

Journal
of
Near-Death Studies

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Journal of Near-Death Studies

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

The **INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR NEAR-DEATH STUDIES (IANDS)** is a worldwide organization of scientists, scholars, healthcare providers, near-death experiencers, and the general public, dedicated to the exploration of near-death experiences (NDEs) and their implications. Incorporated as a nonprofit educational and research organization in 1981, IANDS' objectives are to encourage and support research into NDEs and related phenomena; to disseminate knowledge concerning NDEs and their implications; to further the utilization of near-death research by healthcare and counseling professionals; to form local chapters of near-death experiencers and interested others; to sponsor symposia and conferences on NDEs and related phenomena; and to maintain a library and archives of near-death-related material. Friends of IANDS chapters are affiliated support groups in many cities for NDErs and their families and for healthcare and counseling professionals to network locally. Information about membership in IANDS can be obtained by contacting IANDS, P.O. Box 502, East Windsor Hill, CT 06028-0502, USA; telephone: (860) 882-1211; fax: (860) 882-1212; e-mail: office@iands.org; Internet website: www.iands.org.

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Editor's Foreword

The lead article in this issue of the Journal, by grief counselor Louis LaGrand, is an overview of extraordinary experiences of the bereaved in which they believe they have received spontaneous communications from deceased loved ones or from a divine being. Unlike pathological hallucinations, these subjective experiences are reliably comforting to the bereaved. LaGrand describes the different types of contacts reported and their positive effects on the percipients' attitudes toward death and ability to cope with their losses.

We also include in this issue an article by counseling professor Janice Miner Holden and counselor Rozan Christian analyzing the scholarly periodical literature on near-death experiences (NDEs) and NDE-related topics through 2001. Holden and Christian, who created the interactive, searchable *NDE Bibliography* for the International Association for Near-Death Studies (IANDS) described in the advertisement at the end of this issue, used that research tool to profile the scholarly literature for the first quarter century of the field of near-death studies. The present interesting trends in publication dates, venues, authors, and range of topics, and highlight those topics that remain underaddressed in the literature.

This issue also contains three reviews of recent books. Psychologist Carlos Alvarado reviews philosopher Michael Grosso's *Experiencing the Next World Now*, which argues that cultivating creative, mystical, and visionary experiences can lead to transcendent consciousness prior to death. Next, counselor and educator Betty Maxwell reviews NDEr P. M. H. Atwater's *Beyond the Indigo Children*, a wide-ranging look at the highly intuitive and challenging children of this generation, placing them in the context of various cosmologies and traditions. We also include a review by Atwater of NDEr Nancy Clark's *Hear His Voice*, an autobiographical account of her NDE-like experience that did not occur during a close brush with death but nonetheless included a divine encounter that transformed her life, raising the question of the relationship of NDEs to other mystical experiences.

We end this issue with letters to the editor from psychologist and near-death research pioneer Kenneth Ring, psychologist Jack Selk,

and afterlife researcher Brian Miller, objecting to psychologist Ken Vincent's suggestion in the Winter 2004 issue of the Journal that IANDS and the Journal broaden their scope to include mystical religious experiences; and a response from Vincent.

Bruce Greyson, M.D.

The Nature and Therapeutic Implications of the Extraordinary Experiences of the Bereaved

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ABSTRACT: The extraordinary experiences (EEs) of the bereaved are prevalent phenomena in which claimants believe they have received a spontaneous contact from a deceased loved one or a divine being. These subjective experiences consistently bring healing and comfort to those who are mourning the death of a loved one. Yet EEs remain cloaked in secrecy and receive relatively little publicity due to the controversial nature of the experience. Mourners already dealing with the burdens of grief are reluctant to trumpet their experience and risk being stigmatized, sometimes by the caregivers who should be utilizing the opportunity to help them adapt to their loss. This article highlights the types of contacts reported, messages claimants believe are received, changes in death perceptions, and the therapeutic potential of the experience for coping with the death of a loved one. Much of the material is based on a workshop given by the author throughout the United States.

KEY WORDS: extraordinary experiences; after-death contacts.

Mystical and extraordinary personal experiences have been occurring since the dawn of human history (Cardena, Lynn, and Krippner; 2000; Devers, 1997; Romanoff and Terenzio, 1998; Treece, 1995). However, there is also a parallel history of ignoring, falsely labeling, or even denying their existence (Radin, 1997; Tart, 1997). Of all such unexplainable phenomena, arguably the least publicized although among the most influential in life, are the extraordinary experiences

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(EEs) of the bereaved. These events involve the belief by those mourning the death of a loved one that they have received a spontaneous sign or message from the deceased or a divine being.

The key word is spontaneous: the experience is not invoked or a product of psychic intervention. According to claimants, it appears to originate from an outside source and usually happens when the person is composed and not thinking of the beloved. However, many support persons and counselors suggest that mourners pray for a sign that their loved ones are safe in another existence (Duminiak, 2004). There is even a website for those seeking prayer assistance in this regard (www.geocities.com/adcfriends).

The dismissal of unexplainable experiences as symptoms of psychopathology appears to be especially prevalent when they occur to those who are mourning the death of a loved one or when loved ones who are dying report seeing people who have predeceased them. Not unlike the bereaved, the dying are grieving the loss of their worlds and their loved ones. Surprisingly, in some cases of death bed visions, the dying person who is never told of the death of a friend or relative, reports a visit from that deceased individual (Grosso, 2004).

The frequent pronouncement to explain away such events is that the claimant is in a disorganized and confused state awash in emotion, and is therefore subject to hallucinations, illusions, or other forms of confused thinking (Berger, 1995; Parkes, 1987; Raphael, 1983; Rees, 1971; Staudacher, 1987; Woods, 1998). Conversely, others suggest that EEs consistently result in expanded awareness, often a shift in values and beliefs, as well as a reduction in anxiety associated with grief (Drewry, 2002; LaGrand, 1997b, 2001; Targ, 2001; White, 1997; Woods, 1998).

Although mystical and psi-type events have conveniently been labeled as impossible in order to preserve the existing scientific paradigm, at root their etiology will always remain a mystery. No one on either side of the issue possesses incontrovertible proof of origin, although the plethora of well documented cases of contact give us pause and should not be ignored (Fontana, 2005; Grosso, 2004; Haraldsson, 1987; Stevenson, 1982). Yet mystery is an integral part of existence and positive mental health, and will continue to pose more questions than provide answers (Chesterton, 1908; Ensley, 1997; Raymo, 1987, 1998). The wisdom of the extraordinary calls claimants and their caregivers to greater consciousness of the role of mystery and its unifying properties in the world at large. Significantly, it often leads to action, and for those coping with the death of a loved one, to take the difficult road to restoration.

Transformation Through Extraordinary Experiences

Motivation to reinvest in life is often due to the belief that the deceased has reached out to give comfort. The dead are commonly viewed as consoling and providing solace to survivors and the dying (LaGrand, 2001; Treece, 1995; Woods, 1998). Here is an example from a man whose son was killed in an automobile accident just days after his graduation from the Ohio State Highway Patrol Academy:

The crying and pain that we went through I would not wish on anyone under any condition. The support of many helped, but ultimately we still had a tough road ahead. The crying and grief can come up suddenly by seeing a picture, hearing a song, or seeing a friend. The longing that one has is truly difficult, especially when one has such a close and loving family. I had always believed there was a hereafter and that something still existed after death. But without proof, who knows?

Well, let me tell you, proof was on its way! On the morning of February 4, 1998, forty-five days after Eric's death in a car accident, I awoke at 6:45 a.m. along with my wife Marilyn. She got up to prepare for work as she leaves earlier than I, so I got up and prepared my computer for the day's work. Then I sat down on the bed waiting for Marilyn to finish drying her hair in the bathroom. At 7:15 Marilyn turned off the hair dryer signaling she was finished. I got up off the bed – fully awake and up for one-half hour. My mind was clear. I was not crying and not under any stress. As I took my third step toward the bathroom, I felt a tremendous squeeze and hug on both sides of my body which stopped me in my tracks. Eric appeared right in front of my face, smiling, and the whole room was full of energy. It's like the molecules, atoms, and air are all moving at a tremendous speed. It was forceful, explosive, loving, highly energized – the most exhilarating experience that I have ever had!!

I hugged Eric. I was hugging an energy force not a real physical body. I kissed him on his right cheek and felt his beard/whiskers on my lips. He was moving so fast that I believe he had just passed through the bathroom and barely missed his mother. It was as though he was flying through the house. My mind was ecstatic, lucid, fully awake and aware of what was happening. I could see the tremendous love in the complete environment that Eric brought with him. I knew this was real, on purpose, planned by Eric as I could never have written or wished the events in this spontaneous experience. The force field, aura, and energy surrounding Eric was so strong and charged that it pushed me back onto the bed. It was not Eric's hands pushing me as I could not feel them on me. It was a moving energy of molecules that were traveling at an unbelievable rate of speed. As I had my arms around Eric, his image and I were falling toward the bed. He told me telepathically, "I love you Dad. I love you Mom." His lips did not move. As we fell, he rolled over the top of me and

I could see his whole body. He rolled right into the spot where we had placed his police uniform, leather coat, and hat in the middle of the bed. Marilyn and I placed his clothes there and slept with them for a week after his death because as a baby he and the dog would climb in bed with us. They would wrestle, Eric would grab the dog's hair, and be pulled off the bed. The clothes let us again relive his presence and we could cry and mourn over him together. If I were asked to write a request for an after-death visit I would never have written this—it was wonderful. Eric Zimmerman was in full and complete control for the ten plus seconds of his visit. He let me know positively that he was still alive in a fast moving energy force, in a different plane or dimension, which he was controlling with complete happiness and everlasting love. I saw a view of eternity and believe me it is a wonderful, loving, totally encompassing, joyful world.

I sell pharmaceuticals for a living. I could never reproduce the high, loving understanding, elated, explosive, forceful, molecular moving, ten plus seconds with any drug or medicine!!! Never, never, never. I have tried to relive that experience, but I cannot raise my mind to a fraction of the degree of clearness, love, excitement or energy level that I was given by Eric's visit. Thank you son for allowing your Dad the opportunity to know beyond a doubt that we exist beyond the physical body and that a better life is yet to come to all of us. (LaGrand, 1999, pp. 152–153)

Notice the conviction in the belief that his son lived on, in the love that inspired the visit, and the comfort received from the supposed contact. To the recipient, the experience is real (Barbato, Blunden, Reid, Irwin, and Rodriguez, 1999; LaGrand, 1997a; Targ, 2001; White, 1997). Such belief opens the way to using it in a variety of ways for an adaptive outcome.

I use the term *extraordinary experiences*, although they are quite ordinary, in order to separate them from paranormal phenomena of various kinds (such as mediumship, telepathy, precognition, and clairvoyance) that are commercialized on television and radio. EEs are specifically a life-changing part of the mourning process for many, and need to be honored and given their own specific identity.

It is estimated that 70 million people from all walks of life have experienced the extraordinary when mourning. Melvin Morse suggested that a majority of widows and parents who have lost children have visions of the departed within a year of the death (Morse and Perry, 1994). Andrew Greeley (1987) in a national opinion research poll found that 42 percent of the US population answered in the affirmative to the question: "Have you ever felt you have been in contact with someone who died?" Widows and widowers commonly report evidence that suggests their counterparts have survived (Gallup and Proctor,

1982). It is clear that a large percentage of the grieving population have the experience (Cardena, Lynn, and Krippner, 2000).

Not to be overlooked, children especially report contacts with deceased loved ones and divine beings that influence the way they perceive the world and make choices, and the experience leaves them with a deep reverence for life (Hart, 2003; Lawson, 2003). Here is a recent example from a 41-year-old woman I interviewed:

In November of 1966, I was nine years old, approaching my tenth birthday. I was the youngest of four children. We lived in Queens, New York. Since his early thirties, my father had been plagued with a "heart condition" and had had several very traumatic coronary events. When he died in 1966, he was forty-nine years old.

My Extraordinary Encounter begins with a premonition – one I believe was shared by my father and myself. On November 29, 1966, just four days after Thanksgiving, my mother woke me up for school as usual. In September, I had been "skipped" from the fourth to the fifth grade and I was very pleased with myself and very excited by the new challenging work. I had always loved school – loved to read and the sunny, bustling classroom was such a relief from the usual somber mood of my house. I might add that I was pretty much a docile child and had somewhere along the way taken up the role as peacemaker in the household. This is why it shocked even me when I refused to go to school that day. My mother scolded and argued but I wouldn't be budged. I didn't even have a reason; I just *knew* that I couldn't go to school that day. The feeling was overwhelming and I was willing to tempt my mother's anger to succumb to the feeling. Finally, my mother literally threw her hands up and left the house, late for work. Like any nine-year old, I proceeded to take full advantage of the situation and prepared to spend the day goofing off.

At some point, I did go downstairs; I think I was still in my pajamas. I remember glancing at my parents' bed and noticing that my father was still in bed. I think the notion had occurred to me that he ought to be up by now. As a child, however, you don't generally question what grownups do or don't do. So if it did occur to me that he was sleeping unusually late, I'm sure it would have been in a rather peripheral and matter-of-fact way.

Quietly at first and then quite distinctly, a sound started coming from my father's bed. A gurgling – long and drawn out. I remember being thunderstruck. The sound was so unreal – so unlike any sound I'd ever heard a person make before. Of course, I now know it was the "death rattle," but at the time I only knew it was something consequential – I honestly wasn't sure what. I felt torn – I felt that some action was required of me but I didn't know what. I felt helpless and scared. I continued to eat the sandwich I had made as though it would forever ground me to life as I had known it before. I froze. I ignored the sound as long as I could. Finally, it grew quiet. I don't know how long I sat there in silence; I think it was a long time.

Eventually, I somehow propelled myself out of the chair and tentatively walked over to my father.

In a moment that will always be frozen in time, I had what I have now come to understand as an after-death communication. Slowly and fearfully, I moved toward my father. He was on his back on the inside half of my parents' double bed. I remember the fingers of his right hand, so like my own, delicately curled up as if in sleep. I had to reach across the entire left side of the bed to touch him – but somehow despite my earlier fears, I was compelled to touch him. I remember reaching out with my right hand and touching his right arm just below the shoulder.

In that instant, two things happened. My hand reached out and touched his arm and my brain acknowledged that he was dead. The bare flesh of his upper arm was cold. Even at nine, I registered this as death. This was colder than a person should ever be. In the instant the feelings of panic should have overtaken me – this was my father and he was as cold as the kitchen floor – I was overtaken by a sense of utter peace. It was almost as though he were waiting for my touch. In that instant (I don't think my hand had even left his flesh yet) I had a clear communication from my father. His message was a simple one – it came and it went in a flash: "Everything will be all right." Simple and succinct, yet a moment in time and a message that struck my very soul with a profundity the likes of which I have never been able to re-experience in my entire lifetime. This message conveyed to me a very general sense of "okay." Not just that I would make it through this crisis. Not just that he was okay. Not just that my lifetime would be okay. "Everything" – every little thing in the universe was okay. Everything as we knew it and perceived it was "*all right*." It was how it was meant to be. And then he simply left. I would have to say that person to person, regardless of our relationship and certainly our age difference – our levels of experience – it was on joyful wings that he left.

One of the details that has always stood out in my mind about this experience and has attracted me to many of the accounts of near-death that I have read is this: My father's voice – and I know it was his voice – did not have its source in or even near his body. Rather, his voice very clearly and distinctly came from a spot where the right angles of the walls met the ceiling in the corner of the bedroom. My father spoke to me from a point that was many feet away from his body. Naturally, many times over the years, I have relived this moment over and over in my mind.

I have never again sensed, heard, or felt the presence of death or foreboding that I felt in 1966 – the day my father died. Nor have I felt the perfect joy and peace that I experienced on that same day. My father, to my knowledge, has never again tried to contact me, nor has any other soul. Yet, based on my experience, more than thirty years ago, I believe that, in fact, we do survive after death in a way that I can only describe as blissful.

Since this experience, I have grown up to be a normal well-rounded woman. In my forty years, I have to say that the most pronounced change in my life is that I have no fear of death. I know without

question that after we leave this earth, we continue to live in a different form. This belief is so long instilled in me, that I can't even imagine a person going through life questioning whether there is life after death. (LaGrand, 1999, pp. 143–148)

This life-changing event not only assisted in the management of grief, it formed the basis for a strong belief in an afterlife. Regrettably, many of the reports from children are dismissed as overactive imaginations or daydreams (Hart, 2003). Much learned from these experiences is not reinforced by significant adults, and children are forced to interpret their experiences with no preparation or guidance.

As a grief counselor, workshop presenter, and leader of support groups for suicide survivors, widows and widowers, I am privy to the personal and sometimes mysterious experiences of a wide variety of people. And as occurs in many forms of research on human behavior, I sometimes have to rely heavily on human testimony recognizing the risks of exaggeration and faulty memory (Fontana, 2005). On the other hand, many witnesses can be quite accurate in describing their supposed contact. Typically, according to claimants, EEs spawn personal and/or spiritual growth, reduce existential fear, and generate new perspectives and purpose in life through the questions they suggest and the obvious answers provided.

Many EEs result in major shifts in worldviews as well as in the philosophical stance of those receiving them. Brian Inglis (1990), Ken Anderson (1995), and Deepak Chopra (2003) argued that even so-called coincidental or synchronistic events provide insights and guidance for those who pay attention to them. For claimants reporting extraordinary experiences, the consistent overwhelming questions that present are: Where do I go from here? What will I do with my experience? How will I put to use what I have learned?

The Multidimensional Realms of the Extraordinary

Over the past 25 years in my interviews with claimants and discussions with counselors I have classified the extraordinary experiences of the bereaved into the following fourteen categories:

1. the intuitive or sense of presence experience (sometimes reported accompanied by a telepathic or mental message);

2. the visual or apparitional presence (which may be a facial or full body appearance);
3. the auditory or voice experience (which also includes telepathic communication for some claimants);
4. the olfactory or sense of smell experience (such as flower scents, pipe smoke, perfumes, or colognes);
5. the tactile or sense of touch experience (in which claimants believe they have been embraced, kissed, or touched on the arm or shoulder by the loved one or a divine being);
6. unusual behavior of birds or animals (such as appearing unexpectedly in places or at times when never before seen and being associated in various ways with the loved one);
7. symbolic experiences (such as rainbows presenting at unusual times, butterflies appearing repeatedly and staying with the survivor, and finding objects associated with the deceased);
8. third-party experiences (in which the claimant receives a sign or message that comes through a third person, either child or adult, who has the EE);
9. fourth-party experiences (in which the claimant receives a sign or message that comes through two other people);
10. visitation dreams (vivid, unforgettable dreams, as in the "big dream" described by Carl Jung);
11. out-of-body experiences (in which the claimant has an out-of-body experience and sees the departed loved one);
12. psi kappa (objects move, a clock stops or starts at the moment of death, or lights or other electronic equipment go on and off as a sign);
13. synchronicities (meaningful coincidences pairing something associated with the deceased loved one with an unexpected physical event); and
14. crisis apparitions or sense of presence (in which visual appearance or sense of presence of the loved one is experienced before the survivor has been notified of the death).

The sense of presence and dream state EEs are most commonly reported (LaGrand, 1999; Wright, 1998). Clearly, all of the above are open to skeptical analysis, as they should be. Science can save us from superstition and magical thinking. At the same time, we must be vigilant that dogmatic science does not minimize the credibility of unexplainable human experience or our sense of wonder and awe at the mysterious universe. At the very least, therapists and caregivers

should not discredit these experiences simply because they challenge their own worldviews (LaGrand, 2001; Weiss, 1988). I hasten to add that the most skeptical responses often come from those who have not had an EE. I know several professional counselors who harbored grave doubts about the veracity of extraordinary experiences as reported by clients – until they were suddenly face to face with the extraordinary after the death of a husband or family member. The nature of their professional practices took an abrupt turn as they began to see the therapeutic value and personal meaning that the contact could have on the grief process.

Nevertheless, the issue to confront is not whether these profound subjective experiences can be proven real or unreal, although that is an intriguing question. Obviously, we have to be reasonably sure that the claimant was not severely agitated or suffering from deep emotional trauma at the time of the event. The real issue is that a large number of claimants report the experience though not expecting it, receive solace and comfort from it, and *believe in its authenticity* – all of this, in the absence of any psychiatric disorder. Furthermore, and a critical adjunct to grief work, the anxiety associated with the question of whether the loved one lives on is reduced or eliminated (LaGrand, 1997b; Linn, 1991).

Messages, Meanings, and Changes

It follows that most claimants are not merely convinced of the authenticity of the experience; they take to heart the messages received, make major changes in their worldviews, and find new meaning in life and death. Finding meaning in the death of a loved one through an EE can be a profound healing experience as one deals with the eternal questions of Who am I? Why am I here? And what happens after we die? Although commonly overlooked, meaning has a strong physical impact on a person at the cellular level (Dossey, 1991) as well as an emotional one. One's health can be positively affected by a contact. Meaning therapy is indeed important in grief work. Not infrequently, claimants are able to take their EE, use it to revise their assumptive world, and weave the new insights received into a coherent framework of continuity, direction, and life purpose. In particular, and most significantly, continuing love is often seen as the driving force behind the contact (LaGrand, 2001; Wright, 2002).

Messages received may be explicit, implicit, telepathic, or implied as interpreted by the claimant. Some give advice (“Go home and live”). Others are inspirational (“He’s saying I can get through this”). Most are supportive (“My father wanted to comfort me”). Specifically, there are a number of repeating themes that present themselves in terms of messages and belief changes. Claimants are convinced the loved one lives on and the deceased has knowledge of their plight as survivors. One of the most frequently cited themes is a loss of the fear of death. Many claimants report there is nothing to fear and it brings a sense of relief, freedom, and anticipation. The anticipation is focused on a second common belief change: there will be a reunion with the deceased loved one. This is followed by the belief that consciousness must survive bodily death. The knowledge that life goes on, albeit in a different form, can be the most important factor in the reconstruction of one’s life after the death of a loved one. Presumption and despair is often replaced with optimism and hope.

Not infrequently, the claimant’s perception of the health of the one dearly loved may also undergo a major change. He or she is perceived as whole and happy again, no longer incapacitated or suffering from disease. This is especially clear when the claimant reports a visitation dream or seeing the deceased in a vision or apparition. Relief at the awareness of wholeness is another motivating force in accepting the death and beginning the task of reinvesting in life.

Importantly, it is not unusual for the death of a loved one to challenge the spiritual beliefs of survivors and precipitate a spiritual crisis (Marrone, 1999; Martin and Elder, 1993). Yet spiritual traditions are exceptionally valuable resources in coping with life and death (Targ, 2001). And spiritual surprises abound through the EE, bringing support and reinforcement. The EE often induces a paradigm shift that is spiritually oriented (Devers, 1997). The spiritual significance of the EE is this: faith in something greater than the self is suddenly reawakened. Religious beliefs are also affected. It is not unusual for those who have drifted away from the religious practices of earlier years to find new interest in returning to their houses of worship.

Finally, the extraordinary experience often results in claimants seeing life and their life mission with a different perspective (Devers, 1997; LaGrand, 1997a). Life purposes are reassessed. It is not unusual for the bereaved to be motivated to reach out to those who are in special need, to become more compassionate, or to take up a task that might help their community and perpetuate the memory of the beloved. All of the above changes are new beginnings many people

make throughout life, but the EE motivates the shift for the claimant by reigniting a deep sense of belonging.

Therapeutic Implications

The transformative potential of the EE in coping with the changes imposed by the death of a loved one has long been ignored (LaGrand, 1997b). There are four specific prerequisites for intervention using extraordinary experiences: disciplined familiarity, routine inquiry, techniques for validation, and knowledge of the claimant's belief system.

Understanding the nature of the phenomenon, particularly types of experiences, messages believed received, its meaning to the survivor, and the potential for use in coping with loss and change, is essential. It suggests reading a variety of books written for the general public, recent studies of the effects of EEs on claimants, and familiarity with various spiritual traditions. Talking to those who claim these encounters as well as colleagues, bereavement coordinators in hospices, and support group providers will add immeasurably to an awareness of the diversity of the experience and the many ways it can be interpreted by the bereaved.

Although some caregivers never ask, in most protocols, routine inquiry about extraordinary experiences is part of the intake interview. I recommend that this practice should not be strictly adhered to for the following reason: some claimants believe the event is too personal to share with anyone they do not know or trust. Consequently, some will reply in the negative when asked if they have had what they believe to be a contact from the deceased. Of course, others at intake will willingly respond. While it is at best an intuitive call, in some cases an inquiry may have to wait until the third or fourth meeting with the client.

Understanding the loss experience from the claimant's unique perspective is essential in facilitating the grief process (Rando, 1993) and it is equally essential in terms of the effective use of the extraordinary experience. Significantly, it is the belief system – particularly the meaning of the message received – that must be thoroughly understood and given highest priority. As we have seen, a different belief about death changes everything for the claimant. Specific beliefs about contents, origin, and why the event happened need to be uncovered and discussed, with reassurance given that the

experience is normal (Hastings, 1983). This will set the stage for using the EE in a variety of therapeutic ways. It is their grief, their experience, their interpretation – and most important – their belief, not ours. In the final analysis, they and they alone are responsible for managing their grief work. Thus, openness on the part of the support person, and allowing the claimant's belief system to predominate is essential for establishing therapeutic use of the experience.

In addition, the need for acceptance and validation of the event may be essential for the claimant who in some cases may question his or her sanity and feel threatened by what caregivers or friends might think of the disclosure (Drewry, 2002; Hastings, 1983; Hoyt, 1980; Peterson, 2001; Whitney, 1992). Others need assistance in reconciling the experience with their scientific worldview (Devers, 1997). To facilitate validation and help claimants reach a decision on authenticity, if any doubt surfaces, I recommend the following questions:

- Is this the kind of thing your loved one would do if he or she could?
- Do you feel the experience has involved giving and receiving love?
- What is your deep intuitive feeling about the event?
- Did the experience bring peace?

I emphasize the importance of peace with all clients, often suggesting that if the claimant feels more peaceful he or she is being led by something greater than the Self. We then discuss the importance of considering peace or conflict in decision-making, but especially in matters involving adapting to the current loss.

Cognitive and Intrapsychic Processes of Grief

Therese Rando (1984, 1993) has identified several cognitive and intrapsychic processes of grief that often do not receive the attention necessary to facilitate the normal processing of the loss experience. Extraordinary experiences are ideal vehicles through which these processes can be discussed and acted upon. They include, but are not limited to, forming a new identity, establishing a new relationship with the deceased, and withdrawing emotional energy from the deceased to reinvest in new life pursuits. This in no way implies the complete withdrawal of emotional investment in the deceased. On the contrary, a new relationship with the deceased is healthy and is built on memories, traditions, and what was learned from the relationship when the deceased was still living. Furthermore, establishing a new

relationship is a vehicle for assessing values, adapting to the physical absence of the beloved, finding comfort, and giving meaning (LaGrand, 2001; Vickio, 2000).

Many grief researchers have challenged the traditional theory of relinquishing attachment to the deceased in favor of altering and establishing a new bond (Balk, 1996; Conant, 1996; Klass, Silverman, & Nickman, 1996; Romanoff and Terenzio, 1998; Stroebe, Gergen, Gergen, and Stroebe, 1996; Worden, 1991). Discovering a better way to have a relationship with the deceased loved one is a legitimate reason for therapy (Rando, 1993).

Interestingly, a theme apparent in many dream visitations reported by claimants is that the deceased takes for granted that the relationship is ongoing while the claimant may be struggling with the concept (Kennedy, 1997). The extraordinary experience often helps the claimant understand this idea of a new relationship and facilitates the healthy completion of the cognitive and intrapsychic processes.

Although silence is golden in the counseling setting, a thorough discussion of the three processes within the context of the EE is necessary and should focus on the premise that the experience implies the following: the loved one is in another realm, is still caring, that a relationship based on memory and tradition is appropriate, and that the claimant is a different person entering a new life without the loved one. Emphasis is on a new life, which means the necessity to establish other rewarding relationships, develop new interests and strengthen identity, and reinvest emotional energy in rewarding pursuits.

Often new relationships are established through support groups where the EE is a topic of conversation and in meeting others who have had extraordinary experiences. Such actions promote identity building and shifts in emotional investment centering on the experience. All of the above are based on using the motivation of the contact from the loved one as a sign that these tasks are both appropriate and expected. The belief in the extraordinary experience allows for a key question to be presented to the claimant: "Your loved one is okay, has told you so, and wants you to be okay too. What do you think he or she is asking you to do?"

Depending on the type of experience reported and the message or messages the claimant believes was sent, the EE can be used to adapt to a new life by way of establishing new routines and reducing anxiety caused by the loved one's physical absence. Here are several specific ways to use the experience in dealing with the changes imposed by loss. Again, using the extraordinary experiences of the

bereaved as a tool to aid in coping with the death of a loved one is predicated on the assumption that the claimant is the expert on his or her grief and grief work. Here is a short list of possibilities for using the experience:

1. Suggest finding a word that typifies the EE and the attributes of the deceased loved one (such as compassion, love, gratitude, care, or service). Discuss with the claimant how that special word can be the basis for a plan to put into action as a memorial to keep the loved one's memory alive. Introduce the idea that the EE is a seed of hope to be cultivated and used as a bridge to a new life in which the deceased will always be remembered, and in times of doubt and despair, a way through will always be found.
2. Discuss what the loved one has taught the claimant through the gift of the EE that can be passed on to others in the family and outside of it. This lesson (of caring, love, concern, giving, thinking of others, and so on) plus the loved one's finest qualities can be highlighted as a gift to all. Discuss what specific behaviors would best represent the lesson or lessons taught by the EE.
3. Just as touching the inscribed name of a loved one on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington brings meaning and comfort, so too can touching or holding a symbol, object, or piece of clothing associated with the EE. Discuss creating a word picture or symbol representing the EE to be used as a reminder or motivator in establishing a new routine or to give comfort and guidance. The symbol can be cut from a picture in a magazine, drawn, or crafted by the claimant. It could be a possession of the deceased or something given to the claimant by the deceased that was a part of or a reminder of the EE. The object can be put in Lucite or mounted. Choose an appropriate place to display it so it can be used as needed.
4. Whenever there is unfinished business or conflict between the survivor and the deceased, suggest that the EE is given on the assumption that all transgressions have been forgiven. The EE can be looked at as an olive branch, that the loved one forgives or seeks forgiveness, and sees the earthly conflict from a more positive perspective.
5. Suggest having a drawing or painting made of the EE and give it a name. Have it framed and placed in an appropriate place in the home to be used as a reminder to be thankful and look for other blessings in life that are easily overlooked.

6. Establish the specific message the claimant has received from the EE. Then ask if the person would like to respond to the gift and send a message of thanks or remembrance to the loved one. Have that message written or typed and kept in a place where it will be frequently seen. The message could also be inscribed or printed on a cup or glass as a warm reminder each time it is used that a loving relationship will always exist.
7. Consider creating an affirmation based on the message of the EE, such as, "I am always connected and loved by those who are important to me," or, "I will stay positive." The affirmation can be repeated at any time or place that the claimant feels is appropriate. It can also be crafted and placed on the dashboard of a car or at one's office or workplace. Have several copies made for use in various locations.
8. EEs can also be used in creating rituals of transition, continuity, reconciliation, or goodbye. A formal or informal ritual can be created based on the EE for the purpose of highlighting a specific memory about the loved one. The ritual can be used on a daily basis, on the anniversary of the death or the EE, or on key dates during the year. An informal ritual based on the EE could also be created that emphasizes a new routine the claimant is trying to establish.

The Challenge

For more than two decades I have been involved in studying one aspect of the mosaic of the extraordinary: those experiences that occur to the bereaved after the death of a loved one. The results of these spontaneous encounters have characteristically inspired the claimant to heal emotional wounds, look at life with a new perspective, and often find the most cherished prize of all, peace of mind. Such changes have occurred due to the learning that takes place through experiencing the extraordinary and believing the essential messages or their implications. In essence, extraordinary experiences are the seeds of change in relationships with others, with those who have died, and with the world at large. In short, they enhance the quality of life.

Much of the transformation that takes place is the *natural* process that accompanies believing in and internalizing the experience. Regrettably, it is sometimes buried or suppressed and the claimant is

fearful of bringing it to the attention of the therapist (Targ, 2001), or the work of using it is too often attempted in isolation and without support. The challenge of all support persons is to develop greater awareness of the large numbers of mourners who have the experience, recognize its potential for adapting to the death of a loved one and for reinvesting in life, and work on minimizing personal biases for or against it. Then let us learn to validate and encourage the claimant to embrace the experience as a gift, and creatively utilize it in a healthy manner.

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The Field of Near-Death Studies Through 2001: An Analysis of the Periodical Literature

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ABSTRACT: Since 1975, when Raymond Moody coined the term “near-death experience” (NDE), numerous articles have been published addressing NDEs and related phenomena. To make that literature accessible to researchers, the International Association for Near-Death Studies published an *Index* (2005) on CD-ROM in which the authors used 135 near-death-related topics to analyze more than 800 articles, including comprehensive coverage of more than 600 scholarly articles, published through 2001. Upon completion, the authors realized the *Index* revealed interesting descriptive data profiling the scholarly literature of the first quarter century of the field of near-death studies. Those data are presented in this article, including findings regarding dates, venues, authors, and topics of scholarly publications. The article concludes with a brief discussion of underaddressed topics in the field and of plans for an updated comprehensive index of all periodical publications, both scholarly and nonscholarly, in 2006 to commemorate the first 30 years of the formal field of near-death studies.

KEY WORDS: near-death experiences; literature review; journal information; audiovisual communications media; interdisciplinary research.

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Since 1975, when Raymond Moody coined the term “near-death experience” in his classic book, *Life after Life*, numerous authors have published periodical literature on near-death and related experiences. To provide researchers with easy and meaningful access to that literature, a team at the University of North Texas, the authors of this article, created two Compact Disks-Read Only Memory (CD-ROMs): *Near-Death Experiences Research Bibliography, Part 1* (hereafter called *Bibliography*) (International Association for Near-Death Studies [IANDS], 2002), and *Near-Death Experiences: Index to the Periodical Literature through 2001* (hereafter called *Index*) (IANDS, 2005c). The *Bibliography* indexed the 263 articles from *Anabiosis: The Journal of Near-Death Studies* (1981–1987) (hereafter called *Anabiosis*) and the *Journal of Near-Death Studies* (1987–present) published from the *Journal’s* inception through 2001. The *Index* included those articles plus all other scholarly articles identified through an exhaustive search of the scholarly periodical literature published through 2001, including primarily refereed journal articles along with a few other types, such as newsletter articles published by scholarly organizations. It also included many nonscholarly articles identified through a convenience search of the nonscholarly periodical literature during that same time period. The result was a total of more than 800 articles addressing near-death and related experiences: 703 scholarly and 123 nonscholarly.

For both CDs, we analyzed each article by 135 near-death-related topics. Each article citation appeared in the CD with all the topics it addressed listed beneath it, along with 100 percent of article abstracts in the *Bibliography* and 98 percent in the *Index*. In addition, each topic appeared with a listing of citations of all articles that addressed that topic. With the inclusion of a search capability, the CD enabled a user to create a comprehensive custom list of articles relevant to the research topic at hand. For those who did not have access to reprints, the CDs included the means for the user to purchase one copy of each desired reprint through the IANDS office in Connecticut.

Although we undertook development of these CDs to assist and encourage scholarly research into near-death experiences, once we completed the *Index*, we discovered that it revealed interesting descriptive data about the first 25 years of research and theory into near-death and related experiences. In this article, we will describe the process we used to create the CDs and will report the results of an analysis of the *Index*.

Method

The inspiration for the CDs came from a publication by one of our colleagues on the University of North Texas (UNT) counseling program faculty. Garry Landreth and associates had published an original and an updated volume of the book, *The World of Play Therapy Literature*, in which he and a team of graduate students indexed all refereed journal articles organized into 76 topics related to play therapy (Landreth, Homeyer, Bratton, and Kale, 1995). Through Landreth's Center for Play Therapy at UNT, someone researching play therapy could find a reprint of each of these articles, along with every book that had been published on play therapy. In 2000, we began imagining a similar resource for the field of near-death studies. We saw the first step to be the indexing of articles from the *Journal of Near-Death Studies* that we assumed at the time to be by far the single greatest publisher of near-death related, refereed articles, an assumption that was later confirmed, as will be discussed below.

Creation of the Bibliography

The senior author (J. M. H.) approached IANDS' Board of Directors, as well as her department chair, Michael Altekruise, who had access to university funds to support the project. The IANDS Board agreed to use funds from the organization's research account to match the funds that UNT allocated to the project. Between these two sources, she was able to hire Gary Boudreaux, a 4-D database developer, to create the list/order form for the CD, and Anneliese Fox, head of Fox Computer Systems and IANDS' office manager, to create the artwork for, and actually produce, the CD. In the end, UNT funded somewhat more than half of the \$18,000 that it cost to produce the *Bibliography*.

We began by making two photocopies of each article, beginning with the 1981 Volume 1, Number 1 of *Anabiosis* and ending with the 2001 Volume 19, Number 4 of the *Journal of Near-Death Studies*. One photocopy served as a working copy, the other as an archival copy that would be used as a master for reprint fulfillment.

Meanwhile, we consulted with Bruce Greyson at the University of Virginia Health System, Editor of *Anabiosis* and subsequently of the *Journal of Near-Death Studies*, to develop a preliminary list of topics pertaining to NDEs. Finalizing this list involved at least two challenges. One challenge was determining exactly how deeply to break topics down into subtopics. On the one hand, we hoped to

achieve exclusivity or “narrowness” of focus that would be meaningful to a researcher seeking information on a specific topic. On the other hand, we hoped to avoid having so many topics that a researcher might feel awash in a mire of information while trying to determine all the topics relevant to a particular research focus.

Another challenge was determining parameters on the breadth of topics to be included. IANDS’ literature and mission has included reference not only to NDEs proper but also to “similar” experiences (Kircher, Callanan, and IANDS Board of Directors, n.d.), “related” experiences (IANDS, 2005b), and “near-death-like” experiences (IANDS, 2005a). We considered whether to include topics on such phenomena as out-of-body experiences, after-death communication, precognition, and reincarnation, all of which have been included in NDE reports. As we delved into the articles, we modified the list that ultimately included 135 topics. Examples of topics appear in Table 3. A complete list of topics is available at http://iands.org/bibcd_topics.html.

At the time that the team undertook the project, the senior author (J. M. H.) had been active in the field of near-death studies for 15 years, whereas the junior author (R. C.) was new to the field. To establish some semblance of interrater reliability on article analysis, we began by each reading the same article independently, then comparing notes as to which topics each reader had identified. After a few articles, we reached near-100 percent agreement on two articles in a row. At that point, one of us (R. C.) proceeded independently to read and analyze the remaining articles. In this process, we categorized only topics addressed in the main body of the article, not the literature review. We reasoned that any topics addressed in NDE-related sources cited in a literature review would be included when we acquired and analyzed the main bodies of those sources for the already-planned *Index*.

We then entered each citation using American Psychological Association (2001) format along with identified topics into *ProCite* Version 5 database software program. When we finished, *ProCite* produced two lists. In one list, each topic was listed followed by a list of citations, organized alphabetically by last name of first author, of all the articles that addressed that topic; this list comprised a section of the *Bibliography* entitled “Topics with Citations.” In the other list, each citation appeared alphabetically by last name of first author, and every topic addressed within the cited article was listed under the citation. We acquired copyright permission from Kluwer Academic Publishers, then-publisher of the *Journal of Near-Death Studies*, to reprint the article abstracts in the *Bibliography*. Together, the latter listing and

the abstracts comprised the *Bibliography* section entitled "Citations with Abstracts and Topics." In addition to these two sections, the CD included "Instructions for Using This CD," a "Topics Outline," a "Feedback Form," and a final section describing "Creation of This CD."

Creation of the Index

Creation of the second CD-ROM was easier to the extent that the topics list was fixed and we were accustomed to the process of using it to analyze article contents. It was more difficult, however, in that it involved determining the parameters of which articles to include, as well as identifying, acquiring article reprints from, and acquiring copyright permission to reprint abstracts from numerous publication venues.

As noted above, NDEs involve several phenomena that are addressed in vast bodies of literature in their own right. An example is out-of-body experiences. Potentially, any article addressing a related topic could be included in the *Index*, categorized under the topic, "Related Experiences." To keep the focus of the *Index* primarily on NDEs proper, we made a judgment call to include only what we considered "classic" articles addressing related phenomena. Examples include Wilder Penfield's (1955) "The role of the temporal cortex in certain psychological phenomena," Celia Green's (1967) "Ecsomatic experiences and related phenomena," Walter Pahnke's (1969) "The psychedelic mystical experience in the human encounter with death," Karlis Osis and Erlendur Haraldsson's (1977) "Deathbed observations by physicians and nurses: A cross-cultural survey," William Richards' (1978) "Mystical and archetypal experience of terminal patients in DPT-assisted psychotherapy," and Kathleen Noble's (1987) "Psychological health and the experience of transcendence." What we considered "classic" was our own subjective opinion based on our knowledge of the fields of transpersonal psychology in general and near-death studies in particular; other scholars at the helm of this project undoubtedly would have decided to handle differently this entire matter in general and/or the determination of which not-explicitly-NDE-related articles qualified as "classic" in particular.

To conduct a thorough search of the scholarly periodical literature on NDEs in sources other than *Anabiosis* and the *Journal of Near-Death Studies*, we took several steps. We began with Terry Basford's (1990) *Near-Death Experiences: An Annotated Bibliography*, noting every periodical citation. We also drew from Richard Bonenfant's (2005 inactive) Lazarus website, adding to our list any articles that

had not appeared in Basford's listing. We conducted exhaustive searches of the PsycINFO database using keywords associated with NDEs, again adding any new citations. We then acquired reprints of each article on that cumulative list, some from UNT library holdings, many through interlibrary loan services. Our final step was to review the References page(s) of each of those articles and acquire the reprints of any cited articles that we did not already have, but that appeared possibly to address NDEs. The result was a total of 565 articles from sources other than *Anabiosis* and the *Journal of Near-Death Studies*: 442 scholarly and 123 nonscholarly.

Although our search for scholarly articles was intended to be exhaustive, our listing of nonscholarly articles was not. We included only those we happened to encounter in our search for scholarly publications and did not, for example, consult the *Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature* to maximize the comprehensiveness of our listing of nonscholarly resources. For this reason, we will focus for the remainder of this article on findings related only to the scholarly literature on NDEs.

Other graduate students, Kathy Oden and Lisa Forest, undertook the monumental process of acquiring copyright permission from each publisher of scholarly articles to reproduce the article abstract in the *Index*. Another graduate student, Chris Lorenc, spent one semester "cleaning up" the reprints that would be used for reprint request fulfillment, making sure they were complete, legible, and so on. Boudreaux and Fox served the same functions in the production of the *Index* as the *Bibliography*. Ultimately, the *Index* cost approximately \$11,000 to produce, with IANDES bearing approximately one-third of the cost and UNT subsidizing the remainder. Neither this figure nor the *Bibliography* figure include the senior author's (J. M. H.'s) investment of hundreds of hours in the production of the CDs, nor do they include the investment of considerable time by some graduate students who worked on the *Index* for course credit rather than pay; thus, both figures should be considered not to represent the cost of production if all work had been directly compensated monetarily.

Patterns in the Field of Near-Death Studies Emerging from the *Index*

As noted above, we attempted to include an exhaustive list of references to scholarly articles addressing NDEs – whether or not an

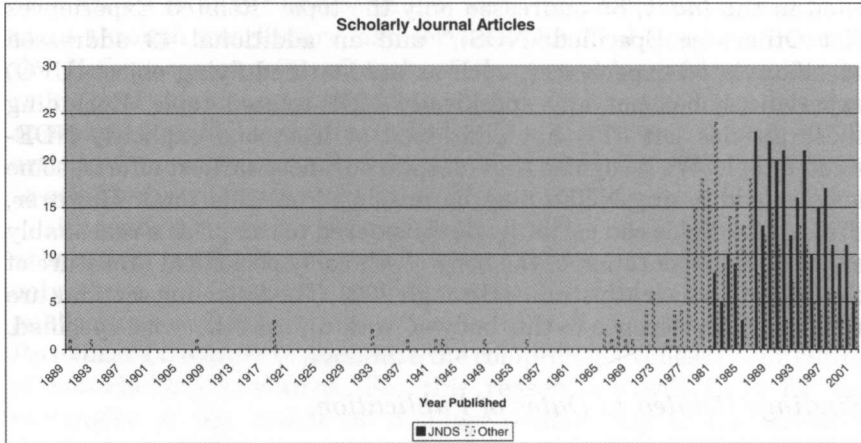
author explicitly used the term “near-death experience” – but also included several articles on similar, related, or like experiences. An analysis of the listings revealed that, of the total 703 scholarly articles cited in the *Index*, 89 addressed only the topic “Related Experiences Not Otherwise Specified (NOS),” and an additional 43 addressed specific related experiences, such as unidentified flying object (UFO) experiences, but not any specifically NDE-related topic. Excluding these articles left 571 that addressed at least one explicitly NDE-related topic. We recognize that, despite our most earnest efforts, some articles addressing NDEs may be missing from this total. However, these 571 articles can certainly be considered to comprise a reasonably accurate representation of the body of scholarly periodical literature of the field of near-death studies through 2001. The following sections are written with reference to this body of work unless otherwise specified.

Findings Related to Dates of Publication

The distribution of scholarly NDE publications by year appears in Figure 1. Although the field of near-death studies can be thought to have formally begun with the coining of the term “near-death experience” by Raymond Moody in 1975, the *Index* revealed that scholarly literature on the phenomenon began much earlier. According to our findings, the earliest article to explicitly address the phenomenon of NDEs (though not by that name) was A. S. Wiltse’s 1889 work, “A case of typhoid fever with subnormal temperature and pulse,” which appeared in the *Saint Louis Medical and Surgical Journal*. Indeed, 40 articles addressing NDEs by no term or some other term were published prior to 1977, when the first articles appeared making explicit reference to Moody’s work. Thirteen of those 40 articles (33 percent) appeared in the 75-year period between 1889 and 1964; the remaining 27 appeared in the 12-year period between 1965 and 1976, indicating that NDEs were increasingly addressed in scholarly venues during the decade before Moody named and provided a consolidated description of the phenomenon. Nevertheless, as the distribution shows, Moody’s work was truly seminal in that the scholarly periodical near-death literature burgeoned after its publication.

Prior to the inception in 1981 of *Anabiosis*, 103 scholarly articles had already appeared addressing NDEs. In the 20 years since its inception (1981 to 2001), 261 articles appeared in *Anabiosis* and its successor, the *Journal of Near-Death Studies*, compared to 207 articles from all other scholarly venues combined. Thus, *Anabiosis* and its successor,

Figure 1
Scholarly Articles Addressing Near-Death Experiences,
1889–2001.



the *Journal of Near-Death Studies* has been a clear leader in the area of scholarly NDE-related periodical literature in quantity of publications.

Findings Related to Scholarly Publication Venues

A total of 124 scholarly periodical venues have published articles addressing near-death experiences. The titles of the top 30 venues and their corresponding number of NDE-related articles appear in Table 1. In addition to these 30 periodicals that published 3 or more articles on NDEs and related topics, 14 other scholarly periodicals published 2 articles each and an additional 80 periodicals published 1 article each.

Not surprisingly, 11 of the top 12 scholarly venues other than *Anabiosis* and the *Journal of Near-Death Studies* that published 6 or more articles on NDEs represented the fields of parapsychology research (4 journals), death studies (3 journals), medicine (2 journals), religion and health (1 journal), and transpersonal psychology (1 journal). More surprising to us was the finding that the third highest of those 11 represented the field of neuropsychiatric pathology, the *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease* – surprising because NDEs have so consistently been found *not* to be associated with “nervous and mental disease” (Greyson, 1983, 1997, 2000).

Table 1
Scholarly Publication Venues Ranked by Number of Articles
Addressing NDEs Through 2001

<i>Rank</i>	<i>Number of Articles</i>	<i>Periodical</i>
1	261	<i>Anabiosis (1981–87)/Journal of Near-Death Studies (1987–2001)</i>
2	22	<i>Omega</i>
3	20	<i>Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research</i>
4	19	<i>Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease</i>
5	12	<i>Theta</i>
6	11	<i>Parapsychology Review</i>
7	10	<i>Lancet</i>
8	9	<i>Journal of Religion and Health</i>
9	8	<i>Journal of Transpersonal Psychology</i>
10	6	<i>Death Studies</i>
		<i>Journal of Parapsychology</i>
		<i>JAMA: Journal of the American Medical Association</i>
		<i>Research in Parapsychology</i>
14	5	<i>Death Education</i>
		<i>Journal of Humanistic Psychology</i>
		<i>Journal of Religion and Psychical Research</i>
		<i>Journal of the Society for Psychical Research</i>
		<i>Psychiatry</i>
19	4	<i>American Journal of Diseases of Children</i>
		<i>American Journal of Nursing</i>
		<i>American Journal of Psychiatry</i>
		<i>Contemporary Psychology</i>
		<i>Essence</i>
		<i>ReVision</i>
25	3	<i>American Psychologist</i>
		<i>Journal of Indian Psychology</i>
		<i>Journal of Scientific Exploration</i>
		<i>Mortality</i>
		<i>Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research</i>
		<i>Psychological Reports</i>

Findings Related to Publication Authors

One might expect Raymond Moody to have authored the first scholarly publication with the term “near-death experience” in the title. In fact, that distinction goes to Carolyn Spencer, whose 1976 article, entitled “The effect of near-death experience on death anxiety,” appeared in the *Journal of Undergraduate Psychological Research*. An examination of the article revealed a further irony: that it was not actually about near-death *experiences* at all but, rather, about near-death *episodes* – the circumstances of a close brush with death during a catastrophic auto accident; Spencer did not question survivors about their subjective experiences during the crises. Thus did Moody lose the distinction of the first scholarly article to include in its title the term he had coined. In 1977, he (Moody, 1977), Michael Sabom and Sarah Kreutziger (1977), and an anonymous author in the *Parapsychology Review* (Anonymus, 1977) published articles with the term in the titles, and it appeared regularly in titles thereafter.

Numerous authors have contributed to the scholarly body of literature on near-death experiences. Ideally, a determination of the “experts” in the field of near-death studies as revealed by sole- or first-authorship of scholarly articles would involve an assessment of the number, currency, and importance of those publications. We could easily determine number and currency of articles from *Index* data; importance was another matter. For example, the only article by any of the authors Pim van Lommel, Ruud van Wees, Vincent Meyers, and Ingrid Elfferich (2001), in which they reported in *Lancet* the results of a 13-year prospective study of NDEs in 10 Dutch hospitals, is arguably more important to the field of near-death studies than even the combination of several articles by some authors with multiple publications. However, lacking a systematic means to assess the importance of various articles, we were left with the cruder indices of number and currency of scholarly publications. Based on these criteria, the top 25 experts in the field of near-death studies appear in Table 2.

Among these experts are several people who have retired, such as Kenneth Ring and Ian Stevenson, or have died, such as Scott Rogo, James Hyslop, and Karlis Osiris. Thus, the number of experts still active and potentially contributing further to the field of near-death studies is a shorter list by at least one-fifth.

Perhaps noteworthy also is the absence of certain names from the list. In many cases, the absence was purely the result of where we set the parameters for the list. For example, Moody and P. M. H. Atwater,

Table 2
Top 25 First or Sole Authors of Articles Addressing NDEs
Through 2001, Ranked by Number and Currency of Articles

<i>Rank</i>	<i>Number of Articles</i>	<i>Author</i>	<i>Most recent Article</i>	<i>Rank</i>
1	32	Greyson, Bruce	2001	1
2	25	Ring, Kenneth	2000	2
3	16	Lundahl, Craig	2001	1
4	14	Serdahely, William	1996	6
5	12	Noyes, Russell	1989	12
6	11	Sabom, Michael	2000	2
7	10	Becker, Carl	1995	7
8	9	Blackmore, Susan	1998	4
		Grosso, Michael	1991	10
		Kellehear, Allan	1994	8
11	8	Greene, F. Gordon	1999	3
		Holden, Janice M.	1996	6
		Morse, Melvin	1997	5
		Stevenson, Ian	1995	7
15	7	Rogo, D. Scott	1984	13
16	6	Jansen, Karl	2000	2
17	5	Gabbard, Glen	1991	10
		Hyslop, James H.	1918	15
		Irwin, Harvey	1993	9
20	4	Alvarado, Carlos	2001	1
		Gibbs, John	1999	3
		Green, J. Timothy	2001	1
		Osis, Karlis	1983	14
		Siegel, Ronald	1984	13
		Sutherland, Cherie	1990	11

both of whom are well-known book authors in the field, are among the 11 sole- or first-authors who have published three scholarly articles addressing or related to NDEs.

Findings Related to Topics Addressed in Publications

A final focus of this article is an analysis of topics addressed in scholarly periodical publications on NDEs. Based on the entire listing of topics and articles, rather than only those that explicitly address

NDEs, the top 10 and bottom 10 topics, along with number of articles addressing each topic, appear in Table 3.

The fact that the most frequently addressed topic is pleasurable emotions during NDEs might be considered good news for the field of near-death studies. By comparison, slightly fewer than half that number addressed distressing emotions.

Some questions also emerge from the “most frequent topics” list regarding “not otherwise specified” categories. What are these 156 “Related Experiences NOS” that, together, appeared second most frequent, but did not include NDE-like categories such as out-of-body experiences (90 articles), or the UFO category (10 articles)? And what is the nature of the encountered beings described in 135 articles that did not include deceased or living entities (98 articles) or spiritual entities (79 articles)? Such questions suggest that a further analysis and breakdown of these NOS categories might be indicated to make the *Index* more helpful to researchers.

Regarding the least-addressed topics, the fact that only one article addressed the topic of humor and NDEs indicates that scholars apparently consider NDEs to be no laughing matter! A further fact may truly be no laughing matter: that four of seven topics addressing religion and NDEs appeared in the least-addressed list. Whereas authors addressed Christianity other than Mormonism in 32 articles, Mormonism in 11 articles, and Buddhism in 13 articles, they addressed Hinduism, Judaism, indigenous religions, and Islam in fewer than 7 articles each. Perhaps most glaring is that Islam was addressed in only two. Clearly, the relationship of NDEs to religion, particularly other than Christianity and Buddhism, is a topic ripe for further research in the field of near-death studies.

Summary

In this article, the creators of the *Near-Death Experiences: Index to the Periodical Literature through 2001* analyzed the contents of the *Index* to provide a particular kind of profile of the field of near-death studies. We are currently seeking funding to create the next version during the spring of 2006, a version that will cover thoroughly both the scholarly and nonscholarly periodical literature through 2005. The data emerging from the new *Index* version will undoubtedly confirm some observations reported in this article and indicate the need for revision of others.

Table 3
Most and Least Addressed NDE Topics in Scholarly Articles
Through 2001, Ranked by Frequency

<i>Rank</i>	<i>Number of Articles</i>	<i>Topic</i>
Most addressed topics		
1	162	Characteristics of NDEs – Emotions, Pleasurable
2	156	Related Experiences NOS
3	153	Methodology in NDE Research
4	151	Characteristics of NDEs – Autopsy, Out-of-Body
5	135	Characteristics of NDEs – Encountering Beings NOS
6	125	Explanations of NDEs – Psychological
7	120	Explanations of NDEs – Physiological, Neurological, Brain
8	119	Characteristics of NDEs – Light, Mystical
9	113	Altered States and NDEs
10	112	Afterlife, Belief in
11	110	Disclosure of NDEs
12	105	Characteristics of NDEs NOS
13	101	Circumstances of NDEs – Illness
14	100	Science and NDEs
15	98	Characteristics of NDEs – Encountering Beings, Deceased-Living
Least addressed topics		
119	7	Characteristics of NDEs – Socioeconomic Status Religion and NDEs – Hinduism Shamanism and NDEs
122	6	Characteristics of NDEs – Sensory, Smell Famous People’s NDEs Hypnosis and NDEs Religion and NDEs – Judaism Spiritualism and NDEs
127	5	Circumstances of NDEs – Combat-Related Religion and NDEs – Indigenous Cultures
129	4	Artificial Intelligence and NDEs Disabilities and NDEs
131	3	Characteristics of NDEs – Psychic Abilities
132	2	Circumstances of NDEs – Non-chemically Induced Religion and NDEs – Islam
134	1	Humor about NDEs

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BOOK REVIEW

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***Experiencing the Next World Now*, by Michael Grosso.**
New York: Paraview Pocket Books, 2004, xvii + 302 pp., \$14.00 pb.
ISBN 0-7434-7105-9.

In this book, addressed to the general public, philosopher Michael Grosso argues that there are phenomena that suggest that human beings survive bodily death. Investigations on the subject, he writes, have “revolutionary implications for human psychology and for how we should view the world and live our lives” (p. xiii). However, Grosso points out that he is not interested solely in providing evidence for an afterlife. Instead, he writes that he wants “to experience my life-enhancing truths in my body – now – and not just deduce them from isolated anomalies or puzzling observation” (p. xiii).

The book is divided into four parts, each of which has several chapters. The first one, entitled “Experiences,” presents a variety of phenomena the author feels are suggestive of life after death. He starts with out-of-body experiences (OBEs). Following countless authors before him, none of which he cites, Grosso writes that OBEs provide us with a clue of what happens at death. In his view, “if my consciousness can function *outside* and *at a distance* from my body, why not survive death without any body?” (p. 22).

Other chapters include discussions of a variety of phenomena. The one about apparitions includes several classic cases, as well as examples of different types of apparitions, among which are those seen during crises, deathbed visions, apparitions of persons long after death, and haunting apparitions. There are also chapters on

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reincarnation and mediumship. The latter include several cases such as those of mediums Leonora Piper and Gladys Osborne Leonard, and a consideration of proxy sittings, drop-in communicators, the cross-correspondences, and both book and newspaper tests. These topics represent veridical mental mediumship; but I am glad that Grosso does not limit his discussion only to the veridical. In his view, "mediumship for the spiritualists was an instrument of prophetic critique of an entire way of life. To take the spirits seriously was boldly to challenge everyday life in America" (p. 66).

Part Two, "Challenges," has two chapters. One is about explanations. It is hard to disagree with the author regarding the assessment of either discarnate or psi-from-the-living agency: "In the end, only a case-by-case analysis allows for credible appraisals; needs, desires, and motivation have to be taken into account" (p. 140). Another chapter is devoted to concepts about the next world that include, among others, the ideas of philosopher H. H. Price.

Part Three is titled "Connections." Grosso suggests that a new approach is needed to connect the idea of, and the evidence for, survival of death to our lives. In his words: "Once this proximity is established, it will be possible to think about preparing for the transition; in this way the stress will shift from theory to practice, from trying to determine that there is a next world to figuring out how to experience the next world now" (pp. 153-154). This approach, however, is not new. It is based on the assumption that whatever may survive death is present in the living and that it may be explored with the living in different ways. A fairly recent example of this approach can be found in the writings of William Roll (1974/1975).

Grosso starts exploring the issue by examining the concept of evolution. As he writes: "Once we think of life after death as a stage in the ascent of biological progress, a stage of increasing autonomy from the physical substrate, it seems less remote from the mainstream view of life" (p. 159). Later in the chapter he mentions the concept of subtle bodies. He argues, inspired by Henri Bergson, Michael Murphy, and others, that "inside our bodies we find harbingers of the next world" (p. 165); that is, bodies other than the physical one are related to life in the next world.

The author sees several phenomena as bridges or connections between our terrestrial and our spiritual life. Memories and acts of will are cases in point, because Grosso feels their final explanation may not be physical or biological, as generally assumed. The same is said about dreaming, which shows connections to extrasensory perception (ESP) and may "be a halfway house to the next world"

(p. 181). Among other phenomena, the author considers artistic inspiration as well.

Grosso mentions other “cracks and doors” (p. 188) that he believes connect this world to the next. There are many examples of people who claim all kinds of visionary experiences, among them prophets and shamans. Mystical experiences, the author writes, imply “release of conscious existence from bodily constraints” (p. 193). Other phenomena Grosso also considers are the materialization of objects by Sathya Sai Baba, the levitations and stigmata of mystics and saints, poltergeists, and physical mediumship. Grosso does not offer any of these phenomena as proof of an afterlife. Instead he sees them as indicators of channels, connections, or openings between our world and other realities.

Grosso argues that we can use “otherworld telescopes” to explore our inner transcendence. By this he means such “natural technologies for inducing visionary experiences” (p. 228) as crystal gazing and a variety of meditation-like techniques designed to control attention. The induction of both lucid dreams and OBEs is briefly mentioned as a way that may be helpful for self-exploration. Although not mentioned in the book, Grosso’s point reminds me of Sylvan Muldoon’s claim that once you have experienced astral projection

you will no longer doubt that the individual can exist apart from the physical body No longer will you be forced to base your belief in immortality upon the word of the Medium, the Pastor, or the Holy Books, for you will have the proof for yourself. (Muldoon and Carrington, 1929, p. 316)

However, Grosso cautions us that the issue is not only about having experiences:

More important is to form an attitude in the face of existence, living in radical openness, without fear of impermanence. It’s about a way of looking at things, a way that keeps us poised for departure, and helps us to think *transitionally*. (p. 232)

In the final chapter Grosso suggests other ways of self-exploration “involving small but significant changes in ordinary life” (p. 256), among them diet and fasting. He also argues that the modern mind is absorbed by all kinds of worries, such as work, that separate us from our transcendental nature. During such distracting situations,

consciousness cannot afford that kind of openness, and so is easily captured by the mundane, and contracted by anxious concerns. To tune into signals from the other side, we would need to reduce the noise and clutter of our lives. (p. 268)

These ideas, as Grosso points out, are related to yoga and other systems that deal with consciousness. But there is also a history of such ideas in parapsychology that Grosso does not include in this section (Alvarado, 1986).

In the epilogue, Grosso restates his conviction that survival of death is a reality. In addition, he writes:

Our evidence ... has implications for the art of living. Out-of-body experiences speak to our ecstatic potential; apparitional experiences to our latent visionary talents. Mediumship proves the polycentric nature of personal consciousness; the "I" we cling to so fiercely is somewhat of a sham, a delusion, and very superficial. There are other "I's," deeper and more interesting than the little I that rides the rickety wagon of my surface consciousness. Tapping into the deeper self is part of our creative endowment. (p. 277)

Grosso is not satisfied with pure research and insists on the importance of personal experience. Certainly personal experience carries a conviction that conventional research cannot convey. They put us in contact, Grosso states, with transcendence that "rightly honored, gain authority and inspire us to pursue our explorations" (p. 277).

My main critique of the book is the omission of information that could have improved the points the author makes. Granted this is a popular book, but discussions of the omitted material are relevant, and sometimes essential, in books crafted for the general public. An example of an all too brief discussion is that of subtle bodies (pp. 12, 163–165). I doubt that readers unfamiliar with the literature on the subject will realize that the author is alluding to an extremely influential concept that comes from antiquity and has been connected to spirituality, survival of death, and psychic phenomena, as can be seen in J. J. Poortman's (1954/1978) study.

Although there are many affirmations about the transcendental aspects of a variety of phenomena such as memory and mystical experiences, the author presents little discussion to support his points. More detail about the reasons behind his opinions would have strengthened his position.

A more detailed use of the research literature would have improved the book in different parts. Regarding OBE prevalence, instead of using anecdotal recollections about students with whom he discussed the experience (p. 8), Grosso could have used the survey literature on the subject. There is little in the book about the psychological correlates of psychic experiences. This becomes important in the author's discussion of the role of forming "an attitude in the face of

existence" to have OBEs (p. 232), which would have been more useful if he had included correlates of the experience that seem to indicate cognitive openness, such as positive relationships with lucid dreams, absorption, dissociation, and fantasy experiences. The point is that in inducing OBEs for self-exploration we need to keep in mind that, most likely, having a set belief or an attitude is not enough because we are probably dealing with an interaction of several variables, some of which presumably reflect psychological and psychophysiological processes related to the ability of individuals to have the experience. Furthermore, one misses discussions of *specific* theoretical constructs such as the psychometric model of hauntings and ideas of subtle bodies. Such concepts are not beyond the grasp of general readers.

In addition, but less important for the purpose of the book, there are a few issues of historical import with which I disagree with Grosso. In his discussion of the ideas of Spiritualists he gives the impression that all of them were interested in women's rights and free love (pp. 65–66). However, it is important to recognize that there were many different positions within Spiritualism about these and other issues. More problematic is the absolute statement that "Darwin's *The Origin of Species* in 1859 triggered modern survival research" (p. 155). While there is no doubt that Darwin's book and other publications had a wide influence on intellectual, religious, and philosophical discussions about the nature of humankind in the 19th century European and American world (Richard, 1987), it is just incorrect to give all the credit to a single historical influence. There were many other factors that contributed to the scientific materialism that, interacting with evolutionary ideas, affected both early Spiritualism and psychical research. One such example is the study of the nervous system, particularly attempts at localization of both sensory and motor functions in the brain (Young, 1970).

These criticisms aside, Grosso's *Experiencing the Next World Now* has much to recommend it. In addition to being a very well-written book, the author is to be commended for his use of classic cases, which are summarized in ways that are both accessible and attractive to the general reader. Grosso's discussion is at its best when he informs his readers about the different types of phenomena that exist, or the way in which they manifest. Two good examples are his descriptions of apparitions and mediumship.

Following on the tradition of Frederic W. H. Myers, Ernesto Bozzano, Raynor Johnson, and others, Grosso presents a wide view of human consciousness. Such a view includes a positive outlook of

human nature and its potential, and a varied map of the range of phenomena that he believes suggest that a component of human beings transcends physical limitations. But perhaps more than most previous authors, Grosso emphasizes how the realization of this transcendence can benefit us in daily life and argues that we should actively cultivate this realization.

Another positive aspect of the book, and one particularly important in a work addressed to the general public, is that Grosso reminds his readers of the need to consider alternate explanations of the phenomena discussed. For example, he writes that "hidden memories can explain cases suggestive of survival, so you have to be sure you have ruled out that possibility" (p. 132).

One hopes that readable books such as this one will both inform the general public and encourage some people to conduct their own personal explorations, and to find a way to contribute to the scientific investigation of these topics.

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BOOK REVIEW

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Beyond the Indigo Children: The New Children and the Coming of the Fifth World, by P. M. H. Atwater. Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions/Bear and Company, 2005, 256 pp., \$16.00 pb. ISBN 0-59143-051-8.

P. M. H. Atwater has always held to the long view in her books, but *Beyond the Indigo Children* is an amazing feat of synthesis that takes the new children, those often termed “Indigos,” and places them in a context whose scope boggles the mind. That context includes the vast and the specific, weaving together metaphysics, legends, the new physics, sociology, child development, gifted education, near-death experiences (NDEs), and transformation. There is so much here that the book warrants reading and rereading just to collect and integrate all the fascinating strands. Although it is a stand-alone unit, it benefits from being paired with Atwater’s 1999 book, *Children of the New Millennium* (revised and republished in 2003 as *The New Children and Near-Death Experiences*). Together they evoke hope, concern, awe, expectancy, and relief that a far-reaching plan is unfolding.

While *Children of the New Millennium* (*The New Children and Near-Death Experiences*) focused on the characteristics of children who are near-death experiencers (one avenue of transformation) and sees a foreshadowing of what is to come, *Beyond the Indigo Children* explains why such children are making waves on the planet and why this is happening now. Its content is the news of today set in a framework of time almost beyond comprehension, where one cosmic

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year lasts 25,920 of our Earth-years. Such time is measured by the wheeling galaxies through space, just as Earth's orbit around the sun counts off a year for us, or as approximately 2,400 years mark the movement from one astrological age to another – such as the swing from Piscean to Aquarian Age, also happening now.

Grounded in an evolutionary and transformational view, Atwater takes a clear-eyed look at the new children, who are supersensitive, confident, antsy, psychic, nonconformist, creative, highly aware, often angry, hard to parent, and challenging to educate. Yet they are also empathetic, creative, gutsy, and great problem solvers. Their most important and unnerving aspect is that they *know*. They are tuned in to intuitive understanding and fail to be impressed by what others tell them unless it fits their inner knowledge. A variety of professionals as well as beleaguered parents are recognizing that “the new kids are different,” and much has been made of the differences, even to unhealthy adulation.

Atwater warns sternly against such limelighting. Her take is that the new children are very like the child near-death experiencers she has been studying for decades. (They also share many traits with gifted children, who tend to be sensitive, energetic, empathetic, have their own agendas, and do not automatically respect or obey adults.) She suggests that the new children, like NDErs and gifted children, are forerunners of the full wave of Indigos yet to come. They give us a taste of the future that we do well to heed.

So much is covered in this book that it is difficult to know what to write about. Atwater looks at sociological studies that recognize the “flavors” of various generations, such as the X Generation and the Baby Boomers, and embeds them within the Hindu context of “root races,” or sequential waves of development of humanity itself. We are currently in the fifth of these root races, and the author sees us moving into a flowering or “Ascension” period, the culmination of thousands of years of experience. She pulls together Bible stories, the Jewish Kaballah, genetic studies such as that of “Mitochondrial Eve” – almost the mother of us all – astronomy, astrology, Edgar Cayce readings, and Caroline Myss's description of the chakra system. She speaks of the noosphere, a term introduced by Teilhard de Chardin to mean that global layer of human thought and interconnection we take for granted today as part of this culmination. Group awareness, interconnectedness, and interdependence appear to be the theme of the now and future time that will eventually bridge into the coming sixth root race, whose thematic color is *indigo*. It is then that the Indigo Children will flood the earth.

A recurring theme is the synchronicity of 5's. There is the fifth root race; the fifth dimension (intuitional sensing); the fifth chakra located at the throat and associated with blue, creativity, communication, will (power-over or power-to); the numerological number 5 (signifying change); and, from child development specialist Joseph Chilton Pearce, a fifth brain. That includes the reptilian, limbic, neocortex, and frontal lobes of the brain, with the fifth brain being the heart. The HeartMath Institute is at the cutting edge of science charting the intelligence of the heart.

All this is happening as we approach "the end of time" according to the Aztec/Mayan Calendar, which measures time up to 2012. Then the "Long Count" ends. Many native peoples likewise are expecting an end to things; some are curtailing pregnancy. Atwater reaches back into the mists of ancient wisdom teachings, including the Kaballah, Theosophy, and the Hindu Vedas, to reassure us that time recycles rather than ends. Although we are in a portentous time, when the shift from Piscean to Aquarian Ages coincides with a full turn of the Great Cosmic Wheel, when the Long Count ends, the sun will rise the next morning and we will shift into an Ascension of the Fifth World, with its colorings, qualities, problems, challenges, and unique solutions.

Everyone will take away something different from this book. Those interested in the New Age, the new challenges of parenting and educating, the increasing spiral of pressure so evident now, ecological crisis, shifting value systems, spirituality and intuition, or a true Big Picture, will each find sections that fascinate. It is likely that each will interpret what is read as a different blend of insight and fable, but no one will read it without being stirred to ponder what is to come and how our choices can influence the future.

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BOOK REVIEW

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***Hear His Voice: The True Story of a Modern Day Mystical Encounter With God*, by Nancy Clark. Baltimore, MD: Publish-America, 2005, 181 pp., \$19.95 pb. ISBN 1-4137-6531-9**

Early on in my research of near-death states, I discovered people who were not near death, many not even in physical danger, who suddenly, unexpectedly experienced what we now term a near-death experience. These people faced the same challenges as did near-death experiencers in integrating what happened to them and dealt with the same spread of long-term physiological and psychological aftereffects. I alluded to them in the columns I wrote back in the 1980s for *Vital Signs*, the newsletter of the International Association for Near-Death Studies (IANDS), mentioned them in my first book (Atwater, 1988), and then in *Beyond the Light* (Atwater, 1994) devoted an entire chapter to what I called “near-death-like” experiences. In most of my books since then I have used separate chapter headings to explore the existence of these experiences and the puzzle they present to ongoing research.

More than a decade ago, IANDS sent out an unofficial questionnaire to its membership, inquiring about those who considered themselves to be near-death survivors. How close they had been to actual physical death when their episodes occurred was one of the questions. Of the 229 who replied, 23 percent experienced the phenomenon during clinical death, 40 percent at the time of serious illness or trauma, and 37 percent had theirs in a setting unrelated to anything that could be construed as life threatening (Atwater, 1994). This latter group claimed to have had experiences every bit as real and involved and

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life-changing as those that happened to people during death or close-brush-with-death crises, and their reports mimicked or matched the same spread of scenario types and aftereffects.

Certainly, it has long since been established that the closer one is to cessation of vital signs, the more apt one is to have a near-death experience; yet this large contingent of near-death-like experiencers indicates that the occurrence of this phenomenon is not necessarily dependent on the physical body's possible demise. Even though another such query has yet to be undertaken by IANDS, many others in the field are obtaining similar percentages in their research. Herein lies the case of Nancy Clark, author of *Hear His Voice*.

What makes Clark's case so fascinating, and her book so special, is that she first experienced a near-death episode, then years later had a near-death-like one – the second being the more powerful. Because of this, I think it is appropriate that we touch upon both of these events before I review her new book.

In 1962, Clark developed toxemia during her pregnancy. She was monitored for a month before delivery, since the threat of convulsions and death was very real. She left her body and floated away after 38 hours of difficult labor:

It was as if I had taken off my overcoat. Below, I saw the nurse pounding on my chest repeatedly shouting, "Come on back, Nancy, you have a son, come back." But that part of me that had separated from my physical form did not want to come back. I felt that I wanted to go toward the light, but once again that darn nurse's voice interrupted my peaceful bliss. (Atwater, 1994, p. 87)

Angry at the nurse, she finally reentered her body, only to discover that she had to peel down a sheet covering her face and hands. She had revived in the morgue.

Seventeen years after her near-death episode, she had a near-death-like experience that was presaged by a vivid dream of her dearest friend dying in an airplane crash. The next morning, he did. Asked to deliver the eulogy at his funeral service, Clark hedged, offering to write the piece if someone else would give it. About 15 minutes before the service was to begin, she felt a strange sensation. Starting at the tips of her toes and gradually working its way up her body were gentle waves of a powerful energy. The force exited out the top of her head, replacing her grief with a peaceful acceptance of her friend's death. When asked for the eulogy she had prepared, she surprised everyone by announcing that she would deliver it herself.

While walking to the podium, she had the sense that her friend was walking with her, hand-in-hand. "My conviction about this is absolute," she declared during a session I had with her (Atwater, 1994, p. 88). Once at the podium, she was only able to deliver three sentences when her eyes were drawn to the back of the room: "I immediately saw a brilliant, pure, radiating, white light. It was unlike any kind of light that you can observe with your physical eyes, nor was it like any kind of light present upon this planet earth" (Atwater, 1994, p. 88). She described this light as being like a trillion suns merged into one. "I knew I was in the presence of God" (Atwater, 1994, p. 88)

Clark recounts an outpouring of unconditional love that was beyond human comparison, and pulsations of luminosity that encircled her in a whirlpool of upward-spiraling energy. All knowledge entered her consciousness. In an out-of-body state, she moved around the room like a sparrow's feather, noticing the radiant white light in everyone who attended as she observed herself, still standing at the podium delivering the eulogy. She left with the light, moving through the ceiling, past the building, above city streets, the planet, and into the dark universe in less time than an eye blinks. She was awestruck at the multidimensional cosmos she beheld, and became aware "of at least ten dimensions as opposed to our three-dimensional world. Time and space were non-existent. Everything was occurring simultaneously. . . . I observed the Light as the Supreme Being and sole creator and starting point of everything ever created" (Atwater, 1994, pp. 88–89).

As she returned to Earth, she understood the reason behind social injustices, crime, all chaos and disorder. She was shown that the simplest acts of kindness are of major importance, and that each person is a unique and integral part of some larger plan. She was given a life review that focused on the times she did not love herself, so she could realize that her true nature, and everyone else's, was love. She was told by the Light to become a communicator and help people become aware of their true identities and understand that there is life after death. In a "flash-forward" scene, she saw how people would ridicule her and resist anything she said until, eventually, the world would realize that life is a continuum.

In *Hear His Voice*, Clark tells us the rest of her story. Each of the 17 chapters begins with inspired wisdom. There are extra sections on "How and Why This Book was Written," "Comment," and "A Final Thought." Kenneth Ring wrote a glowing Foreword. An Appendix Bibliography is included but no Index. "About the Author" tells us that Clark graduated from Women's Medical College at the University of

Pennsylvania, specializing in cytology, the study of cells. For 30 years she worked in the research and clinical cytology arena at Ohio State University and other laboratories studying cells for early detection of cancer and diseases. This scientific background enabled her to analyze her own mystical experience objectively before arriving at the conclusion that parallel realities do indeed exist. Now retired, she is devoting her life to her passion of spiritual work, “by inspiring others toward the Transcendent nature of life and into the mysterious union with the Light of God” (p. 181).

Chapter titles reflect her approach. They are: “Reflections of a Mystic”; “Looking Back”; “A Turning Point”; “A New Life Begins”; “First Wonder, Then Discover”; “A Rare Gift”; “Mysterious Writing”; “The Awakening”; “Why Me, God?”; “Aftereffects”; “Enhanced Abilities”; “Conversations with God”; “Revelatory Wisdom”; “The Call to Hear His Voice”; “From My Heart to Yours”; “The Important Message”; and “Hear His Voice.” As any reader can discern from this, she truly is passionate in explaining what happened to her; yet at the same time, she is careful to show how what she learned from her experiences applies to all of us.

Accepting her mission as a communicator of God’s message was not easy, yet:

When I gave my answer of acceptance, I immediately felt a tremendous infusion of spiritual wisdom or knowledge as if volumes and volumes of material entered my soul. I have noticed that this wisdom surfaces only when I am engaged in the actual work for God such as writing this book. I am always amazed that this wisdom surfaces because it is not something I have previously read about in someone else’s works. (p. 73)

What made it easier for her to finally open up was a chance visit she made to a local church, where the book *Life After Life* (Moody, 1975) was being reviewed as part of their Lenten educational series. The book’s contents jumped out at her. “This is exactly what happened to me” (p. 81), she exclaimed as she began to share her story. To her great surprise, the minister and the people attending the meeting were open and accepting of her experience. The minister told her about Paul in the Bible, whose life was changed when a brilliant light from heaven surrounded him and instantly changed his life. Shortly thereafter, she joined the newly formed IANDS, and in 1984 founded the Columbus, Ohio Friends of IANDS, a group she still facilitates today.

Clark’s intimacy in this book is touching:

Before my encounter with the Light of God, I had no self-esteem, was a perfectionist, judgmental, unforgiving, and a host of other negative

qualities. But *immediately* following my return back from my experience, those qualities disappeared. I became very loving toward God, self and others, not in the old way that says if you are nice to me, I'll be nice to you. Instead, my actions speak more of unconditional love, the love that says I love you, no strings attached. (p. 88)

We are able to recognize from this admission how similar her story is to the vast majority, as told by those who either revived from physical death, were at death's door, or were scared out of their wits by the perception of imminent death, only to transcend this reality and enter another one.

Throughout her book I kept hearing and seeing the thousands of people I have had the privilege of interviewing and studying. After over 26 years of doing this, I still cannot tell the difference between a near-death experience and a near-death-like experience, except for what triggered the episode. For all intents and purposes, it is the same phenomenon with the same life-changing aftereffects. The fact that Clark experienced both, yet feels the first one "served as a means of further preparing me for my actual union with God during my mystical experience in 1979" (p. 45), demands our attention.

Detailed in her book is what happened to her during that second experience: she experienced an unearthly peace, sensed her deceased friend's presence and held his hand, was lifted out of her body and saw that the physical world was an illusion, entered into the reality of her real "Home," encountered a brilliant illuminating light, merged into complete union with what she called the "Light of God," communicated telepathically with this light, experienced indescribable unconditional love, reviewed her life, traveled through a dark void at tremendous speed, wanted to stay but was told to leave to fulfill an Earthly mission, saw segments of her future while infused with tremendous amounts of knowledge, perceived 12 guides who would help her complete her mission as God prepared the way, and returned to Earthly consciousness rapidly, incapable of ever being the same again.

The Nancy Clarks of the world challenge the field of near-death studies. Cases like hers are why I no longer consider the near-death experience to be a separate anomaly, but, rather, part of the larger genre of transformational events that significantly or radically change an individual's consciousness, hence his or her lifestyle and behavior. More emphasis is put on near-death states than the others because, for the most part, these particular episodes occur in hospitals, clinics, or at accident scenes where cessation of vital signs has occurred or was threatened and there is a factual record of some kind that can verify

the event. Also, near-death episodes can and do happen to anyone, anywhere, of any age, race, or belief system, and with similar results. The near-death experience, then, is an ideal state for medical evaluation and statistical research. Unlike with mystics of old who had visions and met spirit beings on mountain tops or in dark caves, we now have a modern miracle for the modern intellect to puzzle over and prod.

Kenneth Ring once said that near-death experiences are spiritual experiences. He might just as well have said that near-death-like episodes are spiritual, too. Clark's book is evidence of this. She says of *Hear His Voice*:

It has been a great privilege to serve God by completing this book He instructed me to write during my encounter with Him in 1979. I do not know if God is finished working through me at this point, but one thing I am certain; I will always remain an open vessel for Him, ready to serve Him in any way He calls me. I have the feeling that my work won't be finished until I return "home" to be with Him once again in paradise. This, after all, is what the journey through this life is all about for *all of us*, receiving the gift of life so we can *learn and be* who we truly are. (p. 177)

Her continuous allusions to God as male may offend some, but her story stands as written, a testimony to the transformative power of both near-death and near-death-like experiences, and the obligation we have in this field of research to study both.

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Letters to the Editor

Scope of IANDS and the Journal

To the Editor:

In regard to Ken Vincent's Letter to the Editor in the Winter 2004 issue of the Journal, I share his conviction that the near-death experience (NDE) is a type of mystical experience (indeed, I was arguing for this view as far back as *Heading Toward Omega* [Ring, 1984] more than 20 years ago), and I always made a point of this when I was teaching my course on NDEs. All the same, I do not necessarily agree that it would be good for either the International Association for Near-Death Studies (IANDS) or the Journal suddenly to open its arms and pages to accounts of mystical experiences or research in this field, although certainly an occasional worthy article on this subject could be published in the Journal, especially if it made a connection to NDEs.

This was always a problem from the very early days of IANDS: whether to extend the umbrella to cover a variety of what Yvonne Kason (1994; Kason and Degler, 1994) called "spiritually transformative experiences" or to limit IANDS just to NDEs or closely related phenomena. And the dilemma was poignant, too, because many people who could relate to NDEs because they had some other kind of similar experiences came to feel that they did not have the same status or sense of belonging as did NDErs – a valid point. In consequence, there was also the danger of a certain elitism or exclusiveness with IANDS, since it catered to NDErs especially, though it, in principle, welcomed everybody.

Nevertheless, I think IANDS and the Journal were right to emphasize NDEs and near-death research per se, and to give them pride of place. Doing so helped to put NDEs on the map and give them a distinct place in the world of nonordinary experiences, rather than diffusing their identity by lumping them with so many other similar transcendental experiences. But that was then. It is a different story now, and should priorities for inclusion be different? However this question is resolved, I personally would not like to see IANDS become IANDMS. That is a truly bad idea. Just try pronouncing it!

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To the Editor:

I am writing in reference to Ken Vincent's Letter to the Editor that appeared in the Winter 2004 issue of the Journal. Vincent would have "mystical religious experiences" included in the Journal. I, for one, would be deeply distressed if that were to happen. Why? Because near-death experiences (NDEs) do not seem to me to be "mystical" nor "religious," as I understand those concepts.

My wife and I were married in 1977, when all the books describing NDEs began to be published. I have a master's degree in psychology and she had a doctoral degree in anthropology. We soon realized something amazing was taking place with near-death research. We continued to read all the books, and I joined the International Association for Near-Death Studies (IANDS) as soon as it was initiated. I lost my wife to cancer in the year 2000 but we communicated well during her terminal months and she felt quite sure we would be seeing each other, in some fashion, again. Since that time, I have met several persons who have had NDEs, and am fairly convinced of the indications to which they seem to point.

However, I do not like the words "mystical" and "religious" used to refer to NDEs. What NDErs describe is nothing like the religion that is preached each Sunday in ordinary churches. And as for "mystical experiences," I am aware of such, as my wife and I continued on a spiritual path while we were together and studied Eastern teachings. But that does not seem to be the direction IANDS needs

to go, and I do not feel that “mystical experience” is the word to use, as we research what “experiencers” are relating to us.

What the NDErs describe allows me to rest assured that there is as good a chance as not that they are describing true experiences. I am 81 years of age and have no concern or fear of leaving this body, just as my wife had to do, four years ago.

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To the Editor:

I am a member of the International Association for Near-Death Studies (IANDS) and a long-time follower of near-death research and the Journal. In the latest issue of the Journal, there was a letter to the editor from Ken Vincent requesting that “mystical religious experiences” take part in IANDS’ agenda and in the Journal.

As we know, the interpretation of the near-death experience (NDE) is based most on the NDEr’s culture or religion, and it is because of this that there is an ongoing debate regarding the origin of the “being of light.” When NDErs come back from an experience, whether or not they have encountered the “being of light,” they should at that time apply the appropriate scientific point of view or religion to their own experiences. The elements of the NDE should be without a label of a specific culture or religion, and we should consider that the “being of light” might represent a supreme being, or one’s higher self as suggested by the holographic reality theory, or a separate part of one’s consciousness as suggested by the Eidolon/Daemon model (Peake, 2004).

It is because of this perspective that I feel religion should not be mixed in with the NDE, with IANDS, or with the Journal, and I therefore oppose Vincent’s proposal.

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Vincent Responds

To the Editor:

It was good to have so prestigious a researcher as Kenneth Ring remind readers that he has long believed, as I do, that the near-death experience represents a type of mystical experience. There is no question that the initial decision to focus the International Association for Near-Death Studies (IANDS) on the near-death experience (NDE) has provided an immeasurable service to NDErs and education to the general public. However, my current Letter to the Editor was written in response to Jan Holden's request in *Vital Signs* (Holden, 2004) for ideas regarding the future of IANDS, in view of its declining membership. I seriously believe that expanding IANDS to include scientific research into other mystical experiences and related phenomena is the natural direction to grow.

My primary impression from the letters of Jack Selk and Brian Miller is that they share an allergy to the word *religious*. Granted, the experience of "unconditional love" expressed by NDErs is often overwhelmed by the harsh, fearful messages of Fundamentalist Christianity and Fundamentalist Islam. Jack Selk is mistaken if he thinks that the term "mystical" implies "imaginary"; like NDErs, those who have mystical religious experiences consider them to be life-affirming, and life-changing, and more real than ordinary life. Folks who are curious to know more about research into this field may find The Alister Hardy Society Religious Experience Research Centre website helpful (<http://www.alisterhardytrust.org.uk/>). William James, in his conclusions to *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1994/1902, p. 569) noted, "Religion, in fact, for the great majority of our own race

means immortality, and nothing else.” The expectation that Jack Selk expressed that he and his deceased wife will be reunited “in some fashion” is the essence of what William James was talking about and the way people have universally understood religious experience.

Brian Miller knows, as do most readers of this Journal, that the interpretation of the NDE is affected by culture and religion. To me, this has been one of the Journal’s major contributions to the study of comparative religion: that NDEs from the time of primitive people until today were, by necessity, expressed within the language and culture of the experiencers. The same is true of scientific research into other mystical religious experiences (Fox, 2003; Hardy, 1979; Hood, 2001; James, 1994/1902). I disagree with Brian Miller that “religion should not be mixed in with the NDE, with IANDS, or with the Journal.” To do so would be to eliminate many articles that appear in the Journal and to dismiss several members of the Consulting Editorial Board who have religious affiliations.

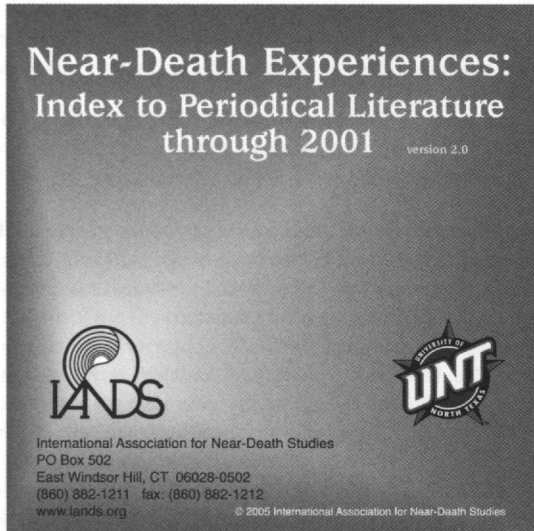
In summary, if continuing IANDS in its current structure is not a viable option, then it seems to me that opening our organization to scientific researchers of other mystical religious experience is the best alternative. Currently, this field is marked by tiny organizations publishing journals with limited distribution. My point is that without a legitimate, strong organization advocating for serious scientific research into these fields, the public will quickly regress into the superstition and sensationalism seen in tabloids. This affects not only continuing research into NDEs but research into all mystical religious experiences.

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