## Letters to the Editor

## More on Kenneth Ring's "Swan Song"

To the Editor:

In several recent issues of the Journal there have been references—some gently ribbing, some less charitable—to my earlier announcement that I was about to leave the field of near-death studies for good (Ring, 1991). Because it is obvious to me that my stated resolve has been the source of some misunderstanding—as well as a measure of incredulity—perhaps I may be permitted a few lines to clarify the nature of my retirement, how it will affect my work on near-death experiences (NDEs), and, finally, the way in which I see the future of near-death studies as a whole.

First, despite the doubters, I really have retired in a formal sense. After 32 years of teaching and research at the University of Connecticut, I hung up my academic robes for keeps as of June, 1994. Since that time, however, I have remained at the university as Professor Emeritus of Psychology in order to continue my work and writing, having at least two further books I am eager to begin.

Second, when I wrote that I felt my work in near-death studies had been completed (Ring, 1991), I had in mind the kind of major research projects that I had undertaken for my three books on NDEs. I didn't mean to imply that I wouldn't write occasional pieces or reviews for the Journal or elsewhere on NDEs and indeed several of these are either already published or in the works. And who knows, maybe I'll even gather together a bunch of essays on NDEs and bring them out as a book! But my days of soliciting NDE accounts or trying to get research funds to conduct another large-scale study are over.

Third, even though I no longer consider myself to be an active near-death researcher, I still intend to remain involved in the field, and will continue to encourage others to enter it and contribute to its development, as I have been doing since becoming immersed in near-death studies myself in 1977.

Finally, I must correct a decidedly curious and certainly erroneous interpretation of my remarks by Vincent Luciani (1992, 1993), who continues to flay me for my apparent conviction that no more research on NDEs, and especially on life after NDEs, really needs to be undertaken. How Luciani could accuse me of something so preposterous is a puzzle to me and, I hope, to anyone who knows anything about me and my work. Just to reassure him and possibly others who share his misgivings about my earlier remarks, may I offer a few facts in my defense?

First, just in the past few months, for example, I have lectured on NDEs in France, Belgium, Italy, Canada, Australia, and the United States, in the course of which I have met with many professionals interested in NDEs in those countries. Wherever I go I have endeavored and, I think, succeeded to some degree to enlist further professional involvement in this field, specifically by pointing to many areas where research is still vitally needed.

Second, at my university I have since 1985 regularly taught an undergraduate course on NDEs as well as a preprofessional advanced seminar from time to time, which has been directed to students who wish to undertake this kind of work in graduate school. An article by one of my students in this course, Amber Wells, who also did her honors thesis with me, has in fact recently been published in the Journal (Wells, 1993). In addition, over the years, I have had numerous letters from prospective or matriculating graduate students elsewhere who have sought guidance from me concerning how to pursue their interests in this field.

Third, concerning the study of aftereffects, I don't think it is unfair (even if it may be immodest) to state that I believe I pioneered research in this area myself with the publication of my book, Heading Toward Omega (1984), over ten years ago, and have followed it up more recently with further studies of aftereffects in The Omega Project (1992). And numerous other researchers in the United States, England, Italy, and Australia — where the books of Cherie Sutherland, Transformed by the Light (1992) and Within the Light (1993), are particularly apposite and worthwhile — have devoted a great deal of attention to this subject, as Craig Lundahl's (1993) recent comprehensive review makes clear. All this shows that Luciani was quite mistaken in suggesting that this has been a neglected topic of research in the field.

Of course, there is much more to be done to develop near-death studies, even in the domain of aftereffects. Everyone would agree with that, and nothing I have ever written should be taken to imply the opposite. If Luciani had carefully read my "Amazing Grace" article, he would have noticed that what I actually said was that if

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you assiduously read the narratives that I provided there and absorbed their implications, you would "scarcely need to read anything else on the matter" (Ring, 1991, p. 35). And I stand by that: everything that is essential to know about NDEs is contained or implied in these stories.

Nowhere did I ever say or suggest that we in the field need do no more research on NDEs or their aftermath. On the contrary, in announcing my own withdrawal from active research, I specifically indicated that the NDE trail is *endless*, and so it is. There are many who will continue to walk it, long after my final words on the subject are written.

But, as I say, I hope I will have the opportunity to contribute a few more things on NDEs in these pages before I am done. After all, if even Michael Jordan could leave the door open to his return, how could I be expected to slam mine shut for good? Especially when the game is forever in one's blood.

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