

# [PDF] Life Among The Dead

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## **Description:**

**About the Author** Born in Birmingham, England, Lisa Williams makes her home in Los Angeles as well as in the small town of Redditch in picturesque Worcestershire. She lives with her husband, Kevin, and eight-year-old son, Charlie, who, according to his mom, has already shown an inherited gift for natural healing and talking with spirits.

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Chapter 1

The Uninvited

I was three years old when I saw dead people for the very first time.

We were living in a flat in Birmingham, in Central England, our family's first real home, and I soon discovered that we weren't alone. Strange faces, balloonlike and oddly translucent, came floating in and out of the walls of my room, and because they were slightly blown up, as if filled with air, they seemed a little clownish. But there was nothing funny about them.

I went to tell my parents. "There are people in the walls of my room," I said.

"What people?"

"I don't know. All sorts of people."

Mom took me by the hand and walked me back. "Where?" she said.

"Well, they're gone *now*, but they were here a minute ago."

"You're making this up."

"No, I'm not."

"Who are they, then?"

"I don't know. Just people, some of them look like clowns."

"Clowns? It's just your imagination! Go to bed."

The next night, the faces were back. I went into the lounge and *refused* to return to my room. My parents were just about to go to bed and, unhappy at the prospect of another sleepless night, my father gave me an angry look and marched off. "If you want to stay on the sofa all night, that's fine, but I'm going to sleep."

I stared at him, even as he switched off the lights and left me in the dark, but feeling guilty, he returned a few minutes later and found me sitting there, still staring. I hadn't moved.

"Why are you such a defiant child?" he said.

"What's 'defiant'?" I asked, scowling.

He picked me up, carried me to bed, plunked me down, and stormed off without saying a word.

For the next few months, the drama continued, sometimes two or three nights a week. An endless array of faces, ghostly and insubstantial, would emerge from the walls, study me for a moment or two, even try to grab at me at times, then just as suddenly dematerialize. Some of them actually addressed me, but I could never make out what they were saying, and they scared me.

"What do they say?" Mom asked.

"I dunno, but one of them comes through the lightbulb and tries to yank my hair."

"Comes through the lightbulb?"

"I just see her arm."

"How do you know it's a girl?"

"Dunno," I said, shrugging my shoulders. "I just don't think boys pull hair."

Exasperated, my parents finally moved me into the spare bedroom, but the faces were back that very night. Bony old men. Angelic boys. Old ladies. Thin girls with pinched cheeks. I went to get my mother, to show her, but by the time we returned, they had disappeared.

"There is nothing there," she said. "It's just your imagination. Go to sleep."

After tucking me in, she curled up in bed with me and stayed until I fell asleep.

There were nights when I would lie in bed scared, begging the uninvited visitors to leave me alone. I'd bury my head under the covers, thinking they would go away if I couldn't see them. And other nights I'd shout at them, "Go away! This is my room! I don't like you!"

My parents were concerned, but they thought I just had a vivid imagination. This was thirty years ago and therapy wasn't an option in my family. We never really showed emotion, and seeing a therapist wasn't even in the realm of possibility, so they dealt with my complaints by ignoring them. And it worked! Whenever I mentioned the faces, they would roll their eyes and continue what they were doing. In time, I stopped talking about them altogether, and soon enough -- taking a cue from my parents -- I began to ignore the spirits. They still came, of course, but they didn't bother me anymore.

I also began to ignore my parents -- or at least that's the way it appeared. "Lisa! I'm talking to you! Are you listening to me?"

I would look up from my perch on the floor, where I was playing.

"What?"

"What is wrong with you? Are you deaf?"

As it turned out, I was hard of hearing. I had compensated for this defect, unknowingly, by reading lips, which I guess I'd been doing ever since words first began to make sense to me. If I didn't look at a person directly, I couldn't really make out what they were saying to me -- which was the same problem I had with my nightly visitors.

When I was five, Mom took me to Birmingham Children's Hospital, where we were told that the tubes to my ears were almost completely blocked. The surgeon cleaned them out and removed my tonsils and adenoids for good measure, and when I awoke I could hear just as well as the next person. This was wonderful indeed, but -- even better -- every afternoon at three the nurses showed up with big scoops of ice cream. I loved ice cream so much I didn't want to leave the hospital!

In the summer, I would play in the big grassy area in front of our building, waiting for the ice cream man to show up. When I heard him coming, I would shout up to the third-floor balcony, "MOM!!!" Moments later, a fifty-pence piece would come sailing off the balcony, tumbling end over end. I would watch like a hawk to see where it landed, then I'd grab it and hurry off to meet the ice cream man.

Except for the haunting faces, life was great, especially now that we had a home of our own. My mother, Lorraine, stayed home in those days to care for me, and my father, Vic, worked as a self-employed contractor. Previously, we had lived with my father's parents, Jack and Josie, in West Heath, Birmingham. They had a two-bedroom house with a lovely, long garden, and I'd run up and down the entire length of it tirelessly, urging my grandparents to look at me. My grandfather would

always be out there, tending to his plants, and he always humored me by looking over.

During the cold winters, I would have snowball fights with my dad, then we'd go inside and huddle around the fireplace with the rest of the family. I especially remember Tuesday nights, because every Tuesday, without fail, Mom and Nanny Josie would go off to play bingo at the local bingo hall. I started to call my nan Bingo Nanny.

In 1976, two years after we moved into our own home, my brother Christian came along. I still remember watching my mother carry this bundled little creature into the house for the first time. I hoped his constant screaming would scare off the spirits, but they didn't seem to be troubled by the crying; in fact, they weren't even vaguely interested in him.

Eventually, tiring of hearing me complain about the visitors, my parents had me switch rooms with Christian, and my mother's mother, Frances Glazebrook, paid to have the room redone. She and my parents chose Holly Hobbie wallpaper. Holly Hobbie was a little girl in a blue chintz bonnet, and she was supposed to personify childhood innocence. She was cute but she had these eyes that freaked me out at night. Now I had to deal with the spirits *and* with Holly Hobbie, staring at me.

In September 1977, I went off to nursery school. I was four at the time. Mom took me the first day, but the second day I was sent off to join the parade of children who made their way down the path every morning, past our building. I tried to be brave about it, but when I got there, I saw that most of the other kids in my class had arrived with their mothers, and that one of them had actually brought flowers for the teacher. I was so upset that I ran all the way home in tears to find my mom. "You're supposed to walk me to school," I said, blubbering. "And you forgot to bring flowers for the teacher."

We went outside and picked a few flowers, and Mom walked me back to school. I gave the flowers to the teacher, who was most appreciative, and settled in. I enjoyed school, but I was shy, and quite insecure. I had a hard time making friends, and the year proved somewhat lonely for me.

I'd gotten used to the visitors by then, but I still huddled under the covers from time to time, trying to ignore them. One evening, just as Mom called me to dinner, a distinguished-looking gentleman, nicely dressed in a brown jacket and matching trousers, appeared in the hallway and followed me to the dining room. It was a *whole* gentleman, not just a face or an arm.

"Don't eat your peas," he said.

"Huh?" I said.

"Don't eat your peas or you'll die."

My dad looked at me, perplexed. "Are you talking to one of your imaginary friends?" he asked.

"He's not imaginary," I said, pointing in his direction. "Can't you see him?"

He looked toward the spot I'd indicated, but saw nothing. "Who?"

"*There!* He's standing right *there!*"

"Don't eat your peas," the man repeated.

"Okay," I answered.

"I don't see anyone," Dad said.

"He's telling me not to eat my peas or I'll die."

My parents thought I was making it up because I didn't like peas, which I *didn't*, but the man was standing there, clear as day. They didn't believe it, but they gave up trying to talk sense to me.

"Okay," Mom said, rolling her eyes. "Don't eat your peas."

I recently found out that my dad's great uncle always had pie, chips, and peas for lunch, and one day -- a few years before I was born -- he choked on a pea and died. To this day I have a terrible phobia of peas.

My favorite food at the time -- the only food I cared for, really -- was a cheese sandwich. Not even *grilled*, mind you; just two slices of bread with cheese and salad cream, which is like mayonnaise with horseradish.

One night, there was a tomato on my plate and the man was back. "Don't eat the tomato, either. You could choke. Avoid anything with pips."

"Okay," I said.

"What?" Mom said.

"I wasn't talking to you," I said.

"There's nobody there," she said.

"He's right there, Mom! He told me not to eat the tomato."

"No, he's not. It's just a ploy to avoid eating your vegetables. He's just like your monkey."

She had a point there. I had an imaginary monkey, whom I'd named "Monkey." I took him everywhere with me because he was good company and nice to chat with. He was a talking monkey. We were inseparable. If I ever forgot him, I moaned until we went back to the house to get him.

The following year, when I was five, we moved into a council house in Tillington Close, in Redditch, Worcestershire, twenty miles south of Birmingham, and that's ...

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