

## A Blind Woman's Near-Death Experience

by Vicky Umipeg

Between 1947 and 1952, 50,000 babies were blinded by excess oxygen, given to them in the newly developed air-lock incubator. One of the clues to this tragedy was the discovery of the loss of peripheral vision among pilots breathing oxygen through air masks. I had been in the womb 22 weeks by December of 1950, when I was born at St. Luke's Hospital in Pasadena, California. Weighing 3 pounds at birth, it was logical that I would be placed in one of the new incubators. Since then, for 43 years, I have seen no light, no shadows, nothing, the optic nerves to my eyes having been destroyed. When I dream, I dream with the same sensations I experience when I'm awake. There is no visual data, just other sensations such as touch and sound. But I have seen as you see. Twice I nearly died, and on those occasions, for the first times in my life, I saw. I left my body and saw. This is an account of my second near-death experience.

On February 2, 1973, I was working as a singer and pianist at a restaurant in Seattle, Washington. It was 2 a.m. The owner, afraid of offending a drunk couple that had offered me a ride home, overruled my objections, and insisted that I accept their offer. He refused to open up his office so I could get change for the pay phone to call a cab. He left, and as no one else was going my way, I reluctantly accepted the ride. As we drove along, the driver mentioned that he was seeing double. His VW bus weaved through the streets. Near the base of Queen Anne hill there was a squealing of tires and we spun out of control. The driver's wife yelled, "Oh, my God, we're crashing!" Everything became very slow. I screamed. That was my last conscious in-the-body awareness.

My first awareness in the emergency room of Harborview Hospital was of being up near the ceiling. I could see! Throughout this near-death experience I was in a state of stunned awe from seeing. In fact, it was so foreign to me that it was almost a complication in my efforts to cope. But it was also like a foreign language that you don't understand, but that you desperately want to hear again. Below me was a body on a cart that I wasn't sure was me. Then I heard a male voice say that there was blood on my left ear drum, and that I might be deaf. "I'm not deaf!" I was screaming at him. "Don't you hear me? I'm right over here!" Then I watched a female say, "We don't know how much brain damage there is. She might be in a vegetative state." I yelled at her, "I'm not in a vegetative state!" I was frustrated and angry because I was yelling with every ounce of strength I had, and it was like I didn't exist! I just wanted to get out of there. Almost immediately, as if in response to my thought, I was drawn up through the hospital, and was rising through space.

I saw lights. I didn't know what they were from. But I didn't care, because I felt so free! I was giddy with the ease of movement that I felt as I rose. I felt like screaming and shouting with intoxication. In the distance I heard the most beautiful sound, like wind chimes. It contained every single note you could imagine, from the lowest to the highest, all blended together. As a musician I was awed. There were so many different tones that I didn't know were possible!

Sucked head first into a dark tunnel, I was drawn by a wind toward a distant light. There was a whooshing airy feeling, as though monstrous fans drew me. Nearing the end of the tunnel, the light became brilliant and just before I reached the end I could hear singing. It was like all the hymns you've ever heard sung at once, and blending together harmoniously! Somehow their combined singing was beautiful, not discordant!

My exit from the tunnel was rolling out onto grass in a balmy, bright summerland scene of trees, where there were thousands of people singing, laughing and talking. Flowers were everywhere in different varieties, and I still recall a near-jasmine scent. Both the flowers and the birds I observed in the trees seemed to have light around them. Among flowers and birds of the same kind, I also noticed that some had more light than others.

Then I saw four friends approaching me from the right and left: Debby and Diane, and Mr. and Mrs. Zilk. I had been very close to Debby and Diane at the Oregon State School for the Blind. Debby had died from a hydrocephalic condition when I was 10, and Diane had drowned four years earlier. Debby and Diane moved toward me gracefully. Both of them seemed to be healed inside, or somehow made better. I could feel them reaching out to me with love and Diane seemed to have an almost desperate desire to say something.

Then, for an instant, it seemed as if I knew everything, that everything made sense. It was as if this place was where I could find the answers to all the questions about life, about the planets, about God, about everything. Suddenly I intuitively understood math and science, and I don't know beans about math and science. I hadn't asked about calculus. Now I understood it. Even without asking questions, answers were imparted about things I'd always wondered about. I had always been troubled about the Trinity. Now I was aware that the Father was what you might call the Being/Source aspect of God, that the Son was the Doing aspect, and that the Holy Spirit was the Imparter. I was aware that these three aspects of God, while separate, were One, similar to the way that a husband and wife are separate, yet one.

As Debby and Diane were approaching, now almost close enough to touch, I sensed a boundary across which I could not go. Then Christ appeared. His light filled my vision. Holding out a raised right hand toward me, He said very definitely, "No!" preventing us from coming closer to each other.

His face was strong and kind, He wore a beard, and His hair was long. But I'm describing a form, and the incredible light He gave off outweighed it. The light came out of His body directly, and He was made out of light. Around His head the light was circular. From that circle spokes of light extended like those you might see from a star. His eyes were all knowing, yet tender. I almost wanted to look away from them, but I couldn't. He could see everything about me, more than I could see or know about myself. He even knew my thoughts before I did! It was scary to be so totally known and exposed, and yet so totally accepted and loved. But I wanted nothing more than to be part of that.

"Well, hello," He said and embraced me. I didn't ever want to be away from Him, ever. Rather, I wanted to be inside of Him, or enveloped by His Love somehow. I was so excited about the knowledge I'd just found that I felt as if I was burbling and tripping over myself, trying to communicate it to Him with a kind of thought transference. He said, "Isn't it wonderful? Everything is beautiful here, and it fits together. You'll find that out. But you can't stay here now, it's not your time yet; you have to go back." Inside I was falling, devastated! Then He said, "Watch this." Then I saw my whole life, from my birth to the current moment. As this was happening I was aware of Him, but my awareness of everything else around me disappeared. In this review I actually saw myself, as well as being aware of the thoughts and feelings of myself and all others involved in every incident in my life. Christ left it to me to assess things, to arrive at conclusions myself. I became aware that I was being harder on myself than He was.

Then Christ said to me, "You have to learn and teach more about loving and forgiving. Whether people deserve it or not is not the point. You shouldn't try to select those who you think should be forgiven, and those who shouldn't." He was referring to a tendency in my past to forgive only those who had apologized to me. He also told me before I left that it was going to be hard, but to remember what I'd learned. Then there was absolutely nothing, for how long I have no idea. All of a sudden I felt heavy and full of pain, and I eventually reentered my blind world in the hospital.

The things I've been through since my second near-death experience have been unbelievably hard. I've been raped, almost murdered, and my children have been sexually abused. The struggle to forgive has been difficult. But I'm learning about separating the sin from the sinner, and about judging less. I'm also letting go of some of my past sense of smugness and superiority. My path has been hard, but in walking it I feel I've grown.