

THE
AFTER DEATH
CHRONICLES

*True Stories of Comfort,
Guidance, and Wisdom
from Beyond the Veil*

Annie Mattingley



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by Annie Mattingley

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INTRODUCTION

Negative Capability, that is, when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason.

—*John Keats, Letter to George and Thomas Keats*

I could have distilled this book's essence into the single sentence: The dead return to let us know they are okay. The two words, "I'm okay," are the ones most often quoted to me from the dead. When the dead use other words, or none at all, their presence alone conveys the same sense and offers powerful healing. The bereaved frequently suffer the twin tortures of guilt and blame. Whether the death is from illness, accident, old age, or sudden violence like suicide or murder, our grief-flooded thoughts may replay every nuance of every choice we made over the last days or hours or minutes of our beloveds' lives like destructive mantras, beating up on ourselves as if doing so could disentangle us from death's grip. We ask ourselves, "Why didn't he . . . she . . . they . . . I . . .?" You fill in the blank. The dead visit us to

stop this terrible process. They come to say, I'm not in my body, yet I exist and I am not suffering. They come to reassure us that however we may wish it otherwise, this is how it is and it is okay. Remember, they may say, we decided together to wait to go to the ER. I participated in that decision with you. A significant part of their message may be, You are not to blame for my death.

I spent my first half-century on the East and West Coasts of the United States, where light pollution, air pollution, and humidity mask the night sky. It wasn't until I moved to the high desert that I experienced the wonder of being able to step out my back door under the magnificent canopy of a visible Milky Way. It had always been there, of course; I just hadn't been able to see it. The other planes of existence are like that, masked by the fact that we look for them with our minds and our physical eyes.

We have other, more ineffable, ways of seeing. At my father's deathbed, how did I "see" his essence leave his body? To answer this directly requires a rationality that might suppress what I experienced. Our human mind and our physical eyes have only so much ability to plumb the deep enigmas. We use these tools to evaluate the world around us, to decide if we are really driving toward a lake not on our map or a mirage. It's not necessarily inappropriate that concern over being gullible can make us doubt the most mystical of experiences. We've heard about those séances where Grandpa had the task of sitting in the room below and tapping on the ceiling with a broomstick at the appropriate moments. The same love that can open the door to invisible worlds can also make us turn a blind eye to the wiles of our own imaginations. The

mystical path is a narrow cliff to be traversed with an oxymoronic synergy of boldness and caution. How we discern what is real, what is charade, is a task beyond teachers or books. We must digest the subtle signs and determine their validity within our deepest, least easily accessed parts.

Our worlds interpenetrate. They exist simultaneously. Our beloved dead are among us as clearly as the Milky Way is above us. Initially I thought it was the pollution of our fears and doubts that could cloud our ability to receive contact. My daughter told me she visited people who did not know she was there. I watch one friend long for a visitation from her daughter she either doesn't receive or isn't aware of. I have come to view as hubris any claim to know why this is so. Each of us receives, or doesn't, according to factors larger than our limited human minds can decipher. If we do become aware of a visitation, its power is layered. The gilded outer shell is the blessing of connection with our beloveds. Within this shell is the eloquently simple seed of awareness of life's continuity.

The more transcendent an experience is, the more difficult it is to convey its full depth and richness, so language is at issue here. Words are like sieves, designed to contain dense matter; the fine grains of the transcendent may sift through, leaving behind only faint traces of their essence. Even the words "the living and the dead" are inadequate. If it weren't so cumbersome, I'd use "those of us with physical bodies and those of us without physical bodies," for if beings can speak, make themselves visible, shine as a light, cause rivers of energy to move through our bodies, unplug phones,

demonstrate their love, how well does “dead” really describe them? They lack physical bodies, that’s all. One interviewee told me the Aramaic word for *dead* translates to “not here but elsewhere,” adding, “not *physically* here.” Another pointed out that even calling where the dead are “the other side” is problematic, for to do so denies their presence here among us. Words cannot describe this kind of interpenetration.



Within our Western literary canon, there are many references to contact with the dead. Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* centers on an after-death communication from Hamlet’s father. Charles Dickens’ *A Christmas Carol* is all about Marley’s visitation to Scrooge. In Ibsen’s *The Lady from the Sea* it is a deceased lover who woos the lady. In the ancient worlds, or in cultures that have retained their older traditions, such contact is expected and sought after. Mexicans celebrate *El Día de los Muertos*, Day of the Dead. On November first *las almas chicas*, the dead children, are invited to return, and on November second *las almas grandes*, the adults, are invited. They are coaxed here with favorite food and drink on fanciful and exquisite home altars and after a visit are urged to return to the land of the dead. In Oaxaca, where *Muertos* rivals Christmas in importance as a holiday, I have seen *las ancianas*, the older women, sit either by these altars or in the graveyards in communion with their dead beloveds round the clock. All over the globe similar days are celebrated at the same time of year, like the Celtic Samhain on October 31 and the Hopi and Zuni Ancestors’ Day on November 2.

As many who have contact with the dead, including myself, experience, the veil between the living and the dead thins at this time of year. Our culture is aware of this too, but the knowledge has mutated into sheet-draped ghosts and masked ghouls. How we celebrate Halloween negates the possibility of receiving love and support from the dead. Mainstream modern culture denies after-death communication as anything but an aberration. This denial is a mass deprivation of our human right and capacity to have continued contact with our deceased beloveds, who long to show their love, to support us, to let us know they are doing okay.

The traditions of every indigenous group I have explored include seeking wisdom and guidance from the dead. I have taken part in rituals in traditional Fijian villages where the *Darne Vuthu's*, or shaman's, role is to seek out this wisdom. The Hopi fashion special cylindrical "bucket" masks to assist in calling back the dead. Various peoples call in the ancestral spirits for help with everything from making tools to moving into a new home. To the African Shona people, those dead who return to teach and support us are matured and purified.¹ I have experienced this maturing with my daughter, and I have heard of it from others. Crossing the veil may make us invisible (not always!), but it also frequently transforms us. An innate generosity and wisdom often arise. When we are no longer restricted to our finite physical bodies, we seem more able to see the full picture of each situation, as if the act of dying strips us of blinders and sets our priorities straight. A woman apologizes to her deceased husband for certain regrets in how she had related to him.

He responds, as if with a shrug, It's okay, nothing more than a row of pins, so let that go. What may have mattered to him in life, in death has lost its significance; it is only their love that concerns him now.

Years ago when my beloved dog Geefer was struck and killed by a car, I was told it would upset me too much to see his body, but I chose to anyway. I was stunned by the absolute clarity of his absence. This was only the slack, cold body of some beautiful black dog who looked a lot like my Geefer. At my father's viewing I stayed away from the open coffin. At the end of his funeral, when I gathered all my scattered parts to approach him, I stifled a rueful laugh. One eyebrow had been cocked into an unfamiliar expression. Familiar wrinkles had been smoothed. His complexion had been "enhanced" with foundation and rouge and powder. Had my father ever for one second considered that someone might rouge his cheeks, he would have stipulated in his will: Absolutely No Makeup. As I gazed at him, I wondered why I had worried so about seeing his body, because he was not in it. Later I wondered what the point was of viewing this collection of cells that I had once identified as my father. Yet I had needed to look at the empty bodies of both my dog and my father to clarify the separateness of their two aspects. It seems that grief and loss make us forget about this, or maybe it's simply plain old habit. I was used to my dog and my father being synonymous with their bodies. It is easy to mistake the external for the internal, the description of a dream for its wonder, our bodies for our enigmatic essence, when it is the essence that is our true self. It is this true and eternal self

that makes contact through the veil, and it is this eternal self that we recognize when contact is made.

The experiences that follow are as varied as the people who have shared them with me. Some are visual, some auditory, some visceral, some subtle, some as life-affecting as near-death experiences. They range through dreams, disembodied voices, visions, electrical and physical manifestations, messages received through nature. They can be the rare frightening contact or a profoundly satisfying grace that precedes or follows a death or occurs at the moment of death. They can happen in a flash or transport us into an extended altered state that lasts all day. Visitations can come once or continue repeatedly for years. They can contain nothing but that relieving “I’m okay” or grant anything from a glimpse to a rich understanding of what we have come together to accomplish in our lives together.

These experiences have defied my early efforts at neat categorization—dreams here, visions there, visitations through nature given their own chapter. What I found was that if a man has a dream *and* a vision *and* a nature experience, to separate these was to lose the rich story of the man himself. The stories are woven together like a tapestry; though chapter 2 focuses on dreams, there are also dreams threaded into almost every other chapter. This method suits the subject matter more effectively anyway. After-death connection is neither rational nor orderly. We don’t have labeled pockets in our psyches in which to file such moments.

Like a sonnet or a symphony, an ADC is more than the sum of its parts. These moments speak to us in the language

of Spirit or God or the universe. They are not intended to be fully understood but rather to be savored and allowed to delight. More than anything else they resemble poetry, which, as Paul Valéry says, is defined by being indefinable.² They imprint themselves indelibly on our memories as being different from other moments in time. I ask as you read that you hold these stories as tenderly as you would a newborn. I ask that you receive them as they were experienced, as precious offerings from someone dearly loved, that you not allow the two-dimensional black and white of the page to diminish them. There is something in them that is unfathomable, even to the one experiencing them. Under too much dissection they may disintegrate.