

They lost their loved ones to Covid. Then they heard from them again

June 20, 2021 by [John Blake, CNN](#)



(CNN)They never ran out of things to talk about. It was obvious from the start.

He was a brawny former Maine lobsterman with a booming baritone. She was a redhead with freckles from Wisconsin who worked in corporate recruiting. They talked about everything from sci-fi movies and her love for the rock group Bon Jovi to whether the Lord of the Rings film trilogy did justice to J.R.R. Tolkien's books.

He asked for permission to kiss her on their first date. She said yes.

When Ian and Michelle Horne got married, he wore a purple tie on their wedding day because it was her favorite color. As the years rolled by, they got matching tattoos and gave each other nicknames from the movie, "The Princess Bride." He called her Princess Buttercup and she called him "Farm Boy Wesley." They made plans to visit Ireland this year to celebrate her Irish roots.

Then came the pandemic. Last fall, after a long battle, Michelle Horne died from complications caused by Covid-19. Ian Horne's "superpower," as he called her, was gone. They had been married almost 10 years.

But not long after his wife's death, the morning radio deejay in Wichita, Kansas, wondered if Michelle was still speaking to him. He was driving to his job in the predawn darkness when he spotted something odd. About two dozen streetlights flanking the highway had turned purple. They looked like a lavender string of pearls glowing in the night sky.



Michelle and Ian Horne. The couple were married almost 10 years.

Horne took it as a sign.

"Michelle knew that was my route to work that I take every morning and was the route she took on her final drive to the hospital," says Horne, who hosts his [morning show](#) on 101.3 KFDI as "JJ Hayes."

"I remember simply smiling and feeling overwhelmed with the idea that Michelle was close."

Reported encounters with departed loved ones are not uncommon

The coronavirus pandemic has now killed more than 600,000 Americans. Many of us never had a chance to hug or say farewell to loved ones who died alone and isolated in hospital wards due to fears of spreading the virus.

But there is another group of pandemic survivors who say they have been granted a second chance to say goodbye. They are people like Horne who believe they've been contacted by a loved one who died from coronavirus.

These experiences can be subtle: relatives appearing in hyper-real dreams, a sudden whiff of fragrance worn by a departed loved one, or unusual behavior by animals. Other encounters are more dramatic: feeling a touch on your shoulder at night, hearing a sudden warning from a loved one, or seeing the full-bodied form of a recently departed relative appear at the foot of your bed.

These stories may sound implausible, but they are in fact part of a historical pattern. There is something in us -- or in our lost loved ones -- that won't accept not being able to say goodbye.

And whenever there is a massive tragedy such as a pandemic, a war or a natural disaster, there is a corresponding surge in reports of people seeing the dead or trying to contact them.



After mass tragedies such as wars many Americans have turned to Ouija boards in an attempt to contact departed loved ones.

The 1918 influenza epidemic sparked a "[spiritualism craze](#)" as Americans turned to seances and Ouija boards to contact departed loved ones. After the 9/11 terrorist attacks came [a wave of people](#) reporting sightings of and even conversations with those who had been snatched from their lives.

When a tsunami struck Japan in 2011, killing at least 20,000 people, so many inhabitants of Ishinomaki [reported seeing](#) their loved ones appear that a [book](#) and a [documentary](#) were made about this city of wandering ghosts.

"These kind of reports are normal in my world," says [Scott Janssen](#), an author who has worked in the hospice field for years and studies these experiences. "It would make sense that in a pandemic or other event that leads to mass deaths that there will be a numerical increase in reports and experiences, given the shared grief and trauma."

These experiences are so common in the psychological field that there is a name for them: [ADCs](#), or "after death communications." Research suggests at least [60 million](#) Americans have these experiences, and that they occur across cultures, religious beliefs, ethnicities and income levels.

Many of these encounters occur in the twilight state between sleeping and waking, but others have been reported by people who were alert.

Bill Guggenheim, co-author of "Hello from Heaven," a book that explores ADCs, believes there is a spiritual purpose behind the visits.

"They want you to know they're still alive, and that you'll be reunited with them when it's your turn to leave your lifetime on Earth," he writes. "They want to assure you they'll be there to meet you and greet you -- and perhaps even to assist you -- as you make your own transition."

A dining room encounter with a beloved aunt

ADCs may serve another function in the world created by Covid -- to reassure people who couldn't be at the side of their loved ones when they died.

Consider the story of Jamie Jackson, an office manager who lives near Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, and her beloved "Aunt Pat." Jackson's aunt died of a heart attack last summer after complications from Covid. Jackson said her aunt was like a mother to her -- someone she spent summers with and accompanied to the hospital for routine medical visits.

But when her aunt was afflicted with Covid, Jackson couldn't visit the hospital to reassure her.

"That was the hardest thing," Jackson says. "You can't say goodbye and you can't be there as an advocate for your loved one, which is difficult because you have somebody who's in the hospital, who's scared and not used to being alone."



Gloves worn by pallbearers are draped on the casket of retired officer Charles Jackson Jr., who died from Covid-19 in April 2020 in Los Angeles. Covid restrictions prevented many people from saying goodbye to dying loved ones in person.

Seven months later, though, Jackson says she heard from her aunt again.

It was December, and Jackson was putting up Christmas decorations in the house while Bing Crosby sang holiday carols. Christmas was one of her aunt's favorite holidays, and she loved decorating. Jackson's bin was filled with the same decorations that once belonged to her aunt.

Jackson says she left the bin in her hallway to get something and when she returned, she saw a translucent figure peering into it. It was the figure of a petite woman, with the same haircut, color of hair and white blouse and blue slacks that her aunt used to wear.

Jackson froze. Her heart started pounding. She fled to her dining room and started crying. When she returned, the figure was gone. She says it was her aunt.

"It was overwhelming," Jackson says. "It's hard to put into words. I felt touched by that. It's obvious that she's around and she's visiting me."

A cold hand on a shoulder and a whiff of perfume

Some post-Covid paranormal encounters are even more dramatic. One woman says she was literally touched by a loved one who died from complications from Covid.

Marie Pina teaches English as a second language in Manitoba, Canada. She says her 79-year-old mother, Inez, was about to be released from the hospital last November when there was a Covid outbreak in her ward. She tested positive and was put in isolation. She returned home the next month, but had lost her strength.

About four months after her diagnosis, her mother died. On the morning of her mother's death, Pina says she was reaching for her slippers in her bedroom when she felt a cold hand on her shoulder. She turned and saw her mother sitting beside her, staring straight ahead with no expression. She looked 20 years younger.

"Her touch was cold, like she had just come from outside," Pina says.

One day not long after that morning, Pina reported another classic characteristic of an ADC. She was making spinach soup, one of her mom's favorites, when she suddenly smelled the fragrance associated with her mother -- a combination of White Diamond perfume and her mom's Chi hairspray.

"The scent was overpowering," Pina says. "My husband and I stood in the kitchen awestruck as I stirred the soup. We both could smell it. It lasted for approximately five minutes before evaporating."



Family members gather to mourn a lost relative at the Continental Funeral Home on December 20, 2020 in East Los Angeles.

Talk to people who have these experiences, and many will acknowledge that maybe their minds created the episode. Others insist the visitations were too real to deny.

Jackson, who lost her aunt, says it's almost irrelevant if they're real or not. Their impact is real, she says. They made her feel better.

"If I needed to see it and it made me feel better and that's all it was, I'm okay with that," she says. "I tell people if they don't want to believe me, that's fine. I don't need to explain to other people."

Some paranormal visitations aren't so welcome

Other ADCs are more chilling. Some paranormal experiences happen to people who are not reassured by them.

"Some people are creeped out by these things and are certainly not looking for them," says Janssen, the hospice worker. "For some it clashes with worldviews or religious beliefs. Some people have visits like this years after the fact when they are not grieving, or have visits from people with whom they have struggled and from whom they might not actually wish to have a visit."



Many victims of coronavirus died alone in hospitals, depriving family members of closure.

Haunting ADCs also are common during wartime. War memoirs are filled with stories of combat veterans reporting creepy, after-death visitations from fallen comrades or even enemy soldiers they've killed. In the classic memoir, "[What It Is like to Go to War](#)," Karl Marlantes, a Vietnam veteran, wrote about how the ghost of a North Vietnamese soldier he killed stalked him years after he returned home.

In one striking [passage](#), Marlantes relates how he exorcised his enemy's ghost. He arranged a private mass with a priest at 2 in the morning at an old church where he says he saw the spirits of the enemies he killed and the comrades who died under his command file into the pews. Even his late grandparents appeared, smiling as if they approved.

Counselors working with veterans often hear such stories, Janssen says. "I've been doing this a long time and I consider it a near universal [phenomenon] that after a particularly heavy engagement, a lot of people in your unit are lost, it is inevitable that some of those troops are going to receive visits from their buddies," he says.

An unusual bird sighting and a cry in the night

Horne, the radio DJ, reports having other after-death encounters with his late wife.

Not long after she died, he was sitting on the deck in his backyard when a cardinal landed on a branch in front of him. Cardinals, according to folklore, **often appear** when loved ones are near. Horne was struck by the bird because he says cardinals don't normally show up in Kansas in autumn.

Horne says he's had moments when he's clearly heard Michelle call to him in the night: "Ian, wake up!"

"It's as if she's in the room with me," he says. "It's enough to snap me awake, and I'm a deep, hard sleeper. Call it an auditory hallucination or what you want, but I definitely hear it."



Perceived messages from deceased loved ones can be comforting but also unsettling.

Both signs are comforting to him in part because Horne remembers how Michelle fought so hard to live. He says her immune system was weakened after she received a kidney transplant several years ago. When the pandemic hit, they both dreaded what would happen if she got the virus.

After their worst fears proved true, Horne says it seemed at first as if Michelle would survive. She endured a lengthy hospital stay, which included being put on a ventilator, but was released last October. She worked hard to get better, but there were times when Michelle's natural optimism wavered.

Horne says she once told him, "I'm such a burden to you. You don't deserve this. You should just leave."

He kept encouraging her in physical therapy. "I was in it for the long haul, for better or for worse," he says.

Michelle's body, though, didn't have the strength for the long haul. She died from a heart attack **last October**, her body weakened by Covid, Horne says. She was 50.

Horne's radio audience has rallied around him. He's shared his story on the air and it's been featured in local newspapers. He finds it cathartic to talk about Michelle.

"I feel that a person dies twice -- once when they have their physical death and the second time, when we stop saying their name," he says. "Any opportunity I have to talk about Michelle, I will take it."



Purple streetlights in Wichita, Kansas, which Ian Horne thinks are a signal from his late wife.

Yet in an odd way, Michelle may be still talking to Horne, even after he first saw those purple streetlights.

When they were married, Horne developed a ritual with Michelle. She worried about his safety driving to work in the dark each morning. After he arrived, he would reassure Michelle by texting: "I'm here. I love you."

The purple lights in Wichita are still shining. Horne keeps seeing them on his morning commute. It's as if Michelle is responding with a similar message.

He's not sure how long the purple lights will remain. He called the city of Wichita and they attributed the faulty lights to a defective batch. They told him they were going to replace the lights. He's in no rush for that to happen.

"I'm kind of honestly hoping that they don't," Horne says. "I will always believe that Michelle turned them purple. Whether she actually did or not, that's up to a reader or viewer to decide. They can explain it away ... I believe it was a way for Michelle to be with me on my ride to work."

https://www.cnn.com/2021/06/20/health/supernatural-encounters-pandemic-loved-ones-blake/index.html?utm_term=1624193216662fc841c608067&utm_source=cnn_Five+Things+for+Sunday%2C+June+20%2C+2021&utm_medium=email&bt_ee=UxjZMeFOjYljbpDAqLwh%2FojajORkDUYzs97%2F5hXTKgEs5QBRE9o8%2B%2BrB27wyD0St&bt_ts=1624193216664