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## WHAT THIS BOOK IS

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Raymond E. Moody, Jr., M.D., started it. In 1975, his book *Life After Life*<sup>1</sup> took off. I mean like a rocket ship. And it has yet to stop turning heads worldwide. Imagine it: a medical doctor discussing patients' stories of entering another realm, an afterlife, at the point of death or when they nearly died, and then describing a pattern to the stories that seemed to indicate that what they spoke of might really be true. The hoopla that resulted was, well, off the charts.

Scientists in other countries objected strenuously. They couldn't match Moody's claims. Ignoring prior work, some of it dating back to the seven-teen hundreds and featuring essentially the same patterning as modern cases, their objections held that there were "too many variables" for comparisons between what they found and what Moody claimed. Kenneth Ring changed that when he published *Life at Death*,<sup>2</sup> a scientific study that verified Moody's work, five years later.

I entered the scene in 1978, quietly researching near-death states and amassing a great deal of data. I would have never known about others had it not been for a phone call from Kenneth Ring. Quite by accident he had run across a small, self-published book of mine entitled *I Died Three Times in 1977*<sup>3</sup> in Hartford, Connecticut. How it got there nobody knows. At his invitation, I journeyed to his "neck of the woods" to meet my peer group. The year was 1981.

My peers turned out to be physicians, psychologists, psychiatrists, and scientists who spoke a “language” I was unfamiliar with. They practiced a type of research that seemed inappropriate for the work at hand. Experience had long taught me that transformational shifts in consciousness and the wide sweep of exceptions that can occur because of them were outside the range of double-blind studies with a control group (the “scientific method”). I felt that my work was just as valid as anyone else’s—90 to 95 percent of what is learned in medicine comes from personnel listening to patients, and over 70 percent of the medical procedures used, even today, resulted from trained observers such as myself who cross-checked and tested what they found. Never once did I just ask questions of people—I observed, watched, and studied them—as behaviors and body language often say more than words do.

My previous experience spanned the sixties and most of the seventies, when I was experimenting with and studying altered states of consciousness, mysticism, psychic phenomena, and the transformational process. Nearly three thousand people were involved in the various talks, classes, experiments, and all manner of projects I sponsored—eventually through “Inner Forum,” a nonprofit metaphysical corporation I created in Boise, Idaho.<sup>4</sup> I couldn’t learn enough, fast enough.

Those were heady days, and then I died. Not once, but three times in three months. What I went through is another story. What I did about it is this story. During my third episode, what I came to call *The Voice Like None Other* spoke. It said: “Test revelation. You are to do the research. One book for each death.” I was shown what that meant and what was to be in each book. Books two and three were named, but not book one. When I could breathe again, every cell and bone filled with the Presence of that Voice, and a passion and fierce determination began to grow inside me. I knew at that moment that somehow I had to put what happened to me on a “shelf” in my mind. I needed to become totally objective. After my body reasonably healed, I moved to Virginia and got a job that had me living out of a suitcase and working on-site during large computerized telephone installations. I traveled half the United States and found experiencers at every turn. I have penned many books on what I discovered, many more than the original three I was asked to write.

So what is this book?

Call it my “last hurrah,” as I retire from active fieldwork in 2010.

Counting my previous work back in Idaho, this book contains the summation of forty-three years of research involving nearly seven thousand adults and children.

Chapters 1 through 15 center on near-death states, and are solidly grounded in actual stories. Some of it may sound familiar to you if you’ve read any of my previous work, but most of it will not. That’s because I finally say things I never dared to say before. (Researchers have to be careful, you know.)

Everything pivots with chapter 16. It is there that we jump from the familiar into the unfamiliar, the type of material that recognizes that near-death states are *not* some type of anomaly, but rather, part of the larger genre of transformations of consciousness.

Consistently over the years I have noticed something else going on with transformative states besides an expansion of faculties and consciousness—what some might call a spiritual awakening or breakthrough. I first described this in a paper I wrote called “Brain Shift: A Theoretical Model Using Research on Near-Death States to Explore the Transformation of Consciousness (Phases I and II).” In essence, this book is Phase III of what became the Brain Shift/Spirit Shift model.

Why a Phase III? Because what I noticed is this: *transformations of consciousness are a biological imperative for the advancement and evolution of the human species*. You can actually track the Brain Shift part through sensitivity/synchronicity, the limbic system, temporal lobes, and deep structures. You can do the same thing with the Spirit Shift that occurs through evidence of a “second birth,” the biological imperative, a new model of existence, and a new Christology.

It’s all here, what I believe to be proof that near-death research needs to step up to the next level, and the next level after that. The transformative process guarantees that we as humans fulfill our destiny . . . but the way this works is far more surprising than what any guru, master teacher, or scientist could ever say.

None of this works quite like it seems, as you will soon see.

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## OPENING STATEMENT

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The physicist Wolfgang Pauli once decreed that a new science is needed to explore the objective side of human consciousness and the subjective side of matter. *Not* mysticism, but a science willing to incorporate objective *and* subjective avenues to discovery while recognizing the legitimacy of personal experience. This new science is now emerging, despite the objections of those who have forgotten how to question and search from fields afar.

Seemingly unrelated ideas now overlap, as one discovery cross-fertilizes another. Today, we are making connections few ever believed possible—in medical breakthroughs, in the study of consciousness, in the esoteric teachings of “mystery,” and within the realms of our own hearts and minds.

I am honored to be part of this revolution, along with hundreds of thousands of others who refuse, as I do, to accept attempts to standardize the unknown.

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# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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The phrase “thank you” can never express my deepest and most sincere gratitude to the following people, without whose aid I could never have accomplished the goal set before me:

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Leslee Morabito  
Pat Fenske  
Bruce Greyson  
Diane Corcoran  
Stephanie Wiltse



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## CHAPTER ONE

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# GROUNDWORK: THE NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCE

*“Research is the highest form of adoration.”*

—PIERRE TEILHARD DE CHARDIN

People forget that the vast majority of near-death experiences emerge from situations of violence or trauma. A typical experiencer contends with body damage (sometimes severe) and the immediacy of recognizing that “here” (where they are now) is not the same as “there” (where they once were). No matter how ecstatic or terrifying the experience may be, what comes next is usually confusing, maybe angry, as most of us didn’t want to come back. We wanted to stay where we were.

The phenomenon captures public attention as none other. It is soul-stirring in the way it reminds even the most staid that home, our true home, is not a joke. It exists, and it is real.

“Off-limit” signs disappear when you engage in research. Starkly different versions of reality emerge . . . about abortion, suicide, life after death, flow states, brain development, the dead coming back, otherworldly realms, spiritual lights, good and evil, drugs, energy fields, the soul, Deity, biological imperatives, animals, ghosts, religious/mystical traditions, psychic ability, children, evolutionary change, and much more. What was once sacred and taboo vanishes.

No skeptic, medical or otherwise, has ever investigated the entire phenomenon—the near-death experience *and* its aftereffects—to any appreciable degree or with a research base large enough for informed comment. A number of near-death researchers have “rushed to judgment,” without recognizing that it is the aftereffects, both physiological and psychological, that validate the phenomenon—not the other way around. You cannot study one without the other.

As for me, I have spent most of thirty-three years working full-time in the field of near-death studies, not as an academician or scientist but as a cop’s kid raised in a police station and taught as a youngster to never believe everything a person tells you—to ask questions, search further, watch, listen, and challenge your own findings. Whatever appears as truth seldom is.<sup>5</sup> Actually, I was a spunky kid who was getting into trouble long before Dad ever became my dad (he adopted me when I was in the third grade, after he married my mom).

I have every intention of saying things throughout the pages of this book that I have never allowed myself to say before. Now that some of my observations have been verified in clinical studies, and my work has passed “the test of time,” I feel a certain ease I have never felt before.<sup>6</sup> That ease, however, could simply be a sign of age—I have passed the seventy-three mark.

Having admitted that much, let me warn you that this book digs deep and covers a lot of territory. It is definitely not for the fainthearted or for those who just want to be entertained. I’ve geared it for courageous, curious folk who demand more from their questions than pat answers. I begin piecemeal with lots of “headers,” each section building upon the last, like “maps and models” spread out for viewing. The fact is that the near-death experience reveals more about life than it does death, and what it reveals is stunning! So, let’s get started.

## COMMONLY ACCEPTED DEFINITION OF A NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCE

Let’s clarify the subject. Yes, I have my preferences on what to offer here, but so does every other researcher in the field of near-death studies. Virtually no two definitions are alike, which drives medical types crazy. So, for the sake of

consistency, I offer this definition, originally developed by the International Association for Near-Death Studies (IANDS):<sup>7</sup>

The near-death experience is an intense awareness, sense, or experience of otherworldiness, whether pleasant or unpleasant, that happens to people who are at the edge of death. It is of such magnitude that most experiencers are deeply affected, many to the point of making significant changes in their lives because of what happened to them. Aftereffects often last lifelong and can intensify over time.

## WHAT IS MEANT BY DEATH

Who among us can be certain if all near-death experiencers were fully dead? Many revived or were resuscitated after clinical death; some were close to death; others, in a split second of utter fear, were convinced they were going to die but didn't (called a "fear" death). Because of this abstraction, what is meant by the "final verdict" and how a physician or emergency worker makes such a determination are called into question. Over time, though, death criteria has radically changed. Back in "merry old England," for instance, when locals ran out of places to bury people, they dug up coffins, took bones to a bone-house, and reused the grave. Once these coffins were opened, one out of twenty-five was found with scratch marks on the inside, proof that people had been buried alive. From then on a string was tied to the wrist of the corpse with the other end secured to a bell above ground. Someone would sit out in the graveyard each night to listen for bell sounds and hopefully, save a life. The slang phrases "graveyard shift," "saved by the bell," and "dead ringer" all trace back to this practice.

We've come a long way since that time in history in developing criteria more dependable than "bell ringing" to be certain the dead are truly dead. But a surprise finding in 2007 abruptly challenged what we thought we had learned.

We've known for some time that five minutes without oxygen is fatal to brain cells. Yet dying itself takes longer to occur because cell death isn't an event, it's a process. An exception is with humans who are exposed to extreme cold or who drown in icy water. It is possible for them to benefit from

hypothermia, a survival response that automatically lowers body temperature enough to slow cell death, sometimes for up to thirty minutes or more.

The 2007 discovery? *Brain cells can actually live for hours after vital signs cease.* Patients die not because of lack of oxygen, but because oxygen was resumed too fast during what were thought to be lifesaving procedures (a reversal of the scratched-coffin terror). Standard emergency room protocols, as it has turned out, are exactly backwards.<sup>8</sup> A revolution in resuscitation techniques is now under way.

## WHAT IS TYPICAL TO NEAR-DEATH STATES

There is little argument among researchers that, on average, most near-death experiencers, adults *and* children, go without vital signs (pulse, breath, brain waves) for between five and twenty minutes. Amazing as this may seem, considering how quickly brain damage can occur after cessation of vital signs, even more amazing is that usually there is little or no brain damage afterward; rather, there is brain enhancement. You heard me right: Individuals return to life smarter than before. Sometimes this enhancement can be quite dramatic, especially with young kids. In my own work, I discovered so many who had revived in a morgue—maybe an hour, maybe six hours after having “died”—that I no longer came to regard this as unusual. I admit a bias here. Being a three-time experiencer myself, it would take a lot to impress me as concerns “the dead come back,” yet impressed I was when I met a man who had revived while being cut open during autopsy after a full three days of being a corpse in a freezer vault.<sup>9</sup>

I doubt that the new resuscitation techniques from the 2007 discovery about brain cells will affect near-death research, as the bulk of cases take place outside hospital environments and the immediacy of emergency treatment. Still, the finding is very important. It proves that what appears to be brain death is not synonymous with cell death. Maybe we ought to entice angels to serve as “cell ringers” with this one (no pun intended).

## CURRENT STATISTICS

Data has been downscaled in the last several years to reflect a more conservative approach to statistics (since the majority of surveys done were not scientific). At this writing, countries worldwide that engage in near-death research report that between 4 to 5 percent of their general population has had a near-death experience (this includes the United States). Global estimates jump to between 12 to 21 percent when focused on those receiving critical care when the phenomenon occurs. What we're talking about here are huge numbers—hundreds of millions of people—of every age, size, ethnicity, social status, belief, and intelligence level imaginable.<sup>10</sup>

Unfortunately, none of the statisticians have ever used a separate category to track child experiencers, so we have no overall data on them. The closest to a clinical estimate for the young comes from Melvin Morse, M.D., in his book, *Closer to the Light*. Morse estimates that 70 percent of children have had a near-death experience. Although his figures show that children are much more prone to the experience than adults during a health crisis, further study is still needed. Why some people undergo the experience and others do not is not understood.<sup>11</sup>

## THE CLASSICAL MODEL

Raymond Moody's original work identified fifteen elements of the near-death experience. He noted how these formed what appeared to be a scenario (content pattern). Moody's list:

- Ineffability, beyond the limits of any language to describe
- Hearing yourself pronounced dead
- Feelings of peace and quiet
- Hearing unusual noises
- Seeing a dark tunnel

- Finding yourself outside your body
- Meeting “spiritual beings”
- A very bright light experienced as a “being of light”
- A panoramic life review
- Sensing a border or limit to where you can go
- Coming back into your body
- Frustrating attempts to tell others about what happened to you
- Subtle “broadening and deepening” of your life afterward
- Elimination of the fear of death
- Corroboration of events witnessed while out of your body

Two years later, after hundreds more interviews, Moody added four more elements to his list of common components to what experiencers claim to have encountered:

- A realm where all knowledge exists
- Cities of light
- A realm of bewildered spirits
- Supernatural rescues

## SAME PHENOMENON—DIFFERENT ANGLE

I had never heard of Raymond Moody or his book until Kenneth Ring told me about them and the field of study that had ensued, three years after I had begun my work. Also unknown to me was that other people were doing the same thing I was. My only introduction to even the term “near-death experience” was through Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, who I met at O’Hare Airport near Chicago in 1978.<sup>12</sup> Her plane to Europe was late, so the two of us huddled like school girls on a bench for over an hour. I told her about my own three

near-death episodes, and she told me about the phenomenon. She never said a thing about Moody.

Elisabeth called me a “near-death survivor” and validated what had happened to me. I will be forever in her debt for that. Yet what she said gave rise to more questions than answers in my mind. A couple months later, after moving from my home state of Idaho to Washington, D.C., a group of experiencers gathered ’round after a talk I had given and the next thing I knew I was studying them, listening deeply, with a determination for objectivity which I strive for to this day.

Naturally I came to look at the near-death phenomenon, both the experience and its aftereffects, in a different manner than the cohorts I had yet to meet. And therein lies the conflict that later became “a very big deal.”