BOOK REVIEW

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Prior to entering a Ph.D. program, my most recent work experience was with a non-profit hospice as a bereavement and spiritual care coordinator. It was during this time that I became exposed to and interested in the experiences of the dying and their loved ones who were left to grieve them. I witnessed individuals who were near death see and speak to deceased family members who were not visible to anyone else in the room. I listened as bereaved parents, spouses, siblings, partners, and friends shared experiences of having been visited by the recently deceased. And I heard the longing in the voices of some bereaved who wanted desperately to have some sort of sign or extraordinary experience that would confirm the continued spiritual presence of the person who had died. Beyond Goodbye: An Extraordinary True Story of a Shared Death Experience addresses some of these experiences from both a personal and scientific perspective.

The author, Annie Cap is not only a writer but also a therapist trained in emotional freedom techniques, reflexology, massage, aromatherapy, and Reiki, all of which she uses to assist people with a variety of physical and emotional issues. She is a dual citizen of the United States, where she originated, and the United Kingdom, where she has made her home for decades and currently resides. Additional information about Cap and her work can be found at http://www.anniecap.co.uk/.

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Although I have no relationship to Cap, after reading her book, I feel as if I know her. That is the personal nature of her book. Cap’s story is unique in multiple ways. First, she had a shared death experience (SDE), which is different from, but had similar aftereffects of, a near death experience (NDE). Second, she described the resistance, challenges, and spiritual development that followed her SDE. The experience itself was one thing; living with the ongoing aftereffects was another.

Cap’s contribution to the literature in this field is twofold. First, she wrote a book for the layperson. It is easy to read, and she provided the reader with basic definitions as needed. True to her intended purpose, this is a book that may help those who are struggling with the aftereffects of NDEs and similar spiritually transformative experiences (STEs). Professionals who do not share a similar experience but work with near-death experiencers (NDErs) may also gain insight into the mixed emotions and confusing experiences their clients may encounter. Second, Cap’s experience was not a “traditional” NDE or other STE. She described an SDE, a rare occurrence but one worth writing about and worth researching in the future, as noted in the Foreword.

The book’s Foreword was written by Penny Sartori, Ph.D., RGN, who is a lecturer and researcher on NDEs and has published a book focused on the experiences of intensive care patients. Sartori is one of many experts in the field of near-death studies whom Cap interviewed as she searched for explanations and understanding of what she was experiencing.

In addition to interviewing professionals, Cap engaged in research as she prepared to write this book. In her Introduction, Cap made it clear that she desired to help those who have lost someone they deeply love and to validate and normalize the aftereffects of NDEs and other STEs.

The book is comprised of two parts. The first part encompasses the bulk of the text and focuses on the author’s personal transformative experiences. The author’s authenticity and transparency is one of the strengths of this book; Cap privileges the reader to experiences, both external and internal, that many people choose not to disclose. A central aspect is the revelation that understanding and adjusting to life after an NDE, SDE, or STE is a process. Cap shared critical aspects of her experiences and her process of adjustment, acceptance, and growth that followed. The second part of the book summarizes information Cap gleaned from interviewing NDE, SDE, STE, and after death com-
munication (ADC) experts. Her story is meant to provide the reader with illustrations, guidance, and a framework for understanding.

In the first two chapters, Cap, the youngest of seven children, recounted the early life of her parents, their distinctly different backgrounds, their passion, and the drama of their marriages and divorces. She provided a detailed account from her own memory and from stories her parents and relatives told her. This background provides richness and context to the rest of her narrative. The author is clear that this is a very personal story, and it is in these first chapters that the reader has an opportunity to gain entrance into her physical and emotional world as well as the nature of her close relationship with her mother, Betty.

Chapters 3–5 introduce Cap’s spiritually transformative story and highlight a series of events that occurred in the seven years following her mother’s death. The author empathically shared in her Mother’s death, an experience that her siblings did not share. This loss left Cap feeling isolated. She stated her hope that her spiritual story will provide a light and lift the loneliness of others who have also experienced shared death but may not have spoken freely of it. This unique experience compelled her to search the Internet to find out if others had similar experiences. This process led her to the experts whom she interviewed and to the realization that her impactful, life-changing SDE aftereffects—were similar to NDErs’ aftereffects.

In Chapter 5, Cap described the extraordinary, empathic contact she experienced with her mother as she passed away. At the time, she did not know she was having an SDE. While on the phone, the author was able to be with her mother as she took her final breaths. As she heard her mother struggle to breathe, she knew that what she had experienced moments before was the same physical processes her mother was going through. This had been her beloved mother’s way of reaching her, of contacting her daughter who lived on another continent.

Chapters 6–8 chronicle the beginning of Cap’s spiritual transformation and belief in an afterlife and the consideration that there may be a God. She began engaging in spiritual practices including prayer and meditation. In Chapter 6, she described her first ADC with her Mother, and from here the story really begins to gain momentum. Wracked by grief, crying—even in her sleep, Cap began to feel someone stroking her hair to comfort her. Fearful and disturbed the first night, later that week she began to realize it was her mother, comforting her the way she did when the author was a child. Cap felt her mother was trying to tell her something important—but the full message was not
yet clear. To further prove her ongoing existence, the author’s mother made her presence known in other ways that were undeniable to both the author and her husband. This was the beginning of a complete turnaround in the author’s spiritual life.

In Chapter 8 Cap revealed that as a Reiki practitioner, she was familiar with energy work and was a collector of rocks and crystals. After her mother had contacted her, the author also began to feel the presence of other ghost-spirits, to see sparkles, and to experience increased sensitivity to energy, light, and sound as her other senses were heightened. Unwelcome contact by spirits other than her mother began to occur, inciting fear and discomfort.

Substantial challenges in Cap’s personal life—seeing ghosts, experiencing synchronicities, finding a spiritual teacher, and becoming a Reiki master—are chronicled in Chapters 9–11. Once Cap began participating in a guided meditation group, she began during meditation to go into trances and to channel, during which she started having conversations with her mother and other deceased relatives. Around this time, the author discovered a method for channeling by writing as opposed to speaking, and the chapter text includes some of her fascinating journal entries. During this time, Cap recognized that some of her childhood beliefs and fears may have been a result of her sensitivity to energies and spirits at a young age. The author continued to read, attend workshops, and learn about entities and angels as part of her spiritual journey.

In Chapters 12–16, Cap revealed much of what she learned about angels, auras, crystals, spirit guides, and mediums. In Chapter 13, she described how synchronicity brought her a new client who was open to the spiritual and was knowledgeable about channeling. From this client, the author learned about an organization where she could take some courses. Cap described a time of confirmation and acceptance of her SDE aftereffects and the extraordinary spiritual experiences of others.

In Chapter 13, as Cap described her recognition of her new spirit guides, I found myself witnessing the strengthening of her belief in what she was experiencing. Finally, in the face of undeniable ongoing experiences of apporting—items disappearing and reappearing somewhere else, spontaneous telekinesis, and channeling, the author was forced to believe in things unseen. As she explained, the confirmations of her experience were fabulous and were coming in various forms and from a variety of people in her life.

Some of the experience Cap gained while attending workshops and
listening to speakers gave her knowledge to be able to have more success and control with voice channeling—and some exposed her to things she did not really want to know. These latter she reportedly opted not to include in this book. In Chapter 16, I shared in Cap’s sense of relief as she conveyed the deep spiritual awakening propelled by the extraordinary experience of seeing and experiencing the flow of love from her mother as she appeared unexpectedly through another person. This encounter served to ease the author’s struggle by fostering an absolute belief in presence of spirits and faith in God. Cap described feeling whole and having increased patience about channeling her spirit guides. As her fear diminished, Cap was more and more open to the signals of spirits when she meditated and felt increasingly confident to meditate on her own. The author shared the experience of recognizing God’s presence and God’s voice and His message for her and her life—a message she shared with her readers through her book.

Part 2 of Beyond Goodbye is introduced by Chapter 17, a brief description of the controversy within medical science about NDEs. Cap introduced the idea of the brain not as a producer but as a receiver of the mind. She also provided background information on a series of NDE studies on cardiac arrest patients. Thus began the more objective part of the book in which the author shared information she researched during her personal quest for understanding.

Chapter 18 presents a list of common features of NDEs. These can include light, a loving presence, a life-review, an out-of-body experience, and visions of angels as well as deceased relatives, close friends, and pets. Cap reminded readers that a small percentage of NDEs are not pleasant. However, pleasant or not, most NDEs result in overall positive, life-changing aftereffects. The author briefly outlined possible explanations as to why some people have NDEs and others do not.

In her interviews with NDE experts, Cap detailed psychological, physical, and attitudinal SDE aftereffects. She learned that, unlike her, some people do not respond well to the impact an NDE, SDE, STE, or ADC has on their lives, and they are unable to integrate their experience and changed self into their lives. These people may struggle with feeling like they are going crazy; they are part of the audience Cap hoped to reach with her story. She encouraged those who have experienced an NDE to visit the websites and resources listed in her book.

With regard to moving research forward, Cap shifted her focus to sharing information from cardiac arrest studies. Because they are
based in research and are scientific in nature, she believed they can lend credibility to and validate the experiences reported by people who have some of these rare NDE encounters.

To conclude the book, Cap shared her theory of the seventh sense. Beyond the five senses, and beyond the 6th sense of psychics, the seventh sense is about openness and receptivity that helps move a person toward one’s full potential when one touches the other-side-of-life. This is a concept that came from her own experience and from talking with others. Here, Cap posed an appropriate question, “What’s next?”

I found the strength of this book to be in its personal nature. That same quality contributed to the book’s weakness. At times, I found chapters to be a bit choppy and to leave some gaps. These aspects may have been necessary given the author’s need to focus the content and sift through the variety of significant experiences, struggles, and transformations she had experienced. In the second part of the book, beyond a resource list and a list of common STE and NDE features and aftereffects, I would have appreciated Cap using her unique position to offer additional practical guidance, both for those currently processing their own experiences and as a primer for those who witness experiencers’ struggles and want to offer support.

Those who are not already open to energy work, channeling, or other supernatural phenomenon may not be able to identify with Cap and the way she responded to her own STE. However, because she wrote in such an honest, accessible style about myriad supernatural, spiritual experiences, I suspect many readers will devour it in a weekend, whereas others may choose to savor it over the course of a few weeks.

*Beyond Goodbye* is different from other books in which authors have written about their own or others’ NDEs and, as such, serves an important purpose. Although Cap’s SDE was indeed rare, she wrote about her course of development in a way that may empower others to process their own experiences with less fear and more hope. These qualities were evident in the conclusion of Part 1 as Cap wrote about her revelation of no longer fearing physical death, of believing firmly in the continuance of life beyond death, and of the existence of angels—knowledge she acquired during the seven year journey following her SDE.

For me, three primary themes emerged and were interwoven throughout the book: personal narrative, spiritual transformation, and synchronicity. The first is simply the author’s story. Cap shared her experience in a candid way intended to open parts of her life to the reader, exposing the sometimes private encounters of those who are
trying to make sense of the supernatural in their lives. The story is also a vehicle for exploring a particular realm of spiritual awakening and reconnection to faith and God. For the author, an important part of experiencing beyond-death contact with her mother was her movement from atheist/agnostic to believer.

Time and again throughout her narrative, Cap entered and exited relationships and became attuned to the synchronicity that her new openness enabled her to recognize. Some shifts in noticing relationships and events are subtle, but can have a profound impact when recognized and acknowledged. These threads woven throughout Beyond Goodbye are unique and yet border universal experiences. I recommend this book to individuals who may be struggling with the aftereffects of an NDE, SDE, STE, or ADC. I also urge health professionals to read it as a possible recommended resource for their clients and patients struggling in the aftermath of STEs and needing the sense of personal companionship and instillation of hope that Cap’s book has the potential to provide.