Jimmy’s Out-of-Body Experiences

Michael Bova

Abstract
Michael Bova reviews events that took place in the early 1970s when his cousin Jimmy confidentially reported spontaneous experiences involving unusual sensory awareness and altered states of consciousness which developed into the apparent anomalies of extra sensory perception and out-of-body experiences (OBEs). Bova describes Jimmy’s emotional duress of having spontaneous anomalies and includes Jimmy’s diary notations. In them we see how these events appeared as foreboding or alluding to mental instability as these strong experiences countered his usual ways of knowing himself and his world. Bova’s serendipitous involvement with two parapsychology research settings allowed him to access information that helped Jimmy understand his unusual experiences. As important as content (data from compiled reports of spontaneous OBEs, laboratory research and available books on OBEs) was, the context of a nonjudgmental trusting relationship supported Jimmy’s personal wellbeing and enrichment from these apparent anomalies. The author believes that his early work in parapsychology and exposure to parapsychological phenomena helped him to help Jimmy. This early work was as both a research assistant at Maimonides Medical Center’s Dream Laboratory and as a student healer in the Consciousness Research and Training Project, Inc. Both research groups were focused on the study of psi but they never let the pursuit of phenomenological investigations override humanistic values and transpersonal experiences of their subjects. The author also believes that forty years since that time, Jimmy maintains an appreciation of life and self identity that were enhanced by those early OBEs.

Key Words: Out-of-Body Experience (OBE), anomaly, parapsychology, psi, precognition

Introduction
In the early 1970s I was finishing high school and going through undergraduate school when I was able to help my cousin whom I will call Jimmy (note, his name has been changed for the purposes of this paper), to cope with and nurture a variety of sensory experiences and altered states of consciousness that occurred spontaneously. Many of these were initially frightening, some of which appeared to be anomalous perceptions and occurrences.

At this time I was also assisting in psi experiments as a subject, judge, then experimenter at the Maimonides Medical Center’s Dream Laboratory. I began as a sleeping “subject” in a telepathic dream experiment with my brother Vin as the “sender” of randomly chosen target information. I then volunteered working in the laboratory’s office and during the next 6 years I was a judge of experimental subject target data, and then was a research assistant in studies being done. The “Dream Lab” ran experiments on psi in dreaming (Mayer, 2007; Ullman and Krippner, 1973) and in
other altered states of consciousness induced by sensory isolation, sensory bombardment, hypnosis, Ganzfeld technique and meditation (Krippner, 1975).

I had also trained in meditation and psychic healing with Lawrence LeShan, PhD as part of his ongoing parapsychology research (LeShan, 1974, 1976). Humanistic and person-centered approaches in training were (and are still) used to help students attain a specific altered state of consciousness associated with anomalous activity (LeShan, 2009). I have continued involvement with his research and today I am a trainer and a member of the Board of Directors with the Consciousness Research and Training Project, Inc. (CRTP). I'm a certified trainer in a mental health wellness process, Wellness Recovery Action Plan (WRAP) through the Copeland Center for Wellness and Recovery, and I direct a residential program in northeast Philadelphia for adults with psychiatric diagnoses. My graduate training was in art therapy and I'm an art therapist in private practice.

My earlier experiences seemed to help my cousin Jimmy who was a high school senior, while I was a college freshman, when he first told me about the unusual experiences which led to his out-of-body-experiences (OBEs). These discussions took place in the trusting context of our relationship as cousins and friends where we were used to discussing our common or individual interests and experiences. My involvement with the Maimonides Dream Laboratory and LeShan's training in meditation and healing ushered in open discussions of our subjective experiences and internal states. As Jimmy described his unusual initial experiences (which he now calls “near-OBE” states) I did not suggest or even think that they were paranormal. When he later did present anomalous reports of precognition and OBEs my background did assist him in understanding a possibility for these phenomena and by offering a context to integrate these experiences.

He described them as “high pitched sounds” in his ears with “vibrations” throughout his body. These took place as he was lying down and relaxing. My initial impression was that they could have been medical symptoms or they were unusual pre-sleep sensations. My experiences at the Maimonides Dream Lab and with LeShan’s approach to meditation and healing adapted me to notice changes in internal states without instantly evaluating or labeling them, and also to trust that there are usually a myriad of “normal” possibilities before assuming they are “paranormal.” Therefore, my first agenda was to help Jimmy to feel safe in his own experiences. They were frightening ones which he literally had to shake himself out of to stop. Instead of this I wanted Jimmy to trust himself, to know he was safe, and to “allow” the experiences to happen. Only when he did allow them to happen did he have full (and classic) OBEs, which I was then able to recognize and support him with.

Possibly, my greatest help to Jimmy was to stay available to him while sharing a grounded sense of wonder, a quality of appreciation that my mentors Stanley Krippner, Lawrence LeShan, Montague Ullman, Charles Honorton, and Joyce Goodrich offered when I shared my experiences with them. I remained focused on Jimmy’s well-being and I cared about him feeling safe in these new experiences. Once Jimmy felt safe and comfortable within his experiences, fully identified OBEs became new experiences for him to adapt to. For several years these became regular experiences that continued to sustain Jimmy’s sense of confidence and personal growth. Jimmy’s ability to appreciate these as exceptional personal experiences was enhanced by reading about OBEs and finding others who also had OBEs. Instead of being jarred and frightened by OBEs as uninvited traumatic events, OBEs instead enhanced Jimmy’s life, providing him with a profound appreciation to life’s vastness and beauty.

Recollections of My Out-of-Body Experiences, Excerpted from Jimmy's Personal Notations
During the late 1960’s at the approximate age of 15, I had an initial series of experiences which I later understood to be “near” OBEs. These would occur in full waking state accompanied by audible “vibration” sensations during quiescent
periods, typically in the 1 AM to 3 AM timeframe. With time I came to realize I could predispose myself to producing or intensifying these near-OBEs by lying awake and peaceful in the quiet of the early morning and focusing on the faint vibrations when they arose.

The initial near-OBEs were subtle enough that I might easily have dismissed them as “bad dreams,” were it not for discussions I had with my cousin Michael Bova. Mike didn’t lead me towards having these experiences through any suggestions, but he encouraged me to experience these sensations without an automatic reflex of fear to shape or censure them. This allowed me to experience OBEs within a discovery process. At that time, Michael was working at the Menninger Dream Research Laboratory at Maimonides Hospital in New York City, assisting in scientific studies of paranormal phenomena. By temperament and through his association with professional researchers who approached these phenomena with objectivity, Michael was able to both encourage pursuit of my OBE curiosities and at the same time calm my fears about the potential outcomes. He advised that I remind myself I am safe in bed and that I allow the experience to develop without impeding it. For example, I explained to Michael that some of my near-OBEs were accompanied by a falling sensation, as though falling off a bicycle or off a building ledge, and I would instinctively resist this sensation and bolt up in bed. His advice was to try and let go of the fear of falling and allow myself to fall, a strategy that ultimately proved my only means of increasing the likelihood that a near-OBE would transition to a full OBE.

My first “full term” OBE occurred within a year of the onset of my “near” OBEs. This time the vibration progressed to an astoundingly intense level—as I imagine it would feel to be in the working engine of a jumbo jet. I was immersed in an indescribably power field of sound and energy. I was soaring, ripping through space with blinding speed. Suddenly I was in my quiet room. I rolled out of bed in a fluid motion and onto the floor. I then heard my father’s voice, he was complaining that the toilet was backed up or overflowing. At some point I emerged from the OBE and determined no one else in the house was awake and that there was no problem with the plumbing. However, a short time later the plumbing problems as occurred in the OBE did materialize.

I became very confused and unsettled by this precognitive aspect of my OBE. I told my cousin Mike about this event and he marveled at it with me. Having someone to tell without fearful minimizing or negative reaction was a comfort and reaffirmed my interests in the experience. My next full OBE was preceded by the same strong vibration state described above. I found myself above my bed and looking down at myself. There was just enough light for me to see the outline of my body on the bed. ‘If that is me then who am I?’ I looked at my right hand. I was horrified to see it was the contorted hand of an elderly or perhaps dead man. Its skin was shriveled and tightly wrapped around underlying fascia and bone. I tried to open and close my fingers but the hand moved in jerky motions beyond my control. I was frightened and filled with panic, and it was no longer good for me to be in that place. I left the OBE state and sat up in bed.

I turned on the light in my room and verified my hands were indeed mine. Recalling the precognitive nature of my first OBE, I feared this second OBE might be foretelling an accident or tragedy involving my hands or perhaps my death. I pondered whether my experiences were “valid;” if they were not, then perhaps I was delusional or going crazy. If they were valid, I was seeing a pre-determined accident. I did not have the same ability to just observe my experience with collected reflection. Confused and still frightened, I walked around my small room and then up and down the hallway just outside the bedrooms where my parents and brothers were sleeping. Hearing my pacing about, my mother came out of her room and asked what was wrong. I explained where I had just been, only to be told what I subsequently was to hear from many others: it was nothing more than a bad dream and I should try and forget it. My immediate reaction was abandonment, having just returned moments ago from a life-changing journey that bothallured and frightened me out of my wits—and the person who has
always been my prime source of comfort and support. Advised me to deny the experience.

From my earliest days I’ve been a “scientist” by temperament, and to this day I work in and have an advanced degree in the sciences. I tend to be very skeptical of phenomena that can’t be verified, duplicated, or explained by the scientific method. If I had even a small doubt in my mind that my experience was in fact a bad dream or a hallucination, I could have taken comfort in my mother’s advice. But my OBEs had passed my own personal “reality” test and were too tangible to discard. Outside of my discussion with Michael, however, I found little support or useful information for my inquiries on this important personal matter, leading me to question my ability to discern reality from non-reality.

Once again I sought Michael’s guidance. He suggested I read the text by Robert Monroe, *Journeys Out of the Body* (1973). Monroe’s descriptions of the different locales visited by him and others put my mind at ease about the hand experience. Discussing OBEs with Michael and several others, I later learned, were similarly open to experience expanded beyond normal perceptive capabilities, which enabled me to explore the greater meaning or usefulness of OBE experiences. For example, I was eventually able to appreciate that the “hand” OBE offered me a profound and invaluable glimpse of my mortality (truly a “precognitive” event), leading me somewhat like Harry Potter (Jimmy Stewart) in “It’s A Wonderful Life” with a greater commitment to live life on this (worldly) plane.

My OBEs continued through the 1970’s and have since tapered off. I still occasionally have near or full-OBEs, and these are now seamlessly integrated into my perceptions of life. They provide a comfortable sort of window into my eternity, that whole “other side” of my life that is perhaps an energy that transcends the worldly plane. While I don’t truly understand what occurs during OBEs, I’ve learned to derive value from their potency and richness rather than deny them or allow them to become a negative force.

**References**