



30 October 2024

Mr. Al Pacino
c/o United Talent Agency
9336 Civic Center Drive
Beverly Hills, CA 90210

Dear Mr. Pacino:

I read with great interest your recent comments about your COVID illness and your close brush with death. I'm a great fan of your work and happy that you have made a full recovery and that we can continue to enjoy your exceptional on-screen talent.

As someone who has spent her academic career studying near-death experiences (NDEs) and who leads the [International Association for Near-Death Studies \(IANDS\)](#), I noticed that the recent *Variety* article about you mischaracterized your experience. From your description, you did not have an NDE; you had a close brush with death *without* an NDE. Like you, about 85% of people survive their close brush with no memory of anything—or anything unusual. But about 15% of people report that during the medical crisis, they had a vivid, emotionally intense experience of lucidly perceiving the material world from a position outside the physical body and/or perceiving and interacting with beings and environments not of the material world. Afterwards, experiencers are usually profoundly changed.

In 2025, the IANDS annual conference will celebrate the 50th anniversary of the book that opened the contemporary field of near-death studies: physician Raymond Moody's [Life After Life](#). Since then, NDEs and their aftereffects have been studied extensively, including at leading institutions such as the [University of Virginia Medical School's Division of Perceptual Studies](#) and [New York University's Langone Medical Center](#).

We researchers haven't yet found a difference between people who do or who—like you—don't report an NDE following what seem to be identical physical medical crises. Because you don't remember anything from your cardiac arrest, it makes sense that you would conclude that nothing exists beyond this life. However, among people who have had multiple close brushes with death due to a serious chronic medical condition or to just being unlucky, they sometimes report an NDE and other times do not. For this reason, one can't conclude from one experience that consciousness does not continue after physical demise. Be prepared for the possibility of a very different experience the next time you come close to death!

Despite many unanswered questions, we researchers now know a great deal. For example, 5-10% of the population have reported an NDE. Experiencers usually say that their perception during the NDE was

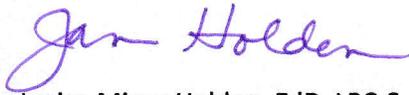
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vivid and was as real or more real than reality as experienced in the physical body. And beyond being subjectively real, in many cases the experiencer learned something during their NDE that was not previously known to them but turned out to be accurate; these cases have recently been compiled into the second edition of the book *The Self Does Not Die*. After NDEs, most experiencers lose their fear of death because they know from experience that their consciousness continued functioning apart from their disabled body.

Most researchers who have studied NDEs and related experiences deeply have concluded that human consciousness is not a product of the brain and that it survives physical demise. A good source on this topic is the Bigelow Contest Essays in which many of the leading figures in the field of near-death studies compiled the voluminous evidence for the survival of consciousness after physical death. For an overview of NDEs themselves, an excellent source is the book *After* by psychiatrist Bruce Greyson of the University of Virginia, the leading researcher in the field of near-death studies. The IANDS Fact Sheet: Near-Death Experiences (NDEs) offers an even more concise summary.

What happens after death is a question that people have pondered since the beginning of time. I'm happy you recovered from your illness, and I hope that when your time comes—and mine as well!—we find that our consciousness, including our memories, continues, and that our experience is as peaceful and wonderful as the majority of near-death experiencers have described.

Sincerely yours,



Janice Miner Holden, EdD, LPC-S, ACMHB
Professor Emerita of Counseling, University of North Texas
President, International Association for Near-Death Studies