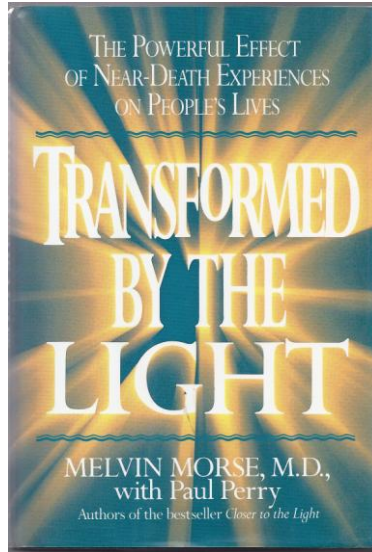


## Transformed By the Light

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### CHAPTER ONE

"It is worth dying to find out what life is."  
T.S. Eliot

"In honesty, Dr. Morse, I don't think the experience has changed me at all."

I had just finished listening to Donna tell the frightening story of the night she almost died and was now trying to find out if she had noticed any changes in the three years since her near-death experience.

Her story was typical of the hundreds of near-death experiences I have heard in the last five years, but it still sent electric chills up my spine to hear her tell it in such a matter-of-fact way.

When Donna was twelve she came down with an acute case of pneumonia. She was allowed to stay at home, since her doctor thought he had it controlled with medication. Her orders were the standard ones for this infection: take the medicine, drink a lot of fluids, and get plenty of rest. She was doing all of those things on this particular evening when bad turned to worse and almost became fatal.

As Donna tells it, she was watching television from the couch in her Cincinnati, Ohio, home when she found it difficult to catch her breath. She tried not to think about it, concentrating

instead on the sitcom that was blaring on the screen. Soon, it felt as though a metal band had tightened around her chest, crushing the very wind out of her.

Donna screamed for her mother.

What her mother saw when she came into the room must have been frightening because she grabbed Donna and pulled her outside to get some fresh air. Donna went down on all fours in the front yard, gasping for air on this cold winter night. Her lungs tightened up and breathing became impossible. Donna's mother acted quickly. She scooped her daughter into the car and raced for the hospital. The last thing Donna heard was her mother screaming her name. Then reality changed radically:

"I remember seeing a light. I was curious and drawn to it. It was like looking into the flash of a camera - white, goldish and very bright.

"Suddenly hands were reaching to me and I saw my grandparents. The hands and my grandparents weren't just part of the light, they were the light. There were hundreds of hands, hands everywhere. They looked like Greek sculpture and they waved me on toward my grandparents who had been dead for several years.

"I communicated with my grandparents but I didn't talk. I don't even remember thinking. But I was right there with them as they spoke. What did they say? They said I had solved most of my problems and could now go either way. That meant I could either stay with them in the light or go back to my body. It was up to me and it wasn't absolutely necessary to stay with them."

Donna doesn't remember making a decision but she came back. When she did, she got a dose of medical reality. The physician who treated her at the hospital said her "hallucination" had been caused by drugs. Since he had given her none at the hospital, he wanted to know what type of drugs she was taking on her own.

Her pediatrician said the same thing. When Donna and her mom told her doctor about the experience of the light she said that it must have been caused by some kind of hallucinatory drug. "Otherwise," said the pediatrician, "you're saying that she had a near-death experience!"

After listening to Donna's story, I thought that was exactly what she'd had. She certainly had many of the elements as we near-death researchers know them. She went from intense pain to having a sense of peace and painlessness. She was engulfed by an intense light filled with love that drew her to it. She saw people of light - in this case her deceased grandparents - who comforted her with the knowledge that everything was all right. She was given a chance to return to her body (which she had no sense of during the experience) or stay in the light with her grandparents. Now she was facing medical disbelief, the unofficial symptom, in which doctors were trying to tell her that this experience did not really happen. In short, they were telling her to deny her own reality.

That is where I came in. I was at a medical conference and was introduced to Donna by a colleague. She had read my previous book, *Closer to the Light*, and wanted to talk to someone in the medical profession who could "understand."

I understood her situation very well. Having talked to hundreds of children and adults about their near-death experiences I know the disbelief they face from many doctors who have difficulty admitting that some things can't be explained by medical manuals.

In talking to all of these near-death experiences, I had come to believe something else as well: they are all transformed by this experience of light. The notion that NDEers are transformed by their experience is not a new one. It is just that no one had conducted a systematic study with proper controls to see if people are transformed.

Some researchers have gone so far as to state that one cannot have had a "real" NDE unless one is transformed by it. Phyllis Atwater, for instance, says that the aftereffects of the NDE are the yardstick for its authenticity.

With my own patients I have seen this transformation take many forms. Sometimes the person who has a near-death experience becomes more loving and caring. Sometimes they have remarkable insights into areas they previously knew nothing about. Sometimes they have become downright psychic, able to see the future in their dreams or accurately predict events through intuition.

But for how long? People who have relatives who died of lung cancer often say that they are transformed by the experience and quit smoking. But when they are surveyed a few months later, they are smoking again.

For how long are they transformed?

Although no one had conducted a study to examine the actual transformations that occur, I was certain from my own experiences that every person who has an NDE is transformed in some way.

Which is why I asked Donna the question: "So how has this experience changed your life?"

And why I was puzzled by her reply: "In honesty, Dr. Morse, I don't think the experience has changed me at all."

I began to probe deeper. Maybe your relationship with your parents is better? "Not really. It's always been pretty good." Perhaps you're smarter in school, I suggested. She thought about it a minute and shook her head, "no." Okay, your ability to do math has improved? "Not hardly," she said. I was patient, knowing that children and teenagers often don't think they are changed by the experience.

"Can you see the future?" I asked.

She looked slightly uncomfortable. "Oh that," she said. "Who told you?" Without further prompting, Donna began telling tales of precognitive dreams, ones that warn of events soon to come. In all she could remember four such dreams that fit into the category of "verifiable psychic experiences." Which means they are dreams she told others about before the events in the dream occurred.

For instance she dreamed that her grandfather died only a few days before he did so, very unexpectedly. The nature of these dreams was quite interesting. Four nights in a row, Donna dreamed vividly that her grandfather went to the family grave plot and cleaned the spot on the stone where his name would be engraved. Then he sat at the gravesite and talked to his grandson who had previously died in an automobile accident. She couldn't hear what he was saying in any of the dreams, but she told her mother after each one that she somehow knew he was going to die.

He died of a massive heart attack just a few days after her fourth dream.

After the grandfather's death, Donna's mother read his journal. He wrote of sweeping off the gravesite and talking to his grandson on the very days that Donna dreamed it.

She told me of other such dreams.

In one disturbing example, Donna dreamed she was at a party with a friend. Tickets were being handed out with writing on them. Donna couldn't remember the one she received, but on her friend's was written the word suicide. She told her family about the dream at the breakfast table the next morning and didn't think much more about it until she was at a party with the friend about a week later. There her friend began talking about family problems. She mentioned a desire to commit suicide.

A couple of days later, Donna suddenly had a premonition that her friend's threat was coming true. It didn't come in the form of a dream or a vision, said Donna, just a strong sense that this good friend was trying to take her life. In a state of panic, Donna rush to her friend's house. She found her there slitting her wrists in the bathroom! Through Donna's intervention the girl was able to get psychiatric help. Both her dream and premonition had come true.

There were other psychic dreams as well. She and a friend had shared a dream while the friend was away at summer camp. Another time she dreamed the contents of a letter and was able to tell its contents to the person who wrote it while the letter was still in the mail. In another event, best described as a vision, she was on a hike in the mountains when she saw a friend being followed by a shadow. She shouted for her friend to took out and as she did a rock ledge beneath the friend's feet crumbled. She feels that her intervention saved her friend from a climbing accident. Based on her track record I have no doubt that she was probably right.

#### DIFFERENT "DEATHS," COMMON TRAITS

"So it looks like your near-death experience has changed things for you," I said. She laughed and acknowledged that it had. Donna, like all the others, had been transformed.

The interest created by *Closer to the Light* brought to me hundreds of people who had had near-death experiences. Most were adults who had had their brush with death as children. There were people who had nearly drowned and those who had been struck by speeding automobiles. There were people who had "died" having their tonsils taken out as well as those who had stuck their heads in plastic bags and nearly suffocated. Some had gone into respiratory collapse from reaction to penicillin. A couple had been clobbered into comas by baseball bats. One was even struck in the ear by lightning as she spoke on the telephone during a thunderstorm.

They had nearly died in very different ways. After talking with them, I realized they had one important thing in common. They were transformed. Virtually everyone to whom I spoke had little or no fear of death. Even though their near-death experience may have happened several decades ago, they were not concerned about dying. Why? Because they knew something, a message that came from the light which almost all of them saw. As one ten-year-old girl told me, "It was like I had a new life. I'm not afraid so much of dying because I know more about it now."

A zest for life was present in all of them, too. By this I mean that they pursue everything life has to offer. They just want to squeeze every drop they can out of life. Sometimes they are not even aware of this very fundamental change in their attitude. As one woman in her seventies said to me: "It would be a waste of time to interview me, since my near-death experience had no effect whatsoever on my life. Beside, I don't have time to be interviewed. I'm too busy with gardening, volunteer work, and my part-time job. There's nothing special about me at all."

Low death anxiety and a zest for life were common traits in the people with whom I spoke. From the many people who contract me I discovered differences that went beyond just changes in attitude.

A large number of people claimed transformations that were paranormal. Some claimed that they had achieved much higher intelligence after the near-death experiences. One, a snowplow operator in upstate New York with the all-American name of Tom Sawyer, found himself writing a string of numbers and symbols within a year of his experience. He didn't know why he wrote them or what they meant, but he frequently found himself doodling during coffee breaks or in the evening after work. When he showed these musings to a college professor he found that he was writing the equations of Max Plank, a physicist, who contributed much of what we know today about atomic theory. Sawyer now says that his near-death experience was a "short course in nuclear physics." But why and how did a person with a high school education get such information? Was it from the light?

Others were certain they had developed psychic abilities. They, like Donna, could not tell what was going to happen in the future. One woman was so disturbed by her ability to see into the future that she had herself medicated, after having a prophetic dream about her brother's murder by intruders. For nearly five years she took prescription drugs that dulled her senses and kept her from being psychic. Finally, tired of a dulled life, she quit the drugs and has now accepted that she will know the outcome of some events before they happen. Why was she privileged, or perhaps cursed, to have such information?

I noticed many other changes as time went on. Some were very profound, as in those people with the increased intelligence or newfound psychic abilities. Others were very subtle. For example, many cannot wear watches because "something" keeps breaking them. Some of these people reported "guardian angels" who stayed with them longer after the frightening experience of almost dying. I was fascinated by the help they received from these merciful companions.

The more I spoke to these people, The more fascinated I became and thought that this was worthy of scientific investigation. After hearing Olaf Sunden's story, I decided to study this legion of the transformed as closely as I could.

### A CASE STUDY IN KNOWLEDGE

The way in which Olaf Sunden almost died was simple enough. What happened after the experience of his near death is too complex for me to comprehend. At the age of fourteen, Olaf had his tonsils removed. During a routine surgical procedure, he was overdosed on ether, a frequent occurrence in those days when ether was administered drop by drop onto a cotton cloth placed close to the patient's face. Olaf stopped breathing and his panicked surgeon began to shake him. His heart may well have stopped at this point, too. Although he was technically comatose, Olaf had a sense of being dead. As he wrote in a very dramatic report:

"Suddenly I rolled into a ball and seemed to smash into a wall into another reality. The passage from this side to the other was extremely painful, a suffocation. The forces which brought me through the death barrier were terrific and the boundary-barrier was extremely strong.

"Suddenly I was on the other side, and all pains were gone. I had lost all my interest and attachment to my biological life. [I realized that] the boundary between life and death is a strange creation of our mind. It is horrifying and real when perceived from this side [the side of the living] and yet is insignificant when perceived from the other side.

"My first impression was a total surprise. How could I exist in such a comfortable way, and how could I perceive and think while being dead, and yet have no body?"

Olaf felt as though he were floating in "a universe with no boundaries." He saw the universe as a system of shrinking soap bubbles, one in which the bubbles appeared in spherical, concentric trains that moved in intricate patterns that he completely comprehended.

On the verge of death, this fourteen-year-old boy with a mediocre school record felt as though he had been handed the keys to the universe. "I felt I had a total comprehension which made everything understandable," he wrote. In his near-death experience, Olaf stood at a "bright orange light." He called this light "the point of annihilation," a frightening place to be but one that gave him universal understanding.

Although Olaf wanted to stay with the light, he felt his "mind splitting into two parts" with that portion that understood everything being left behind. He saw it disappear above him as a beautiful bright galaxy of light, while he was forced into a tunnel and back to his body. "I remember thinking, 'please let me understand this new physics of relativity,' wrote Olaf. "When I

felt a bump and was caught in a channel and transported with tremendous force back into my body. I collected all my power to remember the cosmic comprehension of the universal machinery."

Olaf's cosmic journey ended in an illuminated operating theater where he awoke to find himself surrounded by broken glass and scattered instruments, four frantic physicians and several upset nurses. Two years later he learned that he still had his tonsils left, they had never been removed as planned. The near-death experience immediately changed Olaf's character. He went from being an average student to one who was arrogant and even heretical, refusing explanations presented at school in search of his own. He used theories he had learned on "the other side" to explain the work of Albert Einstein. Olaf at first felt that the near-death experience was little more than an extraordinary dream. As he progressed to the honors program from being a student who seemed learning disabled, he realized that something had happened in the course of his cosmic adventure.

Still he did not truly trust his vision until the early sixties, when he was in his mid-forties. It was then, when the discovery of the neutrino was made public, that Olaf realized that his near-death insights were correct. A neutrino is a type of nuclear particle that is able to pass through the massive core of a star without being altered or affected in any way. When Olaf read about neutrinos he realized that they were among the particles he saw in his experience, the "soap bubbles" that passed through solid bodies.

Now he believed that his near-death experience gave him tremendous insight into the nature of the universe. Some mysterious source of intelligence had been tapped. He was smarter than before, but also free from thinking that confined him to accepted theories and values.

Proof of this increased intelligence lies in his many technical accomplishments, most of which occurred as a result of his trusting the intuition that came to him as a result of the near-death experience. He now refers to his near fatal tonsillectomy as "my cosmic gift."

Olaf holds about a hundred chemical patents, discoveries that made him one of the top engineers in the research and development field. He discovered a way of including more chalk in making paper. Paper is made primarily from wood pulp derived from chopped-up trees. With his highly developed scientific vision, Olaf discovered a way to add 25 percent more chalk or kaolin to the paper without changing its quality in any way. That discovery translates into roughly 25 percent fewer trees having to be cut down to supply our paper needs.

Olaf cites another piece of evidence when proving the validity of his "cosmic gift." Twenty-five years ago his teenage daughter sustained severe head injuries in an automobile accident. She was in a coma for three months and doctors predicted she was likely to stay that way. They frankly told Olaf that his daughter would exist in a vegetative state for the rest of her life.

In this desperate situation, Olaf's near-death experience came to his and his daughter's help. He had to accept the neurological diagnosis, but he did not accept that all possibilities to an acceptable life were exhausted. He supposed that his daughter was on the other side and in a situation like that in which he was after the ether suffocation. He remembered how his own

memory of swimming along with the sea waves appeared like a key that opened up the tunnel for his return to life. Perhaps such a memory from life could also be the key to his daughter's return. Fortunately, Olaf was in possession of a medical substance, a strange relative to caffeine, that he had successfully tested on himself and on his daughter in order to improve their memories during both scientific lectures and school examinations.

Olaf decided to make a final desperate experiment with this substance. The first test, seven weeks after the accident, gave a dramatic effect. The unconscious, inactive girl tried to rise up from the bed for fifteen minutes but then fell back in total coma again. A second test was made a week later with a much stronger result. When the doctors were called, they confirmed that the coma, against all odds, was reversing, even if any mental contact could not be established for sure. A development toward life had begun, and after a month the girl became conscious. She could then, by pressing the hand, answer mathematical questions. One month after the awakening she was examined in mathematics and passed her student examination, that she otherwise would have failed. It took her three years to learn to walk again, and two painful eye operations were required to get the eyes in parallel positions. She is now an architect and mother to two children but still suffers from paralysis in one leg when walking.

To Olaf, this tragic story is an indication that "cosmic gifts" of this kind should be given serious scientific attention.

Olaf learned about my work from such medical journals as: Lancet, and The American Journal of Diseases in Children. He then read Closer to the Light before writing me a letter. Could he come from his home in Sweden to visit? I told him I would be honored.

We met in Washington, D.C., at the International Conference on Near-Death Experiences. Olaf is a tall man in his early seventies. Gray and distinguished, he was the dynamic sort of man who would seem more at home at an ambassador's residence than at a meeting of near-death experiencers. Yet Olaf was delighted to find so many people like himself, people who had gained special insight into life by passing briefly through death's door.

We went to dinner at a French restaurant in Georgetown. Olaf conversed easily with the waiter in French. After ordering a fine bottle of wine, he got to the point of his visit.

"I no longer think I am crazy or a crank because of what happened," said Olaf. "I know that my experience was real and not a fantastic dream. But the question I have is this: Did that knowledge come from inside my own brain or did it come from someplace else? And this universe that I entered. Did I really go to an altered reality?"

## RAINBOW REVELATIONS

Was Olaf's experience real?

Did he really gain knowledge through a near-death experience that led him to create more than a hundred formulas so unique that he could have them patented?



When these questions were asked, Olaf calmly and emphatically said, "These death experiences represent a step upwards on the evolutionary ladder. That is the reason why . . . a criminal younger may become social after such an experience. He has taken a step upwards."

The life of Olaf Sunden fired my curiosity about the long-term effects of these experiences, but his case alone did not lead to the Transformations study. I noticed that people were transformed in many different ways, all of them interesting and most of them highly noticeable.

Take James, for instance. He is a black teenager from the projects of East St. Louis who by his own admission should be caught up in the gang violence and drug trade in which most of his friends are involved. Despite the constant peer pressure to do the wrong things, James is on a straight and narrow path because of a near-death experience that occurred when he was nine.

I'll let James tell his own story in his own words:

"I was like nine- or ten-years -old. I don't know how to swim. I was in the peanut pool with my cousins when all of a sudden I was going down. I struggled to breathe and then I just couldn't do it no more. Then I thought I was dreaming. I could see myself. It was like I was looking at me. I felt scared. Then I just floated out of my body into a safe place. It was all bright. I felt peaceful.

"And you know, when I floated out of my body and saw myself, suddenly I realized we are all the same. There ain't no black and there ain't no white. I saw that bright light and I knew it was all the colors there were, everything was in that light - everything good for me, that is."

James was pulled from the pool by his mother and revived by lifeguards. He embarrassed his mother by crying, "I saw you, I saw you take me out of the pool." At home he told her about leaving his body and the rainbow revelation that he received in the light. She was disturbed by what she heard. "Don't talk that trash," she scolded.

James changed almost immediately after the experience. He quit hanging around with his usual friends because they were already becoming involved in selling drugs. To his mother's surprise (and relief) he became serious about school.

Now, eight years after he almost drowned, James is still serious about school. And his mother still thinks he is talking trash. I met James through a kind and sensitive teacher at his school. She had read *Closer to the Light* and realized that the "trash" James was talking about was nothing more or less than a near-death experience. James was relieved to be able to put a name on the main event of his life.

"I always thought that I had a dream. Then when I heard about these near-death experiences I knew that I'd had one. I feel better about myself. I know that I am different. I don't think about putting people down for fun like I used to.

"You know, when I left my body I didn't think that I could come back. The fact that I could really change my attitude amazed me. I see life the way it really is. It is not meant to be played with. I don't want to end up here with all this gang violence and poverty. I believe in God very

much. I believe God took me out of my body and kept me in a very safe place when I almost drowned."

I was deeply moved when he told me what the long-term effects of his near-death experience were. "Life is not to be played with. I want to better myself."

Although very different people, both Olaf and James were given unique insights into life. For Olaf, it was a deep understanding of molecular chemistry. For James, it was the discovery that skin color is meaningless when compared to the contribution we can make in life.

Each had experiences which changed them greatly from their peers. Despite the extreme difficulty of suddenly becoming a different person, the change appeared to be a comfortable and permanent one. About his switch from a gang member to a ghetto scholar, James said: "Sure it ain't easy. But I ain't going to be like those other people now that I've seen the light."

Is it the light that transforms? I wondered. Is it the light of the near-death experience that gives people a zest for life, takes away their fear of death and fills them with a sort of goodness?

There were more questions that begged answers that only a transformations study could answer. Does the light stay with some people long after their near-death experience is over? Does it come back to them in a seemingly human form?

#### GUARDIAN WRITER

I ask this question because of the peculiar case of David G - - - -, a best-selling author.

David lives in Arizona near my co-author, Paul Perry. When he moved into the neighborhood, Paul paid him a visit and gave him a copy of our book as a "get-acquainted" gift. A few days later Paul received a surprising call from David. "I had one of these as a kid," he said. "It changed my life completely."

David's story is simple and straightforward. It's the after-effects that are puzzling.

"I had infectious hepatitis and my temperature had reached 104 degrees. I was extremely sick and was in my bed at home. My mother was standing beside the bed with my father and the doctor was there too. He had just rigged up an IV bottle and put a line into a vein in my arm.

"I was wide awake and listening to them talk about my case. I remember the doctor telling my mother that I was very sick but that she shouldn't worry because a lot of kids get this sick and pull through. Suddenly I noticed a fourth person in the room. There was a woman in the corner, behind my parents!

"At the same time I saw her I realized that I was out of my body! I was suddenly across the room with this woman and able to see the backs of my parents and look back on myself lying there in bed!

"I turned toward the woman. She was beckoning me to come to her. I think she was blonde and she was certainly very pleasant. She was also very bright and hard to look at.

"As quickly as I left my body I was back in it. I could still see her behind my parents, trying to get me to come to her. I sat up in bed and reached for her and my arms passed right through her. I would have fallen out of bed if my father had not grabbed me. As it was I think I knocked over the IV bottle. "I told them about the woman in the corner but she was gone by the time they looked and they couldn't have seen her anyway. She was for my eyes only."

The experience immediately changed David. He became very introverted. Rather than spend much time with other friends, David was happy in the play world he created. He also stopped being materialistic. For a child of nine, this meant he no longer wanted all the toys being marketed on television. He watched very little television. The experience with the "guardian angel" (which is what he now called the woman of light) had made David a happy loner. The guardian angel remained for David's mind only. She has never appeared to him again. Yet during periods of stress when he needs comfort, the woman of light is there. He can feel her presence in the room, although he can't see her.

Perhaps the most mysterious thing about David's guardian angel is her effect on his work. David says there are times when he is writing that the guardian angel helps him. At a particularly difficult point in a story, when he has mulled over his plot from every possible angle and can't find a way to proceed, the unseen hand of the guardian angel takes over and guides him through his work.

"It is almost like automatic writing, I don't know how else to describe it," says David. "Sometimes there are large sections of my writing that I don't remember having produced. Even my wife, who works closely with me, doesn't recognize this writing as being my own. She says, 'this doesn't look like your style,' and I have to agree with that. There are sections of my book that seem to have come to me from somewhere else."

The experience of the light changed David, like Olaf and James, and seemed to bring him greater direction and insight, but his light took the form of a guardian angel. As I thought of David's experiences, I had to ask myself:

Are there many guardian angels among the transformed? Is it the long-term presence of these "angels" that accounts for the lifelong transformation that most near-death experiencers have?

## THE GENESIS OF RESEARCH \

Questions, questions, questions.

The stories of these four remarkable people as well as the hundreds of others who contact me after the publication of *Closer to the Light* just led to more questions than there were answers. I was reminded of what was said to me by Dr. Archie Bleyer, my mentor from my research days: "Watch out, Mel. Good research always poses more questions than it provides answers."

I found his warning to be true especially when it comes to the field of near-death studies. I decided to undertake another major study into the nature of the near-death experience. This time I wanted to examine the ways in which this experience changes the people who have it. Before planning this study, a massive one to be sure, I thought about the events that led to the Seattle study, the ground-breaking research that became the framework for *Closer to the Light*.

That earlier work began innocently enough.

In 1982 as a pediatric resident I was examining one of my patients, a little girl named Katie, who had almost drowned in a community pool in Idaho. Even without her near-death experience Katie was a remarkable story. She was documented as not having a pulse for nineteen minutes. When I first saw her, her pupils were fixed and dilated, meaning that irreversible brain damage had most likely occurred.

I worked hard on her anyway, although in my heart I didn't think she would survive.

Her family had other ideas. She had a large family and over the course of the next three days there were always family members surrounding her bed, holding her hands, talking to her, or praying. Sometimes they did all three at once, which made things a little more chaotic in intensive care than the doctors and nurses wanted. Still we put up with it, partly because the family just refused to leave, but mainly because we thought she was going to die. I remember putting a line into one of Katie's arteries and having bright red blood spurt across her bedsheets. As this was happening, her entire family had joined hands around the bed and were praying. Let them do it, I said to myself. She's dead anyway.

Three days later she made a full recovery.

One afternoon I casually asked her what she remembered about being in the pool. I was trying to figure out why she had nearly drowned, thinking perhaps that she hit her head on the pool's edge or maybe even had an epileptic fit. But the answer that she gave wasn't anything like I expected: "Do you mean when I saw the heavenly father?"

Over the next few days Katie told her remarkable story. While in the hospital she had left her comatose body and was now able to describe in detail the doctors who treated her and what it was that they did.

She then described going up a long, dark tunnel where she was greeted by a golden-haired "angel" named Elizabeth. The angel took her hand and said, "I am here to help you."

For the next three days the angel did just that. She calmed Katie and even took her on a voyage back to her home, where she was able to see one of her brothers play with his toys in his bedroom and watch as her mother cooked a hurried meal before rushing back to the hospital to be at her bedside. Not knowing what else to say, I asked her what it was like "up there."

"You'll see, Dr. Morse," she said. "Heaven is fun."

Katie's case defied conventional neurology. According to the textbooks in the field, a child with Katie's symptoms should have the absence of any brain function and therefore should comprehend nothing. As one of the top textbooks in the field says, coma should "wipe clean the slate of human consciousness."

Katie's experience (as well as others, as I was soon to find out) did not fit neatly into the textbooks of neurology.

I began to examine the medical literature on near-death experiences and was not happy with the quality of research. Although it was interesting, it seemed to be largely anecdotal, just a collection of interesting stories. With few exceptions that's the way the search was.

Even Dr. Raymond Moody agreed. In his ground-breaking book *Life After Life*, he acknowledged that his research was not scientific, but a collection of stories. He openly challenged the medical and scientific community to research near-death experiences. He boldly asserted that if such studies were done, it would confirm his assertion that near-death experiences are the same for all human beings at the point of death.

I accepted Dr. Moody's challenge. I conducted the Seattle study at Children's Hospital in Seattle. There my colleagues and I studied twenty-six children who had survived cardiac arrest. We compared their experiences of nearly dying to those of 176 seriously ill children who did not experience clinical death. The two groups were carefully matched in terms of ages, sex, medications, and anesthetics used. All were subjected to the frightening environment of the intensive-care unit. Both groups had had the same lack of oxygen to the brain (as documented by blood tests) and the same general blood chemistry.

Almost all of the clinically dead patients had one or more elements of the near-death experience. Yet not one of the 176 "control" patients had any symptoms resembling a near-death experience.

What did this study show? Quite simply that thinking or feeling as if you are going to die is not enough to cause a near-death experience. Near death is actually required before one has the core symptoms of an NDE. In a nutshell, the core experience is the sensation of leaving the physical body, entering into a world of darkness followed by experiencing a warm and loving light. The experience of the light, which is most commonly described by children, is a light "full of good things," as one of our young study volunteers described it.

The Seattle study proved that one needs to be "near death" to have a "near-death experience," and that the NDE is not a fantasy caused by resuscitation. It also proved that NDEs are not a fantasy or hallucination, since none of the control group had them. Surprisingly, no one had ever researched this most basic questions.

I discovered many things by conducting the Seattle study, but the most important thing I learned was to listen. Yes, listen. By listening to the wisdom of these children I realized we can begin to learn about the Greatest Mystery, the one that has puzzled humankind since the beginning: What happens to us when we die?

## TRANSFORMATION STUDY QUESTIONS

Now I was about to launch a study that involved an entirely different question: What happens to near-death experiencers who do not die? How are their lives transformed?

I took a large pad of paper from a cupboard and found quiet spot to sit in the living room. At the top of the page I wrote "Transformations." Underneath it: "A study to determine the ways in which near-death experiences change people."

One by one, I listed the questions that this study would answer:

Do NDEers really have decreased death anxiety? They seem to have a lesser fear of death than people who had not had NDEs. Is their fear really less, or does it just seem to be less? It has been assumed that NDEers do not fear death like the rest of us, but, in looking at the scientific literature, I discovered that no researchers had done an extensive study of death anxiety.

I jotted down a Woody Allen quote that stuck in my mind: "Only three things are certain: Death, taxes, and fear of both of them" Was it possible that NDEers feared only one of these?

Do NDEers really have an increase in psychic abilities? Many of the people I deal with claim that their near-death experience has led to psychic events. These are not eccentric people who dress funny and read tea leaves or fool around with Ouija boards. These are bankers or housewives who look as if they just stepped out of the "Donna Reed Show." They are ordinary people who have had something out of the ordinary happen to them.

Two people came to mind as I jotted down this question: one a banker and the other a housewife.

First the banker and his dream that came true:

"I had a dream of a man I knew who appeared for a second in the middle of the night, dressed in a black suit, standing as if his feet were on a cloud. I had not seen him in ten years.

"The following day I approved a check at the bank where I work for a man who was related to the man in the dream. I asked him about the man and learned that he had died the night before."

The banker was actually comforted by this experience. He said that it confirmed for him a spiritual side to the universe, one that gave him a sense that there is more to life than meets the eye.

The housewife's psychic experience was just as remarkable:

"I happened to touch one of my son's friends on the arm when I suddenly had a vivid, visual image of blood spurting from his shoulder and the arm falling off! I pulled away and gasped in horror. I had to blink several times before the vision went away.

"That evening I told my husband what I had seen. The next day it came true. The boy lost his arm in an industrial accident."

This experience was very disturbing for the housewife. Unlike the banker, she found no comfort in knowing events before they happened. My findings indicate that there is often no comfort in being psychic for many NDEers.

Why do NDEers have a greater zest for living than the normal population? All of the near-death experiencers with whom I spoke have a desire to get everything they can out of life. Many describe themselves as "workaholics," yet few of them seem to have the negative aspects of being type-A, such as the anger that often comes with the person who wants nothing to get in his way.

We wanted to know their spiritual values and how they live their lives. Do they really spend more time with their families? Do they have more hobbies? Do they spend more time in meditation? These are the footprints of the near-death experience, proof that the changes in these people are real.

Said one NDEer: "There's a pun intended when I say that I've seen the light. I know now that life is for living and that light is for later."

Do NDEers really achieve a higher intelligence? Olaf Sunden and Tom Sawyer are but two of many who claim to have an increased intelligence after their near-death experience. Could this be possible? Do they tap into a higher source of intelligence from outside their brains (as Olaf wondered) or does this extraordinary experience activate a portion of their brains never before used?

This is an exciting question and reminded me of a metaphysical quote from none other than Albert Einstein: "The greatest experience we can have is the mysterious."

I put the notepad away. There were many other questions to be answered by the transformations study and much scientific groundwork to be accomplished before even beginning. At this point I had no idea that my research would prove that NDE's are a real human perception, one that changes people for ever.

**END OF CHAPTER ONE**

**Transformed by the Light**