

*Journal*  
*of*  
**Near-Death Studies**

**Editor's Foreword** • *Bruce Greyson, M.D.*

**Guest Editorial: Is Ten Years a Life Review?** • *Nancy Evans Bush, M.A.*

**Amazing Grace: The Near-Death Experience as a Compensatory Gift** •  
*Kenneth Ring, Ph.D.*

**Do "Near-Death Experiences" Occur Only Near-Death?—Revisited** •  
*Glen O. Gabbard, M.D. and Stuart W. Twemlow, M.D.*

**The Myth of the Near-Death Journey** • *Michael Grosso, Ph.D.*

**The Popular Appeal of the Near-Death Experience** • *Robert Basil, M.A.*

**Letter to the Editor: Premonitions of What Could Have Been** • *Kenneth Ring, Ph.D.*

**Announcement**

**SPECIAL TENTH ANNIVERSARY ISSUE**

**Volume 10, Number 1, Fall 1991**



### **Editor**

Bruce Greyson, M.D., *University of Connecticut, Farmington, CT*

### **Associate Editor**

Steve Straight, *University of Connecticut, Storrs, CT*

### **Consulting Editors**

James E. Alcock, Ph.D., C. Psych., *York University, Toronto, Ont.*

Boyce Batey, *Academy of Religion and Psychical Research, Bloomfield, CT*

Carl Becker, Ph.D., *Tsukuba University, Tsukuba City, Japan*

Kevin Drab, *Cherry Hill, NJ*

Glen O. Gabbard, M.D., *The Menninger Foundation, Topeka, KS*

Stanislav Grof, M.D., *Mill Valley, CA*

Michael Grosso, Ph.D., *Jersey City State College, Jersey City, NJ*

Barbara Harris, R.T.T., *Baltimore, MD*

Pascal Kaplan, Ph.D., *Searchlight Publications, Walnut Creek, CA*

Raymond A. Moody, Jr., Ph.D., M.D., *Villa Rica, GA*

Russell Noyes, Jr., M.D., *University of Iowa, Iowa City, IA*

Karlis Osis, Ph.D., *American Society for Psychical Research, New York, NY*

The Venerable Michael Perry, *Archdeacon of Durham, England*

Kenneth Ring, Ph.D., *University of Connecticut, Storrs, CT*

William Roll, M.Litt., *West Georgia College, Carrollton, GA*

Steven Rosen, Ph.D., *City University of New York, Staten Island, NY*

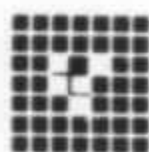
W. Stephen Sabom, S.T.D., *Houston, TX*

Stuart W. Twemlow, M.D., *Topeka, KS*

Renee Weber, Ph.D., *Rutgers College, New Brunswick, NJ*

John White, M.A.T., *Cheshire, CT*

Mark Woodhouse, Ph.D., *Georgia State University, Atlanta, GA*



**HUMAN SCIENCES PRESS, INC.**

233 Spring Street, New York, New York 10013-1578

*Journal*  
*of* **Near-Death Studies**

---

Volume 10, Number 1, Fall 1991

**SPECIAL TENTH ANNIVERSARY ISSUE**

---

<b>Editor's Foreword</b>	3
<i>Bruce Greyson, M.D.</i>	
<b>GUEST EDITORIAL</b>	5
<b>Is Ten Years a Life Review?</b>	
<i>Nancy Evans Bush, M.A.</i>	
<b>ARTICLES</b>	
<b>Amazing Grace: The Near-Death Experience as a Compensatory Gift</b>	11
<i>Kenneth Ring, Ph.D.</i>	
<b>Do "Near-Death Experiences" Occur Only Near-Death? - Revisited</b>	41
<i>Glen O. Gabbard, M.D. and Stuart W. Twemlow, M.D.</i>	
<b>The Myth of the Near-Death Journey</b>	49
<i>Michael Grosso, Ph.D.</i>	
<b>The Popular Appeal of the Near-Death Experience</b>	61
<i>Robert Basil, M.A.</i>	
<b>LETTER TO THE EDITOR</b>	
<b>Premonitions of What Could Have Been</b>	69
<i>Kenneth Ring, Ph.D.</i>	
<b>Announcement</b>	73

**JOURNAL OF NEAR-DEATH STUDIES** (formerly ANABIOSIS) is sponsored by the International Association for Near-Death Studies (IANDS). The Journal publishes articles on near-death experiences and on the empirical effects and theoretical implications of such events, and on such related phenomena as out-of-body experiences, deathbed visions, the experiences of dying persons, comparable experiences occurring under other circumstances, and the implications of such phenomena for our understanding of human consciousness and its relation to the life and death processes. The Journal is committed to an unbiased exploration of these issues, and specifically welcomes a variety of theoretical perspectives and interpretations that are grounded in empirical observation or research.

The **INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR NEAR-DEATH STUDIES (IANDS)** is a world-wide organization of scientists, scholars, near-death experiencers, and the general public, dedicated to the exploration of near-death experiences (NDEs) and their implications. Incorporated as a nonprofit educational and research organization in 1981, IANDS' objectives are to encourage and support research into NDEs and related phenomena; to disseminate knowledge concerning NDEs and their implications; to further the utilization of near-death research by health care and counseling professionals; to form local chapters of near-death experiencers and interested others; to sponsor symposia and conferences on NDEs and related phenomena; and to maintain a library and archives of near-death-related material. Friends of IANDS chapters are affiliated support groups in many cities for NDErs and their families and for health care and counseling professionals to network locally. Information about membership in IANDS can be obtained by writing to IANDS, Department of Psychiatry, University of Connecticut Health Center, Farmington, CT 06032.

**MANUSCRIPTS** should be submitted in triplicate to Bruce Greyson, M.D., Department of Psychiatry, University of Connecticut Health Center, Farmington, CT 06032. See inside back cover for style requirements.

**SUBSCRIPTION** inquiries and subscription orders should be addressed to the publisher at Subscription Department, Human Sciences Press, Inc., 233 Spring Street, New York, N.Y. 10013-1578 or faxed to the Subscription Department at its number (212) 807-1047. Subscription rates:

Volume 10, 1991-1992 (4 issues) \$110.00 (outside the U.S., \$130.00). Price for individual subscribers certifying that the journal is for their personal use, \$36.00 (outside the U.S., \$45.00).

**ADVERTISING** inquiries should be addressed to the Advertising Sales Representative, Daniel S. Lipner, Weston Media Associates, P.O. Box 1110, Greens Farms, Connecticut 06436—telephone (203) 261-2500 and fax (203) 261-0101.

**INDEXED IN** Psychological Abstracts, Parapsychology Abstracts International, Social Work Research and Abstracts, Sage Family Abstracts, Health Instrument File, and International Bibliography of Periodical Literature.

**PHOTOCOPYING:** Authorization to photocopy items for internal or personal use of specific clients is granted by Human Sciences Press for users registered with the Copyright Clearance Center (CCC) Transactional Reporting Service, provided that the flat fee of \$6.50 per copy per article (no additional per-page fees) is paid directly to CCC, 27 Congress Street, Salem, MA 01970. For those organizations that have been granted a photocopy license from CCC, a separate system of payment has been arranged. The fee code for users of the Transactional Reporting Service is 0891-4494/91/\$6.50.

**COPYRIGHT** 1991 by Human Sciences Press, Inc. Published quarterly in the Fall, Winter, Spring, and Summer. *Journal of Near-Death Studies* is a trademark of Human Sciences Press, Inc. The business address for the Journal is: *Journal of Near-Death Studies*, 233 Spring Street, New York, N.Y. 10013-1578. Postmaster: Send address changes to *Journal of Near-Death Studies*, Human Sciences Press, Inc., 233 Spring Street, New York, N.Y. 10013-1578.

## Editor's Foreword

This issue of *The Journal of Near-Death Studies* is a milestone for us, as it was exactly ten years ago that Volume 1, Number 1, was published as the July 1981 issue of *Anabiosis: The Journal of Near-Death Studies*. In the foreword to that first issue, Editor Kenneth Ring wrote: "It is our intention that the Journal become a forum for scholarly discussion and debate concerning a wide range of issues related to near-death experiences (NDEs) and allied phenomena. Not only will we be publishing the latest research and scholarly work in the field of near-death studies, we will also be concerned with an examination of NDEs for the light they shed on matters related to history, mythology, religion, human evolution, and the nature of consciousness." The Journal has remained true to that intention, and has published at times controversial contributions in the interest of expanding understanding of these complex but vital phenomena and of stimulating debate, analysis, and further research.

Over the years the Journal has evolved to include not only research reports, theoretical conceptualizations, historical and cultural perspectives, enlightening case studies, and analyses of both individual and societal implications of near-death phenomena, but in addition, book reviews, letters to the editor, and occasionally entire issues dedicated to heated debates on controversial aspects of near-death studies ranging from therapeutic models for counseling NDErs to neurobiological models to explain NDEs to electromagnetic models of the afterlife. Our contributors have included physicians, nurses, psychologists, neuroscientists, psychopharmacologists, parapsychologists, philosophers, theologians, pastoral counselors, chaplains, social workers, health scientists and educators, teachers, sociologists, anthropologists, physicists, biochemists, electrical and environmental engineers, statisticians, and near-death experiencers from six continents.

We chose to use this occasion of the Journal's 10th anniversary to review the past decade's accomplishments and dilemmas in near-death research, and to anticipate the future prospects for the field. We start the issue with a Guest Editorial by pastoral counselor Nancy Evans

Bush, in which she provides a unique perspective on advances in near-death studies and in the International Association for Near-Death Studies (IANDS) over the past ten years. Hired as IANDS' first Executive Director a decade ago, she has in recent years served on the Board of Directors and is now Vice-President of the organization. Her retrospective documents how our questions and answers have changed as the field and the organization have matured.

This issue's lead article is psychologist and consciousness researcher Kenneth Ring's analysis of what he regards as the ultimate spiritual meaning of near-death experiences. Ring presents this "big secret" of the NDE as the conclusion of his distinguished career as near-death studies' most prominent and prolific researcher and educator. We are fortunate to be able to include in this 10th anniversary issue what Ring threatens is his last word on the NDE.

Our next article is psychiatrists Glen Gabbard and Stuart Twemlow's re-examination of the link between the NDE and the near-death state. Revisiting their seminal study of that issue, first published 10 years ago, they here review the data accumulated over the intervening decade bearing on this question.

Next philosopher Michael Grosso, whose article on explanations of the NDE led off the first issue of the Journal 10 years ago, provides some personal perspectives on the significance of the phenomenon and its study. Over the past decade Grosso has pioneered the view of NDEs in the context of global spiritual development; here he develops further some ideas in what he called elsewhere "the new literature of hope."

In our final article, editor Robert Basil assesses the role of NDEs in American popular culture over the past several years, and speculates on the future sociological impact of more scientifically oriented near-death research. And in a final letter to the editor, Ring notes that NDEs containing premonitions of what could have happened had the NDEr not revived are not new, as suggested in an article in this Spring's issue of the Journal by health scientists Barbara Walker, William Serdahely, and Lori Bechtel, but in fact were described in early studies of NDEs going back a hundred years.

Bruce Greyson, M.D.

*Guest Editorial*

## **Is Ten Years a Life Review?**

Nancy Evans Bush, M.A.

*International Association for Near-Death Studies  
(IANDS)*

**ABSTRACT:** Looking back on ten years of involvement with near-death studies and with the International Association for Near-Death Studies, I review some of the major questions and accomplishments of that decade both in our understanding of the near-death experience and in our service as an organization.

It was only a one-inch ad in the Sunday classifieds of the *Hartford Courant*, advertising for a job description I didn't particularly want—"office manager"—in a field I'd never heard of—something called "near-death studies." But a commute to the University of Connecticut would be short, the idea of learning something new was intriguing, and in that mid-winter of 1981, I did need to find a job. Besides, the position promised to be temporary.

So much for temporary. When Bruce Greyson asked me to write a brief retrospective for the *Journal's* tenth anniversary, it was with the observation that as the two players from those early days who are still somehow involved with IANDS administration, he and I have taken on relic status. He worded it more tactfully than this, of course, but the

---

Nancy Evans Bush, M.A., is a free-lance writer, editor, and consultant on doctoral dissertations, and has a private practice in pastoral counseling. Ten years ago she was IANDS' first Executive Director; she now serves on its Board of Directors as President. Reprint requests should be addressed to Ms. Bush at P.O. Box 9486, Bolton, CT 06043.

shock remained: one old codger talking to another. What, Bruce asked, could I say about my observations over these years?

What was it like in the olden times, when every phone call was apt to begin, "I hope you won't think I'm crazy, but . . ." and television interviews were still a novelty? What was it like, crossing the limitless plains of academic disbelief and media landrush toward what seemed a golden promise for humanity? Bumpy, that's what it was like (and still is, sometimes). What was it like, when we were laid-back and full of talk, when everyone had questions? Questions ran on endless as high desert, their answers muddy as swamps. Having floundered through, we have begun to see progress, sometimes even settlement near old sloughs.

### The Frontier

One question, addressed in early *Journal* articles but still unclear in popular thinking, is represented by the unhappy plight of the physician whose patient announced weeks after a successful and apparently uneventful procedure that a malpractice suit was pending. The reason? "The doctor said everything went great; but I know better, because I had this near-death experience. He never told me I was dead. There's a cover-up. I must be really sick, and he's trying to hide that something went wrong." This is a true story, and not the only one of its kind.

If the experiencer was not near death, was it a near-death experience? We don't have the words quite right yet. "Near-death experience" ("NDE") worked just fine for that first group of Raymond Moody's accounts, and it remains a precise term in appropriate circumstances. Being close to death does constitute, as Ken Ring puts it, "a reliable trigger" for the experience. The lingering semantic difficulty—actually, it's the great semantic impossibility—is that the great majority of experiencers were not clinically dead at the time of the event. A rough survey of the IANDS archives some six years ago indicated that perhaps 10 percent of the writers reported having been declared clinically dead, with the remainder stating vaguely that "something happened" during a routine medical procedure, childbirth, drug incident, accident, illness, or great personal stress, but with no cessation of vital signs and little or no indication of genuine threat to life. So, then, are these "near-death" experiences? Semantically, they can't be; on the other hand, we have no other term for them.

In fact, it now seems that The Experience is the experience, by whatever title. What varies is the manner of its precipitation; obviously, there is no single trigger. Childbirth experiences, trauma expe-

periences, drug experiences, clinical death experiences, meditational experiences, and others share identically the pattern, the intensity, the insight, the aftereffects—all that we call the “near-death experience.” Would a different name be desirable? Probably. Are we apt to find one? Probably not, if only because “near-death experience” is so widely recognized and so firmly established in public consciousness. Some dilemmas continue.

A few questions have been resolved. There was, for example, the hotly-debated matter of whether it would be safe to assemble a large group of near-death experiencers in the same room. Given the high psychic energy of experiencers, especially when talking about their NDEs, what might happen? Speculations escalated. Perhaps we should have back-up generators in case the lights blew, or spiritual emergency trauma teams for emotional storms. Perhaps the entire room would vibrate. (Daydream: Perhaps the vibrations would increase, whining like high-tension wires, moving to a spin until at last the entire group, wrenched from the building by the sheer intensity of their energies, would rise disappearing into the sky like a wheel of light.) Well, there was time for such fancies when we were first on the road. IANDS has now had ten conferences but no generators, no ambulances, no melt-down. High energy, yes, but the lights stay on.

We know now that children do indeed have experiences every bit as powerful as those of adults, and that they may remember an NDE from infancy all their lives. The imagery produced in a childhood experience may be astounding, both in its detail and its archetypal features. Some youngsters seem to have a difficult time afterwards emotionally and psychologically; this unwelcome revelation mirrors the recognition that adult experiencers, too, may find an NDE costly.

Among the discoveries of the past ten years is that answers aren't necessarily as simple as they seem. Oh, the really *big* questions have simple answers; it's just getting from here to there that's complicated. Aftereffects, for example: Isn't it *wonderful* to have been in the Light? Isn't it *desirable* to understand compassion, be unafraid of death, hold non-materialistic values, perhaps to discover enhanced intuitive abilities? After a decade, we can say, “Maybe.” We now know there's a price.

The price paid by a great many experiencers is high. It may include long-term depression, broken relationships, disrupted career, feelings of severe alienation, an inability to function in the world, long years of struggling with the keen sense of altered reality. Divorce appears to be a frequent aftereffect; although reliable statistics are lacking, I have heard figures as high as 75 percent. Although the most disabling aftereffects seem to affect a minority of experiencers, for them the

impact is severe, and effective interventions remain hard to find. The questions do not end.

Some of us are now struggling to find language with which to discuss frightening near-death experiences. Are they truly rare, or is the scarcity of reports a product of experiencers' reluctance to acknowledge having had such an experience? Deep in our cultural assumptions is the equation that pleasure=heaven=reward=*psychologically healthy/positive (good) person* and its corollary, pain=hell=punishment=*psychologically unhealthy/negative (bad) person*. Despite the lack of evidence to support the value relationship so casually drawn, this curious judgmentalism seems bred into us like milk production into Holsteins. How many people struggling with a terrifying NDE are apt to bring their vulnerability into this public arena? And what will we say to them, anyway? The issue may be the Rockies of the voyage. Without the attempt, through, the field of near-death studies will describe only a piece of its whole.

Still on the scene where Gulliver found them are the Laputans (a group of philosophers so ethereal in their interests that they tended to float away if not restrained) and the Lagodans (scientists so materially bound they could barely look up, who couldn't float if they tried). Well, some of the latter remain locked in knee-jerk responses, foaming on cue at the suggestion that scientific materialism lacks some answers and is ill-equipped to deal with questions of meaning and value. "The NDE? It's only . . . only a physiological response . . . only psychological . . . only hallucination . . .," and anything but the reductionist view is "bunk, hokum, and poppycock!" At another extreme, their opposition, whom I shall term neo-Gnostics, apparently regretting the existence of physical form and process, speaks only of "higher" things—higher consciousness, higher self, higher metaphysics. Somewhere in between, the work of the world goes on, and we begin to recognize that a deeply moving experience, pregnant with spiritual meaning, may be seeded by a physiological mechanism. Everything is interconnected; wonders abounding.

### At the Homestead

As for IANDS itself, the road has been no less bumpy. It may have been more rut-filled than that of the research, because whereas the work of theoretical inquiry tends to be solitary, the work of organizations involves lots of personalities and many types of constraint.

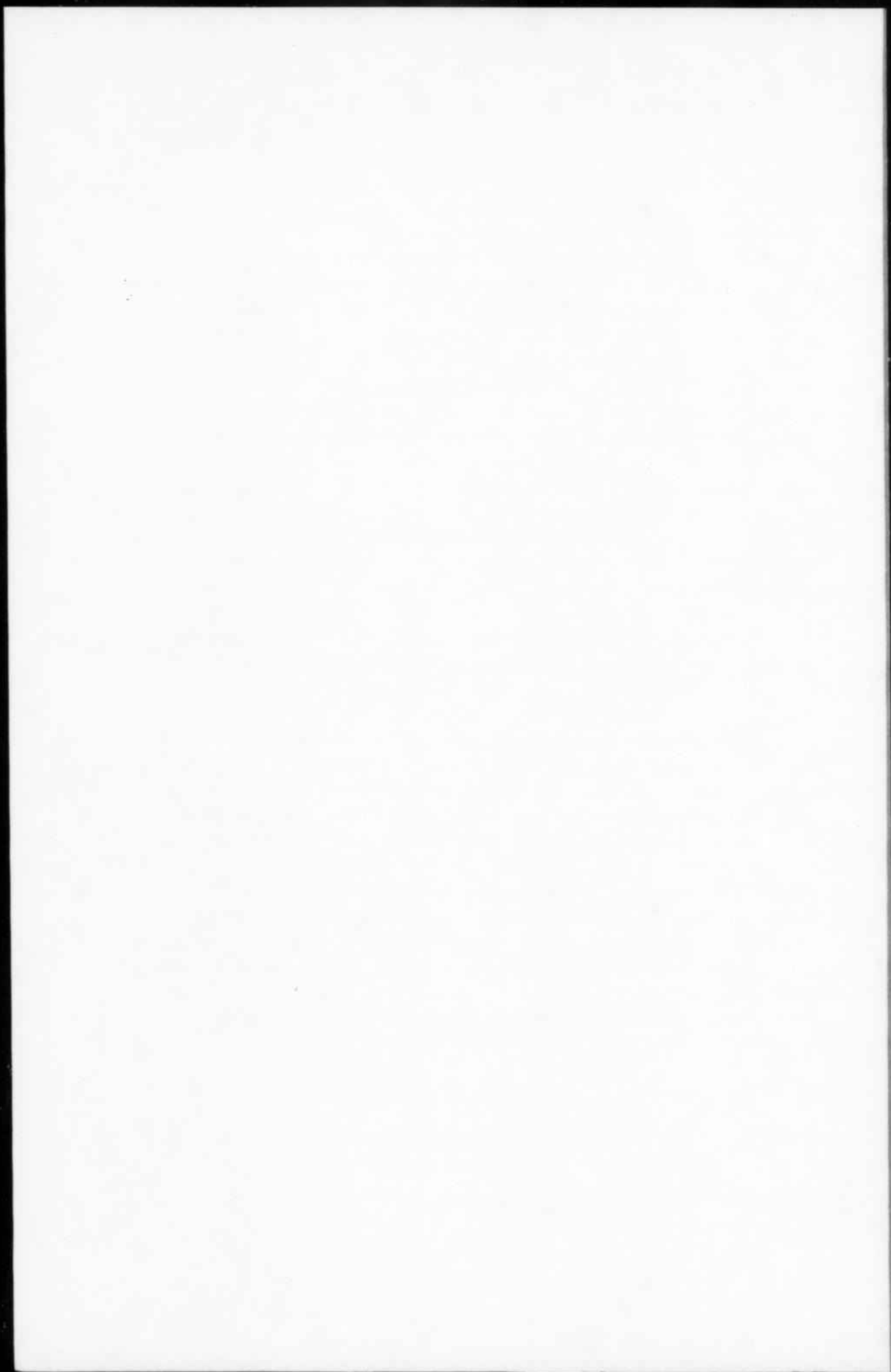
That ad in the *Courant* took me to a little windowless box, which was

IANDS' home at the University, inhabited like a Hobbit hole by student volunteers. It was a one-file-cabinet operation, but what a time of excitement, with everything promising and new and Ken Ring bouncing in every day to see how things were going. Bruce Greyson was still at the University of Michigan; Steve Straight (another of the veterans, behind the scenes) was already managing editor of the journal while working on his Master's degree; Michael Sabom's *Recollections of Death* was still a year away. Within two years, the office boasted four file cabinets and had work-load problems that are still troublesome.

For everyone involved with its inner workings, IANDS has constituted a perpetual enigma. I'm convinced it's a spiritual exercise. There's a Zen saying, "Before Enlightenment: chop wood and carry water. After Enlightenment: chop wood and carry water." It's easy enough to nod wisely at that; the real trick is to live it.

Somehow, the expectation has persisted that IANDS is supposed to be different. After all, don't we know about the Light? Aren't IANDS people filled with unconditional love and Knowing? Sure, but everyone is still on the trail, no one yet past personal issues and Shadow. The human condition still operates, and the challenge remains discovering how to translate the belief in unconditional love into professionalism; learning that Knowing doesn't mean one has all the answers; and finding the system by which at the organizational level—subject content notwithstanding—IANDS can operate as a business. This is a test: chop wood; carry water.

Meanwhile, I rejoice in the miracle of IANDS' persistent demonstration that beyond near-death there is life abundant. I rejoice in all the *Journal* contributors who have worked to frame the questions and to hazard answers, and in the readers who have responded. But mostly, just now, I rejoice in and honor the years of quiet, behind-the-scenes labor of editors Bruce Greyson and Steve Straight, whose patience has been tested more times and in more ways than are rationally imaginable; whose perseverance rivals that of Sisyphus; and whose dedicated skill has kept the wood chopped, the water carried, and their wagon rolling, making possible this tenth anniversary issue of the *Journal of Near-Death Studies*.



# Amazing Grace: The Near-Death Experience as a Compensatory Gift

Kenneth Ring, Ph.D.  
*University of Connecticut*

**ABSTRACT:** This paper illustrates the apparently providential timing and the healing character of near-death experiences (NDEs) and NDE-like episodes, through four case histories of persons whose lives, prior to their experiences, were marked by deep anguish and a sense of hopelessness. Spiritually, such case histories suggest the intervention of a guiding intelligence that confers a form of "amazing grace" on the recipient. Methodologically, these reports point to the importance of taking into account the person's life history as a context for understanding the full significance of NDEs and similar awakening experiences. The article ends with a retrospective account of a childhood NDE in which "the big secret" of these experiences is disclosed.

"We who are about to die demand a miracle."

W. H. Auden (cited in Grosso, 1985)

During the past fourteen years of my research on near-death experiences (NDEs), I have often been struck by the seemingly providential character and timing of these experiences. An individual whose life is spinning out of control and heading on a clearly self-destructive course has an accident and experiences the healing balm of absolute love and unconditional acceptance in the light, and returns to life knowing he has been set right again. A man, after several previous suicidal gestures, takes a massive overdose of barbiturates that would ordinarily guarantee his demise, but for some unknown reason an NDE super-

---

Kenneth Ring, Ph.D., is Professor of Psychology at the University of Connecticut. Reprint requests should be addressed to Dr. Ring at the Department of Psychology, University of Connecticut, Storrs, CT 06269-1020.

venes, during which he comes to see his life with the healing clarity of deep compassion and self-understanding. He hears a telepathic communication—he knows not from whom—telling him that he will recover and will never again attempt suicide, and so it is. A woman, the victim of childhood incest of which she has no conscious memory, falls seriously ill with an undiagnosed illness and while close to death has a fullblown NDE during which she *remembers*. The unlocking of her poisoned memories unleashes powerful healing energies and enables her to confront for the first time and eventually to overcome the psychological obstacles that had hitherto crippled her life.

When such cases as these—and they are typical of many NDEs I have encountered—are considered one after another, it is hard to resist the inference that the NDE, at bottom, is itself *a healing force*. It is almost as though some guiding and benevolent intelligence, seeing that a person's life is about to be shattered, intervenes at the critical moment and makes it whole again (healing of course means "to make whole") by providing a soul-saving revelation through the NDE.

### Amazing Grace

Recently, I came across this same dynamic operating in a different developmental context. In some research by Christopher Rosing and myself (Ring and Rosing, 1990), we discovered that NDEs are disproportionately likely to come from the ranks of children who had been abused or had experienced other forms of trauma or stress in childhood. Musing on the possible psychosocial roots of the NDE, it occurred to me that in some strange, and strangely comforting, way the NDE may sometimes be almost like a *compensatory gift* vouchsafed to those who have had to endure the terrible wounds of such childhoods. In these cases, the NDE—as the data from our study suggested—appears to confer both a heightened sense of compassion and an extended range of intuitive perception that together help the individual gain a compensatory edge in coping with and understanding life's difficulties. Furthermore, it seems probable that the spiritual qualities so evident in and so evidently valued by so many NDEs—and which again our research, and that of others, has consistently disclosed—would not have emerged without the stimulus of the NDE itself.

Finally, I must mention another recent source of these reflections on the remarkable healing potential of NDEs. In the last year or so, I have received a number of written accounts of such experiences that I count as among the most extraordinary and deeply moving of any I have

amassed over the past fourteen years. Why I should be the recipient of such a treasury of inspirational documents of this sort in such a relatively short time is a bit of a conundrum, but not one that I intend to try to solve here. Instead, I would simply like to share them with you here in order to illustrate my thesis with these stories of exceptional worth and emotional compellingness, for these testimonies have a great deal to teach us about what I regard as the almost providential character and timing of these experiences.

Thus, the chief purpose of this article is to present in full some of the richest instances of NDEs and kindred experiences that I have encountered in nearly a decade and a half of near-death research. In addition to their implications for a kind of benign, higher-order intervention, a couple of them represent instances of something exceedingly rare in the near-death literature: essentially *complete* NDEs in which the full compass and meaning of the near-death journey are unmistakably revealed. Because most published NDEs are really nothing more than isolated fragments of a person's experience, we tend to overlook the fact that NDEs occur within the context of a person's entire life and that their full meaning can only be understood in that context. For that reason, with one exception I will reproduce the accounts in full so that what you will be reading is effectively the writer's own story within which the NDE can be seen in its appropriate life context. Not all of these experiences may be, strictly speaking, NDEs, but they all share the same essential qualities that will be evident to anyone familiar with the literature on this subject. Needless to say, I am greatly indebted to the writers of these documents for their permission to reproduce them here and for their permission to use their real names.

### Beverly Brodsky

In August, 1990, I attended the International Association for Near-Death Studies (IANDS) International Conference in Washington, DC. The turnout was large and I was delighted to see many old friends there, professional colleagues and NDErs alike. One morning, having arranged to have breakfast with about a half dozen persons whom I didn't previously know, I sat down and began to listen to an ongoing conversation between two early arrivals. I was particularly struck by the woman of the pair. Small, slender, and dark-skinned, she spoke intently and with a tone of great seriousness about her own experience. Frankly, I was more aware of her manner of speaking than of the

content of her conversation, but since the other members of our party arrived shortly thereafter, it was impossible for me to hear much about her experience, as our breakfast table discussion soon ventured into other realms of especial interest to me. Nevertheless, I made a point of tracking down this woman, Beverly Brodsky, later that day and endeavored to find out a little more about her life, since she had captured my interest so forcibly. We had time only for a short chat before I needed to leave for another engagement, but even without having heard any more of the story of her NDE, I knew that I wanted to learn more about it. Before I left, I asked her whether she would be willing to write out a version of it for my files.

A few days later, she sent the following document to my office:

I was raised in a nonobservant Conservative Jewish family in an overwhelmingly Jewish neighborhood in Philadelphia. The atmosphere was materialistic and, for me, claustrophobic. In high school girls were judged by their clothes and beauty. Bookish, shy, and serious, I went through my teens as an atheist. Since learning, in very muted terms, of the Holocaust at age 8 I had turned angrily against any early belief in God. How could God exist and permit such a thing to occur? The secularism of my public school education and the lack of any religious training added fuel to my beliefs.

I went through a period of depression growing up that was not treated, due to my parents' unfortunate adherence to the belief that psychological treatment was disgraceful, and that personal problems or family secrets should never be aired outside the home. I had reached a desperate phase upon graduating from high school. Too upset to go to college despite my brilliant academic performance, I had trouble facing the future. To make things worse, shortly after graduation, at age 17, my father died suddenly from a heart attack. He had been my rock, my strength, in this world.

My mother went through an emotional crisis of her own after this loss, simultaneously entering menopause. No longer able to bear this unhappy environment, I left home at age 19, living first in Philadelphia's center city, and later moving out to California, where people then wore flowers in their hair and spoke of peace and love for all mankind. I had learned to meditate and for the first time had some hope that I could start over. To me the journey out West was like Hesse's "Journey to the East"—a quest for a new world.

In July, 1970, I suffered a fractured skull and numerous broken bones in my head due to a motorcycle accident that occurred in Los Angeles, California. I had just arrived in California the day before. The motorcycle ride, my first, was part of the celebration of arrival; we were returning from seeing the play, "Hair." I was a passenger on a small highway where helmets were not required, and was struck by a drunken driver. I was thrown to the ground headfirst. When the police arrived, they initially took one look at me and started to book the driver of the car on manslaughter charges since my head was so badly mangled.

I spent two weeks in the hospital, where my fracture was sutured and I was given morphine for the pain. Then I was sent home and told to take aspirin. Since my pain threshold has always been very low, and my self-image was shattered by the contusions which had torn off half the skin from my face, I went home to my temporary apartment with the firm intent that the first night home would be my last. I lay down on the bed and, becoming an agnostic in this moment of trial, as many atheists do, prayed fervently for God to take me; I could not live another day. At 20 I had no goals but to enjoy life and find someone to share it with. The pain was unbearable; no man would ever love me; there was, for me, no reason to continue living.

Somehow an unexpected peace descended upon me. I found myself floating on the ceiling over the bed looking down at my unconscious body. I barely had time to realize the glorious strangeness of the situation—that I was me but not in my body—when I was joined by a radiant being bathed in a shimmering white glow. Like myself, this being flew but had no wings. I felt a reverent awe when I turned to him; this was no ordinary angel or spirit, but he had been sent to deliver me. Such love and gentleness emanated from his being that I felt that I was in the presence of the messiah.

Whoever he was, his presence deepened my serenity and awakened a feeling of joy as I recognized my companion. Gently he took my hand and we flew right through the window. I felt no surprise at my ability to do this. In this wondrous presence, everything was as it should be.

Beneath us lay the beautiful Pacific Ocean, over which I had excitedly watched the sun set when I had first arrived. But my attention was now directed upward, where there was a large opening leading to a circular path. Although it seemed to be deep and far to the end, a white light shone through and poured out into the gloom to the other side where the opening beckoned. It was the most brilliant light I had ever seen, although I didn't realize how much of its glory was veiled from the outside. The path was angled upward, obliquely, to the right. Now, still hand in hand with the angel, I was led into the opening of the small, dark passageway.

I then remember traveling a long distance upward toward the light. I believe that I was moving very fast, but this entire realm seemed to be outside of time. Finally, I reached my destination. It was only when I emerged from the other end that I realized that I was no longer accompanied by the being who had brought me there. But I wasn't alone. There, before me, was the living presence of the Light. Within it I sensed an all-pervading intelligence, wisdom, compassion, love, and truth. There was neither form nor sex to this perfect Being. It, which I shall in the future call He, in keeping with our commonly accepted syntax, contained everything, as white light contains all the colors of a rainbow when penetrating a prism. And deep within me came an instant and wondrous recognition: I, **even I**, was facing God.

I immediately lashed out at Him with all the questions I had ever wondered about; all the injustices I had seen in the physical world. I don't know if I did this deliberately, but I discovered that God knows all your thoughts immediately and responds telepathically. My mind was naked;

in fact, I became pure mind. The ethereal body which I had traveled in through the tunnel seemed to be no more; it was just my personal intelligence confronting that Universal Mind, which clothed itself in a glorious, living light that was more felt than seen since no eye could absorb its splendor.

I don't recall the exact content of our discussion; in the process of return the insights that came so clearly and fully in Heaven were not brought back with me to Earth. I'm sure that I asked the question that had been plaguing me since childhood about the sufferings of my people. I do remember this: there was a reason for **everything** that happened, no matter how awful it appeared in the physical realm. And within myself, as I was given the answer, my own awakening mind now responded in the same manner: "Of course," I would think, "I already know that. How could I ever have forgotten!" Indeed it appears that all that happens is for a purpose, and that purpose is already known to our eternal self.

In time the questions ceased, because I suddenly was filled with all the Being's wisdom. I was given more than just the answers to my questions; all knowledge unfolded to me, like the instant blossoming of an infinite number of flowers all at once. I was filled with God's knowledge, and in that precious aspect of his Beingness, I was one with him. But my journey of discovery was just beginning.

Now I was treated to an extraordinary voyage through the universe. Instantly we traveled to the center of stars being born, supernovas exploding, and many other glorious celestial events for which I have no name. The impression I have now of this trip is that it felt like the universe is all one grand object woven from the same fabric. Space and time are illusions that hold us to our plane; out there all is present simultaneously. I was a passenger on a Divine spaceship in which the Creator showed me the fullness and beauty of all of his Creation.

The last thing that I saw before all external vision ended was a glorious fire—the core and center of a marvelous star. Perhaps this was a symbol for the blessing that was now to come to me. Everything faded except for a richly full void in which That and I encompassed All that is. Here I experienced, in ineffable magnificence, communion with the Light Being. Now I was filled with not just all knowledge, but also with all love. It was as if the Light were poured in and through me. I was God's object of adoration; and from His/our love I drew life and joy beyond imagining. My being was transformed; my delusions, sins, and guilt were forgiven and purged without asking; and now I was Love, primal Being, and bliss. And, in some sense, I remain there, for Eternity. Such a union cannot be broken. It always was, is, and shall be.

Suddenly, not knowing how or why, I returned to my broken body. But miraculously, I brought back the love and the joy. I was filled with an ecstasy beyond my wildest dreams. Here, in my body, the pain had all been removed. I was still enthralled by a boundless delight. For the next two months I remained in this state, oblivious to any pain. I wonder now if this were not the purpose behind the experience—to enable me to get through this period of recovery.

I felt now as if I had been made anew. I saw wondrous meanings everywhere; everything was alive and full of energy and intelligence. My

sister, who visited me shortly after the accident, tells me that I once took her down to the ocean's edge, pointed up to the sky, and tried to show her the path that was inscribed there. She thought that I was either mad or on drugs!

I don't remember too much of this period, except that I did some things that were, for me, incredible. In the past I had been painfully shy and had felt myself unworthy of being loved. I went out, my head swathed in bandages like a creature from a horror film, landed a job in one week, made many friends, and got involved in my first serious romantic relationship. After the earthquake in 1971, I moved back East, went home to my mother, with whom I became reconciled, and started college at 23, another thing I never thought I could handle, and graduated Phi Beta Kappa. Since then I have married, become a mother, pursued a career, and have sipped deeply from the cup of life's blessings that I had never believed would come my way in those dark years before I found the Light. In that encounter with death, I was given joy and purpose to continue on with life.

Although it's been twenty years since my heavenly voyage, I have never forgotten it. Nor have I, in the face of ridicule and disbelief, ever doubted its reality. Nothing that intense and life-changing could possibly have been a dream or hallucination. To the contrary, I consider the rest of my life to be a passing fantasy, a brief dream, that will end when I again awaken in the permanent presence of that giver of life and bliss.

For those who grieve or fear, I assure you of this: there is no death, nor does love ever end. And remember also that we are aspects of the one perfect whole, and as such are part of God, and of each other. Someday you who are reading this and I will be together in light, love, and unending bliss.

### Lorna Stephens

At the same conference where I had met Beverly, I was asked to be the emcee for the Saturday night banquet which featured a talk by Raymond Moody on his latest interest, the ancient art of scrying or crystal-ball gazing. At the end of the banquet, a number of persons from the audience gathered around the head table, hoping to speak to some of the various presenters, and we all did our best to oblige them. However, time constraints and other post-banquet plans prevented us from talking to everyone, and, again, there was one woman who had been very persistent in wanting to talk with me whom I especially took note of and to whom I gave my sincere regrets for having no more time that evening. "Maybe tomorrow," I mumbled apologetically, knowing in my heart that tomorrow's schedule for me was even more crammed than Saturday's had been.

Three days after Beverly's letter had been sent, Lorna wrote hers—

this time unsolicited—to me. Reading it, it was obvious that she, too, had been a recipient of amazing grace. It began:

Dear Dr. Ring,

My name is Lorna Stephens. I don't know if you'll remember me, but I was the "pest" at the IANDS conference last week. I wanted very much to speak with you, but there were so many, many people that needed to speak with you and I was heartfelt for them. I was kind of hoping that maybe someday you would be in Detroit and get in touch with me, but I can't wait for that, I guess. I need to tell you my NDE, but I also feel you need to hear it. I think it pertains to your research concerning NDEs and child abuse victims. I have been an experiencer in both. I need to begin at the very start so this may run kind of long, but I think it is important for you to know all details.

When I was a little girl—the youngest in my family—my earliest memory is my father waking up my older brother at night and beating him. I was about three and I can still hear Stephen (my brother) screaming for help. When I was little, Stephen always watched me. He was more like my father than my brother. My father should never have had children. He can't take noise.

Stephen took the blame many, many times for things I had done. One time when I was little, Stephen and I were in a store in a city where we were visiting relatives. It had this gold film on the windows. I couldn't have been more than four years old at the time, but as the sunlight shone through those windows I felt like I knew this warm and beautiful light—it was a feeling of deep love.

When I was six years old, Stephen started to abuse me sexually. It was to be a secret. And I never told anyone until years later. I, of course, couldn't understand why at times he loved me so much—and at the same time he would hurt me so bad. The sexual abuse continued until I was sixteen and finally strong enough to push him away from me. All during those years, though, I witnessed Stephen, my mother, and other members of my family being both physically and mentally abused. My father was a tyrant and seemed to want to abuse everyone but me. I had terrible feelings of guilt. And I grew up in what seems now as total fear and confusion.

When I was about six or so, I began to have the experience of *déjà vu*. But it was not so much that I felt I was here before. I knew that what I was doing, I had seen myself doing it before in my mind. I learned—well, I actually taught myself how to do this. I would just stare at an object and become deep in thought, just like Dr. Moody spoke of crystals and seeing, [and] would have flashes of future events. But they never really had any significance, but they did seem to happen at turning points in my life. Soon I learned that Stephen and I had a connection. It seemed we could tell what the other was thinking. I know this will sound very strange, but even though he was my abuser, as a young person I was very, very close to him. I just bottled the abuse part up inside of me and kept it there.

One day when I was about seven or eight years old, I was sitting in class and staring at a desk. I had flashes of a man in a studio with

microphones and lots of buttons. All of a sudden, Stephen was yelling, "Lorna, Lorna, wake up." He had come to pick me up from my school class and walk me home.

As the years went by, Stephen and I became closer and closer. I loved him, I just hated the abuse. When we were teenagers we would go out together when neither of us had a date. We always had a lot of fun. He would always seem to forget birthdays and Christmas, so he would give you presents in between those times. He would take me shopping, just to look, and if I saw something that I liked, he would buy it for me. He really loved me. I don't think he ever wanted to hurt me.

When I was seventeen, my mom and I were talking about my father and all the terrible things he had done. I still remember the terrible guilt my mother showed in her face. I felt very sorry for her. Then she finally told me that my father had sexually abused my sister. It finally became clear why Stephen had done what he had done. It was what he had learned from my father.

A year later, when I was eighteen, I married a man who was very abusive as well. I was still too young to realize that I was marrying someone like my father. Stephen was very upset that I was marrying this man. All hell broke loose between us. We were no longer close. I got married and two years later had a little girl, and two years after that I had a little boy. My marriage was falling apart. My husband was into drugs and was physically abusing me. He was also seeing many women on the side. I acted like nothing was wrong, but Stephen knew.

I had a part-time job as an aerobics instructor at the YMCA. I had hardly any money. My husband was spending everything we had on cocaine (crack), women, and booze. I dealt with the bill collectors and my phone, gas, and electricity being turned off, not to mention two small children, the worries of how to feed them, and all of the physical and mental abuse.

As time went on I began to realize that Stephen was right. I also began to heal the wounds from my childhood even though I was still dealing with abuse. I had always had what I felt as a close relationship with God. I talked all the time to Him as a child, and always felt He was there for me. I began to forgive Stephen and had verbalized this to my best friend, Tina, who knew all about the abuse. She said she couldn't understand how I could forgive something like that and I couldn't explain it either, except that I had always loved Stephen and he was the only father I had ever had.

My mother and I were together one day talking and after a while we both admitted that we had strange feelings someone close to us was going to die. I began to have strange dreams after that. I had a dream that I was running through a woods, and I felt like something was chasing me, or I was chasing something—I'm not sure which. All of a sudden in the middle of the forest was a log cabin. I ran inside it and directly opposite the door I ran in was another door. There was darkness all around me inside this log cabin, but outside the other door was this incredibly beautiful meadow with flowers like I had never seen before. It looked so inviting but I knew that if I went through that door I could never go back. Then I woke up.

Stephen had gotten married and moved to Madison, Wisconsin. I knew he was having problems. His wife had been married before and they were in a battle with her ex-husband for custody of her children. Stephen had become a truck driver and was very happy, but he wanted to father those children. I didn't know how to feel about that, but it seemed he had grown as a person, so I hoped it would be all right. Stephen's wife's ex-husband hated Stephen, and had threatened to kill him. It turned out that Stephen's wife's ex-husband wanted to keep the children. He was sexually abusing the little girl. I think Stephen wanted that little girl so he could raise her with no abuse, to make up for me, his first little girl. (He really was more of a father to me than anything else.)

I only heard bits and pieces of this from my mom and small conversations I had with Stephen on the phone. I was back in Michigan with my own battles. My marriage was coming to an end and I knew it. Shortly after Christmas in January, 1986, I had taken back Christmas presents that had been given to me—to have money for shoes my children needed. That night when I came home and went to sleep, I had a dream that I was standing outside in the dark between what looked like trucks. It was a parking lot, I think. There were puddles on the ground and I looked up to see a figure standing in front of me, but in the distance. I saw the figure raise his arm and then I saw the barrel of a gun. I knew he was going to shoot me. He fired, and I felt the bullet hit me. I fell to the ground and then I was across the parking lot looking at my body and I saw a green—I'll be honest, I don't know how to describe it. It glowed and was shaped like a skeleton. It was rising out of my body. I woke up with a start and sat up in bed. I was in a cold sweat and very shaken.

The next day I spoke to Stephen on the phone. He said he had the feeling I was in too deep with something and that he just had the feeling that something very wrong was happening in my life. I lied and said that everything was fine. I asked him how he was and he said, "If you only knew what was going on in my life." I wanted so much to forgive him, to say I loved him and tell him I missed him, because I did. I really missed him. I really felt at peace about all that happened between us and I wanted to make up, but somehow it just didn't seem appropriate over the phone. We said goodbye and hung up.

In February, my mom called me [and] said that Stephen had left with his truck but had been missing for four days. She was very upset. I didn't know what to tell her, but not to worry. I said he probably was just busy on his run and hadn't gotten the chance to call. She said no, that he always called his wife and [she] hadn't heard from him and the trucking company he was working for didn't know where he was. I tried to assure her that everything would be all right. I went to work that night at the YMCA, and I feel guilty to say this, but I wasn't worried about Stephen.

The next morning the phone rang. My husband answered it. I heard him saying, "You're kidding" and "Oh, no." I thought Stephen had been hurt. My husband handed me the phone. He said it was my mother. I took the phone and said, "Hi, mom." She said, "Stephen is dead." I said, "What?" I couldn't believe my ears. She kept repeating, "Stephen is dead." We both began to sob. They found Stephen in the back of his cab. He had never left the truck stop in Wisconsin to his run down south.

They did an autopsy. I received a copy and it's full of contradictions. They never ruled out foul play and a lawyer told my mom to have a second autopsy done, but by that time it was too late—he had already been cremated.

We went through the funeral and I was devastated. Stephen's birthday was February 22, twenty days after his death (he would have been 31). We, as a family, decided to get together at my sister's house in Ann Arbor for his birthday. It was very sad. I baked a cake, even, and covered it with jelly beans (they were his favorite thing to eat). When I got to my sister's she had pulled out all those pictures from our childhood that my mother had sent her when she lived in England. (She lived in England for some years when I was a child to get away from my father.) I had never seen most of those pictures. And many of them were of Stephen and me. They brought back memories that I hadn't had in years. Happy memories of the good times he and I had shared, and there were *so* many. It was my life in review. I became so sad.

I drove home that evening. My husband was in bed asleep, and I wanted—I really wanted to die. Dr. Ring, I was dying inside—dying of a broken heart. I fell on my couch, and as I fell, I started to rise up. I was floating up to the ceiling and then it was like a broken TV screen, a bad signal. Suddenly I saw I was floating in space, but it wasn't like a night sky because the stars were colored and iridescent looking. In the middle of this was a loaf of bread. I know that sounds strange, but it wasn't like a loaf of bread you'd find in a grocery store. It was like homemade bread or a loaf of bread that they would use in church for communion.

All at once I was inside this bread and it was filled with light. Bright, white light, yet soft and easy to look at. It was like the light was alive. And I felt like I was being embraced. Hugged.

Standing in front of me was Stephen. And between us was a window—well, really a hole that looked out to the iridescent stars. He had the same stars in his eyes. He was dressed just like he always had, in blue jeans and a plaid flannel shirt. He looked like Stephen always looked, except for the stars in his eyes. He spoke to me, but he didn't use words. I mean he didn't talk. I just heard him in my head. He said he knew all that I was feeling and that I forgave him and that he forgave me, too. He said he loved me and not to worry about him. Then he said some things I don't remember. But the last thing he said was that when the time came he would meet me there.

All of a sudden, I was falling back, not fast like falling off a cliff or something, but very gently. And then, and I know this sounds strange, I was in my living room looking at my body on the couch from across the room—and then, snap, I was back in my body. I got up from the couch, and even though all that had happened, I didn't feel shocked or surprised, but drained. And I went to bed. (This was not a dream. I would know if it was a dream. *I wasn't asleep.*)

After this I still felt very sad and missed him very much. About six months later I was supposed to be going to a meeting of instructors at the YMCA, but I was sad and missing Stephen. I just couldn't go. I found myself driving by an old graveyard we used to think was really neat when we were kids. It has old tombstones from one hundred or so years

ago. I got out of my car and started walking through this graveyard. It was a warm, sunny, summer day, but I felt like it should have been raining. Suddenly, a thought popped into my head—"John 6." I wasn't thinking about anything like that. I had gotten away from going to church, but "John 6" kept popping into my head.

For a week after this, it kept coming to me. Finally I thought, "Sit down and read this." I read it and in it, it says, "I am the bread of Life and all who believe in me shall not die, but have eternal life." And then I thought: "So that's the bread!" That's what the bread meant.

About two months after this I was at a friend's house who knew Stephen. We were talking about old times we all shared together. I had mentioned to her how my mom wished I would go back to church. She said, "Well, why don't you go and surprise her?" It was about 2 a.m. Sunday morning when we were talking. I said to her, "Yes, I should."

So I went home and got a couple hours sleep and then went to the church. I got there before my mom. She was very surprised to see me. She went downstairs where she teaches Sunday school. I went into the Sanctuary. As I went in, someone handed me a program, and on the cover was a picture of my loaf of bread! Just like I had seen it. And about it, it said, "That you may Live . . ." I started to cry. I went in the church and sat down. It so happened that they were having communion that day. As the minister gave out the communion, he said, "I am the bread of Life, and all those who believe in me shall not die, but have eternal life." Well, you can imagine how astounded I was.

Since that time I did nothing but search for something. At the time I didn't know what to look for. I went to the library and looked up a book on astral projection. On the cover of it was the green glowing skeleton-shaped thing I saw in my dream. (I had never seen this book before.) I didn't find anything I wanted in that book, though. Then I found *Life After Life* by Raymond Moody [1975]. I loved it, but I only wanted to read more—and I kept reading anything I could on NDEs.

I divorced my husband. Went to school for broadcasting (something I had always wanted to do). Met my fiancé (he was one of my teachers).

I kept looking for NDE books. After a few years I got a job at a radio station. One day when a basketball game was being broadcast and I didn't have to do any reports, I went to a nearby bookstore (this was last April). I saw a book called *Full Circle* by Barbara Harris [Harris and Bascom, 1990]. I loved it. At the end she mentioned IANDS. And also the conference in August. I knew I was going.

The next day I was talking to a friend I work with about it and suddenly realized it was what I saw as a little girl—the man in the studio with microphones and all of our buttons. I know now my whole life has led to this.

I bought *Life at Death* [Ring, 1980] and *Heading Toward Omega* [Ring, 1984], and I'm still reading the latter. When I saw you at the conference, I recognized you at once. I hope I have given you something. I feel a Love for you, Dr. Ring, and hope someday you'll say, "Call me Ken." I've pestered you enough and hope maybe someday we'll be able to talk. I don't know where all this is taking me next, but I have never been happier. I'm getting married again next April thirteenth. He, the man

that I'm marrying, knows this story, my story, and loves me unconditionally and supports me. His name is Vaughn. My name again is Lorna, but you can always call me "Pest." I Love you.

P.S. I find it interesting that Vaughn was born dead.

### Pat Clark

My friend Diane Norton deserves an article—if not an entire book—in her own right, but here I want to introduce a friend of Diane's, Pat Clark. Before I heard directly from Pat, I had learned from Diane that Pat was no mere friend. Instead, for Diane, Pat was a spiritual twin, and the only person that Diane had ever found whose pre-NDE experiences had matched her own. For some months before I actually received a letter from Pat, Diane had alerted me that Pat was intending to write me at length, but would do so only "when the time was right." One day, it was.

Dear Dr. Ring,

Hi; my name is Pat Clark and because you are into NDEs I am writing you this letter to tell you some things about myself and my near-death experience.

First and foremost, it has taken me a while to write you, for the timing wasn't right until now. For some unknown reason, as a lot of things since my NDE are unknown, I had to wait at least a year after my NDE to tell you about it.

Let me begin by giving you *some* background information, and as you will read, being near death spanned a number of years of endless adventures, resulting in the fact that the timing was not there for me to die for any amount of time. Again the timing of events in my life, anyway, are and have been an important factor, just like I mentioned before about the timing of this letter—it wasn't meant to be until now.

I'm thirty-five years old. For the past twenty-three years I used and abused drugs. At the age of 12 my mother died and I had a breakdown. I was given Librium to calm the nerves and calm I stayed, for a while anyway. The following year my family doctor gave me Darvon for cramps. At fourteen I started with illegal drugs in a life that spanned the next twenty-one years. Abusing at that time everything from crystal Methedrine (speed) to different and *colorful* acid, including LSD, orange sunshine, purple ozziline, white lightning, windowpane, and mescaline. I'd like to point out that during this era in my life, hallucinations were an everyday thing. Illusions, hallucinations, and dimensional warps were one thing. My NDE was another.

I feel very strongly on this because there is a big difference in that when I took acid, the acid caused the events of seeing things and you have a sense of knowing what you are seeing is caused by the acid. With my NDE no hallucinogens were taken and I knew what I saw, heard, and

felt was like no trip on acid ever taken. For me, it was my trip to the light—a very real voyage in itself.

Getting back to the background, I graduated to barbiturates, heroin, and cocaine by the time I was seventeen. For the next eighteen years, I continued doing cocaine, heroin, barbiturates, and methadone. When I was twenty-two, living in Florida and married to a fellow addict, I enrolled in a methadone maintenance program that I faithfully remained on for a little over twelve years. Accompanied by pain pills, Valium, heroin, and coke. The partying days of drugs turned into the longest days. Month after month, year after year, the cycle was vicious. Being both mentally and physically addicted was a bitch.

When I was seventeen, I had my first conscious overdose from heroin. Walking up four stories to a Bronx rooftop [and] looking down to the street was my remedy of revival to get air, for my friends were too high to take me to a hospital or to inject salt or speed or cocaine. Those were the things to do . . . to get me back to life.

As a senior in high school, I had a bad barbiturate overdose resulting in a six-week stay at South Oaks Hospital for withdrawal. After leaving, I only started to get physically strung out again. Until my late twenties, twenty-eight to be exact, I didn't even attempt to stop, for I didn't think I had a problem. It wasn't until I separated from my ex-husband that I figured I'd try to get off everything and stay just on methadone that I entered my second hospital ten years later [i.e., when she was twenty-eight], only to find out they substituted for the drugs other "prescribed drugs." I had a vacation from coping.

Still addicted to the prescribed drugs when I left the hospital, I continued my dreary life. I went to college at Dowling for four years, not straight a day. Majoring in social work led me to believe I could figure out my problem. In my last semester, I slipped on a puddle of water and got a concussion, threw out a vertebra and continued my devastating life. Both mentally and physically I was in a lot of pain. By the way, at this time, overdosing had become a thing of just blacking out; or having my receptors overflow; or having my system let go of all fluids; or turning colors. It was no big thing—everyday life to me.

In the past three years from June, 1985, to March, 1988, I detoxed four times. In 1985, I gave up crack, remaining on everything else, and to let you know the progression of addiction, I was taking a hundred pills a day, including the other drugs. In 1986, I was to be administratively detoxed off the methadone program because of my failure to stop doing all the other drugs, so I went to Harris Hospital which is in Upstate New York, where I met Diane Norton. I was in such bad shape in that hospital, it was "sad to say." This was the only time and the first time I saw and realized how addicted I was. The average stay is 5–7 days. I was there for 27 days. I left the hospital still unable to sleep for the next two weeks (that's for 27 days and two weeks, no sleep). I shuddered and shook for the next two months. I felt so bad I couldn't allow myself to be in a normal environment with access to doctors for drugs and the illegal ones, too, so I put myself in Rehab for three months.

I left Rehab and got my first job in thirteen years driving a school bus. After a couple of months out of Rehab and three months there (all

straight) I had a bad accident, totalling the bus. (By the way, no one else was on the bus.) I threw out my neck and back pretty good. The doctor gave me pain pills and, believe it or not, that triggered my old patterns and within weeks, I was back to square one.

Now it's July, 1987, and I saw how after three months of abuse how bad I had gotten to detox again. As the doctor said, "There's only so much we can do." After twelve days in the hospital, I was discharged in bad shape. At this point relapse was inevitable.

Then, in October of 1987 is when I had my near-death experience. I went into the Bronx with a friend. Already high, I proceeded to shoot two bags of heroin mixed with some cocaine I had with me. After having it injected into me, I was really wacked out. I went out for the count. I had always told this friend that if ever I overdose, do not take me to a city hospital for fear I would die there. Instead take me to Good Samaritan Hospital on Long Island.

As if God knew, which he did, that is what I wanted, only to grant me my last wish. This is when after countless overdoses, I overdosed forty minutes later. I vaguely remember being carried into the house, and when there, trying to be revived with water, ice, and slapping of the face. Now is when the NDE begins its journey to the light.

I was lying down on the floor of his grandmother's room. At this point, his mother, having seen me as I was, had called the paramedics. They stormed in.

I was out of my body perched on a bookshelf like a little elf. Really, I felt like a little person looking down on this left-behind body. As I looked down watching my physical body turn purple, blue, and then gray, I remember saying to myself in my out-of-the-body self, "This time, Pat, you really did it." There was a part of me, like a sixth sense, that knew this time you really are dying after countless times of coming so, so close. I knew what was happening and with such amazing awareness—watching myself from above still smaller only to see and hear all the paramedics work on me with IVs. I still remember 2 IVs, 2 IV shots of Narcan [and] at that time, I said to myself, "Narcan—that will get me out of my dope-induced coma with no problem." [Yet], a part of me even at that point felt it wasn't time to come to yet, or to get back into this earthly reality. A part of me knew and I felt I had "places to go and things to see." Although I had no idea of what to expect, for I never knew anything about NDEs, yet I felt there was more. It was like going through a revolving door and knowing you can't stop along the way, for it wasn't finished revolving.

I'd also like to mention the fact that my memory went with me into my trip to the light, for otherwise how would I have known that Narcan would bring me out? Trying to revive me and my heart using a defibrillator, I heard them say on the telephone to the hospital, "We're not getting a pulse; we're losing her." I wasn't even upset that I was dying because the next thing I remember happening was that I was floating away.

I was no longer the little elf on the shelf just watching. Now it was me floating in a dimension of total peace and serenity. What a feeling, better and not comparable to any drug-induced or not drug-induced feeling I had ever known. I was floating in a mist that was below me, a sort of fog

above a pasture-type setting. I kept rising and moved upward and toward the brightest light. The light was the brightest and most brilliant I had ever seen both before my NDE and since. The light was more brilliant than a diamond. In fact, it was a whitish-blue color. Again my memory was with me, for how would I know to differentiate the colors? The light was sharper than the light of any star (for astronomy is my hobby).

I kept going toward the light and when I was about two-thirds of the way there I had a multi-dimensional sense, a feeling of seeing my left-behind body, having my past life flash in front of me, and at this point seeing stairs. Or at least to me it was like gigantic stairs—or rather levels of some outrageous and beautifully landscaped city. This part of my NDE is vague. The only way I can best describe it is that it reminded me of a castle. I only got so far and then the trip to the light ended at the bottom part of this plateau castle. The scenes of my life kept flashing before me, scene after scene, event after event zipped by right in front of me. It was like watching a movie without the projector and screen.

This all happened so fast, yet being dead for almost three minutes doesn't seem time enough for all the events to have happened. The timing is so slowed down that I felt like I was there for so long. Even just the floating forever onward and upward seemed longer than three minutes. Only afterward did I think of the amount of time. During the NDE, it was an eternity in itself.

Then just as I felt I found the feeling of total love, acceptance, and peace and serenity did I feel that I was being told that I had to come back, there were things I still had to do.

All of a sudden, I jolted back into the physical left-behind body, flopping like a fish. When I say jolted, I mean just that. It felt like a jolt, and with that crash, [it was] sort of like I hit a brick wall when I came back into my body. Because once all that energy or whatever got into the only place to go, it was like the top was closed off and still all this energy [was] racing around.

My initial reaction was: "What's this?" I realized I was back on this earth, alive. I figured I should be overwhelmed, yet I wasn't. I was pissed off at having to be back. I didn't have any verbal words when I went to the light, but I do know that I was forgiven for all the wrongs I had done and the thoughts and feelings turned into words before I was to return. I was returning to "hear" and, more important, to feel that I . . . still have things to do.

When I came to with such a jolt, [it] made me so aware of the difference between this world and the world of the light. I wanted so much to go back, but in my heart I knew that any way except the way I am to go is not what my God has ready for me in the realm of such total love.

In March of this year, I finally got myself together. I am a recovering addict that unless you knew me before, you would never know that I had such a life of despair.

I am now a happy, good-hearted, honest, wholesome person. I have this inner peace about me that is incredible. I attribute the way I am now to my NDE.

Since my NDE, I am pretty psychic. I seem to know so much more than before. Nothing that happens seems to amaze me. It's so much a part of

me that sometimes I do take it for granted. I am so aware of things, people, and animals. Anything that is a part of this universe I feel so connected to, from trees to stars. I have a special interest in astronomy. I find great pleasure with natural things in my life. I go with my vibes which never get me in any type of trouble [but] instead make me more confident and reassure me of what's right.

Also, since my NDE, I seem to know what is going to happen. At night when I go to sleep, I dream these dreams that to me are sometimes more than a dream. I dream normally—don't get me wrong—but sometimes I go places, and in these dreams I see things that happen later on. For example, I went off in a dream and this was more than a dream. I saw the plane crash that happened in Germany when the plane crashed into the audience full of people. I knew I was in a different country because of the architecture. Afterward, I told Diane about it and what it entailed. I knew I would hear about it, and, sure enough, a few days later, I saw it on TV—just as it happened in my dream.

Sometimes it doesn't take days. I get visions of something minutes before it happens. This happens to me while I am awake. I'll go somewhere and know what the room looks like. It's not déjà vu because that tunes in as it happens. I do get them, too, and I can zoom in to the exact night I dreamt the event.

Well, anyway, I am getting writer's cramp, and I just wanted to say before I end this letter that I know a lot of things I have just told you are hard to believe. Everything I wrote from page one to now has been to tell you about me before my NDE, during my NDE, and after my NDE, and how the NDE has changed me in this life in countless ways. This had to be a long letter to cover *some* of the events in my life. Thanks for reading it.

Due to the Light, I remain Happy,  
Pat

### Bob Helm

One day I received a desperate phone call from one of my friends who works for Canadian television. Did I—she prayed that I did—know a Canadian NDEr in the Toronto area who had a really compelling experience of the sort that would “wow” the Canadian masses? After emitting my usual groan (how often we near-death researchers have heard this urgent query from our colleagues in TVland!), I actually did scan my mental files for such a possibility, but came up one short of the desired number. Still, in my best earnest voice, I promised that I would give it some further thought and call back if I could think of a suitable candidate.

The *next* day a letter from the *perfect* candidate arrived in my mailbox.

Dear Mr. Ring,

I very much enjoyed your book on the near-death experience. It is a great service you are doing, bringing these transformational experiences to public light. Not so long ago my life was completely turned around by one of these and had it not been for the book, *Life After Life* [Moody, 1975], current at the time, I might still be wondering what in the world (or out of it) had happened to me. Somewhere in [Heading Toward] *Omega* [Ring, 1984] you say you never tire of hearing about these experiences, so I am encouraged to offer you mine. In any event, it has been most enjoyable writing about it again. When I first recorded it, shortly after it occurred, the account was emotional rather than descriptive. A present-day edition follows:

On the 7th of November, 1979, I was scheduled for surgery on my leg. It had been broken in an automobile accident years before, and set badly. As a result, the knee joint had been wearing unevenly, giving me a great deal of pain. This was slight, however, in comparison with the enormous amount of both mental and physical pain I had been experiencing for many years; for I had been an alcoholic for most of my adult life, recovered for over a year at this point. My life had been a repeating pattern of self-destructive behavior and depression, the withdrawal experience of the past year dreadfully painful and dark.

I had a premonition I was to die during this operation. The feeling was so strong it was almost a fact in my mind. The surgeon had given me several opportunities to cancel: the date had to be changed, the operation was not essential, etc., etc.; but for some reason I could not fathom I was absolutely determined to go through with the procedure in spite of my fear, and I did so. I was under general anesthetic for the surgery, an osteotomy, lasting almost 5 hours.

I woke up in the recovery room, saying out loud over and over, "I must remember, I must remember." I was desperately ill from the anesthetic, but to my surprise my spirits seemed higher than they had been for many years. The nurse asked me what it was I had to remember, and I could not tell her. This statement absolutely desolated me, and again I was surprised by my reaction. She asked me how I felt, and I said terrific, to her utter astonishment and mine. As I was wheeled on the gurney along the corridor to my room, I tried to no avail to recall what it was I needed to remember so urgently; and I could not. The feeling of loss was overwhelming.

But then, as I absently watched the ceiling above, in a flash, memory began returning to me. The ceiling lights had triggered recall of the most important, vivid, real experience of my life. It returned to me in waves of joy, and I was awe-struck by the memory. It was all so real, and so important; and so improbable!

I had been trained in technology. I had a natural aptitude for the sciences and mathematics, disciplines based on logic. A childhood faith in some sort of Divine Father had been eroded by alcohol and materialism very early in life, and my logical mind would not accept what it could not rationalize. Yet here I was in a hospital, reliving the most important experience of my life, something that had occurred during unconsciousness; and I had never experienced anything more real to me than this. I

did not tell anyone about it at first, because I feared I would be thought insane. Eventually I told two or three of my best friends, also individuals trained in logic, and they dismissed the episode out of hand as an hallucination, in spite of my protestations. I eventually told my wife, who was the first to believe that something extraordinary had happened to me, though we were both at a loss to explain it. This is how I remember it:

I was in a tunnel, traveling at enormous speed toward a light, which was incidental at this point. I had flown frequently on business, and participated in automobile racing at one time, and I was aware that the speed I was traveling was far in excess of anything I had ever experienced, and it was increasing all the time. The walls of the tunnel were a blur, but as I looked more carefully I came to the realization that this tunnel through which I was traveling at such unbelievable speed was composed of planets; individual solid masses blurred together by speed and distance. Incredibly, I seemed to be hurtling through the universe!

There was tremendous sound, too. It was as if all the great orchestras in the world were playing at once; no special melody, and very loud, powerful but somehow soothing. It was a rushing, moving sound, unlike anything I could remember, but familiar, just on the edge of my memory.

I was suddenly frightened. I had no idea where I was bound at such speed, nor had anything in my life prepared me for this adventure. As soon as I realized I was afraid, a presence reached out to me; not physically, but telepathically. It was a calming, gentle presence and a voice, which said, "Take it easy. Everything is O.K. Relax;" and this thought transference immediately induced a soothing effect on me, far more powerful than anything within the experience of my stressful life.

I had been traveling toward the tremendous light at the end of the tunnel; but just as I was about to enter it, everything went black. When I close my eyes in a dark room, I still have the sensation of sight. I also retain a sense of touch and feeling, of having a body. The black of which I speak was total, absent of any sensation. My consciousness simply WAS. I existed, but without any senses whatsoever. It was absolutely terrifying. This lasted but a moment, as had the entire journey. Then sensations began slowly to return, and I understood that these were positive only. There was no longer pain in my leg, nor any physical or mental discomfort or unrest, where before there had been chaos. There was instead peace and joy and harmony and light. Oh, what a Light it was! As I became increasingly aware of it, it was gold and silver and green and full of love. As the sensations solidified, and this seemed timeless because there was no hurry in this place, I became aware of a being sitting beside me. He wore a white robe, and exuded peace. He was the one who had comforted me during the latter stages of my voyage, I knew instinctively. He was comforting me still. I knew he would be all the friends I never had, and all the guides and teachers I would ever need. I knew that he would be there if ever I needed him, but that there were others for him to look out for, so I needed to care for myself as much as I reasonably could.

We sat side by side on a rock, overlooking the most beautiful landscape I had ever seen. The colors were outside my experience, vivid beyond my

dreams, the composition exceptional. It was exquisitely pleasant and there was no pressure, for my friend knew me and loved me more than I could ever know or love myself. I had never felt such radiance and peace. "It's really something, isn't it?" exclaimed my friend, referring to the view. I sat comfortably with him and admired it, uncharacteristically silent. He said, "We thought we'd lost you for a while." We were on an island, overlooking a wooded, rocky bay. The waters were bright with a living quality I had never seen in years of recreational boating. The trees were magnificent, each outlined in its own light. The mountains in the background were stately and calm, each with an indescribable aura.

My first reaction to this amazing sight was awe mixed with fear, but it finally occurred to me to ask where I was. My friend said it was rather difficult to explain; but that they wouldn't be needing me for a while "back there." This puzzled me and I asked if I were dead, and he said I certainly was not, but that I might like to look around when I felt like it. I was more than content to sit for a while, and did so. It was very restful. Then, as I studied the landscape, a lifetime interest in photography prompted me to think that the landscape I admired so greatly would be even better balanced if a certain mountain was repositioned to the other side. Immediately it moved to where I had imagined it! It was difficult at first to believe, but the experience was more real to me than anything on earth, and I knew it had happened. Then, as I puzzled over this, I wondered if I could move it back, and it immediately shifted accordingly.

About this time, while I was still marveling over what I had seen, my friend suggested we might be on our way; and becoming restless myself, I agreed. IMMEDIATELY we arrived at another location, on a beautiful street. We appeared to be alone there, except for the street-sweeper, who was responsible for the spotless condition of the place. Here again, the colors and textures were outside my experience; and the road and the sidewalks appeared to be paved in some kind of precious metal. The buildings appeared to be constructed of a translucent material. I felt prompted to talk to the street-sweeper, and congratulated him on his efforts. He said work was a joy to him, and he derived his pleasure from doing the best job he could at all times. This statement nonplussed me somewhat, for I had never been enthusiastic about what I considered menial tasks. This man appeared absolutely sincere, however; and I was very impressed by his industry and the obvious love and care he brought to his work. While I was thinking about this remarkable fellow, we relocated again, INSTANTLY.

This time we were audience to a choir of angels singing. Angels were totally outside my reality at the time, yet somehow I knew these beautiful beings to be angelic. They sang the most lovely and extraordinary music I had ever heard. They were identical, each equally beautiful. When their song was over, one of their number came forward to greet me. She was exquisite and I was mightily attracted, but I then realized my admiration could only be expressed in a wholly nonphysical manner, as to a little child. I was embarrassed by my error, but it did not matter. All was forgiven in this wonderful place.

Instantly we arrived in an art gallery. It contained the work of the great masters of all time and all places. The display was both classical

and modern. Some of the great works seemed familiar. Others were unlike anything I had ever seen, indescribable. The beauty and form of the sculpture and paintings on display were beyond words. A lifetime could be spent in this place, but to see everything I needed to see during this visit, we must move on.

Next we materialized in a computer room. It was a place of great activity, yet peace prevailed. None of the stress of business was present, but prodigious work was accomplished. The people seemed familiar to me, like old friends. This was confusing, because I knew there to be present those who lived on earth still, and those who had passed on. Some of them I knew by name, others by reputation; and all had time for me, to teach me if ever I need help understanding. One of them was Albert Einstein, whom I had always admired greatly but distantly, and this great man took time away from his duties to encourage me. He asked me if I would care to operate the computer, which was very complex and beautiful and designed to guide the path of destinies. I was flattered, but felt incompetent and unsure of myself in the presence of such greatness. I told him I would like to try, but I was afraid of making a mistake. He laughed gently, and reassured me, saying that error was not possible in this place. Encouraged, I seemed instinctively to know how to operate this unusual machine, and waved my hands in a pattern over the large keyboard, rather like playing a piano without touching the keys. I knew instantly the task had been performed perfectly, and it had somehow been of great benefit to someone. I was suffused with the joy of a job well done. I would gladly spend eternity here at this rewarding work if only for the tremendous feeling of well-being I had experienced as a result.

We continued our tour and arrived at a library. It was a vast old traditional building, containing all of the wisdom of the ages, everything ever said or written. Room upon room, shelf upon shelf of books stretched away as far as the eye could see. By this time I had growing doubt I was destined to stay in this mysterious yet familiar place, even though I knew in my heart it was home. I had the uncomfortable feeling I must return soon to resume my life. My guide, for by now I thought of him as such, told me I must study and learn from the infinite array of wisdom before us. I was dismayed, and said there was no way I was capable of such a task. I was told to simply make a beginning, to do the best I could, and that would always be good enough. There was plenty of time.

The feeling I must leave had grown into certainty and dread. My apprehension was confirmed when my guide told me plainly that it was time for me to go, but I should remember that this was always my home, and I would return some day soon. I told him it was impossible for me to go back to the life I knew after this experience; but he said there was no choice, I had work yet to do. I protested, saying the circumstances of my life were such that I could not continue; and I was filled with consternation at the thought of facing the mental and physical pain I feared would lie ahead. I was asked to be more specific, and I recalled an area of my life in which I had experienced difficulty. Instantly I was filled with an overpowering sense of that specific emotion. It was almost unbearable. Then, with no more than a gesture, the pain was made to vanish, to be

replaced by a glorious sense of well-being and love. This process was repeated several times, with specific areas of my life where I had been experiencing difficulty. My friend then pointed out that I could perform this astonishing feat myself. It was not at all difficult, he said, and I would have an opportunity during the balance of my life to practice, and to make a beginning learning about some of the other things I had experienced during this journey. I was still dismayed, but I was given to understand that there was to be no argument about returning. Rules were rules, and I must abide by them without fail. There were to be no exceptions made for me, and self-pity was not an acceptable form of expression.

In an instant, it all vanished, and I found myself in the recovery room, wondering aloud what it was I was to remember. The experience might have lasted 5 minutes or 5 hours. There was no sense of time at all, and I could not understand this for many years, for my life had always been impatient and hurried.

The effect of the experience on my life was immediate and electrifying. I knew this as a turning point but I had not the slightest idea why, or what had occurred. I was tempted to attribute the experience to hallucination, as my friends had all suggested. Somehow, I could not dismiss it so easily, even though it might be the easy way out. I was immediately motivated to write about it, and about other events in my life. I was filled with a great longing to go back, and knew this planet was only a temporary home for me, though this made no sense at the time. My life was to change radically, and continues to unfold in unforeseen ways to this day.

Following the stay in the hospital, I had arranged to recuperate at home. I had a TV set in my bedroom, and watched my favorite programs. To my amazement, they no longer held much fascination for me. I found myself able suddenly to discern truth. I found this quality present in such things as the documentary programs found on PBS, and the Canadian equivalent; and in programs featuring certain spiritual issues. The latter had actually been repellent to me, and this development made no sense either. I was driven to get to the bottom of what had happened. What could have precipitated such an immediate and unprecedented change, and caused such inner conflict?

My wife was working full time, fatigued by the strain of looking after a bedridden husband and the household too; but I prevailed upon her to make a special trip to the library by taxi to see if she could locate something to explain the mystery. Books had always been my friends, and I suggested she begin with the "Unusual and Unexplained" section. I had seen it often enough, but rarely availed myself of its contents, preferring the distraction of fiction. She returned with two shopping bags full of pocketbooks, selected because of their economical size rather than their content. For weeks I rarely slept. One of the first books I was inspired to read was *Life After Life* [Moody, 1975], written by an M.D. who had researched near-death experiences; and it was reassuring to know that I was not alone. The Edgar Cayce material fell under my scrutiny too. Later my wife and I would join a study group based on this

material, but this was further down the path. The near-death experience is now part of a much greater perspective brought about by a dozen years of spiritual study, prayer, and meditation; and it is quite a different world I see now through the same eyes.

Subsequent investigation unearthed the fact that the experience had been triggered by a momentary cardiac arrest under anesthetic, though the doctors were reluctant to admit this until pressed. The operation was concluded in the absence of my spirit, or soul, I now understand. I am also aware of the symbolism of the events in the experience, and have encountered many of them consciously. There was no sense of time in the experience, and that is impossible to convey in words; nor can words adequately express the joy and peace and light of our spiritual home.

My wife and I retired from the city a few years after the NDE, and now live quietly in a home on the edge of a forest, where we publish newsletters based upon the sharing of spiritual material, and maintain an extensive correspondence. It is far different from the pressures of urban life. The work brings us both great satisfaction, and we have radically altered our thinking and lifestyle; I more so than my wife, who accepts the whole business far more philosophically and patiently than I might have done if the circumstances were reversed. There is much more to tell, but the core of the experience is covered. Death holds little fear for me now, and I know myself and all humankind to be spirit, clad temporarily in body, here on earth to learn and grow. Those who remain in spirit are available to us, to help us along the path. All we need do is ask.

Thank you for sharing my tale. Incidentally, I fit well within the norm of data for NDErs presented in your book. If I may be helpful in any way, please be in touch without hesitation. We are told that if we help one single soul up the ladder while here on earth, our lives should be rated a success. You should be very pleased at what you have accomplished. Thanks on behalf of the many, including myself, who have grown from your work.

Very best wishes,  
Bob Helm

The combination of Bob's story, his offer to help "in any way," his proximity to Toronto, and the remarkable timing of his letter forced my hand to the phone with alacrity. "I think I have someone for you," I told my friend.

When the arrangements were made, it turned out that Bob had apparently worked for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation at one time, and that the director of my friend's program had known many of Bob's former colleagues there. According to Bob, "we all had a great time" and his on-camera return to the world of Canadian TV was thoroughly satisfactory, though he confessed that it was much easier to write about his NDE than to talk about it!

### A Personal Conclusion

Writing this article for the tenth anniversary of the founding of this Journal of which I had the honor of being the first editor has put me in a reflective mood. Images of the exciting early days of the establishment of the field of near-death studies have been flitting through my mind, along with those of many of the persons, researchers and NDErs alike, who played a role in all this. And, perhaps because anniversaries are occasions when one looks back at the past and takes stock of the present, I have been led to think about my own history in and relationship to this field. I have been exploring, studying, wondering about, and writing on NDEs for nearly a decade and a half now, and in the course of working on this article, it has come to me that I have reached the point where I have need to say no more on the subject. That is why, taking a leaf from James Hillman's books and his love of double entendres, I have deliberately entitled this section "A Personal Conclusion." By this phrase, as you will now understand, I mean to indicate not only that I would like to express some of my own personal views on what I have written about here, but also that this marks a personal stopping point for me on the endless trail of the NDE. At the time of this writing, I am also finishing up the manuscript for a new book, *The Omega Project*, which will deal in part with NDEs, and when that's done, I intend to devote myself to new pursuits and explorations.

I don't know exactly what it was about writing this article that brought home to me the fact that my work in near-death studies was now concluded, but I am inclined to believe it had something to do with the depth of insight as well as the extended character of the accounts I have quoted here. In my previous work on NDEs, I have always given a central place to NDE reports because they are, rightly, the foundation for every idea that we researchers offer about these experiences. Never before, however, have I devoted such a high proportion of my allotted space to these narratives. Why now? I think it is because, if I were to give a final summation of the essential teachings that NDEs represent, I would want, as much as possible, to speak in the voice of NDErs themselves. In fact, I consider my role in near-death studies to have been little more than to serve as a kind of channel through which such persons—those who do not write books or articles—could reach a wider audience. The four accounts I have presented here allow me just to stand aside and, addressing that audience one last time, ask simply, "My friends, do you understand?"

Everything of importance that I have tried to bring out in my writing and speaking on NDEs is to be found in these narratives. If you have

read them carefully and absorbed their implications, you scarcely need to read anything else on the matter. *Of course*, in a proper conclusion to this paper, I would discuss the evidence for the providential character of these experiences, their sometimes obvious symbolic character (to which Bob Helm himself makes an allusion), the way in which they reflect the deepest yearnings of our soul, and their incredible power to stay the hand of perdition and restore hope and purpose to seemingly ruined lives. But isn't this all virtually self-evident? Do I need to find still another way to tell you that Auden's cry is answered by the NDE and that Marguerite's salvation is no mere literary convention?

### *Amazing Grace*

Now, you would think that my return to that phrase would and perhaps should mark the real end of this paper, but the fact is that I have another surprise for you: a coda of sorts and one that is almost demanded, as I think you will agree, by the logic of this confessional conclusion. As I take my leave, an NDEr must, of course, have the last word.

### **Göran Grip**

In the summer of 1989, I was a participant in an international NDE congress in Norway and while there, I encountered a remarkable young man, a Swedish physician named Göran Grip. The translator of a number of books about NDEs into Swedish, Grip had had an NDE himself as a child, though, as he will tell you, he came to realize this only in later life. In Norway, Grip gave several presentations, all of exceptional interest to me, but the most memorable by far was his rendition of his own NDE, as he now recalled it, and the meanings he ascribed to it.

I was delighted when I learned that Grip would be attending the IANDES Washington conference in 1990 (already mentioned in connection with Beverly Brodsky and Lorna Stephens) and looked forward to seeing him again. I did have a chance to talk with him privately, but before that I made a point to attend a workshop he was giving in which he again referred to his NDE and how he was able to draw on its lessons in his own medical practice.

I do not know that much about Grip's childhood and background, but his face shows that he is no stranger to suffering and he speaks with

the quiet authority of a man who has spent a great deal of time in self-reflective inquiry. I couldn't help being aware, almost immediately after his beginning to speak, how still the room had become, as if all members of his audience had found that place within themselves that resonated with Grip's own center. Not in his personality—which has touches of a wry and sprightly humor, by the way—but in his effect on an audience, he reminded me very much of Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, another physician whom he clearly esteems and whose work he has also translated into Swedish.

Subsequent to our meeting, Grip was kind enough to send me a copy of a statement he had written concerning his NDE, and it is with a portion of his testimony that I conclude this article. More than anyone else I have quoted thus far, Göran Grip reflects on the meaning and the essential mystery of the NDE. As both a physician and experiencer, he can see it from both the scientific, external perspective and from the standpoint of his own private understanding of it, and what he says about "his theory" about the NDE is most instructive.

In his commentary, Grip says some things that may surprise, perhaps even shock you, especially in view of all that has gone before in this article. Yet, rather than take exception to his words and world-view, I think it is better to see how the NDE compels no final truth—except one's own.

Finally, Grip will let you on what he calls *the big secret*. In my opinion, it has to do with what may be the only universal in the NDE, and the most important lesson that we can all glean from our contact, whether personal or indirect, with the world of the NDE:

It was not until I read *Life After Life* [Moody, 1975] that I realized that I had had an NDE. I recognized almost everything Moody wrote about the NDE. At first I thought that I read about it before, but I soon realized that my recognition was on a far deeper level than intellectual recognition. I knew what it felt like to have an experience like that. With the help of his books and, later, *Recollections of Death* by Michael Sabom [1982], I was able to revive more and more details of my own experience, and I understand that what had been half asleep in my memory for so long was no less than an NDE. However, no matter how much I scrutinize my memory I have to this day not been able to put date and external circumstances to my experience. The closest I can come to it from this point of view is that it must have taken place early in my childhood.

Seen from the outside, however, I don't know of any instance where I have been close to death. But I have been through two minor operations as a child, and both times I was put to sleep with ether. My own guess is that I had my experience during one of these operations when I was about five. I have found the medical records from one of them, and it reports only a completely uneventful hernia operation.

My experience consists of three parts and, again, within my memory there is no connection whatsoever between them. But in the light of what an ordinary NDE looks like, they make perfect sense as three parts of the same experience. . . .

My last memory is the greatest and most important one. I was in a place where everything was light around me—something like clouds and still not clouds the way you see them from an airplane. I was standing at the bend of a road of light leading to something at a far distance that it is not possible to describe straight out.

But with a poetic adult image I could say that it was not a town wall, and behind it was not a town. In the wall there was no gate, and that gate was closed and locked. I was not to go there, and that didn't matter.

In front of me, on the road, was a being of light, a presence rather than someone visible, a light in all the light. I immediately realized that this being could see right through me and reveal my deepest secrets. My very first impulse was to hide, but I realized immediately that this would not be possible—and also not necessary. For between us I now felt a strong mutual wordless love, and I knew beyond any doubts that whatever he would see in me, he would understand and accept.

His love encouraged me to go through my life up to that point. I saw, relived, remembered things that had happened in my life: not only what actually took place but also the emotions involved. Being five years old you haven't had the opportunity to commit many bad things, but I had a two-year-old brother of whom I was very jealous, and a lot of times I had been mean to him in the usual way between brothers, and had been punished in the usual (non-violent) way between parents and children.

Going through what had happened between us, my focus was not on what we actually did to each other (or "who started"). The emphasis was all the time on our exchange of emotions. And because of the love and understanding radiating from the being of light, I found the courage to see for myself, with open eyes and without defenses, what in my actions and feelings made my brother happy, and what caused him pain. And for most of the episodes we went through the being offered me an alternative way to act: not what I *should* have done, which would have been moralizing, but what I *could* have done—an open invitation that made me feel completely free to accept or not to accept his suggestions.

I knew for sure that if I would accept his suggestions he wouldn't become triumphant, saying: "Gooooood boy," and if I turned down his suggestions he wouldn't sulk or try to talk me into changing my mind. I felt totally free and respected. Needless to say, his suggestions were all for a more loving and understanding attitude.

The way we went through the episodes was much like the way you go through things in your own mind: in a wordless way you simultaneously relive something as if it happened once again and watch it from above seeing yourself as an actor among the others; only this time we were two beings seeing the same things at the same "moment."

Time was not passing in the usual manner. The episodes of my life were not replayed like a movie. An entire episode—with its beginning, its middle and its end—stood out as an entity: it was possible to see simul-

taneously every little action or spoken word with its emotion (his or mine) tacked to it. With an adult description it was as if we were able to wander about, back and forth, in a static landscape the features of which were not trees and hills, but actions, words, and emotions. His suggestions were there at the same "time"—as an alternative landscape superimposed on the original one. And although I re-experienced envy, hate, humiliation, loneliness once again, this time it was flooded with his love and the strength it gave to me.

On the other hand, there was a kind of ordinary time lapsing in my wordless communication with the being.

The being had no physical features except for the light. Nevertheless he was quite definitely male. To put a name on him—God, Jesus, Smith—would be utterly meaningless. Although he was far more powerful, wise, and loving than I ever expect to become, he was not superior to me. For on the deepest and most important level of them all—the level where we loved each other—we were equals. Thus "him"—not "Him." And thus no praise, no worship.

This hasn't made me think that I am superior to other human beings. On the contrary, the lesson is *everybody is equal to everybody else* when it comes to real love—irrespective of age, sex, education [etc.].

The patient who gets the first and last word in *Recollections of Death* [Sabom, 1982] puts the proper label on my experience: the *big secret*—the big secret that I was unable to tell my parents about, the new knowledge that I tried to show them, but which went unnoticed by them.

Maybe the most important part of the *big secret* that I was able to bring back and compare to my real life is this: real love between two people (any two—irrespective of age and sex) is always a mutual feeling. The two of you know at all times that you love each other. Love is not a feeling that you carry *within*—it is what is passing back and forth *between* the two of you.

Love is nothing that just comes flying from above, however. It is rather something that you have to build together, nurture, and defend together.

When love leaves you, you know it immediately. If you have the courage, you realize this, act accordingly, and face the pain. If you don't this is the point where you start lying to yourself.

Whenever the feeling is not mutual it is not love but something different: possessiveness, jealousy, sex, hate, depression. Love is the bridge joining the two banks separated by the river. Each end of the bridge is firmly attached to its bank, enabling communication in both directions between the banks. When it is only attached to *one* bank, its other end is hanging loose; it is no longer a bridge. It is only a jetty.

I could say a lot more about the big secret, but I stop here for this time. I am not religious, I don't believe in God, and I never go to church with its empty rituals and dogmas containing only vague and distorted reminiscences of the real thing.

Also I have never been interested in parapsychology.

I don't know if my experience changed my life, or if it gave direction to it in these early years. I didn't have much of a life before the experience to compare with.

I have no theory about the NDE. The fact that I have had one myself

gives me no advantage in trying to explain it, scientifically or otherwise. And this is so for the same reason I can't explain ordinary physical vision only because I can see. The only advantage I have from my NDE is that I know the *experience* exists. I know that other people's NDEs are no more [and] no less "invented" than my own.

Whatever the explanation to the NDE will turn out to be, it will provide us with significant information about ourselves—our true nature. This knowledge will hopefully have an impact on how we treat each other not only within the medical care system but in the society as a whole. And whatever the explanations will look like, they are sure to be exciting and revealing.

But there are of course two sides to an NDE: the scientific one and the experiential one—the outside and the inside. For me who has had the great fortune of having had an NDE, from the "inside" no explanations are really necessary. They can neither add to my experience—nor reduce it. It is as if you had a nice dream where you find a lot of golden coins. Then you wake up and feel sorry that it is over. What a loss!

But in the next moment you discover that you still have all the golden coins that you found in the dream. Was it only a dream, then? Actually, it doesn't matter what it was. The only thing that matters is that the golden coins are good money, and that with it you can buy Real Things.

## References

- Grosso, M. (1985). *The final choice: Playing the survival game*. Walpole, NH: Stillpoint Press.
- Harris, B., and Bascom, L. (1990). *Full circle: The near-death experience and beyond*. New York, NY: Pocket Books.
- Moody, R. A., Jr. (1975). *Life after life*. Covington, GA: Mockingbird Books.
- Ring, K. (1980). *Life at death: A scientific investigation of the near-death experience*. New York, NY: Coward, McCann and Geoghegan.
- Ring, K. (1984). *Heading toward omega: In search of the meaning of the near-death experience*. New York, NY: William Morrow.
- Ring, K., and Rosing, C. J. (1990). The Omega Project: An empirical study of the NDE-prone personality. *Journal of Near-Death Studies*, 8, 211-239.
- Sabom, M. B. (1982). *Recollections of death: A medical investigation*. New York, NY: Harper and Row.



# Do "Near-Death Experiences" Occur Only Near Death?—Revisited

Glen O. Gabbard, M.D.

*C.F. Menninger Memorial Hospital*

Stuart W. Twemlow, M.D.

*University of Kansas School of Medicine—Wichita*

**ABSTRACT:** Ten years ago our research on out-of-body experiences suggested that the elements of the near-death experience (NDE) were not necessarily limited to situations in which survival was threatened. A decade of continued study has confirmed that the *perception* of being near death, independent of the actual reality of the situation, is the key determinant of the classical NDE. From early in life, the infant's dread of catastrophe leads to the elaboration of extensive psychological defenses against the possibility of extinction. The NDE is simultaneously a manifestation of faith and a catalyst for the development of faith.

On the occasion of the 10th anniversary of this journal, it is perhaps timely to reconsider a question we first posed in print 10 years ago (Gabbard, Twemlow, and Jones, 1981). The essence of that question is whether the classic features of the near-death experience (NDE) are associated exclusively with *actual* brushes with death. The answer then, as it is now, is clearly "no." However, the extensive collection of anecdotal reports and scientific studies in the last decade warrants a

---

Glen O. Gabbard, M.D., is Director of the C.F. Menninger Memorial Hospital, and Training and Supervising Analyst at the Topeka Institute for Psychoanalysis. Stuart W. Twemlow, M.D., is Clinical Professor of Psychiatry at the University of Kansas School of Medicine—Wichita, and Instructor at the Topeka Institute for Psychoanalysis. Reprint requests should be addressed to Dr. Gabbard at The Menninger Clinic, Box 829, Topeka, KS 66609-0829.

reconsideration of the meaning and significance of the answer to the question.

Since our report first came out, we have received numerous letters recounting experiences with the phenomenology of the NDE that occurred outside the context of an actual threat to life. One such anecdote is particularly vivid:

A marine sergeant was instructing a class of young recruits at boot camp. He stood in front of a classroom holding a hand grenade as he explained the mechanism of pulling the pin to detonate the weapon. After commenting on the considerable weight of the grenade, he thought it would be useful for each of the recruits to get a "hands-on" feeling for its actual mass. As the grenade was passed from private to private, one 18-year-old recruit nervously dropped the grenade as it was handed to him. Much to his horror, he watched the pin become dislodged as the grenade hit the ground. He knew he only had seconds to act, but he stood frozen, paralyzed with fear. The next thing he knew, he found himself traveling up through the top of his head toward the ceiling as the ground beneath him grew farther and farther away. He effortlessly passed through the ceiling and found himself entering a tunnel with the sound of wind whistling through it. As he approached the end of this lengthy tunnel, he encountered a light that shone with a special brilliance, the likes of which he had never seen before. A figure beckoned to him from the light, and he felt a profound sense of love emanating from the figure. His life flashed before his eyes in what seemed like a split-second. In the midst of this transcendent experience, he suddenly realized that the grenade had not exploded. He felt immediately "sucked" back into his body.

Much to his surprise, the sergeant had picked up the grenade and was chuckling to himself at the reactions of the panic-stricken recruits. It had not occurred to the young soldier that the grenade was only a "dummy" used for demonstration purposes.

This vignette vividly illustrates that *thinking* one is about to die is sufficient to trigger the classical NDE. Our original study grew out of a survey of 339 subjects who had reported out-of-body experiences (Twemlow, Gabbard, and Jones, 1982), in which only 10 percent of the subjects reported that they had been near death at the time of the out-of-body experience. We compared the descriptions of the persons who reported OBEs in life-threatening situations to those who reported them in other circumstances. No characteristic of the experiences was found to be exclusive to near-death situations. However, we also noted that several features of the experiences were significantly more likely to occur when the individual felt that death was close at hand. These features included noises during the early stages, the experience of traveling through a tunnel, the sighting of one's physical body from a

distance, awareness of other beings in nonphysical form, the perception of deceased loved ones, the experience of a brilliant light, and a sense of purpose connected to the experience. Following the experience, those individuals who were close to death were more likely to feel that their life had been changed by the experience, that it was a spiritual or religious experience, and that it was of lasting benefit.

Our study demonstrated that from a statistical standpoint, individuals were more likely to experience the identifying features of an NDE if they were near death. Our results, however, left one important question unanswered. How do we know that people who say they are near death are *actually* near death? Because of methodological limitations (a questionnaire survey), we had to take people at their word. As illustrated by the marine recruit, many people who believe they are near death are actually in no danger. Preoperative patients, for example, regularly assume that they will die when they undergo anesthesia for an operation, no matter how routine the procedure may be. Similarly, individuals who find themselves in an auto accident often assume the worst scenario even though they may escape with minor injuries.

To investigate this vexing question, Ian Stevenson, Emily Cook, and Nicholas McClean-Rice (1989-1990) extensively studied the medical records of 40 patients who claimed to have had near-death experiences. Less than half of these cases had medical documentation to support the view that their life was threatened. In 55 percent of the sample there was no threat to life, according to the investigation of the medical records. Among this latter group were individuals with routine surgical procedures, minor allergic reactions to penicillin, and normal events such as childbirth. An especially interesting dimension of this investigation was the finding that many of those individuals who were not near death recalled having heard a doctor or nurse state that they narrowly escaped death or should have been dead.

Stevenson and his colleagues concluded from their investigation that many people who report NDEs have in fact exaggerated the seriousness of their condition. They share the view that is illustrated by the case of the marine recruit—namely, that the *fear* of death may be sufficient in and of itself to precipitate an experience with the features of the classic NDE.

From the data considered thus far, one might conclude that the perception of proximity to death—either in reality or in fantasy—is the crucial trigger of the NDE. A compromised physiological state is clearly not necessary nor is loss of consciousness. These observations suggest that because death is such an unspeakably horrific prospect,

an elaborate psychological defense mechanism is activated by the perception of a threat to life. Like all defenses it seeks to eradicate anxiety and in so doing imparts a calming, soothing effect. The fact that defense mechanisms occur for the most part at an unconscious level could explain how this protective mechanism could be triggered even when an individual is unconscious as a result of injury or cardiac arrest. Just as defense mechanisms are active in dreams while the dreamer's consciousness is set aside, similar mental activities take place secondary to traumatic loss of consciousness.

One apparent difficulty with this line of reasoning arises from a new area of research that has appeared in the last decade. The fact that NDEs occur in small children has now been well established by several independent investigations (Bush, 1984; Gabbard and Twemlow, 1984; Morse, Castillo, Venecia, Milstein, and Tyler, 1986; Morse and Perry, 1990). Moreover, a retrospective study conducted by Melvin Morse led him to conclude that a person had to be on the brink of death to have the classical features of the near-death experience. In this retrospective study of 121 children who were seriously ill but not actually close to death, none had an NDE. By contrast, 8 of 12 children who had had a cardiac arrest reported an NDE in response to an open-ended interview. These findings, which contradict the studies cited above, are difficult to compare with studies of adults since children have such an enormous propensity for denial when it comes to the issue of death. Morse's data aside, however, the research on NDEs in children raises another difficulty—among these reports are some in children as young as two-and-a-half (Gabbard and Twemlow, 1984), an age where there is no concept of death whatsoever. How can it be that children who are years away from a cognitive understanding of the concept of death are capable of elaborating a highly sophisticated psychological defense to deal with it?

Psychoanalytic insight into the most primitive anxieties of infancy are of considerable help in resolving this dilemma. While the infant may have no concept of death, a sense of *catastrophe* is ever present. The infant's initial anxiety is that its sense of being, of continuity, will not be sustained by the necessary environmental responses from mother (Winnicott, 1965, 1971). Indeed, catastrophe is a starting point for us all (Bion, 1963, 1970). The experience of birth itself is an overwhelming trauma for the infant, and the subsequent anxieties about survival and continuity pervade the infant's existence. As Michael Eigen (1985) put it: "In normal circumstances the mother nurses the baby back into existence at the point where discontinuity can once more be tolerated and used for growth purposes. Over and over the

baby dies out and is reborn. Faith is nourished by this repeated resurrection" (p.329).

The infant who is screaming with hunger and demanding to be fed cannot name the catastrophe that he or she fears. Nevertheless, this nameless dread creates a sense of panic that one's sense of self, one's sense of meaning, one's sense of there being "something" rather than "nothing," is in danger of being destroyed if a specific kind of response is not forthcoming. Wilfred Bion (1963, 1970) was convinced that this sense of catastrophe, so compelling in infancy, remained at the core of existence throughout life. Although our defenses become increasingly sophisticated with development, the concern that a disaster from out of the blue may snuff us out at any moment never entirely disappears. Every day of our existence, we live with death—as a potential and as a certainty. Samuel Beckett's plays and novels capture this sense of death-in-life in a chilling and poetic manner. In Beckett's masterpiece, *Waiting for Godot* (1954), Vladimir made the following observation in one particular monologue: "Astride of a grave and a difficult birth. Down in the hole, lingeringly, the grave-digger puts on the forceps" (p.58).

According to Bion, the only appropriate response to this sense of catastrophe lurking within all of us is faith. The infant must have faith that he or she will ultimately be fed to get from one day to the next. The imagery of the near-death experience can be understood as one manifestation of this faith. What appears to be a catastrophe is transformed into a beautiful transcendental event in which a loving being of light rescues the individual from ultimate destruction. One of the fundamental paradoxes of the NDE is that it is simultaneously a manifestation of faith and a catalyst for the development of faith. People who have near-death experiences may never fear death again. Their faith is strengthened so that the sense of catastrophe with which they live is finally mastered.

The image of the hero who triumphs over death arises from the very core of our being. It is a fundamental component of the great religions and mythologies throughout history (Campbell, 1988; Zaleski 1987). Because the features of the NDE are remarkably consistent across cultures and across time, we have every reason to believe that this response to catastrophe may have some genetic basis. Just as capillaries are genetically programmed to constrict in response to a wound, a psychological defense might be similarly programmed. It is now well established through studies of twins who have been separated at birth that defense mechanisms are influenced by genetic factors (Neubauer and Neubauer, 1990). It is impossible to know whether the genetic

trait associated with the NDE is the result of a mutation, according to the classical view of Darwinian natural selection, or whether it can be better understood as an inheritance of an acquired trait, in keeping with the more contemporary views of the neo-Lamarckians. Nor can any of us explain why some individuals experience an NDE while others do not. As Peter Neubauer and Alexander Neubauer (1990) noted: "Knowing that a feature has genetic roots is not the same as knowing how it is expressed, why it appears differently in different people, and what makes it emerge and recede in the course of a day or a year or a lifetime. Knowing its biological underpinnings does not tell us everything about its later expression" (p.163).

As we reflect back on the question we posed 10 years ago—do near-death experiences occur only near death?—we can state more emphatically today that no, of course, they don't. The dread of oblivion is not an issue that rears its ugly head only when one's survival is literally threatened. It is background noise that haunts us day and night as we frantically strive to deny our own mortality through a myriad of self-deceptions. This conceptual framework for understanding NDEs explains how the imagery can occur at any age, under any circumstance, including calm, relaxed states such as meditation, and in any cultural or religious setting.

Our experiences have led us to conclude that the state of *mind* of the near-death subject is far more important than the state of the *body*. Although full clinical data are not available for many of the cases in the literature, it appears that there must be either a *conscious* fear of physical death, as in the cases studied by Stevenson and his colleagues and our marine recruit, or a *preconscious* or conscious apprehension of some form of catastrophe, whether a divorce, a major upheaval in one's job, a loss of a loved one, or similar disaster. One subject from our original sample of 34 was meditating when she experienced her NDE. She was pursuing a fantasy around the Jungian animus archetype at a time before the explosion of publicity around NDEs. While she was not near death, she was under emotional stress at the time and was concerned about her relationship with her husband. Several other subjects who had NDEs when they were not near death were meditating at the time and reported that a sense of impending doom disturbed their initial relaxed state.

Explanatory models such as the one we are proposing are occasionally perceived as reductionistic because they do not sufficiently mystify the NDE. In our view, man's efforts to live with the absolute certainty of his own demise, and his ability to evolve religion and mythology to transcend the human condition are sufficiently awe-

inspiring even without invoking astral planes and visitors from beyond. The model we are proposing here provides the necessary bridge between catastrophe and faith that sustains us all in the brief, harrowing journey from the cradle to the grave.

### References

- Beckett, S. (1954). *Waiting for Godot*. New York, NY: Grove Press.
- Bion, W.R. (1963). *Elements of psycho-analysis*. London, England: Heinemann.
- Bion, W.R. (1970). *Attention and interpretation*. London, England: Tavistock Publications.
- Bush, N.E. (1984). The near-death experience in children: Shades of the prison-house reopening. *Anabiosis: The Journal of Near-Death Studies*, 3, 177-193.
- Campbell, J. (1988). *The power of myth*. New York, NY: Doubleday.
- Eigen, M. (1985). Toward Bion's starting point: Between catastrophe and faith. *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, 66, 321-330.
- Gabbard, G.O., and Twemlow, S.W. (1984). *With the eyes of the mind: An empirical analysis of out-of-body states*. New York, NY: Praeger.
- Gabbard, G.O., Twemlow, S.W., and Jones, F.C. (1981). Do "near-death experiences" occur only near death? *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*, 169, 374-377.
- Morse, M., Castillo, P., Venecia, D., Milstein, J., and Tyler, D.C. (1986). Childhood near-death experiences. *American Journal of Diseases of Children*, 140, 1110-1114.
- Morse, M., and Perry, P. (1990). *Closer to the light: Learning from the near-death experiences of children*. New York, NY: Villard.
- Neubauer, P., and Neubauer, A. (1990). *Nature's thumbprint: The new genetics of personality*. New York, NY: Addison-Wesley.
- Stevenson, I., Cook, E.W., and McClean-Rice, N. (1989-90). Are persons reporting "near-death experiences" really near death? A study of medical records. *Omega*, 20, 45-54.
- Twemlow, S.W., Gabbard, G.O., and Jones, F.C. (1982). The out-of-body experience: A phenomenological typology based on questionnaire responses. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 139, 450-455.
- Winnicott, D.W. (1965). *The maturational processes and the facilitating environment*. New York, NY: International Universities Press.
- Winnicott, D.W. (1971). *Playing and reality*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Zaleski, C. (1987). *Otherworld journeys: Accounts of near-death experience in medieval and modern times*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.



# The Myth of the Near-Death Journey

Michael Grosso, Ph.D.  
*Jersey City State College*

Have you built your ship of death, O have you?  
O build your ship of death, for you will need it.  
D.H. Lawrence, "The Ship of Death" (1965, p. 139)

There is a difference between one and another hour of life in their authority and subsequent effect. Our faith comes in moments; our vice is habitual. Yet there is a depth in those brief moments which constrains us to ascribe more reality to them than to all other experiences.  
Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The Over-Soul" (1883, p. 171)

**ABSTRACT:** I examine in this article the meaning and developmental potential of the near-death experience (NDE) as a stimulus to inner exploration. The NDE as a prototype of the transcendent contact encounter offers a model for an evolutionary theory of religion. My own experiences and contemporary portrayals of NDEs suggest that the experience is a vehicle for the mythic renewal of our idea of death as a journey rather than as a termination, and may be a stimulus for spiritual revolution.

When in 1975 I stumbled upon Raymond Moody's *Life After Life* (1975) and reviewed it for the *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research* (Grosso, 1976), I had no idea the book I favorably reviewed would become a bestseller and, more importantly, would inspire a new area of research with a special journal devoted to it. Indeed, I had the honor of having my article "Toward an Explanation

---

Michael Grosso, Ph.D., is Assistant Professor of Philosophy at the Jersey City State College. Reprint requests should be addressed to Dr. Grosso at the Department of Philosophy and Religion, Jersey City State College, 2039 Kennedy Memorial Boulevard, Jersey City, NJ 07305.

of Near-Death Phenomena" (Grosso, 1981) lead off the first issue of the *Journal of Near-Death Studies* (then known as *Anabiosis*). So I am delighted that Bruce Greyson, editor of the *Journal of Near-Death Studies*, has invited me to contribute an article to this tenth anniversary issue.

In casting about for a theme, I decided to offer a meditation on the near-death journey. I use the word "journey" because the near-death experience (NDE) is so often a stimulus to inner travels and explorations. Meditating on an experience, as I see it, is going with the experience, trying to get the feel of it from the inside, unfolding, unraveling its meanings, exploring its developmental possibilities.

I am not a medical professional nor a psychologist but a philosopher interested in the nature of mind. I am especially interested in unusual mind-related occurrences—miraculous, paranormal, or anomalous. I am interested in these phenomena because they often transform people's lives, and because of what they may tell us about human beings and the world we live in. Although I have never conducted organized studies of anomalous phenomena (I am indebted to those who have), I have talked at length with many who have had NDEs and other remarkable experiences. I've also had a fair share of my own remarkable experiences. So I consider myself a fellow traveler with those on the near-death journey.

I would like to recount one of my personal experiences that may bear on the NDE. A "great" dream, as I define it, is intensely vivid and meaningful to the dreamer, and seems to come from beyond the boundaries of the personal self; it is the kind of dream that burns itself into the memory, leaving a kind of inner landmark, a pointer to future developments.

In a "great" dream I once had (in press, a), I had to build a boat. To get the wood for this boat I entered the tomb of George Washington. I had to ransack the tomb of a great man, break up the wood of his coffin to build my boat. Much to my surprise I found a coffin within a coffin; before my eyes coffin within coffin appeared, each one becoming more lifelike in appearance.

Out of the last small red-leathery coffin leaped a scarlet beetle, or scarab. I watched the scarab hop away. In the dream I followed the creature, and suddenly found myself hauling a boat—or was it a coffin? I was hauling it up a hill that sloped against a clear blue sky. Then—and here was the "great" moment of my dream—the sun rose over the hill. I looked up at the sun and a brilliant ray of golden light shot into my heart. The warm ray penetrated, seeping through every cell of my

consciousness. In that moment I experienced a bliss that begged description.

I had this dream over twenty years ago, and can still remember it vividly. The intensity has faded, but the image and sense of an altogether higher state of being remain indelibly intact. Never before or since have I experienced such bliss—such a feeling of perfect love.

This dream reminds me of the near-death narratives, the meetings with the beings of light, we hear about so often. My dream experience also helps me get a handle on those luminous raptures reported in the literature of mystical experience. The dream is there, a point of reference, a place to go back to, a bright weathervane I can use to orient my inner wanderings as well as my outer researches.

This experience—however fleeting and private—is often at the back of my mind when I read stories of the NDE. I find myself asking all sorts of questions. For example, is it possible that being physically near death is only one of many routes to this remarkable experience? Might the NDE be just one perspective on a more fundamental experience? Could we in dreams, in meditation, even in drug-induced states glimpse this world we have come to know through the typical NDE?

Perhaps the experience in question is potentially present to all of us all the time, inwardly accessible, and just needs the right stimulus for us to gain entry. That entry gained, the contents of this inward universe of forms might reveal itself to us in more than one way. Perhaps there is more than one way the archetypal near-death experience may be experienced.

Researchers have noticed the overlap of NDEs with mystical experiences. Others have noticed possible connections with the unidentified flying object (UFO) experience (Davis, 1988). What has struck me were similarities to the phenomenology of UFO "contactee" encounters. Kenneth Ring and Christopher Rosing (1990) have recently begun to look at links between NDEs and alien abduction stories. Other candidates for the possibility that the NDE is one type on a continuum of similars include encounters with "angels" and visions of the "Blessed Virgin Mary."

The NDE may offer a natural prototype of such experiences—a kind of code for unlocking the whole continuum. Indeed, the NDE as the natural prototype of a continuum of transcendent contact encounters may offer a model for an evolutionary theory of religion. In *Frontiers of the Soul* (in press, b), I attempted to sketch this theory, and try, for example, to shed light on Saint Paul's conversion and the ancient Greek Eleusinian Mysteries by the psychodynamics of NDEs. So for

me the study of the NDE has been a stepping-stone toward wider speculations on human consciousness.

But to return to my "near-death" dream: meditating on this experience, I feel myself pulled from theory or organized research. Given the "NDE matrix"—the inner resources oriented around images of rebirth, renewal, renovation—we have two options: we can move horizontally toward widening our conceptual grasp of the phenomena or we can move—and I think this is the spontaneous response—vertically, down into the subjective mythic depths of the experience. For the moment I want to pursue the latter.

I believe that this vertical plunge into the meaning, feeling, and state-specificity of the NDE is part of its spontaneous trajectory. If, as some writers have suggested, there is an evolutionary potential to NDEs, then perhaps we are not meant to analyze the experience. The evolutionary function of the NDE might better be served by a more synthetic epistemology.

This would imply that the "truth"—different from the explanation—of the NDE is what we make of it. The NDE, viewed from this perspective, invites us to engage it on its terms; it asks for a poetic, in the sense of creative, response.

For one thing, this would mean trying to maintain an internal point of departure. From an internal standpoint, I try to understand the NDEs of others. Now, my dream was not an NDE. Yet in several nontrivial ways it was very much like an NDE. Like an NDE, it gave me a taste of something I can only lamely call cosmic love. True, I wasn't literally near death, yet in my dream I did undergo a kind of symbolic death.

I found myself dragging a coffin up a hill. But the form of the coffin, it turned out, also suggested a boat. In the universe of dream and myth, forms take on different meanings very quickly. Nothing is entirely solid, as in physical space, where a stone is a stone or a tree a tree. Not so in the world of dreams, where things are fluid and boundaries forever shifting. There a coffin can become a boat.

This puts a different spin on the meaning on death. It opens death up—turns it into a "boat"—the symbol of a journey. And since a boat would not be a boat without water, the dream leads to associations with lakes, rivers, seas. As I meditate, go with the flow of associations, I am carried back to the oldest tale of the human race—the story of Gilgamesh who crossed "the waters of death"—searching for Utnapishtim the Faraway One, the man who survived the Flood and knew the secret of immortality.

I had this dream when I was a graduate student at Columbia University and was busy absorbing the reigning philosophy of scientific materialism. Carl Jung's claustrophobic "boxed in" metaphysics was triumphant in the halls of that venerable institution. The chief method of the prevailing school of philosophy was analytic. I suspect that some part of me saw this exclusive focus on analysis as an imitation of entropy: a philosophy of dissection, destruction, death.

Apparently, the "teacher" in my deep unconscious meant to give me a different lesson in metaphysics. Contrary to the dogma that death is extinction, the dream told me that death was a voyage after all—the main symbolic equation of the dream being *coffin=boat*. That reading is further reinforced by the fact that deep inside the coffin I found a scarab—an Egyptian symbol of immortality.

At the time I had no knowledge of the scarab as an Egyptian symbol or of the image of a coffin within a coffin—also a motif in Egyptian myth. Yet themes from this myth of the Sun God Ra appeared in my dream. It seems the imagery came from somewhere deeper than my personal unconscious. Of course, I cannot prove this; I may have picked it all up unconsciously. In either case, the impact of the dream was tremendous; as far as aftereffects, what counts is not the explanation but the quality of the experience.

Now, the modern rational mind sees death as the end, a "grim reaper," a cul-de-sac; but my great dream and the typical near-death experience—emerging spontaneously as they seem to from a deep, perhaps collective layer of mind—tell a different story: death, seen through the eyes of the unconscious, becomes a boat, a voyage, a journey into the light, a love embrace with the universe.

This is an important point. A widespread pattern of experiences due to modern resuscitation technology, the NDE has become an avenue to a source of mythic renewal of our idea of death. It is as if some older, perhaps prehistoric stratum of mind, seeking a window, an inlet—and against the dictates of modern science—would force its way back into popular consciousness. This older stratum, erupting with its confounding signals and enchanting images, wants us to invert the picture of reality that has been constructed by modern science, and make us see death as a tunnel into a world beyond. The official academic view would have us see death as a hole in the ground, a grave, a dead-end.

So this is one way to think of the meaning of the near-death experience: in terms of what it is doing to us, reviving—not in a rational or objective way, but at a grass roots level of popular consciousness—the living world of the mythic journey. The new (yet very old) myth that is

crystallizing out of modern NDEs—millions if the polls are right—is telling us in no uncertain terms that death is a journey.

The image of death emerging from millions of unconscious minds is clear: it radically reverses "logic," common sense, and ordinary science. It substitutes light for dark, joy for grief, movement for stagnation; it affirms the claims of ancient visionaries from Zoroaster to Saint Paul and Plotinus. And it is doing so in the form of a living myth.

There is no question about the reality of this emerging myth. Let me give a few examples of recent movies that are woven from strands of the new near-death mythology. In addition to sitcoms and sci-fi and fantasy shorts on television the core imagery of NDEs has appeared in such movies as *Return of the Jedi* (Marquand, 1983), *Resurrection* (Petrie, 1980), *All That Jazz* (Fosse, 1979), *Peggy Sue Got Married* (Coppola, 1986), *Jo Jo Dancer* (Pryor, 1986), *Bliss* (Lawrence, 1985), *Ghost* (Zucker, 1990), *Flatliners* (Schumacher, 1990), and *Jacob's Ladder* (Lyne, 1990). The recent movie *Jacob's Ladder* (Lyne, 1990) has irked and puzzled many viewers by its confusing shifts from reality to surreality, but the confusion vanishes once you realize that the entire film is about an afterdeath journey.

Let me describe a few details in one or two of these films to illustrate how near-death motifs are appearing in our contemporary mythic consciousness.

In Bob Fosse's *All That Jazz* (1979), a frenetic womanizing choreographer was taken through several Code Blues; the hero kept bumping into Moody's "being of light," appropriately portrayed as a beautiful woman in white.

In *Resurrection* (Petrie, 1980), in a touching performance, Ellen Burstyn became a healer after her brush with death. Unfortunately, she was treated as a witch by local fundamentalists. Repressed daughter, repressed psychic, she tried to soften the hard heart of her father, a man sadly impervious to the light of unconditional love. Her post-near-death enlightenment, paradoxically, threatened to ruin her; the world is not prepared for unconditional love nor for ideologically non-aligned healing power.

This power, unaligned and undefined, provoked intense anxiety in a Bible-thumping hick chillingly played by Sam Shepherd who, in the name of a jealous God, attempted to blow her brains out. In the end, the force released by the near-death epiphany went underground; attempts to heal the world were forced to take the form of covert actions. Anything resembling real "resurrection" turned out to be dangerous and illegal.

In the movie, *Jo Jo Dancer* (Pryor, 1986), going out of the body during an NDE became for Richard Pryor a metaphor for looking at life from a detached viewpoint. The out-of-body experience became a way of self-rediscovery, getting a grip on the elusive implications latent but normally hidden in one's life.

After glimpsing the whole pattern of his life, the comic hero in *Jo Jo Dancer* regained his will to live. Outside his hospital room—to ease his rite of passage back—a bevy of beauties waited for him. On stage before an enthusiastic audience, he mimed the death of his old self: The End, amid applause and laughter. Near-death was portrayed as a comic rite of passage, a tool of conversion from the old to the new man: another step in the reeducation of the imagination of death.

A similar device was used in Charles Dickens' *Christmas Carol* (1843/1983). (Dickens was interested in psychical research, a new discipline in the early 1880's established by a small group of Cambridge scholars.) In the Dickens story, a man, at high risk of losing his soul, also stepped out of his cantankerous bodily self. One by one, the spirits of past, present, and future took him on a trip into various aspects of his repressed and disfigured life. He put up a fight but eventually gained some special insights into himself. In this way Ebenezer Scrooge became a new man. And so do people on the threshold of death often claim to watch their whole lives, or the significant highpoints, unroll before them in the ultimate "movie" flashback.

But to come back to contemporary movies: with the award-winning Australian film, *Bliss* (Lawrence, 1985), based on the novel by William Carey, the near-death experience became a symbol of planetary decay and renewal. I would like to dwell on this extraordinary but little-noticed film. Here the humor was quite black, blacker than Pryor's; the imagery grotesque, baroque, surreal. *Bliss* added to the new cinematic mythology of near-death by weaving into the narrative items underplayed by researchers: the hellish side of near-death.

The hero of *Bliss*, Harry Joy, an amiable chap who liked to tell stories, had a heart attack after a drinking party. His (invisible) double promptly ascended among the trees; then drifted further into a world of undersea images of exotic beauty and repulsive horror. After it all, Harry was never the same again. There was no attempt to reproduce the typical imagery reported in near-death experiences; no beings of light, no whirling through tunnels, no encounters with demised relations or celestial welcoming committees. Instead, the film embroidered a private mythology of life after death—more importantly, of the living death that was Harry's life.

Harry's world was shot through with deception, infidelity, incest, cancer, insanity, suicide. His life, in short, was permeated by death, bodily and spiritual.

Having a near-death experience, one no longer lives at life's surface; one becomes a psychic amphibian, floating precariously between worlds. Dream and reality melt into each other. *Bliss* underscored this liquefaction of ontological boundaries. It showed how dreams, fantasies, lies mingle promiscuously with truth and external reality.

While Harry was recovering from his heart attack in the hospital, his wife made love to his business partner on a table in a public restaurant. Corruption was totally visible but nobody noticed or cared. The point was that Harry, thanks to the "bliss" of near-death, had distanced himself from the tangle of deception that was his life. Harry's near-death, as taught by ancient philosophers and mystery rites, became a vehicle for transforming insight.

*Bliss* portrayed family life, derelict from the order of nature. After his near-death episode, Harry caught his daughter performing fellatio on his son, who made his pocket money selling cocaine. She of course did not perform this service out of sisterly affection; she did it for the cocaine. We begin to appreciate the savage irony of the title, *Bliss*.

The closer you get to death the simpler your sense of good and evil. Harry, after his brush with mortality, decided to "do good." He began doing good by opposing certain carcinogenic policies of his advertising company. Images of a carcinogenic apocalypse pervade *Bliss*. Meanwhile, he fell in love with a prostitute. His wife was diagnosed as having cancer and, in a final act evoking Valhalla and the Crucifixion, blew herself up at a company board meeting.

Harry retired to the wilderness with his new girlfriend. Like Scrooge, he lived on to old age. At film's end he died again. The camera led us upward, again taking us on a gentle out-of-body flotation. This time there would be no return. His granddaughter spoke his epitaph: "He planted trees," she said. "He told stories." *Bliss* ended on this note. The road to the new Eden was through death. Death in the movies here turned into a symbol of planetary rebirth.

I am describing—not prescribing—what seems in so many cases to result from this experience. The near-death experience is about the unfolding of new life. In a recent film in which I was interviewed, several NDErs described specific changes they underwent (O'Reilly, 1991).

One man wrote ads for television, but quit after having his NDE; his former work now seemed meaningless. He started an organization for

helping gifted children. This was his way of living his mythic journey. Another experiencer chose to end her marriage; the relationship had become meaningless. Measured against the memory of her near-death encounter, divorce from her ordinary existence became a necessity; this was her way of living the myth of the journey.

Another woman suddenly found herself with clairvoyant powers, which met with disapproval from the priest of her local church. This prompted the woman to break from her church, to embark on her own spiritual journey, and move on to explore a wider universe. Her journey was to explore new forms of perception, new ways of knowing the world, moving beyond the restraints of standard rationality, the commandments of standard religiosity.

For many the NDE serves as a tool of deconstruction. Deconstruction of ordinary reality is important in developing a new outlook on life. For anyone interested in the evolutionary potential of NDEs and related experiences, this deconstructive effect is worthy of attention.

As a source of renewal of one's personal mythology, the NDE seems to help us let go of the world we construct through ordinary experience. Thanks to the transformative NDE, we reinvent the rules of the reality game, capsizing the standard paradigms: in one person it deconstructs the money-making game (the NDEr who quit his job as an ad man); in another the conventional marriage game is delegitimized; in yet another it deconstructs two birds with one stone: the bird of scientific reason and the bird of dogmatic religion.

Add them all up, these raids on convention, these perhaps rough weanings from the habits of conventional value and perception, and you have a force in place for spiritual renewal, for spiritual revolution.

So the NDE does not have the earmarks of illusion or defensiveness. On the contrary, the NDE seems rather to lead to a liberating disillusionment—as in those who are disillusioned by their jobs, their relationships, their religions, their routine understandings of the world. These experiences have expansive potentials; they hold seeds of transformation. Not at all defensive, they lead to awakenings, openings, outreachings toward more, not less, reality.

I am trying to make explicit the mythic intentionality that seems at work in the NDE. I am not trying to explain it in the sense of reduce it to an *a priori* set of ideas or ontological presuppositions. I am rather, in a spirit of active imagination, trying to carry the myth forward, see where it wants to go, immerse myself in its *élan vital*, its meandering evolutionary impetus.

So let us enter into the flow of the near-death imagery. Instead of

trying to figure out whether it is an illusion or a defense mechanism or a phantasm conjured by some brain mechanism, let us enter into the mythic near-death journey and see where it leads us.

The experience itself gives a clue to the way to do this. Over and over we have heard it. Those involuntary visionaries who have glimpsed the higher regions and had their foretaste of paradise are, as Jung and countless others have said, depressed, angered, rebellious against the return to a flat soulless existence. Near-death travelers return to the ordinary world under protest, feeling at once cursed, haunted, and driven by memories of their brief brushes with paradise.

As one man told me who had a near-death experience: "I was given a new direction." The new direction was back to the world of light, love, meaning, away from the gray world of compromised ordinary reality.

The clue is in the revulsion. Georg Hegel wrote that contradiction is the force that moves things. The NDE contradicts our "fallen" existence. It points to a new way, a *vita nova*, a way to live the myth forward, a road to incarnating the vision of light. What, in practice, does that mean? It means to live all the deconstructions and dissolutions and divorces and alienations: to decathect the jobs without meaning, the marriages and alliances and affiliations that say nothing, confirm nothing of the vision.

The old world must die, says the myth of the near-death journey; therefore, all institutions, all religions and sciences, all forms of knowledge, all models, routines, categories, paradigms—whatever falsifies, fails to resonate with, or betrays the natural trajectory of the soul to its true source of renewal and wellbeing—all these things must submit to a rigorous critique. Their spell must be dissolved. We have to release our grip on the familiar world. If we want to live the myth of near-death resurrection, we have to question the old system of reality. How else can we join Gilgamesh in crossing the "waters of death" in quest of the secret of immortality?

But to travel the mythic journey of the near-death experience is not to commit suicide. Bruce Greyson (1981) has especially made this clear, thus indirectly confirming that the NDE is about rediscovering life.

The interviewees in Tim O'Reilly's film did anything but commit suicide. They refused the "suicidal" features of their everyday existence; they rejected the "death" that all-too-often conceals itself behind the commonplaces of life-and-business-as-usual, the soul-negating jobs, the false human relationships, the inauthentic institutional affiliations. The NDErs refused to commit suicide by denying their vision and conforming to a deadly reality, a false consciousness. These people

were exploring the myth of the near-death journey, making their own Gilgamesh journey, their own search for paradisaical renovation.

To set out, each in our own way, on the journey to discover paradise, the search to taste the flower of immortality: this, in my opinion, is the great teaching of the near-death experience. It is a call from the depths of a life-affirming Mind at Large to reset our priorities, leave the lies and tinsel behind and seek the impossible but necessary dream of heaven on earth. As I follow the images of the NDE, I find myself coming back to the belief that each of us stores an extraordinary power within, and that there are many inlets into a great sea of transforming life energies.

Once we set out on the near-death journey, however, we're pretty much on our own; we become transitional, marginal people. Each of us must, as D.H. Lawrence wrote, build our own ship of death. So a little courage is called for if we dare to live the myth of our near-death journey. Yet if we heed the word of the near-death visionaries, there is reason to believe that the universe is democratic in its bounty and has armed each of us with the inner resources for embarking on the journey, for heading toward the omega of our life potentials. For not only is there light at the end of the tunnel, not only are we closer to the light and capable of entering the light, but *we are the light*. That, in a nutshell, seems the supreme message.

Ralph Waldo Emerson's essay on *Self-Reliance* (1883b) takes on new meaning in view of what we may now surmise lies latent in all of us. "Trust thyself," wrote that free spirit, "every heart vibrates to that iron string" (p. 32). Millions of people having the same experience are telling us to trust ourselves—not our ideas or our beliefs, but the source of life that lies coiled in our own inner depths. There is a tremendous life force, a life light, a life tide within. The NDE is telling us to trust that light, that the way has been tried, that where things look gloomiest, darkest, most hopeless, there is really a hidden spring of light ahead. The NDE is calling us to "follow our bliss," to use the now famous words of Joseph Campbell (Campbell and Moyers, 1988, p. 91).

The experiencers come back to a broken world screaming in protest, horrified at falling out of the light. These feelings may be nature's way of reminding us we have forgotten that we are the light, that we have all that we really need. Revulsion at the shallowness of our lives may be the greatest gift, the greatest blessing of the near-death experience. For that revulsion reminds us of the need to make the break, to practice the philosophic "death" that Plato extolled—the death of our false relationship to everything.

## References

- Campbell, J., and Moyers, B. (1988). *The power of myth*. New York, NY: Doubleday.
- Coppola, F. (Director). (1986). *Peggy Sue got married* [Film]. Hollywood, CA: Columbia.
- Davis, L. (1988). A comparison of UFO and near-death experiences as vehicles for the evolution of human consciousness. *Journal of Near-Death Studies*, 6, 240-258.
- Dickens, C. (1983). *A Christmas Carol*. New York, NY: Bantam. (Original work published 1843)
- Emerson, R.W. (1883). The over-soul. In *The work of Ralph Waldo Emerson. Volume I. Essays. First Series* (pp. 171-193). New York, NY: Library Society.
- Emerson, R.W. (1883). Self-reliance. In *The work of Ralph Waldo Emerson. Volume I. Essays. First Series* (pp. 31-60). New York, NY: Library Society.
- Fosse, B. (Director). (1979). *All that jazz* [Film]. Hollywood, CA: Columbia.
- Greyson, B. (1981). Near-death experiences and attempted suicide. *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior*, 11, 10-16.
- Grosso, M. (1976). [Review of *Life after life*]. *Journal of the American Society for Psychological Research*, 70, 316-320.
- Grosso, M. (1981). Toward an explanation of near-death phenomena. *Anabiosis: The Journal of Near-Death Studies*, 1, 3-26.
- Grosso, M. (In press, a). *Soulmaker*. Norfolk, VA: Hampton Roads.
- Grosso, M. (In press, b). *Frontiers of the soul*. Wheaton, IL: Theosophical Publishing House.
- Lawrence, D.H. (1965). *Selected Poems*. New York, NY: Viking.
- Lawrence, R. (Director). (1985). *Bliss* [Film]. Sydney, Australia: New South Wales Film Corp.
- Lyne, A. (Director). (1990). *Jacob's ladder* [Film]. Hollywood, CA: Carolco.
- Marquand, R. (Director). (1983). *Return of the Jedi* [Film]. Hollywood, CA: Columbia.
- Moody, R.A., Jr. (1975). *Life after life*. Covington, GA: Mockingbird.
- O'Reilly, T. (Producer). (1991). *Round trip* [Film]. New York, NY: Tim O'Reilly Productions.
- Petrie, D. (Director). (1980). *Resurrection* [Film]. Hollywood, CA: Universal.
- Pryor, R. (Director). (1986). *Jo Jo Dancer, your life is calling* [Film]. Hollywood, CA: RCA.
- Ring, K., and Rosing, C. (1990). The Omega Project: A psychological survey of persons reporting abductions and other UFO encounters. *Journal of UFO Studies*, 2, 59-99.
- Schumacher, J. (Director). (1990). *Flatliners* [Film]. Hollywood, CA: Columbia.
- Zucker, J. (Director). (1990). *Ghost* [Film]. Hollywood, CA: Paramount.

# The Popular Appeal of the Near-Death Experience

Robert Basil, M.A.

*Prometheus Books, Buffalo, NY*

**ABSTRACT:** In this article I argue that as scientific research provides an ever-more-complete physiological explanation of the near-death experience (NDE), popular interest in NDEs will wane, because the transcendental interpretation, which holds that the NDE provides proof of an immaterial soul, an afterlife, and assorted paranormal phenomena, has always been the magnet that has attracted widespread attention to the subject. Since the transcendental interpretation resonates with our culture's deepest wishes, dreams, and fears, the television and newspapers have tended to focus on that model almost exclusively. This unbalanced presentation of near-death research has reinforced the traditional image of science as a cold, heartless enterprise. I speculate that, in terms of its popular appeal, future near-death research may well have more impact on the field of psychotherapy than that of religion or the paranormal.

While other essays in this tenth-anniversary issue of *The Journal of Near-Death Studies* describe advances the scientific community has been making in the study of near-death experiences (NDEs) and how that community can continue its research most effectively, I wish to slice into the discussion from a more marginal position. I will try to answer the following question: what impact will future research on NDEs have on the popular understanding of them? Or, putting it more frankly, this essay will explain why I think that future scientific

---

Robert Basil, M.A., is a senior editor at Prometheus Books, and a Ph.D. candidate in American popular culture and religion at Stanford University. He has taught at Stanford University and at Villa Maria College. Reprint requests should be addressed to Mr. Basil at Prometheus Books, 700 East Amherst Street, Buffalo, NY 14215-1674.

insight will have little or no effect on the popular understanding of NDEs.

In "A Neurobiological Model for Near-Death Experiences," Juan C. Saavedra-Aguilar and Juan S. Gómez-Jeria (1989), summarizing relevant research, wrote that "being really near death does not appear to be a necessary condition to having an NDE" (p. 207). In the conclusion to this important article, the authors flatly reject the religious or "transcendental" model

in the light of present knowledge. Recent neurological analysis of some religious events . . . which seem to correlate well with epileptic phenomenology, suggest that we are on the right path in separating physical elements from metaphysical ones. (Saavedra-Aguilar and Gómez-Jeria, 1989, p. 218)

This "transcendental interpretation" has not been universally rejected by the scientific community, as a brisk exchange in the British journal *The Lancet* has shown. Justine Owens, Emily Cook, and Ian Stevenson (1990) studied 58 patients who reported having NDEs, only 28 of whom were actually near death. They reported "one item relevant to the transcendental interpretation. . . . [W]e found that patients who were actually near death reported enhanced cognitive function at that time" (p. 1177). In a letter to the editor, Karl Jansen replied:

Until objective testing of the cognitive function in dying persons claiming improved function is done the well established paradigms of physical science stand firm against transcendental interpretations. (1991, p. 244)

Bruce Greyson, the editor of this journal, has bluntly noted that NDEs offer poor proof of an afterlife, as quoted in a syndicated newspaper article (Shulins, 1989) representative of the manner in which print journalism treats the NDE. The author quoted Greyson, who stressed the psychological after-effects of the NDE, but devoted most of the article to the transcendental interpretation. Three NDErs were interviewed and told of meeting God, being cradled by a deceased mother during the NDE, and being encompassed by a white light subsequently labeled as God; a Tufts University professor, who was called a "debunker," was given three paragraphs (in a 49-paragraph article) to counter claims that these and other NDErs really died and came back.

Even Raymond Moody, who introduced the subject of NDEs to millions in his *Life After Life* (1975)—a book that unabashedly promoted

the hypothesis that NDErs have, in fact, glimpsed some transcendental world—admitted that science has not shown that the near-death experience provides evidence of an afterlife:

I have talked to almost every NDE researcher in the world about his or her work. Most of us believe in our hearts that NDEs are a glimpse of life after death. But as scientists and people of medicine, we still haven't come up with "scientific proof" that part of us goes on living after our physical being is dead. (Moody and Perry, 1988, p. 151)

Moody's book is filled with incorrect information. His claim that "there are many cases in which people with flat EEGs have had near-death experiences" (Moody and Perry, 1988, p. 142) has no support or corroboration in the medical literature; Greyson noted that "no physician or scientist has yet published a firsthand report with EEG findings" (1990, p. 258). Moody's claim that the NDE is "something specifically connected with being on the brink of death" (1988, p. 141) has been proven false by numerous accounts given by NDErs themselves, as well as by research such as that of Owens, Cook, and Stevenson (1990) noted above. A leap of faith is required to accept Moody's hypothesis.

In short, research conducted under scientific conditions seems to demonstrate, and more and more convincingly, that NDEs have a wholly physiological cause, notwithstanding the pronounced emotional overlay that accompanies them—and notwithstanding, too, the religious/metaphysical/spiritual language with which that overlay is so commonly expressed.

This conclusion has been announced in the public forum. The "NDE debate" is now a talk-show staple; that's how I became involved in the field. A television talk-show was doing such a program, and the producer invited me to participate as a "skeptic" to counter five NDErs, each of whom held the metaphysical hypothesis; that is, each believed he or she had witnessed the afterlife. I had virtually no expertise in the area of near-death research; my research had focused on American fringe religious movements. Susan Blackmore had contributed to my anthology *Not Necessarily the New Age* (Basil, 1989), in which she devoted a few pages to out-of-body experiences and NDEs. I had edited that contribution on a trainride, and literally everything I knew about NDEs I had learned between Rochester and Poughkeepsie. For television, I thought, that ought to be enough.

The show's producer called the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal (CSICOP) and asked whom that haven of skeptics could provide. Since Blackmore lives in Great Bri-

tain and none of the other regular suspects could be rounded up, CSICOP's media coordinator hoped I could acquit the skeptical position well. He made me promise to read his fat file on the subject, which I did, and he got me on the show . . . after the second commercial and after several attractive, sincere, and articulate people told stirring, heartening stories of their souls' voyage into the astral worlds.

The hostess introduced me with this question: "Over 8 million people report having had a near-death experience. Why do *you* say they're lying?"

This debate, I realized at once—and with considerable force—was going to be rather limited. To doubt the prevalent interpretation of the NDE meant that one was an atheist, that one had no hope, that one's mind was closed. The near-death experience was the subject of the show only insofar as it cleared the way for discussion about spiritual growth and faith-proved-true. I *did* note, in fact, that many NDErs return from their experience with feelings of universal love, that there was no need to attack the experience itself, especially when its after-effects seemed so manifestly beneficial. Nonetheless, the hostess nailed me with the kind of logical *non sequitur* that plays so well on television: "Don't you believe in love, Mr. Basil? Haven't you ever been in love?"

The cameras were showing audience members shaking their heads, apparently with disbelief and derision, as I pathetically protested, "I love love!"

"I'm sorry, that really wasn't fair of me," the hostess said. "So let me ask my audience: is there anybody here who agrees with what Mr. Basil is saying today?" After five seconds of silence—a long, long time on television—she summed up: "Okay then. . . . We'll be right back after this message."

I cannot doubt that the appeal of the topic was, and remains, the promise that NDEs evince spiritual worlds, worlds you will get to eventually. That's an attractive promise, and it's one that courses through the veins of most religions.

Most of my "skeptic" friends were pleased with my appearance, though they freely admitted I was mauled. "That's the best we can hope for" was the refrain. Any kind of in-depth treatment of a scientific topic is impossible on television; there's not enough time to state one's case. Moreover, there's not enough time to counter somebody else's case. You can't check or refute claims; all you can do is talk. Whoever talks best wins the argument.

And it's hard to talk best when you're trying to talk science. Indeed, the complexity and the fruits of science are, I believe, the very things that make the New Age paradigm so savory in contrast. Science is

associated with the technology that has given us nuclear weapons, with the pollution that threatens the health of our planet. This world is dangerous, confusing, and transient; so it's a good thing there's another realm, the spiritual realm, which is everlasting and good.

The scientist's world-view is beholden to a lesser reality. Psychologist Maureen O'Hara put it well:

The image of the mainstream scientist held by most New Agers is of a person, usually a white male, with no feelings, no spiritual yearnings, and who is probably oblivious to both the darker applications of his craft and to the magical possibilities of the human mind. The image of "science" is of a completely rational, reductionistic power-trip where "linear or left-brained thinking" and closed-mindedness predominate. (1989, p. 152)

The following exchange, televised on another television talk show, "The Shirley Show," on September 10, 1990, no doubt fortified that image:

*Henry Gordon* (Chairman of the Ontario Skeptics): The concept of the near-death experience is dangerous for a number of reasons. If one tends to believe in these things, one tends to believe in superstitious, supernatural, paranormal things. People tend to be less rational in their thinking. And Lord knows we need a lot more rational thinking today.

*Barbara Harris* (NDEr): I disagree. We need a lot *less* rational thinking. [Audience applauds.] It's out of balance to just be rational. A rational world has made the mess we got right now. I'm talking about *heart*, Henry.

*Henry Gordon*: I was born a skeptic. Basically because I don't like hypocrisy. . . . I'd like to see some of the evidence for some of the claims made here today. I'm going to be your party-pooper.

Television is all about leaping into new and wonderful worlds. The promise of most products advertised on television commercials is one of total, enchanting, and instant transformation. The near-death experience, as told by most NDErs who appear on talk shows, is all about leaping into a new and wonderful world and about becoming totally, enchantingly, and instantly transformed. Skeptics who attempt to explain the effects of asphyxiation on neuropeptides, or who make unwarranted *ad hominem* attacks, aren't going to leap too far. I can do no better than to quote media critic Jay Rosen:

Television is not in the business of disputing beliefs. It is more likely to *entertain* them, as a way of entertaining us. When New Agers

appear on such programs as Phil Donahue or Oprah Winfrey, they are there to discuss holistic health or reincarnation as "controversies," equivalent in their entertainment value to incest, patricide, and men who love fat women. The hosts may stir up some opposition in the audience, or invite a skeptic on to dispute the New Agers. But as representatives of an emergent lifestyle, New Age thinkers are likely to be greeted with the different-strokes-for-different-folks attitude that serves as the unofficial ideology of the Donahue-Winfrey format. (1989, p. 271)

Barbara Harris's book, *Full Circle: The Near-Death Experience and Beyond* (Harris and Bascom, 1990), illustrates the ways in which NDErs have come to interpret their experiences, and it sets out clearly why "skeptics," not to mention scientists generally, will never be able to define NDEs in ways that win large public acceptance.

It goes without saying that NDErs rarely *expect* their experiences, and that their experiences seem strange yet also more "real" than waking consciousness. Because of that sense of "reality," most NDErs will reject a hypothesis that they were merely hallucinating. Hallucinations can be vivid, and they can mimic many aspects of the NDE, but rarely do those who hallucinate interpret their hallucinations, after they have passed, as being actual events, no matter what information they may have gleaned from the hallucination.

A compelling analogy can be found in the film *The Wizard of Oz* (LeRoy and Fleming, 1939). Dorothy's adventures along the yellow brick road *seemed* real to her, though they were brought on by a sharp bump on the head. Returning to normal consciousness by the film's end, Dorothy retained those insights gained in her dream/fantasy/hallucination. It is of note that the adventures of Dorothy and her dog Toto in Oz were filmed *in color*; while their life in Kansas, representing a more mundane experience, was filmed in black-and-white.

Because of this sense of "reality" to the experience, being told that your NDE is a hallucination brought on, for example, by cerebral anoxia (Hines, 1988) is not going to satisfy you. In fact, how could such an explanation not infuriate you? Who wants the most profound experience of one's life explained away with one word: hallucination? An NDEr wants more than one word. And the reason that up until recently most NDErs have accepted the paranormal/transcendental hypothesis is this: those who embrace that hypothesis established a taxonomy of, and a vocabulary for, the experience *first*; they gave shape to the inchoate, gave NDErs a conceptual grip on the experience. Who would *not* choose the serious conjectures of the paranormal researcher or the spiritualist over the debunker's one-word dismissal?

You listen to the people who listen to you; you don't listen, or have a hard time trying to listen, to people who don't. The paranormal researchers and spiritualists were the ones who originally listened to NDErs.

Harris's response to her NDE, as described in *Full Circle*, depicts well this role of the paranormal researcher. Bewildered by her experience, Harris delved into the literature, the initial effect of which was to give names to what she saw and felt: "I had never really thought of it as a tunnel until recently, when I started reading all the literature on NDEs, but I knew that was a good word for it" (Harris and Bascom, 1990, p. 91). That literature also supported a number of paranormal claims, including one that NDErs show an increase in psychic abilities. Harris herself wrote:

My bio-energy field, the result of the NDE, affects electronic equipment. The energy affects anything that uses microchips, including computers and photocopy machines. Ordinary car batteries are sometimes drained when I'm around them. . . . The up side is that burned-out light bulbs sometimes work again around me. The down side is that streetlamps sometimes blow out as I walk past them. (Harris and Bascom, 1990, p. 139)

The importance of attaching words to these experiences was echoed by Blackmore, who began research into psychic phenomena after an out-of-body experience and then became a skeptic after conducting many tests that failed to establish the existence of psychic phenomena. She has retained an admiration for those who champion the paranormal hypothesis, noting in particular the role it plays in giving people language: "Astral projection, mystical insight, cosmic consciousness, and ineffable oneness are not ridiculous ideas to be laughed at but people's brave attempts to describe their experience" (1989, p. 183).

Of all experiences that can be called paranormal, the NDE is unique. Here is an alleged experience of the afterlife that can actually be looked at under more or less controlled conditions, for example in hospitals. Here, finally, science might no longer be able to deny the existence of the soul, of consciousness floating free from visceral support. The experiment is clear: if someone can report having an NDE after his or her electroencephalogram has been flat for a while, then scientists must accept that some form of human consciousness is independent of the brain. The thin edge of the wedge was described precisely by Charles Tart (Blackmore, 1983, p. 230): "Man has a non-physical soul of some sort that is capable, under certain conditions, of leaving the physical body."

I predict that as researchers close in on a wholly physiological explanation for NDEs, popular interest in them will wane, because people come to the topic out of hope and that hope will be dashed. If medicine figures out how to induce an NDE safely, how to excite the beneficial effects described so eloquently by Harris and many others, then interest will no doubt rise again, but it will rise among those who are interested in psychotherapy and not in proof of the afterlife or an immaterial soul.

It is impossible to predict whether such a drug or treatment will ever be invented, or how—or how often and to how many—it would be prescribed, or what society would look and act like when it is filled with self-knowing people-lovers whose fear of death has vanished. It does seem, however, that profoundly effective psychotherapy available on such a wide scale would warrant the same kind of debate now generated by the possibility of improving our biological make-up with designer genes.

### References

- Basil, R. (Ed.). (1989). *Not necessarily the New Age: Critical essays*. Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books.
- Blackmore, S. (1983). *Out of the body*. London: Granada.
- Blackmore, S. (1989). Out of the body? In Basil, R. (Ed.), *Not necessarily the New Age: Critical essays*. Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books.
- Greyson, B. (1990). Scientific commentary. In Harris, B., and Bascom, L., *Full circle: The near-death experience and beyond*. New York, NY: Pocket Books.
- Harris, B., and Bascom, L. (1990). *Full circle: The near-death experience and beyond*. New York, NY: Pocket Books.
- Jansen, K.L.R. (1991). Transcendental explanations and near-death experience (letter). *Lancet*, 337, 244.
- LeRoy, M. (Producer), and Fleming, V. (Director). (1939). *The Wizard of Oz* (Film). Hollywood, CA: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer.
- Moody, R.A., Jr. (1975). *Life after life*. Covington, GA: Mockingbird Books.
- Moody, R.A., Jr., and Perry, P. (1989). *The light beyond*. New York, NY: Bantam.
- O'Hara, M. (1989). Science, pseudoscience, and mythmongering. In Basil, R. (Ed.), *Not necessarily the New Age: Critical essays*. Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books.
- Owens, J.E., Cook, E.W., and Stevenson, I. (1990). Features of "near-death experience" in relation to whether or not patients were near death. *Lancet*, 336, 1175-1177.
- Rosen, J. (1989). Optimism and dread: T.V. and the New Age. In Basil, R. (Ed.), *Not necessarily the New Age: Critical essays*. Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books.
- Saavedra-Aguilar, J.C., and Gómez-Jeria, J.S. (1989). A neurobiological model for near-death experiences. *Journal of Near-Death Studies*, 7, 205-222.
- Shulins, N. (1989, June 25). Seeing the light. Associated Press syndicated article.

# Letter to the Editor

## Premonitions of What Could Have Been

To the Editor:

We owe a debt of thanks to Barbara A. Walker, William J. Serdahely, and Lori J. Bechtel (1991) for calling our attention to what they claimed to be a previously unreported type of precognitive vision associated with near-death experiences (NDEs): seeing the reaction of one's family members to the news of one's death. In commenting on the three instructive case histories they presented to illustrate this phenomenon, they observed that they "know of no other previous accounts in the literature of a near-death prophetic case in which the experiencer was able to view the possible emotional aftereffects of his or her death on parents and loved ones" (p. 93). But, in fact, such cases *do* exist and are to be found, interestingly enough, among the *earliest* examples of NDEs for which we have written first-person narratives.

For one instance, consider the famous example of the English Admiral Francis Beaufort, who had an NDE when a young man in 1791 as a result of a near-drowning incident. This case is especially noteworthy because it was the first in the literature, so far as I know, to use the phrase "panoramic review" in connection with the detailed life review aspect of the near-death episode. However, Beaufort did not only have a memory playback of past events; he also seemed to have had a clear presentiment of what effect his death would have. In writing many years later of this portion of his NDE, Beaufort commented:

The course of these thoughts I can even now in a great measure retrace—the event which had just taken place, the awkwardness that produced it, the bustle it must have occasioned, the effect it would have on a most affectionate father . . . (Audette, 1982, p. 32)

Of course, it may be argued that this is scarcely more than an intimation of the precognition that Walker, Serdahely, and Bechtel

were concerned with in their article, and I would agree, but for a clear-cut example, fully commensurate with theirs, consider another celebrated case from the first major study of NDEs, now a century old.

Albert Heim was a Swiss geology professor who was fond of climbing in the Alps. One day, he lost his balance, fell off a cliff, and hurtled toward what he thought was certain death. Like Beaufort, Heim had a life review—and preview. In his own words:

My sisters and especially my wonderful mother, who was so important in my life, were around me. Suddenly, through the images of the moment, there came the consideration, "I will be dead." Then I saw a telegram or letter messenger who gave my mother, at the door of her house, the notice of my death. She together with the other members of my family took the news with the deepest sorrow, but with pious greatness of soul. They showed no complaining, wailing or weeping. (Noyes, 1972, p. 175)

Of course, as is now well known, Heim not only survived this incident but, because of it, became intensely interested in what we now call NDEs and over the next 25 years interviewed some 30 others who, like himself, had survived near-fatal falls or other life-threatening incidents, and eventually published his findings in an obscure Swiss mountain climbing yearbook (Heim, 1892).

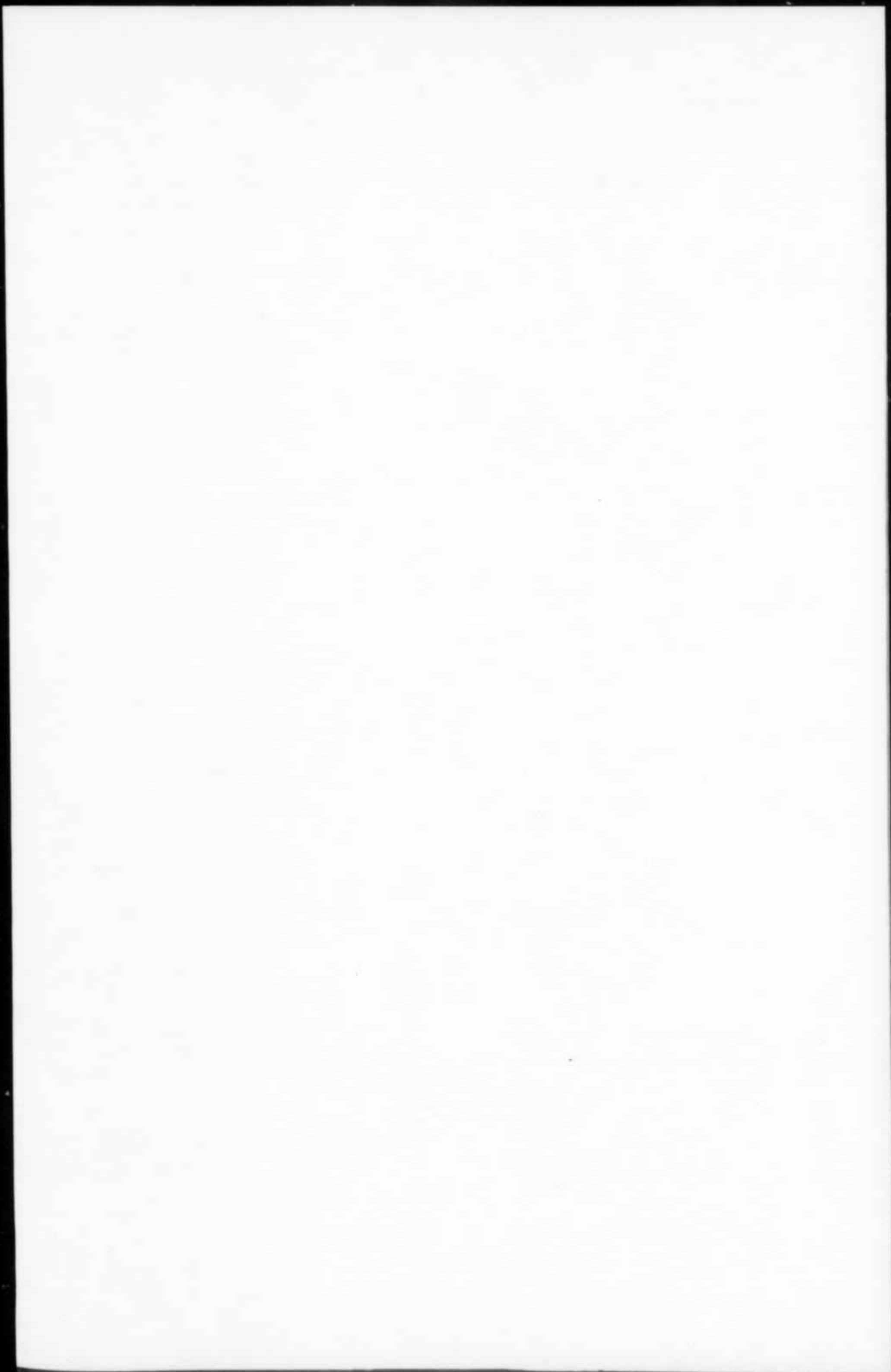
Whether the instances that Walker, Serdahely, and Bechtel cited, or these that I've just mentioned, involved glimpses of an alternate future track that would have actually occurred if the individual *had* died, or whether they have a more prosaic psychological explanation, is a question that must be left open for now. What seems clear, however, is that such apparent premonitions are hardly new to the near-death literature, but, on the contrary, can be found among the first narratives that now are known to mark the beginning of our modern field of near-death studies. In view of this fact, one wonders how many other such undiscovered cases might still remain to come to light. I hope the work of Walker, Serdahely, and Bechtel will help to spur such a search.

## References

- Audette, J.R. (1982). Historical perspectives on near-death episodes and experiences. In C.R. Lundahl (ed.), *A collection of near-death research readings* (pp. 21-43). Chicago, IL: Nelson-Hall.
- Heim, A. (1892). Notizen uber den Tod durch Absturz. *Jahrbuch des Schweitzer Alpenclub*, 27, 327-337.
- Noyes, R., Jr. (1972). The experience of dying. *Psychiatry*, 35, 174-184.

Walker, B.A., Serdahely, W.J., and Bechtel, L.J. (1991). Three near-death experiences with premonitions of what could have been. *Journal of Near-Death Studies*, 9, 189-196.

Kenneth Ring, Ph.D.  
Department of Psychology  
University of Connecticut  
Storrs, CT 06269-1020



## Announcement

**Association for Death Education and Counseling  
14th Annual Conference  
Boston, MA  
March 6-8, 1992**

*Conference Theme: Catastrophic Loss: Global and Personal—  
Making a Difference*

**\*Keynote Speakers:**

Dr. Howard Clinebell, Jr.: "Confronting Global Catastrophe"

Dr. Robert Coles: "The Child and the Family"

Dr. Beverly Raphael: "Psychological Trauma: Therapeutic Intervention"

**\*Invited Papers and Roundtable Presentations**

**\*Exhibits of Books, Media, and Resource Materials**

*Preconference Programs: March 4-5, 1992*

\*The ADEC Education Institute will be offering preconference professional development certification courses and workshops. CEUs for the conference, workshops, and certification courses will be available.

The Association for Death Education and Counseling (ADEC) is an international, interdisciplinary organization dedicated to improving the quality of death education and death-related counseling. ADEC offers three levels of certification: Professional Grief Counselor, Professional Death Educator, and Associate in Death Education and Counseling.

For further information about the annual conference, or for information about the certification program, requirements and fees, or about membership in ADEC, contact:

Sue Berry  
ADEC, Dept. EM  
638 Prospect Avenue  
Hartford, CT 06105-4298  
Telephone: (203) 232-4825  
Fax: (203) 232-0819

# How To Comply With The New COPYRIGHT Law

*Participation in the Copyright Clearance Center (CCC) assures you of legal photocopying at the moment of need.*

Libraries everywhere have found the easy way to fill photocopy requests legally and instantly, without the need to seek permissions, from more than 3000 key publications in business, science, humanities and social science. You can:

*Fill requests for multiple copies, interlibrary loan (beyond the CONTU guidelines), and reserve desk without fear of copyright infringement.*

Supply copies from CCC-registered publications simply and easily.

The Copyright Clearance Center is your one-stop place for on-the-spot clearance to photocopy for internal use.

Its flexible reporting system accepts photocopying reports and returns an itemized invoice. You send only one convenient payment. CCC distributes it to the many publishers whose works you need.

*And, you need not keep any records, the CCC computer will do it for you. Register now with the CCC and you will never again have to decline a photocopy request or wonder about compliance with the law for any publication participating in the CCC.*

To register or for more information, just contact:

	<b>Copyright Clearance Center</b>	
	27 Congress Street Salem, Massachusetts 01970 (617) 744-3350	
<small>a not-for-profit corporation</small>		
NAME	TITLE	
ORGANIZATION		
ADDRESS		
CITY	STATE	ZIP
COUNTRY	TELEPHONE	

# CHANGING YOUR ADDRESS?

In order to receive your journal without interruption, please complete this Change of Address notice and forward to the Publisher, 60 days in advance, if possible.

**Old Address: (PLEASE PRINT)**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Street \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State (or Country) \_\_\_\_\_

Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_

**New Address: (PLEASE PRINT)**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Street \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State (or Country) \_\_\_\_\_

Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_

Date New Address Effective: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Journal: \_\_\_\_\_

**HUMAN SCIENCES PRESS, INC.**

Subscription Dept.  
233 Spring Street  
New York, New York 10013-1578

## INSTRUCTIONS TO AUTHORS

**THE JOURNAL OF NEAR-DEATH STUDIES** encourages submission of articles in the following categories: research reports; theoretical or conceptual statements; papers expressing a particular scientific, philosophic, religious, or historical perspective on the study of near-death experiences; cross cultural studies; individual case histories with instructive unusual features; and personal accounts of near-death experiences or related phenomena.

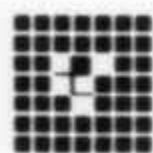
**GENERAL REQUIREMENTS:** Logical organization is essential. While headings help to structure the content, titles and headings within the manuscript should be as short as possible. Do not use the generic masculine pronoun or other sexist terminology.

**MANUSCRIPTS** should be submitted in triplicate, typed on one side of the page only, and double spaced throughout. A margin of at least one inch should be left on all four edges. Except under unusual circumstances, manuscripts should not exceed 20, 8 ½ x 11" white pages. Send manuscripts to: Bruce Greyson, M.D., Department of Psychiatry, University of Connecticut Health Center, Farmington, CT 06032.

**TITLE PAGE** should contain the names of the authors, as well as their academic degrees, affiliations, and phone number of senior author. A name and address for reprint requests should be included. A footnote may contain simple statements of affiliation, credit, and research support. Except for an introductory footnote, footnotes are discouraged.

**REFERENCES** should be listed on a separate page and referred to in the text by author(s) and year of publication in accordance with the style described in the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, 3rd Edition, 1983. Only items cited in manuscripts should be listed as references. Page numbers must be provided for direct quotations.

**ILLUSTRATIONS** should be self-explanatory and used sparingly. Tables and figures must be in camera-ready condition and include captions.



***HUMAN SCIENCES PRESS, INC.***

***233 Spring Street, New York, New York 10013-1578***