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Friday, November 8, 1991

Stories by DEBORAH PEARCE *Times-Colonist Living Editor*

# NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCE

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**S**OME have been revived after being declared clinically dead.

Others have come too close to dying for comfort.

The causes are diverse: illnesses, heart attacks, accidents, childbirth, suicide attempts — even strangulation by a crazed husband.

And the people it happens to are even less homogeneous, coming from all races, religious and social backgrounds and age groups.

What they do have in common is that they all say they remember what it was like to die — and that it changed their lives.

It's called a near-death experience, or NDE, and if pollster George Gallup and this reporter's extrapolations are to be believed, it's happened to more than 10,000 adults in the Capital Regional District.

In British Columbia, the figure would top 104,000; in Canada, 900,000.

There's a society for people who have had NDEs, and those who research the phenomenon. Based in Philadelphia, the International Association for Near-Death Studies has chapters in 10 countries, including Canada, and publishes a scholarly journal four times a year.

Its Seattle chapter





## se living corpses' in NDE collector

Sharp has since heard hundreds of others describe similar experiences, including:

□ **Sense of peace and well being.** "It passes anything you've ever felt on the best day of your life," says Sharp.

□ **Ability to hear and see —** despite, in some cases, having no pulse or respiration.

"People who can hear everything that's going on also feel like they can talk as well," says Sharp, who during her own NDE heard a woman saying, "I'm not getting a pulse."

"Of course you're getting a pulse," Kim remembers retorting. "Otherwise, I wouldn't be speaking."

□ **Noise.** The sounds vary, says Sharp, all the way from white sound, like the hum of an air conditioner, to "your basic chorus of angelic voices" or "hundreds of silver bells hanging in the trees."

□ **Darkness or void.** Sharp's version was a dense, dark fog. "There's no floor, ceiling or sides — but it's not scary." There's a sense of waiting for something to happen, she said.

□ **Dark tunnel,** usually with rounded sides. In this phase, the waiting is over, and people usually report moving, sometimes at incredible velocity. "It's always head first," Sharp said. And it's always toward some-thing at the end, usually a light.

□ **Light.** "It's universally described as alive, as love — brighter than a million suns, yet doesn't hurt the eyes and doesn't illuminate the tunnel," Sharp said.

"It's not like sunlight, lamplight, stage light. It illuminates us from within."

Sharp's NDE skipped the tunnel and went directly to the light, which she said "exploded" beneath her. "It was beyond atomic. It was so incredibly bright. It was alive, and it was all love. [And] this living love was directed, in laser fashion, right at me."

Sharp called the light God, "which I was not sure I'd ever had in my life."

literally face to face with the person we loved."

People who died at a ripe old age usually appear rejuvenated — in their 20s or early 30s, Sharp said. And children who died have matured — again, to their 20s or early 30s.

But the experimenter instantly knows who they are, she said.

"The personality comes through so strongly that they're recognized."

Aside from loved ones, NDEs are sometimes populated with spiritual beings who people label according to their beliefs.

"It's not like these beings wear name tags — 'I'm Jesus, your Lord and Savior,'" Sharp says.

One exception is Elizabeth, who appears to children who come close to death, but not to adults.

□ **Life review.** "It's not that common to have a life review," Sharp said.

Those who do may see their lives from the womb on, or from birth on. For some people the review ends with the NDE. Others see it backwards, starting with the present.

Some describe it as a simultaneous slide show of historic moments, Sharp said.

Others have emotional life reviews, where they're given an object lesson in empathy.

"If I did something really nice for you, with absolutely no gain for myself, I would get to feel how you felt," Sharp said.

"The flip side of that is if I did something intentionally to hurt your feelings, I would get to feel your pain, hurt, fear . . . in an undiluted fashion."

The elements of an NDE are essentially the same regardless of whether the person came near death because of illness, accident or suicide attempt, Sharp said.

With the latter, however, the light is usually absent.

Attempted suicides are not punished for their actions in their NDE, she said.

## RECOLLECTIONS

THE WORDS of this world are inadequate to describe a near-death experience, according to those who've had one.

"That sounds really dumb" or "no, that's not right" punctuate their attempts to convey the essence of an NDE.

"We can't tell the experience — only the experience can tell the experience," NDE researcher and experimenter Nancy Evans Bush told a Seattle conference.

"What we tell is what we can process — what we can pattern. So it emerges as stories."

This is what Victoria residents say about the episodes they remember from when they were close to the edge:

"I was rising and I wasn't controlling it. It's like you have a mission — you simply have to go."

"I felt more like a giant soft fuzzball than a human as I floated higher. I then saw a beautiful golden light that illuminated the room."

"I felt a sense of warmth and love that surpassed anything I had experienced while living my life in my body."

"It was the most intense calm peaceful feeling I've ever had in my life."



## NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCE

## 'One of those living corpses turns into an NDE collector

**K**IM SHARP CLARK died 20 years ago.

Since then she's married, had a daughter, earned her master's degree, developed the field of critical care social work, become a clinical assistant professor at the University of Washington and lectured at universities coast to coast.

Not bad for a cadaver.

"I'm one of those living corpses," Sharp told a recent conference on near-death experiences in Seattle.

Sharp is also leader of the International Association of Near-Death Studies' Seattle branch, the largest of some 20 U.S. chapters of the non-profit society which is also active in Canada, Australia, Belgium, Holland, France and Germany.

And she's one of the best known authorities in North America on near-death experiences, or NDEs.

Sharp has gathered hundreds of accounts of NDEs, many from patients she's worked with at Harborview Medical Centre, a five-star trauma hospital in Seattle.

"More people in Seattle get resuscitated than any other place in the world," says Sharp.

An estimated 35 to 40 per cent of those report near-death experiences, or NDEs.

"I believe everybody who comes that close to death has a near-death experience," Sharp says. "But some don't remember."

Alcohol and drugs can suppress the memory of an NDE, says Sharp.

But so can society's attitude.

"Most important, I think, is the fear of flakiness," she said.

"Also, these are ineffable experiences — there are no words."

NDEs are as individual as the people who have them, although researchers have pinpointed typical elements which form a common pattern in these episodes. Some NDEs



Kim Sharp Clark:

'I blew up like a human balloon'

So when the firefighters untangled their lines and hooked up right way around, Sharp's lungs could not accept the oxygen: instead, it went between the layers of her skin.

"I blew up like a human balloon," Sharp said.

Sharp has since heard hundreds of others describe similar experiences, including:

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a small Kansas town — no pulse, no breathing.

An ambulance was summoned from Kansas City, but meanwhile the town's fire department responded to the call, bringing its brand new ventilator, never tested.

And when they hooked the equipment up, they did it backwards, which sucked all the air out of her body, leaving her fingers and toes black, and her lungs collapsed.

without the assistance of a doctor or paramedic in the crowd, who took over, pounding her chest and giving her mouth-to-mouth until the ambulance arrived.

All in all, Sharp says, she was without oxygen to her brain for 20 minutes.

But it took years — and some hard evidence from others who had been through the same sort of thing — for her to come to terms with the out-of-body experience she had then.

It taught her "everything about everything there was to know . . . it was like telepathy, but better than telepathy."

**Meeting others.** "The most heartfelt aspect, in my opinion, is the meeting of . . . deceased loved ones," says Sharp.

"It is one thing to hope that we see that person again. It's another thing to believe that we will see them again. It's yet another experience to really and truly have that reunion, to be

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## A Victoria club to die for (well, almost) offers instant rapport

IT COULD be considered the most exclusive club in Victoria.

Money can't buy a membership; the most influential friends will be of no use in securing an entree.

To belong, you have to die — or at least come awfully close.

And that experience gives you an instant rapport with others who have been through the same thing, says the Victoria man who started the support group earlier this year, 30 years after his own near-drowning.

The Victoria-Vancouver NDE (Near-Death Experience) Support Group meets informally every six weeks or so, most recently on a Wednesday evening at an apartment near the Crystal Pool.

The reason for its restrictive admission practices was soon made evident to the reporter present, who lacked the prerequisite to join.

"Even having one person who hasn't had the experience changes the flow," said Ron, who like most of the others did not want his last name used.

Some of the members — like Chris, the support group's founder — see their experience as something private — "incredible and magnificent."

The 39-year-old computer programmer is only willing to outline the stages of the episode: an out-of-body experience, a life review, darkness, coming upon the light, and the feeling of peace and serenity.

In fact, he didn't tell anyone what happened until last year when he saw a television program on near-death experiences and realized his was not unique.

"That prompted me to say I'm going to start a group," he said.

Chris advertised in the paper — "something like 'near-death experiencer interested in meeting others,'" he recalls.

Half a dozen people responded, and the first meeting was held in January.

"One guy had his experience in 1949" and hadn't told anyone, Chris said.

"It was uplifting for everyone to talk about this and share their experiences, and to have this instant camaraderie."

Part of what leaves some NDErs so shy about discussing the issue is past reactions from friends and family.

"My experience was in '61, and I tried to talk about it to my husband and friends," says Marjorie, a teacher who nearly died of peritonitis.

"They thought I was ranting, and they tried to distract me."

Helen's experience four years ago was similar.

"Yeah, right — you were just hallucinating," she was told.

But part of the difficulty in communicating with non-NDErs is the lack of words to describe what happened to them.

"The perceptions [during an NDE] are so different," Helen said. "If I say I had a feeling, or heard a voice — it's not like a voice or feeling in this space or time. You can't imagine it — it's another kind of dimension."

NDErs say they also share certain values and viewpoints as a result of their experience.

"When you come back, most people don't have a fear of death," Chris said.

The Victoria group tends to take a casual attitude towards time, arriving unapologetically up to an hour after the meeting's starting time.

"[Once] someone asked what time it was — and nobody was wearing a watch," he said.

They say having an NDE has freed them from being judgmental, and they see their meetings as a haven from the judgmental attitudes of others.

And they say their lives have changed dramatically since their experiences.

Helen, for example, was an anorexic teenager who was "very negative, full of death urges, a lot of self-hatred, full of guilt" when her NDE occurred.

"It really shook me up — and I needed to be shaken," she said.

Business system was a thrill-seeking life — it's short" who Holland 15 years ago weeks with brain injury shattered shoulder.

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Those interested i write the Victoria-Van Group, P.O. Box 7395 5B7, or call 386-9208



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"It is one thing to hope that we see that person again. It's another thing to believe that we will see them again. It's yet another experience to really and truly have that reunion, to be

"People who attempt suicide are just having vision problems. It's a coping mechanism. They're greeted with compassion, not damnation."

Sharp believes an NDE is almost a guaranteed end to suicide attempts: every one of the people she talked to, including a girl who had made 17 attempts, said they would never do it again.

"They learn a lesson," she said.

"Once you're out of your body, time is irrelevant. It seems like a really long time because so many things happen — but it doesn't seem like a long time."

"I don't think there was such a thing as time. It all seemed to be happening at the same time. . . . that time had more to do with distance."

"If you can imagine seeing without any eyes . . . not having a physical body at all."

"My senses were all around me — my senses were me — it was not broken up into pieces in terms of having sensory organs."

"It was as if the world from in my body had been in black and white, and the world out of my body was in color."

"There is no space . . . between things. . . it's all one living organism. I was part of another body. I'm part of everything, and everything is part of me."

"All of a sudden you know everything. You know what makes life go on, but you can't bring it back here — you can only bring the memory of the experience."

"There's an openness, and a knowing, and a learning that's not like how we learn here."

"I remember feeling really airy, going along — and all of a sudden I knew what was happening. I thought, whoa, I'm not ready to check out. I remember turning my back — although I didn't have a back — and coming back out of the light."

"I came back with a horrible jolt — the most intense pain." (This NDE's heart stopped when doctors were trying to lower her blood pressure during pregnancy.)

"When you come back it's painful — it's like you have to be compressed."

"The nearest I can describe [coming back is] like taking a cubic mile of airspace and condensing it into a cubic inch."

Business systems technologist Harry Mensink was a thrill-seeking biker whose motto was, "enjoy life — it's short" when a motorcycle accident in Holland 15 years ago left him in a coma for five weeks with brain injuries, collapsed lungs and a shattered shoulder.

"Now I know better," he said. He adopted a macrobiotic diet, partly for his health and partly because he no longer wanted to be a party to killing anything. Unlike others in the group, Mensink has no detailed memory of his experience, although thinking about the accident induces a feeling of deep peace, he said.

But he emerged from his coma convinced there is life after death, a position 180 degrees from what he believed before. And he began, as many other members did, a spiritual search.

"I knew there was more," says Helen, who began reading about different religions, checked out New Age philosophies and went into therapy. For Judy, a nurse whose NDE occurred during pregnancy when she was hospitalized for high blood pressure, the difference has to do with the realization that "this isn't the end — I don't have to do everything in this lifetime."

"Material things don't matter as much," she said. "The house, the two cars, the boat — they're fine to have, but I certainly wouldn't work two jobs for them," she said. "I would work two jobs to feed my kid."

Judy's accepting attitude towards death shows up on the job, where she works in geriatrics. "People die more readily when I'm on [shift], because I allow them to go," she said.

Besides its closed meetings, the group has social events like barbecues, and is considering an excursion to Seattle to attend a meeting of the U.S.'s largest chapter of the International Association for Near-Death Studies. Plans for the future include volunteer work with the dying — hospice and AIDS patients, for example, Chris said.

Those interested in joining the group can write the Victoria-Vancouver NDE Support Group, P.O. Box 7395, Depot D, Victoria V9B 5B7, or call 386-9208.)

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# NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCE



Debra Brash/Times-Colonist

Sunday Celebration: a far cry from selling houses

## new real estate Thought

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"I think that was my decision not to die."  
Schultz also remembers psychic experiences in hospital — "more than dreams" is how she describes them.

### So what if it's kooky, check out the after-effects

**P**ERHAPS THE overwhelming peace and joy felt during a near-death experience is a function of oxygen deprivation.

Maybe the feeling of being at one with the universe, and having a sense of understanding how everything works is the result of a temporal lobe seizure.

Possibly the radiant light — usually described by experiencers as golden or white, magnetic or loving — is the mind's defence against dying.

Then again, having their life pass in front of them, and encountering dead relatives and friends can be dismissed as a hallucination.

So what? asks Kenneth Ring.

The University of Connecticut professor of social psychology has researched near-death experiences for 14 years, publishing three books on the subject and helping found the International Association for Near Death Studies.

Ring, in Seattle recently for a conference on near-death experiences, is convinced of their authenticity.

But what interests him more is the after-effects.

"Let's suppose the whole thing is a crock," Ring said in an interview.

through scientific research what effects these experiences have."

Research within the past year has uncovered some physical effects of the NDE, Ring said.

Blood pressure is lowered, along with body temperature, and metabolism slows, he said.

Sensitivity to light, sound and such things as alcohol is heightened.

"They're more sensitive generally," Ring said.

"The inference from the data I've collected seems to suggest that people are altered in such a way that they function at a higher level than they did before."

Other changes have long been noted in the wake of an NDE.

Ring researched them by having experiencers fill out questionnaires, by doing personal interviews and by questioning people close to the NDEr who could independently assess the differences.

Some of his earlier findings are reported in *Heading Toward Omega* (William Morrow, 1984, available at the Greater Victoria Public Library).

"The NDE... serves as a catalyst for spiritual awakening and development," Ring writes.

Experiencers tend to see themselves as spiritual rather than religious, and to de-emphasize the formal aspects of religious life, he says.

They feel inwardly close to God — although God may not be the word they use.

They believe in the underlying unity of all religions, and desire a universal religion that would

"NDErs like themselves more," he says, simply.

Values also shift.

Appreciation of life is enhanced; acceptance and caring concern for others increases; ability to express love openly grows.

Concern with impressing others, on the other hand, drops off dramatically, as does materialism.

What NDErs are likely to pursue is knowledge rather than possessions — "a quest for meaning" is how Ring puts it.

An NDE's impact is often felt beyond the person who experienced it, says Ring, who offers himself as an example.

"You can not help be affected by people who have these experiences," he said.

"When you talk with these NDErs, they transmit something. And when you receive a transmission, you're changed."

"I think I have more of their view of the world."

Asked to articulate that view, Ring the researcher seems to squirm.

Then he answers, "What matters is love... kindness."

"It's such a stupid thing to say."

"We all knew this — we knew this at the age of three. But being immersed in these people, you can't forget it."

NDErs realize that separation is an illusion, Ring says.

"In the real world, light connects everything, and we're all made out of light. And therefore you can't treat anything as other than yourself."





Debra Brash/Times-Colonist

Day Celebration: a far cry from selling houses

# real estate New Thought

"I think that was my decision not to die."

Schultz also remembers psychic experiences in hospital — "more than dreams" is how she describes them.

One involved an artist-poet friend who later visited her in hospital.

"I dreamed I was in her studio: it was dark and there was only a light on [over] her table. I was there beside the window, and said, 'Elsie, if you'd just turn, you'd see that I was there.'"

Schultz also dreamed that the studio furniture was arranged differently than she remembered, and that the rug was a different color.

When the friend came to the hospital, she brought Schultz a poem which she had written to her in the middle of the night. She had also rearranged the furniture as Schultz had seen it, and had installed a new carpet, the color Schultz remembered.

That was the beginning of heightened psychic awareness for Schultz, who says since her NDE she fre-

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But what interests him more is the after-effects.

"Let's suppose the whole thing is a crock," Ring said in an interview.

"People are still changed by these experiences in dramatic ways."

Ring, 55, has never had a near-death experience (hereafter referred to as an NDE) himself.

So he files his point of view in the same slot as those of other non-experiencers who take the opposing view: under B, for belief.

"Beliefs are expressions of ignorance," Ring said.

"[But] if you have one of these experiences, you know."

Science cannot prove exactly what goes on during an NDE one way or the other, Ring says.

"I don't think it will ever be settled," he said.

"[But] we can know directly

Sensitivity to light, sound and such things as alcohol is heightened.

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They feel inwardly close to God — although God may not be the word they use.

They believe in the underlying unity of all religions, and desire a universal religion that would embrace all humanity.

They are also more likely to believe there is life after death — regardless of what their religion teaches.

And they are open to the doctrine of reincarnation, and have a general sympathy toward Eastern religions.

As a byproduct of this spiritual development, a variety of psychic abilities have been noted, Ring says.

Included are clairvoyance, telepathy, precognition and bilocation (seeing the apparitions of others or becoming apparitions for others).

Ring's research also showed typical personality changes, especially increased self-confidence and self-acceptance.

Concern with impressing others, on the other hand, drops off dramatically, as does materialism.

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"In the real world, light connects everything, and we're all made out of light. And therefore you can't treat anything as other than yourself."

"It's an instant course in ecology: everything is the same — animals, people, rocks."

"I don't have that consciousness, but I hang out with them, and I'm aware of it."

Ring hopes the next step in NDE research will be to investigate the effects on others who have not had the experience.

"There may be intriguing evolutionary implications," he says. "The way [NDEers] have changed could have an effect on humanity as a whole."

One effect has been the way the western world views death, he said.

"I think we think about death differently. Death isn't as scary for people."



# Scientists tickle brain to unlock bizarre secrets

The Canadian Press

Sudbury, Ont.

Sounding a little like Captain Kirk, Dr. Michael Persinger says he's venturing "where many thinkers have not gone before" to unlock the mysteries of near-death and out-of-body experiences.

Using electricity to tickle the temporal lobe of the brain, Persinger and his team of researchers at Laurentian University have induced these experiences, visions of the afterlife and others in research subjects.

"It's the part of the brain that's involved with language, the sense of self, and experiences of emotion,

quantity knows who is on the phone before she answers it, and can tell what someone is about to say.

Schultz says her husband's recovery from his stroke, and her near-death experience triggered her decision to give up a lucrative career and open a self-awareness centre, first in Edmonton, and another six years ago in Victoria.

Much of Schultz's New Thought message — "it's different than New Age, which can get pretty far out" — harmonizes with the beliefs NDEers often embrace after their experience.

"We are not separate from God, Our Creator, or the universal life force, intelligence or energy (New Thought doesn't tell you what word to use)," explains Shultz, who is also district president of the International New Thought Alliance, and studied with Roy Eugene Davis at the Centre for Spiritual Awareness in Georgia where she was ordained.

"We are immersed in it, and it's within us.

"We're more than body, mind and our emotions — we are this consciousness first of all."

Closer to home, Morse has a book full of dramatic examples that have convinced him that NDEs are not hallucinations, nor caused by lack of oxygen to the brain, or by "anything except by the process of dying."

He recounted the story of a little girl who drowned in cold water — no heartbeat and no respiration for more than 19 minutes.

With no vital signs, Crystal was a "flatliner" — the gold standard of the NDE.

"When I asked her, 'What happened to you, Crystal?' she astonished me by saying, 'I was floating out of my body, and I saw you put a tube in my nose,'" Morse said.

"You put me in a big machine that looked like a doughnut." (That was the CAT scan.)

Crystal also told Morse she had gone to Heaven, sat on Jesus's lap, and made a decision to return to her body.

"That part of her experience did not surprise me — she came from a religious family," Morse said.

"What fascinated me was her blow-by-blow, completely accurate description of her

movement and hearing," Persinger says.

Without this part of the brain — which is located on either side of the head just above ear level — Persinger says people would be "like calculating machines."

"But this part of the brain gives a sense of meaning and personal significance" to the mere storing of facts and occurrences, he says.

A person's emotional background and the sounds and objects involved in the experiment affect the outcome, Persinger says.

One volunteer subject said he believed he'd been abducted by aliens from UFOs.

The process begins by attaching electrical leads to a helmet to create magnetic fields that trigger brain activity. The person then sits inside an acoustic tank that minimizes all outside noise, and lets the brain take over.

The subject typically feels a sense of floating, the sensation of an invisible presence being with them, and a feeling of being out of the body

with vivid memories from childhood.

Most responses can be predicted, says Persinger, such as having visions of a spaceship when the five-note musical pattern from the movie *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* is played.

More "bizarre" responses depend on the individual and the emotions and sensitivity he or she has brought to the experiment, Persinger says.

Some volunteers come from within the university, while others have to be drawn from outside, particularly writers, poets and musicians, who the neuroscience professor says are much more sensitive to his experiments.

And, he adds, women are much more likely than men to describe an outside presence being with them during the experiment.

Persinger says his decade of research has shown some people can even have mystical experiences spontaneously during periods of intensified activity in the earth's magnetic field. Some, for example, have seen apparitions of a loved one who has died.

after a motorcycle crash, and until then believed that death was the end.

"I believe now in eternity — that part of me never dies," he said. "Life is [like] a class in school — I go to the next class, or I have to do the class over, depending on what I do in this class."

This faith in forever may be what draws many non-experiencers to learn more about NDEs.

"They give such a coherent view, and they answer that hunger that's inherent in all of us, that's indigenous to the human condition — Is the universe friendly?" says NDE researcher Nancy Bush.

Other non-experiencers dismiss the NDE out of hand.

"The implication of the NDE can be very threatening for people who live in a post-modern world," Ring says.

"God is not very fashionable, and these experiences have a very spiritual quality."

It is thus easier for some to adopt "rational"





Debra Brash/Times-Colonist

Gail Schultz leads Sunday Celebration: a far cry from selling houses

# From real estate to New Thought

A ¾-TON truck driven by a drunk, and a brand-new Lincoln were the vehicles for the near-death experience which helped rewrite the script for Gail Schultz's life.

Then, she was successfully selling real estate in Edmonton with her husband, Norm, who had just recovered from a stroke doctors said would leave him a vegetable if he lived.

Today, she's director of the non-profit Victoria Centre for Self-Awareness, and teaches New Thought philosophies to hundreds of people every week, both at the Alpha Street centre and at the University of Victoria.

Schultz has no memory of the 1977 collision which sent the truck through her passenger door, burst her liver and left her on a respirator, unrecognizable, with damage that eventually took five operations to repair.

She knows from her hospital records that she was resuscitated twice.

She knows she was losing blood from her liver faster than doctors could pump it in — so they packed her with sponges, closed her up and warned Norm, "She probably won't last the night."

All of this she learned after the fact, when she came out of her coma.

What she remembers from that time is her near-death experience.

"I remember travelling fast — I don't remember being in a body," she said.

"It was through darkness."

There was a swooshing sound, and a feeling of intense speed, she said.

"Then I started to approach a white light."

Schultz describes the light as silver — "very, very bright, brighter than you can imagine any light you would see."

"I think that was my decision not to die."

Schultz also remembers psychic experiences in hospital — "more than dreams" is how she describes them.

One involved an artist-poet friend who later visited her in hospital.

"I dreamed I was in her studio: it was dark and there was only a light on [over] her table. I was there beside the window, and said, 'Elsie, if you'd just turn, you'd see that I was there.'"

Schultz also dreamed that the studio furniture was arranged differently than she remembered; and that the rug was a different color.

When the friend came to the hospital, she brought Schultz a poem which she had written to her in the middle of the night. She had also rearranged the furniture as Schultz had seen it, and had installed a new carpet, the color Schultz remembered.

That was the beginning of heightened psychic awareness for Schultz, who says since her NDE she frequently knows who is on the phone before she answers it, and can tell what someone is about to say.

Schultz says her husband's recovery from his stroke, and her near-death experience triggered her decision to give up a lucrative career and open a self-awareness centre, first in Edmonton, and another six years ago in Victoria.

Much of Schultz's New Thought message — "it's different than New Age, which can get pretty far out" — harmonizes with the beliefs NDErs often embrace after their experience.

"We are not separate from God, Our Creator, or the universal life force, intelligence or energy (New Thought doesn't tell you what word to use)," explains Schultz, who is also district president of the International

near-death experience is a function of oxygen deprivation.

Maybe the feeling of being at one with the universe, and having a sense of understanding how everything works is the result of a temporal lobe seizure.

Possibly the radiant light — usually described by experiencers as golden or white, magnetic or loving — is the mind's defence against dying.

Then again, having their life pass in front of them, and encountering dead relatives and friends can be dismissed as a hallucination.

So what? asks Kenneth Ring.

The University of Connecticut professor of social psychology has researched near-death experiences for 14 years, publishing three books on the subject and helping found the International Association for Near Death Studies.

Ring, in Seattle recently for a conference on near-death experiences, is convinced of their authenticity.

But what interests him more is the after-effects.

"Let's suppose the whole thing is a crock," Ring said in an interview.

"People are still changed by these experiences in dramatic ways."

Ring, 55, has never had a near-death experience (hereafter referred to as an NDE) himself.

So he files his point of view in the same slot as those of other non-experiencers who take the opposing view: under B, for belief.

"Beliefs are expressions of ignorance," Ring said.

"[But] if you have one of these experiences, you know."

Science cannot prove exactly what goes on during an NDE one way or the other, Ring says.

"I don't think it will ever be settled," he said.

"[But] we can know directly

## Scientists tickle brain to unlock bizarre secrets

The Canadian Press

Sudbury, Ont.

Sounding a little like Captain Kirk, Dr. Michael Persinger says he's venturing "where many thinkers have not gone before" to unlock the mysteries of near-death and out-of-body experiences.



—“very, very bright, brighter than you can imagine any light you would see.”

The feeling, she said, was of peacefulness, and “absolutely no fear.”

What she remembers next — “when the light was nearly enveloping me” — is having thoughts of “I want to go back, I want to return.”

“When I thought that, I was immediately back in my body.

use,” explains Shultz, who is also district president of the International New Thought Alliance, and studied with Roy Eugene Davis at the Centre for Spiritual Awareness in Georgia where she was ordained.

“We are immersed in it, and it’s within us.

“We’re more than body, mind and our emotions — we are this consciousness first of all.”

out-of-body experiences.

Using electricity to tickle the temporal lobe of the brain, Persinger and his team of researchers at Laurentian University have induced these experiences, visions of the afterlife and others in research subjects.

“It’s the part of the brain that’s involved with language, the sense of self, and experiences of emotion,

The process begins by attaching electrical leads to a helmet to create magnetic fields that trigger brain activity. The person then sits inside an acoustic tank that minimizes all outside noise, and lets the brain take over.

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## SOCIETY

Continued from C1

drew people from all over the U.S. and Western Canada, including a handful from Victoria.

“Increasingly, people who are

knowledgeable about NDEs agree these experiences do occur,” says Kenneth Ring, a University of Connecticut social psychology professor who started the association 10 years ago, and was keynote speaker at the conference.

Ring includes medical professionals, scientists and academics “who have taken the trouble to read beyond the tabloid level.”

“And that’s something that wasn’t the case 15 years ago.”

The numbers of NDEs are predicated on a poll done by George Gallup and described in *Adventures in Immortality* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1982). Five per cent of the adults studied reported having had a near-death experience.

The study did not include children — considered by some NDE researchers to be the most reliable source of data.

“They’re free of cultural baggage and preconceptions,” says Seattle-area pediatrician Melvin Morse, who has studied the near-death experiences of children for nine years, and works with psychologists in such far-flung places as Tokyo and Zambia.

“It’s really interesting to hear [reports of] African NDEs which start off with ‘patient trampled by elephant,’” he said.

Closer to home, Morse has a book full of dramatic examples that have convinced him that NDEs are not hallucinations, nor caused by lack of oxygen to the brain, or by “anything except by the process of dying.”

He recounted the story of a little girl who drowned in cold water — no heartbeat and no respiration for more than 19 minutes.

With no vital signs, Crystal was a “flatliner” — the gold standard of the NDE.

“When I asked her, ‘What happened to you, Crystal?’ she astonished me by saying, ‘I was floating out of my body, and I saw you put a tube in my nose,’” Morse said.

“‘You put me in a big machine that looked like a doughnut.’” (That was the CAT scan.)

Crystal also told Morse she had gone to Heaven, sat on Jesus’s lap, and made a decision to return to her body.

“That part of her experience did not surprise me — she came from a religious family,” Morse said.

“What fascinated me was her blow-by-blow, completely accurate description of her resuscitation.”

People do not even dream when they are comatose with fixed and dilated pupils, he said.

But they have “astounding other ways of [experiencing] reality,” he said.

Researchers hasten to say — loudly and clearly — that NDEs do not offer incontrovertible evidence of an afterlife.

“I do not see this as proof of life after death — these are not after-death experiences,” Morse said.

Experiences, on the other hand, are far more likely to see their NDE as proof positive of an afterlife — whether they believed in one before or not.

Lin Fraser’s view of death — and of life — was radically changed after her schizophrenic husband tried to choke her to death.

At first, she had no recollection of the relief and release she felt as she travelled down a tunnel, and the conversation she had with the light at the end of it. But five months later she read a book describing an NDE, and “all of a sudden this flood of memory came back.”

The Victoria woman says the experience was a turning point in a chaotic life from which she was unconsciously trying to escape.

“I was a very unhappy girl, and I didn’t have the guts to kill myself, so I married someone who would do it for me.”

Instead, however, she emerged with a feeling of invincibility, and a belief that death “is no big deal.”

“I feel quite blessed and rewarded that I had had the experience — it took away the doubt.”

Dianne Dillon of Victoria came close to dying when she hemorrhaged after her third son was born nine years ago, and now sees death as another kind of birth.

“To the infant in the womb, you could feel like you’re dying” during labor,” she points out. “But what really happens is [you’re] pushed into another life.

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Other non-experiencers dismiss the NDE out of hand.

"The implication of the NDE can be very threatening for people who live in a post-modern world," Ring says.

"God is not very fashionable, and these experiences have a very spiritual quality."

It is thus easier for some to adopt "rational" or "pre-fab" explanations for the NDE — like hallucination, body chemistry or whatever.

Ring, Bush and Morse say that's the easy way out.

"Name me one human function — being scared, falling in love, rejoicing in nature — only a physiological response," Bush said. "What we are is little walking factories of biomechanical reactions."

"It's not only these experiences which can be reduced to 'it's only' — it's everything."

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# NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCE

## NDEERS are more likely to have a history of childhood abuse

**P**EOPLE WHO have near-death experiences are more likely to have a history of childhood trauma than the general population, says social psychologist Ken Ring.

"This is a statistical relationship," Ring said in an interview in Seattle, where he was keynote speaker at a conference on NDEs.

"There are many near-death experiences who do not have that kind of background."

Ring said he conducted several studies, using different criteria to define a traumatic childhood. Included in his definitions were abuse, accident, severe illness and other forms of stress.

"They were always higher than my control group." The findings make perfect sense to Ring.

"You take a situation of an abused child," he said. "That child also dissociates from physical or social reality because it's painful."

"You tune into other realities — that's your way of dealing with trauma."

In later years that person is on the brink of death, "you're a natural for this type of experience — you're more likely to pick it up and register it."

Other things than coming close to death can trigger experiences similar to the NDE, Ring noted.

The alcoholic who reaches bottom, or the drug addict may go through it, he said.

A meditative state may induce it, as can powerful forms of psychotherapy.

"What seems to be the link — you have to do something, or have something happen to you, that pushes your ego out of the way," he said.

"When the ego undergoes a temporary death, then one's consciousness is flooded with light."

Ring told the conference that over the past year he's come to regard the NDE as a "compensatory gift" for suffering.

For example, an NDE sometimes includes a "life review," often described as involving a panoramic memory "during which the person 'sees and understands life with total compassion for oneself and the others involved in one's life.'"

As a result, "you're able to forgive yourself and others for hurtful actions," he said, likening this to "an accelerated form of psychotherapy."

"The goal of forgiveness is one of the great goals of psychotherapy."

Another gift from the NDE is not being judged. "Though you may judge yourself, there is no external censorious being," he said. "There is no sense of sin as we conventionally understand it" and carry as a burden through life, Ring said.

"You can see what a liberation from fear this particular insight is."

About one per cent of NDEs depart from the norm of radiance and light and are filled with darkness and terror — but even they are a gift, according to Nancy Evans Bush, whose masters degree is in pastoral ministry and spirituality.

The vice-president of the International Association for Near Death Studies has been part of a research team working on a descriptive study of dark experiences for the past year.

Data are hard to come by on these NDEs — mostly because North American culture assumes "good people will have good experiences — bad people will have bad experiences," Bush said.

"Given this cultural assumption, which saturates our society... put yourself in the position of a person who awakens [after a dark-side NDE]."

"What you have just encountered is cosmically terrifying. Perhaps your sense is of annihilation."

"And just who are you going to tell? If you tell, what are you saying about yourself?"

Bush, whose own NDE was the dark version, says Jungian psychology has helped her see the gift cloaked in wrappings of terror and despair.

She views it as a key to the experienter's Shadow — "that which we reject as improper, unsuitable, untenable: 'I wouldn't do that; I couldn't do that.'"

For personal growth, the Shadow must be confronted, she said.

"We do not become enlightened by imagining figures of light, but by making the darkness conscious," she said.

"What we repress in ourselves never stays repressed. It comes sliding out — it shows up."

"What we try to deny — what we hate — that's what we become. What we refuse to acknowledge can come to control us."

Bush says she's come to the conclusion that one cosmic law is "you're gotta do your Shadow work."

And she sees a dark side NDE as an invitation to do just that.

"There's something down in the subconscious confronting its own mortality, having questions about being and non-being."

"It can't be dealt with as an issue as long as it's in the unconscious. The NDE becomes like a gift — an unwelcome gift that brings this stuff into consciousness where it can be dealt with."

— social psycho

Ken

dealing with trauma

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ISLAND'S LARGEST ANTIQUES and 2nd HAND WAREHOUSE