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STARTLING DISCOVERIES ABOUT CHILDREN WHO HAVE NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCES

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Children of any age can have a near-death experience. That includes newborns and infants. What they tell once verbal can be quite shocking to parents unprepared or unfamiliar with the startling reality of near-death states.

With a research base of well over 3,000 adult and 277 child experiencers, I can say that the vast majority (76%) of children's scenarios are rather simple - one to three elements - things like the loving nothingness, the friendly dark, a special voice, an out-of-body experience, a visitation of some kind. The closer the child is to puberty, the more apt he or she is to have a longer, more involved episode. Still, kids cases can run the gamut from hellish to heavenly regardless of how old they are. For instance, the youngest I came across to have a terrifying experience was only nine days old. The baby girl was traumatized by ghoulish beings who threatened her when she "died" during surgery. The event haunted her throughout her growing years until, at the age of twenty-eight, she had a second near-death experience that explained the first one.

We all thrill to "out-of-the-mouth-of-babes" stories that inspire and uplift us, yet in our joy we fail utterly to view what happened to the child from the child's eyes - nor are we alert for aftereffects.

Don't let children's usually brief scenarios fool you. The key is intensity. In over two decades of research, I have found that it is the intensity of the experience (for child or adult), not necessarily the imagery or words heard, that has the greatest impact. The simplest of episodes, if intense enough, engender the full range of psychological and physiological aftereffects - no matter the experiencer's age.

With that in mind, let's take a moment to compare child experiencers with adult experiencers. Remember, the intensity is the same and the aftereffects are the same. . . yet the different way kids deal with the phenomenon can be quite surprising. Here's a sample: 57% of the child experiencers once grown went on to enjoy long-lasting and for the most part happy marriages. Adult experiencers, on the other hand, had tremendous difficulty forming or maintaining stable

relationships afterward; fully 78% of their marriages ended up in divorce.

Both groups in my study reported unusual increases or decreases in light sensitivity: about 75% with kids, which is close to the adult range of between 80 to 90%. Whereas 73% of the adults went on to experience electrical sensitivity, not that many children did - about 52% - which may reflect who has more access to technological equipment, rather than a true deviation. Older experiencers are four times more likely to become vegetarians than the younger crowd (even near-death kids snub their veggies).

Afterward, parent-sibling relationships tend to be strained for child experiencers. Additionally, kids are more likely than adults to suffer socially and to report having regrets about what happened to them. An astounding number of children would go back to The Other Side of Death's Curtain after their experience, even if that meant suicide. Child experiencers, whether still young or grown, seldom see a counselor and receive less help if they do go to one. This is not true with adult experiencers - contrary to how loudly they may protest otherwise. Because the disparity between children and adults in this area is so enormous, it begs further comment.

Family/friend alienation - within five to ten years after their episode, one-third of the child experiencers in my study admitted to having serious problems with alcohol. Almost to a person, they claimed that undeveloped social/communication skills were the culprit, along with an inability to understand what motivated the people around them. Their worldview, as it turned out, had altered significantly from either their peer group or family members, making it difficult for them to "fit back in."

There's another aspect to the issue of alienation that, for the child, may be even more profound. Completely aside from any abuse or peer pressure from family or friends, and whether or not parents are supportive, the major factors in a child's experience appears to be who or what greeted the youngster on The Other Side of death, and, how did the episode end? What parent, no matter how wonderful or loving, can compare with Holy Spirit? What person, friend or foe, can interest a child who has visited the bright realms and become buddies with an angel? On top of that, for the child experiencer, connecting with such transcendent love and then abruptly losing that connection can be very confusing, even devastating. Ever so many kids expressed guilt-ridden laments like: "I'm really bad. The bright ones left and I can't find them anymore. It's all my fault they're gone."

We tend to forget how personal children take everything, and the extent to which they will blame themselves if anything seems to go awry. Nor do we notice how large things loom for them. . . literally, their near-death experience can define their entire world. Because many are unable to make "before and after" comparisons, the fact that "here" is not the same as "there" is often too foreign a concept for them to grasp.

The issue of suicide - plain and simple, children reason differently. Unaccustomed to considering cause and effect, they tend to act on impulse; hence, the high degree of alcoholism and an attempted suicide rate of 21%. It seems perfectly logical to a child that the way to rejoin the light beings met in death is simply to die and go back. This is not recognized by them as self-destructive. Their logic says: "I was in this beautiful place while I wasn't breathing. It all went

away when my breath came back. I need to stop my breath so I can return."

Parent/child bonding is initially quite strong. These kids want to be with their families. That bonding brings them back again and again. Common retorts are: "I came back to help my Daddy" or "I came back so Mommy won't cry." The parent/child bond doesn't begin to stretch thin or break until after the child revives. That climate of welcome or threat they are greeted with directly impinges on everything that comes next.

To understand children's cases, we must keep in mind that kids are tuned to different harmonics than adults. Concepts of either life or death leave them with puzzled faces. "I don't end or being anywhere," a youngster once told me. "I just reach out and catch the next wave that goes by and hop a ride. That's how I got here."

This child, like other young experiencers, speaks in the language of "other worlds," one that is less verbal and more akin to synesthesia - which is multiple sensing. The ability enables them to perceive what we call "reality" as consisting of layered realms unhampered by physical boundaries. Because of this, they easily giggle with angels, play with ghosts, and pre-experience the future. Parents generally find such behavior cause for panic. Yet what seems worrisome may have a simple explanation: near-death states expand and enhance faculties normal to us, allowing access to more of the electromagnetic spectrum (typical range of human perception is a mere 1%).

A fascinating aspect of this is, that as a child's mind begins to shift from what happened to them, their intelligence quotient rises. Here are a few sample percentages from my research with child experiencers (details in my book *Children of the New Millennium*, Three Rivers Press, New York City, 1999):

Mind works differently - highly creative and inventive.....	84%
Significant enhancement of intellect.....	68%
Mind tested at genius level (overall/from birth to age 15)...	48%
Mind tested at genius level (subgroup/those under age 6).....	81%
Drawn to and highly proficient in math/science/history.....	93%

There is another observation along this line I want to make: after a near-death experience, a child's learning ability reverses; instead of continuing on with the typical developmental curve - from concrete (details) to abstract (concepts) - a child returns immersed in broad conceptual reasoning styles and has to learn how to go from abstract back to concrete.

Example: a first grader returned to school after drowning and being resuscitated. While his agemates continued with their reading of "See Spot Run," he wanted to know about Greek mythology and why Robinson Crusoe was written. His teacher was stunned, yet he just blinked his eyes and headed for the library.

The most oft-repeated phrase from those I interviewed was: "I felt like an adult in a child's body."

Even those who did not test out with extraordinarily high IQs (which averaged around 150 to 160; several were 184 and above), even these kids evidenced a uniquely creative and intuitive mind, numerous faculty enhancements, an unrelenting curiosity, and an exceptional ability to know things soon after reviving. Some were gifted with

foreign languages. And, all of this occurred without genetic markers of any kind to account for what happened.

Overall, child experiencers are natural computer whizzes. Many become physicists and inventors once grown, even masters of the arts and humanities - some professional psychics. Older teenage and adult experiencers are those most often drawn to some type of healing, counseling, and ministerial roles afterward. Not the kids, at least not the majority. Mention math or science and they're all aglow. And history intrigues them, as well as anything to do with times "past," as if it might apply to what they may have been before (in the sense of reincarnation or the life continuum).

Additionally, 85% of the kids with the greatest acceleration in mathematical ability afterward were the same ones with a suddenly intense and passionate love of music. In the brain, math and music are located next to each other. Children's near-death states somehow seem to activate both of these regions. . . as if they were a single unit.

The child who returns from a near-death episode is a remodeled, rewired, reconfigured, refined version of the original model. The changes they undergo are more dramatic than those of adults, not because their aftereffects are different, but, I suspect, because they are still in the process of basic brain development when their episode occurs. They are "hit" with an impactful, and in most cases life-changing experience, at a time when they are the most vulnerable to the power of such a shift.

How many children are so affected?

Thanks to a poll taken in 1997 by U.S. News & World Report, the estimate for near-death experiencers in the United States has jumped to fifteen million people. That translates to about one-third of those who brush death, nearly die, or who are pronounced clinically dead but later revive. This estimate, though, only addresses adults. Melvin Morse, M.D., in his pioneering study of children (as chronicled in his book *Closer to the Light*, Villard Books, New York City, 1990) puts the figure at around 70% for kids. That means, under the same circumstances, children are twice as likely as adults to experience a near-death episode.

Modern resuscitation techniques and high-technology are bringing back from the edge of death more and more people, especially kids, who return ideally suited for. . . high-technology! It's as if the very citizens we need to thrive in our new global village are being "created" right under our noses (even adult experiencers return more intelligent than before, and become, for the most part, intuitive problem solvers).

What amazes me, though, is that the Millennial Generation is being born this way. Today's new crop of kids compare almost trait-for-trait with what happens to children after a near-death experience. The Millennial Generation are those born between 1982 and about 2003, as identified by historians William Strauss and Neil Howe, authors of *Generations: The History of America's Future, 1584 to 2069* (William Morrow, New York City, 1991).

These young people comprise the fourteenth generation since the United States became a nation, and are the most wanted, nurtured, and educated group of individuals we've ever produced, and the most protected by law. Unusually smart and assertive, they are as creative

and intuitive as they are computer geniuses. And they are scoring higher on IQ tests than any other generation of record, a twenty-four to twenty-six point hike, with a significant percentage of them testing between 150 to 160 or more. But, where they receive their greatest scores is in nonverbal intelligence. That means they're gifted creative problem solvers and intuitive innovators. This jump is so high, changes in the gene pool cannot account for it, neither can education. . . as test scores in the area of rote schooling rose only slightly (a puzzle for educators).

Something of note is happening to the human family, for these anomalies are global, and it is happening now!

Increasing numbers of children are being born "advanced."

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Increasing numbers of adults through near-death states or because of an intensely impactful transformation of consciousness are winding up "advanced." Because this is true, I no longer consider near-death states a separate phenomenon, but, rather, part of the larger genre of consciousness transformations. And, I call such episodes a "brain shift" because they appear to cause a structural, chemical, and functional change in the experiencer's brain, not to mention alterations in his or her nervous and digestive systems, attitudes, and sense of self.

Brain shifts can result from any manner of otherworldly occurrences. I would include here those of a more turbulent nature, such as: religious conversions, near-death episodes, kundalini breakthroughs, shamanistic rituals, sudden spiritual transformations, certain types of head trauma and having been hit by lightning. I would also include those more tranquil in how they're experienced: from the slow, steady application of spiritual disciplines, mindfulness techniques, meditation, vision quests, or because in a prayerful state of mind the individual simply desires to become a better person.

Major characteristics displayed by people who have undergone or who are going through a brain shift:

Physiological - changes in thought-processing (switch from sequential/selective thinking to clustered thinking and an acceptance of ambiguity), insatiable curiosity, heightened intelligence, more creative and inventive, unusual sensitivity to light and sound, substantially more or less energy (even energy surges, oftentimes more sexual), reversal of body clock, lower blood pressure, accelerated metabolic and substance absorption rates (decreased tolerance of pharmaceuticals and chemically treated products), electrical sensitivity, synesthesia (multiple sensing), increased allergies or sensitivities, a preference for more vegetables and grains (and less of meat if an adult), physically younger looking (before and after photographs can differ).

Psychological - loss of the fear of death, more spiritual/less religious, abstract easily, philosophical, can go through bouts of depression, disregard for time, more generous and charitable, form expansive concepts of love while at the same time challenged to initiate and maintain satisfying relationships, "inner child" issues exaggerate, less competitive, convinced of a life purpose, rejection of previous limitations and norms, heightened sensations of taste-touch-texture-smell, increased psychic ability and future memory episodes (pre-live the future), charismatic,

childlike sense of joy and wonder if adult, more mature if a child, more detached and objective (dissociation), "merge" easily (absorption), hunger for knowledge and learning.

In reconsidering near-death states, I now regard adult episodes as a "growth event," an opportunity for the experiencer to make "course corrections" in his or her life; a second chance. With childhood episodes, I now regard them as an "evolutionary event," part of a quantum leap in the development and growth of humankind as a species; a second birth.

The larger genre, transformations of consciousness, I have come to recognize as the engine that drives evolution, what advances us. Beyond all the stories and revelations experiencers tell, and some are quite spectacular, is "a larger presence and a greater plan."

My own three near-death experiences, occurring in the first three months of 1977, opened the door for me to this vision. The thousands of people I have interviewed and studied since reflect back that same awakening: we are co-creators with our Creator, advancing with Creation itself.

Most repeated from near-death experiencers are these four words: "Always there is life." If they're right, and I believe they are, then how can there be an afterlife? A before-life? A death? Kids describe life as "the stream we flow along" while negotiating the currents and eddies of its spread. It is the "homey home" of our visions and the ever-present reality of each moment. Life is all there is.

Children are really quite wise, and we would be wise to listen to them.

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