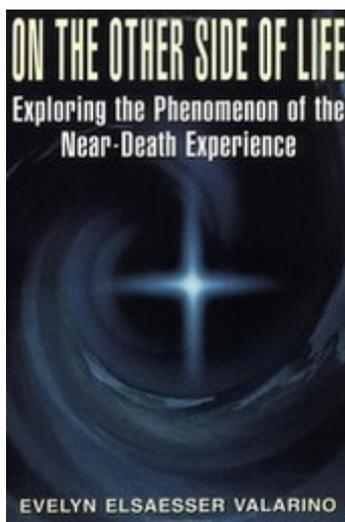


## My discovery of Near-Death Experiences (NDEs)

Experiences related to death – Near-Death Experiences (NDEs), After-Death Communications (ADCs) and End-of-Life Experiences (ELE), in particular deathbed visions, – provide food for thought for a lifetime and beyond. At least, this is true for me. The adventure began more than thirty years ago with my discovery of NDEs.

My first encounter with NDEs took place in the eighties and it turned out to be decisive, both for my convictions and for my activities. Like millions of other readers throughout the world, I discovered NDEs thanks to Raymond Moody's book *Life after Life* (1979). Immediately, I was aware that these NDE testimonies answered most of my existentialist questions, but raised as many new ones. Those accounts which describe the separation of consciousness from the physical body, the entry into a light of unconditional love and absolute knowledge, the encounter with guides and deceased loved ones, the life review, and the vision of a world strangely alike ours yet sublimated, inclined me to think that taking them at face value would not do justice to this fascinating phenomenon. Indeed, the following years have taught me that the deeper you get into the study of NDEs, the more they unveil their complexity.

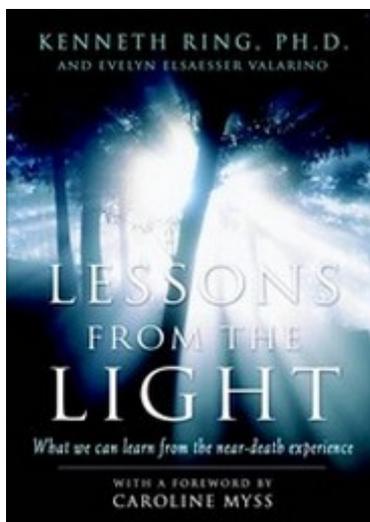
In the eighties, there were books of testimonies and already some scientific works on the subject, but I lacked a cross-disciplinary approach to deepen my reflection: what did a psychologist, a quantum physicist, a philosopher or a biologist think of NDEs? Since I didn't find such a book, I decided to write the book I wanted to read. *On the Other Side of Life* (Insight Books Plenum Press/Perseus, 1997), first published in German translation in 1996 and subsequently published in six languages, consists of interviews with professors from different disciplines, preceded by a detailed description of the phenomenology of NDEs and its consequences.



## ***My encounters***



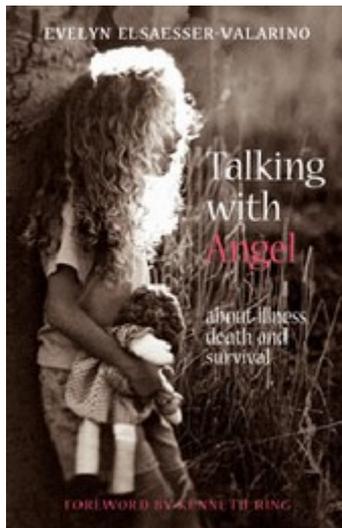
My encounter with Kenneth Ring - professor *emeritus* of psychology and leading expert on NDEs – in 1995 was decisive in many ways. He welcomed me generously in his home close to the University of Connecticut, USA, where he taught, and we taped the longest interview of his long academic career, as he emphasized with the humor that characterizes him. Indeed, an entire day of interviewing allowed us to make a comprehensive overview of his research activities and to crystallize his personal conclusions and inmost convictions. This interview was published in *On the Other Side of Life*. During this sunny summer day, a genuine friendship was born which resisted time and distance, as well as an advantageous collaboration which culminated in the joint writing of *Lessons from the Light* (2000, Reprint 2006 Moment Point Press) published in ten languages.



### **« Talking with Angel about Illness, Death and Survival »**

I wrote a novel, or more simply a story, entitled *Talking with Angel about Illness, Death and Survival* with the aim and the desire to make the current knowledge of experiences related to death easily accessible and profitable to those who are facing a major life crisis. Published first in French in 2009 (Les Presses du Midi) *Talking with Angel about Illness, Death and Survival* was published in ten languages.

The new perspectives NDEs open, the softer conception of death they suggest, the hope they locate beyond known limits, should be at the disposition – if they so wish – of the ill and the terminally ill, the bereaved and, more generally, of everybody who is sensitive to the finitude of the human condition.



***Excerpt from the preface written by Kenneth Ring:***

“On the surface, *Talking with Angel* is the story of a young girl, told in the first person, who has contracted a serious disease. We, the readers, are in the mind of the narrator, the young girl, and from the outset, we are gripped by the drama of her illness. We enter her mind stream, her thoughts and feelings, as her illness develops. It is as if we become her diary – she is writing, she is confiding her innermost thoughts, to us. She draws us into her illness and its vicissitudes, and thus it is that we find ourselves sharing her journey and become intimately connected with her – and with the people in her life. Ultimately, her anguish becomes our own – but so, too, are the things she learns during the course of her struggle to understand and come to terms with what has happened to her. And these insights, the knowledge that comes to her, we come to see are the most important thing. They are really what the book is about and what the book is designed to teach us.

At the beginning of the story, she is seemingly quite ordinary, but as her illness progresses, so does she – in her knowledge, in the depth of her character, and, ultimately, in the profound degree of spiritual wisdom she attains as she confronts the possibility of “the end of everything”. In short, this young girl goes through an accelerated course of personal and spiritual maturity so that by the time the book closes, she reminds of someone like Anne Frank and we realize that we have been privileged to read another young girl’s diary we will not soon forget.

This is essentially a book of wisdom teachings – specifically, teachings about death and the possibility that something profound transcends death and can cast its light back on the living so as to transform them. And, just as with Plato’s dialogues, so *Talking with Angel* is at bottom a mind-stretching philosophical undertaking dealing with one of the great perennial issues but from a completely new contemporary perspective.

Much of Evelyn Elsaesser-Valarino’s life for over the past two decades has dealt with the phenomenon of the near-death experience, on which subject she is already recognized as an international authority. Her previous books and her many lectures have indeed gained for her a reputation as one of Europe’s leading figures in this field. So it is not surprising that it is the perspective of the near-death experience (NDE, for short) that informs this book – and the life of the narrator (though in an unexpected way). But what Evelyn has done here is completely different from anything she has done before”.

### **My collaboration with INREES**

My encounter with Stéphane Allix, founder and president of INREES (French Research Institute on Extraordinary Experiences) was also important for my work in the field of experiences related to death. We started collaborating from the inception of INREES in 2007.

INREES publishes the quarterly magazine *Inexploré*, organizes major conferences, runs an internet information space on extraordinary experiences, publishes books, etc. By drawing on psychology, spirituality and science, INREES proposes to take a fresh look at the *extraordinary* and offers a framework to talk about the latest developments in the field of consciousness research.

### **« Clinical Handbook of Extraordinary Experiences »**

Near-death experiences (NDEs), after-death communications (ADCs), deathbed visions, out-of-body experiences, lucid dreams, shamanic experiences, psycho-spiritual experiences, possession, extrasensory perceptions (ESP)... are they misconceptions? Beliefs? Hallucinations? Reality? The *Clinical Handbook of Extraordinary Experiences*, edited by Stéphane Allix and Paul Bernstein under the auspices of INREES, tries to answer these questions. I have written the chapters on Near-death experiences (NDEs) [chapter 3], Nearing-Death Awareness [chapter 4], and After-death communications (ADCs) [chapter 5]. The handbook is aimed at health professionals, psychologists, psychotherapists, but also at the general public. (*Manuel clinique des expériences extraordinaires*, edited by Stéphane Allix and Paul Bernstein, InterEditions/INREES, 2009).



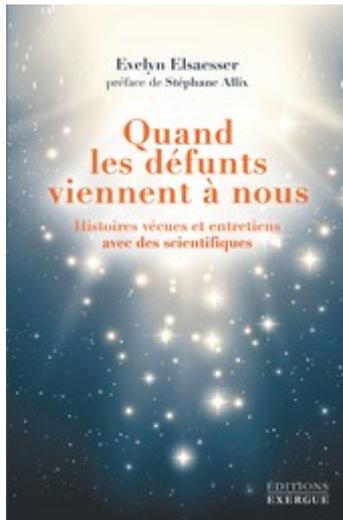
### **My work in the field of spontaneous After-Death Communications (ADCs)**

Over the last ten years, I have focused my work on spontaneous and direct After-Death Communications (ADCs). As a first step, I translated into French the book *Hello from Heaven* dealing with ADCs by the American authors Bill and Judy Guggenheim. This translation was published in 2011 under the title *Des nouvelles de l'au-delà* (Editions Exergue, 2011).

### **« Quand les défunts viennent à nous »**

The translation of *Hello from Heaven* into French consolidated my pre-existing interest in these spontaneous and direct contacts, apparently initiated by the deceased. What is the nature of ADCs? Who lives this type of experiences? Under what circumstances do they occur? What do the deceased “say”? What is the purpose of these communications? And how do people react? Are they surprised? Scared? Pleased? Stunned? Intrigued by the fact of living an event that seems completely inconceivable? And what is the impact of these experiences on the people who had them? On the process of mourning? And on their conception of the survival of consciousness after physical death?

All these questions intrigued me. I decided to study this phenomenon more in depth and to write a book. In 2017, I published *Quand les défunts viennent à nous: Histoires vécues et entretiens avec des scientifiques*, published in four languages.



**Excerpt from the preface written by Stéphane Allix:**

“These experiences of supposed contacts with the deceased are not anecdotal. They occur in tens of thousands around us. Those in mourning who have the feeling of establishing a contact or even a communication in different forms with their deceased loved ones are deeply moved and comforted, but also destabilized because this experience does not fit with the predominant conception of reality. *Quand les défunts viennent à nous* gives us keys to better understand these experiences and integrate them into the process of mourning - thanks to the many testimonies of ADCs, the informed opinions of the scientists interviewed and the reflections of the author.

Evelyn devotes a chapter to a particular type of ADCs - these visions at the time of death, or deathbed visions, in which people on the threshold of death perceive deceased family members or friends who came "to accompany them into the other world", instantly releasing them from fear of death. These visions are reported to nurses, doctors, and health professionals who distinguish them very clearly from any known hallucinatory phenomena.

The originality and great merit of this book is to put After-Death Communications (ADCs) in a wider context, that of other experiences related to death - including near-death experiences and communications of the deceased reported by mediums – and to compare their modes of expression and the messages conveyed.

Countless people have experienced this type of experiences and yet do not dare to talk about them, not even to persons close to them. This is undoubtedly the first benefit of this indispensable work: to bring these widespread and important experiences out of the shadow and out of denial. This is the incredible richness of Evelyn Elsaesser's synthetic work.

*Quand les défunts viennent à nous* is the fruit of a long-term undertaking and probably the most documented work existing to date. This book, which is both rigorous and very pleasant to read, makes it possible to recognize that life after death is a rational hypothesis”.

« **Contacts spontanés avec un défunt** »

Following the publication of *Quand les défunts viennent à nous*, I received hundreds of emails and letters from people who had had spontaneous contacts with a deceased family member or friend. It was clear from this correspondence that they were grateful, and relieved, to finally be able to put a name to the experience. Even though contacts may have occurred decades ago and had deeply impacted and delighted them, they could neither easily share them with their entourage nor fit them into their own conception of reality.

It became evident that the time had come to undertake a major research project devoted to these experiences, which are very common (50-60% of the people had one or several ADCs) and yet so little investigated. I developed a concept for a research project with a view to obtaining a grant, which was generously given to me by a foundation. Once the project team had been set up, the research project entitled *Investigation of the phenomenology and impact of spontaneous and direct After-Death Communications (ADCs)* could be conducted.

In *Contacts spontanés avec un défunt: une enquête scientifique atteste la réalité des VSCD*, I present the research findings of our survey in which more than 1,000 persons participated, illustrated by numerous testimonies.



**Excerpt from the preface written by Dr. Christophe Fauré:**

[...] "After more than 25 years of accompanying people in mourning, today I always ask this question, in a more or less direct way: "Since the death of your loved one, do you have the impression of having 'signs' or particular perceptions? I no longer count the number of people who, relieved by my question, immediately tell me about one or more ADCs!

This is a real subject that deserves our full attention, as its implications are considerable, and I am pleased that my own years of observation and listening, within my practice, find a powerful echo in the content of this book.

It is important to realise that publishing such a book is not a trivial matter and I would like to salute the integrity and genuine courage of these authors, researchers and university professors of international standing who dare to put their professional credibility on the line to venture, as true pioneers, into the mysterious territory of ADCs.

Let us make no mistake: we are not, here, in the domain of belief; beliefs that one would cling to, in a desperate movement, to curb the fear of death and the anxiety of the void. No: the approach of these researchers is quite different. It is based on listening, observation, data collection and analysis. It is based on a scientific methodology that observes and analyses the facts. Thus, even if the subject of ADCs seems to be the opposite of this, one could not be more Cartesian in this way of approaching them! Its authors rely on tangible information and this is what makes their work so relevant and intelligent.

To the objections which would affirm that the ADCs are only hallucinations or simple productions of the mind, my position as a psychiatrist enables me to oppose several counter-arguments. In my experience, ADCs do not meet the diagnostic criteria for psychotic-type hallucinations, nor do they meet the criteria for psychoactive drug-induced hallucinations. This is because psychotic hallucinations occur in the specific context of a mental illness such as schizophrenia. People with hallucinatory mental illness suffer from a painful psychic confinement. Their minds are in turmoil, whether before, during, or after the hallucinatory episode. However, this is not the case for the vast majority of people with ADCs: they do not have any psychotic pathology that could explain their experience. [...]

What is troubling about NDEs is that they too suggest a possible continuity of consciousness after physical death. In NDEs, this possibility is approached through the experience of those who "die", whereas in ADCs, we have the point of view of those who "remain". We are thus offered two views, two extremely different perspectives, but which nevertheless seem to point in the same direction.

Which direction? It is up to you to define it. It is up to you to form your own opinion on the basis of your research and the reliable reading on these different subjects to which you will give yourself access.

And that is where this book can really help you.

Whether it reinforces your feelings if you have experienced an ADC yourself, whether you have not experienced an ADC, even if you are in mourning, or whether it stimulates your curiosity in order to invite you to investigate further and explore the meaning and implications of this phenomenon, you have in your hands a precious companion. It is capable of providing in-depth food for thought.

Who knows where it will lead you? I wish you a good and fruitful reading."

### Associative activities

Evelyn Elsaesser is the project leader of “Investigation of the phenomenology and impact of spontaneous and direct After-Death Communications (ADCs)”.

She is co-founder and member of the Executive Board of Swiss IANDS (International Association for Near-Death Studies).

She served for many years as coordinator of the Swiss branch of the Scientific and Medical Network (SMN).

