

My grandmother, who always turned out for the occasion with her wiry black hair freshly finger-waved and held in place by “diamond” bobby pins and her lips and nails gleaming with her signature Revlon Fifth Avenue Red, would modestly accept compliments on my behalf, beaming with pride and importance. Then, prompted by the family members and my grandmother, I’d inform the stunned-looking man or woman who was standing at the foot of the casket that I had some questions and would then relay his or her answers to the mourners who were gathered.

When I was going on all these “outings” with my grandmother, I don’t think my parents ever knew exactly what I was doing. By now, with four small girls at home, my mother was probably mostly grateful that my grandmother wanted to spend so much time with me. What I’m even more certain of, however, is that the idea of actually questioning my grandmother—the undisputed matriarch of the family—never crossed my parents’ minds! I don’t think it ever crossed my grandmother’s mind to tell her daughter, my mother, who didn’t have the gift, why she was spending so much time taking me on outings. Maybe she was disappointed that her abilities had skipped a generation; maybe she thought her own daughter would disapprove—I never found out for sure. But I’m certain neither of my parents knew what I could do when I was a child.

When I spoke to my father’s ghost at his funeral, he was completely shocked! He recovered fairly well, though, muttering something along the lines of “Your mother’s family was always rather exotic,” and letting it go. After that, I decided there was no real reason to tell my mother.

Of course, once I married Ted, I had two more parents to deal with. I did finally tell my mother-in-law what I was doing most afternoons when I left the house. After all, she was living with us. She never questioned what I told her, although I could tell she was skeptical. When she died, I reminded her ghost that I had always said I’d be the last person she ever talked to. I guess that took care of her skepticism.

My own first *real* memory of really talking to a spirit is from when I was about seven. The experience was unique to me for a couple of reasons. For one thing, it was the first time I’d seen a young ghost. And second, the encounter led to my first deeper understanding of how spirits became earthbound.

It was in the last few weeks of summer, right before I was about to start second grade, when my grandmother announced to my parents that she was taking me to New York for a visit.

“*Comare* Gina is having some problems in her house,” my grandmother told me as we arrived at the airport. I was so excited about taking my first plane trip that I didn’t even think to ask about what kind of problems—or why I should care. If I’d been paying more attention, I probably would