

The Ghosts Inside Me



John Llewellyn James used this quote by Robert Montgomery as a prompt for our writing at a recent meeting of Fermanagh Writers and I couldn't get it out of my mind.

It got me thinking about the ghosts inside me and how they have influenced me. I have written (maybe inadvertently) on this topic in my poetry many times over the years.

The first and most obvious was in my tribute to my friend Ken Walton who died in 2001 and when I wrote these lines I didn't truly realise how prophetic they would be:

*Now I am sure and certain that in his Afterlife out there,
our Ken has found his corners in some great Celestial bars,
where he's regaling friends with stories of his journeys round the stars.
But if you think he's gone forever, you are in for a big surprise,
for when you're least expecting it, you won't believe your eyes:
his Spirit will come whistling and strolling down the wind,
and when he turns the corner towards the glad part of your mind,
he'll whisper you a story, through a haze of memory's tears,
of things you had forgotten, which will echo down the years.*

Ken has visited me many times over the years since 2001. The visits can be triggered by the most insignificant things; the smell of a barbecue can remind me of some of Kenny's stories related late at night in the semi-dark of suburban London, a tale of some of his escapades on board ship, or a funny story of some rascally sailor on leave. When he visits my mind I can still hear his cheery whistling as he strolled from his car to our door.

I wrote a whimsical piece about ESP in which I describe it as a ghost:

*They say that ESP is a ghost inside your head
who invades your private space.
But thank the gods it happens to so few
of the whole damn human race.*

*That ESP is a weirdish thing
it upsets your balanced state;
to find another person has got your
thoughts inside their pate.*

*It buggers up your thinking
about all your private things
to find another person seems
to be pulling all your strings.*

And of course I've written about my Dad and he is very much a ghost inside me. Earlier this year as I sawed some wood for the patio garden I was building, I could hear his voice, "Let the saw do the work, not your arms."

That took me straight back to my childhood when I'd help him with some woodwork and he'd say, "You've got to work with the wood, John, not against it."

I had no idea until years afterwards what he meant.

I also find myself regularly repeating favorite sayings of my mother's. I'm sure some of you have received this reply from me when you asked how I was, "Oh, I'm pullin' the devil by the tail."

There are many more.

*My ghosts are many, loud and quiet
ready to call at any time
but the time I need them most of all,
is when I'm trying to find a rhyme.*

*They always somehow come to me
when I am sorely puzzled
and they will always rescue me
when that poetic muse is muzzled.*

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