

Kit Kat Essay

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“Out of this World”

Approximately five years ago, I presented my maiden essay to our club entitled, “When Did I Choose” which detailed the “coming out” of my youngest child as gay to my family and a discussion of homosexuality from various perspectives. The essay was very personal and I believe well received by our membership.

I decided that this essay should be lighter in tone and instead of dealing with a topic that only five percent or so of you had personally dealt with – a gay family member – I wanted to select a topic more generally experienced in everyday life. I believe I have found such a topic which while very personal is in fact experienced by more than ten percent of the population. By way of disclaimer, I just hope that the lightness of the topic and your general view of it

will not diminish to any degree any kind thoughts or historic feelings you may harbor for my earlier essay.

With that I begin my essay, "Out of this World."

It was a beautiful late July evening in the summer of 1969 that I sat on a bench along the Rhine River in Dusseldorf, Germany. I spent that college summer working for a German steel exporter as a clerk. I lived a few blocks from the river and almost nightly walked along the park promenade after dinner, as was the local custom of many Germans.

For you who may have visited Dusseldorf, the Rhine is a heavily traveled working river with commercial as well as cruise ship traffic. The water is fast moving, and laps the sea wall along the promenade were boats nightly dock so passengers could disembark to enjoy the sites of the Alt Stadt – Old City.

The walkways along the sea walls are not overly crowded, but well traveled in the evenings. After or during my walk I would sit and enjoy the evening, practice my German and occasionally speak to Americans disembarking the river cruises exchanging news of the day.

Since a child I have been fascinated by a full moon. I mark its monthly arrival and am saddened by its departure. So, on this late July night I sat on a bench alone watching as a full moon rose in the sky over the river. The water was lapping the sea walls; people passing by at an evening pace.

I had eaten dinner, but had not had any alcohol to drink nor did I use or take any kind of drugs – even though it was the sixties, I was alone in a foreign country, and this was the Age of Aquarius. But, there I sat, quietly watching the rising moon and then “something extraordinary happened.” With a burst of energy, I left my body! I felt exhilaration, like an exploding star – amass of light – no boundary just unlimited energy in all direction. I don’t remember hearing anything just feeling and seeing.

[Go off text to describe in detail.]

With this release of energy I still had a point of vision. From 40 or 50 feet above, I was looking down at about a 45 degree angle at myself sitting on the bench. I sat eyes closed, completely motionless, lifeless. It was as if I were an empty shell of a body, waiting to come alive.

The only other time in my life I have seen anything similar was at the birth of my child as he was delivered before he awakened, as if he were waiting for a spark to ignite life.

I have no idea how long I was in this state – a second or minutes maybe – I just don't know. There was no fear – only absolute exhilaration. I had no idea what had happened, nor anyone to tell.

There were no emails, no cell phones, and a weekly letter home to the states was my only real vehicle to communicate with friends or family. I just went home. I chose not to share the experience with anyone. I am not sure why. Perhaps I didn't want anyone to think I was crazy or question what really happened while overseas. But I didn't tell anyone.

Over the years I since have told a few people who I thought would find it interesting and whose confidence I trusted. Over the years I have read occasional articles about people who have experienced similar events under differing circumstances and thought I would finally after nearly 45 years try to better understand what happened that extraordinary evening.

As to trusted confidence and secrets kept, I think age has a way of making old secrets seem somewhat trivial, so sharing an experience like this one while personal is much easier now.

When I first thought about the topic, I thought it may be a little “out there” – sorry, couldn’t pass the pun – so I ran it by a fellow Kat and asked him his thoughts. He will remain nameless as I don’t out Kats. The first thing he said was, “I have had one,” so at least five percent of our membership has had an out of body experience and 100% of my survey of two. By way of disclaimer, I am sticking to a 50,000 feet view as a non-medical person. There are two doctors among us who have worked a lifetime with the human brain as well as a psychiatrist and a priest for good measure. They are more knowledgeable and I imagine have an insight into this topic which I will welcome them to share.

So what is an out of body experience?

A general definition is an experience involving a sensation of floating outside of one’s body and in cases perceiving one’s physical body and the world from a place outside of one’s body. Out of Body Experiences, or OBE’s, can be induced by brain traumas, sensory

deprivation, near death experiences, dissociative and psychedelic drugs, dehydration, sleep, electrical stimulations of the brain to name a few.

It can intentionally be induced while many experience them with little or no reason which could suggest that there may be a predisposition to them. One study at the University of Birmingham of 63 normal healthy individuals of whom 17 had OBE's suggested that those subjects "demonstrated behavior linked with neuroelective anomalies in the temporal lobes as well as a general distortion in the brain's ability to process information coming from the body as a whole. All of these anomalies taken together point to minor but crucial differences in the brain, and might well explain why some people have much weaker mental links to their own bodies - which seems like a natural prerequisite for out of body experiences."

I have labeled this potential cause kiddingly as "it's the parents' fault."

Some common experiences associated with OBE's include being in an "out-of-body" - body much like the physical one, feeling

a sense of energy, feeling vibrations, and hearing strange loud noises. Sometimes a sensation of paralysis precedes the OBE.

The term itself is relatively new, having been introduced in 1943 by George N.M. Tyrell in his book, Apparitions. The term was quickly embraced by various researchers in the field and is now the commonly used umbrella word to describe the experience, however it may be caused.

Prior to the use of the term, more belief centric labels as “astral projections, soul travel, or spirit walking were used. These labels are a more paranormal view of the experience which assumes the existence of an “astral” body separate from the physical body and capable of travel outside the astral plane. The idea of astral travel is common in religions all over the world and in historic accounts of the experience.

As you may realize there are different types of experiences with different causes ranging from a very spiritual view to a more scientific, although without clear proof. Please don't infer that a quick mention of something is any way dispositive or dismissive, but I only wish to suggest an area of occurrence or possible cause.

OBE's appear to be either spontaneous or induced. As to the spontaneous, they are broken down as follows:

- a) Some researchers believe that OBE's are reminiscent of sleep paralysis which occurs when a person is waking from or falling into REM sleep which is the state of most vivid dreams. During this REM sleep the muscles of the body, excluding the eye muscles, and those responsible for circulation and respiration are immobilized. This prevents us from acting out dreams. Sometimes the paralysis turns on and remains active while the person's mind is fully awake and aware of the world. Feelings of removal from body, eerie, rushing experiences, hissing and roaring sounds during sleep paralysis are similar to those of some OBE's. Fear is also often a common component of sleep paralysis. In approaching the questions as when do people have OBE's, one study reported that 85% of those surveyed had OBE's when resting, sleeping, or dreaming. Other surveys show that a majority of cases occur while people are in bed, ill, or

resting with a much smaller percentage being drugged or medicated.

There is also evidence to suggest that people who have OBE's also have lucid dreams, flying and falling dreams, and the ability to control their dreams. I will discuss in more detail lucid dreaming which could be an essay itself. There are a number of strong connections between OBE's and lucid dreams with the thought that OBE's are a type of lucid dream. One significant difference between the two is that people having OBE's are convinced it is a real event happening in the physical world and not a dream while in a lucid dream by definition the dreamer is certain it is a dream, with a few exceptions.

b) Near death. Near death experiences refers to a range of experiences associated with impending death, encompassing multiple possible sensations including detachment from the body, feelings of levitations, (total serenity, security or worth) the experience of absolute dissolution, and the presence of light. This phenomena

usually is reported after an individual has been clinically dead or otherwise close to death though not all events arise from life threatening occurrences. With improvements in cardiac resuscitation techniques more near death experiences have been reported. While many medical journals describe the events as hallucinations, parapsychologists & religious believers point to them as evidence of an afterlife. There have been numerous reports in the popular press of such events and in a Gallup poll some years ago claimed that almost eight million people had a near death experience.

Commentator S.M. Simpson, in 2001, claimed the number of such events very underestimated as many people feel uncomfortable discussing them especially if thought to be a paranormal event.

Other characteristics of a near death experience are:

- 1) Sense / awareness of death

- 2) Perception of one's body from an outside position, sometimes observing doctors and nurses performing duties
- 3) Tunnel experience as in moving down or through a passageway
- 4) Immersion or communication with light
- 5) Life review and previews
- 6) Encountering "beings in light" often dressed in white
- 7) Unpleasant or loud sounds and noise though often music is heard
- 8) Connection to the cultural beliefs held by the individual which seem to dictate the experience and later its interpretation
- 9) Telepathic conversations with being of light or angels, deceased relatives and pets, religious figures, demons and fallen angels
- 10) A decision by oneself or others to return to one's body often with reluctance.

Researcher Kenneth Ring subdivided near death experiences into five stages:

- 1) Peace
- 2) Body separation
- 3) Entering darkness
- 4) Seeing light
- 5) Entering the light

He noted that while 60% experienced peace and contentment only ten percent experienced stage five of entering the light.

A very recent cover story in Newsweek from this past October 15, 2012 entitled, "Heaven is Real," sent to me by one of our Kats, goes into vivid detail about the out of body experience of Dr. Eben Alexander, an academic neurosurgeon, teaching at Harvard Medical School and other universities and the son of an academic neurosurgeon.

As a result of contracting very rare bacterial meningitis, his entire cortex, that part of the brain that controls thought and emotion, shut down. After seven days in a coma with all higher order brain functions essentially offline, he awoke.

While many people have experienced OBE's, he suggest that no one has traveled to glance at the realm he experienced while their cortex was completely shut down and while their body was under minute medical observations for a full seven days. Booming sounds, shimmering lights, colors, and a beautiful celestial young girl with a message of, "You are loved and cherished" dearly forever. "You have nothing to fear." "There is nothing you can do wrong." We will show you many things" but eventually you will go back. His experience changed his life.

I just wanted to spend time on the highlights of near death experiences as they seem more generally experienced, as well as giving an example of a contemporary, well-educated, medically trained person in a magazine held in reasonable good esteem discussing their personal experiences and not a crackpot on a late night call in show.

c) The next type of spontaneous OBE's results from extreme physical effort such as high altitude climbing and marathon running with a sense of bilocation being apparent with the

ground and air based perspective being experienced simultaneously.

Bilocation occurs when an individual or object is located or appears to be located in two distinct places at the same instant in time. The concept has been embraced by a variety of religious and philosophical systems over time. From saints in the Catholic Church to sinners in the Witch Trials of Salem to Vladimir Lenin, the phenomenon has been noted.

d) And finally those spontaneous occurrences that fit into none of the previously noted types.

2) Induced. These events are those that are consciously controlled and premeditated which people have claimed to be able to induce. They are broken down into three subdivisions: mental, mechanical, and chemical.

a) Mental induction can take several paths, such as falling asleep physically without losing wakefulness. This “mind awake, body asleep” state is often a suggestive cause of OBE’s. Among practitioners of this state was Thomas Edison, who would rest a

silver dollar on his head while sitting with a metal bucket on a chair. If he drifted off the coin noise falling in the bucket would restore some of his alertness allowing him to tackle problems working on his inventions.

Deliberating teetering between awake and asleep states is known to cause spontaneous episodes at the onset of sleep which ultimately are helpful to induce OBE's. Relaxing one eventually encounters a slipping feeling if the mind is still alert, feeling like you are leaving the physical body.

b) Waking up mentally but not physically is another technique used to achieve lucid dreaming which can permit a person to go into a sleep paralysis which can allow visualization of separations of the body. Again lucid dreaming which is often mentioned is a dream in which one is aware he is dreaming and with a certain degree of control over the participation within the dream or being able to manipulate the experience in a dream environment. These dreams are realistic and vivid.

3) Mechanical induction is a second method which employs brainwave synchronization; magnetic and electrical stimulation,

sensory deprivation and sensory overloading to create the conditions for OBE's to occur.

In the cases of sensory manipulation the aim is to remove space and time references or cause the brain to shut itself off from all sensory input with the result that the confusion and disorientations permit vivid, ethereal OBE's.

While brainwave synchronizations via audio/visual stimulation would normally be thought of in terms of measuring brainwave frequency it was interesting that some researchers have observed that drumming in Native American religious ceremonies have a heightened receptivity to "other worlds" through brainwave entrainment mechanisms.

4) The last method of induction discussed is chemical where often OBE's may be considered hallucinations. There are a number of drugs that can initiate OBE's and produce symptoms of OBE's. Methamphetamines have also been cited as inducing OBE's due to the associated lack of sleep of the individual.

Now that we have generally discussed what an Out of Body Experience is; what the general classifications are; the distinction between spontaneous and induced OBE's, I wish to outline the progression that the experience follows:

While there is a great range of experience, a majority report of hearing loud noises during the onset of the event, while some feel they have willed themselves out of their body and others have been pulled from their bodies. Some claim to have observed details of otherwise unknown to them beforehand such as the anecdotal stories of recalling conversations and actions on a hospital bed while having OBE.

The classical OBE follows perceptually distinct stages although the absence of one or more such stages is not unusual.

- 1) The withdrawal stage is where conscious interactions with the physical environment ceases. Sensory inputs go unnoticed and the body is on autopilot. Sleeping would be a good example.
- 2) The cataleptic stage is when movement has been totally impaired. Alternative sensory information may be present

- such as intense vibrations, noises and even sight through closed eyes.
- 3) Separation stage is when with effort, the perceptual viewpoint can be pulled away from the physical body location. Still subject to intense sensation, pull back towards the body obstructs progression.
 - 4) The free movement stage is when beyond a certain radius movement becomes unimpeded with control markedly increasing. Visual and mental clarity can vary greatly, from barely functional to exceptional.
 - 5) The final stage of classical OBE is reentry. There is a perception of a need to return, leading either to or voluntary reversal of separation or extremely fast involuntary snap-back. Or alternatively, a transition to sleep may occur.

So, how do we explain Out of Body Experiences?

There appears to be two very distinct theories for OBE's – one, a psychological and scientific view; and the other a paranormal

explanation of the experience. Let's first look at psychological explanations of OBE's.

The scientific community's view on the experience is that OBE's are an altered state of consciousness without recourse to the paranormal. Some cognitive science and psychology suggest that the explanation is OBE's are hallucinations arising from different psychological factors. One immediate observation though as a hallucination is the sheer number of people who have had OBE's in many different circumstances, make it somewhat difficult to explain why so many have similar delusion.

Some experiments, though, do suggest that OBE's are natural phenomena arising out of normal brain powers. Some psychologists concluded that surveys and psychological testing of OBE experient find that they are a close approximation of the average healthy American.

Susan Blackmore, a colorful psychologist often mentioned in the field, suggests that OBE's begin with a person losing contact with sensory input from the body while remaining conscious. The person retains the feeling of having a body but the feeling is not

derived from the senses. The person perceives the world as he or she generally inhibits while awake, but this perception is not from the senses. It's the brain's ability to create fully convincing images of the world in the absence of real sensory information.

Sleep researchers believe OBE's to be reminiscent of sleep paralysis, which I mentioned earlier when discussing near death experiences.

Many of the same sensations are experienced during sleep paralysis as OBE's, suggesting two aspects of the same phenomenon.

There is also considerable discussion about the strong connection between OBE's and lucid dreaming which again is a dream in which one is aware that one is dreaming. The dreamer can exert some degree of control and manipulation of the experience. Lucid dreaming is well researched and its existence established.

Studies have found that lucid dreams sometimes do contain OBE-like experience, including noises, floating, vibrations and strange body sensations. In studies these lucid dreams start in two ways – the first are dream initiated lucid dreams. This more

common variety has the dreamer acquiring awareness of being in a dream while fully involved in it, usually right in the middle of REM sleep. Studies performed to test the dream initiated lucid dreams have found that 80% of lucid dreams are of this type.

The other type of lucid dreams representing 20% of the studies are called wake initiated lucid dreams, which occur when dreamers report awakening from a dream and then returning to the dream state with unbroken awareness – one moment they are aware that they are awake in bed in a sleep laboratory and the next moment, they are aware that they have entered a dream and are no longer perceiving the room around them.

Further experiments found most of OBE type dream content was during the 20% wake initiated lucid dreaming. These lab studies showed that OBE's happened in lucid dreams when the subjects were either reentering or awakening from REM sleep or right after they became aware of being in bed.

The conclusion of this particular set of studies in a sleep lab and extensive survey of people who had OBE's is that OBE's tend to occur during lucid dreams and with those lucid dreams, arising from

brief awakenings in REM sleep, by people who have special dream experiences including the capacity of returning to the dream state after an awakening, lucid dreaming, and sleep paralysis. So, the interaction of losing touch with sensory information and the work of an aware mind keeping up its good work of showing us the world it expects creates a mental dream world, but a very real world.

An additional important observation is that dreams don't have to occur during REM sleep. People can lose touch with sensory experience and enter a mental state under other conditions – hypnotic trances, anesthesia, and sensory isolations to name a few. So, a person doesn't have to be asleep to have an experience. From a different point of view, some studies suggest people having OBE's are more likely to be fantasy prone, hold higher belief in the paranormal and display greater somatoform dissociation. Other researchers of neurological and neurocognitive data believe OBE's are due to functional disintegration in specific parts of the brain. Some suspect that OBE's are a result of a mismatch between visual and tactile signals.

Whether a symptom of a healthy individual or one with some physical or mental impairment, one rational that OBE's are not a paranormal event is asking what we consider normal – or what is an “in body experience.” While one may be “in body,” that suggest definite borders, i.e. the physical body, but what of our sense of self.

While being “in body” is perceived by input from the senses from within and the world from without, there is a sense of localization of self in space. But, it's the physical body and sense organs that occupy the specific space, not the self which is not the brain or the body, rather the self is where it feels it to be, its location subjective but derived from sensory organs.

So, if our perceptions are tied to brain function we experience what we expect our brain to see, hear, etc. Therefore, why if we left our bodies would it seem logical to perceive systems identical to those of physical form, again suggesting OBE's are not paranormal occurrences.

While the simplest explanation of an out of body experiences – the human consciousness separating from the human body traveling

in a discorporate form in the physical world, the field of parapsychology and occultism believe that the experience is not psychological, but in fact a soul or subtle body can detach itself out of the body and visit distant locations.

A subtle body is one of a series of spiritual constituents of living beings corresponding to a plane of existence in a hierarchy or chain of beings that culminate in physical form found in both Eastern and Western religion and spiritual systems. But suffice it to say there are many people who sincerely believe OBE's are real, but spiritual in the origin, with no need to be scientifically explained.

Some researchers in this community endorse theories that subtle bodies enter nonphysical dimensions; that consciousness does not leave the body during the experience but travels inward to the recesses of the brain, while one clinical research in 2012 supports the interpretations that OBE's consciousness transcends the boundaries of time and space.

The underlying theme of out of body experience being paranormal is that spiritual teaching in any number of faiths tells us that we have a reality beyond that of this world. An understanding

of how it may occur may be illuminating, but not necessary to believe that OBE's are real and an expression of that spiritual reality. At the same time, I don't want to minimize the life altering effects that such experiences have had in many people in a spiritual way. As I mentioned earlier in my discussion, Dr. Eben Alexander in the October 2012 Newsweek article is dramatic in the story and the life transformation from the experience.

He's educated, bright and not part of some fringe group, so his experiences and many like him need to be heard. While Dr. Alexander was relatively unknown even St. Paul was believed to have experience with the phenomena by some writers. In I Cor. 15:44 Paul writes, "There is of course a physical body so there has to be a spiritual body." He appears to be convinced of the truth of that statement when he writes in II Cor. 12:2 "I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven whether in the body or out." It is assumed he may have spoken of a personal experience.

So what am I to believe? What have I learned from my very limited research about out of body experience. I had no history of occurrences before or since that night. I was and believe to be healthy mentally and physically. I was neither under the influence of alcohol or drugs. I was not under or in an experiment and was not asleep. I was not in either sensory deprivation or extreme sensory overload. I was not hypnotized, under anesthesia, or near death. I did not guide myself into the experience, in fact I had no idea what had even happened. I did not hear loud noises, nor see any people or figures culturally significant to me.

I don't know if any real significance can be suggested from all this, but my experience is unusual in that it falls outside the vast majority of OBE's. I would like to believe that out of body experiences are not just some enabling mechanism of mind and body to protect or calm us from impending pain or death or hallucinations from some physical or mental flaws yet to be diagnosed. I would like to believe that the experience is an expression of the untapped, unknown capacity of the human body and mind which in no measure diminishes a belief in God.

I only wish that my experience could be freely shared by others whether understood or not.

But with all this being said, I know only one thing to be true: on a beautiful late July evening in the summer of 1969, a young man sat on a bench along the Rhine River in Dusseldorf, Germany, watching the full moon rise, enjoying the evening, practicing his German and occasionally speaking to Americans disembarking the river cruises exchanging the news of the day.

Show of hands of OBE's.

Extensive footnotes to be added to attribute text and facts.