

# Deathbed Visions

*F*ather lies dying. The hospital is quiet. Visiting hours are over and the sun has long since set. Father has been sleeping off and on all day. His doctor says the end could come at any time. His wrinkled, sunken eyes open slowly. His breathing has been labored, but now it seems to ease and soften. His eyes track to a corner of the room where there is only a faded green vinyl chair. Father smiles.

"You're here," he whispers.

His daughter, determined to be with him in his final moments, takes his hand. "Yes, I'm here, dad," she says. But she knows he's not looking at her.

"No," father says, never taking his eyes off the corner of the room. "There. It's your uncle Jerome. I never thought I'd see him again."

The daughter glances to the corner, but of course sees nothing. Father seems coherent. In fact, she hasn't seen him so alert in days.

"Oh my!" Father's smile broadens. "And Lucille! And mother is with them! They- they say they have come to help me. They have come to take me with them. Can't you see them? They look so wonderful!"

The daughter wraps her father's hand in both of hers. She doesn't know what to think. Father closes his eyes again and the smile slowly fades from his lips. He releases one long, last breath... and is gone.

Such deathbed visions are not just the stuff of stories and movies. They are, in fact, more common than you might think and are surprisingly similar across nationalities, religions and cultures. Instances of these unexplained visions have been recorded throughout history and stand as one of the most compelling proofs of life after death.

Anecdotes of deathbed visions have appeared in literature and biographies throughout the ages, but it wasn't until the 20th century that the subject received scientific study. One of the first to examine the subject seriously was Sir William Barrett, a Professor of Physics at the Royal College of Science in Dublin. In 1926 he published a summation of his findings in a book titled *Death Bed Visions*. In the many cases he studied, he discovered some interesting aspects of the experience that are not easily explained:

- It was not uncommon for the dying people who saw these visions to identify friends and relatives who they thought were still living. But in each case, according to Barrett, it was later discovered that these people actually were dead. (Remember, communications then wasn't what it is today, and it might take weeks or even months to learn that a friend or loved one had died.)
- Barrett found it curious that children quite often expressed surprise that the "angels" they saw in their dying moments did not have wings. If the deathbed vision is just a hallucination, wouldn't a child see an angel as it is most often depicted in art and literature - with large, white wings?

More extensive research into these mysterious visions was carried out in the 1960s and 1970s by Dr. Karlis Osiris of the American Society for Psychical Research. In this research, and for a book he published in 1977 titled *At the Hour of Death*, Osiris considered thousands of case studies and interviewed more than 1,000 doctors, nurses and others who attended the dying. The work found a number of fascinating consistencies:

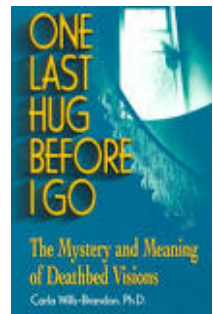
- Although some dying people report seeing angels and other religious figures (and sometimes even mythical figures), the vast majority claim to see familiar people who had previously passed away.
- Very often, the friends and relatives seen in these visions express directly that they have come to help take them away.
- The dying person is reassured by the experience and expresses great happiness with the vision. Contrast this with the confusion or fear that a non-dying person would experience at seeing a "ghost." The dying also seem quite willing to go with these apparitions.
- The dying person's mood - even state of health - seems to change. During these visions, a once depressed or pain-riddled person is overcome with elation and momentarily relieved of pain... until death strikes.
- These experiencers do not seem to be hallucinating or to be in an altered state of consciousness; rather, they appear to be quite aware of their real surroundings and conditions.

## Fact or Fantasy?

How many people have deathbed visions? This is unknown since only about 10 percent of dying people are conscious shortly before their deaths. But of this 10 percent, it is estimated, between 50 and 60 percent of them experience these visions. The visions only seem to last about five minutes and are seen mostly by people who approach death gradually, such as those suffering from life-threatening injuries or terminal illnesses.

So what are deathbed visions? How can they be explained? Are they hallucinations produced by dying brains? Delusions produced by drugs in the systems of the patients? Or could the visions of spirits be exactly what they appear to be: a welcome committee of deceased loved ones who have come to ease the transition to life on another plane of existence?

Carla Wills-Brandon attempts to answer these questions in her book, *One Last Hug Before I Go: The Mystery and Meaning of Death Bed Visions*, which includes many modern-day accounts.



Could they be creations of the dying brain - a kind of self-induced sedative to ease the dying process? Although this is a theory offered by many in the scientific community, Wills-Brandon doesn't agree. "The visitors in the visions were often times deceased relatives who came to offer support to the dying person," she writes. "In some situations, the dying did not know these visitors were already dead." In other words, why would the dying brain only produce visions of people who are dead, whether the dying person knew they were dead or not?

And what about the effects of medication? "Many of the individuals who have these visions are not on medications and are very coherent," writes Wills-Brandon. "Those who are on medications also report these visions, but the visions are similar to those who are not on medications."

## Best Evidence

We may never know whether these experiences are truly paranormal - that is, until we too pass from this life. But there is one aspect of some deathbed visions that is most difficult to explain and lends most credence to the idea that they are actual visitations of spirits from "the other side." On rare occasions, the spirit entities are seen not only by the dying patient, but also by the friends, relatives and others in attendance!

According to one case documented in the February, 1904 edition of *Journal of the Society for Psychic Research*, a deathbed apparition was seen by a dying woman, Harriet Pearson, and by three relatives who were in the room.

Two witnesses in attendance of a dying young boy independently claimed to see the spirit of his mother at his bedside.

### **How the Dying and Their Relatives Benefit**

Whether the deathbed visions phenomenon is real or not, the experience is very often beneficial for the people involved. In his book [\*Parting Visions\*](#), Melvin Morse writes that visions of a spiritual nature can empower dying patients, making them realize that they have something to share with others. Also, these visions dramatically lessen or completely remove the fear of dying in the patients and are enormously healing to the relatives.

Carla Wills-Brandon believes that deathbed visions can help change our overall attitude about death. "Many people today fear their own death and have difficulty handling the passing of loved ones," she says. "If we can recognize that death is nothing to fear, perhaps we will be able to live life with more fully. Knowing that death is not the end just might resolve some of our fear-based societal difficulties."

**If you have experienced a deathbed vision** please email Bobbie at [bobbie@virginiaghosts.com](mailto:bobbie@virginiaghosts.com).