

NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCES IN CHILDHOOD

NOT WHAT YOU THINK

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

Out of the mouth of babes. . . stories from innocents that grab us, hold us in awe, sometimes make us cry. This awe, this thrill we get when we listen to the very youngest describing the heaven we go to after death. . . years later. . . what happens to that child? Several people have pursued this question. Wrote a few books about their observations. Yet none of them did anything in-depth.

I took on that challenge. What about near-death experiences before, during, or after birth? As a baby, toddler, or child up to five years? What about life in the womb? Maybe there's a "rest of the story" we didn't even know existed.

My first go-round with child experiencers was in the eighties and nineties. Those I spoke with or observed spanned the years between kindergarten and in their early twenties. . . most of their episodes clustered between the ages of birth and 15 months, and three to five years. This study was published in the book, ***The New Children and Near-Death Experiences***, and featured 277 cases - all of them forward looking in the sense that their lives were ahead of them.

This second go-round with child experiencers is current, with the majority of 120 experiencers in their 50s, 60s, 70s, and 80s; all of them able to verify having had a near-death experience between birth and the age of five (maybe a relative was still alive who could testify to their story, or perhaps there was a written record of some kind). This older crowd answered the question: did your near-death experience at such an early age make any difference in your life? If it did, what? All of them looking backward - giving honest answers about their early years, life with mom and dad, siblings, school, friends, sex, social and sports

activities, dating, further schooling, jobs, careers, money matters, alcohol/drugs, marriage, children of their own, the mature years.

No problem with memory. Already established with previous near-death studies is how clear memories of near-death experiences remain in mind throughout a person's life. If blocked for some reason, once that memory returns it remains in mind.

Fact: most adult near-death experiencers are able to integrate what happened to them within 7 to 10 years. (I've yet to meet one who did it quicker, although many claim they did.) With children, it's different. The typical child takes 20 to 40 years, sometimes 50, to integrate. Why? Because a child tends to compensate, alter, or adjust in life, rather than integrate. Even when they age into the mature years, that puzzle isn't solved. Most never had a before to begin with, no way to compare anything. Their clear memories of other families, other homes, other worlds, simply do not fit into what they are repeatedly reminded of as "the real world." The majority are uncomfortable around adult experiencers. Because of this, they tend to avoid near-death conferences, and do not like support groups. They claim that adult experiencers talk too much about life after death and "love-and-light" to even be interesting. Their longing is for the life continuum. Living on earth, to them, means: figure out what's here and then do something about it, learn something, make things better, heal and help.

That desire to understand causes misunderstandings and conflicts. Life in this world doesn't work the way they feel it should or could. Before school age and in the early grades, many are bullied - unmercifully. Seldom do they even understand why they're in school in the first place: they know more than parents, siblings, school teachers, friends. Also, why date? They usually know ahead of time what will happen, so, why go?

Three main challenges are faced here: (1) most begin abstracting (dealing with concepts) before the first grade, are not just smarter than their peers, they show signs of synesthesia (multiple sensing/sensory blends - such as hearing numbers, seeing music, smelling color), are highly intuitive, curious, creative; (2) what happens in the family unit and when they go to school colors what happens throughout adulthood as they

try to fit in, but seldom do; and (3) they forever miss “HOME,” the greater collective they know is real - the majority feeling a sense of loneliness or even have periods of being suicide prone - not in a sense of grief but rather - *homesickness*.

Cindy tells us: *Growing up was difficult. I always referred to my family as a group of people who did not know each other, and they decided to stay in this house because it provided food, clothing, and shelter. I never cried; looked at the soul of people.*

According to Penny: *I didn't become suicidal until my sophomore year after four moves and different schools. I actually had planned it out and had taken my parent's gun and I put it in my night stand. Through an intervention that still seems mystical to me, my plan was thwarted.*

Some findings in this one-of-a-kind study: unable to bond with parents 90%; difficult life situations 62%; empathic 84%; highly intelligent 75%; suicide prone 74%; vivid dreams 70%; problems sleeping 67%; out-of-body experiences commonplace 62%; aware of things future 61%; turned to drug use 46%; turned to alcohol abuse 45%; strong spiritual guidance and knowing 76%; had very successful careers in life 74%; long-lasting marriages 52% (only 31% of them, however, were happy - biggest complaint: being ignored or misunderstood by spouse, partner thinks they are flirting when they are actually just being friendly).

There are clear signs of *learning reversals*. What I mean by that is. . . instead of continuing with concrete learning styles (details), they move to abstract learning (concepts). Often they return from their near-death experience immersed in broad conceptual learning styles. . . and are forced by the school system to relearn concrete methods from scratch. Example: while other kids are still reading “Dick and Jane see Spot run,” the child experiencer suddenly prefers Greek mythology and asks the teacher “Why was the book Robinson Crusoe ever written.”

Notice this: mind works differently than before 84%, those with a significant enhancement of intellect of 68%. And that's just general figures. More specific: with those from birth to fifteen years, 48% scored 150 to 160 using standard IQ tests (genius is usually around 136). Yet those who had their near-death experience *before* age six, 81% scored

150 to 160. And. . . those who had their experience between birth and age 15 months, when old enough to take the test, scored 180 and higher. **The younger the child the greater the jump in IQ. Only 4 kids had genetic markers which could explain this.**

Look again: these experiences are happening when the flooring of the brain is being laid, when the basics of brain function and nerve response is coming online, when the vary aspect of consciousness itself as partner with brain is just beginning to flourish. The child enters this world “different” because of what I call “the power punch” of a near-death experience.

Here’s the kicker: 34% were positive about having their NDE; 61% were negative. Why? Because growing up and finding their place in life was just too difficult.

Let’s face it - the aftereffects of near-death experiences for children *are very similar to PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder)*. In my first study involving younger experiencers: 21% had challenges with the idea of suicide - to leave or to stay. With this current group, older people looking back, 74% tended to be suicide prone or had times in their life where this was a major issue. *The older the experiencer becomes the more tempting it is to simply leave.* Hear this: a child does not look at suicide like an adult does (**even when they reach adulthood**). They have no real concept of hurting their family or causing anyone grief. Their logic is quite different. When they were not breathing, they were in a beautiful place with loving people. Now that they are breathing again, that beautiful place and loving people are gone. Aha! The way to get back there, then, is to stop breathing, and that’s exactly what they try to do. This can go on throughout the childhood and teen years, even when adults.

It’s all about HOME. Guilt for wanting to go back. Betrayal for getting kicked out. Many never knew or understood what a human being is or how to be one. Learning about the power of prayer, meditation, mindfulness, how consciousness works and how to work with it, makes all the difference. Spiritual awareness, classes in spirituality and the higher concepts of life, make all the difference. The woman who is now 86 can

attest to this as well. Putting spiritual truisms ahead in life makes a huge difference in how life is lived.

There were several experiencers who were born into extremely negative conditions. One into a Satanic Cult where the goal of her parents was to have a child who could be used in Satanic Rituals. Judy had 17 near-death experiences by the age of nine, the first when she was only six weeks old. It took her years, but she finally reached a place where she could forgive her parents and understand the whats and whys of her life. “All of my experiences in this life, whether they appeared to be dark or light are expressions of Love. Experiences of searching for Love. I came into this life with a purpose. This was not known to me until much later in my life, or I would not have been able to truly know the experiences as they were in the moment. What I know today has brought everything full circle.”

The Forever Angels contains stories of people in poverty who simply wanted to be heard. One saved pennies so she could afford stamps so she could mail me her story. There are many retirees who never dared whisper a word of what happened to them throughout their long life. Some sent tear-stained essays I could hardly read. People like a County Commissioner, Catholic Sister, several farmers, one who was once nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize - are examples of the people who took part. Many sent drawings I could use, some funny, some scary. One shows a mother smoking during her pregnancy, the nicotine affecting her unborn baby who could smell and taste the cigarette and got a “high” each time her mother smoked. Please show this drawing to every physician who claims mothers can smoke during pregnancy without it affecting their baby. Not true!

Another, who died during childbirth *as her mother was trying to commit suicide*, was saved by quick-thinking emergency personnel.

The sum of this study surprised even me. After over forty years of researching and studying near-death experiences, all ages, all parts of this country and others, I was startled the most by what I learned from the youngest of the young. These little ones are more attuned to an ongoing stream of consciousness, a continuous reality, that dips on occasion to enable what we call human life, then it lifts again at human

death to move on to yet another dimension. . . in a continuous and forever opportunity for all of us to become the forever angels we already are.

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P. M. H. Atwater, L.H.D., had three near-death experiences within three months in 1977. This turned her life around completely. She turned to research the following year, and has now completed 18 books either on her findings or experiences related to the phenomenon. Some of her findings have been verified in clinical setting, among them the prospective study done in Holland and published in *Lancet* (12-15-01). To date, her work covers nearly 5,000 adult and child experiencers of near-death states. She has won many awards and travels the world, always inviting people to look past appearances for the truth that underlies what we think we know.