

HOMELESS IN PARADISE

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YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE HOMELESS TO FREEZE TO DEATH – Part 2

When Hypothermia Produces Hallucinations

By Wanda Sue Parrott

(Winter began officially on Tues., Dec. 22, bringing both cold and the return of longer daylight. This two-part series explores the process of freezing to death in order to demystify it and acquaint you with frostbite and hypothermia in yourself and others during the cold days ahead.)

React To Visions, Or Lie There And Let Yourself Die?

IF THE DEAD COULD SPEAK, two homeless men who froze on Dec. 14-15 in downtown Monterey could reveal whether invisible hallucinatory figments beckoned or whispered to them. Or did they lose consciousness, then expire painlessly in the cool-down phase of flash-fire death?

Hallucinations and the sensation of extreme body heat are common symptoms of hypothermia; however, you need not be freezing or homeless to see and feel things that aren't really there. Rational non-homeless people also report diaphanous guardians, gurus and even grisly guides pointing the way back to life. So what?

Is extra-sensory delusion (ESD) a cousin to extra-sensory perception (ESP) that acts as a trickster guiding many victims onto the streets?

Hallucinatory Savors Or Tricksters?

According to The Free Dictionary by Farlex: *Hallucinations are false or distorted sensory experiences that appear to be real perceptions. These sensory impressions are generated by the mind rather than by any external stimuli, and may be seen, heard, felt, and even smelled or tasted.*

Hallucinations manifest as visions, voices or sounds, tactile feelings (called haptic hallucinations), smells, or tastes.

The British Journal of Psychiatry's 1996 report about 4,972 people's hallucinations revealed 37 percent had experienced hypnagogic hallucinations (impressions occurring as people fall asleep) and 12 percent reported hypnopomic hallucinations (sensory impressions while waking up). Seasoned meditators call them "borderline states of consciousness"; sleepers call them "dreams"; psychics call them "visions." We all hallucinate in one way or another.

"You Aren't Dead Until You're Warm And Dead."

Writer Peter Stark was lost in a snowstorm while traveling to meet friends for a ski weekend. They found him solidly frozen in fetal-position near his snowbound Jeep.

Stark's Outside Magazine story "The cold hard facts of freezing to death" (June 2, 2004) details his hallucinatory projection to his friends' cabin:

"You hear jingle bells. Lifting your face from your snow pillow, you realize with a surge of gladness that they're not sleigh bells; they're welcoming bells hanging from the door of your friends' cabin. You knew it had to be close by. The jingling is the sound of the cabin door opening, just through the fir trees.

"Attempting to stand, you collapse in a tangle of skis and poles. That's OK. You can crawl. It's so close. . . .Hours later, or maybe it's minutes, you realize the cabin still sits beyond the grove of trees. You've crawled only a few feet. The light on your wristwatch pulses in the darkness: 5:20. Exhausted, you decide to rest your head for a moment. . . . When you lift it again, you're inside, lying on the floor before the woodstove. The fire throws off a red glow. First it's warm; then it's hot; then it's searing your flesh. Your clothing has caught fire. . . ."

When his friends found him, Stark was bare-chested and freezing to death. He writes: There's an adage about hypothermia: You aren't dead until you're warm and dead."

Read Peter Stark's story online at <http://www.outsideonline.com/1926316/freezing-persons-recollect-snow> .

I wrote the following true account. It appeared in the March 2007 edition of The Diploemat News Letter, of which I was and still am editor for my literary society.

A Turquoise Feather From Barbara Ruth Sampson



"On Jan. 15, 2007, I fell on the icy street, striking my head severely and probably suffering a mild to medium concussion. Getting to a hospital was not possible, as all the deserted streets were blocked by fallen live-wires and ice-covered trees and limbs. Springfield, Mo. looked as if it were a war zone.

"Earlier that day, I had lost one cat; at home, also facing freezing, were five remaining feline friends. The crucial decision was mine: lie here and freeze to death or try to survive.

"Knowing the cats' welfare depended on me was the motivator for my decision to stay awake, turn onto my stomach, then crawl across the ice.

"Two days later I woke up, barely, to find my hands and feet were purple and totally numb. I was starting to freeze to death. Such numbness leaves one with consciousness, but no emotion.

"As I drifted back toward sleep, a line of poetry shouted in my inner ear:

*Death, come when you may,
but life is sweet.*

"I recognized that line from a poem by our late Senior Poet Laureate, Barbara Ruth Sampson, a member of our Meeting the Muse section, symbol of which is the Turquoise Feather."

Death, come when you may, but life is sweet.

"Life was not sweet that miserable day, nor many more that followed, but that line of poetry kept shouting a reminder to me to not give up. Barbara's poetic voice shocked me out of my stupor.

"I managed to stay with friends who had heat and light, visiting my home daily to feed, love and otherwise tend to the five cats, all of which survived the devastating 22-day ice storm.

“On Feb. 2, 2007, power was finally restored and another 24 hours passed before the house was thawed. On my first day home, I found a beautiful turquoise feather on the floor at the foot of the bed from where the voice of Barbara Sampson had come. It was a greenish hue fringed with turquoise, like a feather from a parrot.

“I was the only Parrott in the house, and I do not have feathers.” -Wanda Sue Parrott, Editor



How trustworthy are hallucinations? The “voice” of Barbara Ruth Sampson that saved me from freezing to death came eight months after her death at age 92 in May 2006. If all the dead could speak, the homeless men who froze in Monterey might say: You don’t have to be homeless to freeze to death—but it sure helps.”

Happy New Year.



I live each nanosecond of my life
as ready as the sprinter for the “Go!”
I walk the earth when fearfulness is rife,
packed tight with monsters that no one can know.
I race from lofty peak to lofty peak
to catch the lightning bolts that spear the sky,
and laugh and laugh when thunder booms and speaks
in horrendous tones that numb both ear and eye
I break waves that have pounded foreign shores,
joined astronauts in pioneering race.
My agile mind and creative heart explore
and ever seek for keenest words to trace
these treks for kindred hearts as up we soar
to jet with eagles in the realms of space.
~ Barbara Ruth Sampson,
Stockbridge, Georgia; 1914-2006

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