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Testing Period

A common reaction of experiencers once they decide to tell someone is to test first for trustworthiness. And they will do that in dribs and drabs by tossing out a morsel or two – words, phrases, maybe a drawing or a poem – that indicate something uniquely different happened during the time they nearly died or actually flatlined. This "dribbling" can be frustrating to families, friends, and researchers, stretching interview sessions overlong, or causing others to lose patience and maybe become suspicious about the sincerity of the experiencer. Lengthy testing periods, extending over months on end or even for years, can create tension between people and lead others to write off the NDEr. Most people in the research community understand how to handle the issue of trust, but not all of them. I know this because of comments I received from experiencers, especially those who had distressing, unpleasant, or hellish experiences. It helped me in my work that I, too, was an experiencer. Seldom did I admit this; really I did not have to. Experiencers "just knew."

The Narrative

Once they start talking (either right away or later on), it may be a challenge to stop near-death experiencers. I call this outpouring "gushing." Even while still on the operating table, experiencers once revived can engage in a nonstop flood of words describing what they saw on "the other side," what they heard, what they felt, what was revealed to them. This can cause problems with the medical staff and any family members who might be waiting for word of outcome. That initial "gush" is usually spontaneous, spirited, sometimes loud and animated, with splashes of colorful descriptions and great emotion. If more time has passed, narratives tend to be more thorough, specific, detailed, and deeper. The experiencer, by then, may have already begun the process of searching for meaning and trying to interpret the scenario. Gaps and additions, which may appear as if they were narrative alterations or embellishments, can and do occur between early and later tellings. Rarely is this a lie or an exaggeration. Rather, what I recognize as happening here is that experiencers are giving themselves permission to tell their story in its entirety. That takes courage. To tell someone everything that occurred exposes the individual in ways that may be uncomfortable and a violation of privacy. There are two big issues at this juncture: first, trusting one's

I have yet to find that this additional downloading of extra material changes the original scenario. The near-death experience that occurred remains the near-death experience that was reported. Once the individual accepts what happened and arrives at some sense of meaning as to the various issues and implications involved for him or her personally, the narration tends to take on a structure that holds lifelong. This does not preclude the downloading process, nor remembering more later, especially if the individual is a child experiencer.

The Conundrum of the Child Experiencer

In my research with children who had experienced a near-death they were older. They explained that the incident complicated their life in ways that made growing up a challenge. The majority spoke of being put down or ridiculed by parents, siblings, and friends when they tried to share their story, to the point that they "set it aside" or "tucked it away." Because of this, many did not really deal with their experience or try to integrate it to any extent until they were in their 20s or 30s, some even later. Memory, then, tended to surface in tiers: what could be useful in childhood, what applied to relationships as they grew, what made a difference as an adult, and what spoke to their heart of hearts in quiet moments of reflection and longing. About a third of the child experiencers in my research were clear about what they experienced and immediately appeared wiser than their years, more mature. The especially if their episode happened during birth trauma. Once what was tucked away "burst forth," they appeared to me as if awakened to a truth they had always known but had somehow forgotten.

This delay in remembering, whether it came in steps or in a sudden "burst," can seem like an embellishment to someone not familiar with the near-death phenomenon and what is typical of experiencers. This fact concerns me, since some professionals jump to conclusions or do incomplete research. For example, a recent paper published in *New England Journal of Medicine* about electrical stimulation of the brain that induced the appearance of a person outside the body named this illusion an "out-of-body experience," when all the scientists did was induce autoscopy or the *döppelganger* effect of projecting one's image beyond one's body, which is a feature of shamanistic training

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