

THE FOLLOWING COMES FROM THE BOOK: "COMING BACK TO LIFE: THE AFTER-EFFECTS OF THE NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCE" BY P.M.H.ATWATER. ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED IN HARDCOVER BY DODD, MEAD & COMPANY, NEW YORK CITY, 1988, IT IS CURRENTLY AVAILABLE AS A SOFTCOVER FROM CITADEL PRESS, NYC, ISBN #0-8065-2303-4.

EXCERPTS FROM CHAPTER TWO WHERE P.M.H.ATWATER SHARES THE STORY OF HER OWN THREE NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCES. *Copyright ©1988 P.M.H. Atwater.*

Research is tricky. Statistical data provides indications and trends but misses underlying causes. Scientific research builds diagrams, but only individual cases supply color and design. For a more meaningful opportunity to understand the near-death phenomenon, I believe we need to go beyond statistical renderings and view what happened in context with the lives of those who lived it. You cannot realistically separate the experience from what caused it. To treat it only as an external event is to deny internal realities and miss important clues.

It is helpful, I think, to realize that not all survivors respond to the experience in the same manner. Some are relatively unscathed by what they went through. Others change to some noticeable degree, and a few are so deeply shaken that life for them can never again be the same. Most of those so deeply shaken experienced long, complex scenarios and because of this, they are classified as the "core" group.

Individual response to what happened makes more of a difference than the event itself.

Sometimes it takes years to assess impact and recognize what changes have been or are being made.

At this point, I believe it would make sense to examine one experience in more detail. This way a generalized life pattern of the individual can be seen in context with the near-death episode and its more immediate aftermath. Although objectivity is often difficult to maintain when relating personal issues, I will be as honest as I can while using myself as an example. Naturally, much detail must be foregone to save time and space.

As you read what follows, I invite you to put yourself in my place. What would you have done if such a thing had happened to you? What would have been your responses? Do you think there is a cause-and-effect relationship between the life lived and the resulting near-death experience? Was the scenario literal or symbolic, or both? Are there underlying causes, connections? Would you have told anyone about it or remained silent? Do you think you could have resumed normal lifestyle habits after such an event? What, if any, changes would you have made in your life had it been you?

The more questions you ask and the more answers you search for, the more you will begin to appreciate what a near-death survivor goes through.

Before, During, and After

I had been dying for some time; at least, carbon copies of letters I had written reveal such thoughts, although I honestly do not remember writing any of them. It was 1975 in Boise, Idaho. My husband had left on the pretext of looking for work in the state of Washington, but the truth is we were both destroying each other and neither of us knew how to stop. The period between 1975 and 1977 is like a dark

fog. A family tragedy involving the youngest of our three children facilitated our divorce after twenty years of marriage. It was the last straw.

Mine had been a disruptive and unhappy childhood, but my husband's had been protected and steady. He expected traditional compliance in our marriage, but I had grown in life without such role models. So, not knowing any different, I "assumed" the role I thought he wanted of me, that lasted until I had a nervous breakdown eleven years later at the age of twenty-nine.

During those eleven years every possible hardship and loss occurred, including farm failures, the birth of a child with a serious deformity, near-bankruptcies, and the forced sale of our home to satisfy tax payments; yet, we all chipped in and made the best of what life offered, calling ourselves "The Happy Huffmans." I learned to recycle everything and waste nothing, to raise and can most of our food and to bake everything from scratch. I came to live by the clock in order to balance heavy workloads with fulltime secretarial employment and dedicated Sunday School teaching at church.

Photo taken two months before I died in October 1976.

Of interest is the fact that during this time my husband turned an old hobby of flying into a profession. He excelled as a pilot and came to specialize in crop dusting, flying mostly night jobs. Because his work was so dangerous, we made it a point to joke about dying and even set a place for "DEATH" at many a supper table with the hope our children would grow up without fear of their father's familiar consort. The lives of many a friend ended in fiery crashes or mid-air collisions.

After the nervous breakdown, I began an intense exploration of metaphysics, psychism, Eastern religions, and altered states of consciousness. The more I learned about levels of mind, the more I learned how to better use my own. From then on there was no stopping me. Being practical and insistent upon demonstration, I put everything I learned to work. In a very short time, I went from being a secretary to employment as a professional writer for the state of Idaho, and won award after award for innovative achievement. Miracles then came daily and with them, a rediscovery of God as a valid and vital force in my life. I meditated conscientiously.

My husband left flying after a near-miss, but the reality of personality changes and glandular deterioration from years of exposure to toxic chemicals could no longer be denied. In an effort to regain self-esteem and self-worth, he tried his hand with insurance sales. The more successful I was, the less successful he became. I skyrocketed, while he turned rude and sullen. When he gave up and left for Washington, I was unable to understand why. I felt betrayed and cheated. So did he.

During the dark days that followed after my husband's exit and our later divorce, the family began to drift apart. Kelly, my son, borrowed money and left to attend a cruise school aboard a square-rigger in the Atlantic Ocean. Natalie, my oldest daughter, started college at Boise State while still living at home. Paulie, the youngest, somewhat numb from her family's collapse, began junior high. After a siege of unemployment and living on food stamps that followed the premature demise of my writing career, I found a position as technical manuals writer with a large bank and was later promoted to forms analyst.

I was thirty-nine years old at the time and thought myself and my life a failure. My search for spirituality seemed more a path of escapism than a way to God, and that bothered me. My achievements no longer

brought satisfaction. The idea of being single again after a lifetime of marriage terrified me; dating felt somehow obscene. With a flood of unexpressed emotions locked tightly inside, I became like a "bomb waiting for a place to explode." It wouldn't take much.

Into this cauldron went the decision to attend college and get a degree, but then a man I met while holding weekly public meetings in my home changed everything. We simply enjoyed each other's company at first. He possessed a gentleness I found fascinating. One night he missed the regular meeting so I went on to bed, exhausted from studying for my first college exam. After midnight, Natalie shook me awake saying he was here but something was wrong. Half asleep, I found him more incoherent than I, mumbling something about an accident on the Interstate, totaling his car, police and paper work, no one hurt but the car was a rental. I did what I could to help, then invited him to spend the night as I had several empty beds. After I returned to sleep, he chose my bed.

There is no blame, really, in what happened. Neither of us were thinking clearly. But I became pregnant and he went half-crazy. He would stage dramatic shouting matches with himself and demand I have an abortion. Try as I may, I could not understand his behavior. I loved children and the idea of having another child, though embarrassing, was rather delightful. His peculiar tirades continued off and on for nearly two months. When the business assignment that had brought him to Idaho ended, he flew back to his home in California, pledging to come back when I needed him. Once he was gone and there was again peace and quiet, I turned to God in prayer, asking that if the baby was not to be born it should leave nature's way. Although I would defend any woman's right to choose abortion, my choice was not to have one.

Three days later on a cold and snowy Sunday morning, January 2, 1977, I was suddenly wracked with pain and began hemorrhaging. The girls had not yet returned from overnight visits and I was alone. I made it to the toilet and filled it with blood, passing a very small, somewhat whitish-looking sac. I stood to have a look, never having miscarried before, and, as I did, a sharp pain squeezed my gut and stabbed my chest. I screamed.

That scream exploded all around the bathroom like a Gatling gun, bursting out what seems a million centuries and a million different forms of me all screaming and all suddenly seeking to converge as each "voice" added to the reverberation of the other until the very shrill of it pierced the house and clawed the heavens. My body fell away. And there was silence.

You don't always know you are dead when you die.

It can happen so suddenly and unexpectedly that the thought of death simply does not occur to you. For this reason, I did not recognize death. I only recognized myself as floating next to the bathroom light bulb with the ceiling scarcely an eyelash away. There was no darkness or distortion of any kind; if anything, my surroundings were even brighter and more distinct than normal.

As I looked around, distance relationships differed. It was now a long way down to toilet, sink, and bathtub surfaces. Although I felt no discomfort, the distance change was disorienting and confusing. I began to bump into the brightly glowing light bulb like some kind of moth, yet it did not seem hot when I touched it. Gradually, the confusion cleared and my mind formed lucid questions. Why was I up here bobbing along the ceiling? How was this possible? Why did I keep bumping into the light bulb? The body on the floor was a mess, so I paid it no attention. Spatial differences were all that mattered.

With the beginning of thought and question came the appearance of dark gray blobs floating around in the air beside me. With every new thought, another blob would appear. No other word seems appropriate. They were blobs, like ink blots, but fully dimensional, buoyant, and without definitive form. The more I thought, the more blobs there were, until my peripheral vision was filled with them. What were they? Where did they

come from? Why were they here? They seemed an irritating mystery without solution. I did not like them.

There was an audible snap, and I was jerked like an overstretched rubber band into the crumpled, bloody mess on the floor, entering my body through the top of the head, that area that was once my "soft spot" when a baby, and feeling the need to shrink or contract to fit back in.

I revived to the reality of blood and pain which I dealt with as best I could, cleaning up my mess, changing clothes, stumbling into bed, propping my legs up with pillows. Sleep came. I have always been a heavy sleeper, able to easily sleep through any noise, but I do vaguely remember my daughters shaking me and asking what was wrong. Illness was feigned and they fixed their own supper. I remember feeling a sense of relief because of the miscarriage, for now I would not have to tell anyone about the baby. There would be no embarrassment. My foolishness would remain my own private affair. It was a hell of a way to learn about myself and about sex, especially at my age, but it was over and the baby was gone. I had learned a painful lesson. Soon enough, sleep returned.

Monday morning I was still bleeding profusely, so my oldest daughter Natalie called where I worked and reported me ill. Then both girls left for school. I managed to dress, get in the car, and start it. Even though our family doctor was only about five blocks away in the same subdivision where we lived, it took me nearly half an hour to drive there. The road kept "jumping around" in front of me and sounds were different. Strange geometric figures zigged and zagged before my eyes and the houses on either side of the street kept changing shape. I was also in a great deal of pain and lacked coordination. When the office nurse saw me, she shrieked and ushered me right in. The doctor laughed uproariously when I told him what had happened. He really chortled about all that pain and blood for just one night of sex that I didn't even get a chance to enjoy. To him that was the most hilarious thing he had ever heard of; and I must admit that when I saw myself through his eyes, I did indeed appear to be a stupid, naive fool with a ridiculous story to tell.

But I kept asking him why my legs hurt so much, as there seemed no connection to me between leg pain and a miscarriage. Neither he nor his office nurse responded. So I spoke louder, asking again and again. He never answered my question but instead gave me an injection to my lower right thigh to stop the bleeding and then laughed some more. Every time he looked at me he laughed. I stubbornly kept asking about my legs but his answers were unrelated. No, he did not think I needed hospitalization; yes, he felt the worst was over; and cheer up, the shot should do the trick and I would be fine. All I needed in his view was to smarten up about sex. He sent me home. I never thought to ask why the drive to his office had been so difficult.

Again, it took what seemed forever to drive the distance but I made it back, and within a half hour of arrival all bleeding stopped abruptly, as if a faucet had been turned off. With cessation of blood, my leg pain increased dramatically, especially in the right leg. I went straight to bed, propping up my legs with more pillows. Sleep came quickly and I slept all night, which is not unusual for me. Pain and discomfort, even the labor of childbirth, had never interfered with my ability to sleep. When it is time for me to sleep, I sleep.

The next morning Natalie again called the bank to report me ill and left with Paulie for school. It was now Tuesday, January 4, and my right leg hurt so much I would have hacked it off with a knife had one been available. In throwing back the covers, I stared in disbelief at what I saw. Encircling my leg from knee halfway to crotch was a wide band of bright crimson skin, fiery hot to the touch. Growing out the right side of that band was a huge lump, like a hot burning volcano, angry and bubbling inside. I had no idea what was wrong. I only knew I had to get help quickly. Our only telephone was on the other side of the house on the kitchen wall. My quest for that phone involved more falling and crawling than walking. I made it as far as the dining room.

The pain became so great it obliterated any semblance of reason or logic. There was just me and the pain. I came to regard that lump as my enemy and instinctively I began to fight back. The lump was killing me. At

that point, I did the worst possible thing I could do. I attacked the lump, pushing, hitting, shoving, pounding, and pushing some more. The only thing I could think of was it had to go. It was the lump or me. The lump won.

This time I floated ever so gently out of my prone body, rising straight up while passing through waves of pain that appeared as heat waves on a sidewalk on a hot summer day. These waves of pain were located outside my body; and, as I floated through them, I could feel piercing, ripping power yet it had no effect. I floated on past the pain waves and continued upwards until reaching the ceiling. I stopped floating when I bumped into the light bulb.

That was funny, and in spite of everything, I laughed, appreciating that at least this time it was the dining room light and not the one in the bathroom and it was off instead of on. My sense of humor was intact.

I hovered around the light bulb for what seemed the passing of many minutes, staring at my body below. I was waiting... watching. I knew quite well what had happened this time, but I wasn't certain if my body was fully and completely dead. I searched and studied for any sign of life, any movement, heave, twitch, or breath. I waited, and there was silence. Nothing moved. I waited longer. Still nothing moved. When I was satisfied the body below was truly dead and nothing more could be done for it, I felt an incredible sense of relief. I felt relief at being freed from the heavy, burdensome mass and weight of that body; I felt a sense of having been released from prison. My body was not me. I was me. A body was something I had once worn, like someone wears a jacket or an old coat. It was gone and I was free, and in my freedom I shouted, "I'm dead, thank God, I'm dead."

There was no sorrow, remorse, or even the slightest concern for anyone or anything, including my children's welfare. There was no thought of needing to live again, to finish unfinished business, or of anger or pain. It was completely natural and comfortable not to breathe and I could see everything distinctly, colors and all. I could hear, feel, move around, think, remember, reason, and experience emotion, only all this was different because I no longer had a physical body to filter and amplify sensations. I did not need that body any more.

I was free! I was free!

So great was my joy in my newfound freedom that I danced and whirled around and around the light bulb as if it were a May Pole, and chanted with unbridled glee, "I'm free, I'm free, I'm free." Everything was bright and there was no fear. I was my true self at last. I was me and nothing else mattered. All my obligations, responsibilities, and duties were over. It was all over.

Soon, enough, though, I bored of twirling around and began to ask questions. Each question was asked "out loud" in the hope of attracting "someone's" attention. What happens next? Isn't an angel or being of some kind supposed to come and take me somewhere? What happens now? Where is everybody? Am I supposed to do something or say something? Hey, anybody, somebody, what comes next? Where do I go? What do I do? Hello? Hello?

As my thought produced questions, blobs began to form around me. Blobs again, only this time they were more like shimmering pastel bubbles, fully pliable, transparent, and translucent. This time they were pretty and I liked them. I finally recognized the blobs to be my thoughts jelled into substance but devoid of specific direction, size, or shape. This being the case, I decided to experiment with them (experimentation being a favorite hobby of mine). I wondered what would happen if I could concentrate deeply enough to bring my thoughts together into one single focus and then project that focus forward as if it were a laser beam to a specific spot in front of me. Could I purposefully solidify substance from thought alone? Could I create with it? Would such a creation continue to exist when I was finished or would it simply evaporate?

Excited about this experiment and busy fixing details in my mind, I glimpsed a peculiar shift in my environment. My dining room below was slowly but surely merging into another kind of space coming down from a source past my ceiling. These two spaces or dimensions of space were merging into each other, but I was not moving. I did not change position in any way. I was where I was, but the world around me was changing and shifting and becoming something else. My dining room faded from sight as this new space became more visible and more real. It was like nothing I had ever seen before. It encompassed me.

The new space was both totally bright and totally dark at the same time yet without shape, form, sound, color, mass, or movement. It was aglow but there was no light source. It was dark but there was no darkness. Somehow within this strange environment was the presence of all shapes, all forms, all sound, all color, all mass, and all movement. Everything that ever was, is, or will be was there, yet there was nothing there at all. It was everything and it was nothing, yet within it was a feeling, a pulse, a sensation of energy "winking" off and on - a sparkling potential which "shimmered," just as Jello does before it responds to touch. I called it "The Void" for lack of a better term or idea. It was comfortable enough, so within its crammed nothingness I proceeded with my experiments.

I decided to create and shape a house, a specific kind of house; and I fixed its exact details and size in my mind, clearly seeing each part, noting every proportion, then focusing all that I saw in my mind to hold it steady as I projected it out to a definitive area in front of me. I remember feeling some pain in doing this, like a throbbing ache, as if I was using muscles long dormant. The discomfort or strain I felt was like that of a new skier trying out winter slopes for the first time, pulling and stretching muscles not used in that manner before. I held my focus, though, and before me there formed an image. It happened fairly quickly and when done, I was aghast. There it was. A house.

I moved forward and knocked on a window. It seemed to be glass. I then opened and shut all doors and windows, stomped across the green floor of the front porch, fingered the large brass front door knob, inspected foundations, roof, and chimney, and gave a hearty slap to each of three white porch pillars. This four-square white house with steeply pitched roof was as solid and sound as any house I had ever encountered. It was a good house. It seemed very real.

This demonstration only whetted my desire to try again. The house was inanimate. I wanted now to try something animate, something alive. I chose to try a mighty oak tree. It had to have a huge, thick trunk with large gnarled roots and countless branches in full leaf. Again, I repeated the same process as before, picturing in my mind each detail of the tree and then projecting that image forward to a particular spot to the right of the house, using my mind as a laser beam. This time I did not feel the same strain or discomfort as before and my thoughts were easier to gather into one single focus. Presto, there was the tree complete with textured bark, insect holes, and vividly beautiful leaves.

It happened! It was possible! It could be done! A human like myself could create from scratch. I could bring together the tiniest of prematter, thought energy itself, and direct it to form specific objects, whether animate or inanimate. Thoughts really are things. They are powerful. All the old stories are true. Thoughts are prematter itself for they have substance and mass and thus can be shaped into form at will. It can be done and I did it. I really did it.

I was so overjoyed I went nuts.

I went on a creation binge, bringing together, creating, forming, and giving life to anything and everything I could imagine. I made cities, people, dogs, cats, trash cans, alleys, telephone poles, schools, books, pencils, cars, roads, lawns, birds, flowers, shrubbery, rain, suns, clouds, rivers; and everything had life and everything moved of its own and there was breath, noise, language and all manner of activity aside and apart from me. Everyone and everything had substance and mass and reality, and all went about their own business

according to their own pleasure and perception. It was all so incredibly wonderful that I watched long with fascination, never thinking I was some kind of god, but rather with a feeling of satisfaction that I had engaged in an exercise perfectly normal for me to do and perfectly natural. I rested.

It came then to my mind to see again those family members and loved ones who had passed on before, and no sooner had I thought the thought than they were there - Mrs. Stinson, Daddy Sogn, and a whole host of people from my past including a grandfather I had never seen as he had died of diabetes when his own children were small.

Everyone who came looked as they had when last I saw them, only they seemed more vibrant and healthier than before, brighter. The grandfather I did not know bore a striking resemblance to photographs I had once seen of my natural father's sister in Montana. Next, I wanted to see Jesus, for I had always wished to thank him for the role he played in history and the example he set for others to follow. His life and mastery of being had always deeply impressed me and I was in awe of it. He instantly appeared, without any effort on my part. When he stood before me, there was no feeling to bow down or worship him; rather, I felt him to be more of an elder brother, long absent, whose return was joyous and a cause for celebration. We spoke at length and I was able to express my thanks. There was great love between us and happy chatter. Then he disappeared as suddenly as he had come and with him all my loved ones disappeared as well, leaving behind only the creations I had made. These I dissolved by thinking them away. It felt right that everything should disappear.

I was now alone in this nonplace and there was nothing.

For the first time I looked upon myself to see what possible form or shape I might have, and to my surprise and joy I had no shape or form at all. I was naught but a sparkle of pure consciousness, the tiniest, most minuscule spark of light imaginable. And that is all I was. I was content that way, without ego or identity, pure, whole, and uncomplicated. Within that nothingness I had become, I simply existed, ecstatic in perfect bliss and peace, like perfection itself and perfect love. Everywhere around me were sparkles like myself, billions and trillions of them, winking and blinking like on/off lights, pulsating from some unknown source.

I would have existed in that state of bliss forever had an irritation not made itself known, like an old sore deep within me; then energy waves burst forth from that deep old sore, and with them came the life of Phyllis, playing itself out from birth to death. I remembered hearing stories of past life reviews, a particular feature of dying common to all, where your life passes before you at great speed for final review.

Remembering this, I expected some kind of theatrical showing of my life as Phyllis or perhaps something like a television replay, but such was not the case. Mine was not a review, it was a reliving. For me, it was a total reliving of every thought I had ever thought, every word I had ever spoken, and every deed I had ever done; plus the effect of each thought, word, and deed on everyone and anyone who had ever come within my environment or sphere of influence whether I knew them or not (including unknown passersby on the street); plus the effect of each thought, word, and deed on weather, plants, animals, soil, trees, water, and air.

It was a reliving of the total gestalt of me as Phyllis, complete with all the consequences of ever having lived at all. No detail was left out. No slip of the tongue or slur was missed. No mistake nor accident went unaccounted for. If there is such a thing as hell, as far as I am concerned this was hell.

I had no idea, no idea at all, not even the slightest hint of an idea, that every thought, word, and deed was remembered, accounted for, and went out and had a life of its own once released; nor did I know that the energy of that life directly affected all it touched or came near. It's as if we must live in some kind of vast sea or soup of each other's energy residue and thought waves, and we are each held responsible for our contributions and the quality of "ingredients" we add.

This knowledge overwhelmed me!

The old saying, "No man is an island," took on graphic proportions. There wasn't any heavenly St. Peter in charge. It was me judging me, and my judgment was most severe. As when I previously realized my body was not me, I also came to realize Phyllis wasn't me either. She was a personality or a facade I had once projected. She was an extension of me, a part I had played, a role I had acted. She was a particular development I was engaged in, a particular focus I had become, and that focus had not developed quite as planned.

I was disappointed and saddened at this, but I took interest and satisfaction from one characteristic she had repeatedly displayed, and that was her desire to try and try again. She always did something, even if unwise. She was not one to sit back and wait upon others or capricious fate. She was relentless in her determination to make of herself a better person and to learn everything possible. She was a doer, willing and able, a person who would reach and stretch. This pleased me and at last I pronounced her personality good and the life she had lived worth its living.

During this judgment process, "The Void" in which I dwelt began to pull away and separate from my dining room in Boise. These two worlds separated as they had previously merged, but I was still next to the light bulb, having never at any time altered my location or the space I occupied. Only my environment had changed, not I. As I looked down at the body of Phyllis on the floor, I was so filled with love and forgiveness that I floated ever so gently back into her body, moving as I went on a layer of large bright sparklers such as those used on the Fourth of July. Again, I reentered through the top of the head, feeling the need to shrink and then squeeze back into the tight form Phyllis's body offered.

When consciousness returned and I was again Phyllis, I was so stunned and shocked I was incapable of relating to anything, even the searing pain in my right leg. Instead of continuing only four or five more feet to the kitchen phone, I rolled over the other way and crawled back to my bedroom, lifted myself into bed, and remained there for two days lost in a stupor.

I did not know my two daughters. I did not recognize food nor did I know how to eat, and the bed on which I lay was a foreign object. Everything around me - clothes, sheets, newspapers, lamps, windows, clocks nothing made any kind of sense nor did I recognize any of it. I was lost between two worlds, existent in neither, and unable to identify any sign or landmark that might stimulate memory. Both daughters realized something was wrong but since I had always projected an image of invincibility, they left me alone, figuring I'd call if I needed help.

We are all descended from a long line of independent, individualistic people who pride themselves on being self-sufficient. Add to that the typical "Code of the West" and you'll have some idea just how independent we all were. Once, when our kitchen caught fire and flames licked the ceiling, I saved the children myself, cut off the electricity, doused the fire with salt and then, when everything was under control, called first our insurance agent and then my husband at his job. It never occurred to me to call the fire department. I could take care of it myself and I knew it. So I did. Many were the emergencies, major and minor, I handled in this manner. Bearing this in mind, it is understandable why the girls were reluctant to take action.

Typically, however, I finally managed to come out of the stupor myself. Memories of my job filtered through. Since it was my only source of income, I had to get back to work. I had to. The thought of it became a driving force pushing me out of bed and to the clothes closet.

I have no recollection how I managed to dress and drive my car all the way across town, let alone safely park it. I only remember trying to walk up those two long flights of stairs in the old building where I worked so I could reach my office on the second floor. There was no elevator. My climb up those stairs was more like as

ascent up a formidable mountain where I lost more ground than I gained but, at last, I reached the top just as my boss walked by. She screamed when she saw me and said I looked more dead than alive and insisted a doctor be called. With her help, a specialist was located who would see me immediately and I was whisked off to his office.

By this time, more memory was returning, at least enough for me to remember my right leg, the band of crimson skin, and the hot lump. I could neither stand, sit, nor lie without excruciating pain. After a long and thorough examination, the doctor was puzzled and shook his head. He could not figure out why I was alive, for I should be dead. He said I must have had a major thrombosis in the right thigh vein which, when dislodged by my pounding, must have blocked all oxygen to my brain. The result could only have been death in his view, but since he was not in attendance when it happened, he could only hypothesize. Phlebitis was evident and severe. In his judgment, he felt the worst was over and I was no longer in imminent danger so he prescribed a potent drug labeled dangerous and sent me home to heal. The drug could not be used for more than seven days or it would kill all red blood cells; it was to be taken around the clock. The pharmacist warned a meal must be eaten before taking each dose or I would sicken. My stay at home was to be that of an invalid with legs propped up and no walking except to the bathroom. My boss granted me a leave of absence, so I settled on the living room sofa near the television for a long convalescence. A few people came to visit and the girls arranged to be home early from school, but other than that, I was alone most of the time. I never once used the television, though. I didn't need to. Strange things began to happen.

Perhaps it was side-effects from the drug; at least, that seems as good an explanation as any. All I know is three unusual incidents occurred.

First, I could hear someone's thoughts at the same degree of tone and pitch as their spoken words. Try as I might, I could not distinguish between what anyone thought and what was said. I could hear both. Since people seldom say what they think, I could not tell how to respond - neither with visitors nor my daughters. This continued the entire week I was on the drug, creating a dilemma so confusing I finally refused to speak with anyone, including my children, or acknowledge conversation.

Second, while lying on the sofa staring into space, there formed slightly above my chest an elevated "rainbow-type" arch like a misty bridge, and across that arch there began to parade a whole host of tiny people I came to realize were all my past lives parading by for review, ending with my existence as a lizard-like being from a water star which had gone nova in the Sirius System. This strange refugee to planet Earth eventually died, as did most of its kind, finding the atmosphere and living conditions here not as compatible as originally calculated. I strongly identified with the lizard being, feeling myself to be every bit the foreigner it was, and just as lost. This parade of life fascinated me and I studied each character carefully, noting the possible evolution of my own personality traits and how each came to be. These tiny characters were like fully animated holograms, totally real and alive yet like so much thin air. This parade also continued for the seven days I took the medication.

Third, I became aware of how the physical trauma was affecting my body and quite by chance, I looked intently at the area of my female organs and right thigh. Instead of seeing the outer shape of my body parts, I was able to see with seemingly X-ray vision each individual cell and groups of cells deep inside myself. These cells were upset and they were marshallng together in efforts to fight off any further destruction and to rebuild damaged areas, moving in waves to accomplish this task as if engaged in battle. It had never entered my mind that microscopic, individual cells had any worth or value other than that of primitive organic functioning; yet, there they were, intelligent beings fully capable of emotion, choice, reason, memory, response. They were truly intelligent, not mindless nothings. To say I was surprised is hardly adequate.

I immediately desired to speak with them and apologize for what had been done. Had I continued trying to get to the phone after regaining consciousness, damage might not have been so severe. I was truly sorry.

With the desire came the ability, and speak with them I did and they with me. We had quite a discussion. That experience had such a profound effect on my appreciation of intelligence that to this day I still work in concert with my body, its cells, and substructure. We are a team, my body and I, and we perform together for the common good.

My physical progress was deemed satisfactory by the doctor, so when the week was over, the dangerous drug was replaced with aspirin treatment. Since aspirin makes me very dizzy, my memory of those six weeks of treatment is a blur. I do remember the man who had impregnated me called many times to see how I was doing. He refused to fly back and help but he did send money and, between his contributions and my group insurance, I was able to keep up with mounting medical and household bills. But my morale suffered.

Healers of all sorts came to help once the word was out that I was ill. I had no idea there were so many different ways to heal and so many different people who channeled or worked with healing energy. I know these people meant well and, in their own way, they were doing all they could. But nothing worked - not laying-on-of-hands, not any kind of prayer, not "poison sucking," not magnetic healing, not burping or high energy, not anything, whether orthodox or unorthodox. Nothing worked because I no longer cared. I allowed healers to come because it would have been impolite not to, but, when they left, it was as if they had never been there. Although I could converse somewhat normally by now and was putting up a good front, nothing made much sense. I functioned more from habit than reason.

I returned to work in increments of time, first for a few hours, then half-days, three-quarter days and finally full-time. It was painful to sit in office chairs and I had trouble focusing my mind. Yet, I did my best and slowly strength returned, but I could not walk properly and wound up dragging my right leg. It was unable to support weight.

More help came, and the specialist who doctored me was grand. I was just starting to make real progress when my landlord chose to raise my rent far higher than I could afford to pay, effective immediately. I panicked. Friends came to my rescue, another house was found in an older section of Boise, and my daughters and I moved bag and baggage to our next abode. The house was not as desirable as we had hoped. My daughters were cramped in a small bedroom and the junior high school Paulie attended proved to be her undoing. It was enough to watch a once strong and able mother reduced to jelly, to have her father move far away and experience the loss of all her security, but to attend a school she both feared and hated was the final straw. There were many episodes of skipped classes, drugs, sex, and drinking. I was frankly puzzled by her behavior and was without any clear idea as to how I might handle the situation.

By now it was March 29. My son Kelly had returned unexpectedly from his long voyage on the other side of the globe. He was only home three days when he decided to join the Coast Guard, a move which would enable him to pay off the loans he had borrowed for the cruise school and to pursue further involvement with the sea. The man from California finally returned to Boise and called to see if he could stop by. I said yes. It was evening. Both girls were gone for overnight visits with friends. Kelly was at a bar talking over old times with buddies from high school. When the man came, I was able to briefly state what I had been through and how it had affected me, withholding any emotion and placing no blame. He listened silently. I made one request. I asked that he hold me one more time and just let me cry, let me be a child again without any burdens or fears - if only for a moment. He jumped up, shouted "NO," and ran out the door, slamming it behind him. Almost immediately, he returned, thanked me for meeting with him, and slammed the door again.

He wrote much later to explain his behavior, saying that one of his daughters had been impregnated by a man who promptly deserted her, leaving her destitute. In coming to his daughter's aid, he had cursed and damned the man who left. After storming out of my house that night, he had later realized that throughout my entire ordeal he had in essence deserted me. He had become the man he had once cursed. This overwhelming

realization drove him to near-suicide before he could get a grip on himself. He wanted me to know this so perhaps I could find it in my heart to forgive him so he could in turn forgive himself.

I had no way to know any of this, however, when he slammed the door that night. All I knew was that throughout my life I had never once turned down anyone in need, no matter what sacrifice or inconvenience might be necessary on my part - and now in my hour of need I was denied.

Denied.

The waiting bomb inside me, at the very core of my being, exploded at last.

It was a kind of suicide, for I willed myself dead and my body was too exhausted to argue. Getting well had proven an arduous task; life had lost its meaning; I could no longer understand my own children; and I had come to dislike my looks and body size intensely, feeling myself to be ugly, old, and fat. I knew "The Other Side" was better than this so I resolved to return there. I wanted to die so I did. I have no way of knowing if I really died or not. I only know my body dropped away, falling on a large, overstuffed chair.

This time, I moved, not my environment, and I moved rapidly, first moving out through the top of my head, then sailing up through the ceiling, out the roof, and into the night sky with a universe of stars watching. My speed accelerated until I noticed a wide but thin-edged expanse of bright light ahead, like a "parting" in space or a "lip," with a brightness so brilliant it was beyond light yet I could look upon it without pain or discomfort. I had been a meditator and teacher of meditation for nearly a decade and "heavenly" lights, white light, and all manner of etheric light were familiar to me; but this was not like any of those. It was more intense, more probing, more radiant, more powerful. It was beyond any frame of reference I had. The closer I came the larger the parting in space appeared until, when I reached its edge, I was absorbed by it as if engulfed by a force field. I cannot describe for you how that felt, except to say it was "divine."

I had succeeded. I was where I wanted to be. I was inside bliss.

Further movement on my part ceased because of the shock of what happened next. Before me there loomed two gigantic, impossibly huge masses spinning at great speed, looking for all the world like cyclones. One was inverted over the other, forming an hourglass shape, but where the spouts should have touched there was instead incredible rays of power shooting out in all directions. The top cyclone spun clockwise, the bottom counterclockwise, but their sides were somewhat bulgy rather than being as smooth-sided as might be expected, considering what appeared to be a tremendous rate of spin.

I was floating at a height about mid-way in relation to the cyclones yet far away. I stared at the spectacle before me in disbelief. They were so massive. And seeing them was so unexpected.

Cyclones!

As I stared, I came to recognize my former Phyllis self in the midupperleft of the top cyclone. Even though only a speck, I could see my Phyllis clearly, and superimposed over her were all her past lives and all her future lives happening at the same time in the same space as her present life. Everything was happening at once! Around Phyllis was everyone else she had known and around them many others. The same thing was happening to all these people as was happening to Phyllis. The cyclone was crammed full of people and I had the feeling of seeing all life. The same phenomenon was happening to each and all. Past, present, and future were not separated but, instead, interpenetrated like a multiple hologram combined with its own reflection.

The only physical movement anyone or anything made was to contract and expand. There was no up or down, right or left, forward or backward. There was only in and out, like breathing, like the universe and all

creation were breathing - inhale/exhale, contraction/expansion, in/out, off/on.

The lower cyclone mirrored the upper one. My Phyllis self was there too and so was everyone else, occupying the same general sector of space as above, with the same phenomenon happening in the same manner. As above, so below. To be very honest with you I felt as if I were witnessing the wave pattern of a giant echo, and I began to wonder about life and its meaning. Was existence really just a series of echoes upon itself, spiraling forever outward from some primeval sound or explosion?

Remarkable as the sight was, I soon lost interest for I was tired of life and its struggle, and I was tired of any search for my place in it. My interest was the middle, where the spouts should have touched but didn't, where that powerful, explosive energy was, where those shooting rays originated. The force from that place was so mighty, its radiation so potent and intense, that it was painful to look at it straight on. What I saw of it came in quick side glances to avoid discomfort. That's where I wanted to go regardless of what such a choice might mean. I had a feeling that place, that space, would somehow lead to God. I wanted to know God, I wanted to know what God was, so I began to move toward the rays.

Meanwhile, my son was enjoying himself with his friends, drinking and laughing and talking over old times. He had a mug of beer mid-air when suddenly he put it down, faced his buddies, stood up and said, "My mother needs me. I have to go help my mother." With that, he left, surprising himself as much as everyone else with this unusual outburst.

A year later, when Kelly and I finally spoke of this night, he described for me the bar scene and how surprised everyone was at his behavior, and how it was when he entered the living room and saw my body. He said it never occurred to him to call for help; rather, after sizing up the situation as best he could, his next impulse was to sit opposite my body in another chair and start talking, not about anything in particular, just talking in a way which would create continuous sound. That impulse seemed of utmost importance so he complied - talking and talking - out loud. To understand why Kelly would trust that inner impulse, I feel a need to explain that all three of my children were taught from infancy to trust their own inner guidance, question all authority, and think independently. No form of dependence was allowed. As everything turned out later, this impulse of his was "right on" in the sense that hearing is the last physical faculty to leave at death. Had he spent time calling for help, I probably would have been beyond assistance, too far removed to return. But because he remained true to what "felt" right and followed that prompting, I was able to "hear" him and respond.

I heard Kelly's voice just when I was close enough to the central core to feel the piercing intensity of each ray and be almost blinded by the radiance. His voice caught my attention. As I turned for better reception, I hesitated. Although no words could be heard there was something unusual in his sound. I didn't hear the voice of a son loving his mother. I heard instead the voice of one human being freely giving love to another human being because he wanted to, not because he had to or because it was expected of him. It was the sound of one human being giving full measure, without reservation, without hesitation, without expectation or need, without conditions or strings attached. There was no pleading. Just love. Love so full-bodied and rich, so warm, fresh, and joyful, so generous and all encompassing, that it seemed the greatest of all gifts. Unconditional love! I was so delighted to discover such a thing could exist on the earthplane, I moved away from the cyclones, past the edge of this lightworld that had engulfed me, and back through the night sky to my house below, descending rapidly and entering my body, again through the top of the head, squeezing to fit back in.

This time my body did not respond. I felt slightly cooler than when I left and a little stiff. I panicked.

Instantly, I assumed the role of both coach and cheerleader, and sped from cell to cell, shouting for all I was worth, apologizing to each for what I had done. I promised never to be so thoughtless again, that I was back

to stay and I would do whatever I could to regain my health and make full amends. I kept shouting at cells to wake up, wake up now, I was here to stay and we all had a job to do. The lungs were the hardest to restart. The bellows wouldn't expand, so I puffed and puffed and puffed until a whoosh of air entered; and when it did, my consciousness shifted to my head level. Physically, I blinked for a moment, then tried to stand, just to make certain "everyone" had awakened and all cells were responsive.

Standing was a real struggle. Kelly being wiser at that moment came to help, but my vocal cords would not work. I could not speak. He then put his large arms around me and held me tight. It was as if a prayer had been answered. My son supplied what the man from California refused. Tears came and then a flood. I cried silently for what seemed hours, then Kelly spoke. He told of receiving a letter from me mailed around late January, a letter handed to him after a gale had struck and they were forced to port in northern Spain. It was a dark and dismal time in his life, and he had become uncooperative in class, depressed at discovering this so-called special school was no different than regular high school and did not include oceanography classes, as he had been led to believe. He was saddled with a tremendous debt for what seemed a waste of time and he was inconsolable.

In that letter, I had described life as being an immense school, where we each study certain subjects in certain grades according to our level of understanding, where there were recesses when we earned them and time out; but essentially, the schooling was relentless as we passed up grade levels to higher and more difficult studies until we graduated. Nothing was ever wasted, regardless of how it seemed, and we were all, for the most part, headed in the same direction, back to the God from whence we came. The letter gave him hope and showed him there was purpose in everything, even darkness and despair.

As I stood cuddled in his arms, Kelly returned my words to me, words sent in a letter half-way around the globe, words that helped him in his darkest hour and were now returning to help me in mine. I saw in my mind a "circle" close and I understood. I took this gesture to be a confirmation that my choice to live was a good choice. It was okay to be back. I really could rebuild my life.

My son put me to bed. I slept long and soundly.

By morning I could speak so I telephoned William G. Reimer, a naturopathic doctor. Although major symptoms had been alleviated by traditional medical procedures, I was far from well and still dragging my right leg. Something was wrong, very wrong, and I intended to find out what. I had never been a patient of Reimer's before, but I had once defended him and several other naturopaths when they were unfairly arrested by an overly zealous and ambitious attorney general. Fair treatment under law had always been an issue with me and I considered their treatment grossly unfair. The public defense I helped arrange proved the naturopaths innocent of all charges. They were released and all charges dropped, but the "price" I paid for helping them was high.

In those days, advocacy was not appreciated and naturopaths were considered quacks.

Now my life was on the line. I wasn't certain how naturopathy worked but I was certain about Bill Reimer's ability as a healer. I did not want symptoms cured, I wanted to get down to the basic cause - and this time it must be nature's way. It didn't matter to me if Reimer could solve the entire problem of cause or not - but I knew he could help me begin, point me in the right direction - and that was what I wanted. I was through dying. I wanted now to live.

My choice to explore natural healing and naturopathy as a starting point meant I would need to relearn the definition of what constituted health. I had always thought of health as the absence of disease, but I discovered health is really a state of balance and harmony existing between our physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual selves. Anything else is disease (not-at-ease).

Natural healing, I learned, is based on the premise that all parts of the self are involved in any disorder and that all must be addressed to insure recovery. No single part can be treated out of context from the others. In natural healing, the patient is considered an active participant and all treatments are geared toward that individual's own inherent rhythms of self-healing. Root causes are dealt with rather than symptoms alone and, since disorders are "backed" out of the body the way each entered, the patient usually gets worse before he or she gets better. It is definitely not the fastest method for healing, but it is more thorough and more complete.

After extensive examination and diagnostic testing, Bill Reimer described several courses of action which could be taken; one of which involved a thorough "house cleaning" going all the way back to birth to readjust anything which might be out of line. The idea of possibly correcting a lifetime of abuse and misuse was appealing but also frightening. I was about to pick an easier alternative when I remembered my vow to regain total health, so I consented to the full package. Monthly payments were arranged as my office insurance did not cover naturopathic care. What I experienced while "dead" was not discussed except in passing, and briefly at that. Of primary concern at that point was the condition of my body and my lack of physical coordination.

My health did indeed get worse during the months of treatment which followed but it plummeted farther and faster than Reimer expected. I seemed locked in a downward spiral which could only be slowed, not stopped. As Reimer searched diligently for any procedure which would prove more effective, I began to question the wisdom of naturopathic care. The biggest stumbling block to recovery, as it later turned out, though, was not the type of healing I had selected, nor my purpose in selecting it, but rather my state of mind. I was convinced I was going crazy. Yet I confided to no one my fears lest I be made sport of or condemned, for the reaction from the first physician I had seen and his incessant laughter still "burned" across my memory. It would have made a difference had I been more open but I wasn't.

I didn't fully trust Reimer because I didn't fully trust myself.

I could not believe what had happened to me in dying nor could I forget it. I tried to tell myself it was all a dream or a vision or a hallucination, but I knew in my heart it was none of these. What I saw and experienced began to haunt me. It began to come back, replaying itself over and over again when least expected - the sparkles of pure energy, cyclones, "The Void," exercise of creation - all of it.

What does it mean? Why did it happen? What am I supposed to do about it? Why won't it go away and leave me alone?

What I experienced challenged everything I had ever read, seen, or heard, everything I believed. What I experienced was so powerful, so intense, so shocking, it practically wiped clean the slate of my mind, annihilating my belief systems with it. I had nothing left solid enough to stand on, no grounding, no foundation on which to rebuild; every step I took wavered, like trying to walk on Jell-O. Enough habit and memory returned so I appeared relatively normal and could continue limited consulting projects and various other jobs in addition to my employment at the bank - I could help others but I could not help myself.

My major focus kept centering around the experiences I had survived rather than any other issues. What if they were real? What if everything really happened exactly as I remembered it? If so, if real, then that meant there is no such thing as death. Death does not exist for it was truly just like walking through a doorway or switching states of consciousness. That was all there was to it. Death, then, does not end life, it only changes the scenery and turns life's script around.

If that is right, if my experiences were indeed real, then there really is a single, all-powerful, all pervasive Force in, through, and behind all things. God! That means, then, that God is no fairy story, no wishful

thinking, no joke, no ancient legend. It means God is real. God is.

Such joy, such remarkably good news should be shared. At least, I decided to tell others what had happened to me and what I had learned from it. But when I did, they would nod accommodatingly and continue as if nothing had been said and, if I spoke louder and insisted on the importance of my message, they would withdraw altogether as if I were some kind of kook trying to get attention. I wound up awash in ridicule. If indeed I had a message to share, I certainly did not know how to share it. Whatever good news I possessed came without any instructions on what to do with it.

Silence seemed the better virtue.

I rationalized this retreat into silence by telling myself that what had happened was my secret, it was my own private affair, a special tryst between God and me, and spreading such news around would somehow cheapen or lessen its importance. It belonged to me. It was mine to keep. Others weren't interested anyway so why should I bother.

The deeper into silence I retreated, though, the more I questioned my own sanity and the validity of what I thought true. To complicate matters further, I could not relate to myself as Phyllis. Her habits, personality, clothing,, possessions, and lifestyle were foreign and irritating to me; yet, when I looked in the mirror, there she always was, looking back at me, all five foot seven, one hundred ninety pounds of her. She was shaped like a pudgy balloon with a deep sadness in her eyes and a washed-out face rimmed with short wavy hair. There was ample proof in her surroundings that she had once been a happy, bouncy, spontaneous woman with a penchant for song and a lust for exploration, be it caves or ghost towns. And she adored rocks. Everywhere I turned there were rocks, even in her purse. Rocks in her head, too, I mused.

What was I going to do about Phyllis? I was wearing her body and living her life yet I did not know her. All I knew was - she wasn't me, and I didn't fit her pattern.

This schizoid behavior deepened my fear of instability and insanity.

Into this confusion came three people, all strangers and younger than myself - astute, enthusiastic, and voraciously bent on learning all they could of life and the potential of "self." These three people offered to help me and together we formed a kind of "extended family" whereby we exchanged keys to each other's homes, shared our resources, and formed a mutual support pact. Elizabeth and Terry Macinata were married then and had a young son, Daen (they are now divorced). The other member of our group was Tom Huber (he has since changed his name to Thomas Shawnodese Wind). I dubbed us all "cousins" as we began our year-and-a-half journey together, probing the depths of life and its living.

We would hold sessions employing various kinds of confrontive therapy. Sometimes our sessions were spontaneous and sometimes they were planned in advance, occurring daily or only once in a while. We tried out any idea that seemed reasonable, including psychological games utilizing symbols for deeper insight. Sometimes we just went about the business of everyday living, listening carefully to what each said while observing physical mannerisms. If we detected anything negative or self-defeating, we would challenge that person immediately, forcing him or her to confront the habit, where it came from, why it was there, and what might be done about it. Often we would verbally battle each other and argue heatedly. Many of our sessions were painfully unmerciful as nothing was off-limits to debate, and the more painful a session was the more successful it was considered. Personal issues of every description surfaced.

Meanwhile, my treatments with Dr. Reimer revealed a long list of problems I did not know I had, such as dyslexia (which was later confirmed by a medical physician). When I was a child, I would often feign play, sneak out to an old "milk house," and lock the door, prop up an orange crate for a stage, stand upon it, and

read comic books and Sunday funnies out loud until I finally trained myself to speak correctly when I read. These "secret" sessions took three years and I never confided to anyone what I was doing or why. Dyslexia was unknown then, and there were no special classes for children with learning disabilities. My need to coordinate eyes, mouth, and brain so I could read correctly was instinctual. It was something I did because there seemed no other alternative at the time. The dyslexia condition was just one of many surprises Bill Reimer uncovered.

Since my body had always been quite sensitive, it was no surprise when I learned that many "scars" had collected from a lifetime of reactions to chemical medications. To help correct a whole host of dexterity and speech difficulties, damage from the death experience and shifts in brain/mind functioning, the doctor and my "cousins" had me do many exercises for the purpose of relearning crawling, standing, walking, climbing, running, identifying left from right, seeing, hearing, and organizing thoughts. I performed exercise drills by the hour, daily. I finally reached a point where I could run without falling and my right leg no longer dragged.

By that fall I ventured out and bought a house with a large garden in back. This move put Paulie back in the part of town she enjoyed most, where her childhood friends lived; but, by then, her world had become rooted in rebellion. The move made little difference. She was kicked out of school repeatedly. Discontented and unhappy Natalie deemed this a good time to leave so she rented an apartment and moved out. My overall health began deteriorating again. I suffered three major relapses, the last of which was adrenal failure. My blood pressure registered sixty over sixty. Immediate emergency treatment required my "cousins" taking over my household and my life. When I broke down my new house broke down, too, flooding out the basement bedroom three times and leaking everywhere imaginable including roof and bathtub. I missed so much work from this second round of health reversals my boss finally sat me down and made it quite clear that either I got well and stayed well or I would be replaced.

My life was out of control and I was helpless to stop it.

Everything turned into a horrible nightmare. No matter where I turned or what I did, disaster followed. All the gains previously made were lost. The only thing I could do that gave me the courage to keep going was chant the words, "GOD IS," over and over, sometimes silently, sometimes out loud, by the hour.

In early November, my extended family decided a change of scenery might help, so with Reimer's permission, I was laid snugly in a van and trucked up to Seattle, Washington, to attend the Mind Miraculous Symposium sponsored by the Church of Religious Science in the Opera House of Seattle Center. This giant auditorium was filled to overflowing with several thousand people and a roster of speakers, all famous and brilliant. The injection I had been given had taken effect by then and I was both alert and mobile. None of us knew it, but a miracle was about to happen.

The first speaker, Dr. William Tiller, physicist from Stanford University, talked about "The Eternal Now." He spoke of things like energy, mass, and interpenetration, but I only remember staring at charts and drawings projected on a huge screen behind him. As his talk ended, he stated it was his belief everything happened at the same time in the same space and, with those words, there flashed on the screen his rendition of what the physical dynamics of that phenomenon might look like. The diagram which appeared was of two spinning cyclones, inverted over each other, forming an hourglass shape, and where the spouts should have touched there was a powerful force shooting rays out in all directions.

I jumped out of my seat in shock and ran from the auditorium.

In muffled screams I cried out words like: He saw it, too. He did. I am not the only one. He knows what I know. I'm not crazy. I am not crazy! The cyclones are real. It all really happened. It wasn't a dream or a

hallucination or a fantasy or a projection from any kind of memory. It was real. I am real. I can be Phyllis because I am Phyllis. I am me.

My heart practically pounded out of my chest as I slumped into a cross-legged position under a foyer light. I am not crazy! I am not crazy! I am not crazy!

Soon after, a medical doctor happened by, returning from a call he had made to check on a patient. He was so impressed by the "glow" on my face at that moment that he walked over and sat down beside me, then offered me a job should I ever move to Seattle. I was thoroughly astonished but said nothing except to thank him and affirm that I would consider his offer. Much later, after several more trips to Seattle, I turned his offer down, but its timeliness and impact refreshed me and gave me hope. He was never told the effect his words had on me for it seemed wiser just to savor the promise his offer implied.

He and Dr. Tiller comprised the miracle I so desperately needed. The nightmare was over at last.

From that day on my health improved so rapidly everyone was amazed, including me. The turnaround was dramatic. I now knew I could trust what had happened to me but I still did not know what to do about it. Just because I now knew my experiences were real did not mean I would have to accept them or find any place for them in my life. It was obvious my first step must be a decision. Would I accept or reject? Here is what I considered:

Accepting means taking a risk, to accept my experiences and integrate them into my daily life could well mean more ridicule and scorn from others, and facing the issue of insanity again and again. I could be labeled undesirable or a fake since I had no proof to offer, or I could be accused of trying to be some kind of holy seer or divine prophet. Acceptance would change my life completely, necessitating that I live what I now knew to be true. Since my experiences challenged the validity of everything I had previously known, accepting those experiences would mean I would have to relearn and redefine life from scratch, from breathing right on up to thinking and relating. I had already lost much, but I could lose more; I could lose everything and everyone, but in so losing, I could also gain. I could gain everything and everyone, and possibly learn how to "live" God. Rejection would mean denial, not only of the experiences but my own sense of integrity, honesty, and inner truth. Rejection would mean

turning my back on what I knew happened and pretending it away. But it would also mean I would have to take fewer risks and could retain what security and comfort I still possessed. Rejection would be sensible and practical, all things considered, allowing more time to concentrate on healing and the continuance of life as usual. No one would ever know the difference.

There would be no further damage to my reputation or further insult to my family. My job and lifestyle could be preserved. But rejection would also mean I would have to deny what might have been a peek at God, the opportunity of experiencing creation and the discovery of divine oneness and truth. It would mean saying no when deep down inside I wanted to say yes.

It was a case of "damned if you do and damned if you don't."

Acceptance was clearly no panacea and rejection offered no escape. My decision was finally based on peace of mind. No matter what else happened in life, I still had to live with me. If I couldn't be honest with myself, who could I be honest with? I chose to acknowledge all that happened and totally restructure my life. What had happened, happened. Nobody's belief or disbelief, including mine, could ever change that simple fact.



Photo taken a year and a half after I died.

The Quest to Understand

The near-death experience itself is just an introduction to what comes next. My choice to acknowledge my experience and pursue a total restructuring of my life led to pathways both magical and frightening. Some of what I did next completes Chapter Two in "COMING BACK TO LIFE," and can also be found in "BEYOND THE LIGHT," the section on "Spiritual Emergence/ Emergencies." Only in "FUTURE MEMORY" (hardcover, Birch Lane Press, New York City, 1996; current edition through Hampton Roads Publishing in Charlottesville, VA, ISBN #1-57174-135-6) do I begin to speak of the revelations I received during my three near-death episodes.

My story is scattered as it is because I use aspects of it to illustrate what many near-death survivors go through in coming to terms with their experience and the aftereffects which follow. And there are after-effects, both psychological and physiological. In November of 1978, I began my research of the phenomenon, a full-time commitment that continues yet today and is based on interviews of over 3,000 near-death survivors, 700 of them in greater depth. My books contain my research, much of which has since been verified by other researchers.

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