

LETTERS to the EDITOR

Counseling After an NDE

To the Editor:

I would like to share my subjective response to the articles on clinical intervention in Volume 6, Number 1, of the Journal.

On the afternoon of January 1, 1978, my wife took me to the Emergency Room of Lakewood General Hospital in Tacoma. I was suffering from chest pains and other symptoms of heart problems. That evening I experienced a myocardial infarction and was "gone" for several minutes. During this first incident I enjoyed a near-death experience. I was coded six more times through the night as I kept trying to go back.

For two days, as I continued to hover near death, I tried to integrate this experience into my perceptions of life and death. I was deeply disturbed yet strangely elated, and completely confused. The only outside allusion to the events of the first night were made by Dr. Bob Crabill, our family doctor, who asked me if I remembered anything strange from the night before. I did remember regaining consciousness, as I returned to my body, long enough to raise my head and say to the three doctors who were standing at the foot of the operating table, "You'd better get back to work, fellas: I think you're losing me." I began to tell Bob a little of what had happened to me, but he didn't really seem to want to hear about it.

For some internal reason I didn't mention the incident to my normally very understanding wife, Corrine. After two days, I described the experience to a nun who happens to be a dear friend of ours. She immediately put me at ease by telling me that my experience was not all that uncommon and that, in fact, there was a new book on the market describing this very thing. The book was Dr. Raymond Moody's *Life After Life*, which had been published just a short time before.

I began to feel better about myself during the course of my remaining stay in the intensive care unit. A few days after returning home, the nun, Carol Ann McMullen, came by with a copy of Moody's book and a tape recorder. We taped a conversation about how I felt during and after the NDE. The prime points of this conversation were that I was

profoundly disappointed at not being able to stay in paradise, and I was terribly worried about why I was sent back.

Prior to the incident, I had been a heavy smoker and drinker. I stopped smoking after the heart attack, for obvious reasons, but I couldn't stop drinking. In fact, for the next three years, I lived a very self-indulgent life which included drinking like an alcoholic. Eventually my wife and some close friends intervened in my life and persuaded me to enter the Alcoholics Anonymous program. This worked well, but again after three years of hiding from the issue I was faced with the question raised by the NDE: Why was I sent back? Some people apparently get a choice. I didn't; I was sent back.

Two more years passed without the issue being resolved. At this juncture a graduate student from Seattle University, who was writing a paper about various perceptions of death, told me about the Friends of IANDS group in Seattle. I am not much of a joiner and have resisted Kiwanis, Rotary, and church men's club groups. I was initially reluctant even to consider attending a meeting of this IANDS group. There was, however, a talk sponsored by IANDS scheduled for an upcoming Sunday afternoon at Seattle University. My wife and I decided to make a "day" of it in Seattle and take in the talk. I admit to recalling very little about the talk except that I came away thinking that perhaps these people had something I needed. A short time later a friend of mine and I spent a Saturday in Seattle and attended the Friends of IANDS meeting at the Greenlake Library. After listening to a few people discuss their own experiences, I was persuaded into talking. Slowly I began to feel truly comfortable with these people and my own experience.

Therapy for me consisted of a peer group relationship with fellow experiencers and in sharing with strangers who, for one reason or another, needed to hear about my experience with the hereafter. This new-found ability to share has been the truly healing influence, imparting a sense of purpose and direction to my life. The encounter with a peer group to whom I could relate proved to be the therapeutic intervention which I had needed.

Perhaps being moved in this direction earlier through professional counseling would have sped up the process; I don't know about this. I do know, for me, however, that relating to a fellow experiencer was what began the process of becoming a whole person.

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