

Letter to the Editor

The Future Memory Phenomenon

To the Editor:

Keith Floyd presented a fascinating case in his article in this Journal (1996), in which he described the near-death experience of a woman who received electroconvulsive therapy to treat a lingering and troublesome depression. Much of her experience was similar to or matched case studies of other near-death survivors, including the tremendous fear she faced before and, at times, during the episode itself (Atwater, 1994). Part of her scenario, however, was what Floyd called "a baffling apparition" of a cocktail party that was "lived" in full sound and color and three-dimensional solidity. The woman claimed that the intricate details of the party were so complete as to be "indistinguishable from real life." Since she had no conscious memory of having ever attended anything like that cocktail party, her experience was relegated to the domain of "a puzzling vision." Then, two years later, her "dreamlike" cocktail party manifested, detail for detail, in the world of objective reality, with her in attendance.

I call your attention to the case of Kathleen J. Forti, described in my book, *Future Memory* (1996, p. 19).

When she was eighteen, Kathleen was attacked by a stranger and, with a knife to her throat, raped. Hysteria began to well up inside her as she realized she would probably die and never see her parents again. At that moment, her mind sharpened to crystal clarity, and she floated out of her body to view her attacker from a point above him. All pain and hysteria ceased, and all concerns dissolved. In this detached state, she lived a future segment of her life in great detail. She experienced herself in this segment, as an older woman telling stories to children gathered about her feet while she sat in an antique black lacquer rocking chair, carved exquisitely in an oriental design. The paintings on the wall and each detail of the house where she lived at this future time were clear and precise, as were her thoughts, each physical movement she made, every smell and

taste, conversations, emotions, plus each minute sensation of daily living.

She later forgot about the futuristic episode she had just "lived through," convincing herself the whole thing was a device created by her brain to ensure that she relax and submit to her attacker. Police confirmed that because of the man's history of violence, any struggle on her part would have meant death.

Five years later, Kathleen married and moved into a house her husband already owned. There she discovered the antique black lacquer rocking chair carved exquisitely in an oriental design, and the paintings, and the wallpaper, and all the details previously encountered during her near-death experience. The jolt of seeing these items surface a memory of having "lived" this segment of her life previously. This *future* memory prepared her for married life . . . with one exception. After six years, her marriage ended in divorce (an event she had not pre-lived).

Afterward, she became interested in telling children stories and wrote *The Door to the Secret City*, a book about a child's near-death experience [Forti, 1984]. She then created the company Kids Wants Answers, Too! and dedicated herself to teaching educators how to handle student reactions to life-and-death-traumas.

I have encountered scenarios like this with other near-death survivors, either as part of their episode or later on as one of their aftereffects. In fact, I have come across the phenomenon of "*living the future before it occurs*" so often as an aftereffect that I now consider it typical of the experience of near-death.

In 1987 I launched a research project to see whether the "future memory phenomenon" was present in society at large. Together with research I had done in the 1960s on spiritual transformations and Kundalini breakthroughs, I began to notice a pattern that seemed to be universal to anyone involved to whatever extent in a transformation of consciousness, or what I call a "brain shift." This pattern became the impetus for a book on future memory (Atwater, 1996). I came to define the phenomenon as follows:

The ability to fully live a given event or sequence of events in subjective reality before living the same episode in objective reality. This is usually, but not always, forgotten by the individual after it happens, only to be remembered later when some "signal" triggers memory. Sensory-rich, future memory is so detailed as to include movements, thoughts, smells, tastes, decisions, sights, and sounds of regular physical living. All this is *actually lived and physically, emotionally, and sensorially experienced*, not merely watched (clairvoyance), heard (clairaudience), predicted (prophesied or forecasted),

or known (precognition); and that living is so thorough, there is no way to distinguish it from everyday reality while the phenomenon is in progress. (1996, p. 20)

Do not confuse this with *déjà vu*, which is past oriented. What I am referring to is a clear and cogent ability to access the future somehow and “live” it *before* physical manifestation.

Features I have noticed with the future memory phenomenon are *physical sensations at start and finish*, akin to a chill, rush, lift, tickle, or “high”; an *occurrence pattern* that appears to be universal regardless of experimenter; a particular *mind state when it happens*, usually wide awake and alert, although some report it during dream states and near-death states; *content* typically include mundane activity but sometimes covers significant events, feels like a “rehearsal” of some kind; *awareness of power to change the future afterward*, claimed by some experiencers, although others say they cannot; and *consequences* includes handling stress better because of “rehearsals,” becoming more peaceful and confident, after which the frequency of futuristic episodes often subsides.

I found the future memory phenomenon rather perplexing until I began to study childhood behavior patterns, especially at around the ages of three to five when the temporal lobes develop. Children at this age are almost entirely “future-oriented,” as they play with possibilities of what may soon be expected of them as they grow. These futuristic “rehearsals” give birth to the imagination, which enables youngsters to establish continuity in their lives and the validity of action and reaction.

When I compared this to my near-death research, I began to notice all kinds of correlations, which I discussed at length in *Future Memory* (1996). For the sake of brevity, I will simply say here that people who go through a brain shift display evidence of what appears to be a temporal lobe *expansion* and traits associated with the *rebirth* of imagination. As with the young when they experience the fullness of an emerging consciousness, near-death experiencers during and after their episodes often find themselves involved in enlargements of consciousness.

Once tossed off as “flashforwards” (Ring, 1982), future memory might well be a significant factor in near-death research and a clue to the mechanism for transformations of consciousness, or higher brain development.

References

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P. M. H. Atwater, L. H. D.
P.O. Box 7691
Charlottesville, VA 22906-7691