Shhhhhhh…

My grandparents forbade anyone to talk about what happened because things like that weren’t supposed to happen to good Christian rooted families like mine and when they did, they were buried and burned with the cross-dressing uncle, the incarcerated nephew, and the love-child cousin. For nineteen years everyone but me knew that my parents weren’t sacrificed to cancer or victims of a car accident.

My grandfather shushed my questions like a toddler talking during church service.

My grandmother gave my inquiries the same stare that made me swallow my gum in Sunday school.

Other folks spoke of my mother with reverence but didn’t speak of my father at all. That was the first clue,

but it was too dull. I wanted to believe my parents were walking home from a blues show when a mugger appeared, robbed, and shot them both, and I would grow up bold, avenge their deaths by becoming the incredible Batman. That daydream lasted until I got to high school.

When grandmother passed during tenth grade with the secret still clinched between her teeth, it felt like any chance to find out what happened departed with her. Four years would pass before a newspaper article in an auburn chest would tell me a gospel no one else could.

The comfort of not knowing what so many people did, evaporated like holy water on hell’s door step. I closed my eyes and wept.