

A Book of Columns

Columns written for

Vital Signs Newsletter 1981 - 2004



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INTRODUCTION

Three times in 1977 death claimed me. Each time I experienced a near-death episode - and each was different, although one seemed somehow to lead into the next as if progressive. This means I am one of millions of people who discovered life on the other side of death. Our numbers are growing. Babies, toddlers, kids, teens, young adults, middle-agers, senior citizens – no one is too young or too old to have had such an episode and be uplifted or challenged by it.

I am a little different from most of my compadres in the sense that my "calling" afterward was to research what had just happened to me. It was Elisabeth Kübler-Ross who told me the phenomenon's name – "the near-death experience" – and dubbed me a near-death survivor. Never did she mention Raymond Moody nor his earth-shattering book *Life After Life*. Our conversation together at O'Hare Airport in Chicago was extremely helpful and validating, yet it left me with more questions than answers. Using police investigative techniques as my protocol, I set out in November of 1978 to find others who had experienced the phenomenon. I became a "blank slate" on which they could write their own stories and share deeply. I did not just ask open-ended questions, I studied them – the way they used their bodies, how others responded to them, what their significant others could add. Seldom did I ever mention that I, too, was an experiencer. Rather, I "shelved" my experiences so I could focus intently without personal distractions or opinions.

It was the Spring of 1981 when I received a phone call from Kenneth Ring, a fellow near-death researcher and author at the time of *Life At Death* (Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, New York City, 1980). I say "fellow researcher" because, until I received that phone call, I had no idea anyone else was researching the phenomenon besides myself. He had chanced upon my small, self-published book, [I Died Three Times in 1977](#) (available today on my website – click on the link), at a Hartford, Connecticut bookstore (how it got there no one knows), and he wanted to see me. Days later he came knocking at our door and stayed over night, he and a

companion. We talked almost non-stop. He was aghast at the research I had already conducted; I was equally shocked to learn that anyone else was doing the same.

Ken introduced me to the newly formed [International Association for Near-Death Studies](#) (IANDS), and asked me to be an advocate for near-death experiencers in the newsletter titled [Vital Signs](#). His idea was that by penning such a column, I could begin to reveal the findings from my research. I agreed to do it.

My first column for "Vital Signs" was dated June, 1981. I wrote a total of 17 of which 16 were published. Whatever happened to the last one I do not know, nor does a copy of it survive. In 1997 I began again. This time I wrote 24 columns, the last one published later on in 2004. Many changes occurred during the span of those years, enabling me to write six books about my observations. After a quarter century of dedicated effort, some of my work is finally being clinically verified.

I "paid" dearly for maintaining an objective, professional discipline throughout – for bypassing the depths of what I could have shared in order to search out the depths in others and provide them with a mode of expression. After undergoing a near-death-like experience in the year 2000, I found myself grieving – not only for the sudden, unexpected death of our two-year-old granddaughter Myriam but for my three near-death experiences. My challenge this time was to reclaim them, along with my feelings, intuition, and passion.

Essentially my research is done. Groundwork has been laid; my findings subject to years of scrutiny and criticism. My desire now is to move on ... into deeper realms of soul, healing prayer, and the greater power of God.

I am grateful to IANDS for providing me with an open forum on the near-death experience/experiencer, the phenomenon and its aftereffects. [A Book of Columns](#) is

a historical piece given wholly to IANDS for copyrighting in its own name, publish, distribute, give-away or sell, with any profit used for the continuance of IANDS and the important service it offers as a clearinghouse of information about the near-death experience and related topics. All my columns were originally written for IANDS, anyway. It is only fair that they have the rights to them now.

I am also grateful for the suggestions and support I have received over the years. You all have made a tremendous difference in my life. Being a researcher can be a lonely task sometimes. Your smiles and hugs became my sunshine. Enjoy *A Book of Columns*. You will recognize yourself in its pages.

VITAL SIGNS COLUMN, June 1981
"Coming Back"



Please allow me to introduce myself. My name is Phyllis. I'm from Boise, Idaho (transplanted to Virginia a few years ago) and I believe [I died three times in 1977.](#)

The deaths were over a three-month period and resulted from a miscarriage, hemorrhaging, major thrombosis in the right thigh vein, phlebitis, muscle damage, adrenal failure and many other stoppages and breakdowns. I was alone each time and at home. I was able to see a doctor only after the fact. So I have no clinical proof I actually died. Yet when your life ends, you don't need proof. You know. Professionals matter not and neither does anyone else's opinion. You know what happened; and depending on the severity of what you experienced, when you return as a near-death survivor, you are forever changed.

What I experienced challenged everything I had previously believed and opened up doors of awareness unheard of to me before. It took nearly two years to regain my health and begin a rudimentary assessment of what had happened and what it all meant. I met Dr. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross and later took training from her in working with dying patients. From there I began my own personal quest to determine why my case was so unusual and what other cases were like - really. My quest evolved into speaking tours and teaching seminars (entitled, "Death, and Dying, A Personal Confrontation") and counseling sessions with survivors. It covered many states and thousands of people. I met, personally hugged and cried with more near-death survivors than I bothered to count. Since then, I have written a small book about my own experience and what I "saw" on the other side simply called, *I Died Three Times in 1977*, and am now working on a trilogy of books covering what I learned and offering help for others.

Now you know a little about me - not much, but enough. Today, four years later, my concern is for the survivors and their families. We have and will continue to hear much about death - the moment of death, the journeys before and after, objective and subjective interpretation, empirical and general observations. But who's speaking for or about the survivors? After the initial shock wears off, how do they face the life they suddenly regain? Who do they talk to and how? How do they integrate back into a society which no longer interests them or makes sense?

The problems and adjustments confronting a near-death survivor are not small ones. Most medical staff and professional counselors are not prepared nor trained in how to work with such people. Where do professionals begin? What do they do?

Not every survivor, of course, can remember anything special or different occurring. Many remember nothing at all upon revival. But for those who do, regardless of the degree of involvement or exposure, their lives are never quite the same again. Not all people who remember had positive experiences. Some return panic stricken, convinced all the beautiful stories of light and love are just figments of someone's imagination or the result of publicity-seeking professionals out to make a name for themselves by writing sensational books.

The vast majority of people, however, do have positive experiences - experiences which challenge, uplift, inspire or thrill them. Experiences difficult to talk about but impossible to forget.

There's no mixing up possible peak experiences, spiritual visions, altered states of consciousness, out-of body experiences or other phenomena with the death experience. As one who has had all of them, I can say without hesitation the death experience is different. It's far more intense, involved and dramatic. All the many variables possible in mind expansion or alteration, including drug trips of various kinds, may sound like the death experience when described, and to some extent produce similar results in the person's life. But the death experience is different still, and though other stories may sound similar, the extreme depth of sensation in

dying reaches far beyond anyone's ability to adequately describe or categorize it. I've finally come to realize it takes someone who died and returned to understand someone who died and returned.

This little article is really a column ... written especially for the near-death survivor and his or her family. It is the first installment of a continuing series. A beginning. Your thoughts, ideas, feelings and contributions of any kind are welcome and needed. Please help us to help you!

I'm not a scientist. This is not a column for professionals. "Coming Back" is to be a forum of sorts, a place for feedback, a source of understanding, inspiration and help. It's about surviving and rediscovering life. It doesn't matter what others label what happened to you. What matters is, what do you believe happened to you?

Science is for scientists and they have their special job to do in their special way. Life is for all of us who love, kiss, hug, ask questions, get sick, dance, fear, get angry, chase balls and drink lemonade. Survival is immediate. Right now. Not after the result of someone's research project. It's now!

How do you look at the faces of your children when you return and realize deep inside you no longer love them? At least not the same way you used to. How do you look into the eyes of your spouse and admit in your gut you no longer feel any attachment to them? It's like in coming back, somehow you lost something inside yourself. You see the world around you through different eyes. How do you tell your loved ones that? Will they understand what you're saying? Will they be hurt? Threatened? Confused? Frightened? Who is the new you and how do you live again?

"Coming Back" is for survivors, and for the survivor in all of us. Please share what you encountered in returning and rebuilding your life. Did you have any problems? How did you solve them? What about your family and friends? What did you learn from what happened to you? What impact did it have on you later? How can we help you? Address your contributions and correspondence to: "Coming Back," in care of this publication. Thank you!

VITAL SIGNS COLUMN, September 1981
"Coming Back"

Hello. My name is Phyllis and I'm a survivor. This column is lovingly dedicated to survival and the survivor in all of us. It's about coming back from the near-death experience to live again in a world that no longer makes the same kind of sense. I have come to believe we can all learn special lessons from these near-death survivors as they rediscover life and fit back into society. This column will concentrate on one facet of this struggle each time and will deal with general and specific experiences. This issue I want to talk about God.

The single most common event for survivors during their experience and upon reviving is an encounter with God. It seems that no matter how involved the death experience was, how long it lasted or what happened on the "other side," there was always one overriding presence - God! I've yet to talk with anyone who actually saw God, yet in a strange kind of way each of us did.

With only a few exceptions, to my knowledge, the awareness of God was so powerful and so strong and so intense, it was overwhelming and beyond words to describe. Language doesn't have such words. Whether a light was seen, words spoken, music heard or a being met, no matter what happened, there came an awareness of God ... that God Is, that God Is One, that God Is Love, that God Is All. For most of us, such exposure swept upon us unannounced yet we responded instantly and knowingly. There was no need to question, doubt, hesitate or wonder.

We knew God. God knew us. Identification was immediate, yet God was not found to be any person, place or thing. God was, and everything was God.

Over and over again, I hear or read of people whose first comments on reviving were something like, I experienced God, I found God, I felt God, I was one with God. And these people come back no longer using pronouns like "He" or "She" or relating to the concept of "Father" or "Mother." Such symbols seem no longer appropriate. Many simply refer to God as "It," The Force, The All, One. The idea of

God our Father loses its value. Everyone I've personally talked with considers God a kind of energy, a power source or force both personal and universal - intimate yet detached, loving yet objective, nothing yet everything.

Along with the knowledge of God and Its Absolute Existence and Love comes the loss of fears, guilts, angers, hatreds. Negativity slips away and isn't needed any more. Survivors return so filled with happiness and wonder, they are usually at a complete loss to understand why their family is upset, worried, crying or disturbed. They are often unable to relate to any emotional or mental reactions they formerly understood.

They return convinced death does not exist, that life always progresses and evolves. They come to know death as a doorway we all pass through, a phase, a transition, that doesn't end anything, stop anything or destroy anything. Passing through the doorway only changes our scenery and alters the way we perceive and respond. We're still us. We can still see, smell, hear, think, remember, communicate and move. We're actually more alive once we cross over than during earth life, only that aliveness is different. Most survivors, myself included, no longer had bodies once over. It's like we were light or energy shaped somewhat like a body but not a body. We were different. We were at long last normal and complete. We were home.

Most of us who returned to the earthplane returned knowing we could not stay where we were. Our work on earth was not done. We were either told, felt or somehow knew we must come back. We had a job to do and that job wasn't finished. So we came back, many times unwilling and against our wishes, but we came back ... and that first exclamation, that first flash on awakening, whether we could verbalize it or not, was of joy! The peace of knowing God is, and that life progresses and death is only a doorway. We returned still in awe, still enraptured.

After reviving in joy, many like myself quickly withdrew from others. When we tried to communicate what happened, most did not believe us or they made fun of us.

Often survivors are damned by fundamental religionists or ridiculed by loved ones. A special kind of loneliness follows, of shutting down. There is so much to share but few if any who will really listen. Death has nothing to do with the Christian Bible, the Koran, the Gita or any other holy book. Death is the other half of life. It is a point between time and space, a crack in logic where we all slip. And in that dimension suspended between worlds we meet ourselves and The Force of our creation - and we know.

All survivors are to some degree evangelists. Some are louder than others. Those with a positive experience inspire. Those with a negative experience frighten. Some return to the organized church with an incredible fervor. Most leave the church forever, more concerned with spiritual development than dogma or ritual or rules. Yet they all feel the same need, the same desire to talk, to tell the world of their experience. Each in their own way does indeed have a story worth telling; and as long as there are listeners, they will speak. I hope there are always listeners.

The near-death survivor challenges all of us, regardless of how liberal or conservative, atheistic or devout we are. Survivors see, feel, hear and think from a different perspective, and the information they impart does not completely jibe with what we've previously been taught - no matter our history, culture, religion, philosophy or tradition. Near-death survivors give us a fresh vantage point, a new message, perhaps a different truth. They should not be ignored.

Awakening to life brings with it a revolution in consciousness. We're back in our bodies but we're not the same. From the discovery of God comes confusion about what love is. Next time, I'll talk about that confusion and the need to redefine love.

VITAL SIGNS COLUMN, December 1981
"The Enigma of Love" (Part 1)



For most of us, the near-death experience leaves us unable to understand or participate in love as we did before. We are forced, sometimes painfully, to redefine and relearn what love is. The old rules don't work any more. Truisms and understandings from the past fail.

After the euphoria of what we've seen and experienced .on the "other side" dissolves, we are confronted with the stark reality of survival. We didn't stay dead. We're back in our bodies, willingly or unwillingly. Regardless of what was experienced or how lengthy, the intensity of it cannot be denied or ignored. That intensity, that involvement, is so powerful and so overwhelming, reality ceases to be real. Loved ones cease to be loved ones.

When you die, everything shifts radically. Old norms and perimeters disappear. The familiar fades. You're on your own in a new world of sight, sound, thought and feeling. Earth and all its relationships and dramas become a vague memory, like a dream you once had. Your entire life becomes a wink in time. There are certain common truisms that seem to distort or shift around more than others. These are concepts and beliefs concerning God, love, time, space, form, perfection, life, purpose, unity, oneness.

These we grapple with most when we return to life. Why? Because on earth these so-called truisms are limited and narrow in scope and meaning compared with what we encounter "over there." Once our treasured beliefs have been challenged and altered to fit the new landscape, coming back can be disheartening to say the least. Some resent their return. Others are bewildered, confused and lost. Still others are excited with the second chance to try again at life with their new understanding, only to withdraw later when they're not accepted or believed.

The changed or expanded view of God is usually the quickest to deal with. Often an unshakeable conviction that GOD IS results. Some people readily discuss it, others don't. Regardless of what is shared or discussed, you need only look into the eyes of a typical near-death survivor and see the difference. The sparkle and glow that emanate are alive with a clarity and brightness of unmistakable vision. These people have come to know God like few others.

But love? That particular shift in understanding is not as easy to deal with, and the end result is often negative instead of positive. We come back unable to love as before, or even to understand the love commonly accepted on earth. There really aren't words to describe the kind of love encountered in death except the Greek word agape. Agape has been popularized lately to mean cosmic or universal love, brotherhood, spiritual or Christ-like love, New Age or Aquarian love.

I would describe the love I encountered in dying as "unconditional." It was so powerful, so complete, so forgiving, so all-knowing, so encompassing, it transcended all forms of earth love including agape. Most everyone I've talked with agrees. The love we discovered after passing through death's door was not an emotion, passion, commitment or bond; and it had nothing to do with sex, touching, heart-throbs, warm fuzzies or any form of attachment. The love we experienced was all-consuming yet equally present everywhere. It was a beingness, aware and wise, unifying us with All That Is. It was a coming-together. It was going home. It was a merging with All. It was Light and beyond Light. It was a peace we became.

When you've encountered and experienced that kind of love, how do you ever face your loved ones and explain what happened? How do you tell them you can't love them the old way anymore? How do you tell them you've changed?

How can you possibly single out your love for a husband or wife when you now love everyone equally? How can you possibly relate to certain people as your children or relations when everyone is your family? How can one friend mean any more than

another when everyone is your friend and there are no strangers? Every child becomes your child. Every man your husband, father and brother. Every woman your wife, mother and sister. Boundaries and blood lines, barriers and taboos cease. For the survivor, there are no more divisions, races, religions, nationalities or separations of any kind. Love has expanded outward and it doesn't quit growing.

In my opinion, the value switch in our understanding of love is the biggest single hurdle near-death survivors must face. Many pretend everything is just like it always was, but pretending doesn't last very long. Sooner or later loneliness comes. The love of a mate no longer satisfies. Children, friends and relatives seem distant and strange. Guilt and fear build. Counselors are little help, tending instead to compound the situation. It's an enigma, and it doesn't go away.

VITAL SIGNS COLUMN, March 1982
"The Enigma of Love" (Part 2)

Most near-death survivors are able to love more and deeper, yet in a detached, objective way. They are capable of a different kind of love, almost Christ-like in its unconditional quality. They have had to redefine love and learn how to express it more openly and freely. No matter how dramatic or shy, soft or loud they are, they're noticed for this difference in relating.

That's the nice part. The new knowledge and knowing. The revelation of a greater truth.

Not-so-nice is their frequent inability to personalize that love and the grief their family suffers when they finally come to realize old love ties are gone. Certainly the family's loved one survived and all are grateful. Such survival is usually termed a medical "miracle," but what survived? The face and body look familiar, yet the personality is different. Eyes and voice are different. Something did die and it didn't come back.

Whether we want to admit it or not, many near-death survivors wind up divorced within several years after their experience or seriously alienated from their loved ones. Loneliness and guilt result. Some will not or cannot face or comprehend the depth of their change and how their new mode of expression and feeling threatens their family.

In my own case, it took nearly a year before I could experience any degree of personal love for my three children, yet I was totally in love with everyone I saw. I couldn't make love exclusive. I was instead completely absorbed in the absolute knowing that everyone was my family. We were all equal. We were all children of the same God, expressions of the same Universal Mind, cells of the same Body. I was on a cloud so high I couldn't see individuals nor could I respond to them.

Some families can adjust or make allowances for that. Some families are willing to accept the challenge of what happened and are ready within their own growth cycle to make a giant step forward with their beloved. Such families are rare, though.

The average family terms such a loved one disassociated, hallucinating, brain-damaged-and the average doctor and counselor all too readily agree. Instead of the experience becoming a joint miracle for all to share and benefit from, it becomes a nightmare.

I've encountered near-death survivors so bound up with guilt they could no longer communicate effectively. Often they will come up after a talk I've given and burst into tears. One such woman nearly went limp as she poured out guilts of being unable to love her husband any more. She had sought help from every professional she could find, but none could understand her problem let alone help her. When I told her she was completely normal, she almost went to pieces from relief. I went on to explain that the phenomena she experienced happen to most of us. It doesn't mean anything is wrong and there is certainly no need for loneliness or guilt. She was OK. She was normal.

The only love that dies in death is our old, attached self-centered view of love - the one with all the strings and conditions. Once you've encountered REAL LOVE (the unconditional, universal, cosmic kind), you can never really love the same way again. Eventually some of impact will fade but the memory often doesn't.

What happens to love? Nothing does. It's the same it always was since the beginning of time, and always be. Love doesn't change with death. We do. Suddenly we discover a greater reality. Survival brings with it challenge of "what are we going to do about what we learned!" That's never an easy challenge.

Though one spouse can perhaps never fully understand the depth and intensity of what happened to the other, that spouse can be excited and open enough to explore possibilities and grow mutually from the experience. The quicker the

survivor realizes how normal it is to return to life detached and different, the quicker he or she will open up to accepting life and the earthplane again.

The more understanding and caring are shown, more able the survivor will be able to cope with his or own difference and be willing to integrate and compromise for a successful recovery. It will take mutual effort, openness and patience. It will take a lot of communication and trial and error. It will take time.

The near-death experience demands a radical changed viewpoint. If all parties concerned can be open to that willingness to explore the possibilities presented without dogma or fear, then a dramatic healing can occur, a new lifestyle can be initiated, and that beautiful new kind love can be lived every day - on earth!

Next time - a look at expanded sensitivities.

VITAL SIGNS COLUMN, June 1982
"Expanded Sensibilities"



"It's spooky," claims a near-death survivor from southern California. "I know things now. I just know. Long before something happens, I know it's going to happen. And there's this energy field around me, or whatever you call it. I've been attacked twice now by people with knives. They come right at me and then just before impact, the knife will suddenly jerk away or break. I can't explain it. I just know I don't fear anything anymore. It's like I see through people

and events."

This gentleman had his experience in 1964 and since then a long string of incredible incidents have happened in his life. He has been written about in newspapers and puzzled over by his family. His new way of living has both confused and excited him. Witnesses to some of his phenomena call him psychic. Others call him a messenger of God. His story reminds me a lot of the movie, "Resurrection," and the story it told of a near-death survivor who discovered she had the gift of healing. She had no idea why she had it or where it came from or what she was to do with it. Her gift came with no instructions and no indication of its sender. She finally acknowledged it to be gift of love and in the name of that love, she shared her gift and gave freely to others. In her innocence, she became a threat to religious radicals and was persecuted until she finally fled to anonymity. She never understood what had happened to her or why. She escaped her tormentors but she could never "turn-off" her gift. It wouldn't go away.

There are many myths and legends from throughout history about near-death survivors. Some are true miracles, like Dr. George Ritchie and Arthur E. Yensen, though they would never consider themselves in such a light. Neither are angelic beings but both are inspired souls who have helped thousands. The list of such people is actually quite long, though most of them never became famous or acquired much public acclaim.

Are all survivors like that? Certainly many NDErs return to life and society appearing for all extents and purposes "normal." That is to say, they look and act much like they did before their experience occurred. But there's just as many if not more who return to society seemingly with their "inner doors" wide open. Their death experience either starts or heightens sensory input mechanisms. But it doesn't stop there. For those who are willing to accept and explore their experience and its possible implications, there seems to then develop a more open and receptive climate, a willingness to not only learn from what happened, but also to grow and expand with that learning, a willingness to become more whole, complete and total. Previous belief systems drop away. Old attitudes fade. The experience of survival becomes like the experience of birth. Survivors become "born again," and like babes, they begin to notice and activate new awarenesses, perceptions and input faculties. And like children, their new sensory abilities improve and grow with use and trust.

One of the unusual puzzles I've discovered about the death experience is that the larger experience begins after the initial one is over. Dying seems to open doors which don't shut. Survival isn't the real story, no matter how sensational it may appear. It's only the beginning. The threshold!

For those who approach the event positively and openly, determined to explore and experiment, there comes either subtlety or suddenly a wide range of sensing differences. For instance, some people begin seeing auras of colored light around people, animals and objects. Some experience hearing through their skin, or looking at a photograph and seeing a whole life revealed. Many hear voices and / or music when no one is present. Sensing the future before it happens or receiving messages from "spirit" beings is really quite common as far as I'm concerned. Most of the people I've talked to have a feeling of being guided and protected in what they do, like they have a special purpose to fulfill or a job to do that is divinely directed.

These sensory expansions may last or they may fade in time. Sometimes they expand even further as the years go by. It seems to depend more on the individual involved and how willing they are to risk what's happening to them. Sometimes such expanded abilities seem bizarre, impossible, at total variance with what we are taught to be normal, acceptable. Sometimes they are more like science fiction than living fact.

If you find that amazing or confusing, imagine what such near-death survivors -and their families - go through. Learning to live with seemingly god-like powers or at least "spooky" new sensations is a frightening, lonely experience. If you tell anyone, they'll think you're hallucinating. If you try to demonstrate and prove yourself, you become a threat, a freak of nature. Yet it won't turn off. You can't make the new abilities go away. You can ignore them or be silent, but they're still there. Waiting. Urging. Pushing.

It may help you to know there are many of us like that, many who share your fear and confusion. Perhaps it may help you most to know that at least I, for one, consider you to be - completely normal!

VITAL SIGNS COLUMN, September 1982
"The Moment of Death" (Part 1)

It doesn't hurt to die. There is no pain or fear. Pain and fear come before death's moment, their intensity depending on individual circumstances.

For those who have a lingering illness or debility, preparations can be made for death. Eventually, when fighting or denying are over, the individual accepts or faces death's coming and personal affairs are put in order to the degree possible. If death comes unexpectedly or violently, there is no preparation, no time to understand or comprehend what is happening. No time to even recognize life's termination.

No matter how the person dies or why, I've noticed a predictable pattern to what comes next. I base this observation, upon a lifetime of direct experience and study, dealing with people who were able to describe what was happening as they died and on reports given by those who died and then returned. My observations cover several thousand people, including myself. Though I am not a scientific researcher by any means, I believe the theory which has evolved from these observations is worthy of consideration. This theory covers only that special moment we call death and will be discussed in three installments.

I believe the actual moment of death is a brain shift. Nothing more. Nothing less.

I have come to recognize that moment, that incredibly intense, intimate moment, as a shift or switch within our brain which loosens and finally severs our connection to the linear time! Space world of our functional experiencing. What we lose, then, at death's moment is the predominant rulership and dictation of the left hemisphere of our brain.

This disconnection is followed by a sensation of "crossover," or a type of journey hardly the breath of a second long. I would describe this as a sense of "getting there," where there is either a tunnel to traverse, a doorway to enter, darkness to navigate or some event of this nature indicative of a journey. Many times there is

also experienced someone or something which points the way to go, like a light at tunnel's end or a voice calling or an outstretched hand.

We emerge from this brief passage into a world just the opposite from which we left. It is as abstract as the previous was rational, as free as the previous was fettered, as joyful as the previous was serious. We have entered what I have come to regard as the free-wheeling realm of pure symbols be they melodious music, incredible colors, bright lights, changing images, encyclopedic feeling responses, bizarre panoramas or whatever. There is within this realm total freedom of movement and the urge, even the need to fly, soar, revel in the birthing of our new selves. For some, this emergence becomes a joyful discovery of fairy-like innocence and utter magic. Other, though, are repelled by what they encounter, finding their symbols to be much less than expected, even threatening and frightening. This world to them is anything but joyful and any magic present is more nightmare than heaven.

Sounds like our dreamworld, doesn't it? Well, that's just about what I think it is.

The place we have journeyed to, in my opinion, is the realm of our brain's right hemisphere. I am referring here to the most commonly accepted interpretation of hemisphere functions: left - objective, detailed, linear; right - subjective, abstract, intuitive. Our length of stay within the right hemisphere seems exquisitely brief though it may feel to be years in passage. It is my observation that once we leave our right brain's environment, we truly sever our last ties to the body we once inhabited and the life we once lived. An invisible umbilical cord snaps and we are on our way to dimensions beyond the familiar, dimensions or realms we can only speculate about.

I have come to realize we remain immersed in our right brain for as long as needed or necessary, for here the life review is experienced; here we meet head-on whatever we have perceived, thought, integrated, imagined, dreamed, wished or hoped to be true. It is here we face what we truly believe, who we truly are, how

we truly feel, and what we have actually built ourselves to be. It is no wonder to me why some people are enraptured by what they find and others horrified. If there is a heaven or a hell, this I believe is it.

It is also no wonder to me why some scientists and doctors suspect both automatic manufacture and release of an opiate within the brain during the experience of death which would give dying individuals the illusory feeling of euphoria and make it easier for them to die: or as the researchers would have us believe, making it easier to accept oblivion and ego annihilation, tricking us as it were into believing life continues beyond death when in fact they believe it doesn't. I'm certain these researchers are right on target about the opiate, but I question the narrow focus of their test results. Since the language of the right hemisphere is colored with symbols rather than spoken with words, most scientists and doctors are neither trained nor experienced in understanding the terrain they encounter. It is an area of our life and natural processing which responds more to relaxed stimulus, things like meditation, music, dreaming, visions, fantasy and creativity, than to anything like reason, ciphering, analysis or mathematics. Though operations of both hemispheres can be interchangeable, the left brain does tend to emphasize regimented, disciplined analysis while our right brain operates like a giant sponge, soaking up whatever isn't "nailed down." Out-of-body travel is a common activity of the right brain, in my opinion, as well as some psychic phenomena, mysticism and activities of a religious/spiritual philosophical nature.

I believe this is why so many religious conversions, spiritual revelations and illuminating events sound so similar in description, impact and result to the near-death experience. They sound similar because they are similar: and much of the disassociation, confusion and conflict an NDEr goes through in "coming back" and rebuilding their life is in fact a shared dilemma - shared with anyone who has undergone a brainshift, regardless of how that shift was incurred, or under what circumstances.

VITAL SIGNS COLUMN, December 1982
"The Moment of Death" (Part 2)



This is the second installment of a three-part series describing a particular theory I have evolved about what happens at the moment of death. It is not meant to be a scholarly thesis or research document, but it is meant to challenge, inspire and hopefully broaden current investigations of the near-death phenomena. This theory is not a product of just my own experiences, but includes several thousand accounts of deathbed conversations, interviews with accident survivors and reports from those who died and returned.

As a brief review of the first installment, I outlined the moment of releasing our time/space world of linear experience as a disconnection from the dominant rulership of the left hemisphere of our brain. I went on to illustrate the journey we next take, a sensation of "getting there," often accompanied by someone or something pointing the way, like a light at tunnel's end or a voice calling to us. I then discussed our arrival and entry into the abstract realm of symbols, a free-wheeling world of melodious music, incredible colors, bright lights, changing images, encyclopedic feeling responses, bizarre panoramas. I identified this world as the right hemisphere of our brain. I called the moment of death a brain shift and that's exactly what I've found it to be.

Let's consider again some of the discoveries about left/right brain hemispheres and their activities. Though researchers now state each side of our brain can and does perform some tasks of the other and can be retrained due to accident or injury to take on the other's duties, the two hemispheres normally function separate of each other. The left hemisphere, then, being our center for objectivity, intelligence, analysis, reason, definition, categorization, calculation, language and rationale, the right operating as our center for creativity, intuition, subjective sensitivity, feelings, music enjoyment, dreams, symbols, beliefs, imagination. The left works more like a computer programmer. The right performs like a sponge.

I have come to recognize the moment of death. It is an instantaneous flipping of a switch, a shift of environments. We pass from dense, materialistic, time / space progressions to airy, free-floating abstractions without known boundaries or perimeters. The right brain encounter seems to be a necessary preparatory step, an opportunity for us to review our inner life, scan our memories, discover whatever we have deeply integrated while living, flex movement muscles we never thought we had, clean "house," and in general adjust to a changing landscape. Before we lose all ties to what we were, there is a need to face and understand where we have been and what we have learned while there. Our length of stay in this "halfway house" seems to depend more on what belief systems we integrated while living than on any particular length of time. Organic brain death seems to have no effect on this process, nor does proximity of the physical body.

Most near-death survivors in my opinion never completely leave the environment of their right brain hemisphere before returning to life. They make normal disconnections with their left brain, cross over to their right; but for some reason, be it fate, accident, choice or necessity, they remain partly or solely within the confines of their right hemisphere ... working out and processing whatever they encounter while there, returning like an overstretched rubber band to full consciousness and life when they have experienced enough.

It doesn't seem to matter how we pronounce a body dead. If that individual has not finished processing their inner life memories, beliefs and experiences, they are not fully dead. There is still some kind of connection holding them back, be it invisible cords or organic blocks; and as long as there's any kind of connection, that individual in my opinion will return it to life.

Individuals involved tend to experience this physical return to life as a symbolic message delivered in anyone of a number of ways ... for instance, departed loved ones telling them their time is not up, a light being or angel instructing them to return, a choice given to return and finish what they started, a realization they have

a job to do, or something like an uncontrollable force propelling them back into their physical body regardless of whether or not they want to go. It usually doesn't take long for brain shifting and inner processing to take place. Actual time lapse may only be seconds or minutes, but there are rare stories on record of those souls who took hours before they bounced back like the proverbial yoyo, absolutely shocking the wits out of anyone nearby.

Our mind seems energized and nourished by our living, organic brain, but it is not limited to that organ's size, locality or condition. Even some people's brains which are mostly fluid can still perform thinking exercises, are intelligent and capable of creative thought. Perhaps by now you've heard about experiments conducted by Paul Pietsch (author of *Shuffle-Brain*) when he surgically scrambled brains of small "critters" and found much to his surprise that no matter how he mixed up or changed around brain parts and pieces, the critters performed normally after healing from surgery, and went on about their business as if nothing had happened. Even though our brain is divided into two hemispheres which appear to have separate and distinct functions, we have no way to know what our mind really is or if it is ever "housed" anywhere.

In June, 1982, George Gallup Jr., of Gallup Poll fame, estimated there must be around 23 million Americans who have hovered on the edge of death and returned to tell of it. The near-death phenomenon is hardly a phenomenon. It is much more common than we think. For those willing to share their experience, the stories told are all strikingly alike and familiar, matching what we might term an "Encounter With The Right Brain." Few are those who break this pattern, be they in America or in other countries around the globe. Positive or negative, the pattern of what happens is the same. Even that special knowingness of belonging and allrightness many experiencers label cosmic or universal love is a natural component of right-brain environments.

Rather than helpless "victims of trauma," could it be that NDErs are really people who need a good shock? Are they people who must be forced to face their inner

selves before a productive, healthy life can continue? Maybe in our zeal to investigate the mystery of death's survival, we would be wiser to look beyond obvious circumstances and spend more time comparing before and after lifestyles, philosophies, belief systems and attitudes of those involved. Maybe we've allowed ourselves to become side-tracked by all the excitement, mystery and implications of the apparent "phenomena" we discovered. Maybe we're not studying what we think we're studying. It could well be there's something else involved.

VITAL SIGNS COLUMN, June 1983
"The Moment of Death" (Part 3)

Concluding the theory I've formed of what constitutes the moment we call death, in previous installments I claimed it to be a brain shift, switching us from left hemisphere information gathering to right hemisphere awareness and processing. I also stated it was my belief most near-death experiencers do not completely leave their right hemisphere in dying but in fact return to life before final disconnections are made to organic storage vaults, be they brain or body.

The latter claim I made corresponds with activities and possibilities inherent within right hemisphere capacity. Not only is the right hemisphere the main center of dream-like symbols, images, colors, lights, sounds and movements; but it is also the basic realm of what we commonly call psychic ability, philosophy, religious beliefs, insights and anything spiritual.

Permit me to personalize. For over a decade before my own near-death experience, I was a teacher of meditation, psychic ability, self-development, out-of body traveling and inner perceptions. During this same time, I was also employed as a professional analyst, business writer and government project developer. As a mother of three, advocate of inner development and business professional, I had long since come to realize so-called psychic abilities are very normal; everyone has them and they constitute a natural means of more fully utilizing the capacity of our own being. Such abilities I came to consider tools and skills anyone could learn and improve upon with daily use. I had long since discarded notions about occult superstitions, divine or secret powers as being viable explanations for these abilities. Such labels are really catch-phrases comprising a play on words, disguising a misdirected need for power and attention. My personal goal was to synthesize operations of left and right brain hemispheres, to use both at once. In other words, I wanted to become a whole person with a unified brain/mind.

At my initial experience of death, I discovered something very surprising to me. Where I wound up was very familiar. I had been there before. I had experienced

the death I discovered in dying every time I had dreamed, created, gazed into space, imagined, meditated or fantasized while living - in other words, whenever I had significantly altered my state of consciousness. I recognized my right brain. I had come home to my inner me. Though I didn't stay long, I found the experience to be much more intense and involved than visits I had made while living. True, it was familiar terrain, but suddenly this was no kind of visit and I was totally engulfed.

Consider this - just how many people do you know who are schooled and disciplined in right hemisphere involvement? Just because a person daily uses this faculty (some, of course, use it more than others) doesn't mean he or she has any understanding of what they're working with or how it operates. We most often access the right hemisphere instinctually rather than purposefully. Children and the so-called uneducated, or retarded live in this hemisphere more often than the left. For them it is more accessible and reliable. Civilized people are educated to switch hemispheres and become more left-brained. It's a sign of intelligence and refinement, of socialization. And why not? A linear brain for a linear world makes perfect sense. What we usually forget, though, is we also have an abstract brain for the invisible, intuitive world of subtle influences. We need both halves for a healthy, well-rounded life. In dying, I believe we shift from one to the other for processing and clearing out every last bit of information and memory we have collected in living. We don't want to leave anything behind when we make a final exit.

There are some personality patterns involved here which are also fairly predictable. Those people who have strong, sometimes inflexible attitudes about life, people who are more comfortable with definitions, rules, limits and steady, secure lifestyles, are most often those who find their near-death experience to be a religious conversion and become evangelical in their desire to "spread the word."

Those people who are by nature more open and vulnerable, willing to risk and dare, people who display more artistic or creative talents, meditate, have an active dreamlife, and often have a loose or unconfined life philosophy, are those who most

often return confused and lost for a time, grappling with almost overwhelming sensations of connectedness to all life and a limitless exposure to realities and possibilities beyond the possible.

The first type returns trading one belief system for another. The second type returns adrift within the wonder of it all, freed from any belief system or idea of what is. The first usually finds a course of action to take what is defined at least somewhat by precedent (however strange or different that way may be from life before). The second type returns unable to find a precedent or even a reason to fit back into society. The known way for them dissolves. They are faced with finding a new way, a new precedent, a new reason to believe and new concepts to believe in. Even people trained and disciplined in right-brain terrain before death still would fit in with the second type. The brain shift at death is so intensely involved, previous preparation is helpful but not always adequate.

Neither type is more positive or negative than the other. Both are faced with the same questions. What are they going to do about what happened to them? Are they going to forget it, shelve it, ignore it, or are they going to use that event as a springboard to deeper self-discovery, understanding and growth? Are they going to hide, pretend or open up?

We're finding both types of experiencers are not limited to the category of near-death survivors. The event we name "death" is really not so different from the arenas of paranormal, parapsychology, extrasensory perception, artistic creativity, dreams and visions, drug hallucinations, science of mind, astral travel, prophecy, synchronicity and many other intriguing subjects. We can't claim the NDE experience is unique or even a phenomenon, though we started out doing just that. We can perhaps claim it is more credible in terms of research because it most often happens in a hospital environment surrounded by professional staff, monitoring devices and medical charts. Society can more readily accept this kind of research than anything which even refers to psychism.

As survivors, lay people, researchers and professionals interested in thanatology and the possibility of life after death, we are now faced with an embarrassing fact. We have opened up a "can of worms" with our investigations. Just where is that line drawn to separate strikingly similar experiences? When do we interview and what questions do we ask? How far are we willing to go with our research? Are we prepared for the deluge of our discoveries? Are we prepared for the impact of what we may find and where it may lead?

VITAL SIGNS COLUMN, June 1983

"Coming Back: The After-Effects of Survival"



Doing some research with a doctor of psychology in Chevy Chase, Maryland, helped to put into focus what seem to me to be the most common aftereffects people have who survive the near-death experience, I've long noticed there is a common pattern, but this is the first time I ever tried to list and define that pattern, to bring it into clear focus.

Seven after-effects were isolated. Naturally, some people display more of some and less of others, but for the most part, this list of seven basic effects seems to hold true for most of us. It is my hope that this list suggests a construct, a pattern of behavior modes offering a rudimentary guide to what constitute normal or average effects/response.

Briefly stated, here are the most common after-effects exhibited by the average near-death survivor, according to my own research which involves six years of study and hundreds of personal contacts:

1. The inability to personalize emotions or feelings, especially those of love and belonging to someone.
2. The inability to recognize and comprehend boundaries, rules, limits.
3. Difficulty in understanding "past tense, "or references to what occurred in the "past" (as well as some difficulty to comprehending "future").
4. Expanded/enhanced sensibilities-becoming more intuitive, knowing, spatial, non-linear in perceptions; a sense of timelessness.
5. A shifted or changed view of physical reality-becoming more detached, objective, seeing "through" events/problems, a noticeable reduction of fears or worries.
6. A different feeling of physical self: a certain detachment from body and any

identification with it as "Self," rather a "knowing" that we live in or "wear" our bodies.

7. Difficulty with relationships, language and communications-finding it hard to say what we really mean or to understand language phrasing used by others.

There's a lot to be said about each one of these seven points. Each needs to be explored, at least as much in depth as this column will allow. For this reason, I will devote a column to each, and for the next seven issues focus in detail on the problems and challenges of the near-death survivor. (This new series should be especially useful for NDE families.)

While working with these seven basic effects in the environment of the professional's office, the doctor involved made a surprising observation: A young divorced mother, recovering from an unexpected heart attack and now enrolled in his therapy program, fit the same pattern. She was struggling with almost identical after-effects, though she did not remember dying or experiencing any of the NDE phenomena. Still, her problems, fears, confusions and responses were almost identical to those of an NDE survivor. In fact, many of the doctor's patients fit the pattern; even though none were NDErs, all were involved at one time with a life-threatening experience of some kind, whether brought on naturally, through disease, by accident or self-induced. Another professional commented on the similarity in after-effects with mental patients he worked with who had undergone what he termed powerful, intense hallucinatory experiences beyond their ability to cope with or understand.

There seems to be a common link here, and that link seems to be one of intense reversal - the result of a sudden event so violent or engulfing or unusual that it is outside the realm of an individual's extant mental and emotional coping mechanisms. Instead of being able to adjust, the individual is overwhelmed and all usual communication modes are rendered useless. How do you describe that which cannot be described? How do you respond to physical reality when you've been

exposed to far different realities?

Because the NDE stage or arena of experience is the same or similar as that of other impactful events, it does not strike me as unusual that similar after-effects would be common to all such experiencers. After all, the human body, brain, emotions and psyche can absorb only so much, and will respond similarly when assaulted in a similar fashion. Perhaps NDE research will help those in many other fields of inquiry. We all share more common points than we think, yet are distinctively separate on some major point. Ours is the field of death and what lies beyond. That mystery is still the biggest and the greatest mystery of them all! And it well deserves the special research and exploration we seek to give it.

VITAL SIGNS COLUMN, December 1983
**"The Seven Most Common Aftereffects of Survival:
The Inability to Personalize Emotions"**

The vast majority of near-death survivors have a positive, uplifting experience. There is both the opportunity and the thrill of being totally engulfed in overwhelming love, a kind of love beyond precedent, beyond description. A feeling of oneness and worth.

Even after the initial shock, they often continue to float within the warmth and wonder of such a love. God exists after all. Proof is no longer needed. For those able to share their experience, to whatever degree, each retelling becomes a reliving. It is joyful to speak of it. There is an urge to "spread the good news." Over and over again, I hear survivors tell of the love they experienced and how they want to emulate, develop and expand that love in their own lives. Over and over again, I hear survivors describe how much more loving they are, how filled to overflowing with love they are, and how much more life and its living means to them, how precious everything is. Said one man in southern California (whose experience was in 1964), "I love my wife and children more than I ever thought I could. I love everyone. My experience taught me real love."

Yet his children didn't feel his love, nor did his wife. A gap developed between what he felt and what they felt. I spent many hours with a middle-aged woman and her family in Bedford, Virginia. She spoke of feeling so filled with love and joy she could almost burst, yet her husband, children and parents were terrified. Not only did they not feel the love she described with such glowing joy, they felt her to be hallucinating, so far out they could no longer reach or understand her. She was happy. They were afraid. She was open and ready to change. They just wanted the woman they loved back. She was glowing and utterly transformed. They were bereft.

I would not have ever recognized the difference between what I thought I was doing and its effect on others if it weren't for my children. They finally blew the

whistle. They screamed. They did not feel unconditional love from me. They didn't know what that was and they didn't care to. They felt me to be unreachable. They felt abandoned. They felt I was so detached nothing really meant anything to me. Yes, I was easier to talk to and more understanding; but no, I was no longer personal or familiar. I was a nice woman but I wasn't "MOM."

The last letter I received from the "loving" husband and father in southern California was one of desperation and confusion. He was having tremendous difficulty holding down a job and earning a living. He just couldn't understand why people had difficulty relating to him when he was so filled with love and joy for all of them. Nothing made sense any more, so he was leaving - to drift for awhile.

I gave a college lecture on the difficulties of near-death survival and wound up holding a woman lost in tears when my talk was over. I had stated that I felt the inability to personalize love was a normal and frequent experience of NDErs. She had burst into tears when I called it normal. Her story was like so many others. She had been sent from counselor to counselor and had been in therapy for over a year because she couldn't "love" her husband and children any more. She loved them more than ever, but not personally. She could relate to them in the larger perspective, but she knew she didn't belong to them any more than they belonged to her. The intimate bond was gone. She loved them, but they couldn't "feel" her love, and she was lost in guilt trying to figure out why.

I cannot begin to count how many times I've run into this same kind of story and the same kind of pain and sadness it brings. Unconditional love is wonderful. It is the goal of any transformed or growing individual. It is the Christ-love, the God love, the Universal Agape Brotherhood of All Being, the All-encompassing Love of Complete Forgiveness and Total Acceptance.

But stop for a minute. Let's be very honest. "True" love is not an emotion. It is not personal. True love is a state of being. It is a level of consciousness which transcends human bounds. True love is the "glue" which holds the universe

together. It is all-encompassing, all-accepting, all-forgiving. True love belongs to no one yet fills us all. True love is existence itself! You cannot keep it until you give it away. You cannot possess it until you free it. It makes no demands and seeks no rewards. It welcomes all and denies none. True love simply is!

Are you prepared for that kind of love? Is anyone else you know?

In society, we expect love to be personal, conditional, bonding, definable, limited, exclusive, very physical and based on sense response. Our children expect to be our exclusive possessions. Our spouses expect to be our exclusive mates. Our friends expect to be intimate and privy. Each sees him or herself in a definable role, occupying a specific place in our lives, and expecting the same from us in return for their attention and loyalty. They clearly see the role they play. Any deviation is abnormal, and therefore unacceptable.

Now, there's nothing wrong with this. In order for children to grow healthy and sane, they need warmth, bonding and exclusivity. Mates come together in loving support to build their "nests" and settle down. We humans need personalization. We need emotions and feelings. We need what we define as love. Without these, we either distort, imbalance or die. Psychologically, the development of emotions and love in a healthy individual grows in stages, beginning with primal urges, running the gamut of passion and pleasure, and finally maturing into agape.

What I've noticed with the near-death survivor is that we're most often projected into a state of consciousness we're not prepared for. There was no warning, no opportunity to grow through natural developmental stages. Not only do we reach agape instantly, but we often slide beyond even that into realms of being words and experience cannot define. Once exposed, we have no innate tools or skills with which to handle our new awareness. We struggle and stumble - sometimes alienating when we mean to inspire, confusing when we mean to clarify, threatening when we mean to soften, frightening when we mean to enlighten. We

are not perceived by others as we perceive ourselves. The message we seek to deliver is somehow lost in the translation.

Yes, unconditional universal love is incredible. Yes, it is a state of consciousness worth developing by any and everyone. But no, it isn't easy to understand if you've never been exposed to it. No, it isn't even wanted if you're not ready for it. The real victim of the near-death experience is not the survivor (bewildered as her or she may be). The real victims, in my opinion, are the family and friends. They didn't have the experience. They don't know what's going on, and they're the ones who need the most help.

VITAL SIGNS COLUMN, Spring 1984

**"The Seven Most Common Aftereffects of Survival:
The inability to recognize and comprehend boundaries, rules, limits"**



Dying has such an interesting way of blotting out nonessentials.

Coming back to life is a startling jolt.

Rebuilding with what you have left is confusing.

Who said I have to hold my fork this way? Spoons are so enchanting. Why can't I just walk up to her and start talking about what really matters? Beating around the bush makes no sense. Why can't I converse with the vacuum cleaner? It makes better noise than you do. I want to run, skip, jump rope and climb a fence. I want to catch snow with my tongue and make footprints where none have ever been. What do you mean I'm 47 and people of that age don't do that sort of thing? That doctor doesn't know what he's doing. Can't he see the halos of color around the patient and feel the fear. Why won't anyone listen to me? I know what I'm talking about. Read the book? Why? I know what it says without reading. I don't follow recipes any more. I just ask the food what it wants to do and we all have fun.

Our life and everything in it is the same as it always was. Nothing changed while we were gone. We did. The biggest reason it all looks and feels so different when we return is we now have a basis of comparison. We can now compare our life as-it-was-before with wherever-it-was-we-were. They don't compare!

We know we have to do something about what happened. Life can't proceed if nothing is done. The obvious, most logical answer is - "I'll continue where I left off." And some survivors do and are content. For others, the awe and wonder of what they've experienced, coupled with a sense of privileged gratitude for having been saved from death, compel them to talk about it, ask questions, seek out others who

might have experienced a similar event, and search for whatever mission or goal they were spared to accomplish. Then there are those whose NDEs were so intense and impacting that there is no turning back to life as it was. For them the past has ceased to be and only the future remains . . . waiting to be lived . . . whatever that means.

Regardless to what extent an individual was affected, a period of time follows where readjusting is difficult and uncomfortable. The first seven years are the hardest for the average survivor, in my experience. Previously familiar codes of conduct can lose some of their relevance, or disappear altogether. A loss of boundaries, rules and limits can take on many forms: sensing the interconnectedness of all life while changing a baby's diaper; understanding the unified field theory while driving a truck; watching holograms bounce off soap suds; solving the mystery of resonance waves while darning socks; getting high from the hum of a food blender; and bidding anyone enter as friend whether they "wear" a body or not.

VITAL SIGNS COLUMN, Summer 1984
**"The Seven Most Common Aftereffects of Survival:
Changed Concepts of Past and Future"**

Today's researchers have discovered that poor or slowed memory processes are not synonymous with advancing age. They tell us that a reasonably active life and a stimulating environment encourage continued, if not expanded, synaptic connections and nerve sprouting in the brain. In other words, the human brain is far more flexible than previously thought and is capable of rejuvenation. Yet over and over again, when I asked how their memory worked, survivors would say, "Well, you know how it is when you get older. Everything slows down and you forget." Considering that most of the people I've talked with since 1978 were in their 20s, 30s and 40s, that excuse doesn't ring true. My own memory has slowed, too, and occasionally I have lapses.

Being a trained observer and analyst by profession, I began asking more pertinent, probing questions. Age could not account for what I kept noticing; and if indeed there was a slowdown, how did it work = was it constant or sporadic? The answers I received formed an interesting pattern. In the vast majority of cases, memories of events which occurred after the NDE were sharp and clear. If anything, survivors reported how much better and faster they could remember and how much more efficient their mental processes seemed. Yet, recollections of events which occurred before their NDE were different.

They could still remember the past, but the process of that recollection seemed slower and somewhat impersonal, as if they could not fully identify with it.

Any number of survivors described what they felt was a "line of demarcation" which had formed at the time of their near-death experience, separating those things before from anything which came after. One man put it quite succinctly, "I truly feel as if the old me really did die and the new me has difficulty remembering what went on before." One woman said her retrieval process for accessing memories which occurred before her NDE was like rushing into a back storage vault, grabbing

a movie reel on the subject at hand, running it off on a projector, and zooming in for a closer view when the missing sequence was located. This process took her several minutes and was sometimes cumbersome in public. Another woman said she had to relive a past event in order to remember it. Certainly, not everyone has difficulty remembering "past," but almost everyone does remark about a slowdown.

I found it fascinating to listen as survivors described their memory processes for me. They would invariably use impersonal pronouns when speaking about themselves before their NDE, or sometimes they would refer to themselves by their first name, as if it were another person. When they did use the personal pronoun, "I," it would seem to lack importance. But when they spoke of events which occurred after their NDE, they would be significantly personal and animated. Their shift in speech mode was distinct. When I would bring this to their attention, they would act surprised, claiming they had never noticed themselves doing this before and were unaware they ever made any such reference. Often they would become flustered and embarrassed if I continued to pursue before and after questioning. I wasn't the only one to notice their pronoun slip. Family and friends would chime in they had noticed it, too.

There was something else equally noticeable and prominent. Each survivor would express more concern and interest in the present times than anything past or future. If they went backward or forward at all, it was usually only for a few months or maybe a year. Seldom more. One man's time shift was so radical, he began to live in a very heightened awareness of each moment as it occurred, and refused to acknowledge anything which had happened before or might be yet to come. Even with conversation, he came to realize every sentence spoken began in the past and ended in the future. This meant to him that nothing relevant could ever be said, so he observed a silence of listening and watching, which proved later to be immensely rewarding and helped him to gain a more objective understanding of interrelationships.

There is a common denominator here. Children, the mentally ill, drug users, and people of less developed cultures live either completely or almost completely in the present moment. They have little or no concept of past or future. They have yet to discover (or remember) the civilized concept of time, schedules and appointments. Needs are immediate. Once something has happened, it ceases to exist; and since the future has yet to come, it, too, does not exist. For them, there is only "NOW" and whatever exists immediately astraddle "NOW."

For those survivors more deeply and intensely affected by their NDE, I suspect they have undergone a more physiological chemical change which has shifted their brain's ability to process mind. For others less radically affected, there seems to be a shift of preference and value, a change of philosophy. Regardless of the extent that they have been affected, all survivors I've yet talked with readily agree that time itself does not exist. They have come to feel there is no past or future except by the trained perception of our own consciousness, and the only valid portrayal of time is the recognition of each day's importance.

Once you have experienced timelessness, you can no longer be intimidated by the tyranny of time. Perhaps we could all learn a lesson from the NDE survivor and rethink our own concept of time. Perhaps we, too, could come to realize how precious each moment is, and how much wonder and joy each day holds.

VITAL SIGNS COLUMN, Winter 1984/85

**"The Seven Most Common Aftereffects of Survival:
Expanded/Enhanced Sensibilities-Becoming More Intuitive, Knowing,
Spatial, Non-Linear in Perceptions, a Sense of Timelessness"**



Oh, the stories we hear from survivors! Certainly, there are a few who claim nothing unusual happens and they are now the same as they always were and their life as routine and untouched; but these people are so much the minority, they quickly take a back seat to survivor stories which would make any self-respecting scientist or academician shudder.

Some of the more unusual phenomena involve survivors who claim they now regularly meet with the light beings they encountered during their NDE. Some say they now see and talk with departed spirits of the dead or angel-like beings. Others see people disappear in front of them in broad daylight. There are those who see plants and especially flowers undulate as if they were breathing, while others claim to see a web-like substance connecting all in sight with everything else through a network of glistening threads.

One man, for instance, whose near-death experience consisted of leaving his body while on the operating table, soaring around the room and finally coming to hover over the surgeons' heads (and later accurately reporting everything said or done), today still leaves his body-unexpectedly and uncontrollably. He never knows when it will occur. He can be eating dinner, smoking his pipe, shopping for groceries, driving his car, talking to a neighbor when all of a sudden without warning he will just float out of his body, soar around or hover. While he is out, his body seems to continue whatever it was doing but in a slower monotone, unanimated as if on "automatic pilot." This happens to him so often it has become a problem, and his case is not unique.

Those stories repeated so often they have become commonplace include such claims as knowing who is calling the minute the telephone rings, answering questions before they are asked, knowing someone's thoughts without their speaking, seeing or sensing the immediate future, feeling the approach of an accident before it happens, hearing plants and animals voice their needs, sensing life in all things, an unusual emotional response to touch, taste and texture.

Just as common are stories of survivors who have become so sensitive they function like empaths overreacting to and/or taking on the pain and distress of others. One woman admitted this became such a problem she finally had to quit her position as an emergency room nurse. A former police officer noted the same problem, as he could no longer shield himself or disassociate from the misery and grief around him while on the job. Such people start out feeling in the same control as always, but quickly discover something within them has changed. They seem no longer able to disconnect themselves from the condition of their fellows.

There are so many incredible stories. I could go on and on. So, let's stop for a moment and make some observations. Those stories which are more extreme seem to emphasize changes in the way external environments are perceived, while stories which are more commonplace evolve around internal changes within the individual. The near-death experience seems to shift around normal functions of mind and its sensory input systems, dissolving some while enhancing others. How this happens, no one yet knows, but some striking similarities and comparisons can be made.

For instance, the heightened sensitivities so common for most survivors are very similar to a condition called synesthesia, a supposedly rare distortion of the brain's limbic system (the limbic is located about top center of the brain stem, and links us genetically with a reptilian pre-history). This condition allows people to do such things as see music, hear numbers and smell color. In other words, an individual's sensory input system is disordered from what we would term normal. Interestingly, the brain stem influences or controls emotional input, automatic body functions and

survival instincts. Neurological research in this area could eventually not only explain the whys and hows of synesthesia, but could also challenge our current understanding of what constitutes psychic behavior (since psychism is very similar to synesthesia).

It may be found that psychic ability is really survival ability, and hence a normal function of all living beings. The NDE may somehow stimulate the brain stem and/or limbic, and dissolve modern conditioning and taboos from society.

Another explanation, or one which may work in concert with synesthesia, is that the NDE may somehow stimulate or shift around normal assignments of one or both brain hemispheres, allowing greater and more frequent access to subconscious or right-brain environments. This would automatically enable a person to become more intuitive, spatial, knowing and creative. Also of interest is the fact that people who have experienced sudden blows to the head, back of the neck and spine can sometimes begin to exhibit so-called psychic abilities which are almost identical to those of the synesthetic and the NDE survivor. This is also true of those who have experienced a rise of Kundalini power, or that force said to stimulate or cause spiritual enlightenment and/or unusual psychic phenomena. Other people exhibiting these traits are drug users, the mentally ill, children and those of primitive cultures. There are too many commonalities here to be ignored, yet meaningful research in this area is still lacking.

In those cases of external phenomena involving such things as light beings, departed spirits, angels, disappeareds, visitations of what-have-you-many of these phenomena can be traced back to behavior, attitudes and/or curiosities the individual had before their NDE. There seems to be some kind of "seed" a previous interest, exposure or ability-which is heightened, enhanced, enlarged or expanded by the NDE. That which exists before in kind or in potential is suddenly expanded after . . . often into a fully developed condition.

And therein lies the problem!

Be it a switch of brain environments, sensory input systems or not, the survivor seems to shift almost overnight from beginner status to advanced. Normal development, growth, testing and understanding are skipped. There is no warning and no opportunity for preparation. As far as family and friends are concerned, the survivor is either hallucinating, lying to get more attention or is mentally ill. "It is the work of the devil," says some religionists. "You are mentally imbalanced," says the doctors. "You're nuts," says the neighbor. "Oh, you are just imagining things, dear," says the well-meaning spouse.

The ensuing confusion is disconcerting, uncomfortable, embarrassing, threatening, frightening or downright painful to the survivor. They are in essence, and sometimes in fact, punished for being perfectly normal for what they went through. For many, these after-effects either fade with time, are pushed aside or repressed. For others, the initial expansion or heightening not only continues but grows more and larger in scope. The old adage, "Use it or lose it," applies in the sense that like with any other skill, the more it is recognized and exercised the better it gets. It is interesting and sometimes sad to note which survivors integrate and sharpen their new abilities and which deny them or pretend they never happened.

VITAL SIGNS COLUMN, Fall 1985

"The Seven Most Common Aftereffects of Survival: Difficulty with Relationships, Language and Communications - Finding it Hard to Say What You Really Mean or to Understand Language Phrasing Used by Others"

There are two main shocks the typical survivor contends with:

1. being revived (which means exiting a dimension of more intense involvement)
2. waking up to reality (which means realizing here is not the same as there)

The space/time between shock one and shock two constitutes a "honeymoon" of detachment and innocence; necessary, I believe, to allow the human psyche and supporting life energies a chance to readjust. This honeymoon is like a shock-absorber, a womb-like re-entry phase where data, input, sensations, thoughts, revelations, feelings, insights and impact can all be sifted around, again and again, until some kind of pattern or sense of order can be established.

During this honeymoon, paradox is the only standard. The familiar is now foreign; the foreign is now familiar. It is a period of knowing but not knowing who you are and where you fit in the scheme of things. What is, isn't, and what isn't, is. Rationale of any kind is no longer rational. The world is the same, but you aren't. This honeymoon, this phase of a certain numb vagueness yet clear, insightful perception can last hours, days, months or even years. Until the second shock occurs, the survivor may appear mentally ill or brain damaged, when neither is true. Assuming mental imbalance where none actually exists can actually promote that imbalance. If survivors somehow escape psychiatric commitment, they may be branded weird or eccentric by society, which can lead to alienation instead of integration.

The honeymoon phase can be positive or negative, depending on that particular survivor's response to what happened and treatment afterwards. Normally, the

survivor who had a positive NDE becomes more optimistic and relaxed about life and its living; while the survivor who had a negative NDE becomes decidedly pessimistic or exhibits a need to cling to life. However, this pattern does not always hold true. For example, negative experiencers can learn and grow so much from their NDE they become positive, inspiring members of society. Conversely, a positive experiencer (even one who claimed to have seen Christ) can become so paranoid, frightened, depressed and withdrawn, no one can stand him.

I've long since learned it is not so much the experience itself which is so important (regardless of what kind of experience it was), but rather how the survivor responds to it and what the climate of adjustment is like afterwards. Six years of research in this area have shown me the crucial elements which usually spell success or failure with integrating the NDE are: 1) empathetic listeners who exhibit interest instead of scorn; 2) absence of pressure to resume life as always; 3) freedom to explore ideas and ask questions without shame or guilt; 4) supportive therapy of some kind conducted in a nonjudgmental environment; and 5) exposure to as much near-death information as possible, including material on the after-effects, scientific findings, and articles written by survivors.

The survivor needs help, but the survivor usually doesn't know it. Family, friends and business associates too often add additional pressure instead of assistance. Survivors who were once materialistic and power driven now are relaxed and altruistic; who were once self-centered and easy to anger now are lovingly kind and gentle; who were once scientifically precise and detailed now are intuitive and emotional. These switches of basic behavior are so typical they constitute the norm. How can you resume business as usual when you are no longer the same person?

What we are talking about here is a significant and profound change in basic values and personal characteristics. The survivor changes frequencies while his or her family remains on the same wavelength: This can strain communications sometimes to the breaking point. It's as if the survivor suddenly becomes fluent in Icelandic while everyone else is still speaking Japanese. Language nuances fade

and diplomacy is meaningless. Blunt words blurt out, events are seen for what they really are, keen ears are more apt to hear what is meant than what is said. It is the behavior of a child, a kind of innocence which views everything as fresh, honest, here and now.

Though language skills improve with patience, effort and time, much of the conceptual framework behind language can be severed or distorted. I have found it takes about seven years on the average before anyone can really ascertain to what extent a survivor's mind has shifted, and how well they can synthesize before with after.

Don't forget, survivors now have a basis of comparison non-existent before. Inner and outer environments heighten and expand. Everything becomes more of itself, distorting previous proportions and boundaries. Hence, any problem which was tolerated before now becomes unbearable while anything which satisfied before now becomes a joy. Though many survivors go on to divorce, quit their jobs, drift or play "musical chairs" with life, just as many others stay put, dig in and discover new depths of meaning and joy they never before thought possible. Either way, survivors discover more, and the depths of even more. The NDE doesn't cause anything in and of itself except a shift of perceptions, but that simple shift has a ripple effect, enhancing and enlarging all it touches.

Certainly after the two main shocks are over and it is back to life as always, old habits are often readopted. Cultural "shoulds" and "shouldn'ts" return, along with role playing and performances. Many survivors label their NDE a dream and tuck it away in some far reaches of mind, or cast it off as some hallucination or fantasy. Many cannot or will not integrate their experience; yet being unable to forget it, they pretend it away, suppressing any constructive or beneficial change it could bring.

Others successfully make the integration, immeasurably enriching their lives because of it.

But there is another group, smaller in number, whose NDEs were so intense and impactful that "life as always" becomes impossible. They strike out like the babes they are, sometimes drifting, sometimes wandering aimlessly through mind and miles, bereft of former paradigms and models, willing to experiment and explore. Their story is both inspirational and heart-rending as they form part of a new vanguard in society, a new breed of humans who truly walk to the tune of a different drummer.

"No one is a stranger anymore. Everyone is like a member of my family and I care what happens to them." This quotation from a survivor best describes the challenges and opportunities an NDE creates. We are beginning more to understand what it all means . . .

VITAL SIGNS COLUMN, Spring 1985

"The Seven Most Common Aftereffects of Survival: A Shifted Or Changed View Of Physical Reality. Becoming More Detached, Objective, Seeing "Through" Events/Problems, a Noticeable Reduction Of Fears Or Worries"

"How you gonna keep them down on the farm, after they've seen Paree?" This old song best describes the typical survivor's predicament. How are you going to return to what now seems petty comings and goings when you've just experienced a Greater Reality and a Higher Truth?

Can you imagine what it would be like to suddenly find yourself in another dimension where you experienced all knowledge, all peace, all love, all light, all freedom? Even being able to float out of your body and soar like a bird stretches the mind beyond all boundaries. You don't ever forget it. You can't. It leaves a mark, deep and profound. Even those survivors who staunchly insist life for them is now as normal and sane as it ever was keep their NDE safely tucked away inside their heart of hearts, pulling it out for inspiration when times get tough. Some keep the memory alive by reviewing it over and over, or seeking out stories from others, or hunting new audiences for the retelling of their tale.

It's interesting to notice that those who cannot or will not change their lifestyle and habits to correspond with their new understandings are usually those who cling most to their experience. Remembering and/or retelling seems to renew their vigor and give them courage. This is usually not true, however, for those survivors who choose to strike out and experiment with the world at large, exploring what's there and where they might fit. These more adventurous souls are apt to put their new understandings to work by testing them out in society, and in so doing, are less protective of their experience and less inclined to give it much attention. In essence, they have decided to live what their experience taught them instead of just remember or talk about it.

When you encounter a higher dimension of life, former stereotypes and traditions, rules and prejudices, goals and achievements become like so much garbage. As one

survivor laughingly put it, "People 'are so foolish. They get upset over nothing at all and live their lives as if they were half-asleep!" The NDE brings an enlarged perspective, a basis of comparison. We've seen "Paree" and now the "farm" looks drab. It is all too easy for us to disassociate from life's problems and difficulties. Worries and fears become just so much wasted effort. Yet survivors do worry, fear, anger, get depressed and have problems, like everyone else. But unlike many others, they tend more to see beyond life's stumbling blocks and view instead the broader panorama of symbols and patterns. This trait may make them appear more spiritual and wise than they really are. Just because they have broader vision doesn't make them saints. They learn and grow, make mistakes and stub their toes - like everyone else.

Because of their shifted or changed view of reality, many seem ready to burst with revelation after revelation. Typically, they seek out other sources which may clarify or verify their ideas. Often they will turn to areas like modern physics, transpersonal psychology, the works of Tesla and Einstein, metaphysics, holistic alternatives, the transformation movement or comparative religions. Others turn back to more orthodox pursuits and religions, only to discover in them depths and dimensions they never noticed before.

Survivors usually have a certain lightness and fun about them, yet they are intensely curious and determined too. Since they are often able to understand and perform in areas beyond their previous expertise, they face the utter frustration of lacking credentials to prove they know what they know. Too many times they are labeled kooks, ignored or merely tolerated, when all the time they really do have valuable information and knowledge to share.

And therein lies the conflict!

Even if a golden opportunity does come to share their wealth of ideas, many will muff it. They will miss the boat. For along with all the increase in knowledge, insight and vision is a marked decrease in abilities to verbalize clearly, organize

efficiently and concentrate a focus. Just when the survivor has the most to say, he usually lacks the ability to say it. It is almost as if the right-brain has been expanded while the left-brain was contracted. Hence, the near-death survivors scatter their energies in all directions, hardly knowing where to begin or what to do first. Their speeches don't always make sense and the material they write is often not worth reading. Ideas abound, but the ability to express them doesn't.

Restlessness comes.

The frustrating discouragement of trying to bring back to earth the "treasures of heaven" does more to silence survivors than being criticized or ignored.

VITAL SIGNS COLUMN, Summer 1985

"The Seven Most Common Aftereffects of Survival: A Different Feeling of Physical Self, A Certain Detachment From our Bodies and any Identification with them as our "Self". Rather a "Knowing" we live in or "Wear" our Bodies"

St. Teresa of Avila, the great Spanish mystic and reformer, said, "After you die, you wear what you are." The near-death experience makes clear to all who survive, that the human body and the human soul are not the same. The body and its ego identity slough off with death and decay, but the real us continues, more alive, more vital than encapsulation inside a physical body could have ever allowed. When the NDE survivor revives, that discovery remains.

There are a few survivors who are relieved to find themselves once again tucked safely back into their well-worn, familiar bodies of solid substance; but that former shell of their residence now feels somehow small, tight, confined, uncomfortable, clumsy, unnatural. They feel alienated from the very body which had nourished the formation of their personal identity since birth. They now know they are not their bodies. They feel boxed in.

Invariably, survivors come to describe their physical bodies in obtuse, more objective and detached terms, as if it were a garment they wear or a house they reside in. Some even joke about the particular style and model of "jacket" they wear, daydreaming of other designs it might be fun to try on.

For some, this detachment eventually fades as years pass, giving in to social pressures of "name, rank and serial number" and "of course your body is you." But by far the largest percentage of survivors continue to view the body differently, even after they have finally come to terms with it. One woman put it quite matter-of-factly, "My body is something I put up with. It's the baggage I carry on my trip through life. Whatever I need to survive is packed inside." Another woman was so caught up with her new concept of physical self that when introduced to a stranger, she blurted out, "My goodness, but it's nice to meet the body you're wearing this time!"

I've noticed that many survivors have a feeling or knowing that souls evolve and grow through various cycles, often taking lifetimes to expand their experiences and learning. They talk about reincarnation, sometimes, as if it were an established fact; and almost to a person, mention a Life Plan, and that somehow our lives are ordered and follow a sine rhythm of ups and downs. Survivors lose their fear of death, for they know it ends nothing but the physical body and its ego. For that reason, they often exhibit a detached feeling of physical self. That feeling can be very subtle like a secret hidden deep inside, or it can be such an issue the survivor could almost swear this body they wear must belong to someone else. It couldn't possibly be theirs.

Actual body changes could have occurred besides those resulting from any health problem or accident which caused the death event. These changes are varied and include such things as an unusual brightness to the eyes, a glow or unique sensitivity to the skin (even change of skin tone and/or sun tolerance), a reversal of inner clocks (i.e., a nocturnal person's reverting to morning and daylight hours, or vice versa), heightened sensations of taste/touch/texture, increased allergies. I've heard so many survivors claim they are now so sensitive to drugs and medical compounds they can't imagine what they will do or who they will turn to if a medical crisis should occur. There are some cases of survivors who report a physical force or energy shield now seems to surround them. One man was attacked twice with knives, once by a mugger and once on his job as a counselor, and in each case the knives suddenly deflected or broke within one foot of his body, as if they had struck an invisible wall. One woman noted structural changes in her hands, and especially with her fingers, whereby the distance between joints had subtly but measurably lengthened. She has before-and-after hand prints to prove it.

It is difficult to establish a connection between the NDE experience and sudden, inexplicable body changes because of the absence of verifiable data, but one consistent and obvious change which needs no documentation at all is that

survivors tend to look and act younger and happier than ever before. There is a lightness and joy about them. Years can roll back to the extent that before-and-after photos can be startlingly different.

This is probably more a result of attitudinal and philosophical changes which almost always accompany near-death survival, than of any physical causation per se, for it is a well-known fact that the outer body reflects the inner mind. I have noticed that those survivors who exhibit the fewest physical body changes are those who had the least disruption in their belief system and view of reality; while those survivors who report the most physical changes invariably are the ones whose experience was more intense and impactful, profoundly shifting their thought processes and view of life itself.

Regaining your physical body after death passes is a mixed blessing. Many people return so weakened by their experience and by increased allergies and sensitivities that they are vulnerable to a relapse or another illness or accident. Some even go on to endure additional near-death experiences or close brushes with death during continued health reversals. Naturally, the normal process of healing takes time, and strength can ebb and flow until the body is rebuilt and health restored. Still, it seems to me perhaps something else might be at play here, and that is the will to live. The first year back is rough. Lures of returning to the "other side" are many and strong. It would be so easy to slip back, and this time stay there.

That longing to return can be overwhelming sometimes and can linger for years to come. Yet, the knowledge that we have a job to do and a task to perform is a stronger urge. We have a sense of mission, no matter how mundane or significant, and we know our contribution is part of the Universal Plan. So, we drag around this jacket we wear until the day comes when we can again stand tall and solid and be about our business. We know the day will come when our life, our body and our mind will again feel comfortable and as well-worn as those old shoes we tossed under our bed!

VITAL SIGNS COLUMN, NO. 1

The Experience / The Experiencer

"Low Blood Pressure Alert and Living with Electrical Sensitivity"

The proverbial wheel has turned and once again I find myself penning a column for IANDS – as I did back in 1981 when Ken Ring invited me aboard. That first column was entitled "Coming Back," and it was stuffed full of the discoveries I had made while researching the aftereffects of the near-death phenomenon. It was personal, sometimes confrontive, yet always true to the larger story of what *really* happens when someone encounters LIFE on the Other Side of death's curtain, and then returns to speak of it. I was newly back myself from surviving death and near-death thrice over, and was consumed with the need to fulfill the mission I had been given: "Test revelation. One book for each death." After nineteen years of "doing my job," that passion is still there. With that said, let's begin. It's time to take another look at THE EXPERIENCE / THE EXPERIENCER.

To inaugurate this second go-round I want to address some issues concerning the physiological aftereffects of near-death states (refer to [Beyond the Light](#) for detailed discussion). Overall characteristics follow:

Changes in thought-processing (switch from sequential/selective thinking to clustered thinking and an acceptance of ambiguity), insatiable curiosity, heightened intelligence, more creative and inventive, unusual sensitivity to light and sound, substantially more or less energy (even energy surges, oft times more sexual), reversal of body clock, lower blood pressure, accelerated metabolic and substance absorption rates (decreased tolerance of pharmaceuticals and chemically treated products), electrical sensitivity, synesthesia (multiple sensing), increased allergies or sensitivities, a preference for more vegetables and grains (less of meat), physically younger looking (before and after photos can differ).

LOW BLOOD PRESSURE ALERT

This year, early July, I was listening to a national health show carried where I live over radio station WINA, when I heard a physician discussing a change in how the medical community regards low blood pressure. *It is now "labeled" a disease!* The latest thinking on low blood pressure is that it is not normal and should be treated chemically, that it may be causal in some cases of chronic fatigue syndrome and depression. An example given was that of a woman with a reading of 112-over-60, who had registered at about that rate for several years, had no energy, and thought herself a failure. Pharmaceutical "treatments of choice" were described.

Caution: Just the opposite is true with near-death survivors.

What I noticed with the individuals I had sessions with, is that the drop in blood pressure usually occurred right after their experience and remained that way over time. A few developed high blood pressure in their later years, but only a few. The majority reported consistently more energy and a zest for living atypical to the circumstances of their lifestyle.

Yes, it is true that near-death survivors go through long bouts of depression, but this despair can usually be traced to the utter frustration of trying to fit new ideas and revelations into the old "wineskin" of outmoded beliefs and attitudes. They have a basis of comparison unknown to them before – where they "went" does not equate with where they now "are." This situation is unique in its characteristics and its cause, and cannot be compared to the medical definition of "clinical depression." It would behoove caregivers to inquire of their patients if they might have had a near-death experience previously, or been in a situation where such an episode could have occurred, before rushing to judgment about treatment. Near-death survivors are challenged more by what they *found* in dying, than what they lost.

Let's face it, the average experiencer eventually becomes healthier, younger looking, more active/interested/curious than before, has a hunger for knowledge, contends with a broad array of new or enhanced sensitivities and abilities, is usually enthusiastic and upbeat, interested in spirituality and healing and service-oriented projects ... and ... THEY HAVE LOW BLOOD PRESSURE. This hardly constitutes "disease."

Educate your doctor or nurse practitioner about the difference between clinical depression and chronic fatigue with the typical aftereffects of the near-death phenomenon. The information you can share is invaluable.

LIVING WITH ELECTRICAL SENSITIVITY

Has your replacement bill for electrical equipment been as high as mine? The electrical sensitivity that follows a near-death experience is no laughing matter; it's expensive!

The final straw for me came when my energy field brought down an entire ten-block, electrical power grid and resulted in the loss of countless small appliances for people living in the area. Had I had the money to replace all that "fried" equipment I would have, but I was broke at the time. The studio owner, where I was recording the audiocassette tape [Coming Back to Life](#) (an update of my first book), witnessed the "pop" – that exact moment my excitement peaked as I spoke into a microphone. Newspaper copy the next day detailed the mysterious electrical surge, yet no mention was made about the Power Company having pinpointed the source of the surge – to the studio area I occupied. Overwhelmed with guilt, I immediately set about to find a way I could live with electrical sensitivity and not put anyone or anything at risk.

Here is what has worked for me thus far:

Whenever I'm around electrical equipment that is not used to my energy, I enter into a state of prayer and merge my essence with that of the equipment. In prayer I affirm the glory of God and the wonder of all creation, Thy Will, not mine, always and ever. I talk to the equipment as if it were a member of my family, assuring it all the while that the two of us are compatible and that our energies can mix without difficulty, injury, or breakdown, that I am there in love and will behave in the spirit of that love. I linger for a moment or two in silent respect, then I again affirm our mutual compatibility, stating that we can easily work together for as long as needed or wanted. I bless and praise the equipment in gratitude for all that it does and for what we are about to do together. In closing, I envision myself whole, healthy and happy, and ready to proceed.

I close my eyes to do this. When I open them again, I am filled with appreciation for the equipment and respect for the opportunity I have to share time and space with such a marvel of invention.

As long as I remember to merge in prayer with electrical equipment before I use it, I have no problem with power surges. When I forget this simple ritual, or when in haste I convince myself it's not necessary, that familiar snap/crackle/pop occurs once more and a piece of metal or a length of wiring melts.

How has it been for you?

If you've found another way to live with electrical sensitivity successfully, let me know and I'll pass it along to others.

VITAL SIGNS COLUMN, NO. 2

The Experience / The Experiencer

"Psychic Ability"

I began my research in 1978 after meeting Elisabeth Kübler-Ross at O'Hare Airport in Chicago and finding out during our long conversation (her plane was late) that what I had been through was universal in occurrence and pattern, and that it had a name, "the near-death experience." My time with Elisabeth was a beginning, engendering more questions than it did answers, but at least it gave me direction – something I didn't have before. Within months I was having sessions with other experiencers as myself, intently observing their every move and nuance of language as they described what happened to them, *and was still happening*. Seeing myself reflected in their eyes and hearing my story repeated from their lips was as sobering as it was instructive. Three years later Kenneth Ring telephoned to say that he had heard about what I was doing and could we talk. We did. The rest is history.

Throughout my nineteen years of research, I have always cross-compared whatever I found with discoveries I made during the sixties and early seventies when I interviewed people actively engaged in spiritual awakenings and transformations of consciousness. If you include this prior effort, I have spent thirty years investigating "otherworld journeys" and the impact they have on individuals, families, and communities. Coming from this broader background, I want to tackle a subject *crucial* to the positive integration of the near-death experience, and that is ... **psychic ability**.

Fact: If you weren't psychic before your near-death experience, you become so afterward. If you were psychic before, you become even more so. Attempts to disprove this have only strengthened the mountain of evidence supporting it.

I speak to this fact in every book that I have ever written and I'm doing so once again, for it is that important.

Child experiencers face the same superstition adults experiencers do: if you're psychic, you're considered possessed of the devil. Scientific types believe in essentially the same admonition although their jargon differs: if you can't put it under a microscope, it doesn't exist. Wrong on both counts!

It matters not whether you term that which seems to be paranormal as "psychic" or "intuitive" or "gifts of the spirit," the ability is the same differing only by intent of usage and how described.

From the earliest days of my near-death research, I recognized that the phenomenon seems to somehow enhance, enlarge, and expand whatever potentials and characteristics were present in the individual beforehand. This "across-the-board" expansion encompasses most of the aftereffects, but especially the emergence of psychic abilities. Actually, psychic abilities are more akin to enlargements of one's perceptual range of the electromagnetic spectrum and the extension of faculties normal to us, than any type of anomaly, fantasy, or curse.

It is possible to extend and broaden our five faculties of sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell to embrace *psychic dimensions* (beyond reliance on physical form), and *collective/spiritual realms* (grander realities, the larger view). Since the average person is only aware of 1/60th of what goes on around him or her, these extensions are advantageous and enriching, enabling individuals to circumvent whatever factors may seem to limit the knowledge and wisdom they can access. I consider faculty extensions to be quite practical and easily learned or refined via classes, how-to-books, or as a result of the desire to do so and the will to try.

I would define faculty extensions as follows (notice what happens to what we commonly label *intuition* and *perception* once our everyday faculties extend and broaden):

FACULTY EXTENSIONS

Physical Faculty	Psychic Extension	Collective and/or Spiritual Extension
See/Sight	See without use of eyes; research term - "clairvoyance"	Vision
Hear/Sound	Hear without presence of sound; research term - "clairaudience"	Music
Feel/Touch	Feel, or have an effect on an object, without touching; research term - "psychokinesis"	Art
Taste/Flavor	Flavor without use of tastebuds; research term - "clairgustation"	Discrimination
Smell/Scent	Odor without use of nose; research term - "clairolfaction"	Integrity
Sense/Intuition	Aware without or in advance of recognition; research term - "clairsentience"	Grace
Perceive/Perception	Apprehend without or in advance of physical stimuli; research term - "precognition"	Knowing

The "flowering" of psychic abilities is usually quite unexpected for near-death survivors, which, I believe, accounts for why so many experiencers have difficulty handling them. The power of social and religious "taboos," however, may be the greater stumbling block. I suspect, though, that psychic abilities are simply the outworking of limbic enhancements in the brain/mind assembly and have nothing to do with anything "mysterious" or paranormal.

It is typical after reviving from death to continue to see manifestations from the Other Side, have out-of-body experiences, know who's on the phone before it rings, "live" the future before it occurs, "see through" people's motives, communicate

freely with the varied "voices" of nature, and so forth. None of this is unusual, or a sign of mental instability.

Psychic abilities, like latent talents, surface readily when one's consciousness alters in spiritual development. The same is true with near-death states. Once you recognize this and commit to harnessing and refining these abilities, your life becomes more positive, efficient, easier, and fun – not to mention, colorful.

Truly, the psychic is the gift of spirit and the poetry of consciousness. We are enriched beyond measure by its presence.

VITAL SIGNS COLUMN, NO. 3

The Experience / The Experiencer

"Sleep Pattern Disturbances and 'Flow States'"

Just a brief reminder that low blood pressure is *normal* for near-death survivors. I had a checkup with my doctor recently, and mine registers 110/70. That's a bit high for me, but not too bad. My doctor couldn't believe how healthy I am and that my energy levels and attitude is as "rip-roaring" as ever. So much for the notion that low blood pressure means lethargy and depression. Be certain to educate your doctor about this. Medical people are a little slow to recognize that near-death states change a person's body as well as his or her mind.

The Manhattan and Yonkers IANDS groups, under the leadership of Julie Levine, are quite active. I had the pleasure of meeting her at the Conference in San Antonio. During a brief moment of quiet, she told me that most of their experiencer/members were reporting sleep disorders and asked if I had noticed such a thing as one of the aftereffects. I said no, but that I had noticed something akin to that with children. After their episode, kids usually "trade-in" naptime for increased flow states, and at night they are often very restless and have unusually vivid dreams. Then George T. Threshman, another member of the "New Yonkers," wrote me a letter pinpointing the time when experiencers dealing with this so-called "sleep disorder" always woke up – the same time for everyone – between 3 to 4 am.

Although I cannot say for certain what might be going on here, I do want to invite the experiencers in the New York area, and, for that matter, experiencers the world over, to consider another way of looking at the issue. Perhaps waking up between 3 to 4 am each morning is not so much a symptom of "disorder," as it is an alignment with "natural order." I suggest this because there is an extensive esoteric/mystical tradition that says between the hours of 3 to 4 am is the most ideal time to train yourself to awaken, as those specific hours are when creative and spiritual energies are at their highest vibration and are the easiest to access.

I cannot prove this, but I can give you something to think about. Between the hours of 3 to 4 am, irrespective of location, is when the earth's background base frequency or Schumann Resonance peaks. Measuring at about 7.8 cycles per second for most of this century, it has been thought that this resonance factor or earth pulse beat was a constant. My doctor keeps track of this, and he has cautioned me that different areas of the globe vary slightly in what they register but that current readings have shown an overall rise worldwide. Measuring 9.6 in June of 1996 in eastern Oregon, it is thought that the earth's pulse could go as high as 13 cycles per second by the year 2000 – perhaps even higher, depending on where one lives.

Whatever the outcome of this "quickening," near-death survivors will probably be the first to know. That's because experiencers, whether adult or child, are quite sensitive to any changes in their environment (things such as pressure, humidity, pollution, wind, temperature, and so forth). And, they respond almost immediately to fluctuations in magnetic force fields, electrical surges, and various types of vibrational activity.

We become living "weather vanes" in what we can pick up and respond to; hence, automatically waking up when the background frequency of our beloved "blue marble" is at its "loudest" would be rather *natural*, I think, and in no way a sign of disorder, unless mental aberrations were being experienced, too. If that's the case, one should check in with a doctor.

Near-death survivors don't just become "weather vanes" after their experience, however. They tend to "flow" more.

Mihaly Csikszentmihaly, a psychologist at the University of Chicago, and author of *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* (Harper & Row, New York City, 1990), defines an internal flow state as the state of being so absorbed in what you're doing that time and space cease and a euphoric feeling of complete clarity and sense of purpose takes over. Being in this state of mind he refers to as "going with the

flow." People lose a sense of self in this state. One becomes both actor and observer, irrelevant stimuli are shut out, time and space distort, and there comes a knowing.

Anyone can learn how to have flow states, and at any age, but it is near-death experiencers who assert that not only can one's mind flow, but that lives can flow. That is to say, unrelated events can come together by themselves in purposeful ways and with a peculiar sense of timing. Some people consider this to be a "coincidence," others call it "synchronicity" (so named by the Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung as a way to depict "meaningful coincidence"). An example of synchronicity is what happened to my husband Terry, when he was busy with studies on corporate mediation techniques so he could qualify for certification as a mediator. For no special reason, he suddenly reached over and flipped on the radio. Much to his surprise, an hour-long program on mediation techniques was just beginning – a program that covered exactly what he needed to know at the exact moment he needed to know it.

This sort of thing, synchronicity, becomes a daily occurrence for most near-death survivors, leaving them with a sense that almost nothing happens by accident and that there is a grander scheme of things we can align with if we chose.

The following chart illustrates what I found to be typical with internal and external flow states, and is based on my research:

ASPECTS OF FLOW

Internal to Self	External to Self
Subjective environment	Objective environment
Without a focus	More in focus
Release of thoughts	Release of goals or vested interests
Stimuli fades away	Stimuli increases in clarity
Blank out into nothing	Perk up to new possibilities
Consciousness expands	Experience expands
The mind flows	The life flows
You know more	You do more
Connect with a source of wisdom greater than self	Connect with a source of guidance beyond self
Gain information	Gain harmony and an orderly rhythm to life experiences
Unify in consciousness	Unify with the world at large
A state of mind	A state of living

The only purpose of synchronicity is to catch our attention. It signals that an external flow has been activated (for however long).

What I have consistently noticed is that synchronicity seems to function as a "signal," showing us we have connected to or perhaps aligned with a greater stream of intelligence, a wholeness beyond ourselves – perhaps even the true source of our being. When we are "on course," even for a moment, synchronicity tells us so. It gives us the feedback we need to recognize that an alignment has occurred.

Our societal notion of "coincidence," at least to my way of thinking, is actually a joke we play on ourselves. We use the term as a catchall so that we can avoid explaining what we do not know how to explain. I have discovered that there are no co-incidences in life, just gaps in our ability to understand how unrelated parts can connect to form a unified and meaningful whole.

Oh, by the way, I never was able to train myself to awaken between 3 to 4 am. I sleep so soundly, nothing interferes, not even good intent. Maybe you can do better. Good luck!

VITAL SIGNS COLUMN, No. 4

The Experience / The Experiencer

"The Out-of-Body Aspect of Near-Death Experiences"

Previously, we discussed the possibility of sleep disorders after a near-death experience, a subject posed by Manhattan and Yonkers IANDS groups. I want to underscore that what I noticed in my research was not as much sleep loss or even sleep deprivation afterward – as *a change in sleep patterning*. Examples: adults who had to relearn how to recognize the need for sleep, kids who switched from naps to increased flow states, those who began to wake up during early morning hours as if "on cue," and folks whose dreamlife became so vivid and complex it was as if they lived a "parallel" life while asleep. Again, not sleep loss per se, but a patterning change. (It is acknowledged in research on kundalini breakthroughs that those who experience one often report insomnia. For more information about this, write to: Kundalini Research Network, P. O. Box 1150, Cupertino, CA 95015.)

In this column, I want to address the out-of-body aspect of the near-death experience. The reason is because of a letter I received from Ron Bachman of Enola, Pennsylvania. His letter goes like this:

"I have recently become a member of IANDS, and have of late devoted considerable time to reading IANDS publications, current and some back issues, as well as numerous books and articles on NDEs that I have obtained from my local library and bookstores. I am fascinated with the subject of the NDE, but perplexed by my inability to come to a conclusion on one aspect of the NDE, namely the verifiability of the out-of-body component.

"The implications of a true out-of-body condition is understandably enormous. The suggestion, of course, is that in this state one may possess a sense of non-local visual consciousness, that allows the experiencer to later identify and describe objects and events that ordinary visual senses would not allow. Non-local auditory and/or thought communication senses are often available as well.

"The out-of-body condition is significant, as it is the only NDE component that is verifiable, and, as such, in my opinion, lays credence to the dependability of the more subjective components as well.

"While Raymond Moody, Melvin Morse, and others have provided a considerable number of corroborated examples of near-death associated out-of-body conditions, I have read of very few verified examples of willed or induced OBEs. Since the term out-of-body is applied to both, I would assume that if an NDE survivor having had an out-of-body component was later able to describe a 'visual' sense of viewing his or her body, detail resuscitation attempts, and reveal the dial settings of operating room instruments, etc., then someone having had an OBE should be able to describe out-of-body conditions as well.

"Due to the after-the-fact nature of NDE data, it has been challenged by some as to its reliability. Data from laboratory studies of OBEs, however, overcome that objection, as well as provide more reliable indices in a controlled environment.

"Since NDE studies have been ongoing for many years, and since this is such an obvious suggestion, I am sure OBE studies have been done. I suspect that since I have not yet read of such studies, the results were not very positive. If this is the case, I am inclined to believe:

- (1) Perhaps Susan Blackmore is correct in her assertion that all out-of-body sensations are internal, i.e., fabrications of the
- (2) The out-of-body component of the NDE, and the OBE, are somehow different, and should, therefore, be phrased

First of all, Ron, allow me to correct a statement you made saying that the out-of-body component of the near-death experience was the only verifiable aspect. Not so! Messages of various types, revelations, family secrets laid bare, information the experiencer absolutely could not have know before – pop up during the phenomenon, perhaps during that part where the individual is met by loved ones

who have died before, maybe while he or she is talking with an angel, often as part of the past-life review or during "meetings" with otherworldly beings. Don't jump to conclusions about which aspect of the near-death experience is more verifiable or more important than another, as you would be making a judgment that does not apply.

I cannot speak to laboratory experiments that are designed to induce out-of-body experiences, but I can say that for nearly a decade *before* my own near-death episodes I taught people how to do what we then called "astral travel." Hundreds were successful; only a few were unable to make the grade. Verification was always immediate: I either called people by telephone and had them check details given; or someone would hop in a car, drive to the place, and phone back to relay the news. After years of this, I came to regard astral or out-of-body traveling as a reliable and dependable tool a person could use to make life more efficient and productive.

In 1978 I began to research the near-death phenomenon (both the experience and its aftereffects). Over twenty years of such effort has convinced me that a near-death experience is much more intense, more complex and all-encompassing, than *any* out-of-body experience ... *even if the near-death scenario itself consists only of a single out-of-body flight*. Please refer to Chapter One on "The Initial Experience" in my book [Beyond the Light](#), and especially the case of Ernest Hemingway, the famous novelist. Brief experiences can be and often are enough to change an individual's entire life.

The near-death phenomenon is a complex dynamic that cannot be easily labeled or understood in terms typical of parapsychological studies. It is distinctly different by patterning, impact, and the cascade of aftereffects that follow – both psychologically and physiologically. Because of this fact, I would classify the near-death experience under the genre of transformations of consciousness.

As concerns the out-of-body component to the experience, I know of no such event that could have been verified that wasn't. Those who state otherwise, are simply those who refuse to accept verifications made by others.

Here are a few that were verified in my caseload:

Margaret Fields Kean ([Beyond the Light](#), Avon paperback version, pages 83-88). She was shown during her near-death episode that she was to become a healer. Immediately upon reviving, she began to heal people around her in the surgical ward that needed healing, including a white boy burned black who was in a windowless isolation room. She clearly saw and felt her self leave her body, pass through the walls of that room, and sit on the edge of the boy's bed. The boy could see her as readily as she could see him. She introduced herself and proceeded to counsel him about his fears of dying and leaving his parents. After he smiled and said thank you, she returned to her body. Months later, while continuing her recovery and still in great pain, Margaret attended a large horse show where her daughter was competing. As the announcer blared over the microphone that her daughter had won first place, two people scurried over to where she was sitting. They were the parents of the burned boy and had been searching for her ever since their son died. Their son told them all about Margaret, her name, about her family, and what she had told him about death; and they wanted to thank her for what she did for him. Because of her, he died peacefully and they were able to accept his death. *There is no way Margaret could have known anyone was in that room for the door was closed and no mention was ever made by nurses or staff of the boy, nor could Margaret, having just survived major leg surgery, ever have negotiated the distance. Margaret never attempted to contact the boy's parents, yet they knew her by name, knew she raised horses and competed at horse shows, and they were able to quote, word-for-word, everything she told their son. Margaret's daughter, who was there, confirmed this meeting.*

Lynn, full name withheld ([Journal of Near-Death Studies](#), Vol. 15, No. 1, Fall 1996, pages 7-10). At the age of 13, and during open-heart surgery, Lynn left her body

and viewed her surgery from a point above and to one side of the doctors' heads. She was surprised to see that one of the doctors was a black man. Previously, she had been introduced to the operating team, and they were all of the white race. She had never seen a black doctor before and couldn't help staring at him. When later released from the hospital, she asked her cardiologist who the black doctor was. He said that the black doctor had been called in at the last moment because one of the members of the operating team had suddenly taken ill. Her cardiologist asked Lynn if the man had dropped by to see her, if that's how she knew about him. She said, "No, I saw him during surgery." With that, her cardiologist stopped smiling and told her to go home and forget everything. *Lynn was unconscious when she was wheeled into the operating room. There is no way she could have known about the last-minute switch, or that one of her new physicians was black. Her mother verified this affair.*

Christine Longaker, author of *Facing Death and Finding Hope* (Doubleday, New York City, 1997, page 188), tells about a man who "died" at the accident scene, left his body, and was hovering around the mangled metal when he witnessed a woman in the stalled traffic, unable to see what was going on, pray for those who might be injured. He was immediately attracted to her prayers and found that they gave him strength. After many months of surgery and rehabilitation, he located the name and address of the woman in traffic who prayed and went to visit her to personally say thanks. He was able to locate her because he saw her license plate number when he drew near to draw strength from her prayers. *The woman was totally shocked by his visit, for she did not know about him nor was there any way he could have known about her, much less her license plate number. He was considered dead on arrival at the hospital, but revived after resuscitation attempts.*

(By the way, in my study of children, they were much more likely than adult experiencers to talk about what they called "prayer beams" – that energy they saw exuding from people during prayer. Some talked about how sparkly it was, others saw it as golden or bright white; yet the majority described these prayer beams as rainbows.")

I think these few examples are enough to establish that what is seen during the out-of-body component to the near-death experience is factual and in most cases can be and often is verified.

It is true that all attempts to influence what might be seen in a surgical room while a patient is "out-of-body" have utterly failed. I believe the reason for this is because the particular methods used (i.e., flashing digital signs constantly repeating nonsense phrases) are too abstract. If you study near-death accounts carefully, you will notice that whatever is seen during out-of-body states either was emotionally important to the individual involved or appealed to that person in an emotional manner. In other words, the key to influencing imagery and increasing the possibility of verifiable recall is *emotions*.

VITAL SIGNS COLUMN, No. 5
The Experience / The Experiencer
"Subjective Light"

(concerning God, Divine Intervention, Prayer Beams)

As a researcher, I can assure you that any type of near-death experience can be life changing.

But, as an experiencer, I can positively affirm that being bathed in The Light on the other side of death is *more than life changing*. That light is the very essence, the heart and soul, the all-consuming consummation of ecstatic ecstasy. It is a million suns of compressed love dissolving everything unto itself, annihilating thought and cell, vaporizing humanness and history, into the one great brilliance of all that is and all that ever was and all that ever will be.

You know it's God.

No one has to tell you.

You know.

You can no longer believe in God, for belief implies doubt. There is no more doubt. None. You now *know* God. And you know that you know. And you're never the same again.

And you know who you are ... a child of God, a cell The Greater Body, an extension of The One Force, an expression from The One Mind. No more can you forget your identity, or deny or ignore or pretend it away.

There is One, and you are of The One.

One.

The Light does this to you.

It cradles your soul in the heart of its pulse-beat and fills you with love-shine. And you melt away as the "you" you think you are, reforming as the "YOU" you really are, and you are reborn because at last you "remember."

Although not everyone speaks of God when they return from death's door as I have here, the majority does. And almost to a person they begin to make references to oneness, allness, isness, the directive presence behind and within and beyond all things.

Down through the ages this kind of knowledge has been termed *enlightenment* – literally a waking up to light, an illumination of light, a reunification with The Light. And there are groups, isms and schisms, that decree how one can reach such a state of enlightened knowingness. The rules are many, the pathways numerous, yet the goal is always the same ... reunion with the source of your being, God.

This subject concerns the difference between religion and spirituality, a subject of utmost importance to experiencers. Before we explore research findings that are pertinent, let's define the territory:

Religion – a systematic approach to enlightenment based on set standards or dogmas, which may or may not alter as the religion evolves. It provides the protection of community support and moral development, and the guidance of metaphors to describe what seems mysterious. Its "Holy of Holies," or mystery teachings, are usually reserved for the elect or chosen. *Systems oriented.*

Spirituality – a personal, intimate experience of God based on a mystical awakening or sudden enlightenment. There are no standards or dogmas, only precedents, for individual knowing, and/or gnosis, is honored. Usually referred to as "The Inner

Journey" deep within the depths of self, it demands a thorough "house cleaning" on every level of being in order to access the sacredness of truth. *Process oriented.*

Perspective – at the core of all religions is that moment of enlightenment, that mystical revelation and sacred teaching, from which the religion itself grew and prospered. Sometimes called The Mysteries, Secret Teachings, or Esoteric Truths, this heart and soul of religion is as exquisite and viable today as when first revealed. Yet there is no system of spiritual enlightenment that can guarantee spiritual attainment. Neither does the shelter religion offers negate the individual's responsibility for his or her own spiritual awakening and spiritual maturity.

Of interest here is that one-third of the people I had sessions with continued in a traditional religious setting after their near-death experience. Although some were members of, or went on to join, fundamentalist or charismatic churches (even becoming evangelists), most expressed a desire to remain where they were and quietly work to uplift and enlighten the ministry of their present church. A number became ordained ministers.

The remaining two-thirds, however, either cast aside religious affiliations or had never been involved in any to begin with. For these people, the spiritual path became paramount, as they shifted from standards and dogmas to a personal, intimate relationship with God. Surprisingly, the greater number came to join or support some type of organized, structured church or philosophy later on, some even originated churches of their own. Popular choices were metaphysical (New Thought) churches and eastern philosophical religious ideas. Those who continued in a more mystical approach often became involved with shamanism, or an ecology-based "return to the basics" movement.

Superficial or overly restrictive teachings turn off most experiencers. Because of this, heartbreaking conflicts can arise. I spoke with several near-death survivors who were spouses of ministers. All of them had withdrawn from attending Sunday services and were no longer supportive of their loved one's messages to the

congregation, feeling that the sermons were wrong. Many others came to shun or renounce cherished religious traditions much to the consternation of family members. This turnaround is seldom understood. Labels like "irrational" or "corrupted by the forces of evil" or "the work of the devil" sometimes replace any attempt to seek common ground. Alienation or separation can result.

Previous beliefs, or lack of them, really make no difference whatsoever, as the near-death phenomenon frees an individual to walk and talk with God without reservation or restriction.

With child experiencers, the majority of those I spoke with had the gift of conversing directly with God or Holy Spirit afterward. And they claimed that "divine intervention" was now an active force in their lives.

An example of divine intervention is what happened to Stephanie Lang of New York City. She nearly died at the age of three from a severe kidney infection complicated by measles, chicken pox, and a raging fever. Although she does not remember having had a near-death experience per se, she went on to exhibit most of the aftereffects. (Child experiencers are six times more likely to "tuck away their experience" or forget it than adults; spontaneous recall during midlife is common.) Along with a sharp mind and incredible artistic talent, she struggled with depression and a lack of motivation, and felt somehow "off course" for years. While lunching one day on the roof of a twenty-six-floor skyscraper, she walked to the railing with the intent of just looking around. She began to rock, absent-mindedly lost her balance, and pitched forward toward the traffic below. Before she could react, she suddenly found herself ten feet back from the railing, sitting on her bottom with tears streaming. A clear voice in her head asked, "Are you going or are you staying? If you are staying, you have to change." She credits this rescue to divine intervention. It totally changed her life in how she became goal-oriented afterward, and excited about taking advantage of every opportunity she could. Even though doubts still assail her from time to time, the deep depressions she once had are gone.

This closeness to spirit, a sense of The Divine, of God, propels experiencers into a search for more and better avenues of service, mission, and outreach. It is true that many are frustrated by a lack of any detailed knowing or "message" telling them what to do with their lives or how, but just as many are motivated and "alive" with the faith that where they're headed is the right path for them.

Jungian analyst James Hillman addresses this in his book *The Soul's Code* [1]. He states, "Psychotherapy has become an exaggerated self-searching to find out who we are but has neglected entirely the search for what the world wants from us – our *calling*." David Spangler, author of *The Call* [2], expands on Hillman's idea saying:

"You *are* your own unique self, and if you have the humility to break through the boundaries of ego you will bear the summons of your Call. Something you may not even know about yourself will emerge, and you will discover a service, a gift, a divine purpose behind your actions."

Prayer and meditation take on dynamic proportions immediately afterward with child experiencers, as well as *visioning* (aligning in consciousness with the divine purpose within all of us to love and to express a greater degree of life and caring). Many of these youngsters actually *saw* prayers being said for them while they were out-of-body. They described how the power of those prayers turned into beams of radiant, golden, or rainbow light that would arc over from the one saying the prayer, no matter how many miles away, to where they themselves were "hovering." Once the prayer beam "hit" them, the feeling would be akin to a "splash" of love or an incredible "warming." Because they have seen and felt the effectiveness of prayer, child experiencers consider it a valid and real way to talk with God while sharing God's healing love with others.

Larry Dossey, M.D., former chief of staff at Humana Medical City in Dallas, Texas, and current co-chairman of the panel on mind/body interventions in the Office of

Alternative Medicine at the National Institutes of Health, has a lot to say about the power of prayer, both in his books and personally [3]: "There is a quality that correlates with the effect of the prayer and it's something that sounds very old-fashioned. It's love. And if the individual doing the praying does not have compassion and empathy and love and a deep sense of authentic and genuine caring for whomever they are praying for, these [medical] experiments [on the power of prayer] don't work very well. Love is the key to success."

Typically, children seem obsessed with worship and attending church after their episode. Barbara True Bradley of Des Moines, Iowa (who "died" at four and a half from lobar pneumonia and experienced a near-death episode) said that, "When I was well and returned home, I set up a table in my bedroom, covered it with a white cloth, and had a prayer book and cross on it. I remember kneeling there to pray."

Child experiencers who had been steeped in certain religious dogmas beforehand, however, oft times found that the call to express their inner spirit ran cross-current to their earlier indoctrination and parent's wishes. Kids in this situation were twice as likely as adult experiencers to lose the pure spontaneity and utter joy of their new relationship with God. I was amazed at how, once "turned off" in this manner, child experiencers seldom made peace with religious doctrines again. Theirs became a quiet approach to worship and a silent "partnership" with God.

Don't misunderstand what I am saying here: near-death experiencers of any age usually fall "head over heels" in love with God afterward. The reality of God or "Deity" is no longer a factor for them. Their problem, their challenge, is: how does one successfully surmount society's bias against personally identifying with God?

The vast majority no longer recognizes or feels the need for an "authority" to speak to God in their behalf. They now "deal direct," and feel guided to do so. This practice is labeled by some as "the religion of the resuscitated," a derogatory term meant to demean this switch in awareness and allegiance. Certainly, the spiritual

approach, that personal intimacy with Source, can be fraught with all sorts of difficulties, especially the specter of self-deception, but it is the wave of the future for society as a whole. Perhaps in that sense, then, near-death experiencers are the precursors, those who reveal God as alive and lively and as near to all of us as our next breath.

Footnotes:

(1) *Soul's Code, The: Character, Calling and Fate*, James Hillman. New York, NY, Random House, 1996.

(2) *Call, The*, David Spangler. New York, NY; Riverhead Books, 1996.

(3) *Prayer is Good Medicine*, Larry Dossey, M.D. New York, NY; HarperCollins, 1996. And, *Healing Words: The Power of Prayer and the Practice of Medicine*, Larry Dossey, M.D. New York, NY; HarperCollins, 1997.

VITAL SIGNS COLUMN, No. 6:
The Experience / The Experiencer
"Identifying Near-Death States"

Researchers are now seeking to devise a common criterion that could be used to identify near-death states. Health-care professionals, especially, are troubled by the lack of conformity in the field – no real "signpost" that says "this and this" constitute a near-death experience. Among the views being bantered about is the suggestion that the phenomenon be referred to as "an encounter with an anomalous light."

I voted no.

My vote may seem a bit odd considering the pages I have devoted in my past books to a discussion of "The Light of Enlightenment" and the power of Light as an emissary of Divine Love, The Source of All Being. As a near-death experiencer myself, I can give personal testimony to the absolute physicality of that Light. I KNOW, from the top-knot on my head to the tips of my toes, that THE LIGHT ONE ENCOUNTERS ON THE OTHER SIDE OF DEATH IS POWER BEYOND POWER, ECSTASY BEYOND ECSTASY: GOD! Even I John 1:5 of the Christian Bible says: "This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all."

Why then with this background would I disagree about an element so basic to near-death states?

Research

My goal since I began my work in 1978 has always been to see the near-death experience from 360 degrees, what really outpictures in people's lives, not what I want to see, nor my own or anyone else's interpretation, but the facts as I encounter them – cross-checked, analyzed, and rechecked. (This thoroughness comes from being a cop's kid and growing up in a police station.)

Wrapping up my study of child experiencers of near-death states for the book [Children of the New Millennium](#) (Three Rivers Press), necessitated that I also re-analyze my previous work with teenagers and adults. What I discovered in doing this brought into focus what I had previously noticed but could not quite articulate: the so-called "classical model" of near-death states – a composite created and hyped by the media – does not hold up in large samplings, but neither does how we reference and interpret the image of subjective light.

As concerns subjective light, here's a brief sampling of what I found.

Kids have dark experiences, as well as bright ones.

Kids are sometimes bathed in "dark light," rather than brilliant light.

The kids who had dark experiences talked about "The Darkness That Knows" with the same love and affection as they described their Real Home, their Homey Home, the place where God is, where they were before they had a body and where they will return once their body falls away: HOME-HOME.

Many of the young (once verbal) spoke of having been cradled in a womb-like darkness so purple-black that it shimmered, so silent that it knew all things, so peaceful and wonderful and bliss-filled and perfect that we adults would have named it "heaven" – yet it was devoid of light.

And, the most compelling, evidential cases of genius I found, those without genetic markers that could explain the anomaly, came from experiencers between the ages of birth and fifteen months who had a near-death experience that involved *THE DARKNESS THAT KNOWS*. Overall, of the 277 cases in my study (age range: birth to fifteen years; two-thirds of them under the age of seven), the children most apt to display high IQs afterward *were those who either snuggled into the depths of*

darkness, or who were enveloped by a "dark light," rather than any degree of brightness.

Of the four types of near-death states I have identified (Initial, Unpleasant and/or Hell-like, Pleasant and/or Heaven-Like, and Transcendent – explained in [Beyond the Light](#), Avon Books, New York City, 1994), seventy-six percent of the child experiencers in my study had the Initial-type episode. As a reminder, the Initial near-death experience covers about one to three elements – things like: the loving nothingness, the living dark, a friendly voice, a short visitation of some kind, or perhaps a quick out-of-body experience. Twenty percent of the 3,000 plus adult experiencers I have had sessions with reported this type of episode as well. Those who encountered "the living dark," child or adult, described it as safe haven, a comfortable place that was peaceful, loving; a state of goodness and expectancy. The only experiencers, regardless of age, who reacted negatively to any darkness they faced, were those who went on to describe the fearful or hellish scenarios of unpleasant, distressing episodes. Thus, the majority of the ones I have investigated respond to "darkness" and "dark light" in a positive manner.

When I reconsidered all of the work I have done since 1978 in regard to near-death studies, I came to this conclusion: there are clearly *three very different types of subjective light near-death experiencers report regardless of how old they were when their episode occurred.* How I would classify these inner manifestations of light and light imagery is addressed in the chart on the next page.

THE THREE TYPES OF SUBJECTIVE LIGHT

Type	Color	Function
Primary Light	Colorless	A pulsating presence or luminosity usually perceived as frighteningly awesome, a piercing power, raw essence; the origin of all origins.
Dark Light	Pure black yet often with velvety tinges of dark purple	A shimmering peaceful depth usually perceived as "The Darkness That Knows," a source of strength and knowing, sanctuary; the womb of creation.
Bright Light	The range of yellow-gold-white	A brilliant radiance usually perceived as an almost blinding glow that emanates unconditional love, a warm inviting intelligence, union; the activity of Truth.

Each of these three lights is consistently referred to, irrespective of experimenter age, as more real than the physical light on earth and more powerful than any source humankind could harness – including the sun's rays and "zero-point" energy (the stuff of the universe; untapped electromagnetic energy).

Joe Ann Van Gelder, one of the subjects in my study, had nine near-death experiences as a child, the first occurred when she was fifteen months old and because of a drowning. She had eight more by the time she was ten, precipitated by such conditions as malaria, automobile accidents, burst appendix, electrical shock, surgeries, polio, and additional bouts with drowning. It was the first one, though, that impacted her the most. It involved "the living dark." She displayed an exceptionally high intelligence immediately after, which surprised everyone including her parents.

I received a letter from her not long ago where she questions just what that special darkness she encountered as an infant might have been. She offered the idea that perhaps it was some formless mode of pure consciousness, as no thoughts or feelings were present within it – just the existence of awareness, the bliss of knowingness. She asked, "When death comes near the young, do they in fact

merge back into the Oneness we call by various names God, from which they've so recently come?" Even though Van Gelder has no explanation for the darkness that once cradled her, she is convinced that it has something to do with a type of consciousness that interacts with creation and created matter.

Of intrigue are the observations I was able to make about the effect the three very different types of subjective light seemed to have on experiencers: Primary Light fostered deep mystical knowings in people and engendered more radical changes in their sense of reality and life's purpose. Dark Light gently reassured those it touched and left them with a sense of being nurtured and supported while at the same time linked to larger evolutionary processes. Those who were met with Bright Light, though, displayed a broad range of visibly heightened abilities and an unusual sensitivity to sound, sunshine, pharmaceuticals, and anything electrically based.

In reference to the "electrical sensitivity" component, I was able to show with a questionnaire I used in the book *Beyond the Light* that the presence of electrical sensitivity can be traced, not to the experiencer's length of exposure to the brightness subjective light can produce, but specifically to the intensity of that experience. In other words, it didn't seem to matter how much light filled an individual's scenario or what type, or whether he or she merged with that light. What mattered was *how powerfully and deeply it was felt*, even if for but a brief period of time.

Curiously, if either adult or child experiencer challenged the angels, God, or religious-type figures who appeared during his or her scenario, asking "Is that what you really look like," to a person, the image would dissolve into light or suddenly burst into a massive sun-like sphere. But, again, regardless of image or imagery, initial feelings or sensations, what mattered most, what made the biggest difference later on, was the intensity of what was experienced. And, the spread of aftereffects, all of them, can be traced to the impact of that intensity.

In addition, the aftereffects suggest that near-death states may cause a brain shift: a structural, chemical, and functional change in the brain. I examined this possibility in the research report, [Brain Shift/Spirit Shift: A Theoretical Model Using Research on Near-Death States to Explore the Transformation of Consciousness](#) (Phase II, which integrates my findings from child experiencers into the original model). Because of the numerous connections that can be made between the aftereffects and the intensity of what occurs in near-death episodes, and what that seems to imply, I have come to regard the impact felt from such an experience as far more significant than who or what an individual meets on The Other Side of Death's Curtain.

My work indicates that we can no longer assume that dark experiences and the presence of darkness are always a sign of evil or unpleasantness, and that the imagery found in transformational states is actually secondary in importance to the intensity of the episode.

True, imagery is important: the landscape of heaven or hell, the beings encountered, the indication of rewards or punishment to follow, the messages and revelations given. Yet the real determiner of significance for impact and aftereffects is the depth of feelings and emotions involved.

This underscores what I have been saying for twenty-plus years: the main indicator of whether or not a person on the edge of death has a near-death state is most likely *the extent to which the limbic system in the brain is either accelerated or decelerated*. And what controls the limbic response? A power source we can neither isolate nor measure, because we don't know how.

It is my belief that the "light" and "light imagery" of near-death and transformational states are but the reflected image of a power surge as it registers upon or imprints the consciousness of the one who experiences it. What is perceived as light, regardless of what type of light, may well be the outpicturing of the activation of evolutionary mechanisms that are part of our birthright as human

beings. I suspect that we are all "programmed" for such events and we will have them whenever and as often as needed.

Near-death states are not "light experiences," they are power punches that physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually alter the ones who experience them. To merely dub them "light experiences" misses the richness of their complexity.

NOTE: For two new projects, Atwater needs drawings from experiencers: (1) from child experiencers, especially those done shortly after the experience and during the growing years; and (2) from experiencers of any age who have drawn, or are willing to, sketches of their episode, or send photographs of sculptural renderings. No monies can be paid – these offerings will help to illustrate an overall look at near-death states and near-death studies. Drawings/photographs must be received by December 31st of this year (1998).

VITAL SIGNS COLUMN, No. 7

The Experience / The Experiencer

"Unpleasant Near-Death Experiences"

Let's look again at unpleasant near-death experiences and this time let's refrain from calling them "negative." That's a loaded term that fails utterly to convey the actual range of subject matter.

If you've read any of my books, you know that the first four near-death episodes I ever encountered (back in the sixties) were distressing to the people who had them. I've run into many such cases since then and have spoken openly about what I found, as well as authoring the article [Is There A Hell?](#) which was published in Vol. 10, No. 3, Spring 1992 of the [Journal of Near-Death Studies](#), and in a separate chapter on them in [Beyond the Light](#) (Avon Books, New York City, 1994).

My several decades of research have convinced me that unpleasant and/or hellish near-death experiences are in a class all their own, and are not in any way an "inverted" scenario or a "fragment" of the "unremembered" aspect of what occurred. In trying to categorize them, I think we have blinded ourselves to the fact that the so-called "classical" model so popular today is but a composite of elements put together by the media to sensationalize Raymond Moody's book, *Life After Life* (Mockingbird Books, Covington GA, 1975). This "media model" only addresses components common to the experience. It does not cover what may or may not be a pattern to the scenario itself (i.e., types of episodes).

As an example of what has resulted, the number one complaint made at Friends of IANDS meetings across the world, and for years now, has been and still is, "My experience does not match the classical model." The difference between what the media perpetuates and what people actually undergo continues to widen. The research community has fed into this situation by relying, for the most part, on instrumentation that establishes validity at the expense of exploring the broad range and rich diversity of near-death states. Thus, a shallow, superficial image has

come to overlay a complex dynamic that does not lend itself to easy explanations or "sound bites."

When I began my work, not knowing anything about the near-death field of study, I noticed right off that there were different types of near-death experiences - *distinctive patterns of elements* - that were consistent regardless of the experiencer's age, culture, or belief. The four I discovered have so far held up to scrutiny. A chart describing them follows; occurrence rates are based on my research of 3,000 adult experiencers and 277 child experiencers:

THE FOUR TYPES OF NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCES

- * Initial Experience (sometimes referred to as the "non-experience"). Involves elements such as a loving nothingness, the living dark, a friendly voice, a greeter of some kind, or a brief out-of-body experience. Usually experienced by those who seem to need the least amount of evidence for proof of survival, or who need the least amount of "shakeup" in their lives at that point in time. Often, this becomes a "seed" experience or an introduction to other ways of perceiving and recognizing reality.

Incident rate: 76% with child experiencers
20% with adult experiencers

- * Unpleasant and/or Hell-like Experience (inner cleansing and self-confrontation).

Encounter with a threatening void or a stark limbo or hellish purgatory, or scenes of a startling and unexpected indifference, even "hauntings" from one's own past. Usually experienced by those who seem to have deeply suppressed guilts, fears, and angers and/or those who expect some kind of punishment or discomfort after death.

Incident rate: 3% with child experiencers
15% with adult experiencers

- * Pleasant and/or Heaven-like Experience (reassurance and self-validation).

Heaven-like scenarios of loving family reunions with those whom have died previously, reassuring religious figures or light beings, validation that life counts, affirmative and inspiring dialogue. Usually experienced by those who most need to know how loved they are and how important life is and how every effort has a purpose in the overall scheme of things.

Incident rate: 19% with child experiencers
47% with adult experiencers

- * Transcendent Experience (expansive revelations, alternate realities). Exposure to otherworldly dimensions and scenes beyond the individual's frame of reference; sometimes includes revelations of greater truths. Seldom personal in content. Usually experienced by those who are ready for a "mind stretching" challenge and/or individuals who are more apt to utilize (to whatever degree) the truths that are revealed to them.

Incident rate: 2% with child experiencers
18% with adult experiencers

NOTE: I have found that all four types can occur during the same experience for the same person at the same time, can exist in varying combinations, or can spread out across a series of episodes for a particular individual. Generally speaking, however, each represents a distinctive type of experience occurring but once to a given person.

Yet, even though there are these repetitive patterns, what matters most is how the experiencer *interprets* what occurred and how he or she *feels* about it. In other words, even the best of science cannot account for some interesting "flip-flops." Take what happened during a talk that I gave in Williamsburg, Virginia, some years ago. It was a packed house. At the close of my speech, I asked if there were any experiencers in the crowd who might want to come up to the microphone and share their story. Two people volunteered.

The man was first. He was very nervous, as he had never told anyone about it before. His episode was lengthy and filled with heavenly scenes, beings of light, and great sweeps of love. There was hardly a dry eye in the place when he finished, as his story touched every heart. Then, he proceeded to shock everyone by complaining bitterly about his "hellish" episode and said it was by far the worst experience of his life. The woman who came next described a terrible darkness in hers, and told of having to fight for her life while trying to escape from a violent whirlpool. Thunder raged throughout and wind shrieked, and she was frightened out of her wits. Surprisingly, she went on to share how lucky she felt to have had such an experience. She considered it an affirmation that we all have a second chance at life, that forgiveness is real.

While he looked depressed and sad, head bowed, she was aglow. Her eyes twinkled and a big smile spread her face. The aftereffects had been tough for him: his world an uncomfortable and unhappy place, relationships almost impossible to keep. For her, each upset heralded but another opportunity to "test" new muscles and explore new vision. She had married since and was now the happy mother of three.

The juxtaposition between these two experiencers and how they interpreted what happened to them, struck me, for I had seen it many times before. I came to realize that it isn't so much the imagery in near-death states that makes the big difference as it is the individual's response and the *feeling* sensation he or she is left with.

Undeniable are the cultural overtones present in scenarios and in the language experiencers use to describe and interpret their episode, as well as certain psychological underpinnings that invariably "match up" with the type of experience the individual had. This does not diminish validity, but serves to underscore the constraints experiencers face in trying to articulate and understand what happened to them, and why.

Near-death states of any type seem to be "heavenly washing machines" in how they force individuals to re-evaluate their priorities. To decree all dark experiences as "bad" and all light experiences as "good" is totally out of step with the bulk of research findings. In my book, [Children of the New Millennium](#) (Three Rivers Press, New York City, 1999), for instance, I detail a discovery I made that many kids encounter a dark light or have dark experiences that are loving and wonder-filled. Once I gave public notice of this, I was inundated by adults who experienced the same thing but were afraid to admit it. My stance had apparently given them "permission" to come out of the proverbial "closet." These people were traumatized by the judgmentalism that has evolved over the years from throughout our near-death community, and in particular from various strident and vocal experiencers who have set themselves up as "authorities" about life and death.

If ever we deserved a comeuppance in the near-death field, and this goes for researchers, experiencers, and the general public alike, it is over the issue of unpleasant experiences and dark experiences and the whole subject of that which constitutes bad or evil or hell. We have brandished about the word "negative" as if it were a sword to smite whatever or whoever seems "lesser than." And in so doing, we are left with "egg on our face."

The pattern-types of near-death experiences do indeed suggest, and persuasively, that there is a heaven and a hell ... but not as endpoints!

As a brief aside, let's take a gander at the human brain. The left temporal lobe specializes in unpleasant emotions/images (things fear-based), while the expertise of the right temporal lobe is with pleasant emotions/images (things love-based). All anyone can accomplish when stimulating the temporal lobes (left or right), regardless of method or under what conditions, is to produce *general pattern-arrangements* of emotions and/or images. The reason for this is straightforward enough: the temporal lobes are the place where basic patterns of shape, form, and feeling are stored. Implicit in this is the notion that the temporal lobes may function as some sort of "resource center" or "data comparison device" newcomers (children) can tap into as they learn to distinguish and discern differences. As we age, engaging in creative imagination and invention ensures that both lobes not only remain active but also can take on more expansive and expressive projects.

But if mind states alter significantly, like what occurs during near-death states and impactful transformations of consciousness, the temporal lobes seem to assume the role of *mediator between worlds*. This "mediator within" is strongly in evidence when studying such cases. Initial imagery always matches what will accommodate the experiencer's most urgent need at that moment, and/or what will most affect significant others.

I've noted this "need" factor again and again in all of my books, for I saw it in every single case I investigated. This observation does not negate details that couldn't have been known about in advance by the experiencer that are later verified as accurate, nor does it lessen the power of subjective experiences as guides and arbitrators for the ways we would be wise to live our lives. It just emphasizes that there is more to near-death states and otherworldly journeys than either science or religion can tell us.

The number one comment the majority of experiencers said to me when defining what they learned from their episode was: "Always there is life." If that is true, and I believe it is, then how can there be an afterlife? How can we categorize life as we do? How can we even consider endpoints? The implication is that there must be a *life continuum*, an ongoing stream or flow of consciousness that we leave and reenter upon birth and death into and from the earth plane. This further implies *levels of reality*, rather than a final destination as is currently espoused in our culture.

Just as brain biology gives us the capacity to experience life from 360 degrees, that which is fear-based along with that which is love-based, so, too, does the phenomenon of subjective otherworld journeys guarantee that we miss nothing in our living. Through the mechanism the temporal lobes afford, we are able to access whatever exists within us, whatever we might have integrated into our deepest self, and make the adjustments necessary to facilitate the healing of self and soul.

Almost in chorus near-death experiencers come to accept that they are spiritual beings having a human experience, and that it is up to them to take the first step in reinventing themselves and the world around them. Unpleasant experiences are as much a part of this urge as pleasant ones. Our hells, if we're willing to really examine them, are just as valuable and instructive as our heavens.

As a researcher, I find both the dark and light of near-death states equally important. As an experiencer, I am ever humbled by the rich complexity of the human soul.

VITAL SIGNS COLUMN, NO. 8

The Experience / The Experiencer

"Case Studies that Suggest the Survival of Consciousness after Death"

I would like to share with you a few of my case studies that suggest the survival of consciousness after death. Relatives of the experiencers involved have verified each these stories.

The family of Carroll Gray of Atlanta, Georgia, is still shocked by the fact that at the age of two, while "dead" of hypothermia, she spoke with a grandfather who had died several years before she was born. After Carroll recovered from her ordeal, not only did she accurately describe the man she saw (by picking out his picture from a family album she had never seen before), but she relayed numerous and exact details about the two-bladed pocket knife he let her play with and his gold watch and chain - including the fact that the watch had stopped at 1:17 and the knife casing had a decoration on it of a little shield surrounded by a flower garland and dated 1917. She also said her grandfather told her the shiny things belonged to her.

Although her family was overwhelmed by what she told them, no one would give her the "shiny things" as promised to her in death, until, when she was twenty years old, her mother, while sorting through papers, was flabbergasted to find the grandfather's missing will. In it, he had bequeathed his watch, chain, and gold pocketknife to his granddaughter and namesake. At the time of his death, he had no granddaughter or namesake, nor did anyone have any inkling that he expected to have one, or that through perhaps an act of precognition he was privy to futuristic knowledge. Carroll was finally presented the treasures her grandfather said she could have when she "died" at the age of two.

There is no way any of this could have been imagined by the two-year-old child, especially just after being resuscitated, and with such precise details that were all later verified. I discuss this case in greater detail in [Children of the New Millennium](#),

as Carroll had numerous near-death experiences in childhood, plus she was born with stunning pre-birth awareness.

Lloyd L. Haymon of Friendsville, Texas, did not recognize the signs that a coronary was about to happen. He drove home with a tremendous pain in his lower right side, consulted a medical self-help book for advice, and then called his wife. The next thing he remembers is lying on his living room floor with paramedics all over him, and the rush to reach a hospital with his wife sitting on the passenger side of the ambulance. His was a "code blue."

Lloyd left his body and had a vision of his wife dressed in the clothes she once wore when he first met her. The vision faded as he "yo-yoed" from a space near the ambulance ceiling to inside his body, and then back out again. When he finally stayed in his body, he saw a strange sight: "At my feet is my younger brother who had died years before of cancer at the age of thirty. He is shaking his head as if to say 'No, no, it's not your time.' On my brother's shoulder is a bird. I look closer and it is my bird, Doolittle the parakeet. I couldn't take my eyes off Doolittle, and I want to ask someone why Doolittle is on my brother's shoulder."

After the crisis was over, Lloyd recalled: "As my wife and I head home from the hospital, I ask her if my bird is home. She said no, so I say to her 'Take me to Wal-Mart because I need to get another bird.' She refuses at first, but I get my bird, Sailor. We let him out of his box once home and he flies up to the curtain and sits. My wife then tells me that Doolittle died for no apparent reason the day I had my heart attack. He died while the paramedics were working on me. She let him lie on the bed for three days before she buried him.

"After she speaks, the new parakeet flies down and lands on my shoulder. Young, untrained wild birds do not do this. I put out my finger and Sailor jumps on it. The little guy says, 'Doolittle.' My wife and I both come unglued. Sailor became tame right then, and began to talk, just like Doolittle did. When he died, we buried him next to Doolittle. My life changed forever. I became creative and started building

furniture. I went back to school and became a clinical hypnotherapist. My attitudes, the way I treat people, have changed 100%. I know this happened, and I no longer fear death.

In [Beyond the Light](#), I spoke of Margaret Fields Kean who nearly died in 1978 after being hospitalized for about three weeks with severe phlebitis. A blood clot had passed to her heart and lungs and she became deathly ill. Then she was given injections for nausea that, due to the blood thinners she had previously received, caused internal hemorrhaging. Pandemonium reigned as she slipped away. While absent from her body, she witnessed the scene below her, then heard and saw people in the waiting room down the hall - right through the walls - as well as nurses at their station. She also knew their thoughts.

Margaret went on to have a transcendent near-death experience in which she instantly knew and understood many things; her future, and that she would become a healer. This completely contradicted her vision of herself at that moment in her life, for she was content being a Supermom farm wife who rode horses, taught Bible classes, led 4-H and Girl Scout groups, gardened, canned, and baked bread. A healer? Ridiculous!

Yet, when Margaret revived, she immediately began to heal other patients in the room around her by "reaching out" to them. Then, she "projected" into the isolation room of a white boy charred black by severe burns. She "sat" next to him on the bed, introduced herself, and proceeded to counsel him about his purpose in life. She told him it was okay if he chose to die as God was loving and he had nothing to fear.

Months later, while continuing her recovery and still in great pain, Margaret was attending a horse show when a couple, hearing the loudspeaker announce her daughter's name as a winner, sought her out. They were parents of the severely burned boy. Before he died, he had told them about meeting Margaret and relayed all the wonderful truths she had told him about God and about life. The parents

were thrilled to have finally located her so they could say thanks for what she had done for their son. The dying boy had identified her by name – even though the two had never physically seen each other or verbally spoken in any manner, nor had any nurse known that the two had ever communicated, nor had it been possible that Margaret ever could have known if the isolation room was even occupied much less who might be there.

Faced with the challenge of "physician, heal thyself," Margaret Fields Kean successfully facilitated her own healing, then later that of thousands of others, before she moved to South Africa where she taught the native healers of Swaziland and Transkei her techniques. People trained by her carry on in her stead now that she has retired.

I could share thousands of these case studies, each with some aspect that implies the survival of consciousness after death; yet, what impresses me the most is not evidence of an afterlife, no matter how compelling, but something far more important.

The newer fields of inquiry along this line - nearing death awareness (NDA), after death communications (ADC), and pre-birth experience (PBE) - all point to the possible existence of a single life-stream, a life continuum.

That means the subject is not death; it is life. The concern is not survival; it is the ongoing journey.

What emerges from the stories people tell, and from the research done about the stories to establish their value and authenticity, is a central theme indicative of a progression of souls, who seem to exit and enter a life-stream as they negotiate a luminous spiral of learning and growth.

The notion of an afterlife, then, is rather misleading in that it doesn't fit the profile given by millions and millions of people, a profile so persuasive it demands to be

taken seriously. Take what we've learned so far (about subjective experiences), and compare that with recent revelations from the field of quantum physics (about objective experiences), and you get an exact match: what physicist David Bohm calls the implicate order - where everything folds together in an unbroken wholeness - a universal matrix of worlds and realities without number in a continuum without end.

It might behoove us in our enthusiasm to recount and explore near-death experiences to keep what we find in context with the true territory ... a redefinition of life itself.

VITAL SIGNS COLUMN, NO. 9

The Experience / The Experiencer

"More about 'Children of the New Millennium'"

Note: August 11th is the release date for [Children of the New Millennium](#) from Three Rivers Press. You should be able to get a copy from your favorite bookstore by then if you are interested. The book concerns my study of children's near-death states, and more specifically focuses on 277 child experiences, 44 of which filled out a lengthy and very probing questionnaire. Since the three appendices were deleted from the book by the publisher, I self-published them under the title [Subtext to Children of the New Millennium](#). The Subtext is available now for downloading over my website, or you can obtain it directly from me in printed form. (*Deleted in November of 2003.*)

Straightaway, I want to admit that I was incorrect about a previous finding I made. I claimed that children's episodes do not cover the broad range of experience types as do those of adults. My new study has proved me wrong.

Although most of the child experiencers I interviewed experienced "Initial" near-death states, a hefty 76%, some had hellish experiences, some heavenly, a few were even abstract and transcendent. The youngest to have a distressing, unpleasant scenario that I came across was only nine days old ... the baby girl was traumatized by the ghoulish beings who threatened her when she "died" during surgery. The event haunted her throughout her childhood, and was not resolved until she had a second near-death experience twenty-eight years later that explained the first one.

That child experiencers deal with the same pattern of aftereffects as adult experiencers was borne out, but they tend to respond differently ... sometimes, exactly the opposite. We all thrill to "out-of-the-mouth-of-babes" stories without focusing on the individual child: how does he or she feel about what happened? How does the phenomenon, both the experience and the aftereffects, affect the youngster as the years pass? How does it look through the child's eyes?

This viewpoint, missing from research, was brought to bear quite powerfully for me in 1994 when I found myself sitting in a station wagon full of child experiencers and their mothers - listening to a barrage of complaints. What they were claiming ran counter to what other researchers were saying, but matched observations I had made since 1978. This encounter inspired me to design a special questionnaire to use in a project of rechecking all of my previous work as related to kids.

What I would like to do in this column, however, is discuss some of the differences I found between child and adult experiencers as a way to open the door to this new material, in advance of the book, [Children of the New Millennium](#).

To set the stage, let me say it truly takes a child experiencer to understand a child experiencer. A young man, preferring to call himself "A Child from Minnesota," was suffocated at the age of three and a half by an older brother. Here is his version of the challenges faced by youngsters who experiences the near-death phenomenon.

"Children react differently to near-death episodes than adults because the set of experiences they have to compare them with is smaller. To an adult, such a phenomenon is only one of many life occurrences. But to a child, a near-death experience is the world itself, or 'all there is.' A child has a more difficult time 'drawing the line' between what is eternal and what is earthly. Children are forced to rely on the experience more, simply because they lack what adults can draw from. This colors everything children think, say, and do."

He continues: "Speaking for myself, I have come to understand that the long-term effects of this phenomenon have been very large indeed. These effects include - (1) an ability to desensitize the self from physical sensations; (2) an ability to communicate through nonverbal and non-auditory means; (3) a partial loss of ability to communicate verbally and auditorially; (4) problems reintegrating the ethereal self back into the physical self; and (5) challenge interacting socially."

"My experience of being out-of-body enabled me to learn very young how to perform the separation of body and spirit. My understanding of the process, however, was unconscious. I did not know what I was doing or how I was doing it until much later. This first experience arose as a result of intense pain; so, in the beginning, I used this skill simply to avoid pain. Since the skill itself was unconscious, it quickly became a knee-jerk reaction to discomfort of all sorts. Eventually, I came to remain in that state as much as possible. This led to an inability to function socially. As I desensitized myself to my own feelings, I was equally unable to feel the pain or joy of others. And, as I explored this state, emotions, people, and all social life grew ever more foreign to me - I grew ever more withdrawn. I have come to believe that body and spirit need to nourish each other, and cannot remain separate indefinitely."

Almost every child experiencer becomes adept at dissociation, as did A Child from Minnesota. "Dissociation" was formerly used in the field of psychiatry as a label to describe individuals who "withdrew" or "severed from" any association with their body and/or environment. It was considered an aberrant mental state, unhealthy. Current thinking on the subject has shifted considerably as more mental health professionals are now recognizing that dissociation may actually be a natural byproduct of consciousness as it develops along new lines of thought and creative imagination, that it is more a sign of adaptation than insanity. But, as A Child from Minnesota finally learned, even positive skills that enrich our lives can become "crutches."

Without a supportive framework for understanding in the wake of their near-death episode, a child experiencer can easily feel as if he or she is either stupid, crazy, or suddenly "foreign." Family and friends who are unaware of what such an experience can entail may find their child's sudden behavior changes either frightening or perhaps an attention-getting ploy, maybe even the product of an overactive imagination. Responses like these limit any gains to be had, and often push the child toward repressing the event altogether.

If we compare research results between child experiencers and what I previously did with adults, differences can be startling. To begin with, 57% of the children once grown went on to enjoy long-lasting and for the most part happy marriages (whether married once or twice). Adult experiencers, on the other hand, had tremendous difficulty forming or maintaining stable relationships afterward; fully 78% of their marriages ended in divorce.

I found that both groups experienced unusual increases or decreases in light sensitivity: about 75% with the kids, which is close to the adult range of between 80 to 90%. Whereas adults evidenced 73% with electrical sensitivity, I did not find such a high percentage with kids - about 52% - which may be more a reflection of who has access to technological equipment rather than a true deviation. Older experiencers were four times more likely to become vegetarians than the younger crowd.

Afterward, parent/sibling relationships tended to be strained for child experiencers. Additionally, the kids were more likely than the adults to be challenged socially and to report having regrets about what happened to them. An astounding number of children wanted to go back to The Other Side of Death's Curtain after their experience, even if that meant suicide. Child experiencers, whether still young or grown, seldom saw a counselor, and received less help if they did go to one. This is not true with adult experiencers - contrary to how loudly they may protest. Because the disparity between children and adults in this area is so enormous, it begs further exploration. Here's what I found.

Family/friend alienation - Within five to ten years after their episode, one-third of the child experiencers in my study admitted to having serious problems with alcohol. Almost to a person, they claimed that undeveloped social/communication skills were the culprit, along with an inability to understand what motivated family members and friends (why people around them did what they did).

Unfortunately, 42% of those I interviewed befell the tragedy of parental and sibling abuse. And note the sibling abuse; big brothers and big sisters can pack a mean wallop or give a nasty squeeze when they're goofing off or angry. The worst of all horrors, always, is parents who mistreat their young. While such abuse is rampant throughout the general population, the additional challenges inherent with the near-death phenomenon and its aftereffects seem to exacerbate situations that are already less than ideal.

Still, there's another aspect to the issue of alienation that, for the child, may be even more profound. Completely aside from any abuse or peer pressure from family and friends, and whether or not parents are supportive, the most significant factors in cases involving children that I found was who or what greeted the child on The Other Side of death, and, how the episode ended. What parent, no matter how wonderful or loving, can compare with Holy Spirit? What person, friend or foe, can interest a child who has visited the bright realms and become buddies with an angel? But, for the child experiencer, connecting with such transcendent love and then abruptly losing that connection, can be very confusing if not devastating.

The issue of suicide - Children reason differently. Unaccustomed to a consideration of cause and effect, they tend to act on impulse; hence the high degree of alcoholism and an attempted suicide rate of 21%. It seems perfectly logical to a child that the way to rejoin the light beings met in death is to simply die and go back. They do not recognize this as self-destructive. Yet it is the children, not the adults, who are the most likely to leave the "heaven" of their near-death episode and return to life just so their family will not be saddened by their death.

Parent/child bonding is initially quite strong. These kids want to be with the families. That bonding brings them back time after time. When I interview youngsters, their common retort is "I came back to help my Daddy" or "I came back so Mommy won't cry." The parent/child bond doesn't begin to stretch thin or break until after the child revives. That climate of welcome or threat they are greeted with directly impinges on everything that comes next.

Money, mission, and home - Look at what occurs once child experiencers mature: job satisfaction 80%, home ownership 68%. Add to that those long-lasting marriages and you get a picture of contentment adult experiencers can't even begin to match, and one that the general population might envy. Maybe it's the added years, the extra time children have to experiment with what works and what doesn't as they grow up. In fairness, adults are on the opposite end of the developmental curve, with the bulk of their lives behind them. It is interesting to note, though, that salary motivates neither adult or child experiencers, as the majority tend to eschew money and materiality, possessions and rewards.

Why is it, then, that so many child experiencers, once grown, put such strong emphasis on home ownership? Adults can't wait to be rid of their mortgages; kids can hardly wait to have one, and once they get it, they keep it. Their attachment to home, I believe, is a direct result of losing their "real home" when a youngster. This "wound" appears to create a subconscious need to make certain that no one can ever take away their home again.

Youngsters seldom do anything about "mission" (the reason they believe they came back to life) until they are older, even if they know what their mission is. Adults seem almost driven to communicate theirs and mobilize necessary energies quickly. Yet it is the kids who wind up doing more and making more of a positive and lasting contribution to society. Perhaps this is another finding that simply reflects the age difference, but maybe not. I have observed that child experiencers tend to mature rapidly after their episode, while adults become more child-like. Thus, while the kids cogitate and plan, their seniors take all manners of risks and "jump with the wind." Literally, the kids come back as the "grown-ups;" the adults revert to "children."

Judgment - The non-judgmental aspects of near-death episodes are touted by almost everyone ... the very real presence most adult experiencers report of unconditional love and forgiveness. But with children, a different storyline emerges:

many are met on The Other Side of death by a being whose role is that of a "critical or loving parent." This parental-type figure either gives orders, judges them for past deeds, or in some manner prepares them to meet and fulfill their destiny by warning them in advance of what to look out for and how to behave. It is true that images of a "critical or loving parent" occur more often in cases from Asia, Asia Minor, and indigenous cultures like Native Americans; yet child experiencers from the industrialized nations also report similar "lectures," as well.

There is a counterpoint to this with adult experiencers, and I would say it is the "past-life" review. Older children, teenagers, and adults have a lot of these - an opportunity to witness or relive their past experiences in this life and see how these actions affected others. Even though some report a tribunal arrangement, judges actually judging them for past indiscretions, errors, or mistakes, most claim that it was "me judging me" - an opportunity to fully experience the end-result of deeds and decisions so they could learn from what happened and do better in the future.

The impact of "judgment," either learning from the past-life review or being subject to orders or criticisms, strongly interweaves what comes next in the experiencer's life, irrespective of his or her age, and can be a major component to how well the aftereffects are integrated. With child experiencers here are some specifics:

CHARACTERISTICS TO BE ALERT FOR IN CHILDREN

- ** A powerful need to have a "home," even if only their own bedroom.
- ** An equally strong desire to have an "altar" of some kind in their "home." Anything on their altar they consider to be holy.
- ** An intense curiosity about God, worship, and prayer. Many insist that their parents take them to church afterward, and any church is fine.
- ** An unusual sensitivity to whatever is hurtful or to lies, especially as reflected in national and world events - and the "white lies" parents and siblings often tell.
- ** Loss of boundaries, as if they have "no skin." Many have to relearn social courtesies, common rules and regulations.

- ** An ability to merge into or become one with animals, plants, or whatever is focused on. Borders on self-identification in multiples. Can ease back to normal self-image with age and increased socialization.
- ** Heightened otherworldly activity and psychic displays. Drawn to mysticism and paranormal phenomena.
- ** A change in sleep patterns. May forego naps entirely in favor of increased flow states.
- ** An awareness of the "life continuum" and anything "future," including future memory episodes (remembering the future as already "lived").
- ** Often become fast talkers and fast thinkers, with a driving need to create, invent, read, and learn. May be misdiagnosed as having Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD). Explore alternatives first before trying drugs, as child experiencers may be hypersensitive to pharmaceuticals afterward, as are the majority of adult experiencers.
- ** Behavior changes in school. Just as many become disruptive and angry as withdrawn and quiet. This can carry over into family life, with authority figures merely tolerated.

To understand children's cases, we must keep in mind that kids are tuned to different harmonics than adults. Concepts of either life or death leave them with puzzled faces. "I don't end or begin anywhere," a youngster once told me. "I just reach out and catch the next wave that goes by and hop a ride. That's how I got here."

This child, like other young experiencers, speaks in the language of "other worlds," one that is less verbal and more akin to synesthesia (multiple sensing). The ability enables them to perceive what we call "reality" as consisting of layered realms unrestricted by physical boundaries. Hence, they easily giggle with angels, play with ghosts, and pre-experience the future. Parents generally find such behavior cause for alarm. The kids think it's wonderful.

The child who returns from a near-death episode is a remodeled, rewired, reconfigured, refined version of the original model. The changes they undergo are more dramatic than those of adults, not because their aftereffects are different, but, I suspect, because they are still in the process of basic brain development. They are "hit" with an impactful, and in most cases, life-changing experience, at a time when they are the most vulnerable to the power of such a shift.

Adult episodes seem more geared toward what I call "a growth event" afterward, an opportunity for the experiencer to make "course corrections."

Child experiencers seem geared toward what I call "an evolutionary event," part of what may advance humankind. The differences in how they think, how they perform, what seems to be happening to their brain, is a subject that deserves serious attention ... and clinical studies.

VITAL SIGNS COLUMN, NO. 10

The Experience / The Experiencer

"About 'The Last Laugh: A New Philosophy of Near-Death Experiences, Apparitions, and the Paranormal' by Raymond A. Moody, Jr., Ph.D., M.D."

I have just finished reading *The Last Laugh: A New Philosophy of Near-Death Experiences, Apparitions, and the Paranormal* (Hampton Roads Publishing Co., 1999), by Raymond A. Moody, Jr., Ph.D., M.D. And, I am overcome ... with joy! If my response surprises you, read on.

THE LAST LAUGH is not for the fainthearted, as the book is filled with one bitter and angry diatribe after another. In it, Dr. Moody refutes much of what has previously been attributed to him about near-death experiences, saying, in essence, that it's his publishers fault for leaving out the back matter from *Life After Life* - where he explained in great detail that the phenomenon cannot be used as scientific evidence for life after death. He rails against his treatment from the media, puts down IANDS as little more than a hobby club, and goes on to "set the record straight" and reclaim his rightful "voice."

Any researcher, myself included, can empathize with his complaints about publishers and the way books are promoted. For instance, in my latest book, [Children of the New Millennium](#), the three appendices were edited out because, as I was told, there wasn't enough room for them. I refused to accept that verdict, however, and insisted that they include two pages after the text: one advertising that the missing appendices would be available over my website or from me personally, and giving particulars; and the other page to advertise [IANDS](#) and their website. This was done. I am satisfied that people will at least have recourse - a place to turn for more specific information if they are interested. And the media, well, how does anyone deal with a "machine" that prefers sensationalism to facts?

And I can share his frustration with the litany of misinformation that has resulted, much of it fed by the so-called "experts" who perpetuate, to use his term, "nonsense." Several times last year I considered denouncing the "near-death

movement" myself, for I no longer recognized what was being said by all the books and talk-shows about the subject. And I have been vocal about this discrepancy (even more so in the [Subtext to the Children's book](#), and [The Complete Idiot's Guide to the Near-Death Experience](#)).

Still, I can't help but wonder about the veracity of Dr. Moody's complaints, as he has been riding the "gravy train" of his first book for twenty-five years, and it has paid him well. He is an excellent speaker, a lovable and likeable man, so, why hasn't he spoken up before? Why hasn't he made some attempt to publish, even at his own expense (as I did), what he really wanted to say? If anyone in this world has had numerous opportunities to make a significant difference, it is he. So why the rancor? And why now? Sorry, this makes no sense to me. I can appreciate his complaints, but not his excuses.

In *The Last Laugh*, Dr. Moody reveals how little he knows about near-death states and current research ... yet he also reveals how much he understands about them. And therein hangs the genius in this book. If you can wade through the first half and skip over the diatribes, what awaits you, in my opinion, is well worth reading.

The main point of the first half, though, is important. And, that is, language utterly fails us in trying to communicate and interpret near-death and otherworldly states of consciousness. Because there is no acceptable lexicon we can use, attempts to examine them continuously run afoul of dogmatic scientists, defensive parapsychologists, and fearful religionists. Dr. Moody offers that, since these people have a vested interest in keeping controversy ongoing, humor is the only viable solution. He thus brands himself a "playful paranormalist" who recognizes that the real subject at hand is entertainment. To his way of thinking, the "alluringly unknown" thrill us, tantalize us, entertain us, and keep us coming back for more - whether to hear the stories of others or to learn how to experience "the paranormal" for ourselves.

I don't know that I would have used the word "entertainment" as insistently as did Dr. Moody; "emotions" or "passion" would have been more specific, I think. For instance, back in the sixties, I learned that the only way reliable results could be obtained in experiments regarding altered states of consciousness was to involve the participant's emotions. No emotions - lousy, if any, results. Lots of emotions - fantastic results. We now know that the more enthusiastic, excited, and confident a person is, the more likely he or she will be to exhibit psychic ("intuitive") abilities. In other words, healthy, happy people tend to be psychic. I wouldn't call this entertainment as much as I would "common sense."

Once you make it to the second half of the book, this is where Dr. Moody shines. Skillfully he shows us how, what he calls the "paranormal," is actually a *source of knowledge* - not a "field of knowledge." Taking full advantage of his expertise in philosophy, he illustrates the importance of dreams, visions, and near-death experiences by giving historical examples. Among them, what happened to Rene Descartes, on November 10, 1619, when he shut himself in a room for a day and a night and had a "mindquake." From the new information that poured into his mind came the foundation for analytic geometry and the formulation of mathematical principles in quantifying all the sciences. By going beyond known bounds and limits, by failing to follow ordered regularity, "The paranormal," says Dr. Moody, "is a game of rule-breaking ... new truth out of old knowledge."

He continues: "Indeed, part of what the public finds to be the most entertaining about the paranormal are the ideas that the paranormal suggests and the thought that they may be true! Playful paranormalists hold that what begins as extraordinary entertainment could end as extraordinary revelation, if we would just allow the show to go on, letting it show us whatever it may have to show us (if anything) about what the big show is really all about."

Here's the clincher: "Because people who have near-death experiences can now intelligibly, and rapidly, communicate with one another about what they encounter, and can pass some sort of sense of it along to the rest of us, a consensual reality is

emerging. Today, a common language of the near-death realm having become available, we are taking a collective imaginative leap across another kind of frontier. And we ordinary folk are enjoying the adventure."

While he urges that special techniques be used to help anyone plumb the depths of self and reopen natural pathways to the "unknown," he succeeds best when he illustrates how unconditional love, the central theme of near-death states, is the real goal behind all the hype, all the stories, and all the research.

My joy in reading this book is hearing someone else besides myself say it's time to quit being so "hung up" on the exactitude that has become near-death dogma and take another look at the phenomenon.

The core state, irrespective of scenario types and their varied descriptions, plus the overall changes that result, psychologically and physiologically, suggest that near-death states advance the growth of the human family while informing our social structure and our desire to know why we exist.

Dr. Moody calls this "entertainment." Well, from the point of view of a playful paranormalist, I suppose that's as good a term as any. But that's not what I call it. My term is "passion" - as in "a passion for life, life everlasting."

Near-death states are part of a larger genre - transformations of consciousness. The "scientific method" as presently defined will not work with their study, as there are too many variables. From the beginning of my involvement in the field, I have relied more on observational analysis (non-verbal body language) than I ever did on what experiencers said. Thus, none of my work is anecdotal dependent; that's why it's so thorough.

We can, once again, learn from Dr. Moody. We can lighten up and redefine ourselves and what we think our message is. As experiencers, perhaps it is simply to express and live the love we have come to know through our brush with death.

As researchers, maybe it wraps more around our ability to help others recognize the potential within themselves to experience more of themselves, than it does to clarify and justify.

Science hasn't evolved enough to fully address the significance of transformational states of consciousness. But I submit that we have, like Raymond Moody, advanced to the stage where we can at last recognize the extent of what we do not know.

VITAL SIGNS COLUMN, No. 11
The Experience / The Experiencer
"A New Model"

A new day is dawning in near-death research and in our understanding of near-death states and the people who have them. It is an exciting time for all of us, and especially for the [International Association for Near-Death Studies](#).

We now have the challenge and the opportunity to reconsider the "classical model" and come up with a definition that actually fits the experience - a model medical professionals can use as well as the public at large.

Based on over 21 years of research involving nearly 4,000 people,
I offer the following as a model of the phenomenon for the new millennium:

Context of experience - Symptoms or signs suggesting serious medical illness or injury, or physiological crisis/accident of some kind; or, experiencer's expectations of imminent death.

Content of experience - An intense awareness, sense, or experience of "otherworldliness" - whether pleasant or unpleasant, strange or ecstatic. Episode can be brief and consist of only one or two elements, or can be more involved, even lengthy, and consist of multiple elements. Elements commonly experienced are: visualizing or experiencing being apart from the physical body, perhaps with the ability to change locations; greatly enhanced cognition (thoughts very clear, rapid, and hyperlucid); a darkness or light that is perceived as live and intelligent and powerful; sensations of movement and/or a sense of presence (hyper-alert faculties); sudden overwhelming floods of emotion or feelings; encounter with an identified or unidentified deceased person or animal, or an encounter with an apparently nonphysical entity; life review (like a movie or in segments, or a reliving); information can be imparted, perhaps dialogue.

Typical to experience – (1) Near-death states can occur to anyone at any time, including newborns and infants, and remain vivid and coherent lifelong (unless societal or family pressures weakens memory clusters - repression more common with child experiencers than with teenagers or adults). (2) Children's episodes are usually brief and encompass few elements. The closer the child is to puberty, the greater the possibility of longer, more complicated scenarios. (3) The pattern of psychological and physiological aftereffects seems more dependent on the *intensity* of the experience, than on any particular imagery or length of exposure to darkness or light. (4) Attitudes and feelings significant others display after the experiencer revives directly influence how readily he or she can integrate the experience. Episode content is secondary to that initial climate of interest or disinterest.

Whether the model I developed gains wide approval or is altered in some manner, a single source book - a one-stop 460-page compendium on the entire phenomenon, its implications and aftereffects - now exists. [The Complete Idiot's Guide to Near-Death Experiences](#) from Macmillan saw the light of day in mid-February this year and is available as a softcover via mass distribution. If your favorite bookstore doesn't have it, they can get it easily and quickly. Not your usual Idiot's book, this one breaks all Macmillan records as to length and the respectfulness of the text. Yes, there are snappy headers and captions, but the material is first-rate; new cases, new research, positive/negative - a 360-degree view. Yours truly is the author, with David Morgan as the editorial assistant. Bruce Greyson and Ken Ring were invaluable in their role as guides in keeping me on target, and to both I give a resounding "thank you!"

So here we are, a new millennium, a one-stop source book, a new model on the way (one that is more realistic and usable), and some startling and wonderful new markers: Barbara R. Rommer, M.D. and her incredible work with those who had unpleasant scenarios as chronicled in *Blessings in Disguise* (Llewellyn, St. Paul, MN, 2000); and Colin Wilson with his equally insightful book, *After Life: Survival of the Soul* (also Llewellyn, 2000). In fact, some excellent books on near-death have come out in the last six months, not your usual literature search plus a few interviews,

but real in-depth renderings from some of the best in the field: people such as Kenneth Ring, Michael Sabom, Arvin Gibson.

I don't know about you, but I am heartened at the quality of material that has been surfacing recently. Check out the website where [the near-death account of Lynnclaire Dennis](#) (she's a fellow experiencer and wrote the book, *The Pattern*) is located. She has been able to link up with scientists and a computer expert to present what she saw during her near-death episode in an animated program that illustrates the geometry of what she calls "The Pattern." I congratulate her for staying the course all the years it took to produce this program. Perhaps her efforts will inspire other near-death experiencers to do the same.

I would also call your attention to Jeffrey Spender Wickstrom, a child experiencer, who, once grown, developed an interactive CD-ROM version of his near-death episode - one that viewers can experiment with different endings and different "heavens" (based on the traditional views of other cultures). He is currently seeking funding to take this project nationwide. His story and contact information is in the Idiot's Book, or on my website in the [Marketplace section](#) (a free listing I offer to experiencers and those like them to promote their videos, services, and special projects).

Yes, indeed, we have a new millennium and new vigor, and a new Board at IANDS that inspires us all with their vision and dedication. As for me, I have been researching near-death states full-time since 1978, and have been actively involved with IANDS since June of 1981 - soon after their inception as the organization they are today.

Although I will continue with some aspects of research in the future, I see myself changing focus. I feel a deep need to become personal and open in how I approach things. Myriam did that for me. We lost our granddaughter, Myriam, just before Christmas. She was 2 years old, sick one day with bacterial meningitis and dead the next. There were so many manifestations, dreams, visitations, thousands of people

affected by this one child, that I feel a need to write about it - about death. Interestingly, for the last four months, I have received more email messages and letters from people dealing with the death of a loved one than I have about my work with near-death experiences.

It is time for me to come out and say the things I could never do as a researcher. It is time for me to speak from my heart. How long I continue this column depends on you, dear reader. Let IANDS know your wishes in this regard, and I will pray about it. We'll see.

VITAL SIGNS COLUMN, No. 12

The Experience / The Experiencer

"Near-Death Experiences in Children"

Since my specialty in near-death research is one-on-one sessions with experiencers, I can speak little of the phenomenon's historical significance - except to point out the fascinating anomaly that an amazing number of people important to the evolution of humankind may well have had such an episode during their childhood.

I discuss this at length in both [Future Memory](#) and [Children of the New Millennium](#). Some of the notables I came across in only one week of perusing library records were Abraham Lincoln, Mozart, Albert Einstein, Queen Elizabeth I, Edward de Vere/the 17th Earl of Oxford (who most likely is the real Shakespeare), Winston Churchill, Black Elk, Walter Russell, plus several others. Either I was possessed of "library luck" that week or there really is a connection between near-death states and possible structural, chemical, and functional shifts that appear to occur in the brain, elevating the individual in appreciable ways. My research leads me to believe the latter.

I did encounter near-death states in people of other cultures, as I met many who were foreign born or of racial backgrounds quite different than the typical white Judeo-Christian mindset. Of the 3,000 adult experiencers in my research base (actually the number is higher but I quit counting at 3,000), Caucasian Americans, European and Arabic people predominate at 80%, with 20% being of the black race (15% African Americans, 5% divided between Kenya, Haiti, and African Canadians). Of the 277 child experiencers, the mix is: 60% white, 23% Latinos, 12% blacks, and 5% Asian.

There have been excellent studies done of near-death experiencers in their native countries, as well as a government study sanctioned in China; but I want to mention the ongoing work by Todd Murphy of child experiencers in Thailand. We'll

all be hearing about Todd's findings soon as the [Journal of Near-Death Studies](#) will be publishing several of his articles. Early-on he was kind enough to discuss his ideas with me, so I am familiar with his study - a research project that eventually came to confirm or support many of my own observations.

Having this exposure to accounts from a broad range of racial and cultural traditions enables me to make some "across-the-board" comments - especially about "greeters," who, according to reports, are the first ones met "at death's door." I think you will find this of interest. The terms that follow are those most commonly used by the experiencers themselves.

INITIAL GREETERS MET IN NEAR-DEATH STATES
ranked in the order most frequently encountered

1. Light beings or bright ones (kids generally call them "The People")
2. Angels, with or without wings (can be white, black, or of various skin hues)
3. Deceased loved ones (including relatives not met or known about before who are later verified)
4. God or God's Presence or God's Voice (seldom given a gender by adults, described as an older male by children)
5. Religious figures (usually conform to the predominant religion the experiencer was exposed to, but not always - Jesus has appeared in near-death scenarios of Jewish people, for instance; a Muslim man once told me he was met by Buddha)
6. Animals (most often beloved pets who are deceased, yet there are many reports of non-pets such as horses, lions, or even chickens, who come as "guides" or to deliver a message)

To go a little further with this, most adult experiencers describe God as a powerful, almost blinding sphere of light, that is ecstasy itself. Young children do not use such terms, saying instead that God is like a loving father or grandfather.

Over 70% of children's near-death scenarios involve angels. Not that many adults claim this, more like 40% (although adults often use terms like "light beings" or "bright ones" as if they were describing angels). Just who is what and whether or not there is any real difference between these various emissaries cannot be determined solely by near-death research.

Children sometimes describe an animal heaven they must visit before they can go to the heaven where people are. And they tend to be explicit about skin tones when talking about any religious figure who visited them. By that I mean, Jesus is seen as a man with tan skin adults are the ones who usually see Jesus as white); Buddha's skin is more often seen as somewhat yellowish; Mohammed is described as having brown skin (yes, there are little ones who claim they saw Mohammed). Children seldom deviate in their description of such coloring *regardless* of their own skin tone or cultural exposure; adults do.

There is another greeter, though, who is sometimes encountered - *a living person* - more commonly reported by children than by adults. This may be a favorite teacher, the kid down the block, friends, or relatives. Does this fact call into question the validity of near-death imagery? No, and here's why.

In every case I have thus far investigated where this occurred, the *living* greeter did not remain in the scenario any longer than it took to alert or relax the experiencer. Once that happened, the *living* greeter disappeared and imagery more common to near-death states emerged ... *as the episode deepened*. It is almost as if the sole purpose of *living* greeters is to ensure the continuance of the episode so that it can become more meaningful. They seldom "stick around" like other greeters do.

While speaking of greeters, I also want to address this curious observation: child experiencers are often met by a "critical or caring" parental-type of being, seldom biologically related to them, but almost always someone the child recognizes as an authority figure they must respect (religious or otherwise). This being instructs or

lectures the child on behavior and what must be done to fulfill the reason for his or her birth. These instructions or lectures can be quite stern and involve incidents where the child is judged on his or her progress toward the goal. If a tribunal is present, it is not unusual for the "judges" to be animals rather than people.

This curiosity is rather typical of near-death cases from kids residing in Asia (Todd Murphy discovered a number of them), with indigenous societies and Third World nations. But I have also found them with youngsters from well-educated families in Europe and the United States. Although many "parental" greeters are gentle and loving, some are rather fearful and threaten the child with punishment if he or she does not obey.

One of these cases in the U.S. involved a nine-day-old infant who "died" during surgery for a serious staph infection and abscess. I had intended to include it in [Children of the New Millennium](#), but the account was somehow lost during rewrites and is only mentioned in brief on page 70, and even there in error (at "age nine" should read "nine days of age"). I have since apologized to Judith Werner, the experiencer involved. Thanks to the generosity of Barbara Rommer, M.D., this account will at last be published - in the addendum to the second printing of Barbara's book, *Blessing in Disguise* (Llewellyn, 2000), an important study of unpleasant/distressing near-death experiences. (Now in [The New Children and Near-Death Experiences](#), 2003.)

Judith's scenario involved being surrounded by white-robed figures devoid of emotion, a huge light which glared from above, and a heavy voice called "Inner Stranger" that sounded like a critical and demanding parental authority. The drawing she did of this scene looks like the typical layout of the average medical operating room complete with nurses and surgeons. Still, if you put yourself into the mind of one so young, the white-clad figures easily become evil giants, the light a torture device, and her subsequent treatments (also shown in the drawing) akin to ongoing punishment.

Once verbal, Judith told her parents about the incident and about Inner Stranger and the threats made ("obey me or you will die"). They pooh-poohed her story, and so did everyone else she told it too. She then repressed the experience until, when twenty-eight, she had a near-death-like episode that explained what had happened to her when nine days old. The closure that resulted enabled her to understand lingering childhood fears and angers, and begin the process of turning her life around in a positive manner.

Any discussion of this case must address the question: how could an infant only nine days old remember surgical details, respond to and retain the words of a threatening male - throughout her entire life?

Today, Judith speaks well of Inner Stranger, acknowledging that, although frightening to begin with, his advice has proved to be invaluable over time. Black Elk, the famous Lakota Sioux medicine man, had a similar encounter during his childhood near-death state in the sense that the wise ones who came to him were stern "parental-type elders."

Comparing the kind of accounts we have become accustomed to with those from other cultures and other timeframes in history, helps us to enlarge our perspective of the human mind and of life and death.

VITAL SIGNS COLUMN, No. 13

The Experience / The Experiencer

"Newborns and Infants Who Have Near-Death Experiences"

I want to talk this time about newborns and infants who have near-death experiences, but first I have a few announcements to make that you may find of interest.

[Subtext to Children of the New Millennium](#) (which contains the three appendices missing from the main book) is now available free of charge over my website, www.cinemind.com/atwater. (*Deleted in 2003.*)

I am sorry I could not attend the IANDS Conference in Philadelphia (first one I've ever missed), but I will be at the big IANDS Conference in Holland, November 26th. The Society for Transpersonal Psychiatrists has invited me to speak at their Conference on Consciousness the day before, so I get to stay over and do "two-in-one." If everything goes right, I will then go from Holland to France to meet with members of IANDS-France. This trip will be the topic of my columns after the first of the year - a chance for all of us to know more about our friends in Europe - and about a special meeting November 24 when researchers from five countries will gather with me in Holland to discuss a joint European near-death research project. To say I am thrilled about this would be an understatement!

But that's not all. The latter part of September I will be at a Conference in Seoul, South Korea, and I will do everything I can to inspire the people there to form an IANDS group and perhaps consider near-death research as well. We need more input from Asia, and hopefully China. I have also been invited to speak at IANDS-Chicago and IANDS-San Francisco Bay. (Details posted on my website.)

With that said, let's get back to the real subject of this column. I want to talk about newborns and infants because of the stir [Children of the New Millennium](#) has caused ... among professionals as well as child experiencers.

Linda Silverman, Ph.D., Director of the Institute for the Study of Advanced Development (Denver, Colorado), and one of the leading authorities on gifted children in the United States, contacted me. She had read the Children's book and she was excited. Here's why: 80% of the most profoundly gifted children in her research (kids with IQs of 180, 211, and above - one tested at 262) had very difficult births (termed "precipitous") and went on to display - trait for trait - all of the aftereffects and shifts in behavior of child experiencers of near-death states.

Although her research does not address the near-death phenomenon, per se, therefore there is no data on anyone in her study reporting such an episode as an infant, much of the children's poetry and many of their drawings indicate they may indeed be experiencers. This is reasonable to me, since I discovered in my research that children are six times more likely than adults to forget, block, or repress their experience. Plus, she never thought of such a link so she never looked for it. Who in her field would? Sad to say, we haven't reached the point yet among researchers where people in the different disciplines of study talk to each other and share their findings.

But, get this: The children in her study, just like the youngsters I discussed in my book, exhibit "whole brain" integration (left and right brain hemispheres equally developed and working together as if a single unit), display no difference in spatial reasoning between males and females, are abstract-conceptual learners, natural creative intuitives, and are mature beyond their years - walking as they do "between worlds." Most have electrical sensitivity, as well. These children are passionate about their mission in life, and their mission has to do with spirituality and projects dealing with human rights issues and protecting the environment. Money does not motivate them.

Doesn't this sound like near-death kids?

Schools can't handle these youngsters. More and more are dropping out and are being home-schooled or are teaching themselves via the Internet. And, in concert

with the rise in technological improvements in medicine, there are corresponding jumps in the numbers of these children, paralleling increasing percentages of children simply being born this way *without causative factors to explain it* - as I predicted would happen in [Children of the New Millennium](#). "The only explanation is evolution," states Silverman. She pegs them as "Evolutionary Outliers," the subject of her next book.

I have no doubt that we are seeing evolution at work in our lifetime and that what is happening with near-death states is part of it.

Even the Augsburg Fortress Press, the publishing arm of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, has noted in revealing the results of one of their studies that those youngsters born after 1981 (the Millennial Generation), are seriously concerned about the environment, question authority, yet are hopeful about the future. The majority are smarter and more dedicated to making a difference in the world than any generation before them. Although this study does not encompass "the near-death angle," it still complements what Silverman and I discovered. Today's children are different from their predecessors, and in ways that cannot be linked to genetics, nutrition, or education.

As exciting as this is, I am concerned about a few things. For starters, the challenges at school. With so many dropping out to seek learning opportunities elsewhere, what effect might this have on their social development? Truly, we can use research on near-death kids as a model to predict possible results; and, what I found clearly shows that social maturity and interpersonal communication skills, although improved with many, greatly suffer with the majority of youngsters who have been, what I call, "rewired" and "reconfigured."

Add to this the drugging of our children with Ritalin. Most kids who have experienced near-death states, especially if they were infants when the episode occurred, become hyperactive and hyper-curious and highly imaginative/inventive/intuitive afterwards. *This is a normal, natural component to*

the aftereffects. Even adult experiencers become a lot like this, although, usually, not quite as hyper. There are other ways to handle this development and other methods that can be used, without turning to drugs. A cautionary reminder: Most experiencers, child or adult, become highly sensitive to or intolerant of pharmaceuticals after their experience. Knowing this, and taking a step towards educating parents and professionals, could make a positive difference in the lives of those involved.

Another concern of mine relates to the fact that children, when faced with unexpected change or challenge, tend to compensate rather than integrate. It's an instinct that enables them to quickly adjust. Once an adult, however, this survival skill can work in reverse, masking what really happened to them and the impact that had. All too often, they grow up without the recognition and understanding necessary to use their experience as a source of life enrichment. The younger the experiencer the more I noticed this. It is not unusual for these people to take anywhere from thirty to forty years to finally integrate their near-death state.

And I am amazed at the amount of guilt that surfaces in adulthood from child experiencers who repressed feelings of rejection associated with their episode. Case in point: A seriously injured boy died and, while in an out-of-body state, "walked" through several rooms searching for someone to help him. His father came running. The boy, relieved that his father "answered his call," stretched out both arms expecting to be hugged and comforted. But his father rushed past him, never giving the slightest nod of recognition or concern. The boy was devastated. After reviving, he turned his head away in shame, convinced that he must have somehow committed a grievous crime and was no longer lovable. He carried this guilt into adult life, never making the connection to when or why his feelings of rejection began. Counseling did not help. It wasn't until he learned about near-death experiences that he was able to "connect-the-dots" and realize that of course his father had run past him - as he was invisible at the time. Reclaiming his innocence, he involved himself in the classes needed to redesign his life.

One more: A young girl, who died during surgery and then "walked" hand-in-hand with the people of light on the other side of death's curtain, was crushed when the bright ones suddenly left as she was being resuscitated. She blamed herself for their exit, believing that she must have done something wrong to make them go away. For year she tried to locate them. She'd look under beds, in closets, in basement rooms and attics, even in drawers, but to no avail. Finally she gave up and began "acting out" with foul outbursts of temper. Her baffled parents took her from counselor to counselor. Nothing made a difference until she discovered near-death research. I am proud to say that today she is taking classes in "complementary" forms of medicine and plans to become a physician.

Both of these child experiencers exhibited all of the typical aftereffects following their near-death episode, but, because of feeling that they were somehow "rejected" during or because of their experience, they were unable to integrate the event. They compensated, instead, delaying what later became a happier outcome.

We are so used to tales of how spiritual child experiencers are afterwards, how knowing and mature, that we fail altogether in taking that next step - seeing what happened to them and the impact that had from their point of view. The same is true with the new Millennial kids. We're so busy looking *at* these children, evaluating them, that we miss what we could see if we looked *with* them.

VITAL SIGNS COLUMN, No. 14
The Experience / The Experiencer
"Korean Conference"

The people of Seoul, South Korea, were incredible! Even more incredible was the Fourth International New Science Symposium held in their Cultural Center. About 350 people attended, seated behind huge curving rows of desktops, replete with a shelf below for books and papers. Imagine the scene: a room full of desks, eager people crammed into each row, real-time interpretation in English, Korean, and Russian, a massive stage with the latest in electronic equipment. I presented my work with child experiencers of near-death states, and then made a plea for Korean cases. Almost everyone there had in hand a copy of our IANDS brochure. Afterward, three people stepped forward volunteering to begin near-death research in Korea. A "seed" was planted that day. We'll see how it grows.

Change is in the air, and it's very exciting. Two IANDS groups invited me to speak at special engagements they arranged, and I want to share with you what I noticed at each.

The first was Chicago-IANDS, facilitated by Diane Willis. They meet in the Fellowship Room of Unity Church on the North Shore each month and are a large group. Diane starts each meeting by allowing the spirit within her to express itself through the notes of a Native American flute. A musician of long-standing, she was never able to play impromptu until after her near-death experience. Her newfound openness invites openness in others - a perfect atmosphere for individuals to introduce themselves and either speak of their own near-death episode or about the changes in their lives afterward.

Although mine was a more formal presentation on children's near-death states, I couldn't help but notice how the interest of those who attended was clearly on the aftereffects. They were alert to the differences between how adults and children respond to their experiences; and, they wanted to know more about how anyone could more successfully integrate their own episode.

Dorothy Baughman, one of the members, opened up her lovely home in Lake Forest to an intensive workshop the following day on the "Evolutionary Aspects of Near-Death States." Here again I noticed how actively each person is pursuing definite ideas on putting his or her "newness" to work in society. These people want to make a difference; many already are. Perhaps because of the transformation that has happened and is continuing to happen to Diane, a number of Chicago experiencers are expressing themselves through the performing arts. Yet, there is a growing number committing to hospice and hospital work, and even helping others - one-on-one - wherever they see the need.

Chicago-IANDS inspires their membership to learn all they can about near-death states, as well as the process of personal transformation. The result is an active and expressive group where "miracles" happen. Yes, this type of atmosphere is encouraged by the International Association, and is present, hopefully, in [all Friends of IANDS groups](#). But, in all my years of service to IANDS, this is the first year I have seen meetings where such lively and enthusiastic response is balanced with mutual support and caring.

And this is not just happening in Chicago. I have another report to give, this one from San Francisco Bay-IANDS, facilitated by Nadia McCaffrey.

The San Francisco Bay group also has a large membership and meets monthly in a roomy alcove of Full Circle Bookstore in Belmont, California (thanks to the generosity of Sandra Rath). I've given presentations two years running for this group, and once before when Diana Schmidt headed it.

Perhaps because Nadia has spent over a decade in hospice work, many people in the group have become hospice volunteers or are headed toward new careers in counseling and various types of healing, including alternative and complimentary health-care procedures. Several have entered the ministry; some are professional psychics. This group, like the one in Chicago, is a cohesive gathering of active,

enthusiastic people, dedicated to practical integration of near-death states while seeking avenues of service.

This year, though, Nadia McCaffrey and the San Francisco Bay-IANDS had a unique project in mind - that is why I was there - to help them launch a full-day seminar entitled "Changing the Face of Death."

As a brief aside, the theme for the annual conference of the [International Association For Near-Death Studies](#), held in Philadelphia this last July, was "Service Mission 2000." And this is what I am seeing and hearing all over this country and abroad. The theme of the greater IANDS has quite literally become that "spark" which is enlivening and uplifting Friends of IANDS groups everywhere. And the excitement is real. The theme is catching on locally and regionally and I believe it will continue into 2001 and beyond.

IANDS groups have been hard at work for years creating a safe environment where experiencers could speak, unwind, cry, question, and learn without fear or hesitation. As groups evolved, interest turned more to the aftereffects and what could be done to cope with these changes in positive ways. Integration eventually came to be emphasized as group-work began to center around long-term effects and how experiencers could bring more balance into their lives without losing the larger and more spiritual worldview they had attained. Now, it's as if everyone is poised to take action. The time has come. Near-death experiencers are joining hands and getting busy - Service Mission 2000!

I saw this new vigor in Chicago and I really saw it in California. The seminar, "Changing the Face of Death," was an outgrowth of Nadia finally accepting the mission she was given years ago during her two near-death experiences, a particular mission which was clarified for her last December when she faced death again. Three times it took her, before she finally "heard" and responded. (I can relate to that. Remember the three near-death experiences I had? I call them the "heavenly sledge-hammer effect," because I was too stubborn to catch on the first

time. Some of us are slow learners - you know I'm referring mainly to myself when I say that. No finger pointing intended.)

Since the seminar Nadia and the San Francisco Bay-IANDS did can be used as a model for other near-death groups, here's what happened: They rented the facilities at the Redwood City Women's Club, churned out fliers and announcements and posted them at far-flung places, and staffed the 9:45 am to 9:30 pm affair. There were display tables for those with a service or product to sell, a wonderful natural-foods lunch, entertainment by Heartdream, and a host of speakers - all gearing their talks and demonstrations to "Changing the Face of Death."

David Cardenas, founder of "Transition Support At The End Of Life" (a free service for the dying and their families), spoke on how his group addresses the special needs present at the deathbed. Vivian Silva presented "Dying to be Heard," on the often overlooked needs of older women and the elderly. Marshall Masters covered large-scale catastrophic events that overtax existing services and medical teams. Eliot Rosen showed his award-winning video, "Experiencing the Soul." If you haven't seen it, get a copy. It is one of the finest pieces of work in that venue I have yet seen. (Access [The Marketplace](#) on my website for instructions on how to obtain a copy if you are interested.)

And that's just part of the Seminar. Also included was a demonstration by Rev. Delorise Lucas (Mamma Lucas) on spiritual healing. She is a miracle faith healer who has devoted her life to helping others, and she certainly did that day - many people benefited from her healing hands. Nadia spoke on her commitment to build a special center on land donated to her near Mt. Shasta, as a place where the dying and the handicapped can receive needed help without charge. Dr. Anita Furdek, a world renown visionary and healer, gave an inspiring, and I must say, funny talk on how we can all "practice what we preach." I was the last one, with an announcement about my audio presentation [As You Die](#) (it talks a dying individual through physical death *as it occurs* and the soul's separation). This tape has now been redone and is available in both CD and audiocassette formats (65 minutes).

"Changing the Face of Death" is not just a terrific seminar put on by Nadia McCaffrey and San Francisco Bay-IANDS. In essence the theme of the conference, even the thrust of Nadia's Mt. Shasta Center, is really the heart and soul of the near-death phenomenon itself. We all carry its imprint within us, for we were there - some of us at the edge of death, others beyond and back. And we returned, each in our own way, quite literally changing the face of death.

I applaud where IANDS groups are going and the excitement they generate. Here in Charlottesville, Virginia, where I live, well, a fellow experiencer by the name of Nancy Harding is starting a Friends of IANDS group, and I'm helping her. Our first meeting is November 14 at the Unitarian Church on Rugby Road. Wish us luck. We have big "shoes" to fill, the ones the rest of you are so beautifully wearing!

VITAL SIGNS COLUMN, No. 15
The Experience / The Experiencer
"European Conference"

My trip to Europe involved meetings in two countries: Holland and Germany. I never made it to France. They bowed out because of time constraints. I must say, though, that events in the two countries I did visit kept me hopping, with only a few days for sightseeing. I'll discuss the two conferences I was privileged to attend before I relay to you what happened the evening of November 24th.

On Saturday, November 25th, in the Rudolph Steiner School Ilona Building at Driebergen (Holland), the newly formed Association of Transpersonal Psychiatrists, headed by Dr. S. Gerard Lange, held their first conference. Their theme was "The Transpersonal and Psychiatric Aspects of Consciousness." I gave two talks: "[What the Near-Death Experience Reveals About Consciousness](#)" (I hope to also deliver this in July at Seattle), and "[The Incredible Aftereffects of Near-Death States](#)" (about the pattern of aftereffects, four phases of integration, and types of counseling to use that have the best track record).

Although the other talks given were in Dutch, I'd like to share some of the titles so you will have an idea of the material covered: "Philosophical Aspects, Mystical Experiences, Psychiatric Clinical States, and Phases of Raising Consciousness" (Gradus van Florestein); "Consciousness Through the Eyes of a Transcendental Development Psychology"(Bjorn Prins); "Are Virtual Photons the Elemental Carriers of Consciousness?" (Herms Romein); "Consciousness and Spiritual Energy" (Johan Linschoten); and "Case Histories about Transpersonal Experiences in Children with a Psychiatric Syndrome" (Marleen Oosterhof-van der Poel and Hans Zwetsloot). This is just a sample. Some of the talks were major addresses; others were workshop sessions.

What excites me about this Conference is that only recently have professionals in Holland publicly acknowledged transpersonal psychology and spiritual states of awareness as valid. Dr. Lange spearheaded this important change, and successfully

so, for the Conference was well attended - a salute to his vision and the sleepless nights he sacrificed to make everything happen. The audience was so receptive to material on near-death states that many came the next day, same place, for the annual conference of IANDS-Holland. (The Dutch name for Holland is "Nederland." The IANDS group is "Stichting Merkawah" or "Merkawah-Holland;" their newsletter is "Terugkeer".

Cardiologist, Pim van Lommel, is the guiding light behind IANDS-Nederland. My chief translator and wonderful friend, Tineke Melles-Segaar, is the new President of the group. These two people, along with Dr. Lange, made it possible for me to do two conferences in two days, the second held on Sunday, November 26th.

A full-page feature article in the newspaper De Telegraaf came out in time to publicize the event. Fifteen new members joined because of it. Even television crews were on hand, filming throughout the day. I was interviewed on camera that evening.

The morning was devoted to my talk about children's near-death states, followed by a discussion of what I presented. Dr. van Lommel translated. The afternoon was divided into a number of workshops, but most of the people remained in the large hall for what I thought would be a presentation on the Evolutionary Aspects of Near-Death States. I was surprised to find that the group preferred a question and answer period, as my morning address had stirred up a lot of interest. Come to find out that many of those in attendance were child experiencers of near-death states. And did we ever have a rousing session, with Dr. van Lommel doing what he could just to keep up with translations.

The crowd of child experiencers confirmed observations I had made with their counterparts in the United States. Some of their stories were stunning. One of the things that struck me was how important it is for child experiencers to make a book of some kind about their experience - *even if they are now a grown adult!*

I intend to bring to Seattle in July a copy of the book created by Aafke Holm-Oosterhof. She "died" at the age of 8 1/2 of high fever from a kidney infection and had a wondrous episode, which she promptly "set aside" because of her parent's disbelief. (Remember, child experiencers are six times more likely to do this than adult experiencers.) It wasn't until her father died and she was introduced to the near-death phenomenon, that she began to confront this "missing part" of her life. Writing and illustrating the book was not only an exercise in healing for her, but also the project enabled her to make significant changes in her life. She only printed 24 copies; I have one.

Across the entire back wall was a series of abstract photographs that symbolically portrayed another child experiencer's episode and long journey of understanding and integration afterward. And there were paintings, handouts, and all manner of expressions used to convey the same message - of child experiencers, some still young, free at last to tell their story without the critical judgment of authority figures. Creativity and joy burst forth from each display and page.

The closing moments of the day I shall always remember: Pim van Lommel presented me with the first copy of the Dutch version of [Children of the New Millennium](#). Sigma Press manifested this miracle, having only a few weeks to do the job in time for the Conference. I was told they ran extra shifts and worked long hours to do it. And the book's translators joined me on stage - and signed my book. Both of them, Rinus Beckers and Jacqueline Beckers-Raaijman, had a near-death experience during birth trauma: with Jacqueline, a "missing twin" was involved; with Rinus, the discovery of why he has always been so different. Translating *Kinderen van het Nieuwe Millennium* deeply affected them both.

There is no way for me to adequately thank everyone involved during these conferences. Suffice it to say that seeing the response of all those experiencers, not to mention everyone else, told me why I was there and why I have worked so hard for so many years doing near-death research. Let's not kid ourselves ... research is important!

But hold everything ... there's more. That Friday, November 24th, I held a workshop on my research model, [Brain Shift/Spirit Shift](#), in a 15th century "castle" (very small) in Utrecht. After it was over, an excited group stayed over to share a meal and then gather in a special upstairs room to discuss a Mutual European Near-Death Research Project. Six countries were represented: attending from Holland - Tineke Melles-Segaar, Machteld Blickman, Pim van Lommel, Sybrig Lips, Marieke de Vry, Gerard Lange, Prem Heera, Ingrid Elfferich, and Henk van de Heuvel; from Germany - Denise Wade (formerly of the U.S.); from Hungary - Andreas Liptay-Wagner; from Belgium - Bjorn Prins; from Austria - Englebert Winkler; and from Switzerland - Evelyn Elsaesser Valarino. Most of these people were either medical physicians, psychiatrists or psychologists, or professionals in the fields of business and spiritual mediumship (yes, good mediums are honored in Holland, and I must say Marieke is one of the best and most knowledgeable mediums I have ever met). The main organizers were Gerard Lange, Andreas Liptay-Wagner, and Pim van Lommel. Lange officiated; van Lommel took notes (as did I).

The meeting was lively - with sentiment clearly evident for doing *both* a prospective and a retrospective study.

Liptay-Wagner has already geared up the Budapest Foundation, which he heads, to train volunteers in the standard way to conduct retrospective studies. Over thirty people have now been trained and are ready to begin. His plan to cover the European Continent involves the media, large talks in various cities, a full educational program, bulletins and publications, a lecture series, and so forth. He has a long and successful background in business and is using this practical know-how to launch a very ambitious program in conjunction with what emerges from this meeting. Among his goals is to raise enough money to bring Raymond Moody, Jr., M.D. to Budapest come Spring.

Pim van Lommel conducted the first prospective, clinical research ever done on near-death states; Ingrid Elfferich, the first prospective, clinical research ever on

the aftereffects. Their work vastly overshadows anything done to date in the United States. And, of course, they are both pushing for more prospective studies - this time focusing on a deeper investigation of the aftereffects. This goes along with what Bjorn Prins wants - a new emphasis - especially on mystical tie-ins and spiritual states of consciousness, but utilizing a single agreed-upon set of standards, scales, and questions, so the results can be used in universities worldwide. A particular tack that could be taken is "prevention," showing how much money the government can save in health costs by embracing the spiritual elements of near-death states, and to what extent the aftereffects can improve lives. A goal here is to use proper science to supplant critics, while encouraging the participation of doctors, therapists, and nurses.

Denise Wade spoke of contacting the Max Planck Institute not only in a move for funding but for their active involvement, as they have a collaborative "arm" that addresses projects like this. Heera has already done some work with child experiencers, and he wants to greatly expand public avenues for reaching more.

Van Lommel was especially excited about the possibility of a prospective study in cardiac patients during an Electro-Physiological Study (EPS), with EEG-registration. Interviews would be on a double-blind basis. He wants to do this to see if possible NDEs can be compared with EEGs (theoretically this could also be possible with registration of magnetic activities of the brain). He is convinced that a coordinated team approach can impress the proper sources for funding.

They all agreed that the initial step they need to make is to decide what kind of organization they are, who will be the actual researchers, and where is their office center to be located.

It was suggested that the group, once fully organized, should become involved with the Rudolph Steiner Anthroposophical Clinics, as they would be more interested in this type of research. Winkler was quite expressive as to how valuable child experiencers' stories and drawings would be in working with the dying and those

with serious illnesses or problems. NDE kids, he said, could help heal others this way. Winkler, Wade, and Liptay-Wagner acknowledged how difficult it was to do anything like this in Germany. Near-death states are still a taboo subject there, where any form of disclosure is looked upon as a sign of weakness. This is why it is so important to get books translated into the various languages in Europe, and to have direct mailings of invitations to announce meetings and lectures.

De Vry cautioned everyone that the public's expectations about near-death experiences are too high. Sometimes "revelations" challenge individuals in ways they have trouble handling. "Don't make experiencers into saints," she said. "People project onto near-death experiencers what they refuse to see in themselves. This still is a very touchy thing."

The group talked for several hours, with many good proposals made: about providing safe places for child experiencers to talk and act out their episode, about creating situations where people can dialogue more with each other, about planning more meetings and more educational opportunities, about ways to promote the spiritual aspects.

At the meeting's close, the group voted to meet again to tie up those three main questions: What kind of an organization are they, who are the researchers, and where is their office to be located? Once answers to these questions are agreed upon, they will settle any protocol/funding sources issues, and launch the project. Those from other countries in Europe who would like to participate are urged to email either one or all three of the following people: Dr. Gerard Lange at sglange@worldonline.nl; Dr. Pim van Lommel at pimvanlommel@wanadoo.nl; and Dr. Andreas Liptay-Wagner at Andreas@Liptay-Wagner.de.

When I went to Germany, I met with Dr. Michael Schroter-Kunhardt of Heidelberg (a psychiatrist quite active in near-death research), and Dr. Thomas A. Angerpointner of Munich, a well-known and highly respected pediatric surgeon of international note who is trying to conduct research of children's near-death states

with his patients. As you can imagine, he is having a tough time using double-blind, clinical protocols in his country, because of the difficulty about disclosures - for parents as well as children. But a solution is emerging: Children are beginning to speak of "waking up" during surgery and looking around and seeing things. He has them draw pictures and talk about what they witnessed. He is convinced these kids are experiencing the out-of-body component to near-death states. What they describe to him is accurate - even though there is no way they could have seen or heard what they report. He is hopeful that as he gains their confidence, plus that of their parents, he can at last conduct the research he has been trying to do for several years. Angerpointner and Schroter-Kunhardt cooperate fully with Dr. Andreas Liptay-Wagner. Together, they continue to hold public talks and take advantage of media opportunities to interest and educate the German people.

I came away from this trip impressed with the vitality and vigor of what is now happening in Europe. I would compare this energy to what existed at the Georgetown University Conference in 1990, when IANDS held its first International Conference. I can't begin to praise and congratulate these people enough for their dedication and determination. And I am convinced that the thrust and the power of future near-death research will come from Europe. Already outstanding work has been done in Europe, and they are primed to do even more.

If any of you reading this column want to help with the funding for the Mutual European Near-Death Research Project, please contact [the central IANDS office in Connecticut](#). By donating to the NDE Research Fund within IANDS, but signifying that the money is to go to Europe, you can take advantage of the tax deduction offered by our government while still aiding in a large project that will enlighten people worldwide.

And, on the Monday before I left for Germany, Dr. Pim van Lommel finally mailed his research paper to a well-known medical journal. Once his paper is published (let's all think positive here), we will have the evidence we need to confront critics

of near-death states in a manner that allows hardly any "wobble-room" for debunking. His prospective clinical study is that good!

In a previous column, where I stated that a new day was dawning for the subject of near-death states, I wasn't kidding. We truly are standing on the edge of the most incredible time in our history as the [International Association For Near-Death Studies](http://www.cinemind.com/atwater). For updates as I receive them, check in periodically at my website. The address is: <http://www.cinemind.com/atwater>.

Attendees at the first meeting of the Mutual European Near-Death Research Project, from left to right:

Photo Segment #1 - Sybrig Lips (front row standing), Andreas Liptay-Wagner (back row standing), Henk van de Heuvel (standing in back to the right), Ingrid Elfferich (seated in front row to the right).

Photo Segment #2 - Tineke Melles-Segaar (seated in front row), S. Gerard Lange (standing behind her).

Photo Segment #3 - (standing in the back row) Bjorn Prins, Machteld Blickman; (standing in front) Prem Heera, Denise Wade.

Photo Segment #4 - (standing in the front row) Evelyn Elsaesser Valarino, Marieke de Vry, Englebert Winkler; (the lone person standing in the back row) Pim van Lommel. You don't see me anywhere because I was taking these pictures.

Top photo: Dr. Thomas A. Angerpointner of Munich, Germany, in one of his surgical rooms at his downtown clinic.

Bottom photo: Dr. Michael Schroter-Kunhardt and me at a restaurant in Heidelberg. Dr. Andreas Liptay-Wagner was also present, but he was busy taking the picture.

VITAL SIGNS COLUMN, No. 16
The Experience / The Experiencer
"It's the Kids' Turn"

There were so many incredible speakers vying for spots on the Conference agenda for this July's Seattle Experience, that a number of important topics had to be cast aside maybe next year. The second of the two proposals I submitted was one of them. That proposal had to do with our smallest experiencers – children and the challenge they face with the aftereffects.

I am grateful to the [International Association For Near-Studies](#) for the broad-ranging column they have provided me in [Vital Signs](#). This gives me space to focus on what I think needs attention and right now that's kids.

I have yet to hear of a single therapist, counselor, psychologist, or psychiatrist who has caught on to the difference between child and adult experiencers and made allowance for that in his or her practice. The fact is most of us, experiencers included, haven't a clue. We miss the obvious. Consider this offering a "red flag," and I'm waving it as vigorously as possible.

Now, lest anyone misunderstand what my research of child experiencers of near-death states revealed, I want to state that the majority of kids handled their experience in remarkably positive ways. They became more mature afterwards and more knowing, wise, healthier, intuitive and creative, and seemed to lock-step with life's rhythms as if they knew about A Master Plan and their place in it. Read [Children of the New Millennium](#), especially Chapter 7 "Cases From History." There is no denying the impact child experiencers can have on their families, their communities, and their nation, if not the world. These quietly intense but knowing ones can often appear as "light years" ahead of their age-mates, even though they may have acted "slow" or disinterested or somehow "alien" in school.

Adult experiencers usually become more child-like later on, but the kids tend to behave more maturely, directed. Both groups often go on to experience vibrant

dream states and forms of guidance and knowing that helps them to develop a certain comfort level with futuristic knowledge, creative invention, and a sense of sacredness and purpose. Actually they share a lot in common, but not everything.

As near as I can tell, the pattern of aftereffects, psychological and physiological, are the same for near-death experiencers of any age, yet there is a vast difference between how older people handle this versus the very young. And that difference revolves around two major issues:

1. Children tend to compensate, not integrate.
2. Adults have a "before and after." With the younger ones, what they experienced in their near-death episode becomes their world – and that "world" tends to supplant anything else that came before.

Although adult experiencers can go through much confusion in their lives trying to make sense of what happened to them, some are sorely challenged, the average adult "knocks" on enough doors that eventually they either find a book or an IANDS group or a minister or counselor or best friend who not only listens but gives invaluable suggestions. Material is "out there," lots of it. Today's experiencers, for the most part, do not have to face the same ridicule and/or silence as did their predecessors just ten years ago. What we have all been doing to spread the word is working!

This shift in public opinion and the greater availability of resources has not impacted kids. Yes, the young are admonished to "shut up" when they attempt to tell their story, or told "it's just your imagination" or "don't bother me with such silliness." That's true. And this response from parents, relatives, siblings, and friends, not to mention health-care providers and teachers, does indeed have a chilling effect on child experiencers. Put them down often enough and they'll clam up. Yes, a way to counter this situation is to get information into the type of magazines and newspapers that parents and relatives and teachers read. But,

there's a stumbling block to educating the public in this manner - one most of us would never think of – and that is ... *protective instinct*.

Let me give you an example. In the fall of 1999, after my book came out, I contacted our local Barnes & Noble Bookstore and asked about the possibility of a talk and book signing. This large and successful bookstore has always been more than cooperative in the past with my other books, so imagine my surprise when the manager refused to talk to me. I called every month for five months – nothing. It wasn't until [The Complete Idiot's Guide to Near-Death Experiences](#) was launched, and the store graciously allowed me to do a program about it, that I learned why I was denied such an affair for the book about child experiencers. The manager had read it and was absolutely horrified that near-death experiences could happen to children. His is a store with a strong emphasis on families, and he wanted to do everything in his power to protect parents from any such news. He blacklisted the book. Melvin Morse's previous work did not impress him, either.

Most adults are instinctively protective of children. Anything that seems a threat – either to the child's welfare or to parental authority – is met with resistance. This incident showed me that there's more involved with educating people about child experiencers and what they might contend with as per aftereffects than we may want to admit.

Just as long as we concentrate on stories, out-of-the-mouth-of-babes renderings that fill us with hope and thrill us with the promise of a heavenly paradise, we, in the research community and throughout the entire field of interest, are safe. We offer what the public wants to hear. But the minute we re-examine the near-death experience through the eyes of children and study what happens to them at their level, suddenly, the topic of conversation changes and we are met with a "brick wall." The revelatory power of the near-death phenomenon cuts too close. The public's comfort zone is breached.

So researchers like myself are left "holding the bag." What am I to do with these findings? Of the 277 child experiencers in my research base, one third had serious problems with alcohol within five to eight years of their episode (difficulty socializing and communicating with others); 21% had attempted suicide within about twelve years as *a way to get back to The Other Side* (these youngsters did not see their act as destructive); 61% regretted ever having had the experience to begin with (common complaint - "I lost my childhood"). And that's just a few of them.

What seems reasonable to me is that through this column and any other articles I manage to get published, others will be inspired to do their own research, investigate this area with the idea of seeking ways to make a difference, to educate, inform, cast a new light on all aspects of near-death states - not just what is popular or "acceptable."

To this end, I want to say a few more things about therapy and what I have noticed with adult versus child experiencers.

Adults deal with changes afterward. They are challenged to find new reference points to redefine themselves and the living of life from a new perspective. The ability to compare their life and the world around them from the aspect of "before and after" can be both unsettling and tremendously freeing.

Children deal with the strangeness that the world around them doesn't match what they know. They are challenged to recognize the source of their differentness and accept its credibility. What they encountered in their near-death episode is so real that it becomes their entire world. Comparisons have little if any value.

Where it takes the average adult experiencer about seven years to integrate his or her experience (this has been borne out in clinical studies conducted in Holland), what I have seen is that it takes anywhere from twenty to thirty years for child

experiencers to integrate theirs, if they do at all. I found that children were six times more likely to repress what happened to them than were adults.

Very few child experiencers ever underwent therapy or counseling of any kind. Of those who did, only a handful said it was helpful. I don't know about you, but this sends off alarm bells in my head. We simply must take another look at this issue, and from various angles. The types of assistance that did seem to work for child experiencers were those that were touch-based or designed around mythological role playing or philosophical debates. I provide details about these in the "Subtext" (which contains the appendices edited out of my book by the publisher because of "space limitations") as a free download from my website. The address is www.cinemind.com/atwater. This same material is listed in [The Complete Idiot's Guide to Near-Death Experiences](#). [The New Children and Near-Death Experiences](#), from Inner Traditions, has a more updated and expanded version.

I also discovered that, regardless of the child experiencer's age, creating a book about his or her experience was immensely comforting and healing. This book could be made of construction paper and ribbon with drawings and words, poetry, or it could be a more elaborate project that the individual paid to have professionally done. No matter. The fact is, there's something about the child experiencer committing to paper and pen all that occurred, that seems to free the individual to acknowledge and validate a very special world that fashioned his or her growing years with colors and textures others could not relate to. I highly recommend such an activity.

It is my hope that in the coming years, at conferences, in group meetings, and with research, more and more people tackle the conundrum of integration – as concerns our smallest experiencers. We've done it for the adults. Now, it's the kids' turn.

VITAL SIGNS COLUMN, No. 17
The Experience / The Experiencer
"The Key Role of High Stress"

Most of you missed the announcement. But in my neck of the woods it made newspaper headlines dated February 29, 2000: "UVa research indicates near-death experiences may be a natural physical response to trauma." In other words, stress related.

The University of Virginia researcher so named was our own Bruce Greyson, M.D., the editor of the [Journal of Near-Death Studies](#). In explaining his findings, Greyson is quoted as saying, "The study shows that near-death experiences are normal responses to intense trauma, not a sign of psychiatric illness." This is significant, as there are still some people who have the notion that near-death states are a sure sign of craziness.

Near-death experiences do include features of dissociation (to separate or withdraw from relationships in the world around you) that are similar to various types of mental illness. But, as he is quick to point out, the kind of dissociation involved is the kind we can all relate to, like daydreaming or becoming absorbed in a book or movie. "It's basically narrowing your focus so much that you block out things that are going on around you," Greyson said.

More specifically, what he found is that people who had near-death experiences tended to have more dissociative experiences – the normal kind, not the pathological kind – than those who came close to dying but did not have near-death experiences. "I don't think it takes away from the mystical interpretation. I think it just takes away from the pathological interpretation."

The importance of this finding begins to loom large once you study the deeper implications of Greyson's announcement. The concentration of focus and dissociation created by near-death states in response to traumatic situations sounds eerily the same as the time-honored "formula" used to create a good

shaman, wise one, priest, or spiritual leader, regardless of culture. That "formula" goes something like this: the way to produce a shamanic-type individual with abilities and awarenesses beyond the norm is to subject him or her to a type of traumatic incident or intensely-felt ritual that pushes the person past the fear threshold at death's door and into the realms of spirit. What "pushes," according to mystical traditions, is "high stress." (Some societies use drugs to short-cut this process, but the true "hero's journey" is solely stress-based.)

High stress, then, exists as a commonality in the process of transforming human consciousness. To illustrate how important the stress link is, here is a synopsis of what I have noticed during the 23 years I have been conducting near-death research: most episodes happen to people during major life junctures or at times of unusual stress when spiritual guidance would have the most impact. With young children, relatives and caregivers can be affected as well – to the degree that it's almost as if the child had the experience for them. Yet, the extent to which the episode transformed the youngster becomes more evident as he or she matures, and can become a quiet but powerful directive in the life path chosen by the child once grown. Causes and conditions of death can reflect, at least symbolically, the experiencer's past or current psychological growth, maturity, or lack of it. The initial spirit greeters at the edge of death always match whatever is necessary to alert or calm the experiencer, be that person an adult or child. As the episode deepens, the scenario's message parallels almost exactly the subconscious needs of the individual at that point in time. The life review and any session that covers lectures or advice dovetails whatever was omitted, ignored, or not yet learned in life by the experiencer involved. Afterward, the experiencer's behavior tends to shift toward a desire to express that which has been undeveloped or partially developed – *physically*, in the sense of brain function/nerve sensitivity; *psychologically*, in the sense of personal growth/maturity; and *spiritually*, in the sense of a personal relationship with Deity or God. It's as if whatever traits are missing in the individual's overall maturing process are being "filled in."

I never cease to be amazed at how forthcoming experiencers are when asked to evaluate what happened to them. Almost to a person, they say, "I got what I needed." This blunt answer suggests that another agenda may be in force besides that of the personality self: perhaps it's the agenda of a greater version of self – the soul.

Whatever the truth of this, and it may never be proved one way or the other, the need factor is plainly evident as to timing, storyline, and outcome of near-death states – not in the sense of predetermination or wish fulfillment, but, rather, in terms of a subconscious "agenda" of a higher, more spiritual order.

What impresses me the most is how the scenario people experience always catches their attention in exactly the way and manner that is the most effective for them. Near-death scenarios hardly ever touch on what you or I might expect considering the gravity of that person's life choices and deeds.

For instance, murders hardly ever wind up in dungeons where hellish demons can prick them to pieces with hot pokers. Such criminals usually experience those scenes that infuse them with life's true meaning and purpose – after they have been subjected to "living through" on every level what they did to others. They are subjected to trading places rather than "imprisonment." Those I know who experienced scenarios like this were so utterly shaken by what they went through that they never returned to a life of crime. One Mafia hit man, for example, after such an episode, devoted his life to serving the impoverished and often by dishing up meals in a church soup kitchen. His explanation? "I want to make up for what I have done."

This tendency to "get what we need" can sometimes be rather bizarre, as in the case of young children being greeted by the familiar on the other side of death – classmates and teachers quite alive. Once they relax into their scenario and feel more comfortable, the living disappear and imagery more typical of near-death states emerge. The greeter's job, then, whether for an adult or a child, seems to be

to alert or relax the experiencer so that what comes next will have personal meaning and leave a deep and lasting impression.

Interestingly, the patterning of the near-death phenomenon – what precedes it, what is experienced, how that affects the individual, and the aftereffects which follow – is so similar to mystical traditions of the "hero's journey" and the makings of a "wise one," that it is as if a single phenomenon is at work: the transformation of consciousness. To the degree affected, the experiencer is never quite the same again. High stress plays a key role in this - by ensuring the stage is set for whatever comes next.

ANNOUNCEMENT:

There has been occasion lately in our [Journal of Near-Death Studies](#), especially with the "religious wars" debate between Michael Sabom, M.D. and Kenneth Ring, Ph.D., to question the research methodology and findings of long-term researchers in the field of near-death studies. I, too, have now been called to task.

In the Summer 2001 issue, two reviews of my book [Children of the New Millennium](#) were carried. The first was by Thomas A. Angerpointner, M.D., Ph.D., a specialist in children's surgery in Munich, Germany; and the other was from Harold A. Widdison, Ph.D., a professor of sociology at Northern Arizona University. The former was supportive; the second highly critical, raising questions that need answers.

I welcome what is currently happening in the field of near-death studies. None of the researchers in our field, me included, have been as unbiased with his or her work as claimed or believed. And I have been outspoken about this for years, and have written about research at the crossroads in both Chapter 1 and 23 in [The Complete Idiot's Guide to Near-Death Experiences](#), as well as the Fall 1995 issue of our Journal. Although there is no question in my mind that the majority in our research community have done their best and have contributed mightily to an ever-growing body of research findings, and often at great personal cost, the stack of

books and papers also grows ever larger of shabby work, poorly-planned projects, findings of little value, and thinly-veiled attempts to deify the ridiculous. As the call to revise and reconsider previous work heightens, it is only fair and proper that I take my turn as the subject of rigorous criticism.

By the time this column appears in [Vital Signs](#), my response to Widdison's complaints will be published as a "Letter to the Editor" in [Journal of Near-Death Studies](#). But what you read will be the edited version of my reply. I have received permission to carry the whole episode, the book reviews of Angerpointner and Widdison plus the unedited defense of my work, on my website at www.cinemind.com/atwater. I am doing this so anyone who wants to can read all three points of view and decide for his or herself what to make of it. Along with my response, I also broached issues we all must face in this new era of media/publishing conglomerates – where truth is forced to take a back seat to the demands of sensationalism and entertainment.

VITAL SIGNS COLUMN, No. 18
The Experience / The Experiencer
"A Personal Experience"

Sometime during the month of October 2001, my first book, [Coming Back to Life](#), comes back. Kensington Books of New York City is reissuing it as a hardcover classic. Can you imagine that? After being out-of-print for years, the book is reappearing - complete with new forward, updated Resource Section/Footnotes.

Chapter Two of *Coming Back to Life* contains a brief description of my three near-death experiences and what I went through, at least initially, in learning how to integrate them. In several chapters of [Future Memory](#) I revisited these episodes, especially the third one where I encountered "two cyclones," one inverted over the other in an hourglass shape. Of my three episodes, this third one, the cyclones, came to have the greatest impact on me and led to my becoming a researcher.

I mention this to you, not because the value of the research I have done has been questioned of late, but because the life I have known since I "died" in 1977 came to an end on May 22, 2000 (in the 22nd year of my research), when my third near-death experience reoccurred: the cyclones came back, my energy changed, and nothing has been the same for me since. This manifestation happened while I was standing in prayer facing the Holy of Holies at the back of the Basilica in St. Joseph's Oratory, Montreal, Quebec. Technically, the incident would be classified as a "near-death-like" episode, for I was in perfect health at the time and nothing threatened.

In the past I have talked a lot about near-death-like experiences, as a number of people have them, including children. These events can be as intensely felt and as life-changing as the near-death phenomenon itself, and engender the same pattern of aftereffects. It is true that the closer an individual is to physical death the more apt he or she is to have a near-death experience, but it is also true that the specter of death need not be present for one to occur.

This column is devoted to presentations about both the phenomenon of near-death and the one who experiences it. Since I'm an experiencer, too, I'm doffing my researcher hat this time to share with you on a personal level. It's not so much about May 22nd that I wish to speak, but, those cyclones. To do this, I'll first describe the original event and the effect it had on me. The language I use here resulted from years of struggling for the right words to say. (A fuller version is in Chapter 13 of [Future Memory](#).)

"During the evening hours of March 29, 1977, when I left my body in what felt to be death, I soared rapidly through the roof of the house I rented, glimpsing each molecule of material in the ceiling and rooftop as I went and noting how curious it was to possess such X-ray vision. As if flying, I rose far into the night sky until deep in heaven's darkness I spied a slit of brilliant light somewhat the shape of a 'lip.' When I neared, the lip of light opened slightly, enough to allow entry, but that entry was more an absorption, as if I had suddenly become caught in a force field. This 'field' extended some distance into space and away from the lip. Particles of twinkling brightness identified its presence. I detected the smell of ozone, increasingly 'flat' as an odor the closer I got. Once inside, the light was as overwhelming as it was brilliant, yet it had no apparent source. I spied two colossal forms in the distance, cyclonic vortexes spinning at great speed, with one inverted over the other in an hourglass shape.

"The cyclone on top spun clockwise. The inverted cyclone beneath spun counterclockwise. Where the two spouts should have touched but didn't, there spewed forth in all directions piercing rays of radiant power – not light, power!

"Both cyclones were fat and bulgy, not at all smooth-sided as might be supposed, considering their tremendous rate of spin. Even though the direction of their movement was decidedly right to left for the one on the top and left to right for the one on the bottom, inside each was the presence of the other's motion plus a separate inner convolution. This tri-directional force seemed to create the powerful

spin along with an impression of layering across the surface of the cyclones (without rows or bands to cause the layered effect).

"Inside the top cyclone (and I called them cyclones because that is what they reminded me of), I saw myself, hardly larger than a speck, yet recognizable. Superimposed over me were all my past lives and all my future lives happening at the same time in the same space as my present self. Around me were other people I knew. The same thing was happening to them. Around them were still other people, and others more, until I came to realize all life-forms were present inside the cyclone, and the same thing was happening to each and all. Yet no one and nothing made any 'real' movement except expansion and contraction, as if all life plus the environment in which it existed, was breathing.

"What appeared to be movement, the life-forms acting out their given roles, was actually an optical and perceptual illusion, similar to a hologram but produced by pulsed wave oscillations activated by individual and collective forms of consciousness. If any life-form changed the overall pattern of a personal scenario, 'past' as well as 'future' would alter for that individual and sometimes for others. While each life-form was truly its own self, each was also connected to all others by bubbly threads of a brilliant light that formed a fabric netting or web.

"And what occurred inside the top cyclone also occurred inside the bottom cyclone. As above, so below. In other words, myself plus the other life-forms actually inhabited both cyclones in the same relation, in the same condition. The bottom cyclone, then, was but a mirror image of the one on top. The overall scene first impressed me as if a giant echo were filling the width of a massive canyon.

"The sheer force of cyclonic spin created a counter-activity along each of the cyclone's outer edges, manifesting in the process another energy construct altogether. This extra construct occupied space to the left and to the right of the cyclones and seemed somehow to originate darkness and light as by-products of its existence; thus, darkness developed to the left as light emerged from the right.

"This sight filled me with the realization that darkness and light, by-products of the spinning cyclones, were opposite 'signatures' of the same dynamic. They provided the necessary mechanism and contrast for manifestation to be experienced in a meaningful way. Darkness and light, then, were corollary reflections resulting from the act of creation continuously re-creating and altering itself, for that is exactly what it felt like, as if I were witnessing Creation."

It was my choice at that moment to go into and through the power rays in the middle. Earthlife held no interest for me, only the thought that I wanted to go back to God. As I drew closer to the rays, suddenly, not only was I possessed of knowing, but also revelations of the innerworkings of creation and consciousness were given to me and of Creation's Centerpoint, where I was. Then a voice spoke. I called it *The Voice Like None Other*, for it was not like an angel's voice or a guide or guardian. I felt it was of God. And the voice said: "Test revelation. You are to do the research. One book for each death." I was shown what that meant and what was to be in each book. Books two and three were named, not book one. But I was not shown how long this would take me or what the job would entail. I revived just as I neared the middle. I began my research in 1978 with no knowledge of Raymond Moody or his book. All I knew was that I had a job to do; it was the reason I was alive.

Over two decades of work came to an abrupt end May 22, 2000. When the cyclones re-manifested, I was sucked up into and through the middle where the rays of power were. I felt as if I was being fried, physically fried, by the force of energy that engulfed me. Once back in my body, I managed to leave the Dome and found myself negotiating the Stations of the Cross, located in an intimate garden. Shadows hung until I reached the statue of the resurrected Christ. A sunburst obliterated the scene, as I recognized that the driving energy that had once possessed me was gone. Completely gone. In its place was peace. And I was free.

The offer to reissue [Coming Back to Life](#) greeted me on my return to Charlottesville. With the newness of what had happened I rewrote a book I had been writing about death, remastered the audiotape [As You Die](#), and traveled around the world. I didn't come to the IANDS Conference in 2000 because I couldn't. I was in the throes of "dealing with it," and I still am. Transformative experiences, no matter how wonder-filled they may be, take some getting used to. Our energy patterning alters each time we have one, and we are changed - even beyond our knowing.

I don't pretend to understand the full significance of the cyclones. I just know I feel different. I feel as if a great weight has been lifted from me, a weight that was both a burden and a gift. Floods of faces wash over me, all those years and all those people. I could never have integrated my own experiences to the degree that I did without them and the reflection they mirrored back to me of myself. It is for them that I have "held firm," especially the young boy from Oklahoma with a brain tumor who confided to me that, "The people at our church come to see me and Mom real often and they say I'm going to hell because I saw angels when I died. I know they're wrong, but they're hurting my Mom. Will you please talk to my Mom? Please tell her the truth. She'll listen to you."

Heaven and hell jumble together in near-death studies. Telling the story, educating people, separating fact from fiction, was never "my job." It's everybody's job. What happened to me is simply one more page in a record book the human family writes.

VITAL SIGNS COLUMN, No. 19
The Experience / The Experiencer
"'Heavenly' Justice"

Announcement: If you haven't heard the great news by now, then let me be the one to tell you (if you've already heard, consider this a reminder). *Lancet*, the prestigious, peer-reviewed medical journal, has accepted for publication [the research paper by Pim van Lommel, M.D.](#) (Holland) about his study of near-death experiences. His prospective, clinical study involved 344 survivors of cardiac arrest in 10 Dutch hospitals, with 3 follow-ups providing an 8-year span for focusing on the initial aftereffects. This is a first, and it is a monumental achievement. (The study, by the way, establishes that it takes at least 7 years for an experiencer to integrate his or her experience – a discovery I revealed in the column I wrote for [Vital Signs](#) in the early '80's, and then later detailed in [Coming Back to Life](#).) Congratulations to Dr. van Lommel and all his staff, especially Ingrid Elfferich!

Our topic for this column concerns the conundrum of "heavenly" justice:

This is a touchy subject, but it needs to be addressed.

One of the biggest complaints coming to us from the religious community is that there is no justice, no punishment for sins, spoken of by experiencers when they describe their near-death scenario. Rather, experiencers emphasize that they were loved unconditionally once they crossed over to The Other Side, irrespective of past deeds, sins, or mistakes. At least, that's what most of them say. Many are those of religious bent, however, who view this omission, not as a sign of God's forgiveness, but as proof positive that near-death experiences are bogus. To them the missing component of judgment or justice is a direct assault on the very underpinnings of morality upheld by centuries of religious belief, and not just by Christians. The fact that unpleasant and/or hellish episodes are finally being reported and studied, and that about a third of them center around fearful punishments and torture that were the result of the individual having sinned in life, does nothing to quell their

objections. "What about those who go to heaven?" they rant. "None of them ever talk about having to face a judge."

At first glance it seems like these objections have some merit. After all, one of the first stumbling blocks researchers face if they want to explore the theory of life after death is this conundrum: why is it that most of the hellish scenarios are experienced by good folks, while the bad, people like murderers, usually have heavenly ones? This suggests that criminality might be on the same par as morality, a condition that for most of us is unthinkable. So, whatever happened to justice?

No one really knows the answer to that, but here are a few things I noticed during my years of researching near-death states that may offer some insights.

With adult experiencers – many of them did indeed report having to go to a type of room where a tribunal awaited. Questions were asked of them about their life at this heavenly "hearing" or "trial," as if they were expected to defend themselves or at least give an acceptable answer. Those who sat in judgment were described as all-knowing, yet it was necessary for the experiencer to speak up and do so truthfully. It seemed to be important that the individual acknowledge rather than be told what needed correction in his or her life, although I did find cases where these loving wise ones did most of the talking – even to the point of lecturing. Other types of judgment sessions were reported, yet the tribunal arrangement was the most common one I found.

The most *powerful form of justice* adult experiencers ever described to me, however, was ... *the life review*. In fact, I discovered nothing that could equal it as a revealer of truth and as a leveler of attitudes, personality, and status. The impact it had often overwhelmed the individual.

Yes, there were those who claimed that they were allowed to view their past life in a dispassionate manner as if it were more of a curiosity than anything they had to

take that seriously. Some said they were spared harshness or pain as long as they remained an observer and did not "enter" the scene or get personally involved. But, if they focused too long or too deeply on a given segment or event, instantly, they were fully engaged in the scene.

For those whose life review was a reliving, and many experienced this, well, there really aren't words to describe the impact but I'll try. Imagine what it would be like to relive your life, either in segments or from your birth, all of it, every mistake, every joy, every thought, every word spoken, every nightmare, every miracle, every fantasy, every dream, every plot or scheme, every feeling, every movement or activity. Then go one step more. Add to your imaginings of reliving your life, what it would be like to also experience the results, the consequences, of you ever being alive, from first breath to your death – plus the effect your beingness had on the air, soil, plants, animals, water, people – even those you merely passed by and never met.

As overwhelmingly impactful as this would be, add still another step. Imagine the likes of experiencing any suffering you caused another - the exact emotions, feelings, and pain - *from his or her perspective!*

By imagining all of this, maybe you can now appreciate how a murderer, for instance, might be forever changed by a life review. Trading places, rather than biblical punishment, is far harsher and far more effective. Even just a "simple" reliving can be profound. I've heard experiencers say that it took years for them to reconcile what happened to them during their life review. A few never did.

Certainly, not everyone had a life review or had to face a tribunal, but the vast majority did have to deal with the aftereffects, and an aftermath that wasn't always pleasant. One way or another, the experiencers I studied were confronted with the unfinished business of their lives, the effect their behavior had on others, and any blocks or obstacles that stood in the way of their spiritual growth. By coming to terms with their experience and learning how to integrate it, they, in effect, also

came to terms with what was just and fair in "the game called life." They did not avoid the issue of justice or of sin; rather, they were able to understand such issues on another level – that "sin" really meant "mistake," and that "justice" really referred to appropriate behavior applied in a responsible manner for the highest possible good.

With child experiencers – it is difficult to recognize the tenets of justice. I say this because little ones, even infants, can undergo rather stern scenarios that feature critical or caring parental-types of greeters and scenarios that can sometimes involve lectures, future predictions, and what seems to be rather puzzling judgments. Trying to grapple with how anything like this could happen to those so pure and innocent foments angry responses from adults and the question, "How could God allow this?"

Let me give you three examples of this conundrum.

The first involves a nine-day-old infant in the Bronx, New York, who, while being operated on for a serious staph infection and abscess, lost all vital signs. The little girl drew a picture of the scene when she was older, and tried to tell her family how terrified she was of the "evil" ones in white who caused her so much pain and of the threatening male voice that called himself "Inner Stranger" - who demanded that throughout the rest of her life she must do whatever he bids or she would die. Her family and friends pooh-poohed her and roundly made fun of her "fantasies," even though her drawings and her memories were unbelievably accurate in detail. This treatment undermined her growing years to such a degree that she finally repressed what happened to her. At the age of 28, she had a near-death-like experience that explained the original episode and enabled her find peace.

The second took place in Thailand to a 5-year-old boy and was told to me by Todd Murphy. The youngster had been gored by a large cow and then stepped on in the chest and stomach area by heavy hooves. As he teetered between life and death, he found himself in the palace of Yama, Lord of the Dead, where he had to confront

the cow. The cow revealed that he actually was a man who had once been the boy's enemy. When the boy asked how that could be, the cow answered that long ago they had each been elephant cavalymen during a war. In battle, the boy had decapitated him as they fought with pikes from the backs of elephants. The beheaded man chose rebirth in the form of the cow so that he could avenge his death. He had been trying to rip the boy's head off with his hooves, but missed. The child was initially frightened by the news of his former misdeeds in a previous lifetime yet understanding of the idea that he would have to pay for that crime now. The last case is a very famous one about a Lakota Sioux by the name of Black Elk. At the age of 9 he had fallen seriously ill, his legs and arms swollen, his face puffed up, when a disembodied voice spoke to him: "It is time. Now they are calling you." With that, two men appeared from out of the clouds holding spears that flashed lightning. "Hurry," he was told. "The Grandfathers want you." There followed one of the most spectacular near-death experiences ever reported that involved flying horses, flaming arrows, forests, mountain peaks, cloud realms, explosions of color, and beings of various types. The Grandfathers and all who served them were stern and insistent as they lectured the boy about his future – for he was to save the world (a pretty tall order for a nine-year-old).

Lest we lose ourselves bickering about the various cultures represented here and their different beliefs, focus on the aspect common to all three stories: an innocent child suddenly found him or herself facing stern judgments and lectures. Then consider this. As a result of what happened to them, each of these children made significant contributions to the welfare and upliftment of others. The girl went on to develop a positive relationship with "Inner Stranger," who guided her throughout a lifetime of helping anyone in need. The boy in Thailand became an unusually gifted and devoted monk with deep understanding. The Native American rose to incredible heights as a healer, a visionary, and a renowned spiritual leader.

So where's the justice in near-death experiences?

It's there, for child, teen, or adult – and it's there powerfully.

Perhaps the question is not one of crime and punishment, righteousness or indifference, or that which seems to deny the value of religious principles.

Perhaps the real question concerns the concept of justice itself and who among us can "cast the first stone." God's justice, at least what is revealed in near-death experiences, centers around "the law of appropriateness" – whatever is highest and best for the individual and all else involved. With this law, forgiveness replaces revenge, reassessment negates attack, and love translates into the compassion of understanding.

VITAL SIGNS COLUMN, No. 20

The Experience / The Experiencer

"The Puzzle of Money and How It Has Affected Researchers"

I addressed the touchy subject of "heavenly justice" with near-death episodes last time. Now I'm tackling another difficult topic ... money. And I'll do this in two installments: the first directed toward the research community, the second concerning near-death experiencers.

With the exception of yours truly, researchers in the field of near-death studies usually hold or are retired from full time, salaried positions – most often in academia or the medical profession. Others are students, fulfilling thesis requirements for advanced degrees through some type of near-death research.

Did you ever wonder why this is so?

Money.

Only a small handful ever received grants or donations to help them do their work and none of those monies were that substantial. Fascination with the subject, curiosity, even passion may fuel interest, but it's that separate and steady paycheck that pays the bills. There were a few who negotiated large advances and royalties on book sales; but, contrary to what you might think, they later told "sob stories" on how they lost the money or were nearly forced into bankruptcy because of illness, divorce, problems with publishers, or the like.

As an example of how discouraging things can get, my April 2002 Statement of Royalties for [The Complete Idiot's Guide to Near-Death Experiences](#), shows total sales of 8,180 copies in two years with a net payment to me of \$376.41. The one for [Children of the New Millennium](#) covers a three-year span of sales totaling 5,205 copies – not enough to count. When you factor in the income from all five of the books I wrote about the research I did, that raises my total earnings for almost 24 years of work to just shy of \$30,000. That's it. If I had spent those years clerking

at a K-Mart, I would have earned a fortune by comparison. And my story is by no means unique.

So, why does anyone bother doing near-death research?

A quick look at the roster of those who have published papers or books on the subject is rather revealing. Several of the researchers were so deeply affected by the death of loved ones and dear friends, that they were driven to learn what they could about the existence of an afterlife - and what better venue to investigate than the stories of near-death experiencers. A number were die-hard skeptics who were trying to disprove any such "nonsense," but wound up believers after confronting facts they could not disprove. Some were on an ego trip and craved the sensationalism they managed to achieve. Many, like myself, were motivated by a sense of "mission," the idea that what they learned from their studies could uplift and inspire others - perhaps make a positive difference in society itself. Although none expressed a desire to "make a million," most were on the lookout for funding.

Thanks to Pim van Lommel, M.D. and the Dutch Study that was published in *The Lancet* last December, the near-death experience is once again a popular subject. Only this time participants are truly global; cases, cross-cultural. What was once a dominant viewpoint is now a potpourri of different voices and ideas. And among the new voices are sounds of frustration and impatience, and statements such as: "We cannot be expected to work for free. There must be a way to earn a decent living from the research we do."

Prepare yourself, folks. An influx of research entrepreneurs is headed our way and it is timely that they are.

No one should have to sacrifice to the degree that so many others and I have. It is reasonable and proper that fees be charged, that a market for products and services flourishes, that grant monies open up, and that paid employment be a

possibility – not only in the research field but within the organization of [IANDS](#). We once had a full-time director on payroll at IANDS and we need to have one again.

Profit is not a dirty word. It can be a motivator for the kind of enthusiasm and creativity that reaches across boundaries to spark new growth and understanding. That's not greed, it's green energy - and we're the stewards of "best use."

I said an influx of research entrepreneurs is headed our way. Here's one in the way of a research proposal I received from a group of scientists in Russia. The main contact is Vladimir S. Zhdanov, an evolutionist. Other members on the team are V. A. Geodakyan (doctor of biology, professor, theoretician in biology), V. A. Derecha (doctor of medicine, hypnotist), V. V. Prikhodko (doctor of medicine, reanimator), Yu. V. Tchaykovsky (candidate of technical science, evolutionist), and S. E. Shnol (doctor of biology, professor, biophysicist).

These men are fascinated with the subject of immortality and four variants of how that might be obtained: through cloning an individual, cryogenic preservation (freezing) of a person's body after death so that it can be repaired and rejuvenated later on, cryogenic preservation of only the head (supposedly to save the individual's "conscience") so that it can be transplanted once a clone is readied, and/or storing the individual's "conscience" in computer memory banks until a suitable clone can be created for memory-file transplantation.

The scientists admit that successful cryogenics, cloning, and how to preserve personal consciousness is probably 50 to 100 years away, if then; but they are willing to work with "customers" who could pay for the theoretical work needed to be done now and for ways to test those theories. As revolting as such ideas may seem to members of IANDS, that kind of free thinking is exactly what has turned these men to the subject of the near-death phenomenon – a subject relatively unknown in their country – except for an abundance of case histories and findings that already exist.

In Russia, there are records dating back 25 years that cover the testimony of women in childbirth who experienced near-death states, numerous studies of the fetus in utero, methods of applying what has been learned about the "hereafter" in actual medical practice, 40 years of work on "global evolutionism" that provides a place for near-death states in an integral model of consciousness transformations.

Their proposal makes it clear that the mere increase of quantitative data on new case studies of near-death experiences is not productive, nor desirable. What is really needed, they believe, are new ideas, new assessments, new criteria for establishing the veracity of present findings. In other words, what do we do about what we already know? ... Let the solution to that question be our goal.

The specifics of what they want to accomplish once they receive needed funding are as follows.

I. Produce a book, tentatively titled "*To the Issue of a Possibility for Personal Immortality of Humans.*" They project that this book will cover: Paradigms of Cognition (a sketch that provides for a better understanding of the co-evolution of matter, humans, larger systems of connection and interconnection); Evolutionary Systems (integrity of field effects by Jung and Sheldrake, the hypothesis of Gaia, extraterrestrial civilizations, other variants); Near-Death Experiences and Visionism (the virtual versus the real, perspectives of research); What is Behind After-Death Alienation (the concept of a soul and an afterlife, when and why this might have started); Man-Made Immortality (possible linking of personal immortality with the laws of nature and changing generations, problems of incarnation); and A System of Postulates (a forecast which begins to come true).

II. Project plans and methodologies for supplemental laboratory, archival, and research orientations. Design experiments to be carried out at particular Russian clinics and research institutions.

They include in their proposal an offer to do a comprehensive analysis of 150 years of medical, psychiatric, and ethnological practices, as well as undertaking a study of the variants of physical immortality.

And they are prepared to begin this enormous project as soon as they receive \$10,000. Amazingly, they are also willing to grant whoever funds them the full and exclusive right to use the conclusions and recommendations resulting from their efforts.

Should you or anyone you know be interested in this Russian proposal or in providing funds, contact Vladimir Zhdanov directly at (phone) 3532 72 33 10, (fax) 3532 77 65 88, (e-mail) zuv@mail.ku.ru, (postal) Ul. Tchkalova, 56-171, Orenburg 460001, Russia.

I am very excited about the possibilities here and especially with the idea of including Russian records, case histories, and thoughts in the expanding community of researchers and those devoted to exploring the mysteries of life and death. I hope the necessary funds come through for them, and soon. Yet more importantly, I affirm that the day is rapidly approaching when all of us can feel good and think positive about a myriad of products and services, educational and spiritual opportunities that can arise from what we know about the near-death phenomenon. It's time to apply what we've learned.

VITAL SIGNS COLUMN, No. 21

The Experience / The Experiencer

"The Puzzle of Money and How It Has Affected Near-Death Experiencers"

A brief announcement:

I have just completed **three lists of interest to near-death experiencers** and those like them. They are: Alternative Schools and Universities Offering Excellent Degree/Certificate Programs; Patient-Centered Hospitals; and Suggestions Regarding Various Health Issues. Access my website at www.cinemind.com/atwater to obtain these lists (check the Menu). IANDS also has them for further use and distribution. If you do not have a computer, send a stamped, self-addressed, letter sized envelope, plus a note as to which one you want, to me at P. O. Box 7691, Charlottesville, VA 22906-7691. These lists are 3 to 5 pages long, so keep that in mind when buying stamps. If you want 2 of them, or all 3, send a larger, manila envelope with appropriate postage. No other costs are involved.

The touchy subject of money needs more discussion. In the last installment of this column, I focused on researchers of near-death states; the arrogance of some, the sacrifices of many, and a research proposal submitted by a team of Russian scientists. Now the spotlight turns to the near-death experiencers themselves.

Unquestionably, near-death experiencers resume life routines with a different mindset after their episode. Gone for the majority is the drive for money, position, status, fame, possessions – replaced generally by a sense of mission and a need to serve others or in some manner make the world a better place. Prayer replaces the paycheck as a chief motivator. This change of attitude and commitment is both confusing and inspiring to families and friends, not to mention employers. Although many find creative ways to "fit back in," the majority switch careers within 7 to 10 years of their experience (during that fabled "seven years" that it takes the average individual to integrate the phenomenon – child experiencers can take longer).

New careers, new lives, new relationships ... once an experiencer embraces the full impact of what happened to him/her and what that might mean, worship and worthship take on equal significance. Spirituality blossoms. Only in a minority of cases does this pattern falter.

But, what about that *second* 7 to 10-year timeframe (maybe 20 years later) when experiencers often find themselves reassessing their experience? Were the choices they made worth the results they achieved? Can they still live what was once new to them, on a daily basis, year after year after year?

Five near-death experiencers have something to say in this regard; their comments follow.

Linda Redford, creator of the Adawee Teachings (a school curriculum for children that teaches honor and honesty), featured in my book [Children of the New Millennium](#). "This is an issue I've been struggling with for about a year. I became very depressed and desperate for faith. So much sacrifice. So much regret. I have persevered for 20 years and have not been successful. What I once interpreted as a 'mission,' I now interpret as possibly a memory from a life that was - a connection to the past I experienced when there were no mental institutions, no jails, women were honored and children were sacred - before the white man came to America. I've questioned it ad nauseum the past year. I kept going because I wanted to help make a safe world for children. What I experienced was the greed and selfishness, the arrogance and ignorance of those 'with money' in charge of the 'media.' Whoever controls the media controls the minds of the world. How sad. I have a great sadness that at 54 I have no money for my older age. I have no money to buy a home. I have no money for my grandchildren. I have spent my money on other peoples' children, to stop violence. The will that began this project is gone. Those with power and money have beaten it out of me, just as the whites did to my Indian ancestors. I teach 'history repeats itself' because consciousness repeats itself. As long as our children continue to be educated as their parents were, the results will be the same. Separation, judgments, and violence. Perhaps if I had a

husband or wealth or connections with someone who could have interacted with these people on their level ... I tried. They stole from me, betrayed me, and never looked back. I prayed for 20 years and nothing seemed to work. I now accept the hand dealt to me."

Louis Mayer, a partially disabled survivor of a fatal car accident who lives in Tennessee. "I had a near-death experience and saw the cure for AIDS and a lot of other things. But, first things first. I'm trying to get the cure made for all those infected. It involves an ozone blood wash, and the FDA doesn't acknowledge ozone in medicine in this country, although it has been used safely in Europe for over 40 years. No big drug company cares about a cure. They just want to continue getting billions every year off the infected. The blood wash kills the virus and cleans out all impurities in the blood, and helps the damaged organs repair themselves. I only need 4 things to get the process started – all very legal. I feel I could have a working, curing, prototype made in less than 6 months. But I'm partially disabled from the bad car accident that I died in; 2 of my good friends also died in the accident. I know I'll see them again, though. I move very slowly but my mind is clear as glass. I also am able to see bits and pieces of the future. I don't judge anyone. That's God's job. I just try to do good, but I need some help with that cure for AIDS." He has asked that if anyone wants to pursue the AIDS cure, contact him via e-mail at lugotz2@aol.com.

George Rodonia, M.D., also a Methodist minister, co-creator of an online university, his case in my book [Beyond the Light](#) as well as other publications. "My online university went bankrupt because of 9-11. We were doing very well, starting to make a profit, when suddenly people weren't interested anymore. My church turned me aside because of the bankruptcy. I have no place to live, no house, no pulpit, no money for retirement. I never copyrighted anything. I gave all my work away, inventions in medicine, all of it, given to others. I never got a penny for any of it. I don't want to preach anymore. Publishers, all they want to do is sensationalize my story. I have ideas for healthy products, healthy soft drinks, good books, and

another university over the Internet. Why has all this happened to me? I keep trying. I will not quit, but I'm getting older and things are getting harder to do."

Ned Dougherty, former nightclub owner, now seeking to build a holistic healing center and health spa in northeastern Pennsylvania, author of *Fast Lane to Heaven*. "Currently, I survive financially week by week with just enough money to get by. My few sources of income are primarily from speaking engagements and book sales. While doing hospice volunteer work, I saw the necessity for home care patients to have better beds than the 'torture beds' that were being provided by Medicare/Medicaid, so I became involved as a distributor of home health care products and quality home care hospital beds with comfortable mattresses, heating pads, and built-in massage systems. When I realize that my clients cannot really afford the suggested prices, which happens to be in most cases, I provide these products at or close to my cost. I am not profiting financially from this venture, but I believe that is what I am supposed to do. My payday comes from knowing that I am helping my clients to become more comfortable and secure in their home care. It would be self-serving and dishonest of me to attempt to say that I don't miss the comfortable lifestyle to which I had become accustomed. At times, I can chose to beat myself up over what I had lost, but I find for the most part that I have learned 'acceptance.' All I have to do is to meditate and go back to my first NDE experience when I was shown that 'all things that were important to me were going to be taken away.' I remember the sense of peace, calmness, and serenity that had come over me at that point, because I realized that all the material things that are important to us in this realm are meaningless and non-existent on the Other Side. Whatever we claim to own or possess in this life is really only borrowed and temporary. Although I'm not being rewarded financially like I was with my successful nightclub and real estate businesses, I'm being rewarded in more meaningful ways; like when readers tell me my book changed their lives or helped a relative die peacefully or returned them to their faith in God or helped them cope with a loss. Those times are my payday."

Nadia McCaffrey, hospice care, executive director/founder of "Angelstaff" (a volunteer organization), and "Changing the Face of Death" (has been given land to build a volunteer-run, hospice-type center near Mt. Shasta in California); her near-death experience is in [Children of the New Millennium](#). "I have enough money to survive. Sometimes things are pretty tight, but it's always there when needed. So far, the money hasn't come through to build the center, but I know it will. I have the land. The money will follow. Here is what I have learned in handling money issues: I stay silent, don't panic, wait, the way always comes as well as the guidance that is the most helpful. I keep trust alive and I talk with God. Then, I release the situation completely, knowing, absolutely knowing that God will take care of my needs. I have been handling my finances this way for many years and it has always worked for me. What I am doing is what I should be doing. I trust God. The rest I let go of."

Some near-death experiencers, like Rev. Carol Parrish-Harra of Tahlequah, Oklahoma, have been very successful in solving the money puzzle as they fulfill what they believe is their life's mission. As founder of Light of Christ Community Church, Sparrow Hawk Village, and the accredited, degree-granting Sancta Sophia Seminary, she has achieved international recognition for reviving the ancient "Mystery Schools" (mystical teachings) while staying true to the Christian tradition. She readily affirms that God comes first; "elbow grease" and long hours a close second.

And there are other success stories - actually more than you might think. Each one, though, covers times of great inner turmoil when doubt, fear, and anger threatened to overwhelm the experiencer and derail what he/she felt led to accomplish. We are still human after all, have needs, and get discouraged.

Near-death states do not "save" us from ourselves nor do they shield us from the world we live in. They give us a boost, expand, inspire, and transform us, yet seldom are shortcuts found as to how we might apply our passion and direct the guidance we receive and the knowledge we suddenly "know."

It is frustrating to be in a position like Louis when you believe you were given information that will help people – in his case, AIDS patients – and you are not taken seriously or obstacles block you from contacting those who could act. Whether or not he has something to offer that is truly usable, the urge to reach out and make a difference keeps right on pushing. That's why Linda Redford is back at it, trying to find a way to interest educators in her material. That's why Georgia Rodonia is determined to create an online university of stature, while searching for investor sources. That's why Nadia McCaffrey and Ned Dougherty are giving more talks than ever as they set up networks of people who want to get involved. And that's why I keep doing what I do.

As a result of trial and error, Dougherty has learned a few things he'd like to pass on: "Don't give up your day job – especially if you have recently returned from your experience. For most of us, it takes years of physical, mental, and emotional recovery from a profound NDE to integrate the experience into our earthly lives. Those of us who have returned with a sense of mission have to realize that it may take a long, long time for that mission to become reality. In the meantime, we have to earn an income, pay our bills, file income tax returns, do the laundry, mow the lawn, etc., etc. However, watch for the 'quickenings' – that future point in your life when you know 'It is time!' to begin your mission. The most difficult part of this process of growing into our mission is keeping one foot firmly grounded on terra firma while trying to soar to the Other Side."

VITAL SIGNS COLUMN, No. 22
The Experience / The Experiencer
"IANDS in Scandinavia"

A Surprise:

There now exists the beginnings of an **ESP Comic Book**. Yes, I'm serious, and the creation is well worth viewing if you have access to a computer and the Internet. There is no charge for this. Consisting of 60 frames at present (which amounts to one chapter), it is slated to run a full 15 chapters before completion. The brainchild of Henry Reed, Ph.D., the author of *The Intuitive Heart* and a leader in the field of dream interpretation and psychic/intuitive development, the comic book is actually a joint project with a Japanese illustrator. Wonderful wisdom, especially appropriate for near-death experiencers of any age and those like them, access <http://www.creativespirit.net/manga/e/0.htm>. There is more about Reed in the [Marketplace section](#) of my website. IANDS in Scandinavia:

Thanks to the incredible generosity and vision of Aud Marit Esbensen and her husband Carl, I was able to spend sixteen days last September in Norway. At the time it looked like another trip would follow in 2003, that would take in Sweden and Finland as well. Whether or not that second trip actually occurs this year or next, let me tell you about the first one.

I went as a researcher of near-death states, to represent my work, the field of near-death studies, and the organization of IANDS. But I also went as one who was raised by a Norwegian couple with roots from the Sognefjord. It had been my vow since a child to visit the Sognefjord, I thought to honor the Sogn family, but I discovered much to my amazement that I was there for my heart, too.

Aud Marit and her friend, Anne-Maija Jaaskelainen (a Finn), arranged for me to speak at several large bookstores in Oslo. Both events were combined with book signings and were well attended. At neither place did I need an interpreter to be

understood. English is practically a second language to Norwegians – many even understand American slang.

I checked before I left, and found no Friends of IANDS groups operating in Norway, so I was determined to plant enough "seeds" that at least one would grow. Guess I didn't do enough checking. What I discovered is that there once had been a very active and thriving IANDS community with their own newsletter and regular meetings. The membership was in fact dedicated enough that they sponsored two large conferences on the subject of near-death experiences and had Kenneth Ring, Ph.D. as a keynoter for each. To find out why no one was backing such activity at present, I spoke with several former members who attended one of my talks.

Liv S. M. Evensen had once been the President of IANDS—Norway. She said her life had taken many turns since those heydays of activity and she was now dedicated to obtaining the training and degree necessary to be a part of or to launch new and more effective ways of educating children and teens. She was still interested in restarting what had existed before, but said the time factor of making certain she could first accomplish her education goals was primary. Jon Mannsaker had been conference director, a slot similar to what Debbie James now does for IANDS headquarters. He was proud of what they had accomplished in the past and of being able to bring Ken to Oslo. Yet he was quite clear about not wanting to do anything like that again or of being active in an IANDS group. "I've moved past that," he confided. "Investigations into the paranormal fascinate me, things like the electronic voice phenomenon and out-of-body experiences." He explained that, although he had gained a great deal of satisfaction from involvement with IANDS and the topic of near-death states, he was now drawn to those "otherworldly" areas where he could personally participate and not feel like an outsider looking in.

At the other bookstore, however, the people were more excited. They seemed to hang on my every word, and there was an enthusiastic response to the idea of an IANDS group forming in Oslo to explore the topic further. This enthusiasm may fade, however, without leadership and follow-up.

A fortunate contact led us to Erna Beck in Bergen. Because of her, I stopped in Bergen after cruising the Sognefjord. Everywhere I went, Anne-Maija was by my side to make certain I didn't get lost or get myself into trouble. She became my "right arm" and good buddy. Not as conversant in English, we still had no difficulty understanding each other. Aud Marit and Carl were quite busy, he with their business and she with requirements for the Ph.D. she was working on. This meant they could not always be with me. Anne-Maija was.

There really wasn't enough advance time for Erna to set up a talk for me in Bergen, but she tried anyway. What resulted was an all-day workshop in the upstairs rooms of a practicing shaman who taught his own brand of classes. He was truly a character, a delightful one. By the way, Bergen is the sister-city of Seattle and its climate matches that of Seattle (Hear that you Seattle IANDS folks?).

Erna has since turned out to be an invaluable contact with all kinds of ideas and the willingness to follow through on them. She also knows a lot of people, including Grethe and Rune Amundsen. My fellow researchers will perk up with mention of Rune, for he wrote a book about the findings he made while researching near-death cases in Norway and has continued with his research, delving more deeply into healings possible through past-life regressions. He delved so deep and was so successful with his counseling practice because of this, that he aroused the ire of the psychological establishment. It only took a few complaints against him (not well founded), for established forces to pounce. He was threatened with losing his license. Thanks to Erna, I was able to meet with Rune and his wife Grethe while in Bergen and share a cozy lunch while discussing his situation. Currently, actions taken against him have yet to be completed.

Attending with Rune & Company was Ellinor Helen Markaskard, a name you may want to remember. A book about her near-death experience is soon to be published, and when it is, it will be well worth reading. Her episode occurred in 1979. She was poisoned during surgery by a drunken doctor (in the state he was

in, he had administered lethal amounts of a drug that should not have been harmful). The surgery itself was simple enough; Ellinor just wanted her tubes tied to ensure no more pregnancies. What began as a simple procedure became a nightmare that took her years to recover from, along with having to deal with a transcendent near-death experience that engendered the full spectrum of physiological and psychological aftereffects. As is true in so many cases, the phenomenon of near-death proved to be a greater challenge than the physical trauma of what she endured from the botched surgery. She regularly to this day visits with the "bright ones" she met in death. She often shares the stage with Rune when he lectures at schools and before large professional groups.

A second round of activity in Oslo centered around an intensive, weekend workshop that I gave on the "Evolutionary Aspects of Near-Death and Other Transformative States of Consciousness." Aud Marit, assisted by Anne-Maija, hosted the affair in her lovely home. Attendees were very responsive and through them connections were made to people in Sweden, and especially to Lisa Meyler, who operates a website on near-death material at <http://clix.to/realitycenter>. While you're surfing, check out this larger website that includes all of Europe <http://users.pandora.be/limen/>. (This larger one carries news from IANDS in Belgium, Hungary, Ireland, Netherlands, Slovenia, France, Germany, Italy, Poland, San Marino, Sweden, Switzerland, and United Kingdom. I do not know all of the people involved with this but I salute their efforts nonetheless for a job well done!)

It is my hope that interest in establishing an IANDS—Scandinavia will be re-kindled and that groups in that part of our world will once again thrive. Although previous memberships have dwindled, there is still a bedrock of interest that could be revived.

One thing my travels abroad have shown me: the importance of asking open-ended questions and then listening, studying, watching, waiting. That behavior mode stead me very well during 25 years of fieldwork researching near-death states in the U.S.A., but it is absolutely crucial in countries outside our borders. We cannot

go into another country with the arrogance of thinking what we have learned here will necessarily apply there. The phenomenon is the phenomenon: its pattern holds true anywhere with any population group; but how near-death states are interpreted and what they mean to any given individual does not.

While behaving in this manner during my trip, I became keenly aware of how still, to this very day, there survives a deeply emotional prejudice against anyone who was a Nazi sympathizer during World War II, more specifically against Norwegian women who became pregnant via German soldiers, and, to a degree I found difficult to bear, against the children born of those unions. It's been nearly sixty years and these children (some now senior citizens) struggle yet with a silent disgust that they were ever allowed to exist.

On the trip to Vik and Balestrand, on the Sogneford, we drove past a large building, high up, halfway to the top of mountains near Flam, Norway. I was told this was once a "baby factory" (now a hotel). It housed many of the impregnated women who were "patriotically" helping Hitler create "the master race." After the war ended, it was abandoned, leaving the helpless babes and little ones to fend for themselves. The first physician to go there to check on the children was greeted with a sight so gruesome it is beyond description. What children could be saved were sent to Sweden and other countries, where they could grow up without the stain of their birth.

Trauma like this can either overshadow the storyline of a near-death experience or at least explain how the experiencer might interpret the various images and feelings they undergo during an episode. As researchers, we must be open to this and humbled by it, lest in our hurry to compare one country with another to see how the pattern holds, we ignore the very crux of the phenomenon itself ... its power to illuminate and heal the human experience while unveiling the reality of spirit.

VITAL SIGNS COLUMN, No. 23
The Experience / The Experiencer
"The Experiencer's Family"

Central to my thoughts are child experiencers of near-death states and the unique challenges they face in recognizing and coming to terms with their episode. Yet, we cannot really consider the child without also giving equal consideration to his or her family. What of them? If the family is reasonably open, what happened to their daughter or son can change them as well as their youngster. The incident can become *a shared event* everyone can benefit from.

Friction can and does arise for most though, at least to some degree, and in unexpected ways: like between the parents, from siblings and other relatives, at the child's school with teachers and fellow students, at Sunday School and in church. The case I present in this column focuses on the family of a child experiencer. The account is written by the father and covers the family dynamics of coming to grips with the horror of what happened to Denise (age 10 at the time of her episode), the miracle of her survival, and the totally overwhelming and surprising aftereffects that just go on and on and on. Doug Mendenhall is the father; his report is as submitted.

"In the summer of 1999 our little ten-year-old daughter, Denise, was literally counting the weeks, days, hours, minutes and seconds until school started. Denise was always a happy, sweet little girl.

"Soon after school started her personality changed. She was unhappy all the time, claiming how much she hated school, her friends, everything. Then she started going to the bathroom all the time and drinking tons of water. She would get sick and just not feel well. We asked several medical people that lived in the neighborhood about the symptoms she was displaying, and were told it was probably just a virus. One even was a diabetic nurse and another one was a medical doctor! It was like they were shielded from seeing that it was diabetes. Her

personality change was so dramatic, that we talked about getting her to see some mental health professionals.

"It progressed to the point where she felt real sick on the Friday, November 5th. She played in the morning with her mother, ate lunch, and asked if she could lie down for a nap. My wife went in to check on her an hour or so later and she was asleep. Then after another hour she checked on Denise again and found she hadn't moved and was breathing really strangely. She called me in and we found that her eyes had rolled back in their sockets and she was unresponsive.

"I called a doctor friend and he said to get her to the hospital immediately, also he would call ahead and have them ready for her. So we took off to the hospital. I literally drove over one hundred miles per hour and hit every light green.

"At the hospital they descended on her. As they pulled her clothes off, I was shocked at what a skinny little girl she was. She had always been skinny, but now she looked like a little child from a third world country, skin and bones. I stared in disbelief.

"They put on IV in her immediately and started checking. They told us it looked like she was in a coma and wanted to do many more tests. We sat and waited as they wheeled her off to do a CAT scan.

"Two hours later a neurologist took us to a room and told Dianne and me that Denise was in a coma, from the diabetes she has. But the most devastating thing was that she had suffered a stroke. It was at the base of the left side of her brain, the main artery. He then said that the left side of her brain, more than two-thirds of it was destroyed by the stroke. The blood vessels and capillaries had fragmented like tissue paper and the blood had flowed freely. Normally they would put in a shunt and drain off the blood, but she was so far gone, they saw no reason to do so. All of her organs were shutting down. She would not live past the next twenty-

four hours we were told. If by some miracle she did live, she would be a vegetable the rest of her life, never to walk or talk again.

"They had put a tube down her throat to breathe for her if she quit breathing. Later we would learn that they had wanted to harvest her organs for donation, but had never brought out the forms. A 'bolt' was put into her brain to monitor the pressure, as the liquids they had to give her would make the brain swell, cutting off the circulation at the base and that also would kill her. It seems like there was no way she could live.

"She stayed in the coma for three days and never quit breathing. After two days they took the tube out of her throat. At the end of the third she woke up, looked at Dianne and me and said she was hungry. The nurse looked up, startled, asking if she had just talked. I said she had and they descended on her as she went back to sleep.

"The next day she woke up and stayed awake. They moved her from ICU to the third floor where we could learn to give her insulin shots. I remember that she really was a vegetable when she woke up. She was taught to do everything all over again, from talking, reading, writing, and even going to the bathroom. Within three days she had progressed to the point where she walked one thousand feet that day. She truly was a miracle! The doctors really didn't know what to make of her. They would come in her room, look at her, shake their head, and walk out. We left the hospital on November 30, 1999, twenty-five days after going in.

"We figured that life would go on as normal except that we did have a miracle child with us. Though we now had to give her two injections of insulin each day for her diabetes.

"One day I was trying to give her a shot of insulin and she kept fighting me. She wouldn't let me give her the shot. After forty-five minutes I was upset with her, and let her know it. She yelled, pointing her finger above my head, that I 'was mad and

I was red.' I asked what in the world she was talking about. 'You're mad, you're red," she said again. I had read enough that I knew about the energy field around our body, called the aura.

"You can see auras?' I asked.

"What's that?' she responded.

"I told her it was the energy around our body. She said that she could see them, since she woke up from her coma. This was the start of our family entering a world we did not know existed.

"Over the next month, Denise displayed many gifts or abilities and told us many things. She not only could see the aura of a person, she knew what the color meant. At this point she only saw the first level of the aura. She is able to see 'spirits' as we call them, or people that have passed on (died). She sees Christ and her Heavenly Father. She can tell what kind of person you are; she sees into your heart.

"The most fascinating thing she told us was that while she was in the coma for three days, she had spent that time with Jesus. She told me about His birth, life, His suffering in the garden, the cross. It was in detail, all the colors, smells, and sounds. She told me things that I knew a little ten-year-old could not know.

"All of this changed our lives significantly. My wife and I have six living children, five were at home during this time. The events polarized our family somewhat. I knew in my heart that Denise was telling me the truth of what she had experienced. Yet it was hard for others to understand and accept. We learned many 'lessons' from our little ten-year-old daughter.

"She taught us not to judge; anyone or anything. We learned of God's unconditional love for all of us. One of the biggest lessons was to be grateful for all things.

Gratitude is a huge lesson we were to learn over and over. We learned that after a person dies, he/she can move on to God, or some become 'earthbound.' Such was the individual (spirit) that was in our home at the time. She even encountered some who would not believe they were dead! We learned that evil is real. There are dark spirits who do work for Satan or the Devil. She sees them also.

"We learned through our experiences with her that we all have a guardian spirit(s) or angel(s). We had several experiences where our lives were saved by them, and she saw what they did to save us. She thought it was 'cool.'

"I guess the main spiritual impact on our lives was the fact that she spent three days with Jesus and still sees Him and interacts with Him on a daily basis. This has had the biggest impact on our family. One person asked Denise who her best friend is and she said, 'Jesus.' We ended up going out and talking to people one on one for the next year. All during that year she kept telling me, 'Dad, you are suppose to write a book about all of this.' I told her that I didn't write books and that I didn't want anyone to know about all of this. I felt that it was just too weird for most people to accept, and didn't want to invite persecution into our lives.

"Finally at the end of the year 2000, I agreed to do a book about it. We had a friend help us write it. It was published some seven months later. We then went around and did book 'reviews' where we gave them away. The book is called, *My Peace I Give Unto You*, and we gave away over seven thousand copies over the next eighteen months. From the emails we get, it has changed many lives and helped many people find their Savior, Jesus Christ.

"In May of 2002, we were prompted to write a second book. You see our experiences with Denise never quit. We are continually being taught things and are having experiences. So we published the second book in November of 2002. We have since printed over 1,000 of it. It is called *Possibilities ... Lessons from the Spirit*. Since we have been asked to travel all over the country telling our story, we now sell both books. That defrays our expenses somewhat, since we do not charge

when we do book reviews. The books are available on a web site at: www.publishinghope.com. At one time we had them available in some bookstores, but now we sell them at book reviews or ship them from our home or people can order from the web site.

"Doing the book reviews has changed our lives. We have met many people with similar gifts as Denise. We have met many children and adults who see the spirits of dead people. There are dozens we've met who see auras. Others 'fly' at night when they sleep as Denise does. These people have told us our books have helped them to realize that they are not freaks, that there are many others out there similar to them, with gifts. There are others who can see into you and determine where an illness is. They have come to understand that these gifts come from a loving God and are to be used for His work. Whether they are to be used or not is the will of God, and not that of Denise or those with similar gifts.

"Today, our family has learned to live with a daughter/sister that lives in both worlds; the one the rest of us see and the other one that few others see. She enjoys meeting people that have lived before. When she sleeps she can go back in the past and see events. She has witnessed all of the Bible. She fell in love with the movie, 'Titanic,' when it aired on television and went back to see what it was really like. At first, being able to do this made it difficult for her to attend our church. When people put their own interpretation on biblical events she would turn to me and say, 'Dad, that's not how it really happened.' Now she goes to enjoy the people and be around kids her own age.

"She prefers to be a normal kid, yet knows that she is not. She likes to be around friends that know about her, yet they treat her as any other friend. Being a fourteen-year-old, she loves to talk about the cutest boys, etc. Individuals that look at her as 'special' or gifted, she doesn't like to be around. Or those who want to continually ask her questions.

"We are now used to having others that have passed over, from the other side of the veil, 'hanging' around. There are some special friends she has made on that side that hang around a lot. Others come when thought of. Some come because they know she can see them. Most of the time they are only known to her when they are here. At other times, the rest of us have 'experienced' them at our home. After three plus years of having her live in both worlds, it has become old hat for our family. There are many occasions when we do have fun with it and interact with those who are passed on, through her. I guess to some people that may seem a bit odd or weird, yet to us now it is quite normal.

"As for the future, we will continue to do book review meetings when we are invited and share our story with those that want to hear about it."

The Mendenhall case is important because it involves the entire family. We need more of these, parents and siblings willing to speak up – not only in support of the child experiencer - but in honest dialogue about what each one of them went through grappling with "the impossible reality" of the near-death phenomenon.

VITAL SIGNS COLUMN, No. 24
The Experience / The **Experiencer**
"Farewell"

The history of IANDS is my history. The two of us grew up together. There's a group of us who can say that, folks who were present at or near the beginnings of things.

It was early in 1981 that Kenneth Ring telephoned to ask if he and his companion could spend the night. He had just purchased [I Died Three Times in 1977](#) and he wanted to meet me and ask some questions. My husband Terry and I were living in Harrisonburg, Virginia, at the time. All we could offer was an extra mattress with great covers and good pillows. He accepted. Once he arrived, we talked for hours. I don't know who was more surprised: me at discovering that others besides myself were researching the near-death experience, or Ken in finding out how much I had done independently and how extensive were my findings.

The next morning he told me about IANDS, how it was envisioned to operate, and that it would publish a scholarly journal and a general-interest newsletter/magazine – the latter to be called [Vital Signs](#). The maiden issue was slated for June of 1981, and he wanted me to write a monthly column for it – as an advocate for near-death experiencers, and as a way to begin talking about the research I had conducted and was still doing. I said yes.

When I traveled to Storrs, Connecticut the first time (where Ken was still teaching at the University), and stayed at the "Near-Death Hotel," I came to realize that my "advocacy" would never be just for experiencers but would also involve an "invisible" partnership to the Board of [IANDS](#) itself - doing whatever I could to help them fulfill their mission. No one appointed me to such a "post;" I simply followed "guidance" and remained true to the task. Eventually I did serve two "official" terms on the Board, yet that brief span does not describe either my devotion, what I did, or how I operated. Fortunately for IANDS, a number of people were attracted to the

organization during the early years and, in ways unique to each, kept things going, even when it seemed as if IANDS would surely fold.

I wrote a total of 17 columns initially, of which 16 were published. Whatever happened to the last one, no one knows, nor does a copy of it survive. I returned to the position of columnist in late 1997. This is my 24th and last issue. All 40 have now been compiled into one ebook, entitled [A Book of Columns](#) – copyrighted in such a manner that the ownership and all monies from its sales belong to IANDS. Consider the book a historical piece and, hopefully, a fundraiser. Kevin Williams made this possible, and I want to publicly acknowledge this and compliment him on the incredible job he did pulling the book together and in a professional manner.

By the way, you will want to check both our websites: Kevin's at www.near-death.com and mine at www.cinemind.com/atwater. We have created new sections and expanded offerings concerning the near-death phenomenon and subjects related to it. (Don't forget, of course, to scroll through the fantastic IANDS website at www.iands.org while you're at it.)

Am I retiring? Not really. But it is time for me to step aside.

I'll present my last research paper at the 2004 Chicago Conference and in the next year or so hence finish my [Brain Shift/Spirit Shift Theoretical Model](#) which explores the link between near-death episodes and the entire genre of transformational experiences. Other books of mine are: [The New Children and Near-Death Experiences](#) (Inner Traditions), [Goddess Runes](#) (A. Merklinger Publishing), and [We Live Forever: The Real Truth about Death](#) (A.R.E. Press). [Three new research papers are on my website](#) and I am currently working on another book - about the new children and their link to evolution and prophecy. Whenever possible I also serve as a [Prayer Chaplain](#) (see my website).

My plate is full and I am grateful. High-energy continues to flood my being, unending since my three death/near-death events in 1977. That energy, although

softer now than it used to be, still charges forth to aid others or pass on helpful information or just revel in the glory of each day. In the spirit of "that which propels me," I want to end my time as a columnist by sharing a few cautions and comments.

THE CODEX:

Every near-death experiencer or anyone else more physically sensitive (no matter where in the world you live) needs to know about "The Codex."

The Codex is a name given to a group of regulations, the result of so-called studies conducted through the United Nations, that seek to restrict and control the global sales of vitamins, minerals, herbs, and other forms of alternative medication, personal health-care, and food supplementation. The goal is to "harmonize" such products across the spectrum, to remove guesswork in their use, and insure that medical physicians will have the last word in who can benefit from what. Codex regulations are stringent and establish "dosages" that are greatly reduced from recommendations made from established and credible sources in the United States. Even herbs like garlic are banned. The upshot of governments voting the Codex into law in their respective countries, will be to effectively end the freedom of the individual to pick and choose desired methods of health-care, or to participate in wellness and illness prevention programs. The "intelligence" behind the nutritional codes exacted by the Codex are highly political, and link more directly to physicians and drug companies than to the latest findings in nutritional research and what is now termed "complementary medicine."

The Codex is now law in Norway and Germany. Other countries are expected to follow suit – including Canada and the United States. Reference: United Nations World Health Organization (WHO), and the Codex Alimentarius (Nutrition Code) Commission. Letters addressed to them in care of the United Nations will reach the proper department, but your best bet is [to contact your country's United Nations Representative](#) and demand a reconsideration of the Codex as currently formulated.

Most near-death experiencers and those like them are *unable* to tolerate the pharmaceuticals they once used or were given, and turn instead toward more natural or noninvasive approaches to health needs. Success stories are striking (refer to the case of Cheryl Pottberg in Chapter Five of both [Children of the New Millennium](#) (Three Rivers Press, 1999) and [The New Children and Near-Death Experiences](#) (Inner Traditions, Dec. 2003). This issue is an important one for the near-death community and should be taken seriously.

KEEP TO YOURSELF VS. EXPOSURE TO OTHERS:

There will always be "newcomers" who have experienced a near-death state and don't know where to turn for understanding and support. [IANDS](#) is unique in its ability to make a tremendous difference for these people, yet how many will ever hear about IANDS? And even if so fortunate, how many successfully handle the challenge of "Do I keep this to myself?" or "Do I tell others?" The former saves you from embarrassment, rejection, or pain. The latter enables you to help others, but at what price (loss of privacy, unhealthy behaviors, and the trap of an overexposed ego).

Those experiencers who, to my way of thinking, are the most successful with integrating their episode into a more meaningful life, were those who studied, read, took classes, and, in general, educated themselves about the phenomenon *AND* related subjects. In [Beyond the Light](#), I did a comparison between two men who had had a transcendent near-death experience. One stuck to "guidance," never questioned anything, and refused to listen to another's viewpoint. At first, this was okay but eventually his ego took over and his "guidance" devolved into little more than incoherent ramblings. The last I heard he was living in his car, lost to the world. The other man took advantage of every opportunity to learn more, take classes, study extensively, volunteer at hospitals and hospice, check out spiritual precedents, and talk with people. He became a gifted teacher and speaker who practiced what he "preached."

Those who keep things "pure" often miss the opportunity to recognize and understand what "pure" is. I am not advocating running around becoming a workshop junkie; rather, I am suggesting that experiencers deepen and refine what they learned from their episode – enlarge even further their sense of truth.

HAPPENINGS IN HUNGARY:

Dr. Andreas Liptay-Wagner and the Budapest Foundation continue to be exceptionally active.

He presented his paper, "Differential Diagnosis of the Near-Death Experience," at an international conference addressing brain/mind issues, and in a university setting. In Budapest, training has resumed for nurses and medical staff about the near-death phenomenon, how to recognize and handle cases. Planning stages are currently underway for a one-hour television documentary in 2004, on one of the largest TV stations in Europe. Our very best to the dedicated people of Hungary and to Dr. Liptay-Wagner,

REALITY CHECKS:

Recently, I checked www.amazon.com to see how my books were doing (I seldom do this). Much to my surprise, [Beyond the Light](#) had sunk from 4 stars to barely 2 and was being tossed off as irrelevant, poorly written and poorly researched. One woman said I hated Christians. As I read through these reviews, I understood why sales were almost non-existent. Here is a major, in-depth, pioneering study of adult near-death experiencers virtually being trashed. I sighed a deep sigh.

Outside the near-death community my work is "old-hat," hardly worth considering. No, I'm not feeling sorry for myself. I'm facing facts. And the fact is it's time for me to change.

For starters, I fell at an airport trying to make my connection and broke my left wrist. Required surgery. I take this to mean there's no going back. I can no longer be who I am. I must be "more." Sound familiar? Isn't that what dying does to us, experiencing near-death, being shoved into "the more"? Witnesses who saw the fall said it looked as if some invisible force slammed me into the ground, face first. Does that make me some kind of victim, maybe possessed? No, on both counts.

I had several moments of choice before the accident. At each, I chose the more difficult passage, rather than opting for the easy way. My doctor is Michael Devine. "Michael" means "message" or "messenger." Yup, a divine message has been delivered. It truly is time for me to change.

Thank you for reading my columns and thank you to IANDS for being the wonderful organization it is.

ABOUT THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF NEAR-DEATH STUDIES, INC. (IANDS)



The pioneering work of psychiatrists Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, Raymond Moody, Jr. and George Ritchie brought near-death experiences to public attention in the 1970's. During the years that followed, research studies by Kenneth Ring, PhD, Michael Sabom, MD, Bruce Greyson, MD, and others extended the early findings and stimulated additional interest in the field.

To meet the needs of early researchers and experiencers, [IANDS](#) was founded in 1978 and incorporated in Connecticut in 1981. It was the first organization in the world devoted to the study of near-death and similar experiences and their relationship to human consciousness. Today its varied membership represents every continent but the Antarctic.

IANDS holds no "party line" on interpreting the experience and welcomes any commentary that is based on empirical observation or direct experience. Its position is that thoughtful study and discussion are central to discovering more about the relationship of consciousness to society, life and meaning.

IANDS has evolved from an organization serving mainly researchers to a much more inclusive one. Today IANDS serves five distinct classes of people:

Experiencers -- those people who have had a near-death experience.

IANDS provides publications and contacts with other such people, along with local support/discussion groups.

People close to experiencers -- Many of our services for experiencers are also applicable to people who know them well. We also have specialized materials for those close to experiencers.

Researchers -- those people who are interested in doing research on near-death experiences.

Health Care Professionals -- those people who care for experiencers
Interested other people, including the terminally ill.

* [IANDS website](#) * [IANDS Missions and Goals](#) * [Joining IANDS](#)

ABOUT P. M. H. ATWATER, L.H.D.



[P. M. H. Atwater](#) is one of the original researchers in the field of near-death studies, having begun her work in 1978.

Today her contribution to the field is considered one of the best, her first two books, [Coming Back to Life](#) and [Beyond the Light](#), are deemed "the bibles" of the near-death experience by thousands of experiencers. Using police investigative techniques as her protocol, she has specialized in original fieldwork that also included sessions with significant others. Her findings are contained in six books.

Besides the two already mentioned, the rest are [Future Memory](#), [Children of the New Millennium](#), [The Complete Idiot's Guide to Near-Death Experiences](#) (with David Morgan), and [The New Children and Near-Death Experiences](#) (an expansion of the original Children's book from Inner Traditions). Some of her findings have now been clinically verified her work is referenced in The Lancet medical journal, December 15, 2001 ([the Dutch study by Pim van Lommel, M.D.](#)).

She created the unique audiocassette tape, [As You Die](#), in an effort to help alleviate the fear of death for those who are about to die, and as an aid in helping them go through physical death as it occurs and the soul's separation. The tape was in response to a young man dying of AIDS who said to her: "I've read all the books on death and dying. I've attended all the seminars. No one is telling me what I want to hear. I want to know what it feels like to die. I want to know what you know." Since then, many have benefited from this unusual tape and the peace it brings to them. Using the tape as a springboard, Atwater went on to write the book [We Live Forever: The Real Truth about Death](#).

To keep track of her many projects, articles, and books, and to avail yourself of [The Marketplace](#) (a place where experiencers and those like them can promote their products and services - run as a public service at no cost to the participants involved), explore her website at: www.cinemind.com/atwater.

BOOKS ON NDES BY P.M.H. ATWATER, L.H.D.

[Coming Back to Life](#)

[Beyond the Light](#)

[Future Memory](#)

[Children of the New Millennium](#)

[The Complete Idiot's Guide to Near-Death Experiences](#)

[The New Children and Near-Death Experiences](#)

[We Live Forever: The Real Truth about Death](#)

BOOKS ON RUNES BY P.M.H. ATWATER, L.H.D.

[The Magical Language of Runes](#)

[Goddess Runes](#)

E-BOOKS BY P.M.H. ATWATER, L.H.D.

[Adults' Near-Death States: A Transformation of Consciousness](#)

[Children's Near-Death States: New Research, A New Model](#)

[Subjective Light: Different Types and A New View](#)

[The Challenge of September 11](#)

VIDEO BY P.M.H. ATWATER, L.H.D.

[Beyond the Light](#)

BOOKS PUBLISHED BY P.M.H. ATWATER, L.H.D.

[I Died Three Times in 1977](#) (Dr. Atwater's NDEs)

[The Frost Diamond](#) (childhood story and coloring book)

[Life Sounds](#) (poetry)

[Brain Shift/Spirit Shift: A Theoretical Model Using Research on Near-Death States to Explore the Transformation of Consciousness \(Phase II\)](#)

[A Book of Columns: Another Perspective on the Near-Death Phenomenon](#)

AUDIO TAPES BY P.M.H. ATWATER, L.H.D.

[As You Die](#)

[Goddess Runes](#)