

I stayed at my grandparents' house the night my grandfather died. He'd dropped dead on the sofa, suddenly, although we knew it was likely to happen because we were told his heartbeat sounded like a wet paper bag. For some reason, I thought it appropriate to wear a suit that night - my recollection confirms that I had a history of that when family members died. Somehow I always switched to formal, funeral, "I have a job to do" mode.

I've probably written about it before here, over the years, but I can remember my grandmother having to go upstairs for something that night. My grandfather's body was in his coffin in their bedroom. I can remember her hesitating about going upstairs, while she stood in the middle of her living room, and then saying "I'm feared". There she was, at maybe 77 years old, and she was feared at the prospect of going upstairs in the dark because there was a dead body up there. To this day, something changed inside me because I saw the humanity - the weakness - in a woman who was the centre of my world and who always seemed fearless. She was afraid and I thought, in my naivety, that at her age, and with her strength, that she wouldn't be afraid of anything. I remember falling asleep as I sat upright that night, because I was exhausted. I remember my aunt being there, who would be buried out of that same house and same room, only a few short years later.

I find it odd that she didn't show fear when she died herself approximately five years later. She hugged me and told me her body was "done". She told me she us all and that we were her children. There are times when I miss her so much - her love and that protection that meant we could be innocent and vulnerable children - that it still physically hurts.

Its also made more real because I now know what she meant. I love my daughter more than I ever thought I could ever love another wee person. There's a bitter sweet beauty to this life and I wouldn't trade it, despite its sorrows, for anything.