**Elizabeth Mayer**

Some scientists, who haven’t had a near-death experience, have had extraordinary experiences that altered their lives in ways they are unable to explain scientifically. Elizabeth Lloyd Mayer (1947-2016), a psychoanalyst and professor of clinical psychology, presented some of these stories in her 2007 book, *Extraordinary Knowing: Science, Skepticism, and the Inexplicable Power of the Human Mind*.

Her publisher, Penguin Random House, explains what prompted her to write such a book. “In 1991, when her daughter’s rare, hand-carved harp was stolen, Lisby Mayer’s familiar world of science and rational thinking turned upside down. After the police failed to turn up any leads, a friend suggested she call a dowser—a man who specialized in finding lost objects. With nothing to lose — and almost as a joke — Mayer agreed. Within two days, and without leaving his Arkansas home, the dowser located the exact California street coordinates where the harp was found.”

Mayer wrote, “I had to face the fact that my notions of space, time, reality, and the nature of the human mind were stunningly inadequate.” After researching experiences of extraordinary knowing and publishing an article exploring these unusual states of consciousness, she was contacted by other scientifically trained professionals who began to share their striking stories with her.

A physician she’d met at a professional meeting told her: *He’d been diagnosed 20 years earlier with fatal bone cancer and had become deeply depressed. As a marathon runner, he’d found relief from despair only while he ran. Early one morning, two hours into his run, he’d been suddenly overcome by what he described as: ‘a sensation of light — clear, soft light, as though the light was filling my bones, as though light and air were infusing each bone. I saw it — light penetrating those bones, right through to the marrow. The next week his X-rays were clean. I’ve never told another colleague,’ he said to Mayer. I told my wife when it happened — no one else. And this part I didn’t tell anyone: I know the light crowded out the cancer cells.* How? He didn’t know.”

A “neurosurgeon of world-class reputation” who was “suffering from intractable headaches” came with Mayer, who afterward wrote this report of their conversation. “During our first appointment he begins to describe his work. He’s passionate about it . . . and also supremely successful. He undertakes one dangerously life-threatening surgery after another, yet he tells me, humbly and with quiet gratitude, *I never seem to lose a patient*.

“I probe a little, looking for some hint of possible conflict, anxiety, or pain. He, on the other hand, keeps going back to his work, lighting up as he talks about it. And then it occurs to me that he hasn’t mentioned doing any teaching, even though he’s on the staff of a big university hospital. So, I ask: *Does he teach residents?* He looks away, suddenly silent; finally, he answers:

*No, I don’t teach at all anymore.*

*But you did? What happened?*

*I had to stop. I couldn’t keep it up, but I miss it. I loved teaching.*

“He falls silent again. Gently I probe further. *Why did he have to stop?* And then slowly, reluctantly, the surgeon tells me what he’s never told anyone. He can’t teach anymore because he can’t teach what he’s really doing. As soon as he learns that someone needs surgery, he goes to the patient’s bedside. He sits at the patient’s head, sometimes for thirty seconds, sometimes for hours at a stretch. He waits for a distinctive white light to appear around his patient’s head. Until it appears, he knows it’s not safe to operate. Once it appears, he knows he can go ahead, and that the patient will recover.

*How,* he asks me, *could he possibly reveal that? What would his residents think?*

“They’d think he was crazy; and he thinks, maybe he *is* crazy. But crazy or not, he knows that seeing the white light is what saves his surgeries from disaster. So how can he teach and *not* talk about it?

*And when did your headaches begin?* I ask him. Startled, he looks up at me.

*The headaches started two years ago. And I remember when I noticed the first one. It was the day I resigned from teaching, right after I told the dean.*”

**The two physicians hid their extraordinary experiences, but Mayer explored her experience and extended her living-world to embrace inexplicable healing and knowing. Might we open our minds as well as our hearts?**

<https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/109557/extraordinary-knowing-by-elizabeth-lloyd-mayer-phd/> and Robert Traer, *Extraordinary Experiences* (2021)**.**