

# Commentary

## International Association for Near-death Studies

The strange and apparently supernatural experiences that many people report after a close call with death have attracted a good deal of media attention lately. Unfortunately most of it has conveyed the misleading impression of religious or spiritually-minded people rushing forward to claim these "near-death experiences" (or NDEs) as evidence of a soul that can survive in another world, and skeptical scientists explaining them away as delusions of the brain under stress. *The Weekend Australian* recently devoted the whole front page of its Magazine Section, with banner headlines, to one such debunking article reprinted from Britain's *New Scientist*.

Evidently most people in Australia, and apparently some in Britain too, are as yet unaware that during the past decade, serious research on NDEs has Investigations conducted by psychologists, medical scientists and others under the general umbrella of the International Association for Near-Death Studies (IANDS) have shown that whether one labels these experiences "visions of the Beyond" or "mental fantasies", they still reveal hitherto unsuspected capacities in human consciousness which revolutionise conventional Western ideas about both mind and matter, and hence about the nature of life and death. Put-down terms like "delusion" are misnomers when applied to experiences which in almost all cases leave people more balanced, happier

and more creative than before - and this applies also to the substantial number of NDEs which (like my own in 1983) involve no visions or "out-of-body trips" at all.

Moreover, people who have experienced the basic NDE change of consciousness find they forever afterwards see the whole world differently, in ways which they find hard to convey to those who haven't shared it. For this reason, IANDS has become something more than a society for professional researchers. both in the United States, where it was founded ten years ago, and subsequently in its autonomous British and French branches, it acts also as a forum in which people who have had NDEs can communicate with others who also know the new mode of consciousness firsthand, and can do so without having to subscribe to any particular religious or philosophical belief-system about what the experiences may or may not "mean".

As the first Australian member of IANDS's Research Panel, which is based in the University of Connecticut, I am hoping to start an Australian branch of IANDS this year, with the same objectives.

I would be grateful if anyone interested would write to me, with details of their interests, at 19 Kerr Avenue, Bundeena, NSW 2230.

— John Wren-Lewis.

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