

October 17, 2023

Spontaneous Contacts with the Dead

By [Kenneth Ring, Ph.D.](#)

Part I

My mother died in June, 2001, at the age of 88, which age I will reach this December. She spent her last years in a nursing home, no longer able to walk, and slightly but not seriously demented. (She always recognized me, however, and was able to converse.) During those years, my mother had a characteristic odor -- sort of a sour, spoiled milk, musty quality, but very distinctive.

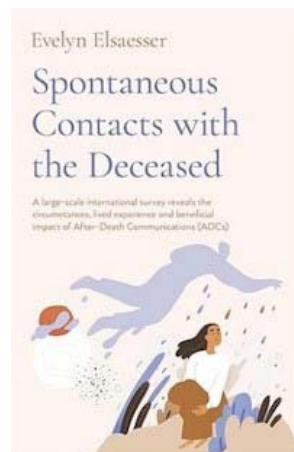


Some years ago, I went to see the film [Amour](#), which is about a woman in her 80s dying a slow and painful death following a series of strokes. It is a great film, very moving, and the woman actress, [Emmanuelle Riva](#), strongly reminded me of my mother in her later years. I kept reliving scenes of my being with her while simultaneously being absorbed in the film.

During most of it, I had my left hand under my chin, and soon I noticed that I was smelling that same unmistakable odor around my hand that my mother had given off. The odor lasted throughout the film. It was so obvious to me that afterward I asked my then current girlfriend if she could smell anything unusual when she sniffed my hand; she could not. By that time, I didn't bother to see if the smell had persisted, but while it lasted, it emitted a very strong malodorous stench.

What I experienced is now called an [after-death communication](#) (abbreviated ADC), and according to a new book on the subject, such olfactory ADCs are surprisingly common, making up some 28% of such cases. For example, here's another one I have drawn from this book, which has some similarities to mine:

After I received a phone call from the respective doctor at the hospital where my mother died, I rushed to the hospital about 40 km from where I live. When I arrived in the town in which my mother died, the traffic lights turned red and I was forced to stop and wait for a while. There I sensed my mom's spirit: I smelled her. I could smell her presence. It was her unique smell and I knew at that moment that she was in the car visiting me. It wasn't just thinking she was there -- it was knowing that she was with me in the car. So I started crying tears of joy to be able to have her near me again and I spontaneously shouted joyfully: "Mom, you are here. You are here mom, aren't you?" It was an unforgettable experience which led to my intense research about life after death and after-death communication."



This case, and others that I will cite in this blog, is drawn from a just published book entitled [Spontaneous Contact With the Deceased](#). The research reported in this book, which involves more than a thousand cases from three language groups (English, French and Spanish) is now the most definitive study of ADCs ever to be undertaken. But it is not just a collection of anecdotal testimonies, but a thorough, scientific analysis of such experiences, which inform the reader about how often they occur, under which conditions, and how they affect people who report them.

Thanks to this research, we can now estimate that the incidence of ADCs is between 50 and 60% in the general population, mainly, but not always, occurring to the bereaved. So they are surprisingly common, though not nearly so well known as near-death experiences.

The principal author of this book and lead investigator of this project is a Swiss researcher named [Evelyn Elsaesser](#), who happens to be a very dear and long-time friend of mine, someone to whom I am very deeply indebted. So before turning to the findings of Evelyn's research, I would like to tell you a little about her and my connection to her.



Around 1990, Evelyn introduced herself to me in an e-mail. She was then working on a book about NDEs and wanted to interview various experts in several different countries. She had selected me to be the representative of American researchers and asked if I would be open to be interviewed by her. Of course, I was flattered by her interest in me and my work, so I readily assented.

Not long afterward, she arrived at the [University of Connecticut](#) and, after greeting her, we repaired to my private office for the interview. It took the rest of the day, lasting some six hours! (Evelyn recently reminded me that she told me she had ten pages of questions and I replied that I only had five pages of answers.)

It was the longest and most searching interview to which I had ever been subjected, before or since. I was really impressed with this woman, and, not surprisingly, we quickly became great friends.

A few years later, after I had just moved back to California, and was working on my book, [Lessons from the Light](#), I became quite seriously ill. I had nearly completed work on the book, but was no longer able to finish it, and I really despaired of being able to do so. I had to give up on it.

Eventually, I recovered, though I still felt unable to return to the book. But I was invited to lecture about my work in [Stuttgart, Germany](#), and since Evelyn lived near Geneva, she was able to meet me there. Evelyn asked someone to take a photo of us while we were having a meal. Here it is:



You can see we were already quite chummy. I remember that encounter because I talked with Evelyn about my unhappiness and disappointment concerning my unfinished book.

"Please let me help you," she offered. And she did. Although I had done virtually all the writing for the book, Evelyn helped me to continue my research for it, and it was only with her help, involving many hours of work, that I was able to complete it. That book would never have seen the light and dark of print without Evelyn's vital assistance. I felt so indebted to her that she is listed as a co-author of the book.

But there was still a problem. Although my agent had always been successful in finding a good publisher for my previous three books on NDEs, he was unable to secure one for this book. But Evelyn again came to my rescue.

A published author herself, she was very savvy about the world of publishing, and in short order, she had managed to find an excellent publisher for the book. Not only that, but she then became my new agent, and through her industrious and unstinting efforts, she secured the rights for many foreign editions of the book. As a result of her agenting work, this book has since become by far my most popular book and has continued to sell twenty-five years after its original publication. And next year, there will be still another updated edition of this book, not only in print, but as an e-book and audio book as well. Not to toot my horn too loudly, but I have been told by my current publisher that it is now regarded as “a classic.” None of this would have happened without Evelyn’s unwavering and selfless support.

On a subsequent trip to Europe, this is how I thanked her when she saw me off on my flight home:



Whether this was actually a “Hollywood kiss” like they do in the movies, where the leading man appears to kiss his beloved, but really doesn’t or the real thing – well, a gentleman never tells....

Since those early years of our friendship, we have visited each other quite a few times, both in Europe and in California. Perhaps our most memorable encounter was at my home at the very end of the year 1999 when, as some of you will remember, it was the y2K year when we were to roll over into the new millennium. There was global anxiety and uncertainty then because nobody knew for sure whether our computers, banks and ATMs would still function and, if they didn’t, what then?

Well, we all breathed a huge collective sigh of relief when the digital world made its transition seamlessly. Evelyn and I celebrated this momentous day by joining many gaily dressed, if weary, new year’s revelers by walking across (most of) the Golden Gate Bridge the next morning. What a great way to

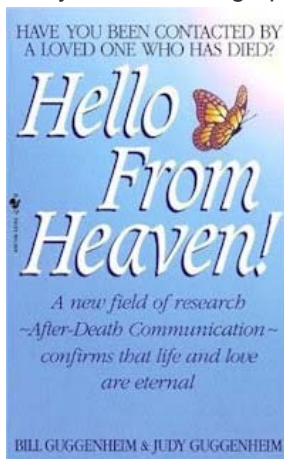
mark the beginning of the year 2000!

Of course, since that time, Evelyn and I have exchanged not only more visits, but hundreds of e-mails and have remained the dearest of friends and collaborators.

So much for our friendship. Now it’s time, at long last, to turn to Evelyn’s book and what it has to teach us about ADCs.

Part II

Evelyn, after having spent some years studying and writing about NDEs, found that she was becoming



increasingly intrigued with ADCs. Like me, she was familiar with Bill and Judy Guggenheim’s book on the subject, with its treacly title, Hello From Heaven!, which is a collection of anecdotal reports of ADCs (Evelyn eventually translated this book into French). But Evelyn wanted to undertake a more scientific, systematic and analytic investigation of this phenomenon, which led her to form her own research team. After receiving grant funds to do this work, she and her colleagues were able to produce, as I have indicated, the definitive book on the subject.

To begin with, let me briefly summarize the principal findings of her research before presenting some illustrative case histories of ADCs.

Because of space limitations, I can only give you a kind of generic summary of the main features of a typical instance of an ADC. There is, first of all, a very definite sense of the presence or some other distinctive sign of a deceased loved

one, though in many cases, the deceased person is actually seen. In any case, what the deceased person conveys is this: "I am fine, I feel wonderful, do not worry about me. I am alive, just in another realm."

The impact of such an unexpected and even shocking visitation usually has a profound emotional effect on the recipient. Feelings of gratitude are common, and the recipient usually feels comforted and reassured that his or her loved one continues to exist on the other side of the veil, so to speak.

ADCs occur in a variety of ways, most often when the recipient is either asleep or dreaming, but in the latter case, it is usually stated with emphasis that "this was no ordinary dream, it was real." Here is a table of the various ways an ADC can manifest and their relative incidence.

Sleep – 62%
Tactile – 48%
Visual – 46%
Auditory – 43%
Sense of presence – 34%
Olfactory – 28%
Coincident with death – 21%

But now to give you a vivid sense of what these ADCs feel like to the recipient, let me cite a few representative cases.

My brother died by suicide on 3 July 2011. He was 32 years old and struggled for 15 years with depression. He was my little brother; we were 5 years apart. I always felt he was fragile and I always felt the need to protect him. But I always knew he would die young, so much so that as a child I would look at his lifeline in his hand to reassure myself. The month after he died, I was home alone and watching TV in the living room. I was watching a programme I was passionate about and I wasn't thinking about my brother at that moment. I went quickly to my room to get something. I was in a hurry because I didn't want to miss the continuation of the TV programme. When I entered my room, I saw my brother lying on my bed. He was lying full length in his favourite position, with his arms crossed behind his head and his legs crossed, looking relaxed and serene as he did when he was a child. It was so real, or rather so unreal, that I was scared and turned my head away. I wondered for an instant if I was hallucinating. When I looked back at the bed, he was gone. 7 years later, I am sure it was not a hallucination. This image brings back a memory of him when he was 5 years old, lying in the same position and whistling happily.

Some of Evelyn's most provocative cases are those in which the deceased loved one manifests to the recipient at the time of his or her death. As noted, such cases make up about 21% of ADCs. Here are some examples, beginning with a couple of short excerpts.

My mother was not anticipated to live more than a few more days. I was in bed around midnight, suddenly sensed her presence at the side of my bed. She spoke my name and patted my shoulder. I felt mom had passed. Within 10 minutes my brother phoned to tell me she had died a few minutes before his call to me.

My aunt passed away in the middle of the night, at about 2.30 a.m. At that moment I was woken up by a caress on my cheek, like a breath of air. The window was closed, there was no draft in the room. Ten minutes later, the hospital phoned me to tell me that she had died.

Next, a couple of longer reports when a loved one appears as if to say goodbye, but not to worry....

I was 23 years old. At that time I lived in Lyon. My grandmother lived 80 km north of Lyon. We were very close, we had a great relationship and friendship. I had been seeing her a lot less lately because I had a very busy job. I didn't come home very often at weekends to see her and my parents who lived in the same small town. My grandmother was very ill and we knew that the illness would soon take her away. My mother asked me to come that weekend and we all went to the hospital (many sisters on my mother's side). On Sunday evening in the hospital we were all around her bed to say goodbye. I was the last to leave... trying

to comfort her and telling her not to be afraid, that she would be reunited with all the people she loved. I left knowing in my heart that it was the last time and, strangely enough, I was not sad!

On Tuesday night I wake up attracted by a strong presence. I am sitting in my bed overlooking a large open loft. And there, right in front of me, only 2 or 3 meters away, slightly higher, I perceive her presence without seeing her! A sort of luminous white haze and above all an incredible sensation invades me, of happiness, of peace, of Love. I smile at her. I know at that moment that she has passed to the other side and that she has come to say goodbye and reassure me. I go back to sleep soothed and the next day leave for work. The telephone rings at my workplace in the middle of the morning, it's my mum. She tells me with emotion that my little grandmother has died!

I awoke suddenly for no reason from a good sleep and saw my grandfather standing at the side of my bed. He seemed slightly younger, healthier and radiating pure love. He smiled at me and said "I'm going away, my wee dove" (his pet name for me). I smiled back at him and looked at my alarm clock, it was 06.00, then he was gone. It didn't occur to me to ask my grandfather where he was going or why he was in my room at 6 in the morning. I just slipped back into a peaceful sleep. I was later awakened by the telephone ringing and my grandmother sobbing on the phone that papa was dead. His death certificate later stated approximate time of death 06.00.

Finally, one last account that conveys just how powerful and moving these experiences can be. In this case, there was also an unexpected confirmation of this person's ADC:

I received a visit from my deceased wife, in July 2013, 10 months after her passing in October 2012, while unconscious under anaesthetic on the operating table for a gall bladder removal in 2012, a year after her passing. At the age of her passing she was 71 years of age. In her visit she appeared younger in age, serene, composed, beautiful, youthful, happy, smiling, full of love and compassion. She was bathed in a gold and white light. The vision was magnificent in its clarity. She assured me with a loving smile that she was "alright" and that "things were wonderful on this side" and that "I would be alright too and had no need to worry". The experience was timeless, beautifully intense, deep, blissful, full of love. I have no idea how long it lasted. One second, one minute, 5 minutes - seems irrelevant. When I woke up, or recovered consciousness, I felt incredibly relaxed and had full recollection of the experience. I felt that I had experienced heaven. This intensely relaxed state stayed with me for several days during which time I initially assumed that the wonderful experience might be drug-induced (the anaesthetic). In the months that followed, the magnificence and intensity of the experience remained but I researched as much as possible with medical people, hypnotherapists and the like to try and determine if there was a drug-induced explanation which caused the experience. I could find no such explanation. Around the same time as my experience my dentist (who had treated my wife shortly before her passing) and a very close lady friend of my wife independently advised me, both in a somewhat "shaken" (for want of a better word) state, that they had been "visited by my deceased wife" asking that "they would look after Matt (that's me)" and she told them that she was alright. This happened around the same time that I had my deceased wife's "visit". This information came independently from and was instigated by my dentist and friend and was not a response to any question I had asked.

Now, some five years later, I feel blessed that I have had this very real experience. I have only to recall it to go into an immediate relaxed and peaceful state. It has been a life changer and I have no doubt that I have experienced an after-death communication from my beloved wife and had glimpsed at the other side that I can only describe as heaven."

Since there are hundreds of cases presented in Evelyn's book, you can understand that since I am only writing a blog and not a book, I have only barely begun to scratch the surface of the domain of ADCs. But if I have managed to whet your appetite to learn more about this remarkable phenomenon, you now know where to go – to Evelyn's compendious book on the subject.



To conclude, I would just like to say a few words about where ADCs fit into the general picture of what happens at and after death. Recent research has now revealed a number of fascinating interlocking jeweled facets in the diadem of death-related phenomena (isn't that a mouthful?). These days, these miraculous events are collectively referred to as [end-of-life experiences](#) (or ELEs). To begin with, we have what traditionally have been called [deathbed visions](#) during which a dying person perceives deceased loved ones who appear to form a kind of "welcoming committee" to help escort the dying person into the realm beyond death. We also have instances of [terminal lucidity](#) in which a

previously demented person "wakes up" and becomes lucid, usually shortly before dying. And of course, there are NDEs, which give a person close to death an intimation of the life to come. And now, in addition to the work of [mediums who appear to channel the dead](#) to the living, we have ADCs, which require no mediation by mediums. Rather, as Evelyn's work shows, these are direct evidential contacts between the dead and us, the living – except they are not dead, just living elsewhere, separated from us, to use [William James'](#) famous phrase, "by the filmiest of screens."

What happens at the advent of death and what happens afterward should give us every confidence that when we die, we don't. We just live elsewhere and when an ADC occurs, we now have additional evidence that life is forever, and that there really is no death, just a change in location.

A personal postscript

I have written this blog on Friday, October 13th, 2023. Since I was born on a [Friday, the 13th](#), in December of 1935, I have always considered Friday, the 13th my lucky day. So in exactly two months, as I said at the outset, I will reach the venerable age of 88. Frankly, given the vicissitudes of my health lately, I am not convinced I will live much longer nor, given the sorry state of the world, do I care to.

But drawing on the hopeful implications of Evelyn's work, I have promised to make an effort to send her an ADC after my death. Since, as some of you may remember, I have long been an ardent tennis fan, I intend to return in the following form:

So, Evelyn, if you should see a tennis ball bouncing crazily into your backyard, well, that'll be me!

6 comments:

1.

Nancy Clark[October 17, 2023 at 8:56 AM](#)

Very nice Ken! I too, have a special place in my heart for Elaine. She endorsed one of my books and was extremely generous with her time and help. I will post something on my Facebook page about her book. Her research will help so many people as your own research has done.

2.

Brian Anthony Kraemer[October 17, 2023 at 1:12 PM](#)

I was very close to my Grandma Kraemer, my father's mother, throughout my life. One month after she died, she came to me in a dream. We ran to each other, embraced and shared an intimacy that was out of this world. Our closeness was not expressible in human terms, at least not in my experience of intimacy. I told my parents, "I know I have been visited by Grandma Kraemer because the love was beyond anything I can imagine here on Earth."

Three and a half months ago, my dad died, June 24, 2023. A few days ago, I was asleep and I heard his voice far, far in the distance. I ran a great distance following the sound his very clear and distinctive voice and when I finally found him I said with love, "I found you. I found you. I knew it was you because I recognized your voice! I just kept following your voice." And then, of course, I woke up.

Some people will dismiss everything that happens while we are asleep with the words, "It was just a dream." I am sixty now and I'm convinced being "asleep" is not "just a dream." Being asleep is a whole other level of consciousness in which we are open to realities on a more wholistic and deeper level than when we are "awake." There are many who are asleep when awake and others awake when asleep. Reality is much richer than this simple notions we are taught to hold to like religious dogmas.

One final comment about the end of one's incarnation in this experience we call life...I have spent much of my lifetime, age 17 to 60, visiting and loving seniors. I have seen them in all their stages of faculties. I have come to believe that their pain and sufferings are just as bearable or unbearable as our own at whatever age we are.

I am not a follower of any particular religion, but there is a beautiful verse in Deuteronomy, 33:25b, that says, "As thy days, so shall thy strength be." I am convinced through my own observations that there are levels of consciousness/awareness way beyond our own whose fundamental character is wholeness, love, unity, oneness, compassion, acceptance, and that the greater the depth of our need at whatever age, the still greater provision of this Loving Presence.

3.

Anonymous[October 20, 2023 at 4:15 AM](#)

beautiful!!

4.

Anonymous[October 22, 2023 at 7:57 AM](#)

I just discovered your work. Thank you very much and bon voyage🍷

5.

Debbie Savoie DeMaio[October 25, 2023 at 6:55 PM](#)

It is such a pleasure to be reading your blog...I am a former student of yours from UCONN and your class was one of the most profound and thought provoking on my transcript...I am a school counselor now (past 25 years) and I find that helping students grieve or understand signs from deceased loved ones has been an important component in my work. I have always been sensitive to signs and auras and have recently begun to believe that I am an empath.... Your influence is far reaching and valuable and I will continue to enjoy your blogs until your final earthly bounce. Godspeed

[Replies](#)

1.

Leanne Tobias[November 1, 2023 at 12:11 AM](#)

Dr. Ring, Thank you for this blog about Evelyn Elsaesser, her research, and her generosity toward you. I look forward to reading Ms. Elsaesser's book and appreciate your insights on her research and business skills. It is clear that Ms. Elsaesser is brilliant and combines a superb intellect with a kind heart. My very best wishes to you both.