

## And She Came Back

Joe Waldron

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TASTE, The Archives of Scientists' Transcendent Experiences [↗](#), lets scientists express their transcendent experiences in a psychologically (and professionally) safe space. This is Submission No. 00038 [↗](#), by Joe Waldron, who received his PhD in Psychology from The Ohio State University in 1975, has been a professor of psychology, and was a Distinguished Research Professor at Youngstown State University in Ohio. He is well known for many contributions to rehabilitative medicine and research on the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory. TASTE is maintained by Charles Tart (Professor of Psychology, Institute of Transpersonal Psychology; Professor Emeritus, University of California at Davis; Senior Research Fellow, Institute of Noetic Sciences; President, Institute for the Scientific Study of Consciousness). Tart's introduction to TASTE is reproduced in the Appendix.

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Irene and I were married during 1966. Twenty-six years later (1992) we had three beautiful daughters and a wonderful marriage. In April she was diagnosed with cancer. She died November 19, 1992. The last eight months were among the best and the worst of times. We seemed to be more and more in love as she slowly slipped away. We were rarely apart. While Rene knew she was dying, she did not want to know about the nitty-gritty of it. She wanted me to take care of "all that palliative stuff," and so I did. During her last seven days I never left her side except to use the bathroom. And then she was dead.

We were both confirmed agnostics: She was a former Presbyterian and I was a Roman Catholic until I turned atheist at age 15. By 25 I was an agnostic because it was the only reasonable position. Death, we agreed, was probably the best night's sleep a person ever got. According to her wishes she was cremated in something like a cardboard box and we remembered Rene as she lived — not in death. Out of respect for her wishes there was no memorial service. I cite these behaviors and ideas to indicate the firm belief we both had in agnosticism.

However, as any good agnostic would do, I said to her two days before she died and while she was conscious, that if she continued after death I would sorely want to hear from her. I anticipated a very long lonely road. Rene in her usual, somewhat humorous way, raised one eyebrow as she looked at me in the way she would do when she nonverbally queried if the other person seriously meant what they said. We did not discuss it any more than that.

Two weeks after her death I was going through the motions of acting as though life had meaning. Two of our daughters were still at home and "Dad" was needed to be there for them. Our family is about as close as five people could be and Rene had been the

center of our collective universe. I was sleeping a lot, as depressed people are likely to do. I knew I was clinically depressed, fought it for the girls' sake and tried to live a normal life — under the circumstances. I entertained no notions of seeing or hearing from Rene again. The black hole was deep and appeared to be never ending. I was learning to accept the idea that the major part of my life was over and only cleaning up was left to do.

As best I can remember, I was lying on the couch about 11:00 PM. I was probably in a hypnogogic state when I got up to answer a knock at the front door.<sup>1</sup> The girls were young adults and I expected any 20-something male or female at that time of night. I opened the door and was startled, surprised, taken aback. There stood Rene in the long red velvet cape I had bought several years ago. I loved her in that red riding hood cape. She was statuesque, regal, and commanded attention whenever she walked into a room. I was proud just to be with her when she wore that cape. Need I say that she only ever wore it at my insistence.

My stupid comment was, “What are you doing here at the front door?” The thought in my mind was, “You are dead — how can you be here?” But I was trying to be tactful.<sup>2</sup> She answered with, “You know why — I don't live here anymore.” There was a smile of love and kindness and also of hesitancy. She turned and walked across the porch to leave.<sup>3</sup>

I was dazed, confused and “came to” standing in the living room. I had closed the door but do not remember doing it. The event was unbelievably real — “more real than real” as the people who have Near Death Experiences say. By the next morning I had pretty well dismissed the whole event. Had to be some kind of hallucination. Though I have never, to my knowledge, hallucinated<sup>4</sup> or suffered anything worse than the depression I was now in. It seemed that maybe I had better straighten up and get on with my life before my daughters noticed how strange their father had become.

And yet — every memory of it was as though it were real. To say I was confused is to put it mildly. Over the next few days I seemed to become more confused, more depressed. Think of the possibilities — maybe she still lived in another world, maybe I would see her again after I died. No, the dead were — well — dead. This hallucination, if that is what it was, was more torturous than not having it. Was she alive — was she not

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<sup>1</sup> In lucid dreams electrical appliances usually do not work appropriately (LaBerge, 1985). However, in our home the doorbell had not worked for several years and it was necessary to knock.

<sup>2</sup> My patients know to telephone me at any hour of the day or night. I think that many problems are best solved when the person is in the middle of the problem. Because of this approach to my professional life I have for many years been able to come quickly awake when needed. My alertness was characteristic at that time.

<sup>3</sup> I do not remember hearing her footsteps as she left. It seems I should have been able to hear them unless she was barefoot. This is unlikely in the formal “ball gown” type of cape she was wearing.

<sup>4</sup> At that time I did not believe I had ever hallucinated. In a following report I will detail some of my out-of-body experiences.

alive? Does she love me, does she not? Like picking the petals on a daisy, though far more painful than such adolescent musings: I was contemplating the center of my universe. By turns I was elated, hopeful, a little giddy and alternatively deeply depressed missing her, anticipating a dismal future, helpless and hopeless. I felt like I was going around the proverbial bend. "Definitely a sharp left turn," I said to myself.

About ten days later I was in my study / therapy office. Our home was in the country and I had a separate wing for my research and practice. This night, as had been common over the last few weeks, I slept wherever I found myself. I just could not bring myself to sleep in our bed. I had worked all day, and I had worked hard to try and loose myself in something other than my own depression. By 11:00 PM I was literally falling asleep as I sat reading on the couch. I nodded once, opened my eyes and there stood Rene where it was impossible for her to stand in a six-inch space between two file cabinets. In front of her was the wheel chair that I had pushed around for the last four months (In reality the chair had been returned to the supply company). Somehow the chair was now gone and we were in a long embrace that seemed to last 20–30 minutes. I have never felt so loved and cared for in my life.<sup>5</sup> We did not talk about anything of consequence. In fact I don't really remember what we said. I do know that the conversation was not in words and I also knew she was "dead" and I was not.

Eventually a woman got my attention and said she wanted to show me something that Rene had made. The lady was kind, I did not want to be rude, so I walked into the other room so she could show me whatever it was. She showed me some sort of other-world crystal carving of a butterfly or something similar. I tried to be polite, said it was beautiful<sup>6</sup> (which it was) but that I had to get back to the other room. When I got back, Rene was gone.

During this whole interaction I was aware of someone else in another corner of the room where Rene and I met. A man who seemed to be there to help Rene do what she wanted to do (see me) and make sure that everything went as it should. He never spoke or communicated in any way but I sensed he was there to help her in some way unknown to me. In thinking about the presence of this other person I have the idea

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<sup>5</sup> During this meeting I do remember that we moved from a standing position near the file cabinets to sit down on the couch. I do not know why we moved to sit next to each other but I do remember sitting on the couch with her for a lengthy period of time. I also "knew" that the wheel chair was initially present so that I would know that Rene was dead. In appearance she looked as she had about one year preceding her death. A very much alive, vibrant, beautiful woman who had always taken excellent care of her physical appearance. At the time of her death she was emaciated.

<sup>6</sup> At the time I was not aware of the symbolic significance of a butterfly as re-birth into another form of life (Kubler-Ross, 1991). From my work I thought of the butterfly as the symbol used by female alcoholics who had liberated themselves from alcohol. In addition, I am not sure this matronly woman showed me a butterfly. It was a crystal carving of some sort that I now think was a butterfly that Rene had carved or made. This is interesting because Rene was not given to handcrafts. She was more into caring for her family, cooking and reading. At that time I knew nothing of consequence about the New Age Movement and thought of crystals as nothing more than pretty stones.

that his function was to insure that I did not remember some of the things that Rene and I discussed. I know we talked about the kids and loving each other. I am also sure that I would have had a million questions about what it was like to be dead. However, I do not remember any of the content of our discussion and that is not like me. In some way, completely unknown to me, this other person had the ability to make sure that Rene and I could get together and that I would take away from that meeting only the information presented here.

All this could be a hallucination, or a dream and indeed if I were to hear it in my clinical practice I would place much emphasis on the hypnogogic state on both occasions. However, it happened to me and I know it was real as well as I can know anything. The ramifications have been long acting, for now all of my non-teaching time is spent in studying after-death experiences. In the last seven years I have read and studied more about parapsychology, after-death, near-death and dying than I ever read for a PhD in developmental psychology.

In lucid dreams I have seen and spoken with her. I have talked with her again and I have very clearly heard her say to me (at 10:00 AM) about two years later as I was coming downstairs in the morning, “Well, you have had that dream three times. Are you going to go and get Beth and bring her home now?” When I heard her voice as clearly as I hear anyone speak who is standing three feet behind me, my hair stood on end, and yet I was comforted and I knew what had to be done. Her voice brought the importance of those forgotten dreams back to the surface.

At the time I did not consciously consider that my youngest daughter was having problems — she was, I got her, and Beth did move back home. I could have known that Beth was having problems from her nonverbal behaviors, her clothes and her quiet attitude. The conscious side of me was trying to accept her and her ways as she matured into adulthood carrying that deep sense of loss for her mother. I could have determined that she was having a very difficult time but it took Rene’s comment to bring it to the surface and make me realize in a startling manner that action was needed now.

To me these experiences are real. So real they have changed my life. My depression was gone — absolutely lifted, after the second instance. I have never looked back.<sup>7</sup> I know

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<sup>7</sup> As much as Rene and I were in love, and we had one of the best marriages I have ever known, I married again about seven months later. I was able to quickly move on with my life because of the things reported here. Before I ever read much of the paranormal literature about the dead, I somehow “knew” that if Rene was to be happy, fulfilled, and contented, I had to let her go and move on with my life. As any psychologist would do I identified what I sought in a woman and allowed myself to meet and be with others. I thought that I would probably marry again in about five years because that is how long it would take to meet another woman who had the characteristics I desired in a woman. Three months later friends introduced me to Kay and we were married about four months after that. The point here is that because of these meetings with Rene, I learned that I was to move on. Kay and I are, after a few rough spots, very happy and I find I love two women, one alive and one dead. My marriage to Kay so easily and so quickly after Rene’s death was not initially understood

she lives on somewhere and that life after what we call death is far too important a topic to leave for soft-headed people to think about.

Now from a hardball scientist who teaches multivariate statistics, research methods and one who wrote computerized diagnostic software, I have joined the paranormal set. I am sure that some of my colleagues think I have indeed gone round that bend when they hear about my public talks and workshops exploring the issues as we in the sciences are prone to do.

And that little agnostic side of me creeps in and says, “Even if you are deluded, the positive affects of after-death experiences are too therapeutic to ignore.” They sure can be life-changing.

## References

- Kubler-Ross, E. (1991). *On Life After Death*. Berkeley, CA: Celestial Arts.  
 LaBerge, S. (1985). *Lucid Dreaming*. New York, NY: Ballantine Books.

## *Appendix by Charles Tart: What TASTE is About*

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**tran-scen'-dent** 1 a: exceeding usual limits: SURPASSING b: extending or lying beyond the limits of ordinary experience... 3: transcending the universe of material existence. [from *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*. Springfield, MA: G. & C. Merriam Co., 1980. P. 1230]

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The Archives of Scientists' Transcendent Experiences — TASTE — is an online journal devoted to transcendent experiences that scientists have reported. It lets scientists express these experiences in a psychologically (and professionally) safe space.

Science is a wonderful profession: I've worked at it for almost 40 years, and love it. As a process for gathering and refining knowledge, it is so useful! But the process is practiced by people, not machines, and we are each affected by the conscious and unconscious hopes, habits and fears of our individual histories and cultural heritages. As Aldous Huxley so nicely put it, each of us is simultaneously the beneficiary and the victim of our culture.

As scientists, we have discovered a body of precisely observed factual data about the world, created a lot of good theories that make sense of much of that data — and we are part of a cultural heritage of *scientism*. Sociologists coined the term “scientism” back in the 1940s, when they realized that many scientists unthinkingly accepted many scientific *theories* as simple, unquestioned *Truths*, just like believers in any “ism,” and thus we often acted like any prejudiced “believer,” especially outside our immediate areas of expertise.

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by family and friends. I know that I was able to do this because of these interactions with Rene and yet could not explain it to others. When I think of how profoundly I was depressed it occurs to me that after-death experiences can be extremely powerful.

This all-too-human narrowness is a significant distorting factor when dealing with the area of life roughly called *transcendent*, used primarily in the sense of definition 1b above, “extending or lying beyond the limits of ordinary experience.” TASTE is primarily about gathering data on transcendent experiences.

Related words which describe the kinds of experiences I am soliciting for posting on this TASTE site are *spiritual*, *mystical*, *psychic* or *paranormal*, all imprecise ways of describing experiences which seem to transcend the ordinary limits of the physical world. All these terms have multiple connotations and semantic baggage that are often at odds with the scientific process, but they are nevertheless in common use. I would prefer to use the term *transpersonal* experiences, experiences which involve apparent functioning beyond, *trans*, the ordinary limits of what we think is possible. Transpersonal has been an empirical and psychological term from its coining by psychologist Abraham Maslow, but it is still not widely enough known. Thus transcendent is the key word for TASTE.

Many, if not all, transcendent experiences are “ineffable,” i.e. the experiencers feel that ordinary language is inadequate at conveying the full scope and vitality of the experience. But words can have a *reminding* function or a *pointing* function: the words resonate with something in the reader’s own experiential knowledge and direct attention. The challenge to the submitters is to use their words as best they can to be both accurate and communicative. If this results in some scientists waxing poetic, so be it! And some of what seems ineffable at first glance can be communicated well as we work at it.

Over the years I have had hundreds of fellow scientists from all sorts of fields quietly come up to me at meetings or write or phone me — when they had decided I was safe — to tell me about their unusual experiences apparently going beyond everyday reality, challenging our concepts of what the world is. These were experiences that intrigued them and/or were emotionally important to them, but *which they could not tell to their colleagues or friends for fear of rejection or ridicule*. Without worrying about more formal definitions, these transcendent experiences have included things such as:

- altered states of consciousness (ASCs), often involving new kinds of apparent knowledge and insights,
- deep feelings of connection with life or the universe,
- the apparent paranormal/psychic overcoming of ordinary barriers to communication,
- various kinds of apparent transcendence of our ordinary physical selves.

Sometimes being able to tell me about such experiences in confidence has gotten them off people’s chests or even been “therapeutic” (although I’m not a therapist). Sometimes I’ve been able to give scientific information about these experiences that relieves the reporter, producing a reaction something like: “Oh, it happens to other sane people? There’s an established name for it? I’m not alone, it doesn’t mean I’m crazy?!” And often the reaction is further on the order of “We only know it happens?”

But we don't know *why*? Why aren't we intensively researching these things? I ought to research it, but I can't, I would be..." (reasons to not research it have included being laughed at and rejected, thought crazy, not getting tenure, losing a job, couldn't get any results published, etc.).

The TASTE project is an attempt to work toward rectifying this strange, *scientific* situation where too many people are forced to deny or repress parts of their own human experience. These Archives are an online journal performing the essential scientific function of full and honest communication of data in this badly neglected area.

I emphasize the word *data*: no particular theoretical interpretation will be made at this site, other than that such experiences are important. The point is to let the data come out and stimulate us....

I hope you will find **The Archives of Scientists' Transcendent Experiences** stimulating!

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