

P. M. H. Atwater, L.H.D.
P. O. Box 7691
Charlottesville, VA 22906-7691
(434) 974-7945

May 26, 2004

JOURNAL OF NEAR-DEATH STUDIES

TO THE EDITOR:

In the Fall 2003 Edition of *Journal of Near-Death Studies*, an excellent study by Jeffrey P. Long, M.D. and Jody A. Long, J.D. appeared. Their study, "A Comparison of Near-Death Experiences Occurring Before and After 1975: Results From an Internet Survey," centered around a questionnaire they posted on their website and key word searches. They were able to conclude from this that there was no appreciable difference with regard to near-death demographics, experience elements, or with the aftereffects between cases which occurred before the publication of Raymond Moody's seminal book, *Life after Death*, and afterward.

The study they conducted frees the research community to pursue older as well as newer cases, and establishes Internet survey methodologies as valid. What concerns me are some of their other comments, especially in regard to "copycat" or plagiarized/fraudulent accounts. These do happen and have happened on their website (as regards to one of my own cases that fell prey to a "copycat" submitted to them, which they in turn recommended to Ken Ring – unfortunately this wasn't discovered until after Ken had published the fraudulent account). Their statement that it is highly unlikely such incidents happen in any significant number is probably true, but then that leaves us begging the question: "What defines significant?" It only takes a few "bad apples" to spoil the mix. I am certain they would agree with me that as researchers, we do need to remain vigilant and cross-check our sources.

Atwater, 2

I remain sensitive to this issue because of my own experience as a researcher of near-death states, a career that has spanned over a quarter of a century. I would remind people that there have been notable changes in some elements over-time, not in aftereffects nor in general patterning, but, rather in imagery and how it is described. For instance:

- The first national survey conducted by Gallup Poll in 1982, gave the statistics of those who experienced seeing or going through a tunnel at 9%. Fifteen years later, I gave a figure of slightly less than a third based on nearly 3,000 cases from my own research base. The only researchers I know of who found claims of a tunnel to be significantly higher (over 70%) were those who conducted their work with experiencers attending a Friends of IANDS meeting. I spoke of this at length in my book *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Near-Death Experiences* (2000). It is obvious to me that the popularity of "tunnels" has increased in tandem with the popularity of the near-death phenomenon – perhaps because experiencers now have a word they didn't have before to describe what they encountered, or perhaps they have inadvertently molded what they encountered to fit the imagery suggested by the word.
- Cultural differences and language constraints have had and continue to have a marked effect on the "color" of imagery encountered during the near-death scenario and how that is described. Example: as concerns a religious figure, someone from Thailand might say it was a Yamatoot (servant of the Lord Yama), someone from Wyoming might say it was an angel, someone from Florida might say it was Jesus, someone from France might say it was a priest,

and so forth. The way I dealt with this was to have the individual draw the "greeter." When I compared the various drawings, I couldn't tell them apart. They all looked like the same bright being of light. Different names and descriptions; basically the same figure. Variations had more to do with who was doing the talking and where they lived.

- To begin with there were very few cases of unpleasant and/or hell-like experiences. Whether or not this was because people were too embarrassed to speak of them, the fact is the "Moody Model" seemed in a way to pre-determine what researchers were looking for and how they went about their search. As more cases were discovered, more people came forward – changing how researchers conducted their work. Thus, types of scenarios evolved as the field evolved.
- This same peculiarity occurred with the aftereffects. In the early days, not that many experiencers reported the radical changes we now know can follow near-death states. Thinking followed Moody's book: people were unafraid of death afterward, became easier going, more loving and generous, more spiritual, and so forth. Today, a larger pattern of both physiological and psychological aftereffects has been identified; my finding that it takes a full seven years to integrate the experience has been verified by the Dutch Study (2001).

The point I am trying to make here is that, although the basic patterning of near-death states has remained consistent overtime and throughout the world,

both before 1975 and after, we cannot say that all aspects of it as reported have. The field of study has evolved, and with it changes and alterations in word use, descriptions, and scenario types and how these are viewed.

As for myself, it was much easier in the late seventies (I came aboard as a researcher in 1978) and throughout the eighties to trust the information I was given by the experiencers I encountered. I double-checked anyway, hence the extent I went through to have sessions with significant others whenever possible. In the nineties, however, the research climate changed, especially after the publication of Betty Eadie's first book and that of Dannion Brinkley's. Experiencers were not nearly as cooperative with me after that, a number of them demanded payment for their story or refused to share much lest they put their copyright at risk. I can honestly say that I could not duplicate today the work I previously did. The climate of research, at least the front-line type of fieldwork I do, has changed that much.

The Internet may indeed be the next frontier in the scope of research that can now be conducted, perhaps not as thorough as what I once did, but nonetheless valuable. And Long and Long are leading the way. They have done a splendid job and I look forward to more reports from them.

... P. M. H. Atwater, L.H.D. near-death researcher,
author of numerous books about her findings,
near-death experiencer.

Footnotes:

Moody, Raymond, Jr., M.D. (1975). *Life After Life*. Covington, GA; Mockingbird Books.

Atwater, P. M. H., L.H.D. (2000). *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Near-Death Experiences* (with David Morgan), pages 12 and 13. Indianapolis, IN; Macmillan/Alpha/Pearson.

Atwater, 5

van Lommel, P., van Wees, R., Meyers, V. and Elfferich, I. (2001). Near-death

experience in survivors of cardiac arrest: A prospective study in the Netherlands.
The Lancet.

Eadie, Betty J. (1992). *Embraced by the Light*. Placerville, CA; Gold Leaf Press.

Brinkley, Dannon (1994). *Saved by the Light* (with Paul Perry). New York, NY;
Villard Books.