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## "IN THE SHADOW OF DEATH"

### How is it that perfectly healthy people sense months ahead that their lives are about to end?

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From the September 1988 issue of "**Fate Magazine.**"

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I WAS RAISED in a police station. That's because my father was a police officer and since we lived outside town on an acreage, Dad would often ferry me back and forth during coffee breaks or whenever he could sign off. I frequently waited around in the station house when he was too busy for chauffeuring, which afforded my insatiable curiosity an "open door" to the bizarre and the ridiculous.

If I happened to be in his patrol car when an emergency arose, I would be whisked along to the scene with strict instructions for my behavior and the need for secrecy. This allowed me to witness the extremes of life at an early age. During this time, my father took it upon himself to train me the art of observation, drilling me on being alert for minute details and nonverbal cues. What I didn't observe personally, I read about by scanning daily logs, arrest reports and police files. Later it was deemed illegal in Twin Falls, Idaho, for passengers such as me to accompany on-duty police officers or to have free access to police information, but during my youth no such ordinance existed.

Among what caught my attention then was the frequency of cases involving "pre-knowledge," by which I mean incidents where victims claimed to somehow know or sense in advance what was about to happen before it did. This kind of response was especially common with assaults, rapes and muggings. When questioned afterwards, these people would say things like, "I had a feeling not to walk up those stairs alone but there seemed no reason not to so I did," or "I knew if I opened that door something bad would happen but I told myself it was just my imagination," or "I felt creepy all over and real scared because I knew good and well what was going to happen next."

Comments like these puzzled me as a youngster, for I couldn't understand why people who knew

about danger in advance would disregard that knowledge and allow themselves to be hurt. It seemed idiotic to me that people who knew better pretended that they didn't. These "victims" usually groaned a lot afterwards, rambling on about how they should have listened to that inner voice or paid attention to that dream or hunch. Then they would put an about-face and promptly conclude that to acknowledge any such "mental imageinnings" was beneath the maturity of a grown adult, that no one in his right mind pays attention to premonitions anyway. And so the dialogue between police officer and victim would continue, with me shaking my head in disbelief wondering if there was some way I could avoid adulthood when I grew up.

Strange as it may seem, this pre-knowledge or advance sensing was also true for those who lost their lives, either by accident or by violent assault. Conversations with survivors and next of kin would reveal intriguing stories about how the deceased must have known what was coming because of the way he behaved before the tragedy occurred. It seems that those who died unexpectedly, regardless of how, changed behavior which was normal for them about three to six months before their deaths.

This change would center on a need to wrap up business and personal affairs, seriously and deliberately, as if there existed some unspoken reason for expediency. Insurance policies took on importance, as did the need to visit - loved ones and to be more intimate or philosophical than usual. One last "fling" was often enjoyed before the individual would relax and be at peace. Just before the death event, the victim would seem to "glow" as if something important were about to happen something the individual had prepared for.

Sometimes this preknowledge would be more than a series of behavior changes, but also verbal and upfront. One such example which I researched is the case of a woman in her late 20's who was killed in an early-morning automobile pileup on the highway outside Jackpot, Nev. During the investigation that followed, relatives all told the same story that the woman knew she was going to die, even how and when. Starting six months before, she had recurring dream which accurately depicted her later demise. Because of the dream, she had been getting her life in order and telling others what would happen. No one believed her. After the accident, her loved ones and friends were grief stricken all the more by their refusal to give the woman the benefit of doubt while she was yet alive.

Another accident involved a high school senior who calmly told her parents she would die in a violent accident the day before graduation. This news was nearly a year in advance and the announcement sent her parents into a near-frenzy of worry until they convinced themselves their daughter must be mentally unbalanced. She was sent to several psychologists for evaluation but each time released with the admonition, "Make certain she takes this drug as it will relax her." There was no dream, no reason for the daughter to make such a statement. "I just know," she'd say, as she readied herself to die.

True enough the day before graduation, she and a girl friend were sitting in a car waiting at an intersection for the light to change when another car suddenly careened out of control and slammed headlong into theirs, killing both girls instantly, yet injuring no one else. Investigators discovered a note written by the daughter revealing that she knew her best friend would be killed at the same time in the same accident as she would. They also discovered that the other girl had displayed the kind of behavior changes which were indicative of someone who knew death was coming even though she had said nothing to anyone about any such awareness.

A year later both mothers each had a dream in which their deceased daughters returned for a visit to explain the why of what had happened. This visitation was so vivid neither mother could keep it

to herself. One of them confided in a local astrologer. Ironically the other mother had shared her story with the same astrologer. Becoming excited about the two dreams, the astrologer contacted the psychologist of the first mother, the one most burdened with grief, for advice on how to handle the situation.

Suffice it to say the psychologist then arranged a meeting where all four parents and he could hear each mother describe her dream. Because of this gathering, an incredible healing occurred and much guilt and grief were released. Neither set of parents knew each other before the meeting; yet each mother experienced her daughter's visitation on the same night at about the same time with the same explanation from the daughters. Both girls had agreed before birth to participate in the violent death event for the purpose of one's helping the other work through a lingering fear of dying in that manner. This death scenario was the only reason each girl gave for having incarnated when she did.

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THROUGHOUT the 20 years that I was married to a farmer, who later became an aerial crop duster, there were many occasions when we found ourselves privy to or involved in accidents and death events.

A neighbor who lived just up the road from where we fanned suffocated when a stack of chopped hay fell on him, while another met his death beneath an overturned tractor. Both widows related similar stories about how different their husbands had been acting for several months prior to dying. Each man had quite suddenly become unusually serious and determined to finish everything possible, from paying off debts and securing finances to frequently double-checking with his wife making certain she understood what to do should he not be present. It was spooky, each wife remarked, even eerie. Although neither man had ever discussed the prospect of death, both had displayed the behavior of a person who must have sensed or known what was coming. In each case this behavior change was evident four months in advance.

Both of these men died within a short time of each other, their deaths deeply affecting my husband and me. Even though each incident was different, to us it was as if we were held witness to the same story told in the same manner by the same people. Repetitive similarities were that striking.

This inspired us to begin research project whereby we would seek out the bereaved of accident victims to determine just how common this advanced "knowing" was. No matter how blank our expressions or how open our questions were, we encountered the same basic pattern. Even children, from the age of four on, exhibited the same or similar cues as adults.

One such case involved a 10-year-old boy who was struck dead by a freakish bolt of lightning while he was playing on a street in the town of Filer with friends. No one else was hurt. There was no storm present.

I knew the boy's mother and we spoke at length about her son's death. She was oddly prepared for the tragedy. Although her son, the oldest of three children, had always been mature for his age, two months before the accident he became strangely deliberate and insistent in his mannerisms, wanting to protect his parents and siblings, being unusually affectionate, understanding and helpful. He seemed obsessed with finishing off jobs yet undone and held in-depth conversations about the meaning of life. Just before he was killed, his behavior reversed to a more relaxed yet expectant mood, as if he were waiting for something important to happen. Classmates noticed the same changes, as did the boy's teacher and grandparents.

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SINCE MY husband was an ag pilot, many of our friends were pilots and shared the same dangers of flying. In Idaho, because bees are protected by law, pilots spraying potent chemicals cannot take off until after bees retire for the night and must finish with their work before bees are active again in the morning. Most crop work, then, is done between the hours of 6:00 P.M. and 6:00 A.M. Planes are equipped with powerful lights for illuminating broad expanses, and ground crews use bright flashlights to signal pilots as they step off each field row about to be sprayed.

But night flying is made truly complicated by the fact that throughout southern Idaho and eastern Oregon most farm fields are bordered by rural utility lines plus single rows of trees, usually tall poplars which comprise windbreaks. Silos and farm buildings also represent obstacles, making even daylight flying a hazard. A skilled pilot will fly several feet off the ground for the field's length, then lift the plane's nose in time to avoid collision with whatever objects or lines might border the field, circle around and descend sharply for another run. Large fields are navigable but smaller ones, especially if lined on all four sides, are virtually impossible to fly. My husband was one of the few ag pilots who specialized in doing fields other pilots would avoid.

Many of our friends were not only agricultural pilots but also corporate, highway construction and flight instructors, and a number of them died in fiery crashes. One such crash took the lives of three of our friends when the Lear jet they were flying nose-dived into the mesa outside Boise. No one could figure out how the crash occurred since the air was calm and vision unrestricted, so it was later chalked up to "pilot error."

Another crash involved a mid-air collision at midnight over a farmhouse near Adrian, Ore. Both pilots plus the farmer's wife in the house below were killed. The woman was trapped inside when burning wreckage fell from the planes and set the house ablaze. According to surviving kin, each one of these six people displayed pre- knowledge or the advance behavior changes already noted, although nothing verbal was ever said.

After a decade of nosing around, we finally concluded our investigative quest having satisfied ourselves that death is no accident no matter how it comes, when it occurs or to whom . We were unable, however, to isolate any recognizable pattern for the interworkings of nonfatal accidents and what constitutes free will versus fate.

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YEARS LATER I researched reincarnation, metaphysics, mysticism, altered states of consciousness and the so-called paranormal, becoming in the process a professional hypnotist specializing in past-life regressions. While engaged in private practice for six years, I was able to explore all manner of alternate realities, thought forms, fantasy, psychological dramas, and what appeared to be actual lives lived before birth in the present one. Each regression was detailed, precise and meaningful to the experiencer, even though I questioned the validity of many of them. Eventually these sessions became so dynamic and challenging that I discarded convention in favor of the unexpected. This taught me never to assume or deny anything and to remain open and receptive at all times. Skepticism is healthy but in excess can block discovery.

It was during this phase of my work that I surprisingly encountered what I came to call the human soul. My client would be under when suddenly a force would take over. There was no mistaking it with any purported past life, present life or aspect of the client's personality. There would be a certain voice change (always the same with each client) and the room temperature would rise

when it emerged. Others present would note a special aura or glow radiating from the client as the voice spoke.

The soul that came forth, no matter from whom, would be detached, loving, objectively knowledgeable, a limitless and timeless source of information. It would speak calmly, confidently and gently. Advice and comments would be offered, for either the prostrate client, me or anyone else who might be in need. Sometimes discourses would ensue on life and its meaning, effective discourses which seemed awesome and sacred. This force, always dependable and unassuming, was nameless, regardless of client, and had no identity of its own. It was never born and did not die. Human deaths, it would say, are planned before birth, and nothing is accidental. Free will is defined as our ability to manipulate the consequence of movements in the earthplane and responses to that activity. Not every session produced such an emergence but those that did were special to say the least.

The day came, however, when I closed my practice. Prospective clients seemed more interested in finding something to blame their troubles on than in truly searching for deeper meaning in their lives. The possibility of contacting their own souls did not interest them. I respectfully referred them to other hypnotists and shut my door to the experience.

For me it was time to pursue other avenues of thought and begin my own spiritual quest. That was 1975. Two years later I physically died, not once but three times, and experienced a different near-death episode with each event.

The first death occurred January 2, 1977, and was caused by a miscarriage followed by severe hemorrhaging. The second, two days later, was from a major thrombosis in the right thigh vein which dislodged followed by extreme phlebitis. Then, on March 29, I committed emotional suicide; I willed my body dead and it was too exhausted to argue. My home at that time was in Boise. Physicians were not contacted until after the fact, so there is no proof I ever died. The physical condition of my body after each event suggests I must have died and a medical doctor confirmed that suspicion.

The term "near-death experience" was unknown to me when all this happened, nor had I heard of Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, Raymond Moody, Jr., or Kenneth Ring, the three pioneers who opened up and established the near-death phenomenon as a real incident which deserved professional attention and serious research. Then, I only knew something unusual had happened, something I was not prepared for, and there were aftereffects. Life suddenly became curiously strange, and me with it. This was both a nightmare and a blessing, for coming back to life meant tackling the depths of fear and the heights of love simultaneously.

My case is unique not only because of what happened to me but because of what I did about it. After moving to Washington, D.C., I set about on my own quest to seek others as myself, for I had a lot of questions to ask. I wanted to know what others went through and were still facing and how they managed to cope.

This quest took me through 10 states where I spoke with several thousand people and contacted in the process over 200 other near-death survivors. Sometimes I shared my own story to find them; sometimes I gave classes and workshops about what death had taught me; sometimes I simply "bumped" into them as part of the daily routine. After another move and a job change, my employment shifted to one of constant travel where I met still more near-death survivors.

I learned a lot in doing this. Mostly I learned how normal I was for what I had been through.

Nothing more would have ever come from this quest had it not been for Kenneth Ring who, after tracing me through a small publication I had written, asked that I write an ongoing series of articles focusing on the survivor's viewpoint for Vital Signs magazine, then published by the International Association for Near-Death Studies in Storrs, Conn. After I went on to publicly disclose a brief rendition of what I believed were the patterns of aftereffects, he encouraged me to write a book. This venture would require much reJh, but the idea that others might benefit from what had helped me spurred me on. Coming Back to Life was published five years later in April 1988 (Dodd, Mead & Company).

Although the book tackles a broad gamut of subjects, it also devotes a section to the coming of full death where I put together a lifetime of observations to produce what I feel is the pattern of advance behavior cues, usually nonverbal and subconscious, that the one about to die "knows" what will soon happen.

The advance behavior pattern I have observed in most people who die unexpectedly is:

About three months to three weeks in advance of the death event, the individual involved begins to change his normal behavior in such a manner as to become more serious, determined, and oftentimes deliberate in a need to complete unfinished projects or concerns.

Subtle at first, these behavior changes also center on reassessing affairs and life goals, wrapping thing up and putting business in order.

Simultaneously, there can be; desire for deeper, more philosophical discussions. Religion and/or spiritual -ity can become more important, as well as the desire to forgive and forget

This is usually followed by a needs to see everyone who means anything special. If visits are not possible, the individual will often write lengthy letters or call on the phone.

As time draws near, individuals usually become quite precise about straightening out affairs and/or training or instructing a friend or relative to take over should any thing happen. This instruction can involve details such as finances, insurance policies, inheritance and the completion of goals or projects. Financial matters and the management of personal and private affairs become quite important.

There is a need, almost a compulsion, to reveal secret feelings and deeper thoughts, to say what has not been said, especially to loved ones. There is also a desire for one last fling or a visit to special places to do what is most enjoyed.

The drive to settle affairs and wind up life's details can become so obsessive as to appear strange or weird to others. Many times individuals want to talk over the possibility of "What if I die? ' as if they had a dream or premonition. On occasion, such people may appear morbid or unusually serious.

About 24 to 36 hours before the death event, the individual involved relaxes and is at peace. Because of unusual alertness, confidence, and even a sense of joy, he may appear euphoric and exude a peculiar strength and positive demeanor, as if something important was about to happen and all prior preparations were finished.

Some near-death survivors have an inkling that something is about to happen but, for most, there is no hint at all. Even for those who did sense something, the near-death experience still comes as an unexpected surprise.

A typical example is George A.R., a near-death survivor from Hamilton Square, N.J., who detailed his experience to show how he came to believe that he could not possibly have died because of the strange way events arranged themselves before his near- death episode happened.

The day before George had an opportunity to buy a burial plot but refused. Because of unexpected car trouble, his wife made a quick trip home and found George perplexed by a seemingly simple pain. The pain was not unusual, but for some reason which George couldn't explain, he insisted upon being taken straight to the hospital, a reaction quite out of character for him. He had his heart attack in the Cardiac Care Unit with a doctor at his side, and while he was out, he heard his wife telepathically calling him through the voice of another and he followed her voice back. Afterwards he clearly saw his brother physically standing at the foot of his bed, when his brother was not in the room at all, verifying for George the reality and importance of the whole episode.

Because near death is a surprise and full death is usually either expected, sensed or somehow known, I have come to realize that the phenomenon of near death is not quite as advertised. Rather it has all the trappings of something else. An experience parallel to death but separate from it, an experience which affords the individual involved a chance to "begin again."

Near death is not full death. I have found the two related but not the same. It wasn't until I wrote *Coming Back to Life* that I came to realize how much my life has evolved around the death experience. I have been able to view this subject from differing angles, enabling me to regard birth as a time of entry and death as a time of exiting whatever dimension we happen to be inhabiting at any given time. I have also come to realize there are more dimensions and aspects to what is termed "reality" than any person, book, philosophy or religion can define.

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