

# Afterglow

The dead reach back to lift the spirits of the living

By ELIZABETH RHODES  
of the Seattle Times

A widow reported awakening nightly to the vision of her dead husband sitting on the side of their bed. She even saw his indentation on the bedspread.

A little girl loved rainbows. After she died, her mother saw rainbows repeatedly. She was convinced it was her dead child communicating to comfort her.

A father heard his missing daughter's voice say, "I'm so cold." Six days later he learned she'd drowned in an icy river at about the time he heard her voice.

Reality? Or are we talking Twilight Zone?

Actually, we're talking extraordinary experiences of the bereaved — although to hear Bonnie Lindstrom tell it, communicating with the dead is so common "we don't make note of it anymore; it's just part of every day." Lindstrom is director of three hospices for the dying in Tucson, Ariz.

"It's really difficult to say, but basically it's a paranormal experience where someone feels they may have communicated in some way with the person who has died. The majority are really spiritual experiences."

They are also firsthand. Psychics, mediums and seances don't play a part in what almost always are reported as spontaneous, and often startling, occurrences.

## A common experience

Although few people talk openly about such communication for fear of appearing nutty, Lindstrom estimates that 60 percent to 70 percent of the bereaved she has seen experience it.

Both Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) and Compassionate Friends, a national support group for bereaved parents, have recorded numerous examples among their own members.

In Florida, researchers Bill Guggenheim and his former wife, Judy Guggenheim, have amassed more than 2,000 firsthand accounts for a series of books. A former stockbroker and a member of the family that founded New York's Guggenheim Museum, Guggenheim has used his own money to pay for 15 years' work into death experiences.

Examples aren't hard to come by, either. Among them:

A terminally ill woman suddenly felt her deceased



# Messages from beyond offer hope

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husband's hand in hers. "I know it was his; I remember the shape of it," she says, taking the experience as a sign that he's there to help her through her own journey.

A young girl grieving because she was not able to say goodbye to a beloved grandmother before she died was visited soon after by the dead woman. Dressed all in white, the grandmother reassured her grandchild that she loved her, and they were able to say goodbye.

"What's important," says Hospice director Lindstrom, "is that these are normal experiences to a loss, and it doesn't mean people are crazy."

Most such experiences are interpreted by the bereaved as positive. Commonly they impart "love, forgiveness, hope, encouragement, reassurance that their loved one is in a good place and they have permission to get on with their lives," Lindstrom says.

"For people who are grieving, it often is a turnaround. They may be depressed, and then they have an experience like this and it changes things overnight."

For example, when MADD invited members to share their own experiences, a San Diego woman confided that two days after her 18-year-old daughter was killed by a drunken driver, the mother was blinded by a brilliant ray of sunshine. Suddenly she heard her daughter say, "Mom, this is the Light I see. Only I can see through it. I am with the Lord. I am OK. I love you."

The mother, who had no doubt this was communication beyond the grave, felt not fear but an instant sense of peace.

In his research, Bill Guggenheim has found these experiences fall into several categories. Most common is sensing the deceased person's presence. Others are hearing their voice internally, or occasionally even over the telephone; suddenly detecting a scent, such as that of a person's hair; or feeling their touch.

Among the most dramatic are the visual experiences where the deceased is fully visible; in other cases, only the head and shoulders appear.

"Almost always the person who came back appears entirely healed and whole, regardless of the form of death. The elderly often appear younger and much more radiant than when they died."

views with people who have experienced these communications have led him to believe they happen "because those who have died and still love us want us to know they're OK, and that we don't need to worry about them, or grieve for them unduly. They often say things like, 'I'll always be there for you,' 'I'll see you again,' and most of all, 'I love you.'"

Sometimes they occur during dreams, or just before or after sleep, although a large number happen when the person is fully conscious. "Many people have just one. But some have a series with one person, and some people have experiences with different people over their lifetime."

Guggenheim says these experiences can happen to anyone, although they occur more often "to those people who are open with their intuitive senses. Children under 18 have them frequently when someone close to them has died. We've even had them in kids younger than verbal, who do something like wave and say, 'Hi, Grandpa.'"

Both Guggenheim and Lindstrom are aware there are many skeptics — people variously believe these experiences are dreams, hallucinations or the work of the devil — and that there's no scientific proof to convince otherwise.

Claims of paranormal occurrences don't impress James Randi. Better known as "The Amazing Randi," the 62-year-old Plantation, Fla., resident writes books and tours the lecture circuit in an effort to debunk the claims of spiritualists and mentalists.

"Really, I just find all this rather silly," Randi was quoted in the Aug. 16 Tampa Bay Times. "This sort of

thing is irrational and illogical. It's been tested endlessly for centuries by scientists and by me for decades, and we've never found any evidence."

Randi himself is a showman, and he carries a signed check for \$10,000 that he'll give to anyone who can display powers he cannot duplicate.

Randi's offer is echoed by the Tampa Bay Skeptics, founded almost 10 years ago by St. Petersburg physician Gary Posner. The local "watchdog" organization of about 100 unbelievers collectively offers a check for \$1,000 to anyone who can prove the case for the paranormal. So far, they haven't found a bread winner.

## Anecdotal proof

"I think with this subject you have to have a healthy skepticism," says hospice director Lindstrom. "You have to try it on and think about it and see what fits for you and what doesn't."

Still, Guggenheim believes that anecdotal proof exists. How else to explain the many firsthand stories he's heard of people learning that a loved one has died from the victim?

"We have cases of people dying in car accidents coming to the living person to tell them first."

What should those who have them do with these experiences?

"Just be grateful for them," says Lindstrom. "Look to see if there's a message, and try to use it in their lives."

Bill Guggenheim believes there usually is a message. "The underlying message behind everything is that love is eternal."

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