

Down Under

By Reaper

Hello, most of you reading this have probably never heard of me. My name was Joseph Wellington and I'm reaching out to whoever might read this to give them a bit of a heads up from my part of the world down under. When I say "down under" I'm not referring to Australia, nor did I make a grammatical mistake when I said my name *was* Joseph Wellington. You see I'm reaching out to you from beyond the grave.

That's right, I'm dead. I've been dead for years now. It took me a long time and a great deal of effort before I was able to communicate with the living and eventually get this story out there but I obviously succeeded in the end seeing as you're reading this now.

Now that I've established who I was and what I am now, the time has come for me to deliver my message and my story. My message is simple: don't die. Funny right? I suppose it must be since the living don't have much choice, but you should definitely put it off as long as you possibly can because I can tell you first hand that being dead is no picnic. My story is obviously a bit longer and I won't go into my back story in great detail.

For me my journey to the grave started when I was just 16 and became ill. My illness started innocently enough with me just feeling a bit more tired than usual which over time progressed to having almost no energy at all. It was kind of like a flu that never quite goes away. Speaking of the flu I started getting sick almost all the time with your everyday illnesses. I got sick more often and when I did get sick I became very ill and stayed ill for longer than usual.

I also started losing weight and fast which prompted the doctors in my time to diagnose me with consumption which causes the afflicted person to waste away and is almost always fatal. My family and I were devastated with the diagnosis but there was nothing to be done but make me as comfortable as possible and see the illness through to its inevitable conclusion.

I was fortunate in a way because the consumption didn't cause me any significant pain until the last few days of my life. By that point I was unable to get out of bed, and I could neither eat or drink without throwing up. Sleep, when I was able to get some, was my only escape from the pain I experienced near the end. The doctors prescribed morphine to me to help me deal with the pain but in those days they could do little more for me.

I recall that when I was first diagnosed and knew I would likely die that I was, to coin a phrase, scared to death. I didn't want to die as young as I was and the whole thing didn't seem fair to me at all. Why should I have to die so young when most people get to live for years and years. Death frightened me through most of my illness. Of course towards the end I began to see death as being the ultimate escape from the pain I was experiencing. Surely no matter what happens to us after we die all pain ceases in death right?

I suppose you have your own ideas about what happens to you when you die. Not your body but your conscience self, or soul, or whatever you'd like to call it. Do we just wink out of existence? Move on to heaven or hell based on how we lived our lives? Become born again as other people or animals? I didn't know and not knowing was definitely the scariest part of the whole ordeal. Well, now I can tell you what happens or at least what happened to me. I honestly never expected what actually waited for me at the moment of death.

At first as I died I remembered feeling extremely weak and cold even though I knew the room I was in at the time should have been very warm. When I passed, several things happened at once. My body stopped moving and the most painful sensations of my illness passed. I no longer breathed and my heart no longer beat but I still felt cold. In fact I was still there trapped inside my body able to see and hear everything but unable to move at all.

My first impression on all of this was that perhaps I hadn't died at all but was somehow

paralyzed or in some weird coma but that turned out not to be the case. It seems souls do in fact exist and our consciousness carries on after we die, the only problem is we don't seem to leave our bodies and we can still use the old senses that our bodies had.

That sounds strange and of course it is. In life I believed the new ideas scientists had that our brains interpret the world around us and it makes complete sense that once the brain and the body stops working entirely you should stop having the ability to see, hear, smell, etc. It makes perfect sense but there I was fully dead and able to do all of those things. It didn't make sense to me and frankly it still doesn't and I've long since given up trying to make sense of it.

Regardless of what the doctors, scientists, and teachers tell us. I'm dead and I can tell you that we do still hang around somehow. The problem is it doesn't seem that we go anywhere. After I died I recall that my mother and father were overcome with grief. Try as I might I was unable to speak, move, or communicate to them that I was still with them, still in my body in fact.

I was removed from the house and placed into a coffin and taken to a hearse that came to collect my corpse to take it to the funeral home. I've always been claustrophobic and I'll tell you that being placed into that box and having the lid shut on you is the most terrifying thing. I wanted to scream and knock that box open again but I could of course do none of those things.

My funeral was both sad and surreal. My friends and family gathered around me. I was there to witness my parents and grandparents crying. The girl I had once hoped to marry broke down and had to be ushered away when she saw me. I did all I could to yell, cry, move, anything really to offer them some comfort. The preacher told everyone gathered to pay their final respects to me and that my soul had ascended to heaven. If only that were true, I didn't seem to be traveling to heaven or hell. I was in a rather humorous way, all dressed up with nowhere to go.

The funeral was bad but nothing could have prepared me for the burial itself. Now the box was closed on me again and this time I knew that it would not reopen. This would be and was the last time I would ever see daylight. It was at least a pleasant sunny summer day so my final memory of the world up there was a good one.

After I was lowered into the ground nothing happened for what seemed like hours. Then a loud and horrible sound exploded around me. It took me a few moments to realize it was the sound of rocks and dirt striking the coffin from above as I was being buried. If there was ever a moment where I would have moved or screamed that would have been it but my body remained stubbornly immobile.

Before long the explosion of rocks and dirt hitting the top of my coffin became softer, more like dull thuds than crashes. Nothing I imagined about death and what being dead was like came close to this. After I was buried all I could do was exist where I was in the dark. I did try to make something happen, hoping that maybe if I tried my soul could move somewhere else, anywhere else really. But try as I might I stayed where I was.

I noticed that I could still feel the hard velvet beneath my back and the still cold air around me. This only heightened my fear however as I wondered what it would feel like if cemetery rats broke into my grave and began to eat my body. I'd read a story about something like that once and it terrified me now. Needless to say I wasn't eaten by rats, but I did end up being eaten.

It started a few days after I had been buried. I couldn't breathe strictly speaking but still a foul sour smell began to reach my nose. At around the same time a horrible itching feeling started to appear here and there across my stiffened body. The itching was mild at first but soon became very irritating and it spread across my body until all I wanted to do was scratch every inch of me that I could reach. Of course I could do no such thing.

The itching grew worse over time and soon it became downright painful. This was around the time that the sour off smell began to smell more sweet like rotting meat. I had realized that the itching and pain I was experiencing was my body rotting away. It didn't take long before the rotting process became mortal agony and the smell was completely unbearable. I spent much of this time screaming over and over again in my mind.

Over time the rotting process turned me more or less into soup and since my body wasn't able to feel much anymore so the pain at long last began to fade. It was at this point that I was beginning to accept the reality that I was never going to get out and the rest of my existence was going to be spent in a box in total darkness.

I remain there to this very day and I expect to be experiencing the same thing for all of time. Which brings me back to the point I was trying to make through my story. Just don't die. I suppose that can't be helped so I'll modify that advice to suggest you enjoy the time you have and try to put off dying for as long as you possibly can. Although I know every single person reading this will one day join me in the dark down under.