

Foreword to the English Edition

by Robert G. Mays and Suzanne B. Mays

This book is like a collection of precious jewels that have been sorted out and set into different sections of a display case, showing different levels of brilliance and color, different degrees of uniqueness and beauty. As such, the book is a valuable catalog of important cases of paranormal phenomena from near-death experiences (NDEs) that have been investigated, confirmed, and documented by researchers over the years.

To the two of us, many of these jewels are old, familiar friends. In our study of NDEs over the past 45 years, we have come across many of these jewels in our reading together as interesting, even fascinating, cases of paranormal phenomena. They are familiar friends because we have studied and pondered them, replayed them in our minds, argued about them, and written about them.

We first encountered several of these jewels in Raymond Moody's 1975 book, *Life After Life*. They included the basic features of NDEs: the feeling of peace, the separation from the physical body, the sense of hyperreality, meeting deceased loved ones, encountering a great being of light, having a "life review" of the events of one's life, returning to one's body, and later finding corroboration of aspects of the experience by oneself or from others.

These last jewels—the perceptions and other information the near-death experiencer (NDER) received during the experience that were later confirmed by other witnesses—were of the greatest interest to us because they suggested that these experiences are not only subjectively but also objectively *real*, that NDEs are, in fact, a taste of what it is like to die and, therefore, they suggest that the *self* does not die when the physical body dies.

A few years after Moody's book, we came across two additional jewels of this type in George Ritchie's (1978/2007) book, *Return From Tomorrow*. In his NDE, Ritchie experienced being out of his body, flying eastward across the frozen plains of east Texas at night in December 1943. He flew over a large river and saw a city on the opposite shore, where he decided to stop and ask directions

at an all-night café. Because no one could see him, Ritchie returned to his body in the army hospital at Camp Barkeley, near Abilene, Texas. There he encountered a brilliant Being of Light who led him into a transcendent realm. Near the end of his transcendent journey, Ritchie was led through an unusual sphere-shaped building where a catwalk led over a tank filled with water.

A while after his recovery, Ritchie and two army buddies were driving back to Texas, and they passed through Vicksburg, Mississippi. Ritchie felt that the city looked very familiar, and he found himself across the street from the café he had stopped at in his NDE 10 months earlier. In 1952, nine years after his NDE, Ritchie was looking through the December 15 issue of *Life* magazine and came across an artist's drawing of a sphere-shaped building with catwalk and tank that was being built in Schenectady, New York, to hold a naval nuclear submarine engine under development. Ritchie had "walked" through this building and over the catwalk 9 years earlier during his NDE.

These two jewels from George Ritchie's NDE—accurate physical perceptions 525 miles from his physical body and an accurate precognitive vision—as impressive as they are, however, do not have sufficient "beauty" to be included in this book's display case because they lack one key element—namely, clear confirmation from an independent source. This book includes only paranormal cases that meet this higher standard. Nevertheless, as a result of our own detailed research into Ritchie's case, summarized at the end of Chapter 2, we became convinced that NDEs are real experiences of a transcendental nature.

To be sure, while the paranormal cases in this book *do* have third-party confirmation, they only *suggest* that the core of one's being survives physical death. In science, there is no *proof* of any proposal, only greater evidence leading to an ever-stronger sense of certainty about the proposal. For the question of survival, the evidence of an autonomous self can only be indirect, because the self cannot be observed physically. The evidence presented in this book, nevertheless, strongly suggests that the self is something that is objectively real and that it survives physical death.

In our study of NDEs, we have been dismayed that these instances of paranormal phenomena are scattered over dozens and dozens of books and research articles, covering now more than 45 years of research. And most of the cases have "disappeared" from common discourse in the field of near-death studies.

Even worse, the NDE research community and skeptics alike have preferred to focus on only a handful of favorite cases, ending up—in our view—flogging and reflogging a few long-dead horses, thereby unequivocally proving, we suppose, that at least *some* creatures can survive physical death, repeatedly.

By far, the most popular cases to argue about have been those of Pam Reynolds (Case 3.29 in the book) and the Dentures Man (Case 3.7), with that of Maria's Tennis Shoe (Case 2.3) "running" a distant third. The result has been that some researchers cite one or two such cases to demonstrate the possibility that the mind can exist independent of the brain, while skeptics cite these same cases with different interpretations to demonstrate the exact opposite.

The arguments on both sides then turn on the very narrow specifics of just these few cases: Could Pam Reynolds have physically heard the conversation she accurately reported, even though she was deeply anesthetized at the time? Could the Dentures Man have constructed a mental model of the crash cart where the nurse put his dentures, even though he was in a coma when the nurse placed them there? Could Maria, prior to her cardiac arrest, have overheard nurses talking about a tennis shoe outside on a window ledge, even though her English was limited and no one reported such a conversation having occurred?

We share the hope with the authors that this collection of the strongest, verified paranormal cases, gathered together in one place for the first time, will change the discourse in this field from the specifics of a few isolated cases to the phenomenon of NDEs *viewed as a whole*.

A Compendium of Paranormal Cases From Near-Death Experiences

In May 2012, we received an e-mail from Titus Rivas that he, Anny Dirven, and Rudolf Smit were compiling cases of NDEs with independently verified veridical (accurate) aspects. From a number of sources, including more than 100 case descriptions NDE researcher Jan Holden had compiled for her chapter on veridical perception in NDEs in the 2009 *Handbook of Near-Death Experiences*, they had thus far collected 50 such cases. Did we know of any recent or obscure cases of this type? We responded with several suggestions for additional cases, a few of which were new to them. We were later delighted when their book in Dutch with 78 cases appeared in October 2013.

We felt that an English-language version of their book would be very important to enable a broader dissemination of this collection among researchers, and Robert assisted the authors to arrange for a publisher. When a mainstream publisher was not forthcoming, Robert persuaded the nonprofit International Association for Near-Death Studies (IANDS), where he serves on the board of directors, to undertake fund-raising and publishing the English edition.

For IANDS, as the foremost supporter of NDE research and disseminator of information about NDEs, this was a natural step to take, although its first step in the field of publishing. IANDS provided about 20% of the funding for this project, and the rest has come from many, many donors—members of IANDS, near-death experiencers, researchers, and the general public—all of whom see the real value of this book for this field.

Indeed, the book is a compendium of the strongest, verified paranormal cases, conveniently classified and cataloged together, with the relevant references for further investigation. With the collection of similar cases together, researchers can readily focus on the common elements of related cases.

Explaining All Aspects of All Near-Death Experiences

NDEs share a number of striking characteristics—namely, hyperreal perceptions, a locus of perception outside the physical body, veridical perceptions of the material and transmaterial realms, indelible memory formation of the experience, and the experience evidently at times occurring when there is no brain function. Theorists have offered two opposing hypotheses to explain these characteristics: (1) electrical activity in the person's brain produces these effects in NDEs, or (2) the person's mind or consciousness has separated in some way from the body, and these effects result.

One effort to shed light on these hypotheses was the 3-year, \$5 million "Immortality Project" led by John M. Fischer, distinguished professor of philosophy at the University of California, Riverside (Cholbi, 2018). The project began in 2012 and funded scientific, philosophical, and theological studies of the possibility of the afterlife.

In a 2014 paper critiquing Pim van Lommel's (2013) theory of nonlocal consciousness, Benjamin Mitchell-Yellin and Fischer conceded that any *complete* explanation of NDEs must account for *all* aspects of *all* NDEs. This principle means that all the elements and all the details of each different NDE need to be accounted for and consistent with the explanation.

Considering the variety of conditions that NDEs occur in—from the NDEr being completely healthy (a near-death-like experience) to being in cardiac-arrest death (Charland-Verville et al., 2014)—this principle appears to present a daunting task for the first explanatory hypothesis that the brain's electrical activity produces consciousness (Mays & Mays, 2015). Such an explanation would need to account for *all* the paranormal phenomena that are documented in this book.

Two-thirds of the cases in this book (Chapters 1–3) describe instances of accurate, verified perceptions in which the NDEr should not have been able to perceive the object or event through ordinary physical senses. In these cases, one of several physical conditions existed: The person’s vision was blocked, the object was out of the physical line of sight or at a distance, or the person was unconscious or clinically dead. These cases present a serious challenge to the brain-production hypothesis.

As incredible as it may seem, the most parsimonious explanation, in our view, is that the NDE is what it appears subjectively to the NDEr to be—namely, that the person’s mind or seat of consciousness in fact separates from the physical body in an NDE and reunites with it when the person is revived. This explanation can account for all the paranormal characteristics of NDEs and all the paranormal cases described in this book.

Are Near-Death Experiences Objectively Real?

The power of this collection of paranormal cases is seen in the ability to address questions that could not be approached adequately with only one or two cases. With several similar cases, the particular paranormal aspect can be generalized, and the argument can be made that the paranormal aspect is *real* in some meaningful sense.

Long before this book was published, we had sought to answer the question: Are there *objective* validations that NDEs are real, that a nonmaterial aspect of the person actually separates from the physical body? If, in the NDEr’s *subjective* experience, the mind or locus of consciousness separates from the body while still perceiving the material realm, there should be some *objective* evidence whereby another person reports an objective effect that confirms the separate “mind-entity.”

Indeed, such paranormal cases exist, and we had, in our studies, assembled several cases in which objective evidence was suggested. But the cases we found were relatively weak, and we were unsure whether other important instances of this sort had been lost in the ever-increasing NDE literature.

Indeed, it turns out that there was an entire class of cases of which we were completely unaware. When we received the outline of this book’s contents, this new type of case—which we call “apparitional NDEs”—just popped out.

In the end, we found *two* types of cases in this book that seem to us to be most evidential in suggesting that the NDEr’s sense of separation is objectively

real. The first type of case we call a “shared NDE”; one case of this type is included in this book (Case 3.32).

In a shared NDE, a healthy person observes the NDEr’s transition out of body and observes other aspects of the event that match the NDEr’s subjective experience. Shared NDEs are very similar to *shared-death experiences* (SDEs), as described in Raymond Moody’s 2010 book, *Glimpses of Eternity*. In an SDE, a person is dying in the presence of one or several others. These loved ones or friends of the dying person themselves experience elements very similar to an NDE—there is unusual light and music. They may observe a mist or shape leaving the person’s body. They are sometimes drawn out of their own bodies and are with the dying person, out of body. They may observe the life review of the dying person. A tunnel may open, and deceased relatives may greet the dying person and escort the person into the tunnel.

In an SDE, the person dies. A *shared NDE* is a similar phenomenon except that the dying person does not die but returns to the physical body and has experienced an NDE.

In Case 3.32, Jan Price was having a heart attack at home. The paramedics were called. She suffered a cardiac arrest on the gurney, and during the paramedics’ resuscitation procedure, her husband, John, who was perfectly healthy, observed Jan’s solid form leave her physical body and rise up, dressed in a flowing, green gown. Then their recently deceased, beloved dog, Maggi, appeared briefly to John. Jan experienced leaving her body, rising above it, and then her dog appearing. Jan had other veridical perceptions of her resuscitation that were verified by the paramedics.

In this case, the elements of Jan’s and John’s observations—Jan leaving her physical body and rising up and their deceased dog appearing—matched exactly. So, in a shared NDE, another person objectively observes the same things that the NDEr experienced and, in particular, observes the NDEr as a localized, nonmaterial entity that is separated from the physical body.

The second type of case we are calling “apparitional NDEs,” of which there are several cases in Chapter 7, both from previous centuries and from contemporary times. The NDEr, while out of body, visits and communicates with a living person, and both accounts are subsequently verified to be consistent with one another.

One of these cases is Olga Gearhardt’s (Case 7.3). In 1989, Olga underwent heart transplant surgery. All of her family came to the hospital to await the outcome, except her son-in-law who could not be at the hospital. The heart transplant was successful, but at 2:15 a.m., her new heart stopped beating, and

it took 3 hours to resuscitate her heart and then longer still for her to recover consciousness. The son-in-law, who was sleeping at home, awoke at exactly 2:15 a.m., and Olga was standing at his bedside. Thinking that the surgery had not taken place, he asked her how she was. She replied, "I am fine. I'm going to be all right. There's nothing for any of you to worry about." Then she disappeared. The son-in-law wrote down the time and exactly what was said, and he went back to sleep.

When Olga regained consciousness, her first words were, "Did you get the message?" Olga later reported that she had left her body and had tried but was unable to communicate with the family members who were all asleep in the hospital waiting room, so she went to the son-in-law, with whom she succeeded in communicating. Melvin Morse and Paul Perry thoroughly verified these details, including the note the son-in-law had scribbled.

Another "apparitional NDE" case is from physician Laurin Bellg (Case 7.5). In 2011, Dr. Bellg was treating a woman in the hospital intensive care unit who was dying of cancer. The woman refused to have her son visit her in the hospital. The son had been estranged from the family for 25 years because of certain financial deals he had made that had harmed the family. The mother continued to feel a lot of animosity toward her son.

So the son is sitting in a bar one afternoon. His mother is dying, he is deep in remorse and regret, and he is crying. He sees his mother coming into the bar. He is elated and gets up to greet her, but the bar is crowded, and his vision is blocked for a moment, and then she is no longer there. The mother wakes up that same afternoon and tells her daughter, "I had the strangest dream. I saw my son in a bar. He got up and started to come to me. I got scared and woke up." Later that evening, the daughter spoke with her brother, who told her about seeing their mother earlier come into the bar and then disappear. The daughter related both stories to Bellg, who then confirmed the details with both the mother and the son. The details of both stories matched.

In all three of these cases, a healthy person objectively perceives the NDEr as a nonmaterial entity existing independent of the physical body. In these cases, the NDE is not just an event perceived subjectively by the experiencer but is also an observation perceived objectively by a healthy person, and the two perceptions match exactly.

The apparitional NDE cases are particularly compelling because the NDEr has a strong desire to visit another person, the NDEr appears to the person as a physical presence, and the NDEr may communicate something. The interaction is corroborated in all details by both parties. These cases strongly suggest that

the mind or spirit of the NDEr has an *objective* existence, especially (a) when the two accounts are corroborated as happening at the same time, (b) when all the observed details of the interaction match, and (c) when information is communicated or the NDEr's presence is made known.

The Power of Numbers

In compiling and organizing these veridical paranormal cases, the authors of this book have made possible analyses such as those described in the preceding section of this foreword. The juxtaposition of similar cases permits a detailed analysis that is often necessary to find the common elements among them and to make valid generalizations.

We believe that because of the paranormal nature of the cases in this book, a healthy skepticism is essential for the reader considering them. For many people, these cases will not fit into their existing conceptual framework or paradigm, whether that is a materialist viewpoint, a fundamental religious viewpoint, or even a "spiritual" viewpoint. These cases will stretch even the most flexible thinking. So, in reading these pages, it is important to keep an open mind, exercise intellectual honesty, and let the phenomenon speak for itself.

The opposite—a closed-minded pseudoskepticism—is also a possible response to these cases. In the extreme, pseudoskeptics seek to fit the phenomenon into their existing paradigm by cherry-picking certain facts, dismissing others, and ignoring the rest. Indeed, when one's mind is made up, any alternate explanation must be incorrect, and the facts do not need to be considered. The last chapter of this book contains a number of examples of such responses.

The power of a large number of cases of one type, assembled together, makes it exponentially more difficult for pseudoskeptics to dismiss this evidence as mere anecdotes, to write them off as fraud or confabulation, or to make *ad hoc* arguments that are specific to only one or a few cases (Mays & Mays, 2017a). At the same time, the power of a large number of cases with similar characteristics makes the validity of a hypothesis that explains all aspects of all the cases exponentially stronger.

It is our hope that this book will now foster this higher level of analysis and a higher level of discourse in the field of near-death studies.

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