHAPTER I

THE CASE OF THE MISSING WATCH

“And above all, watch with glittering eyes the whole world around you because the greatest secrets are always hidden in the most unlikely places. Those who don’t believe in magic will never find it.”

—Roald Dahl

During my childhood, I remember my grandfather as a handsome guy, in a very striking sort of way. He was tall, skinny, and wore flannel shirts all the time. His clothes were simple—his plaid flannel shirt, broken-in blue jeans, and always a pair of well-worn, thick-soled, leather work boots. The skin of his face was tired and stretched. His eyes were bloodshot, perhaps reflecting the stress during his years as an officer in

the army, or maybe it was the strain of his unhappy marriage to my alcoholic grandmother. He had a thick head of hair, with only a few gray patches on the sides. He had regrets—the affair he had had all through my father’s childhood and the fact that he emotionally could never trust anyone. His presence was quiet. He had a way of walking into a room and immediately being seen and then as quickly disappearing. We met the first time when I was the tender age of four. When we saw each other, it was always at night. He would come to my bedroom, speak quietly to me for a few minutes, and then leave. I am the only person to whom he ever said: “I love you.” To say that my relationship with my grandfather is unconventional is an understatement, to say the least. But what makes it *all* even stranger is this: my grandfather, Leo, passed away five years before my birth.

My grandfather was a hard worker, of the blue-collar variety. A career electrician, he rarely missed a day of work over his thirty-five-year-long tenure with the union. He led a fairly uninteresting life. He was never happy in his marriage, and had many affairs with women, and drank many of his fears and anxieties away at the bar. Because of this, his relationship with my father suffered. But we never really spoke about these things in our family. My grandfather died after battling cancer two years before my parents were married, and my grandfather became little more than a memory in an 8-by-10 photo. Leo didn’t like to take photographs, and only a few black-and-white pictures of him survived. My grandfather wasn’t discussed much at reunions or family gatherings. Any of my relatives’ accounts of him paint him as a hard-working

type of guy, up early every morning; the type who believed only after a full twelve hours of labor did one deserve to sleep. He served in the army for four years, an experience that made him formidable in the way he disciplined my father. In life, he was described as a quiet man of few words, who kept to himself. He did drink heavily, but wasn't a belligerent or mean drunk. "He was a quiet drunk, but a drunk he was," my cousin, his niece Mary, would comment dryly, when reminiscing during annual family excursions to her small home in upstate New York.

As a young boy, I experienced vivid dreams. The visceral colors, senses, and emotions in my dreams were very much real to me. I did have normal dreams like everyone else, ones where I would wake up and remember surreal details, maybe a vivid scene or two that stuck with me for hours after awaking. But often, perhaps once a week, I would have a wild, vibrant dream where I saw brighter colors, bigger shapes, sharper sensations, and more primal feelings than usual; these dreams seemed to be coming from a different dimension.

My parents recall that, as a child, I would awaken, even as young as age three or four, to stir them out of their slumber and insist on recounting my dreams to them, right then and there. The dreams, my mother would later tell me, seemed unnatural and strange—they were so specific and all too real. I would describe every detail, every color, and articulate the details in a vocabulary far advanced of a four-year-old. Sometimes, I would describe the people I encountered, usually family members who had recently died or relatives who were about to cross over. My parents found this bizarre. By the age

of seven, I had been to every psychotherapist, priest, rabbi, and anyone else my parents could think of to help me. Many of them actually encouraged me to talk to the “dead people.” Even a Roman Catholic priest—whom my family visited when I was ten—affirmed that the Bible was, in fact, written by “special people,” also known as “mystics” and “seers,” and that there are, in fact, gifted people who can communicate with the dead. “It’s the Angels talking to you,” Father Michael told me.

My grandfather was the first to visit me, and to this day he continues to appear in my bedroom, late at night. Our connection is, now, vastly different. These days, his visits are more about his checking up on me or gracing me with a simple hello. When he first came to visit, I did not understand his intentions. At first, I mistook it for a dream. I did not yet realize it was different, or rather, that I was different. During his first few social calls, my grandfather didn’t say much. I remember being comforted by a vision of him, feeling a warmth come over my chest. As time went on, he started to relate specific messages. He told me about his estate and how my grandmother’s handling of what he had left behind disturbed and upset him. Another time, he passed on a message about my grandmother’s health, which proved true the following day. My grandfather had many secrets and now, in retrospect, I think he visited me at a such a young age because he needed a cathartic means of ridding himself of these secrets. He wanted someone to know who he was, because for his fifty-seven years on Earth, nobody really knew.

One night, I woke up my parents to tell them that Grandpa Leo was in my bedroom. This had been going on for the

past couple of years—a visit by my grandfather in the middle of the night, me waking my parents, them coming into my room only to find my assertions unsubstantiated. My mother muttered, “This is getting to be too much.” I shared with them that Puppa was confused about why Jack had ended up with his prized wristwatch, despite the fact that he had wanted his wife to have it. That watch held significant meaning to my father, who had purchased a Rolex for Leo and inscribed it “To Dad, Love Tom” (yes, I am a junior, named after my father). I sleepily said something about “a donkey bank,” asked if I could have a drink of water, and then asked to be put back to bed.

My parents were dumbfounded. Jack was my grandfather’s best friend. I had mentioned the watch before, but this was the first time that I had mentioned Jack. He and my grandfather had worked together at the electric company for sixteen years. The mention of the donkey bank was chilling, and nobody could make sense of it for a month, until my Great Aunt Rose came for a visit and told us an unsolicited story about my late grandfather’s treasured possession—a bank in the shape of a donkey that she had found in her attic the preceding week. My parents searched for this wristwatch high and low for years. It was the *one* personal item of my grandfather’s that my father actually wanted, but three days after his death, it mysteriously went missing.

My grandfather, who had come back from the grave in Spirit to tell us the exact location of this watch, was completely ignored. Yet, my parents *still* refused to believe.

It would be years until they finally saw the error of their ways.

Flash forward several years. Jack came to my sister's seventh birthday party. Although he lived an hour away, he often frequented family events, staying in touch with us with the occasional holiday or birthday card. My parents affectionately called them "the odd couple." Jack was the diametric opposite of my grandfather in so many ways. Jack was short, Leo was tall; Jack was well groomed, my grandfather was somewhat sloppy and disheveled; Jack had striking dark eyes that jumped out at you, Leo had gray-blue eyes that sunk deeply into his skull; Jack was liberal, whereas my grandfather was conservative. However dissimilar they may have been, Jack had a deep, intuitive understanding of Leo. Jack was the only person who really appreciated Leo, something my grandfather told Jack before passing away.

Jack brought my sister a Barbie doll and Wizard of Oz hair clips thoughtfully yet awkwardly wrapped in white tissue paper for her birthday. As the party progressed, it transformed from a seven-year-old's party into a completely different scene. The men sat around a card table drinking beer and smoking cigars, while the women gathered in the kitchen gossiping about the latest PTA meeting as they sliced up an Entenmann's Danish. I observed the cigar smoke-filled vista quietly from my vantage point lying on the den floor.

At a certain point, my grandfather's name was mentioned. It wasn't uncommon that Leo's name usually came up when Jack was around. The men reminisced about his flannel shirts and how he had only three in rotation, which he washed only occasionally. Someone brought up how he hated animals, yet one time he took in a stray cat and treated it like royalty. They

fondly remembered his contempt for Democrats and how politics was about the only thing that got him talking. “Leo was tough on those liberals,” Ricky, the son of my grandfather’s friend, chimed in from across the table. Cards hit the table one after another. Someone was out of beer, and there was talk about getting another six-pack from Cumby’s and switching to Texas Hold ’em. Then, out of nowhere, there was a dramatic, palpable shift in the air. The smoke cleared. The room fell silent. Then I saw it, the faintest image of my grandfather, stooping down next to me on the floor. “Watch this,” he whispered, his face inches from mine, just floating, ephemerally, like a slide projection of an old photograph lingering in the dusty, smoke-filled air. I looked up expectantly, holding my breath, looking back and forth from the ghostly apparition beside me to the seemingly completely unaware men and women carrying on with the business of the party just a few feet away.

A second later a loud voice boomed from the poker table. “Can’t believe I still got that Rolex,” Jack chuckled. “Only thing he gave a damn about was that Rolex, eh Tommy?”

All the color drained from my father’s now ashen face. “Yes,” my father acknowledged. “Who wants another beer? Mickey? Can I get ya another?” My father, visibly shaken, left the table abruptly, accidentally knocking over a glass of water in the process.

My father immediately went to the kitchen, but he did not make the usual bee line for the refrigerator, opening the door to get another beer while simultaneously grabbing the bottle opener to open it, in his beer retrieval ritual dance. In-

stead, he seemed disoriented and confused, rubbing his hand over his head quizzically. He did not open the refrigerator; in fact, he didn't move at all. He wasn't doing anything in the kitchen. He just stood there, scratching his head. Then he walked right by me, tiny beads of perspiration now covering his furrowed brow. His complexion grew a deep red, like after he'd had a few, but this time it was darker and deeper and covered his entire face. He was flustered, a state unfamiliar to my experiences of my father. My gaze left the Uno game on the floor and instead was focused on my father in the kitchen. I crawled to the doorway between the den and kitchen and poked my head through the beaded curtains to get a better view. My father spoke in a hushed, forceful tone with my mother, waving and flailing, and nervously pacing back and forth, feet stomping angrily on the vinyl tiles.

After this exchange, my father returned to the card game in the den, but the men were on to new topics. Carl was bragging about his wife's new job at the attorney general's office. Jack sipped on a bottle of beer and complained about problems with his '84 Mazda 323. My mother quickly came and went, sheepishly placing a bowl of cashews on the table without so much as a word.

The story's revelations—and finally finding the missing watch after all these years—did *not* make my parents feel any better for knowing. They were not validated or relieved by this message from my grandfather from beyond the grave. In fact, they were unnerved, almost angry.

We never did get the watch back from Jack, who ultimately passed away a few years later. The watch was nowhere

to be found. I like to muse that my grandfather took the one possession he loved and treasured more than any other back to the heavens with him. To Leo, this watch represented all the qualities about himself of which he was most proud: his punctuality, his reliability, and his son.

We never again talked about that fateful night, the night that Jack revealed he had had the watch all along. My parents just weren't comfortable with the implications, though I knew that in a way, it comforted them. They couldn't wrap their heads around it. They didn't have the language to understand the events or speak about them after the fact. But it became less about the watch as a memento of my grandfather or as an antique time-keeping device and more about the watch as a symbol of my grandfather's validation of his love for his son, my father, and validation of the man as a proud, hard-working person of value.

Around my twenty-third birthday, during one of my grandfather's frequent visits, I finally just asked him straight out: "Why was it so important for you to relay a message to Dad about your Rolex? Why did you need the missing watch to be found despite the unsettling consequences of the revelation?"

"Because," he said, smiling mischievously, as his apparition, appearing as a strapping young man this visit, stood before me, "over here, there is no room between our thoughts of secrets or ideas of mysteries. We have to clear all that out. Here, where I am now, this is a world of light and clarity, such a clear sense of knowing and truth that is rarely ever experienced on Earth. Our job is to shine light into the dark

corners of the lives we left behind and at least try to expose these mysteries in some way to people who may not want to know about them.”

I nodded, trying to take it all in.

About a year after this conversation with my grandfather, my father and I were sharing a beer on the front porch of our family cottage in New Hampshire. We were putting together a jigsaw puzzle, an activity we occasionally enjoy sharing. I was working on the far left corner; he was working on the center. We chatted about the recent Red Sox loss and other superficial topics, nothing too deep. It was a clear night, bright twinkling stars decorated the dark blue country sky. My father took a long, deep breath, and I could see his eyes shift from the evening sky to the ground below. Out of nowhere, he blurted out: “So, you think Grandpa’s okay up there?”

“I do, Dad, I do,” I said, feeling a bit awkward.

“How do you know that, though?” he asked, his eyes finally meeting mine for the first time that night.

“I just do. Sometimes you don’t ‘know’ things. Sometimes you just *feel* them. You just get a sense. . . .” I paused to think about the odd late-night visits from my grandfather, still going on, and the various messages he had passed on to me, and through me, over the years. I thought about life, about how my grandfather shaped my future fate from such an early point in my childhood. How many mysteries and puzzles he had solved, I considered them all, as the events flashed before my eyes. Life is a weird mystery—we only get the briefest time to live on the physical plane. Change is the only constant, but it is the only way to discover the many mysteries we are meant to experience in our lives. I savored this visceral

connection I was experiencing between myself, my father, and my grandfather, a connection transcending time, space, life, and death, and wished in vain that it would last forever.

“That’s good, son.” My dad paused a long while, lighting and inhaling deeply on a cigarette. “I get what you mean.” He exhaled just as deeply off to the side of the table.

The stars shone down from the heavens and warmed our souls, and in that moment, I knew, without a doubt, my grandfather was watching over us.