

# **The Eternal Life of Consciousness**



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## The Eternal Life of Consciousness

### Introduction

**What is the best available evidence for the survival of human consciousness after permanent bodily death?** While numerous scientific practitioners have attempted to conclusively answer this question, none so far have succeeded.

Why not?

The kind of scientific evidence-seeking to which our society has become accustomed isn't what we should be looking for here. The best evidence is simply a new perspective on something we already know.

Despite the advances it has attained for humanity, the scientific method is inadequate to conclusively answer the above question. Strong innate curiosity has compelled many brilliant minds to pursue science, usually using methods that overlay data with the rigidity of the scientific method. However, some of these same researchers find that there are times that this method does not—*cannot*—yield accurate answers.

An integral and inextricable component to the scientific method is *observation*. Observation is a cripplingly missing element when it comes to what researchers call “scientific” studies. It is not possible to effectively employ the scientific method in studies on this subject because the researchers cannot personally observe the data. They can only assemble the testimony of experiencers into groupings and make some assumptions that may or may not be what the individual narratives intended. Those studies, while *good* tools, are not the *best evidence*. The best evidence *must* come from individual near-death experiencers telling their individual stories.

Part of what makes science so dependable is the fact that it is an iterative process. In order for a theory to be scientifically accepted, it must be repeatable on demand. Therefore, to say definitively that human consciousness survives permanent bodily death from a purely scientific standpoint, one would be required to repeatedly run the experiment on demand and get the same results each time. Since this would involve intentionally causing permanent bodily death to humans, and then somehow communicating with the deceased in a documented and verifiable manner, it cannot currently be done in a legal or humane setting. (While such an experiment could theoretically be done with terminal patients, it would be ineffective because so many such patients are incoherent or unable to communicate at all.)

Interestingly, the idea of experimenting with life after death was explored in the 2016 Netflix series *The OA*.<sup>1</sup> In the fictional show, a doctor with an insatiable desire to know what happens to human consciousness after death kidnaps five victims, to be used as test subjects. He holds them captive for years as he repeatedly kills and revives them to study what they tell him about their time in the afterlife. While the show is highly entertaining, it is also fascinating in its showcasing of not only the natural human curiosity of the subject, but also the problems inherent in proving anything related to the subject from a scientific standpoint.

### *Near-Death Experiences*

So, if the scientific method can't provide the best available evidence for the survival of human consciousness after permanent bodily death, what can?

While typical scientific research sorely lacks necessary observation, observation is exactly what credible eyewitness testimony provides.

Though there is plenty of *evidence*, none of it can *prove* with certainty that consciousness survives permanent bodily death. No eyewitness has survived permanent bodily death. The next best witness is someone who has survived temporary bodily death, remembers remaining conscious during the event, and is able to recall and recount specific details from the event. This is an experimenter, someone who has actually experienced death (or near-death), remained conscious throughout the process, and witnessed the afterlife for themselves.<sup>2</sup> There is an abundance of experimenter eyewitness testimony that serves as credible evidence in both the public and private domains—experiencers of near-death experiences (NDEs).

From reading or listening to individual NDE testimonies, an inference can be made that consciousness does survive permanent bodily death from the extrapolation that consciousness survives temporary bodily death in NDEs. And the best existing experience that comes closest to permanent death is near death. I am not a scientist, a scholar, or a faith leader. What qualifies me to address the question is my own near-death experience, which turned me from an adamant skeptic to—not just a believer—a *knower*. I now *know* that our souls continue on after bodily death.

More than that, the NDE changed me in ways I never could have imagined. On September 1, 1988 I was a skeptic. Nothing could have dissuaded me from believing that when a person dies, that's the end—that they are gone and nothing of them remains. But a bolt of lightning literally jolted me into reality.

On September 2, 1988, that lightning bolt bestowed upon me a gift, the power and profundity of which remain unmatched more than three decades later. That gift was knowledge:

knowledge that death isn't the end; knowledge that where we are now is a temporary place, and where we go when we die is home; knowledge that what we do with our time here matters and affects our afterlife; knowledge that our souls, the vessels that carry our consciousness, continue on after bodily death and actually become keenly aware, awake, and all-knowing once unencumbered by our bodies.

It's this element of my NDE, the *knowing*, that qualifies me to answer the question of what the best available evidence is for the survival of human consciousness after permanent bodily death. Unless they have had an NDE, no researcher, scholar, faith leader, or scientist can know without any doubt that consciousness survives permanent bodily death. I can testify to that, and I do so without reservation. The certainty and penetrating *knowledge* resulting from my experience and the experiences communicated by many who have had NDEs are the best and strongest evidence available.

One needs to regard the single near-death experience narrative such as mine in comparison to studies done by researchers who draw from hundreds, or even thousands of NDEs. Why would one person's individual NDE story be better evidence than a collection of hundreds or thousands of such stories? Most importantly, any study done by someone who did not experience the NDE themselves loses the scientific component of observability, thus losing their scientific credibility. The information these researchers compile in their studies is subjective and based on what individual near-death experiencers report *to them*. It is far more reliable to go directly to the source of such information, the near-death experiencer themselves, than to rely on secondhand testimony from a researcher who is gathering stories and clustering them into groupings looking for similarities.

In contrast to the NDE studies, the personal NDE narrative is pure eyewitness testimony from an individual who personally observed the afterlife. Eyewitness testimony rises to the legal standard of *beyond a reasonable doubt*. According to West's Encyclopedia of American Law:

*Beyond a reasonable doubt is the highest standard of proof that must be met in any trial. In civil litigation, the standard of proof is either proof by a preponderance of the evidence, or proof by clear and convincing evidence. These are lower burdens of proof. A preponderance of the evidence simply means that one side has more evidence in its favor than the other, even by the smallest degree. Clear and convincing proof is evidence that establishes a high probability that the fact sought to be proved is true. The main reason that the high proof standard of reasonable doubt is used in criminal trials is that such proceedings can result in the deprivation of a defendant's liberty or even in his or her death. These outcomes are far more severe than in civil trials, in which money damages are the common remedy.*<sup>3</sup>

Since any NDE study uses secondhand information that the researcher did not personally experience, that means that there is no study that rises to the level of *beyond a reasonable doubt*.

NDE researchers must make assumptions about experiences they did not personally observe (sometimes even from people with whom they may not have ever spoken). That lack of direct observation calls into question the scientific merit of the study. As Dr. Raymond Moody stated in the introduction to his groundbreaking 1975 book *Life After Life*, “I have never been close to death myself, so I am not giving a firsthand account of experiences which I have had myself. At the same time I cannot claim total objectivity on that basis, since my emotions have become involved in this project.”<sup>4</sup> In other words, by definition, such research could not possibly be separated from personal bias, and thus could not be purely objective, nor strictly “scientific.”

It’s important to point out that in a court proceeding, the sole form of admissible eyewitness testimony is from the eyewitness *themselves*. A judge will not allow someone else to report on what the eyewitness saw or heard. That would be hearsay and cannot be adequately substantiated. It is inadmissible.

The same holds true in any NDE study. These studies use data reported by researchers based on what eyewitnesses to after-death consciousness said happened. That is hearsay and calls into question the veracity of the studies. The only truly legitimate eyewitness testimony must come directly from the eyewitnesses themselves, and not from large groupings of stories in quasi-scientific studies. According to a 2017 article in *Scientific American* titled “Eyewitness Memory is a Lot More Reliable than You Think,” eyewitness memory is very reliable.<sup>5</sup> Hearsay is not.

One critical problem with secondhand understanding or retelling of NDEs is the inherent subjectivity imposed by the fact that all the stories researchers collect vary in so many ways. This bears explanation:

Every near-death experience is unique to the person who lives through it. Though they may have similarities, no two are exactly alike. There are a number of features that have been identified as common to many NDEs. These common NDE features are usually measured using one of two scales; the NDE Scale (also known as the Greyson Scale) or the newer NDE-C Scale.

The most well-known and frequently used list of NDE features is contained in the Greyson Scale developed by Dr. Bruce Greyson.<sup>6</sup> Having focused much of his work on the study of near-death experiences, Greyson is on faculty at the University of Virginia Health System in the Division of Perceptual Studies. Greyson developed the Greyson Scale (also known as the NDE Scale survey) in 1983, and since then it has been the standard tool by which to distinguish NDEs from non-NDEs, based on what occurred during the NDEs in question. The Greyson Scale uses a weighted scoring system to score sixteen multiple-choice questions, with any score between seven and thirty-two considered to be an NDE. The questions were developed from individual NDE narratives and classified into four groups with themes pertaining to the transcendent, paranormal, physiological, and environmental.

Recently, the newer NDE-C (Near-Death Experience Content) Scale was introduced. It expands the list of questions from the Greyson Scale's sixteen questions to twenty questions.<sup>7</sup> Jody A. Long from the Near-Death Experience Research Foundation (NDERF.org) explains that one question from the Greyson Scale was considered redundant and was omitted, and the remaining questions were reworded to make positive, clearer statements. Long goes on to explain that new items were added to address the content of NDEs including negative emotions, the experience of a gateway, the impression of being dead, the decision to come back from the experience, and ineffability. The answers to the NDE-C scale questions are not a multiple-choice format, but rather a scale of 0 to 4 with 0 being "Not at all; none" and 4 being "Extremely; more than any other time in my life and stronger than 3." In the NDE-C scale, there are six questions that are clustered in a category called "Beyond the usual": two questions address "Harmony," five questions address "Insight," five questions address "Border," and two questions that address "Gateway."<sup>8</sup>

Even with these scales, it can be difficult for researchers to consistently classify some of the common and not-so-common elements of an NDE narrative. They have to rely on the description given to them by the respondent as to what exactly happened. Then they must interpret the experience that they did not actually observe. One of the biggest problems in trying to maintain a scientific approach to the study of NDEs is the lack of reliability of self-reported subjective experiences.

For example, one study authored by Dr. Pim van Lommel and several of his colleagues was reported in the prestigious journal *The Lancet*. That study found that 31 percent of near-death experiencers travel through a tunnel.<sup>9</sup> Respondents to the study's authors, while reporting on their own individual experiences, may have used other terms to describe traveling through a tunnel. Had a respondent replied that he had seen a "vortex" or "swirling colors" the researcher may have coded that response as a tunnel, or as something other than a tunnel. Or, if the study questions were more direct and closed-ended, it may have directly asked, "Did you travel through a tunnel?" The respondent may have answered "no" because they thought their experience was one of traveling through something more like a black hole, for example. Some people might call that a tunnel experience, but others may call it something else. Then it is left to the arbitrary discretion of a researcher who did not experience it themselves to classify the experience. But that researcher's classification, though likely well intended, may not even be correct.

### *After-Death Communications*

After-death communications (ADCs) come in numerous forms but always involve a deceased soul communicating with a living person. Thus, the implication is that the deceased

person has a consciousness that is still functional, has survived the death of the physical body, and is contacting (or attempting to contact) a living person.

Some physical evidence of after-death communications does exist, however it does not rise to the standard of proof *beyond a reasonable doubt*. There are, indeed, recordings, photographs, and other purported evidence of after-death communications. While these *are* physical evidence, it is important to point out that they could have been easily doctored. That is in no way saying they all are fake. I don't believe they are. However, the fact that these things *could* be doctored calls into question the credibility of all such evidence. *Beyond a reasonable doubt* is the highest legal standard for proof, and physical evidence of ADCs does not meet that standard.

There are sometimes verifiable eyewitnesses, such as those who have experienced an after-death communication, and those who have been with someone who has received an ADC when it happened. This type of witness testimony can be difficult to scientifically prove since, like NDEs, it is based on experiencer testimony. The data cannot be directly observed by the researcher, but can only be culled from the narrative of the person who received the communication.

There are numerous ways in which the surviving consciousness of deceased people will attempt to bridge the dimensional gap and contact the living. According to Marilyn Mendoza, PhD in *Psychology Today*, there are twelve main categories of ADCs, including sensing a presence, hearing a voice, feeling a touch, smelling a fragrance, visual experiences, and visions. Other categories include twilight experiences that happen just as a person is dozing off to sleep, just waking up, or meditating/praying. ADCs can sometimes be out-of-body experiences, where the living person leaves their body and visits the deceased person wherever they are. This can include physical phenomena such as flashing lights, objects falling off shelves, or appliances turning on.<sup>10</sup>

The ADC category Mendoza discusses that happened to me is telephone calls. Mendoza states, "These are said to be among the more frequently occurring signs. Calls may occur while awake or asleep. People have reported their phones ringing and hearing messages from the deceased."<sup>11</sup> In my case, my landline phone rang, waking two people, and I had a full conversation with my deceased grandfather. I discuss this vivid ADC in detail beginning on page 33.



*Eyewitness Testimony Is the Best Available Evidence*

Individual human factors involved with decoding information can, and sometimes do, skew the data. Because near-death experiences and after-death communications are so unique, and the people reporting them are individuals with their own educations, life experiences, and vocabularies, these variables make it difficult for researchers to accurately and consistently assemble the information. Researchers do an excellent job with the information they have, but still, assumptions must be made by humans.

While these studies are important and definitely have their place in academia and medicine, I do not think they offer the “best available evidence.” The best available evidence comes directly from the mouths, pens, and keyboards of individuals who have personally witnessed their own survival of consciousness following their own bodily death, and have returned to tell of it, and/or have been the recipient of after-death communications and can credibly report on the events. And, each person’s experience must be judged as evidence on a singular, individual basis, separate from the experiences of others, because as soon as an outside individual starts to interpret groups of data that they did not observe, that data *must* become skewed.

*Direct experiential eyewitness testimony is the best available evidence* to answer the stated question of human consciousness surviving permanent death. The best existing experience that comes closest to permanent death is near-death. Therefore, based on logic and reasoning, eyewitnesses who have had a near-death experience, an after-death communication—or better yet, both—are in the most favorable position to provide the most compelling evidence of human consciousness surviving bodily death, be it temporary or permanent.

As someone who has experienced both an NDE and an ADC, providing this best evidence is what I will attempt to do in layman’s language in the following pages. It is not an academic or scientific dissertation on proof of an afterlife, not only because I am not a scholar or a scientific researcher, but also, and most importantly, because absolute proof doesn’t exist. What does exist is credible eyewitness testimonial evidence.

It is worth repeating: While use of the scientific method in studying NDEs and ADCs is sorely lacking in critical observation, eyewitness testimony is all about observation. Because I have personally observed the afterlife, and the survival of my consciousness after death (or near-death), my story and stories like mine provide the best evidence that consciousness survives permanent bodily death.

## My Story

I have told my unique, yet not unusual, NDE story many times both verbally and in writing, to individuals, to small groups, and to groups of hundreds. Additionally, I have appeared on many podcasts and radio shows reaching large numbers of people. By far, the most extensive telling of my story was in the book *Changed in a Flash*, which I co-authored with Jeffrey J. Kripal.<sup>12</sup>

I am telling my story here with a fresh voice, but the facts remain the same. I tried to avoid repetition where I could. I have quoted and cited my own words in certain specific passages from *Changed in a Flash* where I felt I couldn't have worded things differently without losing some of the integrity of my story. Any other similar or same wording to what I wrote in *Changed in a Flash* is due to the nature of personal voice and limited ways to describe the same event.

### *In the Beginning*

On September 2, 1988, a lightning bolt gave me the most powerful and profound gift I have received. That gift, knowledge, remains unmatched thirty-three years later.

People throughout the world have near-death experiences every year. Many never openly discuss these experiences, some talk to close family and friends about what happened, and a handful openly go public with their stories on various platforms.

Even for those who do decide to openly share their experiences, many often keep the story private initially, sometimes for decades. The fear of public ridicule and a perceived loss of credibility can impede many from imparting valuable information about the survival of consciousness after bodily death. This fear of society's judgment deprives humanity of the comfort that the knowledge of the enduring nature of consciousness could bring.

So, it was after much personal introspection and hesitation that I decided, almost thirty years after my near-death experience, to publicly tell my story. I am often asked why I waited so long. When I had my NDE in 1988, society was not nearly as accepting as it is today. In fact, it wasn't until 1975—only thirteen years before my own NDE—that the term “near-death experience” was coined by Dr. Raymond Moody in *Life after Life*.<sup>13</sup> During the past thirty years, many people have shared their NDE narratives, researchers have studied NDEs, and the media has reported on the stories of experiences and findings from hundreds of studies. The ease with which all of this information is shared is thanks in large part to the advent of the internet. This

easy accessibility to information has taken away much of the stigma surrounding near-death experiences since many more people are now exposed to the stories and research. I am not sure if that exposure to NDE literature has educated society about the veracity of NDEs, or simply desensitized us. Either way, it has helped me feel more comfortable exposing my vulnerability.

My story really begins in 1960. I was born the oldest of three daughters to a stay-at-home mother and a father who was a dentist. My grandparents were an integral part of our family life. I had a very conventional and happy childhood, except for a particular trauma I will discuss later. I made good grades in school, generally followed the rules, and stayed out of trouble as I grew up. I had normal teenage angst, but I veered away from anything that could have been truly bad. I went off to college at eighteen, got married at twenty, finished my undergrad degree at twenty-two, had my first child at twenty-three, and started law school as a young wife and mom. In 1986, I had my second baby at age twenty-five. Life was going great.

I had always been very close to all of my grandparents. They were stabilizing forces in my life, especially through my teenage years. I called them after school most days and saw them frequently. My maternal grandfather died in September of 1987. His death was extremely difficult for me. Then, almost a year later, in July of 1988, my maternal grandmother passed away. My grief at losing them was extreme. I was twenty-eight years old, struggling to juggle my profound, overwhelming sadness and taking care of my two young boys every day. It was quite the balancing act, and for months I felt I was on the verge of toppling into the abyss of never-ending despair and loss.

When Grandma died, I was standing by her bedside, along with my dad and my aunt. When my grandmother exhaled her last breath, all three of us who were with her turned at the same moment to look up to the same corner of the room, the one above the left foot of her bed. We then looked at each other, as if to say, "What are you looking at up there?" I think we were all surprised by, and uncomfortable with, the unspoken yet seemingly obvious possibility that some part of Grandma was suspended near the ceiling, and even more uncomfortable that we all seemed to have had the same feeling.

Personally, I felt like Grandma had exhaled her soul; it had just slipped out of her body with that last raspy breath. Shortly thereafter, when my uncle arrived, there was a residual energy still palpable within the room. The rest of us left the room, waiting out in the hall to allow my uncle some private moments with his mother in his grief. When he came out a short time later, he told us that when he had entered the room, Grandma was still there. He left when he sensed she was gone.

This was the first time I experienced firsthand the loss of someone very dear to me. The clear sense I had of Grandma's presence still in the room after she died gave me my first hint that there may be other realms between or beyond what we think of as "life" and "death."

*Retail Therapy*

When Grandma died in July of 1988, the first anniversary of Grandpa's death was coming up in early September. I missed them both more than I could bear. In an attempt to mask the pain I was feeling, I decided to go shopping one afternoon. Generally speaking, since frivolous shopping was a habit far too extravagant for our growing family's budget, such an idea was out of character for me. However, for some reason I felt somehow that shopping that day might bring me some sort of temporary comfort. Even though I knew we couldn't afford expensive clothing, and despite the fact that I didn't even particularly enjoy shopping, something was compelling me that day.

I carefully and intentionally avoided the finer, more upscale department stores, especially Neiman Marcus, which anchors the Galleria Mall in Houston. Yet for all my avoidance, I found myself drawn to that specific off-limits store to buy myself something special. After all, I reasoned, I needed something special to wear to the synagogue for the first anniversary of my grandfather's death.

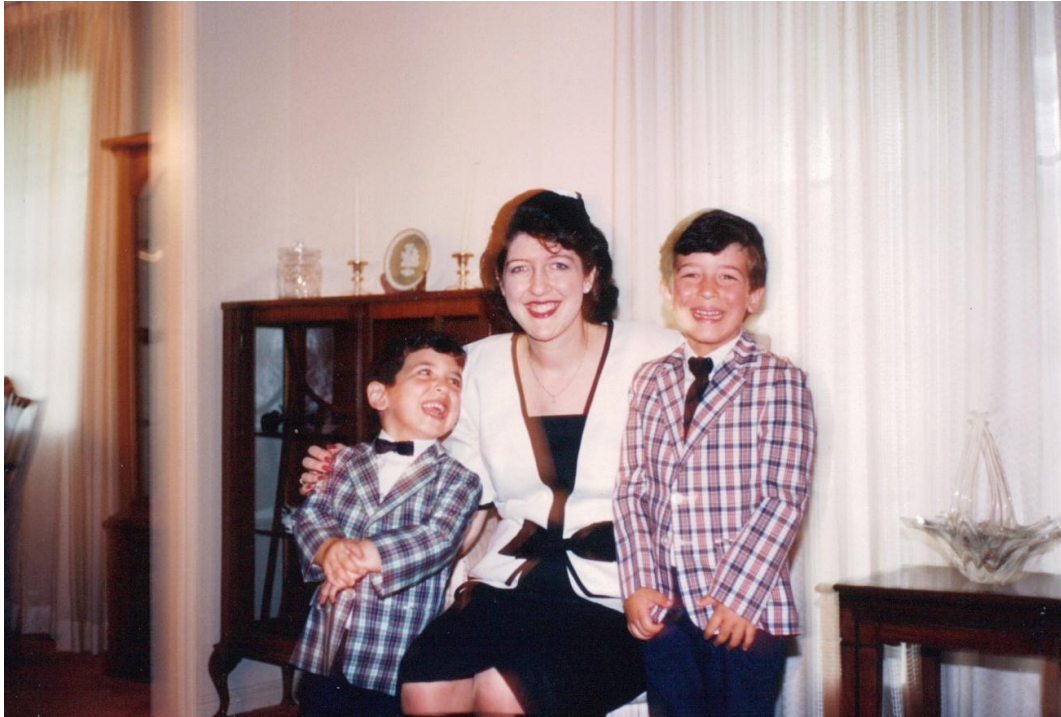
What I found at Neiman Marcus that day was a striking black-and-white suit and equally stunning pair of black-and-white pumps. Those shoes were like a fine piece of jewelry to me. By far, they were *the* most extraordinary (and expensive) shoes I have owned in my life, to this day. As soon as I put them on, I felt like a present-day Cinderella slipping on the glass slipper. I was thrilled at the prospect of wearing such a remarkable outfit, especially the shoes.

In Judaism, the *yahrtzeit*—the anniversary of a deceased person's death—is a significant event. In many Jewish temples and synagogues, the names of those who have died during that particular week in years past are read during the service, and a short prayer called the Mourner's Kaddish, memorable for its rhythmic cadence and its solemnity, is recited by those in attendance. Never having enjoyed religious services of any denomination, my least favorite part of the traditional Jewish service has always been the sad task of reciting Kaddish. I dreaded it, especially on that day, September 2, 1988: the first anniversary of my grandfather's passing.

My husband Barry was out of town on business that day, so I had taken our two little boys, Jeremy and Andy, ages four and two, to services to honor Grandpa's *yahrtzeit*, hear his name read, and recite the Kaddish prayer in his memory. With the importance of the event, it seemed the perfect occasion for me to wear my new outfit. I dressed the boys in the cutest summer madras plaid jackets. They were adorably handsome little guys with their dark hair, deep blue eyes, and dimples.

As we were leaving the house that Friday afternoon, I decided that I wanted a photograph of the three of us. At the time, I was a little upset with myself for stopping to take a picture, since we were already running late without stopping to do something extra. However, an unusually

strong feeling drove me to take the photo. I quickly set up my camera on the tripod, gathered both boys in my arms, and smiled as the camera captured us in what I later realized was the last photo ever taken of the “old Elizabeth”—me, in my beautiful black-and-white ensemble, the last snapshot of the woman whose life was about to change forever, in ways she never could have imagined. I am grateful now for the photo, but regret that it wasn’t a full-body picture. The exquisite shoes deserved to be memorialized, since they were soon to meet a violent end.



The final photo of the “old Elizabeth” taken about thirty minutes before my NDE.

### *The Jolt From Above*

I got the boys in their car seats and quickly backed the car out of the driveway into a beautiful late summer evening. Just as we arrived at the synagogue, the previously sunny day clouded over. The sky suddenly grew ominously dark, and thunder boomed. The boys and I found ourselves sitting in the parked car in the middle of what had quickly become a torrential downpour. This furious storm had appeared to come out of nowhere, and it was frighteningly foreboding. And while I absolutely did not want to get out of the car in that storm, I also did not want to miss the reading of my grandfather’s name in the service that was already well underway. We were parked quite a distance, maybe one hundred feet or so, from the synagogue

door. I told Jeremy to run to the awning that covered the entrance to the synagogue and wait when he got there. He did, and once I saw that he was safely under the awning, I climbed over the seat into the back, got Andy out of his car seat, and prepared to open the car door. By now, the storm had worsened.

I always used to keep an umbrella in the car. I no longer like to use umbrellas, but that evening was the last time I did so without giving it a thought. I held the umbrella in my left hand and opened the car door into the raging storm. I knew that if I carried Andy while simultaneously trying to manage the umbrella in the wind, we both were going to get drenched. So I set Andy down, took his tiny left hand in my right hand, and gripped the umbrella with my left hand high up on the metal shaft. I pulled the umbrella down close to my head.

We had taken just a few steps when the air seemed to suddenly cool and I felt a shiver run through my body. Immediately, I felt a crackling, like static electricity. There was just enough time for me to think, “Oh. This is really bad. This is stupid. I shouldn’t be holding an umbrella.” I realized a little too late just how foolish it was to be crossing a parking lot in a raging storm holding an umbrella—basically a lightning rod—in my hand. I remember thinking, “Oh, this is actually really, really stupid because look at that. My wedding ring is touching the metal shaft of the umbrella.” All of these thoughts rushed through my mind as I consciously thought, “Let go of the umbrella.” But I couldn’t let it go.

It was as if I had somehow beckoned—conjured—what I feared. A small tine of lightning branched off from a larger fork and struck the top of my umbrella. I know this because I was told later by a man who had witnessed the whole thing that he had seen a bolt of lightning with tiny little fingers coming off a larger bolt, and that that is what struck my umbrella first. That tiny finger of electricity did not knock me out. It only served to paralyze my arm and hand around the shaft so that I could not let go of the umbrella even though I desperately wanted to. I later learned that “keraunoparalysis” is the specific type of paralysis I suffered, in which a lightning strike causes a temporary paralysis of the limbs.<sup>14</sup>

Then the big bolt hit my umbrella.

The power of the lightning strike was unlike anything I had ever felt. The deafening explosion, blinding light, and crackling energy hit me all at once.

The thunderous noise literally split our eardrums. Andy was in a lot of pain, screaming with his hands clamped to his ears; but for reasons I didn’t yet understand, I felt no pain at all. Jeremy ran to grab Andy’s hand and pulled him toward the building. Both boys continued to scream: Andy from the pain of his burst eardrums, Jeremy because he had just witnessed his mother being struck by a bolt of lightning.

I continued heading toward the building with my terrified boys. I followed them into the synagogue lobby where I saw someone we knew walking back toward services from the

restroom. The man rushed over to the boys and tried to assess the situation. Jeremy and Andy knew better than to be disruptive during services, yet they could not seem to stop shrieking at the top of their lungs.

As the man was trying to calm them down and figure out what had happened, I stood there wondering why no one was speaking to me. No one was even looking at me. They were all behaving as if I wasn't even there. As if I was invisible. This was very disorienting. I was observing people interacting, yet they appeared to not even notice I was there, too. At one point it occurred to me that my umbrella was missing. I wondered where it was. I knew I'd had it in my hand, but it was gone now. I looked out the window in the synagogue door and saw that my umbrella was a smoking metal skeleton lying on the parking lot in the rain. My gaze shifted to the right. About twenty feet away from the umbrella, I saw a crumpled heap on the pavement. I saw *me*.

Embarrassingly, my first thought was: "Oh God, not the shoes!" I saw that the soles of my new pumps had been blown completely off. They had exploded as the only thing between me-as-lightning-rod and the wet earth. I could see the bottoms of my burned feet in what was left of my once gorgeous shoes. I immediately looked down at my feet where I was standing in the lobby. I saw that my new, perfectly intact pumps were still on my feet, but they were not touching the ground. I was in a standing position hovering a few inches above the carpeted floor. The fact that I was floating added to my uncomfortable confusion.

As this was all rushing through my mind, the man that had approached my boys went into services and, from the back of the room, interrupted the service to ask if there was a doctor who could help. Given that this is a very large synagogue near a major medical center, numerous physicians stood up and rushed toward the back.

I knew that my children were safe and in good hands, so I decided to go get a better look at myself. I floated back outside to my body. I was looking down at myself. I know it is difficult to imagine, but I was really angry about the new shoes and outfit. I was thinking, "Get up. You're lying in the rain in a grease puddle. You are never going to get the stains out of the suit." Suddenly it hit me like the bolt of lightning that it was: "Oh, wait a minute; I'm not going to be getting up. Because I'm dead."

### *The Nuances of Ambiguity*

As I hovered there over my body, I suddenly got it. I went from thinking, "My shoes are ruined" to "I was so wrong about so much." Thoughts came rushing in. I thought about people who believed in an afterlife, whom I had privately mocked for years. They had been right all

along. “What a waste,” I thought as I looked at my body below. “You were so wrong. How could you have lived for twenty-eight years and learned so little?”

My new view of my old self was harsh.

About what was I so mistaken? So much. To begin with, I had been too rigid. Until now, everything to me had been in neat little clearly defined categories of right or wrong, alive or dead, black or white. There was no wiggle room at all in my old world. I suddenly knew that *nothing* was black and white. There I was, lying in the rain, in a grease puddle that made everything from my skin to my clothes look not black, not white, but gray. All of the black and white in my just-ended life, from my starkly delineated, cut-and-dried way of being, to the black-and-white clothing I was wearing, was literally, and figuratively, gone and replaced by a gray, nebulous uncertainty. I learned in that split second that everything—life, death, everything before life, everything after death, and everything in between—is a gigantic gray area of ambiguity.

Suddenly, the sharp divisions that had ruled my routines no longer mattered. This was not something I even thought about at all. It was an understanding that came to me instantly, suddenly, shockingly. That understanding was more like an involuntary awakening, rather than the result of contemplation. I looked at my body on the ground and knew that whatever had just happened to me had given me immediate insight that the woman lying there could never have grasped on her own.

Though it wasn't exactly the same, this was not the first time I'd had an out-of-body experience. Earlier, I mentioned a trauma in my childhood. I had been sexually abused as a child for six years by a teenage boy who babysat for us. At the time, I taught myself how to leave my body to escape the torture of the rapes. Each time I was raped by the babysitter, I left my body, and then returned when it was over.

Although psychiatrists may call my out-of-body experiences as an abused child “dissociations,” I now think of them as repeated rehearsals that enabled me to survive my lightning strike years later. Indeed, my final thought as I left my body for the afterlife was: “You know how to do this. Remember?”

I am not trying to gloss over the abuse I suffered, but I have come to believe that more was at play than just simple (albeit ugly and criminal) child rape. The moment that the lightning struck me, I realized that, just maybe, the abuse had happened at least in part so that I would already know how to leave my body as a survival technique, and, perhaps even more importantly, how to come back when it was safe. As horrific as the abuse was, all of the out-of-body practice I'd had as a child really did make it easier for me as a lightning strike victim to leave my body, experience the afterlife with its wondrous love and beauty, and return to my body when I decided to.



I now came to the startling conclusion that these two defining life events—one horrible (the childhood sexual abuse), the other beautiful (my visit to Heaven and conversation with God)—were linked, and there actually might have been a benevolent reason for my childhood trauma. My early trauma had gifted me with the ability to survive the current trauma. Little did I know then what even greater gifts awaited me.

### *The Glow and the Garden*

As I was connecting all these dots, a warm, inviting golden glow appeared to my upper right. It was not a fixed light but more of a moving beacon that I knew I needed to follow. There was no defined form to the glow. It was more like the diffused light that shimmers around the sun, a flame, or a light bulb. In any case, I understood that I was dead and that my children were safe with my family and the community at the synagogue, so I gave in to the temptation and followed the warmth that beckoned me.

Things immediately became even more foreign to me than they already were. I was suddenly jolted by the understanding that time is not linear. Things were happening in my field of vision, and new capacities were awakening within me, but they were all taking place *at the same time*. My movement was no longer encumbered by my physical body. Whatever it was that I had become flew without resistance or exertion toward the warm glow.

As I followed it, I was led to what I came to call the Garden, although it was unlike any garden here on Earth. Many things about my visit to the Garden I struggle to describe. The words I need to accurately report what I saw just don't exist. We simply can't perceive the Garden "where" (in space) and "when" (in time) we are now.

I have a theory that there is a reason the ability to sufficiently describe my surroundings doesn't exist: perhaps it isn't *supposed* to exist. One of the things I learned in the afterlife is that no two souls have identical afterlife experiences. Each experience in the afterlife is tailored to each individual soul, their expectations, and their needs. Each soul perceives the afterlife, and everything about it, differently. The idea that one particular vision of the afterlife is the only one would be untrue. Therefore, if the words to describe what someone perceives after death don't even exist, then no one can be misled or have any preconceived notions of how their personal afterlife will appear. My theory of "nonexistent adjectives" is perhaps the Universe's way of protecting us from inaccurate expectations of the afterlife.

Even so, I will try to describe what I saw, felt, and learned using our limited existing language and vocabulary. But any attempt to articulate the captivating beauty, knowledge, and all-encompassing unconditional love falls short when I attempt to describe such a place. The

glow led me to a beautiful bench made of what appeared to be hand-carved wooden scrollwork, which had been sanded and polished until the wood was glossy. The wood itself was much more gorgeous and richly colored than any wood I have seen on Earth. The graceful curves and swirls of the deeply carved wood almost looked fluid and felt like a creamy silk or satin to my touch. It was incredibly beautiful and elaborately ornate and looked like an elegant baroque throne built for two. The unique beauty of this bench was only surpassed by the otherworldly comfort I felt when a familiar voice welcomed me and told me to sit on the bench. The voice was that of my beloved grandfather, whose death the previous year was the reason I had been at services that fateful day, when I was struck by the lightning.

When you find yourself dead, in a place of otherworldly love and beauty, with a sudden understanding of *everything*, and you hear your beloved deceased grandfather tell you to sit on the most elaborately crafted bench you have ever seen, you sit. I took a seat on the ornately carved bench and found that it conformed to whatever my individual “body” had become as soon as I sat down. The bench morphed around me. As I sat, cradled in the most comfortable seat imaginable, I began to look around. I saw that I was surrounded by a Garden of foreign plants, the likes of which I had never seen before, or even imagined. The plants continuously blossomed into magnificent flowers that seemed to explode with colors from another spectrum inaccessible here.

My grandfather’s soft familiar voice, complete with the French accent that made it so distinct during his life, was a soothing presence. He said that audible speech would disrupt my absorption of the surroundings, so he was going to give me information, knowledge, and answers to my questions silently. I believe that this voice was actually not my grandfather speaking to me, but was God using my grandfather’s voice to put me at ease. This was a strange reckoning for me, given that in life I had been such a non-religious and non-spiritual person who gave very little, if any, thought to the existence of God. And yet, here I was, sitting on a bench with someone I thought was God in a place that I *knew* was Heaven.

The calming voice shared things with me about our family that only my grandfather, and of course God, would know. This presence gave me information that showed a total knowledge of where I was and what choices I would need to make if I chose to go back to my life on Earth. He relayed the clear impression that the choice to remain in the Garden or to reoccupy my burned body was mine to make. I understood that I could take as long as I needed to make the decision to either stay in the Garden or return to my life on Earth, and that I would be given information that would help me make that decision.

I was dead, but I was more alive, conscious, and aware than when I had been that twenty-eight year old woman with the children and the umbrella in the synagogue parking lot a mere second earlier. I was surrounded by and suffused with an unutterable feeling of unconditional love. The love was all-encompassing and embraced me in every possible way. Everything in the Garden emanated love. The lull of a gently babbling brook, the cadence of the soothing

otherworldly music surrounding me, and the resplendent, fragrant visual feast of constantly blooming flowers and hypnotic colors I had never seen before, all reinforced the knowledge that I now had: that I was safe, protected, and unconditionally loved by God. *I was home.*

The glow that I had followed into the Garden initially had moved away from me. It seemed to be a living energy, a conscious entity that moved with purpose. It was still to my upper right, but it had now shifted behind a mountain range, whose outline in the distance was backlit with the glow's shimmering light from behind the mountains. I resisted the impulse to follow the living glow to the mountains, since the peace, comfort, beauty, and ineffable love that surrounded me where I was sitting were all that I could ever want. The sound of the brook nearby, the music in the air, the sweet scents of the otherworldly vegetative oasis, and the vivid backdrop of the sky and mountains lulled me to depths that I had never known my soul to possess.

Regardless of whether my companion on the ornate bench was actually my grandfather or, as I suspected, God, I knew that I was not alone in the Garden, and I knew that the feeling of abundant unconditional love that this presence communicated to me would never leave me. Still today, I can draw on that memory of unwavering acceptance and love when I need to do so. I could have gratefully and willingly remained there for eternity. That love, that place, that *afterlife* was a gift, tailored to me, from a higher being that loved me unconditionally.

The landscape was clearly meant to comfort me and put me at ease. The sound of flowing water, be it a gentle brook or crashing ocean waves, is something I have always found to be soothing. A view of any landscape has always been enhanced for me if there is a body of water in the scenery. I think that is why it was so prominent and noticeable to me among the other sweet sounds that permeated the Garden. What I understood is that all who arrive in this place encounter and perceive whatever is most comforting and beautiful to them. My source of comfort was the all-embracing feeling of unconditional perpetual love and the unmatched beauty of my surroundings all captured in the Garden. This was *my* personal Heaven.

I understood that all who come to this wondrous place are soothed and welcomed by whatever *they* find soothing, comforting, and pleasurable in life. Therefore, it made sense that *my* Heaven looked like a perfectly manicured garden. I love gardens and find peace and joy in spending time in a well tended garden. During my time in my heavenly Garden, I saw people in the distance. I instinctively knew that those people perhaps had visions of something other than a garden as *their* perfect Heaven. People I saw in the distance may have expected their Heaven to be a thickly wooded forest. Others may have seen a boundless field of wildflowers, or a quiet beach with gently rolling waves. Yet we were all in exactly the same place. We were each in a Heaven tailored specifically for each individual soul there. Understanding this loving kindness added to my ease during my visit to the Garden.

I also understood that one's own appearance there projects the best of each person's soul in their most recent Earthly life. The type of person you are here on Earth colors the experience you will have in the afterlife. What we do with our time here on Earth *matters*. A lot. Learning this was surprising to me as I never thought that my actions or thought processes during life would have any bearing at all on my death. I couldn't have been more wrong. I learned in the Garden that not only the acts I performed during my life but even my very thoughts and feelings had woven together to create the tapestry that was my afterlife—my Garden. The fact that I had been a good person in life mattered in the Garden. The fact that I had not been religious did not.

I feel so inadequate in my attempt to convey the overwhelming totality of the Garden. Time there is perpetual. Its events and sensations all occur at once. This idea of simultaneous time, the physics of it, is something I understood while I was in the Garden but have difficulty explaining, or even understanding, now. I do understand, however, that it is possible to return from another realm or dimension and be completely unable to help those who have not seen it to understand that it even exists at all. Something can be perfectly true yet completely unbelievable and impossible to scientifically prove.

This knowledge that I was absorbing while on the ornate bench in the presence of the loving being who spoke in the voice of my beloved grandfather was also shared with the other humans (or souls) whose forms I saw in the distance. Everyone was in pairs, and no one was alone. Everyone was dressed in what I knew as street clothes. And they were all perfectly beautiful, youthful, and healthy. I wondered: If they were all so perfect, was I?

I looked at my left hand, curious as to how the burn from the lightning strike had affected it. My hand looked as if it belonged to a younger woman. There were no chipped nails or imperfections on the skin, and certainly no burn from the lightning. I noticed that there was also no wedding ring. All I saw was the pristine skin of myself at eighteen or so. The skin on my hand was flawless.

As soon as I thought of questions, I had the answers. I saw people in the distance, although no one approached me. Why were they all paired up? Did I appear to them to be alone? My companion explained that I was also part of a pair, and that he was the other half of the pair. We must have appeared to the distant human forms as they did to me—as a pair, and as beautiful as I ever was at my best.

As quickly as I was receiving answers to my seemingly unlimited stream of questions, I had more questions. There was only one question for which I never received an answer: What did my companion in the Garden look like? Did this partner of mine look like my grandfather at age ninety when he died, or did he look as he did at age eighteen, as everyone else there seemed to? Or did he have an entirely different appearance? I don't know because I never looked at him. I now think I was not supposed to see him because I would have been overwhelmed at the sight of my beloved grandfather.

Or by the beauty of God himself.

### *The Conversation*

My guide in the Garden shared knowledge with me and instantly answered my questions for the entire two-week period I was there. There were three richly colored moon bodies or planets orbiting and revolving above us. I understood the passage of time in the Garden realm by observing the movement of these three celestial bodies. These orbs were vividly bright and appeared, as best I can describe them, to be what we would call violet, although the violet here on Earth does not approach the vibrancy of the violet in the Garden. By instinctively reading this calendar of sorts by the movement of the orbs, an ability I found I already possessed without any effort, I came to know that my visit to the Garden lasted two weeks. I instinctively knew how time worked and passed in a nonlinear fashion in the Garden, just as I know how it works (or at least how we perceive it to work) linearly here on Earth.

I know that the concept of a calendar that marks the passage of time appears to contradict the simultaneity of time in the Garden that I alluded to earlier. I learned that, even in the Garden where time felt simultaneous, there was still a way to ascertain the seeming passage of time taking place on Earth. And though initially in the Garden everything seemed to be happening all at once, once I began to converse with my companion and receive information from him, time seemed to become linear again for the duration of my visit.

I now understand that this happened not because time actually became linear for two weeks, but because I would have no other way of decoding the information I received in the Garden once I was back here in this world. The only way I can understand here what was told to me there is to remember it in linear terms. I do not know if the near-death experience itself was linear, or if I just have to remember it in those terms in order to decipher, understand, and communicate it. My gut feeling is that time there was not linear, but that linear time is my only frame of reference here.

My companion told me that I was welcome to stay there in the Garden, or I could choose to return to my Earthly body. The choice was mine, and his job was to tell me everything I wanted and needed to know to help me make the decision. He also explained that, if I decided to stay, he would escort me from the Garden along a path and over the mountains to where the living glow still patiently awaited my arrival.

It was a difficult choice. Returning to my life here seemed to involve a great risk of losing the fortifying sense of boundless love or limitless time that I knew there. I didn't know

then that this gift of incomparable love I felt would be with me forever on some level, regardless of whether I decided to stay there or return to this life.

The following excerpts from *Changed in a Flash*<sup>15</sup> explain how I came to the decision to return to my life on Earth, and the physical trauma of my actual return:

*Not all of what I was told there was ethereal in nature. For example, I was told that George H.W. Bush would shortly be our President, and that the Cincinnati Bengals would play in the 1989 Super Bowl. These things might seem minor or even silly to some (American elections and football games in Heaven?), but I don't think that they themselves were the point of the information. That is, I don't think that Heaven is about politics or sports unless the deceased is a former politician or athlete. I think this information was meant to help me to understand the nonlinear nature of time. Having the knowledge of future earthly events taught me that those events had already happened in the past yet still were going to happen again in the future. In short, I was realizing the relativity of time, relative, that is, to where one is in time.*

*It seemed to me that eternity itself was keeping an accounting of time. I understood that since time doesn't really exist as we think it does here on Earth, someone or something in eternity is keeping track of every event that has happened, is happening, and will happen. I understood this concept of simultaneous time while I was in the Garden much more clearly than I do here. This is why, I think, it was so important that I be given information about future events so that if I decided to return to my earthly body, I would have a trigger to remind me of the simultaneous nature of time.*

*In fact, this trigger worked beautifully. When George H.W. Bush was elected president eight weeks after my trip to the Garden, my Garden lessons on the simultaneous nature of time came flooding back to me. Suddenly, I remembered. Prior to the election, my lessons about the nature of time were buried so deep that I had yet to draw them forth since my return. I had been very focused on the burns on my feet and dealing with my children while I could barely hobble around. The presidential election and then, a few months later, the Super Bowl served to remind me how real the Garden was and how the true nature of time worked.*

*My companion told me two things that clinched my decision to leave the Garden and return to my still unfinished life. Both involved my children. First, he told me that if I returned to my life, I would have a third child, a daughter. He explained that she had already selected Barry and me as her parents. As he told me this, I understood that if my daughter was already a soul that had made a conscious decision to come to this life as a new baby, then she had possibly been here before. And if she had been here before, we all have possibly been here before. This idea of reincarnation really resonated and made sense to me. I now knew that reincarnation was a fact. When Jeremy and Andy had been*

*born, and I held them for the first time, I already recognized them. It was a different feeling from the overwhelming love I felt for them. It was a familiarity. I had known them before.*

*Reincarnation was a topic to which I had previously not given much thought, if any at all. Had I thought about it prior to my NDE, I would have laughed it off as impossible. But hearing that my child chose me as her mother, somehow made the process of reincarnation not only real, but deliberate and planned. It also made sense of the familiarity I felt with my children as newborns. I understand now that each life is pre-planned and of our own choosing. I asked why anyone would choose a harsh life. Immediately, I was answered. Every life is fraught with difficulties, and the level and specifics of the difficulties depend on the lessons and growth the soul wishes to achieve in any given life. Once a soul achieves the highest level of advancement, they “graduate” and no longer have to come back to this dimension. This dimension, where we all currently reside, is very harsh, and we all should be commended for agreeing to return for more hard-won lessons!*

*Still, my companion told me not to let the knowledge of a future third child color my decision too much. If I decided to stay in the Garden, my future daughter would simply select other parents. In other words, she was returning regardless of my decision.*

*The second thing he told me that helped me decide to return to my life here was that my marriage to Barry would not withstand the changes in me that this whole experience would create. I was told that if I chose to return, Barry and I would be facing a divorce. This was a clincher for me, as I knew that I wanted, and needed, to be the parent to raise our children. I first had to be there, of course, to do this, which meant coming back.*

The thought that I would no longer physically be with my children if I chose to stay in Heaven was heartbreaking. I felt that one of my purposes in this life was to raise these three children and nurture their souls. And while I knew that I could choose to stay in Heaven, I also knew that this was something I would have to come back and repeat in another life if I didn't do it now. Plus, my children didn't deserve to lose their mother if it was preventable, and I was being given the gift of the ability to keep that from happening. Some don't get that option. Then again, I reasoned, perhaps my children had come into this current life with the knowledge that they would one day lose their mother. However, I also felt that if I was being given a choice to return, then losing their mother was not a given, and not something they should have to suffer as children in this lifetime.

*The missing wedding ring on my smooth hand when I looked at it in the Garden might have been a harbinger of all of this. Still, I had a hard time believing that we would get divorced. Barry and I were perfectly happy with each other and our growing family.*

*What I did not yet realize was that the Elizabeth who returned from the Garden was not the same Elizabeth who had been struck by lightning in the synagogue parking lot. I was simply no longer the person Barry had married.*

So I agreed to return to my life to raise Jeremy, Andy, and our daughter-to-be, whom I had a burning curiosity to meet and raise, and whom I already loved. I also knew that the changes in me were going to make me a different type of parent than I had been previously. I understood that while I would be different, Barry would still be the same as he had always been. I wanted very much to share my new knowledge with my children as I raised them. I didn't want them to be saddled with my old black-and-white, rigid way of thinking. I wanted them to understand the nuances of varying shades of gray.

*My companion in the Garden cautioned me that going back would be physically very painful. My burns and burst eardrums were physical injuries to my body that I had not felt yet because I had not been in my body to suffer them. By reclaiming my physical self, I was also agreeing to accept whatever pain was there to bear. I understood that I would have to spend time off my burned feet. My companion reiterated that I needed to remember the overwhelming feeling of unconditional love. Since I was returning to my life as a different person than I had been when I left, that loving feeling would be tremendously comforting and reinforcing as I tried to fit back into society as a dramatically changed person and continue my life.*

He also told me about another kind of pain I would feel as I returned to my body. He said he would have to "help" me back into my body by hugging me tightly, so tightly, in fact, that it would feel as if my bones were being crushed. He explained that this was necessary because my soul was now much larger than my body, and it needed to be squeezed back into my physical frame. Apparently, a physical body is merely a vessel that houses and contains one's soul. Once the soul is freed from the constraints of the body, it no longer has to be a particular size. It can expand and fill as much space as is needed or desired. My understanding of the unconditional love, my knowledge of the afterlife, and all the information I had absorbed there were now part of who I was, and this had expanded the size of my soul. As promised, the hugging was bone-crushingly painful and suffocating as he lovingly squeezed me back into my burned body.

I woke up in the rain on the wet asphalt of the synagogue parking lot.

*Back*

I gasped for air. (How long had I gone without it?) It filled my lungs and revived every cell in my body, though "revive" is sort of a funny word for it, because I felt groggy and was in



pain. I was badly burned, terribly sore from hitting the concrete, and my left arm and hand were immobile—frozen, paralyzed into the same posture and grip as when I had been holding the umbrella. My body had not moved at all from the position it was in when I was struck and fell into a heap on the pavement. My once beautiful new suit, enjoyed in its glory for barely a few fateful moments, was now permanently gray, and the soles of my beloved new pumps, still on my feet, were gone. They had taken the force of the electrical current as it grounded out through me and then through them.

As I opened my eyes, I saw people moving toward me from the synagogue. Initially, I was confused as it dawned on me that while I had been somewhere else for what I experienced as two weeks, here on the parking lot pavement it was likely not more than a couple of minutes. I couldn't understand how I had received so much information and had been so completely transformed in such a short time. It was jarring and bewildering.

Serendipitously, one of the many physicians at services that night had extensive experience treating victims of lightning strikes and electrocution. He was a white-water rafter hobbyist and had helped several people who had been struck by lightning while rafting. Apparently, this is not an uncommon experience for white-water rafters. And, it is not uncommon for the Universe to provide exactly the person you need, with exactly the skills you need that person to have, exactly where and when your need arises.

Doctors concluded that the relatively modest injuries from my lightning encounter were probably due to how I was struck and the nature of lightning itself. Lightning transmits its force downward, as it seeks the earth to ground out. From the top of my umbrella, the electricity flowed through the frame of the umbrella to the place on the metal shaft above the wooden handle where my wedding ring had been in contact with it. Had the lightning hit directly on my body, say, on my head, or if more of my hand had been in direct contact with the metal of the umbrella when it took the jolt, my experience would likely have been a permanent death experience rather than a near-death experience.

When I awoke, it was still raining, but not storming as it had been minutes earlier. I have vague memories of being helped into the synagogue and onto the couch in the rabbi's study. I was in and out of awareness, and really very tired. Several people were there, including the doctor who was a specialist in electrocution. I recall him telling me repeatedly to open my eyes. I was able to open them, but I could keep them open for only a few seconds, maybe up to a minute at a time. I was so tired, exhausted really. After examining me, the doctor concluded that I had a mild lightning injury, an MLI. He felt that I didn't need to be hospitalized at that point. The doctor listened to my heart with his stethoscope and said it sounded fine. I was concerned that I couldn't move my left arm and hand, but he explained that I had keraunoparalysis (lightning paralysis) that would be temporary. He said I would be able to move my hand and arm when the paralysis wore off in several hours. The paralysis lasted for about six hours before it subsided. He also encouraged me to have the burns on my feet and left hand checked and treated the next

day. He explained that I'd have to stay off my feet, which meant bed rest, until the burns on my feet healed enough to be able to get around.

Looking back on it now, it feels a little outrageous that the doctor didn't feel like I needed to be checked out at a hospital. I did ask at the time if I needed to go to the hospital, but he told me that if I were to go in they would just call him in as the resident lightning/electrocution specialist. He would then do exactly what he had just done and tell me the same things he had just told me. So, I suppose there was some practical sense there.

Hospital or no hospital, I was back.

But as I was soon to discover, I was no longer me.

### *Unusual New Abilities*

I had just had two traumas befall me. The first was the actual lightning strike itself, a physical trauma to my body that came with the bonus of spending time in the Garden at the side of God. The second trauma was finding myself back in my body with knowledge and insight that made me a woman whom neither I nor my family knew any longer.

The experience of being struck by lightning and the immediate effects that it had on me both in the Garden and afterwards—the differences in perceiving color and sound, the new knowledge, and the new understanding of time—were just precursors of the ways in which I was about to change. Something in me had opened. I now thought differently. I was much more comfortable now with ambiguity and complexity, less infatuated with black-and-white judging. It was clear to me that the definite separations and the clear either-or thinking that had defined so much of my life were simply not the way things really are. I had not been living in the actual world prior to my NDE. I had been living in an illusory world of my own judgments and learned responses. I had been wrong, and I felt no shame in admitting that to myself throughout the near-death experience, or since.

Shortly after my NDE, I began being bombarded with new abilities that varied in intensity. The one thing they all had in common was how foreign and new they were to me. I had no prior conception of precognition or reincarnation. I don't remember having ever even thought about those topics. However, since my NDE, I found that I would sometimes dream about events before they happened. I would have precognitive nightmares about plane crashes or earthquakes. I received a phone call from a dead person. I became aware of a spirit living in my house. I realized that a necklace I owned was haunted. I could see auras around people, plants, and

animals. I had all sorts of effects on anything electrical. And I developed something called synesthesia.

Who exactly had I become?

### *Knowing*

One of the first things that struck me within the near-death experience itself was the shift from black and white to an otherworldly vision of brilliant, vibrant, living colors. This was not just a visual change; it was also a symbolic one. The Garden was suffused with astonishing light and color. It was alive, and such a contrast to the grays and grease of the parking lot I had just seen.

The living colors were just the beginning. The new convictions and new capacities I had acquired in the Garden began to show themselves in other ways, ways that frankly shocked me. Indeed, it was so strange at first that I honestly believed I was losing my mind.

Three months after my near-death experience, I had a dream that a woman whom I knew of, but had never personally met, had just died. I simply knew that this soul had transitioned out of this world and into the next. I awoke with a single question for which I had no answer. I had no connection to this person. "Why tell me?" I asked the Universe. The answer came quickly. The point of knowing was not the content of the knowledge. The point of knowing was to show me *that I could know*. But there was more. The point of knowing was also to show me that I could know such things *before they happened*. My engrained stubborn skepticism forced the Universe to amplify its efforts to see to it that I believed in my new abilities and remembered the lessons of the Garden.

The morning after the dream, I had to find out if it was accurate. A strong feeling led me for some unknown reason to go see a pharmacist acquaintance where he worked. I just knew that he was connected to the woman from my dream. I drove over to the pharmacy but hesitated before I went in. I was torn. I wanted my precognition to be accurate because I wanted to prove to myself that I actually had this ability. Yet I also wanted it to be a fluke; I wanted some way to justify going back to my much simpler existence. I wanted to pretend that nothing had really happened and that I was the same person I had always been.

I walked up to the pharmacy counter where this acquaintance was filling a prescription. He looked up and, after a few brief pleasantries, told me that a longtime customer of his had died early that morning. He always cared about his customers and took it to heart if anything happened to them. I heard the emotion in his voice as he spoke. I was deeply shaken, too, if for different reasons. I expressed my sympathies and rushed back to my car. Somehow I had been

shown knowledge of this woman's passing that turned out to be true, and this despite the fact that I had never even met her. I was not just confused, I was frightened.

The dream of the woman's passing was just the beginning. My burned feet had kept me in bed for long spells over the previous few months, but they were now healed, and I was able to get around. I had slept a lot. My sleeping had been filled with dreams and nightmares, some of which I remembered when I awoke. This already was a bit strange because, up until this point in my life, I had never had any great ability to recall a dream, even if I had just awakened from it. I would wake up, and the dream would slip away like sand through my fingers. Now, suddenly, I could remember some of them.

At this early stage in my new life, it had not yet occurred to me to document the timing of my dreams or the incidences they appeared to relay. Occasionally, I would tell Barry or my mom about them when I had these dreams or nightmares. It made Barry uncomfortable to hear the tales of my nightmares that appeared to predict tragic events, so I didn't tell him about all of them. My mom, on the other hand, was interested, and we would discuss it. It was after my first plane crash nightmare that I realized I needed to find some way to document these precognitions. And yet I still didn't know how to do that.

### *TWA Flight 800*

The first plane crash nightmare I had was on July 16, 1996, about eight years after my near-death experience. It rocked me badly. In the nightmare I could see "WA" on the wreckage and thought it was a World Airways flight. I knew there were 230 people on board, none of whom survived. I knew it crashed in water, and I knew it was flight number 800. I called my mom and told her about my nightmare on the morning of July 17, 1996. The next morning, July 18, 1996, Mom called me to tell me to turn on the news, quickly. There it was: TWA Flight 800 had crashed in the Atlantic Ocean with 230 people on board. No survivors.<sup>16</sup> This particular nightmare really upset me because it was eerily accurate down to so many specific details.

I shared the information with Barry because I was so shaken, even though I knew it would be more than he could handle. He moved out of the house within ten days. Our divorce was final a year later. This particular nightmare did not cause the demise of our marriage, but it sure didn't help. We divorced in 1997, almost nine years after my NDE.

I had not asked for any of this. The depth of my discomfort with this new precognitive ability cannot be overstated. The internet was not nearly as accessible as it is today, and I didn't really have a good way to research what was happening to me. Local libraries were very limited in their material on subjects I needed to research, and with three young children at home, I had

no time for research, anyway. The ingrained skeptic in me kept trying to diminish what I knew was actually happening, and the internal battle was fierce. I was struggling daily to remind myself that I was sane and that those nightmares were accurate.

I needed two things. I needed an answer to the lingering question of why this was happening to me, and I needed a way to document the veracity (or inaccuracy) of my dreams. Mostly, this was for my own sake—so I would have proof of my sanity to counter the voice of my old inner skeptic. It was not until 2008 that it dawned on me to email brief recounts of the nightmares to myself right after they occurred so that they were date and time stamped. I never imagined that anyone else would look at these. I wrote the emails to convince myself that my mental faculties were intact.

### *US Airways Flight 1549*

One of the earliest nightmare-documenting emails was in January 2009. My second husband Matt and I were vacationing in Jerusalem. We had spent the morning of January 15 walking up and down the cobbled streets of the Old City. I remember eating lunch that day in a restaurant right across the street from our hotel just off Ben Yehuda Street. There was a palpable energy I felt during lunch that I had come to recognize was a precursor to my precognitive nightmares.

After our lunch, we decided to go back to our hotel and take a nap. Matt immediately fell asleep. I was also tired, but the real reason I had wanted to go back to the hotel was that I felt a precognition might be coming on. I wanted to be near our laptop in case I was right. I stretched out on the bed and dozed off. It couldn't have been more than a couple of minutes before I was awake again and typing myself an email describing the vision I had just had. Awoken by the tapping on my keyboard, Matt asked me what I was doing. I explained that I had had a plane crash nightmare and emailed myself about it.

“OK. What did you see?” Matt asked.

“It's really weird,” I said. “I saw this plane, and it was sitting, kind of floating, on water, and there were people standing on the wings of the plane.”

“The physics of that are impossible,” Matt assured me. “Planes float like a rock. Don't worry about it, it can't happen. I'm going back to sleep.” Matt rolled over and, true to his word, fell back asleep immediately.

I knew the scene I had envisioned was more than implausible...it was far-fetched. Yet, my inner conviction of the reality of this event carried more weight in my mind than my rational

understanding and honest doubts. At 2:57 p.m. Israel Standard Time in Jerusalem, which was 7:57 a.m. Eastern Standard Time in New York, I sent myself the following email:

*Mid-size commercial passenger jet (80-150 people) crashes in NYC. Maybe in river. Not Continental Airlines. Not American Airlines. It is an American carrier like Southwest or US Airways.*

The following morning, Matt was facing the TV while we were eating breakfast at our hotel. “Oh my God!” he shouted. “Look!” I turned and saw my vision of the day before captured for the world to see: an airplane bobbing on the Hudson River, with people standing on the plane’s wings waiting to be rescued.

At 3:31 p.m. New York time, US Airways Flight 1549 piloted by Captain “Sully” Sullenberger had landed on the Hudson River after plowing into a flock of geese shortly after takeoff. This was about seven and a half hours after I sent myself the email. Miraculously, there were no fatalities among the 155 people onboard.<sup>17</sup>

### *A Different Type of Nightmare*

One particular precognitive plane crash nightmare is different from my usual ones. I have never published this story because I feel it infringes on the privacy of those involved. For that reason, in the following recounting of this nightmare, I have changed identifying information, such as names, dates, physical characteristics, and locations, to protect the identities of the victims’ family members.

Matt and I went out to dinner with friends on June 29, 2011. The following day, June 30, I was feeling sick nearly all day, I thought maybe from food poisoning. By early evening, though I was feeling better, I was still weak and exhausted and went to bed early.

At a point during my sleep, I was in one of my plane crash nightmares. As usual, I was completely aware of the fact that I was dreaming. This one was different, however. Before this incident, my vision of what was to happen had always appeared to me like a photograph that I was viewing as an outsider. That snapshot is what would appear on the news after the event. So it was all the more startling in my dream that night when I was *on the plane* that was destined to crash.

Another element that set this nightmare apart from the others is that I found out the following day that the events had been happening as I was dreaming about them. This crash didn’t happen a day or two after my nightmare—it happened *during* the nightmare, which was unusually long. It just kept going on for far longer than I was comfortable. In the other

nightmares, as soon as I saw whatever image depicted the given event, I was released to wake up by whatever force was holding me there. This however, was not a single image. It was a movie, and I was in it, bound to endure every minute until the plot ended. It was about to become very unpleasant.

It was nighttime on the flight, dark and quiet, and many of the passengers were sleeping. I could hear some flight attendants speaking in a foreign language nearby in the galley. I looked at a paper napkin that was embossed with the name of a major foreign airline whose nationality matched the language the flight attendants were speaking.

I was seated on the tray table (not a seat *with* a tray table—*on* the tray table itself) of a woman who was buckled into her seat. We were very close to each other, face to face. In the seat next to her was a little boy playing with an electronic toy.

The young woman, who was remarkably pretty with shoulder-length dark hair, could see me and was talking to me. She told me her name was Monique Frankel. It was as if we were at some kind of social function, introducing ourselves and making small talk.

She introduced me to her son Thomas and told me that he was seven years old. Thomas spoke to me, too, but not in English. Monique was speaking to me in accented English. I don't remember asking her anything. I just remember her telling me things about herself and her family. She told me that she also had a daughter, and that her daughter was with her husband on a different flight because they thought it was a bad idea to all fly together. I somehow knew that this was a flight from Buenos Aires to Barcelona, and that they were going home from vacation.

Without warning or a hint of turbulence, the plane banked sharply to the left. It began rocking violently back and forth, and I was being thrust toward Monique's seat as if the nose of the plane were up. There was a terrible sensation of falling. People were now awake and screaming. Monique had a panicked look in her eyes. She and I both knew that I could leave the plane before it crashed. All I had to do was open my eyes and the nightmare would end. But I could not open them. Monique had grabbed on to my forearms and was screaming in my face. *Screaming*, in a panicked and primal way. Everyone else on the plane was screaming, too, and the passenger cabin was bedlam. Amid all the noise, items were flying through the cabin, including people who had not been belted into their seats. At the top of her lungs, Monique was pleading with me to take Thomas with me when I left the plane. She was begging, wailing, "I know you can leave! Take Thomas! His father is George Frankel! Find him and get Thomas to him! Take Thomas! *Please!*"

I knew I couldn't take Thomas or anyone else off that plane with me. I also knew opening my eyes and waking up were becoming more and more urgent. But as long as Monique had a grip on my arms, I was stuck on that plane. Finally, mercifully, there was a jolt, and she let go. My eyes ripped open, and I was safe in my bed. Crying, gasping, but safe. Immediately I sent myself an email with the details of what had just happened.

The email I sent myself was time-stamped at 11:38 p.m., and the plane crashed at 4:40 a.m. in a time zone that was five hours ahead of mine. I was dreaming about the crash as it was happening. Matt was surprised when I showed him the email, particularly because it had people's names in it. So far, that has been the only time I have received such detailed information.

As it was a jumbo jet crash with hundreds of people on board, no survivors, the tragedy was major news all over the world. Three days after the crash, the passenger manifest was printed in the local newspaper, along with the ages and nationalities of everyone on board. There I saw it:

Monique Frankel, age 38, Netherlands

Thomas Frankel, age 7, Netherlands, son of Monique Frankel

I did a little research over the next few weeks and found a human interest piece from a Dutch newspaper. The article was about victims of the plane crash, and it highlighted Monique and Thomas. It said that Monique's husband George and their daughter had been on another flight. They had interviewed George, who explained that the family never flew together in case something like this were to happen, just as Monique had explained it to me on the doomed plane. The article also had photos of the family from their recent vacation in Buenos Aires. The photos clearly depicted the woman and child whom I had met in my dream. Seeing the photos took my breath away.

Years later, as Jeff Kripal and I were working on *Changed in a Flash*, I decided to try to find George Frankel. I wanted this story to be in the book, but I wanted to make sure I wasn't going to upset anyone by publishing it. After all, he and his daughter are also victims.

I found George on Facebook. He was about to get remarried and looked very happy. His daughter is beautiful, and she seemed happy and loved. I did not disturb his contentment by contacting him. I figured it was best to just let him move forward with his life. For that reason, Jeff and I did not put this story in the book.

So, why am I telling it now?

Shortly after finding George on Facebook, I was fortunate to be invited to the Esalen Institute in Big Sur, California. It was there that I was introduced to Whitley Strieber.<sup>18</sup> Whitley has written numerous books and hosts several podcasts, my favorite being *Dreamland*,<sup>19</sup> on the topic of UFOs and similar phenomena. He and I became friends while we were at Esalen, and I told him about this particular nightmare because it upset me more than any of the others. Whitley responded with something that changed my entire attitude toward how I can approach nightmares such as this one.

Whitley said, "Elizabeth, you told me you learned in your NDE that time is simultaneous, right?"



“Yes. Time is not linear,” I replied.

“Well,” Whitley said, “If that is the case, then that plane crash happened, but it will happen again, and again. Right?”

“Yes. That’s awful. So?” I asked.

“So, learn how to go back there,” he suggested. Go there again, and perhaps you can offer some comfort to Monique. Comfort her with the knowledge that death is not the end of her life. Give her comfort that some part of her lives on.”

It was like a light bulb going on. Of course, Whitley is correct. Unfortunately, I have no idea *how* to get back to that crash. But if I could, it might possibly bring some reassurance to Monique, or other such people I might meet in similar future encounters.

A mom to two young boys when all this started, I was busy all day every day. I didn’t approach any of this curious change as some kind of scientific experiment or academic case study. It was not intellectual for me, but rather emotional, and the emotion I most felt was anger. I had no desire to become some radio receiver to the cosmos. I didn’t want the moral burden of any of this. But the premonitions continued to plague me, every one of them made of the same stuff—that undeniable knowledge that these tragedies were perfectly true. I had no idea what to do with this unsolicited information. I was frustrated, angry, and determined to get answers. And while I have learned a great deal since these visions of the future started, there is still so much I don’t understand.

It has never stopped. Thirty-three years after the lightning strike, these incidents continue, occasionally even when I am wide awake. One day in February of 2003, Matt and I were driving to meet some friends for dinner. I turned to him, grabbed his arm, and said: “Earthquake, an area in western China.” That was on a Sunday evening in Houston. In the early morning hours on Monday, the earthquake hit China. It happened too late for the Monday papers in the United States and was in too distant a rural area to attract media attention, at least as far as we knew. But in the Tuesday paper, there was a brief on the international page about a severe earthquake that had taken place in western China at approximately the same time that I had grabbed Matt’s arm and told him it was happening.<sup>20</sup>

### *Phone Call from the Dead*

Many strange things have happened to me since my near-death experience. One of the earliest and strangest took place in the spring of 1990, a year and a half after the lightning strike.

I had recently found out I was pregnant with my daughter. Barry and I were sound asleep in bed, and I received a stunningly obvious after-death communication.

It was about 3:30 a.m. when the phone on my side of the bed rang. This was back when people only had land lines plugged into the wall. I think we are all conditioned to expect the worst when the phone rings in the middle of the night. It is usually news that is urgent, important, and bad. No one calls at 3:30 a.m. to give you good news.

I love my sleep, and at the beginning of my third pregnancy, after chasing two active boys around every day, I relished it. So I didn't really wake up when the phone rang on my side of the bed. It was Barry's shaking me and telling me to get the phone that finally roused me out of a deep slumber. I hesitated to answer because I feared it would be something terrible. That is not exactly how it played out, though. My hesitant "hello" into the phone was answered with the soft French accented voice of my dead grandfather. "Hello, darling," he said, using the affectionate nickname he'd always called me in his life but that I hadn't heard in far too long.

Stunned, I asked why he was calling me. Barry, who was now wide awake, kept asking who it was. I shushed him. I didn't want to give Barry any indication of who I was on the phone with, as I knew it wouldn't sit well with him. I asked my grandfather where he was. The conversation went something like this:

"You know where I am. You've been here and seen it."

"But why are you calling me?" I asked.

"I need you to tell your mother something for me."

"Then why are you calling *me*? Why not just call her? Umm, I can give you her number if you need it."

"I've tried contacting her, but she can't hear me. But since you were struck by the lightning, you can. Contacting you takes a terrific amount of energy, and I don't have long to talk. There is something that I want you to tell her for me."

"Of course I'll tell her."

He then relayed what was to me a mundane bit of family information that he felt my mom needed to know.

By now, Barry and I were both sitting straight up in bed, wide-awake. Barry was still pestering me to tell him who was on the phone. I was still ignoring him.

"Did Grandma find you?" I asked my grandfather.

"Who the hell are you talking to?" Barry demanded. I ignored him.

Grandpa answered: “Yes. She is fine. We are together. All is well. She is whole again.”

I was so happy to hear this. Grandma had had dementia when she died, and the woman she had once been had gotten lost. At the end, her life was a ride on a bridge that crumbled as she crossed. She couldn’t look back and see her history. So hearing that she and my beloved grandfather were together and her memories were intact was healing for me.

“I have to tell you something,” I said.

“I already know. You’re pregnant. And it’s a girl, just as you were told it would be.” His voice became weaker, fainter.

“I can’t hear you well,” I said.

“I have to go. This is taking a terrific amount of energy. I can’t do this often, but I will call you again. Please remember to call your mother and tell her what I said.”

“I will, but please don’t hang up,” I pleaded.

“I will talk to you again. I just can’t do it right now. You need to remember—remember when you were here, the feeling of unconditional love. Never forget that.” This was the message, of course, that I had also been told when I was in the Garden. I begged him not to go.

“Remember the unconditional love. You will have this feeling again soon.” And with that, the connection faded away.

As I reluctantly, tearfully hung up the phone, our bedroom immediately filled with an odorless vapor, as if we were in a dense cloud. In any other situation, of course, if our bedroom filled up with smoke, both of us would be running to get the boys and get out of the house. But the situation was anything but normal. Inexplicably, while we were both sitting in this thick mist, or whatever it was, neither of us acted in fear. And neither of us spoke.

At the far end of the long hallway that extended toward the children’s bedrooms from ours, I saw a bright red light shining through the fog. Like a laser pointer, it pierced through the mist. When I saw that light, I was immediately overcome with the same palpable sense of unconditional love I had experienced in the Garden and had been told moments before to never forget. This must be what he meant when he said “You will have this feeling again soon.” Somehow, the light carried the love. Suddenly, the light and fog vanished in an instant. It was all just *gone*, as if nothing had happened.

Barry turned to me and now calmly asked who had called.

“My grandfather.” I replied.

“Which one?” he asked.

I told him. I then asked him, “Did you see anything?”

He replied: “What smoke? I’m going to sleep.”

He had seen what I had seen but would not talk about it.

After that exchange in 1990, Barry and I never talked about it again until 2011, almost twenty-one years after it happened. By then, we had divorced, had both remarried, and had traveled independently to Jerusalem to attend the rabbinical ordination of our son Andy. By this time, I had begun to tell my now adult children about some of the extraordinary things that were routinely happening to me. Andy in particular has always taken a very special interest in my experiences. Jeremy and my daughter Mallory have as well, but I often wonder if Andy’s proximity to me at the time of the strike somehow affected him spiritually. He grew up to become an Orthodox rabbi.

On the night of his rabbinic ordination, at a dinner celebration in his honor, Andy casually asked Barry if he remembered the night when I was pregnant with Mallory and the phone had rung. My ears perked up and tuned into their conversation across the dinner table.

“You mean the call from her grandfather? Yes, I remember.”

Of all the cynics and doubters of my experiences whom I have encountered through the years, none have matched Barry. This was especially true during our bitterly contested, quite ugly divorce. As Andy asked him about the call, I listened, slack jawed, as Barry recounted it just as it had happened, having remembered all the details as if it were yesterday. Like so many others, he hesitates to make the jump to any conclusion about whether or not I was really talking to my deceased grandfather. But the fact that Barry admits to having heard the phone ring, hearing my half of the conversation, and seeing the smoke and its instantaneous disappearance is enough for me.

I called my mom the day after the phone call in 1990 to share that bit of family information that my grandfather had told me. She asked me how I knew that and I recounted my experience of the night before. Our short conversation ended with Mom in tears. “I know he has tried to talk to me. I try so hard to hear him, and I just can’t.”

I find it puzzling how different we all are. On one side is Barry, who actually witnessed this communion across two worlds and yet cannot allow himself to fully believe what I suspect he knows to be true. On the other is my mom, who fully believes in these exchanges between the two realms but cannot bring the experience upon herself, no matter how much she may want to do so. I should add here that, as time has marched on and life has dealt Barry some pretty swift blows, he has become more spiritual and less cynical in recent years.

*A Scrap of Charged Matter*

There is a spirit who lives in my house. I can sense her, and sometimes I see her. She hovers on the second floor, floating from room to room. She does not interact with us or even seem to notice us, nor does she intentionally make herself known in any way. Our dog McKinley used to sense her presence and bark as she looked up toward our second floor. Several times I heard her bark when I was in another room. I'd come into the den that opens up to the second floor to find McKinley barking at the figure that I could see, as well.

I kept the information about the floating woman to myself until Andy was in high school. He came downstairs one morning to ask if I had been upstairs, as he thought he had seen, or sensed, someone in his bedroom. And then he thought he may have sensed a woman standing behind him as he was looking into his bathroom mirror. When I asked him to describe what he had seen, he hemmed and hawed and then said only half jokingly, "I may have imagined the whole thing. Maybe it was a ghost."

He said that the apparition was not terribly frightening to him. He sensed no ill will from it. He told me it was a young woman and proceeded to describe her clothing, exactly as I had seen it. Andy was somewhat amused that, in addition to his mom, only he and our dog McKinley had seen the woman. If he ever saw her again, he never spoke about it.

Eventually, I decided to tell Matt about our additional resident. He has never seen her but was very entertained whenever the dog or I did. Before she passed away in 2015, McKinley used to sit at my feet when Matt and I would watch television at night. Occasionally, something would catch my eye, and McKinley and I would look upstairs at the open balcony at the same moment. McKinley would whimper or bark, clearly seeing the apparition, just as I did. McKinley would not look away until the woman had floated out of our view.

To my knowledge, the only other person who has seen the spirit was a friend of Mallory's. When Mallory was fourteen or fifteen, she had a group of five or six friends over to our house one Saturday night. They were all crammed together on our couch watching a movie when suddenly one of the teenage boys screamed, "*What is that!?*" He was looking upstairs at the balcony, pointing and screaming. None of the other kids saw anything. He was truly terrified, though, as evidenced by the fact that he wet his pants and went running and shrieking from our house. Although he and Mallory remained friends, he would never set foot in our home again. It was after that episode that I decided to fill Mallory and Jeremy in on the fact that someone, or something, was living upstairs with them. They were fine with it, though, to my knowledge, they have never seen her.

My sense of the spirit upstairs is that she is seeking something. She reminds me of myself just after I was struck by lightning, when I was “hovering” until Jeremy and Andy were safely inside the synagogue. My hovering, I believe, ceased when I understood that I was dead and knew that my children were safe and in the hands of people who loved them. Knowing that, I could get on with being dead, and that’s when I went to the Garden. Because of the way she acts, I sense that she is caught somewhere between realms. Her marginal status is what may explain her movement from place to place. I think it is also why she does not appear to direct her movements with any purpose. She doesn’t appear to see us, nor does she attempt to interact with our household in any way.

I think it is significant that the woman never comes downstairs. We built our current house in 2003, higher off the ground than our previous house that sat in the same spot in order to now be up out of the flood zone that too frequently ravages Houston neighborhoods. Before the new house was built, we never sensed or saw any apparitions. Perhaps the woman is a leftover remnant of energy, a scrap of charged matter, the residue of some memory encoded into the space where the upper part of our house now sits. I don’t know.

### *The Necklace*

Since my NDE, sometimes I feel that inanimate objects have a certain “vibe” or energy that I can sense around or within the object. Even though I understand that they are not living beings, I can’t deny that I feel at times that a non-living object possesses a certain living energy.

Such was the case with my necklace.

In 2005, I had planned to meet a friend for lunch. I was running early, and she typically runs late, so I knew I had some time to shop before she arrived. I walked into a women’s boutique, just planning to browse for a few minutes. This was not a store where I often shopped; in fact, I have never really cared for their clothing. But something drew me in there that day. I quickly lost interest in browsing the clothing and made my way over to the accessories.

This particular boutique carries a fairly wide selection of costume jewelry under its own label. It is rather expensive for costume jewelry but very well made. Each piece of this store’s clothing, accessories, or jewelry has the name of the store somewhere on the item. In the case of jewelry, the store name is stamped into a tiny oval metal tag that hangs from the clasp.

Almost immediately, my eye was drawn to a gorgeous necklace unlike any of the store’s other jewelry. Most of the store’s necklaces are heavy metallic pieces, silver, gold, or bronze in color, but this one was different. The chain was a bronze link chain, about eighteen inches long. On the chain hung the most eye-catching multicolored stone I’d ever seen. The stone itself was

oval shaped, about three inches tall and two inches wide. Something about the colors in the stone reminded me of the Garden. The stone was full of dazzling gemstone hues that changed depending on the angle. Sapphire blue, ruby red, emerald green, amethyst purple, vibrant rose quartz pink, and velvety tourmaline yellow all worked together to make the necklace almost come alive. I reached out and picked it up.

As soon as I touched it, I knew that it was going to be mine. Oddly, though, this particular necklace had no price tag on it. Every single accessory had a price tag, except for this one necklace. I also noted that it did not have the signature metal tag hanging on the clasp.

I carried it to the register and set it down in front of the woman tending the counter. I noticed on her nametag that she was the store manager. She was quite perplexed that there was no price on the necklace. “Oh! This is beautiful. I’ve never seen it before. Where did you find it?” I pointed out to her where I had found the necklace, among all the other jewelry that looked nothing like it. She pulled out a gigantic inventory binder, supposedly a complete price list of every item the store carried. But, as I suspected, no necklace matching the description of the one lying before us on the counter was listed.

After spending a solid fifteen minutes looking through the binder, she walked over to the accessories area of the store, where she held and looked at some of the other necklaces, trying to gauge the price of the one I wanted. She returned to the register and again looked through the inventory binder, still to no avail. Finally she told me she just could not sell it to me. She didn’t think it was from their store, and she had no idea how to price it. I was clearly upset by this. I told her I just had to have it, at any price. She told me to go to lunch and come back after I ate. She would keep looking for the price and see what she could do.

I knew, though, that if I left the store without the necklace, I would never get it. So I insisted that she name a price and let me buy it. Finally, I wore her down, and she agreed. We arrived at a price that was in line with the other necklaces.

The first time I wore the necklace was to work. Due to the vivid and varied colors of the stone, I could only wear it with a few solid-color outfits. At the time, I was working for a custom homebuilder selling custom homes. I had a beautiful office and an assistant who had a good eye for nice things. “That necklace is gorgeous,” she gushed. “Where did you get it?”

I told her where I bought it, and we chatted for a few minutes until I headed back to my office to start the day. A little while later, she came back to my office visibly upset. Her sister had just unexpectedly died and she needed to leave. I felt terrible for her. She was out for several days.

The second time I wore the necklace, another person’s death, quite unexpected, was reported to someone I was with. I was visiting with a cashier in a grocery store I frequented when she got a phone call informing her of a friend’s death. Again, it wasn’t a person whom I

personally knew, but the news certainly affected me. It did occur to me that the same thing had happened the first time I had worn the necklace, but I didn't think too much of it. It was just an odd coincidence, I reassured myself.

...Until it happened again two weeks later, the third time I wore the necklace. I was meeting with a client when he got a phone call. He needed to leave immediately, as someone had died, again unexpectedly. I immediately took the necklace off and knew that I would never wear it again.

This necklace was clearly cursed, or haunted, or *something*, and I decided I had to rid myself of it. The coincidental deaths and the juju that emanated from it were just too much. But how exactly was I to dispose of it? I could hardly give it to someone; its evil emanations would simply attach themselves to the recipient. This is why I also felt that I could not simply return it to the store or, for that matter, place it somewhere where it could wind up around the neck of an unsuspecting woman. I realized that the last woman who'd had it had most likely left it in the store intentionally to get rid of it. That would explain why there was no price tag on it and why the metal tag with the store name wasn't there. I also knew that there would be some very bad karma if I threw it away.

So I took the necklace home and put it in a small airtight plastic Tupperware container that I then sealed tightly with duct tape. "Sealed" is probably an understatement here. I wound the tape over and over around the plastic container so that it would be very difficult to ever open it again. But that was not enough. I didn't want to keep it in the house, but I also didn't want to curse anyone else's property with it. So I carried it outside to the farthest back corner of our backyard and placed it on the ground behind some shrubs against the fence. Eventually I concluded that was not enough, either. I began to worry that someone, the yardman perhaps, might find it. The dark feeling the necklace gave me motivated me to do a better job hiding it. So a month after I set it out against the back fence, I decided to take a shovel out there and bury it. I went out to the back with the shovel, but the plastic container was not there. It was nowhere to be found. I felt really bad about this, but what could I do? I hoped that an animal rather than a person had found it.

About a week later, I opened the front door one morning to get the newspaper. There was the little plastic container, still tightly sealed with duct tape, sitting on my doormat. Visibly upset, I immediately got the shovel, dug a hole in the back corner of the back yard, dropped the plastic container in the ground, covered it with dirt, and tamped it down firmly. Finally, I thought, I could breathe easy. I preferred not to think about how it had gotten to my front doormat.

Three years passed. My daughter Mallory was about to get a new car. We were going to give her old car to her older brother Andy. Jeremy, Mallory, and I spent about an hour cleaning out the car. As is typical with a teenager's car, bits of trash and various abandoned objects had



accumulated over the years in the trunk, under the seats, in the console, and in the glove box. We got it all cleaned out, and I decided to make one final pass through the car. I checked the trunk, the glove box, the console, and under the back seats. Then I stuck my head down under the steering wheel to check that nothing was left under the driver's seat. A glint of something caught my eye. I reached under and pulled out the necklace! It was not in the plastic container, but it was covered in moist, freshly dug dirt. I dropped it like a hot potato and started screaming at Mallory, "*Where did you get this? What are you doing with it?*" Clearly, it had been dug up, recently. Mallory had no idea what it was or how it had gotten in her car.

I was really very upset. I took the necklace home and just left it outside, dirty and loose on the ground in a corner of the front porch. The next day it was gone. It could have been picked up by the mailman, the yardman, or an animal. I had no idea. That was in 2008, and I hoped I would never see the necklace again.

Fast forward eleven years. In 2019, Matt and I decided to remove the carpet in our bedroom and have wood floors installed. The workmen had to move all of the furniture out of our bedroom. Along one entire wall of the room is a heavy oak bookcase full of old books that we never use. Those bookcases and all of the books had been there since we built our house in 2003. I boxed up the books, and the men moved the bookcases. It is extremely heavy furniture, and it took four men to move it. When they did, I saw there was a Ziploc bag on the floor under one of the bookcases.

Inside the bag was the necklace. It's fair to say I was terrified. Absolutely terrified. Those men thought I was crazy. I was visibly distressed and could hardly form the words to tell Matt why. Since Jeff Kripal and I had just had our book *Changed in a Flash* published a year earlier, Jeff was very familiar with the story of the necklace. I called him and texted him photos of the necklace right away. He said that obviously, for whatever reason, the necklace wants to be with me. It keeps finding its way back to me. So perhaps, he suggested, I should try to somehow honor the necklace instead of trying to get rid of it. I agreed.

I now have the necklace on display in my living room. Just as a precaution, I have the display stand under a glass dome, thinking that will somehow block any negative energy emanating from the necklace. I don't know how protective that is, but so far it seems to be working.

What does the haunted necklace have to do with the lightning strike and near-death experience? I am not sure, other than the fact that, before the lightning strike of 1988, I don't know if I would have realized the connection between the necklace and the deaths. The NDE made me much more attuned to spiritual nuances. I feel the need to point out here that I don't believe that the necklace caused anyone to die. It somehow just brought to my attention the deaths that were going to happen, anyway.



The Haunted Necklace.  
Now proudly on display!

### *Seeing Auras*

Yet another strange new ability I discovered after my NDE was the ability to see auras. An aura is a field of light generated by an energy-producing entity. That entity can be anything from the sun, whose aura gives life and light to our world, to a light bulb, whose filament brightens when fed electricity. In addition to the typical auras that all people can see, I also see colored auras emanating from living things; plants, animals, and humans. Unlike the auras from a light source like the sun or a light bulb, auras of living beings are delicate, evasive, and constantly changing. They are all different colors and textures. Some are bright, others dim. Some are thick and dense, others thin and wispy. Some are solid and unmoving, others diffuse. Some are steady, others sparkle, twinkle, and pulsate. The colors of auras range from white to

black, and all colors in between. I can see this energy as it rises off or emanates from living people. I can also feel it if I close my eyes and put my hand into someone's energy field.

In order to see these auras, I have to unfocus my eyes. A white background aids me in detecting them, although that is not always necessary. A good way to practice seeing auras is to look at the old "Magic Eye" books.<sup>21</sup> Those picture books have complex abstract patterned pictures that, if you stare at them long enough, will come into focus as a three-dimensional picture of something clearly definable. The trick is to unfocus your eyes and look *through* the picture. Once you get the hang of that, the clear three-dimensional pictures almost pop off the page at you. Auras work the same way for me. For example, I can look at a person, a tree, or a dog and unfocus my eyes to look through the living being. When I do that, the outline of an aura just pops out at me.

The different colors and textures of the auras depend on things like the health and emotional status of the being. Accordingly, the colors and textures of auras change constantly around people. One day I may see a blue steady solid aura around someone, and the next day I see a green wavy aura around the same person. Sometimes the auras shimmer and sparkle. Sometimes they don't.

The only one I know the probable meaning of with any degree of certainty is a black aura. My feeling is that a black aura bodes ill for the person generating it. I don't know if what generates it is physical (say, an illness) or what such an aura might signal or represent: a comment on the mental status of the person (i.e.; depression), an indicator of a serious physical illness (i.e.; terminal cancer), or something else entirely.

I have only seen a black aura once, and I felt dread. It was in 1992, around someone I knew well. I was driving and had stopped in the left lane at a red light. I looked over to my right. In the car stopped next to me was a close relative of mine. His head turned toward me, but he didn't smile or acknowledge me at all. I wasn't even sure he was seeing me, even though he was looking at me. I said to myself, "Look at that! He has a black aura. I've never seen one of those before!"

I had no idea what that indicated but thought it was strange that he didn't respond to my smile or wave. Four hours later, he had a massive heart attack and died. This was a young man, and it was as devastating as it was surprising. No one expected anything like that to happen. This was very early in my post-near-death-experience life, and I had no idea what auras meant. All I knew was that I could see them, whereas prior to 1988 I could not.

I see auras, but I still have no idea what they mean, which implies, of course, that I think they mean something. I do think they carry information, that they can speak to us, if we learn how to interpret and interact with them. When I returned from my near-death experience, I found that I had this new ability to see, sense, and interact with energy. Whatever these auras are, my own ability to see them has something to do with my NDE.

My interaction with energy doesn't end with auras. Ever since my near-death experience, I cannot wear wristwatches or fitbits. Anything battery operated in close contact with me stops working. The batteries drain quickly. Even my cell phone, if it's in my pocket or otherwise very close to my body, drains more quickly than if it's sitting on a desk or tabletop. And, on occasion, light bulbs near me just burn out. Once I was walking down a flight of stairs and, as I walked down, the light bulbs above my head popped and burned out as I passed by.

My relationship with energy has been tumultuous since 1988.

### *Synesthesia*

Another odd result of my near-death experience is that I now have what neuroscientists call synesthesia. Actually, I do not know if the synesthesia is a result of the near-death experience itself or is a function of being electrocuted by lightning. Either way, I never had it before September 2, 1988, and it was not until decades after my NDE that I first heard the word "synesthesia," much less understood what it meant.

Synesthesia is essentially a neurological phenomenon in which the senses crisscross or fuse so that an individual might "hear" colors, "see" music, "taste" shapes, and so on. It sounds unbelievable, but it is actually much more common than people think. There are around eighty different types of synesthesia. I have a version called Grapheme-Color Synesthesia, where a person will associate letters, numbers, or even words with a specific color.

I think the Garden experience flowed out of the near-death experience and into my daily life through a new set of abilities to sense things through multiple and unexpected sources. Shortly after my NDE, I was in bed with burned and bandaged feet. Perhaps this made me more attuned to the nuances of my perceptions. In any case, I began to realize that, whenever I heard a day of the week mentioned, I immediately and distinctly associated that day with a color. My perception of the color of a day of the week came to me as had the information I received in my NDE, as an instant download of knowledge.

If Jeremy mentioned that he wanted a friend to come over on Tuesday, I would see blue. If Barry said he wanted to take the boys to the zoo on Saturday, I would see orange. The colors I associate with the days never vary. Monday was and still is always red, Tuesday is blue, Wednesday is yellow, Thursday is green, Friday is yellow, Saturday is orange, and Sunday is brown. These colors may vary from one synesthete to another, but they don't for a specific person.

Months of the year took on distinct hues for me, as well. For example, August is orange. It was the time I spent in the Garden immersed in meaning, knowledge, and sensory stimuli all at

once that colored the months as it did. While I was in the Garden, the colors carried information. I received knowledge simply by being there and being immersed in the riotous Garden palette. And then again, when my deceased grandfather called me on the phone, I was shown a red point of light. That light carried love. So, the idea of associating color with other ideas is something I've become comfortable with.

It was not long after I acknowledged to myself my newfound way of seeing the calendar as colorful that I realized I was doing the same thing with numbers. The digits from zero to nine all evoke a sensation of color within me. Zero was and still is white, one is orange, two is blue, three is yellow, four is blue, five is red, six is purple, seven is yellow, eight is green, and nine is orange.

These colors are not nearly as spectacular as the otherworldly colors of the Garden, but they do saturate my life. Between the synesthesia and the ability to see colorful auras around living things, hues flow together for me like watercolors now. This ability allows me to see and sense my world awash in a glorious rainbow.

## Discussion

The only common factor to all of the strange phenomena that have happened to me is the fact that they started after my NDE. To me, it is obvious that my near-death experience is related to my after-death communication and increased sensitivity, spirituality, and knowledge about consciousness and the afterlife. It is as if the voltage I received from that finger of electricity charged me with an energy that pulses through everything. The energy of that lightning was somehow alive and made *me* more alive—more sensitive to and conscious of my surroundings.

Speaking of consciousness, what does all of this mean with regard to human consciousness after death?

Because I can trace all of this back to my near-death experience and I have a complete detailed memory of what happened during my NDE, this means that *I was conscious during the entire event*. There is no reason to think that my consciousness would have been any different had I decided to stay in the Garden. I was there, in the afterlife, and was fully aware of what was happening. Fully conscious. *Meaning, my consciousness survived my bodily death.*

Because I have such a clear memory of every detail of my NDE, even now thirty-three years after the event, not only was my consciousness intact—it was supercharged. I was more aware, alert, and alive than I ever was before, or have been since. The ADC was striking in its intensity, its accuracy, and my wakeful awareness. Hearing my grandfather's voice, seeing the smoke-filled room, and feeling that overwhelming love, plus the knowledge that Barry heard the phone ring, heard my conversation, and saw the smoke that filled the room, is further evidence that human consciousness survives permanent bodily death.

### *Observations*

The near-death phenomenon has been studied extensively for years by professionals in various areas of expertise. It has been legitimized as an experience that Dr. Bruce Greyson reports happens to about twenty percent of the population that finds themselves near death.<sup>22</sup> Twenty percent is a large number of people. Part of having an NDE is being able to remember something, if not everything, about it. And in order to remember it, the experiencer had to be conscious while it was happening. Conscious, yet not here. *Conscious, but in the afterlife.*

One fact I have observed is that for the most part, the researchers who conduct most of the NDE studies are not near-death experiencers themselves. They are professional people from all walks of life who have an interest in the subject for many reasons. But now, forty-six years

after Raymond Moody's *Life After Life* gave credibility to the very real idea of an afterlife, a number of medical doctors and scientists have reported that they personally have experienced NDEs. I find that most of these researchers who have had an NDE are doing the same thing as lay people who have had an NDE. They are either keeping their stories to themselves, perhaps out of fear of ridicule or loss of credibility, or they may be talking about their experiences or writing books trying to relay to the general population what they know—that human consciousness survives bodily death. But, surprisingly, they are generally not running scientific studies. I find that interesting and have asked myself why that is.

I believe the reason is simple. Experiencers do not *need* to study this phenomenon. They already *know* that consciousness survives death. They've seen it firsthand and have no need to search for answers or evidence.

It seems to me that Dr. Jeffrey Long, who has studied NDEs since 1998 and is the founder of the Near Death Experience Research Foundation, would agree with my theory. In his book *Evidence of the Afterlife: The Science of Near-Death Experiences*, Long expressly states in all caps and bold print, "**EXPERIENCE PROVIDES THE BEST EVIDENCE.**"<sup>23</sup>

He then goes on to say, "As far as I'm concerned, it makes perfect sense that the best evidence for understanding what happens when we die would come from those who actually *did* nearly die or even experienced clinical death."<sup>24</sup> He follows this statement with, "Listen, and listen *carefully*, to the people who have gone through a near-death experience. They surely are one of the best sources for understanding what awaits us at the brink of death and beyond. Since realizing that fact, I have never looked back."<sup>25</sup>

Dr. Long is correct. His NDERF study is comprehensive and provides *good* evidence drawn from scores of experiencers of human consciousness surviving death. But, as Long has said, the *best* evidence comes from people like me who have been eyewitnesses to the afterlife, not only in front-row seats, but on stage.

The flush of information and new teachings that filled me in the Garden were occurring at the same time that I was being mesmerized by the sights and sounds of my surroundings. I was being exposed to all of these stimuli at once. My afterlife tapestry of new knowledge and overwhelming unconditional love was woven together with the fibers of all of the sensory experiences in which I was immersed. What I was sensing was also what I was learning. There was information coded in the colors and sounds. There were teachings coded in the images, in the soft gurgling of the babbling brook, in the exploding blossoms, in every single thing I saw, heard, smelled, and touched. Somehow, the beauty and the information were the same thing.

Similarly, when the phone call from my dead grandfather ended with a red laser light through the smoky vapor that filled my bedroom, that light was simultaneously sensory *and* emotional, as the physical color carried with it unconditional and unwavering love.

It has become evident to me that anything we perceive as magical, superstitious, and/or spiritual is really just information that present-day science hasn't yet found a way to explain. Despite our logic and proof-oriented way of seeing the myriad components in life as disjointed, unrelated things—physics, chemistry, emotions, spirituality, thought—all of these things are really just different permutations of the same—*one*—thing.

### *More to the Story*

I have just barely scratched the surface here in describing how my life has been altered by my near-death experience and after-death communication. This abbreviated version of my story just touches on how my relationships have changed, my outlook has changed, and I, as a person, have changed. I keep saying I'm not the same person, that I was one person before my NDE and returned from the afterlife as someone completely different.

Before the lightning strike, I would have considered myself a good person because I was a law-abiding citizen who lived within society's constraints. I always loved and was there for my family, and of course for my children whom I loved unconditionally. Barry and I saw to it that our children had a nice, clean home, lots of toys, a good education, healthy food on the table, and clean beds every night. I was an attentive mom, a caring wife, and a thoughtful friend.

But after the lightning strike, *good* took on a new, more nuanced meaning. I was suddenly very tuned in to the spiritual side of life. I am much more patient, more giving, more caring, and more loving than I was prior to the NDE. I am kinder, calmer. A person is greatly changed when they no longer fear death. My friends today are very different people from the friends I had before my NDE. My current friends have a similar outlook to mine. Most of the friends I had before my NDE have drifted out of my life. Looking back, I hardly recognize the person I was before.

I have never been a religious person, and that hasn't changed. If anything, I am *less* religious now than I was prior to my visit to the afterlife, as now I am completely turned off by any type of organized religion. Religions tend to believe that their way is the right way. They tend to say that if you want to go to Heaven when you die, you need to do things their way to ensure that you make it there. They also dictate *how* to pray. That just doesn't feel right to me any longer. After seeing what I saw in the afterlife, and knowing what I was taught in the Garden, I just don't have the desire or inclination to associate with any particular doctrine.

What I now know is that there is a force that I call God, a higher being. And God hears us no matter where we are or how we are praying. He hears us if we are praying together, but also if we are alone. I feel no spiritual compulsion to attend religious services, though I do go



occasionally for family, communal, or social reasons. But to go for the purpose of talking to God just doesn't work for me. I connect with that higher being much more effectively on my own time, in my own way.

I have to admit, I never ascribed to the concept of spirituality before. Now, my NDE and trip to the afterlife have made me a very spiritual person. I find myself conversing with God often. I marvel at the splendor I see in nature that I rarely noticed before. I can look at an animal and see the beauty in its soul. Most importantly though, I understand that bodily death is just a tiny point on the continuum in the life of human consciousness.

### *What We Do Here Matters . . . A Lot*

One of the clear messages I received in the afterlife was that our actions and thoughts in life will play a role in our afterlife. I learned that we personally have a hand in determining what type of afterlife experience we will have.

I learned in the Garden that the core of a person—the soul—survives. A handicapped person, a sick person, or a person suffering from mental illness in life becomes a soul without limitations in the afterlife since they have shed their physical body. We are all equally whole there.

However, what we do while we are here matters greatly in determining what our afterlife will look like. It has to do with an individual's expectations, actions, and thoughts. It was surprising to me to learn that my thoughts here played a role in my afterlife. If a person has led a good, loving, clean life in which they helped others, then that person knows at a soul level that they are good. But it is also important that a person's thoughts are good, loving, and charitable, as well as their actions. God hears us when we pray to him, out loud or silently. I learned that God knows what's in our minds and hearts, as well as knowing how we act as a person in our life on Earth. A person who knows they have led a good life will *expect* Heaven to be beautiful. And it *will* be—partially because the person has “earned” it, partially because it will meet the person's expectations, but mostly because God has a hand in this, too.

Fortunately, since in this dimension we are all flawed humans, God is benevolent and forgiving. It is through a combination of God's love, our own thoughts and actions in life, and our own expectations, that our afterlife is shaped and becomes a uniquely personalized experience for each of us.

### *A Note about Credibility*

Throughout this essay, I have repeatedly used the term “credible.” When hearing or reading any NDE or ADC narrative, it is not only valid but also important to inquire as to the credibility of the experiencer reporting the experience. Research is only as good as the credibility of the data available. The data in the case of large-scale NDE or ADC studies is entirely dependent on 1. the reliability of the stories told by people claiming to have experienced after-death communications or near death experiences, and 2. the reliability of the people reporting on those stories and gathering the data.

But, how can one know whom to trust? What exactly does “credible” mean? What makes a person credible?

It is the same problem presented to judges and juries in the United States and in international justice proceedings. The court is presented with evidence and must decide what constitutes evidence beyond a reasonable doubt. The justice system has determined that *credible eyewitness testimony* supports the legal requirement that establishes proof *beyond a reasonable doubt*.

To determine if a near-death experiencer is credible, or if anyone is really, there are numerous cues or features to look for. According to a 2018 article titled “Want to Know if Someone is Trustworthy? Look for These 15 Signs” in *Inc.com*, some of the traits found in a trustworthy person are consistency, compassion, and humility. A credible person respects boundaries, often compromises, is relaxed, and is respectful of others’ time. These people are not materialistic, are not desperate for money, and don’t gossip.<sup>26</sup> I would add to this list that it’s critical to assess the people with whom they associate, as this is often an indication of credibility, or lack thereof.

I would like to call attention to an important point that Raymond Moody made. When he is asked how he knows that people aren’t just fabricating NDE stories, he states, “I have witnessed mature, emotionally stable adults—both men and women—break down and weep while telling me of events that happened up to three decades before. I have detected in their voices sincerity, warmth, and feeling which cannot really be conveyed in a written recounting. So to me, in a way that is unfortunately impossible for many others to share, the notion that these accounts might be fabrications is utterly untenable.”<sup>27</sup>

If you find a person who is credible in their telling of their own near-death experience and/or after-death communication, that is much more reliable than reading possibly skewed statistical data reported by a third-party researcher. Believe the credible experiencer and trust that they are telling the truth when they say they know that consciousness survives bodily death. They have seen and experienced that survival personally. *Beyond a reasonable doubt*.

## Conclusion

At the beginning of this essay, I said that the kind of scientific evidence-seeking to which our society has become accustomed isn't what we should be looking for here. The best evidence is simply a new perspective on something we already know.

We have all heard stories of consciousness surviving bodily death. We must stop considering them as mere stories, and start accepting that each story is a glimpse into the evidence of something very real.

The original question was: **What is the best available evidence for the survival of human consciousness after permanent bodily death?**

The answer is:

*The best available evidence that human consciousness survives permanent bodily death is the direct eyewitness testimony (not secondhand reports thereof) of trustworthy people who have experienced temporary bodily death via a Near-Death Experience, who remained conscious throughout the entire experience, returned to this life, and have credibly reported exactly what happened. The ample eyewitness testimony of people who have experienced and credibly reported After-Death Communications adds further enhancement to the incontrovertible evidence of human consciousness surviving permanent bodily death. This direct eyewitness testimony is the only data that meets the legal threshold of evidence beyond a reasonable doubt.*

My goal in sharing my story, finally, after almost thirty years, was mostly to bring eyewitness evidence to others of the knowledge that consciousness lives on. It is difficult for me to be so transparent about my personal experience. I am a private person by nature, but I feel very compelled to share my story. If people who have these experiences don't share them, it deprives society of potential comfort when they need it. Raymond Moody phrases it so well when he says that NDEs "have very profound implications for what every one of us is doing with his life."<sup>28</sup> Clearly, what we do while we are here *matters*. I am hopeful that what I and other near-death experiencers are doing while we are here is helping to provide the *best* available evidence for the survival of human consciousness after bodily death.

It would be unrealistic of me to expect that everyone who hears my story finds it believable. Not everyone who reads or hears near-death experience stories will be convinced. My hope is that by hearing what near-death experiencers have to say about what we have seen and experienced for ourselves, a conversation can be started that will synergistically grow and blossom into an ongoing dialogue that ultimately will yield collective wisdom on the topic.

Ideally, the sharing of my story, and others like it, will raise public awareness and stimulate more reporting of these stories about The Eternal Life of Consciousness.

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<sup>27</sup> Moody, *Life After Life*, 96-97

<sup>28</sup> Moody, *Life After Life*, 125

Cover Art – This is an image I have had on my computer for quite some time. I don't recall where or when I first saw it, but I saved it because it grabbed my attention, and held it. To me, it illustrates beautifully that the eyes are windows to the soul. And when the body dies, the soul reaches out and leaves the human, in this case by way of the eye(s), and consciousness continues on without the human form.