

Stories of Individual Near-Death Experiences

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The following are summaries of stories told to me by my patients, friends, business associates and others. Of course, the names and other personally identifying details have been modified. I am sharing them as a way of extending comfort to anyone who is critically ill and/or has lost a loved one...perhaps these stories may change your concept of death and dying as they have mine.

An elementary school principal:

Joan, a school principal, was in her forties when an aneurism in her brain ruptured. She was at her school when this happened; she immediately became unconscious. Her brain began to swell and when the paramedics arrived, they concluded that she was clinically dead. However, they immediately began applying live-saving techniques. Joan reported that as the paramedics worked to revive her, she experienced herself moving out of her body and watched them working on her from the top of the room, feeling very peaceful. Then, Joan said, she remembered herself moving toward a light where she saw her mother, who had died some years before. She stated that her mother was dressed in a purple dress and she radiated light and love. Her mother told her "It is not your time. You have two little children. You have to go back". Joan noted she didn't want to go back because she was filled with intense feelings of love and peace and joy unlike anything she had ever experienced in the past. All at once, she found herself moving back into her body as the paramedics successfully revived her. Joan reported that this was a life-altering experience. She shared the story with her brother, who found comfort in her story. He asked how old their mother had been and Joan replied that she did not know, but she was beautiful. However, when she shared her experience with her husband, he laughed and did not believe her. Joan, however, said that this experience had profoundly changed her in many positive ways and when her husband continued to ridicule and demean this experience, she eventually left him.

The airplane pilot:

Jake was a truancy officer in a large school system. He developed cancer and endured a number of painful and debilitating treatments which were unsuccessful in arresting his disease. In a

last-ditch effort to survive, Jake volunteered to be a subject for an experimental treatment at the National Institute of Health. At one point during this treatment, Jake reported that his heart stopped, and he was, according to the staff, clinically dead. Jake remembered leaving his body, watching the doctors as they hovered around him and then, moving toward a light. He also reported experiencing an overwhelming sense of peace, love, and joy. When the doctors revived him, Jake indicated he was a different person. Sometime later, Jake, who also was a pilot, was flying alone in a single engine plane over the countryside. Suddenly and without warning, the plane's engine stopped, and Jake reported the nose of his plane began to go straight down toward the earth. Jake remembered that before he was able to get the engine restarted, he felt no fear at all because his previous experience with death had totally removed all fear of dying. Jake talked about death being such a beautiful and loving experience that he would never again be afraid of dying -- and in fact, looked forward to it.

The police officer:

John indicated that he knew that his 70-year-old father was dying. Understanding that he had little time left to be with his father, John took leave from his job. For several days, John sat by his father's bed in the hospital. Over several days, John noted his father was getting weaker. One evening, as John continued to sit by the bed, his uncle entered the room. John remembers that his uncle was laughing and obviously happy; walking toward the bed, the uncle reached out his arms to John's father. In response, his father reached back and when their hands touched, his father died. Just as suddenly, the uncle disappeared. John smiled, noting that his uncle had died many years before this incident, but that he had seen him clearly in this hospital room. "I remember my uncle as being old at the time of his death, but when he came into the room to greet my father, he was younger and looked very healthy." John noted that the visit from his uncle helped John to understand that his father was happy and with loved ones, so his experience of loss was much less than it had been in the past when he lost loved ones. *[Authors Note: Although many who have near death experiences report having people, they love to come to accompany them to the "other side", it is unusual for others to see them.]*

The Tea Party:

Susan had terminal cancer and had been in the hospital for some time. She was in a coma for two weeks and her death was near. The day before she died, her husband reported that Susan was acting out having a tea party and was talking to the people she seemed to be serving. The people she spoke to appeared to be friends and loved ones who had died, some many years before. Susan was smiling and seemed incredibly happy, although she did not respond to her husbands' questions and conversation. She died peacefully the next day.

Carolyn:

Carolyn had worked for the FBI for over 25 years when her supervisor informed her that her required five-year background check had found that her roommate and boyfriend was a man who had served time for murdering his former girlfriend and the girlfriend's new boyfriend. She was told that she if she wanted to keep her job, she would need to terminate the relationship with this man. Carolyn valued her job and told her boyfriend that she was moving out and their relationship was over. She did not appreciate the danger in his response: *"If I can't have you, nobody can"*. Shortly after she had moved, the boyfriend showed up at her new apartment and violently attacked her with a knife. Carolyn indicated he stabbed her 27 times and the only reason she hadn't died was her neighbors heard her screaming and came through her window and saved her. Following a trial in which he was convicted of the assault, the boyfriend received a long prison sentence.

As Carolyn related this story, it was without emotion. Wondering why, I asked, "Did you leave your body when you were being stabbed?" "Yes, she replied, "I sat on the couch and watched him stab me. He broke the handle off of his knife and got another one from my kitchen and continued stabbing me." I asked if she went toward a light. "Yes, I walked between two white lights and my mother came to me and told me it was not my time and I had to go back. I didn't want to go back because it was so peaceful and beautiful." I commented that it must have been comforting to see her mother since she was only three when her mother died and probably didn't remember what her mother looked like. "Oh, that wasn't the first time I saw her. I almost died during surgery after a car accident and my mother came to me there and told me the same thing; it wasn't my time and I had to go back."

Tyrone:

Tyrone noted that he had been once a street alcoholic. No one could stop him from drinking, and he was repeatedly picked up for vagrancy and thrown into the Washington, D.C. jail. On one occasion, Tyrone said that he vomited in a way that totally closed up his windpipe and he reported that he died. He, too, reported leaving his body and going toward the light and seeing a religious figure that was radiating such love, acceptance, and joy that it changed him. Fortunately, one of the jail officials noticed that Tyrone was not breathing and revived him. Tyrone reported that he never drank again. He stated that this experience changed him into a person who cared about others and wanted to do things that would make the world a better place. *[Author's Note: The experience happened fifteen years prior to our conversation.]*

Rachel:

Rachel was fourteen when her mother told me this story. When Rachel was five, she was riding a tricycle on their deck. The deck was in the process of being remodeled and the railings had been removed. Rachel rode her bike off the side of the deck, fell to the ground below, and crushed her esophagus. She was not breathing when her parents found her. They both had EMT experience and, after several minutes, were able to get her breathing. When Rachel regained consciousness, she was radiant. Rachel reported that she had flown over golden cities and sat on the lap of God. When I talked to Rachel at age 14, she indicated that her memory of the golden cities and sitting on God's lap had never faded. She was very mature for her age and seemed wise and very caring about other people.

The Couple:

Mark's elderly parents had remained madly in love with each other through over 50 years of marriage. Both became seriously ill on the same day and for some reason, were taken to two separate hospitals. Mark's mother died that evening. Mark dreaded telling his father of her death because his mother and father had been inseparable, and Mark knew losing her would devastate him. However, as Mark entered his father's hospital room, his father was sitting up in his bed. He looked at his son and said "Your mother came and sat on my bed at 8:30 this evening. She told me it was her time to go and that she loved me very much. Then she kissed me and disappeared". His father understood that she had died (and she, in fact, had passed away at exactly that time). He began crying and told his son, "I can't live without her". Almost immediately, his father drifted into a coma, and died shortly thereafter.

Jim:

Jim was in a commercial airplane when a portion of the engine tore loose from the right-wing during take-off and was driven through the side of the cabin wall. The huge metal piece killed the two people sitting in the seats in front of Jim. Jim was so distraught from having witnessed their deaths that he was having flashbacks. When asked to describe the scene from that experience that had been most traumatic for him, Jim reported; "The first thing I remember is looking down on the scene from the top of the plane's cabin; I thought the plane was crashing and that I was going to die. When I realized that the plane was not crashing, that the wing had only injured the passengers sitting in front of me, I seemed to return to my seat where I could see the bodies of these victims. In this incident, Jim's belief that his death was imminent seemed to allow him to leave his body to spare him from the pain of death. Many other people have reported having this experience; Jim did not have to be in physical pain to leave his body; this seemed to be nature's way of protecting him.

Margaret:

Margaret, age 53, indicated that she had been given her name, Margaret, by the doctor who delivered her because her mother was too sick to give her a name. Following her birth, Margaret's mother was involuntarily confined to a TB hospital for many years, as was the custom during the 40's and 50's. Margaret had overheard her relatives say that her mother had gotten much sicker during the pregnancy with Margaret, and she came to believe that she was responsible for her mother's illness. She also believed that her mother's allowing the doctor to name her meant that she was not loved. When Margaret was five, her mother was finally released from the hospital, although she was still quite frail. Margaret split her time between staying with the grandmother, who raised her, and her very sickly mother. Margaret did not remember her mother being nurturing (probably because she was so ill); Margaret continued to believe that her mother blamed her for her illness.

When Margaret was 11 years of age, her mother became so ill she was again confined to a hospital. Shortly after this, her mother died one night at 3:39 am. At precisely that time, Margaret indicated that her mother came to her bed, woke her up and extended her hand to Margaret, indicating that her daughter should accompany her. She and her mother walked up a flight of stairs toward a light. When they arrived at a door at the top of the stairs, her mother turned to Margaret, looked into her eyes, and said, "I love you!" Then her mother turned and moved through the door. When Margaret tried to follow, her mother used her hand to push her back, so she couldn't follow. The next thing Margaret remembered was waking up in her bed.

Until she entered therapy, Margaret had interpreted her mother's pushing her back as rejection and proof that she was a horrible, unlovable person. It was only after an explanation which re-framed this perception that Margaret came to understand that her mother had come to her at the moment of her death to make sure that the last thing her daughter remembered was her mother telling her she was loved. Her mother had pushed her back from the door, not because she didn't love her, but because she did not want Margaret to accompany her in death. The realization that her mother loved her so much that she had come to her at the moment of her death to tell her so, was a life-altering experience for Margaret.

The Preacher:

This is from the Miller family history as written by one of family (my husband's mother's family):

William Parker Miller? (born 12/10/1818) was a Methodist minister "who preached all over Alabama and West Florida." He was also a doctor. "and all the time he was practicing medicine the only sleep he got was on the buggy while his driver would drive him from one place to the other where the folks were sick. He was the father of 7 boys; three of them died in the war between the North and the South and William was troubled about them. (William Parker Miller was opposed to slavery and the Civil War.) He did not know anything about whether they were "saved" or not. When William died he was staying with another of his sons, and after they considered him dead he revived and looking around until he saw his son, he says, 'Don't be troubled about your brothers for they are in Heaven for I have been there and seen all three of them.'" He closed his eyes and was gone and did not revive anymore."

Linda:

I was told this story by the significant other of a retired FBI agent in 2012; She is at least 68 and he is probably 10 years older.

"Six weeks ago, Jack and I were driving back from a vacation in another state (I was driving) when I started saying unusual things. He said that when we drove up in front of my house, I told him that "this is not my house; my house is in Orlando". Concerned that I was having a stroke, Jack got me to the hospital immediately. After a brief look at me by the emergency room doctor, I was immediately moved to the cardiac unit.

I remember being rolled into that unit, but then suddenly, I was aware that I was walking down a path of indescribable beauty, with flowers growing on both sides of the path. The place was filled with soft glowing light. It was so beautiful, and I felt at peace and didn't want to leave. However, up ahead of me standing in a line on this path stood my mother (who was long-since dead), my daughter (who died 6 years ago suddenly at age 45), and a woman I did not know. Each of the women were glowing and beautiful. Each woman was holding her hand in a way that indicated I should stop. Each of the women told me I must go back; it was not my time. I didn't want to go back.

Suddenly, I was aware of doctors and medical personnel moving rapidly around me, one holding paddles that had been used to start my heart which I was later told had stopped suddenly. One of my daughters told me that the doctors were having problems waking me up after they got my heart beating

again. She took care of this by whispering in my ear, 'Saks Fifth Avenue is having the most incredible sale'. Although I don't remember this, my daughter told me that my eyes popped open at hearing this.

I told the nurse who was taking care of me what I had experienced, and she was not surprised. She replied that many patients in her unit have told her of having similar experiences when their hearts stopped, or they were clinically dead for a period before the medical personnel revived them.

The problem that caused the crazy talk and my heart to stop was not a stroke, but tachycardia. My heart had been beating at a rate so high that it couldn't maintain that speed, so it just stopped. If I had not been in the hospital, I would have died. After a brief stay in the hospital, I went home with medication that treated my tachycardia so that my heart now beats at a normal rate.

A couple weeks after I was in the hospital I was at Jack's house for dinner. I was walking around from room to room and began looking at some of his pictures (I had not done this before). All at once, I was startled by realizing I was looking at a picture of the woman I had seen standing beside my mother and daughter. She was even wearing the same dress she had been wearing when I saw her. I found out that this was a picture of Jack's wife who had died of cancer. Some of the women who knew her told me that she had known she was dying and was concerned that Jack would be very lonely without her. She was a very loving woman and wanted Jack to find someone else after she was gone. She told others she knew him well and he would not make it very well if he were alone.

This experience has had a profound impact on every part of my life. I had been so sad and empty after losing my daughter. Now, I rejoice that my daughter is happy and beautiful, and I will be with her and my mother when I die. My daughter died in her sleep 6 years ago. I was informed of her death by a stranger on the phone. Her death was such a shock to me because my daughter did not have any health or heart problems. I developed tachycardia from the day I was told she was dead.

I feel so blessed that Jack's wife wants me to be with him. I am no longer afraid to die; in fact, I view it as an adventure. I remember clearly how I felt as I walked down the path toward the light and saw my mother and daughter and Jack's wife. I have brought that sense of peace back with me. It has transformed my view of life and death and losing those I love when they die. I am telling this story to others because I want them to understand that death is not an end but a new beginning."

The Blacksmith:

Ron, age 83, had taken up blacksmithing as a hobby a few years before. He had been creating knives to display and sell in a craft show for several weeks. On the morning of the show, he collapsed on the sidewalk in front of his home. His wife called 911; it was discovered at the hospital that he had lost half the volume of blood in his body. The doctor told his wife if she hadn't called 911, he would have been died. After being placed on a gurney and loaded into the ambulance, Ron's wife of 62 years was standing at the back of the ambulance before the doors were closed. Ron later reported that he experienced the most intense experience of love moving from beside his head toward heaven and a second intense love moving from himself to his wife. It was a love that could not be experienced in words. He realized he was given the choice between going toward the light and leaving this world and staying with his wife. When he chose to stay with his wife's love, the pull of love by his head faded away.