

A Young Child's First Encounter with Death

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I was raised by my grandparents. Like Russell's grandmother, my grandmother also believed firmly in the existence of ghosts and the importance of heeding omens. One such incident is forever imbedded in my mind.

It was the Spring of 1960. Mum was baking bread while I sat at the kitchen table practicing my speech for Easter Sunday. "The dough is not rising as it should," she declared. "It has a grave in the center." She said that it meant that someone was going to pass. It just so happened that my grandfather and uncle were in the hospital at the time. Pap, as I called him, had been ill for quite awhile. I do not recall being told what he was suffering from but I do remember him coughing and wheezing. He passed away on Good Friday. The date was April the 14th and to this day I am reminded of that fact. His funeral was the day after Easter. I was sent off to church on Easter Sunday to recite my speech but no family member was there to hear it.

The days leading up to the funeral brought a whirlwind of activity. Neighbors brought casseroles and pies. Relatives that I do not ever remember meeting came by to pay their respects. Suddenly, the visitors all went away and mum and I sat in a quiet

parlor exhausted but too reflective to go to bed. Eventually, we said our goodnights and retired to our bedrooms. Sometime during the night I was awakened by what sounded like pap coughing. I covered my ears and prayed that it would stop. I must have fallen asleep because the next thing I remember is mum waking me up to get ready for school.

I could barely keep my eyes open at the breakfast table. Mum asked me if I had trouble sleeping the night before. I told her about my bad dream in which I could hear pap coughing. "I heard him too." she replied.