

# Death and Rebirth - A Story of Waking Up

A Personal Account by Jennifer De Leon

*One day, I woke up and knew that my Mother was dead. How did I know?  
I knew because I had been with her, to 'another land'.  
My Mother stayed, but I had to come back.*

Here is the story...

My name is Jennifer. Jennifer is a Celtic name and means 'White Wave'. The imagery of the 'white wave' has been one of the most powerful influences in my life.

The wave gathers far out in the depths of the ocean. It begins, very slowly, to roll in to the shore, gathering volume and momentum as it comes. The movement is inexorable, relentless and undeviating. When the wave smashes on the rocks or sand, it sucks back and becomes the Undertow. The undertow is "the current that flows in a different direction to that at the surface." (Concise Oxford Dictionary)

WhiteWave and Undertow. These are words that have become the descriptors of my life... what it is to be me. The wave is a visible, passionate outpouring of colour and sound and movement and energy and the undertow is a hidden, inner flow of 'in-gathering'. They are opposites yet do not exist without each other. For me, all of life is demonstration and outworking of whitewave and undertow.

I am a dancer: choreographer, teacher and performer. I believe I came out of the womb knowing I would dance, and never once in my younger life did I question what it is I should be 'when I grew up'. It seemed an unlikely vision however, and the odds seemed tipped against me, since I was born with a serious heart-defect and so, as a little girl, I was not allowed to run. When I was eight I contracted rheumatic fever and spent one year lying in bed and unable to walk. At the age of nearly ten I was learning to walk again and very uncoordinated. Nevertheless, the vision to dance was fiercely alive, and once I had re-learned to walk, I commenced ballet lessons. Tests at Greenlane Hospital assured my parents and me that my heart was strong enough to begin, while the tests over the next ten years would predicate what happened thereafter. As it happens, my heart has immeasurably strengthened through dancing and I now have a more-or-less clean bill of health. The frail child began running! – Physically, emotionally, psychically... visions of what I would do, what I would become!

On my 18th birthday I left NZ and went out to the wide world to 'follow my bliss'... I went to dance. From London to Vienna to Athens to Stockholm to Seattle, (and places in between) I followed my vision – and the best training and jobs, for the next seven years.

Through my training and conscious development of my own, my dance became a reflection of my 'life theme' – White wave and Undertow. Every direction of movement of my body is defined; made 'real,' through its opposite direction; you observe the one because it arises from the other. You know I move because of the stillness on either side of my movement. You see me arch with abandon because I have strengthened my 'centre' to hold firm with control. You see me jump up because I press down into the floor first. My dance is characterised by flow and lyricism and (seemingly) almost unbounded extension. This is achieved through a journey of now 36 years of practise... discipline, dedication, devotion.

I have danced in countries all over the world; in some places I danced to the top. I thought of myself as the relentless, inexorable – even pitiless – but utterly glorious energy that is the wave. I push myself to shout! to the world and God that I CAN RUN and I shall and I SHALL.

For all the passion of following my bliss, being the white-capped wave that surges and spills ever upward and onward, the undertow must have equal place.

In the 36 years since I recovered from rheumatic fever, I have again been bedridden for an extended time. The incidents that precipitated these times were traumatic and life-changing – and are everything to do with dancing... what happened is part of the crashing wave; the sucking undertow; the Great Dance.

There is one huge wave, and its undertow that changed my life more utterly than any other. I share my story in the *SEN* journal in the hope that others will be encouraged to hold fast, keep the faith, and never give up.

Here is what happened...

While I was dancing in America, I won a major choreographic competition in Seattle. Shortly after this I injured my back very seriously and was compelled to lie prone. I tried various therapies but nothing seemed to work. Running out of insurance money, and warned that I may need a laminectomy, but without the money to pay for this in America, I decided to come home to NZ. As well, it was nearly Christmas and I had not seen my family for some years.

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A dear family friend gave my mother \$2,000 and she came to America to get me. I have just one clear memory of my mother's visit: it is the moment she walked in through the door of my bedroom in Seattle. I believe I shall never forget the sight of my mother, whom I loved so dearly, walk in through that door.

This is the last clear memory I have of events that occurred in the physical plane, for nearly two years. My memory does not include the next nearly two years of my life – although flashes of inexplicable recognition come to me sometimes... (But I do not know if these recognitions derive from those years – or from some other time-space awareness altogether). The paragraphs that follow are as I have been told.

My mother and I flew home to NZ. My father met us off the plane and we went home. In the next five days, I rested in bed, and had consultations with a noted doctor and surgeon who specialised in backs.

On the fifth day after our return to NZ, my mother and I went again to the doctor. We finished the consultation and commenced the drive back to our home. My mother had to call into my father's office, and was there briefly before we continued the homeward journey. Apparently I was well enough to drive.

At an intersection not far from our house the road turned across a river. Our journey required a right hand turn across the intersection and on to the bridge. The details of what happened are erased from my mind, but I have since revisited the intersection and I have had the incident described to me.

The traffic lights apparently were showing green, so I turned right. At this same moment a 40-ton lorry travelling in the opposite direction also entered the intersection, speeding straight ahead, at approximately 65 Kilometres per hour. It was impossible for the lorry driver to stop. His vehicle impacted with the Mini Minor driven by myself.

Apparently my mother was killed instantly. What happened to me is, (unlike the other details) completely clear. I have no doubt that it is true.

I was whirling through darkness; it seemed I was whirling for aeons and aeons. Eventually I came to the Edge. The Edge was an edge between light and darkness. I was in the darkness and on the other side, was light. I stood in the darkness and looked into the light. What I saw was the most beautiful garden. I saw my mother in the garden and there was someone with her. I don't know if that person was Jesus or an angel. The figure was bright and, it seemed, full of tenderness and love. It seemed as if the figure was showing my mother around. I seemed as well to see my mother running! I had never seen my mother running in all my life. She looked so full of life and brightness. I watched and I desperately wanted to get

across the edge, over to the other side – but I could not. I remained, watching, in the darkness.

Then, after some time, I was whirling again through aeons and aeons of darkness.

I know now that I was in the coma for nearly five weeks. During this time, my brother identified the body of my mother and she was buried. My father stayed close to my side through much of the five weeks; later he told me that he talked to me and told me what had happened.

I do not remember waking up. I do know that when I woke up I seemed to have a near-complete memory loss, for apparently I did not know who I was, or where. I did know however, that my mother was dead. I also knew that she did not blame nor hold any accusation against me.

In the months after I woke, life for me was in a great dimness. Things were visible, and events occurred, but everything seemed to be a long distance away. It was as if a great fog existed between me and the rest of the world. I went home to my father's house. It was very quiet there and safe. I vaguely remember I was unable to answer the door or the telephone; I was afraid of this loud, crashing world. I stayed in the peacefulness of my father's home for about four months before I ventured out again into the world. During these four months I was aware that, despite the obvious fact: I had driven the car in which my mother had been killed, there was no sense of shame or guilt. There was an enormous sadness and grief at her departure from my life, but no guilt.

About a year later I visited the mother of a friend of mine: a lady whom I had never met, but whom I visited because my friend suggested it... Further, my friend said she had a link to the psychic realities of life. In my visit to Mrs J. she remarked that I had been hugely blessed by this one thing: that my mother had chosen me to be with her on her last journey.

It remains with me always that she chose me...

One day about a year (or two?) after the accident my father quietly said that he felt he carried the blame. When she had come to his office, just before we drove the rest of the way home, he had an overwhelming desire to hold her in his arms – but he resisted because of the other people in the office. He said that had he held her for those moments, the truck would have passed by.

There was a strange vision he had had, however...

Just prior to the time when my mother left for America to come and bring me home, my father and my mother were working in the house, doing some small renovations. Alone in the front room facing the road, with the sea on the other side, he had lifted his eyes and looked out across the water. In his vision, he saw a figure, moving across the water towards the house. Somehow he knew that the figure was coming to someone, but it was not he. My

father had a sense that the figure was coming for my mother, who was also in the house in another room. At the time, not understanding, he dismissed the vision as a strange dream and thought no more about it.

Another strange and wonderful event occurred while my mother and I were in America. We attended a church service at a church I had not visited before but which a friend had suggested my mother and I would be blessed. At the service, which was lovely but not extraordinarily so to me, my mother was touched in such a way that she said later, she had been "touched by God". Although most of my memory of the days just preceding our flight back to NZ is lost, I do remember the look of my mother after this church service. She was glowing and radiant; a radiance I had never seen before. I believe truly, my mother had had a glimpse of the other country to which she would soon go...

When we had arrived home my parents showed me a picture they had bought to celebrate my home-coming. The picture was of a very stormy ocean, with seabirds wheeling above the waves. My father pointed out one bird, close to the foreground, and said, "that is you, Jenny". He pointed out another bird, further in the distance, and said, "and that is Mum, coming for you". Apparently I had answered, without hesitation, "no, that bird is flying away"...

Did my spirit know, already...?

My father resumed his work at the office. I stayed at home, quietly doing domestic duties and looking after my father. One day he came home and told me of a strange thing... That morning, he was intensely aware of feeling the grief and pain of losing his wife, my mother, so intensely he did not know if he could bear another day without her. Arriving at the railway platform from where he caught the train into town, in his agony he cried out to God, saying "Why? Why"?

Suddenly, his eyes fell on some words that had been scrawled across the footpath. (Graffiti was unusual at this very quiet, very middle-class suburban railway station). Written there were the words: "there's no explanation".

My father said he felt as if God had answered. As unlikely as it seems from these words, my father felt some peace. He said it was as if God spoke to him through these words... and that despite their obscurity, the message intended for my father, and indirectly for me, was this: As senseless as her death may seem, yet the God of all comfort will not leave us bereft. Despite the pain and seeming meaninglessness of so many things, God holds the final, ultimate answer. And further: that our attachment to 'the answer' or 'the reason' is not the goal. Rather, the goal is to believe anyway; to never lose the vision; our vision.

(Perhaps also we need to understand that in the perfect world God designed for us before we chose to assume

Absolute Authority for ourselves, the accident would not have happened... Who can say)? One day, we will understand; understand, at least, what is needful to understand. One day we will be vouchsafed the same vision of glory that my mother received those few days before her death.

My life is completely changed from this experience.

I feel great sadness at the fact that my beloved mother is not physically present in my life. I cannot speak to her in the old way; I cannot see or touch her as I used to do. I know a great longing to see, hear, talk with my mother again, to feel her arms around me, to have her meet my children, now six and just turned eight... to know, simply, she is there.

And yet, she is there. My daughter was conceived two nights after my father died, (Spring, ten years later). The time I discovered I was pregnant was the day and hour anniversary of my mother's death. When I knew I was to have a girl, I named her Gwenneth, my mother's name. My daughter has the same sweet, giving nature as my mother had.

Since this experience, I am conscious of a heightened perception of every aspect of my life. There are no moments when I am not, at some level, acutely aware of my aliveness and being-ness. There are few moments when I am not 'listening' for God's voice – these are the best words I can find to describe my sense of waiting... watchful... awake...

When I dance I have a sense that I am preparing... I hold a vision that one day I will be called to dance in the temple of God. I hold my arms wide, to catch the light; to ride the wave and the undertow. My prayer is this: "Blessed be God. Thy will be done".

There is a presence beyond this physical realm. It is not far away. She is simply in another room, just beyond the borders of my sight.

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