

Talking with Angel about Illness, Death and Survival

by Evelyn Elsaesser-Valarino

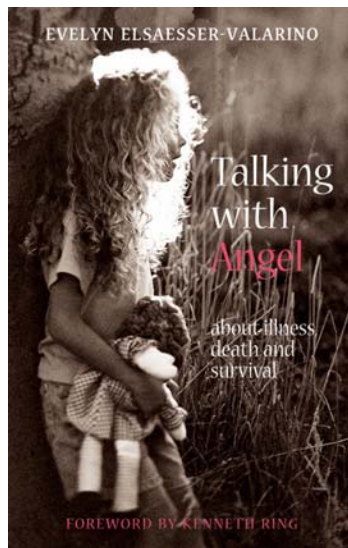
Foreword by Kenneth Ring

208 pages

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Reviews

'Talking with Angel is a courageous book that forces us to confront our worst fears. In the end, however, Evelyn provides us with a sense of hope, a peace of mind, and an invitation into a realm of possibilities that is more beautiful than we can even imagine. Talking with Angel is a triumph for the human spirit.'

-- Dr Allan Botkin, author of *Induced After Death Communication: A New Therapy for Healing Grief and Trauma*

'I enjoyed this book enormously. I found the way Evelyn dealt so tenderly and openly with the subject of death very reassuring. It will be of interest to everyone, whether they are confronting death or not. It can provide lessons for life.'

-- Alison Westwood, *Kindling*, Autumn 2005

'Talking with Angel provides an experiential rollercoaster. Reflection on completion of the book enables me fully to appreciate the journey taken by the reader and the spiritual awakening it provoked. This book is for anyone with questions about the fairness of who lives and who dies, or about life after death. It is also for health professionals wishing to engender hope in people who are faced with death. This book will provide valuable insight and wisdom long after it is put back on the shelf.'

-- Susanne Becker, Lecturer in School of Nursing and Midwifery, University of South Australia, *Contemporary Nurse journal*

'I consider Talking with Angel one of the most powerful and helpful books I have ever read. I am sure it will help countless numbers of people understand and accept their eventual journeys to that wonderful "new dimension" of life that awaits us all.'

-- Rev Richard Southworth, Austin, Texas

'It is written as a novel [...] this format could be a good way to reach people who are having to come face to face with illness and death.'

-- Christian Parapsychologist, December 2005

'Evelyn Elsaesser-Valarino has written a beautiful book that I will recommend to my colleagues and, when appropriate, to clients. It is not only well written, but the content is insightful and education. At one point it brought tears to my eyes. I'm confident it will be heartily welcomed by many professionals and non-professionals alike.'

-- Louis E. LaGrand, PhD, CT, Distinguished Service Professor Emeritus at the State University of New York

'Gripping reading. The only other book that it calls to mind is Tolstoy's Death of Ivan Ilyich, although Ivan does not achieve the wisdom displayed in this book. The format is a tour de force. The simplicity of the narrative structure provides the vehicle through which spiritual wisdom is formulated and transmitted in an eminently palatable fashion. Once you read this book you will understand why human life is such a gift and can be passed on to those in need.'

-- David Lorimer, Scientific and Medical Network Review, December 2005

'The description of an NDE is very impressive and very complete. A very good and important book.'

-- Pim van Lommel, author of Near Death Experience In Survivors of Cardiac Arrest: A Prospective Study in the Netherlands, The Lancet, December 2001

'Talking With Angel is a powerful story of a young girl who becomes a woman during her intense struggle with a life-threatening illness. I recommend this book highly to every-one who values personal growth and spiritual transformation.'

-- Bill Guggenheim, author of Hello From Heaven

'A most poignant and heart-tugging read. This will be an invaluable and comforting book to all who are facing sickness or who are tending somebody. This insights are, however, of universal application. Recommended.'

-- Michael Taylor, New Vision, November 2005

'So intimate that you feel yourself "inside" the girl, caring what she thinks, feels, during crucial moments. The description of the near-death experience is among the most riveting accounts I have yet read about the phenomenon and its aftereffects. The book is simply incredible! Highly recommended for older children, parents, and anyone coming to grips with life and death issues -- regardless of age.'

-- P. M. H. Atwater, author of The New Children and Near-Death Experiences and Beyond the Indigo Children

'From her acknowledged position as one of the world's most well-known researchers and writers on the near-death experience, Evelyn Elsaesser-Valarino produces an

evocative and moving story about dying. Elsaesser-Valarino's triumph is in providing a genuine resource -- not simply for all children and parents desiring education about death and dying, but as one of the few books in the world one can put into the hands of a child who is facing a life-threatening illness.'

-- Dr Allan Kellehear, Professor of Palliative Care, La Trobe University, Melbourne

'Honestly, I was very moved by the story's emotional power and the depth of the teachings it conveys. I found the story gripping from the very beginning, but I think what hit me the most was the account Evelyn Elsaesser-Valarino wrote, in epistolary form, of James' near-death experience. It is simply one of the best and richest accounts (even if it is fiction) of an NDE I've ever come across. I don't think it is saying too much to claim that in itself this bit of writing is a masterpiece.'

-- Dr Kenneth Ring, Professor Emeritus of Psychology, University of Connecticut

"Talking with Angel"... is one of the most compelling, gripping books of all time. It grabs at your heart strings and doesn't let go...A MUST READ for anyone interested in knowing more about the here after.'

--Natalie Smith-Blakeslee, Near Death Experiencer, Professional Medium to Bereaved Moms and Dads and bereaved Mother herself. August 2006

I just finished reading "Talking With Angel" this morning, and had a good cry. Bravo. It is a wonderful, page turner of a story which imparts the very essence of the NDE without falling into the trap of being overtly expositional. I loved it.

Peter Shockey

Writer / Producer

4805 Bethesda Rd.

Thompson Station, TN 37179

I have finished reading your lovely book, Talking with Angel, and I certainly found it to be a fascinating and lovely way of describing what you've learned in all your years of studying near-death experiences. I think your book would be very comforting to anyone facing their own death or that of a loved one, and helpful to those seeking to learn more about the NDE experience as well. So I am pleased to recommend it to my clients and colleagues at Hospice of the Valley, as well as to visitors to my Grief Healing Web site.

Marty Tousley, APRN, BC, CT

Bereavement Counselor

Phoenix, AZ US

Reviewed by Michael Taylor
New Vision, November 2005

'This is a most poignant and heart-tugging read. Reading this rewarding book in short stages is, perhaps, best. The book, which has a fine foreword by Kenneth Ring, details the courage and fortitude shown by a girl facing leukaemia. Part One of the book deals with her stay in hospital and her attitude to the treatment she receives. Crucially, it covers her conversations with her doll, Angel.

Angel's conversations, which touch on God and the meaning of suffering, give the young girl the relief, trust and courage she needs. This assists her greatly and Part Two of the book deals with her relationships with some of the more sceptical patients, especially the pivotal figure of James. To me the most powerful part of this section is James's out of the body experience and the enlightenment he receives. James learns to put things in perspective and see things as a whole. James's experience gives a further boost to the girl and the book ends movingly with seven words. This book will be an invaluable and comforting book to all who are facing sickness or who are attending somebody. The insights are, however, of universal application. Recommended.'

Reviewed by Professor Kenneth Ring

'Honestly, I was very moved by the story's emotional power and the depth of the teachings it conveys. I found the story gripping from the very beginning, but I think what hit me the most was the account Evelyn Elsaesser-Valarino wrote, in epistolary form, of James' near-death experience. It is simply one of the best and richest accounts (even if it is fiction) of an NDE I've ever come across. I don't think it is saying too much to claim that in itself this bit of writing is a masterpiece.'

Dr Kenneth Ring, Professor Emeritus of Psychology, University of Connecticut

Reviewed by Professor Allan Kellehear

'The history of open adult discussion about sex and death has a parallel history for children. There is a great ambivalence about talking with children about these sensitive topics. But worse still, there are few literary or visual resources for children about these topics. And although the topic of sexuality has gained much recognition in recent years from teachers, parents and health professions as an appropriate target of story, information and instruction, the same cannot be said about death, dying and loss.

Of the children's literature that does broach the subject of mortality most deal with a very biological, almost mechanical idea of death. The question of 'where people go when they die?' is often re-cast as 'why do people go at all?' These stories are meditations on the naturalness of death as social disappearance. Other children's stories attempt to explore the surprising complexity of grief when confronted with bereavement over the loss of a family member. Evelyn Elsaesser-Valarino has left all these fledgling traditions of children's writing in her wake by going back to the heart of the matter of death and asking the original question: "Where do people go when they die?"

From her acknowledged position as one of the world's most well known researchers and writers on the near-death experience Evelyn Elsaesser-Valarino produces an

evocative and moving story about dying from the point of view of a child with leukemia. The simplicity of her achievement hides the fact that she is able to sensitively and accurately juggle aspects of a younger child's concerns with an older child psychology. The child's talks with her doll 'Angel' beautifully capture the fear and naivete of an inexperienced life. The child's deepening relationship with a young male doctor contains faint echoes of would-be womanhood in the child-come-teen. In this way, the book will have wide relevance and appeal to the many ages of childhood. But there's more. Lest anyone think this is a 'girl's book' central messages and insights come from boy characters in the book. Their voices and experiences 'partner', parallel and underline those of the main female character.

Furthermore, the book respects uncertainty, giving its emotional expression its rightful place as a bringer of personal doubt - and hope. There is no suggestion that near-death experiences are 'facts' to be understood away from the personal experiences and social symbols that shape it. Like the wider global debate and research on near-death experiences Elsaesser-Valarino takes as her canvas the experience rather than entering an irrelevant discussion about speculative causes and correlations. The possible 'causes' of near-death experiences themselves cause endless debate but all sides agree that the experiences are genuine and - to those who have experienced them - 'real'. Elsaesser-Valarino then charts her narrative around this personal reality of near-death experiences, always leaving space for doubt, comfort, possibility and reflection.

Finally, the greatness of this book is not found in its sophisticated child psychology or the novel application of Elsaesser-Valarino's scholarly expertise. Rather Elsaesser-Valarino's triumph is in providing a genuine resource - not simply for all children and parents desiring education about death and dying - but as one of the few books in the world one can put into the hands of a child who is facing a life-threatening illness. The days are now past when, as adults we need to cast about for informational and reflective resources to help us contemplate our own death. Thankfully, bookshops everywhere have shelves of this material now. Not so in children's literature. "Talking with Angel" is pioneering literature for this neglected area and readership. Evelyn Elsaesser-Valarino's work is a wonderful work of caring for these children and their parents. Like "Talking with Angel" itself, the words herein are a living act of love.'

Allan Kellehear, PhD.

Professor of Palliative Care - La Trobe University, Melbourne, Australia

Reviewed by David Lorimer

Network review: journal of the Scientific and Medical Network, no 89, Winter 2005

Wisdom in Death

'Evelyn Elsaesser-Valarino (SMN) has been working in the NDE field for over 20 years. She herself has written a book called *On the Other Side of Life: Exploring the*

Phenomenon of the Near-Death Experience and is co-author, with Kenneth Ring, of *Lessons from the Light: What we can learn from the near-death experience*. Here she distils her accumulated insight and experience, translating it into narrative form as the unfolding story of a young girl fighting leukaemia. The book is written in the first person from inside the experience of the girl, and makes for gripping reading. The only other book that it calls to mind is Tolstoy's *Death of Ivan Ilyich*, although Ivan does not achieve the wisdom displayed in this book.

The plot is relatively simple, revolving as it does around the progression of the illness. There is the girl's own experience and that of her parents and carers. The occasionally horrific physical symptoms are graphically depicted and the emotional reactions raw. How does the girl handle this and how does it affect those around her? So-called normal life recedes into the background as the girl confronts the likelihood, then the reality of her impending death. This is the cue for the first wisdom track in the form of inner dialogues with her doll Angel, who explains that death is a change of form rather than extinction. Her understanding starts to shift as she realises that the ordeal of illness and suffering can be turned into a lesson in living, and that one still has the choice of whether or not to trust the process of life. Fighting against the illness requires the mobilisation of all the positive forces of willpower, hope, courage and trust. It is a tall order for anyone, especially a young girl on the point of losing her future, but it carries the authentic ring of truth.

Other sick children add their voices. One of them, James, is especially sceptical of religious answers, but then he has a profound NDE which transforms his attitude root and branch. James's lengthy and detailed description summarises the core aspects of the deep NDE. In itself, the articulate eloquence is somewhat implausible in a person of his age, but it is a literary necessity for the structure of the book. James's insights reinforce those of Angel, highlighting the centrality of love and other core values, the experience of which changes the course of James's life and coincides with a miraculous cure of his condition. He knows that the girl understands him, and becomes her constant companion as her bodily frame inexorably weakens. In a sense, he carries her future.

Other visions and dreams indicate the coming transition, and the book ends with the girl seeing her deceased grandmother and moving towards the light. The format is a *tour de force*. The simplicity of the narrative structure provides the vehicle through which spiritual wisdom is formulated and transmitted in an eminently palatable fashion. The reader feels a natural empathy for the girl's situation, which is ultimately that of every reader of this review. This makes it easier to absorb the insights and engage in the ultimate mystical exercise of dying before you die, remembering that a subtle aspect of ourselves is the silent witness of the drama of human life. Once you read this book you will understand why it is such a gift and can be passed on to those in need.'

David Lorimer
Gibliston Mill, Colinsburgh,
Leven, Fife KY9 1JS
www.davidlorimer.net

www.scimednet.org
www.internationalfuturesforum.com

Reviewed by Pim van Lommel, M.D.
Journal for Near-Death Studies Vol. 24, Nr. 3, Spring 2006

This book is about a young girl confronted with a serious and life-threatening disease; her process of coping with hope, pain, decline, and despair; and ultimately the progression of her leukemia, ending with her transition into the Light. This is an amazing book, because Evelyn Elsaesser-Valarino has written this intimate story in the first person, from the “inside” of the girl, with all her thoughts and feelings. And this is why you become so intimately connected with her as she is confiding her innermost thoughts, and all her heart-rending emotions become your own emotions. While reading the book you become one with her, with her illness, with everything what happens around her and within her, including the realization that she will have no future like other boys and girls of her age.

And by identifying yourself with this girl you become a part of her process of spiritual growth, a lesson for living and dying. During the progression of her illness she is comforted by her “inner communication” with her doll Angel, a gift from her deceased grandmother. Her doll Angel explains to her that death is not the end, but only a transition into another form of being. Ultimately, towards the end of her life in the ward for terminally ill children, she hears about the deep and transforming near-death experience (NDE) of James, up to then a rather skeptical fellow patient, who has a miraculous cure of the malignant course of his illness following his NDE. The description of this near-death experience is very impressive and very complete, and one of the best accounts of an NDE I ever have read. Her fear of death is ultimately lifted when she reaches the moment of leaving her body, and while seeing her grandmother, going towards the Light.

As Ken Ring writes in his foreword, this girl could be anyone; and while reading you realize that it could be you, the empathetic reader of this moving book. While reading the book I was wondering if it was especially meant for adults, or also for children with life-threatening illness. The words the doll Angel uses during her communication with the girl seem to be more suited for adults than for children, as does the impressive description of James’s NDE, but the emotional impact of this book will be the same for older children and parents, and for anyone who has been confronted with death and dying or is facing a life-threatening illness. But this book is also a very special gift for caregivers working in hospitals and in hospices, because it is all about the lessons we can learn from NDEs about a new insight into life and death.

Elsaesser-Valarino has an extensive knowledge of NDEs. She has been working in this field for more than 20 years, and has written two books about this subject: *On the Other Side of Life: Exploring the Phenomenon of Near-Death Experience* (Elsaesser-Valarino, 1997), and *Lessons From the Light: What We Can Learn From the Near-Death Experience*, in collaboration with Kenneth Ring (Ring and Elsaesser-Valarino, 2000). In this very good and most important and comforting book she uses a totally new and emotional approach by confronting the reader with the spiritual lessons to be learned from NDEs by becoming intimately involved in the

story of a girl facing leukemia, and her transformation during the progression of her disease.

Before concluding this review I would like to share some endorsements of *Talking with Angel* that currently appear on the Internet (<http://www.steinerbooks.org/detail.html?id=0863154921>):

Honestly, I was very moved by the story's emotional power and the depth of the teachings it conveys. I found the story gripping from the very beginning, but I think what hit me the most was the account Evelyn Elsaesser-Valarino wrote, in epistolary form, of James' near-death experience. It is simply one of the best and richest accounts (even if it is fiction) of an NDE I've ever come across. I don't think it is saying too much to claim that in itself this bit of writing is a masterpiece. (Kenneth Ring)

So intimate that you feel yourself "inside" the girl, caring what she thinks and feels during crucial moments. The description of the near-death experience is among the most riveting accounts I have yet read about the phenomenon and its after-effects. The book is simply incredible! Highly recommended for older children, parents, and anyone coming to grips with life and death issues – regardless of age. (P. M. H. Atwater)

A powerful story of a young girl who becomes a woman during her intense struggle with a life-threatening illness. I recommend this book highly to everyone who values personal growth and spiritual transformation. (Bill Guggenheim)

Gripping reading. . . . The format is a tour de force. The simplicity of the narrative structure provides the vehicle through which spiritual wisdom is formulated and transmitted in an eminently palatable fashion. The reader feels a natural empathy for the girl's situation, which is ultimately that of every reader of this review. Once you read this book you will understand why human life is such a gift and can be passed on to those in need. (David Lorimer)

In conclusion, I am very happy that Elsaesser-Valarino has written this book, and I am obviously not the only one. I recommend it highly for everybody who is willing to be open to the spiritual wisdom that death could well be a mere passing from one state of consciousness into another.

Reviewed by P. M. H. Atwater, L.H.D

'You'll remember Evelyn Elsaesser-Valarino as the collaborator with Kenneth Ring on *Lessons from the Light: What We Can Learn from the Near-Death Experience*. She has spent over 20 years studying the subject, written another book about it, yet this time she makes a significant departure - writing a novel about a young girl dying of leukemia. Well, not exactly a novel. The book reads more like a

journal, one so intimate, so personal, so filled with conflict and puzzlement and fear and love, that you find yourself "inside" the nameless girl, not caring so much who she is as what she thinks, feels, during crucial moments in her ebbing life.

"Angel" is her talking doll, and at first that's a difficult concept to accept. Yet it doesn't take long to adjust not only to British mannerisms sprinkled throughout the book, but to embrace as real and wonderful the special doll made for her by her now-deceased grandmother – a doll of infinite wisdom and knowledge. When her illness worsens, a fellow patient dies, only to revive after having had a near-death experience. The description of that episode, how it affected the boy who had it, and ultimately how it transformed the young girl, is among the most riveting accounts I have yet read about the phenomenon and its aftereffects. The book is simply incredible!

Highly recommended for older children, parents, and anyone coming to grips with life and death issues - regardless of age'.

P. M. H. Atwater, L.H.D., near-death researcher, author of 8 books, among them: "The New Children and Near-Death Experiences", "We Live Forever", "The Real Truth About Death", "Beyond the Indigo Children."

Reviewed by Bill Guggenheim

"Talking With Angel" is a powerful story of a young girl who becomes a woman during her intense struggle with a life-threatening illness. I recommend this book highly to every-one who values personal growth and spiritual transformation.'

Bill Guggenheim, author of "Hello From Heaven"

Reviewed by Susanne Becker **Contemporary Nurse** Vol. 22, Number 1, 2006

Evelyn Elsaesser-Valarino is a coordinator for the Scientific and Medical Network at the University of Geneva and has more than 20 years' experience studying and publishing about the phenomena of near-death experiences. Although not in the sphere of a traditional academic text, Talking with Angel endeavours to share the context of a near-death experience and provides an experiential rollercoaster as the reader becomes the central character in the book.

Talking with Angel is a story about a young girl who is diagnosed with Leukaemia. Conversation with her doll (Angel) enables her to understand more about herself and her illness. The reader never learns the girl's name or exact age although her response to her diagnosis, her parents, friends and hospital staff offer some clues - only to leave the reader guessing again as the patient moves through yet another stage of her illness. Her name and age are not important, however, as it is through

this sense of anonymity that the reader is able more powerfully to embrace the empathy that this narrative engenders.

Talking with Angel explores the concept of death and dying and in so doing explores the concept of life. Through the young girl's discussion with Angel, we are led on a journey that explores the concept of God in a spiritual rather than religious form. I found that the first few discussions with Angel detracted from the book, but I still wanted to finish it. A long passage from a fellow patient who had a near-death experience was also difficult to take on board though it was only through this that I was able eventually to connect with the young girl. It was at this stage that she became my daughter, my mother, my friend, my patient and me. Reflection on completion of the book enabled me fully to appreciate the journey taken by the reader and to acknowledge the clearer insight and spiritual awakening it provoked.

Talking with Angel is written for everyone, as is stated by Kenneth Ring in the foreword:

We are all death-bound, and we are all clinging to life; we are all in the same condition and we all will undergo the same fate. (p.15)

This book is for anyone with questions about the fairness of who lives and who dies, or about life after death. It is also for health professionals wishing to engender hope in people who are faced with death. This book will provide valuable insight and wisdom long after it is put back on the shelf.

Susanne Becker

Lecturer, School of Nursing and Midwifery, The University of South Australia,
Adelaide, South Australia.
