

**ANOTHER MYTH IN PROGRESS,  
HOW THE MEDIA DEFINES WHAT A  
NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCE IS**

by P. M. H. Atwater, L.H.D.

In 1982, the Gallup Poll did the first scientific survey of the near-death experience. Only 9% of those surveyed claimed to have seen or passed through a tunnel to reach “the other side of death.” “Tunnels” became household images after several years of relentless media campaigns to sensationalize Raymond E. Moody, Jr.’s first book, ***Life After Life***.

And, the idea that experiencers always returned more loving and generous, honest and kind, didn’t mesh either. Researchers in Europe claimed to have found that many experiencers went through periods of depressions and confusion afterwards. Because of this, and the lack of tunnel reports, they dubbed the near-death experience an American phenomenon.

Throughout the world, then and now, the tunnel as a signature feature of the near-death experience exists only in the mythology that the media created. As far as what comes next, we have since learned that the aftereffects pattern is much more extensive than originally thought - physiologically and psychologically - and can take

years to integrate.

Today research is global, and on many fronts, giving us new definitions and a more in-depth understanding of what people describe when they report having encountered life on the other side of death. The International Association for Near-Death Studies (IANDS) keeps up with the latest facts and discoveries on their website at [www.iands.org](http://www.iands.org). Recommended for any reader is the encyclopedic ***The Big Book of Near-Death Experiences*** (although originally written by me, the book is now the property of IANDS).

So, here we go again. . . the making of another media myth.

Because of a rash of new interest about the phenomenon, caused by a number of best-selling books written by experiencers, the media is busy creating a frenzy of television stories, articles, movies, and news items that firmly establish in the public's mind that the only valid near-death experience is one that happens in a hospital under the watchful eye of doctors and nurses, beeping equipment, and code blue stat.

Decidedly not true. Conservative figures for near-death experiences that happen to people in a hospital environment is between 12 to 21%. That's hardly a majority. Even those researchers who now report upwards of 28%, that still doesn't vindicate the media from stretching facts. Near-death experiences happen anywhere to anyone at any time. A few make it to a hospital. Most never do.

Who does the public believe? The media version, of course. Where does that leave the vast majority of near-death experiencers worldwide? Puzzled. Differences

between what actually occurs and what the media portrays are still vast.

Certainly, news and entertainment sources, under pressure to feature a story line that fits their allotment of time with sponsor approval, go after subjects that earn them high ratings. Virtually lost in the shuffle is the range of experience types and how the pattern of aftereffects turns people's lives around physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. This is no small thing. Neither is it easy for experiencers to be told by television producers that what they experienced is not valid because it never occurred during or after surgery.

Yes, here we go again. Myths over truth.