

Recovering from/through a Near Death Experience **Looking at existence through the 4th of 9 lives**

In July of this year, on my Grandmother's birthday, my home caught fire and burned until it was gone. I was in it and was subsequently almost gone too. Since that event, besides the enormous amount of effort it takes to reassemble life, work, health, friends, and emotional stability, I had to point blank, reassess every aspect of my existence.

My computer monitor had been placed on a sturdy art table, at the Northwest window in the house. These windows are large and the point of the monitor placement was to allow outside viewing while working. I had assembled a complete home office, with computer, 21-inch color monitor, laptop, two hard line phones, two cell phones, a copier, a printer, a fax machine and a scanner. So, on that day in late afternoon, I stopped remote working at my job, and went into the back of my long and deep home to take a bath. I left my work laptop and the home computer up and running. It was a very hot day and the sun was blasting in the windows, heating the rooms. The fire inspector later told my neighbor that it was the combination of monitor failure (failure to power down when overheating), the sun burning in through the window, the monitor proximity to that window, and the placement of the lovely thin curtains that all contributed to the combustion that day. The monitor exploded into flame, sending chunks of screen glass flying across a 25-foot room and sent fire up the curtains and across the workstation. The insidious toxic smoke filled the home first, shutting out every single ray of sun and removing the oxygen. The greatest accumulation of smoke was in the bathroom, the only room in the residence without a window.

I remember smelling something awful and concluded that since all the windows were open, that it must be from outside. Maybe someone's car caught on fire or they were repaving the streets. It got worse, and then I thought a neighbor's house might be on fire. Since no smoke alarms went off, it didn't occur to me that something might be wrong within my home. Then I opened my eyes and couldn't see. Nothing, not even a hand in front of my face. And the overpowering smell of burning plastics was everywhere. I was crawling out of the bath, when I heard someone call my name. That was confirmation that something was really wrong. There was a back door, in the back bedroom that was supposed to be unlocked, that leads into a narrow stairwell and then gives an opportunity to go outside. I felt my way to that door but it was locked from the other side. At that point, things were very dreamlike, and the voice kept calling. Finally, something cooler than the surrounding air ran into me. My neighbor.

He told me later that we engaged in a tug of war, he (whom I did not know) trying to drag me through the burning residence out to the front door, me struggling to find some clothing to put on in the dark. He brought me out to a waiting aid car and a swarm of neighbors. Through the back doors of the aid car, I could see the smoke billowing out of my home and the windows exploding outward from the heat. My precious home was gone.

When I was released from the hospital later, I insisted on being brought back home. It was desecration, completely. Yet, I was ecstatic to be alive. My neighbor came down to give me the phone numbers of the inspectors, etc. including the name of the man who in attempting to negotiate around the fire engine, had smashed into my parked car - :~). We sat and celebrated being alive. Since he risked his life to find me, crawling from room to room in pitch black dense smoke on the chance that someone was in there, we had a lot to celebrate.

Shock is a good thing. It paralyzes you long enough to survive then it comforts you while your brain tries to grasp what happened. My lungs and throat were burned and I had suffered smoke inhalation and toxic poisoning. I had no clothes, very few possessions, yet still went to work 48 hours later. Shock is what propelled me through finding another residence to live in while they reconstructed my home, and what pushed me through the motions of the exhausting efforts of rebuilding a life. Since that event, every particle of existence has changed, as well as my outlook on life. It is a great measuring tool for what is truly important in life, and what is trivia. I am a different person now, with a renewed appreciation for the choices that we have available to us in every moment of life.

Others have shared their near death experiences with me and I am compiling them into a book. My graduate school companion had her first child with relative ease, then clinically died bearing her second. She was transfused 7 times, and they replaced her entire blood supply twice. Only after radical surgery were doctors able to stop her hemorrhaging and save her life. Another friend paused one night for an extra 30 seconds at a lonely country intersection, and subsequently saved herself by avoiding a 3-car collision that came out of nowhere. She assisted the medics in extracting the victims out of their vehicles, and held some of them in her arms as they died. These are extraordinary events that happen to peoples' lives and if you have your own story to share, please contact me. Your confidentiality will be observed of course. You can reach me via the Contact Us page of this web site.